**Research Article**

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# The impact of the Iraq War 2003 on the British Society: A postcolonial study of Simon Stephens's *Motortown* (2006)

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**Abstract**
This study explores the postcolonial impact of the 2003 Iraq war on British society, focusing on Simon Stephens's *Motortown*. The study addresses the contested field of postcolonialism, rejecting war while examining the transformation of culture and society resulting from colonialism. It explores nationalism, space and place, and the fusion of colonial and indigenous cultures. Concepts like hybridity, ambivalence, and the frame of war are explored within the postcolonial framework. Drawing on Homi K. Bhabha's influential work, *The Location of Culture*, the study examines the position of colonizer nations and their identity. Bhabha's concepts of cultural hybridity and colonial ambivalence illuminate the interactions between colonized nations and imperial colonizers, shaping the identities and cultures of both. Judith Butler's *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* is incorporated, exploring how certain lives receive grief and political protection, while others remain invisible within social and political structures. By applying Butler's and Bhabha's concepts, the study analyzes the impact of the Iraq war on British society as depicted in Stephens's *Motortown*. This research contributes to understanding the cultural and social effects of the Iraq war on British society within a postcolonial framework and reveals the dynamics of power, hybridity, and ambivalence in the post-war context.

**Keywords:** frames of war, hybridity, mimicry, *Motortown*, postcolonialism, third space

## 1. Introduction

Postcolonialism, as defined by Homi K. Bhabha, encompasses the creation and analysis of culture *(The Location of Culture* 1994: 2). It remains a contentious field due to its association with the cultural examination of European imperialism, as colonialism marks the beginning of postcolonial conditions. Rather than resisting or preserving their own colonial culture, postcolonialism seeks to reject the dominance of imperialism through a focus on the postcolonial theory of different aspects of colonial culture (Johansson 2019: 2). It explores the literature produced by both the colonizer and the colonized nations, aiming to shed light on the effects of wars on both sides.

Critics of colonialism argue that literary texts about the cultures of colonized and colonizer peoples were influenced by the colonial powers. In contrast, postcolonial literature critiques such discourse. Colonialism entails the control and authority exerted over a specific land, often resulting in the subjugation, displacement, or loss of life for those living in the occupied areas. The colonizers and their social, linguistic, and cultural assets exercise control over the resources of the colony. Postcolonialism plays a crucial role in the study of literature, examining how colonialism has transformed the culture and society of both the colonizer and the colonized. It is essential for Western powers to address the various forms of dominance and supremacy that emerged as a consequence of colonialism and imperialism. In the context of literature, postcolonial work encompasses elements such as nationalism, politics, space and place, body politics, acculturation, as well as a combination of colonial and indigenous cultures. Additionally, it explores alternative concepts such as hybridity, ambivalence, third space, mimicry, the uncanny, and the frame of war. Contemporary British literature employs numerous strategies to explore the interaction between recent conflicts and the cultural environment within fictional dramatic narratives. Many dramatic texts evoke concepts and imagery that depict the presence of war within domestic settings, adding to the diverse range of war-related interventions on the British stage. British drama often presents "representative but fictional characters" who grapple with the impacts of modern conflict, with the soldier frequently symbolizing the effects of war on the household, mirroring similar themes found in novels and films.

The Anglo-American war in Iraq in 2003 brought about significant changes worldwide. The Middle East, in particular, became a focal point for numerous military and political interests due to the extensive and unfavorable consequences left by the war. The war greatly disrupted the existing status quo in these countries, and its aftermath negatively affected various nations. Surprisingly, even Britain, a prominent colonial and imperial power, was influenced by the Iraqi war. Despite spreading their military and political hegemony over Iraqi lands, Britain and America were unable to completely eradicate the cultural and traditional norms of Iraqi society. This study aims to illuminate the post-war culture and identity of both Iraq and Britain, employing postcolonialism to delve deep into the critical and social nuances of identity and culture portrayed in selected works.

Bhabha's seminal book, *The Location of Culture* (1994), holds great significance in postcolonial studies for its insightful exploration of the position of colonized nations and their identity. Bhabha discusses several crucial topics related to postcolonial culture that contribute to understanding the meaning of culture in different human contexts within the realm of postcolonialism. One of these topics is the concept of hybridity, which Bhabha argues involves the blending of two distinct cultures or ethnicities—the colonized and the colonizers. He emphasizes that cultural hybridity represents the racial mixture resulting from the interaction and intermingling between these ethnicities following the presence of colonialism in the colonized nations. Bhabha provides compelling examples of cultural hybridity, illustrating the significant influence exerted by the colonizers upon the colonized people.

Additionally, Bhabha explores the notion of colonial ambivalence, which highlights the way colonialism unites both the colonized people and their colonizers through postcolonial culture. The colonizers

possess overwhelming power and military force, allowing them to impose their authority over the colonized people. The colonized perceive the colonizers as powerful but oppressive and exploitative, subjecting them to inhumane hegemony over their lands. On the other hand, the colonizers view the colonized people as backward and lacking cultural advancement, yet acknowledging their right to live peacefully in their homelands. Bhabha analyzes cultural ambivalence within postcolonial contexts, capturing the different positions held by colonial ethnicities and their divergent perceptions of one another. In essence, he examines the concepts of cultural hybridity and ambivalence within the framework of postcolonialism as a theory, highlighting the critical interactions between colonized nations and their imperial colonizers, who profoundly shape the identities of the lands they reach (Bhabha, 1994: 94).

Judith Butler's book, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (2009), written by a philosopher and gender theorist, delves into how certain lives are deemed worthy of grief and mourning while others are not, ultimately determining who is considered deserving of political protection. Butler argues that our understanding and response to violence are shaped by social and political structures, leading to the invisibility or ungrievability of certain lives within these frameworks. The book also explores mourning's role in the political process and its potential as a form of resistance.

This study applies the concepts of Butler and Bhabha within postcolonialism to analyze the impact of the 2003 Iraq war on British society as depicted in Simon Stephens's play, Motortown.

## 2. Simon Stephens's *Motortown*

*Motortown* is a play depicting the military confrontations in Iraq. The play concentrates on the British invasion of Iraq and the social and cultural impact it had left in Ira. Undoubtedly, the war influenced both the Iraqi people and the British colonizers when the war had broken out. The influence encompasses the British imperial military mission which had also got influenced by the inherited cultural and social norms of the Iraqi society. As such, the play portrays the effects of war on Iraq on British soldiers who took part in this war as well as their living conditions in Iraq as a foreign country. The play's protagonist Danny whose psychic agitation is an authentic embodiment of the massive influence of the Iraqi war upon the British colonizers. His grievous psychic state represents this influence and its related cultural traits.

The word "grievous" is tackled in postcolonial studies due to its critical significance in revealing the psychic conditions of the colonized people. In *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* Butler offers discursive notions of grief and its effects that appear in postcolonial events or conditions. She tends to describe these conditions as frames which represent the bitter reality of war victims. War results in catastrophic events that make its victims bereaved in lugubrious mourning. That is, the destruction left by war creates melancholic feelings in the victims' psyches; Butler writes: "in this sense frame seeks to institute an interdiction on mourning: there is no destruction, and there is no loss. Even as the frames are actively engaged in redoubling the destruction of war, they are only polishing the surface of melancholia whose rage must be contained, and often cannot (2009: 13). Butler's description of the war frames as melancholic conditions is ascribed to the literary authors of how war negatively influences the victims' psyches and makes them constantly agitated and unstable socially. Soldiers, for example, are directly affected by the war since they participate in its missions and battles. As such, they are in close contact with its fatal confrontations. Their behaviors change into the worst once they return from their military missions.

*Motortown* is, similarly, set in a military scenes involving soldiers who had undergone bitter and bad experience. As I previously explained, the protagonist in the play is Danny. He has been a soldier in Iraq and has returned home when he finished his military missions. He participated in bloody battles and encounters in Iraq, which gradually affected his personality. He is tremendously moved by its destruction of Iraqi places an infrastructure. After his return, Danny commits grievous acts in his hometown and appears as a social

monster due to the effect left by the war upon his psychic stability; his personality becomes completely different from his previous character before enrolling the army to invade Iraq:

> **Tom:** How was it?
> **Danny:** It was easy.
> **Tom:** Pushing on an open door.
> **Danny:** Mostly it involved waiting around all fucking day. Do a couple of patrols.
> **Tom:** Give out a few Spangles.
> **Danny:** We stayed in the airport. They turned the Basra international airport into our base. Had these big old statues and fountains and marble floors and everything. (2014: 19)

In this quotation, Danny is talking with his friend Tom about his experience during his involvement with the war in Iraq. Apparently, there is something disturbing in Danny description of war in Iraq. He recounts his experience that changed his personality when he does not find peace of mind in Iraq; the place of deadly contact between the Iraqi natives and the British soldiers. Danny, in this sense, exemplifies the genuine reality of the grievous states of soldiers who participated in Iraq. Butler looks into this state through the conditions, or frames, or subjective experience of literary characters. These characters could be hegemonic; and they impose their power on other people: "the frames that, in effect, decide which lives will be recognizable as lives and which will not, must circulate in order to establish their hegemony. This circulation brings out or, rather, is the inerrable structure of the frame. As frames break from themselves in order to install themselves, other possibilities for apprehension emerge" (2009: 36). The hegemonic people described by Butler are the colonial oppressors who torment and subjugate the colonized people in radical ways. However, these hegemonic people try to get rid of their psychic tension by restoring to pastimes in order to be safe of war and difficult conditions affecting their personalities. These characters seek the peace of mind to compensate the horrible time they live in war dominated events. They also attempt to replace their past experience with new one to be away of danger and military missions that resulted in grievous memories haunting the lives of soldiers. *Motortown* has a contiguous military depiction of this experience by highlighting the life of the protagonist, Danny.

Danny epitomizes the British hegemony described in Butler's argument. The war influenced his personality; and it becomes drastically different form his previous psychic state. Hence, he alleviates his psychic complications by resorting to pastime, like playing video games and drinking beer. Nevertheless, he remains bored as he is haunted by the memories of war in Iraq: "Danny Had a PlayStation. Watch a few DVDs. Get your one ginger beer a day. I just got bored. Came home" (2014: 20). The same description of war in Iraq as if it was a picnic continues in Danny's speech. It appears as if Danny is misguided and mislead concerning war in Iraq. The war is portrayed as a ghost haunting him wherever he goes and whenever he remembers it. In essence, the impact of the war in Iraq manifests in Danny's changing personality to the worst.

Danny changing personality is ascribed to his adoption of a new culture form the colonized land, Iraq. The oddity of his behaviors is enhanced by the colonial power of the imperial plans of Britain in Iraq. As argued earlier, cultural hybridity comprises the colonized native identity and the colonizers' identity. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha states that hybridity and its cultural traits are connected to imperial domination and power. Colonial power enables its people to use their authority colonized others. Yet, the colonizers' "original identity" changes; and it is reversed as a result of the colonial contact with the native colonized culture: "hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the

production of discriminatory identities that secure the 'pure' and original identity of authority)" (Bhabha, 1994: 112). Bhabha's accentuation of the original identity of the colonizers is attributed to the development of the hybrid identity.

Danny's original identity, in the same way, changes in the course of the bloody contact between the British colonizers and the Iraqi people. Notwithstanding, his culture changes a lot when the war is over; and he embarks a new abnormal life after returning from Iraq. In this sense, he develops two different personalities. To use Bhabha's words, his new personality includes his original identity as well as the behaviors and reactions he adopts form the Iraqi culture and war. When he come back to Britain, people notice his changing personality that had becomes very strange; he tells them that he is affected by war:

> **Tom:** Other people said they thought you looked a bit odd.
> **Danny:** Did they?
> **Tom:** Said it looked nothing like you. Are you as hard as fuck now? (2014: 20)

It appears that the war in Iraq has changed Danny greatly, but ironically, he does not notice his transformation. In the first place, he embodies the impact of the Iraqi war upon the soldiers. He is the stereotype of the influence of the Iraqi culture upon the British original culture stated by Bhabha. According to Bhabha, the postcolonial peculiarities of hybrid identity are considered as "deformation" of the original identity. To clarify, the original culture, or the colonial hegemonic culture, is distorted and deformed by the process of the ethnic interlocution between the original hegemonic identity and the invaded, or colonized, identity. Such deformation is the exact transformation of identity known as subversion i.e., the original colonial identity is subverted and distorted when it becomes hybrid due to the colonial confrontation between the original identity and the colonized or oppressed identity; Bhabha comments:

*Motortown* provides us with various pictures of cultural hybridity. The play includes many scenes of hybridity and its transformation into a cultural identity. Danny and Paul are from a totally different country. They come from Britain to invade Iraq for no obvious reasons. They meet new cultural norms and conversations in the Iraqi territories. Paul, for example, considers these conventions are foreign and they do not cope with his British cultural background. Being so, he gets frightened by the very idea of adopting new culture: "Paul: You see, when you can't tell the difference any more between what is real and what is a fantasy. That's frightening, I think" (2014: 26). To relate this to the concept of hybridity, Danny is moved by the Iraqi cultural traditions which are different from his inherited ones. As a result, he incarnates the position of the bereaved personality that is affected by the bitter experience in the war. The concept of hybridity, here, represents the cultural differences between the British ethnicity and the Iraqi ethnicity. Hence, ethnicity is the essence of cultural genealogy from which the hybrid identity develops. In this respect, Bhabha claims that the concept of hybridity originates in the cultural genealogy of the literary characters. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha maintains that the concept of hybridity is a kind of problem affecting the genuine essence of the native identity: "colonial hybridity is not a *problem* of genealogy or identity between two *different* cultures which can then be resolved as an issue of cultural relativism. Hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal" (Bhabha, 1994: 114). This means that the concept of hybridity encompasses the spirit of cultural native identity.

In *Motortown*, the native cultural identity is both British and Iraqi. On the one hand, the British native identity is depicted through the British soldiers and political representatives that are deployed in Iraq for military missions. They are the colonizers that oppress and subjugate the Iraqi natives. On the other hand, the Iraqi natives are inherit their ancestors' identity. The Iraqi identity is another cultural ethnicity approached in the play through the Iraqi people's society and culture. Terror, accordingly, unites both

identities on the grounds of cultural assimilation and ethnic relationships. Danny is dramatic replicas of the war people who truly witnessed the atrocities of war: "the notion of a War on Terror is completely ingenious. It is now possible to declare war on an abstraction. On an emotional state. *He continues to work*. God. Law. Money. The left. The right. The church. The state. All of them lie in tatters. Wouldn't you be frightened? (2014: 27). Here, Paul is talking to Danny about war on terrorism that is prevalent in the western world. The British colonialism exemplifies the Western attitudes in Iraq that invaded the Iraqi native identity.

Bhabha argues the concept of hybridity is connected with war terrorism and dislocation. To clarify, the concept of cultural hybridity comprises the notion of colonial authority which practices discriminatory actions in the colonized lands. Moreover, colonial terrorism is the cultural cannibalism reflected in the colonial discourse of literary works; Bhabha: "hybridity reverses the *formal* process of disavowal so that the violent dislocation of the act of colonization becomes the conditionality of colonial discourse. The presence of colonialist authority is no longer immediately visible; its discriminatory identifications no longer have their authoritative reference to this culture's cannibalism or that people's perfidy (Bhabha, 1994: 114). In this regard, Bhabha contends that the concept of cultural hybridity involves the colonial cannibalism exemplified in military oppressive terrorism caused by the clashes in the war's battlefields. Yet, terrifying cannibalism includes the authentic meaning of corruption since the colonizers bring with them corrupt actions and behaviors that are traditionally related to their culture; and they are different from the host or colonized native culture.

The native cultural identity in *Motortown* is conveyed by the military clash between the Iraqi natives and the British colonizers. The Iraqi natives interact with British colonizers and got corrupted. The play portrays sexual behaviors and actions which do not fit in the cultural context of the Iraqi society. Such sexual acts are not traditional inherited in the Iraqi society. They are brought by the British colonial invasion; the following scene depicts this colonial corruption: "I saw a fifty-year-old man sit a sixteen-year-old Brummie girl on his lap. He held her breast in his hand and got her to smile at the webcam. Asked her what she thought all of the people watching did while she masturbated. She said she thought they masturbated. It was a truthful image. It sits in my consciousness" (2014: 27). In this quotation, Paul is talking about the corruption of the western world and the horrible that is being done to the population of the third world. The essence of corruption is created by the British colonial enterprises in Iraq whose native cultural identity is affected by the British imperial hegemony. Bhabha also elaborates the concept of cultural hybridity by virtue of colonial oppressive power. The reality of military wars is sustained by the dominant or powerful culture. By time, this powerful culture becomes oppressive colonial authority resulting in the formation of cultural hybridity (Bhabha, 1994: 115). The authority of the colonial imperialism lies at the heart of hybridity formed in a postcolonial world. In *Motortown*, such hybridity is recounted in the literary features of the plot. The Western world spreads its oppressive hegemony in the Iraqi lands through catastrophic events. The West, which is depicted in the personalities of British soldiers, performs dangerous actions in Iraq:

> Paul This whole planet is in a terrible state, Danny, you know? The ecological fallout of the decisions that you have made – you, Danny, personally, today, you, not anybody else, you – the ecological fallout of those decisions is catastrophic. And it's the same for all of us. Times sixty million. Times six billion. And nobody says anything about it. There are too many people. There is not enough water. There is not enough oxygen. And nobody admits it. And so now we're gonna consume China. And then we're gonna consume India and then we're gonna consume Africa and we'll carry on consuming. We'll continue to eat it all up and eat it all up and eat it all up until the only thing we've got left to fucking eat, Danny, the only thing we've got left to eat is each other. (2014: 30)

In this quotation, Paul is pointing to the danger of the Western world and its inclination to invade other countries. The play holds serious and realistic incidents representing the atrocity of the Western world and its presence in Iraq as a colonized country. British imperialism is affected by the Iraqi native culture and war, but it does not complexly take its original customs and traditions. The cultural impact is mutual; whereby the Iraqi people influence the culture of the British people; and the British people influence the inherited Iraqi cultural customs and traditions. In *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* Butler argues that war results in a deep impact on the people and fronts involved in the war. The combatant people are affected by the conditions, or frames, produced by the tense atmosphere of the war: "when the frames of war break up or break open, when the trace of lives is apprehended at the margin of what appears or as riddling its surface, then frames unwittingly establish a grievable population despite a prevalent interdiction, and there emerges the possibility of a critical outrage, war stands the chance of missing its mark" (2009: 26). Butler, consequently, describes the populations influenced by war. Such populations are the combatant people who mutually influence each other during and after the war. In other words, they are the ethnic poles of cultural hybridity discussed by Bhabha via his critical postulations of cultural hybridity.

In *Motortown*, cultural hybridity and war intersect with each other. The war leaves terrible impact upon the Iraqi people who are victims of the military clashes waged by the British colonialism and vice versa. Marley, for example, suffers from cultural hybridity because her ex-boyfriend ostracizes her and goes to Iraq. When he comes back, she notices him as completely different from his previous British personality because the Iraqi war affected his disposition too much: "Marley I heard you could barely speak. Didn't look anything like you. You look terrible, Danny. What have you been doing?" (2014: 31). As I have just argued, Marely is Danny's ex-girlfriend; and she is affected by his personality change. They have been separated after Danny went to war in Iraq. Danny is living in an illusion that they are still together he and Marely. In this quotation, Marely is telling Danny that he has completely changed after he came back from war.

In the previous section, I discussed the concept of cultural hybridity as a critical manifestation of the concept of third space. In "Tourism, hybridity, and ambiguity: The relevance of Bhabha's 'Third Space' culture" (2017: 33), Keith Hollinshed contends that the concept of third space is recognized through the ideas of displacement and admonition. The imperial cultures create their ethnic positions within the postcolonial context of third space. Hollinshed argues that third space is a mere representation of Bhabha's conceptualization of third space as a place of the colonized nation: (2017: 124). Hollinshed claims that third space is appropriated in terms of the Bhabha's emphasis of the cultural difference between the colonized nations and their colonizers. By the same token, Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture*, states the features of third space in made by the tension of different cultures. Therefore, third space becomes global since it affects both the colonizers' and the colonized people's national identities: "the non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space - a third space - where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences" (Bhabha, 1994: 218). Being so, third space is attributed to the tense atmosphere combining two different ethnicities.

In *Motortown*, cultural third space is approached via Danny's and Marley's cultural transformation in Iraq as the land of identity change. However, identity change involves the characters' predilection to kill other people. They used to be trained in Iraq to kill innocent people without justified reasons. The two different ethnicities are the British hegemonic culture and the Iraqi oppressed ethnicity. Third space, accordingly, emerges out when the military tension reaches its peak in the course of the clash between these ethnicities. Again, Danny and Marley are dramatic replicas of the influence of the Iraqi war – as a place of third space – upon the British imperialism which tried to suppress the Iraqi ethnicity during the war:

**Danny** When I've finished with you I'm going to go and find every boyfriend you ever had and

every friend you ever had and get them and shoot them in the face.

**Marley** You what?

**Danny** And all your family.

**Marley** That's nice, Danny.

**Danny** Do you think I won't, Marley, do you think I wouldn't? This is what I'm trained to do.

**Marley** I think you need to go to the hospital. (2014: 31)


Marley, in this respect, exemplifies the British imperialism affected by the cultural impact of the Iraqi war. She accuses the war of changing the personality of Danny who did not use to be oppressive or murderous. At this point, the real Danny arises; and his personality is enhanced by Iraqi social traditions since Iraq is the cultural third space. He is capable of killing with cold blood as he was trained to do during war in Iraq. To Marley's disappointment, she could not believe in Danny's identity change. She recognizes the fact of the massive impact of the Iraqi war upon his personality as a peaceful and meek person as he used to be.

The change of Danny's personality is the result of the impact of the Iraqi war. His hybrid identity is empowered by the Iraq customs and traditions; whereby third space played its influential role to transform his personality. In essence, cultural hybridity and third space intersect with each other in a postcolonial background because "the function of hybridity in the colonial discourse, for him, lies in the subversion of the relation of domination in a colonial situation. In doing so, it exposes the influence of the other so that it reveals itself as double-voiced in the third space of cultural negotiation" (Bhandari, 2022: 173). The relationship between cultural hybridity and third space is tackled in Naglaa Abou-Agag's "Homi Bhabha's Third Space and neocolonialism" (2021). Abou-Agag pinpoints the original place of third space as the "former" colony formulated by postcolonial events: "third Space is the terrain hosting the continuous process of creating and recreating identity and where reaching 'the beyond' is the goal which former colonies should set themselves" (2021: 26). Third space, according to Abou-Agag, is the core of the previous, or former, colonial terrains invaded by imperial culture.

*Motortown* depicts third space through revealing Iraq as the regional site of third space location. This is due to the fact that Iraq is the place where the major war's events take place; and they do change the cultural peculiarities of the British colonizers. Moreover, Iraq is the "former" and original place of third space resulting in new ethnic identities after the military invasions. In the following quotation, Danny and Jade embody this hybrid change of the British personality: "*he lights the cigarette. He smokes it for a while, watching her. He puts the cigarette out on her hand. She screams. Starts crying.* Danny: Did I say that you could move your hand? Jade: No (2014: 37). In this sense, Danny has kidnapped Jade, a fourteen-year-old black girl. She is the girlfriend of Paul whom Danny has met earlier to fix his gun. At this point, Danny is torturing Jade for unknown reasons. It alluded that he is using the same techniques with Iraqis.

Charles Spencer says what he really thinks about *Motortown*, which he calls profoundly unnerving and "gets under your skin" (Spencer, 2006: 22). In the same way, Gardner says that *Motortown* is a violent play that shows how cruel and heartless people can be when they are desperate. There is no doubt that the violent scenes in *Motortown* make people feel bad (Gardner, 2006: 13). Sierz breaks down the play by saying, "There was too much blood tonight, so it was hard to clean it up" (Grochala, 2017: 125). Part of the reason this drama has been criticized with strong feelings is because it has themes of fear and a sense of community.

The Abu Ghraib photos are directly referenced in the play's climax, Scene six, when Danny drags Jade to Foulness Island, an isolated spot where he had accidentally trained to become an Army soldier. The veteran abuses the fourteen-year-old girl mentally and physically before shooting her at point blank

range. Danny's new culture after his tour in Iraq is exemplified in this scene, in which the veteran re-enacts on British soil the events he witnessed and did while on duty, successfully bringing the war home (Coste, 2021: 3). In scene six reminiscent of the Abu Ghraib scandal, Danny uses his cellphone to take pictures of Jade being beaten and coerced into stressful positions. He commands her to remove her jacket before ordering her to place her hand on the ground; he then asks her to pose as his sister. There are a total of six pictures snapped, the last of which is of Jade's lifeless body lying in a pool of blood. The stage instructions unmistakably emphasize the analogy to Abu Ghraib. (Stephens, 2014: 51). The opening lines of Butler's chapter on the Abu Ghraib photographs state that she is interested in understanding "[...] how the frames that allocate the recognizability of certain figures of the human are themselves linked with the broader norms that determine what will and will not be a grievable life." Butler's photographs, like those from Abu Ghraib, have a frame that is structured by social and political norms (Butler, 2009: 63). These standards help to portray enemy existence as precarious and serve the purpose of waging war in the setting of armed conflict (Coste, 2021: 3).

The violent military scenes are literary symbols of cultural hybridity. However, Bhabha contends that hybrid identity turns to be cultural ambivalence, especially when the literary works portray violence. Moreover, violence stands for antagonism of the "other." Here, cultural ambivalence takes its ethnic shape in the postcolonial context of literary works: "it is only by understanding the ambivalence and the antagonism of the desire of the other that we can avoid the increasingly facile adoption of the notion of a homogenized other, for a celebratory, oppositional politics of the margins or minorities" (1994: 52). Cultural antagonism and violence are pursued through Danny's violent treatment of Jade in *Motortown*. He inhumanely torments Jade without logical reasons. He only inflicts tormenting actions against Jade because he believes the war enables him to be violent; and he has justifiable reason for such behaviors. Importantly, he does not torment Jade in Iraq. He does so when he returns back as he believes that he is still in Iraq and could use his colonial power to oppress others: "some of the things we did, down in Basra. It was a laugh. I'll tell your that for nothing. Here, Ali Baba. Get that down your throat, your raghead cunt. You never know. Fucking fourteen-year-old girl? Don't matter. Could've strapped herself. Underneath her fucking burka. Take it off!" (2014: 38). While Danny is torturing Jade, he is thinking of the things he did in Iraq. It as if he imitating his actions or thinks that he is in Iraq right now. He cannot tell the difference between the past and the present or fantasy and the real world. Nevertheless, the impact of the war upon the British personality extends to be cultural ambivalence. That is, Danny is still under the effect of the British uncontrollable authority in Iraq that used to oppress and subjugate Iraqi people during the war; and this appears in Danny's feelings: "Danny I come back home. It's a completely foreign country" (2014: 48). Here, Danny is talking about his estrangement from his own country after coming back from war. His ambivalent feelings are apparent in his actions and speech due to his hybrid cultural background that turned to be cultural ambivalence involving his native British identity and military violence adopted during the war in Iraq.

The concept of cultural ambivalence has a close affinity with the concept of cultural liminality. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha maintains that the concept of cultural liminality indicates the collapsing nature of native identity. To some extent, he describes this collapse as "certainty" which exemplifies the inherited customs and traditions of specific culture or nation. In this manner, the colonized nation disintegrates with modernity and gets detached from its advancement since it dissolves in the postcolonial cultural ambivalence. Bhabha provides vivid and clear critical insights of cultural liminality affected by ambivalence. He says that liminality is a product of the social residuals of cultural ambivalence that develops in violent-dominated atmosphere. Significantly, cultural liminality is a kind of experience leading to the survival of some of the native social customs and traditions, or as Arup Ratan Chakraborty puts it simply, the "liminal space is the 'in-between' location of cultural action, in which according to various cultural theorists, anthropologists

and psychologists meaning is produced…" (2016: 145). This moderate relationship between the native identity and the newly adopted ambivalent and hybrid identity is the crux of cultural liminality.

*Motortown*, similarly deals with cultural liminality through the life of Danny after the war. His life incarnates the stereotypical notion of cultural liminality because he is from a British culture that contradicts with the essential identity traits of the Iraqi society. He changes into a bad person when he returns from Iraq. The following situation exemplifies his transformational state after completing his military mission in Iraq: "Danny I'm gonna convert to Islam. Save me from scumballs like you two. I'm not apologising for anything. See me. I'm as innocent as a baby. I'm a fucking hero! I'm a fucking action hero. I'm John fucking Wayne! I'm Sylvester Stallone! I'm fucking James Bond, me!" (2014: 49). In this case, Danny is talking to Justin and Helen who are both married and liberal in their ideals and values. They are swingers too. They are both trying to convince Danny to fuck Helen, which indicates his changing nature.

Postcolonial cultural liminality is the primary impetus of Danny's changing identity. Cultural liminality, moreover, has a close relationship with the concept of mimicry. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha argues that the concept of colonial mimicry is the genuine imitation of the "other" culture. In this sense, the "other" exemplifies the colonized entities, while the original culture follows the same cultural and social peculiarities of the other: "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed recognition of the other, as a subject of difference " (1994: 86). Consequently, Bhabha tends to refer to cultural mimicry as a desire to follow the same cultural traditions of the other. In *Key concepts in post-colonial studies*, Ashcroft *et al*. provide a similar definition of cultural mimicry as argued by Bhabha. They say that mimicry unravels the core of the cultural predilection of the original identity to be like the other colonial identity. Such similarity is governed by the discourse of the colonial language used in literary works because "mimicry reveals the limitation in the authority of colonial discourse, almost as though colonial authority inevitably embodies the seeds of its own destruction" (2021: 140). Additionally, the concept of cultural mimicry unites the original identity with the "other" identity by means of severe and contradictory "binary opposition." Such opposition represents the postcolonial dichotomy between the self and other. In this sense, the self stands for the Western hegemonic culture; and the other stands for the colonized nation since the "process of mimicry undermines the binary opposition of self and other which is the most striking feature within the colonial discourse" (Ferhood and Janoory, 2020: 199).

The Western ethnicity depicted in *Motortown* is the British imperialism presence in Iraq. As argued earlier, Danny is a great literary figure denoting the radical influence of the Iraqi war upon the British characters. The British characters represent the Western hegemony; and it is the oppressive self. Meanwhile, the Iraqi people are the oppressed other; and they undergo bloody war waged by the Anglo-American invasion. As a result, Danny becomes a killer, which is an obvious example of how the war left its impact upon his personality: "**Danny:** She was like a doll. She was a cute little black thing. How was your lunch?" (2014: 51). Here, Danny is talking to his brother Lee about killing Jade. He describes her as a futile thing without any human value. Danny tells Lee about the influence of the war upon his behaviors. He misses the war as he used to adapt to military fights: "I don't blame the war. The war was all right. I miss it. It's just you come back to this" (2014: 54). Danny is talking to his brother Lee about his condition and that the war in Iraq has nothing to do with him being a psychopath. Thus, Danny's character embodies the British "self" that mimics the Iraqi "other"; and this self is Western British identity affected by the oppressed Iraqi other.

## 3. Conclusion

This study delves into the extensive Postcolonial analysis of Simon Stephens's play, *Motortown*, drawing upon the ideas of Homi K. Bhabha and Judith Butler regarding the social, cultural, and political impacts of war on society. Through *Motortown*, Stephens skillfully portrays the repercussions of the Iraq War on British

culture, shedding light on the broader consequences of colonization. The Iraq War of 2003 left a profound mark on both British soldiers and society as a whole. The physical and psychological injuries suffered by soldiers, along with the loss of lives, showcased the immediate and tangible toll of the conflict. Moreover, the war triggered widespread questioning within British society, with concerns about the government's decision-making and the long-term implications of the conflict. Critically, the war's impact extended beyond Britain, tarnishing its global reputation and fueling anti-Western sentiment in the Middle East. These far-reaching consequences continue to reverberate in the present day.

The war on Iraq also had a significant effect on British identity, provoking a reassessment of traditional values like diplomacy and international cooperation. The decision to engage in the war deepened divisions within society, leading to disillusionment with the government, the military, and the media. Consequently, many Britons were compelled to reevaluate their perspectives on patriotism, national pride, and the country's role in the world. Within this context, referring to Judith Butler's frame theory is crucial, as it allows for a deconstruction of the Western narrative surrounding the Iraq War. By highlighting the devastating effects of colonialism on the lives of the British people, Stephens challenges preconceived notions and offers an alternative frame of understanding. Through *Motortown*, he articulates his opposition to the war and critiques the government's decisions, unraveling the true costs of war on both soldiers and civilians. Ultimately, Stephens's work reveals the flaws in the government's arguments and presents an ideology of rejecting war and standing against governmental actions.

In conclusion, this study illuminates the multifaceted impacts of the Iraq War on British society, as portrayed in Simon Stephens's Motortown. By drawing upon the perspectives of Bhabha and Butler, it unveils the complex consequences of war, colonization, and government actions, urging a reevaluation of traditional narratives and fostering a critical understanding of these issues.

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