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The Image of Iraqi Refugee in Selected Contemporary Australian Plays

Jebur, Wafaa Naeem

إشراف: Assistant Professor Thamir R. S. Az-Zubaidy (PhD)

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IMAGE OF IRAQI REFUGEE

Republic of Iraq

Ministry of Higher Education and

Scientific Research

Wasit University

College of Education for Human Sciences

Department of English



The Image of Iraqi Refugee in Selected Contemporary Australian Plays

A Thesis

Submitted to the Council of the College of Education for Human Sciences/ Wasit University in

Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Education in English

Literature

By

Wafaa Naeem Jebur

Supervised by

Assistant Professor Thamir R. S. Az-Zubaidy (PhD)

2026 A.D.

1447 A.H

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Supervisor's Certificate

I hereby certify that the thesis entitled (*The Image of Iraqi Refugee in Selected Contemporary Australian Plays*) has been prepared under my supervision at the College of Education for Human Sciences/ Wasit University as a partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in English Literature.

Signature

Supervisor: Assistant Professor Thamir R. S. Az-Zubaidy (PhD)

5/4/2026

In view of the available recommendations, I forward this thesis for debate by the Examining Committee.

Signature:

Name: Prof. Hashim Aliwy Mohammed Al-Husseini (PhD)

Head of the Department of English

Date: 5.4.2026

Prof. Dr.

Hashim A.M. Alhusseini
Head of English Department

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Committee Certificate

We certify that we have read the thesis entitled (**The Image of Iraqi Refugee in Selected Contemporary Australian Plays**) and, as an examining committee, we examined the student (**Wafaa Naeem Jebur**) in its contents and, that in our opinion, it is adequate as a thesis for the degree of Master of Education in English Literature

Signature:

Name: Prof. Shireen Shihab Hamad (PhD)
(Chairman)

Date: 8/7/2026

Signature:

Name: Prof. Dhifaf Ibraheem Ali (PhD)
(Member)

Date: 8-7-2026

Signature:

Name: Prof. Ikhlas Mohammed Nati (PhD)
(Member)

Date: 8/7/2026

Signature:

Name: Asst. Prof. Thamir Rashid
Shayyal Az- Zubaidy (PhD)

(Member and Supervisor)

Date: 8/7/2026

Approved by the council of the College of Education for Human Sciences, Wasit University.

Signature:

Name: Prof. Mahmoud Hamoud Arraq Al-Quraishi (PhD)

Dean of the College of Education for Human Sciences

Date: 22/3/2026

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

لِلْفُقَرَاءِ الْمُهَاجِرِينَ الَّذِينَ أُخْرِجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ وَأَمْوَالِهِمْ يَبْتَغُونَ فَضْلًا مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانًا وَيَنْصُرُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ
الصَّدِيقُونَ (٨) وَالَّذِينَ تَبَوَّءُوا الدَّارَ وَالْإِيمَانَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ يُحِبُّونَ مَنْ هَاجَرَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَا يَجِدُونَ فِي صُدُورِهِمْ حَاجَةً مِّمَّا أُوتُوا
وَيُؤْثِرُونَ عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِهِمْ وَلَوْ كَانَ بِهِمْ خَصَاصَةٌ وَمَنْ يُوقِ شُحَّ نَفْسِهِ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ (٩)

صدق الله العلي العظيم

سورة الحشر: ٨-٩

Dedication

In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful.

To my parents, my two brothers, my husband, my friends who held the lamp when the path vanished: Thank you for believing in me when my own faith had turned to ash.

To my supervisor, for his academic guidance, insights, and patience throughout this journey.

To the Iraqi refugees whose experiences, struggles, and voices these pages attempt to honour.

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Abstract

This study investigates the representation of the Iraqi refugee in selected contemporary Australian plays, exploring how dramatic texts respond to the geopolitical realities of border politics, deterritorialization, and forced migration. Focusing on Hannie Rayson's *Two Brothers*, Ben Eltham's *The Pacific Solution*, and Towfiq Al-Qady's *Nothing But Nothing*, the study employs a postcolonial and performance studies framework to analyze the shifting discursive constructions of refugee identity. The thesis argues that contemporary drama serves as a critical site for contesting the representation of the Iraqi refugee, tracing a developmental trajectory where the refugee subject moves from being 'spoken about' through external white Australian media representations (Rayson), to being 'silenced' and managed by bureaucratic state structures (Eltham), and finally to 'narrating himself' through performance and self-representation (Al-Qady). It contends that while the Australian state operates as an oppressive mechanism of border control, the theatrical space functions as an anti-necrocivilizational zone that restores agency, memory, and performative life to the refugee. This project contributes to refugee theatre studies and Arab/Iraqi academic scholarship by offering one of the few sustained comparative treatments of Australian refugee drama from an Arab perspective. Architecturally, it provides a novel comparative corpus that bridges white-authored political drama with refugee self-narration, establishing a foundational framework for analyzing how the refugee evolves from an object of external political discourse into a self-determining subject of theatrical witnessing. Furthermore, it offers the first comprehensive peer-reviewed reading of Hannie Rayson's *Two Brothers* through the analytical lens of refugee and asylum-seeker theory.

Keywords: Iraqi Asylum seekers, belonging, identity, Islamophobia, Iraqi diasporic drama, narrative agency, Australian drama.

Chapter One: Refugee Theatre and the Iraqi Question: Field, Frameworks, and Methodological Approach

1.1 Introduction

The global landscape is progressively marked by the movement of people, driven by persecution, conflict, and environmental degradation. Among these displaced peoples, asylum seekers occupy a precarious positioning, navigating complex legal and social frameworks in their search for stability and safety. The experiences of these individuals from the conflict zones, particularly from Iraq, are often covered in political rhetoric and media sensationalism, necessitating a deeper, more nuanced understanding of their realities. This research seeks to explore the representation of Iraqi asylum seekers within the specific context of contemporary Australian drama, a medium that offers a platform for examining the complexities of displacement and migration. Australia's approach to asylum seekers, particularly through policies such as Pacific Solution, has been a subject of intense national and international scrutiny. The operation of offshore detention centers and the strict enforcement of the border protection measures have fueled debates surrounding human rights, national security, and Australia's moral obligations to vulnerable populations.

While there is extensive scholarship on the socio-political dimensions of global asylum policies, a critical evaluation of your study's contribution requires positioning it across distinct institutional, analytical, and architectural coordinates. Institutionally, within Iraqi and Arab academic publishing, this thesis stands among very few sustained textual treatments of refugee theatre scholarship. Independent surveys of the field confirm that Arab research institutions contribute relatively little to the global discourse on theatrical representations of forced migration; where comparable efforts exist—such as Syrian scholarship (Skeiker) or studies from

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Iraqi-Kurdish contexts (University of Duhok)—they do not intersect with or critique Australian drama. Analytically, while contemporary Australian political theatre has drawn critical interest, Hannie Rayson's *Two Brothers* (2005) has surprisingly escaped substantial peer-reviewed scholarly attention specifically framed as an asylum-seeker text. This study addresses that oversight by providing the first sustained reading of Rayson's play strictly through the lens of refugee representation, Islamophobia, and border enforcement mechanisms. Architecturally, the uniqueness of this research lies in its design: no prior study brings together Hannie Rayson, Ben Eltham, and Towfiq Al-Qady into a unified, comparative corpus. By configuring these three distinct works into a single analytical framework, this thesis traces a vital developmental and aesthetic trajectory—moving from the externalized, mainstream representation of the displaced subject to autonomous artistic self-representation. Consequently, this multidimensional approach moves beyond general discussions of migration to explore the specific artistic, somatic, and dramatic techniques used to contest the state's reduction of the refugee to a manageable, static image.

This chapter provides an exploration of the multifaceted issue of refugees and asylum seekers, examining both the global context and the specific experiences within Australia since 1951 because of the first legal recognition of the refugee crisis as an international responsibility. It begins by delving into the fundamental nature of human migration, distinguishing between chosen and forced movements. It provides the necessary historical context for the 1951 Refugee Convention, established by the United Nations in the wake of World War II to present a binding legal safety net for individuals whom their own states had failed to protect. The core focus in this part of this chapter will be placed on defining key terms, namely 'refugee' as stated in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its subsequent 1967, and 'asylum seeker' as

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understood in international practice, while also critically assessing the inherent complexities and limitations of these definitions.

The discussion then broadens to analyze the issue from crucial international, political, social, and economic perspectives, illuminating the intricate web of factors that drive displacement and shape global responses. Following this foundational understanding, the chapter pivots to a detailed examination of Australia's evolving posture towards forced migration. It casts light on the specific era when Australia began to receive distinct waves of refugees, Australia's contentious notion of 'legal' and 'illegal' refugees, the country's political responses to these arrivals, and the increasingly stringent policies adopted over decades to deter asylum seekers from considering Australia as a destination in their search for a new home.

Fundamentally, human is a displaced subject. Movement becomes a part of their identity. People moved from one location to another to secure their basic rights, to keep sustain in life or even to get entertainment. Unlike normal travelers, forced migrants, namely, refugees and asylum seekers, have no choice to return (Jeffer, 2012, p.18). Indeed, following World War II, individuals have fled their homes because of war, oppression, dearth or natural disasters. Millions of European have been obliged to escape behind the World War II to avoid being in comparable situation (McBrein, 2017, p.114-5).

In an attempt to codify the issue, the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defines the term for the first time in order to provide some protection for this group (McBrein, 2017, p.114-5). Specifically, according to the Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the term 'refugee' refers to a person who

owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is

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outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

Moreover, the expression ‘asylum seeker’ is the one who has applied or plans to apply for refugee status, but their application remains unprocessed. Governments typically evaluate asylum requests to establish whether a person's situation qualifies them as a refugee (UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency, n.d.).

However, although it is the first legitimate definition of ‘refugee’, still this explanation is vague and limited. The definition is slippery according to Guy Goodwin-Gill, an international refugee lawyer, since it depends on who inquires for that definition and the purpose behind this question (Jeffer, 2012, p.19). The Convention registers the term geographically to those who are actually crossed their homelands borders or habitual residence. It determines the category benefiting from the international protection. What strains this definition to be applied is the the surging rates of global displacement as well as the line between the economic migrants and others is sometimes unclear and muddles (Newman & Selm, 2003, p.6).

To address these limitations, the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees broadened the application of the 1951 Convention by removing its temporal restriction. The definition of ‘refugee’ within the 1951 Convention was limited to individuals who became refugee “as a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951”. However, the 1967 Protocol stipulates that “the term ‘refugee’ shall... mean any person within the definition of Article 1 of the Convention as if the words” ... ‘a result of such events’, in article 1A(2) were omitted. This critical amendment effectively extended the Convention’s protection to refugees displaced by

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conflicts and event arising after 1951, addressing new and ongoing refugee crises globally (African Union, 1969).

1.2 International Refugee Laws and Human Rights Frameworks

Beyond these foundational definitions, providing displaced individuals with asylum is not something new; it has been embedded through history and religious instructions. Internationally, displaced peoples had no protection until the beginning of the 20th century, when a modest effort appeared by the League of Nations after World War I. However, the conventions after World War II supersede these efforts. The formal agreements begin with the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol, and then the treaties relating to human rights (Ghezelbash, 2024).

1.2.1 The 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol

As the primary international legal instrument, the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees stands as a fundamental international agreement that defines refugees, specifies their rights, and outlines international communities' obligations towards them. It was adopted to alleviate the crisis of displaced individuals after World War II. Crucially, the convention states non-refoulement as a core principle under Article 33, which prohibits the forced returning policy to the places from which they flee, particularly if their lives are threatened at the expense of religion, race, nationality, or political opinion (United Nations, 1951). Furthermore, Article 31 states that unlawful existence in a territory is not considered a violation, and contracting states are obliged to facilitate legal procedures without any discrimination, as outlined in Article 3 (United Nations, 1951).

Beyond these socio-economic provisions, the convention protects civil and social rights, such as identity and movement, by obliging contracting countries to provide identity papers and travel documents to refugees under Articles 27 and 28 (United Nations, 1951). However, the

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original 1951 Convention was disposed for specific circumstances during the post-war period and to serve a specific group who fled before the first day of January 1951. This geographic and temporal limitation meant the convention restricted qualification to individuals who were out of their homeland with a justified fear, thus excluding internally displaced persons, victims of natural catastrophes, and economic migrants (European Parliament, 2015). This legal boundary is highly significant for refugee theatre studies, as it creates an administrative threshold where the state can weaponize legal prose to strip the asylum seeker of administrative visibility, reducing them to what Agamben (1998) terms bare life.

1.2.2 Human Rights Treaties: Expanding Protection

Building on the framework of the Refugee Convention, human rights treaties aim to ensure that all persons obtain their rights, including asylum seekers and refugees. Some treaties call for providing protection for refugees by invoking the non-refoulement right, whereas other treaties offer complementary protection by implying that the right to life and freedom from torture inherently prohibits the forced return of refugees. For example, Article 3(1) in the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984) states that "no State Party shall expel, return ('refouler') or extradite a person to another State where there are substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture."

Similarly, the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950) proclaims general human rights, stating that each human has the right to live, and explicitly prohibits inhumane treatment, slavery, torture, or detention without a legal accusation from a court (Council of Europe, 1950). Although these rights are general, they involve refugees without any discrimination. In contemporary drama, the tension between these

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universal international instruments and the host nation's localized exclusionary policies becomes the direct source of aesthetic friction, staging the systemic epistemic violence (Spivak, 1988) and ethical denial that the displaced subject must navigate.

1.3 Drivers of Forced Displacement:
Causes and Context.

1.3 Drivers of Forced Displacement: Causes and Context

1.3.1 Wars and Conflicts as Primary Drivers

Moving from the legal framework to the drivers of displacement, the twentieth century witnessed a lot of displacement caused by civil war and world wars, revolutions, and occupation, compelling civilians to flee their homelands to save their lives. Conversely, displacement sometimes occurs because of governmental policies, such as when ethnic minorities face outright expulsion or internal deportation. Rather than protecting individuals, certain international diplomatic agreements actually fueled global displacement by codifying the reciprocal transfer of civilians, essentially moving people like chess pieces to fit new national borders. This process occurred due to two causes: the first as a preventative step, such as the compulsory population exchange between Turkey and Greece in 1923, whereas the second carried a penal intent, seen in the dismissal of ethnic Germans in 1945 from both Poland and Czechoslovakia (Cox et al., 2020).

Indeed, both conflict and violence are direct movers and motivators for displacement. Some people choose to flee since their physical security, lives, homes, and means of subsistence are directly threatened, and their economic, social, and political opportunities are indirectly undermined. Reports from the International Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) have documented this reality, highlighting the direct link between escalating violence and the decision to flee. To illustrate, further violence, such as

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systematic bombings or targeted attacks on a specific group, leads to further displacement. This displacement is often acute during internationalized conflicts, which Bradley (2017) argues impact the issue primarily through the direct presence of foreign troops.

Ultimately, wars are considered the major causes of the refugee crisis during the 20th century, with World War II being the most horrible incident causing the greatest displacement. The Displaced Persons Act, enacted in 1948 by the United States Congress, assisted to open camps to refuge thousands of homeless individuals in Europe. However, instead of solving the crisis, its bureaucratic hurdles effectively trapped many refugees in camps for longer periods, changing a temporary emergency into a protected, systemic struggle for legal recognition (Carlin, 1982). Consequently, the refugee camp progressed from a site of temporary refuge into a permanent space of exception. After World War II, eleven million non-Germans were estimated as displaced individuals. The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration attempted to deport almost 8 million to their origin lands while providing camps to resettle others. Then the International Refugee Organization was created, but its efforts were inhibited by the Cold War. The transfer of Jewish refugees to Palestine in 1948 resulted in a new crisis, leaving behind more than half a million Palestinian as displaced people, leading to the creation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to help them (Carlin, 1982).

1.3.2 Persecution: A Violation of Fundamental Rights

Another significant cause for forced displacement is persecution. According to Article 2 of the 2019 draft of the International Law Commission, persecution is defined as “the intentional and severe deprivation of fundamental rights contrary to international law by reason of the identity of the group or collectivity,” which categorizes it as a crime against humanity (United

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Nations, 2019). The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (2021) similarly specifies persecution as a “severe deprivation of fundamental rights contrary to international law.”

Crucially, this legal framework recognizes that persecution is rarely an isolated incident; rather, it is a deliberate, state-sanctioned, or state-tolerated campaign to marginalize a group based on their core identity. When a state becomes the primary aggressor, the individual is forced into a state of exception where displacement is a final, desperate act of survival that legally and physically renders their existence bare life.

These fundamental violations of human rights comprise the deprivation of the right to life, slavery, genocide, and torture—which includes cruelty, dehumanization, detention, and sexual violence (Refugee, Asylum, and International Operations Directorate [RAIO], 2025). The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) notes that any violation of foundational rights announced by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—such as liberty, security, and freedom from arbitrary arrest or humiliating treatment—constitutes persecution (Li, 2020). Furthermore, the concept of persecution is defined by the Supreme Court as the “infliction of suffering or harm upon those who differ [...] in a way regarded as offensive” as well as “oppression which is inflicted on groups or individuals because of a difference that the persecutor will not tolerate,” which entails economic threats and violence that does not pose an immediate threat to life (*Kovac v. Immigration and Naturalization Service*, 1969; RAIO, 2025).

1.3.2.1 Political Persecution

Examining the connection between governance and migration, Rowland (1999) identifies a significant correlation between governance effectiveness and migration rates. According to Raleigh (2011), “political instability is the most persistent correlate to forced migration” (p. 86).

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This instability shatters the certainty of belonging, transforming the sanctuary of home into a space of fear and imposing on families to select the uncertainty of exile over the danger of staying. Government policies, such as forced removals, domestic deportations, or the organized repression of demonstrations through government-endorsed violence, directly establish situations of human rights abuses, driving people to abandon their residences in search of safety elsewhere (United Nations Human Rights, 2015).

1.3.2.2 Religious Persecution

Religious persecution stands as a profound driver of forced displacement, manifesting as systematic discrimination, violence, and the severe deprivation of fundamental rights based on belief. The intertwining of religious factors with ethno-racial, cultural, and political dimensions makes it difficult for affected populations to find respite within their own countries (RAIO, 2025). Crucially, the Iraqi refugee experience in Australia is defined by its ethno-religious diversity; Australia hosts one of the world's largest Iraqi Christian and Mandaean diasporas, comprising Chaldean, Assyrian, and Mandaean communities who fled Iraq and subsequently established cultural enclaves in areas such as Fairfield in Western Sydney (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2016; Jupp, 2002). According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021), Fairfield remains the essential settlement hub, where more than 75% of Australia's Assyrian and Chaldean population reside, generating a home away from home through compressed community networks and religious institutions.

Throughout recent history, religious and political persecution has led to widespread forced displacement in Iraq. From 1969 to 1975, the Iraqi Shiite population experienced enforced relocation due to the Baathist government. Initially, approximately 60,000 Shiites were uprooted from Kadhimiya, Najaf, Samarra, and Karbala, identified as Iranian even though they were

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citizens. A subsequent wave from 1971 to 1975 resulted in more than 100,000 Iraqi Shiites being compelled to escape. Later, this campaign expelled one million Shiites prior to the Iran-Iraq war, seizing their assets based on accusations of allegiance to Iran. Similarly, outside the region, historical atrocities such as the 1992–1995 Bosnian War led to widespread forced relocation of nearly two million individuals (Al Souhail, n.d.).

1.3.3 Economic Factors in Forced Migration

Beyond conflict and persecution, economic disparities also serve as significant drivers of displacement. Although poverty is a major motivator for displacement, it can also be a significant barrier to migration. Raleigh (2011) states that the “ability to migrate is based on the opportunities to do so; those with fewer assets and lower incomes are often unable to migrate” (p. 89). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the number of migrants and displaced people reached 175 million during the last four decades of the 20th century due to disparities in economic incomes (Jeffers, 2012). A large number of people have fled poverty searching for a “full belly” (Kibreab, 1997). As noted by the Swedish Ministry of Labour (1990), a great many population movements are prompted by economic necessity, hopeless poverty, and environmental destruction, creating migration pressures that continue to challenge affluent host nations.

1.3.4 Ecological or Environmental Causes of Displacement

Lastly, ecological or environmental factors increasingly contribute to voluntary migration. The UNHCR invented the ‘environmental refugee’ term in order to depoliticize the refugee crisis and evade their obligation to furnish displaced people with asylum (Kibreab, 1997, p.22). Occasionally, environmental deterioration results, as consequences of political struggle and insecurity, compelled people in the Horn Africa to concentrate in secure spaces. These

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congregations deteriorate the level of obtainable local resources. Regardless of the lack of low rainfall and disparity of soil fertility, they adapted multiple strategies to coexist with. Some scorched-earth strategies, are politically used besides conflicts and insecurity, oblige people to seek asylum behind the borders (Kibreab, 1997, p.22-3).

1.4 Australia's Asylum Landscape: A Historical Policy Overview

The ink was barely dry on the 1951 Refugee Convention when Australia, like many nations, embarked on a path to address global displacement. It was a commitment forged in an era of profound upheaval, yet few could have foreseen the trials this would bring to the nation's distant borders. It started as a compromise between international duty and national sovereignty arrivals. This unfolding narrative charts Australia's evolving response to successive influxes of asylum seekers, exposing how each wave, each boat, became a crucible for increasingly stringent and, at times, fiercely contested policies that would reshape the very fabric of its immigration landscape.

1.4.1 The First Waves of Arrivals: From Compassion to Control

The humanitarian principles underpinning the 1951 Refugee Convention soon faced their first significant test in Australia with the arrival of distinct waves of asylum seekers. Unlike the organized post-war migration programs, these spontaneous arrivals, particularly by boat, presented unforeseen challenges to Australia's relatively settled immigration landscape. These ensuing policy shifts, initially guided by a degree of compassion, began a trajectory towards tighter controls and a re-evaluation of border management.

1.4.1.1 The first wave: the Vietnamese (1976-1981): Dismantling the White Australia Policy

After ten years of Vietnam war, the capital Saigon fell which led to vast movement of refugees. This warfare caused millions of deaths and homeless individuals as well as forcing

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others to flee their nations. Using small congested boats, the Vietnamese seek refuge in the neighboring nations. The Asian Countries refused to provide asylum for the Vietnamese, the United States, Canada, Europe, and Australia resettled them (Schloenhardt, 2000, p.34). In April 1976, the Darwin harbor received 5 people who had sailed for 16 days from southern Vietnam to seek asylum in Australia. They were quickly tracked by two extra boats carrying 106 asylum seekers (Hazou, 2008, p.18). Later in 1978, the Sino-Vietnamese war opened new door for new waves of refugees by the sea. The majority was Chinese people from the southern Vietnam because of political and ethnic reasons the Vietnam government took minimal actions to stop exodus (Schloenhardt, 2000, p.34). Overall, 2077 Vietnamese individuals reached Australia using 54 boats from April 1976 till 1981 (Hazou, 2008, p.18).

In 1979, Geneva, the United Nations convened a meeting compelling Australia and the other member countries to provide asylum for the South Asian refugees. Conversely, the number of refugees exceeded the number Geneva has agreed for resettlement. Subsequently the famine in Vietnam had contributed to increase the number of unlawful migrants, which faced refusion embodied in push-back policy and entry restrictions (Schloenhardt, 2000, p.34-5). In order to control the illegal immigration from Vietnam, both the Australian and the Vietnamese governments agreed, in 1982, on the Orderly Departure Program. As a result, no asylum seeker arrived at Australia till 1987 (Hazou, 2008, p.18).

Moreover, in 1989 another conference was held to compel Vietnam applying stricter conditions for departing its borders. While the conference addressed the border Indo-Chinese refugee crisis, which included displaced people from Laos and Cambodia, its primary mechanism was the mandatory screening of Vietnamese arrivals. This repatriation process was carried out in accordance with the definition stated by the 1951 Convention. The involuntary

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repatriate included those who were not considered refugees by definition while those who qualified as refugees were resettled in the host countries. The Indo-Chinese considered as 'economic migrants' so they were rejected without any factual assessment of their applications (Schloenhardt, 2000, p.35).

1.4.1.2 The second wave: The Cambodian (1989-1994): Deepening Restrictions

Following the Vietnamese wave, the arrival of Pender Bay, the little vessel, to the Australian border carrying 26 people is the beginning of the second wave from Cambodia during November 1989. Then followed by two another boats. In 1991, Gerry Hand, the Australian Minister of Immigrants, declared the detention of illegal immigrants who were without official documents or proper authorization. So that 104 Cambodian immigrants were temporary detained in Darwin until processing their applications. The detention became obliged during Paul Keating government in 1991 (Hazou, 2008, p.19).

By the end of the Cold War, the Cambodian immigrants were treated harshly and had been ideologically rejected from entering Australia. The Australian side represented by, Gareth Evans, the Foreign Minister, comprised in the Cambodian Peace Plan which involved refoulement of the immigrants along the Cambodian-Thia borders. In order to refoulement the refugees, Australia claimed that Cambodia had a state of security stability. Adding to that, Australia considered the Cambodian asylum seekers as economic refugee and they did not need any protection by Australia or the international community (Hazou, 2008, p.20).

1.4.1.3 The third wave: Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese (1994-1997): Toward a Hard Lind

The third wave of refugee arrivals started with the arrival of 17 individuals to Broome, Australia in 1994 from China, Sino-Vietnam and Vietnam. During processing their refugee

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application request, the Australian government discovered that this group had already been accepted as refugee status in Galang Center in Indonesia. At this time, Nick Bolkus, the Australian Minister of Immigration, amended the Australian migration canon to reject such cases since they had already obtained the protection in another country (Hazou, 2008, p.20). This amendment became known as the Galang Clause and marked a significant shift in Australia's approach to asylum seekers who arrived by boat.

1.4.1.4 The fourth wave: Afghans, Iranians, and Iraqis (1999-2001)

Later in 1999, 440 asylum seekers arrived in Australia from Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq. They fled their homeland because of Taliban regime, government persecution and the Gulf War. This new wave opened new way for migrants to reach Australia. The expatriates from the Middle East entered Melisia without visas, then to Indonesia by the sea or the air reaching to the Australian areas, like Ashmore Reef or Christmas Islands, by boats. This road was controlled by smuggling persons which contributed incredibly to increase the number of immigrants in Australia (Hazou, 2008, p.21).

In response to increasing flow, the Australian government responded to this wave with two initiatives as amendment for the Migration Legislation. Firstly, harsh punishments were imposed in the new version of the Migration Legislation Amendment Bill. It was labeled as 'People Smuggling Bill'. A fine up to 110,000- or ten-years imprisonment is the punishment for anyone embroiled of smuggling offences. Secondly, to reduce the number of immigrants, the government provided the accepted refugees with temporary protection visas (TPVs) for merely three years. After the visa expired, the refugees should re-apply another application for protection (Hazou, 2008, p.21-22). The increasing number of maritime arrivals, particularly from

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the Vietnamese wave, significantly influenced Australia's policy trajectory, leading to the introduction of mandatory detention.

1.4.2 Australia's Policies

1.4.2.1 The Policy of Mandatory Immigration Detention: An Enduring Pillar

Instead of adhering to the international laws, especially what concerns the identity of a refugee within the 1951 Convention and its Protocol, Australia amended it to decide who a refugee is by enacting new Migration Act in 1989 (Reilly, 1993, p.126). In a way, the Australian policy had changed from settlement of refugees into amendatory detention because of the increasing number of refugees. The increasing of the number of arrivals threatened Australia's economy by increasing the unemployment rate in addition to the existence of queue jumper, which is a political term that refers asylum seekers who bypass official offshore refugee queues by arriving by boat (Philips & Spinks, 2012, p.2-3).

Thus, Australia pursues an approach to immigration control. This approach has significantly developed in 1970s with the establishment of three detention centers: one in the capital Sydney for new comers, Melbourne and Perth designed for visa overstayers. This infrastructure for detention was formally legitimized and expanded by introducing the Migration Legislation Amendment 1989, which provided the legal framework to Australia for the arresting and detention of any illegal entrant (Philips & Spinks, 2012, p.3).

Moreover in 1992, as a response to boat refugee wave from Indonesia during Paul Keat's Labor Government by enactment of the Migration Amendment Act. The detention is imposed upon illegal arrivals until getting temporary visa or departing the Australian frontiers. After spending indefinite period in detention, most of detained individuals obtain visas except those who are threatened the Australian security or those who rejected leaving Australia peacefully.

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This policy allows Australia to prevent the illegal arrivals without valid authority to enter its lands unless passing some required tests for deserving the visa. Among countries who adopted this policy, Australia is the remaining one (Philips & Spinks, 2012, p.1). During 7 years, Australia had detained over 1,600 asylum seekers (Kelley, 2021, p. 123).

To illustrate the legal framework, the Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs (DELGEA) distinguished between unlawful entrants and those who initially lawfully entered Australia but subsequently became unlawful. Individuals who become undocumented may apply for protection in Australia and are frequently granted Bridging Visas while awaiting a decision. This status allows for their release into the community, though they remain subject to strict reporting requirements and, in many cases, work prohibitions or limited access to social services. In contrast, unauthorized arrivals, whether by airplane or boat, are typically held until they receive an entry visa or are expelled. This differentiation among categories results in inequalities, as refugee applicants are treated variably depending on how they entered, negatively impacting those who require protection the most. Legal scholar and human rights advocates, such as those within the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), argue that the policy of mandatory detention lacks a logical basis. They contend that the distinction made between documented and undocumented arrivals is fundamental flawed, as there is no empirical evidence to suggest that undocumented persons pose a higher flight risk or are less likely to comply with the legal process (Reilly, 1993, p.127-8).

However, the reality of these detention centers quickly drew significant criticism. The detention centers were not different from prisons. A report from the Australian Council of Churches proved certain points made similarities with prisons. Although they were called

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reception and processing centers, they were surrounded with barbed wires and padlocked from supporting volunteers as well as from the community. This proved that the centers were totally isolated. This isolation widened by the absence of interpreters. Neglecting of the detention circumstances in addition to what the refugees had faced, the centers lacked psychiatric services (Reilly, 1993, p.126).

Beyond their physical conditions, Australia's mandatory detention policies also faced considerable scrutiny for their compatibility with international law. The detention policy used by Australian government contradicts the international laws stated by the 1951 Convention. The Convention obliged the contract countries, in article 31, to avoid imposing any retribution on illegal entrants or illegal presence within their borders in addition to processing their requests. The contracting states also provided all the facilities to processing the asylum seekers cases during a definite period of time which the Australian detention infringed. The article forbade any restriction of asylum seekers' freedom which indeed dissented (Reilly, 1993, p.128).

In line with these concerns, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had recommended abolishing detention because of the hardship the asylum seekers faced in. The UNHCR also recommended the contracted countries to facilitate the procedures for the asylum seekers who had destroyed their documents throughout their journey. It ensured the usage of detention should be for the cases concerning national security or checking the identity. Furthermore, there is no serious efforts to distinguish between the true asylum seekers and those threatening Australian security. In addition, the detention policy does not take into account age, health, previous persecution, previous trauma and bona tides (Reilly, 1993, p.128).

1.4.2.2 The Securitization of Asylum: The Howard Era and Beyond

With the arrival of John Howard to power in 1996, Australia's approach to asylum seekers underwent a profound transformation, moving beyond mere border control to a deliberate securitization of asylum policy. This new paradigm framed the arrival of asylum seekers as a threat to national sovereignty and security, rather than a primary humanitarian concern. While mandatory detention was already established, the Howard government significantly intensified its application and embedded it within a broader narrative of 'border protection', reshaping public discourse and leading to increasingly uncompromising measures to deter unauthorized arrivals.

1.4.2.2.1 The MV Tampa Incident (2001): Landmark Policy Shift

While the Howard government had already initiated a robust stance on border control, it was the dramatic MV Tampa incident in August 2001 that served as an undeniable crucible, igniting a pivotal and immediate shift in Australia's asylum policy. This high-stakes maritime standoff became a defining moment, directly catalyzing the controversial "Pacific Solution" and fundamentally reshaping the nation's approach to unauthorized maritime arrivals with unprecedented swiftness and resolve.

The consequences of this firm stance became starkly apparent on 27 August 2001, when Norwegian boat, called Tampa MV, saved 433 who were about to drown asylum seekers from both Afghanistan and Iraq near the Australian shore, almost 65 nautical miles far. Justifying the previous policies and ensuring the immigration laws for border security, Australia rejected the survivors. Instead, the Australian Search and Rescue organization advocated to refoulement to Indonesia. Owing to that, the survivors threatened to throw themselves overboard in case of refoulement. Tampa had sailed to Christmas Island after threatening, Arne Rinnan, the captain of

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Tampa, to sue on charge of human smuggling, under the Migration Act 1958, if he entered Australia. Considering the humane cases of the survivors beside the strict rejection of Australia, they transported into New Zealand and Nauru (McAdam & Purcelh, 2001, p, 93-4).

Legally, Australia's refusal to protect the survivors had little precedent. There was not any document supporting or justifying the Australian refusal to protect the survivors. Few days later, the World Trade Center was collided by an aircraft which ennobled to Australia to justify the rejection for the security in case of Tampa carrying terrorists. No other country stood beside Australia since it neglected all international laws, humanitarian standards and the Law of the Sea Convention particularly the Article 98. Additionally, the Search and Rescue and the Safety of Life at Sea Conventions has an amendment stating the captain of any ship carrying survivors must be allowed to land the survivors in a safe place regardless of their race and their statuses (McAdam & Purcelh, 2001, p, 94-5).

Ultimately, Australia's response to the Tampa incident and subsequent events like the SIEV X tragedy and children overboard affair led to the Pacific Solution, later the Pacific Strategy. As a response, the Australian government enacted three laws: the Border Protection (Validation and Enforcement Powers), Act 2001, the Migration Amendment (Excision from Migration Zone), to enable interception and offshore processing of unlawful boat arrivals (McAdam & Purcelh, 2001, p, 95-6).

1.4.2.2.2 Implementation of Offshore Processing and the Pacific Solution

Following the Tampa incident, to assert control over its borders, Australia moved swiftly to implement a policy of Offshore Processing to hinder the asylum seekers flow to Australia. The offshore policy used in 2001 by Howard government known as "Pacific Solution" (Gleeson & Yacoub, n. d.). The offshore policy processed when Australia started sending the new arrivals to

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other countries like Manus Island, Nauru and Papua New Guinea. This policy started in 2001 till 2008 and reused in 2012 (Refugee Council of Australia, 2020).

Fundamentally, The Pacific Solution has stated on three categories. Firstly, this policy limits the Australian Immigration zone by excluding the islands surrounding Australia in particular, Cocos Island, Ashmore Reef and Christmas Island. That means that migrants landing on these islands are not allowed to request for asylum in Australia. Secondly, the Australian government commands the Navy to obstructing the boat carrying asylum seekers from reaching Australia. The third amendment calls for establishing some detention centers in both Papua New Guinea and Nauru. This policy is initially made to deter asylum seekers from attending Australia and it really succeeded when merely one asylum seeker reaches Australia in the next year (Alunaza et al, p, 66).

Despite the criticism, the Pacific Solution policy is indeed designed with the explicit goal of deterring asylum seekers arriving by boat and thereby reducing their numbers. Although this policy has been criticized, Howard declared its success in a radio interview in 2002. Consequently, the Pacific Solution contributes to reduce the number of the arrivals and achieving the Australian government's goal (Alunaza et al, p, 67-70).

1.4.2.3 Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs), Permanent Protection Visas (PPVs), and Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV)

As an implementation to achieve the 1951 Refugee Convention and its Protocol, Australia, along with other contracting countries, is obligated to uphold its core principles. These principles include non-refoulment as well as the right to seek asylum. The Australian government, specifically the Howard administration, established a new framework of visas for non-citizen arrivals. Under the Migration Act 1958, the government satisfies its international

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obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol by issuing 'Protection Visas'. As Esmaili and Wells (2000, p. 228) note, Australia utilizes two primary categories of these visas: the Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) and the Permanent Protection Visa (PPV) (Esmaili & Wells, 2000, p.228).

More specifically, according to the Australian Human Rights Commission (2013), the Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) is a type of visas the Australian government provides the new arrivals lacking valid visa which permits them to stay in Australia for temporary period which is merely 3 years. Beside the ability to stay in Australia under its protection, having this visa permit the visa holder to enjoy some medical care and some governmental helps in the income. The TPV holders have the validity to reapply for new TPV after their current visa has expired. Whereas the Permanent Protection Visa has not expired date.

It was during the tenure of the Howard government that notably policy shift occurred with the notable introduced the Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) in 1999. This measure was deliberately implemented by the Australian government with a clear dual objective: firstly, to diminish the perceived incentives that might encourage asylum seekers to choose Australia as their destination and secondly, to deter the operation of human smugglers who facilitated irregular maritime arrivals (Kenny, Procter & Grech, 2022, P.5). Similarly, the Australian government provides another temporary visa called Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV). This visa differs in its period of validity. The Safe Haven Enterprise Visa is available for 5 years and given to the person who intends to study or work and in need to be protected (Refugee Council of Australia, 2023).

To conclude, Australia's post-1951 refugee policy has undergone a radical transformation, moving from a more accommodating stance to one dominated by deterrence and

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border security. The introduction of mandatory detention, the ‘Pacific Solution’ and various temporary protection visas fundamentally reshaped the pathways to asylum, often sparking intense legal and ethnic debates. These measures, implemented in response to perceived waves of arrivals, aimed to control entry and manage perceived threats to national sovereignty. To truly understand the consequences of these policies, the discussion must turn to the human dimension. The next section will therefore shift focus to the unique experiences of Iraqi refugees in Australia, offering direct insight into the challenges and adaptations faced by the people navigating this complex system.

1.5 The Iraqi Refugee Experience in Australia: Displacement, Journeys, and Integration Challenges

This section delves into the multifaceted experiences of Iraqi refugees in Australia, exploring the circumstances leading them to seek refuge, their journeys and subsequent integration into a new society. The late 1990s marked a significant period of successive waves of displacement due to the invasion of Kuwait, the 1991 war, severe years of economic sanctions, US-invasion of Iraq, and the 2014 genocide perpetrated by ISIS, which forced a new generation of Iraqis to seek humanitarian protection on Australia shores.

1.5.1 The Historical Drivers of Iraqi Displacement

1.5.1.1 The 1990s: Sanctions and the 1991 Uprisings

The invasion of Kuwait in 1990 exerted catastrophic pressures on the economic, social, financial, and psychological situations of Iraqi people. Subsequently, the UN Security Council mandated stringent economic and trade sanctions against Iraq in order to compel its withdrawal from Kuwaiti territory in 1990. The following year, the first Gulf War took place and caused more severe tragic impacts. The economic deterioration and the severe UN sanctions increased

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the proportion of unemployment. That sanction turned Iraq “from a country of relative affluence to a country of massive poverty” (Alnasrawi, 2001, p. 217). Almost 1,5 million individuals including children died because of the famine and lack of medicine during that time (Hoffman, 2010, p.131).

In the wake of the cataclysmic aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War and the subsequent violent suppression of the Sha'ban uprisings by the Ba'athist regime, central and southern Iraq witnessed widespread massacres targeting the Shia population. This state-sponsored violence triggered a massive humanitarian crisis, forcing an estimated 37,000 to over 100,000 Shia Iraqis to flee toward the southern marshes and neighboring borders (Human Rights Watch, 1992; UNHCR, 1994). Under these conditions of systemic persecution, numerous families concluded that remaining in Iraq was no longer a viable option to ensure basic survival or any acceptable standard of living. Thus, hundreds of thousand people escaped Iraq (Hoffman, 2010, p.133-4). Although Australia was one of the nations which insisted on the continuity of the sanction on Iraq, it suffered of the increasing number of Iraqis seeking asylum in Australia.

1.5.1.2 The Post-2003 Era: Invasion and Sectarian Displacement

While the 1990s were characterized by a political exodus from the Ba'athist regime, the 2003 US-led invasion essentially transformed the Iraqi refugee demographic. The subsequent disintegration of the state framework and reconfigured the Iraqi experience from one of political alienation to one of religious and ethnic preservation. During this period, displacement became a structural consequence of militia violence and ethno-religious purging, targeting not only political dissidents but also religious minorities and professionals (Fozdar & Hartley, 2013, p.25). Furthermore, the emergence of the Islamic State (ISIS) in 2014 precipitated a third major wave of arrivals to Australia. This cohort was distinguished by a high proportion of religious

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minorities, specifically Yazidis, Chaldeans, and Mandaeans, who escaped what the international community identified as genocide. Diverging from earlier waves, these arrivals were often processed under the 2015 Special Humanitarian Intake, wherein the Australian government committed to an additional 12,000 places specifically for those displaced by the conflicts in Iraq and Syria (Phillips, 2005, p. 4).

1.5.2 The Subjective Experience of Australian Detention and Dehumanization

Despite the Australian government's attempts to silence refugees' voices and distance them from the community and the journalists, critical insights into their experiences emerged through four interviews conducted in 1998 and 1999. The aim of these interviews is to check the effect of detention on detained asylum seekers. The detainees included Iraqis, who were surprised to face hardships that can be compared to those experienced in Iraq. (Phillips, 2000, p.292).

1.5.2.1 Institutionalized Suffering: Testimonies

Beyond identity struggles, hoping safety after fleeing the persecution in Iraq, Fatima as well as other Iraqi refugees faced the harsh reality of detention. They had faced death on the Iraqi borders and during their dealing with smugglers but they had no other choice. She was not a refugee as planned but a detainee. The detention environment functions as a 'total institution', where, as Fatima observes, the distinction between 'refugee' and 'criminal' is strategically collapsed. Fatima commented that the detention center is a 'jail'. "Detention for me it has one meaning - it's jail" adding "[c]amp is different than detention. A detainee is different than refugee. If they call you a refugee it means you are not a criminal. [To become a] detainee you make a mistake like a criminal and they put you in detention" (as cited in Phillips, 2000, p. 293).

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Indeed, while the asylum seekers believed their suffering would end upon reaching to Australia, it proved to be a continuous ordeal. Similarly, Moussa, another Iraqi refugee, faced the same checking in the airport, was threatened with refoulement, and then seized in a small room. Arrivals confronted suspicion, denial, and at ultimately detention. Moussa described his first day on Australian land as “the worst day” (as cited in Phillips, 2000, p. 293). Furthermore, the Australian society looked at the detained asylum seekers as criminals so the detention centers were jails as Fatima expressed. Fatima reached this point of view when she watched an Australian man walking beside the fence of the detention. The man asked her and others to go back with curses (Phillips, 2000, p. 293).

1.5.2.2 Dehumanization and Religious Hostility in detention

This pervasive dehumanization meant many detained people saw themselves as cage animals in a zoo having food and place to sleep. They were treated as objects for outsiders. Fatima added “everything is offered inside the detention center. Place to sleep, food to eat - but [we’re] like animals. They also have food. We are humans want to work, I want to study, I want to feel I am like a human, I don’t want just to eat and sleep” (as cited in Phillips, 2000, p. 294). They were also treated as a homogenous group. The asylum seekers felt worthless and ashamed for waiting in queue for food as Fatima stated. They had lost their past when left their countries and their future depended on a decision taken by a single individual (Phillips, 2000, p. 294).

Another testament to this suffering come from Moussa, who initially praised Australia and believed that his life would be different in Australia after getting the visa. He worked in Iraq for 7 years to afford a forged passport. He described his condition in the detention “[they] ignore me for more than five months, no letters from immigration. I hate Australia in detention [...] I even wanted to be deported to any country except Iraq. (My) hair went grey, I feel very bad, lost

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my hope. Every day ... scared of being deported”. During the period of his detention which was extended to two years, he sent many letters to the Australian Minister of Immigration and engaged in hunger strike (Phillips, 2000, p. 296-7).

Beyond the physical restrictions of confinement, Muslims detainees faced a distinct layer of institutional hostility that targeted their religious identity. The administration of Australian detention centers frequently showed on lack of religious literacy, failing to accommodate the specific temporal and dietary requirements of Islamic practice. For instance, Phillips (2000) documents cases where guards showed blatant disregard for the sanctity of prayer times; on one occasion, officials discarded a group’s food in the rubbish simply because the detainees were 5 minutes late to the mess hall while finishing their prayers (p. 297-8).

1.5.2.3 The Evolution of Mandatory Detention and Policy

To recognize the Iraqi experience in Australia, it must be explicitly identifying the legislative framework of Mandatory Detention. The introduction of Mandatory Detention under the Migration Reform Act 1992 meant that, for the majority of Iraqis arriving by boat, the liberty they sought began behind barbed wire. What was originally outlined as a temporary administrative step soon hardened into a permanent pillar of border security, principally through the Excision from Migration Zone Act 2001 (Grewcock, 2009, p. 157). This alteration did more than just change a legal category; it effectively stripped the Iraqi refugee of their identity as a humanitarian subject in need of care, reshaping them instead as a securitized threat to be managed and contained. The introduction of Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) in 1999 targeted Iraqis and Afghans, generating a liminal legal state which prohibited family reunion. This policy gap immediately contributing to the SIEV-X disaster, as woman and children were

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imposed to take dangerous sea journeys to reunite with fathers already residing in Australia on Temporary Visas (Mares, 2002, p. 122).

1.5.2.4 Psychological Trauma and Mental Health Impacts

Compounding these challenges, waiting in detention for the government's decision led Abdul, an Iraqi refugee detained for 5 months, to suffer from "nightmares and horrible dreams" (as cited in Phillips, 2000, p. 294). Abdul added that he was struggling to escape from Iraq to struggle for survival in the detention. This, as he claimed, caused "a new traumatic stress disorder, a different one ... detention destroys the person mentally". Then he added that these traumatic symptoms needed "... time to recover, to be human again, this is a mixture of feelings" (as cited in Phillips, 2000, p. 298). He suffered from health problems such as sleeplessness, rapid heart beating and loss of appetite (p.298).

Consequently, a spectrum of acute mental health crises, ranging from chronic anxiety and profound despair to more severe psychotic episodes and bipolar symptoms, because a systemic byproduct of the detention environment. Both men and women suffered anxiety, mild despair, psychotic episode and bipolar disorder. The detention is vividly captured in the testimony of Zara, an Iraqi woman, explained that a sharp decline in the mental stability of her peers upon their arrival in Australia. She demonstrated "[h]ere it is more [depression], I think. I know friends, they are sick, Iraqi people, they are sick. They didn't have this when they were in Iraq, but when they came to Australia, she added "They are always desperate, miserable and nervous." (as cited in Vasey & Manderson, 2012, p. 56). Zara's observation highlights a critical irony: the very "safety" sought in Australia became a source of psychiatric injury. The clinical data supports this, as the "open-ended" nature of administrative detention, where no release date is ever provided, creates a state of perpetual hyper-vigilance that shatters the human psyche.

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This chapter has mapped the legal and historical terrain that defines the Iraqi refugee experience in Australia. By tracing the journey of international law from the hopeful humanitarianism of the 1951 Refugee Convention to the modern era, a sobering shift becomes clear: the original commitment to human safety has been steadily eclipsed by a preoccupation with state security. While the 1997 Runnymede Trust report first named Islamophobia as a social prejudice, the global tremors following September 11 transformed this bias into a deliberate tool of statecraft. In Australia, this took the form of iron-clad policies—mandatory detention, the "Pacific Solution," and the precarious uncertainty of TPV and SHEV visas.

Ultimately, these are more than just legislative changes; they have fundamentally reshaped the daily lives and identities of the Iraqi diaspora. When a state redefines a "refugee" as a "security threat," it strips the individual down to what Giorgio Agamben calls "bare life"—a person who is recognized by the law only through their punishment or exclusion. Yet, for all their power, legal and political records are strangely silent on the inner world of this struggle. They document the policy, but they miss the person. To bridge this gap, the following chapters move away from the cold "macro" level of government mandates and into the intimate "micro" world of the stage. Through contemporary Australian drama, we find the human pulse beneath the policy.

This thesis contributes to existing body of work by offering a focused analysis of the representation of Iraqi refugee in contemporary Australian plays, namely, Hannie Rayson's *Two Brothers* (2005), Ben Eltham's *Pacific Solution* (2006), and Towfiq Al-Qadi's *Nothing but Nothing: One Refugee's Story* (2005). It demonstrates how these three plays act as a counter-narrative to dominant political and media rhetoric, offering a platform for fostering empathy, challenging stereotypes, and promoting social inclusion. The thesis is organized in four chapters;

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Chapter one provides the foundational context by examining global as well as local issues of forced migration in Australia, including the era when refugee waves began in addition to the political responses that have shaped policies to deter asylum seekers. Chapter two focuses on Hannie Rayson's *Two Brothers* to interrogate the stereotypical portrayal of Middle Eastern people, the impact of Islamophobia, and the way media shape public opinion. Chapter three studies Ben Elthem's *The Pacific Solution*, focusing on dehumanization, racial prejudice, and the concept of a refugee invasion. Chapter four analyzes Towfiq Al-Qadi's *Nothing but Nothing: One Refugee's Story* through depicting the dystopian reality of the homeland and the psychological impact of displacement.

The thesis processes in four chapters to map this trajectory from objectification to subjecthood. Chapter One provides the foundational legal and historical context of forced migration and border restrictions in Australia. Chapter Two focuses on Hannie Rayson's *Two Brothers* to interrogate the initial stage of this trajectory, where the refugee is largely spoken about through a white Australian political lens, and where the dominant mechanisms are state law, policy, and media propaganda. Chapter Three steps into the second stage of the trajectory by studying Ben Eltham's *The Pacific Solution*, demonstrating how the refugee is physically and discursively silenced and managed through transscalar mechanisms of detention and epistemic power. Finally, Chapter Four culminates the trajectory by analyzing Towfiq Al-Qady's *Nothing But Nothing*, evaluating the ultimate transition to self-narration, where performance and witnessing allow the Iraqi-Australian playwright to reclaim human agency from the state's static, bureaucratic portrait.

The intricate web of international legal structures, shifting domestic border policies, and institutionalized spaces of confinement detailed in this chapter underscores the systemic

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apparatus that has come to define Australia's response to forced migration since 1951. By tracing the evolution of these policies from early humanitarian frameworks to the rigid securitization of the post-9/11 Howard era, it becomes evident that the lived experiences of Iraqi refugees are frequently obscured by state-sanctioned narratives of national defense and legal exclusion. While political records and clinical data document the structural and psychological weight of these policies on the displaced individual, they often remain silent on the socio-cultural anxieties that fuel public toleration for such containment. To understand how these state mechanisms are normalized within the national consciousness, the thesis must shift its lens from the macro-level of policy formulation to the micro-level of cultural representation. Accordingly, Chapter Two transitions into a close textual analysis of Hannie Rayson's *Two Brothers* (2005). This next section will investigate how contemporary Australian drama serves as an ideological battleground, interrogating the ways in which media propaganda, symbolic power, and Islamophobia intersect to manipulate public opinion and effectively reduce the complex humanity of the Iraqi refugee into a securitized threat.

Chapter Two

2.1 The Refugee Spoken About: Media Stereotyping and Islamophobia in Hannie Rayson's *Two Brothers*

This chapter focuses on Hannie Rayson's *Two Brothers* (2005) and examines the stereotypical image of the Iraqi refugee in post 9/11. It critiques the political discourse in which a threatening and monolithic representation of the refugee is configured within an immanent climate of xenophobia and fear. To address stereotyping, it employs a theoretical framework integrating Stuart Hall's Cultural Representation Theory and Edward Said's *Orientalism*. This is contextualized by Post-Structuralist Critique, Foucault's Power/Knowledge and Derrida's Binary Oppositions, for the "us/them" hierarchy. The political dimension utilizes nationalism and hegemony studies, namely as theorized by both Ghassan Hage and Stuart Hall to investigate the notion of "exclusionary nationalism". In addition, the Critical Media Theory, Habermas's Corrupted Public Sphere and Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model, is used to analyze narrative dissemination. Further, this chapter also employed premises of Islamophobia, symbolic power, and moral panic to examine how the play conveys that the religion of the Iraqi refugee, Hazem, is used negatively to link him to terrorism in order to reduce his role and mute his narrative and present him as a threat to the security of the Australian state.

Hannie Rayson's *Two Brothers* is a political play that stages the refugee issue as the central site of the ideological confrontation between the two siblings, James 'Eggs' Benedict and Tom Benedict. Their personal and familial conflict directly reflects the national political divide between the Australian Conservative Government and the opposition. The play is customary in its dramatic form and is structured to emphasize an exaggerated moral struggle, over decisions made by key characters (Balfour, 2013, p.208). To portray the conflicting interests of the two

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political factions on stage, Rayson creates two siblings who differ sharply in political perspectives and agendas (Brisbane, 2005).

Specifically, the play centers on an ethical conflict revolving around the sinking of a fictional ship, the *Kelelasan*, which clearly alludes to the real-life SIEVX disaster. Central to the action of the play is the political figure's son, a young officer in the Royal Australian Navy; his ethical conflict focuses on his involvement as an active officer in the disaster of the ship. The essence of the naval engagement remains unclear in the play, possibly since the details remain uncertain. However, there is a rising tension in the young man's overwhelming feelings of remorse. The play's deliberate inclusion of international uncertainty regarding the specifics of the fictional sinking was unacknowledged by some media commentators. It is important to note that it is this part of the play for which Rayson was accused of implicating the Navy in mass killing through negligence (Balfour, 2013, p.208).

Furthermore, *Two Brothers* is directly drawn by the real tragedy of a ship SIEVX carrying hundreds of asylum seekers. Relying on the two siblings Peter and Tim Costello, Rayson presents in this play two brothers, where the elder brother, James 'Eggs' Benedict, is the Minister for Home Security in the Australian Conservative Government, who hopes to obtain the Prime Minister position who stands for Peter Costello. Peter Costello was the Deputy and Treasurer under John Howard and staunch public defender and implementer of the conservative government's policies, especially the border security policy called The Pacific Solution. Whereas Tom Benedict, the younger brother, is a lawyer and Chief Executive Officer of the Lawson Foundation, an organization dedicated to refugee and defense. Tom stands for Tim Costello, the prominent Australian social justice advocate and former Baptist minister, who criticized the Howard government's policies from a moral and humanitarian standpoint, thus establish the

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ethical counter-narrative to Eggs's political pragmatism. As for the Iraqi refugee in this play, Hazem, he travelled out of Australia to Indonesia via boat to bring his family, with the intention of subsequently returning to Australia with them to seek protection. Hazem in this play is a fictional character who stands for a real Iraqi refugee, Zainalabaden Aluomar, who violated his TPV by travelling to Indonesia to accompany his wife and children using SIEV X boat. Aluomer and his family died when the ship sank.

To weave her dramatic work, Rayson merges some incidents happened in 2001 into one work, such as Tampa Crisis, the tragedy of the drown boat SIEVX, the brutal treatment used by Howard of asylum seekers, the terrorist attacks on the United States, and the Children Overboard Affair. The SIEVX boat, carried 421 reunion seekers with their family members who obtained the Temporary Visas from Sumatra and Indonesia, drown in October 2001. Merely 45 people had been saved after a day by Indonesian boats (Sharma, 2019, p.82-3).

In the aftermath of the disaster, Howard considering the Australian side had not any information about the boat or the drown people in the Indonesian territorial water declaring it unfortunate accident. Strong circumstantial evidences condemned Australia's government for the SIEVX drown. John Howard, the Prime Minister, had an anti-refugee campaign which implicated him for the death of the SIEVX people. The disaster remains uninvestigated as well as surrounded by suspicion. Keeping the disaster away from the public discussion aimed at excluding the refugee issue from the humanitarian cover. What added suspicion was the survivors' allegations of watching two boats investigated the place where they were provided by aircrafts (Sharma, 2019, P. 83-4).

Two Brothers begins with an Australian violent refusal of the 'other'. The opening scene starts with the political figure stabbing Hazem, the only survivor of Kelepesan. It ends with the

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surrender of the characters who call for ethical values due to maintaining threats. Rayson's play was the target of rising criticism since its first performance. In *The Herald Sun*, Andrew Bolt attacked the play for expressing a vomit of arrogant hate. Additionally, Rayson was attacked since it supports conspiracy theory which shows the Australian side as responsible of SIEVX tragedy. The play is criticized as clichéd and trite and its author as mercenary (Balfour, 2013, p.208-9).

Moreover, anger swept over Howard government makes the ministers debate cancelling the Australia Council. The pro-Howard commentators notice the similarity between Rayson's play and the Costello brothers in his government as well as the SIEVX incident. This contentious reception is further highlighted by direct views between the play's supporters and detractors. Helen Thomson, a theatre critic at *Age* newspaper, praises *Two Brother* as a passionate and powerful play by for its contribution to the way Australia treating the refugees in the drama field. She describes it "blow after blow at cherished notions of Australia as an egalitarian land of the fair go. [Rayson's] targets are many, her aim is deadly and she leaves her audience at the end shaken, sickened even, at a national self-portrait that is utterly shameful" (as cited in Phillips, 2005).

2.2 Stereotyping of Middle Eastern People: Islamophobia, Terrorism and Ethnical Distinction

According to Stuart Hall (1997), representation is the process of creating meaning of concepts using language. The representation is not merely transferring of reality, but a "system" because "it consists, not of individual concepts, but of different ways of organizing, clustering, arranging and classifying concepts, and of establishing complex relations between them" (p.17). According to the constructionist or constructivist approach, objects do not mean, it is the

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representation system which constructs meaning through signs and concepts (Hall, 1997, p.25).

Based on Hall's approach, Muslims and Arab are constructed as terrorists not because of inherent feature but through a system of signs and language. However, the existent connection is not natural but repeatedly constructed through political discourse and media.

Building on Hall's framework, stereotyping serves as a key representational practice which essentializes and fixes differences by reducing complex individuals to few, simple, and significant features. This represents these features as fixed by nature. Stuart Hall (1997) states that:

Stereotypes get hold of the few 'simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized' characteristics about a person, reduce everything about the person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them without change or development to eternity. [...] So the first point is - stereotyping reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes 'difference' (p.258).

So, instead of seeing Hazem's full humanity, neglecting his special traits and experience, he is seen through lens of assumed traits such as extremism and violence. Adding to that, these assumed traits appear to entail all Arabs and Muslims.

This process of stereotyping is deeply rooted in western mentality and spread dramatically following the 9/11 attacks in 2001 and other terrorists attack in 2005. Responding to that, the United States started What George Bush administration called "War on Terror" to invade Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. In a new era of national security, the western communities provided the police with extraordinary exceptions for fighting terrorists. These exceptions involved indiscriminately attack on Muslim neighborhoods (Aslan, 2009, p. 68-9).

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Likewise, Australia stood beside the US in this war. The Australian public discourse suspected persons from Arabic or Middle Eastern origins of being terrorists which made the Muslim minority under siege and infuriated people against Muslim immigrants. The radio broadcasted rumors of celebrating the attacks among Muslim (Aslan, 2009, p. 69). In Europe and America, a picture of an Arab face has put in an advertisement of fighting terrorism. The media continuously depicted this picture which created a stereotypical image of Middle Eastern and Arab people as full of violent, hatred, dangerous, terrorists, machine-gun-toting and savage fanatics, who intend to undermine national security (Welch, 2015, p.6).

Commenting on the process of treating non-western migrants, Ghassan Hage (2000) argues that a host country like Australia becomes a site where the two forces of inclusion and exclusion operate. These two contradicting forces stimulate each other, Hage adds since “it is precisely the interest in their inclusion that activated the existing social progress of the exclusion” (p.135). Speaking about the refugee in Rayson’s play, Hazem’s temporary protection visa is not a sign of welcome but a means for accommodating his “temporary” presence in Australia. This is emphasized through the government’s proclamation of its determination to deport him “on the first plane back to Iraq” (p.37) if he does not abide by law and keep quiet. His tragedy is not seen as a humane issue, rather a political problem to be managed. Hazem’s revolt against the state’s hostile reaction toward refugees ultimately leads to his literal murder, symbolizing his permanent exclusion from the national space. A stark example of this occurs when Eggs stabs Hazem in his own home. Eggs attempts to shift the blame onto the victim while standing over Hazem’s body, declaring: '[t]his is your fault. You come here' (p. 2).

As a result, *Two Brothers* serves as a powerful illustration of these concepts, indicating how post-9/11 climate of suspicion manifests through characters’ language and actions. Through

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the character of Jamie, Eggs' secretary, the text demonstrates a very initial political reference to Hazem as a "crazy" from the "Middle East" (p.38) emphasizing, in this sense, the impact of media on people since the sensationalized or prejudicial representation of the minority groups can shape and reinforce negative stereotypes among the populace (Christoph, 2012, p.98-101). When Jamie refuses to provide Hazem and Tom a meeting with the Minister, Eggs, she declares that "we certainly don't want to encourage crazy people" (p.38) as a response to Hazem's effervescence of the Australian law of withdrawing his Temporary Protection Visa. Then she adds "from the Middle East" (p.38) as if belonging to this region is shameful. Referring to the Middle East as a site of regional rejection evidences the stereotypical image of Middle Eastern people. An instance of this is Jamie's suggestion that Eggs declares the news surrounding Hazem's death to the public in a ready-made narrative starting with "[t]his Arab terrorist" (p.56). She links the terrorist character with the Arab identity which aligns with the image of the Arabs in western countries. As such, Jamie is aware of the significant role media plays in shaping people's opinion.

In addition to this, the play also dramatizes the underlying mechanism of symbolic power. The term power frequently refers to overt, material force or physical power, like violence or coercion. The play focuses on the less tangible form, the symbolic power of representation. This symbolic power is the ability to classify, mark, and assign individuals or groups through discourse, thus forming their perceived reality and status within society. The symbolic power is established through representation which concludes that stereotyping is one of its features (Hall, 1997, p.259). Jamie demonstrates the use of symbolic power by employing a strategy of deflected blame, which is a political tactic where an individual or party evades accountability for a problematic issue or event by shifting the responsibility onto an external person, group, or

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entity. When a radio listener expresses distrust regarding a refugee boat sinking, Jamie feels obliged to control the narrative. She instructs that “if the media pick this up- shove it back onto the Indonesian” (p.14). She showcases a cynical view of the press as an instrument for propaganda rather than truth. This action highlights the political goal of deflecting responsibility. In addition, politicians decide which information to disseminate through media. To illustrate, they focus on security issues concerning refugees, as in Hazem’s case, and ignore their humane story or their reasons for leaving their countries and choosing Australia to be a host country.

Ultimately, stereotyping is a strategic act of power which creates a violent hierarchy and frames the conflict as an inevitable binary struggle. As Stuart Hall (1997) asserts, this process occurs where there is a power disparity, with the dominant group stereotyping the minority or subordinate group (Hall, 1997, p.259). This dynamic is best understood through Michel Foucault’s concept of power-knowledge, which argues that knowledge and power are not detached entities but are intertwined, instituting each other. Power is engaged through discourses, institutions, and practices that produce the accepted as knowledge, and this knowledge sustains and reinforces power. This is precisely how stereotyping function in the play. Eggs, a figure of political power, uses the stereotypical knowledge of Arabs as terrorist to justify his actions and present Hazem as the threatening other. This creates the kind of violent hierarchy described by Jacques Derrida (1978) in his analysis of “binary opposition” in which he states in terms “like Us/Them, we are not dealing with [...] peaceful coexistence [...] but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs [...] the other or has the upper hand” (p. 41).

To be more specific, Stuart Hall (1997) contends that the function of stereotyping is to play out a “power/knowledge” game, as described by Foucault. The function of stereotyping

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classifies people according to a norm and constructs the excluded as 'other'" (p.259). Hall maintains:

[a]s Dyer observes, The [sic] establishment of normalcy [...] through social- and stereo-types is one aspect of the habit of ruling groups ... to attempt to fashion the whole of society according to their own world view, value system, sensibility and ideology. So right is this world view for the ruling groups that they make it appear (as it does appear to them) as "natural" and "inevitable" - and for everyone - and, in so far as they succeed, they establish their hegemony (p.259)

In *Two Brothers*, this is evident in Eggs's portrayal of the conflict as "civilization versus anarchy" (p.55). By framing the struggle in these binary terms, Eggs establishes a violent hierarchy where Australia represents the powerful civilized norm and the refugees, as the other, are portrayed as the source of "anarchy". This binary is further reinforced by his claim of a zero-sum game "him or me" (p.55) which eliminates any possibility of peaceful coexistence or compromise and justifies the use of violence against the other as a form of self-defense.

Further, the use of stereotypes in the play is what Michel Foucault would call a "power/knowledge" game, a way for ruling groups to "fashion the whole of society according to their own world view" and make it appear "natural and inevitable" (Hall, 1997, p.259). This struggle to establish a dominant worldview is called hegemony (Hall, 1997, p.259). Jamie, a political figure's secretary, exemplifies this process by using stereotypes to manipulate the narrative. She initially dismisses Hazem as "crazy" and "from the Middle East" (p.38). After his death, she attempts to model public opinion by calling him an "Arab terrorist" (p.56). This is not merely an insult; it is a strategic act that links Hazem to a specific historical context: Al-Qaeda and 11

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September, effectively framing him as a “security threat” (p.51) to justify Eggs’ violent reaction to Hazem’s presence in his house.

Additionally, the play further reinforces the stereotypes by replicating the homogeneous portrayal of Arabs, which as Edward Said (1979) argues, strips individuality and unique experiences, however presenting them as a monolithic threat (p.287). The play replicates this by making Hazem carry the heavy burden of contradictory stereotypes while reducing him to a single, violent identity. This is apparent when Eggs, after stabbing Hazem, blames the victim by saying, “[t]his is my house. This is your fault. You come here” (p.2). He does not only disclaim responsibility for the violence, but attributes murderous intent to Hazem, demonstrating a pre-existing bias that assumes the Arab as inherently violent. Eggs’s act of fabricating a story to make himself the victim is a direct representation of this stereotype. He portrays the refugee as an invader and stranger who threatens his safe personal space.

In this regard, the image of Arab people is passively portrayed according to some assumptions and media ideology. Edward Said (1979) explains the homogeneity, which is “the way media portrayed the Arab is always shown numbers. No individuality, no personal characteristic or experience” (p.287). The homogeneous image, in this play, represents the Arab as full of misery and rage as well as using irrational and eccentric gestures. Said also states that “Arabs, for example, are thought of as camelriding, terroristic, hook-nosed, venal lechers whose undeserved wealth is an affront to real civilization.” (p,108). These stereotypes are precisely what inform the character’s perspectives in the play. Thus, Lachlan, Eggs’ son and officer in Navy, alleges that “they don’t fit in” (p,22). Lachlan’s declaration suggests the essential and natural difference between the Australian community and the immigrants which makes the later unable for adaptation and integration within the new society.

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On a highly detailed level, the play starts with a wide framing ‘security’ then transforms to immediate declaration. This wide framing establishes a broad, abstract, and politically convenient threat, like national safety and border control, before narrowing its focus. Hazem’s character carries in the play a heavy burden of contradictory stereotypes, which are all negative. He is a refugee, who is openly accused of being an Arab terrorist connected once to al-Qaeda and other time to Saddam Hussein. The contradiction of joining al-Qaeda as an Islamic extremist organization as well as being part of Saddam’s army is not that important as the perspective he allegedly represents. Eggs’ stereotyping is augmented by Jamie, Eggs’ senior advisor, who indicates that the Australian Security Intelligence Organization has a dossier that testifies Hazem’s danger. Then, she directly accuses him “He’s a major security threat” (p,51) which leaves no room for doubt. This statement is also part of the discourse of epistemological theory by claiming having the complete knowledge about Hazem.

While Jamie’s accusations are continuous, the play reveals the nature of this threat in detail. Jamie introduces Hazem to mass media as an Arab who is linked to the latest terrorist attacks in Europe and the USA, in particular 11 September. Beside the stereotypical image of Arab, what is “Lurking behind all of these images” Said notes “is the menace of jihad” (Said, 1979, p,287). This is evidenced by Eggs who asserts that it is his “job to keep Australia safe” and his claim that Hazem’s killing “was self-defense” (p.62).

Furthermore, *Two Brothers* demonstrates how the persistent stereotyping of Arabs as inherently violent and deceitful is weaponized to justify prejudice and violence against them. Harper’s Magazine published an article by Emmett Tyrrell who claims that “Arabs are basically murderers and that violence and deceit are carried in the Arab genes” (as cited in Said, 1979, p,287). Even though Eggs is the one who committed violence by murdering Hazem, he attributes

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the murderous intent to Hazem, the Arab character. Eggs considers Hazem, a “trained killer” (p.52), who is seeking revenge despite the fact that it is since Eggs who stabbed Hazem and caused his death.

Emmett Tyrrell also mentions ‘deceit’ as an Arab trait (Said, 1979, p.287). In this sense, his article provides an ideological foundation for Eggs’ defense by normalizing the Arab identity as inherently deceptive and treacherous. Eggs’s narrative about Hazem’s intrusion into his house with a knife and aiming to slit his throat (p.52) is a stunning example of deceit that is meant to demonstrate. The ‘other’ is not just presented as violent; rather they are defined by a constellation of negative attributes, being characterized as violent, deceitful and cunning, which collectively renders their threat unpredictable: “we are no longer safe. In our own homes” (p.56). Just as Tyrrell’s article, “In the Middle East, a New Alignment Being Born?”, creates a simplistic and dangerous narrative about Arabs by lumping diverse nations and groups together as undifferentiated sources of mischief and violence and framing them against civilized nations (as cited in Said, 1979, p. 287), the play utilizes the same tactic. This media-driven narrative, which reduces complex political and humanitarian crises to a binary of “us versus them”, directly informs Eggs’ claims in the play. He constructs a reality for Jamie as well as the audience of Hazem as a vengeful terrorist. This is the essence of Said’s argument that the west creates a monolithic, distorted image of the ‘other’ to serve political and psychological needs.

Beyond individual prejudice, the play reveals how these stereotypes are exploited in political discourse to create a nationalist narrative that discredits political opponents and justifies the persecution of refugees. In a political discourse, Eggs accuses his opponents, liberals or leftists who are perceived as overly emotional with refugees, of hypocrisy. He questions their emotions their sympathy and attitude towards the Australian victims in Bali bombings 2002. He

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intends to discredit his political opponents who defend migrants or refugees of keeping silent when Australians die in terrorist attacks. Eggs employs this tragic incident (Bali bombings) to fuel nationalist discourse and to get support for his government's strict stance against refugees. In doing so, he manages the public perception that sympathizing with the refugees is a betrayal to the Australians who dies in Bali Bombings (p.67).

This political discourse is rooted in a specific form of prejudice known as Islamophobia which appears after terrorist attacks of 11 September. Emily Dubosh, Mixalis Poulakis, and Nour Abdelghani (2015) regard Islamophobia as “irrational fear and intense dislike of Islam and Muslims” (p.139). Erik Bleich (2011) defines it as “indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims” (1585). Bleich adds that islamophobia is rooted “in public, political, and academic discourse” (p,1584) beside a social attempt to perceive both Muslims and Islam “as objects of aversion, fear, and hostility” (p,1584). While the 1997 Runnymede Trust report originally codified the term as “a useful shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam—and, therefore, to fear or dislike of all or most Muslims” (Runnymede Trust, 1997, p.1), the post-9/11 geopolitical climate transformed this social prejudice into a systemic state strategy. Runnymede notes that it is “unfounded prejudice and hostility” (p.6) which aims to exclude “of Muslims from mainstream political and social affairs” (p. 4). *Two Brothers* critiques the way Muslims and Arabs are represented by unanimously labelling them as terrorists. According to Bethami A. Dobkin (1992), this labelling is legitimated through “the degree to which consensus is produced” which depends on making it more dramatic rather than other problems (p.33). Repeatedly framing Hazem as a threat, which is not personal but part of calculated political strategy, achieves a consensus that he is dangerous.

2.3 The Impact of Media in Shaping Public Opinion Toward Refugees

According to theorists like Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, media is not merely a neutral conveyor of information, messages, and symbols for the general public, but a powerful system which promotes the values and agendas of dominant groups. Its role is to engage, delight inform and to promote values, beliefs and behavioral codes within the individuals' mind which assimilate them into the organizational frameworks of the boarder community (Herman & Chomsky, 2008, p.61). Mainstream media has an immense influence in shaping public opinion by creating general consensus over issues. It plays a significant social role by influencing political decisions and promoting certain beliefs that assimilate individuals into a broader community. In Hannie Rayson's *Two Brothers*, characters' manipulation of media reflects this propaganda model, demonstrating how political figures exploit narratives to control public perception and justify dehumanizing policies against refugees.

In addition, Jurgen Habermas discussed his notion of public sphere as the space of discussion of the critical and reasonable debate about the political rules, policies, and the state. It is a mediator between the realm of policies and the private realm which is often used to check, legitimize, and monitor power (Singh, 2012, p.633) to shape public opinion. *Two Brothers* illustrates how the dominant power, personified by Eggs and Jamie, distorts and manipulates the public debate about refugees. By influencing and employing media, they inhibit any space for a critical and reasonable discussion of the policies practiced against refugees. Instead of dealing with Tom's, Hazem's advocator and Eggs' brother, questions or a radio listener's doubts about the drowned boat, they manage the way the narrative is disseminated via media. In addition, the play portrays how the public sphere, which is defined by Jurgen Habermas as an idealized realm where private citizens engage in rational-critical debate to mediate between society and the state,

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has been corrupted. Its corruption is evident in the fact that it is no longer an independent check on power, but rather a tool of political propaganda. Jamie's instruction to shoving the accusation to the Indonesian side, correlates with what Habermas calls "manipulative public opinion" (Singh, 2012, p.636). In such a case, the society is turned into "state-ification of the society" which creates "interventionist character" within the state. This process does not necessarily violate a direct legal right to co-govern, but rather ensures that the state "give[s] individuals limited political freedom and no share in the political decision-making power concentrated in the state" (Singh, 2012, p.636) by suppressing the legitimate channels for critical public opinion that should inform and influence government action in a healthy democracy.

Beyond serving the dominant group, the media's depiction of the minority and marginalized groups, often driven by pursuit of a scoop rather than in-depth analysis, inhibits, their integration into the host community. Vanessa Christoph states that, by circling news transmission, media produces negative and inaccurate impressions on its receivers. The marginalized groups, such as migrants or refugees, captures media attention when they are considered as problem for their host countries. They are represented in a way that is colored by the prejudice of the reporters and the journalists (Christoph, 2012, p.98-101). This coverage perpetuates the negative rumors that aim to present the migrants and the refugees as a threat to national and economical security as well as cultural identity (McCann et al, 2023, p.9).

Furthermore, Rayson's work dramatizes how political figures exploit emotionally potent historical events, such as the Bali bombings, to manipulate public opinion and justify harsh policies against refugees. These creating images, created by political figures or their media agents, are used to psychologically transform the situation to influence the general public's emotional response (McLoughlin, 2023, p.54). Jamie capitalizes on the stereotypical image of

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refugee to benefit Eggs. Knowing how powerful media shapes Australian opinion, and in a final, desperate act of narrative control, Eggs and Jamie attempt to fabricate a story for public consumption that portrays Hazem's death as an act of justified self-defense, thereby deflecting accountability for what the play suggests as murder. Additionally, the play foregrounds the political conflict when Tom, the refugee advocate, questions the official account of the death of the asylum seekers who perished when their boat sank at sea. Combining the incident with a major event like Bali, Eggs and Jamie justify harsh policies against asylum seekers.

Through the character of the radio listener who states that, "there was something dodgy about the sinking of the *Kelepesan*" (p.14), Rayson introduces public dissent and skepticism. The listener represents the skeptical side by refusing to submit to political propaganda and mass media. Jamie uses manipulative filtering of information for political purpose "if the media pick this up- shove it back onto the Indonesian" (p.14). In addition, this process of reproduction of power requires the media and other state apparatuses to carry out the "reproduction of [power]" to ensure public reception of the official narrative. Instances of public skepticism, as represented by the radio listener are evaded by the official proclamation that the crisis has "nothing to do with us" (p.14).

Greg Martin (2015) states that the asylum seekers and the refugees are demonized by both mass media and Australian politicians as "a group posing threat to societal values and interests" (p.307). The play contrasts the government's use of media for control with Tom's attempt to use it as a tool for justice, highlighting the inherent tension between political power and the pursuit of truth. Undoubtedly, Governmental officials, such as Eggs and Jamie, know how sensitive Hazem's story is so they use pressure to guarantee silence. As depicted in the play, Tom's silence is assured by threatening to imprison his son.

2.4 The Subaltern Speak Navigating the Refugee Voice and the Ethics of the Advocate

The play begins by establishing that a refugee's voice is routinely neglected in dominant media narratives, where the refugees are often portrayed as institutionally silent and wordless figures. Although pro-refugee protests call for refugees' rights, still there is an ethical dilemma regarding who speaks on their behalf at a moment when their own voices are suppressed. This does not mean that refugees are literally silent, Hazem's own voice is heard in the play, but rather that their subjective narratives are actively overwhelmed or suppressed by the political discourse. The core issue is thus one of power, not absence. To understand Hazem's positionality, it is critical to precisely apply Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of the subaltern. As Spivak famously argues, the subaltern's predicament is not an inability to physically utter words, but rather a structural failure of institutional recognition. Therefore, the apparent contradiction between Hazem's vocalization and his silencing is resolved when distinguishing literal audibility from systemic recognition. When Hazem speaks, he is physically audible; however, because the host nation's legal and political apparatuses refuse to accept his speech as legitimate historical testimony, he remains structurally silenced—rendering him a subaltern who cannot truly 'speak' within the dominant discourse. This lack of subjective spaces for self-expression demonstrates a system of active marginalization that structurally subverts both policy and academic discourse. Tom as the advocate, is allowed to speak on the refugee's behalf whose voice is different from the refugee's. Tom's voice is accepted by the media not because his voice possesses political and institutional unity. Tom speaks their legal and political language while Hazem uses personal and emotional language which makes their voices disparate. Accordingly, a process of power imbalance is unleashed when the media covers the refugee's narrative (McLoughlin, 2023, p.56).

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Hazem is reduced, by the political figures, like Eggs and Jamie, and the media, to a wordless figure whose own story is consistently ignored in favor of voices that serve a political agenda. He is prevented from speaking for himself, both literally and symbolically. Hazem's silence is made in two distinct stages. Firstly, through his life, his subjective story is already being ignored and reframed by the political debate. Because of its disruptive and emotional, Hazem's voice is structurally muted. Secondly, a literal silence happens through stabbing him, which physically removed his voice entirely, permitting the political figures to fabricate the narrative around him. Although Tom attempts to speak for Hazem's sake, his voice is different. Although using political language, Tom lacks institutional authority to achieve moral justice in contrast to Eggs who has both the institutional power and the political language of propaganda, blame, and legal defense.

According to McLoughlin (2023) "it is crucial to critically examine who is present, who is excluded, and whose voices are highlighted" (p.51). Since "the reliance of the media on information provided by government" (Herman & Chomsky, 2008, p.62) allows the state to control the narrative, Eggs's use of a strategic emotional reminder, evoking past national trauma to prioritize security, effectively cancels Tom's moral critique and reasserts the government's dominance over the political discourse. The process of stereotyping refugees is established from the beginning to function as a strategic act of power that constructs a violent hierarchy between the two binary: "us", the dominant Australian society, and the "them" (Said, 1978, p.2) the refugee. Michel Foucault (1980) argues that multiple power relations cannot exist in any society without the circulation, accumulation, production and functioning of a discourse. Such dynamic hierarchy inheres, Derrida (1978) posits, in binary oppositions like "us" and "them", where one term "governs [...] the other" (p.41). This is embodied through the spatial marginalization of

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Hazem, who is confined to a remote, isolated cliff-top house, symbolically relegating him to subordinate position of the binary. This physical distance parallels the symbolic distance created by stereotypes that reduce him to an unwelcomed stranger and a threat to security. This process is what Hall (1997) describes as a “power/knowledge” game, wherein major group use stereotypes to classify people “according to a norm and constructs the excluded as ‘other’” (p.259). Eggs’s possessive claim, “[t]his is my house” (p.2), reinforces this distinction by establishing a clear boundary between the civilized insider and the primitive outsider, which Said (1979) identifies with the colonial representation of Arabs as “fallen again into a savage state” (p.171).

Following this initial act of marginalization, the scene where Hazem is attacked by Eggs is a powerful illustration of epistemic violence in action. As Gayatri Spivak (1988) argues, Western colonial epistemology establishes itself as the sole legitimate source of knowledge, dismissing other forms of knowledge, such as lived experiences, as irrational (p.76). This explains the reason Hazem’s marginalized testimony, the emotional and factual recounting of loss in “you murdered my wife. My children” (p.1), is not taken seriously and is marginalized by Eggs. His voice is suppressed by dominant characters who refuse to acknowledge his specific, lived reality. By dismissing his suffering and rendering his plight invisible and inaudible, Hazem is reduced to the other who lacks voice and representation. In this way, the physical violence committed by Eggs reflects a deeper symbolic violence that is a production of a whole system of marginalization and exclusion, which ensures that Hazem’s story remains unheard and outside the official narrative. This legitimates voices which fit the dominant perception. To illustrate, Eggs’ claim that Hazem suffers from a “terrible physical and psychological distress” (p.39) and that he must have “imagined a ship” (p.39), is an instance of epistemic violence.

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Beyond individual acts of violence, the dominant political discourse actively works to silence Hazem's voice, driven by the government's concern that his story could "bring down" (p.46) their administration. This act of silencing is a manifestation of discourse as a tool of power, a concept fundamental to Michel Foucault's work. Michel Foucault's work examines how power operates not merely as top-down force of the state, which is sovereign power, but as productive, diffused, and normalizing mechanism, which is disciplinary power. Foucault argues that this modern power generates knowledge and shapes human subjects by making their bodies and behavior submissive and useful through institutions such as hospitals, prisons, and even political discourse.

Lachlan, a naval officer who, despite knowing the truth about the boat sinking and the government's false claims, refuses to speak to the public. His silence is not born of lack of will, but rather from a complex web of institutional and social pressure. Lachlan's loyalty to the navy and his fear of being "court-martialled" (p.43) and portrayed as "Nazi" (p.30) or villain in the media show how biopower and hegemony operate. This fear authorizes that the media's power to construct a negative identity about refugees which can also be turned against Australians who may threaten the state's narrative. Using the public shame and institutional ruin, such as Nazi label, media acts as an enforcer of hegemony in order to compel Lachlan's silence and keep on border security through keeping the protection of dominant political discourse.

To compel Tom's silence, Eggs employs a dual mechanism of dominance rooted in Foucault's modern power. Initially, he uses disciplinary power, the subtle, professional coercion, by attempting to buy Tom's silence with the beneficial offer of a prestigious United Nations job. This tactic, however, is backed by more overt and potent force of sovereign power. Eggs demonstrates that modern power authority holds its traditional absolute capacity in order to

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destroy life by threatening to use the legal system to imprison Tom's son, Harry, on trumped-up drug charges. Eggs is not engaged in a personal feud but is directly wielding the "lucrative judicial system" (Foucault, 1980, p.5) to serve political interests. By acting as "judge, party to the dispute and tax collector" (Foucault, 1980, p.5) simultaneously, Eggs transforms the moral argument into a matter of state-sanctioned coercion, compelling Tom's submission through the overwhelming force of the force of the state and highlighting how law is used as a tool for political control and enforced silence.

Foucault further posits that modern society operates through a dual power structure: a framework of "public right" and "a closely linked grid of disciplinary coercions whose purpose is in fact to assure the cohesion of this same social body" (Foucault, 1980, p.106). In the play, Eggs's attempt to compromise Tom by offering him a new job and promoting in the United Nations Human Rights sector outside Australia perfectly exemplifies this disciplinary power. This offer, while seemingly beneficial, functions as a sophisticated formula of coercion designed to neutralize Tom's advocacy for Hazem and maintain the political establishment's narrative. By appeasing Tom and placing him under his control, Eggs purposes to remove a dissenting voice from the political sphere, thereby guaranteeing the cohesion of the dominant discourse on refugees. Tom's direct accusation, "[y]ou are trying to buy my silence" (p.11), emphasizes his awareness of being subjected to this insidious manipulation, revealing how even apparently benign gesticulations can be turn into instruments of control within a wider power dynamic.

The foundational contest considering marginalized voices comes from Gayatri Spivak (1988), who presented the concept of epistemic violence as well as enquired "can the subaltern speak?" (p.66). Spivak illustrates that the marginalized subject's voice is often stripped away and reduced by the dominant Western, colonial system, which leads to a profound "crisis of

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representation” (p.69). According to Spivak, the matter is not merely related to silence itself, but the active structural suppression of the refugee’s subjective story. This suppression is not just a matter of ignoring the refugee; it is a deliberate act where dominant powers, politicians and media alike, effectively hijack the refugee’s voice to speak on their behalf. When the state rebrands a human being as a security threat or a national danger, it performs a type of narrative erasure, smothering the person’s actual lived reality under a layer of political propaganda. In this environment, the refugee is stripped of the right to define who they are, relegated to the role of “subaltern” whose truth is buried beneath the state’s aggressive rhetoric. This is the heart of epistemic violence: a cruel paradox where the refugee’s very survival is tied to a system that has already decided their story does not matter.

While Spivak’s work is foundational, more recent theorists have expanded on the concept of voice to provide a more nuanced framework for understanding advocacy. Nick Couldry (2010) offers a broader perspective by considering voice as both a value and a process, which gives “an account of one’s life and its conditions” (p.7) and “values all human beings’ ability to give an account of themselves; it values my and your status as ‘narratable’ selves” (p.13). The play demonstrates the denial of this value. Eggs and the power structure refuse to recognize Hazem as a “narratable self”, which justifies his initial symbolic silencing by dismissing his testimony. Furthermore, the play illuminates the violent interruption of Hazem’s voice through the physical silence imposed on Hazem which not only devalues his story but prevents its articulation.

However, Jo A. Tacchi (2012) introduces a crucial qualification, arguing that voice is “inadequate unless there is also a shift in the hierarchies of value and attention accorded different actors and communities” (p. 7-8). This emphasizes that it is not enough for an individual to have

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a story but that it must be listened to by a community that values their experience. This goes beyond Spivak's focus on the initial act stripping voices and instead centers on the ongoing challenge of a dominant power. As Myria Geordiou (2017) critiques how contemporary media narratives about migration and crises "reaffirm[ing] colonial differences between the "civilized" West and the "barbarian" East" (p.5). This analysis aligns with post-colonial thought, such as Said and Spivak, by demonstrating how discourse and representational practices silence subaltern voices and perpetuate the unequal power dynamic established during the colonial era. Thereby making it difficult for the voices of the marginalized to penetrate the dominant political and media discourse, a process demanding them to overcome the institutional apparatus that actively enforces their silence.

Although Hazem's silence is ensured by his death, other instances of silence in the play are conducted with pressure. A remarkable instance is Lachlan's silence. His silence is attributed to a fear of consequences, such as being "court-martialled", as well as the pressure to conform to the navy's unwritten code of loyalty. This fear is because of disciplinary power. It is the knowledge that speaking out means violation of the norms of institution which leads to professional and personal ruin. Another example, Eggs's threat to have Tom's son, Harry, imprisoned on fabricated charge conceptualizes Foucault's sovereign power "which can either benefit or irrevocably destroy life" (Foucault, 1978, p.129).

Eggs's threat is a form of overt, direct coercion that completely overwhelms the political effectiveness of Tom's well-intentioned ethical attitude. The threat is directed specifically at Tom, the advocate, aiming to silence his legal and moral opposition. Consequently, any moral arguments about justice and truth are rendered irrelevant when faced with the state's brute capacity to inflict harm. Tom ultimate surrender to this power by "wiping [the knife] clean"

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(p.76). Sovereign power can compel an individual to abandon their principles to protect what is valuable to them. Tom's action is a symbolic cleanup of the sovereign threat, effectively erasing the evidence of his own resistance. This final, silent action signifies his ample submission to Eggs' power, forcing him to prioritize his son's security over his previously held moral and political principles.

To conclude, Hannie Rayson's *Two Brothers* critiques how political discourse and media manufacture monolithic "Arab terrorist" stereotypes to justify brutal policies against refugees. Though the character of Hazem, the play demonstrates how this strategic dehumanization erases individual identity, replacing it with contradictory negative labels to create a manufactory at play, where a community's humanitarian empathy is suppressed in favor of political agendas, exposing how fear can be weaponized to justify persecution. Rayson's play demonstrates how Hazem, a single character, is burdened with contradictory and negative stereotype, such as allegations of ties to the Islamic extremist group Al-Qaeda, to suppress his narrative. In doing so, *Two Brothers* employs Hazem's tragic story to convey the extent to which dominant powers suppress the humanitarian aspect of the refugee crisis. Through manipulating public perception and weaponizing stereotypes, the play demonstrates how a community can be influenced to tolerate the use of brutal policies against asylum seekers and refugees, by prioritizing a manufactured narrative of national security over individual human rights.

Ultimately, Chapter Two demonstrates how the post-9/11 sociopolitical apparatus in Australia strategically manufactures a monolithic, dehumanized "Arab terrorist" stereotype to justify aggressive border policies and suppress human rights. By focusing on Hannie Rayson's *Two Brothers*, this chapter exposes the mechanics of a corrupted public sphere and a complicit media landscape that weaponize Islamophobia to erase the authentic lived experiences of Iraqi

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refugees, reducing their structural suffering to a managed national security threat. This critical evaluation contributes to the thesis as a whole by establishing the foundational "macro" layer of discourse analysis. It illustrates how language, symbolic power, and state propaganda work in tandem to strip the displaced subject of narrative agency, preparing the public imaginary to accept the institutionalized exclusion of the refugee.

However, while Chapter Two critiques the discursive and media-driven engineering of these stereotypes on the mainland, it opens an essential thematic pathway to the spatial realities of enforcement. The state's insistence on national purity through ideological containment inevitably requires a physical manifestation. To fully understand the violent trajectory of this exclusionary logic, the thesis must pivot from the rhetorical battlefield of the public sphere to the concrete architectures of confinement. Therefore, Chapter Three shifts the analytical lens to Ben Eltham's *The Pacific Solution* to examine the transscalar borderscape of administrative detention. By moving from Rayson's focus on macro-political propaganda to Eltham's claustrophobic domestic allegory, the next chapter investigates how the state's logic physically objectifies the Iraqi refugee into "bare life" and locks them away from the national sight.

Chapter Three

3.1 Refugee Silenced: Bureaucratic Power and the Domestic Borderscape in Ben Eltham's *The Pacific Solution* (2006)

This chapter provides a critical analysis of Ben Eltham's one-act play, *The Pacific Solution*, to contend that the Australian detention process is a transscalar mechanism of exclusion entrenched in paranoid nationalism, projecting the systematic manufacture, spatial manifestation, and the ethical resistance to the existence of the Iraqi refugee within this national imaginary. This analysis initially details the desubjectivation, showing how the state's logic reduces the asylum seeker in the play, Asif Muhammed al-Suhail, through objectification into human waste and Derridean specter, which requires political neutralization. Such ethical denial is physically manifested through the exclusionary borderscape as coercive power is defused. This study demonstrates that this policy is a transscalar mechanism by analogizing the Australian government's excision of external islands to the legal excision of a domestic cupboard used for detention in the play which reveals the detention space as the touchable application of a mandate in order to impose national purity and silence. Ultimately, this study investigates the counter-hegemonic force of the subject's persistence; Asif's frequent physical and verbal acts, from repeated knocking and his rejection to insistence on his complex identity, establish an irreducible act of dissensus and ethical resistance. Drawing upon Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's framework of the subaltern, this persistence shatters the Orientalist gaze, evidencing the marginalized subject's articulation of agency against the system of designed containment.

The implementation of the Pacific Solution was the Australian government's immediate and swift response to a political climate dominated by the Tampa incident, in which Howard government refused to permit Tampa ship to land on its Christmas Island, and a recognized need

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to assert dominance over the borders. Led by Howard government, the policy was multifaceted system to deter the arrival of asylum seekers by boat and minimize their rights (Wood, 2002, p.22). It involved three key measures: erasing specific islands such as Cocos and Christmas from the migration zone, transmitting the Navy to seize and deter boats, and establishing offshore detention centers like Nauru and Papua New Guinea (Gleeson & Yacoub, n.d.; Alunaza et al., p. 66). This solution involves a detailed and multi-step plan of naval interdiction and territorial excision and turning the border into movable political instrument to deter the refugees:

this change in the migration zone, which is known as the “Pacific Solution” and adopted during Ruddock’s tenure, The Migration Amendment (Excision from Migration Zone) Act No. 127 2001 excised Christmas Island, Ashmore Reef and Cocos Island from Australia’s migration zone. It is worth noting that in May 2013, the Abbot’s government extended the excision to include the whole territory of Australia to prevent boat people from benefitting from the country’s legal system by applying for a refugee status. (Az-Zubaidy, 2018, p.12)

As a direct artistic response to this political context, Ben Eltham’s extensive background as a journalist and cultural policy consultant positions his one-act play, *The Pacific Solution*, as a timely and authoritative critique of Australian political life. Eltham, the Lecturer at Monash University in Media and Communications, serves as the coordinator for several of the fundamental subjects in advanced Masters of Cultural and Creative Industries. Before that, he taught in the School of Communications and Creative Arts at Deakin University. He got his doctoral thesis in the field of cultural policy at Western Sydney University's Institute of Culture and Society, then he held a three years post-doctoral fellowship in the Centre for Memory,

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Imagination and Invention at Deakin. He works in media as an essayist, journalist, regular contributor to journals like *Meanjin*, *Crikey*, *Overland*, *Guardian Australia*, and the *Sydney Review of Books* as well as a cultural policy consultant in the federal Department of Industry, the Victorian Music Development Office, the City of Sydney, Creative Victoria, and the National Association for the Visual Arts (Eltham, n.d.).

This authoritative critique specifically manifests in Ben Eltham's *The Pacific Solution* (2006), a one-act play, serves as a pointed critique of the Howard regime's "policies of detainment and forced deportation of asylum-seeking refugees" (McCallum, 2009, p.298). It was acted in Metro Arts Centre, Brisbane, in 2006. It narrates a story of an Iraqi refugee who reaches the front door of three housemates' house in an Australian suburb requiring asylum. The asylum seeker character in Eltham's play, Asif, is not only associated with terrorism but detained in a cupboard before being relocated to an island external to the Australian interior (Az-Zubaidy, 2018, p.11). This critique to Howard's regime comes through the name of the play, its themes, and the chosen characters' names. The major three characters' names: Amanda, Phil, and Johny represent three political figures during Howard regime (1996-2007) who were beside John Howard himself, the Prime Minister and the Immigration Ministers: Philip Ruddock (1996-2003) as well as Amanda Vanstone (2003-2007) (Az-Zubaidy & Al Janabi, 2020, p.45).

The intentionality of this political critique is immediately corroborated by Marcel Dorney, the director of *The Pacific Solution*, who offers essential insight into the play's intended polemical design and the immediate varied reactions of its original audience when Asif initially appears on the stage as when the audience, who "had been made comfortable," (Cox, 2013, p.73) was suddenly challenged. Dorney states that "[t]o turn the identification of the audience around is hardly a new trick, but it's executed here with skill, and—in a way that sets it apart from much

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Australian 'political theatre'—for a well thought-out polemical purpose” (Cox, 2013, p.73).

Dorney continues “[i]t’s surprisingly uncommon for a first-time playwright to draw an audience in so firmly and retain his nerve to deliver the punch” (Cox, 2013, p.73). He states that it is “Ben’s trenchant political intellect that persuaded me to work on this with him in the first place” (Cox, 2013, p.73). Then he continues commenting on the audience’s reaction: “the way those members of the audience unfamiliar with the specifics of Australia's refugee policy laughed at the sheer absurdity of Amanda's final plan. You could tell the ones who read the newspaper; they laughed, too, but the laughter was a very different colour” (Cox, 2013, p.73).

Emma Cox (2013) critically confirms the play’s political allegory, proclaiming that the three Australian characters, who present the governing Liberal Party, are a “vicious trio” whose resort to dehumanizing bureaucracy exposes the exclusionary logic at the centre of Australian national identity. Cox (2013) also states “clung with white-knuckled fervour to a party line that positioned asylum seekers as presumptuous queue jumpers” (p. 69). Cox (2013) asserts that “Johnny, Phil and Mandy aren't just feckless losers, but a vicious trio” and maintains that through their “response to Asif seems ultimately to suggest that a drive to exclude represents the underbelly of Australian mateship” (p70). When the three characters find themselves besieged in their own self-making corner, “they turn to bureaucracy” through “the letter of the law, not Asif’s call for 'human being to human being’”, which means that “they will acknowledge the stranger in their midst” (Cox, 2013, p.70).

The play’s critical function lies in its use of domestic setting as a powerful national analogue in which the legal excision of the cupboard reflects the Australian federal government’s removing islands from the migration zone. Ben Eltham’s setting is a domestic space, in which the three major characters live and the entirely events happen, represents the national space of

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Australia. The play starts with Mandy and Johnny watching the Australian cricket team playing against Pakistan on TV when an Iraqi asylum seeker, Asif, rushes into their house through the front door asking for protection and refuge. Asif, who is treated as a terrorist, is knocked down during a fight with Johnny which results in Asif's loss of consciousness and then confinement in a cupboard. By Phil's assistance, their housemate and law student, they take advantages of the Residential Tenancies Act to "excise the cupboard from the lease" (Eltham, 2006, p.107) to absolve them from any legal responsibility for Asif's "physical well-being prior, during and following his 'request', which is now, legally, rendered null and void" so "there is no legal basis for it to have happened at all" (Eltham, 2006, p.107). So, through using such analogy, between the national and the domestic spaces, Eltham critiques the Australian excision act in 2001, which removes some islands from the Australian migration zone in order to prevent the asylum seekers who reach these territories from applying for refugee status. The play portrays this by erasing the cupboard from the rent agreement which "problematise[s] Asif's claim that he has arrived at their house and also his expectation to be let in" (Az-Zubaidy, 2018, p.12). This is the Pacific Solution Act, which Eltham labels the play on.

To explore this complex relationship between state violence and subjective agency, the chapter deploys a three-stage theoretical framework: the reduction and denial of the refugee image, the spatialization of exclusion, and the reclamation of subjectivity. The primary violence against the subject's personhood is analyzed through Martha C. Nussbaum's theory of objectification and Zygmunt Bauman's concept of the human waste. Such reduction requires containment which is theorized using Ghassan Hage's paranoid nationalism, alongside Jacques Derrida's notion of the specter. The spatial manifestation of this policy is analyzed through Chiara Brambilla's borderscapes, with a focus on the transscalar and hegemonic nature of the

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border. Eventually, the resistance of the reduced asylum seeker is analyzed through the lens of Jacques Ranciere's dissensus, the ethical resistance defined by Emmanuel Levinas and interpreted by David Couzens Hoy, and James C. Scott's everyday resistance. Subjectivity is cultivated by challenging Michel Foucault's power/knowledge mechanism as well as subverting Orientalist gaze of Edward Said, which eventually proves that the subaltern can indicate himself as articulated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

Ultimately, this study asserts that Ben Eltham's *The Pacific Solution* functions as a microcosm which demonstrates the detention policy is the mobile transscalar manifestation of paranoid nationalism to violently produce the image of the Iraqi asylum seekers, Asif, who insists on reclaiming subjectivity. According to Az-Zubaidy (2018), Eltham investigates the white Australians' attitudes by positioning the refugee, Asif, alongside three white Australians. The play's location is the Australians' house which demonstrates the white domination over the national space beside providing a lens of how the refugees are visualized in the Australian imaginary (p.13).

3.2 Objectification, Ethical Denial, and the Haunting of Iraqi Subject

The image of the Iraqi asylum seeker in the Australian theatre is initially established through the objectification theory. According to Martha C. Nussbaum (1995), objectification is the act of treating a person as an object or property, thereby, they are "dehumanized as [...] objects, things or commodities" (p.249). This dehumanization causes them to be used for one's purpose, rather than being subjective and fully autonomous being. A crucial aspect of this is the denial of autonomy, where individuals are regarded as lacking agency or the ability to govern themselves. Such a form of objectification disregards their inherent personhood, minimizing their identity to only a single item stripped of their choices and goals. This denial includes

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“inertness, fungibility, and ownership” (Nussbaum, 1995, p.270). Asif’s request to “apply for asylum” (p.95) is not only immediately refused, but is instead transformed into an accusation of being terrorist. This functions as a deprivation of subjectivity and autonomy. The Australian characters do not see in the asylum seeker, Asif, a human with a story and motivation, but merely a threat. By transforming Asif’s identity into a weaponized label, such as changing his name to Javed Miandad Sohail, he is objectified to express the other characters’ national anxieties and reinforce a pre-existing Islamophobia narrative.

In this context, the “dehumanization of [Iraqi refugee] rests upon and draws strength from denial of [a refugee’s humanity]” (Nussbaum, 1995, p.277). Focusing on a single aspect of a person’s identity leads to ignoring his full humanity. The Australian characters in the play concentrate on Asif’s identity, as an Iraqi and a Muslim, overlooking his personality, subjectivity, and humanity (Nussbaum, 1995, p.277). Mandy’s reaction when hearing his Islamic name, which is articulated through “he’s going to kill us all” (p.95), turns him into a source of fear instead of revealing him as a victim. He is treated with inertness when he is hit and locked in the cupboard, reducing him to a passive creature. He can be considered fungible and violable because he is seen as part of a massive group of refugees, not as a unique individual who deserves respect.

This denial of autonomy is inevitably manifested through physical and verbal violence. Denial of the autonomy leads to deny the person’s identity and his ability to administer himself and his decision. Such denial reduces the whole human to abstract object (Nussbaum, 1995, p.270). Asif’s use of the expression “human being for human being” (p.96) in asking Johnny for help, implies that Johnny has failed to meet this standard, thereby being reduced to less than human. After being refused, Asif uses his body as means of communication by hugging Johnny

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who “throwing him against the wall, where he hits his head” (p.96). Asif becomes “motionless” (p.96) and he “does not move much or resist” (p.97) which confirms that his objectification has been completed. Asif is stripped of the basic resistance energy as well as his autonomy. Asif is not seen as a human but as an object that can be dropped. The language is employed to show the objectification process, Asif is “thrown”, “pull[ed]”, “pick[ed] up”, “drag[ged]”, and “drop[ped]” (p.97).

Crucially, this aggressive, physical handling and objectifying language create the condition for the refusal of an ethical relationship. Through stripping Asif of his personhood, the three Australian characters escape the ethical demand which is imposed on them by the presence of the “other”. In Emmanuel Levinas’s ethical framework, the face of the other requires a non-negotiable responsibility (Levinas, 1994, p.5-8). The face of the other is not merely physical attribute but the epiphany of the Other’s complete alterity. Its significant in its function as the place where ethics is discovered as first philosophy, preceding whole attempts at comprehension or knowledge. The face is nude, defenceless, exposed, and vulnerability which serves as an irresistible and non-negotiable command. Both Asif’s directly request to be treated as “human being for human being” (p.96) as well as his attempt to hug Johnny represent a final invocation of this ethical demand. “Throwing him against the wall” by Johnny, and his subsequent detention and isolation, which constitute ethical and political rejection, function as a denial of the other’s irreducible alterity and reducing the human from a subjective presence into a mere ontological negation, a calculated and expendable un-being, ready for disposal.

The damaging feature of the Iraqi refugee’s image is the political reduction of his personhood: Asif is stripped of being a refugee and is reduced to a merely political concept of “terrorism”. Asif is indicated as “terrorist” whose existence threatens both the Australian safety

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and norms. This is demonstrated through Phil's dialogue to prevent "an Islamist ruin [his] bond" (p.96) and the assertion that he is "still a potential suspect in the war on terror" (p.105). This accusation dismisses Asif's individual situation and instead places him with a pre-fabricated, hostile narrative. Greg Martin (2015) states that asylum seekers and refugees provoke moral panic and anxiety in the Australian community for being demonized as "a group posing threat to societal values and interests" (p.307) by both Australian politicians and mass media. Az-Zubaidy (2018) critiques "the representation of Muslims who are unanimously labelled as terrorists" (p.15) through the play. Then he links "labelling Asif as a terrorist through a word of mouth among the three housemates" with the Vanessa Christoph's "circular dissemination process" (p.15) by indicating how the micro-level rumours act as restricted replication of the state's boarder, self-fulfilling narrative of exclusion. This local circulation of horror functions to legitimize the authorized mechanism of detention by preventively casting the Other as a threat, so making the ideological violence of this state appear inevitable and natural within the social space of the home.

Following this political reduction, the image of Iraqi asylum seeker is further degraded into that of failed consumer or human waste. Among this reduction is evidenced by the negative reception Asif receives: instead of being welcomed, he is regarded as "uninvited guest" (p.100), "un-asked-for cupboard dweller" (p.100), "a non-permitted threshold crossing" (p.100), and "a home invader" (p.98). The marginalized classes, refugees, are regarded as such because they are seen as simple, useless, and contaminating nuisances who can be easily disposed of. Zygmunt Bauman (2004) states that "a world that evaluates anyone and anything by their commodity value - they are people with no market value" (p.39) "They are failed consumers, walking symbols of the disasters awaiting fallen consumers" (p.39). This is demonstrated in considering

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Asif as human waste which must be eliminated. His existence has no value, but rather a “nuisance” which justifies throwing him in the closet and then transforming, as in relocating, something Australian society can “do without joy”. Refugees and welfare recipients are reduced to an abstract “taxes pay” (p.80). Instead of empathizing with their human needs, they are seen as financial leakage from both Phil and Johnny’s money. Johnny’s use of racist term such as “bloody boongs” (p.80), which has a racial connotation, combines the economic dependence and the social degradation. Moreover, the Australian characters use language that scales down and devalues Asif, reducing him to small, unimportant or thing, despite his repeated insistence on being human. These vocabularies, such as “little bastard” (p.97), “little Arab” (p.98), and “little bugger” (p.100) emphasize their perception of Asif’s small size compared to theirs.

Such perception of the variance of sizes has its roots the framework of White managerial nationalism. Ghassan Hage (2000) argues that White Australians believe in their “centrality” within Australia, as a nation, and they are the “governors” and the “enactors” of Australian law over the “marginalized” migrants. The marginalized groups are considered “objects to be governed” (p.16-17) and “to be moved and removed according to a White national will” (p. 18). The Australian nationalists, whether self-identified White multiculturalists or White racists believe in having the right to possess a managerial role to dominate the national territory. The other is seen as manageable and inconsiderable in the managers’ sight (p.42-46). According to Hage, the relation between them is that of governance in which the manager gives himself the right to ethnically exclude others and displace them. Az-Zubaidy (2018) comments that “Asif is viewed as an “intrusive visitor” or a “line cutter” who imposes his presence on the three Caucasian Australians” (p.13). This is reinforced by Asif’s initial attempt to seek asylum, followed by his request to stay at their home for one day. Az-Zubaidy adds that the variance in

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size is “emphasised through the references “he” and “we” [...] which is inevitably required to provide the housemates with the capacity to manage the refugee and frustrate his wish to be included for the sake of satisfying their need to “feel at home”” (Az-Zubaidy, 2018, p.13). These labels are the linguistic consequences of the “white manager” seeing Asif as a manageable being, not as a responsible being.

Instead of being merely person in the play, the asylum seeker embodies a ghost that haunts the Australian society. This is the spectral consequence of the objectification and the ethical denial. Being stripped of his ethical claim, his physical and existential agency, Asif is turned into a contradictory existence of the Derridean specter. Jacques Derrida (1994) defines the specter, the ghost, as a paradoxical existence. This specter is “neither soul nor body, and both one and the other” (p.5), representing a “non-object, this non-present present” (p.5) which challenges the ontology and traditional knowledge. Similarly, the ghost is “that one does not know [...] if it exists” (p.5) with a “disjointed or disadjusted” (p.1) time where the present time is “out of joint” (p.1). Asif, the asylum seeker, functions as the specter who is politically “non-present”, rightless, excluded from the nation and physically hidden and later isolated using both the cupboard and the island. Asif is turned into an object that the state and its agents, the three Australian characters, attempt to neutralize and define as “not here”, but his asking for a help and his actual existence make him an active presence. This attempt of confinement is to impose a non-being case over Asif, who remains spectral revenant to continue trouble to the national conscience and expose the nation’s rotten foundation.

The act of detaining Asif is considered political mourning because that state utilizes the Derridean “work of mourning” to manage a collective ideological anxiety. Derrida clarifies that this work “consists always in attempting to ontologize remains, to make them present, in the first

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place by identifying the bodily remains and by localizing the dead” (Derrida, 1994, p.9). This political mourning aims to “know who and where [...] whose body it really is and what place it occupies for it must stay in its place” (Derrida, 1994, p.9). The whole mechanism of the Pacific Solution, which is performed through the Australian characters’ act of “excising [the] closet from the lease” (p.107) is an imperative to confine the spectral body of Asif. This political desire to overcome the refugee problem has been physically performed through detention and the attempt to render Asif a ghost.

3.3 The Exclusionary Borderscape: Detention as the Physical Manifestation of Paranoid Nationalism

According to Anthony D. Smith (1991), nation is a “named human population” sharing a mutual region, mass culture, myths, economy, common memories, and “common legal rights and duties” (p.12). Likewise, Nelli Piattoeva (2016) argues that nationality “connotes membership in the intangible mental community of the nation and grasps the individual, psychological bond” (p. 2). Then she considers it as “(sub)conscious conviction [...] which is assumed to differentiate members of a particular nation-state from those of others” (p. 2). David Miller (1995) identifies five fundamentals of national constitution which are “shared beliefs and mutual commitments”, “a particular territory”, “distinct public culture”, history, and active character (p.27). Smith asserts that nationalism denotes “the process of state-directed nation-building, the consciousness of belonging to a nation, or having a national identity” (Smith, 1991, p.71). Az-Zubaidy (2020) states that these components, shared by some while disregarded by others, underscore that the nation is a construction of inclusion and exclusion. Az-Zubaidy adds that “not all citizens of the state share the same myths and memories” (p.49).

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Similarly, Yael Tamir (1995) identifies the nation as a “community whose members share feelings of fraternity, substantial distinctiveness, and exclusivity, as well as beliefs in a common ancestry and a continuous genealogy” (p.425). The construction of such collective identity, as Margaret Moore proposes, relies on “shared religion, language, law, geographical isolation, colonial policies, bureaucratic decisions, and the like” (Moore, 2004, p.7). Az-Zubaidy notes that these shared elements, such as “colonial policies, language and religion”, are not common among Australian people (Az-Zubaidy, 2020, p.49). The Australian population remains diverse because the nation’s foundational history denotes a contradiction, being concurrently a place of colonial dominance and a land built by massive immigration. This inherent division prevents a natural emergence of cohesive national identity.

Benedict Anderson (1991) defines nation as “an imagined political community” because its associates “will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives an image of their communion” (p.6). Anderson adds that the nations are distinguished “not by their falsity/ genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (p.6). Then he emphasizes the role nations play to create “a national reality” (p.6). This notion finds its resonance in Tamir’s premise that due to difficulties of contact among different members of society, people “perceive the nation” in accordance to an image that “they have constructed in their own minds” (Tamir, 1995, p.421). Tamir Az-Zubaidy (2020) argues that “Since nations are constructed or imagined according to people’s perception, it is important to investigate whether such image is fixed or fluid and also to state who is privileged to construct it” (p.50). Ernest Renan (1998) believes in the changeability of national identities through his discussion of the existence of a nation by considering it as a “continual affirmation of life” (p.47).

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which aligns beside Moore's perspective, who considers national identities as "social identities, constructed from the social categories that unite and divide people" (Moore, 2004, p.9).

The changeable nationalities indicate the "divisive aspect of the social categories from which national identities are constructed" (Az-Zubaidy, 2020, p.5). Moore contends that observing nations as "discursive formations" leads to inter-group conflict because the formation of each group's identity is determined by an "internal logic" which defines itself by exclusion and opposition to others (Moore, 2004, p.11). Eltham's play demonstrates this "internal logic" as not merely academic but a violent, operative mechanism that justify xenophobia and determining who belongs within the nation's political territories. Therefore, this internal logic "is one of the things that distinguishes a national group from a mere ethnic group" (Moore, 2004, p.11). In Ben Eltham's *The Pacific Solution* "the three characters employ their internal logic to set themselves in opposition to nonwhite Australians, such as the Aboriginals people and refugees like Asif, as well as other white Australians as well (Az-Zubaidy, 2020, p.51). Moore (2004) regards national identity "as the product actions by political or economic elites" to "foster national identities for their own (self-interested) ends" (p.12) and "a means for elites to preserve or enhance their own power and status in the society" (p.12).

In *The Pacific Solution*, Ben Eltham presents a framework of exclusionary nationalism that exhibits racism more than ethno-nationalism as Johnny, Mandy, and Phil seek to minimize not merely the minority groups, but also people who have a common language and culture but vary in their social and political priorities and perspectives. As presented in the play, the three characters view Australia as exposed to threats from external sources and other individuals within the nation (Az-Zubaidy, 2020, p.52-3). Hage argues that Howard's construction for a national identity by protecting the borders and through the paranoid defense of Australian

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security claiming that “paranoid nationalism sets in when ... the aggressive politics of border takes over the very interior it is supposed to be protecting” (Hage, 2004, p.32). This indicates that the “Howard government reverses the trajectory of the Australian national policy from supporting multiculturalism to traditional mono-culturalism” (Az-Zubaidy, 2020, p.53).

The Australian policy and approach towards refugee issue has changed from providing asylum to imposing control over its borders. The Pacific Solution policy contains three pillars: excluding islands from the Australian migration zone, such as Christmas Island, Cocos Island, and Ashmore Reef, through legislation the Migration Amendment Act to prevent asylum applications; the Australian Navy’s authority to turn back the asylum seekers’ boats; choosing a third country to establish offshore processing centers like Papua New Guinea and Nauru (Alunaza et al, p.66). This confinement of the Australian Immigration Zone deters any asylum seekers landing on these excised territories by boats. Through their discussion, the three Australian characters in the play diagnose the problem by “letting other people determine where our house begins and ends” (p.109). Through this analogy of the Pacific Solution, they argue that “our responsibility has been shifted by the excision of the cupboard” (p.109) and “relocate[ing]” (p.109) Asif.

The play presents three white Australian characters to demonstrate how the Liberal Party justifies national exclusion by acting as Australia’s protector. This is highlighted in a discussion between Mandy and Phil about a cricket match between Australia and Pakistan. Phil equates disapproving the Australian cricket team to be “unpatriotic”, “disloyal”, and “seditious” (p.91), conveying how his understanding of the Australian law aligns immediately with Liberal Party’s ideology. Furthermore, Phil projects the party’s exclusionary stance onto other political groups, condemning, the opposition’s, the Labour Party’s “soft line” on refugees. Phil accuses the

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opposition parties of not merely encouraging refugees, like Asif, whom he labels a “terrorist”, but also of prioritizing foreign and minority interests over the security and well-being of the Australian majority. The characters’ point of view frame humanitarian concern and political dissent as threats to Australia’s national security and loyalty (Az-Zubaidy, 2020, p.54-5). Phil rejects both parties’ policy towards refugees and accuses other parties of bringing or encouraging such “terrorist” who are “brought ... or encouraged by left-wing members” (p.108). Through exclusionary lens of nationalism, Australia’s redefinition of its borders and its definition of its responsibilities towards refugees and asylum seekers, constitutes a physical mechanism to impose the exclusion which takes the format of mandatory detention.

The exclusionary logic of the Pacific Solution beside the notion of national purity are not entirely abstract ideas; they demand a coercive and tangible application. This application demonstrates the national exclusionary logic which determines who “we” that deserves to belong, and who “they” are that does not. Consequently, the detention policy is the physical expression or application of exclusionary perception. Detaining someone, Asif as an example, in a cupboard then transferring him to an isolated island, symbolically draws a physical and legal space between the Australian society, presented by the three characters, and the rejected space, the detention. This line indicates that refugees are not part of the nation.

The three Australian characters in the play discuss a solution for Asif’s case. After refusing to provide him with a help though he seeks “a safe place” (p.96), they attempt to “handle[...] this” (p.98). Johnny suggests “putting him into detention” (p.97) justifying “he deserves what he gets” (p.97) because he is “a potential terrorist in the house” which means they “need to come up with plan” (p.99) to keep the “house’s cupboard security” (p.106). Taking advantage of Phil’s legal knowledge, using “Residential Tenancies Act” (p.107) which is not

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escapes them the responsibility of anything not in their property, they decide to “excise this closet from the lease” (p.107) and to “transport[...] to locale surrounded by a body of water” (p.110) which allows them to legally solve the issue. Eltham’s satire lies in the bureaucratic sophistry of Phil’s plan. The act of legally removing the cupboard from the lease is the play’s central satirical analogy for the government’s Pacific Solution, which removes some offshore islands from the immigration zone. This legalistic trick allows both the housemates and the state to declare themselves not responsible for those who arrive outside the artificially defined limits of their domain.

Chiara Brambilla’s approach of borderscapes characterizes the border as a “contested formation” and a “site of struggle” (Brambilla, 2015, p.29), emphasizing its “conflicting multiplicity” (Brambilla, 2015, p.14). This concept illustrates the dynamic conflict between the hegemonic borderscape, the state’s dominant discourse of exclusion and security, and counter hegemonic borderscape, acts of dissent or resistance. Additionally, Brambilla argues that the borders are “engine of social organization and change” (Brambilla, 2015, p.26). The detention policy is the “hegemonic” borderscape. Ben Eltham uses the play’s narrative to create a “counter hegemonic” borderscape through giving Asif a voice to make his suffering visible, thus challenging the dominant narrative of exclusion. The conflict between the state’s attempt to isolate Asif and the three characters’ attempt to hide him activates the site of moral and political struggle.

Brambilla’s idea of mobility of borders in the borderscapes approach challenges the conventional perspective of a boundary as a single, immobile line through defining it as a transitory, “mobile and relational space” (Brambilla, 2015, p.22). This concept suggests that the process of “bordering” is not confined to the physical edge of a territory but it is a “diffused

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formation”, which means it is reproduced and detached across multiple locations and social practices (Brambilla, 2015, p.27). Consequently, the border is an episodic formation that is continually re-forming itself in response to political, cultural, and social changes, driving a constant sense of movement and instability into the spatial dynamics of national control (Wille, 2022, p.4). In *The Pacific Solution*, the national exclusion is not only represented across the actual Australian borders, but is embodied in the smallest place in the national space such as the cupboard at the house.

Consequently, the time-space of borders is considered “inherently unstable” and can only be empirically analyzed as “snapshots”. This focus on the episodic and unstable nature of the borders is for avoiding an “ahistorical bias” and understanding how borders develop and change over time (Wille, 2022, p.6). The cupboard represents the border of concealment and social exclusion by hiding the asylum seeker, Asif. With Asif arriving to the front door, the border was with the house lines which symbolically refers to the Australian borders which is gradually minimized. Then the borders were reduced to exclude the cupboard in which Asif is confined. This proves how the border functions as a variable means of the exclusionary nationalism, allowing the characters to impose and shape a spatial control over Asif.

Finally, Brambilla’s borderscapes consider the border as a “perspectival formation”, which entirely depends on the observer’s viewpoint (Brambilla, 2015, p.22). Borders are not objective facts, but constructed by the political, historical, and social context of the actors involved (Appadurai, 1996, p.33). This concept exposes that the border has multiple meaning and configurations for different groups. The perspectival analysis permits to humanization of borders by shifting attention from “big stories” of state policy to the “small stories” of trauma and lived experience (Brambilla, 2015, p.27). In *The Pacific Solution*, the detention of an

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outsider such as Asif, whether in the cupboard or at island, is not an inhumane act, but rather a perspective construction to maintain national purity and order from the “invader” (p.98) or the “poor” (p.97) beside being necessary of keeping the national security of the “terrorist” (p.15). So, the detention is a tool used by the national exclusion to transform the “other” into a political construct that needs to be treated away from the public opinion. The borders are not a line on the map, but rather the walls of the cupboard that impose isolation in a private place. This isolation reveals social complicity with the exclusion nationalism through hiding the problem, Asif, which contributes to the continuation of the government’s practical viewing the asylum seekers as a problem that should be isolated rather than recognized.

Ultimately, the “mobility” and “diffusion” of the borderscape are demonstrated by its “transscalar formation” (Wille, 2022, p. 2) across different geographical scales. Asif’s detention, whether in the micro-space of the cupboard within an Australian house or the macro-space of the isolated island within the offshore center, is not just a sequence of events, but rather a demonstration that the exclusionary logic is reproduced at every level of national control. So, the cupboard and the island are not diverse spaces, but are “transscalar” manifestations of the similar singular, pervasive national “exclusion borderscape” which dictates the suffering from being made visible and then concealing his existence for maintaining the national self-image. Hence, the borders, as an instrument of power, become detached from the actual physical line on the map which allows it to police and govern internal political territories.

3.4 Reclaiming the Self: Dissensus, Desubjection, and the Construction of a Resistant Identity

Following the discussion, the mechanisms of the Australian government to objectify and to ghost the asylum seeker, Asif, in the context of exclusionary nationalism and detention, this

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section examines Asif's resistant response. Resistance is any act of opposition, challenging, or neutralization of the impact of a dominant control, power, or ideology. For Asif, whose status as a refugee excludes him from typical political channels, resistance takes the form of non-traditional and disruptive actions, from insistent knocking and moral claims to physical collapse. It is an active practice or behaviour, whether overt or covert, intentional or unintentional, undertaken by individuals or groups against a system, structure, or authority perceived as unjust or coercive, often with the goal of forcing visibility and demanding to be counted as a matter of justice. Foucault (1978) states that "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (p. 95), as a notion which is a central to analysing Asif's acts as a political intervention from within the disputed space of the Australian domestic sphere. Asif's acts of resistance, though non-violent, function as an ethical and counter-hegemonic practice that facilitates the restoration of his stripped selfhood. This restoration is conducted through an aesthetic and intellectual act that reasserts his complex subjective presence against the system's attempts at ontological negation.

Furthermore, the interdependence between resistance and power makes the act of resistance as positive act that reshape the space of expression and existence, not merely as negative or opposite process. This can be traced through Jacques Rancière's concept of Political Dissensus. Dissensus is crucial because it disrupts the Police Order, the established hierarchy that administrates the distribution of place and functions, regarding subjects such as Asif, the refugee, to the "bare life" of the uncounted. Jacques Rancière (2011) argues that the political event happens when this partition is broken, states that "[p]olitical dissensus is not a discussion between speaking people who would confront their interests and values. It is a conflict about who speaks and who does not speak, about what has to be heard as the voice of

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pain and what has to be heard as an argument on justice” (p.2). Asif’s actions are a political demand to be heard as a subject making an argument on justice, not merely a body expressing pain.

Indeed, James C. Scott provides the micro-tactics which embody Ranciere’s abstract political event. The persistent knocking is a material act which imposes a rupture in the police order translating Asif’s suffering into an argument on justice. Scott (1985) discusses the daily resistance, the peasant rebellion as example. He states that this small constant struggle can make change, but it can be suppressed before escalating into defiance which Scott considers as “the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups” such as “foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so forth” (p.29). Asif’s resistance is embodied through the repetitive, everyday tactics which Scott describes as “ordinary weapon”. Asif repetitively knocks and scratches the cupboard door with saying “[h]ello” (p.102). These actions are not collective revolt, but rather a continuous, small-scale struggle aimed to enacting change in constricting and controlling environment. This repeated tapping on the closet door is a form of what Scott calls “foot dragging” (Scott, 1985, p.29), as Asif refuses to be silent and subverts the effectiveness of confinement through constant disturbance. This repetition imposes upon the host the need to acknowledge his existence, which they attempt to marginalize or ghost him through the detention and the exile. Furthermore, his question “[w]hy am I locked up in this place?” is a symbolic sabotage of the legitimacy of the entire system. It attacks the moral and legal assumptions underlying Australian exclusion, changing his suffering into an argument for justice through his continued expression and visibility.

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Consequently, Asif's resistance is humble and requires concealment because, as a refugee, he is vulnerable to repression and defeat. The Pacific Solution demonstrates that the "'full transcript" of class relations [...] is simply not ascertainable from the public interaction between rich and poor, powerful and weak" (Scott, 1985, p. 284). The three Australian characters, who symbolically represent the government, attempt to impose a dissimulation by locking him away and pretending he does not exist as Johnny continues "looking back at the TV screen" (p.99) while Asif "murmurs [sic] inaudibly" (p.99). So, his knocking on the door is a silent physical resistance to emphasize his existence and voice to be heard although he is detained and his subjectivity is stripped away. This action represents his insistence on being counted in a space where he is not recognized as member. This action creates a political "dissensus" through making noise, by knocking the cupboard door, to challenge the distinguish between who speaks and who does not.

Beyond the political and tactical dimensions, the concept of ethical resistance, as interpreted by Levinas and detailed by David Couzens Hoy (2004), provides a powerful framework for analyzing a marginalized figure like Asif. Hoy explains that resistance "is not the attempt to use power against itself, or to mobilize sectors of the population to exert their political power" (p. 8). Instead, this ethical resistance is basically the "resistance of powerless" (p. 160). This perspective is central for analyzing a refugee like Asif, whose agency is restricted, not merely by specific laws, but by the state's dominant institutions and epistemic power structures. Asif's disobedience, therefore, is not a tactical political maneuver to overthrow the system, but rather a "non-violent" stand experienced as "a summons from the other precisely not to do violence to the other" (p. 155). This ethical summons makes a fundamental moral rupture by confronting the host's political and physical domination with the complete claim of the Other's

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face. By insisting on his existence and voice from the detained of the cupboard, Asif's resistance exceeds merely defiance; it becomes an ethical insistence on unconditional case of humanity as the eventual form of resistance against a mechanism designed to strip of his rights, identity, and ethical standing.

Turning to the physical, Foucault, in "Essays in Refusal", explains that the body is not a static historical entity, but rather a dynamic surface "molded by a great many distinct regimes" (Hoy, 2004, p.57-8). The body is continually marked and managed: it is "broken down by the rhythms of work, rest, and holidays; it is poisoned by food or values, through eating habits or moral laws; it constructs resistances" (Hoy, 2004, p.58). This framing is vital because it establishes the body as the primary locus of power's discipline and inscription, while simultaneously recognizing it as inherent source of refusal against the norms which seek to shape or deform it (Hoy, 2004, p. 47). Consequently, resistance is not merely a self-conscious political decision emerging from an "originary freedom" (Hoy, 2004, p.98), but from inherent physical revolt against the historical, social, and cultural forces which try to normalize, category, and restrict its possibilities. This perspective is crucial for understanding how the asylum seeker, despite being stripped out of political voice, might have access an irreducible domain of agency in the raw, unyielding materiality of their own physical being.

Specifically, when Asif struggles with Johnny, his body is not just a combat tool; it is the central site where he refuses to submit to their command to leave their house. When he hugs Johnny tightly around his waist, this instinctive bodily act is a vital refusal to the deprivation and imposed distance. Through hugging Johnny, Asif clings to a human or even physical connection, representing resistance to psychological shattering. The hug is a resistance to bio-power because it asserts a raw, psychological life and human connection that the disciplinary system attempts to

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neutralize and govern. Conversely, the subject's physical collapse facilitates the inscription of disciplinary power, as the inert body is reduced to a mere object for institutional classification, isolation, and total management, thus reasserting control over life and death.

Losing his consciousness after being hit by Johnny, Asif's vulnerability allows Johnny to strip him and detain into the cupboard. His body becomes a site where submission to authority is inscribed. Then, the continuous loud banging and scratching sounds from the closet reflect the return of resistance as an innate bodily revolt. Asif's banging from the cupboard is not a call for help, but rather an act of sonic violence and physical effort to breach the walls of isolation and control. This proves that the body, even in the narrowest corner, remains capable of resisting against the norms which seek for restricting it. The loud banging is an act of desubjectivation as well as the body's refusal to accept the reduced identity imposed by the system demands the creation of new viable form of life.

However, resistance is continually in danger of being absorbed by the power of authority. Foucault suggests that the "power can retreat here, re-organise its forces, invest itself elsewhere . . . and so the battle continues" (Hoy, 2004, p.87). Johnny silenced Asif when he asked for a help. Similarly, Mandy repeatedly attempting to silence Asif, by saying "shoosh," "shut up," and "quiet" (p.102), which represent how she invests the power to impose the silence. When Asif continues to break the silence, through knocking and scrapping the cupboard, Mandy does not use the physical power, as Johnny does, but she uses the linguistic power. So, the power retreats from the physical conflict and reorganizes its forces in a vocal form. When Mandy remains silent without commenting on Asif speech, she uses the negative silence, to send a message that Asif's voice, while audible, is worthless. The usage of power is invested in new system of control through threatening Asif with accusations of sexual assault or keeping silent. This silence is the

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new place the Asif is detained in. This illustrates how the battle continues not by the physical struggling, but by the shifting of power to invest itself in the legal and moral instruments to ensure the continued subjugation of Asif.

Moving to the issue of identity, the Australian three characters endeavor to restrict Asif to one fixed attribute: the “Arab terrorist or security threat, images full of hatred and danger” (Welch, 2015, p.6), the “home invader” (p. 98) and “uninvited guest” (p. 100). This is an instance of stereotyping “get hold of the few simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized characteristics” (Hall, 1997, p. 258), in a way “[reducing] everything about the person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them without change or development to eternity” (p. 258). Asif rejects being molded and placed in a pattern and identity imposed upon him as a burden and a danger through identifying himself as a “human” and “computer engineer” (p.103). When Asif identifies himself as an engineer, he presents a complex, acquired, and developing attribute, engineering, which directly contrasts with the simple, preconceived attribute which is imposed upon him. He refuses to be seen through the lens of preconceived threats such as extremism and violence. He substitutes the imposed identity with accurate and professional identity.

Furthermore, Asif’s resistance seems to oppose Michel Foucault’s concept of power-knowledge, which argues that knowledge and power are not detached entities but are intertwined systems that institute and sustain one another. Power is engaged through discourses, institutions, and practices that produce what is accepted as truth or knowledge, and this sanctioned knowledge in turn sustains and reinforces that power (Hall, 1997, p.259). In the context of the play and the detention regime, the state’s power operates by the official knowledge that Asif is a Derridean specter, a non-subject threat, a terrorist, or just a queue jumper whose existence must

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be neutralized. This imposed, dehumanizing narrative is necessary for the Australian characters to ethically justify Asif's containment. However, Asif dismantles the relationship between knowledge that is produced by power by providing material evidence: his skill as a computer engineer which indicates that he seeks to find a job, which is entirely opposite to the imposed knowledge and the dominant narrative. This evidence compels the white Australians to face a truth entirely opposite to the forced generalized knowledge.

Moreover, Edward Said (1979) argues that Orientalism's primary strategy relies on a foundational belief in Western (Occidental) dominance. He states that the Orientalism is maintained through a "flexible positional superiority" (p.7) which always maintains the Westerner in the "relative upper hand" (p.7) when dealing with the Orient. It is not merely a political or military advantage, but rather an intellectual one (Said, 1979, p.7). Then Said uses Gramsci's concept of hegemony in order to explain how the Orientalism gives cultural leadership to the European ideas of superiority in which "European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures" (Said, 1979, p.7). Asif overturns the standard pyramid that Said explained. He uses the cultural comparison as an instrument for criticism to expose the host's supposed ethical superiority. By describing the Iraqi customs of welcoming guests and explaining that "it is a customary to serve tea" (p.103), Asif illustrates that the "other" or asylum seeker has humane values, like hospitality, by which they outperform Australians'.

Finally, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) argues that the subaltern possibility to speak is stripped away because of the colonial systems, or the dominant authority such as in Asif's case. This stripping is not merely literal silencing and preventing of talking of themselves, but rather through epistemic structures that deny their subjectivity which make them not merely

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unheard, but rather their narratives are substituted by the dominant narratives. Spivak considers this stripping “asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious subjectivity” (p. 281). Asif’s subjectivity and existence are stripped by confining him and also attempting to mute him. Yet, his resistance continues to make his voice heard in any way. His cultural comparison, which annoys the authority, represented by Mandy, represents a conscious response for Asif’s transgression of the boundaries of rhetoric. Consequently, he succeeds in directing his criticism at the very heart of Australian identity and values. This means that his words are not ignored or absorbed as in the previous instances.

In conclusion, this chapter charts the fierce process by which the image of Iraqi refugee is both produced, and eventually resisted within Australia’s national imaginary. The analysis determines that the logic of the Pacific Solution policy is spatial, coercive application of paranoid nationalism, initially reducing the subject, Asif, through objectification into human waste and Derridean specter. This denial is physically enacted through the transscalar exclusionary borderscape demonstrating how power disseminates the border from the external shoreline to the internal space of the domestic cupboard, turning detention into a physical mandate for silence and invisibility. Whether in a micro-space of the cupboard or in the macro-space of the isolated island, the confinement establishes the hegemonic borderscape which is designed to keep a perceived purity and internal order. Crucially, this systematic desubjectivation is met by the subject’s persistence, a complex counter-hegemonic force. Asif’s acts of dissensus, from the physical refusal and persistent knocking to his insistence on his complex identity as a “computer engineer”, shatters the imposed stereotypes and proves that the Spivakian subaltern, Eltham’s Asif, can successfully carve out fissures of agency within structure designed for their entirely denial.

Chapter Four

4.1 The Refugee Narratives Himself: Performance, Witnessing, and Identity in Towfiq Al-Qady's *Nothing But Nothing: One Refugee's Story* (2005)

This chapter examines the fragmentation and construction of the Iraqi refugee's image in Towfiq Al-Qady's *Nothing But Nothing: One Refugee's Story* (2005). Depending on and Donald Woods Winnicott's (1960) concept of holding environment and Cathy Caruth's (1996) theory of unclaimed trauma, the initial section explores how the dystopian collapse of the Iraqi homeland shatters the Protagonist's perception coherent reality and self-identity, necessitating the emergence of a False Self as a survival mechanism against state-sponsored violence. The analysis then moves from the psychological to the sociopolitical, utilizing Homi K. Bhabha's "scopic drive" (Bhabha, 1994, p.109) and Stuart Hall's "social imaginary" (Ashley & Stone, 2023, p.2) to explore the refugee's arrival in Australia. It argues that the host nation's bureaucratic system forces a static image on the refugee, symbolized by the mythical Sinbad persona, which fixes the fluid, traumatized subject into a bureaucratic artifact of legibility. Eventually, the chapter posits that the refugee exists in a third space between two dystopias: one defined by the physical shrapnel of war and the other by the cold, administrative violence of the state's legitimating narratives.

Towfiq Al-Qady is a visual artist, writer and actor. During Saddam Hussein's regime, he had been imprisoned and tortured for refusing to join the military or paint the Prime Minister's picture (Cox, 2009, p. 56). Al-Qady arrived in Australia as an asylum seeker aboard a boat in 1999, fleeing persecution in his home country owing to his anti-war and anti-Saddam Hussein stance. During his prolonged detention within an immigration detention centre, he was provided with the opportunity to use brushes and paint, which he turned into a creative outlet. He

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transformed the plain oppressive walls of the desert camp into abloom vibrant and hopeful images which reflected his dreams of fulfilling life and freedom. After obtaining a Temporary Protection Visa, Al-Qady wrote and performed a play through which he publicly shared the painful memories of his previous life in Iraq as well as the subsequent hardship of displacement and settlement in Australia (Cox, 2013, p.187).

This creative resistance highlights what Sarah Stewart (2019) terms “necrocivilisation”. This concept describes a society that, while appearing civilized to its citizens, is predicated on the “proliferation of cells rather than rooms” (Stewart, 2019, p.5) for those seeking asylum. In evaluating the structural violence inflicted upon the asylum seeker, this study utilizes Sarah Stewart's framework of necrocivilisation. It is imperative to clarify that within the scope of this textual evidence—manifested through carceral suspension, the denial of legal subjectivity, and administrative violence—necrocivilisation denotes social, civic, and administrative death rather than literal physical expiration. Stewart’s coinage relies directly upon Achille Mbembe’s concept of necropolitics (the sovereignty to dictate who matters and who is disposable) and Giorgio Agamben’s configuration of bare life (zoe, stripped of political existence, bios). By keeping the refugee in a perpetual state of legal limbo, the state exercises a form of necropolitical management that enforces an administrative death, reducing the human being to a specter within the host nation's landscape.

Within this framework, the Australian state’s hard-line policies effectively unmake the “benign potential of human life” (Scarry, 1987, p.38) by converting spaces of shelter into carceral cells of stasis and suspension (Stewart, 2019, p.45). According to Stewart, the essential function of a “room” is to act as filtering medium that permits the body to “suspend its rigid and watchful postures” (Scarry, 1987, p.39) and involve in “acts of making” that constitute

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civilization. However, in a necrocivilisational system, these nurturing objects are deconverted into weapons of “administrative violence” (Stewart, 2019, p.149), where the refuge is transformed “impenetrable filters” designed to deny the asylum seeker’s subjectivity. Al-Qady’s act of painting the walls was a direct confrontation with this necrocivilisation attempt to reduce his life to ‘bare life’, transforming the suffocating “vessel-cell” (Stewart, 2019, p.27) of detention back into a space of creative “witnessing structure of response-ability” (Stewart, 2019, p.28).

Nothing But Nothing: One Refugee's Story (2005) is a solo, autobiography play written and performed by Al-Qady himself. It was financially supported by Actors for Refugees, Queensland and benefited from the directorial support of the Australian practitioner, Leah Mercer. In 2005, the play was performed at the Metro Arts Theatre in Brisbane, a space frequently used by independent artists. Remarkably, its performance was simultaneously staged an exhibition of Al-Qady's paintings. The play performance was accompanied by live music of Iraqi instrumentalist Taj Mahmoud on the oud. Al-Qady’s play offers a testimony detailing a lifetime's accumulation of psychological and physical suffering, trauma which includes “a fearful and deprived childhood, the deaths of family members and friends, political persecution as a young adult and the arduous journey, with a boatload of fellow asylum seekers, to Australia” (Cox, 2009, p.56). Despite the play’s purposed focus on “one refugee’s story”, the frequent emphasis on the collective trauma which is experienced by various communities, especially a family, a nation, a group of asylum seekers and child civilians’ victims of war, belies this claim to highlight a broader shared experience of suffering (Cox, 2009, p.56-7).

The theatrical space of *Nothing But Nothing: One Refugee's Story* is dominated by a central, “backlit wooden ‘NO’ structure” that serves as profound discursive and physical filter.

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This minimalist set designs featuring only the “NO” and “short strand of razor wire to indicate [...] detention” (Stewart, 2019, p.39), to antagonize the asylum seeker’s subjectivity. By rearranging and manipulated with the letters “N” and “O” to represent diverse settings, from his father’s grave to a prison cell, Al-Qady demonstrates how the “NO” of his past in Iraq is linked to the “NO” of his present in Australia, creating what Stewart describes as a “necrocivilisational continuity” (Stewart, 2019, p.40). Furthermore, the play uses this “NO” structure to challenge the audience’s role in the asylum process. While the audience may feel a “YES” in response to Al-Qady’s vulnerability, the enduring presence of the wooden structure reminds them that their personal hospitality has not yet overcome the rigid institutional frameworks of the state. By moving amongst the viewers and addressing them directly, Al-Qady attempts to establish a “community of witness” (Stewart, 2019, p.43) that models a different filtering principle, one that is based on mutual recognition and “response-ability” (Stewart, 2019, p.43) rather than bureaucratic exclusion. Ultimately, the play concludes with the solo performer presenting the audience with the choice of “YES or NO”, a moment that shifts the burden of the state’s necrocivilisational refusal onto the collective conscience of the citizens.

Emma Cox (2013) states that Al-Qady’s experience of successive wars, deaths of loved ones, and the deceitful boat journey, characterized by the false promises of smugglers and the perilous illusion of a safe passage, along with his detention and reaching freedom land are “presented in language that glides across times, tenses and perspectives” (p.187). He produces his play in “a free-flowing, stream-of- consciousness effect” (p.187), which Cox considers as “painstaking composition” (p.187). Using English language for articulating his painful memories, with Leah Mercer’s help, helps to “realize trauma even as it is theorized as that which fails in the face of trauma” (Glimore, 2001, p.7) and the way he expresses himself is

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“remarkable” (Cox, 2013, p.187). Cox (2013) notes that “[h]is self-presentation at one point even acquiesces, wryly, to an orientalist stereotype of the Middle Eastern voyager: ‘Please write down my name is Sinbad’” (p. 202).

Performing his own autobiography, Al-Qady engages in “intersubjective witness” (Stewart, 2019, p.46), where he merges his own identity with the experiences of the other refugees to advocate for a broader collective experience. Performing his narrative, Al-Qady does not recount a solo history; rather, through a performance which combines identities, he “advocates by intersubjectively becoming all those forced to flee from conflict” (Stewart, 2019, p.39). However, this choice involves personal risk. As Stewart (2019) proposes, by “opening his body to other stories, Al-Qady risks dissolution, the flooding of his own subjectivity that comes of ‘despecifying individual experience’” (p.44) may be erased or appropriated by the audience’s desire for a universalized narrative of suffering. This tension highlights the “paucity of the discursive tools available” (Stewart, 2019, p.44) to asylum seekers, who must often perform their trauma to be seen as human within the Australian system, a dynamic where they are imposed to make their lives suit a frame determined by a hegemonic group. To counter this risk, Al-Qady operates an “address-and-response” (Stewart, 2019, p.39) engagement with his audience, modelling what Kelly Oliver theorizes as a “witnessing structure of response-ability” (Stewart, 2019, p.28) formed of both “address-ability and response-ability” (Stewart, 2019, p.40). By eliciting yesses from the audience, Al-Qady attempts to build a “nascent community of witness” (Stewart, 2019, p.43) that might resist the necrocivilisational impulse to treat his story as merely a “fearful invading horde” (Stewart, 2019, p.42).

Emma Cox (2013) states that *Nothing But Nothing: One Refugee’s Story* is “an emotional, sentimental one” which “doesn’t fit the mould of legalistic testimony, nor did its

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performer adhere to common performance codes for verbatim theatre” because “‘emotional’ and ‘reliable’ are incompatible adjectives” (Cox, 2013, p.187). Representing his victimhood aims to provoke pity from the members of the audience as a miniature of the Australian citizens “in whose name the federal asylum mechanisms operate” (Cox, 2013, p.188). Through presenting himself as a “victim”, Al-Qady draws a direct and immediate call for the audience’s attention and response. Cox adds that “[h]is use of interactive, questioning techniques pushed beyond conventional spectatorship” which makes the audience “implicitly consented to hear his testimony” (Cox, 2013, p.188). Then Cox considers “[w]hat Al-Qady's audiences heard” as a “unique play that is a 'true story' of the writer's life and at the same time a deeply romantic collage of memory, imagination, family, home and new beginnings” (Cox, 2013, p.188).

Nothing But Nothing: One Refugee's Story is a play concentrated on the traumatic experience of an Iraqi asylum seeker personified by a single character known as the Actor whose voice represents the other characters such as his mother, his daughter, a soldier, and an immigration officer (Jeffer, 2012, p.131). The Actor narrates his journey from a life of repressed dreams within wartime in his homeland to his desperate search for asylum. The play is acted by one actor, Towfiq Al-Qady, who narrates the life he once had, dreams of becoming an artist, finding love with Leila, and obtaining freedom. His past is contrasted with the present reality of war and dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, where he is forced to be a soldier or a prisoner, endure the loss of the people he loved, such as his father, mother, as well as his dreams, beloved, freedom and even his capability to remember his own name. The Actor regularly struggles with his own role on the stage and through his own choices: “either be a soldier, or go to a prison” (Al-Qady, 2013, p.194). This stripping causes him to feel “very weak now” (p.198) and “like an orphan” (p.198) so he decides to escape.

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Then the Actor talks about his risky journey toward sanctuary, including being at sea for weeks in a broken boat, which is depicted in a series of desperate pleas for basic supplies such as food, drink, and a safe place to sleep. The bureaucratic absurdity appears when the actor stands in front of the immigration officers, hopelessly attempting to articulate his humanity while being reduced to a succession of questions and numbers. He tries to explain his case as a victim of war evidenced his body is filled with “scars” (p.202). The Actor’s choices are limited to “no” when there is no “yes” (p.202). The play ends with the Actor holding out both his hands to the audience to present his last choice with either “YES or NO. That is the question” (p.202). This conclusion forces the audience to confront the eventual question of whether the refugees will obtain freedom and be able to reside in Australia or not.

Unlike official state-sanctioned inquiries, which are often “perpetrator oriented” (Stewart, 2019, p.178) and focus on legal culpability, Al-Qady’s performance serves as a “[p]eople’s Tribunal” (Stewart, 2019, p.178). While official immigration interviews often “filter away” (Stewart, 2019, p.185) the individual’s context in favor of “prescribed narratives” (Stewart, 2019, p.188), the play provides a space where the “bodies of evidence” (Stewart, 2019, p.12) are permitted to surface on their own terms. In official proceedings, the state acts as a “discourse machinery” (Stewart, 2019, p.10) that strips the asylum seeker of their history, reducing them to a sticky category of threat or a fearful “invading flood” (Stewart, 2019, p.8). However, in the heterotopic space of the theatre, Al-Qady reclaims the “agency in expressing one’s own experiences” that the Australian administrative filter pursues to deny (Stewart, 2019, p.188). By using his body to weave stories around the central “NO” structure, he changes the stage into a site of “intersubjective witnessing” (Stewart, 2019, p.46), where the audience is not a passive jury but rather a “nascent community of witness” (Stewart, 2019, p.43). This theatrical

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“[p]eople’s Tribunal” (Stewart, 2019, p.178) upends the necrocivilisational logic of the state by replacing the binary “ultimatums” of the law with a relational structure of “address-ability and response-ability” (Stewart, 2019, p.40), eventually imposing the viewer to recognize the asylum seeker not as a case file, but a foundational subject of civilization (Stewart, 2019, p.227).

4.2 Between Two Dystopias: The False and the Masked Image of the Refugee

To establish a foundation for analyzing the Actor’s fragmented consciousness the researcher will rely on Caruth’s concept of trauma. Cathy Caruth (1996) defines trauma as “overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (p.181). The traumatic person is “never conscious during the accident itself” (Caruth, 1996, p.187). A person may get away from a shocking accident, “apparently unharmed” and in a “numb state, only to relive it later on in repeated nightmares” (Caruth, 1996, p.181). The symptoms, “series of grave psychical and motor symptoms” (Caruth, 1996, p.181), require time to appear. This needed period for the symptoms’ appearance is called “incubation period” (Caruth, 1996, p.181). The Actor, in Towfiq Al-Qady’s *Nothing But Nothing: One Refugee’s Story* narrates his story in fragmented and incomplete flashback. This non-linearity of narrative is apparent when the war and memories of escaping from the past invade his present. This fragmentation is evidenced in the incarnation of different roles such as his mother, soldier, his daughter and the immigration officer as well as the frequent “yes or no” (p.202) dialogues which are “repetitive appearance” (Caruth, 1996, p.181). This textual fragmentation directly embodies Caruth’s theoretical framework concerning the mind’s inability to fully register the catastrophic event.

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The Actor's insistent question, "[w]hat happened?" (p.201), functions as a literal and theatrical demonstration that the trauma remains "unclaimed" and unrealized. He struggles to assemble the pieces that his mind does not absorb during the actual events of war and displacement. The symptoms appear as nightmares with hallucination "[o]h my daughter... ahh [...] airport, police, passport, police, Saddam, spy, police, guards, soldiers, agents, secret agents, security guards" (p.198). The Actor physically survives the war and the oppression in Iraq, but the real war is going inside him which confirms that the deferred experience is the deadliest. However, this deferred trauma is not just a psychological phenomenon but is transformed through the dramatic process of testimonial witnessing.

The psychological landscape of the displaced subject is explained by what Elspeth Tilley (2012), depending on the work of Edward Said, terms a "plurality of vision" (p.305). Said (2000) noticed that "exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that – to borrow a phrase from music –is contrapuntal" (p.191) characterized by "at least two" cultures, making "simultaneous dimensions" within the mind (Tilley, 2012, p.305). In the context of polycharacter monodrama, this cognitive duality is not just a thematic concern but is embedded into the performance through "split characterization" (Tilley, 2012, p. 328). This method presents the "visible fracture of a single stage persona" (p. 309) to "stage visually" the "plural identification experienced during cultural relocation" (p.304).

Tilley distinguishes between two essential forms of this fragmentation: "switch characterization", in which the actor utilizes unmistakable vocal or bodily changes to delineate different characters, and "layered characterization" (Tilley, 2013, p.308), where secondary figures are viewed through the lens of a primary role. These techniques are not merely aesthetic

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preferences; they “performatively allegorizing the disjointed diasporic condition” (Tilley, 2013, p. 310) by disrupting the physical cohesion of the solo performer. Al-Qady applies these techniques to connect personal trauma with the Australian static, bureaucratic image. As the Actor uses switch characterization to move between the persona of a helpless asylum seeker and a cold Australian official, the fracture evolves from an abstract mental state into a concrete stage reality. This fluid identity proves that the refugee is not a permanent, one-dimensional entity, but a person navigating between “simultaneous dimensions” (Said, 2000, p.191).

In *Nothing But Nothing: One Refugee's Story*, Towfiq Al-Qady employs this plurality of vision through the Actor's performance. By applying spilt characterization to oscillate between the traumatic memories of Iraq and the sterile, bureaucratic reality of the Australian detention center, Al-Qady imposes these “simultaneous dimensions” to clash on stage. Using this technique, Al-Qady reclaims that the refugee's humanity from a static state portrait, presenting instead a sovereign historical subject whose identity is defined by a complex, contrapuntal awareness of multiple worlds. This collision interrogates the ‘refugee’ label, subverting the state's try to reduce the asylum seeker to a singular case number. By substituting a linear autobiography with a clash of realities, the performance asserts the subject's agency as an active narrator. This contrapuntal existence, where Iraqi grief and bureaucratic inquiry inhabit the same body, reclaims identity as a form of vibrant resistance within the diasporic fracture, demanding that the spectator recognize the refugee's life as a complex, historical narrative.

Exploring upon the “plurality of vision”, the structural impact of Al-Qady's play is rooted in what Tilley (2012) characterizes as a “contrapuntal” performative style. This technique represents a significant theatrical accomplishment, as it imposes the spectator to focus on the “performer, the performer-as-character, and the character” all at once (Tilley, 2012, p.309). Such

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a framework facilitates the simultaneous presence of various “temporalities” (Tilley, 2012, p.309), merging the immediate reality of the Australian theatre with the historical memory of Iraq. In *Nothing But Nothing: One Refugee's Story*, Al-Qady adopts this “contrapuntal polycharacter mode” (Tilley, 2012, p.313), to do more than just narrate; he uses it to manifest the “simultaneous dimensions” (Said, 2000, p.191) of the asylum seeker’s life. As the protagonist changes between his personal narrative and the personas of his family or Australian officials, he generates a dramatic counterpoint. This demonstrates that the history of trauma is not an eventual event but a lingering, resonant force in the current moment. This method results in what Tilley calls a “plural identification” (Tilley, 2012, p.304), in which the solo actor’s various roles appear as “two halves of a whole” (Tilley, 2012, p.313). Eventually, this process rescues the refugee’s identity from a rigid, government-defined image, reframing it as a multifaced and evolving historical narrative.

Furthermore, the fragmented structure of the Actor’s narrative positions the performance as a form of trauma testimony, inherently influenced by the theoretical medium. In performance, testimony is usually modified or created for theatrical structure, thus acquiring some characteristics of fiction, including symbolism and tension. This intentional mediation purposes to generate a coherent expressed self from the unaddressed traumatic essence. The first-person narration is not a straightforward account but employs the present tense to evoke a poetic immediacy, demonstrating how the postponed traumatic continually invades the Actor’s present condition (Cox, 2008, p.194-5). This painstaking construction of the witnessed self-paves the way for the play’s theoretical move: the shift toward a collective understanding of trauma.

In lights of these individual shifts, *Nothing But Nothing: One Refugee's Story* advocates for the theatre as a valorized space for “intersubjective witnessing” (Cox, 2008, p.194). This

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chapter advocates that the community serves as the central point through which a witness organizes the meaning of their experience, moving beyond isolated subjectivity. As Cox (2008) notes “Al-Qady constructs a fluid, unstable (inter) subjectivity, performing as and speaking about his mother, lover, daughter and his child and adult selves” (Cox, 2008, p.194). By decentralization of the personal witness, the performance demonstrates that the Actor’s trauma is emblematic of a broader community. emphasizes the opportunities for interaction and connection with others (Cox, 2008, p.193-4). This crucial move toward the collective allows the play to critique the political situations which caused the trauma, specifically the failure of the national support system.

Crucially, this shift toward the collective reveals that the psychological fragmentation of the individual is a direct mirror of the systemic collapse of the nation. It is here that the individual’s internal defense mechanism, the False Self, a concept originated by Donald Winnicott (1965) to define a defensive facade made to navigate a non-responsive environment, meets the collective’s demand for uniformity. The False Self is not merely a private mask; it is a social and political requirement imposed by a failed holding environment, such as the dystopian state of Iraq or the bureaucratic system of Australia. In these environments, the individual is forced to adopt a compliant posture to survive within the collective, sacrificing the spontaneous gesture of the True Self to satisfy the regime’s or the host nation’s truth regimes (Atasoy, 2024, p. 15). This act of global witness, where the play compels the international audience to observe the subaltern’s pain, enables the play to reference the trauma of a community, such as a family, a nation, a group of asylum seekers, and particularly, child civilians affected by war, contradicting its title’s assertion to tell “one refugee’s story”. Al-Qady’s evocate monologue reflects a lifetime of accumulated trauma, from a defenceless upbringing in Iraq to the hardship of migration, in

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which he articulates “the subjectivities and experiences of other witnesses” (Cox, 2008, p.194).

This demand to represent the collective directly links the individual’s divided psychological experience to the systemic collapse of the homeland (Cox, 2008, p.194).

The manifestation of the refugee experience in the play is characterized by an essential psychologic interplay, where the failure of the holding environment is further evidenced by the Actor’s imposed abandonment of his domestic responsibilities and the subsequent removal of his identity. This psychic rupture is poignantly captured in the dialogue with his daughter; her haunting questions “[a]re you going to die like your father? Am I going to die in the war?” (p.197), represent an entirely collapse in the intergenerational transmission of safety. Her silence forces his realization that the struggle has “torn apart and separated” the essential units of society, stripping him of his identity as a protector. This transition into a state of living death is literalized when he flees at midnight, lamenting the necessity of escaping his “home... city... country... [and] people” (p.197). Eventually, this sorrow leaks into his physical body; his sense of loss is so entire that ultimately cries out, “I have lost my country, now I feel like an orphan” (p.198). This orphan status is presented through extreme somatic deprivation, as he collapses to the floor admitting, “I am tired now. I am hungry. I am thirsty. I haven’t had slept for three days” (p.198). Even in sleep, the trauma persists as a frantic, internal list of “airport, police, passport [...] security guards” (p.198), proving that the environmental failure has become a permanent psychological and physical weight.

Therefore, the unclaimed trauma the Actor experiences is understood as a direct consequence of the failure of the holding environment in Iraq is supposed to provide. Because the catastrophic experience was not fully registered in consciousness at the time of occurrence, it remains “unclaimed”, only surfacing later as it invades the present. This is exactly what is caused

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by the loss of the initial support which Winnicott provides within the context of the ego-supportive function. When the homeland converts this holding role, which adapts to the citizen's needs and provides protection, into a source of endless threat and oppression, it establishes a trauma-generating environment that direct assimilation of experience. This failure of the state to contain the self, constitutes the foundational condition for the emergence of the 'False Self'. This False Self acts as a defensive organization intended to protect the core 'True Self' from extinction in an environment where spontaneous expression or dissent has become life-threatening.

The holding environment is a reliable system of care, essentially provided by the mother, which allows the infant to developing a sense of self through the "ego-supportive function" (Winnicott, 1960, p.61). A functional homeland should provide these same conditions, acting as a "facilitating environment" (p. 180) which allows their personal, political, and cultural maturation to develop without being threatened from internal oppression, war, or external threats. In *Nothing But Nothing: One Refugee's Story*, the Actor's trauma is a direct consequence of the failure of this environment in Iraq. When the state converts its protective role into a source of threat, it establishes a trauma-generating environment that prevents the direct assimilation of experience. This failure constitutes the foundational condition for the 'False Self', a defensive organization intended to protect the core 'True Self' from extinction where dissent has become life-threatening.

When a holding environment is replaced by an oppressive state, the individual's True Self, the core of the personality representing the "spontaneous gesture" and authentic instinctual needs, is directly threatened (Winnicott, 1960, p.145). Any authentic expression, such as a drive for personal dissent, is met not with acceptance, but with "impingement" (Winnicott, 1960,

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p.52). In the context of the play, the state's suppression of these gesture compels the Actor to adopt a False Self from destruction by living an "unreal" life (Winnicott, 1960, p.89). This systemic impingement is most visible in the forced militarization of Iraqi youth. The state imposes a binary existence where a young man's only efficacy is to "kill" or be a "prisoner" (p.194). The protagonist's rejection of this role, his desire to "carry a paintbrush" and "draw the people's faces" (p.194) rather than carry a machine gun, highlights the crushing of the True Self under a regime that repurposes even art for propaganda, for instance, "painting murals for the great leader, Saddam Hussein" (p.194). As the Actor notes, "any Iraqi person who doesn't fight will be executed" (p.196), turning the adulthood into a choice between being a victim or a perpetrator. As the Actor notes, the necessity of choosing between being a victim or a perpetrator eventually shatters the self's reliable reality in the same of self-survival.

This process of systemic impingement is illustrated by the dystopian environment of the Actor's homeland, where continuous state-sponsored or structural coercion cultivates a profound collective trauma. This trauma exemplifies what Kai Erickson (1976) describes as a "blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of community" (as cited in Somasundaram, 2014, p. 46). Somasundaram (2014) argues that war-torn contexts facilitate a "deterioration in social norms and ethics" (p.43). In the play, this systemic rupture is evidenced by the Actor's loss of his father, his beloved Leila, and finally his home. The trauma is not isolated to his personal history; it reflects a communal "breakdown of traditional structures, institutions" which once provided a sense of security and belonging (Somasundaram, 2014, p.43). His narrative reflects a wider communal breakdown where the trauma is not isolated to his personal history but represents a manifestation of a collective wound. By imposing young men to become instruments of death, the regime destroys

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the traditional structures and institutions that once provided a sense of belonging, changing the individual's psychological fragmentation into a mirror of the nation's collapse.

The collapse of the holding environment is further proved by the Actor's imposed abandonment of his domestic responsibilities. His promises to his little daughter, which remain unfulfilled due to his flight, manifest a rupture in the intergenerational transmission of safety. This is poignantly captured when he asks her, "[a]re you going to die like your father? [...] Am I going to die in the war?" (p.197). When she keeps silent, he realizes that "the war caused so many problems; families torn apart and separated" (p.197). By leaving his family behind, the Actor experiences a form of "living death" where his identity as a protector is stripped away, contributing to the collective wound that affects the entire Iraqi social fabric. He laments the necessity of his departure, stating, "it is difficult to say goodbye to my kids at this time. Now it is midnight. [...] I will escape from my home, my city, my country, my people" (p.197), he ultimately cries out, "I have lost my country, now I feel like an orphan" (p.198).

The manifestation of the refugee experience in the play is characterized by an essential psychosomatic interplay, or a leakage between the physical and psychological realms. This phenomenon aligns with what Elspeth Tilley (2012) describes as a "traumatic breaching bodily boundaries" (p.322), where the abject nature of trauma "disturbs identity, system, [and] order" (p.322). Somasundaram (2014) further proceedings that war-torn contexts exert a "psychosocial impact not only on the individual, but also their family [and] community" (p.42). In Al-Qady's play, this leakage is initially physical-to-psychological: the sensory horrors of the boat journey, manifested through the pain of the asylum seekers with him on the boat and the cries of the children, transcend mere physical sensation to become indelible psychological scars.

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Conversely, the Actor demonstrates a psychical-to-physical leakage when his internal history of oppression re-emerges within the Australian detention centers. Through “equating the Iraqi policeman with the Australian immigration officers, the Actor collapses the distance between two different geographical dystopias. This cognitive blurring demonstrates how traumatic memory leaks back into the physical body, rendering it a site of converged oppression. As Tilley (2012) suggests, in polycharacter monodrama, the physical body becomes a vessel where characters “intersect and overlap [...] precisely because they converge in and on a single performing body” (p.307-8). Therefore, the Actor’s physical reactions or tremors to the immigration officer are not merely responses to the present, but the visible surfacing of a “sundered” (Tilley, 2012, p.322) subjectivity that remains perpetually haunted by its past.

In the visual staging of *Nothing But Nothing: One Refugee’s Story*, the Actor’s physical gestures and posture function as a “visible fracture” (Tilley, 2012, p. 309), demonstrating the internal “sundered” subjectivity (Tilley, 2012, p. 322). When the Actor vacillates between the stooped, defensive posture of a detainee and the rigid, authoritative stance of the immigration officer, the theatre offers a physical architecture for his psychical trauma. The suffering of the asylum seekers is not merely described but are etched into the Actor’s movements, suggesting that the body has memorized the trauma of the boat journey. By using the same physical vessel to represent both the oppressed and the oppressor, Al-Qady visually determines that the Actor is imprisoned in a “contrapuntal space” (Tilley, 2012, p.319), where the ghost of Iraqi policeman physically inhabits his recent communications with Australian bureaucracy. This performative choice emphasizes the fracturing of bodily boundaries, offering that for the refugee, the past is never a separate entity but a physical weight carried into every new dystopian encounter.

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The adaptation of the monodrama form in *Nothing But Nothing: One Refugee's Story* represents a significant theatrical achievement in representing the fragmented diasporic self. According to Tilley (2012), the “polycharacter monodrama” provides a “contrapuntal space uniquely suited to the representation and negotiation of the defining tensions of diasporic experience” (p.328). This form operates “split character” to reflect the “plurality of vision” inherent in the exile’s consciousness, permitting the Actor to inhabit the voices of his past in Iraq and his present in Australia (Tilley, 2012. p.304). Crucially, the Australian detention center where this drama unfolds is presented as a “heterotopia” (Foucault, 1967, p.4), a “place without a place” (Foucault, 1967, p.9) that exists behind walls to contain those the state estimates others. Unlike utopian, this heterotopic space is a site of “crisis” and “deviation” (Foucault, 1967, p.5) where the refugee is held in suspended animation, isolated from the host society. Moreover, the Actor’s immediate address to the audience, an essential element of “oral storytelling” serves as a mechanism to sustain and construct a diasporic space of interaction and communication (Tilley, 2012. p.304, 307). By engaging the audience in ‘decision making’ to get the “yes” that the officer declines, the play applies moral and political pressure on the governmental systems. The audience is transformed from passive spectators into a public jury, imposed to acknowledge their complicity. This transforms the theatrical space into a site of resistance where the audience is invited to override the immigration officer’s “no”, reclaiming the refugee’s humanity through intersubjective witnessing.

The Actor’s homeland, Iraq, in the play is framed as a dystopian place, which serves as the physical setting for the failure of the holding environment. Dystopia means “bad place” which is used to describe “an imagined society that is dehumanizing and unpleasant, often as a critique or inversion of utopian ideals” (Atasoy, 2024, p.14). The Actor vividly describes the

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dystopian Iraq as “[t]he sky became filled with black smoke and weapons, tanks, soldiers, guns, shrapnel, blood. There is no sun, no flowers, no birds.” (p.192), and where “death follows you to your front door, / through the window, / in the car, in the church, / in school, / wherever you go” (p.194). The dystopian societal models are ruled by a “single regime” which “enforces a unique and unchallenged version of its own truth” in which “individuals exist in a state of pervasive surveillance and control exerted by authoritarian” (Atasoy, 2024, p.15). Iraqi people were controlled by Al-Ba’th’s ideology, by one single figure, Saddam Hussein, using TV whose “all TV shows were about war” (p.197). The TV broadcasts Saddam’s address and threatens the public “any Iraqi person who doesn’t fight will be executed” (p.196) the state “inhibit[s] the capacity for critical thought and imagination” (Atasoy, 2024, p.15). This environment’s insistence on uniformity makes it impossible for the True Self to express its needs.

Continually, any aspirations or other lifestyles are excluded for posing a threat to the dystopian regime’s continuity and stability of its totalitarian order (Atasoy, 2024, p.15). The community under a dystopian system is administered by propaganda flowing from a deprived ideology. The population’s independent thoughts and rights are delimited, freedom is remarkably limited, and a concept or figurehead is glorified by the public who are under uninterrupted surveillance (Chung, n. d.). Such systematic control contrasts the holding environment through preventing the “spontaneous gesture” of the True Self (Winnicott, 1960, p.181). Accordingly, individuality as well as resistance are forbidden and undesirable; the only acceptable aim is the uniformity, imposing the individual into compliant protective posture of the False Self to survive. Saddam Hussein regime compelled the Actor to be once a “soldier” (p.194) or to “paint a mural for the great leader, Saddam Hussein” (p.194). Both options serve the regime ideology by imposing a complete uniformity. The Actor’s desire to paint is the literal expression of

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“spontaneous gesture” which represents the True Self. This establishes the ultimate choice for the Actor: compliance via the False Self or resistance and subsequent displacement.

Consequently, the Actor’s feeling of being “like an orphan” (p.98) after losing his country proves the failure of the holding environment under the dystopian regime control. This regime attempts to produce a False Self through “seduc[ing] into a compliance” and achieving the “environmental demands” (Winnicott, 1960, p.146). However, the Actor struggles to maintain his True Self, which is represented through drawing, the expression of the “spontaneous gesture” (Winnicott, 1960, p.145), by refusing to become a soldier, and drawing a “dove with [his] fingertips” (p.195) on the prison wall. The Actor’s rejection of serving Saddam Hussein’s army, by saying “I would rather be a prisoner than a killer” (p.194), expresses the steadfastness of his True Self. The False Self searches for appropriate conditions to enable the True Self. If the conditions are not subsisted, a “new defence” must be recognized against any “exploitation of the True False” (Winnicott, 1960, p.143).

The Actor’s escape represents the triumph of the True Self’s persistence; physical liberation becomes the only way to maintain inner and create a safe space for assimilating the deferred and unclaimed trauma. However, fleeing Iraq ensures physical survival, it does not achieve immediate psychic healing. As identified by Caruth, this safe external space is merely the first step toward realizing the deferred and unclaimed trauma identified by Caruth at the start of this analysis, signifying that the war, provoked by the failure of the holding environment, has only begun inside him. This struggle turns a supposed sanctuary into a mental battlefield where trauma remains a constant, uninvited quest. Because the cold bureaucracy of an Australian detention center so closely reflects the oppression he fled, the Actor never finds the stable ground

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needed to truly heal. The war inside erases the miles between Iraq and Australia, creating survival feel less like a safe survival and more like an exhausting, endless test of endurance.

During the hardships of the journey by boat, the Actor's dialogue with butterflies and other creature which serves as a vital theatrical achievement, functioning as a dissociative defense against the surrounding horrors. By projecting his need for a homeland onto the vessel, declaring, "[y]ou, boat, you are my choice. You will be my country, you will be my home" (p.201), he tries to find a facilitating environment in nature while acknowledging the ship's fragility as "very small, very weak [...] made from old wood, very old" (p.199). This mental escape is a direct response to the physical trauma of the cries of the children who are told "don't cry, be quiet" (p.200) as they spend "three weeks in the ocean" with "nothing to drink [...] no water" (p.200). His plea to the natural elements, "[s]ea, please be quiet and gentle" (p.201), demonstrates a mind retreating into a parallel reality to survive the pains of the passengers who are "hungry and thirsty" (p.200) illustrates a mind navigating a parallel reality to survive the crossing, a survival tactic that culminates in the tragic realization shared with his daughter: "[s]orry my daughter, I didn't get the freedom" (p.200).

The failure of the holding environment, Iraq, pushes the Actor towards the illusion of sanctuary in Australia. The Actor's repetitive declaration, "I want to see freedom" (p.201), functions less as an expression of desire and more as a performance of requirement for the host nation's acceptance, aligning with Sara Ahmed's critique of the ideological demand for migrant happiness. Ahmed (2010) states that "[m]igrants are increasingly subject to what I am calling the happiness duty, in a way that is continuous with the happiness duty of the natives" (p.130). The Actor uses a self-injunction to accomplish this performance "look, look, a butterfly!/ Life, my friend ... look, we have reached freedom" (p.201) which presents the subject desperately attempt

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to will a new, optimistic reality into existence. The artificial happiness is a mechanism of traumatic denial: the Actor believes that they must suppress the uncontrollable trauma to fulfil the sanctuary illusion which Ahmed (2010) underscores “[i]f the promise of citizenship is offered as a promise of happiness, then you have to demonstrate that you are a worthy recipient of its promise” (p.133).

However, compulsory presentation of happiness is unsustainable and reveals the deceitful nature of the sanctuary illusion. Ahmed (2010) proposes that the promise of happiness is a societal mechanism to maintain the status quo, which transforms the unhappy subject into an image of failure. When Ahmed discusses this in the context of migration, the refugee is framed as the “melancholic” migrant (Ahmed, 2010, p.138). When the deferred trauma resurfaces through role-playing and fragmented memory, the host nation is absolved of responsibility. The Actor’s psychological struggle is framed as a personal failure to respond to the grace of hospitality offered by the host nation (Ahmed, 2010, p.142). Through making the refugee responsible for his own unrest, the system protects its own integrity and sustains the illusion of sanctuary; consequently, the Actor is compelled to bear the weight of this systemic failure (Ahmed, 2010, p.139).

The destructive nature of sanctuary illusion is finally encapsulated in the Actor’s repetitive pleas “[p]lease help us forget./ Please open./ So I should wait./ Let me dream./ So I should wait./ Yes, okay” (p.202). It portrays the moment in which the Actor internalized the social failure following the imposed role of melancholic migrant. This plea reveals the essential demand of the host nation: which requires that the refugee get rid of his traumatic memory to uphold the myth of the promised sanctuary. From this perspective, the refugee’s history of suffering is viewed as an obstacle to the host nation’s “happiness duty” (Ahmed, 2010, p.130), as

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it serves as a constant reminder of the violence and exclusion that the state's bureaucratic system prefers to keep invisible. The grace of hospitality is performed when the host nation provides as unconditional "holding environment" that accepts the stranger's sovereign history and traumatic memory, rather than demanding the erasure of their True Self as a condition for safety. By choosing to wait and dream, the Actor inadvertently absolves the Australian state apparatus of its responsibility for his continuous unrest, thereby preserving the host nation's illusion of being a safe and functional sanctuary. This illusion is shattered because physical displacement alone is unable to provide the psychic solution demanded for deferred trauma. Depending on Ahmed (2010) the home's function as a "container" (p.31) of feeling is shown to fail twice: first in the Actor's homeland, Iraq, and again in the new refuge, Australia. Being unresolved or registered, the trauma is kept as unowned psychic object which no physical boundary can contain. The Actor's desperate escape ensures physical survival, leaving him vulnerable to continuous internal war. The freedom which is expected to provide a cure is the illusion. Consequently, the refugees' fragmented reality must be lived internally, as the Australian bureaucratic system imposes a forced forgetting to ensure that his traumatic past does not disrupt the host nation's self-image as a 'happy' sanctuary. This erasure represents a fundamental failure of Australia as a new holding environment, as it prioritizes its own comfort over the psychic healing of the subject. imposes a forced forgetting to again represent the failure of the new holding environment, Australia.

4.3 In-Between Spaces: Reclaiming Humanity from the State's Static, Bureaucratic Portrait

David L. Eng and Shinhee Han (2003) state that "[w]hen one leaves one's country of origin, voluntarily or involuntarily, one must mourn a host of losses both concrete and abstract. These include homeland, family, language, identity, property, status in the community" (p.352).

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When the refugee, the Actor, encounters the sanctuary illusion, the losses mentioned above turn into tools for bureaucratic torture. The Actor's subjective agency and value are lost and forgotten. When he declares "I am nothing" (p.200), he recognizes that his identity is reduced and shattered this is apparent in his answer to the immigration officer who asked about his name and identity: "I forget, I can't remember." Later, he turns to a collective identity that correlates to his sense of collective trauma "my name is Sinbad [...] [m]y ID, my scars, my body./ My documents, my humanity" (p.202).

In the *Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha (1994) conceptualizes the struggle of identity as a perpetual and "problematic process of access to an image of totality" (p.51), not as an inherent or a priori essence. Identity is never a "finished product" (p.51): rather, it develops from the "uncertain interstices of historical change" and the continuous conflict between "psychic representation and social reality" (p. 40). This struggle is characterized by a dimension of "doubling" and "splitting" rather than a unified identity, as the person is compelled to negotiate their presence within the disturbing "space in-between" (Bhabha, 1994, p.40, 55). Eventually, Bhabha argues that identity is a "liminal reality" created through "displacement and differentiation" situated on a "shifting boundary of the otherness" which resists and interrogates the main narratives of the colonial culture or host (p.51).

Bhabha's assertion that identity is a "problematic process of access to an image of totality" (p.51) is vividly dramatized in the Actor's psychological conflict, where he is unable to attain a unified self. Actor's transformation between his traumatic history in Iraq is categorized by "black smoke and weapons" (p.192), and his imposed adoption of the mythical personality, Sinbad, indicated in the cross-examination by the immigration officer. As such, the Actor inhabits the "uncertain interstices" (Bhabha, 1994, p.51), of the historical change, swaying

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between a lost homeland and a refuge which reduces his humanity to “ID, scars, and documents” (p.198). Ultimately, the refugee’s, the Actor, existence turns into a “liminal reality”, trapped between the “disturbing distance in-between” (Bhabha, 1994, p.51) the binary of “YES and NO” (p.202). Such state of permanent displacement confirms that the Iraqi refugee remains a “shifting boundary of otherness” (Bhabha, 1994, p.51), where he is unable to be fully assimilated into the host culture’s “master narratives” of safety and happiness.

Bhabha (1994) moves beyond the comprehension of cultural identity by transforming beyond “diversity” to the “negotiation of cultural difference”, where identity is created through a mechanism of “cultural translation” (p.2) that negotiated on the boundaries of social power. This newly negotiated, hybrid identity is destabilized by a sense of “special loss”, which Bhabha explains in the concept of “unhomely” as a state where the distinction between the “domestic and the political” is blurred to transform the home into a site of “traumatic transition” (Bhabha, 1994, p.9-10). In the case of displacement, the refugee is captured within the host nation’s “legitimizing narratives” (Bhabha, 1994, p.2) and its “scopic drive” (Bhabha, 1994, p.109) for surveillance, where legal recognition is contingent upon becoming a “visible” (Bhabha, 1994, p.113) and “authorized” (Bhabha, 1994, p.113) symbol of the state’s authority. Eventually, the Actor’s cultural and legal existence is reduced to what Bhabha describes as “signs of authority” (Bhabha, 1994, p.113), the documents and scars that the state practices to fix a fluid identity into a legible, manageable category of refugee (Bhabha, 1994, p.113).

Bhabha’s notion of the “unhomely” (Bhabha, 1994, p.9), where the political and domestic spheres blur, is portrayed through the Actor’s realization that his home has transformed into a site of what Bhabha terms “traumatic transition” (p.2). His memory of the “sky filled with black smoke” (p.192) and rifles in his own neighbourhood demonstrates this loss of spatial safety.

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When the Actor declares that “death follows you to your front door” (p.194), he affirms Bhabha’s notion that home is no longer a private sanctuary but occupied by a hostile political reality, imposing him into a state of “spatial loss” (Bhabha, 1994, p.9) and perpetual displacement.

The scopic drive for observation described by Bhabha (1994) is enacted in the interview scene, where the refugee’s legal existence is created dependent upon becoming a “visible” mark of the state’s power. The Actor’s despairing plea, “my ID, my scars, my body. My documents, my humanity” (p.202), reveals the heartbreaking reduction of the Actor’s complex identity into Bhabha’s “sign of authority” (Bhabha, 1994, p.113). The state does not seek to recognize his cultural difference or his artistic past; instead, it practices his scars and documents to fix him into manageable, legible category of a “[refugee] number? Five million” (p.202). By requesting that the refugee be “visible” through his words, the host nation’s “legitimizing narrative” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2) re-traumatizes the subject. The Actor is caught in a “cultural [...] translation” (Bhabha, 1994, p.2) that fails to glory his humanity, eventually leaving him in a liminal case where he forgets his plea for freedom and accepts the state’s static, bureaucratic portrait of who his is.

Parallel to Bhabha’s framework, Stuart Hall regards identity as enduring an ongoing “living activity” and a “process of cultural production”. Identity is a “social imaginary” (Ashley & Stone, 2023, p.1-2) that people perceive to add meaning to their lives, continually being formed and redefined through the way people present themselves in both intimate and public spheres. Despite being an unfinished production, identity is a “trajectory” which encompasses contradictions, diversity, and a “provisional nature” (Ashley & Stone, 2023, p.37). This nature is dramatized in *Nothing But Nothing: One Refugee’s Story*, where Actor realizes his self as being

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not a “finished production” but a distressed negotiation between his traumatic past and the host nation’s need for a manageable narrative. Hall’s “social imaginary” is represented in the Actor’s adoption of the Sinbad character; through his new identity, the Actor engages in a “process of cultural production” (Ashley & Stone, 2023, p.2) which is designed to substitute his identity as a victim of “black smoke and weapons” (p.192) by a more palatable, mythical figure of Sinbad.

Furthermore, the contradictions inherent in Hall’s “trajectory” are personified in the Actor’s imposed transition from an artist who painted murals to a soldier, and lastly to a fragmented self, “number” among five million. The Actor’s identity remains provisional because it depends on external legal acknowledgement, trapped in the eternal, dehumanized waiting between a “YES” or “NO” (p.202). This struggle enables the Iraqi refugee to comprehend that identity is a constant “living activity” (Ashley & Stone, 2023, p.1), a struggle to reclaim his “humanity” from being reduced to a mere collection of “ID, scars, [and] documents” (p.198). Ultimately, Al-Qady’s play suggest that the refugee’s bureaucracy attempts to stop this trajectory, fixing the refugee into a static category of failure if the Actor cannot perform the required image of happiness.

This bureaucratic control is reinforced by Hall’s definition of the “nation-state” (Ashley & Stone, 2023, p.37) as both “political and territorial entity” (Ashley & Stone, 2023, p.186) that functions according to what Benedict Anderson (1983) calls “imagined community”. National identity is constructed, within a shared land, through “cultural meaning” (Ashley & Stone, 2023, p. 14) which combine individual members into a wider, collective national narrative. Such national identity is a political process which is often “inflected by the power and authority of those who have colonised the past” (Ashley & Stone, 2023, p.16) and demonstrates who is legitimized to “belong” to the land and who is excluded (Ashley & Stone, 2023, p.24-5, 93).

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In the play, the host nation functions as an exclusionary “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983) where the Iraqi refugee’s legitimization is perpetually deferred, demonstrating the violent boundaries of the nation-state. Hall’s argument that national identity is a political method of defining who is permitted to belong is enacted in the Actor’s precarious existence within the sanctuary’s territorial borders. The “collective national story” of the host nation, often framed as a landscape of happiness and freedom, effectively “colonizes the past” by demanding that the refugee erases his own history of trauma to fit in (Ashley & Stone, 2023, p.3).

Consequently, the Actor’s conflict highlights how the nation-state uses its authority and power to reduce a human life to a manageable category. The Actor’s exclusion is not just territorial but profoundly political, codified in the agonizing waiting for a “YES or NO” (p.202). The Actor’s humanity is stripped away and replaced by “signs of authority” (Bhabha, 1994, p.113), the scars and documents which the interviewer uses to judge his worthiness. Eventually, the Iraqi refugee in the play embodies the ghostly figure which haunts the nation’s borders; the Actor is a remainder of a history that the “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983) rejects to include in its national tale, leaving him captured in a liminal zone where he is physically present however politically non-existent.

Identity is formed by a complex interaction of “who we think we are, who others think we are, and how we present ourselves” (Ashley & Stone, 2023, p.2). This self-perception is constructed by “self-defined spaces” (Ashley & Stone, 2023, p.190) which are “based on shared identities as a means of social and political empowerment, collective allyship, and resistance” (Ashley & Stone, 2023, p.190) against external categorizations. In Al-Qady’s play, this complicated negotiation of identity becomes a battleground where the Actor’s self-perception as an artist is contested by external categorizations of the host nation. Hall’s notion of “defining

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oneself for oneself” (Ashley & Stone, 2023, p.29) is viewed in the Actor’s insistence on his creative and human history. Hall’s notion of “defining oneself for oneself” (Ashely & Stone, 2023, p.29) is evident in the Actor’s insistence on his creative history; however, this subjective identity is suppressed by how the others perceive him, whether a threat, a jumper, or just a bureaucratic file. His plea is a tragic attempt at the political and social empowerment. He tries to use his bodily suffering as a shared language for realization, the system uses the same scars to categorize him, transforming a site of trauma into a sign of bureaucratic legibility.

Furthermore, the adoption of the Sinbad character demonstrates an imposed “negotiation with the others” (Ashley & Stone, 2023, p.2); to subsist the state’s scrutiny, he presents himself through a mythical persona to satisfy the host’s “social imaginary” (Ashley & Stone, 2023, p.2) which forced him to abandon his “self-defined space” (Ashley & Stone, 2023, p.190).

Finally, the tension between the selective tradition of the host nation and the Actor’s historical roots forces him to inhabit what Homi Bhabha (1994) defines as a ‘Third Space’, a liminal site of cultural hybridity that, in the refugee context, offers neither belonging nor safety. For Bhabha, this space is an “in-between” zone where the translation of identity occurs, but for the Actor, it becomes a site of erasure where his sovereign history is replaced by a manageable, authorized narrative. This is demonstrated in the interview scene; the state’s demand for a digestible refugee story is symbolized by the adoption of the “Sinbad” persona, a performance that clashes with his True Self as an artist and victim of war. In the Third Space, his cultural difference is recognized only as a set of physical scars to be categorized, rather than a history to be honored. Consequently, the Actor is left to inhabit a “double time” (Ashley & Stone, 2023, p.21), caught between the ghost “pedagogical” time of his Iraqi past and the motionless,

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performative present of his dehumanized existence. He remains an “orphan” of both worlds, waiting for a “YES” or “NO” (p.202) that brands his humanity a state-sanctioned category.

In conclusion, the image of Iraqi refugee in Al-Qady's *Nothing But Nothing: One Refugee's Story* serves as a site of struggle location where the subject's history of transnational displacement encounters the cold mechanisms of external state surveillance. Through Winnicott and Caruth's ideas, it is proved that the Actor's fragmented consciousness is a direct consequence of the failure of the holding environment; the False Self developed in Iraq remains the only protective layer for a True Self which has been denied a safe space to exist. However, the transition to Australia does not offer the psychic recovery promised by the sanctuary illusion. Instead, as explored through Hall and Bhabha, the host nation's “scopic drive” (Bhabha, 1994, p.109) requires a performance of visibility which reduces the Actor's humanity to a collection of scars and documents. By adopting the Sinbad persona, he satisfies the host's social imaginary, yet this act of cultural translation efficiently rebrands his trauma into a palatable, static category. The Actor's eventual agonizing wait for a “YES” or “NO” emphasizes the eventual failure of the bureaucratic container: it can distinguish the refugee as a number; however, it cannot contain the unclaimed history that continues to haunt the subject's present. Ultimately, Al-Qady's play advocates that the Iraqi refugee's humanity can only be reclaimed in the ‘in-between spaces’ of resistance, where the humming of a mother's song or the ‘spontaneous gesture’ of an artist defies the state's attempt to manage the alive trajectory of the self into a motionless, bureaucratic image.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study confirms that drama serves not merely as a mirror reflecting Australian refugee policies, but as a vital space for resistance and identity recapture. The essential finding of this research emphasizes a profound paradox: as the Australian government increased the spatial exclusion and physical displacement of the refugees and asylum seekers, the narrative rebellion rises in the dramatic texts. This thesis demonstrates that while the political policy sought to rend refugees and asylum seekers into a static, manageable image, the dramatic texts open up the space for the refugees to transcend the frontiers set against their narrative and cultural expression.

Chapter Two in this thesis has conveyed that reaching Australia or being provided with temporary protection visa does not ensure safety and protection. Further, it does not grant the refugee the right to have his/her narrative a medium to be heard. While disclosing how racism, Islamophobia and political agendas render Hazem's narrative inaudible, Rayson's *Two Brothers* overwhelms the Iraqi refugee in the play with a historical and political background to portray the hardships refugees face in Australia. Relying on Stuart Hall's social imaginary, this thesis, in its second chapter, has shown how the refugee's authentic self is displaced by dominant stereotypes which are engineered to serve internal Australian debate concerning border security and national identity. Consequently, this chapter proves that physical proximity to the refuge does not grant legitimate agency; rather the refugee's humanity is covered by the state's refusal to involve with their specific historical roots. It displays that while providing the refugee with physical entry to Australia, the temporary protection visa serves as a legal limbo that simultaneously rejects the subject the right to a coherent past or a stable future, reducing the refugee's presence to a mere ghost in the national machine.

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Through its investigation in Ben Eltham's *The Pacific Solution*, this thesis has conveyed a radical shift in Australian policy from the conditional assimilation observed in the initial stage to a strategy of forced displacement and systemic erasure. In this phase, the refugee is no longer just a silent voice within the Australian borders, but a physically removed body, exiled to the Pacific Solution of offshore processing centers which function as extraterritorial vacuums. This geographical distancing generates in a deliberate narrative silencing, where the physical removal of the subject from the Australian land corresponds with their entirely removal from the national consciousness. Therefore, this dramatic space for the refugee diminishes to its absolute minimum, reflecting the state's calculated desire to reduce the refugee and asylum seeker invisible and un-narratable. In this chapter, the thesis has succinctly shown that the that the process of muting the Iraqi refugee, which is attributed to international security issues continues in Eltham's play. The Iraqi refugee in this play, Asif Mouhammed, is targeted relying on his name which suggests his Islamic culture, not on his status as a human being. This phase represents the entirely triumph of administrative violence, where the state's "scopic drive" (Bhabha, 1994, p.109) is used not to observe the refugee, but to oversee their evaporation, leaving them in a case of stability where their identity is suspended and humanity is sacrificed for the sake of border security.

In its final chapter whose focus is Towfiq Al-Qady's *Nothing But Nothing: One Refugee's Story* This study has explored an Iraqi refugee's narrative not only recounted but also performed by the same refugee. Unlike the characters in previous chapters who were spoken about or silenced, the Iraqi refugee dominates the stage from the beginning to the end, transcending the static, bureaucratic image and the necrocivilisational stasis forced by the state. This demonstrates a monumental shift in the thesis's trajectory; for the first time, the refugee's

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history, manifested through his scars and documents, is not just read and interpreted by the state's clinical "scopic drive" (Bhabha, 1994, p.109), but also performed and reclaimed by the subject, Al-Qady, himself as a living testament. This act of cultural translation dismantles the reductive stereotypes already determined in the earlier stages of policy evolution, substituting the state's "legitimizing narrative" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2) with a "witnessing structure of responsibility" (Stewart, 2019, p.28). By changing the refugee's physical trauma into a shared theatrical language, Al-Qady transforms the "NO" of bureaucratic exclusion into a space of "intersubjective witnessing" (Stewart, 2019, p.46).

Eventually, the transitioned analysis of the three dramatic works illustrates the essential failure of legitimating narratives to entirely suppress or remove the complexity of human reality. Where the government's administrative machinery sought to fix the refugee's identity into a manageable, ossified artifact of otherness, the theatre preserves identity as a "living trajectory" (Ashley & Stone, 2023, p.37) which refuses to be silenced by borders. This study has demonstrated that while policies may manage the body's movement, the dramatic imagination remains the final sanctuary, a space where the unclaimed history of the refugee can finally be witnessed, registered, and restored to its full humanity.

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المستخلص

تستقصي هذه الدراسة تمثيلات اللاجئ العراقي في مسرحيات أسترالية معاصرة مختارة، وتتحري كيفية استجابة النصوص الدرامية للواقع الجيوسياسي لسياسات الحدود، وإلغاء الإقليمية (الاقضاء المكاني)، والتهجير القسري. ومن خلال التركيز على مسرحية "شقيقان" (Two Brothers) "لهاني ريسون"، و"الحل الهادئ" (The Pacific Solution) "لبن إلّام"، و"لا شيء سوى لا شيء" (Nothing But Nothing) "لتوفيق القاضي"، توظف الدراسة إطاراً نظرياً يستند إلى دراسات ما بعد الاستعمار والدراسات الأداء لتفكيك البنى الخطابية المتغيرة لهوية اللاجئ. وتذهب الأطروحة إلى أن المسرح المعاصر يمثل فضاءً نقدياً حيويًا لمساءلة تمثيلات اللاجئ العراقي؛ إذ تتبع مساراً تطورياً ينتقل فيه الذات اللاجئ من مرحلة "الحديث عنه" عبر تمثيلات إعلامية أسترالية بيضاء خارجية (ريسون)، إلى مرحلة "إسكاته" وإدارته بواسطة الأجهزة البيروقراطية للدولة (إلّام)، وصولاً في النهاية إلى "سرد ذاته بنفسه" من خلال الأداء والتمثيل الذاتي (القاضي). وتؤكد الدراسة أنه في الوقت الذي تعمل فيه الدولة الأسترالية كآلية قمعية للسيطرة على الحدود، فإن الفضاء المسرحي ينهض كمنطقة مناهضة لـ "حضارة الموت" (anti-necrocivilizational zone) "تعيد للاجئ فاعليته السياسية، وذاكرته، وحياته الأدائية".

تساهم هذه الدراسة في إثراء دراسات مسرح اللاجئين والمنظور الأكاديمي العربي والعراقي، عبر تقديم واحدة من القراءات المقارنة المستفيضة والنادرة للمسرح الأسترالي المعني باللاجئين من وجهة نظر عربية. ومن الناحية الهيكلية، تقدم الدراسة متناً مقارناً مبتكراً يجسر الهوية بين الدراما السياسية المكتوبة بأقلام بيضاء وبين السرد الذاتي للاجئين، مما يؤسس لإطار مرجعي يحلل كيفية تحول اللاجئ من "موضوع" في الخطاب السياسي الخارجي إلى "ذات" فاعلة تمتلك سلطة الشهادة المسرحية. علاوة على ذلك، توفر هذه الأطروحة أول قراءة نقدية شاملة ومحكمة لمسرحية هاني ريسون "شقيقان" عبر العدسة التحليلية لنظريات اللجوء وطالبي الحماية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: طالبي اللجوء العراقيين، الانتماء، الهوية، الإسلاموفوبيا، مسرح الشتات العراقي، الفاعلية السردية، المسرح الأسترالي.



جمهورية العراق
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جامعة واسط
كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية
قسم اللغة الإنجليزية

صورة اللاجئين العراقيّ في مسرحيات أسترالية معاصرة مختارة

رسالة

مقدمة إلى مجلس كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية/ جامعة واسط استكمالاً لمتطلبات الحصول على درجة الماجستير

في الأدب الإنجليزي

تقدمت بها:

وفاء نعيم جبر

بإشراف:

أ.م. د ثامر راشد شيال الزبيدي