Kia Corthron's Subversive African American Dramaturgy on the Paratext of Post-9/11 Racism

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Abstract

This case study addresses the scarcity of scholarly attention to two recent plays by African American playwright Kia Corthron-*7* (2002)*11*and *Snapshot Silhouette* .(2004) The urgency of highlighting these plays is directly related to their peculiar critique of contemporary global issues, such as post-9/11 profiling and the ensuing War on Terror. In this respect, Corthron's focal plays interrogate racialized representations and stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims, which are currently constructing a hegemonic chapter in American history since 9/11 attacks .Arguably, Corthron's focal plays define post-9/11 discrimination as motivated by linguistic abuse that enforces a paratextual control over cultural interpretations. Most importantly, they contribute to the African American literary and cultural response to post-9/11 discourse by particularly contesting the normalized subjection of black identity to dominant politics of antiterror. Alternatively, Corthron's plays present a counterdiscourse that embraces the "cleansing" of language and initiation of Arab ،Muslim, and African American dialogue along lines of decoloniality and justice .My proposed reading integrates and engages narratological and postcolonial critiques of Western domination over textuality to construe the politics of the War on Terror .

Keywords :War on Terror, profiling, abuse of language, paratext, cleansing of language, Arabs and Muslims, African Americans

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Introduction:

This case study interrogates the scarcity of critical attention to certain plays by African American playwright Kia Corthron. In particular, I address two contemporary short plays by Corthron*-7* (2002) *11*and *Snapshot Silhouette*(2004) , which belong to a growing body of literature that figures the lingering aftermath of 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. In this respect ،these two plays can be defined as a part of Corthron’s 9/11 trilogy[1] that responds to the construction of post-9/11 stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims. Arguably, Corthron’s focal plays introduce a peculiar definition of post-9/11 terrorism and discrimination as motivated by linguistic damage that generates misrepresentation and mediates stereotypes. The impact of these stereotypes is long-standing as they construct an authoritative space that pre-controls all cultural interpretations. The significance of Corthron’s plays is also related to their prolific contribution to the African American response to 9/11 terrorism, War on Terror, and cultural profiling of Arabs and Muslims. In particular, the plays interrogate the normalized involvement of the African American community with post-9/11 politics. In this context, Corthron’s *11-7* and *Snapshot Silhouette* can be read as counterdiscourses that embrace the healing of language in order to initiate a cross-cultural dialogue that destabilizes the hegemony of post-9/11 discrimination .

Review of Literature :

The scholarship on post- 9/11 American literature reveals an exclusive focus on the visual representation of Arabs and Muslims in the post-9/11 era. A quite recent study, just published in the March 2013 volume of *American Quarterly* and edited by Sarah Banet-Weiser ،features a number of critics who present significant views about the War on Terror .Banet-Weiser considers the volume a “timely and important forum” (viii). All critical pieces in this collection proclaim that, as Banet-Weiser contends, “we need to think carefully about the role of visual culture in the ‘War on Terror’” (viii .(For instance, Matt Delmont’s“ Introduction: Visual Culture and the War on Terror” highlights how the War on Terror has been mediated through an overwhelming array of visual forms and media (157). Delmont also claims that“ visibility and invisibility are deeply intertwined in the war on terror, and as such, the study of visual cultures offers a critical vantage point from which to understand what is seen and what remains unseen in this war” (157). Delmont’s reflection suggests that visual culture is critical not only to the portrayal of war on a daily basis but also to the execution of and opposition to the War on Terror (159). Thus ، the *Quarterly* volume exclusively focuses on mass broadcast and print media. In particular, the contributors introduce close readings of prime-time television dramas, such as *Sleeper Cell* ،and news reporting, such as articles in the *New York Times* .

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[1] These two plays along with a third play *Somnia* (2001) by Corthron construct a trilogy that reveals how the Western media’s focus on the cultural differences between Arabs and Americans has demonized Arabs and intensified conflicts.

The *American Quarterly*’s March volume essays highlight the specifically visual representations of Arabs and Muslims that have helped form a new kind of racism after 9/11. In this respect, Evelyn Alsultany’s“ Arabs and Muslims in the Media after ”11/9 defines the predictable strategies that form a certain representational mode to define a postrace society[2] and that have become standard since 9/11 by seeking to balance a negative representation with a positive one .According to Alsultany, this mode features “simplified complex representations (168) ”considered by writers as the most direct methods to counteract potential charges of stereotyping. A major manifestation of this complexity is related to the positive representations of Arabs and Muslims that project antiracism and multiculturalism on the surface but simultaneously produces the logics and affects necessary to legitimize racist policies and practices (162). So, these sympathetic representations often challenge or complicate earlier and long-standing stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims as terrorists. However, they contribute only to a multicultural or postrace illusion that operates to justify discrimination ،mistreatment, and war against Arabs and Muslims. However, Alsultany only highlights TV dramas and news reporting to outline the various mechanisms through which a positive imagery of Arabs and Muslims is presented (162 .(In the same volume ،Umayyah Cable adopts a similar approach in" New Wave Arab American Studies: Ethnic Studies and the Critical Turn." According to Cable, the question of in/visibility is important for understanding the contemporary paradox of Arab American racial classification and the critical turn in Arab American studies (233). As such, Cable demonstrates how Arab American studies is informed by decoloniality, radical feminist of color theory, and queer of color critique, and is invested in anti-imperialist and antiracist coalition-building both within the United States and transnationally (232). Thus, all of these readings highlight the conscripted function of visual representation in projecting the post-9/11 reality of Arabs and Muslims.

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[2]“ Postrace racism” is the notion that US society has overcome racism despite the continued proliferation of racism, both inferential and referential, in society and politics) Alsultany ،*Arabs and Muslims*.(7

Along the *Quarterly* volume ،there are other recent collections that demonstrate how the visual representations of Arabs and Arab Americans are central to ethnic studies 'concerns with the hegemonic establishment of a postrace society. For instance ،Alsultany's *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after* (2012)*11/9* highlights the increased criminalization of people of color in the post-9/11 era. As such, Alsultany examines how the particular visual aestheticization of Arabs in media and politics has systematically contributed to the construction of racialized enemies of the US nation. Again, Alsultany's main focus in this book is on broadcast and print media to acknowledge such complex stereotypes and representations. Jamal and Naber's *Race and Arab Americans* (2007) is another work that presents a research on identity construction by exploring some of the structural components that contribute to the post-9/11 representations of Arab Americans in mass broadcast and print media, and prime-time television dramas. One important chapter is Alsultany's" The Prime-Time Plight of Arab Muslim Americans after 9/11" that exposes the racial/racist project in various media outlets, such as news headlines and television dramas .This chapter interestingly highlights the contribution of such televisual discourse to the formation of "virtual citizenship [that] serve[s] as a racial project to redefine US borders, U.S. citizens, and the position of Arabs and Muslims vis-à-vis the U.S. nation" (Jamal 208). "Arab Americans and Muslim Americans in the *New York Times* before and after 9/11" by Suad Joseph et al. is another notable chapter on the topic of racism in print media. In particular, it provides a critique of the *New York Times* 'extensively racist essentializing of Arab and Muslim Americans before and after 9/11. Joseph defines the *Times* as a "representational apparatus" that employs rhetoric to frame reality, present decontextualized information as factual, and discredit the voices of competing interests (Jamal 234). Again, these readings only address the racialized visualization of Arabs and Muslims in post-9/11 media and television drama.

Reviews of the scholarship on post- 9/11 American literature also reveal a research gap related to the examination of post- 9/11 Arab America in light of other ethnic literatures. Before 9/11 attacks, critics, such as Lisa Suhair Majaj, have called for further investigation into Arab American racialization and the importance of building links with communities of color (72-76). In the same context, other critics adopted a feminist approach to contend that both Arab American and African American communities are informed by race and examining their affinity in this regard produces a more nuanced and less defensive feminism. Such calls have even persisted after 9/11 attacks. For instance, the editors of the recent *Race and Arab Americans before and after 9/11* ،(2007) Amaney A. Jamal and Nadine Naber, highlight the increased visibility and interest in Arab America but acknowledge the scarcity of its critical investigation, which account for the urgency of studying its existence in other ethnic literatures of the United Sates (175) .

Considering these calls, a review of the War on Terror scholarship particularly reveals a research lacuna related to the comprehensive response of African American literary and cultural production to post-9/11 stereotyping of Arabs. Most of these works correlate the construction of African American identity with black agency for racialized antiterror. Such depiction has become, to use Sohail Daulatzai’s words, essential to “the redemptive image of a home front united against evil” (136) . For instance, “Of Cain and Abel: African American Literature and the Problem of Inheritance after 9/11” (2013) by Erica R. Edwards is quite a recent study that focuses on “the intersection of a master narrative of post 9/11 black intimacy with state terror and the reinvention of African American literature” (196). Edwards examines the double impulse of black cultural production since 9/11 in the Age of Terror and demonstrates how blackness as a center of agency for national security and postracial unity affected the way we would come to read black cultural production (196). Edwards particularly focuses on *Rebel Yell* by African American writer Alice Randall. Edwards highlights how Randall’s narrative draws a clear line between black protest and black complicity with the War on Terror (198). Edwards claims that the War on Terror has not only normalized but also aestheticized black intentionality for, black agency for, and black intimacy with occupation ،border policing, surveillance, and detention .*The Other Side of Terror :African American Literature After 9/11* is another work, but still in progress, by Edwards which advances a central claim that the meanings and uses of blackness have fundamentally changed since the September 11 attacks, and that these transformations necessarily affect the meanings and uses of African American literature. In particular, Edwards proposes that the African American cultural text replicates the new doubleconsciousness of the post-9/11 era through a language of fracture. Projecting a post-9/11 African American identity, the black text becomes “torn, between allegiance to a postsegregation US state that demands complicity with racialized state terror and nostalgia for a black cultural past identified by its very distance from canonical national knowledge and cultural production” (“Of Cain and Abel” 200 .(Thus, Edwards’s critical pieces are two major works that focus exclusively on the construction of black subjectivity in the context of antiterror but they do not fully address the African American interrogation of post-9/11 stereotyping of Arabs in America .

Other studies that address broadcast and print media also correlate the reconstitution of black identity with national and global counterinsurgency, antiterror, and consequent reinforcement of the US hegemony .For instance ،Alsultany’s article in the *Quarterly* cites the *Sleeper Cell* that portrays the lead African American prisoner, Darwyn Al-Sayeed, as a “good” Muslim. He manages to circulate the notion that terrorism should not be collated with Islam .However ،Al-Sayeed only turns to be an undercover federal agent. In the same cited *Quarterly* volume, Sasha Torres’s “Black (Counter) Terrorism” offers a brief account of some of the ways in which African American figures have come to be linked to terrorism via either their association with Islam or with pan-African blackness .All representations that Torres discusses feature a black counterterrorist agent who gets to infiltrate and spy on an active terrorist cell. In each case ،the black agent is a loyal US citizen but he may be possibly confused for a terrorist, both by the cell members and by the audience as well (171). Torres argues that these complex representations cannot comfortably collate “black” with“ loyal citizen” (176). However, this fact cannot fully avow the discrimination implicated in such representations. As such, the presented televisual terrorist/state agents are “one way that US culture has solved—or at least stifled—this quandary” (176). On the other hand, Muneer Ahmad’s

“Homeland Insecurities :Racial Violence the Day after September 11” is one of the first reviews that have referred to the effect of post-9/11 racism against Arabs on African Americans. Ahmad cites a news report in the *New York Times* which reveals how African American and Latino men, ex-victims of racial profiling, have admitted their support for racial profiling of Arabs and Muslims. Thus, Ahmad suggests that in the wake of the terrorist attacks, African Americans became suddenly more “American,” “now that Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians have assumed the primary position of racial scorn” (171). Thus, the post-9/11 African American identity has been dominantly circulated as a contributor to the politics of anti-terror agency .

All of these reviewed works present significant interdisciplinary approaches to Arab America’s interrogation of the post-9/11 politics. As Cable demonstrates, such studies construct a promising reading for scholars who are not only interested in the critical turn within ethnic studies but also invested in the further growth of Arab American studies as a field .Furthermore, these works solidify the sometimes-precarious relationships between Middle East, American, and ethnic studies (243). However, these critical pieces feature research lacunae as they do not address the literary works that fully examine the complex interaction between Arabs and other ethnic groups in the US. In particular, the reviewed works have exclusively focused on the stereotypical and racially-charged visual representations of Arab Americans and Muslim Americans. Also, they locate the African American identity in proximity with antiterror and pro-racism against Arabs. So, they do not address ،for instance, how Arabs and Muslims may cultivate solidarities with other ethnic groups, particularly the African American community, along lines of decoloniality, justice, and anti-imperialism .As such, my forthcoming reading of Corthron’s dramaturgy in the context of the War on Terror would aim to address this research gap regarding the complete African American response to contemporary postrace discourses. Overall, it would present a vital contribution to the promising scholarship on the contemporary African American reaction to discrimination against Arabs and Muslims in a post-9/11 American society .

Theoretical Framework:

The communication of subversive impulses against the ever-reconstructed racial discourse is constantly maintained by knowledge production within African American literary studies. In particular, the decolonizing discourses in black literature seem to be shifting into a struggle with the new logics of discrimination after September 11 attacks, defined as postracialism. In this context, Edwards demonstrates that “the post-9/11 moment might be understood as the uncanny confluence of a collective writerly re-invention of black literature and a state demand for the postracial” (197). In *Represent and Destroy* ،(2011) Jodi Melamed contends that this “postracial society” has become one of the “touchstones for racial projects that recalibrate state apparatuses” and “expand the reach of normative power” (11). The power structure of “postracial society” has been defined as a new manifestation of the problem of inheritance for black generation after 9/11. Edwards’s suggestion of inheritance is a starting point for my proposition that, like colonial racism ،postrace discrimination is shaped by an ideology of inherited debt that has been mediated through a language of binding and obligation .

Anti-colonialist poetics that highlight the crucial role of language in constructing the forms of human knowledge and determining power relations are central to understanding the new form of imperial post-9/11 racism. Linguistically speaking, the “hyperactive” (Bugraski 75) implication of language in formulating power and initiating conflicts has been highlighted .Linguists have demonstrated how language“ in [the situation of war] has three functions: ‘(a) to produce; (b) to annul; and (c) to distort reality’” (Levinger 232) through the use of inadequate terms and euphuisms that “distort the true picture” of war .(233) Another significant issue that linguists have identified is the damage of language ascribed to the intriguing aspect of the relationship between language and reality in the context of war. This abuse is "to be paid for by the language itself, or rather its speakers" (Levinger 82). Such problematized view of language has been mainly integrated in anti-colonialist discourse .One particular example is George Lamming's theory concerning the colonial damage of language. In his *Pleasures of Exile* ،(1972) Lamming particularly reveals how language has undergone strategic damage through materialism and colonialism for the effect of enforcing colonial control and hegemony. In particular, a kind of "epistemic violence," to use Gayatri Spivak's development of the term،[3] has been done to language by dominant European discourses of knowledge. To explain this logic of damage, Lamming refers to Shakespeare's much-quoted characters, Prospero and Caliban, respectively representative of the colonizer and colonized. Lamming suggests that Prospero's project has annihilated the existence of Caliban by severing him from the reservoir of meanings. This annihilation leads to one psychological result where the" colonized is slowly and ultimately separated from the original ground where the colonizer found him) "*Pleasures* .(157 The word is the tool that Prospero has "tried on the irredeemable nature of his savage and deformed slave" (109) in order to distort Caliban's way of seeing himself. This deprivation of self-realization develops into binding Caliban with one tradition and habit of seeing, which is the colonial condition. So, colonialism projects a restrictive "tradition of habits that become the normal way of seeing" (157). In this way, colonialism endorses one of the tactics that generate the limitation of language or what critic Curdella Forbes calls the" abuse of language" (13). Such abuse encompasses hidden facts and tropes of silence with which the colonizer shapes language in order to control the colonized. Ultimately, abusing language would lead to imposing certain distorted identities and subjectivities on the colonized. As such, the colonized's subjectivity becomes bound to colonial obligations. In the context of the War on Terror, the abuse of language has been reinscribed to generate marginalized identities that are bound to the one and limited reality of post-9/11 discrimination .

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[3] See Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988).

Arguably, Kia Corthron's post-9/11 dramaturgy re-interprets Lamming's complex conception of language in order to interrogate and subvert the power structure of postrace racism. In particular, Corthron's *11-7* and *Snapshot Silhouette* contest the abuse of language that generates miscommunication, literary and visual misrepresentation, and the construction of cultural stereotypes that involve both Arabs and blacks. Such cultural stereotypes become authoritative and function as paratexts, to use Gérard Genette's terminology. In *Paratexts :Thresholds of Interpretation* ،Genette describes the paratext as an" undefined zone" which is not only of "transition but also of *transaction*] being] a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that […] is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it" (2). Arguably, Corthron's plays subvert the paratextual control over cultural interpretations, which is presumed to be motivated by the abuse of language. Again, Lamming's theory of healing language is pertinent to Corthron's aesthetics of subversion. Lamming proclaims the "cleansing" of language as a required process to unbind the constraints of the colonized self ("West Indian" 64-65). According to Lamming, language is essential to the human condition as it comprises a reservoir or a "history of meanings) "*Pleasures* .(156 So, language bears a genealogical significance, being a cultural medium of reconstructing history and re-claiming the freedom of the individual. Lamming proposes that the return to the unconscious and aboriginal reservoir, unrecognized by Prospero, would enunciate the "cleansing" of language .As will be demonstrated, Corthron's response to the pratextual control of language abuse can be defined as the search for an etymology of "cleansing" or healing based on self-realization that reclaims the archetypal way of seeing and maintains cross-cultural understanding .

Corthron's Aesthetics of Post-9/11 Terror and Racism

Being a prolific dramatist, Corthron has always announced her political and international orientation. Corthron considers herself" a political writer with a political point of view) "Shewey, par. 1 .(So, she does not "write agit-prop" for she thinks that the "point gets across much stronger if the audience feels something rather than being told something intellectually" (Shewey ‹par. 1). The first dramatist who has impressed Corthron is American playwright David Rabe. Corthron explains how she has been especially struck by Rabe's heightened language and political content of his Vietnamese plays *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* and *Streamers*) Shewey, par. 30). Rabe's influence has shaped Corthron's international tone as revealed in her focus ‹for instance, on the US soldiers' conflict in the Middle East during the Gulf War .Translating such international interest, Corthron aestheticizes post-9/11 political landscape as a difference-motivated terror that generates a war of image and rhetoric. Such war creates a crisis of miscommunication and misrepresentation that are symptomatic of both linguistic cacophony and opacity .

Corthron's poetics of resistance contest linguistic terror by suggesting visuality as a mechanism to heal the abuse of language. Since language is not reliable any more ‹Corthron searches and travels, both physically and metaphorically, to archetypical spaces that uncover shared struggle for cultural identification. This search or travel is Corthron's prerequisite for any writing on the terror of miscommunication .I mention a significant example that reinforces Corthron's emphasis on the necessity of constant search for archetypical spaces of affinity. In June 2002, Corthron visited the Middle East with a group of American playwrights. Corthron records her reflections about this experience in "On the Road to Palestine" (2003 .(During this trip, Corthron realizes the role of visual travel in dismantling the fabrication of stereotypes. So, Corthron's travel is her attempt to locate the universality of suffering. For Corthron, realizing such understanding is the key for initiating the cross-cultural dialogue required to undermine terrorism. In this context, Corthron demonstrates that "personal contact, dialogue, lived experience, exploration and community-building are not ancillary to but rather the core--the life's blood--of our profession" (28). As will be demonstrated, Corthron pertinently integrates the element of visual travel into the genre of theatrical performance that essentially observes visual expectations created by the physical presence of audience.

It would be significant to mention that Corthron has enthusiastically adopted calls for cross-cultural conversation in her drama. One major example is *Breath, Boom* which has been described as the first dramatic reaction to Corthron's travel to the Middle East ("On the Road to Palestine" 28-30 .(*Breath, Boom* ‹ Corthron's first play for the Royal Court Theatre in London, has been produced in the context of 9/11 terror .The play highlights the symptoms of violence in the African American community ‹with particular focus on female gang members. However ‹*Breath, Boom* can be defined as a 9/11 play for it particularly features Arab immigrants in the US who mysteriously disappear after the arrest of Middle Eastern people following the 9/11 attacks. The inclusion of such characters can be construed as a translation of Corthron's call for directing the attention of the African American community toward the plight of Arabs in the post-9/11 US. Corthron's dedication to cultural issues is also realized in her collaborative efforts with playwrights from various national and ethnic backgrounds to produce diversity-oriented works. A major example is *Somnia* ‹a play which Corthron has contributed to Refuse 'n' Resist's *IMAGINE: IRAQ* that was produced by the Artists Network and Naomi Wallace at Cooper Union in 2001 .*IMAGINE: IRAQ* is an evening of staged readings of post 11/9-plays that examine the interaction between both Iraqi and Western people in a time of US war and sanctions on Iraq. Again, visual travel is a significant trope that Corthron’s *Somnia* ‹staged in a Basra hospital, develops as a mechanism to understand the struggle of other people .In this context, Corthron has already researched the situation in Iraq. She explicates that it is “certainly intimidating for writers to write about places they haven’t been to; it’s a leap. I did a lot of research) ”*IMAGIN: IRAQ* par .(2 .On the other hand ‹ *Somnia* constructs a discursive challenge to the western media that conceal certain facts in order to demonize and perceive Iraqis as violent and so completely other. Aiming to expose such gaps, Corthron demonstrates her frustration as “human beings are dying in Iraq, children are suffering the most [. . .] but none of this ever comes up in mainstream conversations) ”*IMAGINE: IRAQ* par. 1). As such, Corthron’s *Somnia* presents an Iraqi family that is stricken with poverty and sickness. However, familial love and sacrifice define the family’s response to their plight. Definitely ‹violence is not their alternative. Thus ‹*Breath, Boom* and *Somnia* are Corthron’s first plays that engage cross-cultural orientation in order to dismantle the silence and stereotyping that shape post-9/11 discourse on Arabs and Muslims .

11-7 and *Snaphot Silhouette* are Corthron’s next plays that also present a defining response to the highly charged post- 9/11 political landscape. In particular, Corthron’s focal plays contest the regulations and emotional affects integral to the discrimination that involves both Arab and African American communities in the post-9/11 American society. Such discrimination has enforced a new debt on the black community defined as a limited “way of seeing” that sustains cultural stereotypes .The overarching theme of both plays is how Arabs and African Americans’ shared experiences of struggle present opportunities to dismantle the construction of stereotypes generated by the politically motivated abuse of language. Both plays also develop Corthron’s own aesthetics of anti-terror that embrace the healing of language to initiate cultural dialogue .

Corthron's *11-7* interrogates the discursive effacement that shapes post-9/11 official documentation of Arabs and Muslims' reality in the US. Directed by John Michel Garces, Corthron's one-act play was produced by Brave New World Project at Town Hall in 2002 *11-7* .presents the travails of Mohamed, an innocent Iraqi immigrant suffering in jail. He has not been formally charged for nearly a year after his arrest in the aftermath of 9/11 sweep of Middle Eastern aliens .The personal details of Mohamed's life have not been considered in the police investigations or even included in the court records. Officially, Arab Man is fraudulent for he has supposedly got the INS's permission to go to his mother's not niece's funeral. Effacing the necessity of visiting Iraq to comfort his sister who has tragically lost all four children and buried them in one graveyard is not understood or even seriously considered by the INS of an" *insane* "post-9/11 country .(10-9 *11-7*) Such omissions contribute to his representation as a terrorist whose acts are irrational and unfathomable, and frustrate any possibility of his immediate release. Thus, this depiction of a Muslim Iraqi as a terrorist circulates a monolithic image of Islam as brutal, which is strategically used to advance the US empire after 9/11/. Mohamed's case also explicates the strategy of "decontextual[izing] the material reality of Arab and Muslim men's lives" (Jamal 134) in the US. Such decontextualization creates a major discursive gap that has fueled post-9/11 racism against Arabs and Muslims.

In ،*11-7* Corthron integrates an unprecedented strategy of naming/unnaming that could be read as a critique of the complex representations of terrorists in postrace discourse .Critics of post-9/11 cultural, televisual, and literary productions have particularly identified these works' discursive practices of referring to terrorist characters. These designations commonly avoid one-dimensional representations out of supposedly good intensions .For instance, Alsultany demonstrates how it "has become increasingly common for the country of the terrorist characters in television dramas to go unnamed ”and fictionalized as “leaving the nationality of the villain blank eliminates potential offensiveness” (“Arabs and Muslims,” 164). This discursive practice of disclaiming has been critiqued by Alsultany as a simplified complex representation that presumes an anti-discrimination American society but simultaneously legitimatizes racist politics (168). So, disclaimers have contributed to the production of a post-9/11 discourse that hypothesizes a globally cognizant culture that can demystify evil. However, Corthron’s *11-7* uniquely rebuts and invalidates the presumably malleable nature of such disclaimers. In particular, the play exposes the disclaimers ’solely one-dimensional orientation that directly reifies postrace racism and continued support of the US empire after 9/11. Corthron’s play presents the disclaimer “Arab Man” that suggests innocent anonymity. However, this disclaimer involves direct discrimination, being inclusive of all ethnicities in the Middle East and North Africa. It already entails references to any nationality associated with these geographical regions and to Islam, the dominant religion. So, the nationality, faith, and even name of Arab Man become redundancies. In other words, “Arab Man” definitely refers to an Iraqi Muslim named Mohamed. Thus, using the disclaimer “Arab Man” to describe a terrorist involves a direct identification that projects an extreme offense to Iraqis .So, Corthron’s double strategy of dis/claiming contests the post-9/11 discourse’s promised anonymity by exposing how an exact anonymity could obviously implicate discrimination and present terrorism as an Arab and Muslim monopoly .

On the other hand *11-7* ‹introduces a unique strategy that contests the collation of African Americans with post-9/11 discrimination against Arabs and Muslims. In Corthron’s play, Arab Man shares a prison cell with Black Man, an African American convict .They both embrace the same religion of Islam and have the name of Mohamed .The inclusion of these two prisoners recalls post-9/11 televised drama that features African Americans who can pass as plausible terrorists. One example is the opening of *Sleeper Cell* that presents Al-Sayeed, the black prisoner who shares both the confinement cell and the charge of terrorism with other convicts from different ethnicities. Such projection of a black Muslim male as a terrorist has been defined as a simultaneous mobilization of“ codes for militant Islam and for blackness ”that carefully bring them together into the “potentially explosive mix” (Torres .(172 However, it has been argued that this mobilization is suddenly frustrated when the black terrorist is revealed to be an FBI agent who supports racial profiling (172 .(So, black people have been televisually portrayed as both contributors to racist suspicion of black Muslims and loyal agents of the state’s counterterror efforts. Such perplexity in representation reinscribes postrace hegemony by conscripting African American subjects into supporting the racist politics of the War on Terror. However, the case is different in Corthron’s .*11-7* Black Man does not sustain a malleable character that could pose as a criminal and stop identifying with that position by morphing into an agent of the state. Instead ‹the representation of Black Man is consistent throughout the play. Being a Muslim ‹Black Man is a victim of his discrimination as a violent criminal. So, both Black Man and Arab Man are bound to one and limited “habit of seeing” that demonizes Muslims, whether Arabs or African Americans, as criminals. They are deprived of the power of fully realizing and understanding their existence as individuals with equal rights of freedom and self-determination .

11-7 demonstrates how this limited way of seeing is symptomatic of the abuse of language conscripted to the demonization of Arabs and Muslims. Both Arab Man and Black Man are victimized by the damage and consequent failure of language. Though the two men speak the same language, their English is mediated by the paratexts of US constitution laws and mass media. The articles of the US constitution define the conditions of American citizenship, categorize crimes, and enforce the rules of punishment that all have contributed to the marginalization of African Americans. Likewise, the newspapers collate violence and terror with Arabs and Muslims. Reading these print paratexts consequently controls Black Man and Arab Man’s conversations and continue to separate them. So, Black Man’s understanding of the institution’s article 5 about due process leads to his marginalization of Arab Man as outsider“ :Ain’t *born* American ain’t entitled.(4 *11-7*) ”Thus ،the two men’s English is abused by the stereotypes that have variedly demonized both ethnicities, exacerbated their isolation and miscommunication, and disavowed any possibility of understanding or realizing affinity. The stage of *11-7* performs the two men’s lack of communication. And through the play’s opening stage directions, the reader visualizes the inaccessibility of language“ :There is a paper or styrofoam cup attached to the wall with the bottom cut out. As ARAB MAN speaks, BLACK MAN takes off HIS socks, rolls them into a ball and starts playing basketball with the cup as net”(3 .(So, it becomes fathomable why when Arab Man complains about the post-9/11 unfair charges against Arabs and the ensuing loss of liberty and business, Black Man “shrugs” (5), snickers ،5 ،3) (10or persistently “shoots hoops” (3,5, 7). The play’s one-sided dialogue accentuates Black Man’s initial silence that transforms Arab Man’s complaints into monologues. The abuse and limitation of language even become more evident through Black Man’s later responses that are shaped by vagueness and misconception. When Arab Man asks about the implication of July 11th ،Black Man responds: “Seven-eleven. Slurpee” (2), meaning the partially frozen beverage sold and marketed by Seven-Eleven Delicatessen corporations. Black Man’s answer reflects his subjection to a limited language that obstructs his complete self-realization or interaction with other ethnic communities. Black Man’s struggle with survival as a minority in the US confines him to the reality of Seven-Eleven Delis only. This reality of survival jeopardizes Black Man’s perception of other ethnicities’ experiences. So, he reduces Arab Man’s reality to Seven-Eleven drinks as well. Black Man cannot perceive that this date signifies an approaching tragedy for Arab Man, the anniversary of 9/11 attacks and the sweeping arrest of Middle Eastern males. So, this limited way of seeing becomes the new obligation or debt that makes the two prisoners fail to realize their shared struggle, as both Muslims and minorities, against racism.

In ، *11-7* Corthron integrates visual travel in order to excavate spaces of affinity that involve Arabs and African Americans. Corthron's play contextualizes Lamming's emphasis on the significant contribution of language in mapping out the genealogy of being. For Lamming, language is "the verbal memory which reconstructs our past and offers it back to us as the only spiritual possession which allows us to reflect on who we are and what we might become) "*Coming* .(30 So ،language mediates relocating the individual's effaced descent and recognizing his cultural properties. Both Arab Man and Black realize temporary freedom from the restrictive obligations of language abuse. Again, visual travel enunciates such freedom. Black Man visualizes a symbolic trip to Iraq via Arab Man's imagination .(6 *11-7*) The stage directions envision the shift from isolation into closeness as Arab Man before "*Drops/Falls to a whisper* (7 ،5) "then" *BLACK MAN continues shooting hoops. Gradually ARAB MAN moves closer, startling BLACK MAN who stops shooting ،eyes ARAB MAN suspiciously* " .(6)Such shift climaxes into a full dialogue that suggests empathy and understanding. By exercising visuality, both prisoners reclaim words that have been effaced in post-9/11 discourse, such as the US sanctions on Iraqis, ensuing starvation and lack of medicine, and bombing hospitals and water treatment plants(7 .(Such reclamation revises the prisoners' restricted perception of reality. And they start to recognize their collective victimization by racism. Through that trip ،Black Man begins to understand Arab Man's plight, to locate the news of bombing in papers (8), and to identify with his prison mate's struggle as a Muslim minority in the US (10). Thus, the full re-possession of language endows both convicts with self-authority and the ability to reconstruct their identities and relations to others .

The dramatic resolution of Corthron's *11-7* suggests the temporality of liberation from the abuse and opacity of language. The two convicts' shared conversation that develops cultural identification is interrupted by the arrival of the Corrections Officer who reasserts the power of the paratext (8). The Corrections Officer represents the arbiter of the immigration laws that target both Arab Man and Black Man, and abruptly reminds them of their demonization as convicts who are reduced into mere numbers in the prison cell: "Mohamed 1 and Mohamed 2"(9). The two prisoners' suddenly retrieved feelings reflect what Naber proposes as an" internment of the psyche" (Naber (40 status in the context of postrace racism. Naber's theory of internment highlighted Arab Americans' constant feelings that they might be under surveillance by "invisible arbiters of the legality and normality of behavior, [that [render them vulnerable to the 'truths' contrived by the state—even if they were engaging in lawful activity" (40). Such scrutiny creates a sense of bifurcation between their demonization as Arabs and Americanness needed for survival in the US. In ،*11-7* the officer's presence recalls the two convicts' sense of bifurcation and forces them to practice Americanness that entails abiding by the American laws, stereotypes, and preconceptions about Arabs and Blacks .As the play suggests, observing Americanness requires the disciplinary strategy of self-silencing, to use Foucauldian terms. For Arab Man and Black Man, this self-silencing entails their compulsory suspension of the dialogue that they have initiated together and consequent reversion to the imposed language of abuse and misunderstanding. Thus, the final scene is transformed into a terrifying relapse to the two prisoners' earlier cacophony of English that sustains the terror of miscommunication. Arab Man talks about sanctions, deportation, and killing the babies; Black Man recites the American ideals of pride and supremacy and unshaken beliefs in the magnificence of the American nation (11 .(Arab Man screams; Black Man chuckles hilariously (11 .(Obviously, Arab Man and Black Man's survival through imposed Americanness becomes equated with the ineluctable endurance of postrace discrimination. The play's final scene of cacophony also suggests that there is no complete realization of cross-cultural understanding with the in/visible presence of political paratexts. In other words, an absolute cultural dialogue is only possible after cleansing the self from the socially-enforced abuse of language. Such healing is only feasible through conscious subversion and demolition of the discursive paratexts of postrace cultural terror.

Corthron's *Snapshot Silhouette* is another play that addresses the impact of 9/11 terror on cultural communication and representation .The play was commissioned and produced by The Children's Theatre Company in April 17 2004, and directed by Michael John Garcés .*Snapshot Silhouette* presents two twelve-year-old girls, Najma and Tay C, who both live in Minneapolis. Najma is a Somali-Arab immigrant who has just got to the US, and Tay C is an African American native born. Highlighting the post-9/11 crisis of miscommunication for an audience of children is highly significant for it addresses this particular group's problem of internalizing the paratexts of cultural stereotypes. So, both the characters and intended audience of *Snapshot Silhouette* present an unprecedented translation of critics' urgent calls for a move from nostalgia to confrontation and for "keeping new audiences in mind without being stymid by them" in post-9/11 ethnic studies (Majaj 72-76 .(

The play addresses the cultural clash between African Americans and Somali immigrants and their struggle to realize affinity. Prior to writing the play ،Corthron visited the Twin Cities of Minneapolis in order to witness the Somali community's exasperating hardship due to heightened xenophobia and hate crimes after September 11. This exercise of visuality through travel is integrated in the performance of *Snapshot Silhouette* .The play presents a counter discourse to the paratext that endorses cultural misrepresentations of Somalis .A close look at the Children's Theatre's 2003-2004 season print/online booklet on *Snapshot* entitled "In A Nutshell" reveals how Corthron has succeeded in dismantling linguistic cacophony. The booklet includes Family and Teacher guides that present information on Somalia's geography, religion, languages ،and cultures. It highlights the political upheavals, the few natural resources ،and recurring cycles of droughts and floods. So ،*Snaphot Silhouette*'s guide booklet represents a resisting document to the controlling paratexts of media that portray Somalis as savage and ignorant. Thus, Corthron's play has proposed imaginative travel to visualize Somalia through the booklet. This imaginative travel is integral to the healing of linguistic misunderstanding .In *Snapshot Silhouette* ، the scenes of EFL (English as a Fourth Language) classroom perform the cacophony of voices generated by the opacity of the prevailing English that exacerbates cultural misunderstanding (4-7, 14-22). Such scenes predict the cultural, social, and emotional tension that shapes the relation between Tay C and Najma .They dress and act differently. Tay C speaks English. Najma speaks three different languages, Somali, Swahili, and Arabic and is attending an ESL class to learn English .So, Tay C finds Najma's accented English strange and humiliating. While Najma loves school work, Tay C excels in art and making cutouts and silhouettes of American landmarks (11). Najma and Tay C represent two varied ethnicities that are shaped by different religions, Islam and Christianity respectively. They carry the "legacy of their culture[s] of origin" and have a lot of "preconceived notions" about each other ("In A Nutshell" 2). Being a Christian, Tay C cannot understand why the Muslim Najma is veiled and prays differently. Tay C is only subjected to the stories that feed Western consumption. Such stories function as paratexts that construct a new form of debt for the black community .These narratological paratexts circulate an abused language of cultural obligations and stereotypes that shape the blacks 'interaction with other ethnic minorities. Western stories demonize Muslims who are portrayed as in bad need of being drastically reformed to be more like Christians, Jews, or even atheists) Bayoumi .(93–79 As such, Tay C harasses Najma by calling her "Ms Conduct "who "can't eat and talk at the same time ")*Snapshot* .(10 ،12 In turn, Najma lashes at Tay C's derogative comments by voicing out the stereotypes that constantly denigrate African Americans as lazy people (80-85). Tension and deliberate lack of communication are also dramatically envisioned through the stage directions. The theatrical notes highlight the silence that shapes and engulfs their encounters: "Najma, chewing, looks at Tay C, doesn't answer" (10), "No answer" (13), "Silence" (13 .(The constant emotional tension between Tay C and Najma even climaxes into a fist fight one day in their room .(85-80) So, the two girls are bound to a limited "habit of seeing" that generates misrepresentation of their respective ethnicities .

Subjected to grand discourse, Tay C and Najma cannot recognize the reality of their shared experiences and sad memories. They both have lost their fathers and dear sisters. Particularly, Najma has lost her younger sister Qalin to starvation (26); Tay C has lost her older sister Cam to street violence caused by stray gang's crossfire (32 .(And the performative structure of the play uniquely dramatizes the two girls' alienation despite their shared pain. The play presents two separate scenes in which Najma and Tay C respectively verbalize their pain through private dialogues with the phantoms of their dead sisters .Najma recalls teaching the starving Qalin lessons in language and history (39-42). She also dreams of having been able to give Qalin food and water (42-44). Tay C dreams of playing piano and eating ice cream with Cam (44-47). On her birthday, Tay C hates to turn thirteen as Cam died at the age of twelve (45). Likewise, Najma refuses to outlive her sister (44). Both Najma and Tay C experience physical and emotional alienation from their mothers respectively. Najma is waiting for a reunion with her mother from whom she was separated in a refugee camp (26). But Najma’s wish becomes impossible because of the political and financial upheavals in Somalia. Tay C, on the other hand ‹feels distant from her mother Laine because of the latter’s varied responsibilities .Apart from her regular job, Laine is a teacher in a literacy program, a volunteer at a library, an AIDS hotline, and a homeless shelter, and a fan of doing power yoga and step aerobics (8, 38). So, Tay C only feels that Laine definitely has no enough time to be with her daughter. Again, she projects her mother’s absence as motivated by different factors other than plight. Namely, Tay C thinks that Laine is careless and just following her constant ambition of overachieving that she would like to thoughtlessly enforce on the others (12). Tay C cannot perceive that Laine’s busy schedule is her attempted escape from pain. So, Tay C fails to interpret Laine’s signs of overwhelming plight: “You’re not the only one’s suffered” (9). In this context, the theatrical dialogue demonstrates how the distance between Tay C and Laine is a manifestation of their predicament by civil war and violence. Both Laine and Najma perform a recitation of poems that reveal their painful loss and help them realize their affinity through such poetic performance. Laine’s confession to Najma clearly reveals how the loss of Cam forces the mother to overwork in order to escape her pain. So, both Tay C and Laine live in denial and escape from their pain, fear, and dissolution of their families to process their own sorrow. Such performance enables Najma to understand Laine and even call her a “saint” (38). The particular case of Tay C shows how the blacks’ subjection to the reality of pain and racism could project a culturally manufactured denial and misunderstanding of others .Bound to a language of difference, Tay C cannot recognize her shared reality of plight-enforced alienation with Najma and even Laine .This miscommunication circulates a limited way of seeing where the individual cannot perceive other than difference and demonization. So, the debt of racism could produce a new form of inheritance for the black community translated as terror of foreigners .

Again, Corthron's performing art presents visual travel to compel a cross-cultural dialogue so that Najma and Tay C can realize affinity. Tay C frequently visits the cemetery where she recalls memories with Cam. Najma follows Tay C to the site of the cemetery that brings them closer (24-27). So, Najma narrates her war traumas initiated by witnessing the shooting of her father, the death of her starving sister, separation from her mother, and the scenes of unburied victims in Somalia (25-26). Najma's narrative-making of her traumatic experience functions as a subversive discourse that destabilizes cultural stereotyping .Both Najma and Tay C start to perceive that "issues of violence and disenfranchisement touch every one of us" and that "feelings of loss are universal" ("In A Nutshell" 2). The two girls reclaim the effaced language of shared pain and anger. The communal visit to the graveyard transforms Tay C who gradually understands Laine's change after the loss of Cam: "she useta be normal, only became Betsy Busy Bee after my sister died) "*Snapshot* .(38 The end of the cemetery scene presents a call-and-response performance that verbalizes familial separation and loss (27 .(The cemetery's performance is directly followed by a scene of cross-cultural harmony envisioned through the performing art of music. In the bedroom scene, both girls enjoy how the rhythms of Najma's Somali lute rap with Tay C, the rapper (27). Earlier, Tay C prevents Najma from playing the piano and even slams shut the piano's covering, almost catching Najma's fingers (12). After the cemetery visit, Tay C, for the first time, makes a cutout of Najma's "kaman" and tapes it on Najma's wall to express her developing interest in Najma's ethnic music (29). Obviously ،Tay C becomes interested in learning Somali and reading Najma's letters from back home (37). She even decodes Najma's dreams, understands that her African roommate has been missing her mother, and cares to mention that the Somali "Hooyo "!means "Mommy (29 .(As such, this full re-possession of language gradually undermines the boundaries that obstruct the girls' search for a common ground.

They eventually “engage [their] crises” (Roberts, par. 4) and forge a friendship based on hope and respect. The play’s final scene in which Najma and Tay C engage in one activity and ride the same bike represents the resolution and epitome of their healing from language abuse (90 .(Thus ‹both girls are able to recognize their collective victimization and create a new kind of familial relation.

In conclusion ‹the impact of the War of Terror on Corthron’s dramaturgy is undeniable. Corthron’s *11-7* and *Snapshot Silhouette* contest post-9/11 antiterror ‹peculiarly defined as a product of language abuse that generates paratextual discrimination of Arabs and Muslims. On the other hand, Corthron’s focal plays counteract agency for 9/11 antiterror that has become “a constitutive of the new African American literature” (Edwards, “Of Cain” 197). By highlighting the ethnic conflicts between Arabs and African Americans, Corthron also redefines the new problem of debt or inheritance for the black community. Corthron’s aestheticization of post-9/11 terror does not only address contemporary social and political issues but also invites cross-cultural approaches to the terror of miscommunication. In particular, Corthron’s plays embrace the “cleansing” of language to reclaim the archetypal way of seeing and maintain cross-cultural understanding. As such, Corthron’s drama contributes to an inclusive post-9/11 literature that predicates both the cultural diversity and historical affinity of immigrants from the Middle East and Africa to the US .

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