

## العنصرية في الكوميديين تريفور غريفيث

### Racism in Trevor Griffith's *Comedians*

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#### المستخلص:

تعالج هذه الدراسة مشاكل العنصرية في القرنين العشرين والواحد والعشرين في مسرحية كريفث "الكوميديون"، بالإضافة لما يحدثه ذلك من معاناة والالام انسانية. المجتمعات القابعة تحت القوة المطلقة والعجرفة للمستعمر خبرت انواع مختلفة من المعاناة. نظرة المستعمر الفوقية والاذلال تجلب اشكال عدة من الانانية تجاه المجاميع الاثنية الضعيفة والمجردة من القوة، كما لو كانوا مخلوقات من كوكب اخر. يستحضر سؤال التمييز العنصري والحاصل ضمن البلد الواحد بين الطبقات المتعددة ومواطنيه من مجاميع عرقية مختلفة، والمعتقدات دينية وقوميات مختلفة ضمن نفس البلد. كل ذلك يؤدي الى انقسام واسع ضمن المجتمع من خلال تقسيمه الى طبقات عليا ووسطى ودنيا.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ضد-السامية، "الكوميديون"، مجاميع-عرقية، كريفث، العنصرية، القومية.

#### Abstract:

This paper deals with the problems of racism at 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries in Griffith's *Comedians*, beside its consequences on human undergoing and suffering. Communities succumb under the ultimate power and arrogant of the occupation power are experiencing its various shapes. The inferior and humiliating view of the occupiers bears different forms of selfishness towards those occupied weak and powerless ethnic groups, as if they are creatures from another planets. It evokes the question of racial discrimination which it really occurs within the same country between its different classes and within citizens from different ethnic groups, religious believe or even various nationalities. This actually leads to a huge detach in the community in categorizing it into models of upper, middle and working classes respectively.

**Keywords:** Anti-Semitism, *Comedians*, Ethno-groups, Griffiths, Racism, Nationality.

## I- Introduction:

This play reveals three major norms of racism, the first one is built on nationality or geographical origin, the second determine the gender of man and its colour, while the third type is revolving on human beings religious believe. These unhealthy conditions are going to create a direct reaction against that racial frantic discrimination which effects passively in building the concept of equilibrium citizenship as a consequence of the inhuman treatment and feelings of disappointment. Thomas C. Holt in The Problem Of Race In The Twenty-first Century states that:

**..., racism is conventionally understood to refer to the hostility one group feels toward another on the basis of the allege biological and/or cultural inferiority of that other. Among its manifestations are exploitation of the labor and or property of that other (as in slavery and colonialism), exclusion of that other from participation in public life and institutions (as in segregation and disfranchisement), and massive physical violence against that other (as in lynching). (Holt 2002: 4)**

The aim of his play is examining the scopes of racism, hatred and discrimination among people based on individuals ethno, national, culture and even religious backgrounds. The importance of the study lurks in shedding light on such inhuman classification of communities upon their nationality, ethnicity and religion. This is considered as the most dangerous issue in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The goal is to find a solution for such problems through drama.

## II- The Shapes of Racism in Comedians:

Trevor Griffiths in his play Comedians tries to shed light upon such cases of racial discrimination within human societies adapting conceptions of intellectuals such as Karl Marx, Anton Chekhov, etc. in handling and treating such a dangerous matter that confront humanity and its existence. Trevor also concentrates on Anton Chekhov's opinions in building his play realm. It seems that, in this play through comedy, seriousness and difficulty; Trevor Griffiths successes in picturing or depicting his ideas of such abhorring deeds of ugliness. Griffith manipulates light comedy to handle this serious and dangerous topic in order to expose he occupiers through silliness and to present them as trivial people unlike the occupied who are the original community rich in their ancient civilization and exuberant

culture too. Andrew Stott in his book Comedy defines comedy from Aristotelian point of view of as follows:

**Comedy is ...an imitation of inferior people— not, however, with respect to every kind of defect :the laughable is a species of what is disgraceful. The laughable is an error or disgrace that does not involve pain or destruction: for example a comic mask is ugly and distorted , but does not involve pain. (Stott, 2005:19)**

Trevor Griffiths deals with the social, political, spiritual and economic matters with a comic way. He uses comedy by means of comic dialogue, actions and characters, etc. So, the purpose of comedy is not only laughing as Stott goes on in describing the main aims of comedy:" 'Alternative' comedians rejected the easy racism and fast delivery of the gag comic, replacing it with revised form and content."(108) Also Andrew Stott elaborates further on the work of comedy declaring: “ ..., the most positive thing that comedy can do ; it should tell the truth, reveal things for what they are, delivering people from the constraints of prejudicial ideologies, to become 'a radical mode of social communication'.”(109)

John Bull in New British Political Dramatists; comments on the plays of Griffiths in which some may think they are a conflict between socialism and capitalism:

**Griffith is concerned with Marxist thought as a basis for action. He uses the theatre to examine the apparent contradictions in the way Marxist ideas have been handled;...,he examines the way those contradictions are reflected in himself as an individual. But there is no central tradition of Marxist thought in Britain. Griffiths is aware of a hole in our culture where Karl Marx ought to be. His plays are a conscious attempt to fill the whole. (1984:131)**

One of the most dangerous humanity disease is Anti-Semitism as a motivator for hatred and marginalizing people according to their origin. Anti-Semitic racism appears clearly in this play through the speech of Waters. He makes a connection between "...racist humour and the logic of fascism." (Stott: 110) When Water visited the German concentration camps, he finds the most horror and fearful similarity between joke and brutality of the anti-Semitism. Ironically and comically, Waters is disable to distinguish between punishment and torturing innocent people due their religion or believe. He mocks from the victims in his words showing his coldness of feelings as follows:

**'In this hell-place', he says, he saw 'a special block, "Det Stra-bloc", "Punishment Block". It took a minute to register, I almost laughed, it seemed so ludicrous. Then I saw a world like any other. It was the logic of our world....And I discovered...there was no jokes left. Every joke was a little pellet, a final solution. (Griffiths 1976:64).**

The previous speech confirms the huge amount of racism directed against specific religion members hatred and in this part are Jews. The playwright deliberately makes the Jews characters to be absent in the play and just to be mentioned and attacked verbally through the characters who represent the British nation. This technique is enhance the utmost marginalization practiced against members of other religion as being seen inferior without having an influential role in the countries they are living in its lands. The solution for these minorities among majority is to kill them. The echoing of the rival and weapons used to annihilate these innocent victims is a stigma in the face of the nations who claim human rights, peace and equality.

Another image of such racial or social discrimination is incarnated in the misogynous acts of refraining. This expresses the degradation of woman and regarding her as an inferior creature. In the play, George McBrain clarifies the idea of considering woman as a sexual toy. It is another trait of social degradation and woman insulting. The use of colloquial language is to give a portrait of triviality to such a person who thinks badly about his wife. The following speech indicates the social deterioration and corruption through the dialogue between George McBrain and Price:

**'my wife, she's a shut'''. It can be physical or sexual violence as a reaction to the racism. Stott clarifies many ideas and thought concerning this matter that appears in the play when Price begins talking with the male and female couple disjointedly: "Been to the match, have we? Were you at top end wilds? Good wanny? Do you see Macan? Eh? Eh?(Silence) P'raps I'm not here. Don't you like me? You hardly know me. Let's go and have a pint, get to have each other' (Griffiths 1976:49).**

Stott continues that Price realized the anger of working class from the marginalization that happened to them from middle class society and this is clear from the previous disjointed, fragmented and coarse dialogue. The male just knows himself through either violence that is

directed against him or through sexual aggression to become a stereotype that recognize him. This routine is included of two types of jokes, one sexual while the other is racial, both are received madly to dummies not through the audience.(Stott 2005: 111)

In Act One even religion and church become a tool of social, sexual and racial discrimination through treating people badly and shifting away from religious principles and its spiritual guidance to people. The term “ethnic humor” show such social discrimination as Estrella Marie Gonzales and Richard L. Wiseman, through quoting M. Apte, states: “humor disparaging other groups is probably as old as contact between cultures” (qtd. in Gonzales and Wiseman, 172). The writer is satirizing and exposing the bishop which symbolizes religion but unfortunately, he is found in the play looking for prostitutes and this is a kind of stigmatization to religion, believe and its affect bring a deterioration outcomes against human kind:

**SAMULES: S'hard to put your finger on...**

**MACBRAIN: ...as the actress said to the bishop...(Groan)**

**SAMULES(*studiously contemptuous of the interruption*): It's the sort of suit you walk into a tailor's in and ask for the cheapest suite in the shop and he says you're wearing it.(Groan.) Don't groan, you scum learn. (Griffiths 1976:10)**

The conversation between Phill and Ged reflects a clear racial discrimination in the scope of the educational system and methods of teaching and those adopted educational systems applied for other nations who are occupied by the British like Irish, Indian, Pakistanis, etc. Most teachers at those nations are untrained and lack the necessary experience to be real teachers. Griffiths deliberately do this in order to expose the British selfishness even not supporting the occupied countries with an appropriate education:

**PHIL: Yes, I learned it at school.**

**GED: Oh they dint teach us out like that. They taught us spit in'. And peen' up walls...**

**PHIL: Ay well, that's the secondary modern system for you in it. Just a bad system. (1976:17)**

Moreover, the following speech of Waters and Connor contain a lot of hatred and anti-Semitism inferior outlook toward Irish, Africans, Jewish people, etc. It reflects superiority of British arrogant look to other nations as inferior or uneducated nations and lack of experience. So, these nations are victims of the English. They are called as useless and mentally handicapped people but unluckily, these useless people turned to be the intellectuals, thinkers and revolutionist in spite their deprivation as in, "He [Chekhov] illuminates the realities of hunger and oppression far better than the so-called proletarian writers, with their bourgeois villains and working-class heroes"(qut. in Steven G. Snow, 9). Waters is insulting the niggers (Irish and Jewish) through this racial and discriminated speech:

**I've never liked the Irish, you know . . . Big, thick, stupid heads, large cabbage ears, hairy nostrils, daft eyes, fat, flapping hands, stinking of soil and Guinness. The niggers of Europe. Huge, uncontrollable wangers, spawning their degenerate kind whatever they're allowed to settle. I'd stop them settling here if I had my way. Send 'em back to the primordial bog they came from. Potato heads. (Griffiths 2007:225)**

Waters says these people do not believe in Liberty and describe them as useless, ugly, unschooled or uneducated people. This racial outlook to determine by yourself what the occupied nations should study, what to work and portraying them as being evil or being similar to animals in breeding and should be helped in taking decision because they are unable to determine what to do, as Waters says:

**WATERS: Negroes, Cripples, Defectives. The-mad. Women.(Turning deliberately to MURRAY'S row.) Workers. Dirty. Unschooled. Shifty. Grabbing all they can get. Putting coal in the bath. Chips with everything. Chips and beer. Trade Unions dedicated to maximizing wages and minimizing work. Strikes for the idle. Their greed. And their bottomless stupidity. Like children, unfit to look after themselves. Breeding like rabbits, sex-mad. And their mean vicious womenfolk, driving them on. Animals, to be fed slops and fastened up at night. (long pause.)The traitor destroys the truth. (Griffiths 1976:19)**

Waters idea is extended to include the Jewish as money lovers and as the civilization destroyers. For this reason wants to discriminate Irish and Jewish as Hitler does one day. This

is clearly racial or ethnic discrimination against Jewish in Britain in peculiar and Europe in general. This is unjustified attack toward specific ethnic group in particular place. Terry Eagleton in Humour argues that: "To declare oneself worthless may be to proclaim that one is not even worth killing" (10). These images of discrimination are sprung from man's unconscious due building wrongly conceptions about those ethno-group which are different from the majority. British like the Nazis come to marginalize Jews and considering them as money dealers, worshipers and lovers:

**WATERS (*still very matter-of-fact*): They have this greasy quality, do Jews. Stick to their own. Grafters. Fixers. Money. Always money. Say Jew, say gold. Moneylenders, pawn-brokers, usurers. They have the nose for it, you might say. Hitler put it more bluntly. 'If we do not take steps to maintain the purity of blood, the Jew will destroy civilization by poisoning us all. 'The effluent of history. Scarcely human. Grubs. (Griffiths 1976:19)**

Challenor tells Mr. Waters about the problems of simple people who are exploited and just are working to pay their bills. "CHALLENGOR: Well. Nice meeting you....I'm looking for someone who sees what the people want and knows how to give it them. It's the people pay the bills, remember, yours, mine...Mr. Waters's. We're servants, that's all." (Ibid 1976:33)

Ironically, the workers turned to be black in the end of Act One and beginning of Act two as the most racial thing and kind of differentiating between human beings according their skins colours either it is white or black. In Act two, Griffiths preaches the miserable conditions of British working Class. The workers seem idiots as a result of wearing second hand clothes, etc. Connors is very selfish and racists through his dialogue against Indian, Eskimos, Chinese, Irish, Africans, and Pakistanis. Here Connors express his racism against people from other nationalities since he argues:

**CONNOR: ...No Irish, no Scots, no Welsh, no West Indians, no Pakistanis, no Chinese, no Lapps. I said: How come you left out Eskimos? She said: I never *had* Eskimos, and closed the door. Troublemakers, I never knew we wuz troublemakers till I got to England....You'd have to go to India or ... Africa...or Ireland to find out. (Griffiths 1976:38)**

Michael Patterson's point of view in Strategies of Political Theatre; Post-War British Playwrights sees Samuels becoming "the stone-faced Challenor and changes tack to bring

forth stream of racist and sexist: the Irish are stupid, West Indians are cannibals and have big penises,..."(Patterson 2003:79). He is describing the Irish as Jewish through very bad words: "SAMUELS: A black Irish Jew, with a limp, and a stammer, half –blind, and eczema, and leaking sores up nose, and this club foot, with woodworm and piles (*He does all this, very minimally but well.*) was looking for digs". (Griffiths 1976:40)

Dehumanization is another kind of racial image that portray human beings as a mere machines without any emotions just to make moiré profit for work owners. This is the peak of belittling through turning them to automatized creatures. There is no private values or moral considerations in this world of today at all. The two characters Ged and Phil show this in their speech:

**GED: I've told you before about that stick-doll...**

**PHIL: Shut up.**

**GED: Ive got splinters all over my\_\_\_**

**PHIL: Never mid the splinters.**

**GED (*scanning Audience*): They're canvas. Somebody's been painting 'em during the break. What? (Ibid 1976:44)**

According to Anton Chekhov in "A Woman's Kingdom" portrays a typical image to the bourgeoisie as an ultimate exploiters and blood suckers while the workers are their victims. The useless or the workers are introduced as a fashionable because they work hardly just to entertain and live a good live, they do not work to be rich but just to live an honorable life. This because "... devouring other men's lives and sucking the blood of work-ers" (np). The hard working class is embodied in MaBrain with the suffering of the working class without any mercy or humanity toward them: "(MCBRAIN on, carrying hand-mic. *The mania glands sweating freely. He wears a fine maroon evening jacket, hornrimmed glasses on nose end, f rills at chest and cuffs of royal blue shirt.*)" (Griffiths 1976:46)

Act three talks about racial discrimination that was imposed by British authorities against Indians and other occupied nationalities. Bart sees that British was scaring two matters: "the rise of 'regional nationalism'" and "a shift from socialism and the class struggle to nationalism and the struggle for self-determination" (np). These two demands by the occupied nation could be a motivator for British authorities to react violently to those nations



and minorities demands beside neglecting their religious and believes rights. Price gives this notion and sound of racism highly. "PRICE (about dressed, approaching: Revivalist voice): Holy pig. Here, give us it here (Griffiths 1976:55). The people are looking for work. There is no freedom. It is bloody comedy of people who are suffering from discrimination. This involves the intervention of audience who are engaged within the play realm and atmosphere to reform such negative and wrong opinions about the others:

**MACBRAIN: ...I don't want inquests, I want work.**

**SAMELS: Right! Who the fuck does he (PRICE) think he is anyway! (To PRICE.) What about your...performance then, Coco the bloody clown ? It was bloody embarrassing...**

**SAMUELS: Different? It was putrid. Different from bloody comedy, that's for sure. ...**

**PHIL: What a bleeding audience. Thick as pig shit.( Ibid 1976:56)**

Scots and Jewish are introduced in the play as ethno-minorities. Therefore, Challenor expands this to include people of Pakistan, India, the Jewish etc., and he describes them as animals and disable of learning, "people don't learn, they don't want to,..."( Ibid 1976:58). Bart Moore-Gilbert claims that "Six would-be Comedians turn up to be tutored by an exprofessional comic, Eddie Waters, .... But the class, confronted in their first in their first live performance with a talent spotter rooted in that comic tradition of derogatory jokes about women and minority groups, become confused, unsure whether they are being asked to unmask stereotypes or recycling them." (np.) Challenor finds it to be a big problem if these people have learned. He also looks at minorities intellectual and education as mistake that have been committed:

**CHALLENGOR: S'too Jewish. What's a Jew nowadays eh? Who wants to know I mean.**

**SAMUELS: Yeah, I can see that.**

**CHALLENGOR: Same mistake as the Irishman...It was a different act, the wife, blacks, Irish, women, you spread it around, ..., keep it tightly they'll fall asleep on you. ( Griffiths 1976:58)**

The 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries were a headache to Britain and to all the imperialists powers because all intellectuals in the world were from the people who considered as handicapped an lack ability of learning. Those intellectuals were Jewish who were once persecuted and discriminated too. This century also witnessed the allowing of middle classes children to enter Universities as well. It happens the appearance of revolutionary movements and liberation acts from the occupation. The revolted working class established parties and lead their countries for civil societies and democracy in which all individuals are free and equal. Trevor Griffiths had revolutionary thought who lead this battle of liberation and asking for the rights of weak and powerless people through his Comedians. This comedy which was able to influence a lot in the humanity through this global. George W. Brandt writes "A disturbing play, Comedians makes a highly original contribution to the twentieth-century theory of humour." (Brandt 1981:105)

### III- Conclusion:

This study concludes with a clear bleak image of racism established on nationality either Irish, Pakistani, Indian, Eskimo, etc, or established on ethnicity as in state of the Scotts and Jewish and represented in the form of religious believe as in the case of Jewish. These terrible problems at any country necessitate an urgent treatment for avoiding being an uprooted disease which could be develop for hatred and to generate various types of violence including physical or psychological one. The reaction for bad treatment and categorization community on such racial criteria will impose on the other nationalities, minorities or people from other believes to introvert and to not being integrated in the community because of feelings of danger on their specialty, scaring the influence of the majority and even to escape the countries which used to live to protect their special identity and to keep on their souls to find a place that deal with them on humanity principles and not on the base of superior and inferior, majority and minority, or distinguish them according their colour, religion and language.

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