

## The Traumatized as Traumatizer in Yussef El Guindi's *Back of the Throat*

Dr Khaled Saad Sirwah\*

ksirwah@art.kfs.edu.eg

### Abstract

Drawing on a psychoanalytic approach, the present paper tackles Yussef El Guindi's *Back of the Throat* (2006) as a study of the American attitude towards Arab/Muslim Americans after the 9/11 attacks, with a special focus on the traumatic effects arising from police interrogations throughout the play. This is done by employing such features as fear, verbal and physical attacks, inhuman practices, cynicism, scapegoating, *etc.* as negotiated by psychoanalysts like Allan Young, Philip Bonifacio, Marna Young and others. In a seven-character one-act piece, El Guindi illustrates how the police officers, traumatized by the 9/11 attacks, pass on their own trauma to innocent people on so fabricated evidence that they may appear as more sinned against than sinning. The paper has reached three findings. (1) The playwright fulfills his target of showing the American traumatization of Arab/Muslim Americans as due to the West's old view of the latter as inferior and uncivilized. (2) Trauma survivors (the police officers) usually have to pass their trauma on to their victims (by means of cynical inhuman practices). (3) The 9/11 acute trauma has developed into different chronic traumas due to passing it on to others.

**Keywords:** 9/11 attacks, Arab/Muslim American, cynicism, fear, physical/verbal attack, scapegoating, psychological trauma, trauma survivors, violation

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\*An associate professor of English literature, Dept of English, Faculty of Arts, Kafreshikh University

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## Introduction

As a contemporary Arab-American dramatist, Yussef El Guindi (1960-), an Egyptian-American playwright, writes full-length and one-act plays. His work focuses on the immigrant experience in the United States, the collision of ethnicities, and the cultural and political climates encountering Arab-Americans and Muslim Americans. Having a rich history of productions and winning many prizes, *Back of the Throat* (first premiered in San Francisco, California in April, 2005) is an account of the post 9/11 American anxiety, which explores the paranoid effect of the disaster on both sides: the American and the Arab-American societies.

The studies done on Yussef El Guindi's *Back of the Throat* revolve around traditional issues, shying away from the current psychological perspective. Papers such as Ahmed S. M. Mohammed's "Exacerbation of Panic Onstage: Ethnic Problems and Human Rights Violations in Yussef El Guindi's *Back of the Throat*" (2011), Ivan Lacko's "Freedom Stuck in the Throat: Yussef El Guindi's *Back of the Throat* through the Prisms of an Individual Conflict and a Polarized Society" (2013), and Mohammad Almostafa's "Rethinking the Stereotypes and Violence against Arabs and Arab Americans in El Guindi's *Back of the Throat* and Shamieh's *The Black Eyed*" (2015) negotiate violence against Arab Americans violating their human rights. More recent papers such as Suaad M. Alqahtani's "Post-9/11 Arab American Drama: Voices of Resistance in *Back of the Throat*

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and *Browntown*" (2018), Enas Jaafar Jawad's "The Dramatic Representation of Islamophobia in Yussef El Guindi's *Back of the Throat*" (2018), Hakan M. Basak's "A New Historical Criticism of *Back of the Throat* by Yussef El Guindi" (2019), and Oana-Celia Gheorghiu's fragmented title "Framing Islam in Post-9/11 US. A Literary Account: Yussef El Guindi's *Back of the Throat*" (2020) stress violence against Arab and Muslim Americans after the 9/11 attacks and hence stereotyping them as representatives of violence and enmity. The most recent paper that has to do with trauma in Arab-American theatre is Marwa Ghazi Mohammed & Enas Jawad's "Muslim Americans' Trauma in Sam Younis' *Browntown* and Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced*" (2020), which focuses on the cultural misunderstanding that leads to the loss of identity and meaning.

Thus, despite the different studies hinted at above, there is not a single one attempting El Guindi's piece via the concept of trauma—a problem the current study attempts to deal with. However, this study seeks to answer one central question: Who traumatized whom? Answering such a question requires answering other subsidiary ones: (1) What are the playwright's real reasons behind the American traumatizing attitudes towards Arab/Muslim Americans? (2) How could the play(wright) delineate the American inhuman and traumatic practices against Arab/Muslim Americans? (3) What are the consequences expected by the playwright to result from such American traumatic attitudes towards innocents?

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## Psychological Trauma and Psychoanalysis

Derived from the Greek word for "wound," the term trauma refers to "the experience of fear, conceived as a memory, both individual and collective, of traumatic pain" (Allan Young 6). While Philip Bonifacio defines it as "the overwhelming of the ego's capacity to manage threats from the external environment, the id, or the superego" (178), Lenore Terr argues that "psychic trauma occurs when a sudden, unexpected, overwhelming intense emotional blow or a series of blows assaults the person from outside. Traumatic events are external, but they quickly become incorporated into the mind" (8). To Bessel van der Kolk and Annette Streeck-Fischer, "a psychological trauma is an event that both overwhelms a person's psychological and biological coping mechanisms, and...is not an objective event that can be universally applied to all people, but an experience that overwhelms because of the personal interpretation of the victim" (818). Thus, as a response to some distressing event/experience, trauma may be regarded as a severe physical and/or psychological injury caused by some external source(s). However, there are three main types of trauma: acute trauma resulting from a single stressful/dangerous event, chronic trauma resulting from repeated and prolonged exposure to highly stressful events, and complex trauma resulting from exposure to multiple traumatic events.

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Philip Bonifacio argues that when the ego is overwhelmed by threat from the external environment (such as a natural disaster, an accident involving many deaths and severe injuries), the individual may react in a fairly predictable way (178). As included in the definitions above, the traumatic event involves some damage or threat of damage to an individual's mental integrity. Eve Carlson and Constance Dalenberg find it erroneous to confine traumatic events to "only those involving injury or death" arguing that they include any other experiences that are "potentially traumatic" (6). In a way reminiscent of Terr's definition of trauma, they see that the three defining features of traumatic events are "a lack of control over what is happening, the perception that the event is a highly negative experience, and the suddenness of the experience" (6). Moreover, there are five basic factors to explain variations in responses to trauma: "individual biological factors, developmental level at the time of the trauma, severity of the trauma, the social context of the individual both before and after the trauma, and life events that occur prior and subsequent to the trauma" (16). Such factors substantiate how a "traumatic experience impacts the entire person—the way we think, the way we learn, the way we remember things, the way we feel about ourselves, the way we feel about other people, and the way we make sense of the world are all profoundly altered by traumatic experience" (Bloom 1). Arguing that people "become distressed when they cannot control what is happening to them, particularly when what is happening is

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painful,” Carlson and Dalenberg stress “fear, helplessness, horror, and some dissociation” as the most outstanding features of trauma (6). Like Michelle Balaev who argues that “amnesia, dissociation, or repression may be responses to trauma but they are not exclusive responses” (6), Laurie Vickroy stresses that “traumatic responses may include shame, doubt, or guilt, or may destroy important beliefs in one's own safety or view of oneself as decent, strong, and autonomous” (131).

The reactions to traumatic incidents often listed as a syndrome (or a coherent group of symptoms) called the Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are often used as analogous to trauma, with the added implication that no trauma has occurred if no symptoms are found (Marna Young 8). PTSD occurs in combat soldiers, rescue workers, survivors of natural disasters and accidents, and crime victims, as well as police officers (Bonifacio 178-9). This latter fact is accentuated by Marna Young and Rudolf Oosthuizen who do “not deny or belittle the harrowing impact that traumatic incidents have on police members” (2). Bonifacio argues that “police officers who have witnessed or have been directly involved in tragedy have suffered psychological trauma and reacted by becoming emotionally numb...and easily provoked to anger” (179). This leads to different results. On the one hand, disasters “may cause police officers to have traumatic reactions” and as a result of “being overwhelmed by the enormity of a catastrophe” which has “a significant impact on” them, they

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have "to uphold inhuman laws that have since been defined as unlawful, and the cultural divide was in a sense epitomized by the organization" (Marna Young 22). On the other hand, the stress reactions of anger, aggression, and irritability resulting from trauma may lead to loss of control and hence to "vulnerability. When this appears as a result of anger directed at perpetrators and criminals it can lead to frustration and temporary immobilisation but when it results from conflict with and judgements by colleagues it may lead to giving up and withdrawal" (Young & Oosthuizen 9). To Bonifacio, the police "officer consciously experiences conflict between succumbing to the immoral pleasure of feeling that he is immune from the rules and his conscience which constantly reminds him that he is indeed bound by rules of conduct" (84). Bonifacio argues that police officers rely on cynicism: "If being cynical on the job works for the police officer, then he feels no emotional connection to the public. If cynicism does not work for him on the job, he feels overwhelmed by anxiety, pain, helplessness, and nihilism; he becomes depressed and withdrawn in all areas of his life" (117). He further adds: "The police officers who use malignant cynicism to cope with objective anxiety caused by feelings of pain, helplessness and nihilism tend to describe themselves as powerful and superior" (119).

Allan Young centres her book *The Harmony of Illusions* on the views of both Sigmund Freud and Abram Kardiner (an American psychoanalyst, who treated traumatized veterans during the 1920's (5)) of the "symptomatic

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reaction" following traumatic events. While Freud describes it as "*defensive*" because "it functions to preserve the ego," Kardiner claims that it "is a form of *adaptation*. It is an effort to eliminate or control painful and anxiety-inducing changes that have been produced by the trauma in the organism's external and internal environments (89). This is reminiscent of the psychodynamic theory which regards the traumatized individuals as bound to integrate the traumatic event into their view of the way the world goes. Their emotional reactions are viewed as a "result of the discrepancies between internal and external information" (Young & Oosthuizen 4). Allan Young argues that Freud, in his paper "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death" wherein he talks of soldiers at war and never mentions the word *trauma* explicitly, compares "the fear of losing *one's own life* with the fear of taking *someone else's life*" (80). This implies that "a person might also be traumatised by the violence he inflicts on others, and thus a soldier can be both the victim and the perpetrator of his traumatic violence" (M. Young 34). This fact is accentuated by other scholars. Sandra Bloom, for instance, argues:

When we understand the effects of trauma it is easier to grasp how someone could be victimized and turn away from the victim role and towards the victimizer role instead. A victim is both helpless and powerless, and as we have seen, helplessness is a noxious human experience. Human beings will do anything to avoid feeling powerless. If you have been victimized, one of

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the possible outcomes is to assume the power of the one who has hurt you by becoming someone who terrorizes and abuses others. (14)

Moreover, in his *The Inner World of Trauma*, Donald Kalsched discusses two important findings in the literature about trauma. First, "the *traumatic psyche is self-traumatizing*" and trauma does "not end with the cessation of outer violation, but continues unabated in the inner world of the trauma victim." Second, "*the victim of psychological trauma continually finds himself or herself in life situations where he or she is re-traumatized.*" The traumatized wish to change is hindered by the difficulty to try to improve life or relationships, "something more powerful than the ego continually undermines progress and destroys hope" (5).

Both trauma and memory are closely related. The term "memory" has three meanings in everyday usage: "the mental capacity to retrieve stored information and to perform learned mental operations, such as long division; the semantic, imagistic, or sensory *content* of recollections; and the *location* where these recollections are stored" (A. Young 4). "The obsessions with memory and with trauma reinforce each other; a mania for memory is particularly likely to arise at moments of crisis, at times when memory comes to be felt as fragile and threatened—a frequent after-effect of trauma" (Schönfelder 28). Since trauma passively impacts memory, trauma memories cause the distinction between the past and present to collapse and hence "produce a different sense of time—a sense of being frozen

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in time" (83). As a result, "individuals suffering from PTSD often do not experience trauma memories as graspable connections to their past. Rather, these memories possess a perplexing, elusive, or haunting quality and make trauma victims feel locked up in the past" (83). Therefore, "traumatic events of the past are often experienced as being in the present" (Bloom and Reichert 119). Furthermore, Bloom and Reichert point out:

Our way of remembering things, processing new memories, and accessing old memories is also dramatically changed when we are under stress. ... When we are overwhelmed with fear, we lose the capacity for speech, and we lose the capacity to put words to our experience. ... Without words, the mind shifts to a way of thinking that is characterized by visual, auditory, olfactory, and kinesthetic images; physical sensations; and strong feelings. (114-115)

Moreover, "a flashback is a sudden intrusive re-experiencing of a fragment of one of those traumatic, unverballed memories" (116).

In their study "Exploring the Meaning of Trauma in the South African Police Service," Marna Young and Rudolf M. Oosthuizen argue that "after the trauma the victim's view of self and the world can never be the same again; it must be reconstructed to incorporate the abuse experience" (4). This argument is stressed later by Vickroy who argues that a trauma survivor may "live with a fragmented memory or diminished sense of self, or might feel alienated" (131). Hence, trauma survivors are often observed as either "torn

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between the urge to talk and a powerful sense of speechlessness” (Schönfelder 84) or “pass[ing] on their trauma to others. (32). “Many traumatized people expose themselves, seemingly or compulsively, to situations reminiscent of the original trauma” (Kolk 390). They may further resort to self-mutilation, risk-taking behavior, compulsive sexuality, involvement in violent activity, bingeing and purging, and of course, drug addiction” (Bloom 11). They may also “assume the power of the one who has hurt [them] by becoming someone who terrorizes and abuses others” (14). Moreover, Ellen McCoy points out how trauma leads its survivors to scapegoating as an expression of aggression: “Scapegoating is a particular and ubiquitous form of aggression associated with massification, in which some members become targets for projections of the group’s unwanted feelings and other ‘unacceptable’ aspects. Scapegoating involves victims and perpetrators, and tends to become recursive, as perpetrators become victims and vice versa” (90). However, Young and Oosthuizen, illustrating the state of police officers as trauma survivors, argue that

stress reactions of anger, aggression and irritability after trauma may lead to a process whereby control is lost, which may trigger vulnerability. When this appears as a result of anger directed at perpetrators and criminals it can lead to frustration and temporary immobilisation but when it results from conflict with and judgements by colleagues it may lead to giving up and withdrawal. (9)

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Since it is closely related to wars and after wars, trauma as a psychoanalytic term is not confined to psychological studies. It has become more dominant in contemporary American life due to the 9/11 attacks which led to constant wars against terrorism and, hence, resulted in increasing the incidence of PTSD. Again, as an essential term to psychoanalytic studies, it has become a leading concept in literature, applicable to not only individuals but also cultures and nations. Christa Schonfelder argues: "Originally situated in the domain of medicine and then psychology, the study of trauma has, over the last few decades, become relevant in literary and cultural studies. Indeed, as trauma has become a prominent topos in life writing and fiction, trauma studies has emerged as a new field within the humanities [*sic*]" (28). She points out:

While clinical psychology and psychiatry use trauma as a distinct category of human experience for the diagnosis of mental, emotional, and physical health problems, literary studies tend to use trauma as a metaphor for diagnosing general characteristics of literature and culture. In other words, literary and cultural studies tend to argue for the pervasiveness of trauma, and this essential difference in perspective has far-reaching consequences. (35)

Mohd Azmi argues that the "field of trauma studies in literary criticism gained significant attention in 1996" (58) and points out that "repetition is a common response to trauma and easily identifiable in text. Many survivors of

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trauma repeat aspects or the entirety of the event that was traumatic in their life in their mind and, sometimes, in their literature” (59). Moreover, another critic, Balaev, argues that "the evolution of trauma theory in literary criticism might best be understood in terms of the changing psychological definitions of trauma as well as the semiotic, rhetorical, and social concerns that mare part of the study of trauma in literature and society" (2). Thus, "rather than viewing literature as a closed psychoanalytic system, scholars... employ theoretical approaches and critical practices that suggest trauma’s function in literature and society is more varied and curious than first imagined by early theorists" (4). However, concerned with the life of human being, literature has much to do with "memories, introspection, retrospection, foreshadow, flashback and awful remembrances that are colored by pain, wound and trauma" (Heidarizadeh 788). In addition, psychoanalysis trauma involves dangerous long-term consequences. Among the typical causes of this trauma are “confusion and insecurity,” “sexual abuse,” “police brutality,” “domestic violence,” and catastrophic events such as war, treachery, and betray (789).

Given such a detailed study of trauma (as an uncontrollable, sudden, and negative experience), one may contrive its main features as fear, helplessness, horror, exhaustion, sadness, anxiety, and some dissociation, in addition to some typical symptoms like shame, guilt, doubt, rage, psychic numbing, alienation, and feelings of being scapegoated. These features constitute a distinctive, but

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officially unrecognized and untreated, disorder. Traumatic responses may destroy important beliefs in one's own safety or view of oneself. Moreover, PTSD is expected to occur in all people, with no exception, autonomous citizens, crime victims, as well as police officers. Trauma as a psychological concept with its various features is not confined to psychological studies but is well applicable to literary studies, and different cultures and individuals.

### Analysis

The 9/11 attacks, tantamount to a real war on the United States, have designated the birth of the Arab American theatre which has come to show the American audience as well as the rest of the world the unjust backlash against Arab and Muslim American after 9/11. Among the plays bristling with confusion, fear, anguish, insecurity, and police brutality is Yussef El Guindi's *Back of the Throat*. It revolves around an apparently friendly visit by two government officials to Khaled, an Arab-American writer—a visit which soon devolves into accusing him of having ties to terrorists. As time passes, the officials reveal their evidence which turns out to be nothing more than paranoid suspicion based on the unjust stereotyping of Muslims due to misinterpretations of the 9/11 attacks. Explaining the circumstances which led him write the play, El Guindi says:

*Back of the Throat* began as a paranoid thought game. In those first few months after 9/11 as an Arab/Muslim American one wasn't quite sure where one stood. ... Generally speaking, Arab/Muslim men

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flying together on an airplane was a bad idea. Non-Arab passengers were nervous seeing us seated together. ... Which led me to wonder what in my house, among my possessions, might alarm government officials were they to come for a casual visit, to make casual inquiries, as they were doing at that time. Knocking on doors, after being given those “tips.” The rumors of this happening, true or not, were rampant during those first few months. And so the paranoid thought game began, and turned into a play. (Introduction)

The play opens with an ominous informal sudden visit paid Khaled’s, an Arab-American citizen’s, apartment by two government officials/agents, Bartlett and Carl, to interrogate him suspecting ties with a fellow Arab alleged as a terrorist: “*BARTLETT stands opposite KHALED. CARL is flipping through a book. He will continue to methodically inspect other books, papers, as well as clothes*” (1). Exasperated by the 9/11 attacks and, hence, obsessed with a sense of suspicion and doubt about all Arabs and Muslims, the two officials rummage Khaled’s apartment inspecting everything they encounter and manipulating it against him. They may have been so acutely traumatized and blinded by the extremely negative, uncontrollable, and sudden attacks that they have come to deal with any Arab-American as a suspect—if not a terrorist! Self-confident as an innocent citizen and unaware that he is being visited as a suspect, Khaled expresses his readiness to co-operate with the officials for he himself has

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been horrified by the attacks as an American citizen: "I want to help. I've been looking for a way to help" (1). But once "*Bartlett picks up a picture frame from a table*," Khaled finds himself bound to explain and justify himself: "A present from my mother.... It says, er, 'God'... It is ... I'm not religious myself" (2). That is to say, the need to justify oneself has become familiar as a result of this state of denial. Distancing himself thus from being religious is indicative of the traumatic self of the character of Khaled as well depicted by the playwright. While Carl pays no attention to the "music box" he holds, Bartlett picks up a book, the "Koran," which Khaled refers to as another present from his mother (3). At such a point, Bartlett ironically comments: "You're not religious, you say?" (3). In distancing himself from his religion, Khaled is reminiscent of Amir in Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced*, who hates his identity as a Muslim by changing his Pakistani family name "Abdullah" to "Kapoor" (Mohammed & Jawad 95).

The play's start where Bartlett asks Khaled about the message of the Koran and the latter's reply by "Be good. Or else" summarizes the core argument of the whole play. Commenting attentively by "Sounds like good advice to me," Bartlett satirically ignores Khaled's co-operative attitude and cynically replies: "How come you're not religious?" (3). The following lines have much to say about this point:

*Khaled looks over at what Carl is rifling through.*

**Khaled:** It was never comfortable with the 'or else' part.

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**Bartlett:** Nobody likes the punishment part.

**Khaled:** I'd like to think God isn't as small-minded as we are.

**Bartlett:** I guess the point is there are consequences for our actions. Funny, huh. How a book can have such an impact. (3-4)

Each of the two parties feels more sinned against (traumatized) than sinning (traumatizing) and hence Khaled's reply seems to be both an apparent warning to the police officers who have come to his apartment all of a sudden violating his privacies and an intrinsic one to Khaled himself who, as an interrogated suspect, must be direct and good with them. It has been argued above that traumatized police officers rely on cynicism as an indication of both feeling others no emotional connection and seeing themselves as powerful and superior. The two officers have come to Khaled's apartment with a certain agenda in mind and a misconception that he must be a suspect, if not a terrorist, since he is an Arab Muslim! They, like most Americans, use the two words—Arab and Muslim—interchangeably without differentiating that most Arabs are Muslims and most Muslims are not Arabs. Their misconception is based on the negative stereotyping about Arabs and Muslims.

This negative stereotyping of Arabs in general and of Muslims in particular has nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks; it has started long before these attacks, which have fed the racial project against Arab/Muslim Americans. This fact is emphasized by Muslim as well as non-Muslim critics.

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Hakan M. Basak, for instance, argues: “Although profiling of Arabs and Muslims was a concern before 9/11, its scope and impact expanded dramatically after the terrorist attacks” (4). Although conspiracy theories assure that neither Arabs nor Muslims have anything to do with these attacks (Sáfrány 11-18), the latter have come to worsen the situation of both Arabs and Muslims. Long before the attacks, Arabs have been negatively depicted by Western media:

In 1980, journalist Djelloul Marbrouk noted that the Arab in American television stands for ‘terrorism, hijack, intractability, sullenous, perverseness, cruelty, oil, sands, embargo, boycott, greed, bungling, comedic disunity, primitive torture, family feuds, and white slavery. ... Americans commonly think of Arabs as ‘anti-American,’ ‘anti-Christian,’ ‘unfriendly,’ and ‘warlike. (Abdulla 1064)

This fact is stressed by many scholars and critics. Edward Said has put it long time before in his *Orientalism*: “Arabs, for example, are thought of as camel-riding, terroristic, hook-nosed, venal lechers whose undeserved wealth is an affront to real civilization” (108). Moreover, for the past century, the early Hollywood movies represented the Muslim Arab as “an uncivilized character, the outsider in need of a shower and a shave, starkly contrasting in behaviour and appearance with the white Western protagonist” (Ali 82-3). Arab Muslims are further depicted as ““fanatics who believe in a different god, who don’t value human life as much as we do, they are intent on destroying us (the west) with their oil or with their terrorism”” (Qtd by

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Ali 83). Thus, the Western tradition of stereotyping Arabs as terrorists began long before the 9/11 attacks and these attacks added nothing but insult to injury against Arabs and Muslims: “On September 11, former U.S. Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger commented on CNN, “There is only one way to begin to deal with people like this, and that is you have to kill some of them even if they are not immediately directly involved in this thing” (Abdulla 1065). Abdulla quotes the most offensive to Muslims, Reverend Jerry Falwell’s statement on *60 Minutes*: “I think Mohamed was a terrorist. I read enough of the history of his life...that he was a violent man, a man of war” (1066). All this vindicates why after the 9/11 attacks, “Islam and Muslims started to come to the forefront of the Western media, albeit not for very positive reasons” (1063).

Given this false background about Arabs and Muslims, the two officers have come to Khaled’s apartment not as attackers but as counter-attackers, *i.e.*, as survivors who have been traumatized by the 9/11 attacks. Their symptomatic reaction following the traumatic event is either *defensive*, to preserve their egos, or a form of *adaptation*, to eliminate/control the painful changes left them by their acute trauma. Likely, Khaled regards their sudden visit as an uncontrollable attack since he has nothing to do with the false fabricated accusations against Muslims. Thus, each party feels violated and traumatized by the other. Representing the FBI, Bartlett and Carl seize every bit to intimidate Khaled and alienate him as “an Other.” Bartlett cannot pronounce the first sound of Khaled’s name; he

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pronounces it as “Kaled” or “Haled”: “It’s that back of the throat thing” (5). Bartlett’s inability to pronounce Khaled’s name properly signifies the American institution’s inability to accept the Arab ethnicity as part of their country. In other words, Khaled’s name is so problematic in pronunciation, as an alien “other” name representing an “other” language and hence an “other” culture, that it has become a lump in Bartlett’s throat. In Roaa Ali’s words, “[t]he difficulty of its pronunciation becomes a powerful metaphor for the cultural impasse between the FBI agents and Khaled underlining Khaled’s national alienation as an Other citizen” (89). This “phonetic obstacle,” in Enas Jawad’s words, “articulates an inability and/or unwilling to understand the real personality of Arabs or Muslims” (“Other Side of Islamphobia” 245). At such a moment, while Khaled accepts the two agents’ inability to pronounce his name properly, they do not fully accept his presence in their country as an alienated “Other.” As a result, the apparently friendly “casual” visit devolves into direct harsh accusations against him. Ivan Lacko comments: “The nonchalance and civil humor of the opening scenes climaxes when the agents attempt to pronounce Khaled’s name and find it difficult to get it right (258).

Bartlett and Carl build their assumptions of accusing Khaled on the different items found in his studio such as the “picture frame” of “Allah” (2), “the music box” (2), the “Koran” (3), “a periodical” (6), “the computer” (6), “a porn magazine” (9) “two books in Arabic” (11), and “a book on assassins” (13)—a miscellany not eccentric to be found in a

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writer's studio. Such diverse items seen by Khaled as "cover[ing] most people's interests" (16) are Bartlett's reasons for accusing him of "shaping up to be a very unnormal individual" (17). It is very natural for any Muslim to keep a copy of the Koran in his house; what is unnatural is the opposite. Moreover, if finding the Koran in Khaled's apartment will judge him as a radical Muslim or an extremist, finding a porn magazine defies this supposition. The two agents utilize such stuff to both frame Khaled as a radical Muslim and intimidate him into a confession. Ahmed Mohammed comments: "As the officials start selecting items, it appears that they intend to twist facts and use whatever they find as evidence against Khaled. ... Instead of professional investigation, Bartlett presses on Khaled to convince him that his holdings are suspicious and dangerous even though these items do not assert any political stance or extremist ideology" (169-70). When Carl further "*hands [Bartlett] a few of the books he selected*" such as *Getting Your Government's Attention through Unconventional Means*, *A Manual for the Oppressed*, *Theater of the Oppressed*, *Covering Islam*, *Militant Islam* (12), the latter, with stigmatic cynicism, asks Khaled: "Do you feel that oppressed?" Dumbfounded by Bartlett's questioning exasperating situation, Khaled justifies keeping such books by replying: "I was a lit major; I read everything" (12). Unlike the two agents who strip the text out of its context: "A person is reflected by what he owns. It'd be silly to deny that. If you walked into my home, or Carl's, you'd find us. ... Just as you are here in all this" (12), Khaled, aware that "some of [these books] looks

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suspicious,” alerts their attention that these books must be seen in the context of his being a writer who needs “any number of reference books on different subjects. *That’s* the context.” (13). Furthermore, Bartlett establishes him as “a left-leaning subversive with Maoist tendencies who has a thing for bestiality and militant Islam” (19), which, in Oana-Celia Gheorghiu’s words, “is a telling linguistic representation of the absurdities concocted by the national trauma that the attacks on the World Trade Center ensued—because it takes a traumatized mind to put together such ideologically-diverse aspects in order to create a profile of a suspect or, at the very least, of a person of interest” (55).

As mentioned above, Arabs and Muslims had to pay the price of the 9/11 attacks not only by having their homelands invaded under the umbrella of war on terror but also by having large numbers of American Middle-Easterners detained. These stigmatic attacks have left the American community in trauma, paranoia and irrationality revealed in the anti-Arab racism: “Arabs are by necessity dissidents, worthy of surveillance, detainment or deportation” (Almostafa 48). Thus, violence against America has led to the American trauma and suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder reflected in violence against Muslim/Arab Americans. The American paranoia and irrationality are reflected in the two officers’ aggressive attitude towards Khaled as a scapegoat. Ignoring Khaled’s justifications for having items on “politics” and “sex” as something “normal” for a writer and commenting on them in amazement as “abnormal” stress the fact that both

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Bartlett and Khaled are in diabolic oppositions as a police officer and a suspect regarding each other from radically different perspectives and particular contexts. Bartlett presses harder to get any confession out of Khaled by jumping to the computer as a means including plans against the White House. While “*Khaled looks dumbfounded*” by such groundless accusations, Bartlett is “amazed at just how abnormal everything is in [his] apartment” (16-17). Each one is regarding the other as violating his rights and hence scapegoating him. Like the West’s fabricated evidence against Arabs regarding the 9/11 attacks, Bartlett’s “insubstantial evidence against Khaled” is nothing more than “a façade of anti-Arab racism and a manifestation of state violence that produced unjust conditions for Arab and Muslim Americans” (Almostafa 46-7). Khaled is targeted by the police officers not as a terrorist but as an Arab Muslim: “[Y]our background happens to be the place where most of this crap is coming from. So naturally the focus is going to be on you. ... You’re a Muslim and an Arab” (23). As argued above, the animosity against Islam has started long before the attacks; Said has put it long time ago: “For Europe, Islam was a lasting trauma” (59). If, supposedly, the American trauma induced by the attacks were fundamentally caused by Muslims, not all Muslims are the same! Moreover, when trying to traumatize Khaled as a reaction to being traumatized once by the attacks, the police officers are expected to worsen their victim’s situation which may backfire on them later. Carol Fadda-Conrey refers to “Khaled’s possible radicalization as a result of his traumatic

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interrogation [and] the inescapable branding of [him] as a so-called terrorist at the hands of the agents” (170).

Dumbfounded by the officers’ false accusations against him, Khaled as an American citizen is shocked when his right “to have a lawyer present” is trivialized and denied by Bartlett’s cynical reply: “Khaled, you can’t have a lawyer... you’ve been misinformed” (18). Bartlett keeps Khaled down and threatens him to become more unpleasant:

**Bartlett:** What you do have is the right to cooperate with your intelligence and do the right thing and asking for a lawyer is a dumb move because it alerts me to a guilt you may be trying to hide. Which further suggests that I need to switch gears and become more forthright in my questioning; which usually means I become unpleasant. Which further irritates me because I’m a sensitive enough guy who doesn’t like putting the screws on people and that makes me start to build up a resentment towards you for making me behave in ways I don’t like....

**Khaled** (*taken aback*): I’d...I’d like you to leave, please. (18)

Khaled’s insistence on having a lawyer, by going to the telephone and dialing, is further confronted by Bartlett’s repeated direct order: “PUT THE PHONE DOWN!” (20). Violating his civil rights by their suppressive attitude puts a question mark over Khaled’s Americanism. That is to say, by interrogating him in this racial and cynical way, the officers differentiate between the pure American citizen and

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the Arab-/Muslim-American one. This is how he is alienated from his American identity and violently implanted with the image of "Other." This may be reminiscent of El Guindi himself who recalls: "I suddenly felt alienated, and, on a deep level, unplugged from the society. Suddenly I felt my citizenship was imperilled" (Qtd by Berson *para* 14). Bartlett's oppressive method and hidden animosity towards Arab-Americans (who are denied their legal rights as American citizens) assure his cynicism which "implies that equal human rights are not evenly available for all Americans. Therefore, Arab-Americans must reconsider the many facts about which they are 'misinformed'" (Mohammed 170). This attitude is further commented on by Mais Qutami's "Bartlett is infuriated by Khaled's mentioning of rights and laws since he thinks an immigrant does not get to act like a native because of his non-white status" (108). Bartlett's cynical attitude resulted from the disastrous attacks, the "psychological trauma," which led to his "becoming emotionally numb...and easily provoked to anger" (Bonifacio 179).

Finding no evidence in his customary stuff, Khaled as a writer has increased the two officers' violation of his human rights by twisting facts and making a mountain out of a hill in seizing a receipt found in his pocket and misusing it to condemn him: "You were where you shouldn't have been...in a place you shouldn't have gone to. Bad news. Very bad news" (22). No doubt, "Bartlett's verbal reprobation and ruthless demeaning violence expose the American official reaction against Arabs and threaten

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human rights at large” (Mohammad 170). Bartlett’s, and hence, the State’s, unsubstantiated resentment of the Arab ethnicity reaches its climax when he, falsely trying to hide his animosity, exposes the State’s posttraumatic stress disorder reflected in attacking not only Arab ethnicity but also all other ethnicities:

[A]t no time should you think this is an ethnic thing. Your ethnicity has nothing to do with it other than the fact that your background happens to be the place where most of this crap is coming from. So naturally the focus is going to be on you. It’s not profiling, it’s deduction. You’re a Muslim and an Arab. Those are the bad asses currently making life a living hell and so we’ll gravitate towards you and your ilk until other bad asses from other races make a nuisance of themselves. Right? Yesterday the Irish and the Poles, today it’s you. Tomorrow it might be the Dutch. (23)

Bartlett, in Anneka Esch-Van Kan’s words, “underlines that the United States is an immigrant-nation that transcends issues of ethnicity, but at the same time he is taking it as absurdum” (*para* 11). Thus, the police officers, as trauma survivors, pass on their trauma to Khaled. Bartlett’s “I understand your getting nervous. I don’t care for this part myself” (24) is reminiscent of Bonifacio’s “The police officers who use malignant cynicism to cope with objective anxiety caused by feelings of pain, helplessness and nihilism tend to describe themselves as powerful and superior....” (119). Aware of his rights as an American citizen and aware that there is nothing confirmed against him: “You haven’t

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told me what I've been accused of!" (26), Khaled is never unaware that he is already framed just by being a Muslim Arab as a suspect who must be interrogated in an attempt to find any connection to terroristic attacks. He is so traumatized by the officers' cynical attitude that he repeats: "This is my country too...This is my country! It's my fucking country!" (26) and, again, opens the door for them to leave. Moreover, Carl's attempt to alleviate Bartlett makes him so infuriated that he cynically and hysterically satirizes Khaled's words: "It pisses me off! ... 'Its' my country.' This is your fucking country" (27). Thus, despite his strong identification with the American society, the two officers stress Khaled's original Islamic identity. However, these recurrent angry repetitions form "a common response to trauma" (Azmi 59).

Shifting from verbal violence to physical violence comes as a result of Khaled's awareness of his rights and, hence, his refusal to tell them anything until he has a lawyer present! At such a moment, the stage directions read: "*Bartlett quickly walks over to Khaled, grabs him by the arm and drags him into a corner of the room—away from the door, which Carl shuts. Bartlett pushes Khaled into a corner and stands inches from him*" (26). Moreover, whenever Khaled expresses his rejection of such a treatment, he is harshly interrupted and kept down:

**Khaled:** Why—? What are you doing? Let go of me.

Let go of me.

**Bartlett:** First thing: Shut up.

**Khaled:** No I—

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**Bartlett:** (*interrupting*) Second thing, shut up.

**Khaled:** No, I won't, I—

**Bartlett:** (*interrupting*) If I have to tell you what the third thing is, I will shut you up myself. (*Khaled opens his mouth but is interrupted*) I will shut you up myself. ... If I hear another immigrant spew back to me shit about rights, I will fucking vomit... You come here with shit, from shit countries, knowing nothing about anything and you have the nerve to quote the fucking law at me? Come at me with something you know nothing about? (26-7)

As a result of denying him his right to talk, Khaled is suppressed for some time, and the two officers talk and reply to each other as if they were alone! Moreover, Bartlett contradicts himself once again as if he suffers from amnesia to soon forget what he has just said about immigrants: “And I have nothing against immigrants. ... God bless immigrants. My great grandfather was an immigrant” (29). However, obsessed with a sense of trauma, he goes on hysterically repeating himself: “This country wouldn't be anything without them. God bless every fucking every one of them. My family worked damn hard to make this country the place it is” (29). Again, Bartlett accuses Khaled: “You're involved in something you shouldn't be, that's why you're blocked. It's hard creative when all you're thinking about is plotting destruction” (30). Again, Carl reiterates Bartlett's words to Khaled: “The point is he doesn't have anything against immigrants” (30). Bartlett and Carl's contradictory and aggressive attitude can be well regarded as a result of

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the world trauma of the 9/11 attacks they have witnessed and survived. As argued above by Marna Young, disasters may lead police officers to have traumatic reactions and as a result of being overawed by the atrociousness of a catastrophe which has “a significant impact on” them, they have “to uphold inhuman laws that have since been defined as unlawful, and the cultural divide was in a sense epitomized by the organization” (22).

The scene of fear and panic intensifies and becomes more complicated with the appearance of Asfoor and the introduction of the three female characters (Shelly, Beth, and Jean significantly played by one actress) via flashbacks. The four characters appear successively to escalate the action by supporting the information claimed by the officials against Khaled. Bartlett accuses Khaled of having ties with Asfoor, who is meant to be a terrorist—a Mohammed Atta-like figure—the so-called leader of the 9/11 hijackers (Gheorghiu 56) who is, according to the conspiracy theory, innocent. Bartlett “*shows Khaled a photo*” in a “strip club” (32) and “*another photo*” with Asfoor (32). One time, “*Khaled looks but doesn't answer*”; a second time, he “*hesitates*” (32); and whenever he “is about to speak,” he “is interrupted” (32). One cannot take Khaled’s silence or hesitation as evidence against him; his silence/hesitation may be justified by his being panicked by the officers’ attempt to implicate him in something he has no idea about. The panicked and traumatized Khaled is expected to keep silent due to fear, helplessness, horror, panic, and dissociation. Despite Khaled’s denial, Bartlett insists on establishing a relation

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between him and Asfoor, and tries to assert this by a series of witnesses such as the photos, emails, Shelly (the watchful librarian), Beth (Khaled's bitter ex-girlfriend), and Jean (a striptease dancer) based on traumatic flashbacks. Such witnesses are utilized as tools by the police officers to prosecute Khaled. "The librarian remembered him" (34), but Khaled replies to this witness by "Because we used the same *library*?" (37). Suaad Alqahtani comments on this novel situation:

Similar to Kafka's fiction, the play captures the sense of getting caught up and lost in a huge bureaucracy. The Kafkaesque element begins to unfold as the FBI agents investigate Khaled over a chance encounter with the supposed terrorist Asfoor. The agents transform his coincidental meeting with Asfoor into a conspiracy, distorting facts to suit their own purposes. (401)

Although Khaled admits he "*wept for this country*" (37), Bartlett castigates him cynically: "Khaled: calm down; you aren't being accused of anything yet" (38) and faces him with his ex-girlfriend, Beth. As soon as she knows that he is doubted by the officers, Beth increases their doubts: "His whole life seemed to be a big lie. I don't think he has an honest bone in his body" (44) asserting to Carl that his character was so vague that she could not digest him: "When you find out let me know. Because I sure as hell didn't. You spend two years with someone thinking you have a pretty good idea of who you're shacking up with, then boom, he pulls some shit that makes you wonder who

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you're sleeping with" (44). Like a girlfriend rejected and betrayed by her lover, Beth, enviously paying back, increases the officers' doubts against him by interrupting Carl: "He never seemed to come clean about anything. Always keeping things close to his chest, like he had another life going on. It wouldn't surprise me if he was involved" (45). She adds fuel to the flame by alleging that "he was actually gloating" after the attacks (45). Although Khaled defends himself by arguing: "That's a lie... She's twisting everything" (45), she goes further to resemble the attacks on the USA to rape: "It was rape, Khaled" (48). Khaled strongly defends the USA: "The United States of America is not a woman who just got raped. The United States of America is the biggest, strongest eight hundred pound gorilla on the block" (48). Paying Khaled's defence no attention, Beth is supported by the officers to destroy him completely: "He certainly was at the computer a lot. It must have been something steamy because every time I approached him he would do something to hide the screen" (48-9). Thus, Beth is cunningly used by the police officers as both a tool for paying back against Khaled and, therefore, toying with his private life. Basma Al Sayyid comments on this fact by saying: "Khaled's private life is roughly violated and his affair with his ex-girl friend is discussed in light of politics. The personal differences turn to be a public issue" (107).

Physical violence against Khaled reaches its climax when Carl, who seemed kind from the start, is so influenced by Beth's witness that he "*kicks Khaled in the groin. Khaled gasps, grabs his testicles, and collapses onto his knees*" (54).

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Infuriated, he justifies this aggressive act as due to Khaled's "repeated references to an innocence that is not [his] to claim" (54). Khaled's repeated references of innocence are emphatic of his being traumatized! Instead of feeling sorry for his aggressive act against Khaled, Carl, refusing the latter's innocence, overconfidently replies: "If you were innocent, why would I have kicked you? Something you've done has given me good cause to assume the worst. The responsibility for that kick lies with your unwillingness to assume responsibility for the part we know you played. We need to know what that was" (54). This dehumanization and physical abuse Khaled faces represent not only the police officer's paranoia but also "the traumatic backlash experienced by Arab/Muslim Americans after 9/11" (Almostafa 46) and assures the fact that violence has led them to suffer from "severe post traumatic stress disorders" (Elweza 2). It has been argued above by Marna Young that "PTSD is often used as analogous to trauma." As a result of Carl's violence against him, the stage directions, speaking the unspeakable, show how "*Khaled doubles over and lets out a strangled cry*" that he replies to Carl's "Khaled. Khaled" with "*toppl[ing] over as he lets out a more sustained cry*" (55). Carl's cynical reaction to Khaled's suffering is expressed by the former's: "Don't overdo it. I didn't hit you that hard.—That's not pain you're feeling, it's shock. You are overwhelmed by the *notion* of pain—that more might follow—not what I actually did" (55). Thus, "intolerant of Khaled's expression of pain, Carl claims that he "is only having a shock because he is mentally and psychologically

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‘overwhelmed by the notion of pain—that more what might follow—not what I actually did’” (Jawad “Islamphobia” 16). While “*Khaled expresses more of his pain,*” Carl cynically threatens: “enough with the dramatics or I’ll give you something to really scream about” (55). Of course, Carl’s overconfidence in his violence against Khaled is vindicated by his feeling, to quote Bonifacio, “as powerful and superior...” (119).

Despite his previous wild and shocking methods against Khaled, Bartlett seems worried to see him so “*strangled*” (55) and “*winded*” (56) under Carl’s interrogation and asking neighbours for help. This stage, however, represents the conflict the police officer consciously experiences between the immoral pleasure of feeling immune from the rules and the conscience which binds him to moral rules of conduct:

**Khaled** (*winded; to neighbors*): Help (*Bartlett gives Carl a worried look before going back into the bathroom. Khaled starts crawling towards the door.*) Help me.

**Carl**: If you’d’ve kept your nose clean, then you wouldn’t be here, would you, crawling on the ground, trying to get away from the next hit that’s sure to come if you don’t tell us what you and Gamal got up to.

**Khaled**: Please

**Carl**: We know you talked with him.

**Khaled**. No.

**Carl**: You met up. In the strip joint.

**Khaled**: I’m not hiding anything. I swear to you.

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**Carl:** We have the receipt. It's as good as a photo.

**Khaled:** I don't know what you're talking about. ...I haven't done anything wrong! (56)

Under stress and overwhelmed with fear, Khaled may not really remember anything because trauma not only passively impacts memory but also collapses the distinction between the past and the present. In other words, as a result of the police officers' inhuman treatment, the past and the present are so intermingled in Khaled's fragmented memory that he thus appears as a victim with amnesia. Ignoring all his replies, “*Carl either kneels on Khaled's chest or else grabs him around the neck*” (56). Carl not only belies Khaled but also does not allow him to express pain. Like Bartlett, Carl needs a confession from Khaled; but unlike him, he appeals to physical as well verbal violence to get such a confession. Thus, “Khaled, despite his innocence, has now become so enmeshed in the narrative the two government agents have been spinning that there is no way for him to untangle himself from Asfoor and the terrorist attacks (Alqahtani 401). Furthermore, accusing Khaled, who is “*winded/strangled*” most of the time, of “*envying*” (57) America, Carl threatens him of snapping his neck and resorts to slurs and swear words, such as “*“fuck-face,”*” “*“Hitit khara,”*” and “*“Sharmoot”*” (57). Carl thus uses his power to humiliate Khaled not only physically but also verbally. The two officers, “especially Carl, display not only disinterest and satisfaction in Khaled's suffering, but also exercise their authority which confirms that for them ‘the suffering of others is not a means for the attainment of the

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ends of its own will, but an end in itself” (Lacko 261). To El Guindi, Carl represents “the kind of dangerous and incompetent U.S. government agent who presumes he knows all about Arab/Middle Eastern cultures because he spent a few months there. He has a very rudimentary knowledge of Arabic and now thinks he’s an expert. I think these ‘experts’ have been misunderstanding the Middle East for ages and causing many problems” (Qtd by Jawad 16).

Khaled’s suffering and humiliation under Carl’s interrogation is often indicated by not only the harsh dialogues but also such stage directions as “*winded/strangled*” (55, 56, 57) “*half in tears*” (66), whenever “*he opens his mouth he is interrupted*” (27, 32, 58), *etc.* Such and other words assure that Khaled is really traumatized by the police officers interrogating him. The ruthless Carl threatens his victim either to tell him about his relation with Asfoor or he will kick him again:

**Carl:** ...Tell me, or I’ll— (*Carl pulls his foot back as if to kick him.*)

**Khaled** (*flinching at threatened kick*): No!

**Carl** (*continuing*): I will. I’ll exercise my drop kick on your testicle sack and make you sing an Arabic song in a very unnatural key.

**Khaled:** I’m going to be sick.

**Carl:** *You’re* going to be sick. I’m the one who’s throwing up. Only I have the decency to do it quietly, inside, and not make a public spectacle of myself. (*perhaps grabbing Khaled by his lapels*) What did he want from you? What did he want? What

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fucked-up part did you play in all of this? What happened with you in there? What happened when you met up with Asfoor? What did he want? (*Khaled opens his mouth as if he's about to vomit. Carl lets go as Khaled dry heaves. Slight beat*)

... No, it is I who am throwing up, sir, and if I see one scrap of food leave your mouth I will shove it back so far down your throat you'll be shitting it before you even know what you've swallowed again. (57-8)

Threatening to kick Khaled's testicle sack and make him sing an Arabic song assures not only Carl's cynicism in ignoring Khaled's replies and calls for help but also his continual humiliation of him by dehumanizing and violating his sexual organ. Carl's cynical reply "I'm the one who's throwing up" may imply that he is so traumatized by the world trauma induced by the attacks that he is unconsciously traumatizing his victim now, a fact recalling M. Young's argument that "a person might also be traumatized by the violence he inflicts on others, and thus a soldier can be both the victim and the perpetrator of his traumatic violence" (34). Moreover, Carl's "not make a public spectacle of myself" satirically backfires on him by thus making a public spectacle of himself by his continual dehumanization of Khaled. This is reminiscent of Bloom and Reichert's argument above that trauma survivors resort to "self-mutilation, risk-taking behaviour, compulsive sexuality, involvement in violent activity" (119). Thus, if he is to be sympathized with for his own suffering as an

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American, Carl is not to be excused for what exercises over Khaled. Also, if he humiliates and traumatizes Khaled on the plea that he does his “job to defend and protect” his country (58), this means that “Khaled’s trauma is the drama of every Muslim profiled in the US based on ethnicity & religion” (Gheorghiu 56).

Beth's reappearance onstage to assure Carl that she has “no idea if [Khaled] was involved in anything” and that her witness should never be influenced by her anger: “Being a major disappointment and a shit doesn’t make you a criminal” (58) represent some uncontrollable intrusion of the past into the present if one supposes that her previous witness against Khaled (flashbacked above in a traumatic way) has been influenced by being traumatized/rejected, as a girlfriend, by him! Despite all this, Bartlett appears and “walks over to Khaled, who is still prostrate on the ground” (59), to continue pressing him in an attempt to get a confession: “You were there. We had surveillance cameras. It wasn’t your girlfriend who gave you away. It was your pecker” (60). While “Khaled remains dazed, in shock,” Carl faces him with the third woman, Jean Sommers, the striptease dancer who failed to tempt him. She assumes she has seen Khaled and Asfour where she tried to tempt the former who seemed obsessed with a more important affair, which made her feel insulted: “I thought he was extra sweaty because he was just too close to something he couldn’t have. But it wasn’t that. He was always looking around to check for something. It kinda pissed me off he wasn’t giving me his full attention... I’m really pissed off at this point, like I’ve been insulted.

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Like my skills have been called into question” (63-4). Like Beth who preceded her testimony against Khaled by her abusive reference to Muslim women as “a fucking burqa” (48), Jean precedes her above-mentioned words by “Wrapping your women in black and then sneaking in here and getting your rocks off” (63). While allowing herself sexual freedom, Jean denies Muslims the freedom to be committed. Thus, like their police officers who have utilized them, the three women were armed with their prejudice against Islam before giving their testimony against Khaled. All this vindicates the vague nature of the dubious witnesses drawn on by the officers to prosecute Khaled and assert an undeclared relationship with Asfoor. Commenting on this scene, Jawad argues:

A shadowy atmosphere overwhelms the whole scene. May be it is intended, technically as well as thematically, to intensify the panic on the stage as it emphasizes the uncertainty and confusion that any man would feel when confronted with a similar plotted situation. It may signify that all the accusations against Khaled are foggy and shadowy as they are devised on the basis of uncertain comments of the three women and other racial profiling data.”  
 (“Islamphobia” 14)

Khaled’s denial of Jean’s testimony is met with recklessness as usual. Instead, the two officers go on cynically to the most abusive scene of the play—undoing Khaled’s trousers:

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**Bartlett:** ... Can we - look at your pecker? Please? Very briefly. To clear something up. ... (*Khaled makes to bolt out of his chair but Carl pins him down, wrapping his arms around his chest, immobilizing his arms. Bartlett puts on a latex glove.*)

(*Bartlett starts to undo Khaled's trousers. Khaled writhes in his chair in protest. This can be done with most of Khaled's back to the audience. Alternatively, this can take place on the futon, with the agents blocking most of the audience's view of Khaled.*)

**Khaled:** No. - No.

**Bartlett** (*overlapping*): What with that e-mail he sent about tatoos, and the book, and doing it where the skin folds, where you can hide it.

**Khaled** (*half in tears*): Stop it. No. - No.

**Bartlett** (*overlapping*): Was there like some secret mark you each showed yourselves? To ascertain something? Membership? Commitment? What were you doing in there for fifteen minutes? Excuse me. This is embarrassing for me too. (*He has yanked Khaled's pants down far enough for him to look.*) What's that? Is that a birthmark? Or? (*Carl also looks.*) What is that? ...I wish we'd bought our camera with us.... Next time. (66)

Even when "*Khaled covers himself with his hands, and starts to pull up his trousers but Bartlett prevents him from doing so by placing his foot on his trousers*" (67). Self-explained, the lines reveal how horrible and disgracing the violating acts committed by American intelligence are with their scapegoats and victims.

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Such acts are undoubtedly reminiscent of what happened by the same intelligence in Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib prisons. Their violation of Khaled's organ is "not confined to the reference of a merely part of the body because it is seen metaphorically to represent the violation of all privacies that not only Arab American have lost, but to a large extent, all the Americans have lost in the aftermath of the attacks of the World trade Center. (Jawad, "Islamphobia," 16). This fact is stressed by Dennis Brown who argues: "Our protagonist's penis is more than merely an organ: It is a metaphor for all the privacy that Americans have lost in the aftermath of the World Trade Center attacks on 9/11" (*para* 1). Moreover, regretting not having a camera with them to take photos of Khaled naked mentioning "Next time" implies that Khaled is expected to receive further fearsome panicking visits with more sexual violations in future. In fact, recalling Beth's likening the attacks against America to rape and supposing with the officers that Khaled is involved, one may view what they have done with him above as violating/raping his privacies and hence a traumatic reaction. This argument recalls Bloom's "Some trauma survivors reclaim their power by assuming the power of a person who has hurt them, becoming someone who terrorizes and abuses others" (119).

Throughout the violent interrogation, Khaled's replies are always received with entire cynicism from the two officers. In reply to his "I was never there" (67), the two officers, who have taken his laptop, leave him with a cynical comment: "It's your chance to respond. ...we're fighting to

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safeguard that right” (68). Thus, after failing to get anything from Khaled by upholding their inhuman laws, the two officers have to give up and withdraw. While Carl leaves Khaled with the Arabic “Ma’salama,” Bartlett leaves him with its English counterpart saying: “I can go with that....Peace be with you” (68), which implies that he is not ready a bit to accept Khaled as an “other” nor his Arabic Islamic culture. In Jawad’s words, “the relaxed cynical remarks uttered by the two officials when translating “Ma’salama” intensify the feeling of pain and loss of hope of any possible remedy. To the end, they ridicule the peculiarity of the Arabic identity residing much in the Arabic language. They reflect the intentions of making everything Eastern postulated as inferior” (“Islamphobia” 17). They deal with him as a fellow Arab despite living as an American citizen and despite not speaking Arabic: “I don’t speak Arabic” (14). This fact is further supported by the appearance of Asfoor in the play’s finale where he proposes a deal to Khaled, that each one teaches the other his language in a “private class” (69). The play ends with the two of them, alone onstage, where Asfoor gives a monologue about the importance and power of language and his old dream to learn English, and Khaled who, panicked and traumatized, “*does not look at him*”:

When first I come to this country—I not know how to speak. How...even to say anything. ... I say, I must learn language that is everywhere. Language that has fallen on our heads and made us like—like children again. What is this power? What if I know it? ... I

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want to learn. ... I say I want to write. I want to write a book. In English. That is goal, yes? And one day, I say... (*while accent is maintained, the broken English gradually starts dropping*) I might even teach it.... I will teach language back. I will make them speak their own language differently. I will have them speak words they never spoke before. (69)

Thus, torn between the urge to talk and a powerful sense of speechlessness, Khaled pays Asfoor no attention because his view of his self can never be the same again. That is to say, Khaled, as a trauma survivor, lives “with a fragmented memory or diminished sense of self, or might feel alienated” (Vickroy 131).

It has become obvious that Khaled is not fundamentally targeted by the police officers for his association with Asfoor (who too might be innocent), but for being an Arab Muslim. They have been victims of three women’s reckless narratives. This fact is pointed out throughout the text and clarified by Ali: “The reader and audience become aware that Khaled is already framed as a terrorist by the FBI agents, who manipulate the other characters’ recollections of Khaled and create the context for their memories. By the end of the play, Khaled himself appears lost in their narratives, confused and defeated, with an injured and insecure sense of identity” (86). Kan argues: “In the end it cannot be decided if Khaled is guilty or not. He is caught in a web of narratives that distort any clear-cut differentiation between truth and fiction” (*para* 14). El Guindi himself comments on both Khaled and Asfoor:

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I sympathize with them completely and ... Khaled was always innocent in my mind. There would actually be no point (for me) in writing the play if he weren't. I am more interested in how someone can be forced, kicking and screaming, into someone else's narrative (the agents', Asfoor's, the narratives of the women interviewed) and then find himself unable to extricate himself from these stories. (Introduction)

As a result, after the police officers leave him, Khaled cannot breathe a syllable. Even when Asfoor talks to him, he "*does not look at him*" (69). Khaled's silence may be interpreted as "fear of everyman or every Arab-American or every Muslim" (Alqahtani 401) or as an unexpected radical change in his character into the worst that he as a survivor may have some traumatic attitudes towards others, like Asfoor, for instance.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, everyone has experienced moments of trauma. Like the playwright who had been traumatized as a Muslim Arab-American, Khaled has experienced multiple moments of trauma: first by the 9/11 attacks, second by the vitriol against Arabs and Muslims unleashed by media figures after the attack, and finally by the interrogation techniques the audience witnesses. The two officers are themselves trauma victims and their behaviour is symptomatic of a trauma experienced on 9/11. Likewise, signs of trauma have been witnessed throughout on the police officers' cynical and hysterical investigation reflected

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in humiliating Khaled and violating his privacies, and on Khaled's being *strangled, winded, dumbfounded*, and helpless all the time due to the formers' inhuman traumatizing practices.

The study has reached three main findings. First, the playwright has fulfilled his target of showing the real reason for the American traumatization of Arab/Muslim Americans as due to the West's very old view of the latter as inferior/uncivilized and hence stereotyping them as terrorists. Having to take a reaction to save its face after the 9/11 attacks, the USA started with Arabs and Muslims utilizing these attacks to feed its racial project against them. Arabs and Muslims have nothing to do with the attacks; they have been acquitted from being involved in them by virtue of the conspiracy theories. Second, as trauma survivors, the police officers had to pass their trauma on to their victims (by means of cynical inhuman practices). Suffering from a Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), the police officers (or FBI agents) have been so negatively influenced by the sudden uncontrollable trauma of the 9/11 attacks that they have to cynically pass it on to innocent people like Khaled. Hence, relying on the immunity given them by their rules, the two officers had to uphold inhuman laws, defined as unlawful, dehumanizing their victim and violating his privacies. Third, the acute trauma has turned into chronic traumas due to passing it on to others. Like the police officers who, as trauma survivors of the 9/11 attacks, had passed their trauma on to other innocent people like Khaled, the latter is expected to follow suit. In other words,

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victimized and traumatized by the police officers, Khaled has lost his sense of his own self as a helpless victim scapegoated by trauma survivors. So, his view of himself can never be the same again as a result of being violated and alienated. Thus, like his traumatizers, he, in turn as a trauma survivor, comes to pass his trauma on to others like Asfoor.

Having reached such findings, the paper still suggests *Back of the Throat* for further studies by scholars who interested in such fields as political criticism, poststructuralism, intertextuality, semiotics, speech act theories, (im)politeness strategies, etc. It is a contemporary text that is suitable for many critical theories.

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