

ضحايا المدنيين العراقيين في مسرحية جوديث تومسون " قصر النهاية" ومسرحية بيل كين
"الدوائر التسع"

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**Iraqi Civilian Victims in Judith Thompson's *Palace of the End* and
Bill Cain's *Nine Circles***

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Abstract

Iraqi civilians are victims of continuous war, whether during Saddam Hussein's era or the U.S invasion. They are victims of money and flimsy tricks. They are victims in sense of losing everything for nothing. They have fallen victims for many crimes which none of them are known to the public. Yet when these crimes appeared publically, Iraqis are considered as collateral damage and their victimizers are to be victims of the bloody scenes. These crimes are dealt with through two plays. *Palace of the End* tackles Abu Ghraib abuse. It also shows the lies of the U.S concerning the weapons of mass destruction. It also shows the Ba'ath crimes and the continuous oppression that Iraqis endured since long time. *Nine Circles*, on the other hand, shows the crimes of rape and killing that occurred in Mahmudiyah, as well as the hypocrisy of the government in its attempt to justify the crimes and show them as a natural consequence of PTSD.

Keywords: Victims, victimizers, war of 2003 , *Palace of the End*, *Nine Circle*, plays, courts, Abu Ghraib prison, hypocrisy.

المخلص

المدنيون العراقيون ضحايا الحرب المستمرة سواء في عهد صدام حسين أو الغزو الأمريكي. إنهم ضحايا المال والحيل الواهية. إنهم ضحايا بمعنى فقدان كل شيء مقابل لا شيء. لقد سقطوا ضحايا للعديد من الجرائم التي لا يعرفها الجمهور. لكن عندما ظهرت هذه الجرائم علانية ، يعتبر العراقيون أضرارا جانبية ويكون مرتكبوها ضحايا للمشاهد الدموية. يتم التعامل مع هذه الجرائم من خلال مسرحيتين. قصر النهاية يتصدى لانتهاكات أبو غريب. كما يظهر أكاذيب الولايات المتحدة بشأن أسلحة الدمار الشامل. كما تظهر جرائم البعث والقمع المستمر الذي عانى منه العراقيون منذ زمن بعيد. من ناحية أخرى ، تظهر تسع دوائر جرائم الاغتصاب والقتل التي حدثت

في المحمودية ، فضلاً عن نفاق الحكومة في محاولتها تبرير الجرائم وإظهارها كنتيجة طبيعية لاضطراب ما بعد الصدمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المجني عليهم، الجائين ، حرب 2003 ، قصر النهاية ، الدوائر التسع ، مسرحيات ، محاكم ، سجن ابو غريب، نفاق.

1.Introduction

At its best, war is only an excuse to destroy any nation that causes a threat to certain government. According to these two play and the facts being presented, the Bush administration lie to invade Iraq. The war of 2003 was a lie and Iraqis had to pay, and still paying, with their lives and peace, the price of this lie. It was a near-total tragedy for Iraq, the US, and the rest of the world. Instead of bringing peace, liberty and security, the war shattered Iraq and destroy its economy. It cause many Iraqis to be killed for ethnic, religious and political reasons.¹

Judith Thompson's *Palace of the End* is a play about the horrible stories that were happening in Iraq. Its name is a paradox, that has the shape of a palace but its reality is hell-like. This palace is huge and white, full of green gardens, everything related to it refers to life. However, its name reflects its meaning, it is the place where lives were ended. This play shows the truth behind closed doors. It shows the suffering of Iraqis and how they are victims. The horrible acts of the U.S and British government against Iraqis. The play started with a soldier who is nine months pregnant, Lynndie England, or "SOLDIER" (as Thompson uses this name in the text) who did the prison abuse at Abu Ghraib. Referring to her as "ugly" causes her to be so angry, she gets so upset after googling herself and sees her pictures, smiling while torturing Iraqis. For her, this is not a big matter, they are just pictures!²

SOLDIER considers her actions of no different to what she has passed through during her childhood. She experiences different bullies, but no one helps her. She is so surprised at the fact that people wish that she gets raped to know the feeling of Iraqis. These shameful pictures of a "thumbs-up" are the only evident about her crime, by removing them, she would be considered as a great example of a heroin who is much better than: "Pink cotton candy cowards afraid of bein at war. Afraid of your own SHADOW."³ (15)

Instead of accusing her of destroying Iraqis, She asks audience to be in her position and: "Tell me how much you care about them Iraqi men when they are sawin the head off a one of our boys. Tell me fuckin that." (15) She shows no regret: "I was doin' what I was trained to do! And I am very proud to say that the naked human pyramids WAS ALL MY IDEA." (20) Though her acts are seen as inhuman, however, she considers her crime as a natural result to save America: "I'll do whatever it takes to protect my country." (16) Actually this soldier is very blinded with her delusions of being so important: "But first, we gotta find a way to somehow, make them pictures disappear. I look at her, me, that homely little private with the thumbs up." (19) For her, torturing Iraqis, raping them physically and psychologically, is something normal. To oblige them to be naked is a normal matter: "They get naked every time they have a shower." "(20)" For her, Iraqis: "are not men, they are terrorists." (20)

SOLDIER believes the fact that Americans are assisting Iraqis who have already been humiliated. She is very proud of the accomplished result as Iraqis for her:

monsters in the shape of human beings. They was prisoners of WAR[...]guys who had KILLED AMERICANS. GUYS WHO WERE PLANNING ANOTHER 9/11, dude, AND YOU ARE UPSET THAT I laughed AT THEIR WILLIES? (20-21)

She considers herself “a bit of a martyr.” (23) The play presents the concepts of "other" and "self". Depending on her training and upbringing, those who are “other” should be victimized to enjoy the victimizers, whose their actions are considered as patriotic. According to Thompson, SOLDIER is more than just a villain. She is a bigot who should be imprisoned for tormenting and dehumanizing Iraqis.⁴

Torturing Iraqis was a source of pleasure: “And we laugh while we are doin it. Make no mistake. Because we are rejoicing. In defeating. The enemy. Of freedom.” (24). Charley, SOLDIER’s boyfriend and others were having fun while torturing the “pigs.” (24) For her, Iraqis are “evil RAKEES” (25), who deserve to be tortured and sacrificed as they are “other” whose role is just a tool to amuse the “self”. Civilians should be humiliated because they are inferiors. To do so, she has to show herself as a powerful leader who refused to be put at the back where males dominate.⁵

Obliging them to eat their excrement, especially those religious men or those who had the ability to speak a little bit English was their source of pleasure:

So you know what Ronnie does? He hadda take a shit so he takes it right there in a bucket hands it to the man, the guy who spoke English, and Ronnie makes him... eat his shit! Starts shootin at his feet. “Eat it, eat it, teacher.” So he eats... Ronnie’s shit and that shit stink, dude. The funniest was Ry; he gets the other Rakee to kiss the holy man with his mouth full of shit? And Manny throws up. Oh my God we razzed Manny about that all night!!(25)

SOLDIER regarded her deed with those who were captives as a duty: “ I did GOOD for my country. I said NO to the enemy.” (27) For her, the torture was happening at the prison, was one among many other ways to destroy Iraqis. Actually, Iraqis are not human and do not deserve to respect their privacies: “are not men, they are terrorists.” (20) Her words showed not only the monster inside her but her hypocrisy as well. To consider this soldier and those who have helped her as victims was the real crime. Not only that, she was sent to a counselor to figure out anything can explain her crimes. Thompson criticized the way these victimizers were treated, she tried to present facts but the most frustrating thing was the justifications of the soldiers as well as the U.S government.⁶

Dr. David Kelly, on the other hand, is regarded as one of the government's leading experts on WMD. Throughout his monologue, facts about Iraqis being victims of a lie are revealed. He feels shameful because he participated in this lie in a way or another. Many Iraqis have died as a result, this caused him to feel the pain and guilt. He knows that the British and American governments, are victimizers and liars. However, he did nothing⁷

Kelly reveals that thousands of civilian Iraqis are dying every day: “Knowing, and pretending that we don’t know,[...] Oh the things I knew. And I did nothing.” (33) He keeps on blaming himself for being coward because: “you might lose something if you do. Your carefree life, your ability to be happy, your job. Your job. And if you lose your job you lose your pension.” (34) The British government has planted fear inside people: “they said we had to fill the people with fear, [...], they had to understand that the threat of Saddam was like the threat of the Nazis. We all knew that this was not true.” (34) To give himself a relief, he attempts to justify his wrong deed by saying: “we had no power, [...] if we wanted to hold onto our jobs, we had to keep our mouths shut.” (34)

To give himself a kind of consolation, Kelly comforts himself by saying “Saddam is a monster no doubt about that, regime change is a must. The people will dance in the streets, if only for a day,” (34) then he contracts himself by justifying the government’s action and says: “They are good men, Bush and Blair, and Berlusconi. They wanted good for the people, they will topple Saddam, give aid to the new government, and be on their way” (34) He is a victimizer; he feels the remorse and the pain, but the worst crime he has committed was his silence. Despite the fact that he justifies his actions by being helpless, he is a victimizer.

Informing him the news of Iraq, Jalal added more to Kelly’s suffering. Jalal (is an Iraqi and a friend of Kelly) who is opposite to the usual images of Iraqis as uneducated and barbaric. He has five degrees in literature and has read thousands of books. Here, the description of Jalal’s education is done purposely by Thompson because she shows the differences between Iraqis who are supposed to be uncivilized and Americans who are supposed to be the opposite. This is shown the language of SOLDIER and Jalal. Sahar’s Jalal daughter: “American soldiers were watching her. He said they looked at her like a wolf looks at a rabbit. They were ravenous. There was evil in their eyes, he said, Blood.” (37) Marwa, Tabarks and Sahar were the preys that those soldiers were waiting to attack, metaphorically speaking :

“four American soldiers said they were looking for weapons.
[...]And then the four soldiers threw Sahar to the floor, raped the
child. Put a bayonet through the child and shot her in the face.
They then set fire to the bookshop. (37)”

This crime is one among many other crimes of rape and killing, the criminals are known of, yet nothing is done to protect the victims. The irony is that Bush and Blair in their famous speech addressing Iraqis have said: “Coalition forces will help maintain law and order, so that Iraqis can live in security. We will respect your great religious traditions, whose principles of equality and compassion are essential to Iraq’s future. We will help you build a peaceful and representative government that protects the rights of all citizens. And then our military forces will leave.”⁸ Yet nothing has happened as they have promised. Civilians are the victims of their lies and hypocrisy. Narhjus Al Saffarh, who was raped in front of her children during Saddam's regime, is the other victim in this play. She compares the liberation of Iraq to a woman who was abducted by officers and assaulted several times before being thrown out in the middle of the street in torn clothing. Then she was rescued and protected by a family. They then drove her to their place, where she took a bath while calling her relatives.

Shockingly, the man who was supposed to protect her, sneaked into the bath and raped her once more. She remained quiet and didn't say anything. Iraq is similar to this woman in that she would be raped millions of times but silently: "Iraq is once again hell" (47) and "Those who say they have come to save us have come to destroy us."(47)

Al Saffarh and her family are victims because being part of the communist party and they are victims during the invasion as well. Her son lost his life during the torture and she lost her life during the invasion by an explosion. The play presented the three perspectives about the war in Iraq. The Americans were so aggressive in dealing with Iraqis. For them, people in Iraq should be treated badly and must be destroyed every hope they would have in a good future. This policy of playing the role of helper, in order to destroy Iraq more, was very successful. The first two characters in this play contribute to the destruction of Iraq in way or another: SOLDIER through inventing different ways of torturing Iraqis and Kelly through his silence. However, these two are tools for achieving great hidden goals. Victimization of Iraqi civilians is presented by Thompson through the crimes of military and the way the U.S government cover them.

In *Nine Circles*, Bill Cain depicts the crime of Steven Dale Green, a former Army private who is facing federal criminal charges for shooting four family members, including a boy, with an AK-47 assault rifle near Mahmudiya on March, 2006. Green and four other soldiers charged in the case drank alcohol, changed into black clothes, and then raided a home, where they killed the whole family and raped the fourteen year old girl, shot her several times, and burned her body. Green was given an "honorable discharge" after the incident, then depending on the medical findings, he diagnosed with a serious personality disorder.⁹

Reeves the main character in this play, whose character is about Green, is a victimizer whose government tried by every possible means to justify his action and keep on inducting him "Not guilty";¹⁰ the play presented the nine circles he passed in. Each circle is about someone hired by government who tried to justify his crime even though he admitted: "We raped and killed a girl." (66) Then he as a result justifies his crime by saying: "we came here to kill people, sir."(18) Only in circle seven, prosecution tried to show how the soldier was merciless and victimizer who deprived the child her right to live. She is supposed to be protected by U.S troops because this is supposed to be the reason why they came to Iraq. However, the justification is that war makes people get used to violence in a certain way. In addition, the prosecution tried to show that there are many evidences among which the DNA sample. But all these evidences are ignored for the sake of saving their inhuman soldier.

At the same time, the prosecution blames the government: "Our government — from the president on down — is calling for the scapegoating of a young man — the lowest ranking man involved in this admittedly horrifying event." (90) There is a strong hatred toward Iraqis by Reeves: "He wanted to kill everybody. More specifically, all Iraqis." (91) There is a kind of struggle between the prosecution who wants the case of killing and raping to be the center of trial, and the lawyer who tries to defend Reeves by all possible means. The prosecution shows the corruption of the government who seeks for a scapegoat to justify any crime.

When the lieutenant asks Reeves, he tries to show that the U.S army in Iraq came to liberate Iraqis, but those who refuse this liberation are to be punished:

REEVES: we came here to help build a nation. That is our mission. Operation Iraqi Freedom. And that's a very unusual expression because it's both a euphemism AND an oxymoron. You don't see a lot of them but when you do, run, because it means there are no words to describe the unspeakable fuck-up you are in.

Sir, I don't mean we're here to kill all the people. Just the ones who hate freedom. Whoever is left when the killing stops — that's the nation.

LIEUTENANT. Son, I don't know why they're sending your home. Seems to me you're everything we want in a soldier. (18)

According to the above quotation, the pronoun "we" indicates that there are two binaries: superior and inferior. Superior refers to the U.S. who see themselves as "self." In contrast, the inferior refers to Iraqis who are considered "other." Through the lieutenant, the way soldiers are chosen is introduced, Reeves being an exemplary soldier. The lieutenant tries to show sympathy towards Reeves because he is nineteen and he has "seen some terrible things. You've seen people die." (19) However, Reeves's answer was a shock because these terrible scenes were not bothering him and "People are supposed to die." (19) He compares the dead bodies to a couch, an expensive one, and "It cost more than they could afford. It cost more than anything they ever bought." (19)

Later on, he begins to talk about the oath to be loyal to his army. He considers his deeds tremendous, and he is supposed to return to Iraq to service; however, the case is different. He is ready to do anything but not to break the oath of being part of the military by showing that he prefers "to be a suicide bomber. I'll strap on a vest and in the middle of my going-to-Allah party, I'll pull the pin and blown them all to hell." (22) Examining Reeve's reactions, some critics considered his deeds are out of PTSD because of the bloody scenes he witnessed. However, these are just pretexts. Sarah Saddler argues that Reeves is a victim rather than a victimizer.¹¹

The play presents the crimes which had done by Americans against Iraqis. However, those soldiers were treated in a very merciful way, while our victims, the Iraqis were treated in the ugliest way that one can imagine. In addition, there were huge sympathy toward militaries and their psychological statues. While Iraqis were living with the shame of what they had passed through. Reeves feels himself superior and Iraqis are inferior. Depending on the way he talks, he always uses the pronoun "we" refereeing to Americans while "they" when refereeing to Iraqis. The idea of self and other is presented throughout the play. In the sense that Iraqis are supposed to be sacrificed as they are "other" for the sake of having "fun" and amusing the "self."

The play presents the crime which was committed against Iraqis by Americans. However, those soldiers were treated in a very merciful way, unlike the Iraqi victims. Also, the play reflects the moral degradation of those who represent authority. Each circle in this play clarifies the corruption of the government. The characters who met Reeves are far from morality and ethic, and despite the evidence that show Reeves as a victimizer, all characters in this play try to show the opposite.

2 . Conclusion

In *Palace of the End*, Thompson's Canadian identity played an essential role in making her neutral in presenting the facts. In this play, the focus is on the crimes committed by American soldiers against Iraqis, especially those related to Abu Ghraib. David Kelly, on the other hand, is used to reveal the lies of the American and British governments concerning the weapons of mass destruction which leads to his death. Through Kelly, the crimes committed by soldiers against young Iraqi girls, such as rape and killing, are revealed increasing his suffering. Another fact behind the war is that soldiers victimized people to cover up their crimes under the name of duty. This play shows Iraqis as victims of war whose lives have turned into hell; they are victims of both the ex-regime and the invasion.

In *Nine Circles*, Bill Cain presented the invasion through the eyes of a soldier who committed a crime against humanity. Reeves raped a fourteen years old girl then tried to cover up the crime by killing her and burning her body. Cain is supposed to be a Jesuit who is impartial and stands up for victims; however, all he does is justifying Reeves's crime. Cain says that Reeves is a victim of war and past psychological issues. Even though Reeves admits his crimes, his lawyers try to defend him using PTSD as a pretext. The journey through the nine circles shows the hypocrisy and corruption of the U.S. government through the people being sent to Reeves to justify his crime.

End Notes

1 Entidhar Hamzah Abbas Al-Rashid, *The Representation Of The Iraqi War, Middle Eastern Culture, and Women in Benjamin Buchholz's One Hundred and One Nights*, (unpublished master thesis, Missouri State University, 2016), 4-6. < <https://bearworks.missouristate.edu/theses/2369/> > (accessed 18/12/2020)

2 Belgin Bağırlar, “ Radical Feminist Echoes: Judith Thompson's The Crackwalker and Lion in the Streets” *Folklor/Edebiyat* , VOL 26 , NO 103 (2020): 624. < DOI: 10.22559/folklor.1184 > (accessed 18//2020)

3 Judith Thompson, *Palace of the End*, (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2007)" "All the subsequent references to the text are taken from this edition and the pages will be cited parenthetically.

4 Donia Mounsef, “Atrocity, Banality, and Jouissance in Performance” *in, Understanding Atrocities: Remembering, Representing, and Teaching Genocide*, ed. Scott W. Murray (University of Calgary Press, 2017), 261, 263 and 259.

5 Victoria E. Collins, *State Crime, Women and Gender*, (New York: Routledge, 2016), 112.

6 Mounsef, 259.

7 Nadine Holdsworth and Mary Luckhurst, *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British and Irish Drama* (New York: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2008), 211.

8 < <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/wariniraq/gwbushiraq41003.htm>>
(accessed on 3/3/2021)

9 Michael Welch, *Crimes of Power & States of Impunity*. The U.S. Response to Terror, (London: Rutgers University Press,2009),121.

10 “Bill Cain, *Nine Circles* (New york: Dramatist Play Service INC, 2013) All the subsequent references to the text are taken from this edition and the pages will be cited parenthetically.”

11 Sarah Saddler, “Bill Cain’s 9 *Circles*: Dramaturgically Re-Evaluating An American Understanding of the Military and Individualism” (unpublished master thesis, Miami University, 2013), 47-48 <<https://etd.ohiolink.edu/>> (accessed 8/1/2021)

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