

## The Presentation Of Victimization In Selected 2003 War Plays

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### Abstract

Victimization is used to describe the process to be a victim or a victimizer. Even though these two notions are related to each other, however, they have relations to many fields. Being so, victimization is going to be shown in its relation to the war of 2003 in Iraq. This is going to happen through presenting two plays by two different playwrights. Each play is tackled from a different perspective. That is to say, *How Many Miles To Basra?* Is exploring the crimes that were happening in Iraq and the role of media in reporting these crimes. *Re-Entry* is about the coming back of soldiers from the warzone and the effect of PTSD on their lives as well as their families.

**Keywords:** Victimization, 2003 war, PTSD, WMDs *How Many Miles to Basra?*, *Re-Entry*.

### تمثيل الاضطهاد في مسرحيات مختارة عن الحرب على العراق عام ٢٠٠٣

الخلاصة:

يستخدم الاضطهاد لوصف العملية بأن تكون مجني عليه أو جاني. على الرغم من أن هذين المفهومين مرتبطان ببعضهما البعض ، إلا أن لهما علاقات بالعديد من المجالات. و نتيجة ذلك ، فإن الاضطهاد سوف يظهر في علاقته بحرب ٢٠٠٣ في العراق. سيحدث هذا من خلال تقديم مسرحيتين لكتابين مسرحيين مختلفين. يتم تناول كل مسرحية من منظور مختلف. مسرحية كم ميلا إلى البصرة؟ تتقصى الجرائم التي كانت تحصل في العراق ودور الإعلام في تغطية هذه الجرائم. بينما تدور مسرحية العودة حول عودة الجنود من منطقة الحرب وتأثير اضطراب ما بعد الصدمة على حياتهم وكذلك أسرهم. الكلمات المفتاحية: الاضطهاد , حرب ٢٠٠٣ , اضطراب ما بعد الصدمة, اسلحه الدمار الشامل, مسرحية كم ميلا للبصرة؟ , مسرحية العودة.

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Victimization is related closely to different fields of study, namely psychology, sociology, politics, and criminology. The effects of victimization vary throughout life for both victims and victimizers. The impact of the negative experiences can affect victims more than others. Victims can be divided variously into, for example, victims of natural disasters, victims

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to blame, victims not to blame, victims of identity, and victims of social, religious, regional, and finally color discrimination.<sup>i</sup>

Victimization can be classified into different categories, for example, physical victimization is criminally seen in those who suffer from rape, brutality, theft, and murder. Emotional victimization is another category that is seen in those who are under psychological suffering or injustice. This kind of victimization is seen in those with PTSD, especially after wars or shocking experiences. Through social and cultural recognition, socio-cultural victimization is understood through working-class suffering. Physical victimization can be easily discovered in a medical sense. A person experiencing suffering from a particular illness becomes a victim of that illness. For example, patients with cancer are victims of rapacious cells destroying their bodies.<sup>ii</sup>

Criminal victimization is another subcategory of physical victimization; that is to say, committing illegal acts and imposing them on others causes victims of illegal acts to suffer their consequences. Fear of losing necessities and the means required to obtain them (employment, protection, water, food) leads not only to psychological victimization but to socio-cultural victimization, as well. In this situation, a citizen experiencing social strife may feel helpless to provide security for himself or his family and this leads to psychological issues.<sup>iii</sup>

Any discussion of victimization is incomplete unless it is discussed in the context of war.

In war, the victim, the victimizer, a victim who turns into a victimizer, and vice versa are all found. War affects people, civilians, and military. Each has her/his own story. Suffering and bloody scenes are lived through daily by both. Such suffering varies on different levels, i.e., psychological, physical, and even emotional.

War is a central theme in modern drama that is employed to highlight the suffering of both the victims and victimizers, civilians as well as military. The theme of victimization is presented in relation to the 2003 Iraq war and its consequences. Many authors write about the Iraqi war focusing on these crimes. Colin Teevan's *How many Miles to Basra?* and Emily Ackerman and KJ Sanchez's *Re-Entry*, are good examples to present the theme of victimization. In 2005, *How Many Miles to Basra?* Was broadcasted on Radio 3, in 2006, it was produced for the stage. Since September 2001, the U.S. and many of its military alliances participated in the war or what so-called "war on terror." This war led Teevan to focus on Western liberal thinking, which he considered a paradox. He illustrates the paradoxical relationship between the reality of a conflict as it happened on the ground by individuals who

may be perceived as agents of Western culture (a soldier, spy, aid worker, artist, scientist, journalist, or political tourist) and the ranks above them.<sup>iv</sup>

*How Many Miles to Basra?* is about four British soldiers who have been located near Basra. It is about the killing of Iraqi Bedouins who were on their way to pay a ransom to a tribal leader to free one of the men's wife and child who were kidnapped. Geordie, the youngest member of the squad, opens fire on the group of Bedouins at a checkpoint, killing all of them. The soldiers consequently discover that the Bedouin were not planning to attack them as they had thought. Stewart, the sergeant, decides to repay for the killing by completing the Bedouin's trip, paying the ransom, and freeing the hostages. He lies to his team, telling them that he had clearance from his superiors to carry out this task. However, when his lie is exposed, conflict arises. The play ends with the accidental death of the soldiers in an airstrike.

Teevan tries to show the false pretexts and lies of governments going to war. The British/U.S. governments use these pretexts to cover war crimes portraying their soldiers as victims rather than victimizers. Teevan tries to show the similarity between what Tony Blair did when he agreed to invade Iraq, and Stewart, the squad leader who led his men out into the desert in a foolish attempt to carry out a moral action to compensate for the crime they committed. In the play, when men are lost in the desert, they criticize their government's political systems for lying as nothing was real at the war zone, Iraqis were victims and WMDs were lie. Freddie, one of the squad members, admits the truth about Iraq saying that there is no need for their presence and this country belongs to its people: "Iraq for the Iraqis."<sup>v</sup>

Through this play, Teevan shows the relationship between the Irish and British military operations and the war in Iraq. Teevan presents the role of media in establishing that the need to tell the truth is the thing that decides the questions of what is and what is not reported. Teevan shows that the war in Iraq, the Labor government struggle and the BBC have many shared features. The Labor government and the BBC witnessed innocent individuals being sacrificed for the ambitious people who abuse their power for the sake of their ends through using ethical and civilized speeches to justify unethical and uncivilized actions.<sup>vi</sup>

Sayed is one of the Bedouin victims who were asking for the money while he was dying. He used his Arabic, and Ursula, the Irish journalist, speaks Iraqi Arabic a little bit; Stewart, the leader of the troop, asks her to translate his speech because he was repeating the word "Filoos" (26) He sold everything he has to save them from Sheikh al-Kuffa who kidnaped them. This Sheikh does so because Sayed has killed his cousin. Then, he gave them details about the address

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where they can find the hostages. Before his death, Sayed looked at Stewart and said: “Now you have killed me so the debt is yours.” (29)

One of the colonial strategies is to divide the world into “we” and “them.” “We” refers to the civilized countries and “them” to the so-called “barbaric” ones. These are the pretexts used by colonialism which clearly show their fake sympathy in saving the “primitive” societies. In this play, Iraqis act in a way that help transmit a message that they are primitive and savage people who need to be educated and civilized by America.<sup>vii</sup> Later, Malek, the Iraqi translator, admits that Iraqis are nothing like the image that soldiers repeatedly use by saying that they “reduce a country to rags. Then you call us ragheads.” (64) Edward Said argues, “without a well-organized sense that these people over there were not like ‘us’ and didn’t appreciate ‘our’ values – the very core of traditional Orientalist dogma [...] – there would have been no war”.<sup>viii</sup>

Here Teevan tries to show the difference between “we” and “they.” The standard through which the western world looks at the “barbaric” people is what they follow. Those “barbaric” people are supposed to be sacrificed to achieve greater goals. They are scapegoats. They should be the victims, the inferior. The Iraqis are victims of the political systems which try to show the world that they are in control and nothing can be done without their permission, in addition, the strategic position of Iraq and its wealth which makes Iraq a prey for the politicians.<sup>ix</sup>

In his play, Teevan clarified that the politicians know that they are lying. The Bush and Blair administrations knew that Iraq did not have WMDs and did not represent a threat. Admitting that Iraq does not have WMDs would mean that they cannot declare war and invade Iraq. Iraqis were happy for the end of Saddam’s regime because they had been dreaming of prosperity and freedom. After the war, however, the result was shocking, and the situation became probably worse than it was before.<sup>x</sup> There was a verbal fight between Freddie and Malek. When Freddie said he hates Iraq, Malek becomes angry and asks him to look around and explain what he sees:

MALEK: What do you see against that dawn? On the horizon?

.FREDDIE: Pylons. Electricity pylons

MALEK: No, Mr Freddie, they are broken electricity pylons, broken because they have been bombed. Look, look, at the side of the road, burnt out cars. How many can we see from here? Five? Six? And I’d swear if you look close enough, you’ll find the charred remains of ‘ragheads’ that even the vultures and the rats won’t touch. To remove this whom you made to keep us in our place, you have bombed us, monster Saddam impoverished us, stood by and let our children die of the most preventable illnesses, starved us physically and intellectually, and then bombed us some more. You have

destroyed our country. Take a good look at it because when I look at its blasted remains, I see you. You reduce a country to rags, and then you call us ragheads. (65)

Teevan's play is the recreation of how politically motivated psychological trauma is manifested and grows into crime. This play portrays how a soldier suffers from traumatic events overseas. Judith Herman informs her readers that connections that have been severed between those who have undergone trauma must be restored, particularly victims of political terror and combat veterans. The focal point of this play is a war crimes. Incensed by both witnessing and being unable to prevent the murder, Freddie entered into what many trauma psychiatrists call the state of rage, otherwise known as the berserk state. Freddie knows everything, and he represents the corruption of the political system. He is a victim and a victimizer. He knows Stewart's weakness and knows his past and his sense of guilt:<sup>xi</sup>

FREDDIE: No, Stew, no, that is where you're wrong. You see, you've nothing to be ashamed of, or feel guilty about, we were there to keep the peace and her lot were going around planting bombs and abducting and torturing and murdering us lot. You're a soldier, you did the right thing, you couldn't take any chances.

STEWART: This has no relevance –

FREDDIE: Yes it does, it's completely relevant, because you've gone soft. Like the army. You're a sentimental bastard and you're going to get us all killed.

STEWART: We are not going to be killed. We are going to make the rendezvous and we are going to give this money to the person it was meant for, or a woman and child are going to die.

FREDDIE: And I say you have misled us. (59)

The theme of victimization is central in this play. It is presented through characters who play the main roles without being present to act or appear for a few scenes. The Irish girl, for example, represents Stewart's guilt and his past. Malek's daughter and Ursula's brother are similar in that respect. Those characters are the price paid by the people for a war they did not ask for. Each one of them is a symbol of hope, a future for his own country, but war killed her/him for the sake of "a greater end." (83) On the other hand, Geordie is a victim and a victimizer. He is a victim of his alcoholic father and divorced mother. He is bereft of love, and, more importantly, he witnesses violent bloodshed while still quite young. He is a victimizer and is trained to be merciless.

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On the other hand, KJ Sanchez and Emily Ackerman's *Re-Entry* poses a challenge in that war changes people. *Re-Entry* examines the lives of military personnel, the challenges they encountered while serving in the field, and the consequences of their actions. Each story of a returning veteran digs into another aspect of the whole story of those veterans: the impact on families, the political contexts of these stories, and the impact on veterans themselves, to name a few. However, both playwrights were afraid because this topic is sensitive, and sometimes they cannot state the real names to protect the interviewees.

U.S. soldiers serving in combat zones are more likely to suffer PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) than soldiers in non-combat zones. Psychological or emotional therapy is expected to be given to those serving in war zones. Soldiers who kill someone, who are injured in combat, or witness the death or injury of civilians are significantly at risk of having suicidal ideation, depressive symptomatology, and PTSD.<sup>xii</sup>

In the play, Charlie, John, Jay, Pet, C.O, and Tommy, are victims of psychological and physical injury. They suffer from PTSD which is displayed by the absence of normality. That is to say, the lives of the soldiers who lived before they entered combat are gone. PTSD is thus synonymous with the holes that gape within the minds and often the bodies of soldiers sent overseas. War, as a traumatic force that employs soldiers as witnesses of cultural and ethical violence, subsequently leaves them filled with mental and often physical holes.<sup>xiii</sup>

In *Re-Entry*, Pet is the victim of the invasion of Iraq. He was serving in Iraq when he got badly injured in Fallujah, on April, 7th, 2004. He was injured by an RPG weapon. Pet knows the lie and the pretext of the British administration but he cannot confess: "And what I know[...]is that no one's gonna tell you the truth. They're never gonna tell you the way things really are over there."<sup>xiv</sup> (11-12)

This play presents the conflicts mothers live daily when their sons are sent to war zones.

This struggle is offered through the character of the Mom. She has two sons, John and Charlie, who serve in the Marine Corps. She struggles after their coming back because they are no longer the same. They have psychological issues; they suffer from everything and escape that suffering through drinking. For example, John is a marine corps officer early in his career, hot-headed and charismatic. He is drunk most of the time, trying to forget the bloody scenes of war. He is an escapist who resorts to drinking, sex, and anger as a way of forgetting what he faced during his services.

On the other hand, people do not know the truth; the reality in the war zone is different from what is there in the news or social media. Soldiers are trained to follow orders with no

questions to be asked. To obey orders can be immoral, illegal, and even dangerous. Some soldiers found out that being part of the army is not noble, but dehumanizing for both the “enemy” as well as the soldiers themselves.<sup>xv</sup>

Victimization is presented through the female characters as well. They are supposed to be strong and never show fear. Suzanne, the ex-wife of a Marine who was deployed several times, comes from a military family. She tries to explain her suffering by explaining to the audience that things changed in her life after coming back. She explains her story when her husband Jess first came back; she tries to keep him in touch with everything. However, one night she wakes him up to show him something she looks on her laptop, but he starts strangling her. When he realizes what he is doing, he begins to apologize. They get divorced. One of the reasons is his desire not to have kids, which was after his coming back from his fourth deployment. Charlie tries to clarify that war change people: “coming home, you know, — either similar or different, depending on, you know, certain things.” (31)

According to Elizabeth Weill-Greenberg’s *10 Excellent Reasons Not to Join Military*, the invasion of Iraq is a curse because of the lie of the government. For her, the leaders were lying to their people by saying that their country is a target of terrorism. For her military and their families are victims and they are going to be victimizers if they keep on believing that lie. War is an inhuman crime. She urges the mothers of America to be aware of the government’s lie and not to believe that this or that war is to preserve democracy. She asks these mothers not to send their children to death for the sake of money.<sup>xvi</sup>

*Re-Entry* expands on the effects of war on women and men, incorporating testimony from American marines, including women serving in the armed forces, as well as the perspectives of mothers, wives, and sisters of marines. This play is about men and women who went to war and returned having changed drastically. It is also about the war that mothers and wives suffered to keep their men and children sane. It also shows the effects of PTSD on their families. This play presents an account of the military as victims of war. It shows the military as heroes whose names are in the news and social media. However, the other side of the story is neglected. The real victims are in Iraq. There is a great focus on showing the military as victims – they are victims of war, of the political system, and above all, the greed and false pretexts. Iraq and its people, both military and civilian, are also victims who suffered the consequences of a war they did not ask for.

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To sum up, these two playwrights use language and style to create a kind of sympathy by decorating words and choosing specific terms, to justify the outrageous actions of the soldiers. The problem is focusing on the justifications, not on the crimes themselves. Justifying victimization is one problem, the people with this ability are another bigger one – the ability to turn a victimizer into a victim through words.

### Conclusion

*How Many Miles to Basra* and *Re-Entry* presented victimization through the experiences of soldiers in the war zone. However, Teevan tried to reveal the lies of the government concerning the invasion, how Iraq is a victim of the previous regime, and the invasion as well. KJ Sanchez and Emily Ackerman show that PTSD is the cause of soldiers suffering to justify their crimes. The focus of their play is on the coming back to civilized life after war. However, their presence is not authentic because they present soldiers as one part of the story without shedding lights on Iraqis.

The common thing between these plays is that victimization is presented throughout the civilians' and military's eyes. Besides, death is the result of war, and no one is getting benefits except the greedy leaders—the focus on showing that the military is merciful and all that Iraqis do is bombing them. There are victims from both sides, no one can deny that, but Iraq is the biggest loser in this war. Poverty is everywhere, Everything is destroyed, and the only thing that remains is the blood. The plays show little about the human side of Iraqis and their traumatizing experience after the invasion.

### End Notes:

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<sup>i</sup> Victoria Anne Hahl, *Making Victim: Establishing A Framework For Analyzing Victimization in 20th Century American Theatre*, (unpublished master thesis, University of Central Florida, 2008), 6. <<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd/3805/>> (Accessed 12/12/2020).

<sup>ii</sup> *Ibid*,6-7.



- <sup>iii</sup> P. Davies, P. Francis and C. Greer, *Victims, Crime and Society: An Introduction* (London: SAGA: 2017), 10.
- <sup>4</sup> Patrick Lonergan, “Re-Imagining Ireland, Occupying Iraq: Colin Teevan's *How Many Miles to Basra?*” In Marianna Gula, Mária Kurdi, and István D. Rácz (Eds.), *The Binding Strength of Irish Studies: Festschrift in Honour of Csilla Bertha and Donald E. Morse* (Debrecen: Debrecen University Press, 2011), 5.
- <sup>v</sup> Colin Teevan, *How Many Miles to Basra?* (London: Oberon Books Ltd., 2003), 50. All subsequent quotations are from this edition and will be given parenthetically henceforward.
- <sup>vi</sup> Lonergan, 4.
- <sup>vii</sup> Ariane de Waal, “(Sub)Versions of the Them/Us Dichotomy in Iraq War Drama,” *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English*, 2, Issue 1 (2014): 183.
- <sup>viii</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), xv.
- <sup>ix</sup> Rocky M. Mirz, *How the West Was Won and Lost: Athenian Democracy to the Brics: 5Th Century BCE to 2016*(Canada: Trafford Publishing,2016) <https://books.google.iq/books?id> (Accessed on 19/1/2012).
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- <sup>xi</sup> Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), 57.
- <sup>xii</sup> Resul Cesur, Joseph J. Sabiaand and Erdal Tekin, “The Psychological Costs of War: Military Combat and Mental Health”, *National Bureau of Economic Research*, No. 5615 (April 2011): 5. DOI 10.3386/w16927.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Sarah Saddler, “Bill Cain’s 9 Circles: Dramaturgically Re-Evaluating An American Understanding Of The Military And Individualism” (Master thesis, Miami University, 2013), 36-37. <https://etd.ohiolink.edu/> (Accessed on 1/8/2021)
- <sup>xiv</sup> Emily Ackerman and KJ Sanchez, *Re-Entry* (New York: Playscripts Inc., 2010).All subsequent quotations are from this edition and will be given parenthetically henceforward
- <sup>xv</sup> Weill-Greenberg, *10 Excellent Reasons Not to Join the Military* (New York: The New Press, 2006), 14.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Elizabeth Weill-Greenberg,5.

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