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**Power and Resistance in Post 9/11 Theatre in
Anne Nelson's The Guys (2002), Dennis Kelly's Osama the Hero (2005)
and Ayad Akhtar's Disgraced (2012)**

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the Master's Degree in Literature

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Abstract

Literature and stage performance have been profoundly influenced by the unforgettable political events of 9/11. This thesis attempts to explore power and resistance in three post 9/11 plays from three different perspectives: the American embedded in Anne Nelson's *The Guys* (2002), the British as in Dennis Kelly's *Osama the Hero* (2005) and the Ethnic represented in Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced* (2012), showing different aspects of power mechanisms and variable sorts of resistance. It will be clear how each playwright tackled the 11th of September events according to the encodes of his own culture and ideology. The thesis will be divided into an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion. The introduction will be devoted to the theoretical framework. Each play will be analyzed in the light of the modern and postmodern theories of power to show the weaving and interweaving of power relations as they prefigure in American, British and Ethnic post 9/11 theatre with special reference to Michael Foucault.

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Introduction

Some historical events bring about dramatic changes in the futures of subsequent generations. The unforgettable date of September the 11th, 2001, has marked the onset of a series of unforeseen repercussions not only in the United States of America but in the whole world as well. The collapse of the Twin Towers and Building 7 of the World Trade Center has left a trail of destruction that has affected the USA in different ways. The 11th of September events have sent shockwaves across the world. About 2,750 people have been killed during the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre twin towers (Bergen 1). This tremendous tragedy has not only devastated the United States, but it is also regarded as a critical point that has continued to resonate in the thoughts of people all over the world.

Amongst these impacts is the terrible status of the US business that has come to a grinding halt as a result of the unprecedented incident. Not only has the US business been affected, but also the US government and nation have taken steady and decisive steps towards fighting terrorism in the US and abroad. Before people have time to absorb what has happened to their country, the government has rallied troops to launch an attack on al-Qaeda. It is widely known that the "19 militants associated with the extremist Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda [hijacking] four planes in the United States against targets in the United States" have been responsible for the 11th of September attacks (Bergen 1). Former President George W. Bush calls these steps as "War on Terror" according to his speech to his nation on the 11th of September 2001 saying:

Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts ... Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror. The pictures of airplanes flying into buildings, fires burning, huge -- huge structures collapsing have filled us with disbelief, terrible sadness, and a quiet,

unyielding anger. These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed. Our country is strong (Bush).

Asserting America's power, the former US president, Bush, has tended to empower the American nation despite its sorrow. His speech has a multifaceted purpose including consoling their broken hearts, empowering their down souls and threatening to retaliate from whoever tries to underestimate their own power.

Those oppressive attacks have led to countless unexpected results all over the whole world. Within months of the American invasion of Afghanistan, many people have started to speak out against the war that has begun. As the war in Afghanistan and the search for Osama bin Laden have shifted focus to war in Iraq searching for mass destructive weapons and putting an end to Saddam Hussein's reign, protests against the war have begun to become more prominent. The invincible American power has been encountered by counteraction, turning its hierarchical form of power into a deconstructed one and empowering the resistance to take over.

The traumatic events of 9/11 and their atrocities kept resonating in people's minds all over the world. This trauma model figures most prominently in Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History* (1996), which takes a particular interpretation of Freud's trauma theories to forward a larger post structural concern with the referential limits of language and history. The analysis sets the tone for the critical debate regarding trauma's significance in literature and the relationship between individual and cultural trauma. Organizations such as Not in Our Name and Theatres Against War have been created by intellectuals and artists, to speak out against the war and the government's quick shift of focus from Afghanistan to Iraq. Moreover, these organizations have begun to hold international days of protest and evenings of performance. Corresponding with the beginning of these protests and performances, dramatic literature about

the 11th of September 2001 has begun to emerge. As more plays are performed, different categories of theatre have come to light such as Documentary and Ethnic Theatres. In no time after the 11th of September 2001, the theme of some plays tells the memories of this incident.

Power controls both nations' and governments' decisions and reactions. According to Oxford dictionary, power is "the ability to control people or things" ("power"). On one hand, this ability to control people or things is expected to be on all arenas of life such as family, workplace and our relationships in general. On the other hand, power is not only limited to controlling others, it is also related to choices and decisions people make. This ability to take a decision is an undoubtedly known form of power against which resistance comes to counteraction. As the word resistance is defined in Merriam Webster dictionary, it's a noun that means "an act or instance of resisting: opposition" or "the power or capacity to resist" ("resistance"), so resistance acts as an opposition that resists the mainstream in order to prove its existence or to limit power's over control and domination.

According to Eric Liu, "If you don't learn how to practice power, someone else will do it for you—in your name, on your turf, with your voice, and often against your interests" (214). This indicates that power implies the existence of many sources to be acquired in order to be well-practiced. According to Eric, there are six main sources of power in civic life; physical strength or the ability to be violent or aggressive, wealth, authority, social norms, ideas and demography (215).

Not only are the previously mentioned six sources of power enough, but power has laws as well. First, the reactions that result from each action demonstrate the dynamic nature of power. Secondly, power always flows dynamically and never stops. Third, power is a productive process that never stays with the dominant. Enforcing the first and the second laws is the only thing that stops the third one from leading to a situation where only one person has all the control and also

prevents turning the hierarchy of power upside down and letting the resistance take over. According to David Couzens Hoy, “power needs resistance, and would not be operative without it. Power depends on points of resistance to spread itself more extensively through the social network” (82). Consequently, resistance can be considered a modification to any power structure to put it on the right track, or unfortunately, to turn it into tyranny. In other words, power and resistance are two faces of the same coin. They are both two sides of the same equation, no side of them can be simply ignored.

This is exactly what is declared by Michel Foucault (1926-1984), A French philosopher and literary theorist, who is known as being a poststructuralist and postmodernist as he says in his book *The History of Sexuality* “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (95-96). This means that the power relations between individuals cannot be reduced to master-slave or oppressor-victim relations, but they are productive relations, because they imply resistance, so he refers here to a vital fact concerning power which implies that power is never static; it inevitably will be followed by a reaction.

Therefore, power is understood as the capacity of an agent to impose his will over the will of the powerless, or the ability to force them to do things they do not wish to do. As a literary theory, theories of power have witnessed a progression from ideology and hegemony to discourse (Stoddart 192). Engaging with poststructuralism, these theories have come to contextualize the intersection between cultural knowledge and social power. To trace these movements, concepts of power will be explored as they have evolved from their ideological notions to rupture and decentralization.

Modern thinking about power begins in the early 16th century and mid-17th century in the writings of Nicollò Machiavelli *The Prince* and Thomas Hobbes *Leviathan*. Their books are considered classics of political writing, and the contrast between them represents the two main routes whose thoughts about power have continued to this day. Machiavelli represents strategic and decentralized thinking about power and organization. On the other hand, power, for Hobbes, is centralized and focused on sovereignty. Hobbes' point of view has appeared to be triumphant, as his language and imagery have been written more than a century after the publication of Machiavelli's *The Prince* which proves to be more relevant to modern literary research than Machiavelli's military images.

As a continuation of the Hobbesian line to develop the organizational thinking of power, Karl Marx, in the late 19th century, in his perspective about the community of the oppressors and the oppressed, has done the same. In other words, he presents the relations between the exploited working class and the dominant capitalist class, which owns the means of production (such as factories and machines); for both of them, power is structural or hierarchal (Sadan 33-34). According to Karl Marx, ideology refers to how society as a whole adopts the ideas and interests of the dominant economic class.

In Marx's writing, resistance to ideology must take primarily a material form. It is not sufficient to analyze ideological systems from a theoretical or academic view. People can only overcome the ideology of capitalism through action directed at transforming the economic substructure of society. In other words, although those oppressed or subordinate are controlled by power, manifested in the dominant capitalist class that owns the means of production, still, this power is the tool that they seek to gain to become the dominant themselves. Marx says that it is all

about the economic structure of society as those oppressed form “resistance” that they fail to recognize and which implies their absolute submission to the capitalist class dominance.

In the early 20th century, Antonio Gramsci built upon the Marxist theoretical tradition, his notion of hegemony represents an important reinterpretation of the concept of ideology. Stoddart says:

The notion of hegemony is rooted in Gramsci’s distinction between coercion and consent as alternative mechanisms of social power. Hegemonic power works to convince individuals and social classes to subscribe to the social values and norms of an inherently exploitative system. Hegemonic networks of power are the result of contestation between ruling elites and subaltern groups. Hegemony and counter-hegemony exist in a state of tension; each gives shape to the other. For Gramsci, one of the main issues facing the dominant social groups is how to maintain the necessary degree of ideological unity to secure the consent of the governed (200).

More recently, theorists have started tackling power not simply as a master-oppressed relation but as relations of consent or rebellion. Gramsci says that the consent of the ruled is extremely important for the dominant to be secured.

After the Second World War, the social sciences have begun taking an understandable interest in power. At that time, the work of Max Weber (1864-1920) has continued what Hobbes and his followers have theorized and developed as organizational thinking. He has linked power with concepts of authority and rule. He defines power as the probability that an actor within a social relationship would be in a position to carry out his will despite resistance to it. Weber is interested in power as a factor of domination, based on economic or authoritarian interests (Sadan

35). Weber has succeeded in paving the way considering the social relations of power, highlighting the existence of both power and resistance and asserting the dominant factors as being not only economic but authoritarian as well. Those factors may enable the dominant to implement whatever they want regardless of the resistance actors' reaction.

Max Weber and Michael Foucault are among the most controversial and fascinating thinkers of our century. Building on what Weber has paved the way to, Foucault stresses the social relations of power that proved to be perfectly applicable to literature that related to human experience. Foucault defines power from a theoretical perspective in a different way as something that cannot be owned, but rather something that acts and manifests itself in a certain way; it is more a strategy than a possession.

Although Foucault began his career as a Marxist, having been influenced by his mentor, the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, as a student to join the French Communist Party, for Althusser, the state power is a "top-bottom" one. In his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1970), Althusser proposes to distinguish "ideological state apparatuses" from the repressive state apparatus. The state apparatus includes "the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, etc." (Althusser, Lenin 96). These are the agencies that function "by violence" by at some point imposing punishment or privation in order to enforce power. The repressive state apparatus functions by violence, whereas the ideological state apparatuses function 'by ideology' or [ideology propagation]" (Lenin 97). Although the ideological state apparatuses appear to be quite disparate, they are unified by subscribing to a common ideology in the service of the ruling class; in other words, self-centralized policy, as they just care about their ideological state propagation. Indeed, the ruling class must maintain a degree

of control over the ideological state apparatuses in order to ensure the stability of the repressive state apparatus and its hegemonic power.

As stated by Foucault, “Power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or as something which only functions in the form of a chain . . . Power is employed and exercised through a netlike organization . . . Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application” (Balan 2). Foucault is greatly affected by postmodernism as it rejects the notion that there can be an ultimate truth in the social world. It claims that social knowledge is relative or rather contextual to the individuals and their experiences at any moment. However, because language itself is a relative construct, lacking a fixed meaning, according to postmodernism, it is not possible to make accurate accounts of others’ experiences. On the other hand, poststructuralism’s attention is focused on complexity, fragmentation and the microstructures of power as it evolves from its ideological notions to rupture and decentralization.

According to Foucault, power “is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society” (Deacon 115). It is not seen as brute physical force or faced in a single direction, but working net-like creating counterforces; those counterforces can be defined as resistance. Foucault’s disciplinary power theory belongs to the postmodern perspective because instead of relying on hierarchical and ordered systems or solely depending on the perceptions of individuals, disciplinary power is contextually based. It seems more of a critical rebuke to positivist ideas of power rather than a theory in itself. Consequently, it presents a ruptured ideological notion of power in which the top-bottom form of power has turned into a decentralized and fragmented bottom-top one.

Nevertheless, the problem of power relations between society, individuals, groups and institutions is central to Foucault's thinking. He tackles and investigates this problem from a critical and historical point of view in books such as *Birth of the clinic. An archeology of regarding medical* (1963), *History of sexuality* (1976), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), in lectures at Collège de France, such as: *psychiatric power* (1973-1974), *Security, territory, population* (1977-1978), *The Government of Self and Others I* (1982-1983), and *Government of Self and Others II: The Courage of Truth* (1983-1984).

In the first volume of his book *History of sexuality* (1976), Foucault argues that people must overcome the notion that power is oppressive because, even in its most radical forms, it is not only repressive but also beneficial, allowing new behaviors to emerge. He claims that power has a direct and creative role in social life; it is multi-directional and operates from the top-down and from the bottom up. This leads the reader to think about power as “social” practice as it is introduced in O’Farrell’s book quoting Michel Foucault:

Power is not simply repressive, but it is productive . . . Power is not simply a property of a state. Power is not something that is exclusively localized in government and the state (which is not a universal essence). Rather, power is exercised throughout the social body. Power operates at the most micro level of social relations. Power is omnipresent in every level of the social body. The exercise of power is strategic and war-like. (149).

Foucault claims that one of the features of the power theory is that power is not just repressive but also productive as it produces positive effects. He clarifies that power has an enabling function as well, it is not only to be recognized by its negative meaning as it represses or censors or conceals but also it produces and regulates the different circulation of discourses and resistance.

Michel Foucault argues that power is not merely a physical force but a persistent human dynamic that determines our relationships with others. Moreover, he points out that power is not necessarily evil or wicked since it can be productive; which is a reason why power is essential to a just society (“The Subject and Power” 793). Thus, traditional power models are criticized by Foucault; power is not simply about saying no and oppressing people, social groups, or natural instincts; yet, power is positive. Rather than merely restricting mobility and confining people, it shapes patterns of behaviour and events. Foucault asserts that power is a source of pleasure because it is productive and is not exclusively exercised in a repressive or negative way. This feature of power and resistance theory will apply to literature tackling human social relations that lead to different life experiences.

Foucault argues in *The History of Sexuality*, Volume One: “if power was never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really believe that we should manage to obey it?” (36) Consequently, the most significant feature of Foucault’s book is his stress on the modern exercise of the productive nature of power. His main aim is to replace the negative concept and attribute the productive nature to power. It produces reality and truth portrayed in resistance.

The produced resistance is considered to be an outcome of domination as Hollander and Einwohner (2004) discuss this relationship in terms of a cycle: “Resistance and domination have a cyclical relationship, domination leads to resistance, which leads to the further exercise of power, provoking further resistance, and so on.” (548). Although power for Foucault is not just the ruthless domination of the weaker by the strong, this implies the existence of domination in the place of power to make an outcome of resistance. The more domination exists, the more resistance is being provoked. It can be said that there is another feature of power to emerge here which is the relation between those who resemble the domination on one hand and are called the dominant and that