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Arabic Images and Themes in Selected British Plays: A Post-Colonial Approach

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□ ABSTRACT □

Christopher Hampton, Trevor Griffiths, and David Hare have dealt with the colonizer- and-colonized equation through English narratives, permeated with what might be termed as post-colonialist discourse. Their plays, focused on in this paper, have tackled Arabic themes and images, in varied ways, setting contrasts between two cultural Identities: the Arab, Islamic and Third World versus the Western, Judo-Christian and Developed World. Each writer has shed light on the post-colonial status of three parts of the Arab World. In Hampton's *White Chameleon* Egypt emerged as a tolerant country of versatile story tellers, Griffths' *The Gulf between Us* depicts –symbolic- Iraq as a cradle of civilization devastated by Western military technology, and finally Hare's *Via Dolorosa* portrays Palestine as a land claimed by two communities, whereby Hare gives prominence to the Palestinian narrative.

Key Words: Post-colonial Discourse, Colonizer, Colonized, Rhetoric of Place, Westocentrism, Arab Figures

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صور وموضوعات عربيّة في مسرحيات بريطانية منتقاة: مقاربة ما–بعد الاستعمار

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□ ملخّص □

عالج كلٌ من كريستوفر هامبتون، وتريفور جريفيث، وديفيد هير معادلة المستعمِر/المُستَعمَر من خلال نصوص إنكليزية، حافلة بما يمكن تسميته خطاب ما بعد–الاستعمار. تناولت مسرحيّاتهم، التي درست في هذه الورقة، موضوعات وصوراً عربيّة، بأساليب عدَة، حيث وردت مفارقات بين هويّتين ثقافيّتين: العالم الثالث العربي الإسلامي في مواجهة العالم الغربي المسيحي– اليهودي المتطوّر. كما لجأ كلّ كاتب منهم إلى مجموعة من السمات الثقافية في عرض حالة ما بعد–الاستعمار. فبرزت مصر في مسرحية ((الحرباء الأبيض)) لهامبتون بلداً متسامحاً حافلاً برواة حكّائيين متعددي الأوجه، وصوَرت مسرحية جريفيز ((الخليج بيننا)) العراق –المرمّز – مهداً للحضارات التي دمّرتها التقانة العسكريّة الغربيّة، وفي خاتمة المطاف أظهرت مسرحية هير ((درب الآلام)) فلسطين أرضاً تتنازعها جماعتان من البشر، حيث يضع هير سرديّة الفلسطينيّين في الصدارة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: خطاب ما بعد الاستعمار، المستعمِر، المُستعمَر، بلاغة المكان، المركزية الغربية، الشخوص العرب.

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Introduction:

This paper attempts to discuss Arabic themes and images in three modern British plays, in the light of post-colonial theory. Christopher Hampton, Trevor Griffiths, and David Hare have examined the colonizer/colonized equation, in English narratives, reflecting a post-colonialist discourse, through depicting Arab geographical locations and individuals.

Objectives:

This paper aims at tracing Arabic images and themes treated in varied British plays, by several writers, in the light of the post-colonial concepts. As a political and cultural phenomenon, colonialism has brought about repercussions still being, strikingly, recognized, in texts by black as well as liberal white writers alike, through the representation of East/West/Arab/European(British)/colonizer/colonized encounters at times of crisis.

Method:

In an attempt to achieve the afore-stated objectives, some key terms, embedded in post-colonial literary theory such as rhetoric of place, binary cultural categorization - East/West, Colonizer/Colonized/ Center/Periphery- have been borrowed, in order to shed light on the cultural discourse prevalent in the considered plays. Besides, all Arab characters, cultural references, literary borrowings, historical hints, and political concerns have been traced, deconstructed, analyzed, and commented on in the light of the above-stated post-colonial concepts, typically attributed to their original advocates.

Body:

Colonialism as a cultural term involves, according to some writers, 'a critique of past and present power relations in world affairs' and post-colonialism is a 'critical practice which attempts to understand the relation of literary writing to power and its contestations'.[1] The concept of ‘rhetoric of place’ can also be defined as an ‘analytic tool for interpreting the discourse through which post-colonial identity is repeated, perpetuated, and also re-inscribed'.[2] It is the writer’s perspective of this multi-dimensional phenomenon that makes up the bulk of post-colonial writing. A key principle to the Post-Colonial studies is central to 'a simple binarism: the binarism of Europe and its others, of colonizer and colonized, of the West and the Rest of the world, the vocal and the silent,' as well as 'a center/periphery model with roots in world systems theory'.[3] This binary equation of the post-colonial concept tends to bring about slight obscurity as it attempts to address 'unambiguously placed or ambivalent material'. [4]

The three plays under consideration, here, can, therefore, be, dealt with as a narrative addressing some aspects of this colonial experience. What makes this process somehow ‘blurred’ is when the ‘supposed’ colonizer, ‘white’ British writers address the issue of colonialism, in an attempt to re-examine an historical era involving the self and the other. How do their narratives function? Are they straight forward in their discourse along the

[1] Stephen Slemon, 'Understanding the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World', *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft (et. al.) (London: Routledge, 1997), p.106.

[2] Colin Wright, 'Can the Subaltern Hear: The Place of Rhetoric and the Rhetoric of Place in Postcolonial Theory', www.landow.com 7.5.2001 (accession date 25.8.01).

[3] Slemon, op.cit.p.107.

[4] Slemon, p.107.

binary line of post-colonial studies? The following argument attempts to elaborate on these two questions.

The three considered texts have been, supposedly, addressed to the late twentieth-century British theatre-goers, with no experience of colonial oppression, for Britain has never been colonized after the Roman Invasion and partially the Norman Conquest. They have also entrenched cultural concepts such as liberalism, democracy, and human rights, all encapsulated in a sense of Euro-centrism, viewing such 'Western values' as unquestionably ideal to mankind as a whole. The texts under question are linguistic structures of a predominant culture, colonial in the past and modernist, global, and considerably influential at present. They literally live the post-modern age in all its manifestations. In the words of Roger Berger: post-modernism can be regarded as 'a definition of western, postindustrial culture and the emergent or always already dominant global culture'.[5] It is worth stressing that post-modernism is also associated with literary practices and theoretical discourses, contrasted with the modernism of the early 20th century. It is also linked to deconstructionism. In the words of David Macey 'Early references to postmodernism derive from discussions of the visual arts and literature (especially in the United States), and the debate subsequently incorporates discussions of developments within architecture'.[6]

The three writers are mainly main-stream, with one of them, David Hare, having his roots in the fringe theatre. The other two are rather globally oriented: Hampton has developed special interest in European history and culture, and Griffths has been keenly preoccupied with leftist debates on socialism and race relations in British society. Historically, the three belong to the post-colonial white generation, growing in the plentiful fifties and wild sixties: the post-empire breed, coming to terms with new social and political realities. The process developing here is that of reading colonial history in the hope of coming up with a new epistemological meaning. 'If the crisis of meaning in the west is seen as the product of a historical juncture, then perhaps the refusal either to export it or import it may be a meaningful gesture, at least until we can replace the stifling monologues of self and other…with genuinely dialogic and dialectical history'. [7]

In his *White Chameleon*,[8] Hampton has examined a whole colonial phenomenon through the experience of his protagonist, the boy Chris, becoming the playwright Christopher later on. Through the (child and playwright) narrator's voice, the drama unfolds, calling the metropolitan 'Western' audience to reconsider several notions related to the colonial past. The events are set, in Alexandria, against the historical background of the conflict between Egypt and Britain over the Suez Canal, in the mid-fifties, that culminated in the Tripartite Invasion of Egypt. The characters are mainly British. The only Arab character is the 'Egyptian' cook, Ibrahim, who has stolen every body else's thunder in the play.

Through the special relationship with the Egyptian cook Ibrahim, Chris/Christopher's psychological characteristics and intellectual growth are developed. On the social level, Ibrahim represents Chris's link to the world around him in the colonized terrain, and embodies a whole different cultural identity. In his fifties, Ibrahim is

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[5] Roger Breger, quoted by Gilbert McInnis, 'The Struggle of Post Modernism and Postcolonialism', www.landow.com 7.5.2009 (accessed 25.8.2009).

[6] David Macey, *The Penguin dictionary of Literary Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), pp305-6.

[7] Kumkum Sangari, 'The Politics of the Possible', *The Post-Colonial Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft (et. al.) (London: Routledge, 1997), p.147.

[8] Christopher Hampton, *White Chameleon* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992).

the typical Arab Muslim poly-gomist (he has two wives), obedient local colonizers' servant, a sort of Uncle Tom figure, who pragmatically accepts his lot of being subordinated in return for a living. He has also a good sense of humour, and most important of all, he is a diverse story teller, a skill that has fascinated Chris.

This friendship involves a degree of equality. Ibrahim is being depicted as a brotherly figure, or even an adult confidant. On his part, he feels no inhibition in Chris's presence, and does things that he can never even contemplate at home, in the presence of his two wives. He devoutely fulfills his religious duty, yet, he finds whisky and gin irresistable. Although of limited political awareness, Ibrahim provides Chris with an independent perspective of world affairs that helps in shaping his own views. The Anglo-Egyptian conflict, raging on, positively affects this friendship. Following a bloodbath in Port Said, when the British had shot dead several Egyptian natives, who fired at the British soldiers, anti-British sentiments were running very high: When Chris had been beaten up by fellow Egyptian classmates at Victoria College in Alexandria, Ibrahim calmed him down and convinced him not to seek revenge.[9] He also, pragmatically rather than ideologically, claims that he is neutral and 'pro-British', and refers to his wife as being a ' Nazi' for her anti-British sentiments.

Unfortunately, this friendship seems to be developing against strong odds, and is soon undermined by major political developments. Hampton implicitly suggests that, on the human level, there is a bond tying up colonizer and colonized together, regardless of all sorts of inequalities. The 1956 Arab (East)/European (British, French, and Israeli) West conflict puts a great strain on the two protagonists. It transpires that Chris has to leave Egypt along with his mother as war evacuees to his homeland Britain. Ibrahim's tarboosh, accepted by Chris as a souvener in order to remember him in England, turns out to be a key object in this exceptional colonizer/colonized equation[10]. This tarboosh signifies the indigenous local culture. Back home, Chris will be beaten up for sympathizing with the Egyptian side: 'a wog lover'.[11] Against the might of racially entrenched imperial cultural establishments, Chris's pro-Arab sympathies can be easily and ruthlessly brushed aside. In Chris's encounter with the headmaster, the unequal sides of the equation are clearly illustrated: he has been reproached for his so called 'unpatriotic remarks'. And in a philistine manner, Ibrahim's tarboosh has been burned by the headmaster, determined to wipe out any symbol associated with the alien and opponent other (colonized).[12]

Hampton also refers to the typical tense colonizer/colonized relationship. Unlike Chris's favourable attitude towards the locals, his mother's is totally antagonistic and colonial. She simply views the Arab (locals) as enemies. Horrified, she chillingly recalls an experience from her childhood: she was five years-old, when rioting swept through the city of Suez, following World War I:

But I can see them now, coming down the street, they tied themselves together with their, you know, headdresses, round the upper arm, I suppose so the police couldn't separate them. Anyway, about six of them started coming up the back stairs. So Mummy spoke to the cook, the soup was on for lunch; and he got a dishcloth and carried out this great pot and poured it all over them.[13]

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9 Ibid, p17.
10 Ibid, p45.
11 Ibid., p47.
12 Ibid., p.50.
13 Ibid., p.42.

The two sides are, diametrically apart and irreconcilably, hemed in conflicts well to the dead end. This image comes up in sharp contrast to Chris and Ibrahim's warm friendship. Stressed in this passage is the core of power relations, Arab (Egyptian)/British, and East/West, as notions of the post-colonial discourse. The narrative has emphatically operated to reflect the binary ideological cultural system combining the self and the other.

In several parts of the play, one would easily recognize a Western/Euro-centralist attitude towards the Arab World, represented by Egypt, the largest Arab country and its leader who had once been viewed as the icon of Arab nationalism. The play does not refer to Gamal Abdul Nasser as president, but simply as 'Colonel Nasser'. Besides, President Nasser's anti-British sentiments have been attributed to personal resentment or grudge, for ' a British soldier had once shot him in the forehead'[14]. Another major development in the play is President Nasser's famous Nationalization Address in Alexandria (1956).[15] Implicitly, he is being viewed as a populist demagogue and dictator, as frequently mentioned in the British media at the time. In an interesting remark, Ibrahim requests Chris to inform Winston Churchill not to defame President Nasser: 'Winston knows Colonel Nasser is not the second Hitler, because he knows the first Hitler. He would not say this foolishness of Sir Eden'.[16]

As for the notions associated with Alexandria as an alien place, the adult narrator Christopher, through his authoritative and credible voice, nostalgically describes the 'romanticized' or 'exoticized' city, in the pre-Arabic era. 'more than the Pharos lighthouse, the Great library was one of the Seven Wonders. Euclid perfected his system of geometry here; Eratoshens, working from the assumption that the earth was round, calculated its circumference to within 50 miles, while his colleague, Aristarchus, proposed that it revolved around the sun...'.[17] Christopher has typically recalled Cavafy's memory in order to highlight his link to and emotional identification with the place: 'In these circumstances, the poet advises stoicism and gratitude, not cowardice or guilt or self-deception: because sooner or later all of you must lose your Alexandria'.[18] The sense of loss is seemingly twofold. First, the protagonist has lost his childhood in Alexandria, the age of pleasure and innocence, and the era of his initiation rites as a storyteller at the hands of the Arab (Egyptian) minder Ibrahim. Second, as a white adult, he can no longer enjoy the colonized Alexandria of the past with all its romanticized Western images and associations. At present it is an Islamicized place with prayer calls, muzzins, Ramadan fasting etc. The writer is keen on highlighting this cultural 'contestation', whereby, as Home Bhabha has pointed out, the ground of knowledge shifts, and a war of positions breaks out marking 'the establishment of new forms of meaning, and strategies of identification'.[19]

Unlike Hampton's semi-documentary nostalgic *White Chameleon,* Trevor Griffiths' *The Gulf Between Us* is rather an ambitious piece of work, metaphorically portraying two worlds diametrically apart 'Even though the Brits are at the heart of this play', Griffths goes on, 'they're not at the moral center of it. At the moral center 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

[14] Ibid., p.13.
[15] Ibid, p.41.
[16] Ibid., p.43.
[17] Ibid., p.31.
[18] Ibid., p.31.
[19] See Home K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p.233.

the most cursory scrutiny'.[20] Griffiths' piece has been intended to tackle an historical event (Gulf War), that was to leave a lasting impact on world politics, establishing a strong link between the destruction of Iraq 'the cradle of civilization', bringing it back to the stone age, murdering a quarter of million people, for flimsy pretexts, on the hand, and the initiation of the 'New World Order', on the other hand. Its grand design, metaphorical associations, symbolic characters, and cerebral and poetic structure have all reflected a clear post-colonial discourse: 'I don't know that *The Gulf Between [sic]Us* is the whole of my reaction to the Gulf War: it's not a documentary, it's not a journalistic piece. It's a kind of dreamplay'. [21]

Stunningly the play opens, with O'Tool reciting graceful prosaic Islamic phrases: 'In the name of Allah/ The compassionate/ The merciful….'.[22] To the Western audience or readership, this evocation of Islamic references is meant as a shocking tactic, aiming at shaking any preconceived notions about the Arab and Islamic world. Reminding modern contemporary audiences of a non-European holy scripture The Quran, this opening scene paves the way for a series of challenging notions, images, situations, and exchanges, all stressing the Arab/colonized side of the historical experience on varied levels. There is a flurry of voices and activities as well as a muzzin calling the faithful to first prayer.[23] This Arab/indigenous serenity is soon ripped by high-tech videos of famous strikes on bridges, buildings, and installations. Strikingly, this cultural contrast underlines the fact that the mighty Western/ex-colonial power is launching a barbaric war on the ex-and by now virtually- colonized nation. The presence of the so-called other is being considerably slashed under the might of the self (the so-called Western democracies), giving the impression that Western arrogance and high-tech are turning the world into a 'wasteland'. This far reaching connotation is understandably possible in the light of the symbolic setting and theatre of events: a large tent in the desert with a construction site nearby. This symbolic location gives the playwright freedom to conjur up fictionalized details, drawing in the process an image of an Arabic dream being shattered as a result of the Western aggression.

In this unusually tense and fantacized atmosphere, varied ethnically different people have been assembled. The colonized are represented by two Arab ancients, coming in and getting out of action, now and then, Ismael, a young militia commander in charge of protecting the mysterious site, and Dr. Fadia Aziz, an Arab Christian woman, dressed in modest traditional costume, working as inspector affiliated with the Ministry of Health. Through the account given by O'Tool, who has been mistakenly drafted, as a builder on the apparently mysterious site, for his real profession was guilder, and Ryder, a masonry worker, the events of the play unfold, with several unpredictable twists and turns. The difficult situations, into which they have been pushed, their entrampment on the site along with their Arab counterparts, excitingly develop the action of the play, and give their Arab opposite numbers the opportunity to assert their individual and national identity.

Right from the beginning, Ismael's ruthlessness is strongly depicted: he executes a convicted driver in cold blood by shooting him in the back of his head. As time goes by, and the friendship with O'Tool strengthens, and more air raids hit the site, he is in charge of, Ismael is shown as a pugnacious fellow as a result of Western aggression. Apart from this occasional chauvinism, he, like many young men of his age, has been mad about

[20] Trevor Griffths, 'Introduction', *The Gulf Between Us* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p.vi.
[21] Ibid., p.vii.
[22] Trevor Griffths, *The Gulf Between Us* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p.1.
[23] Ibid., p.1.

football and a fan of Manchester United. The aggression has deprived him of his little joy and fiercely antagonized him against the West. Typically, he is a blind follower of the so-called patriotic major –modeled on the nation's leader- who is an ideal example to follow. The identity of the other is seen in terms of self assertion against the alleged aliens. War is the only touchstone that gives meaning to Ismael and his national culture. The set of patriotic values embodied by the major are unquestionable in Ismael's eyes, reflecting once more a binary system encapsulating the discourse of the West/the Third World. This concept is illustrated through a powerful statement: '(IN Arabic) Ismael, son of Akram, brother of Said, spits in your face, you Mongols, you hear me? You hear me? Mongols…'.[24] In Arabic history and culture, 'Mongol' is an extremely suggestive term indicating barbarism and philistinism: the Mongol leader Hulagu was notoriously famous for destroying Baghdad and murdering thousands of its population: 'The city was then systematically looted, destroyed and burnt. Eight hundred thousand persons are said to have been killed. The Khalif Mustasim was sewn up in a sack and trampled to death under the feet of Mongol horses', and all the cities' facilities and monuments of hospitals, palaces, universities and libraries that had been the splendour of the whole world were literaslly razed to the ground by Hulagu's armies.[25]

Although not as militarily active as Ismael, Dr. Fadia Aziz, is not less belligerent in her antiwestern rhetoric. Following the raid, resulting in the devastation of the tent, temporarily used as a crèche hosting women and children, along with the perishing of hundreds of civilians, Dr. Aziz bursts into a long speech addressed to the sky, whence the attacking bombers emerged. Re-echoing Grifffths' discourse this speech sums up the message of the play, condemning the West for its colonial history of ethnic cleansing and obliteration, physically and culturally, of the different other (non-white). 'And I had forgotten', Dr. Aziz protests, 'what you will acknowledge but the world knows, that yours is a country forged and shaped in brutal genocide, the destruction of whole peoples, lives, customs, beliefs, men, women and children who had learned respect for the place that nourished them, who had learned to tread gently on this earth'.[26] At the center of this speech is a typical victimized people's attitude towards their victimizers. Thus, Euro-American-centrism is, semantically, played down, with the voice of a third world culture given prominence. Dr. Aziz refers to both in-equality in the world economy, given that it is being run to the advantage of 20 percent of the world-population as well as the notorious American interventions in Arab political affairs.[27] Dr. Aziz, then, concludes her argument with a critical statement about the shaky moral ground on which the West is standing in its campaign against her country: 'We have only a holy place, a place for worship, a place your cameras tell every day is filled with children. And you send a messile, not a wayward falling bomb, to burn it up…In the name of God? In the name of humankind'?[28] Dr. Aziz' tone is rather moralistic intended to challenge the prevailing anti-Arab attitudes in the West, in favour of a soul-searching exercise; reflected through a semiotic structure, scrutinizing modern international relations through characters' interactions. The moral center is a political periphery (Third World) while the moral periphery is the political –and technological– center (the West).

[24] Ibid., p.54.
[25] See John Bagot Glubb, *A Short History of the Arabs* (London: Quartet Books, 1980), p.207.
[26] Trevor Grifffths, *The Gulf Between Us*, op.cit.,p.49.
[27] Ibid., p.49.
[28] Ibid., p.49.

In addition to anti-western rhetoric, Griffths employs veritable native means of expression of the local people in order to give a new meaning to the war experience as simply Western barbaric aggression. O'Tool, the storyteller, a Brit in his fifties, black hair and full beard dressed 'in the grubby garb of an Arab worker', addresses the audience in his authoritative voice reflecting his autobiographical accounts of the past adventures in the fictionalized country, skillfully using the style of *The Arabian Nights* in order to relate his and his friend's (Billy Ryder) story entitled 'The Story of the Builder, the Guilder, the Minder and the Gulf between them'.[29] His narrative, then, swings into disturbing details about the carnage and devastation, mentioning the Northern Christian 'engines of war' that have brought about many disturbing images:these engines of war 'turned the days into nightmares, poisoning wells, destroying riverbanks, killing crops and livestock, leaving infants suckle in vain shriveled breasts'.[30] Amid this carnage, however, storytelling is the only weapon for immortality or salvation as was the case of Shehrazad, whose story telling pacified the tyrant Shehrayar. And so is O'Tool's story, the reader's –or audience's– only alternative version, changing the dominant Western perspective. This provides some flavour of O'Tool's nicely developed narrative.

And down in the Caliph's courtyard, so recently despoiled by enemy fire, heroes scheme and plot their survival in a tiny war-play of their own. The Builder smells advantage on the poisoned air; the youthful Minder searches for manhood on the sticky paths of duty; and Finbar, our Wandering Guildrer, 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.[31]

Griffths has successfully emulated the cadence, tone, and style of *The Arabian Nights*, intent on leaving a new impact on his readers and audiences. This parodied style, associated with the exotic 'East' is meant to describe a disturbing replica of reality. Skillfully, the narrative mode is aesthetically used as a tool to further the post-colonial, anti-imperialist rhetoric.

Griffths also employs dance and music with ritualistic dimensions involving the ancients. The West intervenes again and spoils the musical party and dance: 'But the music died; and the day and the war –the Grand and the Petty- resumed their customary clamour'.[32] Added to this is the so-called ancients' involvement in dramatic action: it is a powerful poetic image implying the continuity of Mesopotamian civilization. Although the play is allegedly set in the 1990s, the ancients occupy the setting one way or the other. As they answer the muzzin's call to prayer the audience is informed on their Islamic affiliation. Finally, the play ends on an optimistic note. Griffiths' stage directions go: 'The world burns. Western voices move in, out, on the fade, recounting the war they had. The Ancients rise up from the rubble ridge. Stand, in mutable, inerasable, staring out at the city'.[33] All previously employed sounds, images, rituals, narratives, statements, and costumes, have undoubtedly emphasized Arabic cultural aspects as a phenomenon worthy of recognition and appreciation. On the contrary, by emphasizing the Western presence, particularly through war-machinery, Griffths has urged his audience to reconsider the credibility of Western cultural values and seek better understanding of the so-called 'other' (the Arabs). In line with Edward Said's remarks, there is an attempt on the part of Griffts to

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[29] Ibid., p.3.
[30] Ibid., p.15.
[31] Ibid., p.15.
[32] Ibid., p.32.
[33] Ibid., p.57.

'bind the European as well as the native together in a new non-adversarial community of awareness and anti-imperialism'.[34]

Not dissimilar in terms of content to the afore-considered plays, David Hare’s monodrama, *Via Dolorosa*, through a semi-documentary journalistic technique, sheds light on another Arabic cause (Palestine). Confining his work to a series of testimonies made by Palestinian and prominent Israeli figures, Hare has attempted to explore the core of the conflict. Narrative in this work is contested by the two conflicting parties, although the final word is left to the main actor, sole commentator, Hare himself. In an investigative journalistic enterprise, Hare embarks upon a journey to the 'holy land', exploring its landscape as well as the ideologies of the two communities populating it. At the centre of the play are varied aspects of post-colonial discourse, such as rhetoric of place, historical narratives, political sloganeering, and indigenous cultural identity. These features are not confined of course to the Palestinian side, but in line with the scope of this paper focus will be mainly on the Palestinian version of the story. On the face of it, the varied cited statements reflect a documentary tone. However, Hare’s phraseology, cadence, and rhythms encapsulate the typical flavour of the indigenous native Palestinians versus the Westernized Israelis. As a piece permeated with post-colonial discourse, it focuses 'on the reality of the past that has influenced the present'.[35] In her analysis of *Via Dolorosa*, Cathy Turner stresses the fact that: 'While he [Hare] is also able to "bear witness" through stories, this documentary style places an emphasis on the voices he hears, rather than his own: "what my attitude is, is hardly relevant. What matters is what they've got to say"'.[36]

Hare has skillfully put the Palestinian/Israeli showdown in motion. His first interviewee is Israeli director Eran Baniel in the port of Jaffa. The turning point in his life was his famous co-production –in collaboration with Palestinian director George Ibrahim- of *Romeo and Juliet*, in which the Palestinians represented the Capulets and Jews played the Montagues. 'The whole experience opened his eyes'. Hare reports Baniel's experience, 'Any Palestinian who wanted to see the play in Jerusalem had to be vetted by Israeli Ministry of Defence. For an Arab, even to see a play became a privilege, not a right'.[37] It was a play about hate rather than love. Through an adapted literary classic *–Romeo and Juliet-* and symbolic characters, the equation of the Israeli occupation is brought to light with the victimized/Palestinian side given opportunity to raise their voice against the occupation. A sense of guilt is expressed by the occupier as demonstrated by Banikel: 'have you been to the Palestinian territories? Look how the water is allocated. In the settlements, you have the obscene spectacle of Israelis sitting by their swimming- pools while Palestinians carry their drinking water round in jerry cans'.[38] The business of commissioning a classical work on the issue of hatred has led to underlining the occupation/colonial reality, whereby the victimized/colonized native is marginalized and dehumanized.

Hare’s narrative graphically describes the geographical location where the Palestinians reside. To begin with, in portraying his first entry into the alien Palestinian territory, Hare employs intriguing detective story style. 'Nothing prepares you for the physical shock of the passage. One writer has said that driving from Israel into the Gaza

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[34] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p.274.

[35] David Hare, *Via Dolorosa & When Shall We Live?* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p.10.

[36] Cathy Turner, 'Hare in Collaboration: Writing Dialogues', *The Cambridge Companion to David Hare*, (ed.) Richard Boon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2997), p.118.

[37] David Hare, *Via Dolorosa*, op. cit., p.9.

[38] Ibid., p.10.

strip is like moving from California into Bangladesh'.[39] Equally exciting is the narrator's physical activities across the concrete separating the two entities, an image that reminds the narrator of 'a John Le Care movie'. The climax of his adventure into Gaza is the meeting with the revered Palestinian politician Haidar Abdel Shafi.

His vivid description of Gaza reflects the disturbing situation suffered by the natives/Palestinians under occupation since 1948. Their image of being crammed in slums and refugee camps and that of religious Western/Israeli settlers forcefully sharing the place highlights a neo-colonial paradox. The ruthless Western settler is claiming the space and resources of the natives' land. By contrast the natives' presence is strongly felt through other means; costumes, rituals, folkloric conventions, and moral rhetoric as illustrated through the encounter between Shafi and the Western narrator Hare. As Shafi's narrative and argument proceed, post-colonial connections keep surfacing. He refers to the 'indigenous people of Palestine', repeating the collective 'we' time and time again, and like an actor on the stage of history, evokes classical maxims from Arabo-Islamic history: 'You can't get anywhere if you live in a society without principles. When Mohammd came back from battle, he said, "We came back from the little strife and we return to the bigger strife." They asked him what he meant. "The strife of the soul." But of course nowadays nobody thinks of these things'.[40]

The narrator, Hare, then, introduces another Palestinian trying to shape the image of the community. He is Albert Aghazerin, 'the great Palestinian historian', a professor at Birzeit University, whose narrative is a mixture of academically toned stuff and folkloric anecdotes, encapsulating the link, as well as the gap, between Arabs/victimized and Israelis/victimizers. Biblical legend is also evoked by the grand historian in his treatment of the occupation as a political, theological, ideological, and historical phenomenon. He is well versed in Israeli political 'mythologizing:' 'All the apocalyptic stuff starts after 1967. You do get a smell of it before, but it's only after the Six Day War that the Jews come up with this new interpretation of the Bible. The building of the Third Temple! The end of the world! It's pure opportunism'.[41] He also refers to the '*Heife*r' being prepared 'to purge the temple…' and humorously describes the opposite side: 'there are three types of Israel 'the hedonistic Israel of Tel Aviv. The austere Israel of Jerusalem. And the mad Israel of Hebron…...'.[42] The Israeli experience, in the words of Aghazerin, is like a group of people who jumped from a burning building and unfortunately landed and broke the neck of a man who was passing: every time he protests against the harm they've inflicted on him they resort to more harshness in order to silence him. 'And when he doesn't shut up, they break his other arm. Then they break his leg. Then his other leg. All in the hope that one day he'll shut up. But, you see, I don't think he will'.[43] The use of anecdotes goes on: 'Israel has its hand round our throat. It can't throttle us, but nor can it let us go. He's unhappy because he wants to go for a beer, and we're unhappy because we're being strangled, but in some terrible way we're both bound up in each other's unhappiness. We cannot be separated'.[44] The natives' resistance of the occupiers' mighty physical presence is mainly through their counter-narratives expressing their higher moral ground and rightful claim to the contested land.

[39]Ibid., p.24.
[40] Ibid., pp.25-6.
[41] Ibid., p.31.
[42] Ibid., p.31.
[43] Ibid., p.31.
[44] Ibid., p.31.

Hare, moreover, introduces the Palestinian director, George Ibrahim, who co-produced *Romeo and Juliet*, along with Hussein Barghouti, the forty-year-old militant of the *intifada* , whom Hare describes as 'a figure who has tragically disappeared from British life, but whom you still see in Paris and Berlin: the genuine, twenty-four-carat intellectual, arms waving and high as a kite on ideas'.[45] The Arab side's discourse here involves popular culture such as Hollywood movies, depicting Arab figures. George is dismayed about the way Arabs are being dehumanized in movies, representing them as 'monkeys smoking pipes, or more usually, criminals.' He urges his listener, Hare, to 'Think! Think what depths of despair it will take to make you walk into a market with lumps of dynamite tied round your chest. But no American film-maker has ever tried to think. All Arabs get lumped together'.[46] Instead of the manipulated or distorted image associated with this type of Third World natives by Western post-modernist cultural tools, a call for an alternative portrayal in line with Third World reality is being stressed. Western straightjacket images of the other are accordingly undermined.

Hussein Bargouti, on his part, broadens the debate and touches upon sensitive issues, rarely addressed in mainstream Western literary works:

Did you see *The English Patient*? Foreground action: white people, noble, fine feelings, strong, full of laughter, walking in gardens, taking showers, *standing up*! Background action: Arabs, shifty, mysterious, dirty, untrustworthy, *sitting down*! Or *Air Force One*! This picture explains to us what Arabs want. What do they want? To capture the American president! Why? Why would anyone want an American president? Why would they do it? No, really? The reason? Because the world needs an enemy. When the Soviet Union was around, there it was, ready-made. Now it's to be us. It suits the Americans to say, "Who are the Arabs? The Arabs are the people who will start the third World War.[47]

The image of the colonized in post-modern mainstream Western culture is being disputed and deconstructed as a means of Western political power and influence. The poet's narrative functions, here, as an alternative view and perspective to the prevalent one. The Western narrator is once more a witness and the voice of the colonized is given prominence. The latter's argument does not stop here, but further touches upon the sensitive issue of East/West conflicts, be they religious, cultural and ideological:

All the conflicts in this area are imported. They are not organic. What is the state of Israel but the transformation of native Semitic culture into a terrible western caricature? Plus, of course, the added horror of nuclear weapons. Consider: this is where the world's great religions all originate. The West collected its religion from here. Yet how did that religion come back to us? In the form of the Crusades! You take your religion from this part of the world, then you bring it back to us as violence.[48]

The contrast between the 'self' and the 'other' is convincingly illustrated. History has been binding the colonizer and colonized together: the West as a triumphant culture is being perceived as the originator of violence: even its spiritual beliefs have taken the form of violence, wrapped under ideology in the case of both the Crusades and Israelis. The colonized on the other hand has been depicted as the recipient victim of Western violence, who is not standing idly by. In line with Frans Fanon 'The violence of the colonial regime and counter-violence of the native balance each other and respond to each other in an

[45] Ibid., p.33.
[46] Ibid., p.33.
[47] Ibid., p.34.
[48] Ibid., p.34.

extraordinary reciprocal homogeneity'.[49] Once more colonizer and colonized are bound together in a complicated historical dilemma, stressing the fact that the only option left to the natives is to resist their colonial/imperial victimizers, come what may.

The play's over-politicized tone has given it a unique flavour, for dealing with the Arab/Israeli conflict demands a peculiar artistic formula encapsulating the subtleties and complications involved, be they spiritual, ideological, mythological and folkloric. Western power/authority is scrutinized through the linguistic medium of the oppressed people. The play is, moreover, a multi-faceted mirror with varied angles, each reflecting a particular perspective of a complicated reality. It is like a fragmented jigsaw-puzzle that the narrator has not been able to piece together. Nonetheless, the Arabic images stated in the play are convincingly conjured up and insightfully analyzed through a subtle post-colonial discourse.

Conclusion:

The three discussed plays have tackled Arabic themes and images, in varied ways, setting contrasts between two cultural sets/Identities: the Arab/Islamic/Third World versus the West/Christian/Developed world. Each writer has resorted to a set of cultural features in displaying the post-colonial status of three parts of the Arab world. Hampton's Egypt emerges as a tolerant country of versatile story tellers, represented by Ibrahim, and Griffths' –symbolic- Iraq a cradle of civilization, devastated by Western military technology, and finally Palestine as a land claimed by two communities, whereby Hare allows the narrative of the Palestinians he met in the occupied territories to occasionally replace his own and their voice vigorously to be heard. Although addressed to the audience in a post-modern era, their post-colonial structure is simply recognized through their moving treatment of post-colonial issues, partly suggestive partly realistic depictions of human dilemmas and clear deconstruction of Western colonial/imperial enterprises.

There is, moreover, a line of discourse linking the three considered plays, based on unraveling the often misunderstood setting of events. Egypt, -symbolic- Iraq and Palestine are being viewed as full cultural and historic entities which fill the theatrical space with rich cultural features, turning all Western claims of moral and cultural superiority ridiculously hollow. The dramatic framework employed in all three plays is based on a simple equation, along the line that Western individuals –Chris, O'Tool, and the narrator- are intellectually and emotionally attached to the local culture. However, this equation is undermined by overwhelming realities imposed by the 1956 Invasion, the 1990 Gulf War, and the continuous Israeli Occupation of Arab lands. All these themes are powerfully reflected through experimental dramatic texts, based on partly narration and partly dialogue, involving the Arabs and Westerners. Thus, the three writers have convincingly brought fragmented images of the diverse colonial-and-postcolonial era into scrutiny, as demonstrated throughout this paper, in the light of the post-colonial theory.

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[49] Quoted by Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism,* op.cit., p.270.

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