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## De-radicalisation Through the Performative Arts

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### *Abstract*

The Arab-Israeli conflict plays out on a variety of arenas. With regards to international involvement and support, the discursive aspect of the conflict is particularly important; how each side represents itself and the other. In this paper, the discursive means by which contemporary theatre dealing on the Arab-Israeli conflict are examined, with specific regard to changing these frames in a way that can allow for more dialogue and the deconstruction of demonising tropes that continue to frame the conflict today. In the works of Naomi Wallace's *Vision One: a State of Innocence*, a powerful message to this end is delivered, creating an uneasy link between a Palestinian lady and the Israeli soldier who shot her daughter, but died in her arms. Rife with accusations, the play yet manages to bind the two characters together through a trauma that each has lived, a continues suffering of the radical elements in their societies. This connection draws a sobering, yet hopeful conjecture about the ongoing nature of the conflict; the more each side has radicalised itself and inflicted harm on the other, the more the self has suffered, too. The resulting trauma experienced is common ground on which the two sides can understand each other. As a performed experience, the stage is shown to be a safe space on which to express this possibility of approaching the other, of taking down walls both sides have built up for over half a century, and allow for the possibility of recognising each others' humanity.

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### Establishing Common Ground

Few contemporary conflicts are as continuously in the global periphery, while observing the smallest chance of change in the status quo as the Israeli Palestinian issue. Treated under the term of 'Arab-Israeli Conflict', the stakes set on the power struggle go far beyond the internationally recognised and unrecognised borders. As a result, representations of and by each side differ dramatically, resulting in parallel narratives that stem from drastically different perceptions of both historical and contemporary facts on the ground. Facts which

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have now had seventy years to cement themselves not only within national boundaries and perspective cultural narratives in the region, but also within the international community and its uneasy and inconsistent attitude towards the parties involved. Between Israel and the Gaza Strip/the West Bank, the rift between the fronts is deep and established, with the two sides pitted firmly against one another. This divide has proven time and again as nearly impossible, or at least thus far, to bridge; whereas the international community has become the key player that needs to be won for one side or the other. At its heart, the conflict is laden with emotion; anger, fear, frustration - these sentiments seem to dominate the struggle for both Palestinians and Israelis, leading to a polarised understanding of each side in relation to the other.

Interestingly, while the conflict's delegation of power cannot be said to be evenly weighed out, with most jurisdictional and military power clearly favouring Israel, being a "population that is protected by its own powerful, militarized, and nuclear-armed nation-state," while the Palestinian side is characterised by a people that are perceived to be "the original indigenous population that has always been denied a state" (Khalidi 2014). Both sides rely heavily on the threat of the other to justify their actions, and the frequent radical forms of aggression and retaliation they engage in. Subsequently, the image painted for the international community is often one of the victim, of either Palestinians or Israelis at large. On one side, there is the hopeful young state of Israel, founded out of desperation for a homeland, and fighting since to be recognised and allowed to live in peace while living under a perceived continuous threat by its geographical neighbours. On the other, the Palestinian people that have had statehood continually denied to them, forced to flee from land taken away from them, now living under occupation or outside their homeland, with limited to no agency of their own, and perceived to have been abandoned both by other Arabs as well as the international community. To themselves respectively, there is no doubt about the roles inhabited by the self, and the other is just as clearly delineated. Be it either the violent Arab Israel is forced to assert itself against, or the oppressors Palestinians will defy to their last breath, the representation of self is essentially the same, namely that of the victim that would

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strive for nothing other than to live in peace, but is forced to commit acts of violence by the other, out of necessity and self-defense.

The question of credibility in practically any form that is not personal observation has come under intense scrutiny in recent times; from ‘fake news’ (Prier 2017) to a rise in populism across the globe, the rift between various stories that are accepted by various people is paradoxically widening. Whereas the twentieth century saw political orientation defined largely by social class, “in the twenty-first century, class and nation are becoming intertwined in populism,” (Schroeder 2018) garnering support of the people by appealing to simple narratives that provide simple solutions. Additionally, memories both of Britain as a colonial power directly involved in the creation of the conflict, as well as a fading understanding of the atrocities of the Holocaust place Israelis and Palestinians at a complicated point in history, where divergence in narratives have become increasingly polarised. The strength in ones’ own preferred narrative is more important than ever before, and political parties on each side appear to diverge ever further from another regarding future plans for peace and justice. From wresting control over the then called ‘Mandate of Palestine’ from the Ottoman empire, to promising both the Jewish and the Palestinian people a home country, to subsequent declarations and letters that would render its intentions highly dubious and confusing to the various involved parties and ultimately saw an unequal distribution of land between the factions (Rogan 2010), the United Kingdom bears no small part in the shaping of the situation as it is today. Since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, Britain has largely removed itself from immediate involvement, and left vacant a role that would be picked up by the United States of America and later the United Nations, while the States have claimed the role of mediator, an ‘accepted’ role by both parties. Since the United States had played an instrumental role in creating “policy that largely determined the timing and outcome of the conflict in South Africa, just as it was US power that shaped the Oslo process” (Veracini 2006), it appeared to be a natural choice for the choice of an impartial mediator between Israelis and Palestinians. However, due to a widespread belief in the Arab region that “the United States represented a new imperial power playing divide-and-rule politics among Arab

states and promoting Israel's interests over Palestinian rights" (Rogan 2010, p.497), this mediation role has been under stress long before more recent assertions by the Palestinian political elite. A most definitive refusal of the United States as a patron of unbiased mediation came with the election of Donald Trump whose decision to move the United States' embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (Savir 2017) shook the faith of Palestinians in whether the USA could still be considered a neutral mediator. This doubt has since turned into outright refusal to acknowledge the States in a mediation role, exacerbated by the recently released a new Middle East Peace Plan, which has garnered no traction at all amongst Palestinian leadership, and drawn criticism internationally (McGreal 2020). Feeling exceedingly left out in the supposed peace process by a formerly accepted mediator, Palestinians feel increasingly abandoned on the stage of international politics.

### **Performing Victimhood**

There is, however, a different forum in which discourse on the conflict is possible, allowing for input also from the Palestinian side. In the realm of theatre, a space for such dialogue is given, one that allows for a multitude of views to be expressed and interpreted. The way the play acts beyond the stage is multifaceted; here, special attention will be given to the most fundamental aspect of the nature of a performative work, the specific stylistic choices any given piece takes, and the ideas and narratives that are employed on a content level. First, the concept of performance and performativity require definition and scrutiny. For the sake of this body of work, Austin's conceptualisation of performativity will be adopted, where the performative is construed as utterances that "do not 'describe' or 'report' or constate anything at all, are not 'true or false,'" but "The uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not normally be described as, or as 'just,' saying something" (Austin 1962, p.5-6). The impact on the real is what constitutes the significance of performativity in the realm of theatre, where every word uttered can perform an impact on the audience. Butler further expounds on the subject with her claim that "[...] performativity

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starts to describe a set of processes that [...] lead to certain kinds of socially binding consequences” (Butler 1990, p.147). While the former is relegated to things that happen as they are said, perlocutionary utterances in theatre are unique in their “effect on the addressee/audience through what is said” (Aston 2003, p.57). In theatre, this process does not happen explicitly – rarely does an actor on stage directly attempt to move the audience towards a certain action. Yet implicitly, acts on stage have the power to call on the audience to reflect on their preconceptions and re-evaluate their own stances. It is through the performative medium of speech, combined with the actions on stage, that gives theatre the ability to ‘move’ the audience, which is itself a performative act.

Utterances on stage have the purpose to be perceived by the audience, thus, their effect performs in a specialised realm as given by their specific context. Furthermore, ‘performance’ implies a consciousness of the performative act, to perform something is to be aware of the performance. In this awareness, “performativity works [...] to counter a certain metaphysical presumption about culturally constructed categories and to draw our attention to the diverse mechanisms of that construction” (Butler 1990, p.147). A performance can influence and negate these presumptions and categories. Performing a theatre piece is “to mark aspects of texts or performances that gesture to their own conditions of production” (Reinelt 2002, p.206). A play is written and performed with the knowledge of the conditions of its creation, and is therefore necessarily a reflection also of its own aspirations to impact upon the audience.

Furthermore, “performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization” (Butler 1990, p.xv), this repetitive act is also linked to the self-reflexive nature of theatre. In this inherent repetitive and cyclic nature that theatrical performance is bound to, the acts on stage can be said to draw attention to their staged nature. Inevitably, this ritual performance draws attention to itself; unlike a situation outside of theatre that could be considered performative, but where the audience is unaware of the performance, a play cannot pretend to be anything else beyond a repeated and routinely re-performed act. Performance theory, then, which Schechner describes to be constituted by

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“nonverbal facial displays, vocal cries, body postures and movements”, that “culture-specific ‘kinemes’ are ‘built on top of and out of the universal language of emotions” (Schechner 2013, p.306), will be the grounds on which the play will be taken under inspection. The speech and acts on stage, the nature of re-performing as an act, implications of this re-production, and the way culture specific speech and tropes are used to effect upon the audience are of central significance.

Re-production is an important facet of the way theatre works, and it is linked directly to the meanings that can be observed from a play and the effect it is capable of. As Diamond states, “in line with poststructuralist claims of the death of the author, the focus in performance today has shifted from authority to effect, from text to body, to the spectator's freedom to make and transform meanings” (Diamond 1996, p.3). This view necessitates the consideration of performances of the plays to be given their due in addition to the structural, formal, and content functions of the play. It also leaves truthfulness of the events depicted hovering in limbo, a freedom to transform meaning at times seems at direct odds with the aim of the play. With regards to the performative aspect of theatre, self-reflexivity is “covering a whole panoply of possibilities opened up by a world in which differences are collapsing, separating media from live events, originals from digital or biological clones, and performing on stage from performing in ordinary life[;]” it enables theatre to be “Increasingly social, political, economic, personal and artistic [as] realities take on the qualities of performance” (Schechner 2013, p.123). A mimesis of reality may never be able to achieve the same status as reality, yet it can act as a focal lens with which to highlight and subvert the bits of reality it aims to portray. The events and portrayals on stage take precedence over the truthfulness of what they portray, as what is on stage can be considered another form of truth-telling.

It is therefore equally important to address another issue central to the forms of theatre that will be analysed in this piece, namely the concept of truth. Truth – or perceived truth – is intricately linked with the process described above, and of key importance to the plays to be taken under scrutiny. Ultimately, “unmediated access to ‘the real’ is not something the theatre can ever honestly provide” (Bottoms 2006, p.57). Theatre can never reflect objective truth;

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rather, it is a myriad of interpretations or versions of truth that arise from the repetitive and self-aware nature of theatre. Arguably, however, theatre has far more to gain from being ‘untrue’ than it could possibly lose. While on one hand, “[m]ere dramatic fiction has apparently been seen as an inadequate response to the current global situation” (Bottoms 2006, p.57), when engaging with politics, theatre has the ability both to stage and restage fictional and non-fictional events, without being bound to adhere to an exhaustive transcript of every event it displays.

The play under scrutiny in this essay hinges on certain schemata or frames that the characters on stage operate within, the nature of which necessitate closer inspection. Frames are defined by Entman as the act of selecting “some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman 1993, p.52). The identification of frames in theatre, then, can serve to identify biases and preconceptions as well as cast conjecture on the aim of any given work. In the play, the “text contains frames, which are manifested by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments [,]” (Entman 1993, p.52) challenging or reinforcing held beliefs. This interplay with pre-existing clusters of facts and judgement is key when depicting polarising interpretations of the conflict; the extent to which frames are challenged by the play will be of vital importance. It is worth noting that many of the frames operate in exclusion of others, impeding or making communication impossible at times. A dominant aspect of which frames are at work in the play centres around where blame and innocence, perpetrator and victor are understood to be located.

First, it is necessary to identify which frames are at work in any given piece, and the salience with which they are presented. By making a certain idea more prominent by emphasis or exclusion of others, “even a single unillustrated appearance of a notion in an obscure part of the text can be highly salient, if it comports with the existing schemata in a receiver’s belief systems” (Entman 1993, p.53). The attention given to an idea within the play

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is not necessarily indicative of how deeply embedded it is in the frame it exists in. Nevertheless, the salience of a frame can be a good measure in assessing the polarisation of it, as well as the constitution of said frame. A frame, then, can be seen as a form of perceived mainstream narrative, a point of origin from which the play and the audience approach a topic. These deviations from each other continually change the perception of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ on stage, the crux of which lies within the perception of the wrong-doer versus the innocent wrong is being done upon.

Both the Israeli state and the Palestinians of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip engage in a different kind of framing, namely one that is often grounded in a perpetrator-victim dichotomy. The specific framing will be examined in close detail, but first, the term requires clear conceptualisation. In its essence, a victim is understood to be a role that is either self-assigned, assigned by others, or both. Being a victim is a label that comes with pre-conceived ideas of what it means to be a victim, just as “Calling someone a victim encourages others to see how the labelled person has been harmed by forces beyond his or her control, simultaneously establishing the ‘fact’ of injury and locating responsibility for the damage outside the ‘victim’” (Holstein & Miller 1990, p.106). The victim, either self-declared or otherwise, loses agency in its becoming a victim. This is often the case when attempting representation of sub-altern groups by appropriating perspectives that enforce the image of a victim. In theatre, too, “the targets of perspective-taking have [often] been portrayed as vulnerable, sad and passive individuals, who were reliant on someone else’s help to recover from their difficult situations“ (Noor & Halabi 2018, p.3). Their agency is denied through being cast in the victim role; in an effort to relate hardship and evoke empathy, they are muted by their representation. Overcoming this self-limitation can be done through adopting perspectives other than one’s own, however. While limiting an understanding of self to that of a victim can lead to no empathetic understanding of anyone other, the refusal of this role can allow for taking the perspective of others. This form of perspective taking, as will be analysed in following chapters, is what allows for characters that would otherwise be framed solely as victims to relate and empathise with another.



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Furthermore, self-implicating as a victim reduces the possibility of speaking for oneself. When locating the source of suffering outside the self, responsibility shifts from the internal to external. Casting oneself as the victim also establishes a clear relation to the supposed source of damage; by “Bestowing on someone (or oneself) the status of victim [it is] implicate[d] [that one is] absolving that person of responsibility for whatever harm or injury he or she has suffered, creating a one-sided blaming of the victimizer” (Åkerström et al. 2011, p.106). More important than the transferal of blame away from the victim, however, is the question of responsibility; declaring a victim as powerless to act for itself proactively, only react to what has happened to it as consequence of being a victim. In self-perception of the self in a victim role, individuals “do not reveal an essential self as much as they perform a preferred one, selected from the multiplicity of selves or personas that individuals switch among as they go about their lives” (Riessman 2002, p.701). The act of framing the self as a victim is, in effect, a choice; while this choice may not be felled consciously, casting the self in this role consequently removes agency of acting beyond the assumed role. Instead of focusing on causal relationships that lead to harm, “Victimization contrasts with another framing in which events are portrayed in relational or interactional terms” (Åkerström & al. 2011, p.106). Subsequently, self-victimisation is establishing a power dynamic with the perpetrator, in which agency favours the latter. Important, then, is the manner of response given to a situation that casts one in the victim role. Essentially, the above-mentioned choice of victimhood can become a defining part of one’s identity, either in an effort to overcome this label and regain agency, or as a justification for further actions. This dichotomy can be seen not as two separate choices but a process, as “identity is not considered as something you ‘have’ but as something you do; it is created, put on stage,” (Åkerström & al. 2011, p.105) thereby becoming another facet of how an individual and greater collectives perform themselves. In this process of identity, ‘victim’ and ‘agent’ are not necessarily exclusive of another, they “may constitute parallel discourses, visible during the same conversation and providing speakers with resources as they go about making sense of their experiences and reproducing their identities” (Åkerström & al. 2011, p.104). Ultimately, it is the reasoning for

actions that are key in defining the frame out of which an individual or group chooses to act; whether actions are justified by a victim-based interpretation of one's own identity, or an attempt to reclaim agency and see the self as more than being at the whim of circumstances and actions of others.

### Representing Trauma on the Stage

The stage can be a space to explore conflict in a visceral and immediate way other media often lacks. The performance on a stage allows both for interpretation on the actors' and the audience's part, while being a very immediate form with which to engage in representation. In the case of Naomi Wallace's *Vision One: a State of Innocence*, the playwright takes an uncharacteristic approach at representation of the conflict, which effects a unique stance on victimhood as consequence. Produced first for *Theatre 7:84* in Scotland, the play revolves around how the Palestinian lady Um Hisham, the Israeli soldier Yuval, and the Israeli architect Schlomo interact in a dreamscape version of the Rafah zoo in Gaza. The three figures on stage are divided at first by both their national identity, as well as by their interpretation of each other. However, while the architect remains incapable of establishing a connection to either Um Hisham or Yuval, the latter two find that they share a common history. Wallace's play attempts to take a decisive step beyond performance or projection of the self as a victim, consequently taking an optimistic stance at the possibility of agency that comes with a refusal of being powerless to ones' circumstances. Though the subject of the play is closely attached to experiences of trauma and suffering, there are parallels drawn between how these trauma are experienced equally on all sides, and the possibility they harbour in connecting to another on an empathetic level. The characters in this play are connected through shared experiences of trauma, but the connections they form – or do not form – speak of a will to reclaim agency even when cast into the role of the victim. Rather than serving as a reason to radicalise through the direct and historical pain they have endured, the play offers reconciliation in an unexpected manner, a brief glimpse for an opportunity to

approach the other and recognise humanity even in the enemy. In Wallace's play, the depth of understanding between two of the characters, the young soldier Yuval and the Palestinian lady Um Hisham, can only happen because their traumata are closely interwoven. In their ability to empathise and connect to each other in the face of suffering they have experienced, they become both figures able to communicate with each other, and stand-ins for an approach of mutual understanding amongst opposing factions.

Of her own work, Wallace is keen to point out the importance of taking the perspective of others in the hope of overcoming construed and othering representations. While the burden of interpretation lies squarely on the audience of her work, she notes an ambition to "begin to disrupt and challenge our own ignorance about the world today [...] the carnage in [...] occupied Palestine [has] influenced what audiences want to see and think about. [...] Generally, it seems that people, in and outside of theater, are now more eager to challenge the rhetoric and rationales peddled by the media, think tanks, pundits and politicians" (Shamieh 2008). *Vision One: a State of Innocence* delivers such a chance to subvert and change pre-conceived ideas, and offers a way to depict understanding between staunch adversaries outside of the stage. Throughout the course of the play, stereotypes and common tropes continue to surface and consequently subverted by the soldier Yuval and the Palestinian lady Um Hisham. Rather than serving as an end verdict on the conflict, the play utilises these tropes as stepping stones on which to reach further understanding – allowing the two characters to explore nuanced aspects of the other's being.

Before coming to the performance, some attention requires to be given to the formal setting of the play. The interactions between the young soldier/zookeeper Yuval, the Palestinian lady Um Hisham, and the Israeli architect Schlomo take place in "Something like a small zoo, but more silent, empty, in Rafah, Palestine. Or a space that once dreamed it was a zoo" (Wallace 2009, p.6). The choice of setting has several implications on the way the characters can interact on stage. Firstly, the dream setting commences the play with a certain ambiguity; neither the audience nor the figures on stage can be entirely certain as to the time and place they are performing in. Moving away from a focus on representing reality, the play

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can approach the issue of representation without any confines. While various frames are still employed throughout the short play, they interact with each other, and end up leaving open the question as to which proves to be the most salient. Another strength of the dream setting in which Um Hisham, Yuval, and Schlomo meet is that it allows the play to fit into the re-performative cycle of dreaming, in this case the cyclical nightmare in which trauma can be re-produced and confronted. The form the play takes is applicable both to the nature of how trauma is experienced, as well as the cyclical nature of plays; both are routinely re-performed by the same actors and thereby allow for new realisations or even catharsis within the play as well as an outside spectator. Trauma is “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response [...] occurs in the [...] uncontrolled repetitive appearance of [...] intrusive phenomena” (Caruth 1996, p.11). As it is too much for the mind to process in the moment of its occurrence, it “is only accessible through a delayed return of the event in repetitive nightmares” (Duggan 2012, p.23). Alternatively, a play can be another form of a recurring performance done by and to the self. In *Vision One: a State of Innocence*, the repetitive nature of nightmares is adapted into the repetitive and cyclical form that theatrical performance takes. By further aligning the play’s setting to be dream-like and tied to a specific memory of Um Hisham, the stage is set for her and Yuval to re-experience their trauma. The progression these characters take throughout the play mirrors their confrontation with the atrocities they have suffered. In how they respond to these atrocities, and more importantly, how they respond to each other is key in examining how both these figures free themselves of being framed solely as the victim.

The play commences with a monologue by the soldier Yuval. To allow for progression by the character, he is at first introduced as a convivial and spurious youth, seemingly bored with the animals that are under his care. His first line delivered, “He whom love touches not, walks in darkness” (Wallace 2009, p.7) appears unfit for the setting. Only much later in the play does the soldier return to this line and the significance it bears towards him. In the beginning, however, he seems grossly unaware of his surroundings, save the fact that he is to take care of the animals. The physical barriers of the zoo, the cages and the soldiers guarding

them are much like the enclosed strip, which “resembles what was earlier done in the areas incorporated into Israel in 1948-49-[and] can be seen as a carceral enterprise, which is designed to control, confine, and dominate the Palestinians living in these areas” (Khalidi 2014, p.7). Yet, in the context of the further actions in the play, it becomes increasingly unclear who the zoo is shutting in, and who it is shutting out. Um Hisham, the one person in this constellation that seems to be present at her own will, hardly fits into the role of the caged animal that a contemporary frame would push her into.

For the time being, the characters inhabit the stage disconnected from each other, there is no attempt at understanding the other. When the Palestinian lady begins singing, the soldier is keen to assert his authority, ordering her to stop. To further establish the rift in communication between them, he adds, “Gurgling. Singing. Same thing” (Wallace 2009, p.8). Just as the first line he delivered, his rude rejection of her singing foreshadows the true relationship these characters have to each other, and underline his ignorance towards them. The comment on Yuval’s part is at once offensive to Um Hisham, but more tellingly, it also speaks of an inability to communicate with his counterpart. There is no common frame in which to communicate with another, the soldier’s life is separate from that of the Palestinian lady that even song is not interpreted as such by him. At least, this is how Yuval perceives his interaction with Um Hisham. She, on the other hand, understands him even when he speaks to himself, as shown when she responds to his demand in Hebrew to leave her alone (Wallace 2009, p.9). Yuval voices his surprise, showing the audience yet another aspect of his ignorance. His lack of knowledge of his surroundings, as well as the inability to exercise control and engage in meaningful conversation with his counter, not least by an inability to communicate in her language, at first limits how the young man can perform outside of a role of the defensive soldier. In contrast to Um Hisham, he is constantly asking questions, and reacts in defensive aggression to the things he is not privy to.

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### Positions of Power and Ignorance

The compulsive need to exercise authority in the confrontation with something unfamiliar or not understood is depicted extensively in how the young soldier Yuval acts towards the Palestinian lady. While unable to understand, or even want to understand the situation he is in, Yuval is yet eager to exercise the position of power he is in as a soldier to compensate for an initial lack of understanding. First offering to wake up the animals of the zoo as a demonstration of everything he is allowed to do, then answering a prompt by Um Hisham whether he should sleep with an authoritative “[s]leep? I’m the boss of this zoo. I need to stay alert” (Wallace 2009, p.9), he appears self-assertive and eager to show that he is comfortable in the position of power he is in. Yet, neither does he know who Um Hisham is, though she certainly knows him, nor does he seem to have capacity to be in charge at all as the two talk to one another. Expressing boyish confidence, it quickly becomes apparent that Yuval is disconcerted by the zoo, he speaks to himself in Hebrew saying, “something is wrong with this zoo. God help us” (Wallace 2009, p. 8). There is a foreboding about this line, Yuval is aware of something being not quite as it should be. However hard he tries to portray an outward calm, his uncertainty quickly manifest in his aggression towards Um Hisham as he feels his control slip. At first, he tries to ward off her verbal attacks with lines that are not his own. His first line of defense is quoting someone else, “[t]he one who comes to kill us, we shall rise and kill him” (Wallace 2009, p. 9). Yuval resorts to this line from the Talmud as an unquestioned justification with which he has been taught to greet ‘the enemy’. In resorting to the Talmud, he reveals his insecurity; with his own authority in question, he calls to a higher, unquestionable authority. Next, he cites another well known trope, “You want to throw me in the sea” (Wallace 2009, p.9); later when he makes the accusation that if Um Hisham and all Palestinians were “given the chance you would eat us” (Wallace 2009, p.14), further underscoring a lack of rational arguments by repeating platitudes. The accusations he brings before her does not speak of an understanding or actual past communication with other Palestinians, but rather a pre-conceived idea of an enemy that he has been brought up with,

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perpetuated and radicalised by a lack of interaction between them. His defensiveness and need to resort to generalizing attacks show his non-existent grasp on the situation.

Eventually, Yuval's façade of control begins to crumble, and his insecurity shines through to his actions. The performance that is taking place here happens on multiple layers. On the surface, Yuval is acting out part of the 'wall and tower' farce Schlomo has initiated. On this level, he is engaging rather passively in Schlomo's celebration of Israeli colonial history, though he appears to be ambivalent towards it. Secondly, his break of character effectively forces him to perform the symptoms of trauma of his own death rushing into consciousness. This performance is in stark contrast to the passive role he inhabited towards the architect so far, though the audience is at this point not aware of the reason of his trauma, the effect of it becomes immediately apparent. His performing of the symptoms of panic signify an event he has experienced, and is on the verge of re-experiencing again. The event has therefore already happened, resulting in his re-performing the moment it was inflicted to the audience. Since "Traumata are events which are unknowable in the instant of their occurrence; they must somehow be codified, set in relation to other events and experiences, in order that they might be confronted again" (Solga 2006, p.57), this reflects Yuval warding off the inevitable return of the moment of trauma. In the context of the play, however, Yuval is not prepared to engage with his trauma at this point in time. This knowledge, ultimately, is something shared by Um Hisham; it is with her that Yuval can find a way to relive his traumatic moment.

A third performance Yuval, Um Hisham, and Schlomo are engaging in is a theatrical representation on stage that can be seen to go beyond representing an individual. Of course, each of the three figures is personified as an individual on stage, yet they are framed to fit a certain demographic which they can be read to represent. The young zookeeper/soldier is at once caught in his self-perceived role as a caretaker and peacekeeper, and his aspirations as a person that keep rushing in during the play. While he continually answers in a protocolled manner according to his position, he also speaks of personal ambitions and interests, some of which stand in opposition to the role he inhabits as a soldier. This combination of soldier,

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caretaker and aspiring youth allows him to stand in for a young generation of Israelis. Similarly, Schlomo's swaggering attitude and obsolete adherence to old Zionist tropes like the Wall and Tower, fix the architect as a representation of early Zionists that constructed the young Israeli state. Um Hisham, embodying loss above all, acts as a placeholder for Palestinians at large. What Yuval is told and charged to do in his role as a soldier by Schlomo bears contrast to how he interacts with the other two on a personal level. Of Schlomo, he says, "[t]his is no place for you. You give me chills" (Wallace 2009, p.15) showing his distrust of the architect. Instead, he finds himself entertaining a conversation with Um Hisham, together they recite the interior decoration of the house of Um Hisham (Wallace 2009, p.16). Later, as Yuval recites the specifications to the Merkava 4 tank, the Palestinian lady complements his descriptions. Um Hisham draws attention to the sole purpose of the tank to be destruction. Yuval is taken aback for a moment, no longer as certain as he tries to appear to be. His insistence, "I'm not a bad soldier" (Wallace 2009, p.17) is as much directed to himself as it is at Um Hisham. Later, he apologises for the levelling of the zoo (Wallace 2009, p.18). The ability to communicate with Um Hisham brings a profound change into the interpersonal dynamics of the play; Yuval finds himself sharing more personal opinions with the Palestinian lady, while Schlomo is never accepted as an emotional confidant in any capacity.

Yuval is conflicted on the inside, and manages to articulate this to Um Hisham. In contrast to the arguments he brought against all Palestinians earlier, it is towards Um Hisham that he decides to open up to, not the Israeli architect. Articulating awareness and worry over his life as a soldier, he says, "there are moments when I am putting my feet into clean socks or drinking cold water on a hot day and something falls somewhere in the house and breaks and it sounds almost beautiful" (Wallace 2009, p.18). He is concerned with the effect his life as a soldier is having on him as a person, a very intimate detail to share with anyone, and especially so with someone that he should consider to be his enemy. His opening up to Um Hisham also shows that he thinks far beyond the simplistic generalisations he swatted back at her with earlier. The specific reference to taking pleasure out of something breaking indicates a dissonance of his own character. Destruction is not just something he has gotten used to, it is



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something he misses when it is not present. There is a clear progression happening within him; first, he defensively rationalised his role and attacked the person he felt threatened his understanding of self. Now, he is beginning to show that he is not as sure of what he is doing as he pretended to be at the beginning of their meeting. Next, he shows an awareness of the losses beyond personal trauma that have affected both their peoples, as well as an appreciation of the implications his role as a soldier has both on his world and hers. He confesses, “We stole your land, you stole our minutes” (Wallace 2009, p.18). He is perceptive of his function as a soldier, and furthermore aware of what this situation is taking from himself, too. In saying the above, he clearly distances himself from the mindset he expressed earlier, taking a step towards assuming responsibility by framing his nation as having stolen land. Upsetting the previous dichotomy, he is furthermore limiting himself the status of a victim that is acted upon, but unable to act on its own accord. By admitting that blame is not localised on one side, he is shifting the frame to be more centred, allowing for dialogue, and a critical evaluation of his own actions.

As Yuval and Um Hisham continue to converse, the young soldier’s capacity for emotion becomes even more apparent. Allowing himself to show vulnerability in front of Um Hisham, he becomes a character that has more facets and thoughts to share than the simple Schlomo. Eventually, in conversation with Um Hisham, he admits, “You’re right. I never wanted to be a soldier” (Wallace 2009, p.19). The fact that this admittance comes after Um Hisham went into detail of describing her daughter Asma further humanises Yuval. He has a conscience, feels empathy for a woman that has lost her child, and most importantly, can communicate his feelings to this woman who by his own previous statement should be his enemy. At multiple instance of the play, he apologises for the tragedy that befell Um Hisham (Wallace 2009, p.20), and he asks to “Give your family my condolences” (Wallace 2009, p.21). The more the audience becomes privy to his inner workings, the more Yuval exhibits a conscience and empathy for those he has hurt by his being a soldier. Yuval is disillusioned with what he is part of, but has not lost his ability to connect to others. The change he undergoes to becoming a communicative and empathetic figure on stage is no mere

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happenstance. The reason he manages to open to Um Hisham but not Schlomo can be traced to tragedy they have both experienced. In processing this tragedy that befell them, Um Hisham's loss of daughter and home, and his loss of life, they have found an unlikely topic through which they can connect. Trauma is discursive in nature, "the desire to forget and banish to history the events responsible for the intrusions [are] in opposition to the overwhelming need to speak about (testify) and in some way 'relive' these events" (Herman 2001, p.1). Yuval is at first caught in denial about the trauma he has to bear, refusing to accept the fact that he remembers the point of his death. Yet, the moment must come at which the memories of the event come rushing back, and suddenly, the soldier cannot help but relive the moment. He continues to repeat the phrase "Hold me" (Wallace 2009, p.25) to Um Hisham, exactly how he apparently did the moment he died in her arms outside of this dream-like sequence. The traumatic moment is finally rushing in on Yuval, and he stops resisting or relativising it.

Traumata overwhelm the person they are inflicted upon, they happen too fast "to be fully known and [are] therefore not available to consciousness until [they are imposed] again, repeatedly, in nightmares and repetitive actions" (Caruth 1996, p.4) such as theatre. For both Yuval and Um Hisham, the performance of the dream they are caught in, and which Um Hisham revisits nightly, are a way to re-experience and re-visit trauma in order of processing it in a way they were not able to in the immediate moment. On these nightly visits, when Yuval asks if they are in hell, Um Hisham says, "No, Yuval. You are in the Rafah zoo. The one that still lives in our minds. And every day I'll come here and visit you, as I visit my daughter" (Wallace 2009, p.23). Neither she nor Yuval are there of their own volition, the trauma they have experienced together is what binds them to this place. Yet, revisiting this moment allows for both to face and accept what has happened. He accepts both that he has died, as well as the fact that it was in the arms of a Palestinian woman that he lost his life. In doing so, he engages intimately with Um Hisham. The traumatic moment that he is re-experiencing and re-performing on stage are the final necessary step to come to a point of understanding with Um Hisham.

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If Yuval is furthermore to be understood as being representative of a wider Israeli demographic, the final moment is a poignant comment on the ability for Israelis and Palestinians to connect through trauma that they share. Despite religious and ideological differences, the play purports that in the end, the way humans suffer is essentially the same. In such extreme cases, in the absence of other points of connection, empathy for the other and understanding of trauma that one has also experienced is used as means through which to establish a meaningful connection to the other. Yuval comes to accept his own mortality, and that his last moments were shared with a lady who he has been conditioned to regard as the enemy. His earlier accusations and distrust of the woman have entirely disappeared. In fact, by the end of the play, Um Hisham becomes a source of comfort and reassurance to him.

The manner in which the three characters perform identities beyond those of individuals is nuanced and requires dismantling. The easiest to identify in the frames that are active in the play and the wider conflict is Schlomo. The architect inhabits a role that is painfully one-dimensional. In fact, he often does not act in a manner that a person would at all, making the interpretation of him as a concept rather than an individual all the easier to facilitate. He is hungry for ruins “God I’m hungry [...] Yes I can smell it. The crumble of walls. The smell of crushed linen. Toys bursting like fruit beneath the ‘dozer’s blade [...] Delicious.” (Wallace 2009, p.15-16), and refers to himself not primarily as a person, but as an architect. His personality is almost irrelevant, it is his function that stands at the centre of what he is. Yet, Schlomo says of himself that he is “lonely” (Wallace 2009, p.19), the only emotional insight the audience gets to him beyond his abstract personification of Israeli Zionist history. He is lost sight of his intentions, procuring up images of times long gone, in which he and the idea he stands for could be cast in a heroic light. Schlomo laments, “And now, my precious sentiments? – ‘love and belief’ – where are they? They have left a hole” (Wallace 2009, p.20). He appears fatigued, drained of motivation by the very movement he caused and continues to perform. Read as a metonymy of Zionist aspirations, his continued performance has overtaken Schlomo, he is no longer in charge of its ideas, instead, they are in charge of him. Casting himself as a sorry figure, there is yet no sympathy for him coming

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from the Palestinian. Um Hisham dismissively tells him “Leave us, Schlomo [...] your ruins are missing you” (Wallace 2009, p.21). The architect becomes to be understood as more of a destructive force than an individual, he has no place in the rapport Um Hisham and Yuval are engaging in. Showcasing a form of radical expansionism that is neither accepted by Palestinians, nor understood by the young Yuval, Schlomo is unable to form connections with the other figures on stage. The Palestinian’s comment further shows how limited a character Schlomo is, being incapable of communicating with either Um Hisham or Yuval, it is broken buildings he must turn his attention to. Out of touch and dated, he has lost connection both to the people disadvantaged by his system of belief, as well as those that are carrying it out in practice.

Unlike Yuval, who may commence the play being provocative and aggressive towards Um Hisham, but shows growth as a shared tragedy allows him to open up to another character, Schlomo, though leaving and re-entering the set, shows no signs of change or growth. His assuredness does not hide a deeper fragility that desires to be communicated like Yuval; he is the epitome of self-conviction. He does not attack Um Hisham for being a Palestinian, either, in fact, he seems to be entirely oblivious to her. Ignoring her most of the time, she seems too trivial to be given much thought; her concerns are not even worth addressing in the architect’s narrow view of the world. Early Zionism regarded Palestinians much the same way – ignoring them as much as possible by invoking the “country without a people” trope (Weizman 1983, p.115-116). On stage, Schlomo is a rushed and ridiculous figure. Strutting around in an air of self-importance, he seems to be living in a time that has passed, and is unable to perform his function. He prides himself in being “An architect [...] and an architect is naturally a philosopher” (Wallace 2009, p.10). Yet, he is physically unable to carry out his duties as an architect; upon entering the stage a second time, he complains, “[h]ow the hell is an architect to get to work when they won’t let me inspect the property?” (Wallace 2009, p.19), nor does his philosophising speak of anything else but his self-aggrandisement and outdated views. When entering the stage, Schlomo is all zeal and no critical thought, a fool who will neither listen nor be listened to.

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The crux of this zealotry is shown when he cites Ariel Sharon, exclaiming excitedly “Move, run and grab as many hilltops as you can to enlarge the Jewish settlements because everything we take now will stay ours... everything we don’t grab will go to them” (Wallace 2009, p.14). The Homa Umigdal model of settlement Schlomo is referring to has a divisive history in the West Bank, establishing a system in which “Settlements are simultaneously ‘walled in’ to protect them from surrounding Palestinian communities, and connected—by Jewish-only bypass roads—to Israeli territory so as to in effect superimpose a continuous Israel over West Bank Palestine” (Rotbard 2003, p.52). Far from being a model in which lonely Israeli outcrops of settlements lie amidst a vast area that is the West Bank, settlements are increasingly becoming a network of Israeli territory that is creating a lasting Israeli entity in the Palestinian Territories. In this way, “Borders are not only spatial facts. [...] For Israelis, the Arab “other” was always Egyptian, Syrian, Jordanian, or Lebanese, while the Palestinians were essentially transparent, not experienced, not present” (Scham 2008, p.20). Schlomo remains oblivious; despite being the historical force to orchestrate this division, he refuses to acknowledge the Palestinian presence he is talking to. Instead, he talks over her, resounding the worn-out trope “Protection” which even Yuval admits to thinking of as “a machine of invasion” (Wallace 2009, p.11). Both his direct citation of previous Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, as well as his close identifying with political models, have a dual purpose in showing how Schlomo is established as a character on stage. First, he becomes less of a humanised character than a signifier for a political agenda. Secondly, he positions himself clearly on the side of the perpetrator in the victim-offender dichotomy, without even acknowledging those that his ideas cause harm to.

Dismissed both by the soldier and the Palestinian, he remarks a final time, “we see eye to eye, the ruins and I. [...] Yet all I see are ruins. Ah well, Homa Umigdal, Homa-“ (Wallace 2009, p.21). Unlike Um Hisham and Yuval, the supposed ‘tragedy’ of his situation neither effects a change in attitude in Schlomo, nor are there any perceived consequences to his actions except a measured dose of self-pity. Whereas Yuval undergoes a profound change in how he communicates with Um Hisham throughout the course of the play, and Um Hisham

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accepts his empathy, Schlomo leaves the stage much the same way he entered it: self-important, and without insight or understanding. He does not in any capacity challenge any of the views he holds, instead, he acts as a signpost of a rigid set of political ideals, further detracting from being seen as an actual individual on stage.

### **Refusal of the Victim Role**

While the architect presents a figure that is entirely devoid of growth throughout the course of the play, both Um Hisham and Yuval can be observed in undergoing change within the performance. The Palestinian lady, in her role both as an individual and a representation of a greater Palestinian demographic, can both speak for the ideals and frames she functions within, as well as an individual with a unique story to perform. In her introduction to Yuval, she dismantles a prevalent frame consistent with depictions of Palestinians both in and outside of Israel. When asked whether she is a terrorist, she answers, “I commit terrible acts of Palestinianism. I eat liberty from a bowl on the Wall. Fanatic. Security. Democracy” (Wallace 2009, p.9). Um Hisham pokes fun at the stereotypes she is pigeon-holed into, and draws attention to popular frames that dictate the discourse on the conflict. At the same time, this statement is another clear refusal of being cast in the role of the subaltern; Um Hisham denies being the voiceless victim at every turn, her sarcastic statement ridicules the attempt to dismiss her as a violent victim of the occupation. Concurrently, her statement show off the confidence she presents herself with, an attribute that further subverts the image of the meek victim.

Though she initially refuses to engage with Yuval, the circumstance of the performance necessitates her to communicate with him, it is the only way for either of them to find any measure of progression within the dream-state of the Rafah zoo and closure in the wider context of their experiences. The connecting point to the soldier is his mother, a role she, too, identifies with strongly. She ambiguously tells Yuval, “I’ve got something that belongs to her” (Wallace 2009, p.9). For the majority of the play, Um Hisham is privy to

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knowledge that Yuval is not. The awareness of her knowing something he does not is very upsetting to him at first, however, the closer he is brought to the truth of his own death, the less eager he is to learn the truth. The terms of their engagement, as well as the power dynamic of where power resides in their interaction clearly favour the Palestinian lady. Um Hisham possesses more knowledge of the situation and the reason the three figures are meeting on stage, she knows more than they do, and has the bargaining chips in her hand. If the performance is a dream, it is her dream. This situation as a figure of authority is particularly pronounced with the audience as well, while her actions and confidence quite naturally position her to know more than her male counterparts, her apparent knowledge of how all the figures and the setting piece together positions her as a figure of authority to the audience, too.

While she is the most aware of the three figures on stage, and therefore also the character to have most agency, Um Hisham is still not free from the vision she is caught within. When asked by Yuval about why she repeats this meeting on a daily basis, she answers “I have no choice” (Wallace 2009, p.23). She alludes to the same re-performative cycle of trauma that Yuval, too, is caught in. Yet, unlike Schlomo, while she states that the repeated visitation of these moments, the destroyed Rafah zoo, the death of her daughter, and Yuval’s death, the way she chooses to confront these moments is a decision she makes. She is not powerless in how to face these situations, instead, she resolutely rejects any attempt to be cast in the role of the pitied victim when the opportunity to do so arises. Yuval’s apology for what has happened to her daughter may be an important step for him in confronting his own involvement in her death by virtue of being complicit as a soldier; to Um Hisham, his apology is received as a statement by which to once again assign her to a role she does not want to be cast in. She vehemently tells him, “I don’t want your sorry” (Wallace 2009, p.20). Um Hisham refuses being cast as the victim. Becoming a figure that one feels sorry for effectively limits her capacity as an individual; she becomes a receiver of empathy and pity, but is denied an equal standing with those who pity her. To become an object of pity is to lose agency as a person; positioning her as someone who is primarily defined by her loss caused by external

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influences and events denies her the right to speak for herself or take influence on her life in future.

Instead of becoming a figure of pity, Um Hisham explains to the young soldier how the tragedy that befell her gives her capacity to relate to others that have suffered the way she has. She considers reaching out to Yuval's mother, but finds herself "too angry [...] I think of your mother. I don't want to, but I do. We had pieces of life in common [...] Now we have pieces of death. In common" (Wallace 2009, p.22). She relativises her experience to something Yuval can understand, and simultaneously puts herself on equal footing with a person situated on the polar opposite end of the spectrum of the conflict. The mother of an Israeli soldier is an equal but opposing foil to herself, yet it is exactly to her that she draws parallels to. At the same time, she cannot let go of her pride, and has therefore never managed to bridge this final gap and establish contact in the 'real' world. The dream in which the three figures share with one another, however, is precisely the right platform by which communication is possible. If the dream, being cyclical and set apart from the 'real' is to be understood as being manifested in the performance, the ability to communicate in this sphere is equally transferable. Outside of the stage, such moments of empathy and understanding may be hard to imagine, yet on stage, in this dream-state, the characters are not restricted by how they can communicate. The play facilitates a literal stage on which to explore attempts of understanding, if not complete reconciliation, between factions that have immense difficulty in communicating with another outside of the stage.

She manages to show tenderness towards the dying soldier, all the while maintaining her stance towards the occupation and the grief it has caused her. Like Yuval, she is caught in trying to rectify the atrocities she has had to witness to a moment experienced that showed the 'other' side to be as human and vulnerable as her daughter was. As the soldier lay dying in her arms, she admits that "Everything I have despised, for decades – the uniform, the power, the brutality, the inhumanity – [...] I held it in my arms. I held you, Yuval" (Wallace 2009, p.23). In this moment, despite having lost her daughter and her home as cause of the military Yuval is part of, she was able to perceive Yuval as a human being, and finds herself incapable of



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hating him. When asked by Yuval to sing the song she sang at the start of the play, she pointedly refuses. However, the final stage directions of the play direct Um Hisham to “sing the same song she sang at the beginning of the play, the song she sang as Yuval died.” (Wallace 2009, p.24). In repeating the song, and thereby re-performing the moment both of his death, and the start of the play, Um Hisham completes the cycle that both her and Yuval’s trauma are bound to take. The young soldier falls to the floor, and dies shortly after. In the final moment of the play, as the Palestinian woman is looking at the dead Israeli soldier, there is a “fleeting gesture/moment [in which] they connect,” (Wallace 2009, p.24) marking the end of the play. In light of her verbal refusal just seconds earlier to his request, this acknowledgement of him is all the more telling, as it appears in spite of the rejection of him that she wants to continue to hold on to. Ultimately, what connects these two characters is an extremely traumatic moment, that of the soldier’s death and Um Hisham’s inexorable link to it as well as having a daughter of her own that has been killed as cause of the conflict.

The three characters interacting in *Vision One: a State of Innocence*, differ strongly in their representations and functions. The architect Schlomo is completely lost in time, and completely subjugated by his own ambitions, to the point where he can’t relate, nor be related to. In this manner, he is far more alone and denied agency than either Um Hisham or Yuval, as he cannot go beyond complaining about his own situation without having a concept of how to change it. Meanwhile, Yuval and Um Hisham have both experienced tragedy, and are both traumatised, reliving their traumata through the form of the performance-dream. Yet, neither accepts to be cast as the victim. Um Hisham takes charge wherever she can; she may be a victim of an Israeli Defense Force (IDF) raid and the occupation, but she embraces agency wherever she can, be it in having the final word with both Schlomo and Yuval, to refusing to be an unknowing victim. She is also the only one that knows the exact chronology of events that have lead to this point, and how the three of them are connected.

The play also engages with tragedy and loss without framing those affected as incapacitated victims, or getting caught up on sweeping generalisations about large demographics. Instead, the victim position is visited, but relativised by the figures’ capacity to

speak for themselves and effect change either within our outside themselves. Wallace's play takes a more nuanced and two-dimensional approach to representation of victimhood. Characters are not exclusively or predominantly metaphorical for a greater idea or political demographic. While the architect Schlomo is merely a placeholder character for a political past and idea, Um-Hisham and Yuval have a dual purpose. They both at once represent the societies from which they stem, and the trauma and limitations these have to contest with, but also embody figures the audience can empathise with personally as fleshed out characters. The performance thus becomes a conversation that does not dwell on individuals as victims, but gives a convincing example of how they can find common ground not just in spite of, but because of traumatic moments they have experienced. At the same time, the performance can act as a representation of how Israelis and Palestinians can find common ground on which to engage in dialogue of their experiences in the form of theatre. The line between the dream in which these characters find one another time and again is performed in awareness of the re-performative construct of theatre, the stage becomes an effective platform for the characters to divulge their emotions and show empathy for one another that may not be possible off the stage. Meanwhile, the character Schlomo fails to take part in this exchange, and is left alone and effectively voiceless as cause of his inability to acknowledge others beyond himself.

## Conclusion

Naomi Wallace's *Vision One: a State of Innocence* employs a blend of symbolic representation of characters as well as stories of individuals to portray the way in which identity of the victim can both be performed on the stage, while also offering a possibility of how to overcome this frame. The three figures on stage establish a very concise structure in which to represent an interaction, while the setting of a dreamscape allows for interactions that may not be possible outside of the stage. While the three figures can on one hand be read as representations of wider Israeli and Palestinian demographics, they yet each have an individual story to tell. The way they frame themselves in these stories is key in their ability

to communicate with one another; Schlomo the architect fails to attempt to see himself outside of his role as a victim, and is therefore inevitably left behind by the other two characters. In an opposing example, Um Hisham and Yuval manage to connect with each other on a common experience of victimhood, their communication with each other and acceptance of the circumstances as they are allow them to form a connection with one another, implying an optimistic chance at overcoming hatred of one another by accepting the mutual pain that has been received and caused.

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