

**Verbatim Theatre as a Petit Narrative: A Lyotardian
Reading of *Guantanamo: 'Honor Bound to Defend
Freedom'***

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Abstract

The central thesis of this paper is that the authors, Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovo, manipulate the verbatim techniques in their play *Guantanamo: 'Honor Bound to Defend Freedom'* (2004) as pragmatics of communication and legitimation. Through these verbatim techniques, the authors construct a set of paralogies or petit narratives that destabilizes the totalizing nature of America's grand narrative on the absolute justice and freedom, which has shaped the post-9/11 politics and history. Drawing on Jean Francois Lyotard's postmodern discourse on the incredulity towards metanarratives, the paper reveals that this post-9/11 narrative is flawed and inaccurate. A verbatim drama, *Guantanamo* is structured in a way to bring to view fact-based 'petit' narratives that expose the human and legal violations committed against the Guantanamo Muslim detainees, putting the world's most powerful democracy on a moral trial. The petit narratives assert that historical accounts must always be perceived with skepticism, and that there is no such thing as a single, unique reality.

Key Words: Verbatim, Lyotard, Petit Narrative, Paralogy, *Guantanamo: 'Honor Bound to Defend Freedom'*

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Introduction

The central thesis of this paper is that the authors, the journalist Victoria Britain and the novelist Gillian Slovo, manipulate the verbatim techniques in their play *Guantanamo: 'Honor Bound to Defend Freedom'* (2004) (hereafter *Guantanamo*) as pragmatics of communication and legitimation. Through these verbatim techniques, the authors construct a set of paralogies or 'petit' narratives of abuse, violations of human rights, and political corruption and maneuvering. The play's petit narratives aim to contest the totalizing nature of America's post-9/11 grand narrative on absolute justice and freedom. In addition, these petit narratives propose that the post-9/11 American politics and history are triggered by racial and cultural biases, in which the clash of civilizations discourse is overwhelmingly present.

The paper seeks to answer questions related to the functionality and authenticity of verbatim theatre in formulating a counter-metanarrative, or a petit narrative, that confronts audiences with contemporary crises and suppressed historical realities. In the same vein, the paper seeks to investigate how the play's verbatim techniques acquire a postmodern meaning that is consistent with Jean Francois Lyotard's poststructuralist/postmodern notions about the incredulity towards metanarratives, discussed in his book, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984). To the best of the researcher's knowledge, and in light of the secondary research listed in the works cited section, these areas of inquiry through which the play is currently examined have not received due attention. To answer the questions of the study, the paper is structured in a way to give a brief overview of verbatim theatre as a petit narrative, a concise engagement with Lyotard's notions about the postmodern condition of

knowledge, and a detailed exploration of the play in question in light of the verbatim techniques and Lyotard's theoretical formulations.

Verbatim Theatre as a Petit Narrative

Verbatim theatre is a type of playwriting that is based on the use of the exact words of real people. It resurged on the contemporary British stage as a new form of writing that aims to present a fact-based narrative, which contests the totalizing nature and politically engineered discourse circulated by the hegemonic media. Carol Martin states: "It is no accident that this kind of theatre has reemerged during a period of international crises of war, religion, government, truth, and information. Governments 'spin' the facts in order to tell stories. Theatre spins them right back in order to tell different stories" (14). In other words, verbatim theatre responds to the public's dire demand for clarity and understanding that they could not gain from the politicians and governmental institutions whose reliability began to wane and seemed beyond repair. David Hare, the British dramatist and one of the converts to the verbatim theatre tradition, declares:

Very, very complicated things are happening that people struggle to understand, and journalism is failing us because it's not adequately representing or interpreting these things . . . now the[verbatim] theatre rushes to fill that void because journalism isn't doing the job. (62)

Mary Luckhurst adds: ". . . Verbatim theatre can make important socio-political interventions by projecting voices and opinions which otherwise go unheard into a public arena" (201). Accordingly, verbatim theatre, in the words of David

Lane, “performs a worldwide civic function of sorts, creating a democratic theatre that can document all four corners of the globe and give an opportunity for people to talk, and be listened to” (66).

In this manner, verbatim theatre is a political theatre for the most part. It seeks to empower the normally disempowered. It becomes a subtext or a conflicting petit narrative, presenting other eyewitnesses to the social and political realities. Unlike documentary theatre which relies on “the consultation of documentary evidence,” verbatim theatre, stressing authenticity and factual integrity, gets considerably closer to truth by relying on “a word for word” narrative of those “involved” (Bottoms 59).). In place of authors’ mediating hands of creativity, verbatim theatre lays bare the facts, a virtue that is far beyond the capabilities of fictional writing. As such, verbatim theatre is defiant and confrontational. It faces the audience with reliable and legitimate counter-historical narratives, which, in turn, work towards more conscious raising and mental engagement. The audience, faced with the performed materials, “become directly ‘implicated in events’ and, in principle, compelled to take a stand” (Lane 59).

In form, the verbatim is characterized by “a straightforward aesthetic – actors on stage with economical use of set and props” (Luckhurst 202). It employs first-hand materials on the subject matter garnered through “face-to-face discussions with the writer or actor, written testimonies, transcriptions of court hearings and print journalism or recording of interviews and news reports” (Lane 65). Dramatists reconstruct these materials, most often in the structure of the tribunal, in a way to create a conflicting ‘petit narrative,’ as Lyotard names it, about the subject matter under performance. Among many other re-enactment techniques, the

play may thus appear as “a fluid collage of written and spoken statements and interviews,” or a combination of statements and fictional scenes based on evidence, or even a mixture of interpretive dance and text . . .” (Lane 65). Will Hammond and Dan Steward explain the term and process required to create plays within the form:

The term verbatim refers to the origins of the text spoken in the play. The words of real people are recorded or transcribed by a dramatist during an interview or research process, or are appropriated from existing records such as the transcripts in an official enquiry. They are then edited, arranged or recontextualised to form a dramatic presentation, in which actors take on the characters of real individuals whose words are being used. (9)

It is thus the form of verbatim theatre that lends it a special gravitas. The form represents a powerful interrogative mechanism to which other theatrical practices are deemed inferior. *The Color of Justice* (1999) by Richard Norton-Taylor, *Stuff Happens* (2004) by David Hare, *Talking to Terrorists* (2005) by Robin Soans, and *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* (2006) by Rachel Corrie, are a few examples of successful verbatim plays that “tackle complex global issues and are performed on global stages” (Anderson and Wilkinson 154). Added to this list is *Guantanamo: ‘Honor Bound to Defend Freedom’* (2004) by Victoria Britain and Gillian Slovo, a type of ethnodrama whose verbatim dramaturgy addresses moral anguish and social injustice.

Guantanamo is composed of personal accounts, interviews with, and letters by the Guantanamo prisoners, their

lawyers and their relatives in an attempt to present fact-based dramatization or paralogy of petit narratives, that reverses the media-constructed grand narrative. The petit narratives are presented in a disjointed dramatic structure, which simultaneously achieves an aesthetic value and represents a thematic necessity that gives the authors the opportunity to choose from the verbatim archive the most relevant and interesting. Through its verbatim techniques, the play gains reliability and legitimation to interrogate the validity and credibility of the totalizing nature of post-9/11 American grand narrative on absolute justice and freedom, destabilizing its theoretical foundations and condemning the ensuing illegal practices. The play does not only seek “to make visible spaces, events, and subjects that otherwise remained obscured, but it also asserts “claims to truth rooted in the evidence of testimony” (Paik 126). Though the play does not conform technically to the tribunal structure, it still has the power and effect of the moral tribunal that puts the world’s proudest and most powerful democracy on trial.

The play is divided into three acts. The first act narrates the ways the prisoners were detained; the second, their experience of detention; and the third stages a call for justice. The narratives are fragmented, interrupting each other, and out of chronological order. The interspersing of the storylines of the figures represented is meant to parallel the disjointed nature of trauma narratives. Theatrically speaking, *Guantanamo* defies the Aristotelian paradigm of playwriting. There is no single protagonist; there is, however, a multiplicity of protagonists whose tragic flaw is their cultural belongings, which put them in the grip of a political force that is far beyond control. Action in the play has a cinematographic flow, and it constantly shifts from one person to another.

Grand Narratives in Decline: Lyotard's Postmodern Condition of Knowledge

The present research draws upon Jean-Francois Lyotard's theory of knowledge in his book *La Condition Postmoderne: Rapport sur le Savoir* (1979), translated into English by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi as *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984). Lyotard, a French philosopher, sociologist and literary theorist, is best known for his indictment of, or "incredulity" towards, what he calls the grand narratives (*les grands récits*) or the metanarratives (*les métarécits*) of the modern age (xxiv). In this book, Lyotard recognizes grand narratives as big stories with alleged universal consensus, claiming to have answers to the world's disorder. To Lyotard, this "universal consensus is an attempt at unification which seems improbable and impossible" (Ammar 68).

Lyotard states that the totalizing, speculative, and emancipatory nature of these grand narratives, their reliance on some form of transcendent and universal truth, and their claim to give comprehensive explanations to historical events all suffered from the obsolescence of the apparatus of legitimation (xxiv). Lyotard asserts: "The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements Where, after the metanarrative can legitimacy reside?" (xxiv-xxv). Thus, grand narratives and the relevant self-sufficient and emancipatory stories, which are discourses of power, such as Marxism, Kantianism, Hegelianism and religious doctrines, among others, proved bankrupt as they failed to achieve what they were primarily designated for, namely the emancipation and progress of humanity. In this regard, Lyotard argues: "We no longer have recourse to the

grand narratives - we can resort neither to the dialectic of Spirit nor even to the emancipation of humanity as a validation for postmodern scientific discourse" (60).

The focal point in Lyotard's theoretical formulation is to strip historical grand narratives from their alleged possession of absolute truth. In this respect, Lyotard makes a distinction between two major patterns of knowledge: scientific knowledge and non-scientific or narrative knowledge. Lyotard's formulation lies in the assumption that scientific knowledge, which he understands as any form of abstract, analytical, or schematic form of explanation, depends for its legitimation on observable and verifiable statements or moves and is expressed solely through the language game of denotation. Since this scientific knowledge is challenged and refuted by new scientific discoveries, it has lost its appeal to universal truth. Narrative knowledge, on the other hand, is a characteristic feature of pre-scientific societies as it is constructed in view of collective wisdom, and is circulated and handed on across generations through this mode. Lyotard discredits the authenticity of this narrative knowledge as he lowers it to the level of "fables, myths, legends, fit only for women and children" (27). It is the outcome of "a different mentality: savage, primitive, underdeveloped, backward, alienated, composed of opinions, customs, authority, prejudice, ignorance, ideology" (27).

According to Lyotard, this narrative knowledge is developed by those in power into grand narratives or meta-narratives which, in the words of Kumar Sharma, "provide criteria that allows one to judge which ideas and statements are legitimate, true and ethical for each different form of narrative" (469). Lyotard attacks this self-referentiality, or self-validation, of these grand narratives as pragmatics of legitimation. He

declares: “Narrative knowledge does not give priority to the question of its own legitimation and that it certifies itself in the pragmatics of its own transmission without having recourse to argumentation or proof” (27). This leads to what Lyotard describes as “the loss of meaning in postmodernity” and the fact that “knowledge is no longer principally narrative” (26). The deconstruction of these grand narratives, according to Lyotard, is a justifiable act for many reasons. The mere construction and sustenance of these grand narratives tend to unduly ignore the existing chaos and disorder of the universe. After all, grand narratives ignore the heterogeneity or variety of human existence. They are thus untrustworthy. For these reasons, there should not be a single narrative that is true for all people; there should be a space for other petit narratives to emerge.

Lyotard introduces the concept of petit narratives or local narratives (*les petits récits*) as characteristic of the postmodern condition of knowledge. In Lyotard’s assessment, the postmodern condition of knowledge shifts emphasis from grand narratives to a multiplicity of histories or petit narratives with different language games, and rather than a consensus on knowledge, these petit narratives produce paralogies with differentiated accounts. Through these petit narratives, truth is introduced as relative and singular. The problem that Lyotard brings out is that the ‘moves’ or the statements of these petit narratives are “ignored or repressed” by the institution of knowledge. Things are so because, as Lyotard explains, these petit narratives offer rules and assumptions that destabilize the accepted hegemonic positions. Lyotard’s comment on this situation deserves attention; he says: “. . . When the institution of knowledge functions in this manner, it is acting like an ordinary power center whose behavior is governed by a

principle of homeostasis. Such behavior is terrorist . . ." (63). It is apparently an exercise of power and terror, which excludes any player whose moves are threatening.

As proposed by Lyotard, the institution of knowledge production should give way to a multiplicity of standpoints so that other facets of reality are manifested and other voices are heard. Lyotard affirms that the "[p]ostmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert's homology, but the inventor's paralogy" (xxv). Thus, these petit narratives are, in a sense, some **paralogies that construct a discourse of challenging statements expressed in differentiated language games**. These statements gain legitimation by being different from the mainstream accounts. Granted, these paralogies "open up new possibilities for thought and action and allow those voices threatened with silence to be heard opening more pluralist modes of thinking about history, present and the future" (Sharma 470).

Guantanamo expresses a similar incredulity towards the construction of historical knowledge, and the relationship between knowledge and power through which the powerful monopolizes the right to national and international decisions. *Guantanamo* sets out to contest these assumptions and present alternative realities that are threatened to go unseen. In the background of the play is the framing grand narrative of the post-9/11 events in which the war-on-terror discourse was propagandized in prescriptive language games as a self-sufficient and emancipatory narrative that should be embraced by all justice-and-freedom advocates. "After that September day in 2001," Tom Lansford states, "Americans became increasingly willing to exchange civil liberties and individual

freedoms for promises of greater personal security and protection from future attacks” (xi). Accordingly, the American government issued a new bill authorizing the President to use “all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, . . .” (Document-1).

This governmental call, further legitimized by the President’s claim for the Spirit’s, or God’s approval as a guaranteeing metanarrator, brought about two destructive wars in Afghanistan (2001), the home of al-Qaeda terrorist organization, and Iraq (2003), an alleged supporter of al-Qaeda and claimed to possess mass destruction weapons. Suspects with claimed affiliation with al-Qaeda organization or the Taliban government were thus randomly hunted and rounded up in secretive CIA ‘black sites.’ Several suspects were exported to Guantanamo Bay, a US naval base in Cuba. In the mainstream media, the Guantanamo Bay facility was circulated as part of the grand narrative on the US legal justice and emancipation procedures that aim to achieve stability and world peace.

Guantanamo engages with these events and dramatizes a set of paralogies that decenters the grand narrative on absolute justice and freedom that has shaped the post-9/11 American politics and history. The play thus contests the mainstream narrative of Guantanamo as a place for defending freedom in the post-9/11 period. In Lyotardian logic, the play casts this grand narrative as illusionary and delegitimized through a set of petit narratives with differentiated language games that are communicated and legitimized by being verbatim stories of actual detainees, their relatives and their lawyers. Through the play’s petit narratives, issues of race, religion and abuse of

power are revealed as the main stimuli behind the war-on-terror discourse and the ensuing indefinite detention of hundreds of prisoners. Guantanamo is also revealed as a place of torture, large-scale violations of human rights, an execution of unbridled power, and, above all else, a continuation of the colonial project.

Guantanamo: Paralogy of Petit Narratives

Guantanamo brings center stage narratives in a state of dispute. The title of the play suggests this kind of conflict as it indicates the gap between what is said and what is seen to be done, which is a resounding violation of the values expressed by the detention center's motto, 'Honor Bound to Defend Freedom.' The geographical location of Guantanamo suggests the circumvention of any recognized rights for those detained. The place becomes an objective correlative for all types of power abuse exercised outside the realm of all laws and rights. In the play, the authors construct compelling personal narratives set in opposition to the more policy-focused grand stories generated elsewhere. The play foregrounds stories that tackle what Stuart Hall calls as the "sharply opposed, polarized, binary extremes . . .," which are habitually ascribed to those whose identity markers deem them minorities (Hall 229). The stories challenge the US monolithic treatment of marginalized individuals as it casts them as varied, multifaceted and human.

As such, a didactic activist monologue given by Britain's Lord Justice John Steyn commences the play and transports the audience to the heart of the dystopia. Lord Steyn's monologue assumes the function of the stage chorus introducing the forthcoming trauma related to Guantanamo. In his speech, Steyn is cynical about "the most powerful democracy" which detains "hundreds of suspected foot soldiers" (5). The

justification of this detention, Steyn declares, is that this powerful democracy, in times of war, gives itself the right to “adopt measures infringing human rights in ways that are disproportionate to the crisis” and which are “beyond the exigencies of the situation” (5). The result is permanent loss of liberty (5). In the form of the moral tribunal, Steyn attacks the philosophy beyond the Guantanamo prison, which sacrifices the prisoners’ right to access the writ of habeas corpus. The inmates become thus “beyond the rule of law, beyond the protection of any courts, and at the mercy of the victors . . .” (5). Steyn opines that the irony is intensified by the fact that the then US president announces those prisoners, regardless of their innocence or guilt, as “killers” (6). Steyn’s words, taken verbatim from his 2003 speech, originally aimed at “exhorting the British judiciary to condemn publicly the detention center at Guantanamo” and condemn as well Britain involvement in this detention (Mantoan 101). In the context of the play, Steyn’s words set the tone for exposing the unlawful US policies at Guantanamo detention center.

Guantanamo establishes a petit narrative of inconsistency in the US political discourse. The government acknowledges the relationship between place and jurisdiction. Therefore, it creates ‘black sites’ outside the US soil where it sends dangerous suspects to be under counterterrorist activities. In the script, Clive Stafford Smith, an attorney advocating for the rights of the detainees, tells audiences:

Guantanamo Bay is a massive diversion. It’s got nothing to do with the real issues - none of [the people that they think are] the real bad dudes are in Guantanamo Bay, because the American Government would never put them there while there is a possibility that we’ll get jurisdiction to

litigate to get them out of there. So all of them are in Bagram air force base [*sic*]and places like that (33).

This inconsistency in the US policy is made clear by lawyer Gareth Pierce. In the script, Pierce informs the audience: “There is a process of shipping people for instance to Egypt, where you know they’ll be tortured. [You] torture something out of them, then get them back to Guantanamo. [It’s] a grotesque international redistribution” (34). The play depicts Guantanamo as another black site for those summoned to it to face another level of extralegal activities.

Guantanamo digs out the suppressed narrative behind the detention. For the US government, in times of war, some people’s lives do not count and are not worthy of legal protection or human rights. To dramatize this narrative, the play features a series of affective personal accounts that force the audience to reassess their view of Guantanamo and the related US policies. Five British residents of Muslim background, subjected to torture and incarceration, are shown traumatized by being captured, interrogated and detained in this remote Guantanamo for no other reasons than their ethnicity and Islamic faith. It is significant that their narratives are framed and punctuated by Islamic daily rituals. The five calls to prayer recur throughout the play and are followed by recitation of some Quranic verses. This aural theatrical strategy sets the tone for deliberate demonization as the US administration constructs a link between Muslim identity and terrorism. The play features the detainees’ lives before, during and after the detention. The narratives assert that the Muslim detainees are neither terrorists nor “enemy combatants,” as claimed by the US government (Jackson 73).

The play constructs an ethical encounter with the humanity of the prisoners. Moazzam Begg, Wahab Al-Raawi and his brother Bisher, Jamal Al-Harith, and Ruhel Ahmed are all ordinary Muslim people. Mr. Begg introduces his son Moazzam as a loving son, a student of law and a practicing Muslim who sticks to the fundamental rituals of his faith; he prays five times a day and fasts one month a year. He married young and preferred to establish his own business selling Islamic books and clothing. In a similar manner, Wahab Al-Rawi portrays himself as obedient to the law. When the waiter urges him to stop smoking, he directly succumbs to the command, “No problem. I’ll put it out . . . I don’t like to break the law” (8). Nevertheless, he is subjected to strict surveillance due to his Muslim origin. During a business trip to Gambia, he is stopped at the airport for inspection and interrogation. His brother and other partners perished in the same way. Jamal Al-Harith traveled to Pakistan on *tableeg* (teaching Islamic ideas); he was arrested in Pakistan by gun-toting Afghans and handed over to the Taliban who alleged him of being a member of some British special forces military group that targets Afghanistan. While he was imprisoned, the Americans started bombing Afghanistan, which resulted in the fall of the Taliban government. Al-Harith was jailed in Kandahar by the American Special Forces. He was similarly transferred from Kandahar to Cuba “to complete the process,” as he was informed by the American officers. Ruhel Ahmed’s story in the play begins with him already detained at Guantanamo. He is shown writing to his family requesting contact lenses and solution so that he can see properly.

Although this construction may sound simple characterization, it, in the context of the play, has the dramatic effect of fleshing out the personalities of the prisoners. It also

denies the application of the 'terrorists' status to them. In his account, Al-Harith brings forth the dilemma of the Guantanamo interrogators who brought ordinary people to detention but could prove nothing against them, even though they demanded the assistance of all world intelligence. The problem becomes worse: they could not release those people without having something on them (39).

Some of the detainees are British subjects, while others are immigrants who abandoned their native countries to escape violence and political unrest. In Guantanamo, they are all forced by the guards and officials into new identity positions; they are all terrorists and killers and hence enjoy no rights. In his account, Jamal Al-Harith reports: "But the Americans said 'There's no law here, it does not apply'" (45). They are even denied a sense of community and homeland. They were all kept in isolation. Jamal Al-Harith tells the audience about detainees who attempted to organize the other prisoners under a leader to fight for their rights: "So when we tried to organize Emirs, they kept putting them [in isolation] so people were afraid to become Emirs now" (45). In this regard, Mantoan comments: "The localized aspects of prisoners' lives at Guantanamo were ruled by seclusion, denying them access to any form of diaspora wherein they could talk with others about the homeland—shared or not—that they had lost" (105).

The war-on-terror discourse has given rise to a sort of ardent patriotism in which those who do not belong to the nation-state are cast as dangerous and unworthy of any international law protection. Thus, the Guantanamo hybrid detainees are incriminated and tortured because of their cultural background. The script explains that Jamal Al-Harith's capture was triggered by his unsettled geographic location as well as his Muslim faith. In the script, Al-Harith had recently traveled

through Iran to Turkey, then to Pakistan, where he was arrested. The two brothers, Wahab and Bisher al-Rawi, were Iraqis who had been living in England. They moved to Gambia on business. There, they were arrested. The script narrates that the difference between the two brothers is that Wahab al-Rawi has British citizenship, while Bisher retained his Iraqi citizenship in hopes of reclaiming his ancestral house should Saddam Hussein step away from office. Their different citizenships are translated into different treatment at the hands of the Guantanamo officers. Upon release, it is only Wahab, the British, who is set free. In Jamal Al-Harith's account, a detainee is subjected to brutal beatings because of his Arabness. Al-Harith declares: "[There's one detainee] an Arab. They hate him, the guards, the Americans, hate him" (44).

In tandem with its verbatim and disjointed narrative structure, *Guantanamo* juxtaposes conflicting stories on the stage to show the gap between the institutional grand narrative on the one hand and the petit narrative the play constructs on the other. This juxtaposition emphasizes the view that those in power manipulate the history of this event and erase the stories of those who lack power. Accordingly, along with the detainees' personal narratives, the authors of the play insert a segment from a press conference with Donald Rumsfeld, the then US secretary of State, in which he answers questions about the British attitude toward extradition, the transparency of facility policies, and the indefinite nature of the war and the detentions. Rumsfeld's account provides the foil for what the play seeks to stage. By so doing, the play stages the falsehood of the official story constructed by the US government and propagated by its representatives.

In the script, Rumsfeld is introduced as "the villain of the piece" who "would never hesitate to give the slanted

version of reality” (Ahmed 180). In opposition to the detainees’ narratives, Rumsfeld declares in a restaged press conference that the American administration was “able to capture and detain a large number of people who had been through training camps and had learned a whole host of skills as to how they could kill innocent people – not how they could kill other soldiers” (30). Rumsfeld justifies the detention: “We’ve got a good slug of those folks off the street where they can’t kill more people” (30). He lies to the press about detainees being investigated on an individual basis so that it becomes known to a certain degree who belongs to the Taliban and who belongs to al-Qaeda. Rumsfeld’s press briefings demonstrate how he manipulates stereotypes about al-Qaeda fighters’ aggressiveness in killing people to justify the cruelty meted out to Guantanamo inmates. He becomes agitated in the re-enacted press conference, tying the detainees to al-Qaeda and branding them “the most dangerous, best trained vicious killers on the face of the earth” (34). Nevertheless, detainees bearing the American citizenship are treated differently and do not face the same inhumane measures taken against other inmates. Rumsfeld declares that the American detainee John Waker “has been turned over to the Department of Justice. He will go where they want him. He will not go to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba” (35). Rumsfeld's political language reveals not just racial discrimination and political maneuvering, but also a determined attempt to frame all Guantanamo captives as culpable, so that their detention appears legitimate and necessary for global security.

The narratives the play relays deflate the Rumsfeldian rhetoric of irrefutable guilt. In his account, Moazzam Begg appears guilty of nothing other than his religious commitment and humanitarian endeavors to help his fellow Afghani people.

Upon the American bombardment of Afghanistan, Moazzam fled to Pakistan in hopes of returning to Afghanistan to resume his humanitarian job. To his shock, he was mercilessly arrested by “two American soldiers, assisted by two Pakistani officers” who “threw him to the floor, bundled him up, and put him into the boot of their car” (23). Moazzam cries out: “After all this time I still don’t know what crime I am supposed to have committed for which not only I, but my wife and children should continually suffer for as a result” (56). Wahab and his brother Bisher Al-Rawi faced unfounded accusations of association with the Qaeda leader Bin Laden and that they were in Gambia to either build a training camp or blow up something. In his account, Mark Jennings, the lawyer, reveals the injustice inflicted on Wahab Al-Rawi’s brother, Bisher:

I met the family and I got to know them as friends and it struck me that no way are they fanatical about anything. [What I learned about] Bisher was that, yes, he was reasonably devout but he’s the sort of guy that can sleep for England – he used to sleep through morning prayers. (19)

Jennings also reveals that Bisher’s Muslimness, his friendship with Abu Qatada, his philanthropic efforts, his goodness with all people regardless of faith differences, and his skills in piloting and parachute jumping, are all his guilt. Serious charges are not pending, as the man has never taken part in any anti-American or anti-British activities. Similarly, Jamal Al-Harith and Ruhel Ahmad face no definite accusations other than being devout Muslims.

These anti-Muslim accounts invoke the racialized Orientalist tropes in which Muslims appear as “madmen raging impotently at modernity” (Holloway 24) or as “nothing but

trouble” (Said xv). Evidently, these tropes constructed the post-9/11 discursive figure of a terrorist as a violent character who deserves more violence since the law is too mild and permissive to cope with. In light of this construction, Rumsfeld appears in the script defending the exceptional measures taken against the Guantanamo detainees. The play contests these measures by revealing their immorality and vulnerability. In the play, the Guantanamo Muslim detainees are documented as innocent; all the accusations against them have no factual basis.

The narratives of injustice and unlawful detention are further legitimized by legal opinion. Lawyer Gareth Peirce’s testimony draws attention to the play’s appeal for justice and the rule of law. Pierce outlines the disparity between what the American administration states, and what is really put into force. The American administration declares, Peirce narrates: “It seized people for purposes that are clearly the obtaining of information,” but “it transferred them to a place which it believed would be beyond the reach of courts in America.” It also claimed that those detainees were seized on the battlefield, yet it refused to treat them as prisoners of war and so denied them the right to enjoy the protection of any international law. When faced with these paradoxes, the American regime redefines those detainees as “unlawful combatants who were not wearing uniform and were not conforming to the norms of welfare” (32). Rumsfeld gives the American regime the right to deviate from the Geneva Conventions with regard to the prisoners of war’s protective rights. He views the Guantanamo captives as merely dangerous detainees who may be provided with adequate living conditions:

We have said that, you know, being the kind of a country we are, it’s our intention to recognize that there are certain standards that are generally

appropriate for treating people who were – are prisoners of war, which these people are not, and – in our view – but there – and you know to the extent that it’s reasonable, we will end up using roughly that standard. (32)

In Lyotardian logic, *Guantanamo* delegitimizes Rumsfeld’s narrative that Guantanamo and other American detention facilities provide healthy surroundings for the detainees. The play features various torture techniques that the detainees were subjected to. In his letters to his family, Moazzam brings up the images of scorpions, beetles, mice and many other creepy-crawlies that inhabit the Bagram facility. Moazzam narrates the vision of that ten-legged camel spider which “is bigger than the human hand-size, moves like a race car and has a bite that causes flesh to decay – if untreated” (37). In Guantanamo, Moazzam faces another level of atrocities as he is “treated like an animal” and most of the time he is “in chains, thrown into a cell, which is really “a cage” (55). He also declares he has been deprived of light and auditory stimuli: “I have not seen the sun, sky, moon etc for nearly a year!” (56). Designated as an enemy combatant, Moazzam is taken into solitary confinement, which drives him to mental illness. Lawyer Clive Stafford Smith insinuates that Moazzam was forced into a confession of being an agent for al-Qaeda, who is to “send an unmanned drone aircraft from somewhere in Suffolk to drop anthrax on the House of Commons” (58).

For Wahab Al-Rawi, Bagram “is a no-go zone for anybody – there’s no human rights, nothing” (24). In his testimony, Al-Harith reveals types of abuses against the detainees. A man of principles, Al-Harith turns away from the guards who beat other inmates and who refuse to provide any

medications until those diseased drop out or bleed; he sadly remarks: "So if you're in pain, it doesn't matter, be in pain" (44). Against what Rumsfeld says about Guantanamo as a seaside spa, Al-Harith talks about Guantanamo as a "cage in which you have no other choice than to dream and do more worship, otherwise one may lose his sanity. According to lawyer Gareth Pierce, the released British survivors, called the Tipton three, who used to be nice people with whom you "feel very immediately comfortable with, had experienced atrocities in Guantanamo which Pierce describes as a story of "terrible stark medieval horror" (51). Traumatized, the Tipton boys recall being treated as mere "bodies in a container suffocating to death, waking up to find everyone around you dead" (50-51). The groundless and indefinite detention in Guantanamo creates depressive moods which lead to serious suicide ideation. Al-Harith states that "in the first few months at Guantanamo they had 32 suicide attempts" which were reclassified in euphemistic terms as merely "Manipulative Self-Injurious Behavior" and which could only be controlled by anti-depressive medication (40). The post-release condition is no less traumatic. The released British survivors displayed various types of physical problems with regard to their joints and eyes. In the script, Ruhel Ahmed, as his father remarks, who used to be a young boy, appears in pathetic conditions with a long beard, short-sighted eyes and an inability to return to normal life activities. Mr. Ahmed complains:

I'd like to cry but I can't cry. I do not cry. He looks like people who walk around the streets. I don't cry. . . and then my cry comes out. [And] I don't want it coming out... This make [*sic*] me so upset because he is my son, he is a young boy and

I am old man [*sic*]...[and] ...he could not see anything. So I am crying myself. And he said don't cry, this time is gone. . . > He could not sleep apparently. So, he walk [*sic*] round all night... I've been to bed , come back five o'clock... He walk [*sic*] round here. (50-51)

In a meta-verbatim strategy, the authors of Guantanamo include to the script other real characters who are morally conflicted and anguished about the Guantanamo policies, and who comment on the play's restaged verbatim narratives. Tom Clarke, who lost his sister in the 9/11 terrorist attacks, questions the US long detention of those suspects. He also questions why the US spends a lot of money and resources for the so-called war on terror when it could have taken other quicker, and more influential and just measures. Clarke is ethically obliged to those innocent people who lost three years in Guantanamo for no wrongs committed on their part:

I can't imagine a worse thing for any person, they deserve all of our sympathies and all of our efforts to sort of make sure they do actually get the justice that they deserve. (46)

Further, Guantanamo as an incarnation of a global war on Islam rather than on terror is spelt out in lawyer Clive Smith's testimony. Smith raises a critical issue that he believes is at the root of the Guantanamo detention. It is the hatred that the Western world nurses against Muslims and Islam: ". . . We hate Muslims, and let's be honest that's what's going on here, despite the pathetic attempts to pretend that's not true" (43). Once again, the clash of civilizations rhetoric circulated by Samuel P. Huntington looms over the war against terror

discourse. The conflict is thus religion-based. The detention of Muslims in Guantanamo, irrespective of nationality, is thus, Smith explains, a statement of hostility and animosity towards Islam. Smith condemns the pragmatics of this war on Islam. He argues that, given the world's large Muslim population, which exceeds one billion, it becomes insensible to launch hatred discourses against Muslims since this would mean, "we create a world which is a very very dangerous and unpleasant place. Translating onto the international scene, it's terrifying" (43).

In the same vein, Greg Powell warns against considering the measures taken in Guantanamo in view of those applied by the Anti-Social Behavior Orders that the government resorts to for the sake of deterring future anti-social acts and reducing the use of criminal sanctions. The Anti-Social Behavior Orders would penalize football hooligans by seizing their passports, requiring them to report to the police station on certain days, and, if need be, banning them from traveling abroad for some social functions. The government made the mistake of treating those suspects in American and British prisons, as Powell argues, as if they have committed some anti-social behaviors for which they have to be subjected to, among other measures, "a special tribunal," be "incarcerated for a long period of time," "electronically tagged" or "denied access to certain people" (54). Powell explains that the application of these measures on people who have fallen under suspicion will "reinvent the world" by introducing "a whole new area of social control" (54).

Major Mori who introduces himself as a Defense Counsel at the Military Commissions, reveals that the US Court Martial System relinquishes its responsibilities in prosecuting Law of War violations and in ensuring that

innocent people are not convicted. Mori condemns the US justice system which turned out to be “a political system” and so failed to protect the right of people “to have an independent judge,” “an independent review process” and “a fair trial” (59). In the form of a protest, Mori makes the statement: “The system can’t be controlled by people with a vested interest only in convictions” (59). Lord Justice Steyn brings up another stain on the US Criminal Justice System. Steyn uncovers the fact that the British Attorney-General has negotiated an agreement with the Pentagon in light of which the British prisoners will not face the death penalty. This discrimination amongst prisoners “lifts the curtain a little on the arbitrariness of what is happening at Guantanamo Bay, and in the corridors of power on both sides of the Atlantic [...],” so comments Steyn (61).

Overall, these verbatim narratives establish their own paralogy of legitimate petit narratives of oppositional history about Guantanamo. In this oppositional history, issues of injustice and the trauma of losing home, family and a sense of self are centralized. Against the mainstream grand narrative, the Guantanamo inmates appear as merely “scapegoats;” they are the result of the sovereign power’s need for some people to blame at times of crises, as noted by Michala Rusňáková (17). Using Agamben’s language, the Guantanamo inmates are denied the qualified life of a citizen, or the “bios” of life, and reduced to the “bare life” status in which a person turns into a “homo sacer,” or a social outcast, who is simultaneously sacred and damned, and thus cannot be sacrificed, yet violence against him is not punishable (123, 87).

By putting these narratives on stage, embodied by actors who relive the trauma emotionally and physically, the play rattles the audience, forcing them to reconsider their knowledge and understanding. It is significant that the play

ends with a narrative by Lord Justice Steyn. The narrative encapsulates the play's moral and humane message. Lord Justice Steyn quotes John Donne as saying:

No man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main; ...any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee. (62)

Steyn's message, which is engendered in the politics of humanitarianism, is intended to call upon the audience to deconstruct the boundaries between the core and the periphery and to hold accountability for protecting the human rights of all people, regardless of any external signifiers. Through this message and in light of the nightmarish narratives the play foregrounds, audiences are invited to recognize that the unlawful detention of anyone represents an unlawful detention of everyone. The ending, as Moaten proposes, "denies the audience a sense of closure about the situation. . . . Steyn's speeches highlight that the situation at Guantanamo, while specific to a particular historic moment, has far-reaching implications" (Mantoan 107).

Conclusion

In light of the above analysis, it appears that the verbatim techniques that *Guantanamo* manipulates establish a set of paralogies, or petit narratives, through which mainstream historical narratives are legitimately undermined. As such, the play declares there are no metanarratives at all; there is no such thing as 'objective historical reality;' and reality is subjective and constructed according to each individual's social or political power. What exists in the postmodern condition are competing narratives whose heterogeneity of language games

challenges reaching any consensus over principles or values in view of which disputes can be settled. Accordingly, *Guantanamo* tells a challenging alternative story about the post-9/11 cover-ups. These include political maneuvering, injustice and violations of human rights committed against suspects of Muslim origin, among many other atrocities. Conspicuously, the play dismantles the mentality that created Guantanamo.

The petit narratives the play constructs offer the audience the opportunity to confront the other face of democratic America in times of war and national crises. During these times, America sacrifices all its grand values for the sake of securing its project of military and cultural superiority. The war-on-terror narrative is revealed as a ploy to assert dominance. Given this assessment, the play fulfills a number of thematic concerns. It mainly functions as a biting, satirical theatre in which there is a chance to scrutinize values, contest the borders of democracy, give voice and worthy representation to the subalterns and protect them against the tyranny of the majority. The play criticizes without fear, seeks true and multifaceted information, combats the distorting power of the mass media, defines and re-defines freedom for the contemporary audience, and, on top of all, demands the equality of all citizens on this earth. The play also reveals that the injustice inflicted on the Guantanamo inmates produces no docile bodies but impaired persons, physically and mentally, who are skeptical of all calls for a humanitarian world and so become vulnerable to **radicalization and extremism**. The play reveals a world dominated by military power as the response to any threats, even though these threats are imaginary or racially triggered. By so doing, the play demands the accountability of the audience towards urging their governments to always honor

universal human rights and the rule of law. In a sense, the play's paralogy demands the creation of a utopian world where rights are unconditionally maintained, and law aligns with justice.

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المستخلص:

المسرح الحرفي بوصفه مروية صغيرة:
دراسة لمسرحية "جوانتانامو: التزام شرف الدفاع عن الحرية" من
منظور جان فرانسوا ليوتار

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يقوم هذا البحث على فكرة رئيسة، مفادها أن فكتوريا برتن وجيليان سلوفو، مؤلفي مسرحية "جوانتانامو: التزام شرف الدفاع عن الحرية"، قد استخدمتا تقنيات المسرح الحرفي بوصفها أدوات تداولية تضيف مصداقية لبناء خطاب مغاير "بارالوجيا"، يتألف من مرويات صغيرة، تهدف إلى نقض البناء الفكري للمروية الكبرى الخاصة بحماية الحريات والعدل المطلق التي شيدتها الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية إبان أحداث الحادي عشر من سبتمبر، ووهبتها مشروعية الحقيقة الشمولية المطلقة، ومن ثم اتخذتها مبرراً لسياساتها الداخلية والدولية.

يستند البحث على الخطاب الحدائي للفيلسوف الفرنسي جان فرانسوا ليوتار في نهجه نحو التشكيك في مصداقية المرويات الكبرى في زمن ما بعد الحداثة، حيث تقدم المسرحية -قيد الدراسة- المروية الأمريكية على أنها معيبة ومشوهة؛ يتم ذلك درامياً من خلال تقنيات المسرح الحرفي، الذي يستند على قصص حقيقية في بناء مروية بديلة، تمثل محاكمة أخلاقية للإدارة الأمريكية، التي انتهكت مبادئ حقوق الإنسان، وارتكبت العديد من المخالفات القانونية ضد المحتجزين المسلمين بسجن جوانتانامو .

تخلص الدراسة إلى أن الخطاب التاريخي الرسمي لا بد أن يخضع دائماً للتمحيص والتفكيك، حيث لا يوجد في عصر ما بعد الحداثة مروية واحدة تمتلك ناصية الحقيقة المطلقة.

مفاتيح البحث: المسرح الحرفي، ليوتار، مروية صغيرة، بارالوجيا، "جوانتانامو: التزام شرف الدفاع عن الحرية".

