



A. A. N. Al Shammari

**IRAQ IN CONTEMPORARY DRAMA:
A Study of Selected Plays of and about Iraq, 1990-2013**

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy
The University of Sheffield
School of English

2016

**IRAQ IN CONTEMPORARY DRAMA:
A Study of Selected Plays of and about Iraq, 1990-2013**

Alyaa Abdulhussein Naser Al Shammari

Thesis Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy

The University of Sheffield

School of English

Supervisors:

Professor Steve Nicholson

Dr Rachel Zerihan

April 2016

To You...

أحياناً...
ومن خلال فتحة حرف الميم في كلمة موت...
أرى أصابعي قابضةً مثل السجناء: داخل قفص النصوص التي تتحدث عن الحرب
ومثل أي حارس تعب من كل هذا الحذر
أدس لها أسمك بالسر : كمنشارٍ ناعمٍ وقوي
ثم أنام ...

Sometimes...
And through this little opening of the 'd' in 'death'
I see my fingers like prisoners: inside the cell of the texts that talk of war
And like any guard, tired of all this heed,
I push your name secretly through: like a saw, smooth and strong
Then go to sleep...

Maytham Radhi – Iraq, 2015

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	VII
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	VIII
INTRODUCTION.....	1
The History of theatre in Iraq and the Western influence.....	15
Contemporary Political Drama and Iraqi Theatre.....	27
CHAPTER ONE: Iraqi Political Theatre between 1990-2003	41
Abas Alharbi's <i>Al Nehdha</i> : The Challenge of Realism.....	45
Falah Shaker's <i>Heaven Open its Gates...Late</i> : War Prisoners Finally Return Home	54
CHAPTER TWO: Iraqi Theatre after the War, 2003	71
Falah Shaker's <i>The Wild Wedding</i> : A Fulfilled Prophecy.....	75
Hamed Al Maliki's <i>The Cart</i> : A Journey of Changes that Doesn't Change a Thing	85
CHAPTER THREE: Iraqi Theatrical Experiments in Provocation	102
Kareem Chitheer's <i>The Masks</i> : Breaking Theatre Conventions	104
Ali Al Zaidi's <i>Fourth Generation</i> : An Experiment of Shock and Cruelty	116
CHAPTER FOUR: Iraqis in the Western Theatre	131

Heather Raffo's <i>9 Parts of Desire: An Iraqi American Gives a Total Portrayal of Iraqi Women</i>	135
Hassan Abdulrazzak's <i>Baghdad Wedding: Iraqi-British Theatre</i>	150
CHAPTER FIVE: Western Political Theatre about Iraq	165
Trevor Griffiths' <i>The Gulf between Us: A Bridge between Us</i>	166
Judith Thompson's <i>Palace of the End: Three Tragedies around Iraq</i>	179
CHAPTER SIX: Western Theatre and the War in Iraq after 2003	196
Tim Robbins's <i>Embedded: A Struggle for the Truth</i>	197
Rajiv Joseph's <i>Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo: A Play for Both Sides of the War</i>	209
CONCLUSION	224
APPENDIX I: Iraqi Unpublished Translated Plays Texts	237
<i>Al Nehdha</i>	238
<i>Heaven Opens its Gates... Late</i>	249
<i>The Masks</i>	271
<i>Fourth Generation</i>	294
APPENDIX II: An Email and a Review of <i>The Wild Wedding</i>	314
BIBLIOGRAPHY	316

ABSTRACT

This Thesis focuses on contemporary plays written of and about Iraq between 1990 and 2013 and covers significant political and social changes that affected Iraq and the region of the Middle East. The subject of the study has four main objectives: the first is to present examples of contemporary Iraqi theatre practice during this period; the second, is to reveal what may be seen as a concealed reality about contemporary Iraqi life during this critical time that will add to the portrayal of the country and its people conveyed through the media; the third, is to juxtapose the Iraqi and the Western artistic reactions to contemporary conditions in the country, and finally, is to find the possible connection and means of communication between contemporary Iraqi and the Western theatrical and dramatic presentations. A further aim is to open doors between contemporary theatre practice inside and outside Iraq. The study comprises an Introduction, six chapters, and a conclusion. The chapters of the study will carefully examine twelve plays in total: six Iraqi plays and six Western plays. In addition, there are two Appendices which include the four unpublished translations of Iraqi plays discussed in the study and an email with a review which relates to the one of the Iraqi plays that was read at a rehearsed reading in the University of Sheffield in 2014. The Iraqi plays are Abas Alharbi's *Al Nehdha*, Kareem Chitheer's *The Masks*, Ali Al Zaidi's *Fourth Generation*, Falah Shaker's *Heaven Open its Gate... Late and The Wild Wedding*, and Hamed Al Maliki's *The Cart*. The Western plays are: Trevor Griffiths's *The Gulf between Us*, Tim Robbins's *Embedded*, Heather Raffo's *9 Parts of Desire*, Hassan Abulrazzak's *Baghdad Wedding*, Judith Thompson's *The Palace of the End*, and Rajiv Joseph's *Bengal Tiger in the Baghdad Zoo*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere thanks, gratitude and appreciation to my supervisor, Professor Steve Nicholson for his continuous support, for his patience, motivation, and immense knowledge. His guidance helped me the whole time I worked on the thesis and I could not have imagined having a better advisor and mentor for my study. Since the first day of my arrival in the UK, Prof. Nicholson has welcomed me warmly and although it was my first time away from my home country, I found myself among family and friends. He and his beautiful family showed me such kindness that I will never forget. Therefore my deep thanks are extended to his dear family too. Furthermore, I am indebted to his academic expertise and unfailing belief in me; in spite of all the difficulties that I faced, I have always been aware of his strong support and sponsorship. His deep understanding and sustained interest in my subject matter made it possible for me to see it clearer, develop it and actually believe that I can do it. My deep thanks and appreciation is also dedicated to my second supervisor, Dr. Rachel Zerihan, who accompanied me throughout the first three years of my academic study and whose helpful comments and suggestions provided a guide for me to follow and from which I learned much. Both my supervisors created me into a new person with their commitment and genuine diligence.

Besides my supervisors, I would like to thank all the members and staff of the School of English at the University of Sheffield for their help and support throughout my study, particularly Emma Bradley and Dr Bill McDonnell. I am also grateful to Dr. Frances Babbage, for her unfailing support and her time in reading and commenting on my final work, and Professor Adam Piette, the Head of the School of English, for his support. I am extremely thankful and indebted to both of them for their valuable encouragement that they extended to me.

I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the editors of *Route 57*, the creative writing journal of the University of Sheffield, Dr. Matthew Cheeseman and Dr. Agnes Lehoczy for their kindness, encouragement and belief in my translation of Iraqi prose poems and my creative writing, which made me believe in myself.

I place on record, my sincere thank you to Dr. Sara Soncini from the University of Pisa, Italy, for allowing me a copy of her latest book *Forms of Conflict: Contemporary Wars on the British Stage* even before its publication. I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation and gratitude to Professor Nadjé Al-Ali from SOAS, University of

London, for her encouragement, and to Prof. Marvin Carlson of CUNY, for his support in publishing my translations of the Iraqi plays. My sincere gratitude is also due to Professor Muna Al Awan, who dedicated her time to review my translations of Iraqi plays and Arabic critical articles, and whose feedback enriched my discussion greatly. I would also like to thank the HCED (Higher Committee of Education Development in Iraq) my sponsor, without whose help this dream of pursuing my PhD study would never have come true.

My deep thanks and appreciation are presented to the Iraqi playwrights and dramatists whose generosity, encouragement and support made this research possible. My thanks are presented to Mr. Hamed Al Maliki, Mr. Ali Al Zaidi, Mr. Abas Alharbi, Mr. Saad Hadabi, Dr. Awatif Naeem, Mrs. Rash Fadhil, Dr. Sami Abdulhameed, Dr. Fadhil Khalil, and Dr. Ahmed Al Sharji for their time in responding to my questions and for providing me with all the relevant resources to complete my study. Deep thanks are due to the late Mr. Kareem Chitheer whose works inspired and influenced me to a great extent. My deep thanks are also due to Mr. Abas A Janabi, Mr. Muhsin Al Dhahabi, and Mr. Bassim Al Tayeb. Sincere thanks and gratitude are extended to Dr. Samem Hassaballah for his continuous encouragement, friendship, and his efforts to provide me with the proper articles and references that added much value to the discussion of the plays. My sincere and very special gratitude goes to Mr. Falah Shaker who accompanied me from the first stages of this study and whose patience, support and encouragement were priceless; his belief in me made this study possible.

I also place on record, my sense of gratitude to the Western playwrights who gave me much of their time when replying to questions, and who supported my work continuously. My thanks include Ms. Judith Thompson from Canada, Mr. Rajiv Joseph from the USA, and Mr. Hassan Abdulrazzak from the UK, whose support and encouragement was very precious; my deep thanks are also due to Mr. Trevor Griffiths who welcomed me into his beautiful house and spent a long time with me discussing his work. My special and very personal thanks and deep gratitude are to Heather Raffo, the playwright, now the best friend and the 'sister in arts' whose support and belief in me is beyond my belief. She taught me how to be brave and find a voice in writing; she made a new entity of me. And my deep thanks to Mr. Mohammed Fairouz, the classical composer and the dear friend who read my piece, "Fireworks" for *Places of Pilgrimage*.

My sincere thanks are due to Mrs Hilary and Mr David Whitehead, who supported me during my language course and whose support continued throughout my study journey. My deep thanks are also due to Dr. Sarah Oliver who dedicated her time to

proof-read my thesis and whose comments and suggestions in relation to my English language developed this work to a great extent and taught me a lot.

I would like to take this opportunity to convey my gratitude and appreciation to Professor Jane Milling, the external examiner from the University of Exeter and Dr Carmen Levick, the internal examiner from The University of Sheffield, who contributed to the enrichment of the thesis with their insightful comments, suggestions and vital discussion, during the viva.

I would like to express my thanks and gratitude to a number of fellow students and friends here in the UK and in Iraq who were an inspiration without which I would not have been able to overcome difficulties and continue my work. My thanks include Bridie Moore, Zelda Hannay, Cath Badham, Elena Pallarés García, Yelda Yousifi and Amir Vafa, who became my family and guardian angels in the UK. My special thanks are also due to Anthony C Prince who dedicated many hours proof reading my translations of the Iraqi plays and discussing the background of each play with me. Although I am far away from Iraq, the help and efforts of the following Iraqi friends have been very precious to me: Dr. Haider Ata Allah who never hesitated to provide me with resources and material that was of great value; his efforts in tracing the text of *Heaven Open its Gates... Late* and printing it for me was a favour that I will never forget. Also my thanks go to Dr. Muhammed Saif and Mr. Awad Ali whose articles and books were of important value to my work. My very special and deep thanks are due to Mr. Maytham Radhi the Iraqi caricaturist and writer whose support and encouragement were priceless. He allowed me to translate his prose poems as a hobby that showed me the power of translation and gave me deep insights, and he wrote those wonderful lines of the epigraph especially for this thesis.

My deep thanks and sincere gratitude are presented to my family back home whose support and encouragement are beyond description. My thanks include my brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces, my father and my very dear mother who never stopped believing in me in her own way. My endless thanks are to my dear and very near sister Adhraa and her daughter Maryam who showed me the courage that defeated all pains.

My final thanks and deepest gratitude is to my country, Iraq, whose pain and suffering made me stronger and showed me how to stand tall with a healthy soul in spite of the bleeding body. One day I will see Iraq in full health, in both body and soul. A final thank you is also due to the UK, the country that became a new home for me, that showed me kindness and whose privilege I will carry with me wherever I go.

To all the names that I have mentioned here and many more that I could not mention, to all those who made me smile and laugh when I was very tired and even to those who made me cry, I am indebted to you all, for ever. You made me who I am now.

I do not want to forget my very special friend, Mary, thank you!

INTRODUCTION

Iraq, is a country of different spectra, both positive and negative. It is the country where one can find all the opposites placed side by side in the same space in the sense that in this relatively small country there is more than one religion, one ethnic group, and even one nationality.¹ Therefore, the colourful nature of the country is positive in that since ancient times it has enriched the cultural heritage of the nation and its people and at the same time it makes it a fertile environment for conflicts and struggle for domination by inside forces as well as outsiders. Previously known as Mesopotamia, or as Iraqis usually refer to it in Arabic, *Belad Al Rafidayin (The Homeland of the Two Tributaries)*, in reference to the Tigris and the Euphrates, Iraq's two rivers, it is one of the oldest places on earth. Iraqi people are very proud of their history and for being the founders of: the first writing form, Cuneiform Writing, the founders of the first law, The Code of Hammurabi, the inventors of the first wheel, as well as being the cradle of the first human civilizations ever known, such as the Sumerian, the Akkadian, the Babylonian and the Assyrian, who can trace their heritage back for thousands of years. However, history records the political deterioration and decline of the country as early as 1258 with the Mongols' attack on Baghdad and the end of the thriving Abbasid era (750-1258). The Mongols' invasion was followed by the occupation of the Ottoman Empire around the mid nineteenth century, the First World War and its impact followed by the British invasion in 1917, the difficult establishment of the Iraqi kingdom in 1921, the revolution against the monarchs' rule in 1958, and the establishment of the Iraqi Republic. Then there was the revolution in 1963 and the rule of the Ba'thists, whose control and its consequences lasted until 2003. That is to say, the modern and contemporary political history of Iraq proved even more severe for Iraqis. Art, and particularly theatre, being a reflection of life, is one of the fields that survived all these difficulties the country endured throughout a long history of political, social, and economic changes.

The current study is conducted in order to focus on the image of Iraq as portrayed in theatre and drama during the last three decades. The thesis tackles theatrical productions of, and about Iraq, in the period between 1990 and 2013. The primary aim here is to provide insights into the works of contemporary Iraqi theatre makers that are, for the most part, obscure to their counterparts in the West. The second aim of the study is to establish a more humanitarian and accurate image of the country that may differ from, or elaborate on, the purely political image that the media conveyed, especially during these years of severe straggle. The focus on these years came as a result of it being an

¹ In Iraq, there are two main nationalities, Arab and Kurd; and there is a minority, the Turkmen.

era of radical change that the country and its people had endured, and which is still ongoing. For four decades, since 1963, Iraq suffered the absolute control of the Ba'ath Party, which concluded with Saddam Hussein's dictatorial regime that governed Iraq from 1979 and which led to the wars that started in 1980. Finally, the country and its people were isolated from the world due to the economic sanctions in 1990 until the regime changed in 2003. This difficult age was abruptly replaced by the American invasion of the country with the help of the coalition forces in 2003, resulting in chaos, civil wars, conflicts and terrorism that still form the general environment in the country. Therefore, trying to find a clear image of life conditions in Iraq is quite a challenging task, yet through theatre it is made possible, because theatre at least offers artistic theatrical samples that within their collective image may convey the reality that lies behind them. Quoting Professor S. E. Wilmer, Aleks Sierz underlines the idea that "theatre is a public forum which offers a 'particular effective means of conveying notions of what is national and what is alien'. Most playwrights not only reflect and refract the reality around them; they sometimes anticipate and second guess the future." (Sierz 2011, 1) Hence, I have chosen the plays in this study in order to render theatrical responses to the events inside Iraq through Iraqi and Western theatre practitioners, and to show how these practitioners tried to reflect an image of the current situation and depict the future they foresee, through their theatrical works.

In pursuit of accuracy, the study offers two aspects of the story of contemporary Iraq. First there is the native Iraqi aspect represented by contemporary plays written by a number of the most renowned local Iraqi playwrights and dramatists who were live witnesses to all of these political, social, and economic changes and their physical and psychological impact on Iraqis. Chronologically speaking, the plays are Kareem Chitheer's *The Masks* (1990), Abas Alharbi's *Al Nehdha* (1997), Ali Al Zaidi's *Fourth Generation* (1997), Falah Shaker's *Heaven Open its Gate... Late* (1998) and *The Wild Wedding* (2006), and Hamed Al Maliki's *The Cart* (2011). These plays are gathered thematically in the first three chapters of the study according to the main ideas that connect them in three pairs, which are: plays before 2003, plays after 2003, and experimental plays. Secondly, the study moves on to present the Western aspect, that is, it examines Iraq as portrayed through Western plays by internationally preeminent playwrights and dramatists, who reflected their own perspective of the country mostly as the invaders or the new-comers into that piece of land. In their chronological order, the plays are: Trevor Griffiths's *The Gulf between Us* (1992), Tim Robbins's *Embedded* (2003), Heather Raffo's *9 Parts of Desire* (2003), Hassan Abulrazzak's *Baghdad*

Wedding (2007), Judith Thompson's *The Palace of the End* (2007), and Rajiv Joseph's *Bengal Tiger in the Baghdad Zoo* (2009). Again these plays are paired in the following three chapters according to three main themes: Iraqis in the Western theatre, Western political plays about Iraq, and plays about the war of 2003.

It is necessary to stress that these are only examples of the theatrical activities that try to cover the political events the country experienced and is still experiencing, and therefore it is important to look beyond them to point out titles and theatrical events that followed the same trend in contemporary theatre of and about Iraq which the study intends to provide whenever relevant and possible. The plays studied here are carefully selected to cover a range that reflects facts about the contemporary situation in Iraq by Iraqi dramatists, and plays by Western dramatists who portray significant images of life in Iraq and the Iraqis in their works. Dr. Sara Soncini from the University of Pisa in Italy is now working on her most recent book about theatre entitled, *Forms of Conflict: Contemporary Wars on the British Stage*, an early draft of which she kindly sent me. At the end of her book she provides an appendix with a list of all the plays about war produced on British stages in the period 1991 - 2011; the appendix contains 130 plays of which 44 tackled Iraq and the war in Iraq. Dramas about Iraq on the British stage only thus form about one third of the total plays about war, a significant number of plays that suggests that they are a rich subject to investigate, bearing in mind that the list stops at 2011. Up to date there is only one academic study in English that tackles Iraq in the field of theatre worldwide, which is a doctoral research that was completed in 2011 by an Iraqi scholar, Amir A. Al-Azraki at York University, Toronto, Canada, entitled, "Clash of The Barbarians: The Representation of Political Violence in Contemporary English and Arabic Language Plays about Iraq". As the title suggests it looked closely at specific violent political images in a number of Iraqi and Western plays about Iraq, which with this current work will hopefully begin a whole new field of study in theatre and drama that may enrich the Iraqi, and potentially the Western, theatre practices in the future. Consequently, one of the intentions of this thesis is to open a kind of bridge between theatre practices inside Iraq and those outside Iraq, since it is common knowledge to Iraqi theatre practitioners that Iraqi theatre had its roots in Western theatrical theories, conventions, and influence since its formal establishment in the mid-twentieth century, as did Arabic theatre in general. To serve this purpose of facilitating communication and expanding knowledge, I have translated all the Iraqi plays studied here and presented them as Appendices at the end of the thesis. Three of the plays that I have translated during the process of this study: Falah Shaker's *The Wild Wedding*,

Hamed Al Maliki's *The Cart*, and Ali Al Zaidi's *Rubbish* have recently been published in *Arab Stages*.²

I would also like to take this opportunity to point out that in this thesis the translated material aims to offer a precise and accurate version of the play texts in English. In order to make Iraqi play texts in English accessible, the process of translating each of the plays discussed had to go through a number of stages to reach the current state of translation. Indeed, one of the main objectives of this study is to elevate the potential of these plays beyond academic research to the point where it would be possible to produce them in the West. Furthermore, the accessibility and clarity of the new English version of the plays for an English language speaking audience has to be of a standard necessary to measure the quality of the translations. Consequently, each play had to submit to several versions of translation to reach a sustainable version. Each final copy of the translations was sent to the Iraqi playwright for final approval, except in the case of Chitheer's *The Masks*. This was because the writer had died long before this study had begun. In this case, I relied upon my personal knowledge of the Arabic meaning of the words as well as the extensive research that I had carried out on both the play text and its production. Accordingly, these Iraqi plays went through the following four stages: the first was the early draft of translation which I carried out through a literal translation of the script of each play, with the help of the interviews that I conducted with individual playwrights, in addition to the explicit and implicit meaning of the words and their cultural reference. The second stage was the proof reading of the texts by a native English speaker who had no previous knowledge of the play in Arabic and who read them as if they were pure English.³ The third stage was an extensive session of studying the English text which I carried out with the proof reader who went through the second stage of the process. The session was dedicated to developing the new text further by elaborating on the Arabic linguistic and cultural background of each and every word translated in the text; and the choice of the equivalent words in English, with the aim of reaching the best alternative available to match the meaning and the context of the word in Arabic and its equivalent in English.

² *Arab Stages* is a journal that appears twice yearly in digital form by the Martin E. Segal Theatre Centre of New York and is a joint project of that Centre and the Arabic Theatre Working Group of the International Federation for Theatre Research. Al Zaidi's *Rubbish* is not included in this study due to limited time and space. However, the play is part of my larger project of theatre translation and academic research, and it was translated during the process of writing this thesis.

³ This was carried out by a colleague of mine, Anthony Prince, who is a British PhD student at the School of English/ University of Sheffield, and who specializes in Shakespearian drama.

The fourth stage consisted of finding an opportunity for a live reading of the English texts, by other parties. Fortunately, I was able to arrange this for two of the plays. *The Cart* was read by a group of PhD students of Theatre and Performance during a session of the Terra Incognita Group in the School of English which offers regular sessions for practice-based researchers in the University of Sheffield to present their work to their colleagues, share ideas and develop research areas. Furthermore, *The Wild Wedding* received the precious opportunity of a public rehearsed reading through the post-graduate Practice-as-Research Festival entitled, *Terra Incognita*. The text of *The Wild Wedding* was further enriched by the addition of a third character – of the translator, which aligned it with the subject matter of the festival. When the English version of the text was presented to its original writer, Falah Shaker for his approval of the additional character, he was very pleased with the final result. Apparently, the new character of the translator had added a further dimension to the English text of the play. Since this character's main purpose is to explain and comment on the action of the play between scenes, it plays the role of facilitating understanding and adding a perspective overview of the process of translation in general and the translation of the a play texts in particular. The other four plays had smaller reading sessions which I carried out with the proof reader of the texts and also some friends who were interested in the subject. A final stage, that was required in order to scrutinize the translation further before they were included in this study, was the careful examination of the new English version of the text that was the result of all the three previous stages. This examination was carried out by a different person than me and the proof reader, and who should have an excellent knowledge of Arabic and the English language, as well as of drama and theatre in general. For this purpose, the plays were sent individually to Prof. Muna Al Awan, who is an Iraqi Professor of English drama, now based in the USA. She is an expert in her field of research in Western drama, and has had long experience in teaching drama in Baghdad University before her retirement. Prof. Al Awan examined each of the six plays carefully in both languages and gave her assessment and recommendation regarding further refinement of the English version of the texts.

Finally, I read each draft of the text for the last time and sent them for approval to the original playwrights who had been constantly consulted throughout the process of translation whenever a challenge was raised or advice was needed. The one exception was the case of Alharbi's *Al Nehdha* because I had been unable to reach the playwright until recently. However, he read the final translation of his play and welcomed it warmly. In the case of Al Maliki's *The Cart*, the translation shows a very slight change

in the tone and structure of the sentence to differentiate between the language of the characters during the times when Hanoon, (the hero) was alive, and after his death. This is because retaining the original context and the cultural references of the characters' words was more important than maintaining the transformation between slang English and standard English that should have been used as an alternative for the change between Iraqi Arabic and standard Arabic for the character when Hanoon is alive and after his death, respectively. Hence, all the translated texts are available for production should they received such an opportunity in the future, apart from *Al Nehdha*, due to the fact that the play was originally written in a deeply traditional Iraqi Arabic language with heavy reliance on Iraqi cultural and conventional references that needed clarification in footnotes and could not be changed into the English equivalent without affecting the meaning and context of the play. However, as far as possible, I have endeavoured to use succinct and appropriate versions of the critical material that I have translated from the Arabic sources used here. Therefore, I have paraphrased when referring to Iraqi and Arabic critical material, and used direct quotations only when I found a particularly concise version of what the Iraqi and Arabic writers have proclaim. Furthermore, throughout the thesis, where I have referred to books, whether they were primary or secondary sources, that had been published previously, in more than one edition with different, earlier, dates, I have quoted the date of the edition that I used at the time of writing. I would also like to point out that I have used the British English spelling throughout the work, except when quoting from resources where I had to retain the original spelling of the words as they appear in the sources.

The basic methodology utilized in this study is situated in the context of attempts to extrapolate the theatrical samples studied in order to reach the artistic vision behind the creation of each play text, where possible to gauge the playwrights' intention. Therefore, the choice of the samples was made to furnish the research with a variety of theatrical techniques such, monodrama, tragedy, comedy, satire, implicit and explicit cruelty. As a result of the critical political and security situation in Iraq, the methodology pursued here is governed by several factors of practical reality, among the most important of which are: the accessibility of the chosen material, the new translations of the Iraqi plays into English, the recent interviews conducted with most of the Iraqi and Western playwrights about their plays, as well as the readings of the plays that resulted from the research carried out around each play. The theoretical assumption here is based on a general idea that theatre is able to represent an accurate depiction of

the reality behind it even when it is most imaginative and obscure, through the means of comparison and contrast.

In comparison with the six Western plays discussed in the last three chapters of this study the choice of the six Iraqi plays in the first three chapters was largely determined by the practical circumstances that surrounded them. The lack of a reliable formal archive for Iraqi play texts was among the biggest challenges that I faced, particularly for those plays produced during the 1990s. It is only after a long and extensive research that it was possible to locate the Iraqi plays presented here, especially those included in Chapter One. The choice of the two plays in this chapter was largely determined in the first instance by their availability and then with regard to their significance. Chance played a huge role in locating *Al Nehdha* because I found it among a pile of texts that I was looking through that was given to me by Dr. Awatif Naeem, a theatre director and playwright. The play attracted my attention because it was totally different from the rest of the plays in the pile in both language and structure. The process of locating *Heaven Open its Gates... Late* took more than a year of perseverance and research in and outside Iraq along with all those who were involved in the production of the play. This was mainly due to the fact that the playwright, Falah Shaker, had left Iraq in 2006 and did not have the script of his play before I began work on this study. The play was very well-known to Iraqis in the late 1990s, which is why I believed it to be inevitable that I would refer to the most famous work of theatre of the time in this study. In addition both plays accurately captured significant elements of the conditions, concerns and attitudes in Iraq during the 1990s which I recognised. *Al Nehdha* can be marked as a significant play for its daring and explicit depiction of aspects of the Iraqi reality from this time, and it was these which made it a dangerous play, since it challenged the authorities' restrictions on theatre productions of that time; and this was why the playwright Al Herbi had to leave the country to escape punishment. On the other hand, *Heaven Open its Gate... Late* gained wide and unprecedented publicity among Iraqi audiences when it was first performed, in spite of the fact that it is not a comedy, the common trend of popular theatre of that time in Iraq. The play is remembered by Iraqi critics as well as audiences as one of the most well-known plays of its time.

The two plays discussed in Chapter Two were chosen mainly for their themes, their significance and the fact that both are available online which facilitates access to the texts unlike the Iraqi plays of the 1990s. *The Wild Wedding* is striking since I find in it a connection between the life conditions in Iraq during the 1990s and after 2003 since the play was first written in 1991. Yet it received its first formal and public production

in 2006 outside Iraq during the theatre festival in Jordan. Furthermore, the play touches on critical events that extended for two decades in Iraq affecting all aspects of life, that is, the American military intervention in the area and its consequence on Iraq. Additionally, *The Cart* is an astounding play, for it can be seen as the first to present a survey of the contemporary history of Iraq from the 1980s up until today since it depicts the story of a whole country through the story of its hero, Hanoon. The play can be seen as containing a sugar-coated pill to sweeten the bitter politics, as it depicts the suffering of an Iraqi man and his family within a comic frame that makes the play worthy of all the attention that it received inside and outside Iraq. Furthermore, its writer, Hamed Al Maliki is one of the most well-known contemporary Iraqi writers, journalists and activists in Iraq today, which adds to the value of the play itself as a work of a national activist portraying the political and social conditions of his country.

The choice of the two plays in Chapter Three was determined by the fact that they both present a slightly different tendency in Iraq's political theatre, and therefore they introduce innovative practices and challenging themes that are otherwise seen to be taboo. The themes hugely rely on the idea of direct confrontation between the audience and the characters of the plays which includes cruelty and direct violence. The first play, *The Masks*, is one of the earliest plays in Iraq where the playwright devised a technique of abandoning the conventional theatre space by exploiting his own house and giving the audience the opportunity to move with the characters inside it. Hence he is, in one way or another, calling for the direct interactions between the actors and the audience, hence, neglecting what is referred to as a fourth wall in theatre that may separate the two. That is in addition to the violence in the action of the play. With regard to *Fourth Generation*, the second play in the chapter, Al Zaidi retains the conventional distance between the audience and the actors on the stage, yet his play is among the first to present the theme of human body dismembering, as a solution to escape the war and its consequences. Such a theme is a daring and even dangerous idea to be presented in Iraq in the 1990s due to the restrictions laid down by the authorities which resulted in the withdrawal of the play from the festival where it was presented. This makes the play worth selecting and studying here, since it can be seen as the starting point of a movement of violent representations of life on the Iraqi stage that is still evolving, and drawing the attention of Iraqi theatre makers. In addition, both plays have been published in collections of plays by their playwrights that have appeared recently in Iraq.

The selection of the plays in Chapter Four, *9 Parts of Desire* and *Baghdad Wedding*, was made easier by the fact that both playwrights are the only Western playwrights with

an Iraqi origin, Heather Raffo and Hassan Abdulrazzak respectively. The two plays are their first works of theatre that gained international attention and critical acclaim for the importance of their depiction of contemporary Iraq, the country and its people. The plays are the first of an increasing number of valuable works by the two playwrights which I point out in the chapter's conclusion. *The Gulf between Us* and *The Palace of the End*, the two plays discussed in Chapter Five were selected after a deep research and readings of the Western political theatre works of period of the study. The first play is among the earliest plays to be written as a reaction to the Gulf War of the 1990s, depicting the 'Arabic character of the Middle East', which is most likely to be Iraq. The portrayal of the characters of the play as well as the depiction of its events offer deep insights into the reality of the conditions of Iraq during and after the war of the 1990s, which can also be true of The International Coalition invasion of the country in 2003. I see the play as striking because of its severe critical stance of the Western policy in the region that was written by a Western theatre maker as early as 1992. The play does not criticize the Western policy, rather, it criticizes politics in general and the regimes that governed the region by reproducing the Arabic characters with a certain frame of mind that was familiar and recognisable within the country in the 1990s and even now. This makes the play a rich subject matter for discussion and study, as it illustrates the reality behind its symbolic and artistic representations. Conversely, *The Palace of the End*, can be seen as a documentary play focusing on three different stories about the three main pillars in the dilemma of Iraq: an American soldier, a British scientist of weapon of mass destruction, and an Iraqi woman who was captured and tortured by the Ba'ath regime in 1970s. The play can be seen as an artistic as well as realistic representation of what happened in Iraq. The choice of this play also enabled me to maintain my intention of including female perspectives from outside as well as inside Iraq.

Finally the choice of the plays in Chapter Four was largely governed by the idea of presenting the Western perspective on the war of 2003. I see this as a vital requirement for the purpose of this study, particularly when all the Iraqi plays that I had the opportunity to study and hear about lacked the depiction of the Western side of the Iraqi dilemma. Unlike Western theatre, that was and still is produced regarding the issue, it obviously depicts Iraqi and Arabic characters as the main and effective components within it, as is illustrated in the selected plays here. *Embedded* is one of the earliest plays produced that was a direct reaction to the war of 2003, projecting the quandary of both the American soldiers who fought this war and the Western journalists who were responsible for reporting the facts from the battle field. With such ingredients, the play

is a rich material for exploration for me as an Iraqi researcher who lived through the war on the Iraqi side, and was hugely affected by the actions of the former, the soldiers, and the media reports of the latter, the journalists. Furthermore, *Bengal Tiger in the Baghdad Zoo*, furnished the study with a rich phantom depiction of the situation of the country directly after the war in 2003, where the dead, animals and human beings, wander the city of Baghdad and haunt the living. The play successfully touches on the issues of greed and personal interest that in a time of war may likely govern people's actions and reactions, which is a fact in everyday Iraqi life since the 1980s. Moreover, the play portrays the severe impact of the authoritarian regime on an Iraqi individual and his struggle to come to terms with a new reality of a foreign forced invasion of his country and finding the best way to survive it, which is again an important fact of Iraqi life after 2003. The popularity of the two plays in addition to the above mentioned consequential elements made them an essential valuable addition to this study.

One of the important reasons behind the choice of the four plays discussed in Chapter Five and Six, is the importance given to the Arabic and Iraqi characters in them which is equal to, and sometimes exceeds the importance of the Western characters in the same plays. This is a matter that created a certain balance of power in the theatrical worlds of these plays between the Western side and the Middle Eastern and Iraqi side. This is less apparent in the other Western plays that are written in the 1990s and after the war of 2003. Of course, there are other plays by both Iraqi and Western playwrights that would also have been worthy of consideration within this thesis, and which could be discussed in future work. Examples include Sam Shepard's *States of the Shock* (1991), Khalid Al Mutlak's *Jazra Wassatia (A Central Reservation)* (1996), Jerry Quikley's *Live from the Front* (2005), Kadhim Nassar's *Ahalem Kartoona (Kartoon's Dreams)* (2015). Moreover, it was essential to focus on a limited number of plays in order to be able to analyse them in sufficient detail.

One of the main methods of studying the plays was through the interviews with the playwrights themselves in order to elicit up to date reviews and reflections about their works because a considerable amount of time has passed between the time of writing and producing the plays and the time of this study. Furthermore, the questions included in the interviews were formulated to stir the playwrights' memories of their plays. Some were a repetition of the questions the playwrights had already encountered when they first presented their works, while others came as original or different readings of the play texts. This was particularly true of a number of Western playwrights when asked about their plays about Iraq by an Iraqi researcher. Due to the fact that the playwrights

reside in different parts of the world, all the interviews were processed in written form via emails, with the exception of Mr. Trevor Griffiths, who generously welcomed me into his house to record a rich interview about his play, *The Gulf between Us*. With regard to Iraqi playwrights, the interviews were conducted in Arabic and translated into English afterwards, and sent back to the playwrights for final approval before referring to them within the study.

Each play is discussed separately under a different heading that conveys the controlling line of argument that floats to the surface of the play according to the reading that is given to it. This chosen and highlighted argument is sometimes related to the main theme presiding over the subordinate ideas of the play; or it may relate to the circumstances that surrounded the production of the play which reveal some important facts about the Iraqi life in general, and in particular the struggle the theatrical practice undergoes in Iraq. For instance, in Chapter One Abas Alherbi's *Al Nehdha* is presented under the title of 'The Challenge of Realism' in reference to the critical conditions that governed its first single performance in 1997, and resulted in the playwright and his family's escape from the country, while Falah Shaker's *Heaven Open its Gate... Late* is discussed within the title that foregrounds the main plot of the play, 'War Prisoners Finally Return Home'. Moreover, Tim Robbins's play, *Embedded*, in Chapter Six is read through the title of 'A Struggle for the Truth' which is seen as the controlling message within the play, and Rajiv Joseph's *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* in the same chapter is studied as a play with two edges which provides a space for both sides of the war depicted in the play, the Iraqi and the American, which may justify the title under which it is presented, 'A Play for Both Sides of the War'. With the introduction and the conclusion of each chapter, especially of the first three chapters, the study attempts to offer what, hopefully can be seen as an objective description of the political, social, artistic and theatrical circumstances that surrounded the productions of the plays, which in effect will inform the analysis of the plays even further. In order to reach the desired level of choice and analysis of the current theatrical works, a very wide range of readings and research was covered in relation to the history of Iraqi theatre, the beginnings and its evolution, in addition to several personal interviews that I was able to impart long before and during the start of this study in 2012. Inevitably, there could have been other approaches in tackling the plays, such as a research based on studying the critical and public reaction to the chosen plays, particularly the Iraqi plays, through interviews with critics, academics and theatre practitioners, especially those who had the chance to attend or participate in their production. However, due to the unstable and

unreliable political, economic and security reality in Iraq, this was completely impractical and almost impossible.

One of the basic factors that enabled me to further appreciate the choice of characterization each playwright used for his theatrical work is that I am an Iraqi. This also provided me with slightly new and different insights into the Western playwrights' delineation of the situation in Iraq and the Iraqi or Arab characters in their works. I lived all my life in Iraq and experienced all the contemporary political, social, economic situations and wars that are depicted in the chosen plays. I had a first-hand experience of the dictatorship rule in Iraq as a child and later as an adult when every single aspect of life revolved around avoiding confrontation with the regime and the mentality and beliefs of the Ba'th party. The strict system of life that was isolated from the outer world was suddenly replaced with complete chaos and limitless openness to the outside world, creating a sense of confusion and incomprehension on more than one level: personal, social, political and economic, that led to massive civil conflicts and terrorism that still control the life in Iraq today. The actual experience of living in this situation enabled me to evaluate the depiction offered in the theatrical works covered here as realistic, exaggerated, symbolic, or unrealistic, which in my case was mainly of a personal experience that is sometimes reinforced by academic research, and at other times contradicted or even challenged such academic findings.

On the other hand, fundamentally, my actual experience with theatre and dramatic practice is generated from my academic study. Since being a member of what may be described as an Iraqi lower middle class family, in Western terms, attending live theatrical performances was considered to be a distant luxury that was not available to my family during the 1980s and 1990s due to economic and social conditions and reserved conventions, and later became a risk that was better avoided due to the very bad security conditions in Iraq after 2003. I studied Western drama and Modern English drama for my BA and MA studies in the department of English in the College of Education at the University of Baghdad, and then taught English drama and literature in the same department for several years before starting this study. My experience of Iraqi theatre came through the limited 'comic' performances that during the 1980s and 1990s appeared on national Iraqi Television, and I also had the opportunity of reading a number of Iraqi plays that had been published but had not been performed for various reasons. Hence, my experience of theatre and drama in Iraq, as an Iraqi individual member of the public, can perhaps be generalized to a wider population in Iraq. Consequently, this thesis is personal as well as academic research that has resulted from

a marriage between an academic engagement with Western drama and the inclination toward uncovering an undisclosed facet of dramatic arts on a national level, that is, Iraqi.

The framework of this study is formed on two parallel routes, juxtaposing six Iraqi plays and six Western plays within the period of the study. This juxtaposition is intended to clarify the similarities and differences in the theatrical treatment of the same political and social conditions of Iraq as presented in the Iraqi and the Western dramas. On the other hand, there is no direct comparison between the Iraqi and Western plays due to the obvious distinction between the two practices in terms of their contexts and the historical differences between them. Chapter One will investigate *Al Nehdha* and *Heaven Open its Gates... Late*, in order to reveal the political and social impact of wars, economic sanctions and the authoritarian regime on Iraqi life and consequently, on theatre and theatre makers. Moreover, the plays in Chapter Two, *The Wild Wedding* and *The Cart*, will reveal the suffering of Iraqi people that resulted from the long history of dictatorship and the American invasion in 2003 that was followed by chaos and corruption after this year. Conversely, Chapter Three shifts to different Iraqi theatre practices to shed light on two innovative theatre works, *The Masks* and *Fourth Generation*, and how these two plays set themselves apart from other Iraqi theatre practices, showing coincidental and independent evolution of Iraqi theatre practices that in spite of its isolation from the world outside Iraq concurs with the recent Western trends in theatre.

By contrast, Chapter Four focuses on *9 Parts of Desire* and *Baghdad Wedding* as Western plays created by playwrights of Iraqi origin who took their origin as a source of inspiration to create distinguished theatrical works internationally. The chapter foregrounds the issue of the Western theatrical response to contemporary conditions in Iraq and how these conditions brought the country to Western attention and awareness. Further, the plays included in the chapter render a truthful depiction of Iraqi people and their reactions to the circumstances of the country from inside and outside Iraq. Chapter Five and Six discuss the Western theatrical characterization of Iraq and its people during the same period: Chapter Five tackles the political theatrical portrayal of Iraq represented in two plays, *The Gulf between Us* and *The Palace of the End*, whereas Chapter Six focuses on the Western plays that were created as a reaction to the war of 2003 in Iraq as illustrated in *Embedded* and *Bengal Tiger in the Baghdad Zoo*. These two chapters provide the answer to the question of how Western society saw Iraq and the war in Iraq.

The discussion of the plays in this thesis attempts to offer vital answers to the issues of: how theatre in Iraq survived dictatorship and tried to reproduce the political and social life in the country on the stage; what are the circumstances that governed Iraqi theatre practice before and after 2003; how the Western theatre detected the contemporary political development in Iraq and the Middle East; what kind of theatrical forms Iraqi and Western dramatists chose to recreate the contemporary events of Iraq; how effective were Iraqi and Western dramas on their audiences as traced through the critical responses to these works; and finally, how creditable are these theatrical representations to the reality of situation in contemporary Iraq.

The History of Theatre in Iraq and the Western Influence:

In order to have a better comprehension of Iraqi theatrical practice and the context in which the Iraqi plays examined here were created and performed, it is essential to understand the context in which theatre practice developed in Iraq and the role of Western influence on theatre in Iraq. The most important and prominent historical facts about theatre in Iraq will provide an overview of the frame in which Iraqi theatre developed and the obstacles and challenges that theatre makers faced, leading to the difficult decade of the 1990s and after.

Ahmad Fayyad Al-Mafraji (1937-1996), who was a theatre actor, critic, and poet, is considered by Iraqi theatre makers to be the pioneer historian of Iraqi theatre. He started his mission of recording the beginnings of Iraqi theatre history in 1960.⁴ Throughout his life Al-Mafraji dedicated all his efforts to recording an accurate documentation of the history of Iraqi theatre, publishing a number of books and articles, tracing its roots. Among the most important of these are: *The Theatrical Movement in Iraq* (1965), *The Theatrical life in Iraq* (1988) and the article "The theatrical Life in Iraq 1880-1921", which was published in the journal, *Cinema and Theatre*, in Baghdad in 1982. Since Al-Mafraji's efforts to record Iraqi Theatre's roots, there have been a number of publications both in Arabic and English for the same purpose and by different theatre critics and scholars, such as: the published lectures of Dr. Ali Al Zubaidi under the title, *The Arabic Play in Iraq* (1967), Moosa Matti's article, "Social Consciousness in Iraqi

⁴ In his article, "Theatrical life in Iraq 1880-1921", Al-Mafraji states that he was assigned by a daily newspaper in Baghdad to write a series of ten articles about the history of Iraqi theatre in 1960 until 1963, which later led Al-Mafraji to develop an obsession for documenting the origin of Iraqi theatre since then until his death in 1996. During those three years Al-Mafraji wrote ten articles for the newspaper, and later decided to collect and develop them further in the following years.

Drama”, which was first presented at a Conference in America in 1978, then published in *The Muslim World* journal in 1981, and finally made available online in 2007; and Khalid Kishtainy’s book that was published in London, *Theatre with Commitment: Story of Iraqi Theatre* [198-?]. Among the most recent publications in this field is Dr. Sami Abdulahmeed’s book, *Iraqi Theatre in a Hundred Years* (2012) and a recent article published online in *Arab Stages* entitled, “The Birth of Modern Iraqi Theatre: Church Drama in Mosul in the Late Nineteenth Century”(2015) by Amir Al Azraki and James Al-Shamma.

Most, if not all later publications focusing on the roots of Iraqi theatre relied on Al-Mafraj’s early findings about the issue during the 1960s. However, they all agree that the first Iraqi theatrical practices started in the city of Mosul, north of Iraq as part of the Christian churches’ activities in preaching virtue. The earliest of these is a collection of three one-act plays by the deacon Hana Habash entitled, *The Comedy of Adam and Eve*, *Yousif Al Hassan*, and *The Comedy of Tobia*. According to Al-Mafraji, all three texts were dated 1880 (Al-Mafraji 1982, 148).⁵ Furthermore, the beginnings of the theatrical movement in Iraq had its first theatre book published in 1893, which contained one of the most significant plays in the history of Iraqi theatre by Naoum Fathallah Al Sahhar entitled, *Latif Khushaba*, which was a translated and adapted text from an earlier French text. According to Al-Mafraji, it is significant because it marked the beginning of the theatre that was dedicated to social reformation. (Al-Mafraji 1988, 15). This concurs with Al Azraki and Al Shamma’s opinion that Al Shahhar’s play “marks a shift in focus in Iraqi theatre from primarily religious concerns to sociopolitical ones.”(Al Azraki and Al Shama 2015, 4). The play depicts the story of a rich man’s son and his journey from being a spoiled son into a poor servant, as his rich father led him to believe in order to teach him a lesson in modesty. Al Mafraji gives a long list of examples of plays, written and produced between 1880 and 1921 in different parts of Iraq which were mostly historical or translated texts from Turkish and French, as most of the dramatists had had the opportunity to study in these countries when Iraq was under the Ottoman Empire.

Conversely, the origin of theatrical activities in Iraq may well go far beyond the dates stated by Al-Mafraji. In his article, “Art and Theatre in the Ancient World”, Richard Green asserts that it is important to remember that the works of literature of ancient times were

created for a society that was still largely oral rather than one that was in the habit of reading texts: the scenes on the vases were not, as it were, passive depictions but

⁵ The details of the plots and the themes of these plays are available in English in Amir Al-Azraki and James Al Shamma’s article.

ones that acted as a prompt for the viewer that he could explain, recalling the situations created on the vase and the stories that lay behind them.(Green 2006, 165)

Here, Green refers to Greek literature, yet it is likely that the case can be applicable to the ancient *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which is well recognized as one of the oldest pieces of literature found in human history since it dates back more than 4000 years. This may be supported by the narrator's address to the audience, in the prologue of the epic, "I will proclaim to the world the deeds of Gilgamesh" (cited in Ceil 2012). Furthermore, the religious practice of *Ta'ziyeh* (Condolences), which started a few years after the murder of Imam Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet Mohammed in 680 AD in Karbala, is another important indication of the religious and cathartic theatrical practices in ancient Iraq. Khalid Amin's article, "Theatre in the Arab World: A Difficult Birth" explains that these practices were a kind of a reaction created as a result of the sense of guilt that Iraqis, particularly Shi'ites, felt after abandoning Imam Hussein and his family and followers to be brutally killed on that day. These performances were created and enacted during the first month of the Arabic year, Muharram. The first ten days of this month are called Ashura throughout which the performances are carried out to embody the actions of the battle that led to the savage murder of these holy figures by the hands of the Umayyad Calipha and his followers. Amin points out that among the significant features of these practices is that whereas some theatrical events in different parts of the Arab world were limited to temples in ancient times, the *Ta'ziyeh* Islamic performances of Muharram and Ashura used streets as stages:

Every year the Karbala events are reconstituted and represented in elaborately staged performances throughout the Shi'ite world. Within the performance, the audience assumes the role of the passive Kufans who abandoned Hussein to death. They weep and ask forgiveness for their personal sins. The performance becomes a yearly occasion whereby the Shi'ites' historical guilt is re-enacted, leading to a collective emotional discharge and purging of their souls. The performance contains many grotesque elements of real torture and violence, which the performers willingly inflict upon themselves. (Amin 2006, 149)

Although the ancient practices of *Ta'ziyeh* had been popular for centuries, the Ottoman governor of Iraq, Midhat Pasha (1822-1883) banned them in a clear order published in the *Al Zoura'* newspaper, the first Iraqi newspaper, on 4th of Muharram 1286 H, (14th April, 1869 AD). To justify the order it was said that the practices deformed the public opinion and encouraged sectarianism among people. (Al Zubaidi 1967, 33). Yet these practices were carried out by Iraqis privately and secretly within very limited spaces in Iraq until their revival after 2003. Nowadays, Iraqis, mostly Shi'ites, prepare for these

performances on a wide scale for each Ashura of the year; some can even be described as exaggerated forms of *Ta'ziyeh*.

Apart from the tragic performances of Ashura, literary sources refer to several kinds of theatrical activities or the performance arts in ancient Iraq, such as the Shadow Plays, *Al Semajah* (The Lumpish), *Al Mukhanethon* (The Milksops), *Khayal Al Zill* (Theatre of Shadow), and *Al Ikhbari* (The Story Teller) that spread between the Abbasid era and the Ottoman control over Iraq. All of these forms of theatrical activities were intended to entertain and provide comic relief to their audiences. Amin cites verses from a poem by the Iraqi Abbasid's most famous poet, Abū Nuwās (756–814), which describes the atmosphere around the shadow plays at that time:

The wine rises sparkling in the cup
Which is decorated with flawless drawings
Like the shadow player when he darkens
And plays with the string tune . . . (Cited in Amin 2006, 150)

Al Zubaidi confirms that shadow plays appeared in Iraq during that era and later spread into other countries around Iraq. (Al Zubaidi 1967, 23) This supports the idea that the limitation of the theatrical or visual arts in general in Iraq and the Arab region is not the result of an Islamic ban on religious beliefs and practices. Amin emphasises this fact stating, “there is no mention in the Qur’an and the Sunna [teachings] of the prophet Mohammed of any kind of rejection of theatrical practice or of the making of spectacle.” (Amin 2006, 153) Additionally, Al Zubaidi elaborates on this vital issue stating that Arabs, and particularly Iraqis, were not introduced to theatrical arts that were known in the West except for a few vague references that were included in the translation of Aristotle’s book, *The Poetics*, which was translated into Arabic during the Abbasid era. Furthermore, most Greek dramas were unknown to Europeans until the Renaissance. Therefore, Arabs could not know about these forms of activities during the eighth, the ninth, or the tenth centuries and could not have had the chance to see them; and it would be illogical to state that they rejected an idea even before knowing about it or seeing it. (Al Zubaidi 1967, 20-22) The performances of *Ta'ziyeh* can be solid evidence in support of Amin and Al Zubaidi’s argument. If Islam forbade acting, Iraqis would never think of enacting their tragic memories of Imam Hussein in this way.

Abdulhameed refers to the arts practised by *Al Semajah* and *Al Mukhanethon* which were early forms of entertainment. The Abbasid Caliph, al-Mutawakkil (822-861), used these two groups of comic actors to attack his enemies and belittle them verbally. The first group mostly used masks and silent forms of acting that can be described as a form

of pantomime, while the second group used dancing as a form of expression. (Abdulhameed 2012, 4). Later, the main form of visual arts was attributed to Mohammed Ibn Daniyal Yusul Al Mawsili Al-Khuzai (1248-1311), who was widely known as *Al Kahhal* (The Oculist). He was an Iraqi eye physician born in Mosul north of Iraq and later migrated to Egypt. Moosa mentions that Al Kahhal's book *Tayf Al Khayal fi Marifat Khayal Al Zill* (*The Phantom of Imagination in the Knowledge of the Shadow play*) was edited and published by George Jacob (1862-1937).⁶ (Moosa 1997, 23). Amine clarifies the importance of Ibn Daniyal's works:

Shadow plays [masrah a-d-dil][sic] were performed with figures held by sticks against a back-lit canvas screen. 'The audience sitting in front of the screen saw only the shadows of the figures. The man who moved the figures spoke or sang the text just as though the moving figures were speaking or singing'. The performance takes place in a fully arranged theatrical space in which a screen separates stage and auditorium. In addition, the shadow play remains the only performing tradition in the medieval Arab world that relies on a written script. Ibn Daniyal can be called the first Arab dramatist par excellence; he 'wrote three shadow plays under the title *Tayf al-Khaya:l*, by far the oldest known to us and the only dramatic pieces that have come down to us from the Islamic middle ages'. Ibn Daniyal's scripts have been scattered in many libraries in different parts of the world. (Amin 2006, 150)

Hence, it is obvious that such practices can be seen as the early theatrical forms of the Arab world where texts were written and then presented to an audience through visual characters. Al Zubaidi asserts that other activities of the same form remained active in Iraq until the time of the First World War, such as the *Kerkoz* (The Dummy) which mainly presented tales of children; and there was the group of Al Ikhbari, which according to Al Zubaidi, was the nearest form of theatre to Western farce since they were episodic comic scenes that revolved around one theme or idea, which could involve singing and dancing too (Al Zubaidi 1967, 25-7). The task of establishing an accurate history of Arabic and Iraqi drama has thus proved to be difficult for scholars since "Arabic drama, as other dramas of the world, has been eclipsed and stereotyped as a lack of being from both within and without. In other words, there is a narrative missing from the official story of Arabic drama and theatre." (Amine 2006, 145-6) Accordingly, theatrical arts were not completely new to Iraqis before the date provided by Al-Mafraji, 1880, yet, it is true that the plays that started in the Christian churches of Al Mosul can be seen as the earliest refined forms of Iraqi drama that have been found thus far. The refinement of these dramas came as a result of the Western influence on the dramatists, received outside Iraq.

⁶ Jacob was a German Islamic scholar and Orientalist and the founder of the modern Turkish Studies in Germany.

Western influence on Iraqi and Arabic theatre is undeniable, since most prominent figures of Iraqi theatre had first studied and trained in the West. M.M Badawi's book, *Modern Arabic Literature* (1997) explains that the modern era in Arabic literature is a period of *al-Nahadha* (renaissance):

Modern literature constitutes in certain important respects an entirely new departure, even though its break with the Classical has sometimes been exaggerated, for despite its borrowing of European forms such as drama and the novel, Modern literature never really completely severed its link with its past. The Nahdah was in fact a product of a fruitful meeting of two forces: the indigenous tradition, and the imported western forms. Moreover, the change from the past was an extremely slow and gradual process. (Badawi 1997, 1)

This is manifested in the fact that the earliest published Iraqi theatre text, Al Sahhar's *Latif Khushaba* (1893) was in fact translated from French as mentioned earlier. Furthermore, Hakki Al Shbili (1913-1985), who is considered by Iraqi theatre makers to be the 'father of Iraqi modern theatre' received his early education in theatre outside Iraq: first in Egypt during the late 1920s, and then in Paris in the 1930s, and returned to Iraq to establish the first formal Institute of Fine Arts during the 1940s, in which most distinguished figures of Iraqi theatre studied and graduated. These include, Ibraheem Jelal, Jaffer Al Saidi, Yosif Al Ani, Khelil Shawki, Sami Abdulhameed, Salah Al Qassab, Fadhil Khalil, and Beri Hasoon Faried. Al Shbili also played an important role in founding the first Iraqi formal theatre company in the late 1960s, The National Company of Acting. Al Mafarji stresses that the movement of translating Western theatre works had an important role in the development of Iraqi theatre during the 1940s. (Al Mafarji 1989, 10) Since the 1950s, Iraqi theatre practitioners received their higher education in theatre in Europe, the UK, and the USA and on returning to Iraq, they adapted and translated important works such those of Shakespeare, Molière, Stanislavsky and Brecht. There are many important plays between the 1920's and the 1980s that mark the political trend that emerged with the evolution of Iraqi theatre as another influence of Western theatre, as well as the need Iraqi theatre makers felt, to create effective theatre. Among the prominent plays of this period are *Tharat Al Arab* (*The Arab Revenge*) (1922), which was developed by a theatre company known as *Jami't Al Temtheel Al Arabic* (*The Arabic Group of Acting*); *Wahida* (a female name), which was written by Moosa Al Shabender in 1928, depicting the suffering of Iraqi women; *Al A'ila Al Menkooba* (*The Afflicted Family*) written in 1935 by Nedeem Al Etraqchi, dealing with social reformation; *Ana Umk ya Shaker* (*I am Your Mother, Shaker*) (1955) which was written by Yousif Al Ani, calling for political reformation; and *Dairat Al Faham Al Baghdadiah* (*The Baghdadi Circle of Coal*) (1976), which was

adapted by Adel Kadhim from Brecht's play, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1948). Kadhim's play was stopped after its first performance which was attended by Tariq Aziz, the Minister of Media at that time, as it was seen to oppose the principles of the government to support the Great Arab Cause of Palestine.

In spite of the increasing interest in theatre and dramatic arts during the twentieth century, Iraqi theatre makers faced many challenges and suffered much to have their works produced. In separate publications, both Yousif Al Ani and Badri Hasoom Farid describe some of these difficulties Iraqi theatre practitioners faced during the mid-twentieth century. In the Introduction to his book, *Iraqi theatre in 1967*, Farid explains in detail the long and exhausting process of acquiring the formal approval for staging a play text, which might take months between governmental offices, even if it was a translated text of a well-known Western dramatist who had died years before Iraqis decided to stage his plays in Iraq. Farid even states that some of the play texts that were denied formal approval were available to read by all Iraqis in local book markets and they had already been performed in other Arab countries such as Egypt, Syria, Kuwait, or Lebanon. (Farid 1968, 11) The second issue that is problematic for theatre practitioners, according to Farid, is that Iraqi theatre companies were formally connected to the rules of nightclubs according to Iraqi law, which eventually meant that Iraqi theatre makers were treated as if working in this context rather than in theatres. This inevitably affected the reputation of Iraqi theatre makers during that time, since nightclubs have the worst connotations in the minds of the reserved Iraqi society. (Farid 1968, 9) Furthermore, all theatre performances submitted to taxes of up to 25% of the price of each theatre ticket, a matter that burdened theatre makers, and led them to further losses. (Farid 1968, 14-5). That is in addition to the fact that at that time most theatre makers were actually employees who had other jobs, and practiced theatre as amateurs, which meant that they did not have enough time to cope with all the difficulties that surrounded theatre as sometimes they needed to pay for the expenses of a theatre production out of their own money. (Farid 1968, 16-7) All this concurs with Al Ani's statement in his article, "Reality and Modernism in the Fifties Theatre", where he explains the difficult process of getting approval for a script which might take ages, moving from one employee to another in the governmental offices and each giving his own opinion about each detail of the play starting from the movements of the characters, gestures, and dialogue. He mentioned different occasions when a play was given an approval and was later prohibited a day before the actual performance because of a certain employee who wrote to his bosses expressing doubts about the potential danger

of the play. The approval for these plays should have been obtained from more than one source including the General Secretary of the Capital, to the Ministry of Social Affairs, to the Criminal Investigation Department, and even to the Military Leader of the Country. (Al Ani 1982, 115) These procedures continued, with a slight change in forms and regulations until the 1980s and the 1990s; some of these difficulties are going to be highlighted in the discussion of the Iraqi plays in the first three chapters of this study.

The 1980s brought new challenges to Iraqi theatre as the Iraq-Iran war broke out. Theatre witnessed the rise of what was called 'the commercial theatre'. This was initiated after a clear order from the Minister of Culture and Media, Lateif Nesaif Jassim, as early as 1983, that theatre should be a place where people should enjoy their time; "people should be happy" (Al Nusayir 1997, 33). Yassein Al Nusayir, a theatre critic, mentions that Jassim emphasized that theatre should be a place where people should laugh. According to Al Nusayir, that was the only way Iraqis could forget about their tragedies that had been inflicted on them by war and its consequences (Al Nusayir 1997, 33-34). This notion was asserted later by the Manager of Theatres in Baghdad, Farooqu Seloom, in these terms: "People need someone to ease their daily agony; not someone to solve their problems for them" (cited in Hassan Nov.2006). Therefore, new theatre companies were started, to entertain people with songs, dances and ribald humour as their main purpose. Gypsy female dancers were an essential part of these performances, some of them adopting drama as a better profession. Al Nusayir states that the phenomenon of the commercial theatre and the theatre that depended on vulgar humour and comic situations created by misunderstandings are derived from the Egyptian theatre. Iraqis were not known for humour and if they would deal with jokes then it should have a political connotation that criticized a certain aspect of their everyday life. (Al Nusayir 1997, 34) Graham Holderness, Erwin Piscator and Augusto Boal all examine the commercial theatre as a form of mere entertainment rather than confronting society's crises, compared with political theatre, which they rank as having a much higher status, according to its aims. Clive Barker's article, "Alternative Theatre/ Political Theatre" in Holderness's book, *The Politics of Theatre and Drama* (1992), carefully examines the commercial theatre and compares it to theatre that depends on symbolism and concealed images and references. Barker asserts, that "[t]he movements to create National Theatres [...] which I see as now being the dominant and repressive form of theatre, began as alternative theatre or *other theatre* [sic] movements." (Barker in Holderness 1992, 23) Citing Zygmunt Hubner, an artist from Eastern Europe, Barker asserts that "working this way constricted artistic horizons and created bad theatre.

However worthy the cause, the theatre was being used politically rather than political theatre being created” (cited in Holderness 1992, 25); and this exactly explains the situation in Iraq. Many Iraqi critics used different titles to describe commercial theatre according to the context of their comments or in order not to degrade the works of their colleagues. Terms such as: ‘commercial theatre’, ‘public theatre’, ‘alternative theatre’ and the ‘other theatre’, were all used to refer to this same kind of theatre that they did not accept but could not deny. Barker further explains that, theatre workers are “caught in a vicious circle: there is no professional theatre without state subsidy, but subsidy creates an unacceptable theatre. Few like it, but it costs a lot” (Holderness 1992, 24). Although most Iraqi theatre makers’ feelings about this theatre may concur with Barker’s explanation, I still think that some of these ‘comic’ productions, in fact, held political and social suggestions if one took the time to examine deeply, the dialogue, the situations, and the frame of these works. Among the most memorable Iraqi comic plays of that time are: *Al Khait Wal Asfoor (The Thread and the Sparrow)* (1983), written and directed by Mikdad Muslim, which tackled the fables inspired old Iraqi common proverbs and which could reflect directly on the reality Iraqis lived; *Al Mehata (The Train Station)* (1985), written by Sabah Atwan and directed by Fethhi Zain Al Abideen, that presented a story of a woman who escapes her husband’s cruel family within the context of her meeting an engineer, a doctor and an old local man in a train station in a rural town in the south of Iraq; and *Bait Wa Khamis Biban (A House and Five Doors)* (1986), written by Farook Muhammad and directed by Muhssin Al Ali, that depicted the lives of a group of lodgers in a house that has five rooms, each portraying a comic, yet striking, life condition that Iraqis experienced and suffered from during the 1980s.

On the other hand, Farid pointed out that the more notable theatre companies took part of the responsibility for the isolation of ‘serious’ theatre performances, as they were called, because of the language used in such productions. They insisted on using the standard Arabic which was believed to be too serious for the public and ordinary people to cope and identify with, while the “commercial theatres” used Iraqi Arabic which was lighter and more accessible. (Farid 1989, 18) Another trend that these theatre makers followed was to load their works with symbolic images that made them vague and even difficult to understand by ordinary audiences. For example, in 1988 Kareem Chitheer was unable to produce his play entitled *The Pearl* in Iraq until he left for Yemen and presented it in 1993. The play depicts an imaginary land where a mad man is looking for a missing pearl, while everyone in this imaginary land is waiting passively for a ‘new comer’ whom they believe is going to come to their land and save them from the

dictator who governs them. The pearl is believed to have been swallowed by a rooster, yet the events of the play reveal that that pearl is one of the precious belongings of the tyrant king and that it was given to the mad man by the queen who incited the people to rebel. Furthermore, the end of the play reveals that even the rooster that ate the pearl at the beginning of the play is in fact a chicken. This is the surface image of the play, and it is left to a thoughtful audience to discern the writer's real intention which implied a severe criticism directed toward the passivity of the Iraqi people toward the oppression they were subjected to by the regime. In spite of such complicated and symbolic images that were used to cover up the political intentions and messages in the Iraqi serious plays of that time, the plays were a real risk that could not be presented publically inside Iraq. However, Iraqi theatre practitioners continued to persist in creating their theatre to encourage theatrical activities in the country even through the difficult years of the 1990s with distinguished theatre works, as this thesis will illustrate.

As discussed earlier, the influence of Western theatre on Iraqi theatre is one of the major elements that to a great extent contributed to the growth and development of the latter. The academic curriculum that is taught currently in the Institute of Fine Arts and the College of Fine Arts in Baghdad relies on the translated material of Greek, Roman, Shakespearian, and Modern Western Drama; dramatists and theorists such as Chekhov, Ibsen, Brecht, Becket, Artaud, Brook and Piscator are the key figures that help us to understand the mentality and background of Iraqi theatre makers. Therefore, I discuss the Iraqi plays presented here with reference to the philosophy of the playwrights and dramatists who created them, as well as use the opportunity to align them against Western artistic, particularly political artistic theories, such as those of Brecht and Piscator, and I try to trace more recent critical examination of their works and apply them to the Iraqi plays. Additionally I refer to Western critical works in relation to those theatrical trends that were new to Iraqi theatre practitioners in order to examine the extent to which the theatrical mind in Iraq has evolved independently so far during the 1990s and the beginning of the twenty first century when Iraq was in total isolation; how these recent Iraqi plays coincidentally shows significant connections with the most recent trends in the Western theatre such as 'theatre of cruelty', 'in-yer-face', and 'immersive theatre', as discussed in Chapter Three.

The question of how much Iraqi and Arabic theatre owes to Western theatre is one of the riddles that most theatre practitioners and critics tried to solve with no definite success so far. Among the most recent Iraqi publications that examined Western theatre's contributions to the identity of the Iraqi and Arabic theatre are Dr. Sami

Abdulahmeed's book, *Lights on the Theatrical Life in Iraq* (2010) and Dr. Ahmed Al Sharji's book, *Arabic Theatre from Borrowing to Imitation* (2013). In the section of his book entitled 'The Tributaries of Arabic Theatre', Abdulhameed stresses that Arabic theatre is a reflection of what happens in Western theatre since theatre had already started in the Arab world, purely influenced by the West. (Abdulhameed 2010, 46) Unlike Abdulhameed, Al Sharji dedicates his entire book to an investigation of the real identity of Arabic theatre, using examples of the works of celebrated Arabic and Iraqi dramatists and discussing how distinctive they are from Western dramas, yet they still show Western influence now and then. Al Sharji concludes his book by highlighting the idea that there is no such thing as English or Dutch theatre; rather, there are distinguished names of dramatists that with their innovative works established their names as theatre makers and affected the world of theatre in general. (Al Sharji 2013, 206). Further, he concludes his discussion with a final clear statement as a theatre maker himself:

Whatever we present is theatre that is not different from what others in other parts of the world present, the difference lies only in the language, and I repeat 'only', therefore, it is important to strive to establish this idea, perhaps we will be able to rid ourselves of thinking of the other. Whatever we present is: theatre in Arabic. (Al Sharji 2013, 208)

Ironically, Al Sharji is still looking into whether what Arab and Iraqi theatre makers are presenting now is 'Arabic theatre' or 'theatre in Arabic', since in a very recent post on his Facebook page on 22nd of December 2015, he asked that very question, "Is there an Arabic Theatre, or is it A theatre in Arabic?" (Al Sharji 2015) In answer, Al Sharji received around 24 replies mostly from theatre academics, critics, practitioners, and even students so far and most agreed with the idea that there is theatre in Arabic, as he suggested earlier in his book. Interestingly, the exact issue is not new. Amin's article, consulted earlier in relation to the history of Arabic theatre, has a quotation from the fourth volume of James Hastings's *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (1991) that declares, "Even today there is no Arabic drama; there is only a drama in the Arabic languages . . . for all plays that have appeared in the language of Mohammad during the last fifty years are nothing but translations, or at best, imitations of European works" (cited in Amin 2006, 152). For Amin, this is "the most biased statement about Arabic drama [...that] manifests a eurocentric claim of origin and mastery of drama as a genre." (Amin 2006, 152) Arguably, Amin's reflection on Hastings's claim is most probably generated from the fact that Hastings is, after all, a Westerner writing about Arabic theatre. We might ask how Amin would reflect on Al Sharji's current statement and

question. Marvin Carlson opens his book, *Theatre: A very Short Introduction* (2014), with a straightforward statement that can be seen as an unprejudiced response to such a debate: “the best answer is that these activities combined and developed in countless different ways in different communities and cultures, resulting in the modern world in a vast array of theatre and theatre-related forms.” (Carlson 2014, 1) Hence, whether it is an Arabic theatre or theatre in Arabic, theatre in general, regardless of its origin, is an activity that should be shared, appreciated, and examined collectively. It is a means of expression human beings use, just like the activity of writing. The language of this writing may differ but it will always be an expression of feelings and reactions. Therefore, the current study is trying to transcend the origin of the plays, and explain them according to the most appropriate philosophy and opinion that may convey the intentions and the perspectives of their makers. To be accurate, this will only be true of the discussion of the Iraqi plays rather than the Western plays in this study because of the scarcity of Iraqi critical works that would have helped to explain Western plays better than Western critical works; but this will add to the study’s aim of building a bridge between the two sides, the Iraqi and the Western. Moreover, the study also relies on the original interviews that I was able to conduct with most of the playwrights and dramatists studied here.

Finally there is the issue of the title of this thesis: ‘Iraq in contemporary drama’. To explain this title: I have tried to investigate the difference between theatre and drama. Most sources distinguished the two according to the idea that theatre is the physical entity of drama, that is, theatre involves the actual performance of a play text, while drama mostly refers to the written form of a play, the text. However, a dramatist is the person who makes theatre as well as writes for theatre, while a playwright is the person who writes the text only rather than produces the actual performance of his play, which may be attributed to the director of the play. Martin Esslin emphasises the notion that definitions “are valuable and essential, but they must never be made into absolutes; if they are, they become obstacles to the organic development of new forms, experiment and invention.” (Esslin 1977, 11) Because I did not have the opportunity to watch any of the plays studied here live, (except for Robbin’s *Embedded*, via a DVD recording of a live performance since there is no published text of the play) and because the plays are mostly considered through a deep analysis of the texts and the playwrights’ intentions and opinions of their works, the title of the thesis focuses on contemporary drama. The importance of the study lies in the fact that it brings into discussion Iraqi theatrical works that are unknown in the West, for which the performance was ephemeral, like all

theatrical performances. Thus, I have focused on the plays as dramatic texts, but I always try to uncover what is possible about the context of the production and the reception. At the same time I examine the Western plays about Iraq through an Iraqi eye that has never before encountered such dramatic representations of the critical contemporary life conditions that I actually experienced.

Although the diversity of the plays and their writers is one of the main elements that I am keen to maintain in this study, among the twelve plays that are presented here there are two by Falah Shaker, *Heaven Open its Gates... Late* and *The Wild Wedding*. For this choice I have two justifications: first because Shaker has been one of the most conspicuous names in Iraqi theatre since the mid-1980s, receiving recognition and acclaim for almost all of his plays inside and outside Iraq; the second reason is that his two plays chosen here are significant, because of their themes, presentations, and their impact on Iraqi audience, and I see this as most relevant to the general objective of the study, that is, the theatrical portrayal of the Iraqi dilemma in contemporary times. The first play, *Heaven Opens its Gates... Late*, discussed in Chapter One, is one of the most prominent theatrical productions of the 1990s in Iraq since it presents the theme of the returning prisoners of the Iraq-Iran war that resonates in the Iraqi mind of the 1990s and projects an image of the impact of this war and the devastating conditions that followed it. While in Chapter Two, *The Wild Wedding* serves as a theatrical link that connects the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty first century, since it was originally written in the early 1990s, yet was not published or formally produced until 2006. The two chapters are intended to provide a response to the question of how Iraqi theatre highlighted the controlling notions that governed the Iraqi political and social life before and after 2003.

Contemporary Political Drama and Iraqi Theatre:

In his book, *Theatre and Politics*, Joe Kelleher argues that the different understandings of the term ‘politics’ vary according to the context in which the term is used; and they can extend “to refer to the activities of governments and other social systems and organisations, or to the study of such activities and systems, or to the processes by which power is distributed – and struggled over – in society more generally.” (Kelleher 2009, 2) Similarly, Graham Holderness’s introduction to his book that comprises ten critical articles by different writers about political theatre, tries to establish a clear meaning of the terms ‘politics’ and ‘political theatre’ and ‘drama’. He explains that ‘politics’ is the process of change that occurs in the governmental system,

deepened by the social participation in this change, in addition to the relationship between the government and the society itself. These are always “in cooperation and competition, peace and war; and with the individuals, parties and ideas which sustain, develop, defend and overthrow governments and the ideological formations by which their power is maintained” (Holderness 1992, 2). Moreover, he states that political theatre is a distinctive type of theatre as long as “it displays a different kind of relationship with something other than itself – ‘politics’.”(Holderness 1992, 2). Accordingly, he concludes that the identification of political theatre leads “to suggest a certain habitual relationship between theatre and politics: that they are *normally* [sic] very different areas of experience, which happen to become, in the activity of political theatre, interconnected” (Holderness 1992, 2). Since Iraqi life has long been governed by political changes and conflicts, particularly during the last four decades, that have affected all aspects of life within its course, Kelleher and Holderness’ interpretations provide a comprehensible explanation of the nature of Iraqi political theatre under the Ba’th’s regime’s control and after 2003. It was a time when Saddam’s regime was, as Alharbi describes, “an ideological hammer that struck over the head of the Iraqi creativity” (Cited in Raphaeli 2007). Therefore, Iraqi theatre, as embodied in the plays chosen here, presents a clear picture of the political changes Iraqi society experienced during the 1990s, as well as the governmental responses to them and to the creative responses they attracted. Due to the reality in Iraq, it is inevitable that the form of theatre that Iraqi theatre practitioners refer to as ‘serious theatre’ that is different from the popular theatre of the 1980s and 1990s is in fact ‘political theatre’, when one takes into consideration the international understanding of the term.

During the Iraq-Iran war in the 1980s and throughout the wars that followed, every aspect of Iraqi life was considered to be a battle that one needed to fight and win, therefore; education, social life and arts were all treated as a kind of metaphorical war where these battles took place and people had to win them in order to be glorified as victorious heroes. The arts, and particularly theatre, became another ‘Jebha’ or ‘front’, that is, art had to praise the war and the defence of one’s country. Songs, films, literary works including plays had to extoll the achievements of the Iraqi army, its victories, its invasions, the death of large numbers of enemy soldiers, or the capture of prisoners of war. Nobody dared to ask whether these ‘achievements’ were real or mere illusions. That was the norm throughout the 1990s and beyond until the very last day of the regime in 2003. The government considered that theatre had a particular role in defending Iraq’s position and therefore all drama had to display loyalty to the country.

Many plays glorifying war and depicting the patriotism of Iraqi soldiers and their 'great leader' were performed in the National Theatre and other venues. A good example is Muhssin Al Azawi's adaptation of Irwin Shaw's *Bury the Dead* (1936), an American play written before World War II about a group of American soldiers who refuse to be buried after they were killed because they had to take part, against their will, in an unjust war. Al Azawi, the theatre actor and director, entitled the play *The Revolution of the Dead*, and it was performed in 1990 at the National Theatre in Baghdad to show the 'predicament' of American soldiers in war. The play represented the Iraqi soldiers' patriotism but it ignored the fact that Shaw wrote his play to condemn war in general. However, a discerning audience would possibly realise the indirect reference to Shaw's anti-war stance since in order to escape censorship. Using indirect and hidden references for a thoughtful audience to digest was one of the methods Iraqi theatre practitioners used to express an anti-war message. This kind of war propaganda was a very popular way of reaching people in Iraq in the 1990s. Mohammed Ghazi Alekhras's book *Kharif Al Muthaqaf fi Al Iraq 1990-2008* (The Intellectual's Autumn in Iraq 1990-2008) renders a detailed history of the complicated situation of Iraqi intellectuals during the 1990s and after and how they were forced to dedicate all their efforts to compliment the regime and its deeds. He stresses that "toward the end of the 1990s, the praise of the authority was too common to the extent that it was very lumpish and vulgar and those who survived this wave were so few that they did not count." (Alekhras 201, 47). Alekhras refers to the fact that during the 1990s most Iraqi literary writers dedicated their efforts to praise the regime, sometimes due to their fear and at other times due to their desire to be rewarded by the regime. Hence, they produced literary works of such bad quality that they can be distinguished for their vulgarity and dullness. He further states that those who survived this propaganda wave were too few to be taken into consideration. Although the book concentrates on literature generally and poetry in particular, what the writer describes in his book is true for theatre as well.

The decade witnessed the very rapid rise in the 'commercial theatre' movement after the authorities' orders that were given in the 1980s (mentioned earlier). Hence, Iraqi playwrights, actors and directors were caught in a dilemma when choosing between several contrasting and complex options. For example, should they take part in the illusion of Iraqi victory and heroism, or should they join the wave of commercial theatre that sought financial reward from a focus on superficial subjects? Alternatively, should they project an honest and direct opinion and jeopardise their livelihoods and possibly even their lives; or should they give up the theatre altogether and find another

occupation? For Iraqi theatre workers this complex situation made finding an honest voice almost impossible. Some theatre workers believed that expressing themselves via symbolic language and references provided a safe way for their plays to be staged. Yet this did not always work. *Until Further Notice*, which was first performed in the yard of the Iraqi Theatre Forum building in Baghdad in 1992, is one of a number of plays that used symbolic indications to refer to the corruption that controlled the Iraqi life in the 1990s (Abdulhameed 2012, 408). Sami Abdulhameed points out that the play was a collaborative effort between its original writer and its director, Abdulkereem Al Sudani, and a group of actors. It follows the life of a psychopath who starts out as a respected and honest secondary school teacher. After switching to private teaching, he becomes a greedy merchant who uses his knowledge and his pupils' need to make money, and finally he turns into a monster who trades in everything. Since the play's daring subject matter reflected a reality for Iraqis it proved to be successful and was performed again for the Second Baghdad Festival for Arabic Theatre in the same year. The play "could have continued to run in performance for a longer period, except that [the company] feared questioning when some people volunteered to incite against the play" (Abdulhameed 2012, 409). This example is an illustration of the authority's careful observation and monitoring of theatre activity.

Abdulhameed mentions many plays and performances that used symbolic ideas and characters to reflect difficult realities, such as Awatif Naeem's *Mueter Yemma (Dear Son Mueter)* 1990, Haider Muna'ther's *O'olai'k (Those)* 1992, Sinnan Al Azawi's *Al Mubheroon Dhid Al Rieah (Those Who Sail against the Wind)* 1995, Qassim Mohammad's *Al Mejnoon (The Crazy Man)* 1996 and Adil Kadhum's *Laiss Illa (Nothing More)* 1999, and many others.⁷ He also refers to a number of theatre festivals and events where Iraqi playwrights and directors used to present their works, such as the Annual Theatre Festivals held by the Theatre Forum in Baghdad and those held by the Ministry of Culture and Media and The General Office of Cinema and Theatre. Yet, during the late 1980s and early 1990s the works of serious theatre started to decrease and be limited to a particular group of audiences, because of the growing pressure exerted by the authorities on the theatre workers and the audiences. This 'serious theatre', as Iraqi critics prefer to call it, mainly attracted theatre students and academics and those who were related to the field in one way or another.

⁷ At the end of each chapter in Abdulhameed's book, *Iraqi Theatre in a Hundred Years*, he provides detailed lists of Iraqi plays that were produced during the period covered in each chapter. His Chapter Nine that covers the 1990s provides a long list of theatre festivals and plays of the period (p.417-449).

According to Abdulhameed, after 1990 the activities of the Arabic Theatre Union, whose headquarters were in Baghdad, ceased. In addition, the government stopped paying the annual fees for membership in the International Centre of Theatre in Paris, and finally the government ordered the Iraqi Theatre Centre, which was originally intended to be independent, to be reshaped. (Abdulhameed 2012, 449-450). These actions contributed to the Iraqi theatre's isolation from the outside world and reinforced a closer observation and control of theatre works by the authorities.

The Committee of Iraqi Theatre, which was formed upon presidential orders in the early 1990s (Al Sherji -2 2013, Abdulhameed 2012, 396), was the only formal office that could give approval for any theatre text to be performed, whether at the National Theatre or by any of the private theatre companies. In Part Two of his article written in 2013, entitled "The authority of theatre and theatre of authority in Iraq-2", Ahmed Al Sherji stressed that it was this committee only that had the authority to give the "indulgence" that confirmed that a text was approved in terms of its intellectual safety; "The intellectual safety is the only thing that might threaten the authority; the texts should not contain anything that might go against the beliefs of the ruling party. This way many plays were banned and important scenes were cut and adjusted according to this intellectual safety" (Al Sherji 2013). The term 'intellectual safety' was familiar to Iraqis during that time, as any action and reaction of the people was governed by this concept supposedly in order to retain the safety of the society and order in the country. In reality, it was the authorities' safety that lay at the heart of the order.

In the twenty third chapter of his "Chapters of the History Iraqi Theatre", Latif Hassan stresses that the quality of Iraqi theatre was destroyed at this time, since by using the 'carrot and stick' method it succeeded in "domesticating" most of the theatre workers in Iraq to meet the needs of the regime and its purposes (Hassan 2006). Hassan then gives a very clear example of the situation for Iraqi theatre actors by adding an advertisement that appeared in one of the main weekly magazines in Baghdad, Alif Ba' (A B), placed by one of the respected Iraqi theatre actors who enjoyed a long career in theatre and T.V. Productions:



The literal translation reads as follows:

An advertisement: to all the respected T.V. and Cinema Production companies, we would like to draw your attention to the following: an old and experienced actor who graduated from the Institution of Fine Arts would like to participate in dramatic and T.V. works, low payment accepted, and he is ready to play historical, middle age and elderly roles. He is bearded but ready to shave off his beard if needed and when asked. Contact number: 4157907.

Signed by Meki Al Bedri. Alif 'Ba' December 9th, 1998. (Hassan 2006)

This shows the deterioration in the social and economic condition of theatre workers during the 1990s and possibly explains why some of them joined the commercial theatre or took other jobs. Yet if one reads between the lines of this advertisement it could symbolise the social and economic condition of the whole of Iraq during these years. It could also be interpreted as a cry for help. By suggesting that although he is an old and experienced man he is ready to shave his beard, he is challenging the traditional, respectable image of Iraqi man. In an Arab country such as Iraq, where men are proud of their moustaches and beards as they are symbols of dignified manhood, this is a daring image of the humiliated men of Iraq. Al Bedri is declaring that Iraqi men have been degraded by poverty and authoritarian control over their lives. Using this advertisement, Maki Al Bedri managed to transcend all kinds of censorship and to perform a theatrical act without needing a director, a playtext or even a stage to communicate his meaning to his audience. He mocked all the limitations imposed by the authorities in a statement that revealed Iraqi life and the way art had been affected, in a single, short advertisement. It is clear that this amounts to a cry for help in a country where complaining about poverty and openly seeking help could be very dangerous.

However, there was a group of theatre workers who believed that theatre should be honest, direct, and critical of reality and that it should uncover the harsher aspects of life of society. As Clive Barker suggests;

[o]ne of the assumptions behind the aggressive or critical political theatre is that what is hidden or obscure in politics should be made manifested on the stage. [Yet in] a country under single-party rule this is difficult: under a dictatorship it can be positively fatal. (cited in Holderness 1992, 29).

There were Iraqi playwrights and directors who preferred to leave Iraq and find other free spaces to work. Some of them proved to be effective and expressed the reality of life inside Iraq freely and succeeded in making their names as Iraqi theatre workers, such as Jawad al-Assadi and Kareem Chitheer, Qasim Metrod, and many others, in addition to those who remain inside the country and struggled and took the risk, they all worked to produce the serious theatre they believed in. Therefore, those Iraqi theatre makers may conform to what Michael Patterson describes as the hope of the playwrights of the British political theatre that after watching their plays, the audience may “leave the theatre in some way changed, their political awareness heightened” (Patterson 2006, 5). Al Sharji stresses that theatre cannot provide radical solutions to the problems of the society no matter how provocative or inciting it may seem: “In spite of the revolutionary nature of Iraqi theatre, it did not topple the regime, it rather remained dissentious; because regimes cannot be toppled by a theatrical performance, regimes fall only by American tanks” (Al Sharji -2 2013). For Patterson,

[a]ll theatre is political. Indeed, it is the most political of all art forms.[...] And because the theatre uses words, its communication can be particularly specific and challenging. In the theatre, live actors speak out loud in front of, and sometimes even directly to, an audience, and so ideas and feelings are expressed at the same instant to a community of onlookers. [...] T]he audience in the theatre cannot avoid assuming a certain communal role, so too the process of artistic creation in the theatre is a shared one. (Patterson 2006, 1-2)

Hence, it is hypothetically possible to see these Iraqi plays as political even if they did not comprise the conventional characteristics of ‘political theatre’ if there are ever fixed ones.

Christine Evans’s article “Notes Towards a Political Theatre” (2010) states that among the necessary features of political theatre is that it should be abstract and has the ability to change. Since one of the main concerns of political theatre is “to create theatre against political atrocity” (Evans 2010, 377), Evans clarifies that the difference between genocide and political theatre is the abstraction that theatre generates. For her, “the path towards genocide is its crushing literality. The gap between word and deed, word and person [...] is systematically narrowed, and then closed” (Evans 2010, 377). Conversely, theatre’s “[a]bstraction forces a gap between word and thing. It requires us to step back and imagine things otherwise, completing a picture whose meaning is not pre-packaged

into ‘message’. It creates plural configuration of possibility” (Evans 2010, 377-8).

Furthermore, there is the

temptation, created by the powerful need to bear witness, [which] is to make drama that reports, that draws on the immediacy of testimony to make its truth claims [...] It is a space of imagination, defined by the tension between its fiction and the undeniable materiality of the bodies that enact them. (Evans 2010, 378)

Therefore, for Evans, political theatre may provide a space for the imagination that otherwise is hampered by the reality of politics; and in turn, it secures a space for an imaginative, but possible alternative reality that may supply solutions for the predicaments that politics precipitates. On the other hand, according to the second criterion, political theatre must achieve change. Evans suggests that the “possibility of change defies inevitability’s coercive narrative, demanding choice at whatever level is still possible” (Evans 2010, 378). In her article, Evans explains that “[p]erhaps theatre can intervene in genocidal politics only at certain times – before the careful manufactured politics of inevitability becomes unstoppable; before *there’s nothing I could have done anyway* [sic] becomes the law” (Evans 2010, 378). Evans concludes her argument: “I don’t know if art can change things, but it can shift the frame in which they appear. And framing is no small thing, or genocidal politics would not pay such attention to it” (Evans 2010, 378). Evans’s claim slightly challenges Michael Patterson’s and Ahmed Al Sharji’s claims, referred to earlier, about political theatre dramatists’ aspirations regarding their works: for Patterson the playwrights may *hope* to leave an impact that could lead the audience to change their minds about the issue presented to them, while Al Sharji stresses that theatre may persist in being dissentious, rather than actually changing any reality. In this context, Evans’s two features may not be ineluctable. A play can still be considered political even if it does not comprise Evans’s features of abstraction and the ability to change. However, all these features may form a scale with which it is possible to measure how many of the plays, produced since the first Gulf War in 1990 until now inside and outside Iraq, can be labelled as political. It is possible to claim that the theatre that was, and is, created in reaction to what happened in Iraq falls into at least one, if not more, of these propositions. That is, a political play is able to create an abstraction of a cruel political reality, or, it may achieve the possibility of a slight change in the sense that Patterson suggested: it is an aspiration for political theatre when such “plays might not cure the sick but they would at least confirm the healthy in their health.”(Patterson 2006, 5) Moreover, these plays

may embrace the hope of leaving a crucial impact on their audience, whilst remaining dissentious towards the reality they portrayed.

Hence it is important, in the context of this study, to refer to political theatre and plays produced about wars, especially when there is a significant increase in the production of political theatre in general, and about the war in Iraq in particular, during these wars. In the Introduction to her book, *Political and Protest Theatre after 9/11*, Jenny Spencer quotes Marvin Carlson's assertion, that the imminence of war in Iraq made American theatre organizations rush "to join the international group THAW (Theatre Against War) and, in coordination with their anti-war protests, began to produce 'the most concentrated and dedicated political theatre to appear in America since the 1960s'" (Spencer 2012, 4). This supports the suggestion made by Evans: "Perhaps keeping the flame of [the imaginative possibility of change] alive is *what I could have done anyway* [sic]" (Evans 2010, 378); therefore, theatre practitioners rush to claim their right to register their reaction to such a critical event and to state that *they have done what they could do*. It shows their eagerness to reveal such stances publically through theatrical works.

At the beginning of a chapter on the theatre of war entitled 'To Smash the Mirror', in his book *Imagining Iraq: Literature in English and the Iraq Invasion*, Suman Gupta cites Paul Fussell, the literary historian. Fussell argues that "[s]eeing warfare as theatre provides a psychic escape for the participant: with a sufficient sense of theatre, he can perform his duties without implicating his 'real' self and without impairing his innermost conviction that the world is still a rational place" (Cited in Gupta 2011, 96). In other words, 'war theatre' or 'theatre of war' potentially provides a catharsis for both the performers as well as the audience in Western theatre.

With Fussell's argument in mind, the last chapter of this study interrogates examples of Western theatre productions that focus on the climactic event of the 2003 war in order to examine the other side of war, the American side. Since Chapter Two explored Iraqi theatre after 2003, a focus on Western theatre of the same period would add support and expand the understanding of the issue of the Western side of the picture and its representation on the stage. As Fussell explains, theatre has a particular role, which helps to highlight the differences between Iraqi and Western theatre of war. Iraqi theatre's depictions convey the suffering people endured during a long period which has an effect on social and personal life. This cathartic impact on the audience is probably unintended, but what is clear is that it directs the audience towards a personal reaction

so that they themselves encounter the tragic impact of war and are actually encouraged to react to it.

Gupta argues that the phrase ‘theatre of war’

is effective because it captures a double bind of location and participation in war. On the one hand, the war zone is like a stage and those in it become self-conscious performers who are displaced from the everyday life of ‘real’ selves and located in an ‘irrational’ place. On the other hand, the theatre stage and actors materialize an experience which temporarily draws audiences away from their everyday existence and ‘real’ selves – and under those conditions the dislocations of war can be effectively represented and conveyed, even if war is distant or past. (Gupta 2011, 96)

Therefore, Western theatrical representations of war in theatre shed light on Iraq as a war zone, portraying the soldiers’ psychological, as well as physical destruction during and after the war.

On the other hand, since the 1980s some Iraqi serious theatre works took a slightly different form with innovative experiences in theatre production that are mainly referred to as ‘experimental theatre’ among Iraqi theatre makers and critics, and these constitute the core for Chapter Three in this study. Iraqi and Arab practitioners have been involved in the field of experimental theatre since the mid-twentieth century, and their work played a part in events and festivals in the most recognized venues in the Arab world including the annual Cairo International Festival for Contemporary and Experimental Theatre (CIFCET). Many Iraqi and Arabic theatre critics and academics have attempted to define and distinguish the idea of experimental theatre and how it differs from conventional theatre. Most agree that a theatrical event is seen to be experimental when it breaks the familiar traditions of theatre in form and content. The theatre academic Amer Al Merzooq defines experimentation in theatre as:

an action that aims at developing new visions that differ and go against the conventional Aristotelian visions, by breaking what is familiar in the theatre and shattering the Aristotelian concept of time, space, and structure, abandoning the ancestral artistic that is based on aesthetic theories of form and content. (Al Merzooq 2015)

Taking experimental theatre in the Arab world, including Iraq, into consideration, Al Merzooq states that more than forty theatre practitioners have recently agreed on certain features that should be evident in a theatrical performance in order to be considered as experimental:

- Experimentation is a rebellion against fixed rules.
- Experimentation is related to democracy and free expression.
- Every play includes a certain kind of experimentation.
- Experimentation is related to the performance’s technique.
- Experimentation is creation.

- Experimentation surpasses recession.[That is, breaks stagnation of ideas and techniques.]
- Experimentation is open to other cultures.
- Experimentation is a field work.
- Experimentation is connected to society.
- Experimentation is a revolution. (Al Merzooq 2015)

Al Merzooq's third feature that every play has an element of experimentation is significantly distinguished here as it obviously shows a tendency toward regarding all plays as experimental; however, it may reflect Al Merzooq and the other critics' tendency to avoid clear and definite specification that may exclude any theatrical practice from examination under that title of being not experimental or conventional which can be unjustifiable.

The definition and characterization of the concept of experimental theatre that Al Merzooq puts forward may provide some clarification, yet at the same time, it may also lead to more generalization about the concept. He clearly explains that being experimental, theatre should incline towards breaking conventions and any rules that may govern a theatrical work. Additionally it should render a certain kind of experiment in theme and technique, and this may offer a straightforward distinction to an experimental idea. Simultaneously, Al Merzooq highlights that experimental theatre may also involve a revolutionary nature of social themes and structure that may be contained in every play, and which may well be the quality of many, if not all, theatrical works, and particularly, political theatre. In his article entitled "Experimentation... Theatre, and the Different Reading-2", Ahmed Al Sharji adds that it is the text of the play that encourages the different readings created by the director as the text is "the basic material from which the performance can emerge visually and aesthetically" (Al Sharji 2013). Furthermore the theatre critic, Mohammed Al Fertoosi argues that the goal of experimentation is to present "a new subject matter and a new style in a new form, using unfamiliar means" (Al Fertoosi), and he supports this claim by quoting Hameed Mohammed Jawad, who is one of the pioneers in experimentation in the history of Iraqi theatre, stating that it is "entering into secret undeclared spaces in a theatre text through invading aesthetic philosophy." (Cited in Al Fertoosi)⁸

⁸ Hameed Mohammed Jawad is an Iraqi theatre practitioner who returned to Baghdad during the 1960s after he had finished his M.A. in cinema in Moscow. He was among the first instructors in the Department of Theatre in the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad and is known for his new innovations in creating theatrical performances from Shakespearian plays. He taught many well-known current theatre practitioners in Iraq such as, Salah Al Qassab, Awni Karoumi, Fadhil Khalil, and Jawad Al Assidi. Yet, Jawad left Iraq after a short while for France and never returned.

In his opening speech at the Festival of Experimental Theatre in Cairo in 2009, Richard Schechner, professor of Performance Studies at the Tisch School of Arts, New York University, states that artists, particularly experimental artists, bear the responsibility of going beyond borders in their theatrical works. He stresses that whether these borders are physical or abstract, it is the artists' responsibility to challenge them:

though such borders can be necessary most of the time, there are still places and times when we should cross these borders, think of the unthinkable, or the unbelievable, and act in the worlds of imagination, not only what is happening now, but what will happen in the future. [...] For what purpose? The purpose is to push the borders further, broaden horizons, question standing beliefs, and challenge them to create societies of artists and audiences that may be temporary, yet strong; and also to show how people can cross repeatedly back and forth between reality and imagination endlessly. (Schechner 2009, 20)

This concurs with Kadhem Al Nassar's statement that experimental theatre provides a free space to theatre workers. He emphasises that "we should not forget that experimenting is a space of freedom that gives each theatre director the opportunity to follow the style and the trend that is suitable to consciousness, observation and culture" (Cited in Alhinidi 2009). According to Samem Hassaballah, the Iraqi theatre director and academic, the idea of experimental theatre lies in "breaking what is perceptible and coming up with a new perception" (Hassaballah 2015). Therefore, it is possible to conclude that any play or theatrical performance is a new experiment in provocation, since theatre's aim is to have an impact on its audience. The extent of freedom, the willingness of its creators (playwrights and directors), and their intention to generate a certain reaction may identify the value of the experiment that is measured by its influence on the recipients. Finally, theatre experimentation may be seen as the theatre that attempts to touch the borders of this extent of freedom, willingness, and intention and may even go beyond them towards maximum provocation in accordance with the social, political, and artistic context, culture and the period in which the whole experiment is created. That is, what is deemed experimental in one culture at one time might not be in another culture or at a different time.

Since the late 1960s, Iraqi theatre practitioners have made many attempts at experimental theatre, especially when it comes to the students of the College of Fine Arts/ Department of Theatrical Arts. Among the prominent examples are those based on innovative approaches to Shakespearian plays. In his essay "Shakespeare and Iraqi theatre" (2012), Abdulhussein Alwan analyses how Iraqi theatre makers have worked on Shakespeare's texts since the mid-1960s, adapting the plots and modifying them into

an Iraqi framework to produce new plays. The earliest experiment was in 1967 by Hameed Mohammad Jewad, who developed *Hamlet* in such a way that he created a stage in the shape of a question mark, in addition to constructing other shapes made by different props and heavy curtains, and creating what Alwan describes as almost a shadow theatre. Alwan explains that the same play was treated by Dr. Sami Abdulhameed when he created his Arabic *Hamlet* during the 1970s. The play was produced a third time by Dr. Salah Al Qassab, a theatre director and academic, who created what is known as the ‘Image Theatre’ during the 1980s (Hemdawi 2010).⁹ Awad Ali describes Al Qassab’s *Hamlet* as a shock for all Iraqi theatre practitioners, especially because it

violated the Shakespearian text and because of its exoticism, its hypothetical and surprising images, and its primitive ritualistic atmosphere. As the director, [Al Qassab], suggested there was no actual murder of the father that disturbs Hamlet, and that it was mere illusion created by Hamlet’s sick and schizophrenic imagination. (Ali 2009)

The most recent version of Iraqi Shakespearian plays was an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* by the director Monadhil Daood which was presented in Iraq in 2012, then at the Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon in the UK in April the same year. The play pictured the story of Romeo and Juliet in an Iraqi setting, portraying the couple as coming from two Iraqi families with different conflicting religious sectors namely, Shiit and Sunni. Romeo and Juliet in Baghdad touched upon the current crisis in contemporary Iraq. Richard Spencer’s article, “‘Romeo and Juliet in Baghdad’ comes to London” explains that

Romeo and Juliet in Baghdad is as in-your-face as an Iraqi suicide attack. The play will be performed in Arabic, but with its English subtitles, a plot whose outline is well-known and a staging that is stripped to the basics, it should be more than accessible to British audiences, as well as those who will see it in Iraq. (Spencer 2012)

For Spencer, Romeo and Juliet in Baghdad was ‘in-yer-face’, probably because it drew his attention to ideas that he had never thought of in the original Shakespearian *Romeo and Juliet*. Since its first presentation in Baghdad, the production was a source of controversial debates among Iraqi theatre practitioners as most of them agreed that the play did not represent an original contribution to Iraqi theatre practice, and that it rather

⁹ Dr. Al Qassab is considered to be one of the main founders of the term ‘Image Theatre’ in Iraq and the Arab world. He started publishing his theory about his theatre works that are built mainly on effective images, signs, symbols and scenes in addition to language during the 1980s. Among his publications are *The Theoretical Operative of Image Theatre* (1986), *Beyond Image: The First Sign to the Image of Memory* (1990), *The Chemistry of the Performance* (1994), *The Chemistry of Image* (1998), and *Image Theatre between Theory and Application* (2003).

naively simplified a critical issue. Abduljabbar Al Atabi's article, "Romeo and Juliet in Baghdad, a Consecration to Sectarianism or a Call for National Reconciliation", offered viewpoints of several Iraqi theatre makers and critics, who mostly agreed that in spite of the long and important history of the cast members of the play, they did not present a performance that exhibited their long history or their important experience in theatre. While others insisted that the simplicity of the play was intended to create a direct influence on the audience by highlighting recent memories of the impact of the religious conflict on Iraq. (Al Atabi 2012) According to Samem Hassaballah, the play did not carry from Shakespeare's play anything except the names of the characters, particularly when using Iraqi colloquial language and setting. (Hassaballah 2012) This concurs with Spencer's shock that the theme of the play was too obvious, yet the play draws the audience's attention to the struggle and the actual fights among the two families in conflict rather than the romantic story, since the "audiences will be mesmerised by the swagger of the young Iraqis on stage" (Spencer 2012). Hassaballah emphasized that the play provoked a sectarian conflict in Iraq rather than criticized it (Hassaballah 2012), which perhaps explains why Spencer concluded his review of the play stating:

I cannot [...] say that watching it will make its audience want to see more of the country, or even want to understand it better. But Iraq has idealists and dreamers as much as anywhere, and representing them on stage may yet prove contagious; in any case, sometimes [...] the] call for beauty amid the torments is worth hearing for its own sake. (Spencer 2012)

Despite the controversy, the play remains one of the latest attempts that succeeded in finding its way to the British stage with an intention to astonish the audience or even to shock them and allow them to reconsider the issue presented. The choice of a Shakespearian play by Iraqi dramatists to portray the religious conflict in the country can be seen as another element that makes it an 'in-yer-face' performance for the Western audience, which refers to the Iraqi tendency to experiment through their theatre practices, creating their own notable versions of theatre works.

According to Qasim Matrood, the playwright and theatre director, the experimental theatre text should

carry charm, mystery, and astonishment. The text should astonish the recipient with the theme, vision, language, and images that create shock. When the shock and astonishment are achieved then we are definitely in the area of experiment. The writer of the experimental text should tend towards experimenting, freeing himself of any taboos; his thoughts must be captivating and limitless, allowing himself to experiment with many things around him. In this way the new text is created. (Cited in Alhindi 2009)

By ‘charm and mystery’, Matrood probably refers to scenes and dialogues that carry more than one unusual interpretation injected with audacity, leading the audience to find more than one path to identification. Since Matrood focuses on the text as the main source of shock, the experimentation he describes here can be generated from the content of the play, that is, the themes and the language that may or may not be reinforced by an innovative form. Hence, I have chosen the plays discussed in Chapter Three, *The Masks* and *Fourth Generation*, because for example, in Chitbeer’s play, the shocking content is further developed by a new approach of presentation, while Al Zaidi’s play carries its shock mainly within its text and, it retains a conventional presentation. Still, it is very important to bear in mind the fact that Iraqi society might be described as quite reserved and there are limits even in terms of experimentation and bold innovation.

The theatrical concept of ‘Theatre of Cruelty’, which was developed by Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) was possibly familiar to Iraqi students of dramatic arts since some Iraqi theatre practitioners and academic staff studied abroad during the 1960s and the 1970s. However, the most recent trends, including, ‘in-yer-face’ theatre, and ‘Immersive Theatre’ are totally obscure and unknown to contemporary Iraqi theatre practitioners. These trends can be seen as the contemporary international movements in experimental theatre worldwide. They may also relate to the Iraqi theatre’s experimentation with lighting, and with its unconventional treatment of the extent of directness, provocation, and intimacy of the images presented. These tendencies shown in these plays carry much of the form, structure, as well as the language which may belong to Theatre of Cruelty, Immersive Theatre, and ‘in-yer-face’ theatre or even to all of them simultaneously, especially within their Iraqi context.

Accordingly, the choice of plays collected and presented here is intended to offer a collective range of theatre experiences as well as practices that may give an overview of the theatrical artistic reaction to the major contemporary events in Iraq both from inside and outside the country. They are also designed to explore an example of evolvement of the Iraqi theatre practices side by side with the Western theatre, rendering a potential opportunity for comparison and contrast that may elaborate on the image of the country and its people. Therefore, the following six chapters will provide further detailed depictions to enable discussion of the issue concerning contemporary Iraq, the country and its people, via the means of theatrical representations from inside and outside Iraq respectively. This elaborate and artistic image will be built up with each chapter, starting from Chapter One which sheds light on one of the most difficult decades in the

lives of Iraqis as well as Iraqi theatre during the rule of the Ba'th regime, that was followed by years of chaos and insecurity that still control the Iraqi life until today.

CHAPTER ONE

Iraqi Political Theatre between 1990-2003

The 1990s were most difficult years for Iraqis who lived through the Iraq-Iran War in the 1980s and the war with the International Coalition Forces that began in 1990 and ended with the invasion in 2003. Thirteen years of economic embargo left the suffering Iraqis in poverty, whilst the Iraqi government's power increased to such an extent that it was one of the most authoritarian regimes of the era.

In 1988 Iraqis thought that the war had ended, that they would be able to live peacefully and that the regime had learnt its lesson well; but war had left most Iraqi families without fathers, brothers, husbands, or cousins. In many cases, more than one member of the family had been lost. Yet, during the brief years of peace between 1988 and 1990, some serious issues emerged. Prices were constantly rising and families began to feel the consequences of a long futile war with Iran, and moreover, they had to endure the annual celebration of a fake victory. Political tension reached a climax in 1989 when the minister of defence, Saddam Hussein's cousin, Adnan Khairallah, was killed in a helicopter crash, which, according to Charles Tripp, "may not have been wholly coincidental" (Tripp 2007, 240). During the early months of 1990, Saddam Hussein announced that the Iraqi economic conditions were very critical, therefore, he sought the help of the neighbouring Arabic Gulf countries during a general meeting that took place in Baghdad. Ultimately, the Iraqi government declared an economic crisis but all its attempts to find financial help failed, which led to the disastrous decision to invade Kuwait.

The result of the invasion is clear to the world. Iraqis suffered the impact of Iraq's unjustified invasion of its neighbour as they were punished by the total economic and trade sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council in 1990 which lasted until after 2003. Tripp observed that these sanctions proved to have "had no appreciable effect on the power of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship over Iraq, [and] the reports also increasingly made clear that the sanctions themselves were contributions to the widespread and terrible suffering of the Iraqis." (Tripp 2007, 253) In 1991, after the Iraqi army had withdrawn from Kuwait there were uprisings in many southern Iraqi cities, but the rebellions collapsed when Saddam became more powerful and took tighter control of the central government in Baghdad. As a result, Iraqis were under greater pressure. Economic collapse led to social and cultural deterioration, as well as geo-political isolation. To give an example of this, I started my first job at the age of 19 as a primary school teacher in 1996. My monthly salary was about 3000 Iraqi Dinars which was less than two dollars. That was the average income for a middle class family during the 1990s; and it rose to 20000 ID (less than 10 dollars) in 2003 just before the

fall of the regime. Social values started to change, and earning a living became the priority for everyone in Iraq. The Ba'th party exerted strong control on every governmental institution, from primary schools up to the highest level of social and governmental hierarchy. The Ba'th Party's control was so severe that there was no escape. All Iraqis had to complete a form saying that they were members of the party but if not, at least sympathized with it. This applied to all students over the age of twelve, and no one could go to University without presenting their official record from their previous secondary schools which clarified their political status in the Ba'th Party; and this kind of strict formality covered most aspects of life in Iraq. Joseph Sassoon's book *Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime* (2012) details the policy that the regime adapted to make most Iraqis, if not all, Ba'thists. Sassoon cites Hussein's declaration in the 1970s that "it should be [their] ambition to make all Iraqis in the country Ba'thists in membership and belief or in the latter only" (cited in Sassoon 2012, 45). He further provides an image of the party's file that was required from all Iraqis as an official record stating the status of an Iraqi individual in the Ba'th Party (Sassoon 2012, 48), therefore, "masses of Iraqis became affiliated but only a small percentage were active members" (Sassoon 2012, 46). I used to lose (burn or tear) my record intentionally whenever I went to a new school or passed to a new stage in my study, so that I would start a new record in the new place. If a student kept the same record whenever they made a change, they would be forced to get a higher rank in the party, namely from *mu'ayyid* (sympathizer) to *nasir* (supporter) to *nasir mytaqaddim* (advanced supporter) then a member.¹⁰ Therefore, the intentional loss of the record was one of the strategies many Iraqis employed in order to escape getting further involved in the party.

The above is a very brief description of the key facts of political life in Iraq between 1990 and 2003, its effect on Iraq's economic and social life and the consequences to art and the Iraqi stage.¹¹ It is impossible, in one study, to cover all the aspects of the complicated situation of the struggling Iraqi theatre practitioners within such drastic conditions. In the Introduction to this thesis I clarified the kinds of pressures that theatre-makers, and indeed, all Iraqis suffer in order to produce theatre works that they

¹⁰ The full membership hierarchy and the process to advance in this system is thoroughly detailed in Sassoon's book.

¹¹ The life conditions described here are drawn from my personal experience as I lived them, as well as collecting information from family members and friends who lived these years as I did. These facts are considered common knowledge among Iraqis, as it is described within a number of sources that focus on Iraq during these years in details such as Charles Tripp's *A History of Iraq* (2007) and Joseph Sassoon's *Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime* (2011).

believed in, during the late 1980s and the 1990s. To illustrate this the current chapter will focus on two plays by Abas Alharbi and Falah Shaker which have been selected for their significant themes and structures, and also, to show the extent of the risks these theatre makers took in order that their works were produced: the first is a monodrama revealing the economic and social deterioration in Iraq, and the second, a vision of the harsh impact of war on the Iraqi family. The plays are discussed with regard to the era in which they were created and in connection with their first production, to reveal two very substantial aspects of Iraqi life in the 1990s. In addition to that, the two plays are significant in terms of the circumstances that governed their presentations to an Iraqi audience. Unlike the trend of the Iraqi public theatre of the time, these two plays did not offer compliments to the authorities, rather, they presented direct depictions of the difficult life Iraqis lived during that period. Hence, Alharb's play was stopped after its first performance, whereas Shaker's play managed to carry out a considerable number of performances before it was stopped, most probably when its potential danger was realized by the authority. This will inform the two main purposes of this study: to examine the political environment that surrounded the plays and the variety of the artistic and dramatic styles in theatre practice. In *Al Nehdha* and *Heaven Opens its Gates... Late*, Abas Alharbi and Falah Shaker tried their best within the restrictions under which they worked to capture the conditions that controlled contemporary Iraqi life. The subject matter and themes of each play will, hopefully, disclose an aspect of Iraqi life that was greatly affected by war and the political environment that surrounded the country and its people between 1990 and 2003.

Alharbi's and Shaker's plays are read in the light of their own Iraqi context with references to the recent interviews I conducted with the two playwrights, and also in reference to a collection of Western critical essays and books that examine political theatre in the wider scope of the term, specifically Graham Holderness's *The Politics of Theatre and Drama* (1992) and Joe Kelleher's *Theatre and Politics* (2009). These are among the key recent critical works written and edited about theatre by theatre scholars who have long-term experience in the field and whose critical work can significantly be tested against the Iraqi theatrical works studied here. According to Mick Gordon:

[a]ll theatre happens in the mind. What occurs on the stage is contrivance, an illusion, presented to us, the audience, with specifically chosen information. The quality of that information and how it is communicated will vary, but regardless of quality, when we are in the theatre our minds suspend their disbelief and legitimise the illusion. And it is our minds that pull the experience of theatre together with a single silent question: 'What's the story?' (Gordon 2010, 7)

Raising questions such as this can be at the heart of theatre in Iraq as it is in the West, although the difference suggested here is that illusions created by Alharbi and Shaker, are strongly grounded in the realism of Iraqi life. Therefore, for an Iraqi audience the question might be slightly different from Gordon's, that is, 'I know this story, what shall I do about it?'

Abas Alharbi's *Al Nehdha*: The Challenge of Realism

Al Nehdha is a monodrama for one female actor, first performed by Awatif Salman at the Theatre Forum in Baghdad in 1997 and was controversial straight away for its unusually explicit depiction of the themes that it contains. Alharbi emphasised that Salman was the third choice to play the role after two other actresses, Awatif Naeem and Ibtisam Fareed, had refused it (Interview 2016, 2). Alharbi gave no clear reason for the two actresses' refusal, but it is possible to suppose that one of the reasons might well be their realization of the risk the themes of the play implied. Father Yousif Jazrawi mentions that the play was performed again in 2004 as part of the Al-Mada Festival in Kurdistan, north of Iraq (Jazrawi 2015).¹² Yet, the play's candour led its writer and director, Abas Alharbi (1951-), to flee Iraq after that first and only performance in the 1990s. Alharbi states that after the 1997 performance, he was restricted and isolated until he had the opportunity to leave Iraq for Jordan in 1999. Then in 2005 he and his family travelled to Australia where he lives now. He pointed out that he "escaped to Jordan, then became a political asylum seeker through the UN" (Interview 2016, 2) after the performance of the play. I found the text of the play by mere chance among a number of play texts given to me by Dr. Awatif Naeem in 2011 when I asked for her help in finding Iraqi play texts of the 1990s to study. The text did not show the writer's name, and I discovered it when I showed the text to Dr. Sami Abdulhameed in early 2012, before I came to the UK. Alharbi himself did not have a copy of the text until I managed to contact him in 2013, when he asked me to send it to him to make sure that it is the same that he wrote in 1997.

In comparison to the symbolism and the trend toward commercial of Iraqi theatre during the 1990s, Alharbi's *Al Nehdha* can be considered one of the most daring and direct plays of its time. The playwright managed to say exactly what he wished to say

¹² In 2011, Alharbi stated that Awatif Salman is planning to do another performance of the play in Baghdad, as soon as she receives the needed support for it.

without ambiguity or the kind of rhetorical language that requires intellectual exercise. Alharbi explains that during that time, he and his friends who were involved in intellectual activities used to go to bars to get drunk, which made them “indulge in raving talks to relieve the anger inside [them]” (Interview 2016, 2). He explained that after events he used to accompany his friends to Al Nehdha Bus Station in the middle of Baghdad for cheap food and tea:

After having some food, we used to drink tea. I used to prefer to buy tea from a particular old woman, who was not like other women who wore makeup. I knew from her, that she had a son who was a soldier and that she dreamt of marrying him to a good young woman. The woman's name is Chmmala. This name is usually used in the countryside, in families that have many girls, and they consider a new baby girl as a bad omen. I took Chmmala's character as a model, and started to write about the biography of the place itself through her. The place was crowded with miseries and contradictions. She was brave to dare to reveal the truth, relying on the idea: ‘it is a word, if you say it you'll die, and if you don't you'll also die, say it and leave a wider space in this world.’ (Interview 2016, 2)

Alharbi's play could never have been shown had it been examined by The Committee of Iraqi Theatre, and it was a coincidence that enabled it to be performed: “The censors did not have the time to delete anything, as they only saw it with the audience on the day of performance” (Interview 2016, 3). Alharbi further explains:

When I finished the text, I couldn't find a theatre to produce it, and I could not afford to produce it privately until a friend who was a director of commercial theatre (the cheap comic theatre of that time) knew about it. The man wanted to show that he sided with serious theatre, especially when he knew that I belong to that kind of theatre. He gave me 25000 ID, which was about 15 dollars then[...] We rehearsed for only ten days because it was very difficult to find a place for rehearsals at that time as it coincided with the occasion of the International Theatre Day in Baghdad, 1997. The opening speech was for a theatre practitioner from Korea, I cannot remember his name, presented by the artist, Sami Abdulhameed, and there were conversational debates between him and the Minister of Culture, Hamadi, at that time. The Minister wanted to compliment the theatre workers by attending the performance. Usually he did not attend the performances on such occasions, he used to give his speech and leave, and theatre workers used to celebrate such occasions alone. But unfortunately for the late Sadiq Ali Shaheen who was the general director of the show, the Minister decided to attend the play[...] When the play was performed it was seen as a theatrical and thematic revolution, which aroused arguments among intellectuals and media, a matter that created confusion within the General Office of Cinema and Theatre, and which eventually resulted in investigations into the performance of the play by the men of the Cultural Security Office, and it went as far as summoning members to the building of the General Security Office. (Interview 2016, 2)

Alharbi stresses that the play was very dangerous and that “[a]nyone who talked about the play was considered to be part of the team, and they were sent to be questioned” (Interview 2016, 3). It was only through the help of a few friends that Alharbi was able to escape Iraq in 1999: “This made me leave the country as quickly as I could after I

received information that reached me through those who sympathized with the play that I might be sent to prison or get executed” (Interview 2016, 3) Hence, it is clear that whatever *Al Nehdha* offered to its audience was considered to be a dangerous violation of the ‘intellectual safety’ that the regime maintained and observed very closely. That is why it was necessary that the play and its writer should disappear or be sent into voluntary exile.

The play is set in the district of Al Nehdha in the middle of Baghdad. Although the text does not differentiate the several characters of the play clearly, the actress, Awatif Salman, indicates the change of characters through using different voice tone, positions, or gesture, conveying different roles of two fellow peddlers, a drug dealing deserter, and a prosecutor. This is obvious in the video recording of part of the performance that was given in the festival in Kurdistan, Arbil, which was made available online on YouTube in 2011. The setting of the play is a square in a bus station in the middle of a ruined district. Conversely, the monologue involves a number of characters from two separate locations, a square in the middle of a bus station in central Baghdad and a court where the main character is on trial. Chmmala is accused of drug dealing and suspected of murdering the drug dealer, Abas, whose character she plays when remembering how he tempts her to sell the pills. During the trial, Chmmala recalls how she became involved in drug dealing when she was unaware what the pills that she sold to soldiers and young men in the garage, along with her tea, actually contained. She, herself, has become addicted, as these pills helped her to cope with her ugly reality.

The dialogue not only touches on realistic conditions in Iraq, but the use of Iraqi ‘very colloquial’ Arabic, as well as the seriousness of the play, distinguishes it from others produced in the 1990s. Since Alharbi used the traditional Iraqi–Arabic dialect rather than standard Arabic which is generally used in the ‘serious theatre’ of the time, he captured the reality of everyday Iraqis; and he clarified this when he said, “The colloquial language, particularly the southern Iraqi slang, is an epic language that conveys the ancient Sumerian sadness, precision of words, and poetic rhythm; these are psychological factors that made the recipient identify with the show easily and spontaneously” (Interview 2016, 4). The use of this language makes the play specifically Iraqi. It is not intended to carry a message for the whole world or to express universal ideas and themes. But the fact that it was performed for one day only and with a restricted audience in Baghdad made it unique and limited to a few who had an opportunity to attend that sole performance. The play mainly speaks of the women who suffer during times of war and how they are taken advantage of when they are

vulnerable and in need: “They are these blue eyes that cursed us... Neither the beautiful nor the fake is protected from the heat of its suns... Don’t let them work in the sweets factories.”(1/233)¹³ The play reveals how they are punished by society and traditions: “The knives of your cousins will look for your daughters till midnight in restaurants and nightclubs”; (1/234) and it exposes the harsh reality of life in Iraq during the 1990s and the focus on finding food for the day: “Your Nehdha lost us our lives ... we got nothing from them except the monthly share of food... it is not my stove only” (3/238).

In addition to the roles of Chmmala, Abas and The Prosecutor, the actress plays the roles of Chmmala’s fellow peddlers, Fedheela (Om Ferha), and Sadyia. Fedheela is a mother whose girls work in a chocolate factory in Al Nehdha. She is accused of prostitution, after being arrested near the factory which is apparently a corrupt place:

The court has given the sentence in the presence of the charged criminal, Fedheela Mussbah Mughbash, of fifteen years in prison for her practice of blackness
[*prostitution*]...

[*Fedheela again*] Hey you, my daughters were working in the sweets factory! May you never throw sweets on the heads of your happy people ... I waited for them in Al Nehdha till midnight, by Chmmala who sells tea... Ask her... The girls didn’t show up...I went to the factory and suddenly the police came...(1/235)

Fedheela and her daughters symbolise the exploitation that Iraqi women had to face, especially when their men are away fighting or have died. In contrast to Chmmala and Fedheela, Sadyia is a woman who is better able to cope and to find a way of living, and protects herself by using make up, and taking control rather than being controlled:

Hey you, Sadyia, with the red lipstick, did they take your stove too?

[*Assuming Sadyia’s voice*] If they took everything in the whole Nehdha, they would never dare to take a spoon from me.

[*She starts playing both roles of Sadyia a fellow peddler on the street and herself in a small conversation.*] Then why do I have this terrible luck?

You can't take good care of your living.

I give half of my earnings to the holy shrine of Master Hamdallah ... How can I be more careful...? You woman with the gum!

With all the respect... If heaven asks for charity, the ground also asks for its right... And the eyes of the people ask for food before even their mouths... What would you lose if you used some lipstick and a gum to chew, to be attractive?
(3/238)

Chmmala impersonates three kinds of women that capture the models of Iraqi women of the time. They are: the weak woman who tries her best to survive, and falls in the process, represented by Fedheela and her daughters; the woman who tries to justify her choices and falls in the process, portrayed in Chmmala; and finally, the one who thinks

¹³ The page number that appears before the slash is the pagination of the text in the original Arabic text; while the second is the location of the text in the translated unpublished text.

she is in control and in the process loses herself by being used, characterised by Sadyia. On a more general level, the play's channelling of several characters through a single performer shows the different responses to poverty and war. First she shows the people who could not change their principles and as a result lived the agony of war and its consequences, such as Chmmala herself, Fadheela and her daughters, who lose everything, even their lives due to their vulnerability. Moreover, by embodying the other characters, such as Abas, the deserter and drug dealer, and Sadiya the fellow peddler, the character shows those who were ready to compromise everything to survive, yet still their loss is undeniable.

While the Prosecutor is trying to convict Chmmala of the criminal act of drug dealing and killing Abas, she describes in painful detail how she lives every day, and reveals harsh truths about Iraqi society and conditions in the 1990s. Yet, the prosecutor's character clearly shows no consideration for her situation:

Your honour... I beg your pardon, you should not be influenced by such words and your decision should not be affected by sympathy with this old devil in the shape of a poor old woman... To the beholder she looks a naïve and primitive country woman... But she did what most mafia men could not do ... The crimes stated in this file! The question is what kind of a trick did she use to drag the victim to the crime scene? (4/239)

The Prosecutor's lack of sympathy for Chmmala symbolises the gap between the authorities and the people in Iraq. The failure to recognise her innocence illustrates the difference in humanity and morality in the two sides of society. The gap results in a lack of communication between the people and the authorities, which increases the people's hardship and the authorities' power. Moreover, the irony created by the structure of the monodrama, in that Chmmala is herself the Prosecutor, reflects the notion that victims are themselves the cause of their own misery because they remain silent, which again adds to the play's danger to the authorities. Sarcastically, Chmmala states that finding the truth requires a straight tongue, while hers is thirsty and twisted: "Your honour, judge, you want the truth and truth needs a straight tongue... My tongue is tired of running after the truth... It'll be cut off and I will swallow it and go speechless and we'll all be lost with the lost truth." (2/236) Her words are both ironic and realistic in the sense that many Iraqi people yearn for a voice that openly and without fear speaks of their suffering. Many Iraqis have searched for this truth throughout the wars that they endured yet they are unable to 'water' their thirst for the truth as Chmmala metaphorically puts it. Hence, *Al Nehdha* dared to speak loudly of the Iraqis' pains and the consequences of war for society in such a way that threatened the authorities.

Alharbi touched on issues that all Iraqis experienced but could not speak about, at least not in public.

According to Iraqi critics, *Al Nehdha* is considered to be part of the mono-dramatic movement that appeared and became popular in the 1990s because of the limited financial support for theatre activities at that time. Sabah Al Anbari's article, "Three Features of Contemporary Iraqi Theatre" (2003) borrowed Jerzy Grotowski's term, 'Poor Theatre' to refer to the movement, as this kind of theatre was initiated in Iraq because of limited artistic and technical support. Hence, most Iraqi playwrights found that monodrama could be useful, economically, to present their themes with a smaller budget. Accordingly, the General Office of Cinema and Theatre started an annual Festival for such monodramas which they thought would give theatre workers a good opportunity to find work; Al Anbari highlights the fact that such a festival could be considered as a unique event in the world of theatre in general. (Al Anbari 2003).

Alharbi offers his reasons for writing this monodrama:

Playing through the form of monodrama was more exciting, and I was more keen on delivering the discourse than paying attention to the aesthetic side of structure, although I was innovative here believing that one voice and one body would form a short path to reach the inner selves of the recipients and provoke them to feel the agony of the character in front of them. (Interview 2016, 4)

Al Nehdha fulfilled what Holderness describes as, "the progressive political role of art." That is, *Al Nehdha* succeeded in, "exposing and interrogating ideology: and since ideology is rooted in the structures of culture and in artistic forms, the pressing and priority task is to expose structure and form, to open cultural artefacts up to investigation and challenge" (Holderness 1992, 9). However, it proved to be a risk for Alharbi as the play led to his being condemned and marginalized by the authorities.

Although *Al Nehdha* is mainly concerned with exposing the social reality of Iraqi society at the time of its production, it can be seen as highly political in terms of Alan Sinfield's characterization of political culture:

[c]ulture does not transcend the material forces and relations of production. Culture is not simply a reflection of the economic and political system, but nor can it be independent of it. Texts are inseparable from the conditions of their production and reception in history; and involved, necessarily, in the making of cultural meanings which are always, finally, political meanings. (Cited in Holderness 1992, 5)

In this sense, *Al Nehdha* deals with Iraqi political cultural realities. The play also fulfils the duty of political theatre as described by Kelleher. For an Iraqi audience of the 1990s, it is the theatre that "speak[s] 'for' us and 'for' our world" (Kelleher 2009, 10). Even if Chmmala is not saved at the end of *Al Nehdha*, as is Mother Courage in Brecht's

Mother Courage, her audience can at least “learn something by observing her” (Cited in Kelleher 2009, 52). According to Yassein Al Nusayir’s book, *The Questions of Modernism in Theatre*, a play might not be effective only through the tale that it tells; the timing of presenting the play can have a crucial role, as well as the actor who embodies the action in that specific time to make the work tangible. (Al Nusayir 2010, 80) Alharbi’s play gains much of its significance from the fact that it was written and performed in the 1990s, when whatever was being said and enacted could be seen and felt just a few steps outside the Theatre Forum Building where the performance took place. It is a play that speaks out about “something going on in the world that should not be happening, that should be preventable.” (Kelleher 2009, 21):

Stand up... I say, stand up; what is wrong with you... Weakened! All of us are full of heart ache... The heart aches as if it knocks on the chest's door to open; full of lamentation as we all lean on our shafts. What you see on the back of the hedgehogs are not quills, they are the shafts of patience towering to their Lord.
(1/233)

The authorities may have seen the play’s opening lines as a threat; and what Kelleher states about debbi tucker green’s *Random* can easily be applicable to *Al Nehedha* as it creates a political interpretation. The play opens up to a political potential,

even if the drama does appear at some level to stage a political defeat, having little enough to offer in terms of either political 'commitment' to a stated cause or organized 'resistance' to a state of affairs, and making no sort of promise at all in terms of political 'efficacy' (Kelleher 2009, 22).

However, in this case, *Al Nehedha* proved to be effective enough to be banned after only one performance by Iraqi authorities.

The very title of the play highlights the playwright’s cynicism, since ‘Al Nehdha’ is the Arabic word for restoration. It literally means to stand up and restore. Yet, none of these meanings are accomplished by Iraqis nor by the play itself as it was unable to survive more than one performance. Hence, the play evokes a great irony regarding the Arabic meaning of the word and its actual representation. That is, although the word carries a positive connotation of restoration and resistance, it depicts a reality of the poor exhausted district of Baghdad and its people, an impecunious population of women, children and the elderly, who make their living through the soldiers who arrive at the garage to take the bus, that takes them to battlefield, from which they might never return. Vulnerable women, trying to survive as peddlers, are exposed to exploitative men who take this crowded district as their shelter from the military police: “Do you remember your daughter's blue eyes... Clear blue eyes as the pure sky that has no hawk

to bite a pigeon" (1/233). Al Nehdha, the district, proves to be cursed for its people; it is the place young men leave and never return, leaving their women and families and women to suffer with no protection or help:

Curse be upon this Nehdha that is unable to rise up on its feet ... Hey you, loser, my husband, Al Muhamadwi , get down off your horse I feel so heavy with pain and there is no help... Hey you, loser, Abo Jwad [*Jwad's Father*] without you and your protection the God's sky is shivering with cold... I told you and warned you not to use your fine horse for pulling the carriage... can't you see what this time has done to us Abo Jwad... Pills... Prison... and a grave that wouldn't take the white hair of Chmmala in... why? Why does death refuse those who are rejected by life? Why? (5/242)

The old Iraqi mother, Chmmala, who earns her living by selling tea on the pavement is caught in a situation where she needs help but no one offers her a hand except a drug dealer, who takes advantage of her ignorance and need to earn a living by giving her drugs to sell to soldiers and young men as headache pills:

Om Jwad... Take these headache pills... You can sell them with the tea. My good tea could not help cure headaches in this Nehdha... Are you saying these silly pills will help?
Don't worry about the customers... I will work these out.
Then why don't you sell them yourself?
You know I am not legally allowed to walk free in the streets... And I can't stay in al Nehdha for more than an hour... You just say "yes" and you will find the customers queuing here...
I said "yes" and good fortune came from all directions. (4/240)

This Iraqi woman carries all the burdens of war on her shoulders while her son is at the front. She does not know if he is alive or dead, and lives in the hope that he might return one day and she will be able to enjoy his presence again. That is why she pretends to be strong and tries her best to survive until his unlikely return:

Please, you, young man if you happened to meet my son don't tell him that I was attacked by the Municipality... Don't tell him they took his mother's stove... He might get worried... Don't tell him that I can't sell one "estican" [*cup*] of tea... Tell him that we live in eternal spring and prosperity... Our moon is shining happily and spreading joy all over the places... Those people of the Municipality are joking with us... The old man is cared for and he is doing fine... He never cries, he is a good man... The teacher teaches the children "Dar... Daran... Shuqqa" [*a house... two houses, a flat*] (3/237)

But when she prays to God and when she asks others to pray for her, she reveals the ugliness of life and begs for help:

Oh, God, the pure virgin women have left their homes to live on the pavements in Al Nehdha... Tell [God] that cold has beaten the chest of the old women... So please wrap them with your grace and warmth of mercy... It's better than their patience that is longer than Ayyub's ... Oh Allah who answers all prayers... We are asking you by the thirst of the Prophet's granddaughters in their captivity to quench

our thirst from your “Kawther” of mercy... The bitterness of this life has made our mouths go very dry. (5/241)

Another irony is that this woman who carries the burden of life at this time and in this place is herself seen as a burden. The Iraqi name Chmmala is very significant here because of its meaning, which she explains: “When I was born the whole wide world seemed to close upon my father as he had five daughters and I was the sixth, that is why he called me Chmmala” (4/239). In this context the word ‘chmmala’ means ‘an extra addition’, or an extra burden in colloquial Iraqi Arabic, showing that her very existence was an extra addition to the burden of the world of her father and family; an addition that was not welcomed at all.

Al Nehdha’s uniqueness is generated from the idea that the heroine of the play speaks of the way Iraqis lived and suffered with a realistic tone and eloquence that is unfamiliar to every Iraqi old and young. Furthermore, she does not use standard Arabic as other serious Iraqi plays did then, rather, she uses familiar local Iraqi Arabic. With her multidimensional character, Chmmala expresses the viewpoints of a peddler, a criminal, a mother, and a prosecutor all in one. She speaks from her pain that led to the accusation of drug dealing. The mono-dramatic structure of *Al Nehdha*, where characters in conflict speak in the Iraqi colloquial tongue, presented through only one performer, enables the play to evoke the empathy that Alharbi hoped for. Moreover, the choice of making his play a monodrama, with one actress embodying all the different characters of the play, may also refer to Alharbi’s realization that all Iraqis share the same consequences of war no matter their social status or background, and highlights the difference between the suffering of the people of the lower status and the severe control of those who are at the top of the society. This is significant in order to identify the problem of Iraqi society and to express it in theatre. Iraqis are all unified and entrapped in this ruined and distracted place, whether a ‘garage’ or ‘court’. They are all baffled by the same everlasting riddle of the existence of life after death expressed in Fedheela’s words:

Dear sister I think we the poor are entitled to go to Heaven... If only death wouldn’t be painful, we would all go for it... Tell me, sister how is it? Is it like when you finish your sentence in jail and you are released... Are we to fly up or... or... to be swallowed by the ground? (1/235)

When reading the lines of the play in Arabic there is no clear specification of the characters. Rather, they are realized through what they are saying. In the translation, I preferred to retain this sense of confusion in order to maintain the sense of unity created

by the structure of mono-drama, and therefore, I did not clarify a specific character when quoting from the play. Furthermore, to a large extent, the choice of a female character to represent these characters intensifies the impact of the play, since women are more vulnerable yet they bear the weight of war and its consequences on their shoulders.

For an Iraqi audience, the play carries what Clive Barker identifies as an important feature of Piscator's work; "simplicity of expression, lucidity of structure, and a clear effect on the feelings of the working class audience" (Cited in Holderness 1992, 26). Here, the working class is represented in the unfortunate ordinary and simple Iraqi peddlers, war deserters, thieves, soldiers and their families who form the majority of the population in Iraq. These features make *Al Nehdha* one of the important plays of the 1990s, as they challenge all the restrictions on theatre at the time, revealing the ugliness of the reality. Furthermore, *Al Nehdha* touches on facts that are significantly true in Iraq even now, for example, Chmmala's calls for help because the young man who prayed on her abaya steals it:

the one who prayed on my Abaya has taken it... Stolen it... and run away... Get out of your dirty hole, Om Ferha, I am so cold... I am shivering... Hey, dear son, Jwad, the whole world is dark in your mother's eyes from Al Kindi to Ibn Al Jozi ... Hey, my son, Jwad! Your helmet is protecting the borders and your mother's shoulder has nobody and nothing to protect her. (5/242)

This image is a direct criticism of the use of religion in order to take advantage of people and deprive them of their rights. The man, who asks Chmmala to pray on her abaya, left her exposed since the abaya represents the cover or veil that protects her. This is an incident that often occurs in Iraq, and is still a source of difficulty for people. It resonates in the mind, particularly the Iraqi mind, and evokes one of the prominent mottos Iraqis chant during demonstrations against corruption in Iraq in late 2015: "By the name of religion, thieves have stolen from us". This refers to the corrupt religious men and politicians who use their authority to steal the country's fortunes while Iraqi soldiers are fighting ISIS and dying every day to protect their families and return the displaced to their homes.

Falah Shaker's *Heaven Opens its Gates... Late: War Prisoners Finally Return Home*

Falah Shaker (1960-) is one of the most prominent names in dramatic writing in Iraq. Shaker's *Heaven*, as he prefers to call it, is a significant play for its main theme

and its impact on the Iraqi audience. *Heaven Opens its Gate... Late* was first performed at the Jordanian Theatre Festival in 1998, and featured Mahmood Abo Al Abas and Shatha Salim, two well respected and famous Iraqi theatre actors. After that, it was performed in Iraq in 1999 for a short period. Both the director of the play, Muhsin Al Ali, and the main actor of the play, Abo Al Abas, had very significant administrative positions in theatre in Iraq at that time; Al Ali was the General Secretary of the Artists Union in Iraq and Abo Al Abas was the director of theatre affairs in the Union. Their prominent positions played a vital role in supporting the production of the play and in passing the play text through censorship committees in Iraq. Shaker explains to Dr. Sayd Ali Ismeal, an Egyptian theatre academic and critic, that choosing well known theatre workers with a certain kind of administrative authority was among his “weapons” that he was very keen to use in order to reach his audience with the least amount of objection from governmental authorities (Ismael, 2015). Later, the play participated in the Carthage Theatre Festival in Tunisia, when Jwad Al Shekerchi, another famous Iraqi theatre actor, replaced Abo Al Abas in the lead role.¹⁴ The play received the *Golden Ta'nit* Award for the best text, best direction and best acting, an honour that was considered to be the award of the century as it was the last Festival in the twentieth century. The play returned to Baghdad to be performed at the Al Resheed Theatre, where the run lasted for almost a month. It is among the most prominent dramas of the 1990s in spite of the fact that it is a tragedy and written in a poetic Arabic language which implies that because it is in a more elite form it would not have been expected to gain popularity. According to Al Shekerchi, the play was popular with the Iraqi audience and could have run for a whole year, if allowed (cited in Abas, 2006). In Shaker’s view, the play’s run was stopped only because the stage was already booked for a following comic play:

[T]he Office of Theatre and Cinema was a self-funded office at that time, the salaries of all the employees were paid from the income of the theatre productions that used to be presented in Iraqi theatres. The Office had been already in contract obligation with other theatre companies and Al Rasheed Theatre Stage was booked for another play. They never thought that a play like *Heaven Open Its Gates... Late* would stay in performance for that long. They would have imagined that it would take few days and stop after that like other performances. Those actors and theatre workers of the following performance that was supposed to be put on the same stage had to be paid for their time; that was the reason why the play was stopped and the theatre was taken for the following play (Interview 2014, 3)

¹⁴ There are different stories about the reason why Abo Alabas left this role but Shaker did not confirm any of them. It is confirmed though that Abo Alabas left Iraq for good in the same year, 1999, in spite of the huge success the play’s premier gained in Jordan and Baghdad.

This may have been the General Office of Cinema and Theatre's official justification for ending the show, but I believe that the actual reason may well have been the themes presented in the play.

In spite of the play's success and fame, finding its text was one of the long and difficult processes in this study which took more than a year of research between early 2013 and mid-2014. It was found with the help of an Iraqi post-graduate student in theatre studies, Haider Ata Allah, together with one of his teachers, who managed to locate an old and incomplete manually printed text of the play. Ata Allah electronically reprinted the pages of the text and sent it to me, after which I delivered the incomplete copy to Falah Shaker, who completed it as he remembered it and sent it back to me for this study. Then fortunately, Shaker managed to find other copies through Abo Alabas, the first lead actor, Al Ali, the director of the play and other friends; and he decided to publish the text. The play was finally published online for the first time in May, 2015.

As with most of Shaker's plays, the play primarily consists of a conversation between two characters, in this case, a husband and wife. The husband has just returned home after more than ten years as a prisoner of war, the wife is unable to recognize him and refuses to accept him as her husband unless he proves his real identity to her. When at the end of the play he finally does this, their reunion is interrupted by the entrance of a number of new returning prisoners of war, each claiming that they are her husbands and repeating all the claims that the first prisoner used. *Heaven Open its Gates... Late* situates these events around one long act of six scenes, that Shaker called 'paintings'. The term 'painting' refers to Shaker's tendency to create images that pictures the pain of these two suffering characters and their lost identity after ten years of separation. Throughout the scenes, the prisoner tries his best to convince the woman that he is her husband by reminding her of particular very intimate memories that they shared before his departure. Conversely, the woman tries her best to resist her desire to accept him, using reasonable and ironical questions about his changed behaviour and looks. The prisoner explains that each change is due to the miseries that he had witnessed, and how these dark years had changed both his looks and his attitude to life. The play is further enriched by a third actor who plays the role of two other characters, a teacher and a school guard who carry the same name, Yousif, which has a special significance in the prisoner's memories of life before war. Through these characters, Shaker reveals the ugliness of war and its consequences to Iraqi society in general. The dilemma caused by the question of whether the prisoner is the woman's husband or not continues until the end of the play when the woman and the audience are finally convinced, especially as

he can recall the very intimate details of the type of physical relations the couple used to enjoy. Yet, the solution is shaken when a number of prisoners enter the scene, to claim the right to be the woman's husbands, leaving the woman and the audience confused and unsettled. This play is the last of Shaker's series of five plays known among Iraqi theatre practitioners and critics under the title of '*The Quintuple of Love and War*'. Most of these plays were performed in Baghdad and other Arabic countries and were very successful recipients of awards. The five plays are: *A Contemporary Love Story*, directed by the late Hani Hani; *A Hundred Years of Love*; *In the Heights of Love*, both directed by Dr. Fadhil Khalil; *The Tragedy of the Writer of Jokes*, a text in progress; and finally *Heaven Open its Gates... Late*, directed by Muhssin Al Ali.

The process of exchanging war prisoners began between Iraq and Iran following the end of the Iraq-Iran war that lasted for eight years (1980-1988). During the 1990s, Iraqis heard and lived many stories about returning prisoners of wars who could not cope with the new Iraq that they found. Iraq was suffering from severe economic sanctions and was controlled by poverty and critical political conditions. Iraqis witnessed many tragic incidents about the prisoners' return, including some that were believed to have been killed and returned to find their wives married to other men, which was the main story of another of Shaker's plays, *A Hundred Years of Love* (1995). Hence, the theme of Shaker's *Heaven* is very immediate and connected to Iraqi life during the 1990s. According to Shaker, "[t]he play discussed the social effect of war and that effect of war started to appear in Iraqi life in the early 1980s and it has not ended up to this very moment." (Interview 2014, 5). The impact of war is endless and Iraqis are still under the same pressure of war and its consequence.

Both Shaker and the lead actor of the play, Al Shekerchi, mention that the incident of the returned war prisoner has a real connection to their own lives. Shaker's sister's husband was a prisoner in Iran for nearly ten years and when he returned just after the time of the performance of the play, his wife refused him and for months could not believe that he was her husband. That connection to reality led Shaker's brother to insult him and his play as he believed that he used his personal life to write his plays, though this particular play had been written and performed even before his brother-in-law returned. (Interview, 2014, 10). Moreover, Al Shekerchi mentions that he accepted the role because it reminded him of his close friend who had just arrived from Iran after being a prisoner of war for more than ten years. He stresses that he had drawn his character from his friend, through conversation with him and listening to his stories, which described how he used to live during the years in prison. This connection was so

relevant to Al Shekerchi that he totally identified with the character to the extent that he deserted his marital bed for a quite long time (Abas, 2006). Such relevance played a vital role in the success of the play, in spite of the playwright's use of a very poetic language.

Shaker does not name his main characters; he gives them the titles of "WIFE"¹⁵ and "PRISONER". In this way he tries to highlight the fact that she could be all Iraqi wives who lived and witnessed the pains of war, and he could be all Iraqi male prisoners, the victims of war. In so doing, the playwright's intention was to make his characters more general and related to all Iraqi individuals:

Giving names to characters would make them particular characters which will reduce the effect or the chance of generalization. But when I refer to her as wife, she can be any wife and all wives, and the husband all husbands and any husband. She is like all and different from all and he too is like all and different from all. All this is part of the attempt of generalizing the case for all humanity, in one way or another. (Interview 2014, 12)

Since she is a wife or a woman, this character is required to accept what is left of her prisoner of war husband. He is a product of war, left with nothing recognizable in him, even to his wife.

The play captures the psychological impact of war on the Iraqi family through the confrontation of two themes, love and war, which leads the husband to blame himself for going to war as if it was his choice:

PRISONER. It's my fault, I am the one who went to war and I am the one who imprisoned myself and deprived myself from seeing the dearest of the dear. I went away with all my being leaving you without protection, starving and insecure. I was cruel with you. I imprisoned myself all these years. I apologize for ten years that I lost in vain in hunger and crying for you, for my loneliness. I lost them in suffering and longing to come back. I apologize for I am deposed in my own home; a coup d'état has overthrown me. [*Addressing her*]: my new King, don't kill me, let me go back to my prison. (262)¹⁶

Here, the Prisoner's words are deeply ironic, since victims are to be blamed for being victimized. They suggest severe criticism of the Iraqi soldiers' helplessness in wars with which they are involved, against their will, yet it is they who bear its cruel consequences as they are to be blamed for such helplessness. According to Saif, in this particular, painful speech, Shaker succeeded in satirizing the tragedy of war:

¹⁵ The original reference to the character in the original Arabic text is 'woman' but the word 'woman' in Arabic context can mean a wife. After I asked Falah Shaker about the use of the word her, he insisted that she is a wife, therefore I translated the name of the character as 'WIFE' rather than woman.

¹⁶ The page number of the text refers to the location of the text in the translated text only as the play was only recently published online with no pagination.

We are facing an expressionistic theatre in which the writer uses images from his unconscious to describe the tragic events that created a disordered and distorted reality. It was thus logical that the writer chooses a tragic style that is at its best also sarcastic, so sarcastically cruel that it leads to laughter and tears simultaneously. The writer and the director successfully agreed to use this kind of sarcasm in presenting the tragedy in accordance with the principle that rejects the logicity of logic and embraces the logic of illogicality. (Saif 2001)

Thus, Shaker's tragic style leads the action of the play forward to confront the audience with the question of how the play is going to end. The psychological impact of war is equally apparent on the wife when she confesses that her denial is because she is unable to bear a new departure if war comes again: "WIFE. The shock, the despair, the war that creeps to the eyes; my fear of a second departure... All this has made me do what I do" (264). Naser Abdulwahid, the theatre critic, states that the play reveals the dark face of war and its psychological significances. War can deprive life and freedom of all their meaning, leaving only ruins instead of human beings. Abdulwahid further explains that Shaker managed to reveal all these dark images of war, using a poetic language that makes the play the nearer to being a ritualistic performance rather than a play. (Abdulwahid, 2002) This concurs with Hassan Al Assi's view since he believes that the play shows the dangerous psychological impact of war because it leaves every moral value equal to nothing as these conditions of war "deprive us of the chances of life itself." (Al Assi, 2011) The dramatic or tragic nature of Shaker's play is revealed largely through the emotional dialogue. Shaker stresses that the main motive for his works is to make the voice of the victim heard, and he tends to use the poetic language of his plays to convey the amount of pain Iraqis suffer. (Ismael, 2015) On more than one occasion, Shaker clarifies that his intention is not to create a tale or a story in his theatre, that is, not to create a series of events that is interesting and appealing in the abstract, but to create a dialogue that would be able to reveal an underlying reality.

Starting with its title, *Heaven Open its Gate... Late*, the play is ironic since it juxtaposes a heavenly dream of reunion with the cruel reality of denial; while the rhetorical language distances it from its audience, it resonates with their lives in the play's events and emotions. Its poetic language conveys a heavenly world of sentiments and feelings that are lost and betrayed because of the harshness of war that changed everything around us:

PRISONER. You are betraying me... You are not my wife. Being a war prisoner never led me astray, I was led astray when you ruined my memories (*He throws his case from his hand.*) Shall I return like this? This is my kingdom, my home; my garden is overrun with weeds: parsley, greens and onions! Where are my roses that used to be watered with my blood to make them red? You are not

my wife any more... Should you greet me like this after all these years of prison... Shall we meet like this?! I used to dream of thousands of images of our meeting. (*The wife is sitting on the bed looking in the opposite direction to where he stands.*) The door is eaten with decay and left like an injured soldier, deserted on the battle field; the garden has become a market for vegetables. Where am I in all this? You killed my dreams and my home. This house is not my home... Oh, dear home, I never left you like this. I don't want to return to it while it is in ruin. What a disappointment! You are not my wife any more. (244)

The Prisoner's words clearly show a sense of loss and pain that has replaced every beautiful memory that he carried. The wife feels the same painful betrayal when she is unable to recognize her long awaited husband: "WIFE. I don't know you. You are not the one who delayed my death, and you are not the one who kept my patience alive. I wasn't weaned for you. It's not only that I don't know you, but I don't like your look either." (245) The Wife here admits that she is unable to recognize him as her husband and she is repelled by his looks. Saif explains that the heaven that was promised through the title was never reached through the events of the play. Its 'gates' are in a state of confusion, never really closed or completely open. (Saif, 2001). With his play, Shaker creates a dream of unreachable heaven or the illusion of heaven, until the end of the play when the audience might leave questioning whether heaven exists at all.

Most theatre critics generally believed that the use of the standard Arabic rather than the colloquial Iraqi language was a discouraging factor for the ordinary Iraqi public. According to Hamed Al Maliki, a playwright and a critic, this play was a shock to all theatre critics and the Iraqi audience as it countered the belief that language was one of the reasons why Iraqi audiences preferred commercial and comic plays over tragic and serious plays. With *Heaven Open its Gates... Late*, the audience waited in long queues to buy their tickets. (Al Maliki, 2010); and indeed, the play proved the belief to be false. I had the chance to talk to more than one person among the audience who attended the play in the 1990s, and they still remember its impact to the extent that one of them even remembered some lines.

Abas Hakim Hussein, an academic and a theatre critic, stresses that though the language of the play is standard Arabic, the main theme of war in the play is quite colloquial for Iraqis as it is part of their everyday life:

[i]n *Heaven Open its Gates... Late* the local colloquial utterance is not absent. If it occurs as a general concept, war, with its psychological impact, it is usually verbal, general, and local and exists in the right place. And it asserts itself here as an inevitable necessity, that when removed would create an obvious vacuum. Therefore, the writer's use of it is the most wonderful contribution to the beauty of the text. Moreover its use establishes its daily/textual impact on the ears of the

reader, and the resulting music in utterance/reading. To conclude, the active presence of this local oral utterance abbreviates tenths of standard words that might fall short of expressing the common public concerns and worries. (Hussein 2013, 896)

Furthermore, Hussein refers to the Wife's use of the endearing phrase, "I'll give my soul to you" several times in the play, which according to him, is another indication of the use of colloquial Iraqi terminology since the expression is more Iraqi Arabic rather than standard Arabic, that draws the play nearer to the sense of being particularly Iraqi. (Hussein 2013, 896). Abdulwahid stresses that such language and environment of the play "fertilized the space of expression in a ritualistic display." (Abdulwahid 2002) That is, the mixture of the local references such as 'I'll give my soul to you' which is enriched with highly poetic utterances of standard Arabic had an influential presence in the play since it was accompanied by an emotional dramatic environment.

The play's main environment is of doubts, confusion, uncertainty, and truth and lies, and this resonates with Chmmala's thirst for truth in *Al Nehdha*. Right from Shaker's first scene, the two main characters demand the sympathy of the audience so that they believe them and take their sides. The wife is unable to understand that this man is her husband, while the husband is trying his best to remind the wife of their dearest memories and letters in hope that she will believe his claim:

WIFE. No, you are not my husband!
 PRISONER . (To himself) Have I changed that much while being prisoner of war!
 WIFE. Are you asking me if being a war prisoner changed you to that extent? How could I know? I've never seen you before.
 PRISONER . (Applauds her) How clever! Do you have the guts to make jokes as soon as you see me after all this time and try/
 WIFE. (Interrupts him with objection) Do you want me to have a fake husband as a joke? (244-5)

He refuses to believe that she is able to deny him and that she is totally in shock and cannot accept the idea. He uses every effort to provide proofs, proofs that instead of convincing the wife, as well as the audience, about his identity, increase the confusion about him:

WIFE. What does fooling look like, then? Can war change the colour of the eyes... Your hair might go grey or your face might age, yes... but the colour of your eyes... That is impossible.
 PRISONER . You forgot the colour of my eyes... The colour of my eyes...
 WIFE. I am a woman. Do you know what that means? A woman who would never stop staring at the eyes of her lover to remind herself how much he loved her. One second is enough to recognize the brightness of your eyes and their colour. How

- about the years that I spent staring at your eyes even when you were asleep!
- PRISONER . It's the terror of war and the tears of the prison that steal the brightness of the eyes and even their colour.
- WIFE. And prison can make a man shorter than he used to be?!
- PRISONER . I'm belittled by your absence; there were no hugs from you to hold me upright. Your loss was enough for me to put the shroud of the grave on and you want me to be as I used to be!
- WIFE. Oh dear God, his heartbeat convinces me but my eyes can't believe... Is it possible that war can change our looks, and make our lovers an enemy. (*Insisting*) No... I won't be fooled; there is a scar on your forehead... (249)

Such a dialogue suggests the possibility of both the truth and falsehood, and here the audience is left with no clear evidence of which is which. The dialogue is clearly meant to create a sense of loss and unsolvable dilemma. For Shaker, the challenge is not one of finding the truth about the person, it is rather the more general question of what is left of them and whether what remains of this person is able to support the life that they are to live. Shaker tries to reveal the extent of the impact of war on both spiritual and psychical levels on humans:

That was a disastrous consequence of war when a person loses his certainty about the other; even a mother would lose her certainty about her own son whether dead or alive. The loss of certainty is one of the most serious consequences of war because in war one's faith in principles and certitudes are shaken. A person would lose his principles and certitudes including faith in parental and human relationships and as time passes he would find that nothing looks like them anymore or like the image he has in his mind. To give you a closer example, if two friends are parted for a long time, their looks might change because of the factor of time and age, but in times of war, with all the painful pressures on both the prisoner of war and his family inside the country, the vision of the heart is confused, the soul is deformed and disfigured, the memories become totally clouded. That is why it is never a question of lying or truth but it is an issue of how the soul gets distorted because of war. (Interview 2014, 10-11)

The wife's denial is driven by many justifications, most of which are quite reasonable, such as the prisoner's height or the colour of his eyes. Yet using romantic ideas that coloured his highly poetic language, Shaker convinces the wife, and probably the audience, of the possibility that the prisoner is the real husband.

The sense of closure in the play is only felt when the prisoner manages to convince the wife that he is her husband, referring passionately and romantically to more intimate details of their physical relationship and his knowledge of the places of certain moles on her body (263). Yet ironically this conclusion is very brief, when suddenly a new prisoner enters the stage announcing that he is the rightful husband and the number of the prisoners keeps growing to fill the stage, leading the wife to collapse at the very end.

(*They approach each other to hug; suddenly a second PRISONER enters in rage.*)

PRISONER 2. You are betraying me... (*To the wife*) You are a traitor... You are not my wife... This is not my house any more... What a humiliation and disappointment! Is this how I come back? Is this how my kingdom should be? My home... My garden is taken over by weeds, parsley, greens and onions... Where are the roses that used to be watered with my blood to take their redness.

(*The WIFE and the PRISONER are in astonishment, PRISONER 3 enters.*)

PRISONER 3. Not your husband... Who am I then? How I have dreamt about the three moles on your neck, below your breast, and above your knee.

(*And henceforth, war prisoners keep on coming in, each one saying a line of the dialogue, until the stage is full of prisoners*)

WIFE. (*Screams*) Dear God... which one of you is my husband? (264)

Al Assi stresses that here the conclusion is another beginning, and the end is a continuation rather than the climax of the play. (Al Assi, 2011) For Saif, this reveals Shaker's awareness that war is not over in Iraq, and this is to be expected due to the accumulations of wars in the country. For Iraqis, war was not only on the frontier, it was under the sun and everywhere. He further adds that Shaker explains this fact skilfully through the two characters of the teacher and the school guard (Saif 2001). Shaker's prediction proved to be real as war in Iraq is still a reality that never ends.

The two characters named Yousif are used to reveal the more general dilemma of Iraqi society in the 1990s. Being a teacher and a school guard makes these two characters representatives of the stable and secure life, yet, these images of security and stability embodied by both characters are also victimized by war and its influence, as it is revealed through the dialogue between the Prisoner and the characters. Each has his own tragedy that increases the Prisoner's own tragedy. The teacher, who is a symbol of dignity and pride for any Iraqi, is humiliated to the extent that he starts to mock his own humiliation:

YOUSIF. (*Interrupting*) Never! Being demeaned is not being in need. Being demeaned is to kill your time thinking what you should eat, and being demeaned comes in types, my son, just like food. There is being demeaned of the first class, as when you sell your brother for a meal, and the other is of the excellent type when you make your son a meal for a month. And there is the refined type of being demeaned when you put your mother in a freezer to feed you for a whole year... (253)

On the other hand, the school guard reveals the ugliness of the war and the economic sanctions that manipulated and deformed the lives of the Iraqis during the 1990s to the extent that death became part of their prayers:

YOUSIF. I stretch my hand to the wounds. Isn't the water of the innocent a prayer? The dirty water kills purity. How can I be near God...? Dear God... There are new rules to be near you, we don't find

clean water or soft ground to pray on... All these have gone, and I kneel down for prayers with my hunger and I purify myself with my blood... And I scream with my whole soul... Dear God, why did you leave your son in the embargo...? God forgive us... How close is blasphemy to a coffin that comes unexpectedly! ... Ahmed and Hamid and, and, and... and me, we are all dying, dear God... Did the angel of death take into his consideration that twenty million would die in one hour...? For his sake, have mercy on us, dear God... Dear God, please make the shale stone our bread... We are begging for Your Heaven in our earthly hell... but what Heaven when the breast feeds hunger! ... Dear God, have mercy on my weak mind, and bless it with recognizing your wisdom. (260-1)

Here, Shaker uses religious prayers to draw the audience's attention and sympathy to the vulnerability of the Iraqi public at that time. They are helpless and have totally surrendered to their tragic and unjustified fate. This can be read as another direct criticism of helplessness and surrender that controlled the Iraqi mind during this period. Using the name YOUSIF for both of these characters can be of significance to the Iraqi mentality as it has a religious connotation, referring to one of the prophets, Joseph, who is known for his beauty and wisdom.¹⁷ These two features can be applied to the wisdom and beauty of the teacher as a guide, and the school guard as the provider of safety; yet they are both distorted and humiliated by war and the sanctions.

The play touches on an important issue, that of beauty and innocence; but this is depicted as having been deformed through the idea of the lost children, and with them a lost future. War does not leave space for the beauty of children and the hope for tomorrow:

PRISONER. My wife! I don't remember having children...
 WIFE. Because you were taken as a war prisoner before...
 PRISONER. Before what?
 WIFE. We don't have children, because war has eaten half of the bed.
 PRISONER. We could have slept on the other half.
 WIFE. But you were taken prisoner before we shared the bed. (252)

There is no room for children as "war grants children white moustaches" (247). Hence, Shaker believes that his hero

refuses to have children because war has eaten half of their bed, and in other moments he represents the authorities' point of view saying that he wants children so that war can continue, which says clearly that he does not wish to have children to make this life continue but to make this war continue. (Interview 2014, 8)

Shaker's view is evident in the Prisoner's words: "We will... We will have children... or how could this war continue?"(253). In connection with the two occasions when the

¹⁷ The Arabic version of the name Joseph is Yousif.

Prisoner shows that it might not be suitable for him to wish to have children, it is possible to say that the play belongs to what Shaker refers to as ‘the theatre of open interpretations’. According to him, it is through these contradictory ideas and confusions created by the characters in the scenes, his play and some other Iraqi plays managed to escape censorship (Interview 2014, 4-5). This is when the playwrights artistically makes “the political force of what the actor is *saying* [*sic*] and the theatrical force of what the scene is *doing* [*sic*] [appear] to be aiming in different directions” (Kelleher 2009, 42). The Prisoner returns to raise his voice against the cruelty of this war and the sanctions which deprive Iraqi children of their right to be children. “Oh Embargo, you are making our children prophets... they deny the beauties of life before knowing them. A child denies the pleasures of life! Can there be anything more blasphemous than this...? This is how prophets were created, then” (261). Therefore, Shaker is stating clearly that children are less lucky than grown-ups in Iraq as they lose their innocence through being deprived of the basic rights in life.

Heaven Open its Gates... Late was performed with a very simple setting and symbolic décor where the stage was mostly empty except for an old mobile bed, a board, iron bars to represent a cage, and an iron frame to represent a door. For Abdulwahid, the director created a metaphorical scene with these simple objects that revealed the different significant levels of the themes. (Abdulwahid, 2002) Muhammad Alobaidi, a theatre critic, explains that such a simple décor gave the actors the space to move freely and smoothly to reveal the accurate meaning of each object and its significance to the plot. (Alobaidi, 2008). Alobaidi's explanation concurs with Saif's view that the simple and mobile props and décor reinforced the actor's ability to move freely and to symbolically free themselves from the stillness of fixed props that might be created if the play had a naturalistic décor; Saif stresses that this supported the thematic details of the play rather than the realistic one. (Saif, 2001). This simple setting was one of the methods Shaker uses to give the audience space to imagine their own environment and family home. This might not be very difficult as the audience is probably familiar with the story of the play in general, which would encourage the open interpretation that Shaker aimed for in the first place, and which makes the play even closer to each person in a particular way.

For Saif, Shaker's *Heaven* answered his question of how would the Iraqi theatre portray war and sanctions and whether Iraqi theatre practitioners would directly display the people's suffering; would it move towards the Western Theatre of the Absurd and the illogical; or would it submit to the Ba'athist ideologies of deceit by making

propaganda theatre productions? In reply to this question, Saif quotes Shaker's reasons for writing such plays:

War has ached my sleep with nightmares as if hell exercises its power on my memory. My heart trembled and I said my Shahada [testimony] but I hope my death would be delayed that I may be able to find something to say – about people whose most desirable dreams have been devoured by twenty years of wars and sanctions, people who seem to be only born to be slaughtered. And if it were not for a few conscientious voices, we would have been thrown into oblivion, for this new world does not inform you with the suffering and torments of the victim but celebrates the victory of the killer. In the middle of the internet and live satellite channels, I stand alone screaming in the desert with full of voice, 'Can you feel the agonies of the victim?' (Cited in Saif, 2001)

Therefore, what Skaker is trying to do can be explained. He uses his generalized characters, his symbolic and simple setting, and even his minor characters of the same name to help his audience to “register something of what determines relations of power in *this [sic]* given space, and perhaps [his audience can] imagine how those relations could be different” (Kelleher, 43). Each character and symbol in this play can refer to a free standing aspect of Iraqi society of the 1980s and the 1990s, a society shaped by war and its consequences. A woman or a wife, who is left alone to her dreams and lost future, to be reunited with them when it is too late, and she is unable to understand or feel ready to accept it. A man, who is actually a prisoner of his horrible memories of war and is totally deformed so that even his soul cannot cope with the change: hunger, humiliation and death that spare no one, not even the innocent children. People who are surrounded by cages, beds, boards and doors, yet they are unable to submit to their prison, have rest, talk about their miseries, or even see their way out.

Al Nehdha and *Heaven Opens its Gates... Late* share an aim and tendency to reveal the impact of war and the sanctions on Iraq. Both plays severely criticize the inhumane condition of the Iraqis during the 1990s. However the two plays are different from each other in their presentations. The first, *Al Nehedha*, is a monodrama with a factual language that relies on the ability of its single actress and the audience's imagination to portray the characters of the play through their Iraqi accents and linguistic style. The second, *Heaven*, also draws its frame from a very current and realistic story of the returning prisoner of war, yet its poetic language is more romantic and imaginative in

situating the plot within its deeply stylized and rhetorical dialogue. The second main very obvious difference is that Alharbi's play was performed in Iraq for one day only, while Shaker's play succeeded outside Iraq, before its production in Iraq that lasted for almost a month at the Al Rasheed Theatre in Baghdad in 1999. Shaker's policy is to use the fact that the play proved to be very successful outside Iraq before he presented it inside, although it could have put all those who worked in it in real danger, because it dared to picture the pain of war, imprisonment, poverty and the helplessness of Iraqis at that time. Besides Shaker, many critics insist that the play can have many different interpretations. On the other hand, its representation of the cruelty of war and its consequences is quite unmistakable. In this respect, the real challenge that the play and playwright himself faced while it was presented in Iraq is whether the authorities would take into consideration the reputation of Shaker as a famous playwright or not. Both Shaker and Muhsin Al Ali, the director, were summoned to the Office of the Chief of Intelligence in Baghdad where he questioned them personally about the real purpose of the play and whether it was intended to be against the regime or with it. Shaker described the meeting:

[The Chief] said: I watched your play with two other people, one of them said that the play was against the regime entirely, the other said, it was the best work that defended the Iraqi regime. As for me I wasn't sure, at one time I felt like the first person and at another I felt like the second. That's why I wanted to have you here to talk about the play. I said to him, 'I am Falah Skaker... and when I show my plays outside Iraq – despite their winning of awards- I reflect the picture of freedom that is given to us in Iraq. This is necessary for our image outside!' And before I added any more of this tune, he [The Chief] interrupted me saying, 'What is important to me is what is shown inside Iraq just like what is shown outside Iraq!' And after a long discussion, he said, 'I'll suggest one thing and you can always not take it into consideration. I am not asking you to praise the President or the government, but I just want you to add a sentence to the Prisoner's dialogue that means that he loves his homeland. And I don't think that you disagree with that! That's why I would like you to add this line because I will attend the play again to see this.' Of course, such a request looks very easy, but in fact the love of the homeland was connected to the love for the leader and the addition of such a phrase of the love of the Prisoner's love of his homeland would kill any open interpretation I am aiming at. On the other hand, it was impossible for me to refuse the request of the Chief of Intelligence! That's why I added a line to the text saying, 'I have a home that I love, and it's waiting for my return'. (Cited in Ismeal, 2015)¹⁸

Shaker mentions that the Chief of the Intelligence showed them his generosity by offering them both expensive perfumes as presents at the end of this meeting. The potential threat behind such a meeting was obvious enough for both men. This is the

¹⁸ I could not find the added line that Shaker is referring to in the published Arabic text. It is probably because the line was added to the oral version only and for a short time before the end of the performances of the play.

risk that Shaker took when he chose to present his play inside Iraq, and obviously, both Shaker and the play's director survived this risk. It is well-known for Iraqi theatre makers that this play had undergone many drafts. The director, Al Ali, stated that the original text of the play was much longer than the performed one: "The original text of the writer was very long; what had been deleted could make a whole different play on its own." (Ismael 2015) Many scenes had been deleted for the purpose of escaping censorship, yet the play did not lose its general theme and message.¹⁹

The years between 1990 and 2003 can be fairly described as years of isolation for all Iraqis who once lived in Iraq, and Iraqi theatre was no exception to this. Such isolation contributed to the close observation and control of artistic activities, mainly in theatre by the authorities, therefore, all theatre productions were censored and monitored closely in case any word or idea would go against the "intellectual safety" mentioned earlier. However, Iraqi playwrights and theatre practitioners did their best to present their themes and beliefs in different ways. Alharbi and Shaker are among those playwrights who insisted on the importance of the role of theatre in calling for, and inciting for, the revival of a decent life for Iraqis. Each playwright used his own philosophy. Alharbi's realism was far too dangerous and he could not have survived if he had stayed in Iraq after *Al Nehdha* in 1997. On the other hand, Shaker was among the few playwrights and theatre workers who survived censorship and remained in Iraq until 2003.

In a more optimistic mode, Shaker believes that dictatorship and censorship had served Iraqi theatre in one way or another.

Censorship in Iraq was stupid at that time, if I may say so, because most people who were responsible for authorizing play texts used to keep in their minds a certain idea that a certain text is either with or against something. That is why the plays of open interpretations appeared in Iraq, in other words, a play can say everything and say nothing at all at the same time. Or it might say what apparently goes in accordance with the authority of the time, but it might hold a totally different idea if read in a different way. That left the censors in trouble sometimes as they couldn't decide whether a certain text is with or against the country, and by country I mean the people in power, the authorities, according to the terminology of censors at that time. (Interview 2014, 4)

Mahmood Abo Alabas further explains that most Iraqi theatre practitioners found a shelter in symbolism as it was a safer way of expressing their ideas on the stage. He stresses that "Censorship was present in the mind of the writer even before the

¹⁹ I could not find any further details about the deleted scenes of the play, yet Shaker emphasised that the first original copy of this play was left in his house in Iraq and he wishes that one day he will be able to return to Iraq and find it there.

authorities, as a result of fear.” (Interview 2014, 1) Hence, Iraqi theatre makers preferred symbolism or rhetoric language to coat their ideas, and thus escaped censorship. Shaker and Abo Alabas’s opinions concur with most Iraqi theatre critics and practitioners, Abo Alabas confirms that some Iraqi theatre makers “maintained the theme of humanity in their works, although they ran away to symbolism in their expressions, in order not to fall into the common ideology.” (Interview 2014, 1). By common ideology, he refers to the propaganda theatre or commercial theatre that controlled the 1990s. This might explain the ambiguity that a reader might find in some theatre works, such as Chitheer’s *Pearl* (referred to in the Introduction). It may also explain the danger Alharbi faced, because his play was very realistic.

Many Iraqi plays that followed the trend of symbolizing or carrying multiple interpretations, according to Shaker’s terms, succeeded in finding their way to the stage, such as Yousif Al Saigh's *Alethi Dhel Fi Hetheyaniah Yeqidhan (He Who Remains Conscious while Hallucinating)* 1993. Al Saigh's play was adapted by Ihssan Al Telal (1963-2014) from a long poem by Al Saigh (1933-2006) that reveals the reflections of a war martyr after his death. The play was considered by most Iraqi theatre critics as a poetic documentary that spoke about the real impact of war on Iraqi society through a soldier’s story. Its highly poetic language might be one of the reasons for its highly symbolic themes. Such a play can be placed in the same category as Chitheer’s *Pearl* and Shaker's *Heaven Opens Its Gates... Late*. Yet the difference is that while Chitheer and Al Saigh chose a remote setting for their play, Shaker uses real life events for his.

Shaker insists that there were two main factors behind his play’s success. Firstly, there was the director’s clever use of media: that is, he used the play’s income to pay for its advertisement. Secondly, Abo Alabas, the actor who took the lead role in the premiere of the play, was responsible for authorizing it. Therefore, in addition to its subject matter, all these factors played a significant role in the play’s success. Furthermore, Abo Alabas mentioned that the authorities chose to allow a few political plays to pass censorship to earn the sympathy of theatre workers and the Iraqi public at that time. (Interview 2014, 3) Therefore, it can be said that Shaker's play was one of those texts that the authorities chose to allow, during the politically critical years between 1999-2003. However, this opportunity was not available to Alharbi’s *Al Nehdha*, which boldly shows the deterioration of Iraqi social and moral life, through touching on sensitive themes of prostitution and drugs, the themes that used to be consistently concealed from the general public, though felt by all Iraqis during that time.

This era was one of fear for all theatre practitioners, as described by Abo Alabas (Interview 2014, 3), which was followed by a complete change in 2003 that is, after the fall of the regime. Most Iraqi theatre practitioners looked forward to that change, hoping for a better future and a freer environment in which to work. Yet the change came with additional challenges of security and chaos that have still not been settled and the light of that settlement is not quite clear yet. In spite of that, Iraqi theatre makers persist in continuing their efforts to produce theatre, but this time, with several attempts to claim its international status through works outside, as well as inside, Iraq. Hence, the following chapter will focus on two important plays that were produced after 2003, portraying the critical change that was brought upon the country and its impact, as well as projecting the status and the reaction of the characters of the plays as representatives of Iraqi individuals to all this history of wars and struggle.

CHAPTER TWO

Iraqi Theatre after the War, 2003

The confusing, critical and unstable situation that followed directly after the fall of the regime on April 9th, 2003, affected all aspects of life in Iraq; and theatre was no exception. The years after 2003 witnessed the return of many Iraqi playwrights and theatre practitioners to the country, who looked forward to the long-awaited change of regime. However, when they returned after 2003 they were shocked to find that public buildings, universities, formal and governmental offices, libraries and theatres had been ransacked and burnt down. The extent of the destruction and chaos was so great that some theatre practitioners decided to leave the country, as did Falah Shaker in 2006. Others expressed their disappointment through their drama, as Hamed Al Maliki's play will explain.

The first theatre production after 2003 was a play entitled *Maroo min Huna* (*They Passed by Here*) that was produced in the only part of the Al Resheed theatre still intact as early as May, 2003, a few weeks after the fall of the regime, by a group of theatre practitioners, who called themselves 'the survivors'. Abdulhameed points out that the play was an improvised work, which was presented as a call for all theatre practitioners to return to work after the devastation that the country had undergone at that time (Abdulhameed, 2012, 498, and Telephone Interview, 2012). Said Ihmaidi's article, "*Maroo min Huna* on the Ruins of Al Rasheed Theatre in Baghdad", provides further details about the work through the director of the play, Bassim Hajar, who stressed that it was a kind of a panorama that presented images of the history of Iraq since the time of the Mongol invasion, depicting the suffering of Iraqis throughout this long period (Ihmaidi 2003). Using a mixture of action and musical scenes of Western and Iraqi music that included some songs of the Beatles and written material from other Western writers such as Henry Miller and Albert Camus, and Iraqi writers and poets such as Faris Haram and Ali Rustim, the play depicted different unrelated images from Iraqi history and life. Al Hajar stressed that the main message of this work was that, "Elimination of the dictator regimes is not enough and [Iraqis'] life must change towards the best, we do not want better surgical applications, but we want a better life" (cited in Ihmaidi 2003). The first full play to be produced after that was performed at the Al Resheed Theatre during the early months of 2004. For this purpose, Falah Shaker wrote a new play about the life and death of Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr (1935–1980), an Iraqi Shia cleric, philosopher, and ideologist, who was imprisoned and executed with his sister, Bint Al Huda, by Saddam's regime in the early 1980s. The play was performed by a number of well-known Iraqi theatre actors including Shatha Salim and Sami

Abdulhameed, and was directed by three theatre directors: Ahmed Mussa, Kadhim Al Nassar, and Ra'd Muhssin.

As a result of the desolation that had overtaken Iraq directly after the war in 2003, most of the exiled Iraqi theatre practitioners' visits proved to be unsuccessful. The theatre director Jawad al-Assadi (1947-) visited Baghdad in 2004 after long years of absence but he returned to his exile in Lebanon shortly afterwards to write his *Baghdadi Bath* (2005), a play that reflects the Iraqi people's psychological and physical destruction as well as the country's. Kereem Chitbeer (1961-2005) was another significant Iraqi playwright who returned from exile after 2003, only to die in Iraq in 2005. His last play, *The Mourning is not Appropriate for Caligula* (2004), is a significant text that had previously appeared before 2004 in a series of seven episodes in the *Alwifak* newspaper, published in London. Until now there is no record of a performance of the play. The published text states that it was written in 2002 in Canada, where Chitbeer lived, yet the last episode of the play was published in the newspaper on the 8th of April 2003, one day before the fall of the statue of Saddam in Baghdad. In its last scene, the play depicts the fall of the dictator, Caligula, when his statue was toppled and the people of his kingdom invaded his palace and robbed it, which foreshadowed the events in Baghdad after the fall of the statue of Saddam Hussein on the 9th of April. Like his colleague al-Assadi, Chitbeer returned to Baghdad in 2004 and decided to try to put on a performance of one of his latest plays, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, at the National Theatre in 2005, and he succeeded in this aim.²⁰ Yet his unexpected death after a heart attack a few weeks later, following the death of his nephew and guide in Baghdad in an explosion, shocked many theatre workers in Iraq.

Another Iraqi theatre practitioner, Qasim Matrood, visited his country too, and afterwards, died of cancer in 2012 in London, a city he found a more suitable place to work.²¹ The political change that these theatre workers were hoping for did not materialise. The regime's control and its effect did not disappear merely because the people in power had changed. The violence and cruelty of daily life in Iraq reflected the values of powerful people; as Kadhim Al Nassar, a theatre director, puts it in his article, "Life after the War" (2005): "We were aware that the regime and its control was a result

²⁰ As it was one of the governmental buildings used by the coalition forces the National Theatre was protected, and therefore survived the attacks and the chaos of 2003.

²¹ I met Mr. Matrood in the National Theatre in Baghdad in 2011, when I was visiting Dr. Awatif Naeem to gather information in relation to my work. When he knew I was travelling to the UK to carry out research into theatre, he was so happy that he gave me his contact details, promising to meet me in the UK and he promised to provide any relevant resources he had in his possession. However, a few weeks after my arrival in the UK, I was shocked to hear that he had died in London, before I had the chance to contact him.

of a cultural mode that does not change by mere change of the head of the authority, and this is what the days after the change have proved to be true.”(Al Nassar 2005) According to Abo Alabas, the relationship between the Iraqi theatre workers inside and outside Iraq was, and still is, critical and confused due to the misunderstanding between the two, which contributed hugely to the disappointments of most of the Iraqi playwrights and directors who tried to return to Iraq to work after 2003 (Interview 2014, 3-4). The misunderstanding that had arisen between the two parties, the insiders and the outsiders as we might call them, was probably the result of the years of separation from one another which in turn, created a deep mistrust. Each side found it easy to judge the other or to prove them wrong, making them unable to appreciate each other’s sacrifices in staying in Iraq or leaving it during those years. Such disappointment and mistrust can be manifested in the fact that most well-known Iraqi theatre practitioners who had a long history in theatre making, and who returned to Iraq after 2003, could not stay long in Iraq and could not have any major theatrical production in collaboration with the theatre makers inside Iraq so far.

In spite of the unstable and insecure conditions in Iraq at that time, some theatre workers tried their best to revive the status of theatre activity. Yet it was too difficult and complicated to portray the state of the Iraqi life in one or more dramas. Some of the theatrical works of that time succeeded in finding their way to a few venues, like the academic stage in the Department of Theatrical Arts in the College of Fine Arts and the National Theatre, as these were not regularly open to the public. Furthermore, the critical security situation forced these performances to be presented only during the day. The National Theatre was unable to open its doors for a performance in the evenings until 2008 with a comic play entitled *Jeeb Al Melik Jeebe (Get the King, Get Him)* by Ali Hussein and directed by Haider Muna’ther. The play, which ran for several days, was described by Abdulhameed as “a kind of political cabaret” (Abdulhameed 2012, 513). Abdulhameed’s *Iraqi Theatre in a Hundred Years* mentions a large number of plays and performances that took place after 2003 which represent different points of views in relation to Iraqi political and social life before and after 2003.

This chapter discusses two examples of plays that were performed after 2003 inside and outside Iraq: Falah Shaker’s *The Wild Wedding* and Hamed Al Maliki’s *The Cart*. Iraqi and Arabic theatre critics consider these plays to be among the most effective, according to their themes and presentation and, according to the amount of recognition and attention these two plays received from theatre critics and from their audiences inside and outside Iraq during the time of their first performances and after. Although

they are two plays written by two writers with different styles, they share similarities that connect them, the most important of which is that they portray symbolic and vivid images of the cruel reality of contemporary life in Iraq. Shaker's play can be seen as a mirror showing how the cruelty of society towards its victimized individuals creates individuals who are cruel to one another, while Al Maliki's play can be seen as a thoughtful survey of the contemporary history of an Iraq that is applicable to most Iraqis. Both plays try to cover many years of radical changes in Iraqi political, social, and even ideological life since the 1980s until today. Therefore, it is essential to emphasise the fact that these are only two examples of Iraqi theatre as there are many more, including, Awatif Naeem's *Nissa' Lorca (Women of Lorca)* (2006), Yahya Ibrahim's *Khergitu Min Al Harb Sehuen (I Survived War by Mistake)*, Muhamnd Hadi's *Hadhira Tigwal (Curfew)* 2007, Hadi Al Mehdi's *Hamlet Teht Nesib al Huraia (Hamlet below the Freedom Monument)* (2010), and Kadhim Al Nassar's *Ahlam Kartoona (Cartoon Dream)* (2015). I chose these two plays, *The Wild Wedding* and *The Cart*, because they represent the works of two of the most prominent theatre writers in contemporary Iraq. The theme of the plays is another important reason for inclusion, as they both focus on an evaluation of the Iraqi reaction to these vital changes in the history of the country. Further, the play texts are among the few that are published online and both have been performed in more than one Arabic country, which makes them recognizable and effective since they reached Arabic audiences outside Iraq.

Falah Shaker's *The Wild Wedding*: A Fulfilled Prophecy

Although Shaker states that the play was written in 1991, I shall discuss *The Wild Wedding* in this chapter, since it was not performed until the late 1990s. In the introduction to the play, published online in *Alhewar Al Mutamedin* in 2006, Shaker mentions a few undocumented performances before 2003, first in Morocco then in the college of Fine Arts in Baghdad, as a graduation project for one of the students of the Department of Theatrical Arts. This was followed by a performance in Sweden in Arabic and later, in Swedish (Shaker 2006). In spite of the fact that in his introduction, Shaker expresses doubts that his play would see the light of day, it received its first formal production later in the same year, in The Thirteenth Theatre Festival in Jordan, receiving an award as the best theatre text. The play was produced again in 2011 by the

Omani Restaaq Company as part of another theatre festival; then by students of the College of Fine Arts in Basrah in Iraq during the same year. Finally Naif Al Shammari mentions the latest production of *The Wild Wedding* in April 2013 during the Al Doha Theatre Festival in Qatar. The play is significant to the current study as it formulates a link between the 1990s and what came after 2003. There are several facts that make *The Wild Wedding* an important play, namely: the time when the play was first written in 1991 which reflects the playwright's vision during the first Gulf War; the fact that its first performances took place without Shaker's knowledge; the play was produced in a well-known Arabic theatre festival in 2006; and in addition, the literal and symbolic themes presented in it. These factors contribute to making the play a significant portrayal, depicting the transitional phase that Iraq went through before and during 2003. The regime's strong control over everyday life as well as theatre, the fall of the regime, the military invasion, and the chaos that followed are all perceived in the plot of the play in a very poetic and symbolic style. They are reflected in the image of the little girl who is raped and left to suffer its consequences and her sense of guilt which killed all her hopes of a better future. Furthermore, the rape results in a spiritually and psychologically deformed son who grows up to become a tortured soul, seeking revenge from all those around him, including the only person he ever belonged to, his mother. It is a tragedy of the country portrayed by two characters who try to find love, hope, and a better future, but who fail to communicate with each other because they are blinded by the pain they feel, which eventually leads to their deaths.

The play is an adaptation of Yann Queffélec's (1984) novel *Les Noces Barbares* which won the Prix Goncourt award in 1985. However, Shaker has manipulated the original story of the novel to indicate what would then have been an imaginary invasion of Iraq by American forces. The novel portrays the complicated relationship between Nicole, a French baker's daughter who was gang raped when she was only thirteen by three American soldiers based in a coastal town around the end of World War II, and Ludovic, the sixteen-year old son born as a result of that rape. Though the son passionately loves his mother, she sees nothing in him but the result of that night when she was brutally raped. From a very early age, Ludovic is left in an attic for more than seven years, and then sent to a mental home. The novel was translated into Arabic by Maysoon Dhiea Abolhab in Baghdad in 1990 with the same title that Shaker borrowed for his play, *The Wild Wedding*, and it seems that the novel was quite well known

among Iraqi intellectuals.²² The critic Awad Ali mentions that the novel attracted attention for its theme when the translation appeared in Iraq and the Iraqi poet, Mohammed Madhloom, predicted that it would be an inspiration for many Iraqi writers. (Ali 2013, 11),²³ which indeed it was. The novel was first translated into English as *The Wedding* in 1987 by Linda Coverdale and a second translation was published as *The Savage Wedding* in 2012 by the same translator.

Unlike the novel, the play opens a very long time after the incident and after the girl has given birth to a boy – the result of the rape. The whole story is revealed in a long dialogue between the mother and the teenage son on a dilapidated boat on the river Tigris in Baghdad through seven scenes, and ends with the death of both characters: the mother falls into the water and her son follows her trying to save her. Therefore, the play examines a very complicated dilemma faced by a thirteen-year old girl who is deceived in the name of love, and then raped. She cannot get rid of her son, nor can she accept him as part of her life because he constantly reminds of her shame in a very reserved society. Portraying a meeting between a son in his late teenage and his young mother, the dialogue of the play provides the details about the cruelty meted out to the son, as well as the details of the mother's rape when she believed that an American soldier who was part of the troops of an 'imaginary' invasion of Iraq, loved her. He raped the girl with the help of two other soldiers a day before they left Iraq to return to their country. Such an incident is hugely shameful for any girl and her family in Iraqi society and Iraqis would prefer death to living with it. In spite of the son's love for his mother, he seems to bear all the consequences of the sense of shame and guilt his mother feels. His mother and her family neglect him, leaving him in a barn when he is a toddler to grow up into a scared child who knows nothing about the world. Then he becomes a servant in his mother's house after she marries, and is subsequently sent to a mental health hospital after being totally rejected by his mother; finally he becomes a resentful teenager and a fugitive criminal.

During various productions of *The Wild Wedding*, the play underwent several interpretations and adjustments. In his book, *Mirror and Imagination* (2013), the theatre

²² Shaker mentioned to me that the novel attracted much publicity in Iraqi newspapers when the translation was published in 1990, as the novel's subject matter concurred with the regime's campaign against America when Iraq invaded Kuwait, which made the novel a source of interest for many people in Iraq.

²³ The page number of the source is taken from an electronic copy of the source, therefore it might differ from the published copy that was released in 2013; the used copy was given to the author as a courtesy by the critic Awad Ali himself.

critic Awad Ali summarizes the adjustments made to the play by the Iraqi director, Ahmed Hassan Mossa, in the production in Jordan as follows:

1. The mother does not take the boat in search of money as in the original text but to retrieve her father's cloak and 'Igal' (something like a headband worn by Iraqi old men to represent their dignity and pride, especially in the countryside).
2. Unlike the mother in the original text the 'new' mother is unmarried, making her more of an idealistic and 'puritanical' character, who would not marry out of shame or for money.
3. While the original mother deliberately goes to the American soldier driven by her feelings of love for him, which makes her partially guilty, there is no reference to how the 'new' girls comes to be raped which suggests that she is totally innocent .
4. The final change is in the closure of the play. While the original tale leads to the accidental death of the mother and the son, the new play ends with the mother burying her son alive in an iron box and hanging herself using her father's Igal. This action is symbolic, since it suggests that the ugliness of the whole affair has to be erased. (Ali 2013, 13-15)

The son's character is further interpreted by both Mossa and Ali Al Hamadani, the directors who produced the play in Basrah. They depicted the son as deformed, a hunchback, suggesting the psychological deformity that both the mother and the son suffer which is reflected in the physical appearance of the son. Furthermore, the whole idea of rape was changed into a cruel marriage between an old man and a teenage girl when the play was performed in Oman. All these changes made by the directors who produced the play on different occasions further distanced it from its original source, Queffélec's novel, to make it closer to its Iraqi and Arabic environment in which it was reproduced. Such interpretations support Mohammad Atwan's claim that *The Wild Wedding* "is an intellectual text that is difficult to understand, and a compound text with many layers that are not easy to be revealed, and for this reason it is open to highly spirited interpretations and targets sophisticated recipients" (Atwan 2011). The many interpretations represent the directors' understanding of the play and their choices regarding ways of projecting its subject. These choices may also refer to the flexibility of the main plot that allows directors to illustrate it in different ways, according to their vision and aims. The complexity of the situation of the play comes from attempts to

define the kind of relationship that connects these two characters beyond the physical blood connection of a mother and son. There is also the connection of guilt: she is a girl ashamed of her rape, and he is a son who is ashamed of being the fruit of the rape. The mother's conflict lies within her maternal love versus her anger and hatred of the reality forced upon her, accompanied by her deep sense of shame. The son's conflict, which underpins his miserable life, lies between his need of love and protection versus his rancour towards this woman and his society. Both are innocent victims and at the same time, guilty.

According to Atwan, these layers also apply to the play's general theme, the tragedy of the rape. Awad Ali, as well as Hamid Al Maliki, strongly suggest an interpretation that covers the more general and metaphorical political rape of the country, represented by the mother, rather than the particular incident of the rape of a girl; a rape that results in a distorted son, and the future distortion of the nation. There is a further level of complexity added to the play, which may emerge from placing it into its actual context in Iraq. The play was written in 1991 during the First Gulf War. The coalition forces that fought against Iraq at that time were led by America, yet there was no actual invasion then. However, Iraq was invaded by American troops in 2003. Therefore, if the play with its recent production after 2006 is intended to depict an actual invasion, then it is definitely going to be the invasion of April 2003. It is crucial to point out the fact that during this invasion there were actual reported incidents of rape perpetrated on Iraqi girls and women by American soldiers.²⁴ Hence, the play reflects reality and it is significant, in that it portrays the meeting of this Iraqi girl after many years with the son who is the fruit of the rape. Consequently, the time scheme of the play, written in 1991, is drawn through the memories of the mother and the son from the incident of rape (most likely in 2003) to the growing of the son and then to his life until their death in the dilapidated boat. Accordingly, it is possible to say that the play is a prediction of the coming invasion and its consequences.

Clive Barker's description of the "Avant-garde experimental theatre" concurs with *The Wild Wedding*, since the latter has also "been built upon the structural emancipation from presenting consistent characters, linear action and localised setting" (Holderness 1992, 27). Both the mother and the son are intentionally rendered as inconsistent in

²⁴ Among the very prominent incidents was the rape and killing of a fifteen-year old girl and the murder of her father, mother, and little sister in 2006. The incident is known in the media as The Mahmudiyah rape and killings. Among the early detailed reports that was published about this incident is Ellen Knickmeyer's article, "Details Emerge in Alleged Army Rape, Killings" for *The Washington Post* in July, 2006.

presenting their feelings, moving from searching for love to feelings of hatred, as through the course of the play their characters change from victims to executioners, from weak to strong. Furthermore, the play does not show a linear action or a chronological order; the events and the memories presented through the dialogue of the play display different locations and times in the lives of the two characters to explore the complicated relationship between them. The play opens with a scene of the mother trying to convince her son that she has come to save him while he repeats two words: ‘lying’ and ‘love’ (2-3)²⁵:

Son.	You are lying.
Mother.	I came here for you.
Son.	You are lying.
Mother.	Why don't you believe me? I came for you.
Son.	You are lying.
Mother.	I am here. Can't you see me?
[...]	
Son.	You are lying.
Mother.	You are giving me a headache.
Son.	I love you...
Mother.	Oh... me too. Let's leave this place.
Son.	I love you.(2)

Such an opening, Al Maliki states, is an important element of Shaker’s theatre in general:

[t]he theatre of Falah Shaker begins at the peak of the action; from the first scene the spectators find themselves at the climax of the plot to be quickly confronted with a compulsory and psychological falling action through precisely selected words and through conscious associations of ideas to arrive anew at the heart of the problem and to finally discover that all throughout the performance, they have been moving in an empty circle, but it is a circle of fire. (Al Maliki 2010)

Al Malilki’s remarks could also apply to Shaker’s *Heaven Open its Gates... Later* which I discussed in the previous chapter. Finally, although the setting of the play depicts a single location, the old boat, the dialogue helps the audience to imagine different locations where both characters had previously been: the barn where the little boy had been left, the camp where the young girl was raped, the married woman’s new house, the sanatorium where the boy was sent, and finally back to the boat where both their lives end.

The Wild Wedding fulfils Barker’s presumption about the critical political theatre, “If it makes manifest what is not shown in the official press [...] it is idealistic and immature and counter-productive and it will be censored”. (Holderness 1992, 30).

²⁵ The page number given for each extract of the play is from the PDF copy of the translated text that is published in *Arab Stages* (Fall 2015). The original Arabic text published in 2006 has no pagination.

Taking the critical political situation at that time, *The Wild Wedding* depicts what was not so but could be, in the future. Like Barker's presumption, Shaker's play made manifest what was normally suppressed and censored in 1991, and it further predicted a critical assumption about the future. This justifies the failure of the attempts at producing the play during the early 1990s, and its revival only after 2003, and it also explains Shaker's doubts that his play might not see the light of day which he expressed in the introduction to the published text. (Shaker 2006). Hypothetically speaking, it is possible to say that the play was intended to "communicate critical responses" that could be "translated into practical politics" (Piscator 1980, vi) which, as Piscator suggests, is one important purpose of political theatre. Hence, Shaker emphasises that after he had completed the play, the text caused him much pain whenever he tried to read it again (Shaker 2006), yet his intention was not fulfilled. Since the original play was written in 1991, it is possible to read the play as Shaker's prophecy, intended to warn the Iraqi people of what might lie ahead of them, yet he was unable to do so as the play was not produced until the late 1990s in very limited venues mostly outside Iraq. Besides, even when the play had its first formal premiere it was presented outside Iraq in 2006 and the first production in Iraq was after that. Consequently, the play may be read preferably in terms of "Aristotle's coercive system of tragedy" as described by Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* which is "used before or after the revolution... but never during it!" (Boal 2008, 40). In this sense, *The Wild Wedding's* productions fulfilled the role of being "designed to bridle the individual, to adjust him to what pre-exists" (Boal 2008, 42). The productions only came years before and after the actual events, therefore, when watching the play the audience was either being prepared for what might pre-exist or what has already happened; in both cases, the audience's reaction was most likely of sympathy or empathy which Boal suggests are the reactions to the coercive system of tragedy. (Boal 2008, 41) In line with Kelleher's understanding of political theatre, *The Wild Wedding* depicts a future that the audience could not imagine at the time of its writing: "This future is the possibility of a new human relation, a relation to the future of the world that was not available *then* [*sic*] but could be available now, at least an idea, if only in the theatre." (Kelleher 2009, 53) According to Kelleher this future is "an idea of an ideal place or ideal social organization that is unlikely to be found yet" (Kelleher 2009, 53). However, this is exactly the opposite to what happens in Shaker's play because although he unintentionally predicted a future that was 'not available' in 1991, and is 'available now', this future was flawed and tragic. Furthermore, the play's revival and production after 2003 represented a

reproduction of this tragic present, hence, it made an immediate connection with, and had influence on, both the writer when he first wrote it, and the audience, which can be explained by the recurrent productions of the play in more than one country in the Arab world and in Iraq.

In addition to the main theme, the play uncovers the human tragedy of people controlled by money, though ironically it is a play regarding a mother and a son, whose relationship should naturally be one of an innate sense of love. Yet Shaker makes it obvious that the purpose behind this mother's search for her son is the money that she lost:

Son.	You came to ask me to show you the place for the money.
Mother.	I came to save you.
Son.	Because of the money.
Mother.	No... because I am your mother.
Son.	Not because you love me... but because you are my mother.
Mother.	No because I... I.... Here...
Son.	You don't love me, you want the money.
Mother.	I'm not here for the money.
Son.	Let's burn it!
Mother.	What?
Son.	Let's burn the money so that you can be here for me.
Mother.	Burn the money? Burn all that you have gained in your life?
Son.	So that you can be here for me.
Mother.	Just for that? Is there any sensible person who would burn a whole fortune for such an idea?(3-4)

This quick exchange of ideas between the two characters could lead to confusion, leaving the audience unable to determine which of the two is in control or more reasonable, and it raises the question of what kind of relationship governs these two individuals. Therefore, this play shows its political tendency by adapting Stefan Collini's definition of politics as stated in Kelleher's *Theatre and Politics*: "the important, inescapable, and difficult attempt to determine relations of power in a given space" (cited in Kelleher 2009, 3). This concurs with Boal's belief that politics is a sovereign art, "whose laws rule over relations among men in their totality", when 'men' in this case refers to humanity in general (Boal 2008, 12). Therefore the attempt at defining the relationship between the mother and the son here is an attempt to recognize the more general political relationship that governs the ideas that these two characters represent, that is, the invaded homeland and its future, in addition to the individualistic interpretation of the characters themselves. Shaker's character, the Son, is trying his best to achieve that degree of love that might fix the problem between the two sides of the world of the play:

My sickness and coughing might draw your attention to me, even if just for a moment. You might feel pity for me. I can't ask a victim to love... but I can give myself the right to ask pity from one victim to a more victimized one. This pity might give me the illusion of love, and this illusion may be enough for me. (9)

Here, Shaker relies on the notion of testing the degree of a person's love by arousing pity, yet he creates a complicated situation since it can be seen as reciprocal. Both characters seek pity and love, whilst they exercise hatred and revenge resulting from their sense of shame and neglect.

Another significant concept tested in the play is the idea that 'to forget and forgive' would solve the impasse between the two sides: "We might love each other if we forget who we are" (10). Here, Shaker examines the possibility that if they forget the past it would lead to forgiveness. Although the idea of forgiveness is not literally articulated here, the idea that love may result from forgetting suggests an unintended forgiveness, hence, Shaker offers a possibility of love that is accomplished by forgetting 'who we are'. In effect, they would be denying their identity and all their pain. This is a significant suggestion as it may offer a political solution to Iraq's sectarian conflict that started after 2003, resulting in generations of criminals and victims equally. Since sectarian conflicts are generated from differences, leading to the tendency toward revenge that leads to even more conflicts, the suggestion of a reconciliation as a result of forgetting and forgiving may ideally pave the way towards deliverance. Yet, realistically, Shaker himself expresses doubts about the notion through the Mother's character since she soon dismisses the idea as almost impossible, saying that they are not innocent anymore because they are "victims, and victims lose their innocence" (12). She further suggests that:

What pain and suffering returns when you forget your sadness for a while... No I don't want to forget my pain... (*In pain*) but that's impossible... Even if I were happy in forgetting how my pains grew through the years... I don't have the right to forget... I am only entitled to insanity. (13)

In its complex relations and cruel tensions the play depicts a reality about life in Iraq which mainly concerns the fatal consequences of wars on people's lives.

A strong, recurrent theme in *The Wild Wedding* is the series of wrongs, the actions and the reactions that are revealed when one pain leads to another, starting from the rape until the death of the two characters. The boy himself is a result of the wrong that happened to the mother, leading her to reject him as a child, though he is innocent: "It's not your fault and it isn't mine" (6). He is punished by all the members of her family; from the mother's mother who is ashamed of her daughter, to the young mother herself

who cannot see anything but shame in that little child: “Your mother who hated your shame, or my mother who hated my shame?”(15) It is clear that because of the bitter sense of shame that the first mother, the girl’s mother, feels as her daughter was raped, the girl, the young mother, grew up with an even stronger bitterness toward her son, the result of her and her family’s shame. Her father also feels guilt about the rape because he allowed the soldiers into his farm: “He raped you in his own way too, when he thought that his friends were loyal and real friends” (16). She married to cover up her shame and to get money to leave the country: “I knew that you got married to get rid of the torture of your family and stop the shame of the past... and for his money too” (18). The chain ends with the creation of another criminal, the Son, who kills his mother’s husband: “I killed the translator, Saeed, and took the money”. (21). This is possibly a demonstration of the direct confrontational aspect of the play that

subjects the spectator to a sensual or psychological impact, experimentally regulated and mathematically calculated to produce in him certain emotional shocks, which, when placed in their proper sequence within the totality, are the only means whereby he is enabled to perceive the ideological side of what is being demonstrated – the ultimate ideological conclusion. (Eisenstein cited in Barker, Holderness 1992, 28)

Hence, by depicting the sequence of pains in *The Wild Wedding*, Shaker portrays a long line of war victims that leave nothing behind but a victimized future, in order to provoke his audience and put them under the pressure of the impact of the agony that could be inflicted on them.

From the very beginning of the play, contradictions and paradoxes impact the audience. Love and hate, lying and honesty, sanity and insanity, innocence and guilt, and right and wrong are issues that are never clarified within the course of action in the play. This sense of uncertainty created by these contradictions is possibly made deliberately to highlight the confusion and chaos in society itself. The son ironically raises the question of whether his mother loves him or not and what would make him happy:

If you hated me, I would be happy, because at least I would be alive in your eyes... and if you loved me... I would die of happiness. You were stupid. You wanted me dead, but you didn't know how! It was so easy. If you really wanted to kill me, you needed only to love me just a little bit and I would have been dead long ago. (16)

The question of who is sane and who is insane is another predicament in this sense: “You weren't insane; you almost drove me mad. And here you are trying to make me crazy again now.”(4). There is another contradiction when the son concludes that if he is a thief and a bastard then he is to play the role of the police: “Mother. (*In anger*) You

are a bastard, a thief and a murderer! / Son. I'll be my father, a cop, and I'll arrest you"(22). *The Wild Wedding* ends with the American national anthem being played while the two characters sink into the water, symbolizing the kind of 'victory' the Americans achieved in Iraq. The juxtaposition of opposites in the play creates another successful portrayal of contemporary reality in Iraq, particularly after the war in 2003.

Among the references in the play is the location of the meeting of the two characters inside "an old dilapidated boat used for river transport on the banks of the Tigris" (2). The Tigris is the river that runs through the heart of Baghdad, the capital of Iraq and one of two rivers that are a source of pride to Iraqis as they are where human civilization originated, where Sumerians invented writing, Cuneiform, and where Babylonians established the first law in all humanity, The Code of Hammurabi. The two characters meet on the boat that was Fareed's shelter, yet it provides the fatal conclusion for him and his mother. In this context, a boat may symbolize safety, that is, transport to the harbour, but, it becomes the vehicle that takes them both to their watery graves, and the river is their final destination. Their death in the Tigris is inevitable as the mother points out very early in the play that it is fatal and dangerous to be in: "this boat is deserted and sinking" (3) and since water can be seen as a symbol of purity, the river is the place where both will be able to finally wash their sense of guilt, shame, and pains away. For Iraqis, what could be more purifying water than that of the Tigris? The source of life becomes their death.

With all its cruelty and complexity, *The Wild Wedding* remains a play that foresaw the future but could not change it, and later it reflected the present and was unable to change that either. It earned its status as a successful Iraqi political play, as although it could not change the reality that surrounds it, it maintains its role as imitative and dissentious by reproducing reality artistically.

Hamed Al Maliki's *The Cart*: A Journey of Changes that Doesn't Change a Thing

Hamed Al Maliki (1969-) is an Iraqi writer who is known in Iraq for writing more than one very successful TV series, among the recent and most prominent of which are a TV series entitled *Alhub wal Salam (Love and Peace)* and another entitled *Abo Tobar*

(*The Man with an Axe*), he has worked in journalism since the mid-1990s.²⁶ Al Maliki has also written three plays, *Hymns of Being Lost* (2000), *The Guilty* (2009), and *The Cart* (2011), which since its publication online in 2011 has been performed in various Iraqi cities. The first official performance of *The Cart* was at the National Theatre in Baghdad on 22nd of October 2013 as part of the opening ceremony of the First International Theatre Festival in Baghdad. The play was also highly acclaimed by theatre critics and Arabic audiences when it participated in The Sixth Arabic Theatre Festival in Sharja, UAE, in January 2014.

The Cart can be described as a black comedy although Al Maliki prefers to say that it is a political cabaret, as it is full of mockery and comic scenes, encouraging its Iraqi audience to think critically of the situations that might make them laugh or smile. The play takes its audience on a journey of one long scene which moves from life to death towards the afterlife, when the hero of the play, Hanoon, is questioned for his actions during his life. Yet ironically, the play's atmosphere has no religious mood; and the character's dialogue questions and challenges political, national, and personal principles and even religious beliefs that are otherwise considered as fixed and unquestionable. Hanoon is a middle-aged man who has suffered the long history of wars in contemporary Iraq, in addition to economic crises, the fall of the regime, and the new and free, but difficult and insecure, everyday life. All these issues clearly affect the type of life this man and his family experience. He earns his living by selling vegetables from his cart during the day, while he spends his nights drinking alcohol so that he can forget about his misery. Drunk and confused due to the news about the revolution in Tunisia and the Arab Spring, Hanoon tries to commit suicide by throwing fuel on his body and trying to burn himself. His wife succeeds in preventing this and puts him to sleep, yet during the night he passes away from alcohol poisoning. After his death, Hanoon starts to remember his past life through three main characters that are played by one actor. They are: his primary school teacher; the sergeant who trained him during the 1980s war with Iran when he joined the army after his graduation from a college of Languages; and finally a politician who represents the new government in Iraq after 9th of April, 2003. In the end, he meets Mohamed Bouaziz, the Tunisian young man who died in 2010 after setting himself on fire in protest against the bad conditions there.

²⁶ The first series depicted the complicated life story and suffering of an Iraqi soldier in the 1980s war and after the regime change in 2003, and Abo Tobar is a nick name of a serial killer who was known in Baghdad in the 1970s and was arrested and executed then. The TV series depicted the life of the criminal and the process of arresting him by the Iraqi police.

Finally, Hanoon's wife, Fedheela decides to push the cart to sell vegetables so that she can support her children.

The Cart is a political play that uses satire, irony and lamentation. Its political atmosphere is revealed through domestic scenes: a drunken husband who argues with his wife because of their poverty and finally, dies in his sleep. The play's progress from Hanoon's poor house to the memories of his life reminds us of how the political environment actually influences the individual's social life. This man is driven to alcohol because he is exhausted by being used, ignored, and humiliated. Yet even the illusion of comfort that he finds in alcohol is threatened because the new government bans alcohol:

HANOON. *(He is calm)* Drunk! Don't you know that even alcohol is banned now? Those who steal are very important and they put them on TV; and those who kill put on clean suits and the cameras take photos of them. But the person who drinks alcohol to forget about those who stole their living and who killed him is called drunkard, and furthermore they have banned it, so that he won't forget... Yes, you loser, so that he won't forget and stay afraid and hide in his wife's lap... That is why, loser, I said leave me. Let me burn myself. Do you think that Bouazizi, or whatever his name is, is braver than me! (2)²⁷

Al Maliki bravely depicts Iraqi social and political contemporary reality in Hanoon's sarcastic remarks; the image evoked severely satirizes the situation that gives responsibility to corrupt politicians and at the same time even deprives Iraqi people from the right to forget about their reality in alcohol, since they are too passive to change things.

Being drawn from major real life events and situations that most Iraqis have experienced and still experience, *The Cart* expedites theatre's function of transcendence as described by Michael Patterson in his *Strategies of Political Theatre* (2006):

[T]heatre depends on transcendence. On one hand, the actors must transcend their own individuality in order to assume the role of a stranger. On the other, the audience must escape from their own self-centred preoccupations in order to become involved with the events on stage. And this process, which occurs both in the empathetic playing of realism and in the social emphases of Brechtian theatre, is an inherently political act, for the origin of political thought is in the willingness to identify with others, to share their problems, to experience transcendence. (Patterson 2006, 2-3)

²⁷ The page number given for each extract of the play is from the PDF copy of the translated text that is recently published in *Arab Stages* (Spring 2016). The original Arabic text published in 2011 has no pagination.

Because what Hanoon describes in *The Cart* before and after his death is of direct connection to most Iraqi audiences, the process of transcendence that is described by Patterson is probably more plausible and achievable here. The Iraqi actor who plays the role of Hanoon may easily assume his role since what Hanoon experienced is most probably part of the reality of the actor himself. Furthermore, the Iraqi audiences are not required to completely escape from their ‘own self-centred preoccupation’ as Patterson states, rather, they are required to simply remember what most of them have actually experienced in order to ‘become involved with the events on the stage’ since it is already part of their life. Therefore, the willingness to identify may already exist in this case, leading to a smoother process of transcendence, in effect sharing and achieving the ‘inherently political act’ in the end. Furthermore, according to Muhammad Wardi, a theatre critic, *The Cart* cleverly presents not only the transformations in the modern history of Iraq, but by borrowing the story of Bouazizi, it includes all Arabic audiences in general. (Wardi 2014). Wardi adds that *The Cart* belongs to “the shocking theatre” where the audience is confronted with the most painful realities in their lives “to motivate those dry emotions and revive our lost sense of humanity under the compulsory changes imposed on the Arab world, the thing that led to the formation of the Arab personality in a way that almost deformed it.” (Wardi 2014) In her article, “*The Cart*, a New Reading for the Arab Spring”, Suzan Al Ameri stresses that the play belongs to the political theatre which is intended to engage its audience beyond mere entertainment; it aims at enlightening and motivating them by putting forward questions about their reality for which each member of the audience is required to find answers and demand change. (Al Ameri 2014). Therefore, this “willingness” to identify and share that Patterson refers to may already exist for the Iraqi and Arabic audience of *The Cart*. With its frame, religious references, and its content about the memories of Iraqi recent history, the play depicts an immediate reality for most Iraqi and Arabic audiences.

For Al Maliki, the play is a mixture of comedy and tragedy: “It is both. It is a mixture of the suffering and mockery that the Iraqi people have lived. It is a kind of what is called a political cabaret that criticizes and exposes a whole age of disappointments, represented through Hanoon and his wife” (Interview 2014, 6). *The Cart*’s structure and narrative can be described as being able to “incorporate an element of narrative in its dramatic production” in Brechtian terms (Brecht 1992, 70). Hence, it can fulfil the function of theatre as described by Brecht when the spectator would possibly say:

I'd never have thought it – That's not the way – That's extraordinary, hardly believable – It's got to stop – The sufferings of this man appals me, because they are unnecessary – That's great art: nothing obvious in it – I laugh when they weep, I weep when they laugh. (Brecht 1992, 71)

Furthermore, an Arabic or Iraqi audience member would possibly add, 'Yes, I know it very well, I have been there, I am there'. Al Maliki stresses that his play is meant to remind and warn the Iraqi audience:

The new generation does not remember anything about what we have gone through before. I wanted to warn them from falling for a powerful dictatorship that glorifies wars. Also to remind those who have forgotten what we have gone through before and warn them against the return of such power. Most of my works carry this dual aspect: reminding for warning. (Interview 2014, 8-9)

Therefore, Al Maliki's depiction of the tragic situation that Iraqis experienced, and Hanoon's life which could be seen to represent an average Iraqi individual, might generate laughter because of the innovative comic style in which the situation is framed; and this may concur with Brecht's intention outlined earlier. On the other hand, the audience is warned to think about, and react to, what is presented before them.

The imaginary setting gives the play the flexibility to enable the plot to move through time, highlighting certain characters and events that shaped Hanoon's life.

Through its main character, Hanoon, as an example of the Iraqi persona, the play reveals many stages in the Iraqi life; starting from the stage of formulating social awareness in the early years of school, to the stage of joining the army and military service, and from there to the stage of the reaction of this human to the emergence of democracy and the fake election boxes, the eagerness of those politicians to buy people only to let them down once they win, and finally the reaction of this person toward the Arab Spring and the story of Bouazizi. (Al Ameri 2014)

These phases in Hanoon's life, and more generally in Iraqi life, are successfully represented by the characters of the Teacher, the Sergeant, and the Politician. Each one is taken to represent a significant role and an era in Iraqi contemporary history. The Teacher represents the early school years where Iraqi children are taught the principle of contentment and to follow orders without question:

TEACHER.	What does the word 'house' mean?
HANOON.	A homeland
TEACHER.	Shut up, a house... is a... house, like the one belonging to your parents, for example!
HANOON.	Teacher... the house is a home. And if I don't have a house then I have no home! And if the house that we live in is rented, then that means that our home is rented.
TEACHER.	Hush you, behind this board there are ears listening. Come here and write, Hanoon! (7)

Secondly there is the Sergeant, who represents the years of war that Iraqi people suffered since the Iraq-Iran war in the 1980s. During this phase, Hanoon, and all Iraqis, used to obey and march to war submissively:

SERGEANT. (Commands) Get ready.
 HANOON. (Ready) Long live the Ba'th.
 SERGEANT. Rest.
 HANOON. (At rest) Long live the leader.
 SERGEANT. Hanoon, get ready.
 HANOON. (Ready) Long live the Ba'th.
 SERGEANT. Hanoon! To the left; move!
 [...]
 SERGEANT. You have a long tongue, Hanoon!
 HANOON. Because it is trained to shine the military boots of you and your general, so that both of you can be happy with my discipline. Sergeant, take me to war.
 SERGEANT. (Commanding) Hanoon, be ready.
 HANOON. (Stands ready) Long live the Ba'th.
 SERGEANT. Hanoon, to war, march.
 (The SERGEANT starts his military march before HANOON and HANOON follows similarly.) (8-10)

His words are extremely familiar to most Iraqis of the same generations as Hanoon, and those even younger.

Finally there is the phase of, 'democracy' where Hanoon is faced with the totally new challenge of choosing the rightful representative for his future, and is yet again deceived by a Politician:

POLITICIAN. (Laughs) That's why we came for you. You are ignorant; we are going to educate you.
 HANOON. Educate us! How?
 POLITICIAN. With this game.
 HANOON. A game that is called 'whatever you like'?
 POLITICIAN. (Laughs) Yes, whatever you like.
 HANOON. What are the rules of the game?
 POLITICIAN. The rules are very easy, you just need to put a piece of paper inside the box.
 HANOON. Paper?
 POLITICIAN. Yes, paper; just like that. (He takes a piece of paper out of his pocket and insert it inside the box.)
 HANOON. Yes. And what happens after that?
 POLITICIAN. I rule.
 HANOON. I put the paper inside the box, and you rule?
 POLITICIAN. Yes.
 HANOON. Why?
 POLITICIAN. Just like that.
 HANOON. I didn't get it.
 POLITICIAN. I... represent you.
 HANOON. Where?
 POLITICIAN. In the parliament.
 HANOON. Why you?
 POLITICIAN. Because I am a politician. (12)

This scene highlights Iraqis' unfamiliarity with the practice of real democracy, their confusion over the sudden regime change, and the way that the new 'politicians' come to use this ignorance in their own interests.

The critic, Zehra Al Mansoor states that these three characters represent the individual and the collective authorities with their specific characteristics. The poor citizen is placed in the middle of these endless circles of character patterns, representing the suffocating authority on the chest of the individual, who has yielded powerlessly with no other choice but to be "the perfect citizen" who listens and obeys submissively. Al Mansoor further explains that

it is certain that the play has chosen these characters not only because they are the effective characters in the Iraqi individual's life only, but in the life of the citizen of Arab countries, where the individual is forced to remain a prisoner to the dictated norms from childhood to the last day of his/her life. (Al Mansoor 2014)

Accordingly, Al Mansoor emphasises that Hanoon's life condition and the powers that controlled his life represent the collective image of the Arabic character in general and its struggle and failure to achieve independence.

Unlike reality for Iraqis and Arabs, *The Cart* provides a chance to glimpse into life after death, which gives Hanoon and the playwright the freedom that enables him to question many beliefs and clichés that had been taken for granted in Iraq. After death there is nothing that might threaten Hanoon, therefore he is able to challenge his memories and those characters that led him as they lead most Iraqis. Ironically, the recognition that he is dead provides him with the space and the bravery to criticize the very fundamental issues about his life; religion, politics, economics, politics, life and even death:

HANOON. Now I'm sure, Fedheela, I am dead, and my cart is dead with me too. It has stopped whining too, Fedheela. Oh, please, dear God, forgive me. I repent to thee. "God is the Greatest! God is the Greatest!" Here I am praying. "Prayer is established" but life is not established in my country that is measured by the scope and type of prayers. "God is the Greatest; God is the Greatest. I bear witness that there is only One God." You are my God. Please don't abandon us, we are the poor in the country of petrol. "I bear witness that Mohammad is God's Messenger." How patient you are my Lord with those thieves of my country who have stolen holiness and wear it as a mask that hides the knives with which they cut off heads off using Your name, dear Lord. "Come to Prayers", and "Come to Life", "God is the Greatest." He is bigger than anything. Why then do those little ones laugh at Hanoon pushing his cart through the roads while they pass by him with their luxurious cars! Oh dear... their four-wheel-drive

cars and my cart that has my soul-drive.²⁸ I used to push this cart with my soul so that I could go back to Fedheela with a piece of bread for my children and some new used clothes and a bottle of alcohol for me to drink and forget the day that had just passed, when I escaped an explosion simply because destiny wanted to give me another chance in a life that is full of humiliation and misery and holy slogans and catch-phrases created in God's name but have actually nothing to do with God.

You, Fedheela, your Hanoon is dead, Your Hanoon is dead... (4)

Here, Hanoon questions many ideas and beliefs starting with the religious beliefs and practices of Islam, for example, the prayers that are otherwise taken for granted, and no one dares to challenge their meaning and purposes to the individual and to society. The idea of using religious concepts and slogans to manipulate people's reality for the interest of those in control is one of the dangerous concepts that Hanoon is finally able to reveal and discuss, only because he is dead. Another concept, that is challenged here, is the theme of contentment: "Contentment is an everlasting treasure. [Well-known Arabic proverb]"(7), that is, accepting the little that was offered to Hanoon when he was a child while observing others receiving more than they deserve:

(Hanoon writes the sentence, and revolts angrily.)

HANOON. How can that be, sir? How? It's a lie, a lie. They want to convince us with this rubbish that they call life, and they own these luxurious cars and fancy palaces and perfumes and have the dancers during the nights for their hungry lips. They have everything and for us there is only poverty and we should be content, because poverty is our everlasting treasure. How can that be, teacher? (7)

Here, Hanoon expresses his inability to understand the injustice that controlled his life before death, when he suffered in order to survive while those in control enjoyed the luxuries of life at his expense. One of the Iraqi conventions that Hanoon challenges is that to succeed, a person needs to work very hard. Conversely, he says: "Success is not for those who work hard. It is for those who have good luck, and Hanoon has lived his whole life without any luck." (8) Hanoon resists what The Teacher is trying to make him believe, namely the idea that success is always the result of hard work; he refuses to believe it because of all the suffering that he has had to endure.

Death has allowed Hanoon the freedom to satirize the three touch-stones that had been indisputable during the last two decades of the twentieth century in Iraq: God, Homeland, Leader: "We neither kept our God, nor protected our homeland nor got rid of our leader! What a bunch of liars we are! Allah, Homeland and Leader."(272)

²⁸ By soul-drive, Hanoon is saying that his cart is driven by his soul only. Al Maliki used this unusual structure of the phrase to maintain a sort of imitation of the phrase 'four-wheel-drive.'

Hanoon directly questions the generally accepted idea that sacrifices are to be made while defending one's country and beliefs:

SERGEANT.	Hanoon, you have to die for your home.
HANOON.	And why can't I live for my home?
SERGEANT.	You should die for the sake of God.
HANOON.	And does God need my death for him to be worshipped?

(10)

Openly and bravely, the playwright establishes that the new changes in the country after 2003 did not actually change anything for those simple Iraqis who suffered during the previous dictatorship and still suffer, because of corrupt politicians who neglect the people's needs. He clarifies that nothing has changed except for the names of the leaders that can actually be derived from the same word, saying that, "we replaced Allawi with Elaiwi." (8), because both are different pronunciations of the same Arabic popular name, Ali. He goes as far as challenging the death of his model, Bouazizi, whom before he died he wanted to imitate. Bouazizi asks Hanoon why he did not burn himself to start a revolution as he did himself when his death had led to a revolution in his country, Tunisia, and in other Arabic countries like Egypt, and which led to what is known as the Arab Spring. Mocking him, Hanoon, asks Bouazizi: "*(Quietly)* And what did you gain, idiot!" (17), which clearly shows Hanoon's doubt about what Bouazizi has gained as an individual for daring to sacrifice himself like this; and it also refers to the idea that rather than solving problems, the Arab Spring led to even more confusion. Ironically, Hanoon's resurrection after death enables him to be severely critical of himself as well as others.

Similarly, Hanoon represents the rebellion in most ordinary Iraqis who have waited for the right time to express anger and disagreement with what is happening all around. But the time had been slow in coming because it has never been safe enough for him. During his life, Hanoon sought liberation or a compensation for his miserable life, in alcohol, since drinking alcohol enabled him to say what he might not dare to say when he was sober. This is evident when he confesses that it is not like himself to complain about his miseries; he would rather accept them and hide:

I didn't want to burn myself for my country. I just felt that I was a pile of rubbish that had a blood circle moving that blood with powerful orders and I decided to burn myself so that I made the world cleaner and to get rid of the smell of my dirty pain. If you can keep a secret, I was drunk. If I was aware of what I was doing, I would have taken a corner in my house just as in my whole life waiting for salvation, and the end of my days. (17)

Here, Al Maliki criticises Iraqis and Arabs for their inactiveness and passivity in facing control and dictatorships. Here, Hanoon shows that he is aware that his lack of action has turned him into a puppet who has submitted to any order without objection. This has made him worthless in his own eyes; he feels that he is nothing more than rubbish that should be burned. Such harsh criticism targets a sense of inferiority that results from passivity and highlights the value that can be acquired from activity and the refusal of oppression.

The second main character in *The Cart* is Fedheela, Hanoon's wife. She represents the Iraqi woman who takes all the family's burdens on her shoulders when her husband dies. She tries her best to save her husband from death when she succeeds in stopping him from burning himself and tries to prevent him from drinking as she realizes the danger of alcohol to his health, yet she fails to stop him from dying. (1-3). She criticizes Hanoon for not betraying his morals, in order to provide the shelter for her and her children when he had the chance to be a thief – as many other Iraqis did after the 9th of April 2003:

FEDHEELA. Ha... are you asleep now? You may never wake up again. What a distress you are! He wishes to burn himself, as if we need more miseries! Don't you have mercy for yourself or for us? Why didn't you steal like everybody else during the invasion; at least we would have a tent to cover our heads if you had, and maybe it would have been better than this wet room that we can't afford to rent. What a hell we live in! Let me take the children and sleep on the roof, and you stay here by your bottle and the news. It's just my luck! (3)

Fadheela's criticism of her husband reflects reality as it suggests that the looting that happened directly after the invasion in 2003 was a result of poverty and desperation after long years of sanctions, but it also clearly shows how desperate this Iraqi family's life really is, with such hard conditions in the country.

Hanoon finds that his wife Fedheela is the only one who is going to be genuinely affected by his death:

Slap your face Fedheela, slap it. It's only the wife who will be sad for my loss. She alone has the right to cry and weep. Instinctively, the mother will cry from her soul, as the son is part of her soul, while the wife would cry for the love of her life that is to be buried in the ground; a wing that used to protect her, a wing that the gravediggers' spades will break and cover with dust (7).

Al Maliki uses Fedheela to play the role of the next link in the chain that keeps life going, when she starts to push the cart after Hanoon's death:

(FEDHEELA looks up, as if hearing HANOON's voice. HANOON and BOUAZIZI leave the stage and FEDHEELA stands up, wrapping her Abya around her waist

with a belt of cloth and she holds the cart and starts pushing it around. We start hearing the squeaking of the cart again.)

FEDHEELA. (Calls) Here you are; your best vegetables... vegetables... Where are you, people? I have the best vegetables... vegetables..... (18)

According to Al Ameri, the continuous squeaking of the cart and Fedheela's insistence on pushing it after Hanoon's death is a significant sign of continuing revolutions in the Arab world. It is a clear suggestion of the demand for change, a gesture that incites the Arabic people to continue seeking their freedom (Al Ameri 2014). However, Fadheela can be seen as another necessary element that keeps the circle of life going, helplessly. Like Mother Courage in Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*, Fadheela concludes the play pushing the cart; and she especially resembles Brecht's characterisation when she hears an explosion nearby: "A very loud sound of an explosion, darkness. The squeaking of the cart continues." (18). This symbolizes her insistence on surviving although surrounded by pain and suffering; life continues.

Asked whether the symbolism in Hanoon's cart is similar to that of Mother Courage, Al Maliki stated that in general the cart can be an effective symbol in theatre: but the cart in his play is not necessarily connected to Brecht's cart. Furthermore, he used it as an icon to convey the instability of Iraqi life and explains that the idea of using it as a sign in the play is drawn from the fact that

Iraqi streets are full of carts as well as terrorists. Terrorism is killing people every day and among them are those who own those carts. Those carts are the providers of a large number of families. Terrorism generates death and those carts generate life by providing honourable food for the tables of those poor people. Most of those who push those carts are holders of university degrees and they could not find employment opportunities suitable for them. They hang up those degree certificates on the toilets' walls as Hanoon does. You can find the cart in my country in different shapes; vegetable carts, Hanoon's and carts for carrying the injured and the dead after each explosion; the wheelchair is another kind of cart. Our society is a society that is full of physically and mentally handicapped people. In the end, we all need carts. (Interview 2014, 4)

For Al Ameri, Al Mansoor, and Wardi, the cart is a pivotal prop on the stage which represents everything to Hanoon and his family. It is their home, their source of living, their street and even their country. Moreover, Al Ameri stresses that the sight of Hanoon, sleeping on the cart in the actual performance, signifies the fact that whilst he is supposed to sell vegetables from it he has become part of the merchandise that he sells. He is used and manipulated. (Al Ameri 2014) Hanoon himself stresses his cart's weakness as its only power is his own soul compared with the wheels of the politicians

who lead the country (267). For him, the cart is another element of pain and a burden that he pushes, as well as his source of living.

Al Maliki uses the language of the play to fulfil the role of conveying the setting, as the main character, Hanoon, uses colloquial Iraqi Arabic when the scene is in this life and the standard Arabic when it is in the afterlife. The transition between life and death is a transition between what is familiar and what is unfamiliar, which is significant since it explains the use of standard Arabic in the afterlife and the colloquial in this life. It also explains Hanoon's freedom to express his unease with his life, after his death, using unfamiliar language (standard Arabic), unlike his familiar submissive language (colloquial Iraqi) when he is alive. The director of the play, Imad Muhammad, mentions that the use of language is meant to differentiate the Iraqi identity and its particular history through the use of the Iraqi colloquial dialect to highlight the specific relation of the events of the play to Iraqi life and conditions (Albena 2013). Al Mansoor agrees with Muhammad in that this particular Iraqi dialect of the play was very colloquial to the extent that it became difficult for the Arabic audience to understand at times, especially in the opening dialogue between Hanoon and his wife. Al Mansoor highlights the fact that some English terms and words are used in the performance, particularly when Hanoon tries to translate the Politician's speech about democracy and the prosperity that the Politician is going to provide when he is elected. (12-4) According to Al Mansoor the presence of English terms refers to the presence of the Western forces in the Iraqi life after 2003 (Al Mansoor 2014), and it may also serve as an indicator or a reminder of Hanoon's high education since he is a graduate of the College of Languages. For the theatre critic Ibrahim Al Yousif, the use of the Iraqi colloquial dialect reinforces the melancholic tune of the language to convey the sadness and depression the characters feel throughout the play (Al Yousif 2014). That is clearly conveyed in Fedheela's recitation of lamentation rhymes over the death of her husband at the beginning of the play: "We didn't have the chance to see him and he didn't see us, and we didn't say good bye" (6), at the beginning of the play.

The Cart criticizes, satirically and openly, the role of the media in the suffering of the Iraqi individual during the times of crises, when Hanoon cleverly refers to the number of major news channels which he follows, as most Iraqis did and still do. He clearly justifies his reasons for not believing any of them saying:

HANOON. I want to watch the news. Al Jazeera, let's see Al Jazeera... No this one wasn't fair to us... Al Arabia, yes, let me watch Al Arabia, oh no... since this beautiful reporter was killed I stopped watching it. Alhurra... let's watch Alhurra... oh no... they say

it's American and I don't want any American thing, what America has given or taken from, me!(3)

Hanoon further mocks these news channels by comparing them to salads that one enjoys while drinking alcohol. He uses these images to express his disappointment with the changes that occurred in Iraq and their progress so far.

HANOON. I saw you during my salad... Sorry, I mean in the news.
 BOUAZIZI. I like your choices, what kind of salad do you prefer?
 HANOON. Al Jazeera sometimes, one plate of Al Jazeera with half a bottle of alcohol would be enough for me. But sometimes it gets boring so I change the plate. Al Hurra is good, but it is full of fat, and I'm already suffering from high cholesterol, that's why I changed it to Al Arabia. Al Arabia sometimes becomes so cold and tasteless, but that's only sometimes, that is why I have no other choice except for Al Iraqia. (*He laughs.*)
 BOUAZIZI. Why are you laughing?
 HANOON. Al Iraqia is unfermented, tasteless!
 BOUAZIZI. Unfermented? You mean just like bread?
 HANOON. (*Painfully*) We wanted Iraq to be a piece of bread. They gave us bread that is kneaded with blood and what is left of our young men was scattered on the pavements of the roads under the title of Jihad and false mottos. (16)

According to Al Maliki, the Iraqi individual is a victim of the media.

This difference among channels befuddled the Iraqi individual and led him to wrong thinking many times, leading him to misjudgements because of the news. That is why I wanted to say that the news for the Iraqi person, i.e. (Hanoon), is what he takes with a glass of alcohol, something like salad as we call it in Iraq, but a poisoned salad. (Interview 2014, 8)

In her essay, “*The Cart: from the Source of Living to Following News and the Memories of the Past*”, Aza Al Qassabia, stresses that the play carries an “epic atmosphere” because it conveys a number of painful realities about everyday life related and commented on by a narrator, as in conventional epic theatre (Al Qassabia 2014). With its survey of Iraqi contemporary history and the comic delivery and satire, *The Cart* tries to fulfil the role of the theatre in Iraqi society as described by Dr. Hussein Ali Harif in his article “Theatre between Politics and Sociology” (2012); as he believes that theatre has a significant role of educating, enlightening, inciting, and entertaining the audience.

With its narrated events that are drawn from Iraqi reality and the totally unrealistic setting, *The Cart* might be an effective political play since its setting, the depiction of life after death, as well as its dialogue and structure that examine contemporary Iraqi life retrospectively, all carry the elements of tragedy, comedy and even sometimes,

absurdity. Moreover it touches most, if not all, Iraqi individuals, leaving them unable to deny being in Hanoon's shoes many times and thinking exactly as he thinks. They might even have mocked themselves in exactly the same way as Hanoon does with deep disappointment: "I made my cart and I hung my bachelor certificate on the wall of the toilet so that when I shit, I shit with honour. I pushed my cart and with it I pushed all my disappointment and my dignity and what was left of my age through these cold roads."(11) It poses the question of the value of the word and the action. When Hanoon envies, and tries to imitate, the action of Bouazizi, at the same time he is unable to answer whether any action can be of any value in bringing the necessary change to his life. This is a question that is left to the audience to answer – if they can.

The Wild Wedding and *The Cart* are two plays that can be distinguished by their ability to depict time, events and actions that move between past and present with the intention to disturb and challenge the Iraqi audience or forcefully remind them about their recent history. Shaker's *Wild Wedding* entraps its audience in a search for the criminal and the victim in the past memories of the mother and her son. With Hanoon and his cart, Al Maliki seeks to remind his Iraqi audience of their former experiences and these images require them not to forget but to learn a lesson in order to prevent them from making the same mistake again.

The playwrights' choice of structure in the plays can be explained in the same light in which Patterson examines Brecht's theatre techniques in his *Strategies of Political Theatre*, to serve his political ends. The

plots were structured in such a way as to avoid the sense of inevitability that accompanied traditional linear construction. This so called 'epic' technique told the story in leaps rather than seamless sequential narrative, the acid test being whether it is possible within the play to change the order of many of the scenes without disrupting the narrative. The strategy here is again to alert the spectator that the events that are unfolding are not inevitable but that there are or were alternative courses of action. The action is therefore often set in the past or in an exotic, possibly fabulous location, so that the spectator may more easily contemplate events at a distance. The outcome of these events is also often revealed in advance so that the spectator may forgo suspense about the ending to focus attention on the way the plot develops. (Patterson 2006, 18-19)

In Shaker's *Wild Wedding*, the order of events already departs from reality: the predicted invasion of the country as early as the 1990s, with the meeting of the mother and her son and their recollections of their past life, as well as the cause and effect of a

series of suffering that both mother and son experience. Therefore any reordering or rearranging of the events of the play would only result in less confusion, as the play starts with the very end of the story. On the other hand, Al Maliki's *Cart* slightly contradicts Patterson's claim. Although Hanoon selects scenes from his previous life, which might look like the leaps that Patterson refers to, they are chronologically straightforward and any alteration to their order would be illogical to the Iraqi audience. Yet, one of the messages of the play is meant to alert the audience to the possibility of changing these miseries presented to them and that a different course of action in the future might result in a better life, as Al Maliki wishes to remind and warn his audience. Therefore, the two plays may conform to the 'epic technique' described here in reference to the structure of the tale they present, yet they contradict it in the sense that both plays depict inevitable events that can no longer be changed as they have already happened. Moreover, unlike Patterson's description, each of the two plays creates its own location, that might *not* be exotic or fabulous yet it is definitely part of the familiar past that Iraqi audiences have lived through; yet, in the hope of creating a better future, it provides some distance which enables the spectators to contemplate. Hence, in both plays the ending may not be as important as the 'attention on the way the plot develops' since the play already starts at the end in the *Wild Wedding*, and Hanoon dies at the beginning of the play too. Accordingly, in *The Wild Wedding*, Shaker confronts his audience with a complicated situation. Although the scenery does not change during the course of the play, members of the audience may find themselves conflicted about the guilt or the innocence of the two characters. That is to say, although their deaths at the end of the play might not have been predicted at the beginning, their deep involvement with the events of their lives makes their past more important to decisions about their future. Thus, the audience may leave wondering whether what they have witnessed justifies the characters' tragic deaths. Finally, in *The Cart*, Al Maliki creates a distinctive Iraqi epic that reveals a whole history of a country through one main character, following his death.

These plays are examples of the activity and tendency of the Iraqi theatre after 2003. The first is a prophecy that was written more than ten years earlier and proved to be true only after almost twelve years. Again, Shaker succeeded in drawing the attention of his audience and theatre critics to his theatre. According to Shaker there is no difference between his theatrical styles before 2003 and after.

I don't believe that there is a difference in my theatrical style before and after 2003. First because I haven't written much after that year, and second, I feel that what I have written before 2003 is what is suitable for the theatre of open interpretations.

Whether a dictator comes or freedom is granted, I do feel that the advanced theatre is the theatre of open interpretations, which is why I don't feel that I need to change my theatrical style. (Interview 2014, 11)²⁹

Conversely, the fact that the play was not performed publically in Iraq or in any Arabic theatre festival as it was in 2006 points to the difference between the situation before and after 2003. The fact that Shaker forgot about the play after he had written it in 1991 may be a result of a subconscious awareness that his play would not be completely welcomed during the 1990s in Iraq, or at least it would not be allowed without major changes, which is what happened with his *Heaven Open its Gate... Late*, discussed in the previous chapter. Shaker is one of the Iraqi playwrights who stayed in Iraq throughout the long years of wars, economic sanctions, and the dictatorship of the last three decades of the twentieth century. Yet he left Iraq in 2006 to live in the United States of America because of the confused and unstable condition of the country after 2003. It may also have been because the changes after 2003 were not completely positive and favourable.

With *The Cart*, Al Maliki presented a political tragedy, portrayed in a comic frame, which proved successful among Iraqi as well as Arabic audiences. Yet, the text seems to be more daring than the original production of the play as it contains direct criticism and satire directed at the political failure in Iraq over the last three decades, leading to public suffering. This is clear when comparing the published version of the text with the recorded production of the play. The director changed and omitted several scenes from the text; specifically, he amended those that directly referred to the drinking of alcohol and the last scene where Hanoon's wife and the guard wait for the promised help from the politician and compare the former regime with the new politics. (16-17) Al Maliki describes these changes as

a compliment paid to the Ministry of Culture, as Iraq has been turned to an Islamic estate that is still embarrassed to announce its Islamic nature, at least at the present time. This is what we are all afraid of: the absence of freedom of thought and expression and its withdrawal, facing the islamtization of the Iraqi Culture. (Interview 2014, 3)

According to Al Maliki, “[t]here is no obvious censorship, at least not in Baghdad. But we are always aware of that policeman inside us; that policeman that we inherited from Saddam Hussein's time; he is still hindering our pens with fear; the fear of the silencer” (Interview 2014, 5). Iraqi artists, and particularly writers, have developed a sense of

²⁹ By the term, open interpretation, Shaker points to his tendency to make his plays capable of more than one interpretation rather than one simple and straightforward message.

self-censorship that they cannot escape, especially the generation who lived and worked through the last four decades in Iraq, a matter that is emphasised in the play as there is no tangible change as yet, in the political, social or artistic situation in Iraq.

Iraqi theatre after 2003 produced many works that were significant and effective, such as Jawad Al Assadi's *Baghadi Bath* (2005) and *Women in War* (2006) which were performed in several places around the world, in addition to many other works by theatre practitioners, such as Kadhim Al Nassar, Awatif Naeem and Rasha Fadhil.³⁰ Moreover, these two decades, the 1990s and the 2000s, brought huge changes to Iraqi contemporary history, moving from the very cruel years of sanctions to the regime change. These years encouraged theatre practitioners to experiment and explore more than one style and trend in presenting their theatrical responses. Such trends, examined in the following chapter, vary from changing the conventional theatre space to projecting violent images on the stage, which proved to be a challenge and an innovation for theatre workers as well as Iraqi audiences.

³⁰ As an example Awatif Naeem's *Women of Lorca* (2006) was performed in several places around the world since its first production in Iraq such as in Germany in the Silk Road Festival at the Roar Theatre, and in Holland at the theatre of the Ship of Cultures. In 2007, the play was given another performance in Tunisia at the Al Hemraa theatre. Another example is Rasha Fadhil's *The Curse of Whiteness* which was first performed in Oman in The Sixth Theatre Festival for Universities in December 2009.

CHAPTER THREE

Iraqi Theatrical Experiments in Provocation

There are many influential individuals who have had a significant impact on the growth of Iraqi theatre in general and the experimental theatre in particular since the mid-twentieth century, such as Dr. Salah Al Qassab, Dr. Awni Karoumi, Dr. Sami Abdulhameed, and others. Each has his own theory and practice in developing a new theatrical experience to create innovative theatre texts, as well as theatre direction. They may all agree with Karoumi's claim, "It was the experimental theatre in the world which introduced the naturalistic and realistic trends in drama" (cited in Jaber 1988). As explained in the Introduction to the study, these Iraqi theatre practitioners chose to follow a slightly different path in order to produce novel theatre experiences due to the restrictions and the close observation exacted by the authorities, and also due to their wish to create innovative and revolutionary theatre experiences for themselves, as well as for their audiences. This chapter presents two plays that can be considered to be among the pioneering works in the field of 'experimental theatre', due to their avant-garde approach in presenting themes emerging from their responses to the Iraqi reality. With reference to the collaboration of form and content to create new experiences, the current chapter focuses on two particular playwrights, Kareem Chitbeer (1961-2005) and Ali Abdulnebi Al Zaidi (1965-), as well as on other theatre practitioners who followed in their footsteps.

Chitbeer is among the early innovators in the domain of experimentation, specifically the practice of abandoning the conventional theatre space and taking over an entire building for a theatrical performance. On the other hand, Al Zaidi's plays conform to conventional theatre in many respects, yet they tend to break these conventions using shocking themes and implications, and in effect, creating innovative Iraqi theatre experience; a matter that may qualify them to belong to the domain of experimentation. The two plays are particularly interesting in relation to their time of writing and production, as they were written as early as 1979 as in the case of Chitbeer's *Masks*, or during the difficult years of the 1990s as is Al Zaidi's *Fourth Generation*. Although they were written some years apart, the two plays share a central tendency to expose violent and disturbing portrayals and reflections of the reality, which is unusual in conventional Iraqi theatre in general, aiming to provoke unusual reactions on the part of the audience. The chapter discusses Chitbeer's *The Masks* (1979-1990) and Al Zaidi's *Fourth Generation* (1997) both of which consciously aim at presenting themes that are considered taboo, socially, politically, and even sometimes artistically, hence they surpass traditional ways of thinking about Iraqi reality and confront the audiences with unfamiliar subject matters.

Kareem Chitbeer's *The Masks* (1979- 1991): Breaking Theatre Conventions

The theatre critic Alaa Al Majid describes Chitbeer as “a rebel, absurd, a dreamer who builds houses of illusions on sand, obsessed with theatre, lover of art to madness, and careless of everything except announcing his madness.” (Al Majid in Al Deraji 2014) Al Majid also describes Chitbeer as a person who loved art to such a great extent that it may reach madness in his way of expressing his dedication to create artistic visions in his theatre. Chitbeer is known among his Iraqi fellow theatre makers for being the director who turned his family house into a theatre to present his first play, *Voices of Faraway Stars* (1979) when he was only eighteen. According to some Arabic theatre makers, Chitbeer might be known more for his Al Maqueel Theatre that he founded in Yemen, where he lived during the first half of his exile (late 1990-1996). Chitbeer spent the second half (1996-late 2004) with his Palestinian wife and children in Winnipeg, Canada, where he studied theatre and was recognized as a very good student, gaining an Honours Degree in Theatre and Drama from the University of Manitoba.

Although he was quite young when he wrote *The Masks*, Chitbeer proved to be ahead of his time in his theatrical aspiration. His play showed clear ambition and a commitment to creating a new Iraqi theatre experience for his audience. His determination was not affected by time or difficulties, as he had to wait a very long time, almost ten years, for his play to be presented. Furthermore, the play is clearly very important to Chitbeer, and that is possibly the reason for the title of his first published book, *The Masks and Other Plays* (2001), which is a collection of eleven works. It is the only play that he introduces in this book with short articles about his early career as a young theatre maker that were written about him around the same time when he wrote his play. He also concludes the text with a few facts about the early attempts at producing it in Iraq, prior to its actual first production in 1990.

The Masks was originally written in 1979, yet it remained in script form until its first production in two theatre festivals in Iraq. The first was at the Sixth Theatre Festival for Experimental Theatre in Baghdad, 1990, at the Theatre Forum house, then at the Fourth Theatre Festival for Experimental Theatre of the Institution of Fine Arts in Sulaymaniah, Iraqi Kurdistan, in the same year. Chitbeer states in his book that there had been three attempts to produce the play during the 1980s. While the first failed because of war, the other two failed for mysterious reasons, for example, when the rehearsals went very well, supported by the Alressala Theatre Company, and with the

help of the Iraq Theatre Company; yet they stopped when the stage and the headquarters of the Iraq Theatre Company were burnt down by “mysterious hands” (Chitheer 2001, 116). This may suggest the serious danger that the authorities might have found in this play, and the amount of risk Chitheer was ready to take to produce it. Chitheer’s remark about the unsuccessful attempts to produce the play may suggest his knowledge about who might have been behind the failure of the attempts, which would most likely be the government or those who were loyal to it. Awad Ali clarifies that even the production of the play during the nineties faced many problems, one of which was the withdrawal of many cast members before the show, a matter that led Chitheer to present his play with just two actors and in front of a limited audience. (Ali 2003) There might have been more than one reason for the withdrawal of the actors which may include but is not limited to their fear of being questioned by the government afterwards, or an external pressure that was put upon them to hinder the production. Ali expresses his surprise that the play was even admitted to the festival in Baghdad. Further he informs us that “the play texts that participated in the festival of this year had not been sent to the committee of censorship for some reason; in addition to that, Chitheer did not present all his scenes before the Inspection Committee, on the premise that he had not finished working on them” (Ali 2003). The writer’s persistence and the fortunate circumstances made it possible for the play to be produced in Iraq. Ali stresses that “it is only good luck that there had been no secret reporters among the audience; otherwise they would have enjoyed the scene of Chitheer being arrested” (Ali 2003). Shortly after that performance, Chitheer left Iraq for Yemen where he found more freedom for his theatre practice.

The Masks is a very radical play with regard to its form and structure. There is no actual story-telling plot, developed through the progress of the play. Rather, it is a gallery of enacted images that are framed in ten spaces of a house, Chitheer’s own house, where the Clown guides the audience between them. The living tableaux, which Chitheer refers to as paintings, are shown in the house as: images of human brutality, the impact of war on human lives, the victories of dictatorship, and ruins, leading to the final image of Adam and Eve, discussing their first sin and ironically, trying in vain to undo it. Instead of acts and scenes, the play is divided into Movements, specifically seven movements, pointing out the actual physical movement of the audience and the characters from one room in the house to another. Chitheer’s script provides a diagram of his house as a hypothetical layout for staging the play, and he points out that his scenes are in seven movements that are distributed throughout the ten

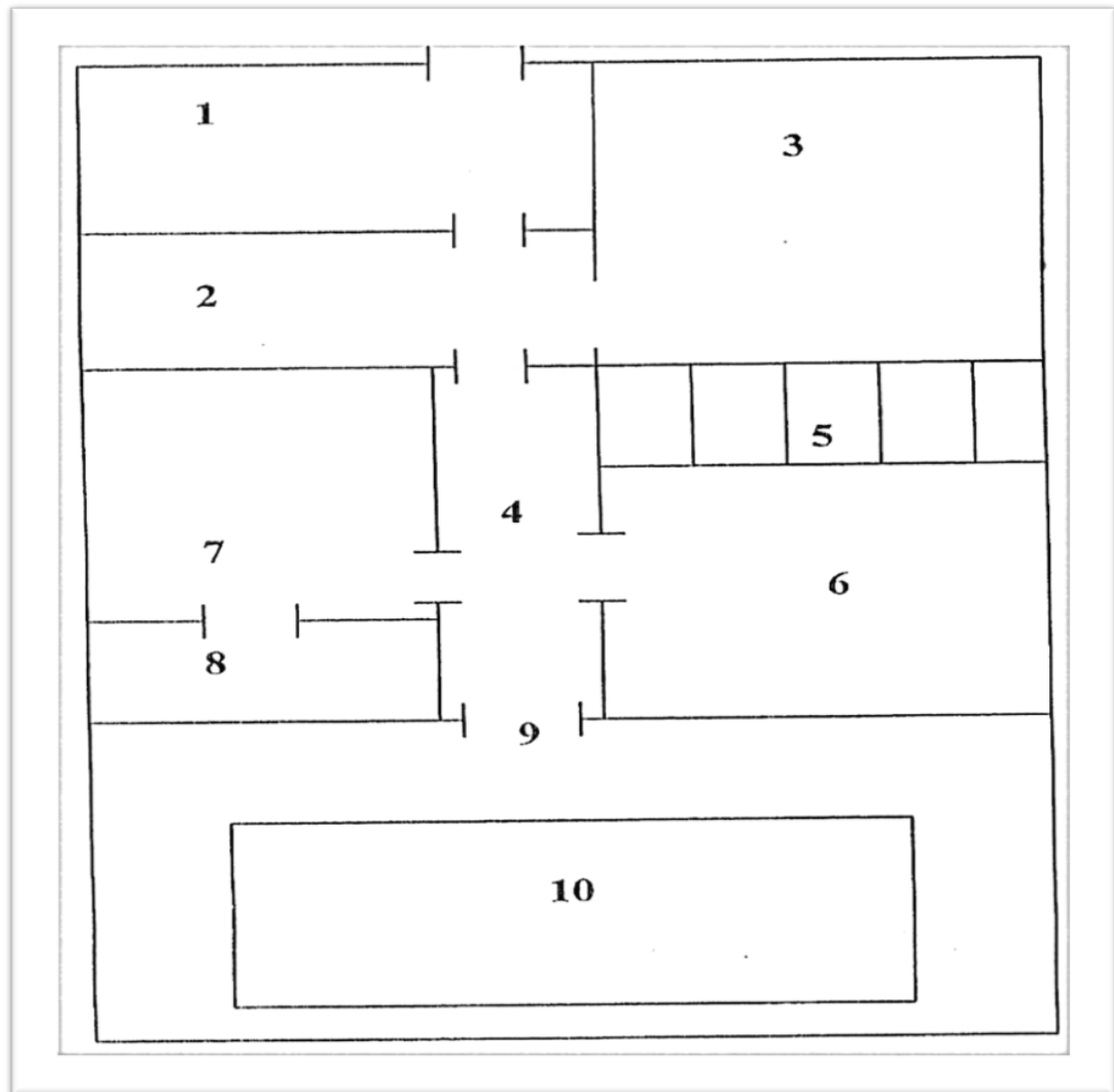
spaces of the house, to which the audience are invited. The play opens with a kind of exhibition of paintings:

Before the beginning of the play the audience enters the reception room, Room Number 1, and one of the audience members cuts the ribbon at the entrance to Room Number 2 to announce the start of the show; then the audience is allowed to enter the rooms. The house is turned into something like a gallery and the paintings are actually frames in which the audience will see human beings, the characters of the play, moving inside, embodying the paintings. In other frames, the audience will find some props, like clothes, pieces of furniture, and household tools. Thus, some of these paintings are mobile, with sounds and words, while others would be frozen. The titles for these paintings are put alongside each frame. (95/269-70)³¹

Therefore, the play opens unconventionally, inviting the audience to be part of the show, by giving them the responsibility of cutting the ribbon that opens the entrance. This gesture clearly suggests to the audience that without it, there will be no play or no action to follow, thus they are the play; they are actually the characters of the play, here to share their guilt, and this is signalled more than once in the performance. Sharing the guilt involved in creating a dictator is suggested in *The Masks* as early as in Movement 1, when the actors submit to the tyranny of the king when they are able to see clearly the amount of suffering they are experiencing, yet they keep cheering: “Long live the king”(99/273). The Clown describes the scene as “crazy” (101/272), suggesting the irony of a painful reality and the public’s passive reaction towards it. The play represents what might be described as a reversed image of the world where everything is upside down, which is physically epitomized in Movement 2, where Chitheer depicts a man crucified and tortured while he is hanging upside down. This idea is further crystallised when the play concludes its scenes by presenting the characters of Adam and Eve at the end, when they are the beginning of humanity and they may well start the play rather than conclude it. This reversed image may reflect Chitheer’s intention to refer to the reversed or lost values of humanity, leading to wars, deaths, massacres and lost battles.

Below is the layout of house in which the audience’s tour is to take place:

³¹ The first page number belongs to the Arabic text, and the second is the pagination of the unpublished English translation of the play.



As Chitbeer stresses in his text, this layout can be adjusted according to the space available for the performance. He clarifies that it was performed in an area of 1000 meters square in the production in Sulaymaniah, and then in an area of one meter square in Yemen in 1994, as the opening production for his Al Maqueel Theatre there. (Chitbeer 2001, 116/287).³² This strongly suggests that the productions of the play may have taken different interpretations when scenes were merged or deleted in order to fit or expand according to the available spaces for production. The playwright presented *The Masks* with more than twenty characters, which touches on ideas and issues that can be relevant to more than one country and community since his characters vary from the Arabic historical brutal governor of Iraq during the Umayyad Era, Al-Hajjaj Ibn Yusuf Al-Thaqafi, to twentieth century dictators including Pinochet, Franco and Hitler, in addition to Lorca the poet and the playwright. These characters are accompanied by a

³² The original text of *The Masks* is written and published according to the layout of Chitbeer's own house, yet the formal productions of the play were done in different spaces. I was unable to find any formal or private record of how he adapted the play into the different spaces.

number of other minor but unusual characters, such as mad women and men, one with a missing arm and one with a missing leg, a journalist, an old man and a young man, and as mentioned previously, the play ends ironically, with Adam and Eve.

The tableaux that open the play have sarcastic titles through which Chitheer is clearly mocking particular situations in life to show the world that human beings have created, and comedy comes from pain and brutality. These paintings include “- Warm Bath: *A man with his head attached to many plastic tubes, sitting on a chair, washing his feet in a bowl with the blood pouring from the plastic tubes attached to his body*” (96/270); “- Reduce Speed: *A frame in which there is a phrase saying ‘reduce speed, turning point ahead of you; the corpse is metres away’*” (97/271); or

- Human Relations: *Many hands overlap, holding books, bottles of alcohol, cigarettes, pens, daggers, guns, hats and chains.*

!!? [sic]

A hole in a wall designed with women’s clothes, scarves and Abayas, among them the face of a young beautiful woman with braids that are stretched out far beyond the frame.

[...]

- Family: *A woman, repeating continuously and monotonously “My first son was taken by war; the second couldn’t take the shock and committed suicide; the third didn’t dare to kill himself and sought refuge in bars; the fourth ran away from everything and travelled far away, preferring estrangement and forgetting... My first son was taken by war; the second couldn’t take the shock... etc.”* (97/270-1)

Such paintings are presented as an introduction to the action of the play through which the playwright attempts to prepare his audience. They introduce a journey that “can sometimes be an emotional journey that gives you a startling feeling of having lived through the experience being represented. This can tell you more about an extreme state of mind than just reading about it.” (Sierz 2001, 7) With Chitheer, this journey goes beyond reading and watching, it takes the audience on the journey since they are literally moving inside it. This is especially true when the characters are based on real people with familiar names of Arabic Islamic figures, twentieth century politicians and dictators, poets, as well as ordinary people.

In his introduction to *The Masks and Other Plays*, Yassein Al Nusayir states that among the plays that were included in the book, *The Masks* is the text that comes closest to fitting the concept of a play, because it contains all the required ingredients of a text, dialogue, action, and public mythology that are based on old tales of warriors, poets, mad people and even Adam and Eve. He further explains that

the main theme in Kareem Chitheer’s plays is his choice of characters and incomplete events, in which he looks for models representing the complete circle of life; he directs them in a destiny inspired by current history to reveal the tragedy of people who are blindly led to meaningless wars. We find him picking his

characters from this demented abnormal life so overwhelming that the mind is lost and degraded. This theatrical theme makes the text open to experiments within the inner human being. Therefore what comes from the mouths of the characters is nothing more than the poetic buried subconscious full of what is known, unknown and strange. (Al Nusayir in Chitheer 2001, 13)

In *The Masks*, Chitheer chooses real-life characters that are probably well-known to his audience, which makes them familiar and recognizable. Chitheer portrays these characters through his own point of view as an Iraqi artist who realizes the consequences of the actions of such familiar personalities as dictators, poets, or even simple ordinary people. Al Nusayir believes that this technique ensures that Chitheer's plays provide the spectator with new experiences of life, as they reveal inner conflicts that are derived from contemporary history, and are hidden or otherwise unrecognized. (Al Nusayir in Chitheer 2001, 13) That contributes considerably to the juxtaposition that Chitheer creates in his play by placing dictators and tyrants next to poets, playwrights and ordinary people: direct violent images of power versus artists and helpless victims. These contradictory characters are placed on the steps of the stairs, speaking familiar lines of historical brutality and poems:

AL HAJAJ. (*On the first level, holding his sword high*) I see some heads blossoming and it's time for the harvest and I am the owner. By God, I will take the brave for the guilt of the weak; and the righteous for the guilt of wrongdoer, till you say to each other, run for your life, Saad, Saeed is dead.

[...]

HITLER. (*On the fourth level, raising his arm making his known Nazi salute, repeating his famous words over the tune of a military march.*)
I see the whole world as tanks like the eyes of Eva Braun. (102-3/275-6)

On the stairs, Lorca, reciting his poem, ““Casida of the Weeping”” is on the next level to Al Hajaj and Pinochet, while Hitler is next to two characters trying to recite Paul Éluard's poem, “Liberty” (103/276). Such juxtaposition highlights the two extremes of pure savagery and romanticism in human action.

Throughout the scenes of *The Masks*, Chitheer tries to confront many Iraqis' fears and concerns: war, dictatorship, injustice, and by presenting the image of Adam and Eve even religion since these two characters have a religious connotation in the collective Iraqi mind. These images may represent the sources of the conflict in contemporary Iraq, leading to pain and suffering. With his tableaux, he succeeded in putting forward a gallery, in which his audience would mostly identify themselves in one image or more in one of the rooms of this house. These images are closely related

to the reality of Iraq then and even now, which is one of the powerful features of the play as it goes well beyond the time that it was intended to portray, 1979-1990s. The conflicts presented reveal a great deal about the contemporary history of Iraq between the last decades of the twentieth century and today. Hence, Chitbeer created an experience of immersive theatre in the sense that the audience “*experienced* [the work] *from within* [sic] rather than as an observer... You are part of it, rather than looking on fundamentally distinct” (cited in Machon 2013, 72). The play also fulfils one of the main features of Immersive Theatre as stated in Josephine Machon’s book, *Immersive Theatre*, as members of audience “are physically surrounded by another world” (Machon 2013, 55). In Movement 3, Chitbeer signals the idea that the public may share part of the problems they suffer, when he includes the audience in the frames that are lined up on the steps of the stairs:

The frame moves down slowly. The man and the woman feel the movement, as if they had received an electric shock. They try to resist, and they try to utter the word ‘liberty’ but the letters of the word don’t come out of their throats, but turn to stones that choke them. They struggle, and breathe with difficulty, as if going through an epileptic seizure. They finally utter the word but it comes out broken, unclear; as if they are vomiting what is inside them. The frame comes nearer and nearer to them and is finally filled with the audience, who come too close and touch the two characters. (104/278)

This movement may refer to Chitbeer’s suggestion that the audience, and beyond that, the public or ordinary people, should share the responsibility of calling for liberty if they want a better life, and should work harder towards achieving it. Using poetry and famous lines of dictators, Chitbeer is drawing a picture of the world the audience inhabits, where dictators are suppressing people and poets are trying hard to break the constraints imposed by their dictators. By using the image of the poet here, he is perhaps trying to refer to all forms of artistic creations that call for liberty. Yet, he is pointing out that such attempts will not succeed unless people are united, recognize their power when they are in the same frame of thinking, and make the same amount of effort towards the same goal.

The image of the immortal warrior in Movement 4 is another daring suggestion because Chitbeer implies that metaphorically warriors cannot die. An audience may read this as a hint to the hope that is created by the spirit of persistence when there is an aim to be fulfilled; even if the warrior dies physically, his spiritual call for resistance will live forever:

THE OLD MAN.

Dear son, they told me once that there was a warrior who fell from a ship into the sea when the storm was very bad. They all saw him falling down into the sea. They all said

he was dead. He drowned into the depths of the sea. He
 was eaten by whales.
 But after a few years they saw him kissing his girl on
 another ship.
 THE YOUNG MAN. How did this happen?
 THE OLD MAN. Didn't I say, my son, he was a warrior...! (107/280)

That he chose these lines as the epigraph for his play indicates that this theme is very important to Chitheer. (89/266). This scene encloses the audience members within a circle where they find themselves looking first at two men, one of whom is looking for his missing arm, while the other is looking for his missing leg. Meanwhile, in another corner there are two other men who assume the position of an army officer and a soldier; and in the end the soldier decides to stand behind his officer. This may signify the idea of the vital role of the leader who is followed by his soldiers; and it may similarly refer to the passive role of soldiers who always follow their leaders. Finally there is the Old Man and the Young man who tell the story of the immortal warrior. The audience is moved from one part of the scene to the other, as the members are surrounded by the three groups of characters rather than facing one of them. Accordingly, *The Masks* can be considered as one of the “performances that explicitly tried to provoke, challenge, contest and activate their audience whereby the convention of the ‘as-if’ was no longer the dominant leading principle, but rather the realities of the performative circumstances were emphasized.” (Eversmann in Meyer-Dinkgrafe 2012, 279). Because the play may not require the audience to pretend to be in the position of the actors in front of them, they are rather required to contemplate and react to the images portrayed to them. This requirement is reinforced by placing the audience in the middle of these images that do not offer a tale but project episodic situations that demand reflections. The two characters who open the scene, Movement 4, recite some lines extracted from a poem by Sergey Alexandrovich Yesenin: “In the crowded street, I walk alone/ I wipe the world’s walls with my shoulders, in fear of the passers-by and the bullies of the district. As if I have never been a bully myself, blocking roads for wanderers; here, I am gathering my memories. Farewell my bravery!” (105/279) This suggests the reality that those who are gathered in this room are in fact part of what is happening around them. Though the room is crowded, and they might feel under the pressure of the cruelty of these bloody images presented very close to them inside these rooms, it is possible that once they have actually been part of such bloody events in their lives, even by simply keeping silent while witnessing them.

Awad Ali describes Chitheer's play as having what he refers to as an overlap of different levels of "fantasy, surrealism, absurdity, and symbolism within [its] artistic texture. The atmosphere of the play seems like a mixture of seriousness, mockery, satire, and tragedy, making it nearer to black comedy." (Ali 2003) This is clearly represented in Movement 4, when the two men are looking for their limbs in a heap of amputated arms and legs. The two characters are engaged in a serious, yet cynical search for their lost limbs, since as soon as they find them, the two limbs are pulled away and disappear. The scene is a mixture of seriousness and mockery because it sheds light on the critical deformity of the characters that cannot be simply reformed by identifying the missing part, it rather requires a strategy to locate, secure and correct this deficiency. In this Movement, Chitheer may also intend to divide the attention of the visiting audience to more than one scene in Room 6, as there is a different action occurring on another side and the focus is shifted using lights to show a wardrobe and two men leaving it:

They start emptying their bags. The first takes out a skull from his bag. He checks it and puts it aside. He then takes out a shoe; he puts the shoe on and tries it by kicking the skull. Then he finds that it doesn't match his size, so he takes it off and pushes it aside. He takes out a hat that he likes, and puts it on, then he takes out a general suit from the bag and puts this on too, assuming the role of a general, though the suit is clearly larger than his size. He stands stock still, as if in the army. (105-6/ 279)

The fact that the military shoe and suit do not match the size of the characters is another fearless reference that Chitheer is bravely offering here, since it may suggest that such powerful characters in reality are assuming roles bigger than their actual potential or abilities. They continue trying on some military clothes and medals, assuming the role of army officers in a band, while the focus changes again to another corner in the same Room 6 where a drunken Old Man is telling his son, The Young Man, a story of the warrior. Here Chitheer is both reminding his audience of the Romantic idea of heroic figures, and at the same time, mocking their reality.

The Masks is a play noticeable for its directness in representing its themes and actions. As Albdulhadi Sadoon argues:

In Kereem Chitheer, there is a lot of the mixture between the practical description of theatre production and the game of the narrative employment of direct theatre. Let me highlight the word "direct" as it does not mean the function of directness that is cruelly judgmental or with a dry impact according to the norms of our Arab reader. It means much more than this. For me, it is the direct confrontational contact and it means the desire to reveal publicly, and present everything in front of the audience. (Saddon 2002)

The Masks obviously breaks the illusion of theatre in general since it does not offer a specific tale or separate its characters from the audience with a conventional stage, instead it leads the audience inside the world of mini plays within one play. Furthermore, the play contains scenes that are at different levels of directness. For instance, in Movement 5, the characters are presented as mad people who face a journalist and bombard him with questions about the miseries of the world and how the Journalist may convey their stories in the media; and they question whether he is really aware of these pains when he writes about them or whether it is a mere profession that he practices while he is enjoying his luxurious life:

- MADMAN 1. Jour... nal... Journalist, can you write an article about hunger?
 JOURNALIST. Sure!
 MAD PEOPLE. (*Satirically*) But the hungry can't buy your journal.
 MADMAN 3. Tell me, journalist, how many Hiroshimas have there been on this earth?
 JOURNALIST. One, one of course!
 MAD PEOPLE. Wear your glasses; you are definitely short-sighted. (*They start bombarding him with many questions without waiting for answers.*)
 Hey Journalist, how many babies are born? And how many die per day? Hey journalist, how many distressed mothers are there? How many people can hunger reap per day? Journalist, how many bombs have fallen and how many dead bodies are looking for coffins?
 Journalist, how many organizations are there for animal welfare? And why aren't there any human welfare organizations like that? Journalist, would you write an article about hunger before or after eating? Or would you write it while you are feeding your dog?
 JOURNALIST. (*Covers his ears with his hands*) This is too much!... Stop... Enough... This is enough... Enough (*He leaves running away toward Room 8, and disappears.*) (109-10/ 282-3)

Chittheer's directness goes further when he criticises himself as a playwright and the brutality of his play and the amount of blood in it, when one of the characters of the play refuses to perform his role, as *The Clown* explains to the audience. This scene takes place when the audience are taking their first tour around the paintings:

- With No Title: *The door of the kitchen with a frame, inside which half the body of an actor appears, trying to pull himself out, but s/he is dragged back inside by a mysterious force. He is screaming: 'Damn, damn, I can't stand this blood imposed on me by the playwright, and the director after him... damn both of them... damn both of them... damn.'*
Behind him THE CLOWN appears talking to the audience.
 - Excuse me ladies and gentlemen
 We'll close this hall because one of the characters is rebelling inside... but we promise that you can have a look later. (97/271)

When he places such a character at the beginning of the play, Chitheer puts forward a kind of warning to his audience that what they may see in this world can be far from pleasant or mere entertainment.

The character of The Clown is part of the play's directness as it is quite difficult to determine whether he belongs to the world of the play or the actual world of the audience because he is the host of the show, the one who leads the audience, and the one who comments on the action of the play. At the beginning of the play, he acts as a guide and a sane person in the real world, apologizing for the rude behaviour of the actor before the start of Movement 1. Then, he introduces the play, announcing the insanity of the world: "Crazy, crazy, crazy... / Crazy who says the earth is round,/ It is oval; at one end stands an insane man and a sane man at the other. But the mystery is who is who? Who is the sane and who is the insane?" (98/272) While in Movement 5, after he reminds the audience of the actor's objection, he is once again part of the actual world and this time, he agrees with the actor:

Excuse me, ladies... Excuse me, gentlemen; we promised you before that we'd let you see this hall, and there you are. Yet we can't fulfil our promise completely. What you have just seen is only a glimpse of the scene that I can't show, because of the objection of the main actor to the huge amount of blood in it. If you want the truth, he has all the right to object. I, personally, would object if I were in his shoes. As a solution, we replaced this scene with another. (107-8/ 281)

This technique shows Chitheer's skill in creating a character who provides a further link between the real world of the audience and the fictional world of the play. Though in this case, the two worlds overlap.

The two characters, Adam and Eve are significant in *The Masks*, since they appear at the very end of the play. Adam and Eve are presented as being very sad and affected by the miseries portrayed in the world of the play, and they justify it as being the result of their own mistake in picking the wrong apple and trying to correct it by picking another apple, in vain:

EVE. No use, Adam.
 ADAM. (*Helpless*) Yes, no use, Eve, even if we ate all the apples of God. (*He stops picking and stretches his arm to resemble a cross.*)
 EVE. Adam, you are the first to live.
 ADAM. But I'm the first to be killed. (*His head falls to his chest, as if crucified on the tree.*)(114/ 286)

Here, the characters, Adam and Eve, suggest the possible interpretations that what is happening in this world is nothing more than the consequences of human negative actions. Additionally, it may refer to the idea that what humans suffer in life is nothing but a punishment for Adam and Eve's original sin that all human beings inherit.

The play concludes with sharp irony, when The Clown is trying to comfort the audience by encouraging them to come to the garden, yet they are surrounded as “*The dead bodies start moving and there are sounds of screams coming from the windows and door of the house behind the audience. Music, chaos, sounds of barking of wild dogs, crows and wild birds, accompanied by flickering lights*” (115/286) Yet, The Clown reassuringly says: “Never mind... this world is fine...” (115/287) Ironically, this is echoed in the circumstances of Chitheer’s actual death. He died of a heart attack in 2005 in Baghdad and not as one would have expected, either in an explosion, or in an act of terrorism. Shaker Al Anbari explains Chitheer’s death in his article, “The Iraqi Director Kareem Chitheer whose Life Ended in Hugo Morgue”: “Such death is considered strange in Iraq today. It suggests that everything is fine, but everybody knows very well that things are not fine... at all” (Al Anbari 2006).

With the spectacle of dead bodies, weeping women, scattered human limbs, scenes of torture and executions, screams, skulls, and masked men, Chitheer’s play may echo Kathleen Tynan’s description of Edward Bond’s *Saved* (1965) in Sierz’s *In- Yer-Face Theatre*, when “‘the image of violence’ [in the play] confronts us with ‘our own complicity’, making ‘us face the fact that something in us responds to it’, forcing us ‘to admit that violence is not foreign to our nature’.” (Sierz 2001, 19). Although there is no clear evidence that Chitheer intended to follow, or even that he knew about Antonin Artaud’s theory of the “Theatre of Cruelty: *First Manifesto*”, *The Masks* can be seen as a clear manifestation of achieving direct contact between the audience and the actors (Artaud 2014, 68). Hence, *The Masks* is a dramatic event that is intended to “pursue a re-examination not only of all aspects of an objective, descriptive outside world, but also all aspects of an inner world, that is to say man viewed metaphysically, by every means at its disposal” (Artaud 2014, 65) This is especially true when Chitheer intentionally uses famous historical, political characters and even those of religious significance throughout his play, thereby creating a world that is a mixture between fantasy and reality. According to Artaud, this is the only method that will enable us “to talk about imagination’s rights in theatre once more” (Artaud 2014, 65). Chitheer’s *The Masks* takes the idea described in Artaud’s theory, of placing the audience in the centre literally by making them part of the action of the play and not passive spectators. They open the play, they move from one scene to another, and they are directly addressed by The Clown. Like Sarah Kane, for Chitheer the “form is the meaning of the play” (cited in Sierz 2001, 102), since the form of Chitheer’s play is obviously part of his intention to shock and shake his audience about their surroundings, leading them to rethink their

actions and reactions towards the symbolic representations behind the images presented to them. Moreover, *The Masks* follows the immersive practice in theatre in the sense that in this play “the traditional confines and use of studio space moves beyond the conventional deployment of such staging to become the world of the performance.” (Machon 2013, 88) Such practice manifests much meaning in the play; hence, the form of the play is part of its meaning. Had Chitheer had the opportunity and the freedom that ‘in-yer-face’ theatre or immersive theatre provides to playwrights in their countries, his plays would have probably proved popular, yet his theatrical art proved to be too daring for the authorities in Iraq. On the cover of his book, *The Masks and Other Plays*, Chitheer quotes his teacher in the Institute of Fine Art, Dr. Salah Al Qassab, saying: “I was astonished by this adventurer, Kareem Chitheer, as an actor, a director, and a playwright”. What is interesting is that Kareem Chitheer wrote his play when he was about eighteen and had gained little knowledge, if any, about Western theatre in the Institute of Fine Art in Iraq from his teachers, some of whom had the chance to study theatre abroad and might have introduced him to Western theatre.

Ali Al Zaidi’s *Fourth Generation*: An Experiment of Shock and Cruelty

Again, it was chance that led to the production of *Fourth Generation* in 1997, as Ali Al Zaidi stresses when explaining how the first performance of the play was achieved during the 1990s in Baghdad:

The text of *Fourth Generation* belongs to what I call post-disaster texts, meaning after the wars of the dictator. The text was written at the end of 1996, was first performed in 1997 in Baghdad at Al Sha’ab Theatre during the Iraqi Fifth Theatre Festival, and was directed by Zeki Atta. Chance played a big role in producing this text, which could not have possibly been performed while the dictatorship was at the peak of its power at that time. Yet the artist, Muhssin Al Azawi, was a member in the Festival Higher Committee, and he was the uncle of the director, Zeki Atta. He influenced the Committee and the rehearsal of the play was not censored like all the other performances of the Festival. The Censorship Committee was delegated by the Ministry of Culture, the Office of Cinema and Theatre, which was the main sponsor of the festival. Though the play escaped censorship, we faced many difficulties with the Higher Committee of the festival and they cancelled the participation of the play in the competition to receive the award of the Festival. They tried their best to cover up for their mistake of allowing the performance of the play, in order not to stimulate a bigger problem with the authorities. (Interview 2014, 1-2)

After that single performance, the play disappeared or was hidden away until a collection of Al Zaidi's plays entitled *The Return of the Man who wasn't Absent* (2005) was published by The Arabic Union of Writers. The play proved to be dangerous for the Iraqi stage during the 1990s because of its subject matter. As Al Zaidi states, it was written as a reaction to the impact of war upon the writer as a member of a society which witnessed the 1980s Iraq-Iran war and the 1991 Gulf War and the economic sanctions that Iraqis suffered for thirteen years afterwards. Using satire and irony, the play tells the story of a family of a blind Grandfather, a son with one arm (Abu Arm), the son's wife (Mother), a dumb grandson (Son), and a new baby only a few hours old. While the first generation is represented by the grandfather, who lost his eyesight in the war, the second generation is represented by his son, Abu Arm, who has lost his arm in war too. However, it is not clear how the third generation, represented by the dumb grandson, Son, lost the ability to speak. The play opens with some kind of celebration that is overlapped with screams and shouts of anger and sadness while a new baby is born to the family. The father, Abu Arm (the man with one arm), decides that in order to guarantee a decent life for this new baby boy, its arm must be amputated. This is because the men have to beg in order to provide for the family, since begging is the only way open to them. When Mother objects to the cruelty of the idea, Abu Arm starts a campaign that soon spreads around the whole city, calling for the amputation of human limbs so that they can survive and escape continuous war. The campaign receives welcoming reactions from the city, whose people start to follow the advice of Abu Arm in cutting off their own and their children's limbs. They even start a trade in exporting these limbs to neighbouring cities. As a result of the Mother's objection, she is forced to submit to amputation herself; so she loses her arm and is forced to accept the amputation of her baby boy's. The play concludes its action with an unexpected twist when the Mother announces that she is pregnant again.

In spite of the fact that Iraqis are used to seeing a person in real life with lost limbs as a result of long years of wars and terrorism, the situation enacted on stage can be quite shocking. This is one of the topics that is taboo in Iraq. People are aware of it, but would never openly talk about it. Al Zaidi's courage in bringing this theme to the stage, that is, to the surface of the Iraqi consciousness, is unique, especially during the critical years of the 1990s. This is probably why the audience of this first performance in 1997 was worried about watching the play as well as being shocked by its content. Al Zaidi states that

I was watching the reactions of the recipients and listening to their words, as they expressed their surprise that such a play with its dangerous dialogue and open opposition to the oppressive political regime was being publically performed. Many of them told me that it was an extremely risky adventure to stage the play at that time, as it condemned and mocked the authorities and their disastrous wars, perpetrated by the dictator of that time. (Interview 2014, 2)

Hence, *Fourth Generation* fulfils Sierz's description of 'in-yer-face' theatre in the sense that it can force Iraqis to look at unpleasant and painful issues. That is why they "avoid them for good reasons – what [these ideas] have to tell [them] is bad news: they remind [them] of awful things human beings are capable of, and of the limits of [their] self-control" (Sierz 2001, 6). Furthermore this play forced Iraqi audiences to challenge their fear of the authorities by actually watching it.

In the dedication of his play, Al Zaidi states that it was not written for the current time, rather, it is written "*To another time that will never come!// To a whole generation with their full limbs!*" (48/289)³³ This makes it clear that the playwright realizes very well that his plays might not be performed during his lifetime. He is quite satisfied with the idea that his text exists for a future time when a generation would be able to perform it with no hesitation: "It is not important for me if this text will not be presented now, surely it will find its way to performance in the decades to come, and it will be celebrated by a future generation" (Interview 2014, 10). For Al Zaidi, "theatre can never die"; that is why he has high hopes that a future generation will change reality for the Iraqi society and theatre (Interview, Al Amel).

All the characters in *Fourth Generation* are portrayed as handicapped, yet they seem to accept that war has caused their deformities. Further, they seek what they refer to as 'a safe future' and preach this idea publically, and ironically they find support: "ABU ARM: I received some delightful reactions, Dad. They said that it's a perfect procedure to guarantee the future of their sons" (65/297). The play shows the characters' tendency towards deformity, even in its structure where its scenes are numbered as First, Second, Preface, Fourth, A Late Preface, Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh respectively, which suggests that in addition to the characters' deformity, the play's structure is deformed, too. For Al Zaidi the characters' physical deformities symbolise the spiritually handicapped souls of the Iraqi people:

³³ The first page number refers to the pagination in the original Arabic text, the second is the pagination of the unpublished English translation of the play. The page number of the Arabic text is taken from an electronic copy of the book I received as a gift from the playwright himself; therefore, it might be different from the page number that is found on the hard copy of the book, which is not available to me at present.

we are facing spiritual handicap basically; a rebellion against concepts and a confusion of definitions, a total chaos that invades human beings here. In other words, there is a tangible mental and physical handicap, in addition to the more important spiritual handicap that paralyzes human beings and makes them live in a limited horizon that destroys their lives. (Interview 2014, 5)

Here, Al Zaidi emphasises that he intentionally creates this deformed form to show resistance to every reality around him. Therefore, the deformed structure of the play is part of the deformity of the situation of the play. Al Zaidi wants to make sure that nothing is left in its chronological order and the destruction that is inflicted on society has reached an extreme. By using such titles for his text, he tries to make sure that the sense of deformity that is physically presented in the play would be read as well, since such titles will not be recognized by the play's audience.

In the view of the theatre practitioner Ali Adel, the *Fourth Generation* belongs to the Theatre of the Absurd though the action is not absurd at all, as "in this brutal time everything is possible and it is not strange that the father would abandon his fatherhood to think of a mad solution for his baby son so that he would not be taken by the destructive war machine and its horror" (Adel 2011). Adel's article compares Al Zaidi to Guevara, for his revolutionary spirit in theatre and themes. Such a spirit distances his plays from absurdity to bring them closer to 'in-yer-face' theatre by confronting his audience with what they would conventionally avoid and showing them deformed and handicapped images of themselves. As the inventor of the term, Sierz provides a very clear and extensive definition for 'in-yer-face' theatre in his book:

in-yer –face theatre is any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message. It is a theatre of sensation: it jolts both actors and spectators out of conventional responses, touching nerves and provoking alarm. Often such drama employs shock tactics, or is shocking because it is new in tone or structure, or because it is bolder or more experimental than what audience are used to. Questioning moral norms, it affronts the ruling ideas of what can or should be shown onstage; it also taps into more primitive feelings, smashing taboos, mentioning the forbidden, creating discomfort. Crucially, it tells us more about who we are really. Unlike the type of theatre that allows us to sit back and contemplate what we see in detachment, the best in-yer-face theatre takes us on an emotional journey, getting under our skin. In other words, it is experiential, not speculative. (Sierz 2001, 4)

This definition specifies what might be considered to be the conditions required for a play to belong to 'in-yer-face' theatre. According to this, a play should be uncomfortably direct, unconventional, provoking, shocking, and experimental in language and structure. These features aim at leaving the spectator with questions about their lives, rather than providing solutions to their dilemmas that are reproduced on the

stage. Sierz continues to explain that there are two kinds of ‘in-yer-face’ theatre: a ‘hot’ version and a ‘cooler’ one. While the former depends on extremism to create an unforgettable experience on the part of the spectators and is presented “in small studio theatre”, the latter uses comedy or is performed in “larger auditorium” and with “a more naturalistic style” to present its troubling devices in order to disturb the spectators’ emotions. (Sierz 2001, 5-6) In both cases the audience is forced to “look at ideas and feelings [they] would normally avoid because they are too painful, too frightening, too unpleasant or too acute” (Sierz 2001, 6). Accordingly, while Chittheer’s *The Masks* can be seen as an Iraqi ‘hot’ version of ‘in-yer-face’ theatre because it encloses the audience within its cruel world, *Fourth Generation* is probably a ‘cooler’ version. The audience endures cruelty through the characters’ justifications for their reaction to war, which might be seen as slightly comic, but is undeniably disturbing.

In an interview with Ghaffar Afrawi in 2010, Al Zaidi states: “most of my texts pay attention to everyday life and to those dark corners which I have taken out to the light” (Afrawi 2010). Al Zaidi’s theme involving deformity adds another dimension when he deprives his characters of names, preferring to mark them either by their status in the family, as with Grandfather, Mother, or Son; or by their deformity, as with Abu Arm. It is implied, therefore, that these characters’ names are not important; names can have no use in their lives, and since their existence is a mistake then it is a waste of time to think of a name:

ABU ARM.	What shall we name him?
GRANDFATHER.	Nothing, nothing... another craziness is breaking into the corners of this house.
SON.	<i>(Continues to laugh)</i>
ABU ARM.	What shall we call him, then?
[...]	
GRANDFATHER.	Names, names, names... Nobody calls us by our names; names are mistakes, too, that we stick on our sons’ foreheads.
ABU ARM.	I will name him, will you allow me?
GRANDFATHER.	Madness, madness, madness, madness, madness...
ABU ARM.	<i>(Shouts)</i> Unknown... I’ll call him ‘unknown’.
GRANDFATHER.	I’ll leave you with your Unknown and go out. Charity givers are waiting for me on the pavements. They are awaiting my gracious hand on which they put their miserable gifts. <i>(Exits)</i>
ABU ARM.	It’s a wonderful name. <i>(He repeats the name loudly till the echo of his voice fills the house.)</i>
	Unknown, Unknown, Unknown... <i>(Exits)</i>
SON.	<i>(His laughter becomes like weeping and severe moaning)</i> (52-3/289-90)

Abu Arm finds no other suitable name for his new born baby except 'Unknown', which is a cruel sarcasm that Al Zaidi uses to portray his characters. Furthermore, this is black comedy which is hugely shocking and painful to a normally more reserved Iraqi audience.

The Grandfather may be the playwright's mouthpiece since his opening words invite others to speak up and raise their voices: "Hey, you speak up; you, the dead... (*The shouts become louder*) Nothing but quiet songs" (51/289). His words are quite ironic, since the stage direction clearly states that there are loud shouts outside. This probably refers to the way many Iraqi people suffer and scream with pain, but nothing is heard because their shouts are internal and not public as they should be. He further confronts the audience with a direct description of their world with a question: "Craziness, the world is full of craziness. What shall we do, we who are destined to own a little piece of mind?" (51/307) Although Grandfather declares that they are the only logical people, who still own some reason left in their heads in this world, such statements open the play to the rest of the illogical series of actions that seems to be acceptable to the characters, for instance, when the public declares its support of Abu Arm's idea of amputation. The Grandfather satirically describes their response as a reaction of the dead who try to move towards life:

GRANDFATHER.	Reactions of the dead... that can move toward life.
ABU ARM.	They supported my idea. I didn't hear one single objection. One of them said that I am the pioneer in this field. Another assured me that these ideas are big and will build the country, and what made me happy is that one of the men said that he'll write about me and my ideas and that I am a national wealth to be proud of.
GRANDFATHER.	You have the honour of being the pioneer in the coming operations of the cutting. (64-5/297)

Hence, the play is full of irony, inviting the audience to question the rationality of whatever is happening or being said on the stage. ABU ARM consistently represents the logic of what is illogical, comparing his family members to lambs. Therefore, as a result of his responsibility as a father he needs to take the action of cutting off the arm of his new born baby, so that he can protect him from a horrible future of war that he witnessed. He says that his father used to shepherd a herd of lambs and cut their ears to distinguish them and protect them: "When the lambs became fat, my father used to cut off their ears. I used to say that my father was a cruel man. But when I grew up, I understood that he was very concerned about the lives of his lambs" (59/293-4). Abu

Arm's description of what he witnessed in war portrays the amount of bitterness, leading to such logic:

He is my son... He was conceived in war and born at a time of preparation for another war. He'll grow up in the middle of a third war, and get older in a fourth war, and live at the beginning of a fifth war, and die, and be cut into pieces by the end of a sixth war, and will be resurrected again at the beginning of a seventh war and reformed at the beginning of a war... (59-60/294)

He further describes the images of the cut bodies that he has witnessed in war:

I entered [the fire of war], woman; it's merciless. (*Shouts*) Oh God, I saw them, how they were mutilated, their heads being pierced, their chests, their eyes. You are talking about things that you haven't seen; you didn't breathe the smell of gun powder that is yeasted in my lungs. I don't want him to see what I saw, rotten dead bodies; others that are burnt; others turned into ashes. I saw their heads fly away from their bodies; how men returned to their wives with no manhood, ruins of men. I saw how their wives took second husbands because they refused to sleep with dead bodies... (64/296)

Therefore, it is only logical to such a character that "[i]ncompletion leads to beauty and will not lead to perfection; because I would hate it if he was complete, like a chicken or a rooster." (59/293) Hence, when the aims are positive, it does not matter how ugly the actions are: "When the intentions are good, the actions are good too. I'm not aspiring to a personal gain or benefit out of this, but I am trying to live up to my responsibility, as a father." (63/296) It is this rationality that justifies the whole city practising amputation; that justifies cutting off the Mother's arm and the father amputating his own baby's limb. It is clear that Al Zaidi's intention is to demonstrate the violence that used to control Iraqi life in the 1990s. According to Olga Bolzek, the demonstration of violence in 'in-yer-face' theatre "is impossible to overlook or ignore. It shows naked pain, suffering, humiliation and torturous death. Violence is shown literally as well as figuratively." (Bolzek 2010, 5) There is a difference here in that with 'in-yer-face' theatre, in this case Sarah Kane's plays that Bolzek refers to, may show such violent images literally on the stage, whilst Al Zaidi's treatment is slightly reserved since his violent amputations are made off stage. Still, Al Zaidi could not keep silent about such violent happenings in society, as he satirizes his people's silence and criticises their acceptance which he embodies on stage to show the ugliness of the situation of the country during those years. It is worth pointing out that during the 1990s, there were many tales of soldiers inflicting injuries to their bodies just to be able to ask for leave from the army, which was very humiliating and cruel. Stories of soldiers breaking their own arms or legs for this purpose were recurrent anecdotes Iraqis used to privately exchange during that time.

The characters' physical amputations which are carried out off stage, and which is most likely conveyed in some way through costumes when the characters are on stage, obviously portray the image of the deformed community behind it. Furthermore, the play highlights the spiritual deformity of these characters, which is represented through the dialogue that carries much irony and sarcasm, and in most cases, demonstrates a tragic sense of bitterness and pain resulting from the reality of war. The Mother is the only character who objects to the practice of amputation which she denounces as unnatural and inhuman: "By doing this, you are deforming beauty, turning beauty to ugliness. You are changing the law of nature that you call for. This is a crime" (62/10). She still has hope that her baby might have a better chance in the future, unlike Abu Arm:

MOTHER.	He is still too young for wars.
ABU ARM.	He'll grow up soon; he'll grow up soon to find it waiting for him!
MOTHER.	Not all those who entered the fire were killed. (63-4/296)

Conversely, Abu Arm explains to his Son that Mother's attitude is unacceptable, and that she needs to be awakened from her illusions that contradict the principles they are living by:

Your mother says that your time is not like his time [*referring to his mute SON*]. But time is a fixed term, it has never changed, mad woman, she'll kill him. She hasn't tried the pain of any shrapnel. I will kick her out of the house. Principles are principles. Though she is your mother, I have to kick her strongly. [*addressing his mute SON*] Don't worry; I'll cut off his arm before his first day is over. Try to talk to her, (*He retreats*) but how? With signals... (66/297-8)

Al Zaidi provides Abu Arm with a very clever answer to support his claim:

War is blind too, it can't see the difference between who deserves to live and who doesn't. Blind, yet it made me into a beggar who knows his path very well. The smoothness of the roads is used to my feet; the streets are honoured with my cries; I greet them in mornings and evenings: "Help me, please!" (69/299)

These are the 'signals' that Al Zaidi tries to send to members of his audience who might still be enjoying the illusion of a peaceful future in Iraq. He suggests that the violence is continuous and is a part of every house as long as they continue to accept it. Al Zaidi clarifies that in writing his plays he tries

to create a reality out of an assumption, in spite of the strangeness of the subject matter I present. [...] I think that the atmosphere of the war of the eighties and the practices of the oppressive authorities against human beings in Iraq were the strong incentives to write this hell in a reading that is almost shocking for the recipients and the authorities as well. (Interview 2014, 2)

This offers a possible reason for his play's withdrawal from the festival after its first performance since such an intention could have been too obvious to be presented at that time, and might have threatened the theatre crew as well as the festival committee. The playwright fully realized that such a treatment of the themes might be a source of threat to his play, but he intended it to break more than one restriction that Iraqi society and theatre are suffering from:

Surely such an idea is not familiar in Iraqi theatre, as this theatre generally tends toward picturing what is realistic and common. Thus such themes try in one way or another to destroy many of these measures and conditions of our Iraqi and Arab theatre. Maybe the theme of cutting human limbs in a whole city is a strong demonstration against the destruction of wars, under the shadow of the authority of death. (Interview 2014, 3-4)

Here, Al Zaidi highlights the fact the disastrous impact of wars on Iraqis was further intensified during the 1990s by the severe authoritarian control over the country and its people. Thus, when it tried to push the borders of logical and acceptable themes and content, *Fourth Generation* played a significant role in establishing a new experiment in theatre practice, and it proved to be difficult to continue at that time as the results could have been fatal to those involved. It is the kind of theatre that might “touch the raw nerves” of an Iraqi audience, as it is clearly touched the authorities' nerves (Sierz 2001, 5).

The play's extreme exaggeration and ironical comedy is constructed around a city which accepts amputation as the best practice to live peacefully and happily:

ABU ARM.	It is a new process of circumcision.
GRANDFATHER.	How eager I am for the time when the whole city will realize its natural role in our unnatural life. They are fighting wars and standing against us with cut off arms and legs; heroes, brave men... A city with no limbs or eyes...
ABU ARM.	We have formed a committee to distinguish outstanding cases, dad.
GRANDFATHER.	You will honour all outstanding cases in a celebration of the amazing occasion.
ABU ARM.	Our neighbour decided in a moment of extreme faith to pierce the eyes of his family members. Imagine the whole family blind! Can you imagine the scene?
GRANDFATHER.	Moments of faith, dear son, are moments of test for the individual against himself. It is a hard test. Congratulations to you, believers in the inevitability of darkness.
ABU ARM.	Do you know the fat butcher on our street?
GRANDFATHER.	I know him. He used to be skilful when it came to cutting off arms and legs. Honourable profession.
ABU ARM.	People have started coming to him from the east and the west. It is crowded there; many cutting operations have been delayed till tomorrow.

GRANDFATHER. If only I wasn't blind, I wouldn't hesitate for a second before presenting my limbs. (72-3/301-2)

The journalist, Neriman Othman explains this as showing the extreme extent of hopelessness in which “people of that city have become defeatists and surrender to the fullest” (Othman 2009). On the other hand, the idea of a celebration might be an exaggeration in order to awaken the audience; Al Zaidi is probably aiming at reflecting the fact that by keeping silent, Iraqis are declaring their acceptance and celebrate the authorities' cruelty during the 1990s.

Othman goes on to explain that

this defeatist mentality dictates to them that there is only one way to escape war disasters, and that is by destroying themselves. Therefore they do not wish for a new life to be born. Yet nature refuses their decision, and the Mother is pregnant again, in hope that a fifth or sixth generation would see light, with full limbs and the ability to speak (Othman 2009)

This is demonstrated in the conclusion of the play since it ends where it started with the Mother declaring that she is pregnant.

Atheer Muhssin Al Hashimi's article, “The Paradox of Writing in Ali Abdulnebi Al Zaidi's plays” (2013), discusses in details how Al Zaidi's plays are distinguished for their irony and paradoxes in their titles, content and symbolism and references, which together make them rich material for multiple interpretations. This is clearly shown in his *Fourth Generation* where these paradoxes in themes and reaction are presented skilfully and are concluded in a challenging tone in which life persists in renewing itself with the expectation of a new baby coming to this deformed life. However, the ending can also be read as a sign of the absurdity of continuing with this life as it can be seen as a form of mockery that Al Zaidi directs against human life itself.

Describing the difficulty of technique in his *First Manifesto* of The Theatre of Cruelty, Artaud states that

[t]he problem is to turn theatre into a function in the proper sense of the word, something as exactly localized as the circulation of our blood through our veins, or the apparently chaotic evolution of dream images in the mind, by an effective mix, truly enslaving our imagination.

Theatre will never be itself again, that is to say will never be able to form truly illusive means, unless it provides the audience with truthful distillations of dreams where its taste for crime, its erotic obsessions, its savageness, its fantasies, its

utopian sense of life and objects, even cannibalism, do not gush out on an illusory make-believe but on an inner level. (Artaud 2014, 65)

Chittheer's *Masks* and Al Zaidi's *Fourth Generation* can be considered as attempts to create theatre of a kind where the members of the audience find themselves in a dream-like situation, unable to believe what they see, but at the same time unable to deny its presence in the theatrical space while they are watching these plays, nor in the reality beyond the theatrical space, out of which such representations are created.

The critic Jamal Al Hashimi described Chittheer as a "friend who is haunted with an obsession for innovation, research and variation in theatre" (Al Hashimi 2005). Chittheer's practice of creating a new experience in theatre is referred to as 'Image Theatre', which was recognized by Iraqi theatre practitioners during the 1980s, where a performance occupies the whole space where it is presented while the audience own a certain amount of freedom to move around to watch the play. Dr. Awni Karoumi's *The Hymn of the Rocking Chair* (1987) is one of the most prominent examples of this practice. The play, which was originally written by Farooq Mohammad, with poetry from the Iraqi poet Araian Al Sayd Kheluf, and directed by Karoumi, gained popularity, for it turned the traditional Baghdadi house of Theatre Forum in Baghdad into a space where an audience was invited to listen to two women in two separate rooms reading letters from their lovers who were taken away from them by war. In this sense, Karoumi may conform to Chittheer's philosophy that

every place is suitable for performing a theatrical work, as long as it can be manipulated and its contents made use of, in other words, theatricalising the place. This does not mean erasing its features but rather giving it a new perspective. In this case the audience would be part of the performance and totally involved in it; moving along with the actor, and therefore the action of the play would move around the place of the performance. (Chittheer 2001, 91/296)

The writer and academic Ina'am Jaber attended Karoumi's play in the 1980s and wrote about the experience of being inside the theatrical performance with no stage to separate the audience from the performer, which stops a member of the audience "from escaping his or her reality no matter how shattering it could be" (Jaber 1988). It is quite clear that the practices of placing the audience physically in the middle of the action of the play can have an unforgettable impact on the audience. Most Iraqi and Arabic theatre critics see Dr. Salah Al Qassab as the pioneer and founder of the term 'Image Theatre'. Al Qassab as Chittheer's teacher at the Institution of Fine Arts was obviously a source of inspiration for Chittheer, as the latter was an embodiment of his beliefs and theories.

Recently, in 2013 and 2014, there were two theatrical performances that attempted to create theatre that approached Chitbeer's practice in experimentation. Samem Hassaballah's article, "Iraqi Center for Theatre – a Meditating Reading in Baghdad Festival for Theatre" (2013) states the details regarding Anas Abdulsammad's *Too and Too*. The play was performed as part of the Youth Theatre Festival in Baghdad in 2013. Using the five different rooms and the yard of the building of the Theatre Forum, the playwright and director, Anas Abdulsammad, portrayed images that were similar to those presented in *The Masks*, where the audience encounter symbolic and suggestive episodic performances that referred to contemporary social and political issues in Iraq. In October 2014, there was another attempt to use the house of Theatre Forum to present a new play entitled *Izayza*.³⁴ Bassim Altayeb, the director of the play, which was created through improvisation by a number of actors, used all the parts of the house of the Theatre Forum including the central yard, as well as the stairs. Accordingly the "scenes of the show remained fixed while it is left to the spectators to move to reach them." (Hassaballah 2014) In *Izayza*, the audience was divided into groups according to choice; each is supposed to follow a guide toward the rooms of the house where actors wait for them. The show focuses on the idea that there must be some kind of bad omen that is causing all the suffering and pain in this haunted house, which might symbolically refer to the bigger house, the country. According to Hassaballah, the play made use of the historical traditional concepts of *Izayza* as a reference to religious traditions in ancient Iraq, rather than referring to recent or contemporary 'taboos' or beliefs and religions, which might be too dangerous for theatre makers to tackle. Such Iraqi theatre practices can easily be recognised in relation to the form of theatre known in the west as 'immersive theatre', as it is focused on exploiting "all that is experiential in performance, placing the audience at the heart of the work. Here experience should be understood in its fullest sense, to feel *feeling* [sic]- to undergo." (Machon 2013, 22) Such unfamiliar method of presentation that is enhanced by familiar themes for Iraqis proved successful among spectators and the public since *Izayza* ran for several weeks during the two productions of the play so far, in the late, 2014 and May, 2015. Furthermore, Al Zaidi's revolutionary spirit continues to challenge the reserved Iraqi mentality through his latest plays.

Another play that is closely related to Al Zaidi's practice of presenting direct violence on the stage is Samem Hassabllah's *Ice*, which was premiered at the theatre of

³⁴ The word *Izayza* is an Iraqi traditional term used to refer to the small bone of an animal that is treated by sorcery to inflict bad influence on the place where it has been thrown. For Iraqis, the object is a bad omen as it might bring trouble to the place or the people living in that place.

the Department of Theatrical Art in the College of Fine Art in Baghdad in 2010. It was also presented at the Festival of Arabic Theatre in Egypt in the same year. *Ice* is an adaptation of a French play entitled *Un Riche, Trois Pauvres (A Rich Man and Three Poor)* (1987) by Jean-Louis Calvert.³⁵ The play is striking for its shocking theme of four brothers who kill their parents and later rape and kill their sister, and eventually kill each other for power.³⁶ The presentation of the play is unique as the director, Hassaballah, chooses to cover the stage in darkness while the whole performance is located in a relatively small square corner of the stage that is lit with coloured lights, white then red, until one of the brothers manages to escape this lighted spot into the darkness after killing his other brothers. Hassaballah explains that his play is adapted to show his reaction to the critical and very cruel reality Iraqis lived after 2003 because of the emergence of the sectarian conflict and lack of security. (Interview 2015, 1) It is possible to argue that *Ice* deals with the “irrational states of being and understanding. Through the new acting and directing techniques the unconscious minds of the director and actors would speak to the unconscious mind of each spectator.” (Bermel 2001, 7) It is possible that one of Hassaballah’s intentions is to awaken the audience to the danger that might be hiding in the dark side of our lives, represented by the dark part of the stage.

As far as Al Zaidi is concerned, his plays should not be seen as cruel just because they confront the audience with things they would rather avoid as he insists that he “cannot take responsibility of what comes out of the heart, and therefore [he has] nothing to do with the impact of his works on others’ souls.” (Interview, Sahib 2013). Like Hassaballah, Al Zaidi explains that his plays are reactions to real life situations; therefore, he believes that the revelation of this cruelty in the reality of society is not cruel, but the reaction of the recipients towards such revelation is cruel, because they see it as a taboo:

The action of cruelty here comes from the spectators who are unable to rid themselves of their limited ways of thinking when they come to the theatre; they rather remain under their control. Therefore they read the show according to their beliefs and thinking. I totally realize that there is no such thing as a totally free spectator, who has no limitations at all, but if these limitations turn into cruel reception, there lies the difference. These texts that you refer to do not leave the domain of being realistic, meaning that they deal with issues that actually happened

³⁵ Hassaballah came across Calvert’s play through the *Anthology of Modern French Theatre* by Dr. Mary Eliass. The play is written in the form of collage and consists of many scenes that are unrelated. I could not find any further information about the play other than the Arabic introduction that was sent to me by Dr. Hassaballah.

³⁶ Hassaballah points out that he substituted the female character of the sister with a dummy in the production presented in Baghdad, as he avoided the mother’s role that was originally written in the first draft of the text.

in one way or another in the Iraqi, Arab, or human reality in general. But dealing with them here comes from a different perspective; but we are still discussing what is commonly known as a daily reality, for sure. In short, I see that the cruel action comes from the activity of receiving these texts, resulting in the cruelty of the show and the texts together. (Interview 2014, 8-9)

Al Zaidi's explanation of the cruelty that comes from the audience rather than the plays can be seen as quite logical, particularly when the plays are still attempts to break taboos in theatre and reveal the ugly, naked reality that Iraqis live, yet are still too cautious to speak about.

Al Zaidi clarifies that in writing his plays he has a certain objective of shocking his audience with ideas to achieve what he aspires for in his theatre:

In writing my texts, I always try to draw the Iraqi and Arabic spectators to my exotic working area where I wish to achieve the sense of shock inside them. Thus, my shows are too provocative for their taste that is not used to such atmospheres. Hence I put my themes on paper first, and then I look for outlets that can shock the spectators and put them on the alert. I might plan for an idea, but it always develops during the process of writing. I always think of my audience giving great attention to the moment of shock that the show would leave on their awareness and thinking. The purpose is to make them reconsider many things related to their everyday lives and their attitudes to wars and dictatorship. (Interview 2014, 4)

By 'exotic working area', Al Zaidi mostly refers to his tendency to create plays that touch upon critical ideas which are otherwise seen as taboos or untouchable. Through the severe reaction his plays receive, it is evident that in shocking his audience and even theatre critics Al Zaidi has achieved some of his aims.

Despite the violent images presented in these play, they still lack intimate sexual scenes and explicit abusive language that are some of the distinctive features that appear in Sarah Kane's and her fellow writers' works in the West. Moreover, such physical violence that *is* depicted on the Iraqi stage is not shown to the same extent. This is due to the reality of the highly reserved society those Iraqi writers come from. Still those plays proved to be provocative enough "that the actors on the stage force the spectators to react and [...] to stop what is happening ... [T]his theatre is to wake up the deepest sense of spectators and make them think over common norms and rules" (Bolzek 2010, 6). In such a society, intimate language and relations and explicit violent images are not only taboo as far as the audience is concerned, they are taboo, or a red line, that the playwrights themselves would not wish to cross. Yet the attempts described made by Iraqi theatre makers may lead to more experiments in this field, and may in turn lead to more provocation. Both *The Masks* and *Fourth Generation* are accepted as unusual plays in their Iraqi context, in spite of the fact that the themes that they display are

familiar or even realistic to a certain extent. Both playwrights chose a certain amount of exaggeration in imagery and dialogue in order to touch nerves and leave an unforgettable impact on their audience, which is likely to be achieved in both cases, regardless of the obstacles and the limitations both plays had to face. Chitheer and Al Zaidi theatrically represented their country, Iraq, and its people through a new perspective that is a result of their deep observations and sensitivity.

In contrast to what has been discussed so far in this study, the following three chapters are going to be dedicated to the investigation of the portrayal of Iraq and its people through new Iraqi-Westernized and purely Western viewpoints, which will enhance and add to the image that is exhibited by Iraqi dramatists.

CHAPTER FOUR

Iraqis in the Western Theatre

As stated in the Introduction to this thesis, this chapter intends to focus on a different perspective, that of examining the Western theatre's reaction to the war and the situation in Iraq. The starting point will be a focus on examples of Iraqi theatre practitioners who are based outside Iraq. The reality of the political, social, and even psychological life conditions in Iraq during the last three decades can be quite overwhelming, difficult and painful to describe particularly for Iraqis; and the facts can be staggering for non-Iraqis. As an Iraqi who lived most of her life in Iraq, I believed that we knew our situation better than those outside. Nevertheless, this is not always correct, because being inside the problem sometimes encloses one in a small circle, which leads us to overlook the complete picture of being part of a wider world. Hence, the current chapter focuses on two Western playwrights who descend from Iraqi origin, yet spent all or most their lives in the West. They established a status in international theatre as distinguished observers and theatre makers because they made use of their heritage and their actual distance from Iraq to form a deep understanding of the country's situation through remarkable theatrical works that proved effective and different in style and content from those of their Iraqi counterparts. I first discuss Heather Raffo, an Iraqi American playwright and actress who was born in 1970 in Michigan, USA, to an Iraqi father and an American mother. She gained a BA from the University of Michigan, an MFA from the University of San Diego, and also studied theatre in the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London. She visited Iraq only twice: in 1974 when she was about four years old and as an adult in 1993. The last visit proved to be very important as it inspired Raffo to start working on her first and most known work about Iraq up to date, *9 Part of Desire* (2003), which is the subject of this examination. She was also the sole performer of the roles of the nine Iraqi women depicted in her play. Second, I consider Hassan Abdulrazzak's work. Abdulrazzak is a British scientist and playwright of an Iraqi origin, who was born in 1973 in Prague, to an Iraqi socialist academic father and a mother who was a doctor. He spent part of his childhood in Baghdad until his father was summoned for questioning by a security office in Baghdad during the early 1980s. This led the family to flee Iraq to Egypt around 1981, to Algeria, and then in 1986 to the UK, where they settled. Abdulrazzak holds a PhD in molecular biology from University College London and he worked as a researcher in Harvard University and Imperial College. As a playwright, his play *Baghdad Wedding* (2007), which is discussed here, is his first and most notable play among his other plays that he wrote later about Iraq and the Middle East in general. The play tackles the critical theme of the reaction of exiled Iraqis to the events inside Iraq

after 2003 and their return to their homeland, set against the Iraqis' reaction from within the country. Both playwrights pursued successful paths in theatre-making in their portrayal of images from the Middle East in general and Iraq in particular. As a female actress and playwright, Raffo's is particularly interested in revealing women's reality in the region, while Abdulrazzk's focus is mainly on exposing deep political and incisive images of the contemporary Arab world.

Being an Iraqi woman, Raffo's works hold a substantial resonance for me, especially her *9 Parts of Desire* since the life experiences depicted in the play are part of my own experience both personally and in terms of Iraq. The fact that the play contains no male characters made it a kind of feminist play about Iraqi women. Raffo herself believes that she is a feminist with a specific interpretation of the term:

I am a feminist. I don't know if there is a definition out there that can even define what that means. It brings such controversy. But I believe that women are equal to men. That is all. We deserve equal value, equal voice. Men and women in equal partnerships are powerful and well balanced. The minute there is an imbalance of power so many things start going wrong in society... specifically because half of the population is so devalued. (Interview 2014, 4)

Her play projects and highlights a variety of Iraqi women's stories in themes that have never been tackled before. According to Karen Malpede in her introduction to *Acts of War: Iraq and Afghanistan in Seven Plays* (2011), studying plays by/ about women might lead us to

ask the gender question: Are women's plays different than men's and, if so, in what ways? Or when women come to write plays about war and witness, what do they add? Of course, they offer a woman's perspective; they look at history from woman's head. (Malpede 2011, xxiii)

Therefore, in order to provide the woman's perspective and an accurate depiction of the reality of Iraq we need a female theatrical work. In Iraqi contemporary theatre, female playwrights are, historically, scarce for a variety of reasons, but most importantly because of male domination in the field and the reserved values and traditions of society. There are some exceptions to this, such as Dr. Awatif Naeem (1950-), who is a theatre director, actor, and playwright. Naeem started her career as a theatre maker during the early 1970s, acting, directing, adapting and creating many plays until the present day. Among her recent and well-known works is the play entitled, *Women of Lorca* (2006), which is an adaptation of four plays by Federico Garcia Lorca: *Blood Wedding*, *Yerma*, *The House of Bernarda Alba* and *Marian Pineda*, in which she depicts Iraqi women's conditions, embodied in the characters that she borrows from Lorca's plays. Her play has been performed and gained much recognition in Iraq and a number of Arab

countries in different theatre festivals. Among other Iraqi female writers who wrote for theatre are Rasha Fadhil and Lutfia Al Dulami, yet their theatre works are not as well-known as Naeem's inside or outside Iraq, since both are mostly recognized as novelists rather than dramatists.

The focus here is on Raffo because her work serves the purpose of the study. The play is internationally recognized, as *9 Parts of Desire* offers rich multidimensional characters who are drawn from actual women that Raffo had met, which makes them realistic, with the important additional factor that they have been depicted by an Iraqi American woman. In the analysis of the circumstances of the lives of Iraqi women, Nadge Al Ali's book *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present* (2007) is an extensive explanation of the reality of the history of Iraqi women's lives and their dilemma and struggle through modern and contemporary history. She concludes that

Iraqi women have been involved in shaping all aspects of society and making up its very fabric. They have not merely been passive victims but have had agency and have reacted resourcefully to, adopted and coped with changing living conditions, state policies, law and wars. Some women have even been part of oppressive political and social and structures.... Yet, examining the experiences of women also makes it painfully clear that Iraqi women have not only suffered as the rest of society from repression, wars, sanctions and occupation. They have also been subjected to gender-specific forms of oppression, poverty and violence. A growing number of Iraqi women have been carrying the burden of being the main breadwinner while having to care for children and other dependants, as thousands of Iraqi men lost their lives through political persecution, wars, occupation and, more recently, sectarian violence. Women have more and more been used as symbols to demarcate boundaries and 'authentic' culture. In the process, women's dress codes, mobility, participation in public life and moral conduct have become subject to public scrutiny and control. (Al-Ali 2007, 267-8)

Accordingly, the portrayal of Iraqi women caught in the middle of the harsh contemporary history of the country is essential in supplying a clearer account of the country's situation; especially because Raffo's play provides a thoughtful monodrama of nine very different women's stories.

By contrast, Hassan Abdulrazzak's origin, his experience as a Westerner, and his being an Iraqi in exile – which are all clearly depicted in his play – reinforce this study by supplying the perspective of an Iraqi outsider alongside the Iraqi male dramatists discussed in the previous chapters. In his book, *Rewriting the Nation: British Theatre Today* (2011) Aleks Sierz states that *Baghdad Wedding*

offers the refreshingly frank perspective of exile, and the result is suffused with a heady mixture of delicate melancholy, fierce indignation and a fine perception of the workings of the human heart. Drawing on his Iraqi heritage, Abdulrazzak creates a hybrid sensibility, mixing poetic Arabic elements with a good-natured British naturalism. (Sierz 2011, 85)

Sierz's impression of the play, which provides a refreshing new perspective to Western portrayals of the war of 2003 in Iraq, concurs with Abdulrazzak's first intention in writing it, as he confirms in a recent interview that at that time he was following the news on Iraq during and after 2003:

I noticed how Western media assumed that Iraq was always a backward and violent place and completely failed to provide a context for the news coming out of Iraq. They failed for example to mention that there was once a thriving middle class, highly educated and cultured, which was forced to flee Iraq due to the murderous sanctions that were imposed on the country after the Gulf war of 1991. However, I would be lying if I said I had set out to write a play that corrected that wrong image of Iraq. The reality is I wanted to write about love, first and foremost, and particularly love that fails, tragic love in other words. The personal layers in the play were more important than any political points I got across, because they provided a complex and human picture of Iraqis.

I had read about a wedding that got bombed in Afghanistan and thought a similar thing might happen in Iraq. So I wrote the opening scenes of the play where a wedding caravan gets bombed by the Americans in Habbaniya.³⁷ As I was writing the play, indeed a wedding party was bombed in Iraq so it was very much a case of life imitating art. (Interview 2016, 1)

Therefore, Abdulrazzak's play is a requisite addition to this study as it supports the Iraqi perspective provided earlier; furthermore, it enriches it with a mixture of its humane and Western nationalistic aspect that will be reinforced further in the following chapters.

Both playwrights' contributions in the field of theatre are recent; that they are the dramatists' first plays to gain much attention in the world is an additional factor that proves the global interest in the issue of the conflict in the country and its impact on the international consciousness.

Heather Raffo's *9 Parts of Desire*: An Iraqi American Gives a Total Portrayal of Iraqi Women

Although she has visited Iraq only twice in her lifetime, in *9 Parts of Desire*, Raffo manages to capture the deep sense of insecurity and harshness most Iraqi women experienced and still experience today, both inside and outside Iraq. The play started as a monologue for Raffo's Master's thesis, and then developed into a monodrama about nine Iraqi women which she herself performed. Premiered at the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh in 2003, the play gained its first success when it moved to the Bush Theatre

³⁷ Habbaniya is a town about 55 miles (89 km) west of Baghdad in Iraq, on the banks of the Euphrates near Lake Habbaniyah. The place was a Royal Air Force station 1936-1959, and then became a station for coalition forces after 2003, and is now used as a military base for the Iraqi army. There was a tourist resort for Iraqi families in the 1980s and early 1990s very near to the military base which has now been turned into a camp for displaced Iraqi families because of the conflict in the region.

in London. A year later, The Public Theatre, New York hosted the play as part of the New York Now Festival of readings. A later version of the play was premiered in 2004 at the Manhattan Ensemble Theatre, where it was performed continuously for twenty-four weeks, winning a number of significant awards such as the 2005 Blackburn Prize Special Commendation, the Marian Seldes-Garson Kanin Fellowship, and Lucille Lortel Award. Since then, several theatre makers have produced the play, the most recent of which was in November 2015.³⁸ In an article for *UFS News*, “Play Illuminates Middle Eastern Women”, Barbara Melendez states that this staging is different from earlier productions of the play because it is the first time the play is being presented by

16 actors playing the part of what has typically been a one-woman show. This innovative production, directed by Andrea Assaf, include[d] women and men – not all theatre students – and only one Middle Eastern Student in a play about nine Middle Eastern women.” (Melendez 2015)

Raffo worked with the cast of students for a few weeks and was excited that they decided to present the play because for her, “[t]here is a whole other conversation that can be had when 19 and 20-year-olds bring you this story because they care to.” (Cited in Melendez 2015) Raffo stresses that with every production, the play “brought on a very spirited conversation” (cited in Melendez 2015). That these actors belong to the young generation is vital to Raffo since “[t]his generation is removed from the issues that caused these conflicts. But it’s in their hands now, how they read history and what they remember. I’m curious to see how they take it in and what they do with it” (cited in Melendez 2015). Obviously, Raffo’s primary intention of bringing the voice of Iraqis to international awareness has materialised. After years of working on and reworking the play between 1998 and 2003, Raffo reached the conclusion that “[e]very person, every experience, everything I saw needed to be articulated in some way. There weren’t a lot of people talking about similar things in other arenas, Iraq’s history, the Iraqi people’s concerns, the deep secrets in their hearts” (cited in Melendez 2015). Hence, her play proved distinctively effective as it is evident when the play remains a subject of innovative theatrical shows more than a decade since its premiere, that it is still open to interpretations and explorations by directors and theatre practitioners.

The title ‘*9 Parts of Desire*’ immediately focuses on an investigation of the reality and true nature of women’s lives, actions and reactions. Raffo borrowed her title from a

³⁸ The production was a collaboration between Art2Action and the USF School of Theatre and Dance (University of South Florida), through the Association of Performing Arts Presenters’ “Building Bridges: Campus Community Engagement Grant Program,” a component of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art, known as “THIS Bridge: Arab, Middle Eastern & Muslim Artists.”

phrase that she had read in Geraldine Brooks's book of the same title. Brooks attributes the phrase to Imam Ali bin Abi Talib, the nearest cousin and the son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammad.³⁹ In an interview with Riz Khan on *Al Jazeera English*, Raffo stresses that the full passage reads as follows: "God created sexual desire in ten parts and He gave nine parts to women and one part to men, and nine parts of shyness to women and one part of shyness to men" (Khan 2007).⁴⁰ According to Lauren Sandler's article "An American and Her Nine Iraqi Sisters", the title of the play carries the sexual implication that is derived from the original quotation of Imam Ali, yet it carries nothing else from Brooks's book:

But when Ms. Brooks read the play, she was so impressed by the material that her initial dismay melted away, she said. "It is resonant," she wrote in an e-mail message. "It unpeels layer upon layer of the characters' lives, never reaching for the easy or simple assumptions about who or what is to blame for their predicaments. (Sandler 2004)

In the same interview with Khan, Raffo states that the line lives in the play in the sense that these nine women are representatives of a desire for liberation in all its forms; personal, political, cultural and national: "Each of these characters embodies a completely different set of circumstances and values, and so that title really spoke to [her] as a sort of mosaic of the kind of women that [she was] going to portray" (Khan 2007). Here, Raffo tries to emphasise her intention of finding a voice for women in the Middle East and particularly Iraq, hoping for liberation and empowerment.

Having nine different characters, Raffo's play covers many, if not all, different aspects of Iraqi women's experience. "Some of her women have stayed in Iraq and paid a price. Some have left and paid another. All, however, are exiles from normalcy, from the basic human desire for peace of mind" (Marks 2006). Terry Teachout's article, "Invisible Women", explains the connection between these nine women, although they have different ideas when it comes to politics and war:

Most express no settled opinion about it. For them, violence has always been an inescapable part of their lives -- especially their lives as women in an inconceivably repressive culture -- and it is simply not possible for them to envision a world without it. Time and again they utter phrases that illuminate the blasted landscape of their native land like flashes of lightning. (Teachout 2005)

³⁹ Geraldine Brooks is an Australian American journalist who spent more than six years between the late 1980s and 1990s in the Middle East as a foreign correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*. Her *Nine Part of Desire: The Hidden World of Islamic Women* (1995) is a non-fiction narrative in which Brooks depicts her journey and reflections of women's lives in the Middle East during that time.

⁴⁰ I tried to find the original quote in Arabic, but all Arabic sources came up with different versions and different wording for the allegedly original quote, which raises doubts about its authenticity. Moreover, it is worth noting that there are a considerable number of sayings and/or ideas attributed to the Prophet, Imam Ali, and other religious figures that have not actually been confirmed or formally acknowledged as authentic. They might well be general social conventions rather than actual sayings and concepts.

Therefore, Raffo's characters portray a comprehensive image of women's lives shaped by savage dictatorship and war. The play depicts nine women who share the same pain and have lived it and survived it all whether they were inside or outside Iraq. They are: Huda the communist in exile, and Layal the artist who chosen to remain inside the country; Mullaya, The Doctor, Iraqi Girl, Umm Ghada, and Nanna the peddler who all had no other choice but to stay inside the country; Amal who managed to leave the country after failed marriages; and finally there is the American who is half Iraqi living far away from the country.

The play moves freely between the two extremely different characters of Layal and Huda. The first is the artist who is closely involved in Saddam Hussein's regime. Raffo has indicated that this character was originally based on Layla Al Attar, a well-known Iraqi artist who was the director of the Saddam Art Centre in Baghdad before being killed with her family by an American raid on her house in Al Mansour in early 1993, after drawing the face of the American President Bush on the floor of the entrance to the Al Rasheed Hotel in Baghdad. Raffo saw Al Attar's paintings in the Art Centre during her visit to Baghdad in late 1993; she recalls seeing many portraits of Saddam too, then she says:

I went upstairs into this little back room and there was a wonderful nude of a woman, standing with her back towards the viewer amid a thicket of bare trees. I was transfixed because I thought, "It's a painting of me." It spoke to me of femininity and of sorrow, everything I had felt in Iraq... I found so much of myself in that painting. I immediately photographed it. When I got the film back it was the only picture that had come out on that roll of film. I've lived with that image ever since. I knew Layla had to be a character in my play, so I asked everyone if they knew her or her work. I tried so hard to meet someone that had met her but she kept slipping through my fingers like a shadow. (Cited in Romanska 2010, 219-220)

On more than one occasion Raffo describes Layal, the character, as being also based on the woman in this painting whom she sees as being resilient. This is probably why Raffo chose to alter the spelling of Al Attar's name, Layla slightly, into Layal in the play, because Layal, the character in the play, is a mixture of the actual woman, Al Attar and the fictional woman who appears in this painting. She is the beautiful Iraqi woman, who is both envied and frowned upon because of her relationships and position with the regime, yet she doesn't care what others say:

Some other artists more senior than myself
would have hoped to be curator of Saddam Art Center
these jobs they are hard to come by and
it takes a lot to get them.

Always they make a rumor of me
 that I got this position because I was having an affair
 at that time they said
 with Saddam's cousin-
 they can believe what they like
 I don't care what they say. (9)

Raffo points out that among all her nine characters, Layal is the closest to herself; she is “a woman who wants to creatively give women a voice in the world and uses this process to also discover herself.” (Interview 2014, 1) This concurs with the intention of Raffo’s play, stated earlier. Layal may be seen as attempting to represent all Iraqi women, especially when she declares that:

I think I help people maybe
 to be transcending
 but secretly.
 Always I paint them as me
 or as trees sometimes like I was telling you.
 I do not ever want to expose exactly another woman's body
 so I paint my body
 but her body, herself inside me.
 So it is not me a lone
 it is all of us
 but I am the body that takes the experience.
 Your experience, yourself, I will take it
 only you and I will know who it is
 and others let them say
 oh Layal, again she is obsessed with her body! [She laughs] (8)

These lines accurately express the way Raffo felt when seeing Al Attar’s painting in the Art Centre. That “haunting painting”, as Raffo refers to it, is entitled *Savagery*. She describes it in a note in her published play, saying that it is of, “a nude woman clinging to a barren tree. Her head was hanging, bowed, and there was a golden light behind her, like a sun.” (x) Raffo explains that she identified with this character since both of them are artists who wish to give these women their voices; otherwise they would have gone unheard:

She is the artist. The central core. She is the reason they come to life. If she was not painting them or as an artist giving her self over for them they wouldn’t have voice. They wouldn’t have come into being. Much like Heather. If I hadn’t, written then acted them. They would not have existed in this experience. (Interview 2014, 2)

Furthermore, Layal is a very logical character who is aware of her flaws and talents, which makes her a tangible and a realistic character:

I try to have understanding of all sides, and I have compassion
 just not enough.
 I'm a good artist.

I'm an OK mother.
 I'm a miserable wife.
 I've loved yes, many
 but
 not enough.
 But I am good at being naked
 that's what I do, in secret. (10-11)

She is a powerful character in the sense that she is aware of both her weak and strong points, as well as other people's opinions of her, which might have given her this strength since Raffo intentionally depicts her as enjoying a certain form of freedom that is not available to other Iraqi women in general. This freedom mostly comes from being an artist; and probably, that is why it is possible to see her as having elements of Raffo herself in her.

By contrast, there is Huda, the leftist who was tortured by Saddam's regime and is living in exile. In order to play this role, Raffo needed to "[stiffen] her neck to become an ageing expatriate academic whose voice hardens as she describes babies tossed inside sacks of starving cats in the prison cell she once shared" (Sandler 2004). For Steve Oxman, Huda represents the "double-edged political sword [that] is captured in part by the conflicted emotions of the exile, who insists, with tears of doubt in her eyes, that the current mess is still preferable to the way things were." (Oxman 2005) Raffo depicts her as a "*whiskey drinker with fifty years as a smoker, HUDA is an Iraqi exile in her seventies now living in London. She has a keen sense of humor.*" (18) She is able to diagnose the dilemma of the Iraqis:

Anyway, I tell you our dilemma,
 some in the opposition praise America one hundred percent
 they know they are the only power
 and the whole policy of the world is in their hands,
 Personally, I have my doubts about American policy,
 still prefer chaos to permanent repression and cruelty
 because Saddam was the worst enemy to the people
 than anybody else. [*sic*] (19)

She is a rational and down-to-earth woman, who is not driven by high hopes, but knows her reality very well and is able to evaluate it as it is. She continues to examine Saddam's regime, drawing on her personal experience and how Saddam and his men exploited women in the worst way possible, making them sex slaves and further, accusing them of prostitution and killing them in cold blood for this guilt. She concludes her real life accounts saying: "So What chaos is worse than this?/ Let it be chaos at least something will come out of it./ Maybe it's the only way"(19). Furthermore, she explains her anti-war political views and how this particular war is different because

she supports it: “I walked for peace in Vietnam,/ I walked for Chile,/ but this war it was personal, this was against all my beliefs/ and yet I wanted it./ Because Saddam/ Saddam was the greater enemy than, I mean,/ imperialism– “(20)

In his review of the play for *The New Yorker*, John Lahr explains such a radical change in the political preference of war for such characters as being a psychological reaction to a long life of cruelty and suffering: “As Freud knew, when you can focus only on pain your thinking is wrecked. For more than a generation under Saddam, Iraqis lived in a state of permanent paranoia, which left them passive and mute.” (Lahr 2004) Lahr also relates it to Layal’s witty comment about Iraqis mastering the art of being silent: “Iraqis, they know not to open their mouth not even for the dentist.” (8). This is a deep understanding of most Iraqis’ predicament which Raffo herself projected and reflected in her two characters, Layal and Huda, yet they act differently according to their situations. Huda fully realizes that:

The mistake is not the war, no, America had to do it
the mistake was supporting Saddam all his life.
All the Arab countries too – they treated him like a buddy, a king
giving him all these weapons to fight this eight years’ war with Iran,
and he gassed Halabja, he drained the marshes –
And finally, after all these years, finally found him
an old man in a hole
and they want to give this man a fair trial?
No
He was always who he is – he is a savage.
It’s a cycle, repeating. Fallujah, Najaf,
the golden mosque – Samarra –
We are fighting for who they will trust –[sic] (40)

However, for Romanska, Huda is numb as she escapes her pains and memories with alcohol. She realizes that reconciling to her past, present and future is forbidden or almost impossible as “her love for her country and her hate for Saddam *vis-à-vis* the American invasion, [which] is forever foreclosed” (Romanska 2010, 224). She is an Iraqi who feels the paradox that Iraqis suffer, and she feels her helplessness about it, as do most Iraqis:

I am in a period of disheartenment everywhere.
Maybe I should be there.
I don't know what to do with myself now, I have doubts, yeah, well
about my whole life.
I don't feel I have achieved what I wanted, my potential.
The worst thing I fear most now is civil war.
Iraqis don't want to be cut up, to be separated.
Ya'ni, we had fine interrelations
my family married with the Shi'a, my husband was a Kurd
there was no segregation sort of thing – these people
they have been living together in this area for thousands of years.

if we want to sculpt a nation
 we cannot hack away at it
 without a plan for the human being.
 Each moment is vital – (39)

Unlike Layal, who is based on the dead artist Al Attar, Huda is still alive; therefore, she is in the middle of the dilemma and able to evaluate it thoroughly. Huda can be read as the representative of the Iraqi objective eye and mind. Her fears and worries proved well-founded in the years following the premier of the play, as Iraq fell into civil conflicts from late 2004 until today, costing Iraqis much. Such worries and predictions presented by Raffo make the play resonate with Shaker's *The Wild Wedding*, discussed in Chapter Two, in the sense that theatre makers may be aware of the inner fears of the society since they portray them in their dramas, trying to raise awareness, yet are unfortunately unable to prevent them.

Besides these two different characters, there are seven other women in the play who represent all ages and social classes in Iraq. There is Amal, the Bedouin in her late thirties “*who looks so intently at whomever she is talking to, you would swear her eyes never blinked. She asks many questions; she really thinks there is an answer out there for her.*” (11) Raffo based this character on a woman whom she met in London in the same way that she met the other women who inspired her play. In her interview with Frances Degen Horowitz, Raffo recalls how she spent months with this Bedouin and how she loved spending time talking to her. Later, she felt that writing this woman's story was like writing a song because she could not remember her exact words, but she wrote what she felt would represent her. According to Raffo, the woman was very happy that Raffo had fully represented her in Amal, even when she did not use her precise words. Ilka Saal argues that Amal “*talks about her repeated betrayal by the men in her life*” (Saal in Ozieblo 2012, 145); she is a woman who knows what she needs, but somehow is unable to identify it:

I do, I very much feel this void
 and I have no peace
 always I am looking for peace.
 Do you know peace?
 I think only mens have real peace
 womans she cannot have peace
 What you think?
 [...]
 Tell me what you think
 what should I do?
 I want to memorize what you say,
 so I can be this way freedom again. (11, 18)

Raffo deliberately portrays Amal addressing her audience with incorrect English language, most likely to escalate the idea that she is a vivid character who is based on a real person.

Pamela Renner's article "Iraq Through the Eyes of Its Women" for the Theatre Communications Group describes Amal as "a robust Bedouin mother who has left two husbands behind and lost the love of a man she idealized". (Renner) For Romanska,

Amal's choices may seem incomprehensible; her decisions erratic and somewhat as if made outside of herself. In search of something she cannot name – she calls it peace – she goes back and forth between West and East, running away from one man toward the phantom of another. She does all of this to fill the void inside her, trusting naively that once she finds the man, the void will be gone. But the more she persists in her search, the emptier she feels, unable to see the absurd futility of her plight. It is only when she finds someone who listens to her story, when she can finally find her own voice, that she discovers, to her surprise, that the peace she has been so desperately searching for is nowhere else but within her. (Romanska 2010, 223)

Raffo states that when the real woman, upon whom Amal is created, had the chance to see the play in London, she "wrote in her journal: 'Tonight I felt like a woman. I always feel like an Arab woman, but tonight I am just a woman.'" (Cited in Slander 2004)

Amal confesses:

I have never talked this before
nobody here knows this thing about me
I keep it in my heart only
oh, I talk a lot!
I wish to be like this! [*She laughs*]
I want to be like you
this is the most free moment of my life
really I mean this
Oh really I love you, like a sister I love you
the most free moment of my life. (18)

Accordingly, Amal's statement unfolds the true feelings of an Iraqi woman. It reveals the Iraqi women's need to be listened to, to be united with the world, to be heard and noticed. With her simple English yet sincere feelings and words, Amal is a vital character to the play, as she represents the suppressed and helpless women whose lives revolve around being married to a wealthy man and raising children, yet who are mostly betrayed and let down.

Among all the characters of the play, Umm Ghada's story is the most historically accurate since the character is drawn from the true story of Umm Ghdad who was known among Iraqis during the 1990s. She is

the mother who searches for the remains of her children among the rubble of an explosion outside of the Amiryiyya bomb shelter. Among the charred and fused bodies, she recognizes her daughter Ghada (meaning 'tomorrow'), and she

becomes known as Umm Ghada (Mother of Tomorrow), though her full name is 'dead with them'". (Friedman 2010, 601)

She introduces herself as a famous Iraqi character: "In Baghdad, I am famous now as Umm Ghada/ because I do live here in yellow trailer/ outside Amiriyya bombing shelter/ since the bombing/ 13 February 1991" (28). According to Romanska's article "Trauma and Testimony", Umm Ghada is "a textbook trauma victim" (Romanska 2010, 227) With her "*great stillness and pride, peaceful and dispassionate [sic]*" (28), she reveals the Iraqi sense of guilt when surviving all these disasters, particularly wars, while their dearest people die: "I'm hard to understand/ why I survive/ And my children dead./ I asked to Allah why?/ Why you make me alive?/ That night all people died/ four hundred three people/ and there's nothing we can do. They are dead." (29) She is the witness who takes the responsibility of telling the story to the world of the loss of her family and all those who died in that shelter, on her witness stand, her trailer, where she lives outside the shelter (Romanska 2010, 228), asking those who visit her to sign a guest book to prove that they are witnesses too:

This trailer is my witness stand.
All photos on this wall – and here – are me
with emissaries from the world
who come to Amiriyya shelter to look
what really happen here
not what they read in papers
or see in the CNN.
Here is guest book they all sign,
Your name will be witness too. (29)

Romanska highlights a significant feature about Iraqi women when they lose their loved ones, that is to say, although Om Ghada is still alive; her identity is merged with her dead daughter: "In the symbolic erasure of her own identity, renaming herself so as to designate her relationship to her daughter but nothing else, [she], though alive, ceases to exist on the same night her daughter died" (Romanska 2010, 228). Umm Ghada confirms this, saying, "All my family is here, Ghada is here/ so I am Umm Ghada, Mother of Tomorrow./ My full name is dead with them." (31) With Umm Ghada, Raffo succeeds in portraying an Iraqi mother who, though she is devastated because of her loss, stands proud with the mission of making the world witness her family's unjustified deaths.

The doctor and a nine-year old girl are other characters in *9 Parts of Desire*. They are images of two Iraqi female representations of knowledge and innocence and how

dangerous both could be. The doctor describes how she is caught in the misery of her knowledge of the horrible consequences of the use of weapons in the war against Iraq:

It could be depleted uranium, or chemicals that were released from the bombings during the Gulf War, but I can see something changed in the environment – giant squash, huge tomatoes. They say the radiation in plants now is at eighty-four times the safety limit. But who can clean it? Ever? We will have this depleted uranium for what – four thousand years? How many generations is that growing up handicapped? I am afraid to see them when they're grown.
It's better, maybe, death –
My husband says death is worse, *il-mawt yihrig il-glub*, death burns the heart. But I don't believe – (21)

She has just delivered a boy with two heads and she realizes that she is pregnant. This doctor is an example of the cultured and enlightened Iraqi women who understand the dangers of war and its consequences, yet are unable to change it.

Conversely, there is the little girl, who is eager to go to school to know more. The “young girl who loves the music of 'N Sync” (Teachout 2005) entertains herself cleverly by telling the difference between “RPGs or American,/ tank or armor vehicle,/ Kalashnikov or M16”. (26) She gives her cousin a bullet, and “he made a key chain from the M16 bullet/ because they are longer and he says ‘more elegant’” (26). The girl resumes her anecdotes and reveals that she had informed against her father by mistake when in school she mentioned how he criticized Saddam and his regime at home, which led to his arrest and execution. The girl portrays the danger that Iraqis risked when they tried to be free at home, talking politics while their children listened to them and unintentionally repeated their words in the wrong places, like in schools. Such a thing could be fatal, as this girl’s story illustrates.

There is also an Iraqi-American woman, who is torn between her two countries. This character is in part inspired by Raffo’s own personal experience. In her interview with Riz Khan, Raffo emphasises that this character is a portrait of herself, as well as some other Iraqi American women she had met, and there are scenes in the play where she has actually described true events which she experienced while the war was happening in Iraq and the news about the war was shown on TV:

I don't even know
hundreds of thousands?
How many Iraqis?
And
a woman actually turned to me
and said that
she said
“the war it's all so heartbreaking”
she was getting a pedicure.
I was getting a fucking pedicure.

I walk
 I can't walk
 down
 the street
 I want
 New York to stop.
 Why don't we count the number of Iraqis dead?
 Why? (49)

Remarkably, the American concludes her scene by repeating the line “I love you” ten times before listing the names of her relatives in Iraq, and again she repeats the same line more than twenty times when she finishes uttering all the names. According to Lahr, the American character took the role of the enchanter who “chants the words “I love you” and then lists the names of the forty-five members of her own extended Iraqi family, beginning with Behnam, Rehbab, Ammar, Bashar, and continuing until all are pronounced into our world.” (Lahr 2004) Giving a voice to this character, Raffo is actually expressing her passionate reaction to the events in Iraq since the early 1990s.

She states:

Oh, I'm not just from Michigan—I'm living in Michigan with a big family in Iraq. I'm not on one side of this war. I can't sit in a bar with people cheering as bombs are going off. My body, blood and psyche want my family to live. What if I never see them again? What if they're just in the wrong place in the wrong time? (Cited in Renner)

Raffo reveals that by being half Iraqi she shares all this suffering; despite being in America and actually far away from Iraq, she still feels affected by the war there; this is why she feels a responsibility to express the pain the war inflicted on Iraqis.

Nanna, the eighth woman, “*is an old woman, scrappy and shrewd; she has seen it all. She is selling anything she can on the street corner [sic]*” (41). She is the witness who saw everything and feels burdened and exhausted by what she sees: “I have too much existence/ I have lived through twenty-three revolutions/ my life has been spared— / if my life has been spared/ to whom I owe my debt?/ I have so much to repay./ To whom do I owe my debt?” (42) As a peddler, Nanna concludes the play by selling Layal’s painting, *Savagery*, the painting of a nude women hanging on a tree. Romanska, clarifies that according to Raffo, “Nanna's selling of the painting *Savagery* functions then as an epilogue to remind us finally that everything we have witnessed has a price.” (Romanska 2010, 233) Nanna declares at the end that “Our history is finished/ so it is more worth/ more worth. / I give you secret/ some trees are womans/ this one, little one, is me/ I let her paint me/ aa, she see me/ shhh/ don't say/ my husband he thinks it's just a tree.”(68) This echoes Layal’s claim at the beginning of the play: “I paint my body/ but

her body, herself inside me./ So it is not me alone/ it is all of us.”(8) These women are one; all women around the world are seen here as one and share their experience. During her interview with Degen Horowitz, Raffo stresses that one of the main messages of her play is to say that all women around the world “are absolute equal in [their] quest for fulfilment and fullness as women.”(Degen Horowitz 2005). Hence, she concludes her play with her characters repeating each other’s words to declare their oneness.

All these women are woven together with the ninth central character, Mullaya. Raffo identifies the term ‘mullaya’ accurately, stating that she “*is a woman in Arabic culture hired to lead call-and-response with women mourning at funerals. She is considered very good if she can bring the women to crying frenzy with her improvised, heart-breaking verses about the dead*” (3). Traditionally in Iraq, a mullaya takes the role of the mourner, which is very essential in Iraqi life. Because of continuous wars, torture, and consistent instability since the late 1970s, death has been a recurrent and everyday fact for generations. This influential character carries the whole weight of the play when, standing by the river, she introduces it. She tells of the ancient history of this country and the bitterness of its water. She expresses her pain, her worn soul, and her country’s story with poetic language:

Let me tell you I have walked across it
 Qurna, Eridu, Ur
 the Garden of Eden was here
 its roots and its rivers
 and before this Garden
 the chaos and the fighting
 loud and angry children–
 the dark sea lies beneath my country still
 as it has always done
 sweet and bitter water – children of Nammu.
 But our marshlands now are different
 they've been diverted, dammed, and dried
 I have walked from there to here
 from the flood
 to the highway of death
 collecting, carrying
 you can read the story
 here it is, read it all here
 on my sole.
 My feet hurt
 I have hole in my shoes
 I have holes now even in my feet
 there are holes everywhere
 even in this story. (4-5)

As a mourner, Mullaya's role is essential in the play, since she represents a "more symbolic figuration than character, and her wailing is directed at no one in particular and for no one in particular. In fact, what she mourns is the nation as a whole: its past, history, and culture." (Romanska 2010, 218) This is shown in her return at the end of the play, when she repeats lines her fellow women have spoken through the play, which creates an echo in the minds of the audience with her final statements: "I can't stop what I am here/ either I shall die/ or I shall live a ransom for all the daughters/ of savagery./ She called it Savagery/ when you love like you cannot breathe" (66). These words are another indication of Raffo's emphasis on showing women's unity.

Mullaya opens *9 Parts of Desire* with an Iraqi traditional female song of "*Che Mali Wali*". The opening of the song reads as "Because I have no protector/ by God, [oh dear!]/ I am tortured in my life/ Oh Daddy, [oh dear!]/ Because I have no protector." (75-76) The verses of the song can be seen as an indicator of the status of Iraqi women, in addition to the image of the river where Mullaya is performing "*her ritual ablutions*" (3) For Raffo both "the river images and the search for a 'ruler' or 'leader' are very core to the subtext of what the country has been going through" (Interview 2014, 3) The song is well known to most, if not all, Iraqis, and particularly to women. It is about how weak and helpless women can be. Therefore, Raffo's choice of this song refers to the fact that historically, Iraqi women have been pictured as passive dependents.

Ultimately, the song is used ironically, since Raffo's nine characters prove to be survivors rather than victims: Layal with her charms and desire to live; Huda with her acceptance of chaos in the hope of a better future; Amal with her quest for peace and her story to be heard; Umm Ghada with her witnesses' book, standing by her trailer to tell the story of her loss; the doctor who knows that life in Iraq can be fatal, yet she is still working; the little girl with her dreams of a better future; the Iraqi-American who insists on announcing her connection to the two sides of the world; Nanna, who sees it all while continuing to make her living; and Mullaya, who carries the voices of all women to be heard. In explaining her need to portray these women in theatre, Raffo believes that

[t]hese women just aren't in the world. There are no images of Iraqi women out there that aren't flat, one dimensional and somewhat victimized. The real Iraqi woman does not exist in Western culture.... That's when I knew I had to tell the stories I'd heard because they're funny, sexy, radical and deeply emotional. (Cited in Romanska 2010, 217)

Raffo does not believe that these women are victims. They have suffered brutality, yet they are fighters for a better life. (Khan 2007) Raffo insists that her nine characters are

drawn together by their desire for life. To live. To live full and free. To pursue dreams. It is just that their dreams are different. For instance they might all dream of love to be loved and to love their family... but they might all want this in very different ways. [...] I find them all very strong because I don't find any of them playing the victim. They have all had hard lives, but all are searching to live, live better, deeper, wiser. None of them want to stay silent."(Interview 2014, 2-3)

Furthermore, Raffo explains:

Each of these women is dealing from a primal need of something that they want in a non-victim like way that they are going for at every moment. They never stop with their needs and wants in an active pursuit of it. And that is what I think is unique to these characters in the play. (Degen Horowitz 2005)

However, these women are even further victimized by being constantly seen in a stereotypical image of helplessness, weakness and mostly vulnerable characters.

Another significant symbol in the play comes from the transformation from one character to another. To change her character, the actress, Raffo, uses an abaya. The abaya is a traditional Iraqi cloak, a large, black piece of cloth which Iraqi women traditionally wore outside over their everyday clothes. Nowadays, women still wear the abaya in different parts of Iraq, especially in the countryside, remote small towns and cities, and while visiting religious shrines. Raffo uses the abaya as a prop that she successfully turns into a robe, a baby, and as an actual abaya. This cover has long been believed to have functioned as a shelter that Iraqi women can hide behind; but, conversely it has been used in this play in an active way, as part of the identity of these Iraqi women, and yet it did not hide them or hinder them from having a voice.

Finally, it is crucial to point out that the passage of the play is built around the five Islamic calls for prayers in one day. Raffo explains this, saying:

Because the play travels back and forth in time. I wanted to give it the sense as if all these rotating cycles of life were as similar as the cycle of one day. So if one storyteller were to have told the stories of these women. It happened over the course of one day. They all crossed paths like that in one day. It is about the cycle of the heart, the soul, the country, the many wars. (interview 2014, 1)

Furthermore, it shows Raffo's awareness of the religious frame of mind or the religious outline that controls the conventional Iraqi mind, which is possibly one of the main elements that contributed to create such characters. After more than ten years of research, interviews and making friendships with Iraqi women all around the world, as well as connecting with family in Iraq, Raffo came back "to liken [her stories] to a song." (Degen Horowitz 2005) She created this play to represent all women around the world who are suffering war and harsh life conditions. For Joanna Settle, the director of *9 Parts of Desire*, the play is "never going to go out of date, because there are always

going to be women in the middle of war trying to live their lives”, a view proved to be true so far, particularly given its recent production in late 2015 (cited in Pressley 2006).

Although Raffo lived away from the country except for those two short visits, her play was able to shed a strong light on Iraqi women’s lives. She gave them the voice that took their story to the world outside Iraq. Raffo mentions that all Iraqi women who saw or read the play were surprised at how she was able to know so much without experiencing it. (Degen Horowitz 2005) In response to this, she clarifies that it is because she is “an artist and this is what artists do” (Khan 2007). Yet, such a deep knowledge and a full understanding, and then the ability to portray it with such depth, can only come if one feels and lives the situation. In spite of that, Raffo was able to create an artistic depiction of the situation of Iraqi women without actually living it, but rather through her spiritual connection to the country and deep insight. Her play is an achievement that earned all the attention that it received.⁴¹

Hassan Abdulrazzak’s *Baghdad Wedding*: Iraqi-British Theatre

Abdulrazzak’s first play *Baghdad Wedding* was premiered at the Soho Theatre in June 2007 and then staged in Sydney, Australia, in 2009, winning the 2008 George Devine Award and the 17th Meyer-Whitworth Award. It consists of two acts with 26 scenes, moving between London and Iraq between 1998 and 2005. The word ‘wedding’ in the title of Abdulrazzak’s play immediately resonates with Falah Shaker’s play, *The Wild Wedding*, discussed in Chapter Two. Unlike Shaker’s play, *Baghdad Wedding* unfolds its events with an actual wedding, however, the connotation of rape and cruelty is actually the more significant connection that brings Shaker’s and Abdulrazzak’s works together since both plays carry an implicit or explicit rape metaphor of the country, Iraq, indicating the American invasion in 2003. Other than these two comparable elements, the two plays are quite different in their treatment of themes and presentation of characters.

Baghdad Wedding traces the lives of three Iraqi friends, Salim, Marwan and Luma, who are in their thirties, have lived most of their lives in exile in London, and who

⁴¹ When I first read the play text while I was in Iraq, which was sent to me by Raffo herself in 2011, I could not believe that Heather Raffo had never lived in Iraq. And when I translated the play to my family and my mother particularly, we were convinced that the writer had lived in Iraq for quite a long time in order to be able to write about Iraqi women like this. It is only when I met Raffo in London in 2013, that I was convinced that she had visited Iraq only twice, and all her creative work comes from the emotional connection that she has for this country.

decide to return to Iraq after 2003. The play examines the reasons for their return and the discovery of whether it is a wise decision, or not. Each one of those three characters has a different motive for returning to Iraq. Salim, a bisexual doctor, who has recently published a controversial novel entitled *Masturbating Angels*, returns to Baghdad excited about the 'freedom of Iraq' to get married. He is thought to be dead after his wedding is attacked by American missiles as early as Scene Two of the play. After being captured by insurgents in Fallujah and then arrested by the Americans, he returns home to his friends and decides to stay in Iraq. Marwan, the narrator and Salim's best friend, returns to Baghdad upon the invitation for Salim's wedding. But he attends Salim's funeral instead, then his wedding with Luma, his long-term love, at the very end of the play. Luma, Salim's beloved in London has broken up with him because of his behaviour, and returns to Baghdad after her father's death during The Desert Fox campaign, to get married and then divorced, and finally to marry Salim after his return from death.⁴² She decides that she has to stay in Iraq out of duty, and because it is her only real home. Other than its three main characters, *Baghdad Wedding* is enriched by other minor characters: Kathum, the journalist; Yasser, the art critic; Omer, the young man who works in a food store in Baghdad; three insurgents, Ibraheem, Nadir and Sayef; Mark Booth, the American Colonel; as well as a few friends from London and American soldiers.

According to Aleks Sierz, the play filled the gap of the Middle Eastern point of view about the 2003 war through the eyes of Western writers, as most of the plays written and performed in the West show one side of the issue (Sierz 2011, 85). Nicholas de Jongh asserts that "Abdulrazzak vividly conveys an impression of young, westernised Iraqis in London, succumbing to sexual freedoms their intellectual friends in Baghdad abhor" (de Jongh 2007). Abdulrazzak himself stresses that the play is aimed at changing the stereotype picture that is usually conveyed about Iraqis and Arabs:

Arabs tend to get portrayed in western culture as conmen, religious fanatics or terrorists[...] I wanted to show authentic Arabs, the kind of people I know and grew up with, who are interested in the arts, who drink and smoke, and whose social relationships are not governed by taboos. I hope in the future we'll hear more of this kind of Arab voice. (Cited in Henley 2008)

⁴² The Desert Fox campaign was a major four-day bombing campaign on Iraqi targets from December 16, 1998, to December 19, 1998, by the United States and United Kingdom, justified by the Iraqi government's failure to comply with the UN security council resolution that the regime should not interfere with United Nations Special Commission inspectors for mass destruction weapons inside Iraq.

He emphasised this intention in the recent interview I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, which shows Abdulrazzak's sense of responsibility to convey a more realistic illustration about the very complex society of his origin.

Michael Billington believes that Abdulrazzak "does an admirable job in reminding [the audience] of the way private lives intersect with public tragedy" (Billington 2007). With its "booze, drugs, sex and strong language [that] are not usually the stuff of plays about the endless tragedy of Iraq" (Henley 2008), the play has earned the title of "hot theatre" as described by de Jongh at the very end of his review, "Stirring scenes from Iraq", for the *Evening Standard* in 2007. Abdulrazzak asserts that his play started as comedy sketches between man A and man B, and developed into an award winning play (Schlote 2011, 103). *Baghdad Wedding* takes its audience right into the lives and minds of the "educated, the independent-minded" Iraqis (Abdulrazzak 102). With its characters and settings, it provides the other side of the story of the war, the Iraqi side, yet through an outsider's eye, a British Iraqi in exile.

Salim, the hero of the play, is a complicated character who mixes the Iraqi heritage of childhood memories with the complexity of a contemporary Western life; a man who is described by Luma, his ex-girlfriend, as "a kid, running around, trying everything on." (55). He travels back to Baghdad to breathe the "oxygen of freedom". (22) After he tries everything outside Iraq, Salim returns to his country to marry. But before his return, he publishes a novel about his gay life for which he will be criticized even if he dies:

KATHUM: We gave you a false name. For the sake of your family. Certain people would have claimed it was divine punishment.

Salim is briefly puzzled.

SALIM: On account of the novel! Good thinking. Yeah I could see it: 'Breaking News – (He moves his hands to indicate a headline appearing at the bottom of a TV screen) – God strikes down the sodomite.' (70)

A man who can smell Baghdad in his new colleague's clothes and sees "the Tigris in the parting of [his] hair" (27), Salim always manages "to find the few grains of hope scattered in the wasteland" (39), and his novel hints at the "Arab venturing into the 'dark heart' of the white England." (54). He does not see any difference between being captured by the insurgents or the Americans except that while he was with the insurgents, the Qur'an kept him busy. (87) He is a secular character who unexpectedly cries out the name of Jesus when he is about to be killed, and is ironically saved by his knowledge of the English language. (83) He is also a supporter of the American invasion, finding charm in Clinton (43), yet later he fantasizes a horrible image of punishing the American colonel for his treatment (95). He expresses both his love and

hatred for the American sexually. He is a complex and unpredictable character, who is described by Abdurazzak as “quite a macho” (Schlote 2011, 106), who keeps the spectator interested until the very end. Abdurazzak further explains:

I think Salim in particular is a fascinating character because of his wit and approach to life. When the play was performed in Australia, the actor playing the role ended up winning the prestigious Helpmann award for best actor. He was up against actors that had performed in a high profile production of Shakespeare’s history plays. This made me realise that I had created in Salim a character that is very satisfying for an actor to play and that appeals to an international audience. (Interview 2016, 2)

Accordingly, it is possible to argue that Salim is not only a central character in the play; rather, he is a collective character who tries to break every fixed convention and stereotypical understanding about the Iraqi persona in general inside and outside Iraq. In spite of being injured by the American plane attack on his wedding, kidnapped by insurgents, imprisoned, humiliated and tortured by the Americans, he decides to stay, work, and write in Iraq against all odds and therefore, he can be seen as the well-educated doctor, the controversial novelist, the cruel and selfish friend sometimes, as well as the Iraqi nationalist rebel.

On the other hand, there is Marwan, the narrator in the play, an engineer who is totally convinced that Iraq is no more than a dream country. His innocent childhood dreams about UFOs turn into adulthood concerns about “turning up to exams unprepared and naked.”(33) He is the friend who accepts his mate as a brother without paying attention to whom the mate is sleeping with (39). An Iraqi who hates “the art of Arabic hypocrisy” (53), Marwan confesses that as Iraqis “[w]e grieve repeatedly; publicly, you might even say theatrically until our grief loosen its grip and becomes mere rituals.” (40) He is a lover who keeps his love secret for years in the hope that Luma will realize it, and accepts being the “just-in-case guy”(100) until the very end when he attends her wedding to his best friend, Salim. (103). He is the one who draws the comparison between the two countries, England and Iraq, by their wedding customs: “A Wedding is not a wedding in Iraq unless shots are fired. It’s like in England where a wedding is not a wedding unless someone pukes or tries to fuck one of the bridesmaids.”(23). He believes Iraq is finished (102), and his last dream in Baghdad is stated as:

Something descended from the sky but it was not a spaceship. What came down was a dark, ominous temple. I walked up the steps and crossed into darkness. It began to rain. Hands reached out to bathe me. I tried to open my eyes but couldn’t. I heard murmurs, prayers, felt a cloth upon my face. My entire body was being bound in a shroud. The white shroud for burial. (104-5)

Such a dream obviously conveys Marwan's sense of despair and a near-death in connection with Iraq, which is inevitable since it is a reality that most Iraqis have experienced for years. Yet it is a new experience for him as although he is originally Iraqi, he is still a new-comer. Unlike Salim and Luma, Marwan is depicted as the most realistic character of the three main characters, since at the end of the play he prefers to return to the safety of London rather than withstanding the insecurity of Baghdad as his fellow characters decide, in spite of the fact that the latter is his original home city. Symbolically speaking, Abdulrazzak crystallizes the view that

Marwan longs for Luma who represents for him the best things about Iraq. He gets her back briefly, the way Iraqis for a short while after 2003 felt everything will be alright, but then he loses her once again. And sadly he has perhaps lost her forever. Although the character of Kathum does offer him a small ray of hope that he may get her back in the end. In Marwan's final monologue the two strands of the play [104-5], the political and the personal, are tied together. He mourns a lost love and a lost country. (Interview 2016, 5)

Therefore, Marwan is the link between the two sides of Iraqi society, those who are in exile, and those who are still in Iraq. Both long for one thing, the country, yet are unable to feel safe in it and mourn for it, whether they stayed or decided to leave.

The two friends, Salim and Marwan, are in love with the same woman, Luma, who is portrayed as a "too stolid" (de Jongh 2007) and a "duty-driven" (Billington 2007) character, which is manifested through her role in the play when she decides to return to Iraq for her father's sake in the first place, and then decides to remain in the country because she feels a responsibility to do so. While being in Iraq and witnessing the consequences of the war, she realizes significantly that "[p]erhaps someone should be opposing the opposition"(52). She is the "dope fiend"(52) who, when Marwan accuses her of having abandoned her principles by wearing the hijab, defends her point of view by giving an accurate and vivid account of the kind of life Iraqis live:

Principles?! When you leave your house not knowing whether you'll come back in a body bag, when you work in a hospital where you have to throw out everything you learnt in London in favour of constant improvisation, when you virtually have an orgasm every time you hear the whirl of electricity turning back on and feel grateful for every lousy minute of light you get, when you have this... this... Everest of shit to deal with every day, the last thing you worry about is whether you are betraying your principles by wearing a hijab. (53)

Abdulrazzak makes this statement to illustrate the extent of the difficult conditions inside Iraq which apply to the Iraqi life even before 2003. It also resonates with Marwan's sense of inevitable death in his last dream.

It is possible to state that with his three main characters, Abdulrazzak manages to find the people who would “scream at the top of their lungs about what is happening.” (102) Therefore, he indeed provides a missing Iraqi voice on the British stage about the war in Iraq. (Sierz 2007) When reviewing the reactions of the three main characters of his play, Abdulrazzak affirms that

In *Baghdad Wedding*, Luma is the first who returns to Iraq, gets married and works as a doctor. Things don't work out for her on a personal front but she finds satisfaction in her work. Salim, the bisexual hedonist is the last person we think could integrate in Iraq. But there is a ruthless and ambitious side to him and in Iraq he finds the subject matter for his art. He too decides to stay. It is Marwan, who grew up on comforting nostalgia of Iraq that struggles the most and eventually fails to reintegrate once he is confronted with the awful reality of modern day Iraq. (Interview 2016, 3)

The three main characters are only examples of the exiled Iraqis' reactions to the situation in their home country. Since there is a huge difference in their personalities and motives, they make their decisions according to their ultimate aims in life: whether it is to achieve change and help others like doctor Luma, fulfil their eagerness for inspiration and artistic thirst like Salim, or preferring nostalgia to facing personal and national defeat and death, like Marwan.

The play presents a variety of actions and locations to its audience that combine to reveal the extent of change this war has brought to Iraq, the country and its people, creating a chaos that none of the characters is able to comprehend. Nothing and nobody is the same as before the war. Even Ibraheem, the terrorist, might be seen as a victim when he describes how his youngest daughter has been killed by an American sniper: “We couldn't reach the cemetery that day. We had to bury her in our garden like a dog. (*Pause.*) Once you lose your dignity, like our Palestinian brothers, you can't get it back without a fight.”(82) However, the American colonel, Booth, too regrets being in Iraq, although his way of putting it is purely sexual. He is looking forward to the day when he leaves once he finishes his ‘job’ as he informs Salim, “Because nothing would give me more pleasure right now, Mr Salim, than to take my dick out of your country. (*Pause*) But I have a job to do here. And I intend to do it.”(91) Booth's image suggests that he realises what he is doing in Iraq as ‘fucking’ the country. The play successfully shows the difference between the two characters on the two extreme edges of the conflict in Iraq, both give their justifications which might sound reasonable and acceptable for some, yet both are versions of the horrible state of the country and the reason behind creating such a state. Abdulrazzak explains: “I've heard countless stories from Iraqis who retired after decades in exile who say ‘Hassan, you won't recognise the

country. The people have changed. I don't recognise the faces on the street'." (Interview 2016, 2) Hence, his portrayal of the country came through his recognition of the amount of confusion and chaos created in the country and the people or the themes behind it.

Right from its opening scene, the play reveals its openness about sexual images and references, a matter that makes it rather daring to be performed in Arabic in Iraq or any other Arab country today. These images reach their climax with the rape metaphor of the country:

BOOTH: You know Mr Salim, the British were fond of calling your country Mesopotamia.

[...]

BOOTH: Meaning 'Land Between the Rivers'.

SALIM: Yes, I know. [...]

BOOTH: I was wondering why they insisted on this name in particular. The Brits never do anything without a reason.

SALIM: The name has along hist-

BOOTH: See, I have this idea. I was looking at a map of the country the other day, really focusing on it when – boom! – this image just popped into my head. Now forget the current border; just erase it out of your mind for a second.

SALIM: I think it is being erased as we speak.

Pause

BOOTH: What do you see?

SALIM: Two rivers pouring through Shatt al-Arab into the Persian Gulf.

BOOTH: Wrong. It's a tight pussy.

SALIM: What?

BOOTH: You heard me. This is why Mongols, the Ottomans, the Brits and now us have all wanted to stick out dicks into it, to put our mouths, our tongues into it and let its juices flow down our chins. But you know what? We were wrong. This is no sweetheart virgin. We've stuck our dicks into a whore's pussy with every goddamn dick-snapping disease under the sun. (90-91)

Such a metaphor can be highly offensive to any individual, let alone an Iraqi man, even if he has lived most of his life outside Iraq like Salim. Furthermore, the reference to the map of the country is striking because it directly points out the actual land that it refers to. A man's land is a man's honour for an Iraqi; hence, it is possible to perceive the evocative impact of comparing the invasion of the country to rape. Consequently, this violent image, which suggests the political and economic purpose of the invasion, is followed by the description of Salim's imaginary and violently sexual revenge of Booth, in the same scene (95). In response to Schlote's suggestion that the violent images in *Baghdad Wedding* shows an influence of 'in-yer-face' theatre (Schlote 2011, 105-6), Abdurassazk counters the idea, stating the main influence toward writing such violence in his play was Harold Pinter's poem "American Football" that was written as a reaction to the Gulf War in the 1990s:

Hallelullah!
It works.

We blew the shit out of them.
 We blew the shit right back up their own ass
 And out their fucking ears.
 It works.
 We blew the shit out of them.
 They suffocated in their own shit!
 Hallelullah.
 Praise the Lord for all good things.
 We blew them into fucking shit.
 They are eating it.
 Praise the Lord for all good things.
 We blew their balls into shards of dust,
 Into shards of fucking dust.
 We did it.
 Now I want you to come over here and kiss me on the mouth. (Pinter)

Furthermore, Abdulrazzak believes that “[v]iolence can be justified, provided you’ve built up the frame.” (Schlote 2011, 106) He asserts:

I just wanted to use the technique of reversing. So Salim’s speech really came kind of from this origin, the language of it and the rhythms were inspired by the Harold Pinter poem, but I just thought this time it’s in the mouth of an Iraqi voicing his anger. (Schlote 2011, 106).

Accordingly, like *The Wild Wedding*, *Baghdad Wedding* concurs with Clive Barker’s suggestion about political theatre (Holderness 1992, 28), by aggressively subjecting its audience to a sensual and psychological impact aiming at an emotional shock to encourage a deeper perception. Written from an Iraqi Westernized point of view, the play provides the regional, in addition to the national and international perspective of the political activity, which Barker believes to be a significant function of political theatre. (Holderness 1992, 37) The play may also fulfil Piscator’s claim: it is “a means to an end” (Piscator 1980, 23): a means to show the ugliness of war and whoever is involved in it; and to psychologically shock its audience to develop a certain reaction, most probably to condemn war in general.

After reading or watching the play, it is almost impossible to avoid asking why an Iraqi playwright depicts the lives of such personalities rather than focusing on the more important issue in social terms, the suffering of the Iraqis before and after the war. Why does Abdulrazzak portray his characters in this Westernised way even though this might earn him some criticism, as did his character, Salim? Abdulrazzak himself mentions that when an Iraqi audience member was asked about the play he replied: “Oh, it’s a nice play, but you have not shown our suffering and our misery and you have given the wrong impression. Not everybody drinks in Iraq society” (cited in Schlote 2011, 107). To this Abdulrazak frankly responded that his characters in *Baghdad Wedding* come

from the same background as his own: “I come from a background where people drink and I know it’s not the majority. And I wanted to show that and I have a right to show that.” (Schlote 2011, 107). He adds:

I’ve had some feedback from Iraqis living in London and Sydney. The reaction was as you would expect. The liberal ones liked it a lot. One man in Sydney came up to me after the show, hugged and thanked me for presenting a different image of Iraqis to the Australian public than the negative one they encounter frequently in their press.

However, I also recall an encounter with two women in London who told me they didn’t understand why I had a gay character in the play. I found this very funny because I had anticipated their conservative view and satirised it in the play itself in the form of the critic/censor Yasser and his attitude to Salim’s homosexuality and hedonism. (Interview 2016, 4)

While defending his novel, Salim, the main character, explains part of Abdulrazzak’s reasons for using such a context to reveal his story: “If I want to write about mango or dates or oil or Islam or the war or whatever then... sure... by all means but I also reserve the right not to. (*Pause*) I think things will change. This war will change how we are perceived!”(63) When I read the play for the first time, as an Iraqi who had just arrived in the UK, I definitely felt slightly agitated by the explicit sexual images and references within it. Furthermore, when I had the opportunity to read a draft of its translation in Arabic, I found it difficult to finish reading it.⁴³ On the other hand, the play carries much political and social truth that is undeniable for most if not all Iraqis, even for those who are unable to accept its openness, particularly when it is depicted with a fair amount of comedy that possibly makes it more appealing.

Although Salim is sure that this war must result in something good, as it brought Iraq to the map of the world, his other two friends, Kathum and Yasser, do not share his optimism. Kathum replies, “it was wonderful to finally do some real journalism again and feel connected, even in a small way, to the outside world. But what good is it doing me to have the sympathies of the independent?”(63) Yasser adds, ““Something good will come out of this!’ Do you know what will happen the day after the Americans pull out? We’ll be instantly forgotten.”(64) Salim and his friends’ opposing views represent Iraqis’ two main conflicting concerns nowadays inside and outside Iraq.

In *Baghdad Wedding*, Salim could be interpreted as the personification of his country. He is a mature man in his thirties, who is full of beautiful memories of his childhood and the dream land where he “could run around there like children again. Maybe climb a few palm trees” (23). He lives in exile with the country under

⁴³ The Arabic translation of the play was sent to me by Abdulrazzak himself, which had been carried out by friend of his.

dictatorship, and then returns after the cruel invasion in the hope of regaining his, (or symbolically, Iraq's), health. He suffers the pains inflicted by the insurgents and the invaders, the Americans, just like his country, Iraq, that suffered under the control of the dictatorship, Saddam's regime, the wars, and the sanctions imposed. He survives exile and his country survived the dictatorship, but in deep anger. Salim's nearest friends believe that he is unable to change his nature: "Can a leopard change its spots?"(21), just like Iraqi people who may believe that the country will never change, yet he does not take the first plane out of it, which proves that he is changed as Luma suggests (101). He is ready to prepare a wedding and stay to get better and write about the process of healing: "Salim wants to be here. He wants to work as a doctor again." (102). Abdulrazzak suggests that his play is realistic when the tale that unfolds is not going to end happily through the wedding of Salim and Luma, as Kathum explains: "Only in stories can a wedding be the end. In life, that's never the case. You can't tell how things might turn out."(104). Here, the playwright elaborates:

Throughout *Baghdad Wedding* there is 'meta' commentary on the play and literature in general. Salim's book, *Masturbating Angels*, is the equivalent of a 'play inside the play'. So we get the scene where Kathum and Yasser discuss why Salim wrote about homosexuality and not Iraq and that provides the impetuous [*sic*] to discuss the role of the author where Salim gets to make fun of the Booker Prize from a postcolonial perspective. I kept up that meta commentary with Kathum's observation about the wedding not being the end because so many 'romantic' stories end in a wedding. I also wanted to suggest a life for the story beyond 'the end'. (Interview 2016, 5-6)

Abdulrazzak intends to examine even literature itself through his characters. Moreover, the play can be seen as an outstanding theatrical representation that projects a particular period in the contemporary history of Iraq; the period itself has a history that started long before the beginning of the play and its end extends far beyond the end of this play. It is what the initial intention of Abdulrazzak's play might convey, and that is that in Iraq there is a whole life beyond what is depicted in the media that needs to be investigated before casting judgement. In one of his significant lines Salim states: "sometimes it takes an outsider to show the native what he keeps missing" (64). Elaborating on this particular statement, Abdulrazzak explains:

It was a line very much directed at the British public. Several plays had been written by English playwrights about the Iraq war which had cardboard cut out depiction of Iraqis. I'm thinking here particularly of David Hare's *Stuff Happens*. I wanted to correct that. The discussion of the violence that unfolded post invasion did not take into account the repeated history of violence by the West against Iraq. There was an amnesia about that and everyone was just lost, like a herd of pathetic cows, in the question 'why are Iraqis looting?' They had forgotten about the sanctions, they had forgotten about the Iraqi intellectuals who had to sell their

books to survive and about the Iraqis who had to live in exile. I wanted to remind them of all these things. (Interview 2016, 4-5)

Arguably, Salim's words can fairly be directed to the Iraqi audience as well, since the play carries much of the cruel truth that most Iraqis need to hear, realize, and face.

Throughout his play, Abdulrazzak consistently reminds his audience that this is a fictional play and not reality. When Marwan reflects on the discovery that Salim is gay, the latter suggests that after accepting him, Marwan and he had a physical relationship, to which Marwan angrily objects saying that they never did. Yet Salim's answer is comical and unexpected: "I know but I am dead now... I can say whatever I like"(39). When Salim recalls how he asked Ibraheem to see the Qura'n, Ibraheem rushes to bring him a bowl of water. Kathum interrupts the series of memories, explaining the use of water, and Salim agrees:

KATHUM and MARWAN are listening to SALIM's account throughout. They could be on the stage while the story unfolds or sitting amongst the audience when not needed.

KATHUM: (*Whispering.*) It's for ablution.

SALIM: Ablution! Exactly! It came to me like a thunderbolt.

KATHUM: You've been away too long.(79)

This dialogue interrupts Salim and Ibraheem while they are acting the recollections of the incident, which highlights the notion that what the characters are acting on the stage is nothing but a fictional stream of memories whose course can be interrupted and changed any minute, as real life is. As the Americans attack the house where Salim is hidden, Salim asks the soldiers by the name of Jesus and his call freezes the soldiers and gives Marwan the freedom to "*wave his hand in front of one of the frozen SOLDIERS*" (83); and talk freely. And when he finishes, he gives them the permission to continue: "You boys feel free to carry on" (83). Another similar interruption is when Salim is being tortured by the Americans using an old fashioned stereo playing very loudly the tape of Whitesnake's song 'Here I go again'. Salim tries to explain to his friends, Kathum and Marwan, the reason for this kind of torture screaming, "SALIM: I THINK TO SOFTEN ME UP. / MARWAN: WHAT/ KATHUM *presses the stop button./* KATHUM: God that's awful." (87) A final example is in Act 2: Scene 11, the description of the scene reads:

Optional: a hospital porter could walk amongst the audience, shining a light in their faces and calling out the names of the patient. Other patients could be standing in the aisle, demanding to be seen. Finally the porter finds the patient he is looking for and guides him to the stage. LUMA enters and exchanges a few introductory lines that lead up to the dialogue below. The lines could be improvised by the actors. (97)

By breaking up the illusion of the play, the effect is to keep the audience constantly alert to the fact that what they are watching, although fictional, can also be as real as their everyday actions and reactions are. These actions and reactions of the actors, interrupting, commenting and almost implying that the audience are part of the show too, are perhaps meant to make the audience feel that these are also the audience's own normal, everyday actions and reactions. It also may refer to the play's intention to keep the virtual distance between the audience and the world of the play to a minimum.

Baghdad Wedding can be seen as the kind of theatre that “represents our lives to us in ways that can persuade us to make judgments on the quality and fidelity of those representations and to make critical judgments too on the lives that are represented” (Kelleher 2009, 10). In this case, ‘us’ may refer to a Western audience, as well as an Iraqi audience: firstly it provides a new perspective for Westerners which may have highlighted affairs and interpretations of the issue of war that they have never thought of, which is evident through the attention the play received in and outside the UK; secondly, although the play has not been performed for a predominantly Iraqi audience, it was still alarming for those few Iraqis who watched it, and it may well remain so if in the near or far future, it is granted the chance to be presented for Iraqis. In the same sense, the play fulfils Brecht's claim that theatre consists of “making live representations of reported or invented happenings between human beings and doing so with a view to entertainment. At any rate that is what we shall mean when we speak of theatre, whether old or new” (cited in Kelleher 2009, 66). As Raffor chose an Iraqi traditional song to introduce her play, Abdulrazzak chose another traditional Iraqi song, entitled ‘Baghdad’ to present his play, because “[t]he song, like the play, is full of nostalgia towards that iconic city” (Interview 2016, 6). Abdulrazzak describes his play as “a monument to Iraqi suffering, it is a scream but also in places it is a laugh. One of the most remarkable things about Iraqis is that they have endured calamities that would have made other nations melt like heated butter” (Interview 2016, 6). In support of this, Sierz states that “Abdulrazzak's text is beautifully written, highly imaginative and emotionally true - it's a great mix of anger, humour and poetry, spiced with a fine perception of the workings of the human heart”. (Sierz 2007) Although Abdulrazzak understands that it might take a hundred years for his play to be presented in Iraq or in Arabic (Interview 2016, 3), given its Iraqi Westernized characters and daring language and images, *Baghdad Wedding* may come to represent a new trend in Iraqi theatre, a fresh perspective that will enrich the Iraqi stage if it has the chance to reach it. Yet with

the social, religious, formal, and conventional censorship that governs the situation in the country, the play may need some time to find its way to Iraqi audiences.

Since he left Iraq in the early 1980s, Abdulrazzak has never returned to Baghdad, which makes him almost as distant as Raffo to the country, especially since he was not born in Iraq though both his parents are Iraqis. The distance between both these playwrights and Iraq has somehow reinforced their personal, and in effect theatrical, perspective of the country, leading them to create remarkable plays that are deeply thoughtful, and striking, for Westerners as well as Iraqis. Following the critical and popular success of their plays, both Raffo and Abdulrazzak continued their efforts to raise the issue of the country and the whole Middle Eastern region through their later artistic works.

Since writing *9 Parts of Desire*, Raffo has been working on several projects covering the same issue of women's status, and the psychological impact of war on domestic life. Among her most recent works is an opera entitled *Fallujah*, for which Raffo wrote the script, with music composed by Tobin Stokes.⁴⁴ The opera depicts the story of mothers and their sons, American and Iraqis, on the two sides of the Battle of Fallujah in Iraq in 2004:

Through youth on both sides of battle, the opera follows mothers and sons reconciling with a war that changed their relationships forever and acutely exposes a daily fight for identity and belonging. The result is a heart-wrenching, mind-opening story that questions who we become when bearing witness to violence, and looks closely at the relationships which help piece us back together.
(*heatherraffo.com*)

Shelter Drill is another ten-minute piece of theatrical writing that Raffo published as part of *Book Wings Iraq* in 2014 through the International Writing Program set up by the University of Iowa. The piece has also been read and recorded and was made available on YouTube in May 2015 by the Kennedy Center. *Shelter Drill* depicts a number of women from different regions around the world, particularly Iraqi and American, and the impact of violence on them according to their societies, and how it shapes their present life and future. Another significant project that Raffo has already started is *NOURA (working title) – A Doll's House re-imagined*, which is a new

⁴⁴ The opera had its first public reading in March 2014 at The John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts in Washington, USA. It had its World Premiere at Long Beach Opera, USA, in March 2016.

adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's *The Doll's House*. Raffo adapts Ibsen's play to reveal the story of Noura, the Iraqi immigrant and her family in their new home, America, and the psychological and social impact of leaving home on this woman and her daughter, Maryam, whom she hid for more than twenty years.⁴⁵ Furthermore, with the Epic Theatre Ensemble, Raffo created *Places of Pilgrimage, a Bridge of Understanding*, which is a video and podcast series of stories written by Arab women developed through theatrical writing workshops.⁴⁶ The initiative involves the cooperation of the female writers with prominent Arab American artists, actors and composers, to read their writings aloud and then sit together to discuss the material recorded.

Abdulrazzak has also written and produced other theatrical works focusing on similar issues of political life in Iraq and the Middle East. His play *Prophet*, which was premiered in 2012 at the Gate Theatre, London, tackled the Egyptian revolution in 2011. His short play *Lost Kingdom*, was selected to be part of San Francisco's Golden Thread ReOrient 2015 Festival, and depicts an investigation of Saddam Hussein by an American officer in the CIA before his execution.⁴⁷ In collaboration with the Kevin Spacey Foundation, Abdulrazzak wrote the text of the play entitled, *Dhow Under The Sun*, which was performed by 35 young actors from different Arab countries. The play was staged in Al Sharja, UAE, in January 2015, and depicts life inside refugee camps. Additionally, his comic mono drama *Love, Bomb and Apple*, which premiered in July 2015 at the Arcola Theatre, London, UK, portrays four young men: a Palestinian actor, A Pakistani born British young novelist, British Youth, and a New Yorker all performed by Asif Khan. In this play, four very different men share their reflections about the impact of war and violence around the world with sharp and witty satire and sarcasm. Among his most recent works is a play that is still in development, entitled *Fire Blazing Brightly*, in which Abdulrazzak returns to focus on Iraq; he refers to it as a "follow up play" to *Baghdad Wedding*, in which he "explore[s] in more detail the psychological and even biological reasons behind the apathy of the world towards Iraq. *Fire* is a more complex play than *Baghdad Wedding* and takes on bigger and more difficult themes. [he] hope[s] one day it will see the light" (Interview 2016, 6).⁴⁸

⁴⁵ The play had its first reading in December 2015 at Georgetown University's Myriad Voices: A Cross Culture Performance Festival. Raffo kindly sent me the drafts of her works in their early stages and I had the precious opportunity to read them while they were under development.

⁴⁶ The work was created through the support of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. I participated in this project by writing a piece entitled, "Fireworks" which was read by the classical composer Mohammed Fairouz.

⁴⁷ The text of the play was recently published in Arab Stages (Fall 2015) edition.

⁴⁸ The first rehearsal reading of some of the play's scenes took place in March 2014 as part of the event of Al Mutanabbi Street Starts Here, an evening of poetry, drama, film and photography. The event was

Therefore, it is evident that both playwrights are in eager pursuit of revealing realities about their original heritage, despite their geographical distance from it and the difficulties they might face in doing so; and their efforts thus far have proved fruitful, earning much attention worldwide. The discussion of these two plays here reinvigorates the questions of how the Western world saw Iraq and the recent political events and their physical, social and psychological impact on the country and its people; and, just as importantly, how the Western theatre depicted the country theatrically and how much of the Western depiction resonates with the Iraqi and the Iraqi-Westernized portrayal of the events in the country. The study attempts to provide some answers to such questions through the subject matter of the following chapters.

CHAPTER FIVE

Western Political Theatre about Iraq

There has been a considerable number of plays produced as reaction to the Gulf War of 1990, as stated in the Introduction, among the earliest are Sam Shepard's *States of the Shock* (1991), Harold Pinter's *The New World Order* (1991), and Mime Troupe's *Back to Normal* (1991). This chapter shall focus on two further plays: Trevor Griffiths' *The Gulf between Us* (1992) and Judith Thompson's *Palace of the End* (2010), chosen because they clearly reference Arabic and Iraqi characters as main voices in their plots in order to explore both sides of the story. According to Spencer, political theatre "can only be meaningfully discussed and understood within the sociohistorical context that provides the targets of protest and makes the politics legible." (Spencer 2012, 1) Since these two plays provide the sociohistorical context that adds significance to their meaning, their inclusion here will enrich the current study.

The main purpose of tackling the Western point of view of Iraq and its crises is to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issue of the war in Iraq and the theatrical representation of this issue, the country and its people in the West. Therefore, one of the reasons for choosing these plays is the nationality of the playwrights, British and Canadian respectively. Furthermore, Chapter Six focuses on plays written by American male playwrights, as it is necessary to examine the reactions to the wars and political backgrounds of the other nations that have a close relationship to the events. Being written by a female playwright, *The Palace of the End* may add further diversity to the samples of the perspectives studied here. This also adds to the understanding of the artistic and humane reaction towards events in Iraq, as well as the Iraqi theatre practitioners' reactions which in the end will provide a wider, better, and international artistic and theatrical communication. Finally the timing of the action of these two plays (the first is in 1992 and the second is in 2007) could add to our understanding of the changes that have occurred during these fifteen years in the political, social, as well as the theatrical responses to the events.

Trevor Griffiths' *The Gulf between Us*: A Bridge between Us

In the introduction of his play, Trevor Griffiths (1935-) explains that during the 1990s while he was watching the rising tension in the Middle East closely, he was already working on a play which was intended to feature the building of a wall on the stage. As a result of the outbreak of the Gulf War in 1991, the play changed into one entitled *The Gulf between Us*, which was premiered in January 1992 at the West

Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds. Set around “*a large Bedouin tent*” (Griffiths 1992, 1) in a desert in the Middle East, the play features four main characters: two Western individuals, Rafael Finbar O’Toole, the gilder, the narrator and “the timeless fool” (Griffiths, Interview 2015) of the play; and Billy Ryder, a builder. There are also two Arabic characters, Ismael, a teenager who is supervising the work of rebuilding a holy shrine, and Dr. Aziz, a female doctor who is supposed to help the women who are looking for their children near the shrine, which is also a crèche, as well as some kind of military base. In addition to these characters, there are other minor ones: another builder named Chatterjee, a number of workers identified as Ancients, as well as militia men, and weeping women.

The main events of the play are woven around the rebuilding of the holy shrine that is due to be finished with the help of the Western builder, Ryder, and the gilder O’Toole, under the supervision of the teenager, Ismael, the minder. O’Toole summarises the events of the play as follows: “Wherein it came to pass, on the twenty-first was told the Tale of the Builder, the Gilder, the Minder and the Gulf between them” (3). The play unfolds in two acts in which explosions are heard in the background, and Ismael repeatedly receives military orders from his Major who never appears on the stage, yet, apparently, is of such great importance that Ismael does his best to satisfy him. Each character in *The Gulf between Us* is pursuing a personal quest. Ismael is the youngest among them, yet he enjoys the power of the controller; of course, he is himself controlled by his Major. Billy Ryder’s main aim, once he has the money he came to the desert to collect, is to take back his documents, passport and visa, from Ismael and leave the country. However, Ismael is unwilling to give him these documents until the building is finished. O’Toole’s aim is to free Chatterjee from prison, which he does by making him seem to be the only one who can help Ismael to accomplish his task of finishing the job of rebuilding the shrine. Finally, there is Dr. Aziz, whose main aim is to comfort the distressed women and search for the children who disappeared after one of the raids. At first she is sure that the children had been moved away from the shrine/crèche, only to discover later that they were not evacuated as she thought, but had all been killed there.

In the introduction, Griffiths also stresses that the “country in which the play is set is not named as Iraq. The war is not necessarily that war. It’s an un-named country and an un-named city in an un-named war. The references suggest Iraq and the West, but I hope the play generates thoughts and feelings about more than just the most recent

conflict” (vii). Furthermore, in a recent interview with Griffiths in June 2015, he gave me a warning:

Don't over-determine Iraq. Don't write Iraq irreversibly and irrevocably into the reading that you give the play, because I don't know enough about Iraq. I am looking at a culture; I'm trying to talk across a gap between this culture that I've been raised in and the one that you've been raised in. (Interview 2015)

Accordingly, in Christine Evans's terms mentioned in the Introduction of the thesis, Griffiths's intention is to create an abstract idea of a country out of the actual events that led him to create *The Gulf between Us*. He confirms that “no special understanding of Iraq [is needed] in order to get the meaning of this play.” (Griffiths, Interview 2015) However, and because this study's main focus is Iraq and the war in Iraq, the play carries more than one inevitable sign that suggests Iraq is the country he depicts, especially for an Iraqi audience. In particular, the action is mostly drawn from actual and symbolic events that occurred in Iraq between the Gulf War and the latest war of 2003. The holy places that were hit by military forces are clear references to the holy shrines in the middle of Iraq that were targeted by governmental forces of the Iraqi regime during the uprising in late 1991. The characters, such as Ismael who may represent the members of the violent militias in contemporary Iraq, and the doctor who represents the active civilians who try to offer help and guidance, are parties who are deceived into thinking that they are in control while they are actually controlled. And they may also refer to the Iraqi military forces that fought and killed in the wars in Iraq since 1980s and were almost destroyed in the process; they are just like Ismael, who is deceived into following orders without questioning, such as the instance when he was ordered to kill the bus driver who turned out to be innocent, at the beginning of the play (3), and, at the end of the play, even Ismael himself is killed (54) The foreigners, who ostensibly came to the country to help, are actually there in their own interests, but at the same time, they witness the pain that surrounds them. Finally there are the innocent children who were killed when they were used as human shields to protect a holy peaceful shrine which was targeted because it was used by the military forces. This clearly refers to several similar events (with similar consequences) that actually happened in Iraq in the 1990s, the most well-known of which is the incident of the Al Amiriya shelter on 13th February 1991.⁴⁹ The conclusion is that although Griffiths

⁴⁹ The Amiriya shelter was a civilian shelter in the middle of Baghdad, used by hundreds of Iraqis during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s. The shelter was destroyed by the U.S. Air Force with two laser-guided smart bombs, killing more than 400 civilians mostly women and children. The American forces presented evidence that the shelter was used by some Iraqi military intelligence as well, which was to justify the attack that killed hundreds of innocents.

wishes to widen the interpretations of the play, the Iraqi reference is significant for an understanding of its context. However, it is not limited to Iraq because in essence, it highlights the gap between two different nations and cultures, as he makes clear from the title.

O'Toole plays a vital role in *The Gulf between Us*. He is the main and first character who “*appears foreground in tight golden spot: ‘The Gilder’s Lamp’*. He’s large, pushing fifty, with long black hair and a full beard, dressed in the grubby grab of an Arab worker. He carries a large battered grip, an instrument case slung from a shoulder” (1). Although he is portrayed as a Westerner, partly Irish, O'Toole is mostly the narrator, who opens the play with Islamic prayers: “In the name of Allah/ The Compassionate/ The Merciful/ Blessings and peace eternal/ Upon the Prince of Apostles,/ The Master Muhammad” (1). He is well described as the Gukha in the play by Griffiths himself and by other critics.⁵⁰ Griffiths states:

At the heart of the piece I put a character who is both in the present tense of the play, trapped in the war zone, yet at the same time is above the action - a kind of transhistorical narrator. ... He’s called the Gukha in Arabic. He is doomed to live forever and keeps coming back. He’s like the flea under the king’s nightshirt. He’s anarchic, anti-authoritarian, devious, cynical and compassionate.... And he’s the storyteller – he shows you where to look for the next part of the story. (Cited in Garner 1996, 385)

Jeanne Colleran explains that O'Toole “is a fabular creature, [...] Fallible in his specific memories, O'Toole manifests some instinct for the good; as a transnational and aligned figure, he hovers over the action and, chorus-like, points out instances of heroism and occasions for pity.” (Colleran 2012, 62) Jonathan Bignell’s article “Trevor Griffiths’s Political Theatre from ‘*Oi for England*’ to ‘*The Gulf between Us*’” also describes O'Toole as a character “who doubles as The Gukha, a narrating storytelling figure from Arabic literature who lived forever, and points out similarities between the Gulf War and the Crusades” (Bignell 1994, 52). In the same article, Bignell argues that this “character became potentially a vehicle for a meta-narrative about the naturalistic action, where the action could be contextualized and historicized in an alien, non-naturalistic mode.”(Bignell 1994, 52) Hence, O'Toole is almost a supernatural character who does not belong to the natural world of the play and at the same time is in the heart of it. He is the figure who comments on the action of the play and beyond its narrative, he is a combination of what is familiar and unfamiliar, since with his non-naturalistic mode of

⁵⁰ Gukha or Juha, as he is known by all Arabs and particularly Iraqis, is a historical well known character from the 9th up to 11th century. He is also known by other titles in other Middle Eastern nations. The character is known for his wit, sarcasm and comic situations with rulers and high class people.

timelessness and untouchability, he plays the role of the chorus, highlighting significant moments in the play, in addition to the fact that he is one of the main characters in the progress of the action of the play. Griffiths stresses that

though the Brits are at the heart of this play, they're not at the moral centre of it. At the moral centre are Arabs who are experiencing this crushing, horrific, punitive, exemplary war which is being handed down to them by the Western Alliance for reasons and values that really don't stand up to even the most cursory scrutiny. (vii)

Hence, with his appearance and attitude, O'Toole's character concurs with both main aspects of Griffiths' intention in his play. He is the Britain who represents the 'Western Alliance' and he is 'at the heart of the play' by being the mythological fool that is drawn from the Arabic history.

For the Western audience, then, O'Toole can be seen as the character who bridges the 'gulf' between the two different nations, the Western (as being the familiar) and the Middle Eastern (as being the unfamiliar), depicted in the play. This role can be successfully reversed if the audience who watches the play was to be an Arabic audience when the Western becomes the unfamiliar and the Middle Eastern becomes the familiar. He plays two roles; on the one hand, he is the Westerner who has his own aim (releasing Chatterjee from prison), even if it means crushing Ryder's hand (26), to prove that they are in need of another builder: "I like to leave places when I'm ready. As it happens, I've been waiting for someone, a friend. He's been detained" (17). He is the Westerner who is not deceived by the political policy that led to war: "Look at it (*the site, the world*). Look at it, will you. The new world order. We're the joke."(14) But at the same time, he is the 'other' character, portrayed with a dulcimer, who is detached from the action of the play as the narrator who provides an accurate description that is needed to reveal the complete picture of this "new world order":

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 fortunate citizenry huddled within and so bring the Caliph to his knees. Already, between one moon and another, their great engines of war, their mangonels and petrarier, have turned the days into nightmare, poisoning wells, destroying riverbanks, killing crops and livestock, leaving infants to suckle in vain on shrivelled breasts. Smoke covers the noonday sun like a death-shroud; deadly vapours, cries of the bereft and the dying, choke the narrow streets; sweet order collapses into murky chaos. And down in the Caliph's courtyard, so recently despoiled by enemy fire, our heroes scheme and plot their survival in tiny war-play of their own. The builder smells advantage on the poisoned air; the youthful Minder searches for manhood on sticky paths of duty; and Finbar, our Wandering Gilder, his plans deep laid and all but ready to spring, struggles to recall the details of his tale from the wearying darkness that engulfs him. A phrase bubbles in his brain-pan: 'One clean heart, one clean heart, 'What? Who? Ha. Of course. He had quite forgotten. The Good Doctor. (15)

O'Toole's statement here is one of the earliest and probably the most significant he addresses to the audience. His words are striking as he is able to reveal the reality of what is happening around the contemporary world, the new order. Using the metaphor of the Crusaders' attack on the Islamic Caliph, he depicts a precise image of the contemporary conflict. He even identifies the actual interests of the characters of the play accurately as 'the builder who smells advantage', 'the youthful Minder who searches for manhood' and 'the Gilder who struggles to recall the details of his tale'. Accordingly, his is the voice that seems likely to echo in the audience's minds. As the narrator he cleverly maintains the interest of the audience in relation to the forthcoming events of the play at the beginning of Act Two by pointing out that what is portrayed here is real and has consequences that are worth observing and following:

The dance was real. It happened. Yet it was not written; rather the dance wrote itself [...] But the music died; and the day and the war – the Grand and the Petty – resumed their customary clamour. Voices, questions, ifs and buts, echoed round his brain-pan: had he the story aright, would the young Minder risk all for all and have the Apprentice brought, to give his plans for rescue the chance to prosper? Would the battered Builder fall in line or splinter underfoot like brushwood, most of all, would the Gilder's own failing memory and crumbling eyesight last he journey? (32)

Since he opens the play with prayers, O'Toole also concludes it, praying and courageously clarifying:

In a building the military had begun using, with some sort of command 'n' control gear in the roof, a known target of enemy guided-fire since Day One. What a pickle. I pass over the part taken by the enemy, Lord, I know you're a sceptic on the matter. Save to ask whatever happened to proportion, doesn't this sort of thing stretch the credulity a touch, even yours, they could see it was being used for military purposes but managed to overlook – or at least overcome – the fact that it was in regular use as a nursery, oh come on, Lord, these men know exactly what they're doing, the rest is teasing. (57)

He criticises the act of raiding a shelter used by civilians, even though it was also used for military purposes. The question that can be raised here is: who committed the ugliest crime: the enemy forces that 'overlook or overcome' the fact that there are civilians inside this location, or the authorities who realize from Day One in this war that the location is a clear target? Here, O'Toole can be seen as "a transnational and unaligned figure" (Colleran 2003, 626). Therefore, he may represent the humane side of the world, that takes care of personal interests and works towards them, and at the same time realizes the amount of corruption that controls this world. He is a realistic character, in the sense that he is aware of the facts that surround him, yet is unable to change them.

The second Western character in *The Gulf between Us* is Billy Ryder, the builder. He is presented as someone who came to the Middle East for a specific purpose, earning money, and once that is done, he cannot wait to leave. This is made very clear when he discusses whether there is any possibility that O'Toole can help him out in return for a payment if necessary:

Who gives a shit? Trouble for these buggers is leverage for me, man, that's all I care about. I've shelled out a small fortune down at that bleedin' office 'n' I'm getting nowhere, [...] You put your back into this one for me and I'll see your right and that's a promise. Now just tell me what you can do and I'll work round you, OK... I mean you do have a trade, just... I mean what are you?(14)

Ryder can be seen as the opposite to O'Toole: “[i]f O'Toole's origins are unknowable, Ryder's are completely exposed.” (Colleran 2012, 63) He is a brick-layer who has managed to get himself an Armani suit and a Rolex. Further, Colleran suggests that even his name, Ryder is another indication that he represents, “the parasitic economy of which he is part.”(63) She further clarifies that his being “inarticulate and uneducated” makes him “a bred-in-the-bone neo-capitalist with colonial prejudice” (63). In the shadow of the New World Order that was claimed to be the aim behind these current wars in the Middle East, “Ryder is the trickle-down version of [this idea]: He believes enthusiastically in profit and corporate efficiency, ignoring his own labor roots and his fellowship with other laborers” (Colleran 2012, 63). Griffiths portrays Ryder in the play as the one who works towards, “*establishing rhythm and work pattern*” (23). Ryder stresses: “This is my job, my deal, I'm fast, man, never mind the quality, check the speed”(19). Though a brick-layer, he thinks like a typical capitalist, looking for opportunities to make more profit or even a dream of a profit:

An' like everything went quite, like that... An' I had this brilliant thought: what if there's no war? Four weeks on and this place'll be doin' business as usual. And he who dares, wins. Next day I'm down the ministry doin' deals, talk about a field of clover, there's queues formin' around me, The Brit who refused to Quit. I've contracts for *millions* [sic] in that bag there...”(23)

Colleran's depiction of Ryder as representing economic parasites is illustrated in these words which show him to be another realistic character of his time.

At the end of the play, Ryder remains unchanged, as he looks after his own interest, and pays no attention to whatever happens around him: “I've got the ticket to ride and I'm OK.”(55) “Ryder's political obtuseness interferes with his mercenary economic desires. His bald self-interest, greed, and jingoism cause him to underestimate his Arab employers, and he fails to pull off his great swindle and great escape” (Colleran 2012,

63). This self-centred quality in Ryder is manifested in his last interaction with Chatterjee, the Pakistani builder:

CHATTERJEE: (*Soft*) Billy.

RYDER: Can't hear you, sorry.

CHATTERJEE: Just wait by the corner, I'll take you down to the river, Persian steamer, gotta tidy up, I'll see you right. OK...?

RYDER: (*Turning*) Your oppo, what's-his-name, he could've had us all dead.

CHATTERJEE: some of us are, Billy.

(*He swings his lamp across the dead ISMAEL. RYDER peers at it across the site.*)

RYDER: I mena us. I mean me.

(*He leaves. CHATTERJEE watches. Resumes.*)

CHATTERJEE: (*Lamp to face, master again*)... who, changing all things, remain himself unchanged; who alone is the paragon of all perfection...(55)

Chatterjee's final statement can be seen to imply that Ryder is as a Westerner who, through the pursuit of his own interest, remains unchanged, while he is the main reason for the changes that happened around this world. On a more general level, it is possible to read it as Griffiths's criticism of Western contemporary policy in the Middle East.

In her article, "Disposable Wars, Disappearing Acts: Theatrical responses to the 1991 Gulf War" Colleran observes that "Ryder's interactions with O'Toole and Chatterjee, whom he calls the 'Paddy 'n' a Paki', and the animosity that grows between the three men during the course of the play draws attention to the fissures in British society at home and in Northern Ireland." (Colleran 2003, 628) Therefore, in Ryder's character Griffiths achieves one of the vital aims of the political theatre since he forms a political and social critical view of Griffiths' own society within the context of a foreign landscape. In this sense, he represents the theatricalized political commentary on reality, which is an important objective behind the depiction of reality in political theatre. Ryder may represent Griffiths' image of the conflict of interests among the Western capitalists inside the rich foreign space. Unlike the shadowy character of O'Toole, who is hovering between the West and the Middle East, Ryder is obviously a Westerner who is placed in a foreign country with a specific aim, which he fails to achieve because of his arrogance and blindness toward what is happening around him.

The most significant Arabic character in *The Gulf between Us* is Ismael, who is a young man and yet portrayed as most powerful among the characters of the play. He is a teenager whose job is to ensure that the work of rebuilding the shrine is going smoothly. He receives his orders from a higher but invisible party, the Major. Although the play conveys Ismael as an authoritative figure, Griffiths takes every opportunity to stress that he is like a teenager: "*late teens, in shirt, slacks and good shoes, stands motionless between mid-and foreground, a kid's football balanced on his raised right foot*" (2). When giving orders to other workers, Griffiths describes him as "*hold[ing] up his arms,*

like a footballer demanding acclaim from the terraces” (2). His first words reveal that Ismael is receiving his orders from a higher authority that he is keen to please: “Yes, sir, it's done, Major, completely screened, the area cordoned off, I'm still waiting for the labour” (3). He follows orders even if it means killing an innocent bus driver, simply because these are the orders. He enjoys playing the role of the controller with the other characters, particularly foreigners:

ISMAEL. OK, Ryder Billy, I show you the job...
 RYDER: Excuse me, you don't seem to be hearing me, hey...
 ISMAEL: (*Hard*) Hey!
 RYDER: (*Fast*) What?
 ISMAEL: Don't hey to me. I do heying.
 RYDER: That's fine.
 ISMAEL: You bet. (5)

Conversely, this young man, who does not accept disrespectfulness or taking orders from foreigners, is fond of football, Manchester United in particular, to the extent that he is ready to pay more money to get the club's T-shirt from O'Toole. He knows all about Sir Matt Busby and Paul Gascoigne, better known as Gazza. This amount of admiration for football team impresses O'Toole who confuses Gazza with Gaza, as he thinks that Arabs would normally talk about the latter rather than the former:

ISMAEL: Your team. Man United.
 O'TOOLE: Right.
 ISMAEL: Good team, eh?
 O'TOOLE: the best.
 ISMAEL: Red devils.
 O'TOOLE: Right.
 ISMAEL: Sir Matt Bussaby.
 O'TOOLE: Yeah.
 ISMAEL: You skinhead, hunh?
 (*O'TOOLE smiles.*)
 You know Gazza?
 O'TOOLE: Gaza? Never bin, no.
 ISMAEL: Gazza, Gazza?
 O'TOOLE: Gazza, right. Sure.
 ISMAEL: Great, hunh?
 [...]
 ISMAEL: Ten dinar. I give you.
 O'TOOLE: Uhunh.
 ISMAEL: Fifteen.
 O'TOOLE: You like it?
 ISMAEL: 'S OK.
 O'TOOLE: Cost me two hundred.
 (*ISMAEL thinks.*)
 ISMAEL: OK, twenty(11)

While talking to his girlfriend on the phone in Arabic “*Ismael's chat is light, bantering, shy, hesitant, vulnerable: for these minutes, the war has no presence for*

either of them. He has asked her to marry him; he wants her answer.”(23) These minutes of romantic peace are brief because he loses the connection after being interrupted by the work that is happening all around him and he “*smacks the phone with his fist, pissed off*” (25). When he realizes that Ismael is involved in, or at least is aware of, why the children have disappeared, O’Toole offers to help him, predicting that Ismael might have a problem here. Yet, Ismael denies it:

O'TOOLE: Friend, if you have a problem...

ISMAEL: (*Standing*) Problem? I have no problem.

O'TOOLE: A man without problems has a problem.

ISMAEL: (*Starting off; the howling thickening*) I follow orders, no problem. (13)

Ismael eagerly defends his position, asserting that he had served his country by following orders: “A man serves his country and his people. When a man treads into choices, he calls his Major...” (30). Being convinced of this, Ismael refuses to take O’Toole’s advice, but his attitude puts him in conflict with Dr. Aziz, the Arabic doctor, who comes to help the distressed women:

ISMAEL: (*In Arabic*) I have orders...

DR. AZIZ: (*In Arabic*) What is the problem? I will take a couple of minutes, and I can also send the women home happy before the bombs start falling...

ISMAEL: (*In Arabic*) The Major's orders are explicit... (37)

His insistence is almost obsessive, especially when he realizes the dangerous consequences of following these orders; however, he believes that it gives him status among the others. However, Dr. Aziz points out that Ismael is behaving like a child trying to play a role that is bigger than him: “He’s checking with his superior. He is a boy. He should be playing football, learning skill...” (39). His determination is to play the role of the authority:

ISMAEL: OK, I look at. (*To DR. AZIZ; in Arabic*) You go, Dr. Fadia, it's best for all...

[...]

ISMAEL: (*Arabic*) The only thing these women have to fear is their own frenzy driving them to interfere with our work here, for then they will surely get hurt, I cannot disobey my orders... (40)

According to Colleran, Ismael is “the armed teenage soccer player [. He] is a figure familiar from South Africa to Belfast of youth conscripted into movement they do not understand” (Colleran 2003, 626). Griffiths depicts an Arabic character who is quite contemporary and real, especially for an Iraqi mind; a young man who thinks that he is important, simply by following and giving orders, and who does not understand the

disastrous outcomes that following them may bring.⁵¹ O'Toole reveals that Ismael's ignorance led to the final result of the death of the children who were in the shrine when it was raided:

You didn't even know the babes 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, he fed you the cover story, you couldn't swallow it fast enough, you took his lies for truth and now you're to die for it, you poor ignorant bastard. (53)

Confronted with this, Ismael replies, "I had my orders" (50). He dies in an explosion, but is proud of himself and puts all the blame on the new Mongols who have come to destroy his country again: "I not speak your words no more. (*His fingers tear at his tongue*) YOU DON'T JUDGE ISMAEL. NOT YOU PEOPLE. NOT YOU PEOPLE [...] (*In Arabic*) Ismael, son of Akram, brother of Said, spits in your face, you Mongols, you hear me? You hear me? Mongols"(54). Ismael's constant use of Arabic when talking to his girlfriend, to Dr. Aziz, and at the end of his life could be interpreted as a persistent reminder of the difference between him and the Western characters in the world of the play. He belongs to a culture that can be vague and even difficult to understand for them. In the play, Griffiths maintains a balance by providing viewpoints of events of both sides of the conflict. Whilst Ryder is the Westerner who has come to the desert to make a profit, Ismael is the native, who managed to find a status – though false – in the middle of the rubble. Both sides are placed in the same location but still they lack communication since the play is mainly "talking about the separation between Arab culture and Western culture" as Griffiths emphasises (Griffiths, Interview 2015).

The second Arabic character in the play is Dr. Aziz, a female Christian doctor, who tries to find the truth about what happened to the children in the shrine. As with all the characters she is greeted first by O'Toole: "*He looks up suddenly. A woman appears, front of stage, on the other side of the red-taped picket: Arab dress and headgear, strong leather briefcase*"(16). Although she is a woman in a site that is both holy and military, she is portrayed as having an element of power that is almost spiritual. Her first words are lines from Shelley's poem:

My name is Ozymandias, King of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away. (16)

⁵¹ Most of the members of armed groups and militias that are active now in the Middle East, and particularly in Iraq, depend largely on teenagers who seek attention by carrying arms and giving orders, and seeming to be in control, which leads to the creation of the terrorist groups that rely heavily on recruiting such ignorant teenagers to destroy the area and inevitably the world.

These ironic lines describe the state of the battered shrine around them. Dr. Aziz is similar to O'Toole in that she also plays a role that reveals the two sides of war. Although a Westerner, O'Toole hovers somewhere between the West and the Middle East with his unusual Arabic clothes and characteristics; and although she is portrayed as an Arabic woman, Dr. Aziz is a Christian in an Islamic shrine, helping Muslim civilians, women and children. Griffiths intended to draw Aziz with this ambiguity, "I juggled with other questions to do with Aziz, such as who exactly she worked for and what level of authority she had. She has an office somewhere. She is in charge of these standards of the nursery and child care" (Griffiths Interview 2015). Stanton B. Garner argues that Dr. Aziz "appears surreptitiously to prove or disprove the government's assurances that the shrine was not inhabited by children" (Garner 1999, 235). She questions the legitimacy of targeting civilian dwellings. Gradually, she realizes that there is something suspicious about the case and she demands to know the truth, saying that it is difficult to distinguish falsehood, "if liars looked like liars, who would believe them?" (41) She is furious with herself because she unwittingly lied to the distressed mothers and decides to look for herself: "Not because I believe I sent the mothers with a lie. But because I cannot know the truth unless I see for myself. These are small things I speak of gentlemen. Breach of trust. The responsibilities of care. Mothers and children" (45).

According to Colleran,

Dr. Aziz [is] the only woman character and the moral center of the play... [S]he will offer the most direct and damning indictment of the Western Alliance; she is able to voice such a clear and unequivocal judgment because she is the only character in the play not compromised by self-interest. (Colleran 2003, 626)

When Dr. Aziz reveals the names and cases of the children who died in the Shrine/crèche (48-49), she starts to question the truth behind the political claims and purposes "where a mere 20 per cent on [the other] side of this tiny planet take and hold and consume a full 80 per cent of its bounty." (49). She refuses to accept any justifications for the death of these innocents:

No no no, please, this will not be justified by invoking the evil of my rulers or the unavoidability of your 'collateral damage', gentlemen. This world is full of evil rule, look at those bribed or bullied to give you houseroom here, look at those you would restore to their thrones, and tell me how we are worse. As for the unavoidable, how stupid, how very stupid you must think us, to imagine a decent human being believing you for one second, when you have told us and you have shown us your ability to tell the time on a child's wristwatch from one hundred miles, the side a woman parts her hair, the stubble on a man's face. We have a holy place, a place of worship, a place your cameras tell every day is filled with children.

And you send a missile, not a wayward falling bomb, to burn it up... In the name of God? In the name of humankind? In the name of ... (49)

Here, Griffiths draws a character who defies any political attempts to fool the international public with ideas such as the innocents' death being unavoidable or part of the collateral damage. Furthermore, he portrays her as unusual: a Christian, Arabic female doctor who is resolute. Through her, Griffiths states a prophecy that proves to be true, especially for Iraqis: "You destroy your past with these acts. Your future too. Wars only have beginnings. No ends" (49). In the characters of Aziz and O'Toole, it is possible to say that Griffiths might have used them to present the thoughts and criticisms regarding the atrocities of war occurring around the world, from both sides of the war. That is to say that by creating these characters who come from the two sides of struggle, Griffiths tried to bridge the gulf between the two worlds of the play, placing a humane soul in the middle of the conflict to express the consequences that politicians overlook and deny.

Griffiths decided to change his mind about the original play he was working on to write *The Gulf between Us*, perhaps because he felt that these two sides in this unnamed war are separated and different, and by juxtaposing them, he emphasised the connection between them and their common humanity. Significantly, Griffiths points out that during the 1992 performance of the play the two acts of the play were not separated by an interval. He states:

I didn't want the first act to end as it ended. I wanted to go through pretty well to the next scene without breaking. And so we played a whole silent scene, silent of dialogue that is, in which they break for tea. They wash, they pray, they drink tea, and then the four of them play music and dance for about twenty minutes. The audience were free to go to the bar during the Interval or to stay in the auditorium, and very many of them chose to stay. (Interview 2015)

It is clear that he did not want the audience to feel a distance between their reality and the imaginative world of the play. He wanted them to be, as far as possible, part of the world of the play. He stresses that watching the actors on the stage while taking a break "utterly altered the way people felt about it" (Griffiths Interview 2015). His intention, as stated earlier, was to bridge the gap between the two cultures and nations depicted in his play; yet with this gesture, it is possible to say that Griffiths' trial went beyond that to attempt to bridge the gap between the two worlds of the play, the fictional and the real.

For Bignell, *The Gulf between Us*

represent[s] cultural otherness. The play was set in an unnamed Arab country (probably Iraq), so that its British characters were destabilized and defamiliarized in the course of action by their contact with Arab characters – who were initially

'other', but progressively presented as at least equally available to audience identification. (Bignell 1994, 51)

Griffiths maintains this 'otherness' by occasionally reminding his audience that there are strangers here, with his setting and Ismael's and Dr. Aziz's constant use of the Arabic language. The presence of the Ancients is another element of 'otherness' as they "move soundlessly over the stage as a kind of a mute chorus." (Garner 1996, 384) Their presence can be seen as a constant reminder to the audience that there are others who are around, albeit unheard. Griffiths states in the introduction to the play, and during the recent interview with him, that he has an ambition that the play be produced in the region and to have an Arabic audience, so that this theme of otherness could be felt by both nations, as the Arabic audience would view the Western characters of the play as different, that is, the 'other'. In some ways Griffiths achieved this by insisting on casting the play with some Arabic actors, mainly Palestinians, as "the play demands politicized people, people who would, by dint of their own experience, understand the issue that this play deals with" (vii). This reinforces the political aspect of the play, and encourages the audience to react and respond to the ideas playing out on the stage.

Judith Thompson's *Palace of the End*: Three Tragedies around Iraq

Thompson's *Palace of the End* had its premiere in Los Angeles in 2007, followed by a production in Canada in January 2008. The play was produced again at the Peter Jay Sharp Theatre in New York in June 2008 and continued for several weeks. According to Michael Billington's review of the production of the play in 2010 at the Arcola in London, the play proved to be "exceptional" (Billington 2010). It is a trilogy of three unrelated characters who come from very different nations, yet are connected by one of them, Iraq. It is important to point out that the phrase, 'Palace of the End', has a clear resonance in the Iraqi mind since it refers to a well-known building in the middle of Baghdad that was the house where the Iraqi royal family lived in the 1950s. It was demolished and rebuilt in the 1970s as the headquarters of the General Security Office in Iraq. At first, the phrase referred to the idea that it was the palace where the monarchy rule ended in Iraq, then the phrase switched, in the Iraqi consciousness, to

refer to the building where the lives of those who entered it as suspects, ended.⁵² In her play, Judith Thompson (1954-) brings three very different characters to the stage in order to state their testimony about their experiences in Iraq. They are an American soldier, a British scientist, and an Iraqi communist. Two women and a man, two dead personas and a living soldier, these are the components of the *Palace of the End*, and each has a different tale to tell. With no communication among the three characters, these ordinary people provide three very different, and at the same time similar monologues, a matter that makes them quite unique.

In an interview with Iris Turcott, a dramaturge, in November 2007, which was published within a Study Guide prepared by The Canadian Stage Company, Thompson explains how she came to write the *Palace of the End*:

I was invited by Ross Manson to participate in a political cabaret (The Wrecking Ball), where I had to write a play based on current headlines. "The Pyramids", which was really the first draft of The Palace of the End was the result. I became interested in the people in the play. David Kelly fascinated me, and I after this project I [sic] did so much research on him, almost obsessive, that I had over 124 pages of my own notes. Lynndie England prompted me to look again at our culture's passion at [sic] and hatred of unattractive women. This one was trained to be a torturer, taught by "the best of the boys" in the army, just as she was befriended by similar types in formative years. Narjas Al Saffarh's story is well known to Iraqis, but not available in English. My neighbour, who is Iraqi, translated parts of it for me and when I asked if I could credit her help in the manuscript, she rejected my using her name as she did not want to be associated with any story so horrible. (Instead, I have donated proceeds from the sale of the play to a charity for the children of Iraq.) (Study Guide 11)

Thompson's play can be considered to be a documentary since it only deals with actual characters and their stories. Thompson states that: "[e]ach monologue is inspired by news stories or research on real events but the persona or character in each monologue has been created by me, and everything other than the real events springs from my imagination." (Cited in Jones 2008) Therefore, the play, "is both a documentary play and a philosophical play: no matter how faithful a playwright is to the real person the character is based on, as soon as the character is written it is fiction inspired by a real

⁵² For most Iraqis, the building is a horrific site. The name was originally given to the Palace of Al Rihab, which was the residence of the royal family. On 14th of July 1958, a coup took place, turning the monarchy rule in Iraq into a republican government by a military revolution led by a number of officers. That day, the king, Faisal II (aged 23), and the royal family members, including women, children and even some servants were killed brutally, except for a very few who managed to escape. After the second revolution, led by the Ba'th party in 1963, the palace became a jail for those who were considered traitors to the revolution of the party. Many Iraqis were tortured and killed there. Later, when it became the General Security Department of the Ba'th's regime, it was well-known to all Iraqis, and even the world, that it was the building where horrific torture methods were used on Iraqis who were considered against the regime until its last days in 2003, when the place was raided by the American forces and destroyed totally. After that, all the official documents, describing the horrors of this site were revealed publically, to confirm what all Iraqis had already known about the place.

person.” (Thompson, Interview 2015) Thompson retains the fictional nature of her play since she puts words in the mouths of her characters, especially those who are already dead, David Kelly and Narjas Al Saffarh. Most of the monologue spoken by the soldier, the first character to appear in the play seems to coincide with whatever the actual soldier, Lynndie England, said or referred to, in the media.

Thompson introduces her first character as, “*A young American, female SOLDIER about twenty three years old and nine months pregnant, with a West Virginian accent*” (7). The audience easily identifies her as Lynndie England, who was one of the convicted American soldiers involved in the abuse of Abu Ghraib’s prisoners in Iraq in 2004, especially when she cannot resist the temptation of googling herself:

*(She looks at the computer longingly, makes sounds of an inner struggle) Ohhhh...
Don't do it don't do it do not google yourself girl...
She googles herself, mouthing the spelling of her name as she does, goes to first site. (8)*

She discovers that there are six hundred thousand results with her name and concludes that that means she is famous, “WORLD famous”(8). Yet when she reads the comments on these sites, she remembers the kind of fame she gained. She is called “Slut, bitch, white trash a whore, an excuse for a human being, worst of all feminist.” (8-9) to which she replies proudly: “Pink cotton candy cowards afraid of being at war. *Afraid* of your own SHADOW”(9) According to Colleran, this depicts, “a hideous slice of American culture, heightened and actualized through cyber violence.”(Colleran 2012, 186-7) Such harsh and abusive comments make her reflect on what she has done in the Abu Ghraib prison, and leads to her long monologue in which she is caught between pride at her bravery in serving her country in the best way she knew, which for her is a fair justification for all the sexual abuse she committed there, and her sense of guilt for what she has done there that she tries to resist to admit. This may make the character, Soldier, resonates with Ismael in *The Gulf between Us*, discussed earlier, as both of them were merely following orders when killing or torturing others and are shown to be proud to do so.

Soldier’s reflections reveal how delusional and confused she is. On one occasion she sees herself as a heroic figure: “I am like Joan of Arc- being burned at the stake!” (12) Then she feels proud at being a martyr: “See I guess I'm a bit of a martyr. Like them pretty eye Palestinian girls who wear the scarf and walk into a supermarket and blow theyselves up? THAS what done [*sic*]; I done blew myself up” (18). As she is required to give her statement in court she decides that she will not go to prison and instead she will escape to Quebec. Therefore she is “going to exile like Napoleon, and

like Napoleon, [she] will return one day, an American hero”(12). She shows no regrets about any of the sexual abuses she and her fellow soldiers inflicted on those detainees, because for her it was “SERIOUS- INTELLIGENCE- WORK”(15). She admits that the ‘HUMAN PYRAMID NIKKED CAPITIVE MEN’ (15) was completely her own idea. She asks reasonably: “Tell me how much you care about them Iraqi men when they are sawing the head off a one of your boys. Tell me fucking that” (9). This concurs with what the actual soldier, England, said in an interview with the BBC in 2009: “compared to what they would do to us, that's like nothing [...] because if you think of it, I mean what, they, at the same time, they were cutting our guys' heads off, burning bodies, and dragging them through the streets of Baghdad and hanging them off bridges. And this happens at colleges or whatever, here in the US all the time” (YouTube 2009). Referring to Iraqi detainees, Soldier explains that, these are not men, they are terrorists” (15). She continues “as far as I am concerned I was doing what had to be done, to get to the intelligence and that is according to their culture, me laughing at their willies was worse than beating way worse. I was softening them up; like you might put out hard butter on window sill” (15). Sharon Friedman explains that this soldier

exploits what she has been taught is common knowledge – the homophobic, misogynist, and religiously and culturally conservative attitudes of the Iraqis – to humiliate the prisoners [... therefore she] does not see homophobia and misogyny operating in the US military elite, who share these attitudes and amuse themselves by inflicting these forms of torture. (Friedman 2004, 606)

This also reinforces what the actual soldier, England, states in the media about the fact that such forms of torture were already used in Abu Ghraib when she arrived; therefore, she did not see anything strange in doing them herself. Colleran states that the idea “there might be a limit in warfare or consequences for abusing an ‘enemy of freedom,’ who was merely a ‘Muslim monkey,’ is inconceivable for the Soldier and, in this respect, her functional name suggests an ‘every American’ way of thinking about the War on Terror” (Colleran 2012, 186). Hence Thompson’s reference to the character as Soldier is successful since in this respect, she may be seen as a representative of the members of the American Army rather than only the real character, England. She is used as a scapegoat who is to be condemned and punished for the way of thinking that controls this institute, the army, rather than the country or the nation behind it. This is what the lawyer confirmed to the Soldier when he advised her to act as “retarded” to escape punishment, yet she refused, insisting on telling “the truth [...which] is not what anyone wants to hear” (12). Further, Thompson states that “Lynndie England deflects all responsibility; she is doing what everyone does; she is a pawn and made, by her

bosses and the media, into the scapegoat (white trash) for everything that had gone wrong with the American soldier” (Study Guide 11). Confirming Thompson's statement, Soldier explains that whatever had been done in this prison is not unusual or unprecedented; for her it is quite part of her usual life: “I’ll tell you I didn’t do nothing to them Iraqis that hadn’t been done to me many times at clubhouse. By my friends, and they still my friends. Yeah I’m not mad at ‘em, it was just a little fun” (18). Hence, the play indeed shows a “hideous slice of American culture” as Colleran stated, which could possibly be one of Thompson’s comments or reflections about such a culture that is implied in this character.

Among the many insults that the Soldier received, the most outrageous ones for her was her being called ‘ugly’ or a ‘feminist’. These seem to be the most hurtful comments which she denies and objects to: “If all of you was right here in front of me now what I would say to you is one thing above all: I am NOT ugly. [...] I hate ugly women, women who don’t take care of themselves I am not that women. [...] I am *not* an ugly girl and I am definitely not nor have I ever been a feminist. I hate feminists, mam, now feminists are UGLY” (9). Responding to this, Friedman states

[the SOLDIER] retorts that she is not ugly (indeed, she has been the lover of her supervisor and is pregnant with his child even though he has married another woman involved in the abuse) and, most pointedly, that she is not a feminist (read “man-hating and unnaturally aggressive”) (8–9). In any other circumstances, she “respects men and their privates” (12), and offers a rational defense of her sexually abusive actions that clearly alludes to the military’s othering of Iraqi men in terms of religion and sexuality. (Friedman 2010, 605-6)

Soldier seems to be very concerned about being desired and wanted, as she admits that she accepts such kinds of humiliation from her friends and that this does not concern her because at least she was “BUSY ON A SATURDAY NIGHT” (18). That is why she joined the army and left the Dairy Queen Café to join handsome people who talked to her “like Tom Hanks Style” (10). She found in the army what she could not find at home: “I mean guys like Charley never looked at me back home [...] I couldn’t believe it. I liked the way he called me he always said ‘Private Sexy’ like that?” (20) Therefore, it is obvious why she hated being called ‘ugly’ among all other forms of verbal abuse she suffered online, and maybe even in real life. As a woman, Thompson empathizes with the actual soldier, England,

who believed her only currency was male approval, a big part of that was her ability to cut off all compassion for the Iraqi detainees... It is interesting to note that when she worked at a chicken rendering factory in West Virginia it was she who complained about the brutal treatment of the chickens! As a woman who was not only poor, but considered “ugly” by western standards, she had no value, except as a soldier. (Interview 2015)

This may also be another indication of why Thompson preferred to name her character as Soldier, rather than using the actual name, particularly when she refers to the other two characters in her play by their real names. It is her feeling of pride in being a soldier that is the most important thing to her, and which could also be the grounds for her existence in the play; although the name, England, for an American soldier can be significant and ironic in the context of this play. Soldier, like England, is a victim of the higher powers that she could not resist because she needs to feel secure. Soldier and England assert that they acted under pressure from their bosses, mainly Charley Garner, an officer who is known for his cruelty, and who uses her love to make her follow his orders. Although he leaves her and never replies to her letters, and is convicted and jailed for his deeds, Soldier, pregnant with his baby, promises that she will wait for him: “I will wait for you the whole eight years, you taking the heat for Condoleeza me and the baby, cause the love we found in Abu Ghraib is like Romeo and Juliet” (11). England confesses that if it was not for Garner she might not have done what she did: “Garner pulled the ‘if you love me, you’ll do this’, And I guess on some level I didn’t want to disappoint him, just because then he’ll leave me and I will feel alone in this war zone.” (YouTube 2009) Therefore, Soldier portrays the perceived female need for security, and it is this that led her to act abusively and to justify her actions.

Soldier is convinced of the necessity and acceptability of what she has done in Abu Ghraib, since she was defending the country where she grew up singing “God Bless America every single day of [her] life”(10). She believes her own rhetoric when she says, “I did GOOD for my country and I said NO to the enemy” (23). Still, she is quite disturbed by it all. In the play, she describes how she feels when she sees her pictures smiling while humiliating those detainees, which took no more than one second: “Like those dreams about yourself where ya did something WEIRD soothing you would never do? And ya wake up and ya feel uneasy and you are glad that nobody was lookin in your dream? And ya just wanna forget it and ya do, because dreams, they just disappear, don’t they?” (14) Yet those pictures were not a dream and they did not disappear. Soldier states several times throughout her monologue that her breathing altered when she committed these things. The actual soldier, England, also speaks with regret when she says, “America sees me as this villain, this monster because I was in this photograph that took a split of a second of the time” (YouTube 2009). She states that she accepts responsibility for her deeds just because she “was dumb enough to be there.” (YouTube 2009) The presenter of this interview describes her hair as “greying at just twenty-six

years old” which reveals what this woman has gone through. Hence, Thompson’s portrayal of England is skilful since it shows a woman who is proud of her deeds, yet wounded by them.

Like Soldier, Dr. David Kelly is driven by his sense of guilt at what he did in Iraq. When Soldier and England agree that they only did what they were told to do in the play and in real life, Dr. Kelly takes full responsibility for his actions. That is why what we see of him in the play is his last moments alive, as he has already cut his wrist and is about to die. Dr. Kelly is

a Welsh/ Englishman of 59, a microbiologist, [who] sits against a tree. His pant leg [sic] is pushed up, and there is a slash at his wrist, but not much blood. There is a little blood on his knee. His glasses are beside him, on one side, and his watch on the other. There is a bottle of water beside him, and an empty bottle of pills. (24)

Yet, unlike that of the Soldier, Dr. Kelly’s monologue is completely the product of Thompson’s imagination as the actual Dr. Kelly, on whom the character is based, was by that time already dead: “David [is] more articulate and more self-conscious, [who] has a highly developed sense of serving as history witness, the only one available to him when telling the truth has failed. Kelly anticipates the reaction that the audience members know has already happened” (Colleran 2012, 188). It is clear that Thompson used the public’s reactions to Kelly’s death to develop her character. As cited earlier, she states, that she almost became obsessed by the news about him. Therefore, Thompson’s extensive research about the real man helped her create the theatricalized version of the scientist, making the character focus on ideas that she wanted to highlight in her play, such as the doubts about his death, the reasons leading to it, his reaction to what happened after that, and what is still happening in Iraq, in addition to his involvement in the issue of the investigation about the weapons of mass destruction.

In the play, Dr. Kelly anticipates that there will be some reasonable doubts about his death. However, it is clear that he commits suicide in a wood, which suggests that there is no doubt. His monologue justifies his suicide, showing the reasons for his deep feelings of frustration, despair and disappointment that led him to kill himself. He refers to the emails he sent to friends just before his death that were not unusual and gave no clue about his depression. He points out that there will be doubts about him being too weak, a “sad little Walter Mitty of a man” (28), who couldn’t take the pressure, and there will be much gossip, and even rock songs about him. He refers to an old conversation with a friend when he predicted that he “would probably be found dead in the woods” (32) when Iraq is invaded which will conjure up all kinds of questions surrounding such a sudden and unexpected death. Kelly’s sense of frustration and

despair reached a peak when he knew about what happened to his Iraqi friend, Jalal, and his family at the hands of the American soldiers, who raped Jala's young girl and killed her and the rest of the family. For Kelly, Jalal was "one of the most kind and joyful and learned men" (34). Jalal's family was very dear to Kelly, but he could not do anything to protect them when they asked him for help (34-6). This incident seems to be the straw that broke the camel's back, and led to Kelly's collapse and his decision to tell "The truth the truth the truth the truth the awful horrible terrible truth" (37) The repetition of the word "truth" here reveals the anger that this character suppressed by not telling the truth; it also reveals his urgent need to expose this truth to the world, versus his inability to do so, which is why he finds no better solution than death. Throughout her play, Thompson does not attempt to give answers to the riddle of Kelly's death; rather, she intends to project what may have been happening in this man's mind. Thompson sees Kelly as any other ordinary person:

We have all had moments where we have felt morally compromised and not acted because of fear of unemployment or disgrace, though in David Kelly's instance it meant millions of innocent lives. And we all want a witness to our good deeds and our end. We want to leave a legacy of virtue (Interview 2015).

Therefore, Thompson intended to project onto the stage a reality that people might have missed or forgotten about themselves when they blame such characters for their deeds. With her *Palace of the End*, Thompson's audience is not given readymade or easy answers. She leads them "to dig, to pose the questions to which there are no easy answers" (Study Guide 11) Friedman describes Kelly as "forever present as a reminder of past deeds repressed and of future responsibility" (Friedman 2004, 608). Thompson's intention to raise questions is clearly present in Kelly's story.

Furthermore, Kelly confronts the audience with a challenge that could be the justification for the whole play: the denial of a certain knowledge that threatens and jeopardizes normal and comfortable life: "I'm beginning to think that it's the greatest sin of our time. Knowing, and pretending that we don't know, so that we won't be inconvenienced in any way." (30) By his death, Kelly is going to be invisible and

[i]n his invisibility, he will have a stronger presence than he had in life. However, the strength of his plea to the audience does not come from the position of power and authority that he held in life; as a ghost, he relies on childhood, domestic, and parental images that resonate with the guilt he feels for the family in Iraq. (Freidman 2010, 608)

Freidman's claim is supported by the example Kelly gives when he asks the audience to imagine living in a house where one knows for sure that there is a child being tortured

in the basement, but insists on denying or ignoring it (30-1). Kelly's shocking analogy is aimed at triggering a sense of guilt that may lead the audiences to acknowledge the recognition of such atrocities and refuse them, in Iraq in particular and in the world in general.

Kelly's monologue starts with an announcement: "I've solved the riddle" (24). And he concludes by saying: "And one day they will see clearly that although I look as though I've lost, I have won. I have solved the riddle" (39). For Friedman, the riddle that Kelly solved is the riddle "of how to defeat the agents of war, as well as the mystery of his earlier silence and his self-deception: 'Have you ever told yourself an unforgivable lie?'" (Friedman 2010, 607) On the other hand, Colleran argues that he solved the riddle "by realizing that in order to keep the story of the lie of weapon of mass destruction alive, he had to find a better, more saleable news story, and few are better than an unexplained death." (Colleran 2012, 189) Perhaps these are riddles that Kelly the character and possibly even the actual man on whom the character is based, has tried to solve while he was alive. However, probably, the real riddle that he, the character, is happy and proud of solving is the answer to his question about how a human being can live peacefully when they are aware of the crime that is being committed. Kelly realizes that his death brings him nearer to the innocence of his childhood: "this is [his] first moment of peace since the invasion" (25). The sight of the redness of his own blood brought him closer to the red roses that gave his relief. That is why he chose this "Harrowdown Hill" because it reminds him of childhood innocence (25). For Kelly, the riddle concerns a human's ability to forget their humanity, and, as he discovers, the way to regain it is death. In the end, Kelly thanks his audience for listening and "witnessing" what he has gone through and he promises his audience that though he is going to die soon he will remain here forever: "I am here, and I promise, I will always be here" (40). In saying 'I' he probably does not refer to himself as a person but rather to the idea of his childhood innocence that would never accept injustice or a lie, which is why he dies singing Winnie the Pooh and promising his daughter he will be in her dreams every night. In his freedom and ability to find peace after death, Kelly's character resonates with Hanoon, the main character of Al Maliki's *The Cart* studied in Chapter Two, since both of them find a better 'life' in death. Whereas Hanoon, with his simple and humble personality and background, could not take his own life, Kelly, with his refined background as a scientist, is brave enough and articulate enough to do it and furthermore to justify it in the play eloquently. Both characters share the sense of peace after death, yet they leave behind a cruel reality.

Among the most prominent and common elements that the three characters of the *Palace of the End* share is their sense of guilt, their being in Iraq, and the fact that their lives changed and reshaped because of this connection to Iraq, even though at different times and as a result of different forces. Thompson describes her third character, Nehrjas as

A beautiful, but haunted Iraqi woman in her forties or early fifties [...] She is a woman who has a strong buoyant spirit but she has suffered immeasurably. She makes her way to a chair and table upon which there is a small golden pot of tea and a glass saucer and a tiny glass with a gold rim. She drinks tea as she talks. She smiles, happy to have audience.(40-1)

Thompson created the character of Nehrjas based on the tragic story of an Iraqi Communist Party member Nehrjas Al Saffar, who was a victim of the Ba’th party and its secret police during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Thompson came across this woman’s story through an Iraqi neighbour who translated the story for her from Arabic. (Interview 2015) Al Saffar and her family were tortured, and even her two young boys were tortured before her eyes. Although pregnant, she was raped and tortured in front of her boys, and her youngest boy, Fadhil, died while being tortured in front of her. She survived, only to die in 1990. (Al Saffar 2013) Thompson’s Nehrjas is seen as a ghost who states her purpose clearly so that her audience realizes the sense of guilt that she carries in her heart. She compares mothers to trees, “a full-grown tree” (43):

Just as the leaves breathe out into the air and fill it with healing substance I breathe out my memories, good and bad. It is not company I want. It is to bring back what I can never bring back. And anyway: You will know that I deserve to be alone. For I have committed the greatest sin of all. (43)

She feels guilty because she kept silent and refused to tell where her husband was when her little boy was being tortured. The husband was eventually found and killed soon after her son died. This is what the torturers informed her: “We found your husband anyway you foolish woman. And oh... we are sorry about your son, we were going to let him go today, but he must have had a weak constitution. He is with Allah” (58). This concurs with the real story of Al Safar, her tortured sons and her husband. According to Michael Billington, “rather than simply celebrating resistance to evil, [Nehrjas’s monologue] is movingly imbued with the guilt of the parental survivor” (Billington 2010). Freidman states that the Soldier and Nehrjas are meant to “represent women as weapons of war, one the ‘female decoy’ of the masculinized military (a cover for sexual and racialized abuse), the other the rape victim of Hussein’s misogynist secret police” (Freidman 2010, 607). This resonates in Thompson’s story of Sahar’s rape. She was the

thirteen-year-old daughter of Kelly's Iraqi friend. These three examples show Thompson's intention of highlighting how rape as a means of torture has been, and still is, used by all authoritarian powers, whether Iraqi or American, and whether of criminals or innocents, as long as they believe it to be effective.

In her silence, Nehrjas relied on a general humane rule that no one would harm a child or a pregnant woman, not even in war time:

I was quite certain they would not kill us because it was so deeply in my culture to never harm a pregnant woman or a child. I thought we will survive this. My son will be known forever as the most heroic child ever lived. He will become a great leader. But he kept spinning. (57)

Possibly, this reflects Thompson's explanation of why the real Nehrjas kept silent while watching her sons being tortured. Nehrjas's eight-year old Fahdil was hanged in a fan which was spinning on full speed. She refers to the Prophet Muhammad's orders to his army during one of the battles that Muslims should not kill an old man, cut a tree, kill a woman, or kill a child, which in general is one of the human rights. But these rules seem to have been overlooked and neglected by the Ba'th Party's secret police during that time in Iraq, which was known as the "Jihaz Haneen" the Instrument of Yearning (50), and in the Palace of the End, which was the headquarters of the secret police.⁵³ Nehrjas explains:

The torture jail was a fairytale castle, from long ago where the king had lived – we had not liked him either, he was Saudi but he was nothing compared to Saddam. The gardens were tended by a master gardener, a true genius of nature. And so the castle was called the Palace of Flowers. Until the Dark Age. When it became The Palace of the End. (50)⁵⁴

When her son died, Nehrjas realised she had misjudged the extent of cruelty the secret police could reach; and Thompson uses such facts about the life for Iraqis during the Ba'th regime to highlight these important facts. Colleran points out that "[o]f all the plays about Iraq, Thompson's most engages the question of whether Hussein's treatment of the Iraqi people warranted intervention, and the play's answer is

⁵³ It seems to be a common error to call the secret police of the Ba'th Party 'Jihaz Haneen' and to translate it to 'instrument of yearning'. The correct official title for this secret police was 'Jihaz Hunayn', which refers to the historical battle of Hunayn, in Islamic history. The word Hunayn, is the name of a small valley near Makka where the historical battle took place. This title was given to the police by Saddam Hussein who founded the secret police in 1966. The difference in pronunciation between the words 'Haneen' and 'Hunayn' in Arabic is unrecognizable in the written form of the word, unless the writer puts the correct Arabic accent for it, which is not a common thing in everyday writing. That is why the confusion of the two words is very common even for some Arabic speakers. Joseph Sassoon points out this fact clearly in his book, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party: Inside and Authoritarian Regime* (2011), p. 96.

⁵⁴ This is another common error. The Palace of Flowers was a different palace of the royal family facing the Palace of Al Rihab, which was named later as the Palace of the End as I clarified in a previous note. Yet it is true that both palaces had the most beautiful gardens in Baghdad at that time.

unambiguously yes” (Colleran 2012, 190). Thompson’s intention in revealing such a story is “not to shock the audience, but to acquaint them with the terrible, impossible moral choices that people are forced to make in such situations” (Interview 2015). With a Western audience, the element of shock could be inevitable, particularly if they did not know about such facts in relation to the practices of the authoritarian regime in Iraq since the 1960’s, while if the play is watched by an Iraqi audience, the impact of such revelation can go beyond shocking into reminding and substantiating terrible realities. During a recent interview with Thompson in November, 2015, she confirmed to me that dozens of Iraqi students had the chance to watch the play and applauded her for it.

Heather Raffo’s play, *9 Parts of Desire* (2003) – discussed in Chapter Four – shares the same structure of a number of characters with different, yet related monologues, with *Palace of the End*, as Raffo also uses tragic stories about Iraqi women before and after 2003. That is probably the reason (in addition to the fact that she is half Iraqi) why she was very successful in performing the role of Nehrjas in the Epic Theatre Ensemble production in New York in 2008. In his review for *The New York Times*, John Del Signore, states that “Raffo gives such an intense, nuanced performance in the role that it’s impossible to remember the other stories until she’s finished — which is a good thing, since Nehrjas’ sad story is about Iraq, but otherwise unrelated.” On the contrary, all the stories of *Palace of the End* are related as they reveal stories of tortured human souls, mainly because of guilt. The Soldier bears a strong sense of guilt that is redeemed because she finds peace in her belief that her deeds when following orders served and protected her country. Dr. Kelly’s sense of guilt stemmed from his knowledge of the truth that he could not reveal and which victimized him until he found freedom in death. Finally, Nehrjas cannot forget that her silence led to her very young son’s death. Still, Thompson expresses a particular interest in Nehrjas’s character saying:

as a teacher and a mother, I really LIKE this character, though I am perplexed and horrified by her choice to withhold the whereabouts of her husband though her son is being tortured because of this. I try to wrap my mind around cultural difference—as she says in the play, millions of children’s lives are at stake as her husband was the only feasible opposition to S.H. (Interview 2015)

Nehrjas clarifies: “If we give in, we are giving not only our lives but the lives of millions. It would be like giving up Nelson Mandela, you understand? It would be like saying yes; you can go and murder these million children” (56-57). Her justification now may possibly render a better reason why the real Nehrjas kept silent, since this secret police’s cruelty was widely known for most Iraqis at that time, particularly for those involved in political activities that went against the Ba’th’s interests or threatened

it. Therefore, Nehrjas is perhaps even more interesting than the other two characters in the play, because including her story provides a cultural difference that makes *The Palace of End* an even more a distinctive and rich play.

One of the most important things that Nehrjas added to the story of the *Palace of the End* is her ghostly reflection on the current situation of Iraq, since the actual Nehrjas died long before the American invasion of 2003. Her reflections can be seen as a metaphor that evokes the situation in Iraq after 2003. She explains that what is happening in Iraq

reminds me of a young woman I know who had been taken off the street one day by officials and raped many many times. At the end of the day they threw her out of the car to the said road, in the countryside.

She crawled along, bruised and bleeding half naked, and soon, a car stopped. A very kind and gentle man with his family stopped and helped her to the car. The wife covered her and they took her to their home nearby and the wife drew a bath for her and said they would call her family while she cleaned herself and rested. As the children played in the house, the man sneaked into the bathroom and raped her again in the bath. She did not cry out because she did not want to embarrass his family. And when [the young woman's] family arrived, thanking this man so profusely, bringing him gifts-

Those who say they have come to save us have come to destroy us. (47-8)

This resonates with the interpretation of Falah Shaker's *The Wild Wedding*, discussed in Chapter Two, when the mother in the play is compared to her country, Iraq, and the invasion is seen as the rape that this mother was subjected to, resulting in a torn soul, a neglected child, and a deformed relationship between a mother and a son, which represents the future. It further resonates with the rape metaphor of the country depicted in Hassan Abdulrazzak's *Baghdad Wedding*, discussed in Chapter Four, which confirms the idea that all these playwrights, despite their different backgrounds, Iraqi, Iraqi-British and Canadian, conceived the American invasion of Iraq as a rape with all its negative physical, moral, social and psychological consequences.

Like Dr. Kelly, in Thompson's play Nehrjas finds peace in her death, during the first Gulf War. She reveals that after her death she met her little son and he forgave her, and they flew together around Baghdad: "It is very nice this flying" (60). She is more optimistic in her death and for all the victims of Iraq saying: "they are everywhere, all around us. And when there is finally peace, Fahdil will come again and we will fly together, we will fly through the crowns of Nekhla and into the eyes of Allah" (61). Such words may be seen as an invitation to the audience to share such optimism; conversely, it can be seen as naïve or unrealistic, particularly in relation to contemporary conditions in Iraq. Still, it carries a kind of an Iraqi persistence to find reasons to look forward to a better future, that may well prove impossible. Nekhla is the

palm tree that Iraq is famous for, and it is mentioned earlier in the play, when Dr. Kelly states that his Iraqi friend's book shop was called Nekhla (33). At the beginning of the monologue NEHRJAS states that women should always be compared to trees, particularly palm trees for their generosity.

In his review of *Palace of the End*, Kenneth Jones cites CanStage (The Canadian Stage Company in Toronto that produced the play in Canada in 2008) stating that

Palace of the End is a searing triptych of monologues exposing the ugly truth behind the headlines of the current situation in Iraq. It provides three distinct perspectives on the reality of the war [...] Each account is a riveting indictment of one of the contemporary world's worst conflicts and also a celebration of the music of the human voice and the power of the human soul. (Jones 2008)

Conversely, Colleran sees the play's three monologues as a chronological method of reading Iraq's contemporary history in reverse:

Read backward, the three monologues trace the failure in Iraq back to the American support of the Ba'ath coup, through the manufactured evidence justifying war and invasion, to the abuse at Abu Ghraib. The account of Hussein's megalomania and violence is not omitted, but it is framed within the context of the utter collapse of Western ideals. Abu Ghraib has succeeded the Palace of the End as a place for torture, and Hussein's thugs have been replaced by an ignorant young woman soldier. (Colleran 2012, 191)

Jones's and Colleran's readings are equally valid. Additionally, with her three different characters, Thompson demonstrates how people can be "linked by destruction [...] War links people of all nations in a terrible way" (Interview 2015). The play provides a space for different interpretations, since Thompson's characters reveal facts about their personal struggle as tortured human beings, as well as the facts about this country which has been a battle field for a long time. It can be seen as an abstract idea of a country that is shaped by cruelty and war, and whose struggle and critical conditions can apply to any part of the world that is victimized by war.

Thompson's choice of the title of the play, *Palace of the End*, and the three different parts of the play, MY PYRAMIDS, HARROWDOWN HILL, and INSTRUMENT OF YEARNING, is hugely significant. Iraq is identified as being the 'palace of the end' for these three characters, as it is the place where they have discovered themselves and their reality. The young Soldier ends her youth there when she has accepted that she is a scapegoat for this war. On the other hand, Dr. Kelly was fully aware of his reality, yet he tried to deny it and failed. Finally, in the process of her 'heroic patience' with torture, Nehrjas lost her child and her peace of mind because of her patience. Hence these titles are ironic, as well as symbolic reminders of the stories they carry. Significantly, Soldier and Dr. Kelly repeat that they have "Crashed through the looking glass" (24, 38) during

their monologues, while Nehrjas recites lines of poetry: “In a world whose mirrors are dimmed” (55) which Thompson states that she took from the title of Lewis Carroll’s novel *Through the Looking-Glass* and from a poem by a famous Iraqi poetess, Nazik al Malaika. She explains, “it’s the idea that when we look in the mirror we are seeing an illusion, and if we look more deeply there is a warped version of ourselves, and of the world we live in” (Interview 2015). Hence, the play can be seen as a platform where these characters encourage the audience to look deeply within themselves and the world around them in the hope that they get a clearer vision of a better future.

Suman Gupta cites Harold Pinter’s statement in *Imagining Iraq*, as follows:

When we look into a mirror we think the image that confronts us is accurate. But move a millimetre and the image changes. We are actually looking at a never-ending range of reflections. But sometimes a writer has to smash the mirror – for it is on the other side of that mirror that the truth stares at us. (140)

And this is exactly what Griffiths and Thompson try to do with their plays. With their theatre works, they smashed the line that separates the two sides of the image, the real and the theatrical, in order to present the other. Moreover, by including characters of both sides of the war, they managed to maintain an almost balanced representation of the two sides, dispensing a clear illustration of the situation, and leaving the interpretation and analysis of this dilemma to the audience. While the Gulf in Griffiths’s play is bridged by two of the characters, O’Toole and Dr. Aziz, Thompson’s three different stories are interwoven with the strong thread of Iraq and the injustice these three people faced and endured. While Griffiths relies totally on his imagination to reverse the mirror image, Thompson enriches the facts and the real events about her characters with her dramatic imagination for the same aim.

The difference in the timing of the two plays indicates another significant feature of the theatrical treatment of the issue of war in Iraq. Griffiths created an imaginative setting to present a contemporary issue, making it a holy place, a shrine, which could refer to the historical heritage of the site since it is still being abused by war and its makers. Conversely, Thompson concentrates more on facts about the modern history of Iraq and the people involved in it. Her play covers a history of more than three decades of suffering that led to the current situation, which appears to be more complicated. In Hassan Abdulrazzak’s *Baghdad Wedding* (2007), discussed in Chapter Four, the central

character, Salim, says that Iraq has been brought to the map of the world because of war: “This war has brought Iraq on the map. People now can make connections between their corner of the world and this place in ways that were not possible before. So the degrees of separation are finally collapsing” (Abdulrazzak 2007, 63). Therefore, it is clear that the vision of Iraq as the home of the ancient civilization of Mesopotamia and *A Thousand and One Nights* has changed into a more contemporary image of the struggle of Iraq and its people, which is the result of contemporary politics and wars.

Both Griffiths and Thompson make their female characters more expressive and accurate than the male characters in portraying the horrors that result from authoritarian power, revealing that they (women and innocents) are among the first victims of it. Dr. Aziz refers to this as “collateral damage” (49), and Nehrajs too explains that the old rule of not killing innocents has nowadays become a joke: “Do not kill a woman, a child or an old man. Do not cut a tree. What happened to that? That is only a joke now. That is ‘collateral damage’” (59).

Iraqi women are the focus of several political plays; one of the earliest (and most shocking to me) is Martin Crimp’s *An Advice to Iraqi Women*, which was presented as part of a series of short plays entitled *War Correspondence* at the Royal Court Theatre in London, in April 2003. (Soncini [2016?], 275) Despite its title, the play was not intended for an Iraqi audience since it targeted Western audiences, to create a deep, sarcastic irony meant to strike at the Western political policy during the critical time of the invasion of Iraq. This very short play consists of a number of pieces of ‘advice’ to Iraqi women showing that everything in their little safe houses can be a minefield, and child protection must be a priority. If Iraqi women had watched this piece of theatre at that particular moment in 2003, they would have left the theatre in astonishment at the heavy irony that is levied at the reality of Iraqi life at that time. The play’s irony and satire come from the fact that the pieces of advice presented to Iraqi women in this play are not only far away from the reality they lived in 2003 but may even be seen as sarcastic about it, when streets were literally patrolled by American soldiers carrying weapons day and night and dashing into houses at any minute of the day, and where the sound of explosions and bullets is part of everyday routine and when the country with all its parts was a real war zone. In such an environment the play gives advice such as “Buy one of those plastic things to stop young children opening the drawer in the kitchen: there are knives in it.” “Check the eyes of teddy bears. Don’t buy a teddy bear if the eyes are loose. Check the squeak of the teddy bear. If you think the squeak might frighten your child, don't buy it.” “Use a good cream. Use a good brand. Use a reliable

cream. If you use a good brand of reliable cream your child will not burn.” Or “Like your house, like your car, like your child’s colouring book, your garden is a potential war zone. Keep sheds locked.” (Crimp 2003).

Western plays about Iraq and war in Iraq vary in their intentions and ways of presentation; however, they may be seen to be similar to each other in the sense that they are all most likely intended to represent the playwrights’ tendencies to record their stance in this war in general. Some of them tend to depict the two sides of the conflict, the Iraqi and the Western as they saw it, unlike the Iraqi plays about the same period that largely avoided such depictions. Yet they may share a tendency to create an abstract idea of a country victimized by war.

The two playwrights, Griffiths and Thompson, portray Iraq through their own different visions. Griffiths’ *The Gulf between Us* can be seen as an attempt to realize the differences between the two diverse cultures of the West and the Middle East, through a recognition of the gulf in history, culture, politics and traditions that have separated them and their attempt to bridge it. Thompson’s *Palace of the End* shows Iraq as a place where all the real characters, reproduced in the play, move towards their end, whether they are Iraqis like Nehrjas, or Westerners like Kelly, or a military person like England. Accordingly, it is possible to say that Robbin’s *Embedded* and Joseph’s *Bengal Tiger* – the subjects of the following chapter – share this tendency. These two plays also depict Iraq as a country that is very different for the Western, particularly American, characters they portray; it is a place where the life that these characters used to know has ended, or changed forever. If they returned home from Iraq, they returned very different. This view point can be seen as typical of many of the plays that have been written and produced about war and politics in and related to Iraq.

CHAPTER SIX

Western Theatre and the War in Iraq after 2003

Since the beginning of the war in 2003 and thereafter, a significant number of Western plays were written and produced about the specific theme of war in Iraq with explicit, direct, and specific treatments of Iraq; these include Jonathan Lichtenstein's *The Pull of Negative Gravity* (2004), Sean Huze's *The Sandstorm: Stories from the Front* (2004), David Hare's *Stuff Happens* (2004), Jerry Quickley's *Live from the Front* (2005), Simon Stephen's *Motortown* (2006), Gregory Burke's *Black Watch* (2006), and Roy Williams's *Days of Significance* (2007). This chapter focuses on two plays: Tom Robbins's *Embedded* (2003) and Rajiv Joseph's *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* (2009). I have chosen these plays because Robbins's *Embedded* was the first that attempted to examine events that occurred in Iraq during this war. The first production of the play was in July 2003, only months after the war began. By contrast, Joseph's *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* is a more recent play focusing on the same issue. The play was first produced in 2009, with its most recent production in the USA in 2013. Both plays rely heavily on a number of actual events that occurred in this war zone which make them in that sense realistic. Furthermore, in common with other Western plays dealing with the subject, they question the war through the West's perspective, that is, from the point of view of the soldiers or other individuals who were deployed in Iraq during the period. While the Iraqi presence in the first play, *Embedded*, remains implicit or shadowy and not central, *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* offers significant roles for Iraqi characters that can be seen to be pertinent to the plot and to the development of its theme. Both plays depict incidents that resonate in the Iraqi mind as 'real'. As an Iraqi who survived this war and had first-hand experience of it, I can confirm that more than one incident described in these plays really happened. Fortunately, these plays do provide insights into the mentality of those Iraqis thought of as the 'enemy' at that time. The opportunity of juxtaposing these two sides in the war through theatre should help us to construct a picture of this critical time and to erase its dark side and provide us with a wider and a more comprehensive perspective of what actually occurred.

Tim Robbins's *Embedded*: A Struggle for the Truth

The Actor's Gang, the theatre company founded by Tim Robbins (1958-) in 1981, premiered his production of *Embedded* in July 2003 in Los Angeles, where the company is based. The play then moved to the Public Theatre in New York early in

2004. *Embedded*, written and directed by Robbins, proved popular among the audience, and it ran for many months. The production then moved to Riverside Studios, London during late- 2004. The popularity of the play encouraged Robbins to film it and later, to release a DVD. So far, there is no published text of the play, but in an interview, Robbins explained that he had decided to release a DVD of the play, so

[t]hat more people get the chance to see it. We got an amazing response wherever we performed the play, despite the fact that it wasn't receiving any kind of support in the press. From the start it was a word-of-mouth phenomenon. 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. It was the same when we went on a tour of eight states in the fall. People came and gave standing ovations. It was the reaction we got from military families, soldiers and war journalists who had just returned from Iraq. It was their enthusiasm, their support, that gave us the mandate to film the show. (Cited in Bleifuss 2005)

In spite of all the public support, and the long runs *Embedded* enjoyed inside and outside the USA, many of the reviews and much of the critical feedback regarding the play and about Robbins himself were negative. Adam Klasfeld, the theatre critic, states in *Theatre Mania* that at its best, *Embedded* is “a biting satire of media censorship” (Klasfeld 2004). According to Ben Brantley’s review of the play in *The New York Times*, “The cast [of *Embedded*] is undeniably industrious, yet somehow the energy these actors exude seems artificial. It is hard to avoid the sensation that everything said here has been said before, in some cases many years before” (Brantley 2004). Benjamin Lazier’s article, “Natural Right and Liberalism: Leo Strauss in Our Time”, describes the play as a “satire in its rudest guise [...] Whether it succeeded is doubtful. If anything, it unwittingly satirized a form of left-paranoia as much as its intended target of right-wing bellicosity. Still, the play was an intelligible, if extreme extension of the zeitgeist.” (Lazier 2009, 171) Robbins’s reaction to such views was:

It’s nothing new for me. You get thicker and thicker skin and you come to expect this stuff. When I told the cast we were moving to New York, I said, ‘The good news is that we were invited by the Public Theater, the bad news is that we are not going to get one good review.’ I knew it going in. (Cited in Bleifuss 2005)

Robbins states that such negative reviews of the play were expected, and probably generated because the play criticizes the media severely. He affirms that “[s]ome people just truly hate it because it's too loud and too abrasive and too satirical” (BBC 2004) Furthermore, Robbins was accused on more than one occasion of being unpatriotic and a Saddam supporter, which shows the dispute that the play generated.

Conversely, Dr Kevin Quarmby, an academic, an editor, and theatre critic, acknowledges in his own article on *Embedded* that

[t]here is going to be a load of media interest over the coming days and weeks in *Embedded*. Whenever a Hollywood star [referring to Robbins] glides into London you can smell the anti-aircraft guns smoking over Heathrow, as the press long to down this latest onslaught from across the pond. Only the staunchest pro-war lobbyist could fail to appreciate the skill and guts that it has taken to even get an airing for this production, let alone an opening in London. Robbins has created an entertainment little short of genius, performed by an acting company whose commitment and cool will become legendary. If political theatre is your scene, *Embedded* is for you. If the unusual and the avant garde is your scene, it's also for you. If you want to be part of that privileged group who can hold their heads high and say 'we saw *Embedded*,' and feel you have shared a moment of theatrical history, then this is definitely for you. (Quarmby 2004)

Such controversial reviews and mixed critical values had the effect of making the play even more striking, as it had obviously attracted diverse attention.

Embedded can be described as a mixture between a documentary and a comedy, where there is more than one plot to tell. It presents the audience with three episodic tales of the soldiers who fought the war, the politicians who planned and carried out the war, and the journalists who witnessed and reported it in Iraq in 2003. It is a satiric revelation of the political strategy behind the war, which sheds light on the issue of censorship in the media. In this respect, Lazier foregrounds that *Embedded* was

the most radical and unnuanced version of a view of Leo Strauss that became common parlance in the popular press: that his neoconservative disciples looked to his philosophy for inspiration as they orchestrated the war in Iraq, and that they were correct to draw the conclusions they did. (Lazier 2009, 171)

The play takes its title from the fact that there were a number of journalists embedded within the military forces, fighting in Iraq during 2003. According to the DVD released in 2005, the events of the play are divided into ten scenes: 'Leaving Home', 'Let's Have a War', 'Love and Waiting', 'Chomping at the Bit', 'War', 'The Road to Babylon', 'Victory', 'The Aftermath', 'Where To Now', and 'The Reckoning'.⁵⁵ The play opens in the autumn of 2002, when soldiers are preparing to go to war, and then jumps to the actual war in March 2003. The play relies heavily on comedy to communicate an anti-war political stance, using masks and satire when showing the high-ranking American authorities, who are cynically nicknamed as Rum Rum, Gondola, Woof, Dick, Cove, and Pearly White. These characters are probably the "transparent representations of Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz and Condoleezza Rice."

⁵⁵ As there is no published text of the play, I am using the titles of the scenes to refer to the location of the quotations which have been taken from the play.

(Lazier 2009, 171), who were significant political personalities in relation to the American decisions about this war. In addition to them, there are a number of journalists and soldiers, whose stories unfold to reveal “decent men and women in an indecent predicament.” (Glass 2004). In an article entitled “*Embedded Live: A Moment Captured*” published in the *Huffington Post*, Robbins states that he used his “pile of collected articles and scribbled notes, to try to tell the story of [the American] reckless neo-conservative administration’s march to war” (Robbins 2005). It is clear throughout the video of the play that most of the military statements, the instructions for journalists, and news reports from the battle field are taken from actual press reports, as they are referenced clearly within the video; while the ironic and comic discussions that take place in the Office of Special Plans and other dialogues among soldiers and their families are likely to be imagined by Robbins himself.

The video of *Embedded Live* starts with the following statement:

There are different kinds of truths for different kinds of people; truths appropriate for children; truths that are appropriate for students; truths that are appropriate for educated adults; truths that are appropriate for highly educated adults, and the notion that there should be one set of truths available to everyone is a modern democratic fallacy. It doesn’t work.

These are the words of Irving Kristol, who, according to the video, is considered to be ‘one of the key architects of neo-conservatism movement’. The DVD is a recording and an edited version of one of the actual performances of the play during its shows at the Public Theatre in New York, and to make such a statement at its very beginning obviously advertises its intention to criticize the way politics manipulates the idea of truth, by creating different versions of what is ‘true’ according to the politicians’ needs. Robbins explicitly accuses the American authorities of lying to their people and the world and deceiving them about the actual reasons for this war. The performance begins where newspapers’ headlines announce the start of the war, such as “*The New York Times*: ‘U.S. Says Hussein Intensifies Quest for A-Bomb Parts.’” On the 8th of September 2002, the “*Associated Press* reported: ‘CIA Says Iraq Stockpiling Bioweapons’”, and, on 5th of October 2002, “*The New York Times* reported: ‘Rumsfeld says U.S. ha[d] ‘Bulletproof’ Evidence of Iraq’s Link to Al Qaeda’” on 28th of September 2002. While in the ‘Office of Special Plans’, which is the centre of power in the world of the play, the fictional and comedic, yet powerful, characters in *Embedded* meet to decide about the war in Gomorrah (Iraq) against the Butcher of Babylon (Saddam Hussein). In Charles Glass’s review of *Embedded* for the *Independent* he explains that using such biblical titles to refer to the location of the war is “perhaps

reflecting the American religious right's conception of that 'evil' country" (Glass 2004). Furthermore, it may also reflect Robbins's intention to emphasise the idea of censorship. By altering the actual names of the characters and the places into more symbolic and generalized references, he is highlighting the idea that he is avoiding direct or open criticism for targeting such powerful characters in reality or the highly sensitive subject of the current war because the play was among the first theatrical reactions, being presented just a few months after the war in 2003.

In the play's fictional Office of Special Plans, the characters create suitable facts to be disseminated to the public in order to manipulate public opinion and support for the war. They make fun of "the growing protests" in the world against the war, which go against their interests, and they try to work out what their "mission" in Gomorrah should be, and what it will achieve. The result of their discussion is that they are still not sure whether their slogan should be "the weapon of annihilation", that he "killed his own" which is a reference to the Butcher of Babylon killing his own people to "liberate the people [from] years of oppression", or whether they should adopt a slogan based on "the day that changed the world", meaning 11th September 2001 (Let's Have a War). In spite of the fact that there is no link between Gomorrah and the 'day that changed the world', they still take that event as the core reason for their mission in Gomorrah. These powerful, masked characters seem to totally adopt Leo Strauss's philosophy of the 'noble lie' which states "that an elite few in society should know the truth. These elite few may have to tell lies to the uncomprehending masses." (Motzkus 2004, 8) In their third meeting in the Office of Special Plans, which is held in order to discuss the fatal mistakes of the war, its consequences and how to hide these mistakes from the public with lies, Pearly White clearly justifies them, saying: "Moral virtue has no application to the truly intelligent man, the philosopher. As Leo Strauss would say, moral virtue only exists in the popular opinion when it serves the purpose of controlling the unintelligent majority" (The Road to Babylon). As it is stated in the introduction to the video of the play, Strauss is a "[c]elebrated Philosopher and the guiding light of the neo-conservatives, who are forging America's new foreign policy. Strauss taught philosophy at the University of Chicago during the 1950's and the 1960's."⁵⁶ Therefore, it seems that whatever is forged and planned in this Office of Special Plans is based on Strauss's philosophy and beliefs. Klasfeld's review of *Embedded*, clarifies that Strauss

was a famous 20th century Jewish philosopher who escaped Weimar Germany and later became a professor at the University of Chicago. He taught Plato, Machiavelli,

⁵⁶ I am not sure how or whether this statement appeared in the live performance, it is most probably stated in the programme of the play.

Nietzsche, and Hobbes while calling for the educated elite to defend U.S. democracy. Many people credit him as the founder of the neo-conservative movement and charge that he believed governments should manipulate the naïve populous with "noble lies" that serve the good of the country. (Klasfeld 2004)

In support of the play's introduction, Glass provides an excerpt taken from an article that appeared in June 2004 in *Harper's Magazine* about the effect of Strauss on the American policy: "One of the great services that Strauss performed for the Bush administration was the provision of a philosophy of the noble lie, the conviction that lies, far from being simply a regrettable necessity of public life, are instead virtuous and noble instruments of wise policy" (Glass 2004). The notion that truth is manipulated under the title of the 'noble lie' is reinforced visually by Robbins's strategy of having these characters wear half masks that reveal only some of what needs to be revealed, hence offering a half-truth rather than a total lie. Furthermore, Quarmby's review, indicates that

[i]n this age of instant information, of twenty four hour news reports and live images bombarded into our living rooms, the most important instrument for dissemination of the Straussian noble lie is the journalist in the war zone. Control her/his report and the web of deceit is spun to perfection. (Quarmby 2004).

Accordingly, the play illustrates that it is necessary to the government that the journalists and reporters require a military point of view which is provided by Hardchannel, an army officer, who trains the journalists who are to be embedded in the battle field to report from the scene there.

Colonel Hardchannel is portrayed as the character who is responsible for censoring whatever is reported, that is, to suit the purpose of the war rather than the reality of what is happening there. In Klasfeld's words, Hardchannel is the character who

trains a platoon of reporters in a sort of boot camp. A Dr. Strangelove for the musical theater set, Hardchannel calls journalists his "bitches" and fondly recalls playing Anna in a German production of *The King and I*. He orders his soldiers to send all news to an unnamed official who can reject any article by pressing a red button. (Klasfeld 2004)

Hardchannel forces the journalists to repeat after him that they are "maggot Journalists" (Let's Have a War). Weinstein's review argues that by doing so, Hardchannel

reveals his own feelings of inferiority as he accompanies his shouted commands with show business references to prove to them he is not the uncultured slob he imagines them to think he is. He is marine colonel as bullying Broadway director. Foster, struts, his disdain over the top, the journalists drop at his bark and give him 69 ... pushups that is. (Weinstein 2003)

According to Brantley's article, "Prowling For Laughs From Today's Foreign Policy", Hardchannel is "a macho colonel with a passion for musical comedy" whose job is to summarily censor those journalists "who break from the official script" (Brantley 2004), and he does this by making the journalists repeat his words, stating:

All reporters preparing package script must submit the scripts for approval. Packages may not be edited until the scripts are approved. When the packages are updated, it must be reapproved, preferably by the originating approving authority. A new computerised system of script approval will allow authorized script approvers to mark scripts in a clear and standard manner. Script executive producers will click on the coloured approval button to turn it from an unapproved red to approved green. If your editors make a change to a script after approval, the button will turn to yellow. All this said, you are free to write what you want, provided you do not reveal troop location or compromise our security in any way, whether physically or with regard to morale. Finally, you are to refer to our troops as Coalition Forces, not US Forces. If your copy is missing this specificity, you will be instructed to include it. (Chomping at the Bit)

In the video, this statement is said to have been taken from a CNN Document, the "Reminder of Script Approval Policy" that was published in *The Independent*, UK, February 25, 2003. Moreover, the Fox News review, entitled, "Robbins' 'Embedded' Play Not So Realistic" reported the reaction of the actor V.J. Foster, who played the character of Hardchannel, to a claim made by Rich Doherty, a PhD graduate from Berkeley who fought in Iraq, that the political view of the play was not a true description of actual events on the ground. Foster's response was: "With all due respect sir, a lot of people in this country feel this administration went to this war with an agenda of their own and this play resonates with a lot of people who come to see it" (Cited in Fox News 2003). In one of his angry comments to Colin Stringer, the *Independent Wire* journalist, who tries to uncover actual incidents on the battle field for the public, Hardchannel screams: "This is not a TV Show. It's war" (War). Glass objects to Hardchannel's comment, stating that: "But it was a TV show - battlefield drama for the cameras, as long as the cameras were pointed where the Pentagon wanted them to be" (Glass 2004). Whether exaggerated or real, Hardchannel's character represents a tendency in politics that flourished during 2003 which attempted to convince the global public of the necessity for the war and its patriotic objectives, which Robbins highlighted through the newspaper's headlines that called for the war. The justification for this was that the ends justifies the means. In a clear example of this, Hardchannel explains to the cameraman why he needs close up photos of the decayed bodies that were found in mass graves in Babylon after the war, although he had previously prohibited such photos. Hardchannel shouts: "We've got to show the world how evil this new Hitler was. Some of the world does not agree with what we've done

here, and the more we can tell the story of his evil, the better off we'll all be" (Victory). Hence, the play shows that Hardchannel's rules and the journalistic strategies at critical times are used to show and focus on what the evil 'Butcher' did, and to avoid what the war meant for innocent people.

In the same way, the first scene of *Embedded* was followed by an announcement, which issued instructions to the audience of the play:

Due to legislation recently enacted by the United States Congress, and in the spirit of the neo-patriotic tune, being expressed daily on the airwaves; the Actors' Gangs has no choice but to forcibly remove anyone who disrupts tonight's performance. You have every right to express your opinion, but don't get your feelings hurt if we make you express them outside. A special protest area has been set up for your convenience. It's behind the orange cons of the corner of Sixth Street on Avenue D. You can say whatever you want to, there. Don't blame us. This is the age where an institution's first amendment rights supersede the individual. If you don't like, it move to Iran. We are not fucking around. If you don't like it, get the fuck out and don't expect your money back. (Leaving Home)

In her review for *The Guardian* entitled "Sleeping with the enemy", Audrey Gillan states that this announcement "is a reflection of America's intolerance for dissent, of the embedding of the country's politics as well as its journalism and the demise in the tone of debate to a shrill slanging match between left and right." (Gillan 2004) Gillan, who herself was one of the journalists who was actually embedded in Iraq during the conflict, reports that the events portrayed in *Embedded* are far from what she experienced when inside Iraq, although she does confirm that some of what she had written was actually censored. She argues:

Unlike Robbins's journalists, I was never once told what to write, though some of what I did write was censored. I was never lied to, as far as I know. Indeed, compare the complaint from Amy Constant, a reporter with *Embedded*'s "Big Paper of Record", that the chemical weapons discovery she wrote about turned out to be paint thinner. When I came across Iraqi kit designed for protection during a chemical attack, the commanding officer with the unit I was alongside assured me this was not dramatic evidence of the existence of weapons of mass destruction. Three days after this formed an understated part of my story, I heard defence secretary Geoff Hoon on the BBC World Service breathlessly announce that such kit had been found, which proved that Saddam did indeed have weapons of mass destruction. (Cillan 2004)

Thus, "Robbins's play is about concept, rather than about the reality" (Gillan 2004). It is the concept of deception through an economy with the truth of what is to be revealed to the public, how it is revealed, by whom, and when. Consequently, it seems that Robbins tried to draw the public's attention to this concept, through both exaggeration and satire.

During the performance, one man in the audience suddenly starts to shout, and object to the content of the play. He calls the play a "propaganda piece of bull shit", and

asserts that, “Leo Strauss is a genius”, and that “It is demeaning to the great country that we live in”. Furthermore, he shouts that, “This is a right war for the right reasons” (Chomping at the Bit), and makes more hostile and angry comments about the play. The protester is confronted by some guards who beat him and lead him outside the theatre. Elyse Sommer’s review of the play describes the incident: “Only one man actually needed to be ejected during the performance I attended and that one is, as might be expected, part of the script.” (Sommer [2004?]) Hence, since the incident is part of the show, Robbins is obviously predicting the kind of treatment a protester would face if he objected to these events in reality. This can be seen as an attempt to show the case through reversing it, that is, Robbins ironically inflicts the harsh treatment that he (or anyone who has a similar stance) might receive when expressing an opposition to war publically on those who may oppose his play. This idea is played out when Buford T., a high-ranking officer in the American army, assures the audience that in a democracy people are allowed to protest, yet he also reminds the audience that the treatment meted out to protesters can always become more severe and aggressive (Aftermath), if needed.

The second significant character in *Embedded* is Private Jen Jen Ryan (echoing Private Ryan in the American film *Saving Private Ryan*), and a reflection of the real Private Jessica Dawn Lynch, who served as a soldier in Iraq during 2003 as a unit supply specialist with the 507th Maintenance Company. Lynch was injured and taken as a prisoner to Southern Iraq, when her unit was ambushed by Iraqi forces in March 2003. Later she was saved by U.S. Special Operations Forces on April 1, 2003. Weinstein describes Robbins’s portrayal of Jen Jen as the “child of a family that could not afford to send her to college without the military and who is injured in a vehicle crash.” Hence, she joined the army hoping that she would be able to save the money she needed to attend college, which makes her father feel guilty (Leaving Home). In a conversation with Raymon, her lover and a fellow soldier, Jen Jen reveals that the need to earn money leads many American soldiers to join the military forces, especially women. She counts the number of the female soldiers in her tent saying:

Jen Jen.	All, there is like four mothers in my tent.
Raymon.	Really!
Jen Jen.	Yeah, they have to leave their kids to come here.
Raymon.	That’s fucked up.
Jen Jen.	Well, I know, it’s part of the deal and all, but they got kids and two of them are single moms. Laurie, this Indian chick, she’s got a sixteen-month old. No husband to help out. She was getting welfare they stopped it, so she joins up. Last night she was crying for hours, I was up with her.
Raymon.	That’s some sad shit.
Jen Jen.	Jane, she joined up to learn how to cook.

Raymon. To cook?
 Jen Jen. Like a chef.
 Raymon. What is she? Stupid? (Love and Waiting)

This notion is confirmed by one of the Journalists, Chip Webb, who says:

I really love these guys [referring to American soldiers], though. I feel for them, so far away from home. There is an essence of America. [...] But really, I respect these men and women. I don't have the guts to do what they do. There but for the grace of God go I. I didn't need to join the army to go to school." (Love and Waiting)

Ironically, this is true of most Iraqi soldiers on the other side of the battle, since an Iraqi soldier's salary was higher than for any other job in Iraq at that time. In addition, this is significant because before 2003 it was compulsory for all Iraqi men to serve in the army after finishing their studies. Iraq had suffered approximately thirteen years of economic sanctions since 1990 which deprived Iraqis of their simplest and most basic needs, and led many young men to join the army to survive. However, most of them lost their lives during the wars. In spite of the obvious differences that separated American and Iraqi armies, the soldiers on both sides had many things in common.

Robbins copies the true story of the capture and release of Private Lynch in the character of Jen Jen in *Embedded*, since Jen Jen is also captured, by Gomorrah's forces. She is injured and moved to a hospital in Babylon. The dialogue between Jen Jen and the doctor in Gomorrah echoes the true feelings of most Iraqi people during this war. When Jen Jen is severely wounded, afraid, and angry, she cannot easily trust the doctor in the hospital where she is held as a prisoner of war, yet when he offers her food, he assures her that she is going to be safe, and that he means well and will protect her from the Fedayeen:⁵⁷

Doctor. They cannot take you anywhere now. You do not have the strength. You will not make it. I will tell them.
 Jen Jen. They won't listen to you.
 Doctor. I can try.
 Jen Jen. How come you speak English.
 Doctor. I studied in London. Now, you need to eat something. Would you try something that you see opened in front of you, like some crackers. Would you eat some crackers?
 Jen Jen. Why would you want to help me?
 Doctor. Because I am a doctor. It is my job.
 Jen Jen. But I am the enemy.
 Doctor. (*Pauses*) Some of us are happy, you are here. Some of us want things to change.

⁵⁷ The Fedayeen are Iraq's Special Forces, founded during Saddam's regime. They are known for their Black uniforms that also cover the faces, and for their cruelty and severe treatment, even of Iraqis who declare their objection to the policy of the regime during the late 1990s and the first years of the millennium before the fall of Saddam.

Jen Jen. But won't they hurt you if you help me. Aren't you scared?
 Doctor. They have taken my brother. They have tortured me. They
 cannot hurt me anymore. I am not going to kill you, Private. I
 did not become a doctor to kill people. (War)

Most reports about the actual Private Lynch, and by Lynch herself, state that she was well treated by some of the Iraqis when she was captured and it was the help of Iraqis that led to her rescue. Moreover, when the doctor suggests that some people are happy that the American forces have come to topple the regime in the country, he reflects the actual feeling of many Iraqis at the beginning of the war.⁵⁸ This scene encapsulates a moment in the play when both sides in the war find a humane connection due to fear and uncertainty, which Robbins wishes to focus on: “the tragedy that results when young men and women are asked to engage violently with strangers in a hostile land” (Robbins, 2011). In this particular scene, the play manages to paint a significant picture of both sides of the war. This is portrayed in the fear of the invading forces felt by the injured soldier, juxtaposed with the feelings of the local people of the country who are determined to challenge the fear that they have felt for a long time. Both sides find it difficult to trust one another.

After the war in the play, The Office of Special Plans meet again to look into the subject of an election in Gomorrah and whether it is going to be possible to arrange one because of the unstable condition of the country. While most of the members declare that it is going to be difficult, they all retreat when agreeing to Strauss's concept of democracy cited by Woof: “Democracy has to be informed by an educated populous, and until they are educated, it is the obligation of those that are smarter to help them make the choices that will best serve their emerging democracy” (Where To Now?). This illustrates the kind of democracy they intend to install in the country. Satirically, Cove tells a joke, “Why can't we win the war on poverty”, and gives a clear answer, “there is no money in it” (Where To Now), which suggests that to politicians, war is an important source of income to politicians. Accordingly, they start to think of where to relocate after this war, calculating the possibilities of the coming wars with historical nations such as Persia, Sumeria, Judea and Asiria, since such wars have proved to be profitable for them. Ironically, this predicts the Arab Spring that followed the Iraq invasion in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and finally Syria that were in most cases encouraged and supported by America.

⁵⁸ As an Iraqi who lived through this war and the wars during the 1980s and 1990s. I can confirm that what the doctor is doing and saying to the private soldier in the play can reflect reality to a large extent. More than half, if not most, of Iraqis were relieved by the fall of the regime, though they were later disappointed by what accompanied and followed this fall.

It is only at the end of the play that a thoughtful description of the situation in Gomorrah, Iraq is given by Sarge, an officer who fought this war, stating that though it looks as if the war has ended, it is far from the end:

They say the war is over. I wish it was for me, so I could see you and the kids again. We have more work to do, though. There are a lot of good people here, a lot of angry people too. I don't suppose you come out of years of fear with a real healthy outlook. These people have been living in fear for years, looking over their shoulders, thinking their neighbour is going to turn them in. People that cannot trust their neighbours kind of need everything that go their way. We're just trying to figure out how to make them trust us. My men are good men. They've come here in honour and serves, and with good intentions. We are trying to get these people water, electricity, jobs, but there are some locals and enemy combats, instead of help, ban or sabotage, trying to undo whatever we do to help. (The Reckoning)

This description is an insightful analysis of the feelings that most Iraqis had when they faced the American invasion, and it perhaps also reflects what many American soldiers felt at the time. It also reveals the complicated situation that the native people of the country and the foreign military forces found themselves in at the end of the actual invasion.

In his strong defence of the play, Quarmby affirms that

[t]hese are realities of war. What is frighteningly believable is the portrayal of those who seek to adapt our responses, who see us -- you and me -- as 'the masses' to be herded like dumb cattle through our lives and into the slaughterhouse of our own meaningless mortalities. *Embedded* attempts to expose this subculture of power. It does so in a thought-provoking and, often, hilarious way. (Quarmby 2004)

For Quarmby, the play explores, with an intentionally sharp satire, the reality of wars and the political view that leads to it, and this provokes the audience and draw their attention, in order to awaken them to the amount of death and destruction these wars leave behind. For this and for its comic treatment of this grave issue, it is possible to say that the play has succeeded in drawing attention towards it. Conversely, Gillan, being a journalist herself, points out that

Robbins fails to explore the relationships between the journalists and the soldiers, the emotions they feel in the midst of battle. His sympathies are with the young soldiers far from home, the reservists, the mothers separated from their children, the men whose jobs may not be there for them when they return, the soldier who cannot bear the guilt after shooting out a car full of Iraqi civilians - but the journalists are just patsies. (Gillan 2004)

Gillan's criticism of the play is driven by her belief that it has marginalized the journalists' role in favour of highlighting the sacrifices of the military forces in this war. Such an opinion can be justified since the play portrays journalists as fairly impotent characters who are used as means in the hands of politicians and the commanding

officers in war time. Although the play's title suggests that their role is a significant one, Robbins characterises the journalists as tools to convey the politicians' philosophy and intentions. Yet, the play does present a role for active and honest journalism through the character of Colin Stringer, who tries his best to reveal honest news in spite of Colonel Hardchannel's close observation and control. Though it is possible to say that *Embedded*'s episodic presentation sympathises with one side, represented by soldiers and their families, more than the other, as Gillan claims, the play is still one of only a few plays that sheds light on the horrific experience of soldiers and the 'accidental' death of innocents in war conflict.⁵⁹ Despite all the critical reviews that attacked *Embedded* and the others that defended it, its repute cannot be denied; the play's impact can be measured by the fact that a master student in Journalism and Communication at Utah State University, Jeremy Gordon, made the play central to his thesis entitled "Framing Anti-War Theatre: Public Perceptions of *Embedded*" (Gordon 2008). The play obviously stirred controversial interest among theatre goers, theatre critics, and even journalists. This can be considered to be its success, in addition to the truths it reveals in connection with both the American and Iraqi sides of the war.

Rajiv Joseph's *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*: A Play for Both Sides of the War

Highly acclaimed by most theatre critics and audiences, Rajiv Joseph's *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* was performed several times in different places in the USA. Its first production appeared in 2009 at the Kirk Douglas Theatre in Culver City, followed by a performance in Los Angeles at the Mark Taper Forum in 2010. The Broadway staging of the play was in 2011 and featured Robin Williams in the leading role of the Tiger. In 2012, the play also opened at the Caroline Actors Studio Theatre and its most recent appearance was in 2013 at the San Francisco Playhouse. The play was a Pulitzer Prize finalist, and also received a number of recognition awards on different occasions, such as the Outstanding New American Play from NEA (The National Endowment for the Arts) Awards, in addition to the nominations for the

⁵⁹ I have a personal experience of family members who died during the war in 2003 in Iraq, when eight of my cousins were killed by what used to be called 'friendly fire', which is the term used for mistaken attacks by the Coalition Forces over civilians, which killed innocent people. For me, the play provided the other side of the story by giving an insight into the burden that such 'mistakes' can leave on those soldiers and the pressure they are under.

Drama League Award and the Outer Critics Circle Award. Charles MacNulty, a theatre critic from the *Los Angeles Times*, asserts that it is

[n]o ordinary play. I'm tempted to call it the most original drama written so far about the Iraq war, but why sell the work short? The imagination behind it is way too thrillingly genre-busting to be confined within such a limiting category... *Bengal Tiger* marks the breakthrough of a major new playwriting talent. (Joseph 2010, II)

As its title suggests, *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* takes its main plot from the actual incident of the tiger of Baghdad Zoo, which “was shot by one of [the American] troops when the tiger bit off a finger and mauled the arm of another soldier” (Weinstein 2010). The simple layout of the play tells the stories of a tiger, two American soldiers, and an Iraqi translator who used to work for Saddam Hussein’s son, Uday. The story, which is set in the early days of the invasion in 2003, relates to the Bengal tiger that is guarded by two American soldiers. After being shot, the Tiger in Joseph’s play returns to life as a ghost to present existential and philosophical dilemmas about religion and God. Running alongside this narrative is the story of the two guards, the soldiers, Tom and Kev, and their Iraqi translator Musa. They are fighting over a golden gun and a golden toilet seat that Tom has stolen from the palace of Uday, after the latter was killed. In Tom’s defence after his hand is savaged by the tiger, Kev kills it. The tiger’s ghost haunts Kev, leading him to try to cut his hand to present it to the ghost, in effect killing himself. Musa is haunted by the ghosts since he used to work for Uday as a topiary artist. The play reveals that Musa’s sister, Hadia, was raped and killed by Uday, which led Musa to feel guilty as he was the one who took her to Uday’s garden, and that is why he sees his sister’s ghost also. In addition to the main characters, the play presents minor Iraqi characters speaking Iraqi Arabic, and a leper whose character is so ambiguous that it is difficult to distinguish whether she is alive, or a dead woman walking, just like Uday, the Tiger, Hadia, or Kev after he commits suicide later in the play. The main, but not the only, inspiration for Joseph to write his play was Lawrence Anthony’s book *Babylon's Ark: The Incredible War Time Rescue of Baghdad Zoo* (2007), which tells the real story of the animals in Baghdad Zoo after the invasion, including the killing of a tiger by an American soldier in 2003.

The play’s originality stems from its distinctive treatment of the theme of the physical and the psychological conflicts presented through the characters of the play. It takes the real story of the killing of the tiger to a metaphorical level when the Tiger comes back to Baghdad as a spirit wandering the streets of this city, referring to himself as “Dante in Hades” (176), and debating the purpose of existence. While addressing the

audience, *The Tiger* takes them on an analytical journey through this life and the purpose behind it, with a slightly comic, yet very philosophical frame, looking for God. Joseph significantly gives voice to some Iraqis by including lines in Iraqi Arabic for major characters such as Musa, the Iraqi translator, and even Kev after his death; as well as some minor characters, such as Musa's sister, Hadia, the Iraqi husband and wife, a prostitute, and a leper. The play's world is one of magic realism in which the characters are confronted with their inner psychological demons through the existence of ghosts. Furthermore, there are the golden objects, the gun and the toilet seat, which seem to be the spoils of war for the Americans; but for the Iraqi, who was used to seeing Uday with it, this gun represents an important symbol of power, cruelty, and tyranny.

Joseph's play, which is presented in two acts and nine scenes, skilfully mixes the two American and Iraqi worlds so that it enables Kev to speak Iraqi Arabic fluently only after his death; while Musa and Hadia, the ghost, speak fluent English when talking to each other. Whilst Uday and Hadia had already died before the start of the play, the Tiger and Kev are killed within the progress of the action. All these characters continue to walk the streets of Baghdad restlessly after death without being noticed by anyone, except for Musa, who is, unexpectedly, able to see the dead characters and talk to them freely. Neal Zoren's review in *NealsPaper* describes the play as being philosophically grounded with powerful images, revealing the viciousness of people and the motivation for such viciousness. Zoren continues:

Joseph's play neatly depicts the human traits — jealousy, fear, rationalization, game playing, revenge, expediency, power — that lead to conflict and war and presents them next to, and in tandem with, the harshness of war that robs many of their basic humanity. Full of insight though "*Bengal Tiger*" is, Joseph's script is often too blatant in its approach. Individual sequences have intensity, entertainment value, or both, but "*Bengal Tiger*" seems to be assembled by the numbers, Joseph baldly plotting passage after passage with a mind towards bravura effects. His ability to interweave the fates of characters and to supply some arch, cynical dialogue, is mitigated by the simplistic way he frames his material and his ploy of using the supernatural, specifically ghosts with the will, and the ability, to do harm, to advance his story. You get the impression that Joseph is just cooking up situations for their bizarreness rather than for their poignancy and that, even when a sequence registers as meaningful or commentating, it plays like a writer's trick instead of as an integral part of a solid play. (Zoren 2014)

Zoren points out that it is clear throughout the play that there is a specific aim behind its dialogue and action. It is intended to create situations that simply surprise the audience with their 'bizarreness' above anything else. Although he is critical, it is undeniable that Zoren highlights that the sequence of the sentences and passages in the play is part of Joseph's talent in creating an effective theatre experience. Tony Brown's review

explains that *Bengal Tiger* is “a play in which war dead on both sides haunt their own killers, a realistic and otherworldly evocation of post-traumatic stress disorder in the making” (Brown 2011). Steve Wilson adds that it is a play “crowded with ghosts, conscience, and guilt” (Wilson 2014). Charles Isherwood agrees, stating that *Bengal Tiger* is a “boldly imagined, harrowing and surprisingly funny drama [which] considers the long afterlife of violent acts, as well as the impenetrable mysteries of the afterlife itself” (Isherwood 2010). At the very end of the play, Musa feels exhausted because of the number of ghosts that he sees in this city, Baghdad. Covering his eyes in exhaustion he says, “Too many ghosts. Ghosts everywhere” (240). Joseph himself has “often considered this play more of a ghost story than a war story” (Joseph, Written Interview 2015, 2). He further explains that his aspiration in writing plays is to provoke thinking and reconsideration more than anything else: “I would like to think that my plays provoke conversation and reflection, and that through these, one might enjoy and appreciate what they have seen or read” (Joseph, Interview 2015, 3). Therefore, the play may be described as a deliberately complex play, depicting the perplexity of war situations and cruelty in general, rather than the Iraqi war in particular.

Moises Kaufman, the director of the Broadway production, describes the Tiger as the main character and “the soul of the play” (Rose 2010, part1). He is a resentful creature who opens the play mocking lions for their stupidity because they were killed: “The lions escaped two days ago. Predictably, they got killed in about two hours. Everyone always gives lions so much credit. But I am bigger than them. I am bigger than those motherfuckers.” (Joseph 147) Yet his animalistic nature overpowers his interesting wit and intelligence, driving him to bite the American guard Tom’s hand when he tries to feed him a Slim Jim, just before being shot dead by the second American guard, Kev. For the Tiger, this is normal as he repeatedly admits that getting hungry often means getting stupid, therefore he acts stupidly. (150, 154, 155) Death does not prevent Joseph’s Tiger from wandering around in this world of the play and challenging the existential mystery: “See, all my life, I’ve been plagued, as most tigers are, by this existential quandary: Why am I here? But now... I’m dead, I’m a ghost... and it’s: Why aren’t I gone?” (175) In this tranquillity of death, the Tiger philosophically continues to ponder:

The fact is, tigers are atheists. All of us. Unabashed. So why am I still kicking around? Why me? why here?
 It doesn’t seem fair. A dead cat consigned to this burning city doesn’t seem just.
 But here I am.
 Dante in Hades. A Bengal tiger in Baghdad.
 (beat) You didn’t think I knew Dante, did you?

Now that I'm dead. I'm having all sorts of revelations about the world and existence. Things just appear to me... Or maybe I'm floating into it. But it doesn't help. No matter how much I learn. I'm still trapped. I just thought I'd be gone by now. Why aren't I gone? Will someone please tell me why I'm not gone from here!?(175-6)

Such inquiries suggest that this 'dead' Tiger is more than a mere animal. Reciprocally, Kaufman points out that for him as a director, all the characters are "fully fledged" (Rose 2010, part 4), rather than symbolic. Kaufman's statement, that the characters are three dimensional, that is, realistic rather than images of characters, corresponds with Joseph's intention in creating the character of the tiger:

The Tiger has always represented a tiger—which is to say he has always represented the primal, the animal force of nature which is apolitical. The Tiger has no interest in the human folly of war. And so, once I made the Tiger a speaking, thinking character, he became an interesting narrator for this play about the war in Iraq... neither American nor Iraqi nor Human. A beast. (Joseph Interview 2015, 1)

On the other hand, this Tiger is like no other animal since is able to talk and walk around after death and this new philosophical existence of this Tiger enables him to rethink his status: "When an atheist suddenly finds himself walking around after death, he has got some serious reevaluating" (176). Inevitably, he attracts symbolic interpretations, especially in this city and during this time. Joseph explains his interests in such characters:

On another level, I am interested in the convergence of primal and political forces. I think our lives are in many ways determined by both—the biological impulses that make us living creatures vs. the man-made structures that rule our world. When these two things collide, interesting stories are there to be told. (Interview 2015, 1)

The Tiger is also distinguished for his determination to find answers to striking questions that no other animal has the chance to ask and probably no human has either: "What if my every meal has been an act of cruelty? What if my very nature is in direct conflict with the moral code of the universe? That would make me a fairly damned individual" (187). His question amounts to a confrontation with the cruelty and greed for power. In response to the question of whether or not the Tiger's words are meant to criticise war in general, Joseph explains:

I think rather than "criticize" it is meant as a provocative thought—one might consider it from the Tiger's actual point of view, which is that as a wild animal, is he hardwired to commit murder/acts of cruelty? Or it might be lead [*sic*] one to think about the folly of war and human nature. Again, with these lines in the play, I am not trying to write in code to make a

statement or a point. It's just an interesting question, I think... and one that pushes the Tiger through the play. (Interview 2015, 3)

Accordingly, Joseph skilfully used his Tiger, who is by nature cruel and primitive, to represent and question actual animalistic traits, particularly killing, which has also left its traces on the other human characters in the play, Uday, the soldiers, and even Musa. This is in addition to the picture of the primitiveness and cruelty of war itself which can be seen as the only winner and hero in the world of the play, which in effect reflects life itself.

As a ghost, the Tiger haunts Kev, the American soldier who killed him, while at the same time he is looking for God and the philosophy "about sin and redemption"(192). He tries to atone for his sins by turning to vegetarianism after death, yet when he acknowledges reality, he gives up, angrily:

We're just stuck here, son, Mastodons in the tar pit of life-after-death. And I'm tired, and I'm not a saint, I'm just the biggest predatory cat in the entire fucking world. So I'm gonna kill something, and I'm gonna eat it and I'm gonna wave this bloody carcass in God's face and tell him, You knew I was a tiger when You made me, Motherfucker. (223)

As he is frustrated with his journey, his search after death leads him to picture "God in a cage" (241) because he is convinced that all the chaos in the world is God's fault. He reaches the conclusion that in the end "the Lousy dead, innumerable and in constant parade, would finally have [their] holy land... a cage in a garden in a burning city."(242) And in the same way that he, the Tiger, opens the play, he closes it but this time recites the rules of hunting for the audience:

Don't fuckin move. Don't make a sound.
Be conscious of the wind: where's it coming from.
Be still.
Watch.
Listen. (242)

As Robin Williams, who played the role of the Tiger explains, the Tiger moves in the world of the play as a ghost "evolving from a consciousness, then a conscious, and then conscience"; (Rose, part 1). His meditation about life and death, the powerful and the weak, the reality of his nature and its conflict with the greater good, the idea of damnation, heaven and hell, and the existence of God, made this character wider than a mere big cat, moving after death and questioning everything.

During the productions in Los Angeles and Broadway, Charles Isherwood reviewed *Bengal Tiger* twice, in 2010 and 2011, for *The New York Times*. Describing the Tiger in 2010, he states that this "creature's profane musings on the cosmos and the nature of

man and beast provide tasty comic diversion from Mr. Joseph's bleaker considerations of the legacy of brutal acts taking place both before and after the American occupation" (Isherwood 2010). He added in 2011: "this creature of dumb instinct begins acquiring a moral sense and with it the burning desire to know how the afterlife can exist without God, and how God can ignore the unruly garden of corruption that his world has become" (Isherwood 2011). Therefore, 'this creature', whether a mere animal or a symbol of a human being, becomes a representation of a beast who is occupied with crucial reflective thoughts about this life. In an interview with Gerard Raymond, Joseph elaborates on his intention to highlight "the folly of human conflict. So then to give the animal a voice is to give the primal a voice. And by having the tiger as the narrator of this play, I have a strictly apolitical voice" (Joseph 2011). This is a statement that he emphasises and almost repeats during the recent written interview I made with him in June 2015, as mentioned earlier, describing his intention for the character. Moreover, Lucy Komisar, concludes: "the tiger is our moral conscience, and the play is about war and repression exercised by the strong against the weak" (Komisar). This conclusion is strongly supported by the Tiger's description of his lunch as consisting "of the weak, the small, the stupid, the young, the crippled. Because they're easier to kill" (187). This can also be true of human tyrants and power seekers who target the vulnerable since they are easier to control.

Additionally, there is Musa, who used to be a topiary artist. He is Uday's victim who becomes a translator, the 'terp', who works for the Americans, and finally a killer. Musa's character could be seen to represent all victimised characters who are turned into beasts. Joseph introduces Musa as a dedicated translator, who genuinely works hard to master his job with a light humour, looking carefully at every word American soldiers say and trying hard to understand their meaning and purpose, as well as the context they are used in:

- Musa: I speak English, but I don't understand casual American phrases. So when I go with the soldiers, I listen for these phrases and write them down so that I can better understand the way you speak. It's also why I enjoy watching films.
- Kev: You learn English from *The Fast and the Furious*?
- Musa: I watch *The Fast and the Furious* because of the cars. I like the cars. (158)

But Musa is unable to escape his reality as a victim who is caught between his miserable past and a mysterious future. His dead sister's shadow haunts him in every girl he sees (210). After seizing the golden gun which originally belonged to Uday from

Key, he refuses to return it to Tom, the American soldier, who took it from Uday's palace:

- Musa: I'm sorry...
(laughs) Why would I give you the gun?
- Tom: Why would...? It's mine! I'm not in the mood, okay? I got a headache and I'm stressed out so just give me my gun. It's mine. I'm serious.
- Musa: No, you are not serious.
- Tom: I'm not? You want to test me?
- Musa: You don't know what is serious.
 You have no investment in this gun, it does not mean anything to you outside of the fact that it is gold. You're looting so you have something, something to take home. I don't care about what you have to take home, Jonny.
- Tom: What the fuck are you talking about?
- Musa: What the fuck? What the fuck are you talking about, Johnny?
- Tom: My name's not Johnny!
- Musa: My name is not Habib. (218-9)

Musa's insistence on keeping the gun relates to the connection that he feels with it, and to what it represents morally, to him, rather than to what he can do with it. For him the gun is not the mere investment that it might be for Tom. Owning this gun can give Musa a sense of owning his own past and probably gaining some kind of control over his future. Musa's argument with Tom reflects his sense of pain and determination to distinguish himself as an Iraqi, and an artist who is forced to live a violent life that he did not choose. This is something that some Americans cannot easily understand, as they never had to live the way Musa had to live:

- Musa: I'm a gardener! Don't you understand? I'm not a terrorist! I'm not an arms dealer! I'm not a translator or "terp".
 I'm a gardener!
- Tom: Fine! So you're a gardener! So what!?
- Musa: You don't understand... you don't understand...
- Tom: What don't I understand?
- Musa: I am an artist! I am an artist!
- Tom: Yeah, okay, you're an artist.
 Golden Gun. Where is it?
- Musa: And Weapons?
- Tom: I am not getting you a bunch of fucking weapons, okay?
- Musa: Then you're not getting the gold gun! This is not complicated!
 Capitalism! Thank you! Now you want something for nothing?
- Tom: What do you want with a bunch of weapons anyway?
- Musa: What do you think I have to my name? A stupid job with U.S. Military?
 And what about when you all leave? What will I have then?
 I'll have a bunch of guns and bullets I can sell because that will be the only thing worth anything. Is that so crazy? (220)

In addition to his insistence on making others recognize him for who he really is, an artist and a gardener, which is far from being merely a 'terp' for the Americans, Musa is also trying hard to make use of the chance that he had with Tom's eagerness to return

‘his’ stolen golden gun. He wants to extinguish the fear that most Iraqis have of the future beyond the invasion, by asking for weapons which seems to be the only means of support and the security he dreams of. Williams explains that in such times of wars and insecurity, guns and bullets are the currency (Rose 2010, Part 2). During this dialogue, Musa reveals that his real guilt is that he is always led to work for the wrong people, the tyrants. Finally, he realizes out how the world works:

Tom: Yeah, it’s crazy.

Musa: I am tired, do you understand?!

I am tired of making the same mistake over and over and over again.

I always work for the wrong people.

I always serve the tyrants.

Not anymore.

I am tired of being made a fool.

Tom walks away from Musa, rubbing his eyes, exhausted.

Musa: It’s a simple deal.

What you want and what I want.

Isn’t this how the world is supposed to work? (220-1)

According to Arian Moayed, the actor who played Musa in the Broadway production, Musa’s character is different from other Middle Eastern characters that are usually represented in Western theatre either as total victims or evil, such as Nehrjas’s character in Thompson’s *Palace of the End* or the young Ismael in Griffiths’s *The Gulf between Us* (both discussed in Chapter Five). Musa is a real character, that is, he is complex, rather than good or bad. He tries to deal with the situation “right here and right now” (Rose 2010, Part 2), and ponders what is going to happen when the event is over, which goes beyond the question of Iraq, and becomes applicable to “anyone who is displaced from war from the beginning of time” (Rose 2010, Part 2). Musa is haunted by Uday’s ghost, who puts such a powerful pressure on him that it leads him to submit to the fact that he “will live with [Uday’s] voice” (240), and because of his frustration, Musa eventually kills Tom. In the end, he is resigned, though he is not fully convinced:

I will live with it.

It doesn’t matter, because my hands belong to me.

My hands have their own memory.

And when I put them on a plant, they create something.

They will create something...

Musa says it but he has not convinced himself. (240)

In this speech, Musa can be seen to represent most victims of war and tyranny, particularly Iraqis. It is not easy to forget and overcome such experiences, therefore there is no better way to deal with them other than to live with the memory and to focus on what one has at hand. When Musa is faced with the Tiger, he is able to see and hear the beast, who takes Musa as God, after hearing him say that he made the topiary in the

garden. As the Tiger admires the garden, in spite of it being destroyed by war, he tries to convince Musa that he is God, yet the latter refuses saying: “God has spoken. This world. This is what he’s said” (241), as they refer to the garden, now destroyed, Musa’s words show his disappointment and frustration with his life and future.

Charles McNulty wrote three reviews of *Bengal Tiger* for three productions of the play in 2009, 2010, and 2011 respectively. In all his reviews of the play, he stresses the centrality of Musa:

If there’s a protagonist in this field of characters, it is indeed Musa, who is wrestling with loyalty to his nation and his position with the U.S. military, with his hatred of the Hussein legacy of brutality and his disgust with the American carnage that has supplanted it, with his identity as a creative being and his recognition that without power art and beauty are utterly expendable. (McNulty 2010)

For McNulty, Musa is “an artistic soul trapped in a globally manufactured hell.” (McNulty 2009) More significant is Musa’s struggle with what McNulty describes as “the play’s open-ended questions: How can one survive when innocence is so wantonly violated? Who can one serve when callous destruction and greed seem to be inextricably bound up with power?” (McNulty 2011) Zoren adds that

Musa, in significant ways, becomes “Bengal Tiger’s” central character. He is the everyday Iraqi who had a good job and enjoyed the freedom he had to landscape the grand garden of the great Uday Hussein but who had his life shattered, first by Uday’s display of wanton power, and later by the ongoing war Iraq endures. (Zoren 2014)

Musa is the essence of an Iraqi character who was born during a war, raised up under the control of a tyrant, and is required to survive eternal conflict.

Bengal Tiger has three more significant characters, Uday, Kev, and Tom. Since he had already died before the action of the play, the first character appears as a ghost. Eventually, Kev and Tom die: Kev, by taking his own life, and Tom is killed by Musa. However, Uday’s ghost plays a fundamental role in illustrating the sadistic nature of Saddam’s regime. His influence on Musa, who may represent many Iraqis, is undeniable and huge, since he attempts to create another version of himself in Musa, especially when he realizes that Musa has killed Tom:

Uday: Don’t tell me you didn’t like it! It felt a little bit good, didn’t it? Killing the boy, leaving him to die.
When you realized the bullet hit, that it caused pain, you felt *relief*.
I know it, man. The pain went away.

Musa: Yes, the pain went away.

Uday: Good. You’re beginning to learn about survival.

[...]

 You know what your problem is Mansour?

Musa: I don’t have a problem.

Uday: Your problem is this: the best thing you're ever done, in your entire life, was only possible because of me. Without Uday, you're just a petty gardener. (237)

Such is the character of a tyrant and his powerful influence on his victims even after death. He keeps repeating the idea that it is only because of him, that Musa is something: “[w]ith Uday, [...] you're the artist, building topiary, doing these great things. Because *I* wanted them. Because *I* employed you. Because *I* provided you with thousands of gallons of water in the middle of the fucking desert” (238). For Musa, there is no life without Uday, particularly when he is very proud of his artistic talent in creating a beautiful garden. Uday insists “[t]his is *Uday's* garden! You think this place is *yours*? These animals are *yours*? Even your *memory*? It all belongs to Uday” (238). Karen Weinstein's review of the play argues that “Uday's ghost never questions why he is there; he simply persists in his sadistic narcissism. Some torturers never die; they never even fade away. Musa was destroyed by Uday's rape of his sister; as a ghost, Uday the torturer just continues to torment Musa” (Weinstein 2010). Therefore, Joseph creates this character to reveal the history behind Musa's character and to illuminate facts about the complex reality of Iraqis' life before the invasion, which may inevitably affect their present and future.

On the other hand, there are the characters of the two American soldiers, Tom and Kev. Interestingly, after killing the Tiger, Kev starts to hear and see the ghost of the Tiger everywhere, such as when he is searching through an Iraqi family's chest of Blankets:

Kev stares at one of the Blankets, draped over a chair now. He paces around it, as if it might suddenly attack him. Something spooks him.

He grabs the blanket and bunches it up and then throws it just as Tiger enters the scene. The Blanket hits Tiger and clings to Him. Kev sees this, but nobody else does.

Kev: Oh God, no way.

Tiger seems to be almost sleepwalking, not aware of his surroundings. He shrugs the blanket off and wanders around, not sensing Kev or anybody. (169)

Western audiences can appreciate the scene, when the blanket's fur may represent the tiger, but the scene, “the raid scene” as Joseph refers to it (Interview 2015 1), is strikingly relevant to an Iraqi audience. It is common among Iraqi families to own what they believe to be the best kind of blankets, which is heavy blanket and made of wool. This blanket can be found in almost every Iraqi house and it is known among Iraqis as the ‘blanket with the tiger’, because it has an image of a tiger on it. When Joseph heard about this from me, he asserted that he did not know about it before, and for him it was

“a surprise to hear and seems to be a fantastic coincidence” (Joseph 2015, 1-2). Of creating such a scene, Joseph explains:

[o]ne must create a room of chaos, in which every person is in a state of panic for different reasons. It is within this crucible that the soldier Kev first sees the ghost of the Tiger, as so begins to lost his mind [*sic*]. It is also the scene in which Musa acquires the gold gun. But it is also a reflection of how communication difficulties led to unnecessary violence on a near constant basis. (Interview 2015, 2)

Should Westerners and Iraqis attend the play at the same time, their reaction to this scene might reflect the differences between them. For the Westerner, such a simple reference represents a successful moment written by a talented writer, yet for a native Iraqi, it is reality, and therefore deeper and more meaningful.

Both soldiers, Kev and Tom, are obsessed by owning the golden gun and the golden toilet seat, which they looted from the palace of Saddam’s sons. Exhausted by the Tiger’s ghost before and after death, Kev turns to God with prayers, yet, interestingly he prays in Iraqi Arabic:

Kev: (Arabic) I am lost in the desert.
Anee Tayel Bil sahra’

أني تايه بالصحراء .

God, I am lost in the desert and I am calling out to you in prayers. Because I have never before prayed, I am praying to you in a different language because the very strangeness of it makes me feel like perhaps you would understand.

Ulleh, anee, tayeh bil sahra’ oo da ed’eelek, anee b’oomree me di’ait gebul, bess hisse da ed’eelek brair lugeh. A’roof hathe shee ghreeb bess emellee inoo tigder tiftehimnee.

الله اني تايه بالصحراء، ودا ادعيلك. اني بعمرى ما دعيت كيل، بس دا ادعيلك خسخ بغير لغه، اعرف هاذة شي غريب بس املي انو تكدر تفهمني.

(*He holds his severed hand high above his head, as if to offer it to God*)

Take my hand, heal my severed body, take me from the desert. Let my mind find peace.

Ukhuth eedee, ishfee gissmee ilmitgetta’, ikhithnee min il-sahraa’. Khelee bal-ee yirtahh.

اخذ ايدي، اشفي حسمي المكطم، اخذني من الصحراء. خلي بالي يرتاح (222).

Like the Tiger, Kev seems to have acquired much wisdom and knowledge after death, and in his ghostly form, the Iraqi Arabic language is among these things that he gained. As Americans, both soldiers maintain the position of the other side of war in the play, the enemy. Together with Uday, they are the means for the development of the characters of the Tiger and Musa.

In his role as translator, and along with the other characters who speak Iraqi, Musa satisfies Joseph’s insistence on having the Arabic language in his play. Joseph intended Musa to be a translator to cover his two main aims:

There is symbolism with him being a translator, just as there is symbolism in him being a gardener. However, I don’t frontload my plays with symbolism. I made

Musa a translator because I wanted there to be an Iraqi character who would a) have a realistic excuse to have a deep relationship with the soldiers and b) speak English. This made the choice of him being a translator an easy one. Once I had decided upon that, his action and his language took on its own significance in relation to the greater themes of the play. (Interview 2015, 2)

Therefore, it can be seen as part of Joseph's artistic method to convey his themes. He explains this saying:

I wanted to see acts of translation and I wanted the audience to understand that confusion. And that's why none of the Arabic [in the production] has supertitles. On a deeper level, the play is about other sorts of translation: The translations between the ghosts and the living, which is kind of a haunting process. So we see most of these characters in the play die and remain alive, or remain sentient. I feel like that movement from the living into the dead is, in and of itself, a form of translation that these characters are trying to negotiate. (Raymond 2011)

By using the strategy of translations, Joseph aims to make a cultural statement that would be difficult to achieve via supertitles to convey the words to the audience. The writer wants his audience to fully experience the sense of alienation that American soldiers might have felt while posted in Iraq. Furthermore, by doing this, he manages to create a line that separates between the living and the dead in the play. Hence, the unfamiliar sounds of the Iraqi Arabic utterances are meant to stamp an impression on the audience which intertwines reality and imagination, and this life and the life after death. Nothing is real and nothing is fully comprehensible.

Bengal Tiger in the Baghdad Zoo creates a world where both sides of the battle, the Americans and the Iraqis, are interrelated. Joseph stresses that

I don't speak Arabic. We had a woman and a young man, who were from Iraq, who helped us with that in Los Angeles. They not only translated the text but they also transliterated it so it could be read phonetically. They also recorded it onto a CD so the actors had something to hear and be able to pronounce it correctly. Even now we have a dialect coach who helps the actors with their pronunciation. Iraqi Arabic is profoundly different from other kinds of Arabic. (Raymond 2011)

With its symbolism, metaphoric and philosophic, as well as comedic, the play brings the Americans and the Iraqis together, establishing them as humans being tortured and turned into beastly ghosts or ghostly beasts, by war.

Both Robbins and Joseph are driven by their desire to explain the critical situation of war and to confront their audience with it. They both appreciate the importance of their contributions as theatre makers toward the change they aspire for in the world.

While Robbins's play has been described several times as belonging to the Brechtian theatre, Robin Williams has stressed in an interview with Charlie Rose, that Joseph's play reminded him of Beckett's theatre, in the sense that it challenges the vital questions about God and the reason for existence. For Williams, the play was "powerful" enough, that is why he decided to return to Broadway in 2011, after more than two decades since his last theatre work in which he had acted that was Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in 1988. (Rose, part 1) Joseph's style is very different from Beckett's style in the sense that his play deals with realistic events that happened recently, and he illustrates his play on a metaphorical level, which makes it resonate powerfully in the audience's mind. In 2011, and before the release of the DVD of *Embedded*, Robbins stressed that "[w]hether through satire, documentaries, pop songs or films, whether these stories are seen by many or ignored, whether they are loved or reviled, now is the time to testify, to stand up and be counted" (Robbins 2011). In the same year, 2011, Joseph explained:

I felt writing a naturalistic play about Iraq would be impossible because I couldn't write a realistic, gritty war story about something I hadn't experienced myself... This led to certain characters speaking from beyond the grave and conversing with other characters even after their death... *Bengal Tiger* is a play that has a lot of humor [*sic*] it, but it also makes people confront the war. I think that makes it a unique experience. (Joseph 2011)

This is obviously applicable to *Embedded* too, as both plays rely on their humour and comic frames to reach their audiences.

Except for Hamed Al Maliki's *The Cart*, one of the key differences between contemporary Iraqi plays of war and the Western plays, that have been studied here, is the tendency in the latter towards humour and the metaphysical. An example of this can be found in Robbins's characters in the Office Special Plans as well as Hardchannel in *Embedded*, and the world of Joseph's *Bengal Tiger* where nobody seems to die since all the characters return to wander the world after their death. Most, if not all Iraqi playwrights, believe in the seriousness of treating the issue of war and its consequences which is reflected in their productions. Because they have been in direct contact with the war of 2003 and the previous ones, Iraqi theatre makers feel victimized, which they reflect in their plays, particularly those discussed in previous chapters of this study. Another reason why Iraqi playwrights take their work seriously can be explained by the conservative, and sometimes rigid nature of the Iraqi society that was accustomed to isolation for almost two decades before 2003 and has become vulnerable to all sorts of terrorism after 2003. Yet, Al Maliki's *Cart*'s successes has proved to be most effective through its latest popularity among its audience and theatre critics inside and outside

Iraq, with its slightly comic treatment of modern Iraqi history. This is particularly true of Robbins's and Joseph's plays, as both are highly comic, which heightens their deep and metaphorical tragic subject matter.

Both plays, *Embedded* and *Bengal Tiger*, with their comic frames and serious and tragic essence, received some criticism from theatre critics and the media, although it is much less apparent with the latter. Robbins responded to such opposing views stating that: "The attacks are meant to make you feel isolated, to prevent others who feel in a similar way from speaking out against the war." (Brantley 2004) The public reaction to the plays proves the effectiveness of theatre upon the audience; and the public's need of theatre to reflect their reactions towards what has happened in Iraq. And it is, indeed, war that those playwrights, Iraqis and Western, are attacking and confronting. And it is war that the audience are urged to react to and stand against.

CONCLUSION

In Chapter Two I discussed Falah Shaker's play, *The Wild Wedding*. The play received a rehearsed reading on the stage of the Drama Studio in Sheffield University on 12th June, 2014. During this presentation a third character, the Translator, was added to the two characters of the play, the Mother and the Son. As the play's translator I wrote the third character's dialogue based on a written interview that Zelda Hannay, the director, and I had conducted.⁶⁰ The character's role was to reveal my reflections on the process of translating a play in relation to the representation of both languages, Arabic and English and in addition, it was meant to clarify and comment upon the action of the play.⁶¹ The Translator concluded the rehearsed reading of play with the following monologue:

Translator: "What does a language 'feel' like? Arabic or English?"
 To explain that to you, I think I should say that it feels like milk and tea! We are born and the first thing we put in our mouths is milk, right from the very first few minutes of our lives, we don't know whether it is tasty or not, we just suck it, or we die. With times, it becomes part of our lives. Some would enjoy drinking milk until the very last day, without questioning whether there is something else which might taste better. This is how Arabic feels to me; it is milk that kept me alive since the first day of my life. But somehow, as I grew up, I tasted tea, the English language (not the English tea!), and I quite liked it. Actually I found in tea all what I was looking for in milk, away from the whiteness that leaves no space for other colors [*sic*]. Eventually, I stopped enjoying milk alone or tea alone; the combination of both became inseparable and essential for me. What is more enjoyable than a cup of tea with a generous dash of milk! (Shaker 2015, 23)

The rehearsed reading was attended by a number of students, university professors and lecturers, as well as a few members of the public. Two months later, we received a review that was written by one of the audience members who asserted that she chose to write about the play because it left an impact on her: "I wrote about *The Wild Wedding* as it has haunted me ever since *Terra Incognita*" (McManus 2014). In her review of the play, McManus highlights that the "play plunges [the audience] into an unstable world, one which most Westerners are unaware of". (McManus Review 2014)⁶² She further explains: "This piece had a powerful effect on the audience. It makes one realise that

⁶⁰ The reading of my translation of the play was presented as part of the post-graduate Practice-as-Research Festival entitled, *Terra Incognita*, The cast included the director, Zelda Hannay and three other colleagues in postgraduate studies, Siobhan Foster, in the role of the mother, Tim Norwood, in the role of the son, and Moe Shoji, in the role of the translator. In the light of the festival's main idea, 'practice-as-research', and upon the suggestion of the play's director, Hannay, the third character was added.

⁶¹ The published text of the play in *Arab Stages* is the version that was presented at Terra Incognita festival; therefore, it contains all the three characters.

⁶² McManus wrote the review in connection with her application for a job (in which she was successful) with the Arts Council England.

our theatre is the poorer for largely ignoring non-English speaking, theatre”, which proves the value of the intended exchange that this study aims to achieve. For McManus,

The production, given a rehearsed reading, was more developed in performance than that phrase usually describes, with the actors only occasionally referring to scripts. This enabled both audience and performers to access the visceral nature of the language and content; a simple read-through would not have had the same effect. (McManus Review 2014)

A more significant comment from McManus relates to the Translator’s final words, quoted here, since she highlights that “At the play’s end, [Translator] pours herself a cup of tea: the milk represents her mother tongue, which nourished her as a child, the tea represents English which she now needs to mix with the Arabic to nourish her fully.”(McManus Review 2014)⁶³

As stated in the Introduction to this thesis, theatre and drama are a means of expression that humans use to reflect on their life experiences and show their responses artistically. It is an activity that can use any language yet retain its ultimate objective of enlightening people about their lives. Here, the Translator’s words express this idea entirely through the notion that both English and Arabic are means of expression that can individually fulfil their ultimate aim, yet the combination of both can result in a more fully nourished comprehension of the situation.

As also explained in the Introduction, my principle objective of the thesis has been to provide an overview of contemporary Iraqi drama and theatre practices before and after 2003, as being a critical era that radically affected all aspects of Iraqi life and brought the country into the international media. Consequently, Iraqi drama brought international public awareness of the result of the wars since 1990. A second aim was to form a deeper understanding of Iraqis’ lives as presented through both Iraqi and Western theatre in order to challenge the stereotypical image of the country and its people that is presented in contemporary media. A third aim was for the study to serve as an attempt at bridging the “gulf”, as it is portrayed in Trevor Griffiths’ *The Gulf between Us*, discussed in Chapter Five, that exists between the two sides of the world, the Iraqi and the Western, through theatrical practices. This attempt has been fulfilled by juxtaposing the theatrical demonstrations of all theatre makers presented in this study. I consciously avoided making any direct comparison between Iraqi and Western theatre works in this study, because I believe that having similar or fixed variables, such as similar life conditions and relatively similar or common histories, are an essential requirement for any comparison to be precise and reliable. Both theatre practices have

⁶³ The full review is added to the Appendices of the thesis.

discrete conditions and ages that can easily make any comparison misguided, such as the still young history of the formal theatrical practice in Iraq in comparison to the long history of the Western theatre; the cultural background behind these theatre works, is another distinct difference between the two theatrical practices. Additionally, there is the political and social environment in which these practices are generated and presented, that is, the relatively democratic atmosphere surrounding the contemporary Western theatre as compared with strict governmental dictatorship before 2003 that was followed by the dictatorship of society, religion and conventions after 2003. Consequently, highlighting the differences between the two theatrical practices is another aim or an achievement of this thesis.

An important element that differentiates contemporary Iraqi and Western theatre about Iraq is the lack of complete knowledge about one another on the part of both sides. Although, the Western plays about Iraq presented here exhibit some knowledge of Western playwrights and dramatists through their Iraqi characters, Iraqi theatre makers clearly show a tendency toward avoiding any tangible depiction of Western characters in their theatre works, except for the thematic presence of the Americans in Shaker's *The Wild Wedding*. Trevor Griffiths maintained that "You can only really write about what you know" (Interview 2015). However, it is possible to argue that a better understanding and knowledge was presented through the plays tackled in Chapter Four, Heather Raffo's *9 Parts of Desire* and Hassan Abdulrazzak's *Baghdad Wedding*, since the writers are half Iraqi in the former and originally Iraqi in the latter. In Griffiths' *The Gulf Between Us* and Judith Thompson's *The Palace of the End*, discussed in Chapter Five, and Rajive Joseph's *Bengal Tiger in the Baghdad Zoo*, discussed in Chapter Six, the Iraqi presence is discernible, yet it is still not fully comprehensible, since, as is fully explained within these chapters, Griffiths emphasised that he does not "know enough about Iraq" (Interview 2015), while both Thompson's and Joseph's recognition of the Iraqi characters in their plays are the result of what they encountered in the media and through some acquaintances. However, the Iraqi presence in Tim Robbin's *Embedded* is mainly achieved purely through a symbolic and political perspective, which is the image of Gomorrah and its people. Unlike the Western plays, the Iraqi plays studied here focus mainly on portraying their side of the story before and after 2003. This may be explained in two ways: first is the overwhelming confrontational life conditions Iraqis lived during the 1990s and the prompt and chaotic life condition they lived after 2003, which means that there is already very rich material to reproduce and dwell on in Iraqi

theatre. Second, as Griffiths states, playwrights and dramatists tend to write about what they are most familiar with rather than anything else.

In spite of the obvious variance between the Iraqi and Western plays presented here, these works still show some similarity in the depictions of certain issues and themes. Among the most apparent and recurrent ideas in these plays is the theme of doubts and uncertainty about the reality they are living, and about their future, which can mainly be detected in Abas Alharbi's *Al Nehdha*, Shaker's *Heaven Open its Gate... Late* and *The Wild Wedding*, Hamed Al Maliki's *The Cart*, Abdulrazzak's *Baghdad Wedding*, Griffiths' *The Gulf between Us*, and Joseph's *Bengal Tiger in the Baghdad Zoo*, and traces of which can also be found in the rest of the plays. Such themes could be the result of the confusion and the cruelty of Iraqis' conditions pictured in Iraqi plays, and in the Western plays, can be explained as being the result of the actual uncertainty of the playwrights and dramatists reflected in their work. In both cases, whether the sense of doubt and vagueness is intentional or not, it provided an element of reinforcement to the themes of those plays since it allowed more space for interpretation for critics and audiences simultaneously. A second recurrent image in plays is the violation of virginity and rape that is quite tangible in many of the plays: intensely in Shaker's *The Wild Wedding* and Abdulrazzak's *Baghdad Wedding*, while it can be traced with less intensity in Alharbi's *Al Nehdha*, Raffo's *9 Parts of Desire*, Thompson's *The Palace of the End*, and Joseph's *Bengal Tiger in the Baghdad Zoo*. In the first two plays the woman's rape is intended to depict an actual physical state that is a metaphor for the rape of the country. The second group of plays portray the actual physical rape inflicted on Iraqi women through different periods of time and for different reasons. Distinctively, the rape image that is implied in Thompson's play is the image of rape as an instrument of torture imposed by American soldiers on the detainees of Abu Ghraib to 'soften' terrorists as is described in the play.

Kareem Chitheer's *The Masks*, Ali Al Zaidi's *Fourth Generation*, Al Maliki's *The Cart*, Raffo's *9 Parts of Desire* and Thompson's *Palace of the End*, all shed light on a significant theme: the silence, surrender, and helplessness of Iraqis in the first four plays and of the Westerner represented in the character of Dr. Kelly in the fifth. All these characters share that inability to talk about the truth they live while they are alive; and they achieve this aim only when they die, as did Hanoon in *The Cart* and Dr. Kelly in *Palace of the End*. Salam Abood's book *The Culture of Violence in Iraq* traces the works of some of the major Iraqi literary writers during the 1980s and the 1990s to reveal the harsh and cruel reality that Iraqis lived. These writers developed tactics such

as coping and adaptation; that often meant keeping silent which, according to Abood, was disastrous. Toward the end of his book Abood, an Iraqi, stresses that whatever Iraqis lived is

a fate that was imposed on us, yet still, it was imposed on with our own hands, or at least because of our passive attitude in resisting its ugly and evil face. It is a fate that was formed by our participation, and not by other external forces, neither from an upper world nor an underworld; and this is what everybody is trying to deny, but it is the bitter truth that we cannot get rid of its viciousness now. (Abood 2002, 270)

Abood's statement can be applied to the case of Dr. Kelly in the sense that the character was also unable to talk about the truth while he was alive, due to a sense of threat which is highlighted in the play. Whether they (the writers) keep silent like most of the Iraqi characters presented here or are able to articulate their suffering like some of the other Western characters presented in the study, the predicted negative result will always be the same: cruelty and death. Accordingly, such forced passivity can be said to be the reason behind the recurrent theme of craziness and illogical chaos, such as that presented in Chitheer's, Al Zaidi's and Joseph's plays and even to a certain extent Robbin's play. While the illogical situations in the first two plays are a result of a huge amount of suffering and struggle, such situations in the last two are a result of an attempt to criticize and comment on the kinds of struggle the characters experience.

A prominent and almost universal theme that is shared in all of these plays is women's struggle and suffering as a consequence of dictatorship and wars. Before 2003, Iraqi plays crystallised the social, political and economic pressure on women; the characterization of Chimmala, other women in *Al Nedhda* and the wife in *Heaven Opens its Gate... Late* are more than enough in the current context to depict an Iraqi woman's story during that time. Similar depictions are rendered in the Western plays, and are further illuminated by Nadja Al Ali's statement describing the dilemma of Iraqi women after 2003:

We find that the US invasion of Iraq initially opened up new, albeit circumscribed, spaces for Iraqis Women's activism. However, the limits of US commitment to women's empowerment is demonstrated by the administration's support for the construction of a political system in which communally defined political interests erode women's rights and women's participation. Moreover, in the context of a foreign occupation and a political system in which ethnic and religious identities are salient, gender identities are being reformulated by various actors in order to mark national, religious and ethnic differences within Iraq, as well as between Iraq and the 'West'. Consequently, Iraqi women activists find themselves under increasing pressure and forced to negotiate a difficult situation. (Al Ali 2009, 65)

Al Ali's point of view is embodied in characters like Hanoon's wife in *The Cart*, Dr. Aziz in *The Gulf between Us*, the mother in *The Wild Wedding*, Amal and the American

in *9 Parts of Desire*, and even Luma in *Baghdad Wedding*. They all long to be free of pain, like Amal, who expresses herself in the following way:

I want to be like you
 this is the most free moment of my life
 really I mean this
 Oh really I love you, like a sister I love you
 the most free moment of my life.
 Don't leave, stay with me
 Oh I need to talk everyday this way.
 Is this American way?
 Tell me what you think
 what should I do?
 I want to memorize what you say,
 so I can be this way freedom again. (18)

All the women presented in the plays, even the Soldier who represents the tyrant among them in *The Palace of the End*, are part of the collateral damage of the governmental and social dictatorship in Iraq, and war, and its generators. Additionally, they are even more victimized by their inability to speak or the lack of space where they can articulate their conditions, and furthermore, by being wrapped in a certain stereotypical vision that the media disseminates to the world.

In reference to the idea of contemporary political theatre that is discussed in the Introduction of the study, the common theme in these theatre works that connects all the plays and their discussion can be explained in terms of a medium that provides the audience with an opportunity to experience a reality that is otherwise hidden or overlooked, that is, what it is like to be an Iraqi and/or a Westerner in such a complex situation. Peter G. F. Eversmann's article, "The Play of the Spectator" asserts that in experiencing theatre,

the fact that audience members can refer to these experiences as being transported to another time and/or place is significant and it has even resulted in such concepts as 'double consciousness' – whereby the spectator perceives the world of the play as being real but at the same time, somewhere hidden, has the notion of it 'only' being a theatre performance – as a kind of safety net that one can always fall back upon. (Eversmann in Meyer-Dinkgrafe 2012, 285)

Hence, theatre and drama provide the privilege of safety; while the plays present to the world an artistic and well as realistic depiction of Iraqi life, of cruelty and war; and they maintain the required sense of safety so that the audience can perceive and reflect logically on such experiences. This sense of safety is not available to the characters embodied in such events in these plays because they are under the pressure of the conditions they experience which in the end tends to hinder their logical judgment. Abdulhameed emphasizes the notion that theatre should be a solid weapon for civilized

communities with a “mission” to shed light on the defects of the society, by satirizing, and even mocking them with an objective of reforming life conditions. (Abdluameed 2010, 22) This ‘mission’, of unveiling the ugly reality in a society, can perhaps best be fulfilled through the safe experience that theatre can offer about the defects in familiar and unfamiliar societies, which is aimed at reforming them.

One of the vital conclusions to be drawn from this thesis is that a number of further studies have to be carried out which, hopefully, will be fulfilled in the near future either by me or in collaboration with other researchers in the same or even different academic field in the Arts and Humanities. This study revealed many issues that could be a rich source of material for academic examination both from and about Iraq. I shall summarize the main and most prominent of these as follows:

1. Iraqi Plays in the West: Following the rich experience of the rehearsed reading of the translation of *The Wild Wedding* at the University of Sheffield and the audience’s responses that I have seen, an important future project would be to try to push the potential of these plays to reach beyond reading and academic study. I intend to continue my attempts at presenting the other translations that I have already made of Iraqi plays, and other new translations of other significant plays for publication, and to contact people who might provide an opportunity of producing these plays in the West, and particularly in the UK.
2. Women and Theatre in Iraq: Since its establishment in the first decades of the twentieth century, the practice of formal Iraqi theatre paid significant attention to the status of women in society. Plays such as *Al Fatat Al Iraqiah (The Iraqi Girl)* by Mahmoud Nedim and *Wahida* by Moosa Al Shabender in the 1920s are among the early plays that depicted the life conditions of Iraqi women and called for the reformation of their status. Al-Mafraji points out that the first Iraqi actress, Mediha Saeed, joined *Al Firqa Al Watenia Lil Temtheel* (the national company of acting) in 1929. (Al-Mafraji 1985, 10). Al Zubaidi states that the first Iraqi play written by a female writer was *Mejnoon Layla* (1946) (*The Mad Man of Layla*) by Atika Al Khzraji (1924-1988) (Al Zubaidi 1967, 194). In spite of the strictly conservative nature of the Iraqi society, in the 1950s new actresses were encouraged to join theatre activities, such as Fekhria Abdulkareem known as Zaineb, Nahida Al Remah, and Azedohi Samual. Furthermore, the 1970s witnessed an important increase in the number of Iraqi theatre actresses by a number of contemporary prominent female names in Iraqi theatre, such as May Shaoki, Ronak Shaoki, Iqbal Naeem, Awatif Naeem, Shatha Salim and later

Suha Salim. Among them Awatif Naeem is one of the rare active female dramatists in Iraq today, whose plays gained acclaim and recognition inside and outside Iraq. Therefore, investigating women and their status in Iraqi theatre is an essential part of any future study in this field. Plays such as *Madness of Doves* (2012) and *The Silent Women* (2014), which are among the most recent plays by Naeem, are significant plays to be noted and examined. Moreover, Iraqi male dramatists, too, evidently find women's issues rich material through which to depict the situation of the country. The Iraqi plays studied here show the undeniable prominence of the role of women in Iraqi society. Additionally, plays such as Ali Al Zaidi's *Rubbish* (1995), Jawad al-asadi's *Women in War* (1998) and Saad Hadabi's *Ashes* (2013) are only examples of distinguished plays that deserve every attention in connection with the issue of women in theatre and society in general. I have already translated the plays mentioned above and have started to examine them with the intention of pursuing further research in the near future.

3. Iraqis in The West: This topic can be divided into two parts:
 - a. Continuous investigation and examination of Raffo and Abdulrazzak's theatrical activities as referred to in the conclusion of Chapter Four, could be a fruitful field of research. Although these playwrights' works have a different focus, they can be in active connection with the previous issue of women and their status in Iraqi society since Raffo's main focus of her work is depicting the situation of Iraqi women and her struggle. Moreover, the significance of the position of Iraqi women in Abdulrazzak's works is also evident.
 - b. Iraqi dramatists in exile is another important field that deserves deep examination. Names including Abas Al Janabi in the UK, Basim Al Tayeb, Mukhald Rasim, and Enkidu Khaled in Europe are only examples of Iraqi theatre practitioners who found a better environment for their theatre activity in the Western world. I had the opportunity to attend Al Janabi's play *Game Over* that was presented at Academy 2 in the University of Manchester in March, 2013. In spite of the limited resources that were available for the production, Al Janabi's play was thought-provoking, as it depicts the brutal history of Iraq within a slightly comic, yet very suggestive framework. The play portrays the story of the A Thousand and One Night, of Shahryar and his mistress

Shahrazad who instead of telling him stories of the past, reveals to him prophecies of the future of Baghdad and what would happen in modern and contemporary time. Shahrazad's negative prophecies lead the king, Shahryar to be shocked, disappointed and unable to believe what he hears, particularly when he is used to rule a thriving country during the Abbasid era. I distinguished the works of these Iraqi theatre makers from Raffo and Abdulrazzak, since they migrated from Iraq as adults rather than spending all or most of their lives in the West, which may set them apart in their perspective and style.

4. Translations: This, too, is a two-dimensional research topic:
 - a. Theatre text translations. Throughout my research I experienced the lack of well-preserved and documented Iraqi play texts. Some of the plays that I have studied here were found by mere chance, such as *Al Nehdha*, and I needed to wait years to chase others from one person to another and from one Iraqi city to another in order to collect the scattered pages and put them together, for example, *Heaven Open its Gate... Late*. It is only through the generous help of the playwrights themselves, the support of some Iraqi friends in the academic field of theatre and fortunate coincidence that I was able to collect these significant plays. Therefore, researchers face huge obstacles when they try to locate, trace, and finally study plays. There are many plays for which I could not find a text or a person who might help, especially those that were produced in the 1990s, although I am in contact with the playwrights themselves – but they do not keep a copy of their own texts. As a result of this crisis I feel that a movement of translation for Iraqi plays would be the best solution. Firstly, it would encourage theatre writers to locate their texts wherever they are and publish them either online or through Iraqi and Arab publishers. Secondly, it would introduce a generation of the Iraqi theatre makers to the world. Moreover, a reversed movement of translation, that is from English and other languages to Arabic, can be of great significance to Iraqi theatre practitioners, since the early 1990s; the movement of translations, particularly theatre translation, retracted to almost nothing during that decade and it is currently still very scarce, which contributes to the negative isolation of Iraqi theatre practice in general. Therefore, I intend to start this work by translating the Western

plays that are included in this study into Arabic and hopefully find a space for publishing them in Iraq, which will introduce a flavour of the Western perspective of the recent wars to Iraqi theatre practitioners as well as the public.

- b. Critical theatre work translations. As stated in 'a', the Western critical publications of the last three decades are not available in Arabic so far, which may affect the progress of the theatre activities in Iraq in one way or another, since the influence of the Western theatre on Iraqi and Arabic theatre is established earlier in this study. Therefore, it is essential to translate works such as Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*, and the theoretical writings about contemporary trends such as 'immersive theatre', 'verbatim theatre', and 'in-yer-face' theatre, into Arabic, which will definitely find a considerable amount of attention among theatre makers and students too. In return, the translations of some Iraqi critical works, such as those of Dr. Salah Al Qassab's theory of 'image theatre' referred to in Chapter Three, and the recent critical works of Dr. Ahmed Al Sharji in relation to acting and theatre practice in general may find some audience in the West as well. I have already made a plan for conducting some of these projects myself in the future.
5. Innovative theatrical experience in contemporary Iraq: In spite of the isolation from Western theatre that Iraqi theatre makers feel, because of the political conditions during the last three decades and the current critical situation in the country, new theatre events are being held and celebrated every year and in more than one city in Iraq. Works such as those of Samem Hassaballah and Ali Al Zaidi that are referred to in Chapter Three are significant innovations in Iraqi theatre practice in general, and they are definitely worth translating and examining academically. In reference to his *Ice*, discussed in the same chapter, Hassaballah is currently working on a second part of the play, entitled *Autumn*, that I had the privilege of hearing about during its early drafting. Anas Abdulsammad is another Iraqi innovator, referred to in Chapter Three, whose work and theatre workshops need further investigation and introduction to the international stage through translation and research. I have already started a research paper entitled 'Iraqi in-yer-face theatre' that I hope to be able to complete within a short time that involves the translations of some of the plays

mentioned here and their examination in relation to the idea of the Western theory of ‘theatre of cruelty’ and ‘in-yer-face’ theatre.

6. Further studies of Iraqi and Western plays: As is clarified in the thesis, the plays that are presented here are a limited sample of the range of the plays that were written and produced during this period 1990-2013, which I could not tackle because of the limitation of time and space for this study. Therefore, further future studies will include other Iraqi and Western plays that are written during the same period of the this study, such as Sinnan Al Azawi’s *Al Mubheroon Dhid Al Rieah (Those Who Sail against the Wind)* (1995), Khalid Al Mutlak’s play *Jazra Wassatia (A Central Reservation)* (1996), Kareem Chitheer’s *The Mourning is not Appropriate for Caligula* (2004), Kadhim Nassar’s *Ahalem Kartoon (Kartoon’s Dreams)* 2015, Sam Shepard’s *States of the Shock* (1991), Harold Pinter’s *The New World Order* (1991), Jerry Quickley’s *Live from the Front* (2005), and Roy Williams’s *Days of Significance* (2007).

Other than these most apparent, and if I may say urgent spaces of investigation, there are several minor fields of study that could be conducted, such as: comparative studies of Iraqi and Western theatre practices, the rich field of the Iraqi theatre adaptations of Western themes and the buoyant trend of ‘commercial theatre’, since both of these are undeniable realities of theatre in general, not only in Iraq.

Among the important issues that are established in the thesis is the relation between the Iraqi and the Western theatre practices, particularly those of the idea of the Iraqi ‘serious theatre’ and the international understanding of political theatre. Moreover, as is stated in the Introduction to the thesis, Iraqi and Arabic theatre in general is believed to have taken its most refined shape and has been developed as a direct result of the influence of the Western theatre, since most Iraqi and Arabic theatre practitioners received their theatre education in the West. This influence and impact of Western theatre on Iraqi theatre is also due to Iraqi and Arabic theatre practitioners’ efforts in translating the Western theatrical theories into Arabic. Consequently, the references to Western theoretical writings in theatre that I used in discussing the Iraqi plays were possible; and hopefully, those references have reinforced comprehension of the background of these plays and the intentions of their authors. Furthermore, the works that are tackled in Chapter Three, namely Chitheer’s and Al Zaidi’s plays, proved to be Iraqi innovative practices that unintentionally coincide with the most recent trends in the Western contemporary theatre, such as ‘in-yer-face’ theatre and ‘immersive’ theatre. This informs the notion that the difficulty and complexity of the reality of those Iraqi

theatre makers led them to even more creativity that happens to concur with the rest of the world, despite the fact that they were totally isolated during the 1980s and the 1990s. After all, theatre as a genre of literature is intended to reproduce “truthful representations of life” (Brecht 1992, 107) and “drama concludes once reconciliation, challenge or achievement is complete” (Gordon 2010, 27). In this context, it is equitable to agree with the Clown in Chittheer’s *The Masks* that “[w]hat [we] have just seen is only a glimpse of the scene” (108/299), since such conclusions, reconciliations, challenges and achievements are ongoing, as is life. In effect, theatre activities are continuous, especially of and about Iraq, particularly when Iraqi theatre has survived decades of difficulties and crises so far, proving its persistence.

APPENDIX I

Iraqi Translated Unpublished Play Texts

AL NEHDHA⁶⁴**1997****Abas Alharbi**

Translated into English by: Alyaa A. Naser

⁶⁴ Al Nehdha is a central district in Baghdad. It is a very old and neglected district; known mainly for the working class people. It is famous for being a place for drunken men at nights and prostitution. It is very crowded and thus makes a good haven for deserters from military service. Mostly poor and unfortunate families live there. The district is also known for the bus station or a garage for those soldiers who used to go to their services in the different parts of Iraq from this bus station. It is also a place for illegal street vendors who are always raided by the Municipality. Ironically, the word (Al Nehdha) in Arabic means the Rising.

[All Characters are played by one female character, Chmmala: a woman who is in her late fifties wearing the traditional Iraqi abaya,⁶⁵ talking to nobody and everybody. During this monologue, she assumes the voices of many characters, the Judge, the Prosecutor, her dead friend Fadheela and her daughters, and many other characters from Al-Nehdha.]

- Allah is one, the second is Mohammed, the third is Ali and his sons⁶⁶... Stand up... I say, stand up; what is wrong with you... Weakened! All of us are full of heart ache... The heart aches as if it knocks on the chest's door to open; full of lamentation as we all lean on our shafts. What you see on the back of the hedgehogs are not quills, they are the shafts of patience towering to their Lord... saying to Him could this be life and when it passes, we are to be judged after that! Oh, most merciful! [*Addressing somebody, presumably her friend Fadheela*] Pray with me... Oh Lord who answers all prayers... Cry with me... We have nobody else but He creator of this blue tent... this blue sky that has no like but in the eyes of those who confront... [*Addressing her friend again*] Do you remember your daughter's blue eyes... Clear blue eyes as the pure sky that has no hawk to bite a pigeon... They are these blue eyes that cursed us... Neither the beautiful nor the fake is protected from the heat of its suns... Don't let them work in the sweets factories⁶⁷... It's better to have them married to anybody... even to those black dogs with nothing in return... We don't ask you for anything neither in advance nor later,⁶⁸ we're just asking that you protect her nights from evil wolves. [*Recites a verse of traditional poetry as if in a celebration of a marriage*] Here comes the brand new and original gun that is never used before⁶⁹... [*Reconsiders what she was saying*] What are you talking about... not used before! Oh, yeah, not used and not blackened! [*Sarcastically*]. Who has asked for marriage and we asked him for anything?

⁶⁵ Abaya is the traditional cover for Iraqi women used to wear in the streets, now mostly in the countryside and old traditional places as the holy shrines.

⁶⁶ Ali is Prophet Mohammed's cousin and son-in-law, and his sons are known as Shiites' Imams.

⁶⁷ Those sweet factories were known among the public as places for prostitution and immoral acts as the owners and the male workers in these factories would take advantage of the female workers because of their poverty and need for money.

⁶⁸ It is part of the Islamic and traditional habits when a woman is engaged her family would ask the suitor for an amount of money to be paid for her or her family as a kind of a gift for the bride and her family and when signing the contract of marriage the groom is to sign for another amount of money that should be paid to the bride in case of divorce. These two amounts of money differ according to the families of both the bride and the groom.

⁶⁹ In Iraqi folklore, a virgin is compared to a new gun, pure and unused, and her family is very proud of her purity; that is why she is compared to an old Russian gun that has never been used or fired before; to show their pride in her they celebrate that in her wedding with songs and poetry about her virginity and purity.

Fadheela... The heart has stopped or I have gone deaf ... Stopped!... Oh...no, It hasn't... [*Addressing Fadheela's daughters*] You daughters, Ferha and Zwaina,⁷⁰ tear your clothes in grief over her!⁷¹ But, what to tear! Your clothes are already worn out in Al Nedhal Street⁷² ... [*addressing her dead friend again*] Dear sister, Om Ferha⁷³... Why didn't you wait for me... I don't want to stay here either... These pills have grinded my heart ... Oh, where is it? Have you hidden one for me? One pill... to show mercy for your soul and protection for me... No one will pray on your corpse except me... [*As if talking to another person*] May you have a long life, brother ... May you have a long life son! [*As if preparing for the funeral*] Make the tent larger, hey boys⁷⁴ ... Your mourners are many... Add more sugar to the tea of the funeral... Take the death certificate to Al Mukhtar⁷⁵ ... Let him omit the name from the monthly share⁷⁶ ... Tell the dresser of the street to have rest now⁷⁷ ... Fedheela needs no more pills below her tongue... It's only the problem of Chmmala now, who can't sleep unless she takes pills [*referring to drugs*]... What a bad conclusion... a conclusion of pain... of exhaustion.

We spend our lives running... And we'll die running... [*Addressing her dead friend*] You are happy, you took your soul and ran away... leaving me alone with this amount of meat that is not tasty at all for worms⁷⁸ [*mocking her situation*]... Oh woman with your age, you raised a generation... with your big heart that'll kill you... The knives of your cousins will look for your daughters till midnight in restaurants and nightclubs⁷⁹ ... [*Assuming the voices of the cousins looking for her daughters*] Hey, that one with the red dress is our

⁷⁰ Ferha and Zwaina are the endearment versions of the Arabic girls' names Ferah and Zena, meaning happiness and beautiful adornment.

⁷¹ Tearing off one's clothes is a sign of the sadness in times of disasters and very shocking sad events in traditional Iraq and it still is in remote countryside.

⁷² The main street in Al Nehdha district.

⁷³ In Iraq, married woman is called by her first born child rather than her first name out of respect.

⁷⁴ It is part of the Iraqi tradition in funerals to have big tents to receive the mourners; the bigger the tent the more important the dead person would be. Adding more sugar is a sign of welcome.

⁷⁵ The director of the neighbourhood, as the mayor.

⁷⁶ Since 1990 and during the embargo times in Iraq, each family received a share of basic food items provided by the government according to the number of the family members. Therefore a family is required to inform the mayor or the provider of the monthly share if any change takes place in the number of the members of the family as in the cases of marriage, giving birth, death... etc.

⁷⁷ Traditionally, the male nurse in the neighbourhood would have a shop in the main street to treat people and give them the needed medicine and injections as he would be cheaper than the doctors, that male nurse is called the dresser.

⁷⁸ The amount of meat is a reference to Chmmala's own aged body.

⁷⁹ If a girl or a woman has a bad reputation, commits adultery or is known to have worked in prostitution she becomes a disgrace to her family and is thus hunted by her brothers or cousins if she doesn't have a brother to clear the reputation of her family.

daughter! No, it's the one who is showered with money... Hold your hands, sons, they're all alike... Don't rush; you may kill a girl and she turns to be of another family... Check her well... Be careful! Maybe that one who got inside the ghost [Mercedes].⁸⁰ Neither their ghost is asleep nor your heart is calm in peace... But it's alright... Dear sister I think we the poor are entitled to go to Heaven... If only death wouldn't be painful, we would all go for it... Tell me, sister how is it? Is it like when you finish your sentence in jail and you are released... Are we to fly up or... or... to be swallowed by the ground?

[Assuming the voice of a judge] The court has given the sentence in the presence of the charged criminal, Fedheela Mussbah Mughbash, of fifteen years in prison for her practice of blackness [prostitution]...

[Fedheela again] Hey you, my daughters were working in the sweets factory! May you never throw sweets on the heads of your happy people⁸¹... I waited for them in Al Nehdha till midnight, by Chmmala who sells tea... Ask her... The girls didn't show up... I went to the factory and suddenly the police came... I was shattered... my scarf on one side and my abaya on the other side... [the voice of the police to Fadheela] Move... Get up ... [Fadheela] Hey sons my sibha;⁸² I used it for as long as the male date palm tree lives⁸³... Praise be to Allah is able to do anything... Praise be to Allah who plans everything... Praise be to Allah... how can I collect what is scattered! One pill is below your foot...

[Imitating someone who wants to buy pills] I want a pill... [Herself again] Do not worry; it is midnight... Open your pockets... The Cross pills... the Axe pills⁸⁴... Anything you want...

[As if in court again, taking the oath] I swear by God's name I will say the truth... the whole truth and nothing but the truth... I want a pill... Ask the guards of the jail who were here before, they all know the story of Chmmala who has never closed a door in the face of a woman before...

[She starts taking both roles of the prosecutor and herself as a criminal.]

A question?

An answer, son!

⁸⁰ As a very expensive car, Mercedes used to be called a ghost in Iraq as a nick name for its high value.

⁸¹ Throwing sweets on the heads of people on happy occasions is a folklorish practice in Arab countries.

⁸² Sibha is a kind of rosary that is used by religious men in their worship God and in Islam it is used by people in everyday prayers and worship.

⁸³ Date Palm trees are very popular in Iraq and are known for their height and long life. Male palm trees are known to be even taller and live longer.

⁸⁴ These are alias used for drugs among those who use them.

Do you have any relation to the victim, Abass Zighair Chelooob, known as Abas with the dagger; did he use to visit you at your house?

Dear son... That man was a deserter... and he runs away every time he sees the military police around.⁸⁵ He knew Al Nehdha and Bab Al Shaikh very, very well...⁸⁶ My family never received cowards or shameful men in their houses.

[*Judge or prosecutor*] Be careful in choosing words, you woman. You are in front of a legal court ... You are not on the streets of Al Nehdha... Say master. I swear by the Master Malik⁸⁷ ... I have never known him before... That damned hour when I lost my gas stove⁸⁸... If I knew it will bring me such troubles I would have given a gas cylinder with it.

Hey you, son... Nephew... Master ... Please, I want a headache pill and I will give you my son's wedding cabinet⁸⁹... [*As if talking to her friend again*] Get out of your sewage... Om Ferha ... I am shivering... my tongue is twisted ... [*To the court again*] Your honour, judge, you want the truth and truth needs a straight tongue... My tongue is tired of running after the truth... It'll be cut off and I will swallow it and go speechless and we'll all be lost with the lost truth... One pill without water... [*Addressing her absent son*] Dear son, Jwad, your mother is thirsty. May your flask be always full of water... Never open your mouth to air... Close your teeth... Be a brave man... they say the threads of the sun are rooted in the mouths of men, if they say Ahh ,of pain, they'll lose them and they'll live in darkness and if they kept their mouths closed they'll have their flasks dry and in both cases it is a puzzle... a confusion... [*To her friend again*] Dear sister, Om Ferha, I want a pill; have mercy on your soul and save me.

[*To the court*] I do not want a pill from you... I will take it from Fedheela ... The dead won't laugh on the disasters of the living... I know their souls fly above Al Nehdha in pairs, in pairs... in groups⁹⁰... Sing with your aunt Chmmala... oh our lives... oh our sadness... and pain!

⁸⁵ Military police were known in Iraq for looking for deserters of the army and arresting them to be executed in public.

⁸⁶ Another district very similar to Al Nehdha and next to it.

⁸⁷ A very religious dead man known among simple Iraqi people as a holy person, especially in the far countryside. He has a shrine where he is buried and those people are used to visit him and take blessings from the place.

⁸⁸ A small mobile gas stove that is used by peddlers to cook tea and make sandwiches on the street.

⁸⁹ This is known as the most expensive gift to be given to the happy couple in the wedding.

⁹⁰ She is referring to the spirits of the martyrs, those who are killed in war.

[Referring to people in Al-Nehdha] That is the bus driver who took extra money from you... This is the woman who cheats in selling cream and butter who cheated on you... with her cheap tea... but my tea ... your aunt's tea is very fine with cardamom on a non-smoking stove... Why do your eyes fly away following dyed women⁹¹ ... my sons, I too have a son like you, he polished his military boots here in Al Nehdha and never gave himself to such women... Believe me, sons, those faces of the women of the night⁹² are fake just like the drum of Al Demmam⁹³ in the city where nobody is fasting.⁹⁴ Why is nobody buying...? Oh a raid! A raid and the Municipality.

They hide under the bridge... as if waiting for the chance to attack us; just when the raid starts! Hey, you losers run away with your things... They come for us... Hey you, that man is blind his cakes are scattered down and spread all around the gate of the garage... Go help him, please, good men... Whose helmet is that; that is on the floor? Hey sons, why are you running... We are chased by the Municipality... What about you? Why are you running? Oh, going to Basrah.⁹⁵ By the name of Allah, what beautiful tall palm trees are they! Please, you, young man if you happened to meet my son don't tell him that I was attacked by the Municipality... Don't tell him they took his mother's stove... He might get worried... Don't tell him that I can't sell one "estican"[cup] of tea⁹⁶... Tell him that we live in eternal spring and prosperity... Our moon is shining happily and spreading joy all over the places... Those people of the Municipality are joking with us... The old man is cared for and he is doing fine... He never cries, he is a good man... The teacher teaches the children Dar... Daran... Shuqqa⁹⁷ [*a house... two houses, a flat*]... The man from the Municipality has slipped and fallen down and his eyes are filled with tobacco... Never mind, everything can be fixed as long as you are safe... Tell my son to take a leave and come back, I

⁹¹ Women who use a lot of make-up especially lipsticks to attract men are known as dyed women among Iraqi people.

⁹² Are prostitutes or fallen women.

⁹³ Al Demmam is the drummer who walks in the middle of the nights drumming to wake the people up for the meal before dawn, Suhoor, during Ramadan.

⁹⁴ Fasting is the sign of believers in Islam.

⁹⁵ Basrah is the southern Iraqi province that is known during the 1980s and the 1990s as the centre of the Iraqi army where most battle fields used to be. The city suffered a lot during the Iraq wars. Most of the soldiers who fought there faced death and never returned to their families.

⁹⁶ This is a small cup of tea; it is part of the Middle Eastern tradition to use these special shapes of cups for tea; known also in Syria and Turkey.

⁹⁷ Dar is the Arabic word for a house, Daran means two houses, these are the first two words that children learn at Iraqi schools as they are the easiest in writing and reading in Arabic; the character adds the last "Shuqqa meaning a flat" to satirically comment that people like her have their own houses which wasn't true, of course.

bought him a bed and everything is ready for his wedding... Oh please, Almighty Allah, that saved Yunnis from the mouth of monster to the land again;⁹⁸ bring me back my stove... Hey you, who can hear me, can anyone find my stove... Please, bring it back to me...

Hey you, Sadyia, with the red lipstick, did they take your stove too?

[*Assuming Sadyia's voice*] If they took everything in the whole Nehdha, they would never dare to take a spoon from me.

[*She starts playing both roles of Sadyia a fellow peddler on the street and herself in a small conversation.*] Then why do I have this terrible luck?

You can't take good care of your living.

I give half of my earnings to the holy shrine of Master Hamdallah⁹⁹... How can I be more careful...? You woman with the gum!

With all the respect... If heaven asks for charity, the ground also asks for its right... And the eyes of the people ask for food before even their mouths... What would you lose if you used some lipstick and a gum to chew, to be attractive?

Me! Jwad's mother!¹⁰⁰ Cursed be your forefather... Even with our straightforwardness Allah is not satisfied with us! I will pour on you all my anger and frustration over the loss of my stove and the poverty that is eating us! [*She starts to beat her*]... Get away from my face, you loser... [*As if stopped by a man from behind her*] Don't interfere these are women's quarrels.

[*Assuming the voice of a man who is trying to calm her down*] Om Jwad [Jwad's mother] you are a wise woman... Who said that your stove is lost...? I will bring it back to you even if it was in the mouth of the lion... It's only the Municipality.

[*Assuming a conversation between herself and a strange man*] Your Nehdha lost us our lives ... we got nothing from them except the monthly share of food... it is not my stove only.

What would you say if I brought it back?

I will cook a rooster on it for you as a reward and for the sake of Allah.

⁹⁸ The prophet Jonah or Yunis in English.

⁹⁹ He is another dead religious figure who used to be loved long ago and is known as having a kind of a holy status among simple minded old people of Baghdad and whose shrine is visited regularly by them.

¹⁰⁰ As honoured women in Iraq are called after their son's names, they feel very proud of that.

Now we disagree... If you want to cook for me... You have to know that my food is different, Om Jwad! If you want the stove you must get me one of the Bridge!¹⁰¹

The bridges are very expensive in Baghdad , Abas [*The man's name*]¹⁰² Whenever there is a raid we put our hands on the concrete of them till our hearts turned into stones along with our eyes.

Oh, she has started reciting verses for me! [*Mockingly*]... Hey, it's only a silly worthless stove... As if it's the stove of the Al Timimy Bath¹⁰³ ... Hey, you wait now... You are a treasure for me!

[*To the court again*] I wish he never found that treasure... Your honour and master... When I was born the whole wide world seemed to close upon my father as he had five daughters and I was the sixth, that is why he called me Chmmala¹⁰⁴ ... And, that Abas with the dagger, calls me a treasure!

[*The Prosecutor*] Your honour... I beg your pardon, you should not be influenced by such words and your decision should not be affected by sympathy with this old devil in the shape of a poor old woman... To the beholder she looks a naïve and primitive country woman... But she did what most mafia men could not do ... The crimes stated in this file! The question is what kind of a trick did she use to drag the victim to the crime scene?

The stove, dear son... It is only my stove that dragged that man of the dagger to me... The raid was on, and on the other side the raid of the Municipality and only those who are lucky would be able to find their things... And suddenly that Abas brought it to me from nowhere and he took money from me for the bridge things and walked away... Would he never have crossed that bridge!... Ha if you don't believe me, ask, Om Freha [*Freha's mother*] she was there waiting for her daughters to get back from the sweets factory... Tell them sister how he used to stand by me as a little chick by his mother.

[*Assuming Abass*] Aunt, Om Jwad, you are an old woman and selling tea only would not support you by itself... How can you survive with those women like

¹⁰¹ He is referring to a nick name for a drug.

¹⁰² Baghdad is a city that has two main parts, Al Kerkh and Al Rusafa, which are separated by the river Tigris; that is why there are many bridges in Baghdad that connect these two parts. Chmmala misunderstands his words about the bridge and takes it literally to mean the bridges.

¹⁰³ That is a very famous and big public and traditional bath in Baghdad, its stove is supposed to be very big and expensive.

¹⁰⁴ In the villages and among the poor classes, girls are considered as a burden for the families therefore a father of five daughters would never be happy with a sixth one that is why he gave her that names which means 'an extra' in Arabic as if a n extra burden to carry.

Widad, Angham, And Nessma¹⁰⁵... You know, Abo Khalil and his last tea in his leave¹⁰⁶... He should go for nice faces... That's why I said I should help my auntie, Om Jwad... Take these headache pills... You can sell them with the tea. My good tea could not help cure headaches in this Nehdha... Are you saying these silly pills will help?

Don't worry about the customers... I will work these out.

Then why don't you sell them yourself?

You know I am not legally allowed to walk free in the streets... And I can't stay in al Nehdha for more than an hour... You just say "yes" and you will find the customers queuing here...

I said "yes" and good fortune came from all directions... Hey losers, this is my hot tea with cold water with pills that will lift you to the skies... Son... I found all the money I need... These were pills that work like magic as if you are spreading poison in the Tigris and you get fish so easily from the river... You get it all, Chmmala... I do not think there could be more good luck... Can't you see you, false women with the lipstick; you thought it would be with makeup only!

[*The Prosecutor*] Your honour... Everybody is listening to how this suspect is pretending that she was ignorant of her act of social destruction and corruption. She continued to sell these pills till the moment when she was caught by the police. She claims that she thought these pills were for headaches, though she herself has taken a lot of them.

[*Herself again*] All the pills are white, son... For headaches... heartaches... and for the broken hearts... White made by the English¹⁰⁷... Haven't you seen how those boys stood in the queue for their aunt... That was Riadh the lame and Reheem with his collar.

[*As if selling in the street again*] Tell me son, how many pills do you want? Five... And you, sweet boy... Don't thread your eyebrows... it's a girly thing, dear young man... And you dear son why did you shave you moustache?¹⁰⁸

Can't you see your brother here who have them grown all over his neck... Run

¹⁰⁵ Those are other younger women who used to sell tea for soldiers, but they seem to attract men for other things rather than the tea itself.

¹⁰⁶ This is the nickname used for any soldier in Iraq.

¹⁰⁷ Anything made by English is used to be believed as the best among old Iraqis.

¹⁰⁸ Threading the eyebrows is a practice of young women, yet it became a kind of a fashion among young men during the 1990s in Iraq and it was criticized by all older people who considered it part of the corruption of modern times. A mustache is considered as another sign of bravery and manhood in the Middle Eastern world.

away boys, the military police is coming... Welcome dear, tall son ... You are as tall as my own son... The same uniform... The same belt... What do you need... Tea or water or even pills?... You want to pray?... Oh, dear son, what a blessed moment... Here you are this is the direction of the Qibla¹⁰⁹ ... blessed prayers... You can take my Abaya to pray on... Maybe then I will get some of the blessings of your prayers... Allah is the greatest¹¹⁰ ... Please pray for me, you ready man... Pray that Allah would bring me back my Jwad... Jwad the son of Chmmala... Safe and sound... His helmet on his head, never been hesitant on the battle field and his gun is steady on his shoulder... Praised be my God the Highest who lifts up the heads of people with all their burdens on their back... Praised be Him who puts warm clothes on naked bodies... Tell Him... Oh, God, the pure virgin women have left their homes to live on the pavements in Al Nehdha... Tell him that cold has beaten the chest of the old women... So please wrap them with your grace and warmth of mercy... It's better than their patience that is longer than Ayyub's¹¹¹ ... Oh Allah who answer s all prayers... We are asking you by the thirst of the Prophet's granddaughters in their captivity¹¹² to quench our thirst from your "Kawther" of mercy¹¹³ ... The bitterness of this life has made our mouths go very dry... Oh, dear, another raid!... The Municipality again... They have left all the rubbish in the whole country and are running after us... Please, dear son, Allawi, hey you with the carriage, take these "Istikanat" [*small cups*] with you, I do not want them to be lost too.¹¹⁴

Oh... My stove is not here... Who took it? Hey, you losers, who took my stove... Oh... No... my Abaya is taken too! Oh what shall I say? My whole life, I've never walked without it! What shall I say? I was in a funeral and I lost it?¹¹⁵
Oh... how can I go through those silly bus drivers? ... They won't let me alone... with my Abaya they didn't... And they say don't take these pills, Chmmala!

¹⁰⁹ Is the direction of the prayer for all Muslims, which is toward Makka.

¹¹⁰ The first calls for prayers in Islam, to start a prayer.

¹¹¹ Job in English, a Prophet who is known for his very long- lasting patience in enduring disease and loss of everything.

¹¹² She is referring to the well-known tragedy of Imam Hussein the grandson of Prophet and his family. The granddaughters of Prophet Mohammad were taken as prisoners after the battle of Kerbala and they were left thirsty for a very long time in captivity.

¹¹³ It is a name of a river in heaven that is believed to have very sweet water, according to Islam.

¹¹⁴ Plural for Istican or small cups for tea.

¹¹⁵ It is a kind of a joke known among the Iraqis that old women lose their Abaya in funerals due to the crowds of women in these events.

Hey, you, the one who prayed on my Abaya has taken it... Stolen it... and run away... Get out of your dirty hole, Om Ferha, I am so cold... I am shivering... Hey, dear son, Jwad, the whole world is dark in your mother's eyes from Al Kindi to Ibn Al Jozi¹¹⁶... Hey, my son, Jwad! Your helmet is protecting the borders and your mother's shoulder has nobody and nothing to protect her... Hey, you Egyptian, Hammada,¹¹⁷ you who used to say "please can I work here!" You are laughing at me now! I am Chmmala; the daughter of Sheikh of his tribe who was never a coward or never leaned on others... Curse be upon this Nehdha that is unable to rise up on its feet¹¹⁸... Hey you, loser, my husband, Al Muhamadwi,¹¹⁹ get down off your horse I feel so heavy with pain and there is no help... Hey you, loser, Abo Jwad [*Jwad's Father*] without you and your protection the God's sky is shivering with cold... I told you and warned you not to use your fine horse for pulling the carriage... can't you see what this time has done to us Abo Jwad... Pills... Prison... and a grave that wouldn't take the white hair of Chmmala in... why? Why does death refuse those who are rejected by life? Why?

Hey you earth... Have mercy on them... These are your people... Your family!

CURTAINS

¹¹⁶ These are two destinations in Al Nehdha; she is showing that she feels totally lost in a very familiar place.

¹¹⁷ During the 1980s and 1990s lots of Egyptian workers lived in Iraq and they were known for asking for work everywhere.

¹¹⁸ The word Al Nehdha in Arabic also originally means to stand up and face difficulties.

¹¹⁹ It is the family name of her husband, men are usually very proud of their family names.

HEAVEN OPENS ITS GATES... LATE

1999

Falah Shaker

Translated into English by Alyaa A. Naser

[Characters:

PRISONER: A war prisoner who has just returned home

WIFE: His wife who waited his return for ten years.]

First Painting

(A small house with poor furniture, yet elegant. A few imitated paintings, flowers, and an impressionist portrait of the PRISONER that looks like him and unlike him at the same time. The WIFE is sitting as if asleep in meditation. The PRISONER enters slowly, looking worried and a bit angry and his anger increases as he speaks. At the beginning, he addresses the place with no specification, rather than addressing the WIFE, whom he does not notice at first. The strange thing is that the WIFE listens to him while sitting, with care, as if she has gone through the same situation before.)

PRISONER. You are betraying me... You are not my wife. Being a war prisoner never led me astray, I was led astray when you ruined my memories (He throws his case from his hand.) Shall I return like this? This is my kingdom, my home; my garden is overrun with weeds: parsley, greens and onions! Where are my roses that used to be watered with my blood to make them red? You are not my wife any more... Should you greet me like this after all these years of prison... Shall we meet like this?! I used to dream of thousands of images of our meeting. (The wife is sitting on the bed looking in the opposite direction to where he stands.) The door is eaten with decay and left like an injured soldier, deserted on the battle field; the garden has become a market for vegetables. Where am I in all this? You killed my dreams and my home. This house is not my home... Oh, dear home, I never left you like this. I don't want to return to it while it is in ruin. What a disappointment! You are not my wife any more.

WIFE. No, you are not my husband!

PRISONER. *(To himself)* Have I changed that much while being a war prisoner!

WIFE. Are you asking me if being a war prisoner changed you to that extent? How could I know? I've never seen you before.

PRISONER. *(Applauds her)* How clever! Do you have the guts to make jokes as soon as you see me after all this time and try/

- WIFE. *(Interrupts him with objection)* Do you want me to have a fake husband as a joke?
- PRISONER. This is worse than what I have lived through. Have I gone mad and am I now faking my own self? Have I got married and had a home in my dreams only? Your denial is going to kill me!
- WIFE. Hey, I don't want to kill you or make jokes with you. I am his widow till he comes back.
- PRISONER. And here I am; back.
- WIFE. I don't know you. You are not the one who delayed my death, and you are not the one who kept my patience alive. I wasn't weaned for you. It's not only that I don't know you, but I don't like your look either.
- PRISONER. Oh dear God, kill me then; you know who I am!
- WIFE. Who are you?
- PRISONER. I'm... I'm... Oh... What a humiliating question! I'm your husband.
- WIFE. My husband! Why do you use the widow's waiting? I'm a martyr for him, you can't fool me.
- PRISONER. I fool you... My love!
- WIFE. Don't say love, I am waiting to hear it from him, only!
- PRISONER. My love... My love
- WIFE. You sound like him, but you won't fool me.
- PRISONER. I'm the one who is waiting for the word, my darling...
- WIFE. I won't say it, except to him.
- PRISONER. I'm nobody but him.
- WIFE. I know my husband. *(Screams)* You are not my husband.
- PRISONER. Who am I, then?
- WIFE. My brain addles with this question!
- PRISONER. OK, nothing happened. I might have had illusions about you before my imprisonment... Is it possible? If you allow me, to take some of my things that I dreamt are still waiting for me?
- WIFE. Take whatever you like.
- PRISONER. This statue, we bought it because we thought it was silly. We wanted to capture our laughs, so we bought it, though it is ugly. But we loved our memories being of it... And this vase...

- WIFE. We hated it.
- PRISONER. We bought it because the seller kept on interrupting our privacy by coming out again and again... And this... I went to buy a pair of shoes for you... and I came back with it. (*He throws some pencils down*) I yelled 'I brought this!' (*He writes on the ground.*) So that war wouldn't make you forget that you used to write your heart beats, even if it was unreasonable and childish... Take these pencils and write for me every night. (*He throws some papers in the air that fill the stage. He reads from one of the papers.*) The day is the 8th of December. We celebrated our wedding anniversary, that's why I decided to live some more years. (*He reads from another paper.*) I am going away from you, my love, please be the place I emigrate towards. (*From another paper*) I can't reach you... but I promise that I won't die before I do it.
- WIFE. (*She reads.*) Barbed wire is my blood... How can my heart escape to meet you?
- PRISONER. (*Reads*) The sun is a traitor, how could it leave you and set in the evening?
- WIFE. My fingernails are long now to dig my grave... And when it did, I remembered you and I found my fingers pointing with victory.
- PRISONER. The angel of death asked me how I would like to die... I said standing... He said, 'But that is against the rules of nature.' I said, 'Ask her then!'... Nature said, 'Only lovers have the freedom to choose how they die.'
- WIFE. I wish I have the certainty of prisoners of war, or even their pains. May be then I can be certain of what I have forgotten.
- PRISONER. And does the bullet depart the body of the dead so that he can forget about it? How could I be alive when I am a lover of my death, so that the bullet of your love won't be a failure.
- WIFE. But... you don't look like him... Or maybe you are not... You've changed.
- PRISONER. Changed... How couldn't I change when having the angel of death dwelling in my breath! You are frightened by your own exhalation, in case it won't be followed by an inhalation! Why don't I change and this hell of bullets settles in your friends'

bodies in the shelter, one after the other? The night I was taken a prisoner was more than enough to change the shape of all humanity. Why didn't I change when I was the only living person among thousands of dead bodies with no single living sound, not even a sigh from a wounded soul? I thought war was over or that that was the last battle... Where could I go? I collided with dead bodies wherever I went. Why shouldn't I change? It was doomsday; I wanted to hear a sound even if it was of a bullet that would go through my heart... I wanted to see a light even if it was of shrapnel that would go through my eyes... I touched those bodies trying to find my way out... I couldn't distinguish if they were bodies of enemies or friends. This night of doomsday made me run till dawn with increasing numbers of dead bodies beneath my feet. Then I remembered you and asked you which way to go so that I could reach you, my love... Come and take me... My ways are filled with dead bodies... Why shouldn't I change? I didn't change, because I am still electrified when I remember you... I didn't change, even if the prison played its game with my face and gifted me with a new one... I am deformed with war. Is it possible, my love, that you won't recognize my heart beat?

WIFE.

I can feel your love... but you are not you!

PRISONER.

Not me?! Is it my fault if war grants children white moustaches... We are blind, guided towards each other by the breaths of our hearts...

WIFE.

My soul... is hurting me. It recognizes you, but I...

PRISONER.

You are your heart.

WIFE.

No, my mind says it's not you.

PRISONER.

And did war spare our minds to think wisely!

WIFE.

I am not rambling... and I'm still in love with him.

PRISONER.

You love me!!!

WIFE.

And who are you to say/

PRISONER.

(Interrupts, screaming) I'm your husband.

WIFE.

But you are...

PRISONER.

You never said, 'but', before... You used to whisper 'I'll give my soul to you'. You used to stand here... every evening and

whisper 'I'll give my soul to you' and I let the newspaper fall from my hands to say 'let the newspaper go to hell' if it deprives me of looking at your face for seconds during this short leave, and then I'll be back to the frontier and I would still feel the taste of our first kiss on my lips. And you used to say, 'It's only days and you...' and I used to interrupt you to say, 'I want our kiss to be eternal'.

- WIFE. Oh, my only man... This waiting is going to kill me.
- PRISONER. I won't be absent... I'll leave my soul here.
- WIFE. Leave it here... my heart stole it the day we met.
- PRISONER. (*Remembering his words passionately*) Your heart stole it? You are a thief, then!
- WIFE. (*Smiling*) I didn't steal it; my soul is your soul.
- PRISONER. (*Protests, lovingly*) You didn't say that. You said, 'I'll give my soul to you.'
- WIFE. (*Hesitant*) I'll give my soul to you!
- (*The PRISONER speaks quickly while he remembers what they used to do in the past. He lies on the bed.*)
- PRISONER. When I used to be on a leave, I used to lie on this bed, reading the newspaper and you used to come and say/
- WIFE. (*Interrupts lovingly*) I'll give my soul to you.
- PRISONER. (*Enthusiastically*) And the newspaper falls from my hands and I get up and say, 'Give me a kiss' and you say/
- WIFE. (*With fondness*) Don't you get tired!
- PRISONER. (*Enthusiastically*) Tired?! My leave is about to end and we didn't... didn't... we are still discussing a mere kiss!
- WIFE. (*Laughs*) I'll stop discussing it on one condition; you stop talking about the kiss.
- PRISONER. I'll stop on one condition.
- WIFE. What do you want?
- PRISONER. Give me a kiss.
- (*They laugh.*)
- WIFE. (*Takes notice of herself*) I'm confused... You are not my husband... You won't fool me.
- PRISONER. I am not fooling you.

- WIFE. What does fooling look like, then? Can war change the colour of the eyes... Your hair might go grey or your face might age, yes... but the colour of your eyes... That is impossible.
- PRISONER. You forgot the colour of my eyes... The colour of my eyes...
- WIFE. I am a woman. Do you know what that means? A woman who would never stop staring at the eyes of her lover to remind herself how much he loved her. One second is enough to recognize the brightness of your eyes and their colour. How about the years that I spent staring at your eyes even when you were asleep!
- PRISONER. It's the terror of war and the tears of the prison that steal the brightness of the eyes and even their colour.
- WIFE. And prison can make a man shorter than he used to be?!
- PRISONER. I'm belittled by your absence; there were no hugs from you to hold me upright. Your loss was enough for me to put the shroud of the grave on and you want me to be as I used to be!
- WIFE. Oh dear God, his heartbeat convinces me but my eyes can't believe... Is it possible that war can change our looks, and make our lovers an enemy. (*Insisting*) No... I won't be fooled; there is a scar on your forehead...
- PRISONER. Ha!
- WIFE. On his eyebrow!
- PRISONER. It used to look like a small orange... your lips used to reach out to it every evening, bringing my forehead to you lips.
- WIFE. Where is it now?
- PRISONER. With the power of love and while remembering your lips, my heart beat moved it to my heart... (*He reveals his chest*).
- WIFE. No way... Impossible, this can't happen.
- PRISONER. Your memory is tired with beloveds whom we lost in war...
- WIFE. The frontier is in my rambling mind, the war in my weak heart... I'm just like the war, killing all memories of my beloveds, and I don't know why.
- PRISONER. And here I am coming back to you.
- WIFE. Don't snatch me... Don't plant your mine of illusion in my house.
- PRISONER. It's my house too... I won't do that... Do you remember, 'Marry again if I was killed'? I used to say it when I felt afraid and I

- sensed your love... 'Marry again if I was killed, and you restlessly screamed/'
- WIFE. *(Interrupts)*Who would be able to relive our dreams or memories, except you?
- PRISONER. With the humiliation of fear you whispered, 'To the couch'.
- WIFE. We bought it with ten dinars.
- PRISONER. And the dining room.
- WIFE. We sold it to buy the books that you like, and the TV.
- PRISONER. We won that in the lottery; in a moment of fear and shame I said to you, 'Marry again if I am killed', and you screamed, 'No, that won't happen.'
- WIFE. How do you know all that; and you are all you and not all you? What a betrayal, that I can't find the tears of my happiness when I see you again. Please leave me.
- PRISONER. Where... ? I have nobody else in this world.
- WIFE. I don't know. Go anywhere; just go!
- PRISONER. To my death, maybe!
- WIFE. I'll give you my soul, don't say that again... I mean give me a clue that my mind can believe what you are saying!
- PRISONER. And do you need more than my heartbeat as evidence?
- WIFE. My disaster is that you are telling the truth. *(With embarrassment, but resolute)* How were we in bed?
- PRISONER. We used to steal the morning to our bed, we started with lips and it would wander over our bodies, then we couldn't help it till the light went inside our soul and the kiss went astray and you screamed/
- WIFE. *(Interrupts)* My only man...!
- PRISONER. *(Interrupts, to finish her words)*The frontier is calling for you... leave lots of babies in my womb... *(Gradual darkness rises)*
- WIFE. *(Shouts angrily)*Enough... You know more than my husband.

Second Painting:

(With increasing music, we see the PRISONER lying on the bed and the WIFE sitting down on the bed.)

WIFE.

I'll tell you what: you are not my husband. Not my husband. Because you are like him in everything. There must be a change in you, I mean in him. I prepared myself for the fact that you would come changed. You came as you went. I admit that your look changed, but where is the prison in your soul? You are still compassionate, loveable; your language is so tender when you talk about your pain... No, I am sure you are not my husband, because you are exactly like him. As if you or he never went to prison. I used to cry... cry and prepare myself so that you could regain life from me, I used to cry for hours when I was trying to remind you about our memories that might bring back the blood to your heart. Oh, how much that worried me and made me cry, even more than your absence! How I should help you come back as you were before. How can I remove the prison from your veins and body...? Your memories... and... and here you are coming back as you went. Not as the war prisoner in my imagination and my pain. How can you want me to believe that you are my husband...? Would you make use of illusions...? You have to be deformed so that you don't disappoint my soul by regaining you from your deformity. Would that help you, my husband...? I want you not as you are... but as a captive, exhausted and torn... who barely can breathe, so that I can grant my soul the pride of waiting... the pride of regaining you to life as you were... You are hurting me because you haven't changed... You haven't changed.

PRISONER.

What do you want from me? You were the bread that I used to eat when I was hungry. Is it my fault that I loved you with a love that made the prison seem a wedding ring? Thank you, my love, for saving me from prison. I wouldn't have been alive if it wasn't for you. My feeling that you were waiting for me made the prison as a fruit; a fruit that opened my appetite for you to water my dreams with your shades, my dear palm tree... So that I could come back full of strength to plant you again. (*Angrily*) Do you want me sick, shattered, lost, confused, weak, near to death! Here you are, my love. Here I am now... Now, farewell to the health

that you gave me. I will go back to being a war prisoner without your dreams... What a breaking that will explode in me! ... I am now without your mercy... What sky can bear my disappointment? A war prisoner outside his home, yet no one is waiting for me. I'm deformed... disabled... I won't honour my homeland when I am back, broken... I have nobody to belong to... Why should I have to come back when there is no one waiting for me?

WIFE. I'm... I'm...

PRISONER. You are... Who are you?

WIFE. I'm... I'm...

PRISONER. Not responsible.

WIFE. I'm your beloved...

PRISONER. What is your full name, or full and surname... I'm...

WIFE. I'm your wife.

PRISONER. My wife! I don't remember having children...

WIFE. Because you were taken as a war prisoner before...

PRISONER. Before what?

WIFE. We don't have children, because war has eaten half of the bed.

PRISONER. We could have slept on the other half.

WIFE. But you were taken prisoner before we shared the bed.

PRISONER. A puzzle... It's a puzzle; and I want to sleep.

WIFE. What a meeting this is, after all these years! Two words and you want to sleep, you haven't even kissed me...

PRISONER. Later, I will know you later...

WIFE. Oh, dear lover, how much you are changed by the prison.

PRISONER. How much I'm changed by prison? Prison was nothing but a leave from the battle and here I am again coming back to the war.

WIFE. But the war is over.

PRISONER. Not for me, I'm an eternal fighter...

WIFE. What about your home?

PRISONER. I'll fortify it and we will be safe.

WIFE. We are!

PRISONER. Yes... we are... you will be my wife when we have children.

WIFE. But we don't have any children, yet...

PRISONER. We will... We will have children... or how could this war continue?

(Music, the WIFE disappears.)

Third Painting:

(YOUSIF, the teacher is at the door, the PRISONER is shocked when he sees him. Throughout this scene the wife remains hidden on the stage.)

PRISONER. You... You are my teacher... Yousif?!

YOUSIF. Your teacher!

PRISONER. *(Hesitates)* My teacher... You are... You were...

YOUSIF. The most knowledgeable one!

PRISONER. No... No... The most... The most...

YOUSIF. A man with pride...

PRISONER. No... No...

YOUSIF. Dignified!

PRISONER. You... were...

YOUSIF. I was... I'll teach you a good philosophy that might benefit you after a few breaths or hours.

PRISONER. I... I... I...

YOUSIF. Don't interrupt me, boy... I'm your teacher, Yousif, talking to you *(in pain)* I am tired... tired of being a proud man...

PRISONER. Who is demeaned...

YOUSIF. Bored... To be demeaned is not to be in need.

PRISONER. I... I... I...

YOUSIF. *(Interrupting)* Never! Being demeaned is not being in need. Being demeaned is to kill your time thinking what you should eat, and being demeaned comes in types, my son, just like food. There is being demeaned of the first class, as when you sell your brother for a meal, and the other is of the excellent type when you make your son a meal for a month. And there is the refined type of being demeaned when you put your mother in a freezer to feed you for a whole year...

PRISONER. *(Laughs)*

- YOUSIF. Don't interrupt me. Boy... Well done boy, you still know the rules... And there is, my son, the fatal type of being demeaned... when you sell yourself to practice all other kinds of being demeaned from the first to the last... You are a proud man who never starts with less than its first type till them. A demeaned man who is to be dignified by his people.
- PRISONER. *(Starts to hug the teacher, Yousif)*
- YOUSIF. No... No hugs... My small finger is worried that if I close my hands it will eat its neighbouring finger.
- PRISONER. *(Walks to the board) A proud man... (He hangs down his head.)*
- YOUSIF. I see you hung down your head!
- PRISONER. A proud man who is bored.
- YOUSIF. Cares... I exaggerate sometimes in all this. Don't mind me, and excuse me... Excuse me, I was beaten by my appetite that is on food strike. I'm... I haven't changed... I'm not... I smell cooked food... on each doorstep and shout at my cold soul, 'Shut up, you are a proud man who is bored'... Bored with too much food until he like nothing more than weaning.
- PRISONER. I'm... I...
- YOUSIF. Don't interrupt me, boy, I'm a proud man who is weaned and nothing would compensate for milk, there are no breasts/
- PRISONER. Mr Yousif.
- YOUSIF. Don't interrupt me, I am a proud man who can be weaned but will never be demeaned. I exaggerate and lie sometimes and you have to excuse me in all that. After all, I'm a proud man who is bored, and weaned.
- PRISONER. *(He is tired and angry with his teacher, talking to him without noticing that he left the stage.)* Keep quiet Mr Yousif... You are my flag and ensign... If I believe what I hear, then it makes me feel that cutting off the hand in captivity is easier for me than holding a pencil... You and the cool mornings used to fill our days with heat and we used to scream, 'We are the youth of tomorrow' *(starts enchanting the anthem)*. Why, my teacher, should yesterday be tomorrow... Why... Why... Mr Yousif?
- WIFE. *(Appears as YOUSIF exits)* Mr Yousif!!!

(Music)

PRISONER. Mr Yousif was here.
 WIFE. Mr Yousif disappeared a long time ago.
 PRISONER. But he was with me, here.
 WIFE. Impossible... You're rambling.

Fourth Painting:

(The PRISONER is collapsed behind a chair; the wife enters reading a letter.)

PRISONER. Rambling. I'll divorce you.
 WIFE. You are selling what you don't own.
 PRISONER. You are my wife... I say it and go.
 WIFE. No... you won't divorce me because/
 PRISONER. *(Interrupts)* Because I love waiting for you, as I love you... and that's why I wrote to you years after my captivity that I should divorce you, so that you could start your life all over again.
 WIFE. And what a start that would be without you in it...
 PRISONER. Me!
 WIFE. I mean him...
 PRISONER. He is a war prisoner now.
 WIFE. You say that this is your home and I'm your wife; you are free to go anywhere and you claim that you are/
 PRISONER. *(Interrupts)* A war prisoner... And everything is delayed from life till I meet you again.
 WIFE. I am here before you... You can say it for sure if you can't see me.
 PRISONER. I really can't see you because you want to isolate me from my best feature, being your husband.
 WIFE. *(With hostility)* But you are not my husband, my husband never used to leave his dirty socks in the bath without washing them! He never listened to the radio, as if in a recording shop, when we wanted to sleep. He never walked into the living room with his slippers and steps very loudly, waking the whole house and even the dead. And many, many other things... What I see now is disgusting. My husband was never like that.

(Long pause)

PRISONER. (Calmly and helplessly) The rubbish of war is in the eyes, till the day when you see the flower and you think that it is a thorn and you fear touching it... Don't get used to missing the things you like but try to like the things you don't like so you can live with them, like rotten bread and raw potatoes; you wash your teeth with dust and you take a bath with dust and drink the drops of water like you are putting a gold chain round your neck. Captivity is worse than war itself... It stole the best of my days... Those days I spent on the frontier, dreaming about my leave and coming back to you... To come back to the things I had forgotten since I died... I mean my captivity... Be my mother and teach me again...

WIFE. (Confused) And you have things better than him... (Reacts) or than you did before... You eat with a fork and a knife and elegantly and he used to eat with his hands... And you return everything to its place and he used to leave everything scattered... He was...

PRISONER. (Seriously and angrily) Don't say, 'He was'... say, 'You were'.

WIFE. Was... I mean you were (*insisting*) or he was... I don't fear you... He never yelled as you yell at me now.

PRISONER. When he used to go on a walk, how did he return?

WIFE. Less stressed and...

PRISONER. Did I go on a walk? The war, then... the prison... You want me to come back with a bunch of flowers in my hands...? From my rotten boots and smelly socks... do you want me to dress in a suit as a groom instead of my worn out military suit...?

WIFE. You are avoiding the question... I asked about your habits that you master better than him (*reacts*) or than you did before. This 'you' used to make you feel good. I want to know the truth to rest.

PRISONER. The truth... I'm still/

WIFE. (*Interrupts*) You have to convince me, for I don't know what imperfect love is!

PRISONER. It is the company of captivity that makes each one of us change his habits for better ones.

- WIFE. (Screams) Imprisonment! With imprisonment and rotten bread you eat with a fork and a knife and that's how you picked this up? You told me that imprisonment is the worst thing that can happen to you in war and it stole the beauty of your life... You want to fool me, saying the company of imprisonment... It's the emptiness of imprisonment.
- PRISONER. The same faces... The same conversations... The same neighbours. Nothing new. Out of hunger we invented food and games, just like the luxurious people when learning how to dance. Our brains invented food out of rocks: this is Kebab, and this is Dolma and we started eating, and we were rebuked by the people who used to be luxurious, who taught us how to make a knife and fork out of papers and how we should eat. Prison has undermined and belittled me till my eyes have become curved and I couldn't see anything from below the door except for the guard and his weapon... Scattered me my darling so I could see your face well and turn my head into all directions with ease. Scatter me and free my heart so I could make the moon look like your face again. (He cries with embarrassment.)
- WIFE. Please excuse me; I don't know with whom I should be... Or how I should be... you have the right to give me all the right and believe my doubts. My senses are destroyed. Your voice and the shock of war were alone in the waiting... All the wells of deprivation were springing up, trying to water you and be watered by you. Just like my dream... You used to be a small bird in my hand, and as soon as I spread my love as seeds to feed you, you flew away to the prison.
- PRISONER. The cage of your hands was my heaven.
- WIFE. Why did you gift me hell, then?
- PRISONER. I didn't.
- WIFE. No, you did... You set off the wolf of my femininity and they dragged you as a lamb to the prison.
- PRISONER. I ran out of ammunitions and I was/
- WIFE. (Interrupts) You should have flown away and settled on my hand... Doesn't love make miracles?

- PRISONER. If love has miracles, then the hearts of our mothers would have become shields, protecting us in battle... If love creates miracles no one would have died at all, even the cruellest criminals have those who love them and then they won't die.
- WIFE. But you told me...
- PRISONER. If I died and your shadow passes me by, I'll stand up and regain my life again.
- WIFE. Why didn't you do that?
- PRISONER. Because I didn't die... I was just taken a war prisoner.
- WIFE. Why didn't you die and return to me as a martyr so that I can have peace from my waiting.
- PRISONER. I thought my return would make you happy!
- WIFE. Your return is a miracle and there is no room for miracles in our time... How do you want me to believe that you are here among us, and the truth is that you are not my husband?
- PRISONER. Not my wife... not him... not me.... who am I then... who?

Fifth Painting:

(He takes a corner in the dark, and suddenly the guard of the school, again, YOUSIF, enters and the PRISONER is shocked with his unexplained entrance. The WIFE disappears aside again.)

- YOUSIF (*the guard*). Who... Who...
- PRISONER. Me... Me...
- YOUSIF. Who?
- PRISONER. Mr. Yous... I mean uncle Yousif.
- YOUSIF. The school guard.
- PRISONER. But you...
- YOUSIF. Look like the teacher... Hunger made us alike.
- PRISONER. Uncle Yousif, do you remember me?
- YOUSIF. I never forgot you, not for a moment!
- PRISONER. The school guard... Thousands of pupils passed by your eyes and they are crowded in your memories. They remember you, but you forget them.
- YOUSIF. Except you.

PRISONER. Except me, and I was...

YOUSIF. You were Ahmed's friend.

PRISONER. Ahmed... (*Eagerly*) Oh, how is he now?

YOUSIF. He is...

PRISONER. How many children did he have?

YOUSIF. He...

PRISONER. He became a doctor as you wished for him.

YOUSIF. But he...

PRISONER. He said enough guard duty, this job is preventing you from getting nearer to God. You have to have time for your religion. He used to breathe your dreams, he was smart and strong and he must be... he must be...

YOUSIF. He is a murderer.

PRISONER. Murderer?!!!

YOUSIF. He murdered all my dreams before he fulfilled them and became a martyr.

PRISONER. (*Screams in shock*) Oh God, why are graves more than dreams?

YOUSIF. You were always in my memory, challenging the grave that contained him.

PRISONER. I am more criminal than him... I have no dreams anymore.

YOUSIF. (*Disappointed*) Only now... I believe that Ahmed is dead... and Hamid.

PRISONER. Hamid!

YOUSIF. They are both martyrs.

PRISONER. (*Despondently*) Hamid! He was so young, he wasn't old enough to go to war, or...

YOUSIF. And did you think that fighting was on the frontiers only?

PRISONER. Wasn't it... Where else then?

YOUSIF. Under the sun.

PRISONER. Sun?!

YOUSIF. His fever used to make the sun ashamed and I used to scream on the ground, "God, please take him to the breeze of heaven".

PRISONER. Oh, dear God!

YOUSIF. And my humiliated dignity begged the bread, "Please bread, be healthy for him; be wheat and not barley".

- PRISONER. Dear... Dear God.
- YOUSIF. Bread, be as he used to like you... Don't shock his appetite with bitterness. And the roughness of the bread pushed me towards the softness of the ground where I used to pray. And my hunger begged the god of satiation to take his breath away. (*He kneels down to the ground in prayers*) Your heaven is white bread... I swear that was heaven without nymphs or rivers of wine.
- PRISONER. God forgive us.
- YOUSIF. And... God forgive us... It's only the hunger of a child who has promised his death to heaven... This embargo... and the school... and the sun in his body stung my blood and I ran to the oven... Everything but fire. Please, my prayers rug, help the oven to light up... and the bread should be very white... My son refuses to go to the belated heaven without white bread for his coffin. (*He collapses.*)
- PRISONER. (*Screams*) Dear God, you made all our children martyrs! There must be a heaven... God forgive us, I don't deny it... but there must be heaven as big as our pains and suffering. How many years do angels need to make this heaven for us...? And if they already have, how many more thousands do we need to forget about our earthly hell... Uncle Yousif.
- YOUSIF. Oh Dear God, how beautiful You are, God... I started to fear meeting You with my weakness and exhaustion and ugliness... I wanted to be clean for my last prayers... I wanted to be purified... competing with angels when they are present for You.
- PRISONER. Do that, please. I need it.
- YOUSIF. And what is your sin?
- PRISONER. My sin... I... don't know how to pray anymore.
- YOUSIF. And how do I pray... Isn't water purification? Purification makes us nearer to God... And when there is no water, God becomes far away.
- PRISONER. God forgive us.
- YOUSIF. I stretch my hand to the wounds. Isn't the water of the innocent a prayer? The dirty water kills purity. How can I be near God...? Dear God... There are new rules to be near you, we don't find

clean water or soft ground to pray on... All these have gone, and I kneel down for prayers with my hunger and I purify myself with my blood... And I scream with my whole soul... Dear God, why did you leave your son in the embargo...? God forgive us... How close is blasphemy to a coffin that comes unexpectedly! ... Ahmed and Hamid and, and, and... and me, we are all dying, dear God... Did the angel of death take into his consideration that twenty million would die in one hour...? For his sake, have mercy on us, dear God... Dear God, please make the shale stone our bread... We are begging for Your Heaven in our earthly hell... but what Heaven when the breast feeds hunger! ... Dear God, have mercy on my weak mind, and bless it with recognizing your wisdom. (*He exits.*)

PRISONER. Oh Embargo, you are making our children prophets... they deny the beauties of life before knowing them. A child denies the pleasures of life! Can there be anything more blasphemous than this...? This is how prophets were created, then.

(*Music rises.*)

Final Painting:

(*The PRISONER comes forward. He pulls the bed towards the back of the stage.*)

PRISONER. What a comfort... the house, the children, the laughs, the safe bed and the exploding dawn in our hearts. You allowed me all that as my right... my right... My legal right... How could the Void replace me in my home and I found myself in the frontier. The war is over, so why should I fight in my own home? It would have been easier if I was martyred... uncle Yousif... Uncle Yousif... Mr Yousif...?

WIFE. (*Appears*) Once again, I tell you, Mr Yousif disappeared long ago.

PRISONER. It wasn't Mr Yousif, it was uncle Yousif, the guard.

WIFE. The guard is dead... Yousif died long before his sons died.

PRISONER. That's impossible... It's just seconds before.... He was here with me!

WIFE. You mistake a house and a wife; that is possible. But talking to dead people too!

- PRISONER. *(Pointing to his head)* Is there a brain that I can use? Or illusions that I am trying to recognise? He was with me; Ahmed was killed in war, and Hamid died of hunger.
- WIFE. *(Astonished)* And how could you know that?
- PRISONER. Didn't I tell you he was here?
- WIFE. That's impossible... Could hunger and loss replace my mind and heart?
- PRISONER. Me too, just like the guard and the teacher... Oh... all my defences are collapsing.
- WIFE. They are my defences that are collapsing... since I was afraid to be full and won't leave enough for tomorrow, my defences have collapsed, dear defeated lover.
- PRISONER. Keep silent...
- WIFE. My stomach is widowed from all that I love.
- PRISONER. Shut up.
- WIFE. My shield is falling and how many whores will come out of my body if...
- PRISONER. Shut up... Shut up... You bitch!
- WIFE. You shut up, my shield is falling so that my blood becomes my protection and my shield shall become harlotry if I sleep full. My hunger should keep me awake for my memories, but my protection has fallen down.
- PRISONER. It's my fault, I am the one who went to war and I am the one who imprisoned myself and deprived myself from seeing the dearest of the dear. I went away with all my being leaving you without protection, starving and insecure. I was cruel with you. I imprisoned myself all these years. I apologize for ten years that I lost in vain in hunger and crying for you, for my loneliness. I lost them in suffering and longing to come back. I apologize for I am deposed in my own home; a coup d'état has overthrown me. *[Addressing her]*: my new King, don't kill me, let me go back to my prison.
- WIFE. You can't stop begging and your mockery won't make you any nearer to my heart.

- PRISONER. *(Imitating a street beggar)* Please help me... Give me a wife... I became her shield, *(in pain)* damn me. How hollow I am. This country should be my shield so that I can regain my straightness and be her shield. My dear darling, be my home.
- WIFE. I will be... when I know that you are my husband... You are not my husband... and/
- PRISONER. *(Interrupts)* You are not my husband?! Not me? Who am I then? Who is then dreaming about your three moles that I worship? On your neck, bellow your breast and above your knee.
- WIFE. How could you know the places of these moles on my body?
- PRISONER. Are you asking me, *(angrily)* really asking me? How do I know the places of your moles? What kind of woman are you? You knew me from the start. I made reasons for you to fool myself... and justify your denial. From where did you get this ability to forget? Where did all these nights go when each one of us searched every inch of the other's body to look for a memory that we couldn't remember and pushed it away with kisses ... Alas... Alas... I made my heart your home, my soul... Alas... Alas. In my prison, I used to breathe slowly so that my breaths wouldn't disturb your image in my heart... Is there anybody else in your life now? My hands won't kill you to give you rest, I'll leave you between the knife of your conscience and your treacherous body.
- WIFE. I, betray?! Do you remember this? *(Referring to her dress)*
- PRISONER. It's ...
- WIFE. This is the last dress I used to wear when you left, and you said...
- PRISONER. I want...
- WIFE. *(Interrupts)* A piece of your dress so that I can breathe your scent *(He searches amongst his things and he takes out a piece of cloth)* Since the time you went to prison until now, I haven't put on any other dress.
- PRISONER. *(With great pain and love)* Darling...
- WIFE. *(Interrupts)* I take it off and wash it and I stay in my bed covered with sheets till it gets dry so that I can wear it again... I, betray?! I wish I could, may be then I could be free of your love, maybe then my death would become easier.

PRISONER. Then, why do you deny me?

WIFE. The shock, the despair, the war that creeps to the eyes; my fear of a second departure... All this has made me do what I do.

PRISONER. Let's forget... Let's forget... all that has happened and go back to our first week of marriage, Let's start again... You can ask me whatever you want, command me!

WIFE. I command you... command you to do for me whatever your soul loves...

PRISONER. (*Passionately*) My soul loves whatever you love.

WIFE. My soul is for you, you are all that I love.

PRISONER. Dear love!

WIFE. Dear love!

(They approach each other to hug; suddenly a second PRISONER enters in rage.)

PRISONER 2. You are betraying me... (*To the wife*) You are a traitor... You are not my wife... This is not my house any more... What a humiliation and disappointment! Is this how I come back? Is this how my kingdom should be? My home... My garden is taken over by weeds, parsley, greens and onions... Where are the roses that used to be watered with my blood to take their redness.

(The WIFE and the PRISONER are in astonishment, PRISONER 3 enters)

PRISONER 3. Not your husband... Who am I then? How I have dreamt about the three moles on your neck, below your breast, and above your knee.

(And henceforth, war prisoners keep on coming in, each one saying a line of the dialogue, until the stage is full of prisoners)

WIFE. (*Screams*) Dear God... which one of you is my husband?

CURTAINS

Started in 1995 and finished in 14 March 1998.

THE MASKS

1979-1990

Kareem Chitheer

Translated into English by Alyaa A. Naser

- Dear son, they say, there is a warrior who fell from a ship into the middle of the sea when the storm was very high; they all saw him fall into the sea. They all said he died, drowned and was eaten by the sharks and whales. But after several years they saw him kissing his beloved on another ship...
- How did this happen?
- Didn't I say he was a warrior...?!

Shall we say that the young artist, Kareem Chitheer is whimsical or eccentric? What makes us say this about him is attempt to turn his personal house into a small theatre, in which he directed and acted his play *Sounds of Far Away Stars*. He invited some of his fellow artists who enjoyed the show for several days. Kareem Chitheer is a hard working artist. He graduated from the Institute of Fine Arts, Department of Theatre in 1980-1981 with distinction. He took parts in different plays, like *Marssad*, *The Case of a Martyr*, *The Bird of Happiness*, *The Story of the Zoo*, *Hamlet Wakes up Late* and others.

Currently, Kareem is presenting a new work that he wrote and directed, entitled *The Masks*, where he turns his house into a stage for performing his play. About this experiment he states:

Basically the experience is based on a simple idea that every place is suitable for performing a theatrical work, as long as it can be manipulated and its contents made use of, in other words, theatricalising the place. This does not mean erasing its features but rather giving it a new perspective. In this case the audience would be part of the performance and totally involved in it; moving along with the actor, and therefore the action of the play would move around the place of the performance.

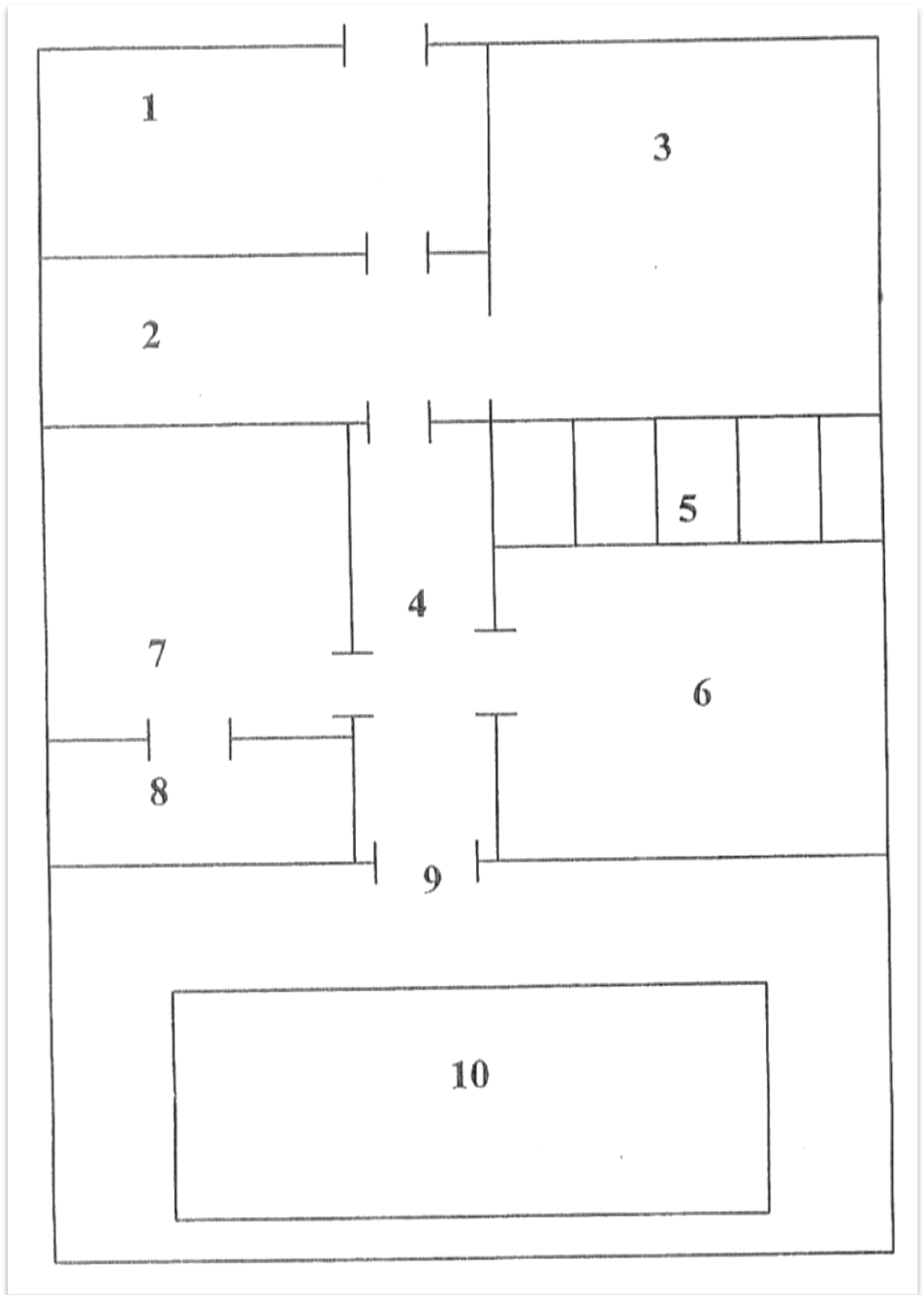
Al Jumhooria Newspaper 18/04/1985.

Under the light

Kareem Chitheer has been one of the most hard-working artists since his college days at the Institute of Fine Arts from which he graduated in 1980-1981, among the ten top students. He has directed many plays, like his *Sounds of Far Away Stars*, a play of one actor in which he turns his house into a theatre as an experiment of the “Theatre of the house”. *The Hostess of the Lodgers* is his graduation dissertation, with Iqbal Naeem and Muhammad Saif as actors. He acted in many plays, such as *Hamlet Wakes up Late*, *The Hunter*, directed by Ra’ad Al Nashi’, *The Bird of Happiness* directed by Muhammad Qassim, and *The Story of the Zoo*. Lately he participated in the Sixth Festival for Experimental Plays with his *The Masks* as a writer and director with Ameen Hmood and Sahira Iwaid as actors. Kareem Chitheer is a figure that attracts attention for his love of experimenting and his constant acquisition of knowledge through reading and practice.

Al Thewra Newspaper 9/5/1990.

An experiment in theatre performance



A vertical profile of the place of the show which is the house of the playwright in Baghdad in 1979.

The Characters:

- THE CLOWN
- AN OLD WOMAN
- THE MOTHER
- A GIRL
- THE MAN IN THE PICTURE
- AL-HAJJAJ IBN YUSUF AL-THAQAFI (661 AD- 714 AD he was the governor of Iraq during the Umayyad Caliphate)
- PINOCHET(Augusto Pinochet: the dictator of Chile between 1973 and 1990)
- FRANCO (Francisco Franco: the dictator of Spain from 1939 to his death in 1975)
- LORCA (Federico García Lorca, a Spanish poet, playwright and theatre director)
- HITLER (Adolf Hitler: an Austrian-born German politician and the leader of the Nazi Party)
- A MAN WITH AN AMPUTATED ARM
- A MAN WITH AN AMPUTATED LEG
- TWO MEN
- A JOURNALIST
- MAD MEN
- A YOUNG MAN
- THE OLD MAN WITH THE RED MARK
- WOMEN IN MASKS
- EVE
- ADAM
- OTHER CHARACTERS

Before the beginning of the play the audience enters the reception room, Room Number 1, and one of the audience members cuts the ribbon at the entrance to Room Number 2 to announce the start of the show; then the audience is allowed to enter the rooms. The house is turned into something like a gallery and the paintings are actually frames in which the audience will see human beings, the characters of the play, moving inside, embodying the paintings. In other frames, the audience will find some props, like clothes, pieces of furniture, and household tools. Thus, some of these paintings are

mobile, with sounds and words, while others would be frozen. The titles for these paintings are put alongside each frame:

- A man Hanging his Limbs and Body to Have Some Rest. *The man has hung his body and limbs on a coat hanger, except for his head that is in deep sleep.*
- A Spoiled Child. *Music, toys and child's clothes... In the middle, there is a dead body of an African child next to a bowl turned over or full of spiders.*
- A Mouth Piece. *There are many pairs of shoes with different colours; two shoes in different colours and shapes are talking to each other. Written on one is: 'Hey, how are you?' while the other shoe has, 'I am tired of the long walk of life; a long walk.'*
- Craziness: AN OLD WOMAN *laughing hysterically and looking at the audience with eyes full of mockery and craziness... She opens the fridge and a dead body of a young man with military clothes falls out... She removes the body from the fridge and her laughter turns into weeping and screaming... She holds the dead body and cries bitterly.*
- Auction: *Arms, legs and heads cut and hung on the wall, bordered by the frame, with moaning sounds, broken cries and screaming.*
- Warm Bath: *A man with his head attached to many plastic tubes, sitting on a chair, washing his feet in a bowl with the blood pouring from the plastic tubes attached to his body.*
- Human Relations: *Many hands overlap, holding books, bottles of alcohol, cigarettes, pens, daggers, guns, hats and chains.*

!!?

A hole in a wall designed with women's clothes, scarves and Abayas, among them the face of a young beautiful woman with braids that are stretched out far beyond the frame.

- Merciful Hearts: *the stairs that are turned into five levels – five steps, where we see in the first step an approximate photo of AL-HAJJAJ IBN YUSUF; on the second step a photo of FRANCO; the third has a photo of PINOCHET; on the fourth there is a photo of HITLER; the fifth step has an empty frame...*
- APARTHEID [This word is written in English in the original Arabic text]: *Two white gloves holding knives and forks trying to cut a glove or a hand that is black.*

- Medals: *Masks and war medals; in the middle, there is the mask of Moshe Dayan, (who I have hated a lot since I was a child.)*¹²⁰
- A Paper: *A man and a radio in a frame, the man is looking for a clear signal on the radio, but all radio channels overlap. Another man in a frame, next to the first, but without a title, is trying to listen to what the radio is saying, spying on the man and his radio, and writing on some paper.*
- From the Archive, Eid: *A swing, balloons, a child or a number of children, joy, laughter, and singing.*
- Reduce Speed: *A frame in which there is a phrase saying 'reduce speed, turning point ahead of you; the corpse is metres away'.*¹²¹
- Strike: *A man with long hair and a thick beard standing looking at the sky, carrying a banner that says 'A strike against all human rituals till the end of human misery'.*
- Family: *A woman, repeating continuously and monotonously: My first son was taken by war; the second couldn't take the shock and committed suicide; the third didn't dare to kill himself and sought refuge in bars; the fourth ran away from everything and travelled far away, preferring estrangement and forgetting... My first son was taken by war; the second couldn't take the shock... etc.*
- With No Title: *The door of the kitchen with a frame, inside which half the body of an actor appears, trying to pull himself out, but s/he is dragged back inside by a mysterious force. He is screaming: 'Damn, damn, I can't stand this blood imposed on me by the playwright, and the director after him... damn both of them... damn both of them... damn.'*
Behind him THE CLOWN appears talking to the audience.
- Excuse me ladies and gentlemen
We'll close this hall because one of the characters is rebelling inside... but we promise that you can have a look later.

It is possible to add or delete or rearrange the above paintings and it is also possible to make use of abstract art works or some inventions by the team delivering the

¹²⁰ This comment is found in the original Arabic text, I think it refers to the Chitbeer's own feeling about the character.

¹²¹ The original word in the text is not quite clear whether it is 'Jenna' or 'Jutha' these are two different Arabic words. The first means Heaven and the second means a dead body or a corpse. The word is corrected by hand and it is not clear. I preferred the second in the translation as I thought it would make more sense within the context of the play. All the hand written notes on the original text is believed to have been made by Chitbeer himself.

performance. It is also important to maintain the atmosphere of the experience by using human skulls, placed around the space at random.

- *The skulls are lit when necessary with red lights on the floor and the ceiling. They should impede the course of the audience, as they move from one room to another. The audience should feel as if they are entering a cemetery when they enter the house. The audience should be accompanied by a singer walking by their side and singing a song with special rhythm that suits the atmosphere and the subject of the show; alternatively it is possible to use news, cries, laughter, war sounds, and daily conversations instead of the song. Pans, plates, and spoons are used to create sound effects for the performance.*

Movement 1

(The tour finishes in 4(the corridor) after they have gone through Rooms 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8.)

THE CLOWN. Crazy, crazy, crazy...

Crazy who says the earth is round,

It is oval; at one end stands an insane man and a sane man at the other. But the mystery is who is who? Who is the sane and who is the insane?

An actor, holding a globe, spins it around, laughing. An actress holds a doll. Another actor holds a knife. Another wears a necklace of skulls. Another is imitating the sound of a goat, and the rest imitate him and start making the same sound of a goat. All the doors are opened and shut with force together, once. Silence, then the sound of a train arriving grows gradually louder, along with the sounds of the actors and some pots.

THE ACTORS. (All together)

Where is this going?

Where is this world going?

The CLOWN starts rowing, as if leading a boat, and the actors follow him. He leads the audience and the actors together to 3. There we find a bed in the middle; there is a hole in the middle of the bed from which the upper half of a man appears spreading his arms with an exaggerated frozen smile on his face. Around the man there are lots of newspapers with different languages, so he looks like a picture a public figure that appears in these papers.

ACTORS. *(After the motion of the audience and the actors settle down the CLOWN withdraws, leaving them meditating on the frozen man; then they continue.)*

We are starving,
starving, dying;
You, death, stop the death,
you death, enough death.

(They stretch their hands to the audience.)

AN ACTOR. One penny... one penny... please!

AN ACTOR. A piece of bread!

AN ACTOR. A tie; an old coat!

AN ACTRESS. A nail colour; kuhel¹²² (eyeliner) for an eternally infected eye!

AN ACTOR. A glass of wine; birds singing!

AN ACTOR. Quiet please; deep sleep!

The frozen man moves; his smile is turned into continuous wild laughter with the bed moving upwards slowly and many skulls dangling from it. Gradually we realize that the frozen man is sitting on a throne of human skulls holding a whip in one hand, and in the other a chain tied around the actors. He continues laughing wildly, whipping the actors, then...

Queues of hungry people

Trying to devour me

I yell at the queues

I am the king

I can't hear but...

THE ACTORS. Long live the king

Long live the king...

THE ACTRESS. *(Screams while hugging her doll)*

He is dying. My baby is dying.

(A curtain falls from above to cover the bed and the man in the painting together. The actress continues crying)

My baby is dying.

¹²² Kuhel is traditional eyeliner that is used by Arabian women made of the powder of certain rocks and natural herbs sometimes; it is used for healing infected eyes sometimes.

THE ACTORS. What? Dying! (*The movement of the actress is frozen; the actors start moving around her after they manage to free themselves from the chain, saying*)

We are all dying... our children, our young men, our women and our old people.

(*The actress moves again holding the body of her dead baby – the doll – torn between the audience and the actress, and starts singing a lullaby; (dililol),¹²³ and when she repeats the short song again the voices of the actors interfere with her voice as they form a funeral procession walking behind the actress.*)

THE ACTRESS. Dililol ...

THE ACTORS. Our children

THE ACTRESS. Dear baby...

THE ACTORS. Our best young men

THE ACTRESS. My baby...

THE ACTORS. Our women and old people

THE ACTRESS. Dililol, your enemy...

THE ACTORS. Hunger

THE ACTRESS. Is sick and tired

THE ACTORS. Death

THE ACTRESS. And lives in...

THE ACTORS. The massacres

THE ACTRESS. The waste land...

THE ACTORS. Madness (*Their voices are mixed more and more with the sounds of the pans, abnormal movement and sounds as if hysterical and crazy. A scream.*)

THE CLOWN. (*Alone*) Stop this madness. (*A dream- like music*)

Movement 2

THE CLOWN. (*Moving with the dream-like music saying*) Crazy,
Crazy, crazy.

THE ACTRESS moves towards him, stretches her arm, and shuts his mouth. She gives him the corpse of her doll, then throws off her motherly clothes in front of the audience,

¹²³ The song of Dililol is a well-known Iraqi song (bed time song for young babies). The original text states that it is possible to replace the song with any lullaby according to the place of the performance.

and appears as a beautiful young woman, as if in a dream. THE CLOWN receives the doll and the clothes, as if in greeting, and bows to her, indicating to her to move to room number 2, where the lights are. She is followed by the actors and the audience. In 2, we see a cross put upside down, on which an actor is crucified; his head is on the ground and his legs are upwards. The actress runs for him and hugs him, but she is surprised as she finds out that she is hugging his legs. She withdraws, thinks for a while about the situation of the cross,¹²⁴ trying to recover from the shock, and returns to touch his legs carefully. With her hand, she follows the line of his body as if she is following a mysterious plan in a maze game to find the right way out. She moves downwards slowly with her hand trying to discover what she is seeing, till she reaches the head of her man at the bottom of the upside down cross. She is startled, withdraws her hand and returns to him, then screams. Her scream is accompanied by screams from different directions, the dream-like music stops.

- My love
- My son
- My brother
- My husband
- My father

All the screams are repeated several times. The actress cries and falls to the ground weeping by the cross. She stands, but this time with pride, as if there is no trace of sadness on her face. She starts dragging the cart of the cross, to which a piece of cloth is attached and stretched whenever the cart is moving forward. On this piece of cloth are some dates, titles of lost battles and apparently some names of martyrs.

Movement 3

THE CLOWN is playing on a musical instrument to draw the attention of the audience to lead them to 5 (the stairs) where the lights are focused on the stairs.

AL HAJAJ. *(On the first level, holding his sword high)* I see some heads blossoming and it's time for the harvest and I am the owner. By God, I will take the brave for the guilt of the weak; and the

¹²⁴ The printed copy of the play states that it is the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) whenever the text mentions the cross but it is written off with a pen by hand. I cannot be sure who wrote off the 'International Committee of the Red' leaving the word 'cross' only. But as the copy I have is signed by the playwright himself as a gift to a friend I can assume that he himself did this as it is his own text and he might have preferred the word 'cross' for some reason.

righteous for the guilt of wrongdoer, till you say to each other,
run for your life, Saad, Saeed is dead.¹²⁵

PINOCHET appears on the second level, stretching his hand toward a board. There are several numbers written on the board. The numbers are crossed over with red except for the last number which Pinochet crosses off and we hear a shower of bullets indicating the fall of a new victim, whose names were crossed, and as the sound of bullets is heard, his smile widens.

LORCA. *(On the third level, Franco stands like a statue while Lorca is sitting by a widow reciting.)*

I have shut my balcony
Because I don't want to hear the weeping,
But from behind the grey walls
Nothing is heard but weeping.
There are very small angels who sing,
There are very small dogs who bark,
A thousand violins fit in the palm of my hand.
But the weeping is an immense dog,
The weeping is an immense violin:
The tears muzzle the wind,
And nothing is heard but the weeping.¹²⁶

Before finishing his poem, the statue of Franco moves, pointing a gun towards Lorca and shoots him; Lorca falls dead by the window.

HITLER. *(On the fourth level, raising his arm making his known Nazi salute, repeating his famous words over the tune of a military march.)*

I see the whole world as tanks like the eyes of Eva Braun.

An empty frame: *Under the empty frame dangling from above the stairs, a man and a woman keep reciting an extract from Paul Éluard's poem, "Liberty":*

On my notebooks from school

On my desk and the trees

On the sand on the snow

I write your name

¹²⁵ This is a famous line, said by the infamous character Al Hajaj about the people of Iraq when he was appointed by the Umayyad Caliphate to rule Iraqi and subdue factions there.

¹²⁶ Lorca's poem "Casida of the Weeping".

On every page read
On all the white sheets
Stone blood paper or ash
I write your name
On the golden images
On the soldier's weapons
On the crowns of kings
I write your name

On the jungle the desert
The nests and the bushes
On the echo of childhood
I write your name

On the wonder of nights
On the white bread of days
On the seasons engaged
I write your name

On all my blue rags
On the pond mildewed sun
On the lake living moon
I write your name

On the fields the horizon
The wings of the birds
On the windmill of shadows
I write your name

On the foam of the clouds
On the sweat of the storm
On dark insipid rain
I write your name

On the glittering forms
 On the bells of colour
 On physical truth
 I write your name

On the wakened paths
 On the opened ways
 On the scattered places
 I write your name

On the lamp that gives light
 On the lamp that is drowned
 On my house reunited
 I write your name

On the bisected fruit
 Of my mirror and room
 On my bed's empty shell
 I write ...

The frame moves down slowly. The man and the woman feel the movement, as if they had received an electric shock. They try to resist, and they try to utter the word 'liberty' but the letters of the word don't come out of their throats, but turn to stones that choke them. They struggle, and breathe with difficulty, as if going through an epileptic seizure. They finally utter the word but it comes out broken, unclear; as if they are vomiting what is inside them. The frame comes nearer and nearer to them and is finally filled with the audience, who come too close and touch the two characters.

Movement 4

THE CLOWN. That's strange what's happened to them? (*To the audience*) Never mind them, leave them, my friends; let them write their names on notebooks, sand, and the clouds. Come with me, here. (*He leads the audience to Room 6 where the light is focused on the middle of the room where we see two men, one without an arm and the*

other without a leg. They are standing in the middle of a pile of mutilated arms and legs.)

THE MAN WITH AN AMPUTATED ARM.

(Neglecting the legs, inspecting the arms)

My arm, where is my arm... Oh, this is my arm... Oh, no it isn't.

This! No... maybe this... not... and this too is not mine.

THE MAN WITH AN AMPUTATED LEG.

(Inspecting the legs.) My leg, where is my leg... This? No... It's not mine, not even this...

THE MAN WITH AN AMPUTATED ARM.

This is my arm... Yes, it's my arm. I know it because of the tattoo; I got it when I was a teenager.

THE MAN WITH AN AMPUTATED LEG.

Oh, this is my leg. I know it as I know myself. These are the scratches I got when I used to play football.

Before they reach up to catch the arm and the leg some hidden threads pull the arm and the leg away. They crawl towards them but the limbs disappear, accompanied by the sound of barking dogs.

THE TWO TOGETHER.

(Hopelessly) In the crowded street, I walk alone

I wipe the world's walls with my shoulders, in fear of the passers-by and the bullies of the district. As if I have never been a bully myself, blocking roads for wanderers; here, I am gathering my memories. Farewell my bravery!¹²⁷

They disappear while the light is focused on the wardrobe, whose door is open, and two men with bags get out of the wardrobe. They start emptying their bags. The first takes out a skull from his bag. He checks it and puts it aside. He then takes out a shoe; he puts the shoe on and tries it by kicking the skull. Then he finds that it doesn't match his size, so he takes it off and pushes it aside. He takes out a hat that he likes, and puts it on, then he takes out a general suit from the bag and puts this on too, assuming the role of a general, though the suit is clearly larger than his size. He stands stock still, as if in the army.

¹²⁷ According to the original text this is an extract from a famous poem by Sergey Alexandrovich Yesenin, with some inversions of the word order.

The second takes out a shoe from his bag, comparing his shoe to the first shoe on the ground. He tries them both on and finds that they fit him. He takes out a coat and puts it on, after checking it, then a tie that he throws away. Then he takes out some medals, which he hangs on the chest of the first man, and a stick that he keeps for himself. After emptying his bag completely, he moves toward the first man and stands right behind him, assuming his position. They march together to the sound of a military band, till they disappear.

In another spot in Room 6,¹²⁸ we see an old man with a bottle of alcohol and a young man standing beside him. The young man is looking at the old man sadly.

THE YOUNG MAN. Father, why are you drinking?

THE OLD MAN. *(After drinking from the bottle)* Drinking?!

I drink because I lost my first dream in a bar. A thief stole it from me and gave it to another thief, and then to another and another. I drank again to forget my first dream. Then they stole my second dream, then I drank for the second; they stole the third and the fourth... and the tenth... and... till I became without a dream.

THE YOUNG MAN. You are raving.

THE OLD MAN. That's why I called for you.

THE YOUNG MAN. To listen to your raving?

THE OLD MAN. Why not, and all the world is raving?

THE YOUNG MAN. But I came here to talk to you in order to stop your drinking. Can't you see it has worn you out?

THE OLD MAN. Dear son, they told me once that there was a warrior who fell from a ship into the sea when the storm was very bad. They all saw him falling down into the sea. They all said he was dead. He drowned into the depths of the sea. He was eaten by whales. But after a few years they saw him kissing his girl on another ship.

THE YOUNG MAN. How did this happen?

THE OLD MAN. Didn't I say, my son, he was a warrior...!

Movement 5

¹²⁸ The original number in the script is 3 but I think it is a printing a mistake, it is rather 6, as the scene takes place in Room 6.

THE CLOWN. *(Playing on his musical instrument)* Now my friends how about going to another place maybe we can find more reasonable people with less raving and more sense.

He moves towards Room 7 and the audience follow him. In this room, which is the kitchen, we see a heap covered with a black sheet and on the walls there are some sheep leathers, skulls, knives, masks of tired faces and heads, as if it is a butchery. On the gas stove there is boiling water. At another spot there is a banner that says 'Deir Yassin massacre' in bloody letters. The butcher, or a man assuming the role of a butcher, is talking in some mixed and obscure words, as if chewing them. On the opposite side, there is a half-naked man having a bath in the blood that is dropping from the banners dangling from the ceiling, on which there are some letters and words that the audience are able to complete. All this is accompanied by children's screams.

THE CLOWN. *(Pulls a curtain to hide the scene)* Excuse me, ladies... Excuse me, gentlemen; we promised you before that we'd let you see this hall, and there you are. Yet we can't fulfil our promise completely. What you have just seen is only a glimpse of the scene that I can't show, because of the objection of the main actor to the huge amount of blood in it. If you want the truth, he has all the right to object. I, personally, would object if I were in his shoes. As a solution, we replaced this scene with another. *(He pulls a black cloth off the heap. The audience are surprised to see a group of mad people screaming. Simultaneously, a journalist appears from Room 8 carrying a small suit case and an audio recorder.)*

JOURNALIST. You *(referring to a mad person)*! You, who are you?

MADMAN 1. I am an ungrateful father

JOURNALIST. *(Referring to another)* And you?

MADMAN 2. An adopted grandfather.

JOURNALIST. *(To another)* And you?

MADMAN 3. A child who resigned his childhood.

JOURNALIST. *(To another)* And you?

MADMAN 4. A man who objected to the norms of his family and chose the pavement, with his total free will.

JOURNALIST. *(To another)* And you?

MADMAN 5. I can't. I can't stand this tonight.

ALL MAD PEOPLE. Why?

- MADMAN 5. I have a headache and I can't stand upside down.
- MADMAN 4. *(Looking through the legs of the mad people and the audience, saying)* Garbage men... Damn garbage men... They swept away my song... Damn them, where did they go with my song...?
- JOURNALIST. What song, hey you?
- MADMAN 4. Not now, not now. Let me find it first, then you can look for a singer for it... Damn. *(He continues looking between the legs of the journalist who comes nearer to him. Madman 4 raises his head and looks at him, as if seeing him for the first time)* Hey, who are you? Are you the singer?
- JOURNALIST. No, I am not the signer.
- MADMAN 4. Who are you then? Are you a doctor?
- JOURNALIST. Not that either.
- MAD PEOPLE. *(Surprised)* Who are you then?
- JOURNALIST. Actually, I am a journalist.
(They start to laugh mockingly and gather around him, in a different manner.)
- MADMAN 1. Jour... nal... Journalist, can you write an article about hunger?
- JOURNALIST. Sure!
- MAD PEOPLE. *(Satirically)* But the hungry can't buy your journal.
- MADMAN 3. Tell me, journalist, how many Hiroshimas have there been on this earth?
- JOURNALIST. One, one of course!
- MAD PEOPLE. Wear your glasses; you are definitely short-sighted. *(They start bombarding him with many questions without waiting for answers.)*
Hey Journalist, how many babies are born? And how many die per day? Hey journalist, how many distressed mothers are there? How many people can hunger reap per day? Journalist, how many bombs have fallen and how many dead bodies are looking for coffins?
Journalist, how many organizations are there for animal welfare? And why aren't there any human welfare organizations like that? Journalist, would you write an article about hunger before or after eating? Or would you write it while you are feeding your dog?

JOURNALIST. *(Covers his ears with his hands)* This is too much!... Stop... Enough... This is enough... Enough *(He leaves running away toward Room 8, and disappears.)*

THE CLOWN. Journalist! Hey, you journalist... These are mad people's questions, nothing more. You don't need to run away like this. *(To the audience)* Poor man, he lost his balance and ran away... Believe me, if he had stayed with them longer, he would have joined them willingly. *(He speaks while covering the mad people with the same piece of cloth.)* Then imagine what would have happened? *(To himself and the audience)* Really, what would have happened... ha? *(Laughs)* How stupid, I am. Nothing would happen, except that their number would increase by one, no more...

Let's leave them alone, and move to another place, perhaps we'd find more sensible people. *(He stops as he finds a new idea)* Ah... what would you say if I showed you the truth? *(The sound of a door being slammed is heard, the Clown reacts, as if s/he has received a slap on the face.)* Excuse me, I meant I should lead you to the garden.... Perhaps you are fed up in here. There in the garden you can breathe some fresh air, and take a break for a while... ah! *(He leads the audience, playing on his instrument.)*

Movement 6

The audience stands in Room 9, looking towards 10, the garden, in which there is nothing that indicates it is a garden, except one long tree with a burned trunk, standing like a pillar of ash, while the branches are still green. Near the tree there are three pillars that are attached to each other at the top to form a pyramid, from which chains are dangling – they look like the pillars and the chains that are used to lift car motors. A man is chained inside the pyramid. In front of the pillars there is a big hole where several dead bodies have been thrown randomly. Near the pillars, to the right, there are three or four men. Their hands are chained behind their backs, standing as if in a queue. To the left, there are two masked men, standing. They wear strange clothes with long boots and red gloves. Masks, skulls, armours, swords, guns, helmets, and military

uniforms are spread around the floor and the walls. The man who is chained inside the pyramid lets out sighs that are mixed with suitable sound effects. When the audience settle in Room 9 and have been given the time to recognize all the details in Room 10, a masked man with strange clothes enters, distinguished with a red ribbon tied around his arm.

THE MAN WITH THE RED MARK. *(To the masked men)* Ha... What did you find?

THE MASKED MEN. *(Pointing to the chained man's body dangling)* The dream, the dream, sir.

THE MAN WITH THE RED MARK. Terrible malfunction, it's unbearable... Pull him down and replace him with another one

THE MASKED MEN. Yes, sir. *(They pull the man down and throw him in the hole with the other bodies. They bring another man who is the first in the queue and chain him to it instead. Sighs, sound effects, unclear words in different languages are heard. All these end with the sound of the man with the red mark.)*

THE MAN WITH THE RED MARK. Another... another... Another. *(All the men are hanged respectively, and thrown in the same hole afterwards.)*

THE MASKED MEN. *(Drawing his attention)* The queue is over, sir!

THE MAN WITH THE RED MARK. I know. The problem is that work starts to be scarce here.

THE MASKED MEN. What shall we do?

THE MAN WITH THE RED MARK. Let's go to another place, maybe we'll find more work available somewhere else.

THE MASKED MEN. Alright, sir.

THE MAN WITH THE RED MARK. Don't forget your work tools. *(He leaves from where he came. The masked men take off their masks and look even uglier. They stuff their suitcases with masks, gloves, knives, and other things. They close their suitcases and carry the three pillars and leave through the audience, disappearing inside the house. Near the tree, Adam appears with a gas mask.)*

THE VOICE OF EVE. Adam... where are you, Adam?

ADAM. Here I am, woman!

EVE, *(Enters running towards him. Before she reaches him, she stops to smell the air, and says.)* Don't you smell a strange thing, Adam?

- ADAM. *(Takes notice of her and shouts)* Go back, crazy woman, put on your gas mask!
- (She leaves and comes back with her gas mask, moving forwards towards him.)* What are you doing here in this deserted place, Adam?
- ADAM. Getting ready to take the second round.
- EVE. Second round?
- ADAM. Yes, woman. And I will fight so that our descendants won't be killed by each other.
- EVE. Our descendants? have you gone mad? How could you say our descendants, when the taste of the apple is still on our lips?
- ADAM. Look around you, Eve.
- EVE. *(Looks around herself)* Ah?
- ADAM. What do you see?
- EVE. *(Unable to believe)* What's this? This is the ruins of a battle.
- ADAM. You'd better say many battles.
- EVE. And the solution is?
- ADAM. *(Climbing the tree)* Let's try again.
- EVE. *(In a hurry)* Adam, please, please, Adam. Leave the apples alone. I am still unable to forgive myself for my first sin. Damn it, who led me to this? The apple was still unripe then.
- ADAM. *(Continues climbing)* Yes, its taste was bitter, but it wasn't your fault, or mine, Eve. It's the evil that is deep, that evil they call Satan. He is the one who pushes us to it. Climb the trunk, and Adam will pick the apple this time, not you, Eve.
- EVE. I said, please leave the apples alone.
- ADAM. *(Reaches the top of the tree, picks up an apple and eats half of it and throws the other half to Eve, who is still standing by the tree)* Don't worry, it's ripe this time and not bitter, like before.
- EVE. *(Hesitates first, then eats her half of the apple. Then suddenly very loud sounds of battles and guns are heard, reinforced with sound of planes and heavy guns. Eve, who is taken by surprise, jumps to climb the tree.)* What's this?
- ADAM. We need to pick another apple, then. *(The sounds of war return, and continue between the picking of the apples. Adam repeats the*

same words with pride, while he is picking apples, in the hope that the sound will stop) Another... another... another.

Adam and Eve are at the top of the tree. They start to scream as mad people, laughing, crying, and weeping, picking apples, eating parts of them and throwing the rest to the ground, as the sounds of war become louder and more intense.

EVE. No use, Adam.

ADAM. *(Helpless)* Yes, no use, Eve, even if we ate all the apples of God. *(He stops picking and stretches his arm to resemble a cross.)*

EVE. Adam, you are the first to live.

ADAM. But I'm the first to be killed. *(His head falls to his chest, as if crucified on the tree.)*

Movement 7

THE CLOWN. *(Talks to the audience, inviting them to Space 10, the garden)*
Come in, come in here. Don't hesitate, there is nothing to fear. *(The dead bodies start moving and there are sounds of screams coming from the windows and door of the house behind the audience. Music, chaos, sounds of barking of wild dogs, crows and wild birds, accompanied by flickering lights. The audience is surrounded by dead bodies that are moving forward, and by all the actors, who start coming from inside the house, dancing madly, and also by the sound of the clown continues.)*

Come in, through here or there, no difference: here or there, they are the same hunting dogs. Madness, massacres, wars, queues, and hunger are waiting...

Come in

Come in

These murdered bodies are eaten by wild birds, and have not been buried,¹²⁹ yet...

He laughs, screams, and the same sounds surround the audience in the middle of 10. When these sounds and screams reach their zenith, Eve gives a terrible scream from the top of the tree that silences all other sounds and freezes the motion. Complete silence.

¹²⁹ This is an extract from one of Salah AbdulSaboer's poems. Salah AbdulSaboer (May 1931 – 14 August 1981) was an Egyptian free verse poet, playwright, editor, and essayist.

Never mind...

Never mind... this world is fine...

Darkness covers the clown, the actors and the audience.

CURTAINS

Baghdad (1979-1980)

Notes:

Many attempts have been made to produce this play, *The Masks*, in the house of the playwright; he actually wrote the original text according to the map of the house that is shown here.

- The first attempt was in 1979, during the period of writing the text. That continued till 1980 and it could have been presented then, but war broke out...
- The second attempt was in 1985, and it was announced in the newspapers.
- The third attempt was adopted by Al Ressala Theatre Company in cooperation with the Iraqi Theatre Company. The rehearsals were indeed started and they were doing well when suddenly the theatre and the headquarters of the company were burned down by mysterious hands.
- The first production of the play occurred in 1990, during the activities of the Experimental Theatre Festival, by the Theatre Forum (inside the house of the forum) and then it was also performed in that year during the Fourth Kurdish Theatre Festival in Sulaymania, North of Iraq, in the gardens of the Sinjar Summer Resort, in an area of more than 1000 square meters, with trees, fountains, and fences, ending in in the car park.
- The play was also produced in an area that was not more than a meter and a quarter across, in Maqueel Centre for Research Studies in 1994, in Sanaa, Yamen. This was the opening of the experiment of the Maqueel Theatre (a theatre company founded by the playwright himself.)
- It is very important to acknowledge and thank the efforts of my colleague, Riadh Theaib, who lived with me the birth of this work. I also extend my thanks to dear sister, Raghad Abdulrazaq; my colleague, Mohammad Saif; the friend Ali Minshid, and others who enriched the work with their views and suggestions during the period of writing, and afterwards. My thanks are extended to all those who participated in presenting this work during its first attempts, or its public performance.

The playwright.

FOURTH GENERATION

1997

Ali Abdulnebi Al Zaidi

Translated into English by Alyaa A. Naser

Dedication

To another time that will never come!

To a whole generation with their full limbs!

Characters:

- GRANDFATHER... Blind (first generation).
- ABU ARM (the man with one arm)... The father, his right arm is truncated (second generation).
- SON... his tongue is truncated (third generation).
- MOTHER

Place:

A very ugly house, the couches are not suitable to sit on; the walls are full of cracks and decaying, full of spider webs. The place is very dirty and smells horribly, as if the place of the action is a very deep hole. Worn out clothes are spread arbitrarily around the house.

First: (GRANDFATHER- THE SON - ABU ARM)

(Screams, weeping, slapping, shouts of women, with an echo, filling the space.)

GRANDFATHER. *(Appears in shock)* What happened? What is all this about?

SON. *(Appears, careless)*

GRANDFATHER. A wedding can turn rottenness into a fragrant smell? *(He calls)*
Hey, you speak up; you, the dead... *(The shouts become louder)*
Nothing but quiet songs.

ABU ARM. *(Appears frightened)* Dad!

GRANDFATHER. You mean me?

ABU ARM. *(Embarrassed)* I have a baby boy!

GRANDFATHER. *(In fear)* A baby boy? You have a baby boy?

SON. *(Laughs loudly)*

ABU ARM. This is what happened.

GRANDFATHER. Craziness, the world is full of craziness. What shall we do, we who are destined to own a little piece of mind?

ABU ARM. What shall we name him?

GRANDFATHER. Nothing, nothing... another craziness is breaking into the corners of this house.

SON. *(Continues to laugh)*

- ABU ARM. What shall we call him, then?
- GRANDFATHER. *(Hits him with his stick)* Why don't you stop these crimes?
- ABU ARM. It was no more than a mistake in my wife's calculations.
- GRANDFATHER. The world is collapsing for nothing except this miscalculation of your wife. I've always warned you about touching your wife, you beggar!
- ABU ARM. Dad, please!
- GRANDFATHER. You should guarantee his future, then!
- ABU ARM. He's arrived, dad. I apologize to you.
- GRANDFATHER. I wish him dead, or dying, or that he'd die.
- SON. *(His laughs are turned into screams.)*
- ABU ARM. *(Shouts at the grandfather as if shouting at his son)* I said I apologize.
- GRANDFATHER. In the dark room, mistakes are always made. Our mistakes are the starting point of disaster.
- SON. *(His screams are turned into bitter howling.)*
- ABU ARM. Why don't you name him?
- GRANDFATHER. Names, names, names... Nobody calls us by our names; names are mistakes, too, that we stick on our sons' foreheads.
- ABU ARM. I will name him, will you allow me?
- GRANDFATHER. Madness, madness, madness, madness, madness...
- ABU ARM. *(Shouts)* Unknown... I'll call him 'unknown'.
- GRANDFATHER. I'll leave you with your Unknown and go out. Charity givers are waiting for me on the pavements. They are awaiting my gracious hand on which they put their miserable gifts. *(Exits)*
- ABU ARM. It's a wonderful name. *(He repeats the name loudly till the echo of his voice fills the house.)* Unknown, Unknown, Unknown....
(Exits)
- SON. *(His laughter becomes like weeping and severe moaning)*

Second: (MOTHER- ABU ARM)

- ABU ARM. Here he comes.
- MOTHER. Your son?
- ABU ARM. Unknown.... Isn't it beautiful?

- MOTHER. So beautiful... Did you say unknown?
- ABU ARM. I named him 'Unknown'. Let's celebrate his arrival.
- MOTHER. Shall we dance? Dance! Dance... You said Unknown.
- ABU ARM. What do you think?
- MOTHER. About dancing?
- ABU ARM. The name.
- MOTHER. No, no, no, no, no, I don't know.
- ABU ARM. Let's dance...
- MOTHER. For Unknown.
- ABU ARM. I want him unknown, woman, our time doesn't deserve to be lived with faces, names, or limbs!
- MOTHER. Limbs?! He is a piece of your scent, my husband.
- ABU ARM. When babies are born, feelings grow; and when feelings grow, we die of hunger!
- MOTHER. We can spin around them... Did you say 'feelings grow'?
- ABU ARM. Sure... everybody was dancing when we were born.
- MOTHER. Were you beautiful?
- ABU ARM. Beautiful to the extent that I saw the whole world as a very big piece of ugliness.
- MOTHER. Don't exaggerate... Shall we sing for him too?
- ABU ARM. Yes, sing... Were you beautiful?
- MOTHER. Beautiful to the extent that I used to see the world...
- ABU ARM. (*Interrupting*) don't exaggerate... let's dance and sing for him.
- (*They dance: moving awkwardly, as if talking a special language*)
- MOTHER. You look happy?
- ABU ARM. So happy, let's take today off.
- MOTHER. Really... A wonderful chance to rest your feet cracked by continuous walking.
- ABU ARM. I am very tired, woman.
- MOTHER. To feed us.
- ABU ARM. They ran after me. Hit me with stones, those children, they called me names, they think I am mad.
- MOTHER. So that we can eat... You said they thought you were mad, wonderful.

ABU ARM. This is what they thought. I ran a lot; not one corner of the street was left that I didn't hide in.

MOTHER. Our work forces us to sacrifice a few things.

ABU ARM. Everything.

MOTHER. So that we don't starve.

ABU ARM. They were calling... Abu arm, Abu arm...

MOTHER. They are still young.

ABU ARM. They are unaware of the difference between a beggar and a mad man.

MOTHER. It is always for our empty stomachs... You said unaware, wonderful.

ABU ARM. It appears that they were unaware. I ran a lot. Not one house was left that I didn't hide in.

MOTHER. Our work demands that we sacrifice a few things.

ABU ARM. Everything.

MOTHER. Abu arm... You didn't go in to see the new baby.

ABU ARM. Not now... I find it difficult to walk with one arm.

MOTHER. Put your left arm in warm water, and don't forget the salt... you said not now?

ABU ARM. Wait for the right moment... I won't forget the salt.

MOTHER. You must be eager to see him.

ABU ARM. A lot... our little lamb...

MOTHER. Lamb?!

ABU ARM. Unknown, our baby, I wish he wasn't sick.

MOTHER. On the contrary.

ABU ARM. [*Hesitant*] And and and ... his limbs?!

MOTHER. What about them?

ABU ARM. Perfect?

MOTHER. Sure...

ABU ARM. Right and left legs?

MOTHER. Perfect.

ABU ARM. How ugly perfection is when it is born from a narrow-minded woman!

MOTHER. Why do you keep your right arm thinking always?

ABU ARM. I must see him, I'll make him live lightly, with no arm.

- MOTHER. *(Laughs)* What will you do with his arm?
- ABU ARM. Nothing, Nothing, Nothing... I'll just cut it!
- MOTHER. The arm of the lamb?
- ABU ARM. Unknown.
- MOTHER. Who is unknown?
- ABU ARM. Our new baby, the beautiful...
- MOTHER. Joking... ?
- ABU ARM. *(Angrily)* Don't be silly.
- MOTHER. It must be a dream that you had yesterday morning. I've always warned you: 'don't sleep at night' but you listen to nothing but your own snoring.
- ABU ARM. You know very well that I don't know how to dream.
- MOTHER. The temperature of your soul is very high.
- ABU ARM. How long since he was born?
- MOTHER. He is still less than an hour old.
- ABU ARM. Young babies don't realize pain during their first hours.
- MOTHER. Stop using these terms, let him live with two arms.
- ABU ARM. One arm is enough, enough. I want to clarify the features of his future. I am trying to plan for him since his first fall.
- MOTHER. What do you want from him?
- ABU ARM. I wish that he would enjoy a life with no risks.
- MOTHER. With one arm?
- ABU ARM. How would an arm benefit him, when the shrapnel separates his head from his body?
- MOTHER. To be a beggar?
- ABU ARM. To be far away from war, fire, death, cutting.
- MOTHER. Incomplete?
- ABU ARM. Complete. Incompletion leads to beauty and will not lead to perfection; because I would hate it if he was complete, like a chicken or a rooster.
- MOTHER. Your law; written by the blood that fell in war. To die is better for him than to be touched by your dirty law.
- ABU ARM. When the lambs became fat, my father used to cut off their ears. I used to say that my father was a cruel man. But when I grew up, I

- understood that he was very concerned about the lives of his lambs.
- MOTHER. And your son?
- ABU ARM. My lamb.
- MOTHER. What will you say to him when he grows up?
- ABU ARM. You were full of life, dear son, and I cut your arm!
- MOTHER. Will you guarantee him a future when he becomes a beggar?
- ABU ARM. A professional beggar.
- MOTHER. He won't forgive you.
- ABU ARM. I am not waiting for forgiveness from anybody.
- MOTHER. You are wasting some inheritance that you don't own.
- ABU ARM. He is my son... He was conceived in war and born at a time of preparation for another war. He'll grow up in the middle of a third war, and get older in a fourth war, and live at the beginning of a fifth war, and die, and be cut into pieces by the end of a sixth war, and will be resurrected again at the beginning of a seventh war and reformed at the beginning of a war... and and and ...
- MOTHER. One moment of divorce can count for all the wars on earth. He is our son, do you understand? Not a lamb.
- ABU ARM. Stop comparing... Sometimes we are lambs against our will; lambs of a special type.
- MOTHER. Lambs, but with full arms.
- ABU ARM. When the wool of sheep is sheared, this does not mean that we should slaughter it. This life is fevered. It is an excess to have limbs: two arms, two legs, two ears, two kidneys, two eyes...?
- MOTHER. They forgot your name, they call you...
- ABU ARM. Abu Arm... I know.
- MOTHER. The house of Abu arm, the wife of Abu Arm, the street of Abu Arm...
- ABU ARM. I swear to you by the laugh of your baby that you haven't heard yet, that I am doing this for his future, so that his ears won't be penetrated by the power of hymns.¹³⁰ Do you hear me?
- MOTHER. Hymns?
- ABU ARM. The baby is crying!

¹³⁰ Abo Arm is referring to some Iraqi traditional national hymns calling for war.

- MOTHER. For his arm that is to be thrown to our old guard dog.
- ABU ARM. Crying for a life that he is unable to live safely.
- MOTHER. And we, the parents, what is our use, what's our role?
- ABU ARM. Our role is to think of how to create a safe, stable, quiet life for our children. When we cut off his arm, this means that I'm cutting the thread of pain, hunger, fear, and horror. I am providing him with a safe life. I will guarantee him a job for the most difficult times.
- MOTHER. Peace... is to live complete.
- ABU ARM. Peace ... is a word that you hear with your ears not your arms!
- MOTHER. When he grows older, he'll refuse, as you are refusing now what the shrapnel did to your right arm.
- ABU ARM. Minor losses are not like great losses.
- MOTHER. But they are losses.
- ABU ARM. Losses, but they won't lead to disasters.
- MOTHER. It is already difficult to live with two arms, how about one?!
- ABU ARM. Everything is on its way to brevity. I can clap with one hand, listen (*He claps with one hand.*)
- MOTHER. Leave the baby alone.
- ABU ARM. The future of the babies is always decided by their fathers. The law of nature; you can't change that.
- MOTHER. Your father didn't cut your arm.
- ABU ARM. Mistakes, mistakes that nearly led to finishing me off, except for the mercy of those shrapnel, who were satisfied with one arm.
- MOTHER. Wisdom doesn't suit you, beggar.
- ABU ARM. I don't claim to be wise, beggar, when my arm flew away, wisdom fell upon me.
- MOTHER. How could you decide the destiny of a creature that you haven't seen yet?!
- ABU ARM. He is like all creatures, what makes him different? Are his skin bones, his soul made of steel, so sharpeners won't penetrate them?
- MOTHER. I haven't seen anything more beautiful than him.
- ABU ARM. Beauty is the grace of God, a moral feature that is unable to perform miracles.

- MOTHER. By doing this, you are deforming beauty, turning beauty to ugliness. You are changing the law of nature that you call for. This is a crime.
- ABU ARM. You have to consider it very well before accusing others. When the intentions are good, the actions are good too. I'm not aspiring to a personal gain or benefit out of this, but I am trying to live up to my responsibility, as a father.
- MOTHER. Who gave you the right to decide the destiny of others?
- ABU ARM. You are not others, you are my beautiful lambs.
- MOTHER. Your axe says a different thing.
- ABU ARM. The axe is just an instrument to cut excess things. This world is full of excesses. There will be a time when we will live without heads, they are excess, woman. Why would we need heads if they don't work, broken down, disabled?
- MOTHER. Leave the baby out of your black thoughts; (*shouts*) leave him...
- ABU ARM. (*Shouts at her*) Leave him to whom? To be cut by shrapnel? To die of hunger on one of these pavements of our city? To these nights when he sleeps without supper? To whom? To those mothers who destroyed the lives of their sons with their idle emotions?
- MOTHER. He is still too young for wars.
- ABU ARM. He'll grow up soon; he'll grow up soon to find it waiting for him!
- MOTHER. Not all those who entered the fire were killed.
- ABU ARM. I entered it, woman; it's merciless. (*Shouts*) Oh God, I saw them, how they were mutilated, their heads being pierced, their chests, their eyes. You are talking about things that you haven't seen; you didn't breathe the smell of gun powder that is yeasted in my lungs. I don't want him to see what I saw, rotten dead bodies; others that are burnt; others turned into ashes. I saw their heads fly away from their bodies; how men returned to their wives with no manhood, ruins of men. I saw how their wives took second husbands because they refused to sleep with dead bodies...
- MOTHER. (*Screams*) No, you won't cut it off.
- ABU ARM. I will cut it off.
- MOTHER. (*Leaves horrified*) No, that's impossible, you won't...

Preface: (ABU ARM – GRANDFATHER)

ABU ARM. Dad?

GRANDFATHER. What?

ABU ARM. I talked to the people of the city an hour ago?

GRANDFATHER. About what?

ABU ARM. About the issue of cutting off the arm.

GRANDFATHER. Everything is isolated from its reality.

ABU ARM. I received some delightful reactions, Dad. They said that it's a perfect procedure to guarantee the future of their sons.

GRANDFATHER. Reactions of the dead... that can move toward life.

ABU ARM. They supported my idea. I didn't hear one single objection. One of them said that I am the pioneer in this field. Another assured me that these ideas are big and will build the country, and what made me happy is that one of the men said that he'll write about me and my ideas and that I am a national wealth to be proud of.

GRANDFATHER. You have the honour of being the pioneer in the coming operations of the cutting.

Fourth: (ABU ARM- SON- MOTHER- GRANDFATHER)

ABU ARM. Your mother refuses that I cut off the arm of the baby. Emotions are the pot of all disasters. There is no room for emotions.

SON. *(Looks at a small mirror in his hand, careless about the words of ABU ARM.)*

ABU ARM. Ask her about your tongue that you were born with it, where is it? Ask her on which forbidden ground it fell off you, without your knowledge. Ask her *(Shouts at him)*; I said ask her! Ask her about my arm that flew far away, fell to the sky!

SON. *(He is still careless about ABU ARM.)*

ABU ARM. My arm used to be here for many years *(He points to the place where his arm should be.)* Your mother says that your time is not like his time [*referring to his mute SON*]. But time is a fixed term, it has never changed, mad woman, she'll kill him. She hasn't

tried the pain of any shrapnel. I will kick her out of the house. Principles are principles. Though she is your mother, I have to kick her strongly. [*Addressing his mute SON*] Don't worry; I'll cut off his arm before his first day is over. Try to talk to her, (*He retreats*) but how? With signals...

- MOTHER. (*Enters*) What about?
- ABU ARM. The baby.
- MOTHER. He's asleep. Leave him to sleep peacefully, shush... he's asleep.
- ABU ARM. His peace won't last long.
- MOTHER. I won't leave him to your axe, to cut off his innocence.
- ABU ARM. I don't hate my own son; on the contrary I love him more than you do.
- MOTHER. He's not your son.
- ABU ARM. I will slap your face.
- GRANDFATHER. (*Enters in haste*) Stop quarrelling, you, annoying couple. This way we won't find a solution.
- MOTHER. I am not looking for solutions.
- GRANDFATHER. You are to realize your role as a mother. During these years of amputation that have affected this family, you have been an eye witness only; be like this for your baby now.
- MOTHER. Then you share this same silliness with him.
- GRANDFATHER. I'm the first generation of this family who didn't see how rain falls from heaven. The mistakes of my father made me live an eternal night.
- MOTHER. (*To her son*) And you?
- Son. (*Looks at a mirror, and points out that he doesn't know.*)
- Mother. You don't know! I am living with a bunch of mad men with a logic that couldn't possibly become the sacred law.
- GRANDFATHER. You need to cry badly.
- ABU ARM. Crying will help you heal this burning heart of yours... Cry.
- SON. (*Cries while he is carrying the mirror.*)
- MOTHER. Babies are born to be roses in houses not to be stones.
- ABU ARM. (*Mocking*) Here he is, your son, and a beautiful rose.
- GRANDFATHER. I will tell him the tales of his grandfathers in ten wars: listening, watching, participating, and dying.

- MOTHER. I won't let you touch my baby.
- ABU ARM. Try to get over this subject.
- GRANDFATHER. Because you won't be able to resist it.
- MOTHER. I will scream with the top of my voice.
- GRANDFATHER. Screaming can lead to calm.
- GRANDFATHER. At least he won't be blind.
- MOTHER. (*Screams*) Yebooooy!¹³¹
- SON. (*Screams mockingly*)
- GRANDFATHER. Shut up, you two.
- ABU ARM. Don't wait for anyone to save your baby's arm. We are all confused about his arm.
- MOTHER. (*Quietly*) Grandfather, you are a wise old man and he'll listen to what you say. Tell him to leave the baby alone.
- GRANDFATHER. I can't see anything my daughter. If he had one arm, two arms, or even three, this darkness is dismal. You haven't experienced darkness before. That's how my eyes disappeared after war pierced them with its many numbers. I suggest that he should not cut off his arm, but may pierce his eyes instead.
- MOTHER. What a curse that you stand like this to announce coming wars!
- GRANDFATHER. War is blind too, it can't see the difference between who deserves to live and who doesn't. Blind, yet it made me into a beggar who knows his path very well. The smoothness of the roads is used to my feet; the streets are honoured with my cries; I greet them in mornings and evenings: "Help me, please"!
- ABU ARM. We are wasting time.
- GRANDFATHER. I don't know why women should be talkative like this.
- MOTHER. I beg you, please wait for a while, please! One day only.
- ABU ARM. The decision has been made unanimously.
- MOTHER. Without my knowledge.
- ABU ARM. And now you know... what will you do?
- MOTHER. I demand that you be a real father for your baby.
- ABU ARM. There is nothing left except you demand the right of humanitarian asylum for your son's arm!

(The sound of a baby crying is heard)

¹³¹ This is a traditional Iraqi cry for help, by the name of the father, or the brother sometimes.

MOTHER. He is crying... I am coming for you, my baby. (*Exits in fear*)
 GRANDFATHER. I suggest you cut off his mother's tongue before his arm.
 ABU ARM. I will put this suggestion forward for implementation one day.

A late Preface: (GRANDFATHER- ABU ARM- MOTHER- SON)

(*A leg falls on the stage with clothes and a shoe, ABU ARM, MOTHER, and GRANDFATHER are shocked.*)

GRANDFATHER. What's this that fell on us?
 ABU ARM. A leg!
 GRANDFATHER. Whose leg is it?
 MOTHER. Who threw it into our house?
 ABU ARM. It is a good omen.
 GRANDFATHER. They say that limbs fly, high when they are separated from bodies.
 ABU ARM. (*Checking the leg*) This leg is no stranger to me.
 MOTHER. Do you know it?
 GRANDFATHER. Whose?
 ABU ARM. It's for a man who has gone to protect our limbs against amputation, returning with no limbs himself.
 ABU ARM. Amputation or cut off?
 ABU ARM. It's cut off... it is still bleeding, this is a valuable catch.
 MOTHER. Catch?!

(*The son appears holding an arm, which he waves and puts beside the leg.*)

ABU ARM. And there is his arm.
 GRANDFATHER. It seems that his limbs are distributed among the houses of our block... How fair this is.
 GRANDFATHER. And his head?
 ABU ARM. Maybe his mother hanged it on the front door to keep the evil spirit out. (*About to leave*)
 MOTHER. Where are you going?
 ABU ARM. I will try to find someone to buy it.
 MOTHER. Buy it?

Fifth: (GRANDFATHER- SON- ABU ARM- MOTHER)

(Some cheerful sounds of people and, music are heard from outside the house.)

GRANDFATHER. What's happened? What are these people cheering about? Is it a wedding?

SON. *(Appears carrying a bag full of clothes. He opens the bag and starts spreading the clothes all over the house.)*

GRANDFATHER. You, speak up... is it a wedding or a circumcision?¹³²

(The sounds get nearer, ABU ARM appears.)

ABU ARM. Good evening, Dad!

GRANDFATHER. What's wrong with you?

ABU ARM. Our neighbour cut three arms off his sons.

GRANDFATHER. Good news always comes in piles.

ABU ARM. Not only this, his eldest son came forward himself and presented his arm.

GRANDFATHER. A loyal son.

ABU ARM. It is a new process of circumcision.

GRANDFATHER. How eager I am for the time when the whole city will realize its natural role in our unnatural life. They are fighting wars and standing against us with cut off arms and legs; heroes, brave men... A city with no limbs or eyes...

ABU ARM. We have formed a committee to distinguish outstanding cases, dad.

GRANDFATHER. You will honour all outstanding cases in a celebration of the amazing occasion.

ABU ARM. Our neighbour decided in a moment of extreme faith to pierce the eyes of his family members. Imagine the whole family blind! Can you imagine the scene?

GRANDFATHER. Moments of faith, dear son, are moments of test for the individual against himself. It is a hard test. Congratulations to you, believers in the inevitability of darkness.

ABU ARM. Do you know the fat butcher on our street?

GRANDFATHER. I know him. He used to be skilful when it came to cutting off arms and legs. Honourable profession.

¹³² Circumcision is a happy event for boys in the Arabic culture, where families celebrate the manhood of their boys.

- ABU ARM. People have started coming to him from the east and the west. It is crowded there; many cutting operations have been delayed till tomorrow.
- GRANDFATHER. If only I wasn't blind, I wouldn't hesitate for a second before presenting my limbs.
- ABU ARM. You know, dad?
- GRANDFATHER. What?
- ABU ARM. A man, whose right hand was cut off, was so happy that he said: 'Cut off the other, cut it!'
- GRANDFATHER. Well done to him and his two long arms, they rest in peace, up there!
- ABU ARM. *(Finishing his sentence)* And he cut off the left, laughing and happy with his faith. Oh God, Dad, it was a unique scene to watch, a moment of revelation and true humanity, that cannot be achieved unless there is a powerful vision of the future.
- GRANDFATHER. They are racing each other to glory, to the field of serious and actual work. They burst into streets after they got rid of the nightmare of war that is at the doors. They won over their sick selves.
- (MOTHER enters, while loud screams are heard from outside.)*
- ABU ARM. What's wrong, woman?
- MOTHER. They are running after me.
- GRANDFATHER. Who are they? *(Yells)* Who are you? What are these sounds?
- (Knocks on the door, loud voices.)*
- MOTHER. They want to cut off my arm.
- ABU ARM. Are you running for an arm?
- MOTHER. It's my arm; no one has the right to it.
- ABU ARM. What a shame, our house was honoured with the idea and you don't follow it.
- GRANDFATHER. Human selfishness is the fastest way to human destruction. Present it, daughter; present it to be cut off, as a sacrifice for your coming life, the cheerful one.
- ABU ARM. It seems that you are a loner who hasn't presented her arm to be cut off, or even your leg.
- MOTHER. This is what they said to me.

ABU ARM. I have seen how humans turn into equilateral squares.

MOTHER. How?

ABU ARM. One man came forward, or he was the man of the men, came forward to the butcher and said: ‘Two arms and two legs; cut them off’ and everybody started cheering in the name of God. The song was beautiful and smooth from these mouths that enjoyed the scene of the cutting.

GRANDFATHER. Two arms and two legs went quietly to heaven, quietly...

MOTHER. What did the butcher do?

ABU ARM. He fulfilled his wish. And instead of doing the same, you are afraid to spare one arm... Don’t you feel ashamed of yourself?

(The knocks on the door are harder. The mother screams and tries to escape. But she feels that all the exits are closed in her face. She stops.)

Sixth: (MOTHER- BABY- GRANDFATHER- ABU ARM- SON)

MOTHER. *(Entering quickly, her left arm is cut off and she carries her baby with her right arm.)* They are running after me, say something; your father wants to cut off your arm, whom did you steal?¹³³ I don’t know. I don’t have the power to escape. All the roads of the city are closed. They are surrounding the house, our bedrooms, and our souls. You shouldn’t have come. How could your innocence meet their knives? Between your sweet smile and their tusks? I know they weren’t like this before, but they left their identities behind, and turned into something else. You shouldn’t have come. Instead of receiving you with hugs, they are receiving you with axes. They want you to be a beggar of a special kind teaching you their profession while you are a baby. Why are you silent? Say something, reject it, move, whisper...

(GRANDFATHER and ABU ARM enter.)

GRANDFATHER. Who’s there? Who?

ABU ARM. Your escape won’t be any use.

MOTHER. Can you wait for an hour?

ABU ARM. What do you want?

¹³³ It is a rigorous Islamic sentence that if a thief is caught stealing, the punishment is to cut off the hand.

- MOTHER. To find a new way that involves less loss.
- ABU ARM. Why do you call it loss? We've started exporting limbs to the neighbouring city and the price of an arm has reached a thousand dinars.
- MOTHER. Call it whatever you like.
- ABU ARM. Be brief.
- GRANDFATHER. Let's end this story.
- SON. *(Entering, carrying a large box)*
- ABU ARM. We are trying to bring better and more stable economic condition to our country, by selling limbs. They are rare goods.
- MOTHER. If he must be given an impediment, then pierce one of his eyes, instead of cutting off his arm.
- ABU ARM. One eye? This is not an impediment according to common social norms.
- GRANDFATHER. Be generous and say two eyes together.
- ABU ARM. He'll be a mocking figure no more. Add to this, eyes have no market value.
- SON. *(Opens the box, take out several arms and legs and starts counting them.)*
- MOTHER. Another suggestion. How about cutting off a toe; isn't this a better idea?
- ABU ARM. It must be a convincing impediment, woman, and with good financial profit.
- GRANDFATHER. It must be apparent to ordinary eyes. These are the eternal conditions that cannot be abandoned.
- ABU ARM. This impediment is very simple and does not evoke pity. No one would feel it.
- MOTHER. From where shall I get you a satisfying suggestion?
- ABU ARM. There are specialized committees for this type of thing; they have been formed lately to look into these subjects. The issue is related to the family only. The problem with your baby is that he has a beautiful face and this is a big problem that will face him in the future.
- MOTHER. You suggest, then...
- ABU ARM. Deform his face, for example!

- GRANDFATHER. A leg or an arm...
- SON. *(Still counting arms and legs)*
- ABU ARM. Two legs, he will need them to walk. How could he wander in the streets without them? Our profession requires that continuously. The arm, gentlemen, nothing but the arm.
- GRANDFATHER. You always convinces me. Objective! You are an objective son.
- ABU ARM. Thanks for your sweet compliment, Dad.
- MOTHER. And the suggestions?
- ABU ARM. Sorry, they were not convincing.
- GRANDFATHER. Your argument was weak.
- SON. *(He looks for other things in the box; he doesn't find them.)*
- GRANDFATHER. Give him the baby quietly; don't let him feel a thing.
- MOTHER. No... Please, not now!
- ABU ARM. Let's sing for him.
- MOTHER. I beg you, leave a while.
- ABU ARM. Give me the baby. Let me kiss him. Stay away, away...
- MOTHER. Have mercy... Please, mercy...
- ABU ARM. *(Angry)* Away... *(He takes the baby violently)*
- MOTHER. *(Screaming)* My baby. Who will save my baby? Please, no. is there anyone who will save my baby? *(Exits screaming)*
- SON. *(Stops, watching ABU ARM)*
- ABU ARM. *(To the baby)* Why did you come?
- GRANDFATHER. You shouldn't have come.
- ABU ARM. And here you came. Things are not in my hands now, would you allow me and stretch your left arm for me, my dear baby.
- GRANDFATHER. He won't let you feel any pain. It's only a turning point between to be and not to be.
- ABU ARM. You are still very young for pain.
- GRANDFATHER. You are a guest in our house. We always receive dear ones with surprises.
- ABU ARM. And what a beautiful surprise. The whole city will receive the new beggar with hugs, what a beggar!
- GRANDFATHER. You'll learn how to be a beggar of a special kind, everybody is waiting for the happy event.

- ABU ARM. I will send them your beautiful arm to celebrate with tonight. They'll dance and sing to its presence.
- GRANDFATHER. Till dawn.
- ABU ARM. Come on, my baby, stretch your arm... I won't touch it. You can do it; stretch it.
- GRANDFATHER. Listen to your father, he is older than you.
- ABU ARM. I won't force you to do anything. I know it is still very small, very small, and shining white..
- GRANDFATHER. Leave these emotions aside, be strong.
- ABU ARM. One inch, how sweet, the sun hasn't touched it with its heat. (*He plays with him*) You don't seem to be afraid. I will teach you how to wander in the streets, how to sleep on pavements day and night. It's a wonderful profession, you little beggar, my little lamb. Come on, take it out of this cloth that keeps it warm. (*He take out the arm*) yes, like this, and close your eyes, my baby. I will count to three and you have to be strong... One, two, three... (*He hits the arm with the axe.*)
- SON. (*Takes the arm and put it with his collection of arms and legs in the box; he seems happy.*)

Seventh: (SON- ABU ARM- GRANDFATHER- MOTHER)

(*SON pushes in a number of boxes one after the other till the stage is full of them.*

GRANDFATHER and ABU ARM enter)

GRANDFATHER. Where is your wife, son?

ABU ARM. She is in pain.

GRANDFATHER. She must go to the doctor or keep silent.

ABU ARM. She went to the doctor.

(*MOTHER enters, she seems very worried.*)

ABU ARM. What's wrong, woman?

GRANDFATHER. You came?

ABU ARM. What happened?

MOTHER. A new, sad surprise.

GRANDFATHER. Speak up, what happened?

MOTHER. I went to the doctor.

ABU ARM. What did she tell you?

MOTHER. *(Screams loudly)* Congratulations, I am pregnant.

(GRANDFATHER and ABU ARM stand silently.)

SON. *(Struggling)* Pre...gn...an..t ?!

CURTAINS

Note: The text was first published in 2005 in a book entitled as *The Return of the Man Who Was Not Absent*. A collection of plays published by The Arabic Union of Writers – Syria.

APPENDIX II

An Email and a Review in Relation to *The Wild Wedding*

Clare McManus

Attachments 04/08/2014

Dear Alyaa and Zelda

I recently had to write 600 words for Arts Council England on something I'd seen as part of an application for some consultancy work -which I've now got!

I wrote about *The Wild Wedding* as it has haunted me ever since *Terra Incognita* and then thought perhaps you might like to see it.

Clare

The Wild Wedding

By Clare MaManus

This British premiere of *The Wild Wedding* was staged as a rehearsed reading at *Terra Incognita*, a post-graduate festival on practice-as-research at the University of Sheffield, in June 2014. The play, by Iraqi playwright Falah Shaker, was translated by Alyaa A Naser, an Iraqi PhD student researching and translating Shaker's works into English.

The play plunges us into an unstable world, one which most westerners are unaware of. A mother and son, one raped, the other the product of that rape, try - and fail - to create a relationship for which they have no template, in a country ravaged by wars. Fareed, the son, is unable to love; his mother, Jameela, unable to mother him.

The relationship shifts constantly, occasionally nearing a resolution, but the damage inflicted on both prevents them from having enough empathy or mutual understanding to negotiate a relationship.

There are moments that are deeply disturbing as Fareed tries to create an incestuous relationship with his mother. He does not know what a maternal relationship is. This is particularly discomfiting for the audience because the performers are close in age, making the mother /son relationship more like that of two teenagers. This casting is deliberate, towards the end of the play we discover that Jameela was raped when she was only thirteen, making her and her son near contemporaries. The punishments Jameela underwent from her family trying to hide her and her pregnancy, are mirrored by Fareed's living in the rotting hold of a boat. We do not know whether the American

soldier boyfriend who (she thought) loved her and wanted to marry her and take her home was aware that she was only thirteen. Towards the end of the play, she describes her terror when he and his two friends rape her.

The production, given a rehearsed reading, was more developed in performance than that phrase usually describes, with the actors only occasionally referring to scripts. This enabled both audience and performers to access the visceral nature of the language and content; a simple read-through would not have had the same effect. A minimal set with scattered broken toys was a constant reminder of Fareed's age, which emphasised the inappropriateness of his sexual advances to his mother.

A valuable addition to the practice-as-research topic was the inclusion, for this production only, of a translator at the side of the stage. Comments on the action or reflections on the problems of translation were created from interviews with Alyaa Nasser by the director, Zelda Hannay. The translator sits at her desk, working at her laptop, framed by a desk lamp with a tea tray to keep her company. Occasionally she clarifies references that would not work for a non-Iraqi audience. For instance, we are told that Jameela is an Arabic name meaning beautiful and Fareed means unique, or alone. At the play's end, she pours herself a cup of tea: the milk represents her mother tongue, which nourished her as a child, the tea represents English which she now needs to mix with the Arabic to nourish her fully.

The play has been translated into Swedish and performed there, and also performed in Oman, Morocco, and other North African countries but never in Britain or the US. This piece had a powerful effect on the audience. It makes one realise that our theatre is the poorer for largely ignoring non-English speaking, theatre.

During the play Jameela talks of how she tried to kill her unwanted baby.

At the end of the play the boat is sinking. Both are in it.

BIBLIOGRAPHIES

Primary Resources

English:

- Abdulrazzak, Hassan. *Baghdad Wedding*. London: Oberon Books, 2007. Print.
- *The Prophet*. London: Oberon Books, 2012. Print.
- Al Assadi, Jwad, Robert Myers and Nada Saab trans. “*Baghdadi Bath*” *Performing Arts Journal* 89 (2008): 112-123. Print.
- Al Janabi, Abas. *Game Over: Prophecy in The Future Tense*. Unpublished. 2012. Print.
- ----. *Hymn of Love and War*. Unpublished, [2010?]. Print.
- Al Maliki, Hamed, Alyaa A. Naser, trans. *The Cart*. *Arab Stages* 2.2 (Spring 2016). Web. 18th April, 2016. <http://arabstages.org/2016/04/the-cart-a-play-by-hamed-almaliki/>
- Al Zaidi, Ali, Alyaa A. Naser, trans. *Rubbish*. *Arab Stages* 2.2 (Spring 2016). Web. 18th April, 2016. <http://arabstages.org/2016/04/rubbish/>
- Brittain, Victoria, and Gillian Slovo. *Guantanamo*. London: Oberon Books, 2011. Print.
- Burke, Gregory. *Black Watch*. London: Faber and Faber, 2010. Print.
- Corrie, Rachel. *My Name is Rachel Corrie: The Writings of Rachel Corrie*. n.p.: Nick Hern Books, 2005. Print.
- Crimp, Martin. *An Advice to Iraq Women*. *The Guardian* (10 April 2003). Web. 1 July 2013. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2003/apr/10/theatre.artsfeatures1>
- *Attempts on her Life*. London: Faber and Faber, 2007. Print.
- Darweesh, Mohammed ed. *Selected Iraqi Plays*. Baghdad: Mamoon House, 2010. Print.
- Edwards, Gwynne and Henry Livings Trans. *Lorca Plays: Three*. London: Methuen Drama, 1995. Print.
- *Embedded*. Dir & Wri. Tim Robbins> Perf. Steve Porter, Brent Hinkley, V.J. Foster, and Kate Mulligan. Cinema Libre Distribution, 2005. DVD.

- Ensler, Eve. *Necessary Targets: A Story of Women and War*. New York: Villard, 2001. Print.
- Graham-Lujan, James, and Richard L. O'Connell eds. *Three Tragedies of Federico Garcia Lorca*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1959. Print
- Green, Debbie Tucker. *Truth and Reconciliation*. London: Royal Court, 2011. Print.
- Griffiths, Trevor. *The Gulf between Us or The Truth and Other Fictions*. London: Faber and Faber, 1992. Print.
- Hare, David. *Stuff Happens*. London: Faber and Faber, 2004. Print.
- Hill, Holly, and Dina Amin, eds. *Salam. Peace: An Anthology of Middle eastern-American Drama*. New York: Theatre Communication Group, 2009. Print.
- Holmes, Jonathan. *Falluja*. London: Constable, 2007. Print.
- Joseph, Rajiv. *Three Plays: Gruesome Playground Injuries/Animals Out of Paper/Bendal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*. Berkeley: Soft Skull Press, 2010. Print.
- Lichtenstein, Jonathan. *The Pull of Negative Gravity*. London: Nick Hern Books, 2004. Print.
- Malpede, Karen, Michael Messina, and Bob Shuman, eds. *Acts of War: Iraq and Afghanistan in Seven Plays*. Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2011. Print.
- Michael, Atour Issac. *An Iraqi Wedding*. New York: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013. Print.
- Moore, MarJo. *Birth from Scorched Hearts: Women Respond to War*. n.p.: Golden, Colo, 2008. Print.
- Norton-Taylor, Richard, ed. *Justifying War*. London: Oberon Books, 2003. Print.
- *Called to Account: The indictment of Antony Charles Lynton Blair for the crime of aggression against Iraq- a hearing. Devised by Nicolas Kent*. London: Oberon Books, 2007. Print.
- Nottage, Lynn. *Ruined*. New York: Theatre Communication Group, 2009. Print.
- Raffo, Heather. *9 Parts of Desire*. Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2006. Print.
- Shaker, Falah. Alyaa A. Naser, trans. *The Wild Wedding*. Arab Stages 2.1 (Fall 2015). Web. 18th Jan. 2016. <http://arabstages.org/2015/12/the-wild-wedding/>
- Thompson, Judith. *Palace of the End*. London: Oberon Books, 2010. Print.

- Wallace, Naomi. *In the Heart of America and Other Plays*. New York: Theatre Communication Group, 2001. Print.
- Williams, Roy. *Days of Significance*. London: Methuen Drama, 2009. Print.

Arabic:

- al-Asadi, Jwad. *Nessa' Fi Al Herab* (Women in War). Damascus: Kena'n House for Publishing, 2003. Print.. ٢٠٠٣. الاسدي، جواد. *نساء في الحرب*. دمشق: دار كنعان للنشر، ٢٠٠٣.
- Al Harbi, Abas. *Al Nehdhah*. Unpublished. 1997. Print.. 1997. منشور. الحربي، عباس. *النهضة*. غير منشور. 1997.
- Al Maliki, Hamed. *Al Arabana. Alhewar Al Mutamedin* 3427. 15 July 2011. Web. 24th Sep. 2013. <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=267355>. المالكي، حامد. *العربانه. الحوار المتمدن* 3427. 15 تموز 2011. مصدر انترنت. 24 ايلول 2013.
- Al Muqdadi, Faysel Ibraheem. *Five Iraqi Women Plays*. Erbiel: Al Menara Printing, 2011. Print.. 2011. المقدادي، فيصل ابراهيم. *خمس مسرحيات نسائية عراقية*. اربيل: مطبعة المنارة، 2011.
- Al Sa'igh, Yousif. *Three Plays: The Door, Desdemona, The Return*. Baghdad: The house of General Cultural Affairs, 1994. Print.. الصائغ، يوسف. *ثلاث مسرحيات: الباب، بيزدمونه، العوده*. بغداد: دار الشؤون الثقافية، 1994.
- Al Zaidi, Ali Abdulnebi. *The Return of the Man who wasn't Absent*. Damascus: Arab Writers Union Publications, 2005. Print.. الزيدي، علي عبد النبي. *عودة الرجل الذي لم يغيب*. دمشق: منشورات اتحاد الكتاب العرب ٢٠٠٥.
- *The Return of the Man who wasn't Absent. Alsadaqa* (12th Nov. 2006). Web. 6th August, 2014. الزيدي، علي عبد النبي. *عودة الرجل الذي لم يغيب. الصداقه*. ١٢ تشرين الثاني ٢٠٠٦. مصدر انترنت. ٦ اب ٢٠١٤.
- *Rubbish*. The publications of The Union of Arab Writers 2005. *Al Sadaqa* (12th Nov. 2006). Web. 6th August 2014. الزيدي، علي. *تمامه*. منشورات اتحاد العرب ٢٠٠٥. *الصداقه*. ١٢ تشرين الثاني ٢٠٠٦. مصدر انترنت. ٦ اب ٢٠١٤.
- *Divinities*. Damascus: Temooz for Printing, Publications and and distributions, 2014. Print. ٢٠١٤. علي عبد النبي الزيدي. *الالهيات*. دمشق: تموز للطباعة والنشر والتوزيع، ٢٠١٤.
- *Modification*. Unpublished Text. 2014. Print. ٢٠١٤. علي عبد النبي الزيدي. *نص غير منشور*. ٢٠١٤.
- Chitheer, Kareem. *The Masks and other Plays*. Damascus: Nineveh House for Publishing, 2001. Print. 2001. جثير، كريم. *الاقنعه ومسرحيات اخرى*. دمشق: دار نينوى للنشر، 2001.

- Fadhil, Resha. *Temptation in a Night that is turning to Dawn, Al Eqlam Al Theqafiya* (1st Sep. 2009). Web 1st July 2013.
http://www.aklaam.net/newaqlam/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1209:2009-08-30-13-06-27&catid=64:2008-10-14-08-39-18&Itemid=176 ،فاضل،
رشا. غوايه في ليلة ايلة الى الفجر ، الاقلام الثقافية 1 ايلول 2009. مصدر انترنت 1 تموز 2013
- *The Curse of The White, Me'akum* (2007). Web. 1st July 2013.
<http://maakom.com/site/article/1509> مصدر انترنت 1 تموز 2013
- *Al Jalad (Whips under the Heaviness of Toasts)* . Unpublished, 2009. فاضل، رشا .
الجلاد (سياط تحت وطأة الانخاب). غير منشور، 2009
- *Ishtar In Baghdad. Al Noor* 1273, 9th April 2009. Web. 1st of July 2013.
<http://www.alnoor.se/article.asp?id=44936> [9 ،1273، النور في بغداد. رشا. عشتار في بغداد.]
نيسان 2009. مصدر انترنت 1 تموز 2013
- ... , and Abdulrazzak Al Ruba'i. *The Shadow. Al Noor* 1057, 21 August 2010. Wed 1st July 2013.
<http://www.alnoor.se/article.asp?id=87759> فاضل، رشا ، وعبد الرزاق الربيعي. الطيف. النور 1057 ، 21 اب 2010. مصدر انترنت 1 تموز 2013
- Hadabi, Saad. *Ashes. Radio-Theatre.com* (12th Sep. 2013). Web. 18th August, 2014.
<http://radio-theatre.com/bng/index.php/fashion/item/322-2013-09-12-02-16-15.html>
هدابي، سعد. مسرحيه رماذ. راديو- مسرح.كوم ١٢ ايلول، ٢٠١٣. مصدر انترنت. ١٨ اب ٢٠١٤
- Kadhum, Zuhayir. *Dates and Grapes: Five Plays*. Baghdad: All Shamss Printing, 2011. Print..2011.
كاظم، زهير. رطب و عنب: خمس مسرحيات. بغداد: مطبعة الشمس، 2011.
- Naeem, Awatif. *Al Samitat*. Unpublished. 2013. Print.. غير منشور. 2013
- *Hia Aliti Te'ti Aw...* . Unpublished. 2003. Print.. غير منشور. 2003
- *Jinoon Al Hema'im*. Unpublished. 2010. Print.. غير منشور. 2010
- *Nequish Henna*. Unpublished, 2005. Print..2005. غير منشور.
- *Nessa' Lorca*. Unpublished. 2005. Print.. 2005. غير منشور.
- Naser, Abdulsettar. *The Night of Orchid: Six plays in One Act*. Baghdad: The Office of General Cultural Affairs, 1994. Print..
ناصر، عبد الستار. ليلة السحلب: ست مسرحيات في فصل واحد. بغداد: دائرة الشؤون الثقافية العامه، 1994
- *Women of Rain*. Baghdad: Al Nehedha Library, 1987. Print.
ناصر ، عبد الستار نساء من مطر. بغداد: مكتبة النهظه العربيه، 1987

- *Iraqi Plays: Readings in Iraqi Theatre*. Amman: Dar Ward al Urduniyah for Publishing and distribution, 2007. Print. ناصر، عبد الستار. مسرحيات عراقية: قراءات في المسرح العراقي. عمان: دار ورد الاردنيه للنشر والتوزيع، 2007.
- Shaker, Felah. *Al Irss Al Wehshi. Alhewar Al Mutemedin* 1497 (22 March 2006). Web. 16 Dec. 2012. <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=60190> . شاکر، فلاح. العرس الوحشي. الحوار المتمدن 1497. 22 اذار 2006. مصدر انترنت 16 كانون الاول 2012.
- *Al Jena Tefteh Abwabaha Mute'ekhra. Alfurja* 37/2014 (R.D.M.D. 2421-9452). (5th May 2015). Web. 14th Sep. 2015. <http://alfurja.com/%D9%86%D8%B5-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%A3%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%81-%D9%81%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD-%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%B1/> شاکر، فلاح. الجنة تفتح ابوابها متأخرة. الفرجة 37/2014 (ر.د.م.د. 2421-9452). 5 مايس 2015. مصدر انترنت. 14 ايلول 2015.
- *Fi A'ali Al Hub. Alhewar Al Mutemedin* 1517 (11 April 2006). Web. 16 Dec. 2012. <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=61963> . شاکر، فلاح. في اعالي الحب. الحوار المتمدن 1517. 11 نيسان 2006. مصدر انترنت 16 كانون الاول 2012.
- *Jisser illa Al A'imeh. Alhewar Al Mutemedin* 1495 (20 March 2006). Web. 16 Dec. 2012. <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=60016> شاکر، فلاح. جسر الى الائمة. الحوار المتمدن 1495. 20 اذار 2006. مصدر انترنت. 16 كانون الاول 2012.
- *Tufahaht Al Qalib*. Unpublished, 1999. Print. شاکر، فلاح. تفاحة القلب. غير منشورة، 1999.

Iraqi Texts Translated by the Researcher (Unpublished)

- al-Asadi, Jwad. *Women in War*. 2013.
- Alharbi, Abas. *Al Nehdhah*. 2012.
- Al Zaidi, Ali Abdulnebi. *Fourth Generation*. 2014.
- Chitheer, Kareem. *The Masks*. 2013.
- *The Wedding*. 2013.
- *The Pearl*. 2013.
- Fadhil, Rasha. *The Curse of Whiteness*. 2014.
- Hadabi, Saad. *Ashes*. 2014.
- Naeem, Awatif. *Madness of Doves*. 2012.
- *Women of Lorca*. 2012.
- *Neqish Henna*, 2013.

- *She is to Come or....* 2013.
- Shaker, Falah. *On the Heights of Love*. 2013.
- *Heaven Open its Gates... Late*. 2014.

Secondary Resources

English Books:

- Ahmed, Leila. *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011. Print.
- *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992. Print.
- Al-Ali, Nadjie Sadig. *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present*. London: Zed Books, 2007. Print.
- ... , and Deborah Al Najjar, eds. *We Are Iraqis: Aesthetics and Politics in a Time of War*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2013. Print.
- ... , and Nicola Pratt, eds. *Women and War in the Middle East*. London: Zed Books, 2009. Print.
- Al-Azraki, Amir A. "Clash of the barbarians: The Representation of Political Violence in Contemporary English And Arabic Language plays About Iraq" Diss. York University, Toronto, 2011. Print.
- Altoma, Salih J. *Iraq's Modern Arabic Literature: A Guide to English Translations since 1950*. Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, Inc, 2010.
- Anthony, Lawrence, Graham Spence. *Babylon's Ark: The Incredible War Time Rescue of Baghdad Zoo*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2007. Print.
- Artaud, Antonin. Victor Corti, trans. *The Theatre and its Double*. London: Alma Classics LTD, 2014. Print.
- Ayckourm, Alan. *The Crafty Art of Playmaking*. London: Faber and Faber, 2004. Print.
- Bengio, Ofra. *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq*. Oxford: Oxford: University Press, 2002. Print.
- Bermel, Albert. *Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty*. New York: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2013. Print.

- Bertman, Stephen. *Handbook to Life in Ancient Mesopotamia*. New York: Facts on File, Inc. 2003. Print.
- Bharucha, Rustom. *Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture*. London: Routledge, 2005. Print.
- Billington, Michael. *State of the Nation: British Theatre since 1945*. London: Faber and Faber, 2007. Print.
- Birch, Anna, and Joanne Tompkins, eds. *Performing Site-Specific Theatre Politics, Place, Practice*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Print.
- Boal, Augusto. Adrian Jackson, trans. *Legislative Theatre: Using performance to Make Politics*. London: Routledge, 1998. Print.
- . . . Charles A., Maria-Odilia, Emily Fryer, trans. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. London: Pluto Press, 2008. Print.
- Bolzek, Olga. *Shara Kane's Role in the In-Yer-Face Theatre*. Germerly: Grin Verlag GmbH, 2010. Print.
- Bradby, David, Louis James, and Bernard Sharratt, eds. *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama: Aspects of Popular Entertainment in Theatre, Film and Television 1800-1976*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980. Print.
- Bradley, Laura. *Brecht and Political Theatre: The Mother on Stage*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006. Print.
- Brecht, Bertolt. John Willett, ed. and trans. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*. London: Methuen Drama, 1992. Print.
- Brooks, Geraldine. *Nine Part of Desire: The Hidden World of Islamic Women*. London: Penguin Books, 2007. Print.
- Brown, J.R., and B. Harris. *Contemporary Theatre*. London: Crane Russak, 1962. Print.
- Carlson, Marvin. *Speaking in Tongues: Language at Play in the Theatre*. USA: The university of Michigan Press, 2009. Print.
- . . . *Theatre: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Print.
- Chinna, Stephen. *Performance: Recasting the Political in Theatre and Beyond*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2003. Print.
- Colleran, Jeanne. *Theatre and War: Theatrical responses Since 1991 (What is Theatre?)*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Print.

- Davis, Walter A. *Art and Politics: Psychoanalysis, Ideology, Theatre*. London: Pluto Press, 2007. Print.
- Deutsche, Rosalyn. *Hiroshima after Iraq: Three Studies in Art and War*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. Print.
- Duelfer, Charles. *Hide and Seek: The Search for Truth in Iraq*. New York, Public Affairs, 2009. Print.
- Edgar, David. *How Plays Work*. London: Nick Hern Books, 2012. Print.
- *State of Play: No1 (Playwrights on Playwriting)*. London: Faber and Faber, 1999. Print.
- Esslin, Martin. *An Anatomy of Drama*. New York: Hilland Wang, 1977. Print.
- Fountain, Tim. *So You want to Be a Playwright?* London: Nick Hern Books, 2012. Print.
- Freshwater, Helen. *Theatre and Audience*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Print.
- Garner Jr., Stanton B. *Trevor Griffiths: Politics, Drama, History*. USA: The University of Michigan Press, 1999. Print.
- Giannachi, Gabriella. *The Politics of New Media*. London: Routledge, 2007. Print.
- Gordon, Mick. *Theatre and the Mind*. London: Oberon Books Ltd, 2010. Print.
- Grotowski, Jerzy. Eugenio Barba (ed.) Peter Brook (Preface). *Toward a Poor Theatre*. London: Methuen Drama, 1981. Print.
- Gupta, Suman. *Imagining Iraq: Literature in English and the Iraq Invasion*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Print.
- Haupttleisch, Temple, et al. *Festivalising! Theatrical Events, Politics and Culture*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007. Print.
- Holderness, Graham, ed and Introduction. *The Politics of Theatre and Drama*. Hampshire: Macmillan Academic and Professional Ltd, 1992. Print.
- Hughes, Jenny. *Performance in a time of Terror: Critical Mimesis and the age of uncertainty*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011. Print.
- Itzin, Catherine. *Stage in the Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain since 1968*. London: Methuen, 1980. Print.
- Kelleher, Joe. *Theatre and Politics*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Print.

- Kishtainy, Khalid. *Theatre with Commitment: Story of the Iraqi Theatre*. London: Iraqi Cultural Centre, [198-?]. Print.
- Kosok, Heinz. *The Theatre of War: The First World War in British and Irish Drama*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Print.
- Kritzer, Amelia Howe. *Political Theatre in Post-Thatcher Britain, New Writing: 1995-2005*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. Print.
- Lane, David. *Contemporary British Drama*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2010. Print.
- Machon, Josephine. *Immersive Theatre: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Print.
- McDermid, Paul. *Love, desire and Identity in the Theatre of Federico Garcia Lorca*. Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2007. Print.
- McDonald, Marianne. *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Theatre*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Print.
- Meyer-Dinkgrafe, Daniel, ed & Introduction. *Consciousness, Theatre, Literature and Arts 2011*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012, Print.
- Middeke, Martin, Peter Paul Schnierer, and Aleks Sierz, eds. *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary British Playwrights*. London: Methuen Drama, 2011. Print.
- Moosa, Matti. *The Origins of Modern Arabic Fiction*. Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 1997. Print.
- *The origins of Modern Arabic Fiction*. Boulder: A Three Continents Book, 1997. Print.
- Najjar, Michael Jim. "Contemporary Arab American Theater and Performance in the United States: Restaging and Recasting Arab American in Theatre, Film , and Performance" Diss. University of California, Los Angeles, 2011. Print.
- Ozieblo, Barbara and Noelia Hernando-Real, ed. *Performing Gender Violence: Plays by Contemporary American Women Dramatists*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Print.
- Patterson, Michael. *Strategies of Political Theater: Post-War British Playwrights*. Cambridge: University Press, 2006.
- Perntki, Tim, and Jan Selman. *Popular Theatre in Political Culture: Britain and Canada in Focus*. Bristol: Intellect, 2003. Print.

- Pinter, Harold. *Art, Truth and Politics: The Nobel Lecture 2005*. England: Illumination For more, 2006. DVD-ROM 1 disc
- Piscator, Erwin. Hugh Rorrison, trans. & Interoduction. *The Political Theatre*. New York: Methuen Drama, 1980. Print.
- Ridout, Nicholoas. *Theatre and Ethics*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Print.
- Rokem, Freddie. *Performing History: Theatrical Representation of the Past in Contemporary Theatre (Studies in theatre, History and Culture) (Studies in Theatre History and Culture)*. Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2000. Print.
- Rubin, Don et. al. eds. *World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre Volume 4: The Arab World*. London: Routledge, 2013. Print.
- Sassoon, Joseph. *Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime*. Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2011. Print.
- Sierz, Aleks. *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today*. London: Faber and Faber, 2001. Print.
- *Rewriting the Nation: British Theatre Today*. London: Methuen Drama, 2011. Print.
- *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*. London: Methuen Drama, 2006. Print.
- Sikes, Alan. *Representation and Identity from Versailles to the Present: The Performing Subject*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Print.
- Soncini, Sara. *Forms of Conflict: Contemporary Wars on the British Stage*. Unpublished book. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, [2016?]. Print.
- Spencer, Jenny (ed.). *Political and Protest Theatre after 9/11: Patriotic Dissent*. New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2012.
- Starkey, Paul. *Modern Arabic Literature*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006. Print.
- Tresilian, David. *A Brief Introduction to Modern Arabic Literature*. London: Saqi, 2008. Print.
- Tripp, Charles. *A History of Iraq*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Print.
- Tulloch, John. *Trevor Griffiths*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006. Print.

- Wandor, Michelene. *Carry on, Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 2005. Print.
- Waters, Steve, *The Secret Life of Plays*. London: Nick Hern Books, 2013, print.
- Wertheim, Albert. *Staging the War: American Drama and World War II*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004. Print.
- Weber, Anne Nicholson. *Upstage: Making Theatre in the Media Age*. New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2006. Print.
- Wiseman, Susan. *Drama and Politics in the English Civil War*. Cambridge: University Press, 1998. Print.

Arabic Books:

- Abas, Ali Muzahim. *Greetings to You, Those Work in Theatre: Theoretical Essays in Iraqi Theatre*. Baghdad: The Central Publishing House of Workers, 1985. Print.
عباس، علي مزاحم. *سلاما ايها المسرحيون: مقالات نظريه في المسرح العراقي*. بغداد: مطبعة العمال المركزيه، 1985.
- Abdulhameed, Sami. *Iraqi Theatre in a Hundred Years*. Aman: Al Adeeb House, 2012. Print.. 2012. *عبد الحميد، سامي. المسرح العراقي في مئة عام*. عمان: دار الاديب، 2012.
- *The Arabs in Shakespeare Theatre: A Comparative Study of the Approximation of the Text and the Direction*. Baghdad: The Foundation of Masir Murteda for the Iraqi Writer, 2011. Print.. *عبد الحميد، سامي. العرب في مسرح شكسبير: دراسة مقارنة للمقاربتين النصية والخراجيه*. بغداد: مؤسسة مصر مرتضى للكاتب العراقي، 2011.
- *Lights on the Theatrical Life in Iraq*. Baghdad: A Mada publishing Company, 2010. Print. . 2010. *عبد الحميد، سامي. اضواء على الحياة المسرحية في العراق*. بغداد: مؤسسة المدى، 2010. مطبوع.
- Abood, Salam. *The Culture of Violence in Iraq*. Germany: Al Jamal Publication, 2002. Print. *عبود، سلام. ثقافة العنف في العراق*. ألمانيا: منشورات الجمل، 2002. مطبوع.
- al-Asadi, Jawad. *Theatre is my Heaven*. Beirut: Al Adab House, 2008. Print. *الاسدي، جواد. المسرح جنتي*. بيروت: دار الادب، 2008.
- Alekhras, Mohammed Ghazi. *The Autum of the Intelctual in Iraq 1990-2008*. Baghdad: Al Tenwir Publishing House, 2011. Print. *الاحرس، محمد غازي. خريف المثقف في العراق 1990-2008*. بغداد: دار التنوير للطباعة والنشر، 2011. مطبوع.
- Al Juboori, Jemeel. *Habazbooz: In the History of Comic Journalism and Caricature in Iraq*. Baghdad: The House of General Cultural Affairs, 1986. Print. *الجبوري، جميل. حيزبوز: في تاريخ صحافة الهزل والكاريكاتور في العراق*. بغداد: دار الشؤون الثقافية العامه، 1986.

- Al-Mafraji, Ahmad Fayyad. *The Theatre of the 1980s: the Theatre in the Time of War*. Baghdad: The Ministry of Culture and Media, The department of General Culture, 1989. Print. المفرجي، احمد فياض. مسرح الثمانينيات: المسرح في زمن المعركة. بغداد: وزارة الثقافة والاعلام، دائرة الشؤون الثقافية والعامه، 1989.
- *Baghdad Festival for Arabic Theatre: 10-20 February 1990*. Baghdad: Ministry of Culture and media, Cinema and Drama Office, 1991. Print. المفرجي، احمد فياض. مهرجان بغداد للمسرح العربي: 10-20 شباط 1990. بغداد: وزارة الثقافة والاعلام، دائرة السينما والمسرح 1991.
- *The Artist Haqi Al Shibli: the Pioneer of Iraqi Theatre*. Baghdad: Iraqi Artists Guild, 1985. Print. المفرجي، احمد فياض. الفنان حقي الشبلي رائد المسرح العراقي. نقابة الفنانين العراقيين، 1985.
- *The National Company for Acting: Brief Pages*. Baghdad: The ministry of Culture and Media, The Cinema and Drama Office, 1989. Print. المفرجي، احمد فياض. الفرقة القومية للتمثيل: صفحات موجزه. بغداد: وزارة الثقافة والاعلام، دائرة السينما والمسرح، 1989.
- *Theatrical Life in Iraq*. Baghdad: The Ministry of Culture and Media, The Cinema and Drama Office, 1988. Print. المفرجي، احمد فياض. الحياة المسرحية في العراق. بغداد: وزارة الثقافة والاعلام، دائرة السينما والمسرح، 1988.
- *Theatrical Movement in Iraq: A Historical Survey for the Emergence of theatre in Iraq, its Evolution and the Ways to Raise it*. Baghdad: People's Publishing, 1965. Print. المفرجي، احمد فياض. الحركة المسرحية في العراق: عرض تاريخي لنشوء وتطور المسرح في العراقي ومسيرته ووسائل النهوض به. بغداد: مطبعة الشعب، 1965.
- Al Nusayir, Yassein. *The Questions of Modernism in theatre and the Relationship of Drama to mythology, Civilization and Philosophical knowledge*. Nineveh: The House of Nineveh for Publishing, 2010. Print. النصير، ياسين. اسئلة الحداثه في المسرح وعلاقتها الدراما بالمثلوجيا والمدنيه والمعرفه الفلسفيه. نينوى: دار نينوى للدراسات والنشر والتوزيع، 2010.
- *In the Contemporary Iraqi Theatre*. Belgium: The Dessert Foundation, 1997. Print. النصير، ياسين. في المسرح العراقي المعاصر. بلجيكا: مؤسسة صحراء، 1997.
- Al Ra'I, Ali. *Theatre in The Arabic Homeland*. Al Kuwait: Alm AL Me'rifa, [1980?]. Print. الراعي، علي. المسرح في الوطن العربي. الكويت: علم المعرفة، [1980?].
- Al Seraj, Sami. *Explicit and Hidden Pages in The Iraqi Theatre and Television life*. Baghdad: Somer Publishing, 1988. Print. السراج، سامي، صفحات ضاهرة وخفيه في الحياة المسرحية العراقية. بغداد: مطبعة سومر، 1988.
- Al Sharji, Ahmed. *Arabic Theatre from Borrowing to Imitation*. Baghdad: Adnan Publishing. 2013. Print. الشرجي، احمد. المسرح العربي بين الاستعارة الى التقليد. بغداد: دار ومكتبة عدنان، 2013. مطبوع

- Al Zubaidi, Ali. *The Arabic Play in Iraq (Lectures)*. Egypt: The Institution of Arabic Researches and Studies, 1967. Print.. الزبيدي، علي. *المسرحية العربية في العراق: محاضرات*. مصر: معهد البحوث والدراسات العربية، 1967.
- Ali, Awad. *The Visible Presence: Theatre from the taboo to Post Modernism*. Damascus: A Meda House for Culture and Publishing, 2008. Print.. عواد، علي. *الحضور المرئي: المسرح من التحريم الى ما بعد الحداثة*. دمشق: دار المدى للثقافة والنشر، 2008.
- *The Mirror and the Imagination: proximities in Arabic Theatre*. Damascus: Nineveh House for Publication, 2013. Print. علي، عواد. *المرآة والتخييل: مقاربات في المسرح العربي*. دمشق: دار نينوى للنشر، 2013. مطبوع
- Fereed, Bedri Hasoon. *Iraqi Theatre in 1967*. Baghdad: Al Sa'doon Publishing, 1968. Print.. فريد، بدري حسون، *المسرح العراقي في عام 1967*. بغداد: مطبعة السعدون، 1968.
- Hussein, Ali. *Iraqi Directors 1: Sami Abdulhameed*. Baghdad: Al Qadissia House for Printing, 1983. Print.. حسين، علي. *مخرجون عراقيون 1: سامي عبد الحميد*. دار القادسية للطباعة، 1983.
- *Iraqi Theatre Today*. Baghdad: Research and Studies Center, 1978. Print. *المسرح العراقي اليوم*. بغداد: اعداد قسم الابحاث والوثائق المسرحية في مركز الابحاث والدراسات، 1978.
- Queffelec, Yann. Maysoon Dhia Abo Alhab, trans. *Al Ors Al Wahshi*. Baghdad: Al Mamoon Publishing House, 1990. Print. كيفيليك، يان. ميسون ضياء ابو الحاب، ترجمة. *العرس الوحشي*. بغداد: دار المامون، 1990. مطبوع
- *The Emergence of the Theatrical Activity in Iraqi: The Iraqi cultural Week in The Arabic Republic of Egypt, Cairo and Alexandrian 15-30 November 1974*. Baghdad: n.p. [1974?]. Print.. نشأة النشاط المسرحي في العراق: الاسبوع الثقافي العراقي في جمهورية مصر العربية القاهرة الاسكندرية 15-30 نوفمبر 1974. بغداد: بلا ناشر، [1974?]
- *The National Company for Acting between 1968-1979*. Baghdad: The General Organization of Cinema and Theatre, [1979?]. Print.. الفرقة القومية للتمثيل في الاعوام 1968-1979. بغداد: المؤسسة العامة للسينما والمسرح، [1979?]
- *The Silver Jubilee 1952-1977*. Baghdad: The Company of Modern Artistic Theatre, [1977?]. Print. *اليوبيل الفضي 1952-1977*. بغداد: فرقة المسرح الفني الحديث، [1977?].

English Articles

- Amine, Khalid. "Theatre in the Arab World: A Difficult Birth" *Theatre Research International* 2.31 (2006): 145-162. Print.
- Athey, Ron. "Theatre the Holiest of Holies" *Contemporary Theatre Review* 23.1 (2013): 69-70. Print.

- Awade, Nick. "The final Frontier –Jawad Al-Assadi and performing Arts in Baghdad" *The Stage People* (7th Jan., 2005). Web. 28th August, 2014.
<http://www.thestage.co.uk/people/2005/01/the-final-frontier-jawad-al-assadi-and-performing-arts-in-baghdad/>
- Beach, Maria. "Nine Parts of Desire (review)" *Theatre Journal* 58.1 (2006): 102-103. Print.
- Beeman, William O. "The Anthology of Theatre and Spectacle" *Annual Review of Anthropology* 22 (1993): 369-393. Web. 12 Nov. 2012.
<http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev.an.22.100193.002101>
- Bignell, Jonathan. "Trevor Griffiths's Political Theatre: from 'Oi For England' to 'The Gulf between Us'" *New Theatre Quarterly* 10. 37 (February 1994): 49-56. Print.
- Billington, Michael. "Baghdad Wedding" *The Guardian*. (Wed. 4th July 2007). Web. 6th Sep 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2007/jul/04/theatre>
- "Palace of the End – review" *The Guardian*. (Tues. 2nd November 2010). Web. 20 May 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2010/nov/02/palace-of-the-end-review>
- Birks, Roberta. "Searching the truth" *Canadian Literature n.d.* Web 29 May 2015.
http://canlit.ca/reviews/searching_for_truth
- Bleifuss, Joel. "Embedded with Tim Robbins" *In These Times* (27th June, 2005). Web. 13th February, 2015.
http://inthesetimes.com/article/2177/embedded_with_tim_robbins
- Bradby, David. "Afterword" *Contemporary Theatre Review* (2013): 92-93. Print.
- Brantley, Ben. "Prowling For Laughs From Today's Foreign Policy" *The New York Times* (15th March, 2004). Web. 15th February, 2015.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/15/theater/theater-review-prowling-for-laughs-from-today-s-foreign-policy.html>
- Brown, Tony. "'Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo' by Cleveland Heights' Rajiv Joseph opens on Broadway" *The Plain Dealer* (2nd April, 2011. Web). 15th February, 2015.
http://www.cleveland.com/onstage/index.ssf/2011/04/bengal_tiger_at_the_baghdad_zo.html
- Ceil, Chenoy. "Epic of Gilgamesh" *Socail Science Research Netwrok* (March 29, 2012). Web. 4/11/2012. http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2030863
- Chaudhuri, Una. "Regime Change: King Lear in Los Angeles, George Bush in Iraq, Americans in France" *The Drama Review* 48.1 (2004): 86-94. Print.

- Colleran, Jeanne M. "Disposable Wars, Disappearing Acts: Theatrical Responses to the 1991 Gulf War" *Theatre Journal* 55.4 (December 2003): 613-632. Print.
- De Jongh, Nicholas. "Stirring the Scenes from Iraq" *The Evening Standard* (3rd July. 2007). Web. 6th Sep 2013. <http://www.standard.co.uk/goingout/theatre/stirring-scenes-from-iraq-7396725.html>
- Del Signore, John. "Intense, absorbing, and thought-provoking" *The New York Times* n.d. Web. 30 May 2015. <http://heatherraffo.com/projects/palace-of-the-end/>
- Eustis, Oskar. "Going the Distance: An Interview with the Playwrights" *American Theatre* 27.4 (2010): 61-74. Print.
- Evans, Christine. "Notes Towards a Political Theatre" *Contemporary Theatre Review* 20.3 (2010): 377-388. Print.
- Fernea, Elizabeth. "Remembering Ta'ziyeh in Iraq" *The Drama Review* 49.4 (2005): 130-139. Print.
- Fox, Killian. "Truth and Reconciliation- review" *The Observer* (11th Sep. 2011). Web 26th Sep. 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/sep/11/debbie-tucker-green-truth-reconciliation>
- Friedman, Rosalind. "Theater Review - Bengal Tiger" *Theater Circuit* n.d. Web. 15th February, 2015. <http://wmnr.instantcore.com/web/page.aspx?title=Theater+Review+-+Bengal+Tiger>
- Friedman, Sharon. "The Gendered Terrain in Contemporary Theatre of War by Women" *Theatre Journal* 62.4 (2010): 593-610. Print.
- Gale, Maggie. "Contemporary" *Contemporary Theatre Review* 23.1 (2013): 15-18. Print.
- Garner Jr., Stanton B. "Politics over the Gulf: Trevor Griffiths in the Nineties"" *Modern Drama* 39.3 (Fall 1996): 381-391. Print.
- George, Contini. "My Name is Rachel Corrie (Review)" *Theatre Journal* 59.1 (2007): 116-117. Print.
- Genzlinger, Neil. "The Cycle of life, Damaged by the Horror of War" *The New York Times* (24th June 2008). Web 29 May 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/24/theater/reviews/24pala.html?_r=0
- Gillan, Audrey. "Tim Robbins's new play, Embedded, Mar 04, New York" *The Guardian* (31st March, 2004). Web. 15th February, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2004/mar/31/theatre.politicaltheatre>

- Gilleman, Luc. "Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*, and: Sara Kane's *Blasted* (Review)" *Theatre Topics* 21.1 (2011): 102. Print.
- Glass, Charles. "Review of Tim Robbins' *Embedded*" *The Independent* (10th September, 2004). Web. 15th February, 2015. http://www.charlesglass.net/archives/2004/09/review_of_tim_r.html
- Gordon, Jeremy. "Framing Anti-War Theatre: Public Perceptions of *Embedded*" Preview of an unpublished Master thesis. Utah State University, Logan UT, 2008. Print.
- Green, Richard. "Art and theatre in the ancient world" *CUUK6IIB-McDonalds & Walton* (November 27, 2006) Web. 13/2/2016. https://www.academia.edu/3289469/Art_and_the_Theatre_in_the_Ancient_World
- Henley, Jon. "The Other side of Baghdad" *The Guardian* (Friday 18th January 2008). Web. 2nd August, 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2008/jan/18/theatre>
- Iball, Helen. "Room Service: En Suit on the *Blasted* Frontline" *Contemporary Theatre Review* 15.3 (2006): 320-329. Print.
- Isherwood, Charles. "In the Iraq War, People Acting Like Animals, and Vice Versa" *The New York Times* (15th May, 2010). Web. 15th February, 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/15/theater/reviews/15bengal.html?pagewanted=all>
- ... "Ghostly Beast Burning Bright in Iraq" *The New York Times* (31st March, 2011). Web. 15th February, 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/01/theater/reviews/bengal-tiger-with-robin-williams-review.html?pagewanted=all>
- ... "9 Parts of Desire" *The New York Time Review*. n. d. Web. 3rd July, 2014. <http://heatherraffo.com/9-parts-of-desire-new-york-times-review/>
- Jabar, Ina'am. "Song, rocking chair, two women cash in prize" *Baghdad Observer* 6424 (20th Jan. 1988). Print.
- Jones, Chris. "9 Parts of Desire' gives women of Iraq many voices" *Chicago Tribune*. (8th May 2008). Web. 3rd July, 2014. http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2008-05-08/features/0805060397_1_iraqi-women-heather-raffo-docudrama
- ... "a tiger tale set in Iraq" *Chicago Tribute*. 12th February 2013. Web. 15th February, 2015. http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2013-02-12/entertainment/chi-bengal-tiger-theater-review-20130212_1_bengal-tiger-baghdad-zoo-tiger-tale
- Jones, Kenneth. "Judith Thompson's *Palace of the End* Looks at Iraq War" *PlayBill*. (14 January 2008). Web. 20 May 2015. <http://www.playbill.com/news/article/judith-thompsons-palace-of-the-end-looks-at-iraq-war-146816>

- Joseph, Rajiv. "Rajiv Joseph on Bringing the Wild World of Bengal Tiger to Broadway With Robin Williams" *BroadWay.com* (6th April, 2011). Web. 15th February, 2015. <http://www.broadway.com/buzz/155911/rajiv-joseph-on-bringing-the-wild-world-of-bengal-tiger-to-broadway-with-robin-williams/>
- Kim, Solga. "Blasted's Hysteria: Rape, realism, and the Thresholds of the Visible" *Modern Drama* 50.3 (2007): 346-374. Print.
- Klasfeld, Adam. "Embedded" *Theatre Mania* (15th May, 2004). Web. 15th February, 2015. http://www.theatermania.com/new-york-city-theater/reviews/03-2004/embedded_4495.html
- Knickmeyer, Ellen. "Details Emerge in Alleged Army Rape, Killings" *The Washington Post* (July 3, 2006). Web. 3/3/2016. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/07/02/AR2006070200673_pf.html
- Komisar, Lucy. "'Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo' is a fierce political statement against war" *The Komisar Scoop n.d.* Web. 15th February, 2015. <http://www.thekomisarscoop.com/2011/05/bengal-tiger-at-the-baghdad-zoo-is-a-fierce-political-statement-against-war/>
- Kubly, Jenna L. "Theatre and War: Theatrical Responses Since 1991 by Jeanne Colleran (review)" *Theatre Journal* 66.2 (May 2014): 306-307. Print.
- Lahr, John. "The Fury and the Jury: Women, and men, make themselves heard" *The New Yorker* (8/11/2004). Web. 5th July, 2014. <http://heatherraffo.com/9-parts-of-desire-the-new-yorker-review/>
- ... "Survival of the fittest on Broadway" *The New Yorker* (11th April, 2011). Web. 15th February, 2015. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/04/11/tooth-and-claw-john-lahr>
- Lazier, Benjamin. "Natural Right and Liberalism: Leo Strauss in Our Time" *Modern Intellectual History* 6-1 (April 2009): 171-188. Print.
- Magant, Virginie. "Eurasian Theatre: Drama and Performance between East and West from Classical Antiquity to the Present" *Contemporary Theatre Review* 21.4 (2011): 530-531. Print.
- Marks, Peter. "'9Parts' For One Eloquent Actor" *The Washington Post* (9th October, 2006). Web. 3rd July, 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/08/AR2006100800998.html>
- McManus, Clare. "The Wild Wedding" A review present to the Arts Council England and an email to Zeldia Hannay and Alyaa A. Naser (4th August, 2014).

- McNulty, Charles. “ ‘Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo’ at the Kirk Douglas Theatre” *Culture Monster* (18th May, 2009). Web. 15th February, 2015.
<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/culturemonster/2009/05/review-bengal-tiger-at-the-baghdad-zoo-at-the-kirk-douglas-theatre.html>
- . . . “ ‘Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo’ at the Mark Taper Forum” *Culture Monster* (26th April, 2010). Web. 15th February, 2015.
<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/culturemonster/2010/04/theater-review-bengal-tiger-at-the-baghdad-zoo-at-the-mark-taper-forum.html>
- . . . “ ‘Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo’ on Broadway” *Culture Monster* (31st March, 2011). Web. 15th February, 2015.
<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/culturemonster/2011/03/theater-review-bengal-tiger-at-the-baghdad-zoo-on-broadway-1.html>
- Melendez, Barbara. “Play Illuminates Middle Eastern Women” NSF News. (November 2015). Web. 4/2/2016.
http://news.usf.edu/article/templates/?a=7094&z=221&utm_source=9-parts-of-desire-111215&utm_medium=rotator&utm_campaign=ushomepage
- Moosa, Matti. “Social Consciousness in The Iraqi Drama” *The Muslim World* 3-4.71 (1981): 228-246. Print.
- Motzkus, Hiedi Tolles. “Embedded: A New Satire Explores The Art of War” *Phi Kappa Phi Forum* 84-3 (2004): 8-9. Print.
- Myers, Robert. “Blood on both Hands: Jwad Al Assadi's Baghadi Bath” *Performing Arts Journal* 89 (2008): 108-111. Print.
- Ng, David. “Pulitzer for drama goes to ‘Next to Normal’” *Los Angeles Times* (13th April, 2010). Web. 15th February, 2015.
<http://articles.latimes.com/2010/apr/13/entertainment/la-et-pulitzer-drama-20100413>
- Oxman, Steve. “A moving portrayal of Iraqi women” *Los Angeles Times*. (16th September, 2005). Web. 3rd July, 2014.
<http://articles.latimes.com/2005/sep/16/entertainment/et-desire16>
- Pinter, Harold. “American Football” *HaroldPinter.org* (n.d.) Web. 7/2/2016.
http://www.haroldpinter.org/poetry/poetry_football.shtml
- Pressley, Nelson. “9Parts’Palywright Is Fully Engaged in Iraqi Women’s Strife” *The Washington Post* (8th October, 2006). Web. 3rd July 2014.
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/06/AR2006100600256.html>

- Quarmby, Kevin. "Tim Robbins, Embedded, Riverside Studios, London" *quarmby.biz* (9th September, 2004). Web. 15th February, 2015. http://www.quarmby.biz/reviews/review_Embedded.htm
- Raffo, Heather. "Heather Raffo's Aha Moment" *n.d.* <http://heatherraffo.com/heather-raffo-aha-moment/> . Web. 3rd July, 2014.
- "Fallujah: The First Opera about Iraq War" *heatherraffo.com* (*n.d.*) Web 7/2/2016. <http://heatherraffo.com/projects/fallujah/>
- Raphaeli, Nimrod. "Culture in Post-Saddam Iraq" *Middle East Quarterly* 14.3 (Summer 2007):33-42. Web. 12th Jan. 2016. http://www.meforum.org/1707/culture-in-post-saddam-iraq#_ftn7
- Renner, Pamela. "Iraq Through the Eyes of Its Women" *Theatre Communications Group*. *n.d.* Web. 3rd July, 2014. <http://www.tcg.org/publications/at/Apr05/raffo.cfm>
- Robbins, Tim. "Embedded Live: A Moment Captured" *Huffington Post* (25th May, 2011). Web. 15th February, 2015. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tim-robbins/embedded-live-a-moment-ca_b_1484.html
- Romanska, Magda. "Trauma and Testimony: Heather Raffo's '9Parts of Desire'" *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 30 (2010): 211-239. Print.
- Sandler, Lauren. "An American and Her Nine Iraqi Sisters" *The New York Times* (17th October, 2004). Web. 3rd July, 2014. http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/17/theater/newsandfeatures/an-american-and-her-nine-iraqi-sisters.html?_r=0
- Schlote, Christiane. "Not Just another Play about Iraq: An Interview with Hassan Abdulrazzak" *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 41.1 (2011): 101-111. Print.
- Shirley, Don. "Voices from a war zone" *Los Angeles Times* (13th September, 2005). Web. 3rd July, 2014. <http://articles.latimes.com/2005/sep/13/entertainment/et-raffo13>
- Sierz, Aleks. "Baghdad Wedding review at Soho Theatre" *The Stage* (5 July 2007). Web. 6 Se. 2013. <http://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/review.php/17341/baghdad-wedding>
- "Reality Sucks: The Slump in British New Writing" *Performing Arts Journal* 89 (2008): 102-107. Print.
- Simakis, Andrea. "Rajiv Joseph remembers Robin Williams, the box-office Tiger who helped take his play to Broadway" *The Plain Dealer* (12th August, 2014). Web. 15th February, 2015. http://www.cleveland.com/onstage/index.ssf/2014/08/rajiv_joseph_remembers_robin_w.html

- Simonson, Robert. “Public Theater to Present Tim Robbins' Embedded, Beginning Feb. 24” *Playbill* (16th January, 2004). Web. 15th February, 2015. <http://www.playbill.com/news/article/public-theater-to-present-tim-robbins-embedded-beginning-feb.-24-117393>
- “It's War at the Public Theater as Tim Robbins' Political Satire, Embedded, Opens March 14” *Playbill* (14th March, 2004). Web. 15th February, 2015. http://www.playbill.com/news/article/its-war-at-the-public-theater-as-tim-robbins-political-satire-embedded-open-118446#search_form
- “Tim Robbins’ Embedded Extends Again, to April 25” *Playbill* (26th March, 2004). Web. 12th February, 2015. <http://www.playbill.com/news/article/tim-robbins-embedded-extends-again-to-april-25-118724>
- Sommer, Elyse. “Embedded At New York's Public Theater” *CurtainUp* [2004?]. Web. 15th February, 2015. <http://www.curtainup.com/embedded.html>
- “Robbin’ ‘Embedded’ Play Not So Realistic” *FoxNews.com* (1st December, 2003). Web. 13th February, 2015. <http://www.foxnews.com/story/2003/12/01/robbins-embedded-play-not-so-realistic/>
- “Robbins defends Iraq war satire” *BBC* (1 September, 2004). Web. 15th February, 2015. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/3617184.stm>
- Stoltenberg, John. “Reading of ‘Noura’ at Georgetown University’s Myriad Voices: A Cross-Cultural Performance Festival” *DC Metro Theatre Arts* (December 4, 2015). Web. 5/2/2016. <http://dcmetrotheaterarts.com/2015/12/04/186300/>
- Spencer, Richard. “Romeo and Juliet in Baghdad' comes to London” *Telegraph* (4th April, 2012). Web. 9th Dec. 2014. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-features/9184099/Romeo-and-Juliet-in-Baghdad-comes-to-London.html>
- “Study Guide: Palace of the End: Written by Judith Thompson, Directed by David Storch” *The Canadian Stage Company* [2008?] Web. 29 May 2015. https://www.canadianstage.com/ArticleMedia/pdfs/Education/Study_Guides/Palace%20of%20the%20End%20-%20Study%20Guide.PDF
- Teachout, Terry. “Invisible Women” *Wall Street Journal Review* (January 2005). Web. 3rd July 2014. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB110565623580225747>
- Weinert-Kendt, Rob. “After the War: Iraqi Theatre Artists Forge Ahead – and Reach Global Connections- in a Cautious, Still-Fragile Country” *American Theatre* 29.2 (2010): 38-62. Print.

- Weinstein, Karen. "Embedded – Tim Robbins" *Culture Vulture.net* (11th November, 2003). Web 15th February, 2015. <http://culturevulture.net/theater/embedded-tim-robbins/>
- ... "Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo" *Center Theatre Group* (30th May, 2010). Web 15 February, 2015. <http://culturevulture.net/theater/bengal-tiger-at-the-baghdad-zoo-la/>
- Werner, Jessica. "Tim Robbins pours his anger into an anti-war play -- just don't call it political theatre" *SfGATE* (6th December, 2003). Web. 13th February, 2015. <http://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/article/Tim-Robbins-pours-his-anger-into-an-anti-war-play-2510013.php>
- Wilson, Steve. "BWW Review: BENGAL TIGER AT THE BAGHDAD ZOO Opens at the Unicorn Theatre" *BroadWay World* (9th December, 2014). Web. 15th February, 2015. <http://www.broadwayworld.com/kansas-city/article/BWW-Review-BENGAL-TIGER-AT-THE-BAGHDAD-ZOO-Opens-at-the-Unicorn-Theatre-20141209>
- Young, Stuart. "Playing with Documentary Theatre: Aalst and Taking Care of Baby" *New Theatre Quarterly* 25. 01 (2009): 72-87. Print.
- Zoren, Neal. "Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo — Temple Theaters at the Adrienne" *NealsPaper* (23rd September, 2014). Web. 15 February, 2015. <http://nealspaper.com/2014/09/23/bengal-tiger-at-the-baghdad-zoo-temple-theater-at-the-adrienne/>

Arabic Articles:

- Abas, Ali Muzahim. "The Political Theatre by Dr. Abdulaziz Hamuda" *Theatre and Cinema* 7-8 (1973): 42-46. Print.. علي مزاحم "عبد "عباس، المسرح السياسي من تأليف الدكتور عبد "عباس، علي مزاحم (العزیز حموده "المسرح والسينما 7-8 (1973)
- ... "What a Tiring Job: Theatre Criticism!" *Arabic Horizons* 7.7 (1982): 154-155. Print.. 155-154 : (1982) 7.7 عريبه "افاق عربيه " باللقند المسرحي من مهنة شاقه " افاق عربيه 7.7 (1982)
- Abas, Wajeh. "Jwad Al Shekerchi: Iraqi now is a Burning Volcano with Stories and Tragedies" (1st Nov. 2006). Web. 18th Dec. 2013. <http://aladalanews.net/index.php?show=news&action=article&id=7071> ،عباس وجيه."جواد الشكرجي: العراق الان بركان يغلي بالقصص وبركان يغلي بالماسي" 1 تشرين الثاني 2006. مصدر انترنيت. 18 كانون الاول 2013
- Abdulameer, Ali. "Women in War: a dramatic text in a book, Jawad Al Assadi observes a scene from the Iraqi disaster" *Al Hayat* 14639 (23th April, 2003). Web.

28th August, 2014.

http://daharchives.alhayat.com/issue_archive/Hayat%20INT/2003/4/23/%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D9%86%D8%B5-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%AC%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%94%D8%B3%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%B5%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%8B-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AB%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A9.htm

عبد الامير، علي. "نساء في الحرب: نص درامي في كتاب، جواد الاسدي يرصد مشهدا من الكارثة العراقية" *الحياة* ١٤٦٣٩ (٢٣ نيسان، ٢٠٠٣) مصدر انترنت. ٢٨ اب، ٢٠١٤

- Abdulhameed, Sami. "The Development of the Mental Directing in Iraqi Theatre" *Sep issue. The Pens* 3-4 (1987): 15-29. Print. . "تطور الذهنيه الاخراجيه في عبد الحميد، سامي. " (المسرح العراقي" عدد خاص من الاقلام 4-3 (1987)
- Abdulsahib, Aziz. "An Interview with the Artist Ahmad Fayyad Al-Mafraji" *Our Theatre* 4 (1977): 3-4. Print. . "لقاء مع الفنان احمد فياض المفرجي" مسرحنا " (1977) 4-3: نشرة 4
- ... "An Interview with the Artist Haqi Al Shibli" *Our Theatre* 2 (1977): 3-4. Print. . "لقاء مع الاستاذ الفنان حقي الشبلي" مسرحنا نشرة 2 (1977) 4-3:
- Adel, Ali. "Ali Abdulnebi Al Zaidi... Guevara of theatre" *Kitabat* (22 March 2011) Web. 8th Dec. 2014. <http://www.kitabat.com/archive/i82153.htm> "علي عبد عادل، عادل. " (النبي الزيدي... جيفارا المسرح" كتابات (٢٢ اذار ٢٠١١) مصدر انترنت ٨ كانون الثاني، ٢٠١٤
- Al Ani, Yosif. "Testimonies" *The Arabic Writer* 7. 24 (1989): 22-3. Print. . "شهادات" يوسف. " عدد خاص من الكاتب العربي 7.24 (1989) 23-22
- ... "The reality and Modernism in The Theatre of the 1950s" *Arabic Horizons* 7.7 (1982): 110-124. Print. . "الواقع والحدائه في مسرح الخمسينيات" افاق عربيه 7.7 (1982): 124-110:(1982).
- Al Atabi, Abduljabar. "Romeo and Juliet in Baghdad... a Consecration of Sectarianism or a Call for National Reconciliation" *Elaph* (20/ 4/2012). Web. 4/3/2016. <http://elaph.com/Web/Culture/2012/4/730615.html> "عبد الجبار. " رميو وجوليت في بغداد... تكريس الطائفه ام دعوة للمصالحة الوطنية" ايلاف (٢٠١٢/٤/٢٠) مصدر انترنت. ٢٠١٦/٣/٤.
- Al Atia, Aqueel Ibraheem. "Ahmad Fayyad Al-Mafraji... The Pioneer of Theatrical Documentation" *Sot Al Akhr* 502 (22/10/2014) Web. 13/2/2016. <http://www.sotakhr.com/2006/index.php?id=23312> "عقيل ابراهيم." احمد فياض المفرجي... راند التوثيق المسرحي " صوت الاخر ٥٠٢ (٢٠١٤/١٠/٢٢) مصدر انترنت. ٢٠١٦/٢/١٣

- Albenaa, Abdulaleem. "An active theatre presence and The Cart is very near to win" Awraq Thaqafiayh. 30th Jan. 2014. Web. 5th Oct. 2014.
http://artistsdhiqar.blogspot.co.uk/2014/01/blog-post_4446.html البناء، عبد العليم.
"حضور مسرحي فاعل وعربانه قاب قوسين او ادني من الفوز" اوراق ثقافية. ٣٠ كانون الثاني ٢٠١٤.
مصدر انترنت. ٥ تشرين الاول ٢٠١٥.
- ... "An interview with the direcotor Imad Mohammad: The Cart is a daring reading of the reality through different stages" *Albayan*. 17 Dec. 2013. Web. 28th Jan. 2014.
<http://albayaniq.com/?p=14974> البناء، عبد العليم. " حوار مع المخرج عماد محمد: مسرحية العربانه
قراءة جريئة للواقع عبر مراحل مختلفه" البيان. 17 كانون الاول 2013. مصدر انترنت. 28 كانون الثاني 2014.
- Abdulwahid, Naser. "Heaven Opens its Gates Late!!" *Al Sahil*. 10th Nov. 2002. Web. 21st March, 2013. <http://saihat.net/vb/showthread.php?t=35751> عبد الواحد، ناصر. "الجنة
تفتح ابوابها متأخره!!" الساحل. ١٠ تشرين الثاني ٢٠٠٢. مصدر انترنت. ٢١ اذار ٢٠١٣.
- Al Ameri, Suzan. "The Cart: A New Reading of the Arab Spring" *Alsharja*. 15th Jan. 2014. Web. 3rd March 2014. <http://www.emaratalyoum.com/life/four-sides/2014-01-15-1.640672> العامري، سوزان. " العربانه: قراءة جديده للربيع العربي" الشارقة. 15 كانون الثاني 2014.
مصدر انترنت. 3 اذار 2014.
- Al Anbari, Sabah. "Three Features of Contemporary Iraqi Theatre" *Sabah Alanbari.com* (2 May 2003). Web. 27 August 2013.
<http://www.sabahalanbari.com/panto-essays/three.htm> الانباري، صباح. "ثلاث ملامح
للمسرح العراقي المعاصر" صباح الانباري. 2 مايس 2003. انترنت. 27 اب 2013.
- ... "Aesthetic Sensors in Al Nessar's Show" *Sabahalanbari.com n.d.* Web. 28th August, 2014.
http://www.sabahalanbari.com/my_books/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%82%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A1%20%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B8%D9%88%D8%B1/%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%A1%20%D9%81%D9%8A%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%A8.htm الانباري، صباح.
" المجسات الجماليه في عرض النصار" صباح الانباري. كوم بلا تاريخ. مصدر انترنت. ٢٨ اب، ٢٠١٤
- Al Anbari, Shaker. "Jawad Al Assadi shows for the first time in Baghdad post-Saddam, three Iraqi women looking for a place" *Al Hayat* 15180 (19th Oct. 2004). Web. 28th August, 2014.
http://daharchives.alhayat.com/issue_archive/Hayat%20INT/2004/10/19/%D8%AC%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%94%D8%B3%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%B6-%D9%84%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%94%D9%88%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D8%BA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%B5%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%AB%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AB-%D9%86%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%A9-

- Al Hashimi, Jemal. "Gone and not gone... the document of the playwright and theatre artist Kereem Chitheer" *Alhewar Al Mutemadin* 1273 (1 August, 2005) Web. 9th Dec. 2014. <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=42230> .الهاشمي، جمال. "رحل لم يرحل... ملف الكاتب والفنان المسرحي كريم جثير" الحوار المتمدن 1273 (1 اب 2005) مئدر انترنيت. 9 كانون الاول، 2014.
- Al Hesseb, Jawad. "Snapshots of Jawad Al Assadi's Works in Theatre" *Alhewar Al Mutemadin* 3202 (1st Dec. 2010). Web. 28th August, 2014. <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=236839> الحسب، جواد. "شذرات من اعمال جواد الاسدي في المسرح" الحوار المتمدن 3202 (1 كانون الاول، 2010). مصدر انترنيت. 28 اب، 2014.
- Al Maliki, Hamed. "Falah Shaker, Again" *Startimes* (12/1/2010). Web. 11/1/2016. <http://www.startimes.com/?t=21346733> /12 /المالكي، حامد. "فلاح شاكمر مره اخرى" ستارتايمز 12 /1. مصدر انترنيت. 11 /1 /2016.
- Al Mansoor, Zehra. "The Cart... Circles inspire the world of rebellion" *Al Ayam* 9091 (Saturday 1st of March, 2014). Web. 21st March 2014. <http://www.alayam.com/alayam/Variety/270764/%C2%AB%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A9%C2%BB..-%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%87%D9%85-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AF.html> المنصور، زهراء. "عربانة... دوائر تلهم علم التمرد" الايام 9091 (الاذار 2014). مصدر انترنيت. 21 اذار 2014.
- Al Merzooq, Amer Sabah Noori. "Experimentation in the Youth Theatre... Experiments in Iraqi Theatre" *College of Fine Arts, University of Babylone, Iraq* (7/2/2015) Web. 25/1/2016. http://www.uobabylon.edu.iq/uobColeges/service_showrest.aspx?fid=13&pubid=6299 المرزوك، عامر صباح نوري. "التجريب في مسرح الشباب... تجارب من المسرح العراقي" كلية الفنون الجميلة، جامعة بابل، العراق (7/2/2015) مصدر انترنيت. 25 /1 /2016.
- Al-Mafraji, Ahmad Fayyad. "Theatrical Life in Iraq 1880-1921" *Cinema and Theatre* 1.1 (1982): 146-53. Print. . "الحياة المسرحية في العراق 1880-1921" سينما ومسرح 1.1 (1982).
- Al Muhssin, Fatima. "Three plays about War Jawad Al Assadi Participates in the War Festival in London" *Alriyadh* 13299 (18th Nov. 2004). Web. 28th August, 2014. http://www.alriyadh.com/Contents/18-11-2004/Mainpage/Thkafa_15035.php المحسن، فاطمه. "ثلاث مسرحيات عن الحرب جواد الاسدي يشارك في مهرجان الحرب بلندن" الرياض 13299 (18 تشرين الثاني، 2004). مصدر انترنيت، 28 اب، 2014.
- Al Nassar, Kadhim. "Life after the war: about the theatre of the nineties in Iraq" (9th Decemeber 2005). Web. 5th Sep. 2013. <https://www.facebook.com/notes/%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%B8%D9%85-%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B1/%D8%AD%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%A8->

- [%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%B8%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B1/433966902618](#) ،النصار، كاظم. "حياة ما بعد الحرب: عن مسرح التسعينات في العراق" ٩ كانون الاول ٢٠٠٥. مصدر انترنت. ٥ ايلول ٢٠١٣.
- Al Nsayri, Hussein. "The Historical Play between Document and Art" *The Pens* 24.3 (1989): 158-189. Print.. "المسرحية التاريخية بين الوثيقة والفن" /الاقلام 24.3 (1989): 159-158.
 - Al Nusayir, Yassein. "Theatre Criticism in Iraq: A Quick view on Its General Lines" *Arabic Horizons* 7.7 (1982): 136-140. Print. . "النقد المسرحي في العراق: المامه . سريعه في خطوطه العامه" /افاق عربييه 7.7 (1982): 140-136.
 - ... "Three Models of Local Theatre Direction" *Theatre and Cinema* 10 (1974): 26-32. Print. 10 "ثلاث نماذج من الاخراج المسرحي المحلي" /المسرح والسينما ملحق 10 (1974))
 - ... "Three Models of Theatre Direction in Iraq: A Hypothetical Dialogue" *The Pens* 24.3 (1989): 70-79. Print. "ثلاث نماذج من الاخراج المسرحي في العراق: حوار . مقترض" /الاقلام 24.3 (1989): 79-70.
 - ... "Nessa Lorca: a Confused Discourse" *Alhewar Almutamedin* 1688 (29th Sep. 2006). <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=76851> Web. 2nd March, 2013. "نساء لوركا: خطاب مرتبك" /الحوار المتمدن 1688. 29 ايلول 2006. مصدر .انترنت. 2 اذار 2013.
 - Al Qassabia, Aza. "The Cart from the Source of Living to Following the News and the Memories of the Past" *Alwatan* (26th Jan. 2014). Web. 3rd March 2014. <http://alwatan.com/details/3685> "مسرحية العربانه من مصدر الرزق الى متابعة الاخبار وذكريات الماضي" /الوطن. 26 كانون الثاني 2014. مصدر انترنت. 3 اذار 2014.
 - Al Saiyagh, Yousif. "The Pioneers of Iraqi Theatre: Bishop Sulaman Al Saiyagh" *Arabic Horizons* 7.7 (1982): 125-133. Print. "من رواد المسرح العراقي: المطران سليمان الصائغ" /افاق عربييه 7.7 (1982): 133-125.
 - Al Samara'i, Madjid. "Alfred Feraj and a Talk about Theatre in Its Current Reality" *Theatre and Cinema* 7-8 (1973): 42-46. Print.. "الفريد فرج وحديث عن المسرح في واقعه الراهن" /المسرح والسينما 7-8 (1973): 46-42.
 - Al Sharji, Ahmed. "The authority of theatre and theatre of authority in Iraq -1" *Al Mada* 2821. 17th June, 2013. Web. 27th August, 2013. <http://www.almadapaper.net/ar/news/446228/%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AD-%D9%88%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AD-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82> الشرجي، احمد. "سلطة المسرح ومسرح السلطة في العراق" /المدى ٢٨٢١. ١٧ حزيران ٢٠١٣. مصدر انترنت. ٢٧ آب ٢٠١٣.

- "The authority of theatre and theatre of authority in Iraq -2" *Al Mada* 2827. 24th June, 2013. Web. 27th August 2013.
<http://www.almadapaper.net/ar/news/446634/%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AD-%D9%88%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AD-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82> الشرجي، احمد. "سلطة المسرح ومسرح السلطة في العراق-٢" المدى ٢٨٢٧. ٢٤ حزيران، ٢٠١٣. مصدر انترنت. ٢٧ آب ٢٠١٣.
- "Experimentation... Theatre... And the Different Reading -1" *Al Mada* 2946 (25/11/2013) Web. 25/1/2016.
<http://www.almadapaper.net/AR/news/454944/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AD-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%BA%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A9> الشرجي، احمد. "التجريب... المسرح... القراءة المغايرة-١" المدى ٢٩٤٦ (٢٠١٣/١١/٢٥) مصدر انترنت. ٢٥/١/٢٠١٦.
- "Experimentation... Theatre... And the Different Reading -2" *Al Mada* 2952 (2/12/2013) Web. 25/1/2016.
<http://almadapaper.net/ar/printnews.aspx?NewsID=455346> الشرجي، احمد. "التجريب... المسرح... القراءة المغايرة-٢" المدى ٢٩٥٢ (٢٠١٣/١٢/٢) مصدر انترنت. ٢٥/١/٢٠١٦.
- "Is there an Arabic Theatre or is it a theatre in Arabic?" *Facebook* (22/12/2015) Web. 12/2/2016.
<https://www.facebook.com/ahmed.sharghi/posts/10153993161291412> الشرجي، احمد. "هل هناك مسرح عربي ام مسرح باللغة العربية؟" منشور فيسبوك. (٢٠١٥/١٢/٢٢) مصدر انترنت. ٢٠١٦/٢/١٢.
- Al Shammari, Naif. "The Wild Wedding... The Mother's Conflict with the Fruit of her Rape" *Al Shahed* (11th April, 2013). Wed. 28th August, 2013.
http://www.alshahedkw.com/index.php?option=com_content&id=90872%3Ar-1-----&Itemid=410 الشمري، نايف. "العرس الوحشي... صراع الام مع ثمرة اغتصابها" الشاهد (١١ ابريل ٢٠١٣). مصدر انترنت. ٢٨ اب ٢٠١٣.
- Al Tahir, Ali Jwad. "A Scholarship in Theatre Criticism" *The Pens* 24.3 (1989): 137-139. Print. 139-137 : (1989) 24.3 الاقلام "بعثة في النقد المسرحي" الطاهر، علي جواد.
- Al Talib, Omer. "Toward a New Arabic Theatre" *The Pens* 3-4 (1987): 44-59. Print. 1987) 4-3 *الاقلام من* الطالب، عمر. "نحو مسرح عربي جديد" عدد خاص من الاقلام 3-4 (1987)
- Al Tequi, Yeqdhan. "Women in War for Jawad Al Assadi on Babel Theatre between exile and nostalgia, and conflicting moods" *Al Mustaqbal* 3923: 21 (26th Feb. 2011). Web. 28th August, 2014.
<http://www.almustaqbal.com/v4/Article.aspx?Type=np&Articleid=455027> التقي،

يقظان. " نساء في الحربي لحواد الاسدي على مسرح بابل بين المنفى والحنين والامزج المتضاربه" /المستقبل ٣٩٢٣: ٢١ (٢٦ شباط، ٢٠١١). مصدر انترنت. ٢٨ اب، ٢٠١٤

- Al Yousif, Ibrahim. "The Tragedy of the Iraqi Citizen in The Cart" *Alkhaleej* (15th Jan. 2014). Web. 21 March 2014. <http://www.alkhaleej.ae/alkhaleej/page/9c74ecd9-959a-403e-a382-6acd55e7e78f> 15. اليوسف، ابراهيم. " /مأساة المواطن العراقي في عربانه" /الخليج. 15 كانون الثاني 2014. مصدر انترنت. 21 اذار 2014.
- Ali, Awad. "A Dialogue with Young Theatre Workers" *Arabic Horizons* 7.7 (1982): 158-160. Print 160-158 : (1982) 7.7. علي، عواد. "حوار مع مسرحيين شباب" افق عربي 7.7 (1982): 158-160.
- ... "Kereem Chitther and the Image Theatre" (8th Sep. 2003) Web 7 Dec. 2014. <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/Syriantheater/conversations/messages/258> علي، عواد. "كريم جثير ومسرح الصورة" (٨ ايلول ٢٠٠٣) مصدر انترنت. ٧ كانون الاول، ٢٠١٤.
- ... "Kereem Chitther is gone, but the storm was at its full power" *Azzaman* 2174 (28th July, 2005) Web. 27th August, 2013. <http://www.azzaman.net/azzaman/ftp/articles/2005/07/07-28/679.htm> and <http://www.hdrmut.net/vb/showthread.php?t=186240> علي، عواد. "رحل كريم جثير، لكن العاصفه كانت على اشدها" الزمان 2174 (٢٨ تموز ٢٠٠٥) مصدر انترنت. ٢٧ اب ٢٠١٣.
- ... "The Masks and the Image Theatre" *Alnoor* (25th Feb. 2009) Web. 26th Nov. 2014. <http://www.alnoor.se/article.asp?id=41710> علي، عواد. "الافتحه ومسرح الصورة" /النور (٢٥ شباط، ٢٠٠٩) مصدر انترنت. ٢٦ تشرين الثاني، ٢٠١٤.
- ... "The Strategy of Characterization in Theatre Text" *The Pens* 24.3 (1989): 108-116. Print 116-108 : (1989) 24.3. علي، عواد. "استراتيجية التشخيص في النص المسرحي" الاقلام 24.3 (1989): 108-116.
- ... "Hamlet in Iraqi Theatre" *Addustour* (13 April, 2014) Web. 9 Dec. 2014. <http://www.daraddustour.com/index.php/iraqi-affairs/15694-2014-04-13-17-14-07> علي، عواد. "هاملت في المسرح العراقي" /الدستور (١٣ نيسان، ٢٠١٤) مصدر انترنت. ٩ كانون الاول، ٢٠١٤.
- Alhindi, Rehab. "Experimenting in Iraqi Theatre" *Hewaraat* (8 Aug. 2009) Web. 9th Dec. 2014. <http://hewaraat.com/forum/showthread.php?t=9248> الهندي، رحاب. "التجريب في المسرح العراقي" حوارات (٨ اب ٢٠٠٩) مصدر انترنت. ٩ كانون الاول، ٢٠١٤.
- Alsaidi, Muthena. "Finishing a daring Theatre performance in Nasriayah, in spite of sabotaging attempts to stop it" *Nasiraelc* (2nd Oct. 2014) Web. 12 Dec. 2014. <http://www.nasiraelc.com/?p=27597> السعيد، مثنى. "الانتهاء من عرض جريء في الناصريه رقم محاولات تخريبه لايقافه العرض" /الناصرية الكترونيه (٢ تشرين الاول. ٢٠١٤) مصدر انترنت. ١٢ كانون الاول، ٢٠١٤.
- Alwan, Abdulhussein. "Shakespeare and Iraqi Theatre" *Alhewar Almutamedin* 3789 (15 July, 2012) Web. 9th Dec. 2014. <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=315903> علوان، عبد الحسين. "شكسبير والمسرح العراقي" الحوار المتمدن ٣٧٨٩ (١٥ تموز، ٢٠١٢) مصدر انترنت. ٩ كانون الاول، ٢٠١٤.

- Ameen, Bedie'a. "Iraqi Theatre: Attitudes and Pitfalls" *Arabic Horizons* 7.7 (1982): 98-109. Print. 109-98 : (1982) 7.7 افاق عربييه . امين، بديعه. " المسرح العراقي: مواقف و عثرات " افاق عربييه 7.7 (1982): 98-109. Print.
- Alobaidi, Muhammad. "Attraction and Repulsion in the Works of Jawad Al Shekerchi" *Alhewar Almutamedin* 2443. 23 Oct. 2008. Web. 24 March 2014. <http://m.ahewar.org/s.asp?aid=150849&r=25&cid=0&u=&i=2003&q=> العبيدي، محمد. "التجاذب والتنافر في اعمال جواد الشكرجي" الحوار المتمدن 2443. 23 تشرين الاول 2008. مصدر انترنيت. 24 اذار 2014.
- Al Saffar, Mahmood. "Nehrjas Al Saffar 'Om Munadhil', the rhyme of struggle and dedication" *The Communist Party Journal*. (15 Dec. 2013). Web. 10 June 2015. <http://www.iraqicp.com/index.php/sections/objekt/8684-2013-12-15-20-18-20> الصفار، محمود. " نرجس الصفار ،ام مناضل انشودة الكفاح والتفاني " جريدة الحزب الشيوعي العراقي. 15 كانون الاول 2013. مصدر انترنيت. 10 حزيران 2015.
- Alzeki, Kareem. "Detentions in Iraq: The Palace of LA Rihab (the dention of Palace of the End)" *Alhewar Almutamedin* 3522. (21 Oct. 2011). Web. 5 June 2015. <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=280417> الزكي، كريم. "معتقلات العراق: قصر الرحاب (معتقل قصر النهاية)" الحوار المتمدن 3522. 21 تشرين الاول، 2011. مصدر انترنيت. 2 حزيران، 2015.
- Asker, Qusay Al Shaikh. "With the short play, The Curse of Whiteness for the Iraqi writer, Rash Fadhil" *Al Noor* (15th April, 2009). Web. 7th July, 2014. عسكر، قصي الشيخ. "مع المسرحيه القصيره (لعنة البياض) للكاتبه العراقيه المبدعه رشا فاضل" النور. 15 نيسان 2009. مصدر انترنيت. 7 تموز 2014.
- Atwan, Mohammad. "The Wild Wedding: the Argument of Seduction and Sin" *Shehryar*. (7th Dec. 2011). Web. 28th August 2013. http://www.shehryar.com/ar/node_2099/node_6241 عطوان، محمد. "العرس الوحشي: سجال الغوايه والخطيئه" شهريار. 7 كانون الاول 2011. مصدر انترنيت. 28 اب 2013.
- "Doctor Awatif Naeem Calls the Government to take care of the Artist and the Iraqi Culture" *Al Akhbaar* (2009). <http://alakhbaar.org/home/2009/01/62333.html> . Web. 2nd March, 2013. " الدكتور عواطف نعيم تدعو الحكومه الى لاهتمام بالفنان والثقافه العراقيه" الاخبار . 2 اذار 2013. مصدر انترنيت. 2 اذار 2013.
- Fabach, Joachim. Ghanim Mahmood, trans. "Theatrical Experience in Iraq" *Arabic Horizons* 7.7 (1982): 150-153. Print. فباخ، يواخيم. ترجمة غانم محمود . "تجارب مسرحية في العراق" افاق عربييه 7.7 (1982): 153-150.
- Ferid, Bedri Hasoon. "The Absence of the Elements of Tenderness and Amusement in Iraqi Theatre" *Arabic Horizons* 7.7 (1982): 134- 135. Print.. فريد، بدري حسون. " غياب عنصري الطراوة والمتعه في المسرح العراقي" افاق عربييه 7.7 (1982): 135-134.
- ... "Testimonies" *The Arabic Writer* 7.24 (1989): 18-19. Print.. ["شهادات" عدد خاص من الكاتب العربي 7.24 (1989) 19-18]

- Hamzza, Hussein bin. "Jawad Al Assadi remembering the nightmares of Baghdad" *Al Akhbar* 1347 (24th Feb. 2011). Web. 28th August, 2014. <http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/4942> ٢٤) ١٣٤٧ الاخبار "جواد الاسدي يستعيد كوابيس بغداد" الاخبار ١٣٤٧ (٢٤) شباط، (٢٠١١). مصدر انترنت. ٢٨ اب، ٢٠١٤
- Harif, Hussein Ali. "Our Theatre between Politics and Sociology" *Al Mesrah Haiatuna* 7 (12 Nov. 2012). Print. هارف، حسين علي. "مسرحنا بين السياسة والاجتماع" المسرح حياتنا 7. 12 تشرين الثاني 2012. مطبوع
- Hassaballah, Sameem. "The play of Women in War" *Alhewar al Mutemdin* 2971 (10th April, 2010). Web. 28th August, 2014. <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=211018> حسب الله، صميم. "مسرحيه نساء في الحرب" الحوار المتمدن ٢٩٧١ (١٠ نيسان، ٢٠١٠). مصدر انترنت. ٢٨ اب، ٢٠١٤
- ... "Romeo and Juliet In Baghdad.. Sectarian Suggetions Courting Western Culture" *Alhewar al Mutemdin* 3707 (24/4/2012). Web 4/3/2016. <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=304765> حسب الله، صميم. "مسرحية ريمو وجوليت في بغداد... مقترحات طائفية تغازل الثقافة الغربية" الحوار المتمدن ٣٧٠٧ (٢٤/٤/٢٠١٢). مصدر انترنت. ٢٠١٦/٣/٤
- ... "The Iraqi Centre for Theatre – a meditation in Baghdad Festival for Theatre" *Alhewar al Mutemdin* 3964 (6th Jan. 2013) Web. 5th Dec. 2014. <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=339889> حسب الله صميم. "المركز العراقي للمسرح: قراءة تأملية في مهرجان بغداد المسرحي" الحوار المتمدن 3964 (٦ كانون الثاني ٢٠١٣) مصدر انترنت. ٥ كانون الاول ٢٠١٤
- ... "Izayza: a theatrical Performance teasing mythology" *Almada* 3191 (13 Oct. 2014). Web. 5th Dec. 2014. <http://www.almadapaper.net/ar/news/472984/%D9%86%D9%82%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%8A-%D8%A5%D8%B9%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%B2%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%B6-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%A9> حسب الله، صميم. "إعزيزة" .. عرض مسرحي يشاكس الخرافة " المدى ٣١٩١. (١٤ تشرين الاول ٢٠١٤) مصدر انترنت. ٥ كانون الاول ٢٠١٤
- ... "Expermenting in Youth Theatre: the transformation of the function and the limitation of the term – texts-" *Azzaman* (6th Sep. 2015). Web 6th Sep. 2015. <http://www.azzaman.com/?p=127712> حسب الله، صميم. "التجريب في مسرح الشباب: تحولات الوظيفة وحدود المصطلح - نصوص" الزمان. ٦ ايلول ٢٠١٥. مصدر انترنت. ٦ ايلول ٢٠١٥
- Hassan, Hussein Sermak. "In the Memory of the Departure of Kereem Chitheer" *Almothaqaf* 1540 (9th Oct. 2010). Web. 27th Aug. 2013. <http://almothaqaf.com/index.php/araaa/19498.html> حسن، حسين سركم. "في ذكرى رحيل كريم جثير، المثقف" ١٥٤٠. ٩ تشرين الاول ٢٠١٠. مصدر انترنت. ٢٧ اب ٢٠١٣

- Hassan, Latif. "Chapters of the History of Iraqi Theatre: Hameed Mohammed Jawad and his Magical flut... and the Gains of Iraqi Theatre Practitioners in the 1960s of the last Century" *Al-Nnas* (6/3/2006) Web. 27/1/2016. <http://al-nnas.com/CULTURE/Fnon/teat9.htm> حسن، لطيف. "فصول من تاريخ المسرح العراقي: حميد محمد جواد ومزمارة السحري... ومكاسب للمسرحيين العراقيين في ستينات القرن الماضي" موقع الناس. (الاثنين 6/3/2006). مصدر انترنت. 27/1/2016.
- Hassan, Latif. "Chapters of the History of Iraqi Theatre: Chapter twenty three" *Al-Nnas* (Tuesday 14th Nov. 2006). Web. 28th August, 2013. <http://al-nnas.com/CULTURE/Fnon/teat23.htm> حسن، لطيف. "فصول من تاريخ المسرح العراقي: الفصل الثالث والعشرون" موقع الناس. الثلاثاء 14 تشرين الثاني 2006. مصدر انترنت. 28 اب 2013.
- Hemdawi, Jamel. "Image Theatre between theory and application" *Al Ababia*. 29th Sep. 2010. Web. 5th Nov. 2015. <http://ar.aladabia.net/article-5149-> حمداوي، جميل. "مسرح الصورة بين النظرية والتطبيق" الادبية. 29 ايلول 2010. مصدر انترنت. 5 تشرين الثاني 2015.
- Hussein, Abas Hakim. "The Public Oral Thinking and its Relation to the Iraqi Theatre Script that is Written in Standard Arabic" *The University of Babylon Journal for Humanitarian Sciences* 21:3 (2013): 870- 910. Web. 21st March 2014. Print. حسين، عباس حاكم. "التفكير الشفهي الشعبي وعلاقته بالنص المسرحي المكتوب بالفصحى" مجلة. جامعه بابل للعلوم الانسانية 21:3 (2013): 870-910. 21 اذار 2014.
- Ihmaidi, Said. "'Maroo min Huna' On the Ruins of Al Rasheed Theatre in Baghdad" *Aljazeera Net* (28/4/2003) Wed. 3/3/2016. <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/cultureandart/2003/4/28/%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7-%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%87%D9%86%D8%A7-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A3%D9%86%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B6-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AD-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D8%BA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF> احميدي، سعيد. "مرو من هنا على" انقاض مسرح الرشيد في بغداد" الجزيرة نت (28/4/2003). مصدر انترنت. 3/3/2016.
- Ismael, Sayd Ali. "Falah Shaker... A theatre maker who lives the legend of a poet" *Alfurja* 37/2014 (R.D.M.D. 2421-9452) (6th May 2015). Web. 14th Sep. 2015. <http://alfurja.com/%D9%81%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD-%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%B7%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%B1-%D8%A3-%D8%AF-%D8%B3%D9%8A/> اسماعيل، سيد علي. "فلاح شاكرو... مسرحي يعيش اسطورة شاعر" الفرجة 37/2014 ص (رقم الايداع القانوني 2421-9452). 6 ايار 2015. مصدر انترنت. 14 ايلول 2015.
- "Jawad Al Assadi and Women in War in Warsaw" *Elaph Theatre* (2004). Web. 28th August, 2014. <http://www.elaph.com/ElaphTheatre/2004/10/17038.htm> [جواد الاسدي "ونساء في الحرب في وارسو" مسرح/ايلاف (2004). مصدر انترنت. 28 اب، 2014]

- Jwad, Qahtan Jassim. "The Strategy of Disassembly In theatre Performance" *Al Meda* (8 Dec. 2012). Web. 2 March 2013.
<http://www.almadasupplements.com/news.php?action=view&id=6208> جواد، قحطان جاسم. "ستراتيجية التفكيك في العرض المسرحي" المدى. 8 كانون الاول 2012. مصدر انترنت، تاريخ المرور 2 اذار 2013.
- ... "The Cart Reveals the influences of the Arab Spring on the Iraqi Human" *Al Meda* 2616 (8th Oct. 2012). Web. 28th Jan 2014.
<http://almadapaper.net/ar/printnews.aspx?NewsID=177> جواد، قحطان جاسم. "العربانه تكشف تاثيرات الربيع العربي على الانسان العراقي" المدى 2616. 8 تشرين الاول 2012 مصدر انترنت. 28 كانون الثاني 2014.
- Jazrawi, Father Yousif. "Abas Alharbi... With his aura there is an image of the towering homeland" *Al-ghorba* (6th March 2015). Web. 12/1/2016. http://al-ghorba4.blogspot.co.uk/2015/03/blog-post_6.html جزراوي، الاب يوسف. "عباس الحربي... في ظلته صورة للوطن الشامخ" الغربية (6 مارس 2015) مصدر انتر نيت. 2015/1/12.
- Kereem, Alia e.d. "The Curse of Whiteness for Rasha Fadhil in the Theatre Festival in Oman" *Maakom n.d.* Web. 7th July, 2014. كريم، عاليه (محرر). "لعنة البياض لرشا فاضل في مهرجان المسرح في سلطنة عمان" معكم (بدون تاريخ). مصدر انترنت. 7 تموز 2014.
- Khalil, Semir. "the conclusion of the Fifth Iraqi Theatre Festival for Education in Basrah" *Al Ittihad* (1st March, 2014). Web. 18th August, 2014.
http://www.alittihad.com/News_Print.php?ID=13251 خليل، سمير. "اختتام مهرجان المسرح الخامس للتربيه في البصره" الاتحاد 1 اذار، 2014. مصدر انترنت. 18 اب، 2014.
- Khalusi, Natiq. "The Point of View of Iraqi Theatre and the aids of the Text and that Language." *Theatre and Cinema* 10 (1974): 23-25. Print.. خلوصي، ناطق. "وجهة نظر (المسرح العراقي ووسائل النص واللغة" المسرح والسينما ملحق 10 (1974)
- Khazim, Yassemina. "Women in War: the cruelty of Iraqi dispersion after the invasion" *Al Byan* (29th March, 2011). Web. 28th August, 2014.
<http://www.albayan.ae/five-senses/reconnaissance/2011-03-09-1.1399111> خازم، ياسمين. "نساء في الحرب قسوة التشتت العراقي بعد الغزو" البيان 29 اذار 2011. مصدر انترنت. 28 اب 2014.
- Merzooq, Sadiq. "The technique of sednign and receiving response in Al Abaya for Saad Hadabi" *Al Sabah* (28th April, 2014). Web. 18th August, 2014.
<http://www.alsabaah.iq/ArticleShow.aspx?ID=69930> مرزوق، صادق. "تقنية الارسال والاستجابة التلقي مسرحية العباءة لسعد هداي" الصباح 28 نيسان، 2014. مصدر انترنت. 18 اب 2014.
- Muhammad, Hussein. "Nessa Lorca sing for freedom in Algeria" *Al Itihad* (15th June 2008). <http://www.alittihad.ae/details.php?id=26032&y=2008> Web. 2nd March 2013. محمد، حسين. "نساء لوركا ينشدن لحريه في الجزائر" الاتجاد 15 حزيران 2008. مصدر انترنت. 2 اذار 2013.

- Munshid, Adana. "Experimental Theatre in Iraq: Between Heritage, Imitation, and Modernity Model." *Alitthad n.d.* Web. 25/1/2016.
<http://www.alitthad.com/paper.php?name=News&file=article&sid=22677> ، منشد،
عدنان. "المسرح التجريبي في العراق: بين التراث والتقليد وانموذج الحداثة" الاتحاد. بلا تاريخ. مصدر
انترنت. ٢٥/١/٢٠١٦.
- Othoman, Neriman. "Black Snapshots from Al Zaidi's Plays" *Theatre and Theatre Practitioners* (31 Dec. 2009). Web. 6th August, 2014.
http://www.aklaam.net/newaqlam/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1521:2009-12-31-10-13-59&catid=64:2008-10-14-08-39-18&Itemid=176 [عثمان،
نريمان. "لقطات سوداء من مسرحيات الزيدي" مسرح ومسرحيون ٣١ كانون الاول ٢٠٠٩. مصدر انترنت. ٦
اب، ٢٠١٤]
- Sadoon, Abdulhadi. "Kereem Chitheer in The Masks and other Plays" *Isdarat n.d.* (30 July, 2002) Web. 7 Dec. 2014.
<http://www.alimizher.com/n/1y/books1/boarticles1/asmasks.htm> " سعدون، عبدالهادي. "
كريم جثير في (الأقنعة) ومسرحيات أخرى " اصدارات (30 تموز 2002). مصدر انترنت ٧ كانون الاول،
٢٠١٤.
- Saif, Mohammad. "Heaven Open its Gates... Late" (17 Dec 2001). Web 24 March 2014. <http://www.alimizher.com/n/1y/drama1/msdrama1/msaljanna.htm> . سيف، محمد.
"الجنة تفتح ابوابها ... متأخره" 17 كانون الاول 2001. مصدر انترنت. 24 اذار 2014
- Sandel, Readh Sabar. "Rubbish Between Courtesy and Standards of Art" *Essays in Criticism* (16th March 2013). Web. 6th August 2014.
https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=472775529443666&id=472553589465860 ، سندل، رياض صبار. "قمامه... بين المجامله ومعايير الفن" مقالات في النقد. ١٦ اذار،
٢٠١٣. مصدر انترنت. ٦ اب، ٢٠١٤
- Shafiqua, J. "Nessa Lorca in Iraqi Dress" *Al Messa* (2nd August, 2008).
<http://www.djazairress.com/elmassa/7580> Web. 2nd March, 2013. شفيقه، ج. "نساء لوركا
في حلة عراقيه" *المساء* 2 اب 2008. مصدر انترنت. 2 اذار 2013
- Schechner, Richard. "The Opening speech of Richard Schechner in the opening ceremony of the Festival of Experimental Theatre in Cairo: What is the experimental theatre" *Al Mustaqbal* 3464 (26th Oct. 2009). P.20. Web. 16th Sep. 2015.
<http://www.almustaqbal.com/v4/Article.aspx?Type=np&Articleid=375088> ، شيكنر،
ريتشارد. "كلمة المسرحي الكبير ريتشارد شيكنر في افتتاح مهرجان المسرح التجريبي بالقاهرة: ماهو المسرح
التجريبي؟" المستقبل ٢٤٦٤. ٢٦ تشرين الاول ٢٠٠٩. صفحة ٢٠. مصدر انترنت. ١٦ ايلول ٢٠١٥
- Thamir, Fadhil. "Nessa' Lorca: A Step toward a Serious Iraqi Theatre" *Al Meda Al Theqaffi* 676 (26th May 2006). Web. 2 March 2013. <http://almadapaper.net/sub/05-676/10.pdf> . ثامر، فاضل. مسرحية نساء لوركا: خطوة على طريق مسرح عراقي جاد" المدى الثقافي .
676. 26 مايس 2006. مصدر انترنت . تاريخ المرور 2 اذار 2013

- “The Artist Yousif Al Ani: I Fear Walking a Step without Learning” *The Pens* 24.3 (1989): 127- 132. Print. " الفنان يوسف العاني: اخشى ان اسير خطوة دون ان اتعلم" /الاقلام 24.3 (1989): 127-132.
- Therwat, Yousif Abdulmesiyah. “The Prospects of the Influence of The Western Theatre on Iraqi Theatre” *Arabic Horizons* 7.7 (1982): 141-147. Print.. ثروة، يوسف عبد المسيح. " افاق تاثير المسرح الغربي في المسرح العراقي" /افاق عربييه 7.7 (1982): 147-141.
- Yahya, Hassaballah. “Toward New Values in Iraqi Theatre” *The Pens* 24.3 (1989): 101- 107. Print. -101: (1989) 24.3 "نحو قيم جديد في المسرح العراقي" /الاقلام 24.3 (1989): 101-107.
- “The Diseases of the Iraqi Theatre” *Arabic Horizons* 7.7 (1982): 148-149. Print 149-148: (1982) 7.7 "امراض المسرح العراقي" /افاق عربييه 7.7 (1982): 149-148.
- Yousif, Aqiel Mehdi. “Ibraheem Jalal: the Creative Question” *The Pens* 24.3 (1989): 122- 126. Print.. -122: (1989) 24.3 "ابراهيم جلال: السؤال الابداعي" /الاقلام 24.3 (1989): 122-126.
- Wardi, Mohammad. “The Cart tales about the Painful transformation in Contemporary Iraqi History” *Alittihad* (14 Jan. 2014). Web 3rd March 2014. <http://www.alittihad.ae/details.php?id=4214&y=2014> الوردى، محمد. "العربانه تحكي التحولات المؤلمه في تاريخ العراق المعاصر" /الاتحاد. 14 كانون الثاني 2014. مصدر انترنيت. 3 اذار 2014.
- W. T. S. M. H. “Rubbish reveals a side of the miseries of wars and the conditions of women then” *Iraqi Voices* (4th Feb. 2014). Web. 6th August 2014. [http://ar.aswataliraq.info/\(S\(153y0355v1hpyl45bixj4s55\)\)/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=311342&l=1](http://ar.aswataliraq.info/(S(153y0355v1hpyl45bixj4s55))/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=311342&l=1) و. ط. س. م. ح. " مسرحية "قمامة" تكشف جانبا من مآسي الحروب وأوضاع النساء خلالها" اصوات عراقيه 4 شباط، 2014. مصدر انترنيت. 6 اب، 2014.

Recordings and Interviews

(All written and telephone interviews are conducted by the researcher)

- Abdulhameed, Sami. Telephone interview. 22nd Dec. 2012.
- Telephone Interview. 25th Dec. 2012.
- Abo Alabas, Mahmood. Written interview. 30 Jan 2014.
- Al Assadi, Jawad. Interviewed by Ricardo Karam. Hadeeth Akher, Alsumaria, Youtube, 18th Feb., 2013. Web. 27th August, 2014. مقابله مع ريكاردو كرم، الاسدي، جواد. مقابله مع ريكاردو كرم، حديث اخر، السومريه، يوتيوب، 18 شباط 2013. انترنيت. 27 اب 2014.

- ... Interviewed by Zahi Wehbi. Bayt Al Qeseed 18th Sep. 2012, Al Mayadeen Culture, *Youtube*, 17th Sep., 2013. Web. 27th August, 2014.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GT_ryokZors بيت الاسدي، جواد، مقابله مع زاهي وهبي. *القصيد* ١٨ ايلول ٢٠١٢، ميادين الثقافة، يوتيوب، ١٧ ايلول ٢٠١٣. انترنيت، ٢٧ اب ٢٠١٤
- Interviewed by Nohad Topalian. "Jawad Al Assadi dreams of presenting plays in Baghdad" *Mawtani* 26th June, 2010. Web. 30 Sep. 2014. http://mawtani.al-shorfa.com/en_GB/articles/iii/features/entertainment/2010/06/26/feature-03
- Interviewed by Nohad Topalian. "Jawad Al Assadi dreams of presenting plays in Baghdad" *Mawtani* 26th June, 2010. Web. 28th August, 2014. <http://mawtani.al-shorfa.com/ar/articles/iii/features/entertainment/2010/06/26/feature-03> " طوبالين، نهاد. جواد الاسدي يحلم بعرض مسرحياته في بغداد" *موطني* ٢٦ حزيران، ٢٠١٠. مصدر انترنيت. ٢٨ اب، ٢٠١٤
- Interviewed by Nohad Topalian. "Iraqi Director, Jawad Al Assadi sheds light on 'Women in Threatened Societies' *Mawtani* (9th March, 2011). Web. 28th August, 2014. <http://mawtani.al-shorfa.com/ar/articles/iii/features/entertainment/2011/03/09/feature-05> " طوبالين، نهاد. " المخرج العراقي، جواد الاسدي يسلط الضوء على نساء في مجتمعات مهدده" *موطني* ٩ اذار، ٢٠١١. مصدر انترنيت. ٢٨ اب، ٢٠١٤
- Interviewed by Rebecca Joubin. "Jawad Al Assadi: Director Returns to Iraq to Find Nothing the 'Same'" *Al Jadid* 11.52 (Summer 2005). Web. 30 Sep. 2014. <http://www.aljadid.com/content/jawad-al-assadi-director-returns-iraq-find-nothing-%E2%80%98same%E2%80%99>
- Alharbi, Abass. Monodrama of *Al Nehdha*. *Youtube*. 10th May, 2011. Web. 31st August, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKoJ5ix6p-8> الحربي، عباس. *مونودراما النهضة*. يوتيوب. ١٠ مايس ٢٠١١. مصدر انترنيت. ٣١ اب ٢٠١٣
- Written Interview. 11th Jan. 2016.
- Al Maliki, Hamed. Written Interview. 1st March 2014.
- Al Zaidi, Ali. Interviewed by Ghafar Afrawi. "An Interview with the playwright and journalist Ali Al Zaidi" *Fadha'at Messraha* (12/9/2010). Web. 6th August 2014. <https://fadaatmasrahea.wordpress.com/2010/09/12/%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A/> الزيدي، علي. حوار مع غفار عفراوي. "حوار مع المسرحي والاعلامي علي الزيدي" *فضاءات مسرحيه*. (2010/9/12). مصدر انترنيت. ٦ اب ٢٠١٤

- Interviewed by Hussein Kereem Al Amel. "The Playwright Ali Abdulnebi Al Zaidi to Meda: Everything is possible except that theatre is impossible to die" *Al Mada*. n.d. Web. 6th August, 2014. <http://almadapaper.net/sub/07-729/p13.htm>
الزبيدي، علي. "الكاتب المسرحي علي عيد النبي الزبيدي للمدى: كل شيء ممكن لكن المسرح لا يمكن ان يموت" حاوره حسين كريم العامل. المدى. بلا تاريخ. مصدر انترنت. ٦ اب، ٢٠١٤
- Interviewed by Bassim Sahib. *Theqafa w Fen* (Culture and Art). 3rd May, 2013. Web. 6th August, 2014. <http://nas2day.org/ar/?p=1787> مقابله مع باسم صاحب ثقافه وفن. ٣ مايس ٢٠١٣. مصدر انترنت. ٨ اب ٢٠١٤
- Interviewed by Gheffar Afrawi. *Dramatic Spaces* (12th Sep. 2010). Web. 6th August, 2014.
<http://fadaatmasrahea.wordpress.com/2010/09/12/%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A> مقابله مع غفار عفاوي. فضاءات مسرحيه ١٢ ايلول، ٢٠١٠. مصدر انترنت. ٦ اب ٢٠١٤
- Written Interview. 2nd of Sep. 2014.
- Written Interview. 5th Dec. 2014.
- England, Lynndie. "Abu Ghraib & Lynndie England Interview" *BBC* on 13.08.2009. *YouTube*. Feketubeaccount's channel. Uploaded on Sep 8, 2009. Web. 14 June 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGjeavuAxAI>
- Fadhil, Rasha. Written Interview. 8 June, 2014.
- Interviewed by Nabeel Al Haideri. "Rasha Fadhil have never seen a play, yet her plays are receiving awards" *Al Iraq Al Hur* (12th August, 2011). Web 7th July, 2014. <http://www.iraqhurr.org/a/24296575.html> فاضل، رشا. مقابله مع نبيل الحيدري. "رشا فاضل لم تشاهد مسرحيه لكن مسرحياتها تحصد الجوائز" اذاعة العراق الحر. 12 اب 2011. مصدر انترنت. 7 تموز 2014.
- Interviewed with Abdul Jabbar Al Atabi. "No sound higher in my writings than the sound of love" *Elaph*. 12th April, 2014. Web. 7th July, 2014. <http://elaph.com/Web/Culture/2014/4/893952.html> فاضل، رشا. مقابله مع عبد الجبار العنابي. "لا صوت يعلو في كتاباتي... غير صوت الحب" ايلاف. 12 نيسان 2014. مصدر انترنت. 7 تموز، 2014.
- Griffiths, Trevor. A Private Interviewed. Thursday 25th June, 2015.
- Hadabi, Saad. Interviewed by Fa'iz Jawad "The reality of Iraqi drama is fully active as long as there are trials of marketing to the Arab world" *Azzaman* (17 Jan., 2014). Web. 18th August, 2014. <http://www.azzaman.com/?p=58180> هدايي، سعد. مقابله مع فائز

جواد "واقع الدراما العراقية مفعم بالحياة مادامت هناك محاولات تسويق عربية" الزمان ١٧ كانون الثاني، ٢٠١٤. مصدر انترنت. ١٨ اب، ٢٠١٤

- Interviewed by Abdulaleem Al Bena. *Al Mowaten News n.d.* Web. 18 August, 2014. <http://www.almowatennews.com/index.php/2013-04-19-21-24-31/1630-2013-07-08-15-17-59.html%2018> .هدابي، سعد. حوار مع عبد العليم البناء. اخبار المواطن بلا تاريخ. مصدر انترنت. ١٨ اب، ٢٠١٤
- Interviewed by Abdulaleem Al Bena. *Al Byan* (28th July, 2013). Web. 18th August, 2014. <http://albayaniq.com/?p=10722> .هدابي، سعد. حوار مع عبد العليم البناء. البيان ٢٨ تموز، ٢٠١٣. مصدر انترنت. ١٨ اب، ٢٠١٤
- Interviewed by Merwa Abas. *Al Bayyna* (24th Nov. 2013). Web. 18th August, 2014. <http://albayyna-new.com/news.php?action=view&id=26714> .هدابي، سعد. حوار مع مروة عباس. البيئه ٢٤ تشرين الثاني، ٢٠١٣. مصدر انترنت. ١٨ اب، ٢٠١٤
- Interviewed by Haider Inthar. *Akad News* (28th August 2013). Web. 18th August, 2014. <http://www.akadnews.org/%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%AF-%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%88%D8%B2-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%B3> .هدابي، سعد. حوار مع حيدر اذدار. اكد نيوز ٢٨ اب ٢٠١٣. مصدر انترنت. ١٨ اب، ٢٠١٤
- A speech at a formal evening for resisting violence against women. ahmad alshaibany *Youtube* (10 Dec 2013). Web. 18th August, 2014. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1oOCTUGCeC0> .هدابي، سعد. كلمه بمناسبة الامسيه الرسميه لمتاهضه العنف ضد المراه. احمد الشيباني يوتيوب ١٠ كانون الاول، ٢٠١٣. مصدر انترنت. ١٨ اب، ٢٠١٤
- Interviewed by Jabbar Eidan. *Al Mada Paper* (17th May, 2014). Web. 18 August, 2014. <http://www.almadapaper.net/ar/news/464686/%D8%A8%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%A7-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%B3%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D9%87%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%8A--%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%85%D8%AA-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89--%D8%AF%D8%AE%D9%88%D9%84%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B1> .هدابي، سعد. حوار مع حبار عيدان. صحيفه المدى ١٧ مايس، ٢٠١٤. مصدر انترنت. ١٨ اب، ٢٠١٤
- Written Interview. 30 Sep. 2014.
- Hassaballah, Samem. Written Interview. 21 August, 2015.
- Joseph, Rajiv. Interviewed by Gerard Raymond. Interviews, *Theatre Go to Comments* (3rd April, 2011). Web. 15th February, 2015.

<http://www.slantmagazine.com/house/article/lost-and-found-in-translation-an-interview-with-playwright-rajiv-joseph>

- Written Interview. 27th, June, 2015.
- Khelil, Fadhil. Telephone interview. 16th Dec. 2012.
- Telephone Interview. 17th Dec.2012.
- Naeem, Awatif. Telephone interview. 1st March. 2013.
- Raffo, Heather. Written Interview. 24 June, 2014.
- Interview by Riz Khan. "Women in Iraq War" *Al Jazeera English*. *YouTube* (2nd May, 2007). Web. 3rd July, 2014.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnqLMoHUSU>
- Heather Raffo Al Jazeera "Everywoman" Interview re: 9Parts of Desire. *Hlraffo, Youtube* (24th November, 2008). Web. 3rd July, 2014.
- Interviewed by Frances Degen Horowitz. *Women to Women: Heather Raffo, actress, "Nine Parts of Desire" CUNY TV, Youtube* (28th April, 2005). Web. 3rd July, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C0myV6hA6QU>
- Shaker, Falah. Written interview. 21 March 2014.
- Thompson, Judith. Written Interview. 13th June, 2015.
- Williams, Robin, *et. al.* Interviewed by Charlie Rose. *Youtube*, 10th July, 2010. Web. 15th February, 2015. Part 1 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KsW6T13X_Wo
- Interviewed by Charlie Rose. *Youtube*, 10th July, 2010. Web. 15th February, 2015. Part 2 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ZsJuAZ8Uvo>
- Interviewed by Charlie Rose. *Youtube*, 10th July, 2010. Web. 15th February, 2015. Part 3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rkprx15ogTE>
- Interviewed by Charlie Rose. *Youtube*, 10th July, 2010. Web. 15th February, 2015. Part 4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7LWYMfw1ps>