

THE IRAQI WAR ON STAGE: AN EXAMINATION OF AMERICAN DRAMA AS ANTI-WAR MESSAGE

Ismael Hasan Alsanafi

College of Fine Arts, University of Al-Qadisiya.

Diwaniyah, Iraq.

Email: Ismael.hasan@qu.edu.iq

Abstract:

So as to prove the potentiality of drama as a substitutional and the most culturally and socially credible device for moral dissent which is broadly recognised by many researchers who claim that drama can serve as a lawful device for social and political reform. Drama and theatre can be stand in contrast to media dominion to present itself as a significant art, to address public sensitive problems which are unobtainable to the outside world. This paper assumes that drama and theatre can act a remarkable function in developing awareness against the war in Iraq by examining theatre critics' reviews to Tim Robbins' anti-war play '*Embedded*'. The selected play for this study examined the function of the journalists in the fighting field, and compared it with the news and viewpoints of other reporters which are shown in the general public media to examine the discrepancy between the two resources. With the play '*Embedded*', Tim Robbins; the playwright declares his certainty in the capability of theatre and drama to be a device for political and social reform: "Theatre is an extremely responsive medium. You can engage with the news and the stories that we're being fed that are affecting our perceptions of the world right now. I think we are living in iconographic times" ("Werner, 2003, p. 4"). This paper concludes that, with the

usage of staged performance, play can supply a general viewpoint which is less restricted with the pressure of interpersonal groups or faithfulness to economic in general.

Keywords: (Theatre; embedded; critics; Iraq; anti-war).

الحرب العراقية على مسرحها: فحص الدراما الأمريكية

كرسالة مناهضة للحرب

اسماعيل حسن الصنفي

كلية الفنون الجميلة جامعة القادسية. الديوانية ، العراق -

بريد إلكتروني: Ismael.hasan@qu.edu.iq

الملخص:

وذلك لإثبات إمكانات الدراما كجهاز بديل والأكثر مصداقية ثقافياً واجتماعياً للمعارضة الأخلاقية التي يعترف بها على نطاق واسع العديد من الباحثين الذين يدعون أن الدراما يمكن أن تكون بمثابة أداة قانونية للإصلاح الاجتماعي والسياسي. يمكن أن تقف الدراما والمسرح على النقيض من هيمنة وسائل الإعلام لتقديم نفسها على أنها فن مهم ، لمعالجة المشاكل العامة الحساسة التي لا يمكن للعالم الخارجي الوصول إليها. تقترض هذه الورقة أن الدراما والمسرح يمكن أن يؤديا وظيفة رائعة في تنمية الوعي ضد الحرب في العراق من خلال فحص مراجعات نقاد المسرح لمسرحية تيم روبينز المناهضة للحرب "المدمجة". درست المسرحية المختارة لهذه الدراسة وظيفة الصحفيين في ميدان القتال ، وقارنتها بأخبار ووجهات نظر المراسلين الآخرين التي تظهر في وسائل الإعلام العامة لفحص التناقض بين هذين المصدرين. مع مسرحية "Embedded" ، تيم روبينز ؛ يعلن الكاتب المسرحي عن يقينه من قدرة المسرح والدراما على أن يكونا أداة للإصلاح السياسي والاجتماعي: "المسرح هو وسيط شديد التجاوب. يمكنك الانخراط في الأخبار والقصص التي نتلقاها والتي تؤثر على تصوراتنا للعالم في الوقت الحالي. أعتقد أننا نعيش في زمن أيقوني Werner" (" ، 2003 ، p. 4). "تخلص هذه الورقة إلى أنه باستخدام الأداء المسرحي ، يمكن أن يوفر اللعب وجهة نظر عامة أقل تقييداً بضغط المجموعات الشخصية أو الإخلاص للاقتصاد بشكل عام.

كلمات مفتاحية: (مسرح؛ المضمنة؛ نقاد العراق؛ ضد الحرب).

Introduction:

April 9, 2022, this is to indicate the 19-year of Americans' occupation to Iraq in order to replace and overturn Saddam's authority. The costs of this operations were priceless, 80,000 to over one million of Iraqis have been dead martyrs, while various estimates that more than four thousand soldiers from the coalition forces have been killed in action (Goodman, 2008). Furthermore, about million and a half Iraqi people have immigrated and exiled since the occupation in 2003 (Barstow, 2008). On the report of the "Pew Research Center", seven years later launching the invasion, 54% of American citizens believe that the U.S. troops have committed the wrong decision to occupy Iraq.

In spite of the overwhelming general exhaustion regarding the American invasion to Iraq, the majority followers of American government fail to recognize the larger part of community's opinions. 81 percent of the American citizens believe that the leaders of any government need to take public opinion into consideration when making significant decisions (Bacevich, 2006). Dissent could be categorized and defined in various styles, and may represent various ways, such as civil disobedience, riots, campaign of defiance, boycotts, and strikes (Crummey, 1986). Jasper (1997) stated that the typical dissents nowadays "include large public rallies and marches, occupations of symbolic or strategic sites, provocative verbal and visual rhetoric, and more mainstream lobbying and electioneering" (p. 5-6).

This paper deviates from the "aforementioned standard" ("Jasper, p. 5") ways of objection and dissent, this study examined the function of literature that could help in all forms of protest. The study examined how could "*Embedded*", the huge disseminated war dissent film/drama which was documented by

an activist and anti-war writer and “Tim Robbins” in 2003. This literary piece was interpreted by professional theater reviewers; (theatres’ critics) and was well received by audiences inside and outside the United States (Choudhury, 2007). The current paper is located within the framework of ethical and moral dissent, and literary genre as a device for artistic protest. The potentiality of theater and drama as a substantial, the most political and socially relevant device for ethical objection is broadly recognized by many critics whom claimed that the drama acts as a lawful and real device for public and social reform (“Reston, 1985; Pottenger, 2001; Colleran, 2003”). In other words, this paper seeks to explore if a specific literary piece of drama can be a legitimate for opposition of certain political decision.

This paper intends to have the following objective as the scope of this study: To investigate the ability of anti-war drama; ‘*Embedded*’ to be comprehended and understood equally by personal and public levels to achieve the aim of this paper.

This paper comprises six sections, including the current section. Section one provided an overview of the paper including a general introduction of the study, the statement of problem, objectives of the study, as well as the required significance. Section two is devoted to research questions that need to be discovered later. The third section is to recheck the relevant studies which are highly related to anti-war Iraqi theatre for the last eighteen years only to designate the gap for the paper. The fourth section is selected to the explanation of the method adopted which is suitable for this paper and the data that intended to be tested for this study. The fifth section is dedicated for the discussions of the selected play. The final section is devoted to the last part of the study; the conclusion.

Research Question:

How could the playwright act as a connection between reality and the ideal while trying to recreate a dislocated community with the help of drama.

Literature Review:

From the early start of American occupation to Iraq in 2003, a number of literary works have been accomplished to depict this war on screen and stage. Undoubtedly, this number is increasing now, and it seems that this trend will be continued. The process of creating alternative literary types of communication are required to establish the required criticism of the conflict (Colleran, 2003). The comprehensive readings of all anti-war literary works provide a universal mission of opposition by adopting the genre of drama in general (“Elam, 2003”). Robbins; the playwright portrayed a sympathy for both soldiers and journalists at the same time, he has a strong disdain towards the authorities which were the main reasons for invasion of Iraq (Werner, 2003). This play depicts also the duty of the embedded people; (the journalists) in the Iraqi war and check the contradiction between the journalist’s views and the public information and news which is shown in reality.

Before and even through the American war against Iraq, theatre responded to the Bush government’s war against terror, many playwrights started to produce revolutionary plays equal to the war in 1960s (Carlson, 2004). A various collection of literary works; (plays) have been developing as a kind of response to the war, diverse in style and topic. Table 1 for the related plays with chronological order.

Table 1 of anti-Iraqi war plays

No.	Author/year	Name of play
1	Heather Raffo (2004)	<i>'Nine Parts of Desire'</i>
2	David Hare (2004)	<i>'Stuff Happens'</i>
3	Jeff key (2006)	<i>'Eyes of Babylon'</i>
4	Christopher Shinn (2006)	<i>'Dying City'</i>
5	George Burke (2006)	<i>'Black Watch'</i>
6	Rajiv Joseph (2007)	<i>'Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo'</i>
7	Jonathan Holmes (2007)	<i>'Fallujah'</i>

This section is very important for each research paper because its main purpose is to collect related studies, recognize weaknesses or gaps of other authors' works

(Alsanafi, & Mohd Noor, 2019). All the reviewed plays' main concerns were anti- Iraqi war. The researcher starts the query with the help of the three research engines (IEEE Explore; ScienceDirect and Web of Science), the researcher didn't find any work related to the play or the film so that he collected many plays which shared the same tendency towards the American war.

Bishop (2006) argued that *'Embedded'* the play as well as the film brought the Iraqi war live into Americans' living rooms. Tim Robbins stayed to act as an important role as anti-war and

liberal political activist, he has already commented and criticized the war against Iraq as well as government policy in general in many occasions followed September “11. Robbins”; the playwright has been a criticizer of former president “George W. Bush” and he was a target of condemnation by many American people in general and the conservative camps in specific. He has been accused of being unpatriotic and supporter to Saddam’s regime (Werner, 2003).

The play “*Embedded*” is organized just like a mosaic structure, interviewing families, articles of troops, publicity of certain heroes, lap-dog reporter, politicians, and an independent journalist (Hurwitt, 2006). ‘*Embedded*’ contains also short blackouts which loaded with video scenes of real war actions which are punctuated by booming protest songs and strobe lights. These videos consist of American soldiers with their families left behind, with a tearful letters and heartfelt goodbyes. These scenes involve also innocent people who are described in a realistic way, highlighting the human toll of the war (Isherwood, 2007). Both American women and men recruited by the authority to march the battle for many reasons, whether it is a means to pay for college or National Guard duty. One scene shows the American private; (soldier) unintentionally killed a whole family in who were alleged of being criminals or suiciders. Lastly, ‘*Embedded*’ also offered the audiences with fresh music of the embedded reporters who were the main supporter of the play information among the public, soldiers, and the Office of Special Plans (Jensen, 2008). ‘*Embedded*’ offered audiences with two veteran journalists who are Stringer and Gwen, who attempted to be independence in their attached reporting, to offer skeptical voice and darker dispatches from the front. Those two characters struggled to report the blood

and death, misinformation and mistakes that their colleagues normally committed (Kennedy, 2004). Finally, despite of *'Embedded's* satirical plot which recognized this literary act from the other anti-war drama is, its convenience. The live presentation of this drama is disseminated in DVDs in order to create an interesting combination of film and theatre.

'Embedded' is a mixture of satirical descriptions of military and governmental operations and some natural scenes which were taken directly from soldiers or journalists who witnessed this war. The main focus of this literary work concentrated on the president himself and his political administration who are linked to the Bush White House by such nicknames as 'Dick' (Brantley, 2004). The term *'embedded'* was highly used during and after the war here in Iraq to indicate some journalists who were permitted to escort American soldiers as they marched toward the capital; Baghdad (Brantley, 2007). Robbins described journalists who participates in the Iraqi war as Pentagon puppets. He also addressed soldiers as killers and thieves of innocent children and women, and the Bush's administration as war mongers (Carlson, 2004). In the play; *'Embedded,'* Hard channel addressed the reporters "his bitches" and said that if he didn't like what they have delivered, he needed to write it himself and simply adopt their own names. Robbins; the playwright, also censored all news coming from Iraq. He has already interviewed the troops, Fox News journalists, as well as other journalists. Troops and Reporters were only informed that they mustn't reveal war operation details that could be threaten the security of the United States' soldiers (Carr. 2007).

Methodology:

This paper has directed a suitable text analysis of the written discourse regarding the feedbacks of the selected theatre's critics

and their criticism of the war against Iraq and the way they explained the dominant strategies in reviewing the play. Relatively, the researcher sought to examine how do the theatre's reviewers reacted towards the play and how can this literary piece regard as an anti-war message. Nevertheless, the "New York Times" journalist; Robin (2004) stated that despite the play 'Embedded' has gotten only three presentation so far, on stage, but specialized critics "took their shots" (p. 22). How the critics understand an anti-combat literary work such as "Embedded" may specify predominant behaviors regarding the American context. Iraqi war and political policy, and how those behaviors promoted in connection to commitments to political institutions and prevailing culture. More interestingly, critics' feedbacks of the selected play, may provide a vision of how predominant principles could be reinforced or challenged.

The feedbacks of Theatre's critics or the reviews of any audience have been classified under three diverse replies to literary text. First, dominant reply; (the reading as being proposed), second, oppositional reply; (insertion the play into another frame of reference), and finally, negotiated reply (decoding all the hegemonic situation), all these aforementioned classifications to illustrate the categories for explaining audiences' diverse understanding of the same literary text ("Hall, 1980; Morley, 1980"). Hall Alice (2001) stated that, critics' feedbacks function to both support the viewers to determine whether to watch a play or not based on their recommendations, and to offer contextual facts that could determine how audiences respond and interpret to the play they observed. Hall asserted that spectators normally don't watch a film or a play without being exposure to reviews, news account, advertisements. Douglas Gomery and

Robert Allen (1985) stated that a play or a film reviews assist two primary purposes, first; sustaining an agenda-setting task. Second, updating audiences in particular of what to deal and think about establishing normative restrictions of a film and a play at a precise time in history. The way the researcher collected the date for this study, which focused on critics' feedbacks of '*Embedded*'. The researcher examined all previous studies of the play "*Embedded*" within a month only before the first debut of the drama, 23rd of October, 2003, to a month post the play performing, 24th November, 2003. The outputs of this process were 13 feedbacks of "*Embedded*" during this designated period. feedbacks were presented in 11 diverse magazines and newspapers covered seven States inside America.

Media feedbacks presented in the main local daily newspapers such as the "*Wall Street Journal*", "*The Los Angeles Times*", and the "*New York Times*", as well as large daily circulation and state newspapers, such as "*Chicago Daily Herald*", "*Phoenix New Times*", "*The Boston Globe*", and the "*Philadelphia Inquirer*". This paper aimed to offer a new insight and perception into how could theatre critics negotiate anti-war drama into their cultural, spiritual, and political prejudices which are normally in contrast with the anti-combat literary works. By examining how anti-war play acts and functions by the critics as well as in the normal individual, this study aims to enlarge the description of objection and fully understanding the social limitations of anti-war drama set by the people in general. This paper suggested that there is minority of American community continued supporting the Iraq war and the President Bush at that time. However, the majority of the American public didn't have any intention to support or maintain the American war

(Choudhury, 2007). As such, this paper suggested to examine how individuals' political allegiances, religious commitments, and collective subjectivities assist in understanding 'Embedded' as an anti-war message. Applying the theoretical framework of this study regarding how theatre critics interpret and react to 'Embedded' anti-war message. Moreover, this paper offered a vision into how various responses are received, banned, or negotiated by a mass with a powerful commitment to authority and pro-war sentiment.

Finding and Discussion:

This section is dedicated to analyse all the data that we have already collected in the previous part of this paper. The method of valuating and revaluating the critics' feedbacks suggested the significance of the spectators/reader in the procedure of construction the understanding inside the framework by decoding and encoding a text (Diawara, 1990). The researcher has done text analysis of all received feedbacks, observing both negative and positive "critical" reviews to the play; "Embedded". Feedbacks of the text were predominantly negative (9), with just 31% react to the text positively (4). As explained earlier, drama or theatre during the time of war may help as an effective tool to represent a controversy (Reston, 1991). The play can provide an alternative method for distributing information (Colleran, 2003), as well as pursue to humanize history and object all forms of war (Pottenger, 2001). All these claims have presented and constructed the foundation and the purpose of this study. So as to examine play's effectiveness as a dissent tool, this paper offered scenes of actual actions from the Iraqi war and presented an essay with open-ended to check critics' comprehension of the literary work; a play.

The results of this study were expected and within the scope of the feasibility study. According to Ravi (2005), even the protest and activist people who are usually against any act of war sometimes mute their voices when the fight begins in order to avoid allegations of “giving comfort to the enemy” (p.59). Ravi” added: “When a nation’s troops are on the ground in a war, support for the troops becomes the accepted value that is accepted without question” (p. 59). Therefore, the results of this study were expected. Consequently, within the contemporary social atmosphere of restlessness regarding the battle in Iraq, “*Embedded*” can be considered as the most valid source of protest activity or information (Renner, 2005). The result suggested that the dissent message of this play was discounted earlier by political and cultural media so as the majority of citizens in America supported the war as a suitable strategy of international defense, or as a way to backup the American soldiers. The study has adopted open-ended self-report reports so as to inspect how audiences interpret the literary play within their own political and cultural subjectivities. The researcher analyzed and summarized all the feedbacks of the audiences; (critics) which reflected their cultural identities and religious allegiances adopted to analyze “*Embedded*”. All of those were then classified and regulated into based on their reactions. In other words, each individual already used prevailing ideological allegiances to comprehend of what he experienced.

Correspondingly, Ryan (2004) stated that educational contribution, values, religious affiliations, past experiences, and personal prejudices can help to create attitudes in producing social authenticity. Ryan argued also that people continually involve in developing attitudes to comprehend the outside universe, and in

the crux how to understand their society. This study argued that Robbins' literary work is away from the conventional and traditional classification within the cinema and theatre genres. Therefore, the mission was somehow hard for the critic to analyze, as Gorman and Allen (1985) have suggested, that the play utilized multimedia in the act of production at the same time captured act on DVD. Hall (1980) argued that audiences can understand and decode any literary work with one of these statuses or positions: (1) the oppositional status, (2) preferred status, (3) the negotiated status. This method of rechecking the readings process by the audiences suggested the significance of the audiences in the procedure of gaining the meaning of the text by coding and decoding the play. Hall (1980), states that most spectators adopted negotiated readings, that prefer a predominant reading, and also privilege audiences the chance to use other aspects to negotiate the idea. Consequently, the explanation and understanding of a literary text does not depend only on certain elements such as class, gender, race, etc.: "Rather, it is identification with a cultural subgroup that is important because social positions structure and restrict access to various codes and discourses" ("Lind, 1996, p. 54").

Furthermore, theatre critics of '*Embedded*' constructed their reports regarding the drama's incidents as a confrontational and threatening towards battle supporters, particularly, indicating to this literary work as Tim "Robbins' message" to the Iraqi war. Afterward, depicting '*Embedded*' with terms often to indicate an illogical retaliation or attack towards civilized community demonized this anti-war play to consider it as assaulting intellectual discourse. For instance, the "*Hartford Courant's* Malcolm" "Johnson (2004)" addressed to "*Embedded*" as a

“Brechtian attack”, while “*Variety*”’s” Joel Hirschhorn (2003)” referred the drama as “an angry echo”. In the other side of the tunnel, “Werner (2003)” of the “*San Francisco Chronicle*” asserted that “*Embedded*” is a “very smart, very screwball and ultimately chilling comedy, dramatizing the interactions of journalists and U.S. troops during the invasion of Gomorrah, an oil-rich rogue state ruled by the Butcher of Babylon” (p. 2-3). Finally, theatre critics have framed and constructed “*Embedded*” as an anti-combat letter with some policies that operated to restrict audience extra explanations of the wider ideas in the text. Moreover, “Stout, et al. (1999)”, stated that most American citizens won’t have desire to watch the work unless, “they will rely on the interpretations of critics in the mass media for a summary as well as an opinion about the play’s content and theme” (p.136).

Gitlin (1980), stated that critics’ reporters normally demonized, simplified, and narrowed the play main essence as well as the group’s efforts. Gitlin declared that the media coverage centered merely on the accident not the issue, the fight and neglected the harmony, and the plot rather than the meaning. Furthermore, theatre critics concentrated solely on (the protagonists); spokespersons, whose actions and appearances were reliable with what the leader of protest may appear and how he must behave (Alsanafi, & Mohd Noor, 2018a). Furthermore, Gitlin stated that critics’ feedbacks concentrated on the awareness that dissent leadership is disruptive, costumed, and parading. The play’s satirical structure helps to make this literary piece as an explicit work of dissent. Through amusement, irony, and critical scorn, the selected play powerfully challenges the war in Iraq. Nineteen years post the first launch of the United States led

occupation of my country Iraq, general as well as international opinions have changed gradually negative. Regarding the public opinion and viewpoints, study has been conducted in September 2018 by the “Pew Research Center”, 54% of these polled showed that the order to occupy Iraq was inappropriate. The percentage is escalating from one year to another, American people started to recognize as well as understand the pointless existence of their troops in Iraq (Pew Research Center).

Conclusion:

“Theatre is a weapon, and it is the people who should wield it”.

“Augusto Boal”(1993, p.25), “*Theatre of the Oppressed*”

The current paper provided the most complicated viewpoint of how culture and media influenced outcome information, and comprehension of anti-Iraqi-battle dissent. Moreover, this paper is different from traditional investigation of protest and media that includes questioning media coverage, marches, and social movements, this research paper contains broader conceptualizations of media and protest. This is the essence of this study in which it contributes a suggestion of how anti-combat dissent is understood and comprehended during a wide social context. The current paper offers a viewpoint into how press and media rely on cultural norms and values to impact people views and how a particular model of reports can help and give feedback to interpret of anti-war play. the research highlights a link between art and news, that tells how could media interrelate with the community tradition and culture, particularly when constructing anti-combat literary work. The widespread of this literary work as well as the influence which made regarding media or people are considered a huge prove of the role of theatre as didactic and

curative tool in each community, and this is one of the characteristics of each theatrical work Alsanafi, & Mohd Noor, 2018b). Elam (2003) stated that the mass readings of old anti-combat plays offered a universal letter of protest by adopting the genre of theatre. “Dardis (2006)” stated that through global and political discussion regarding the decision to invade Iraq, Tim Robbin’s anti-war paly “took to the streets to voice their opposition,” an act dissenter sustained to participate longer after the battle “officially” ended (p. 117).

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