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**Witnessing, Testimony and Ethics:  
The Theatre of debbie tucker green [sic]**

Treball de Recerca

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## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Contemporary Britain and Globalisation</b> .....	<b>6</b>
1.1. Individualism, Diversity and Politics in Britain .....	9
1.1.1. Gender Violence .....	12
1.1.2. Racism and Street Violence .....	16
1.2. Globalisation and the Mass Media .....	22
<b>2. Ethics Today</b> .....	<b>25</b>
2.1. Lévinas and the Face of the Other .....	26
2.2. The Speaker as Testimony and the Listener as Witness .....	27
2.3. Witnessing: Literature, Theatre and Television .....	29
<b>3. Contemporary Black British Theatre from 1990s</b> .....	<b>33</b>
3.1. Black British Theatre .....	37
3.2. Black Female Theatre .....	42
<b>4. debbie tucker green [sic]: <i>random</i> and <i>dirty butterfly</i></b> .....	<b>45</b>
4.1. <i>dirty butterfly</i> (2003) .....	50
4.1.1. Language: The Said and the Unsaid .....	59
4.2. <i>random</i> (2008) .....	60
4.2.1. Silence .....	67
4.2.2. Politics and Ethics .....	71
<b>5. Conclusions</b> .....	<b>72</b>
<b>Works Cited</b> .....	<b>75</b>

## Abstract

Contemporary Britain is experiencing a growing interconnectedness with the rest of the world. In the era of globalisation, societies seem to be much closer, for everything that happens in a specific place, almost inevitably, has some kind of effect on the rest of the world. The economic markets have expanded, nation states have become less important and political decisions are increasingly taken internationally, and cultures are much more intertwined. Moreover, the mass media has brought the every day occurrences closer and people learn about the horrors that other people experience almost instantly. Nevertheless, far from creating any sense of empathy or care for the ‘other’ who suffers, the constant bombarding of news about crime and abuse seem to have desensitised contemporary Britain, and the Western world at large. The growing preoccupation with the lack of empathy and solidarity towards the ‘other’ has become the subject matter of many philosophers such as Zygmunt Bauman or Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, who have examined globalisation and have contemplated ways of awakening the somehow ‘relaxed’ societies, who usually detach themselves from the problems of the ‘other’ so as not to get morally involved. This Master’s dissertation aims at examining the ways in which theatre makes a reactivation of the ethics of care possible through the face-to-face encounter ‘here and now’ with the other that theatre enables. Through the process of actively gazing at and listening to the other, the spectator can elaborate a critical response to the actor/character’s testimony. To do so, I shall analyse two of Debbie Tucker Green’s plays *dirty butterfly* (2003) and *random* (2008), which deal with two specific types of violence, domestic violence and street crime, respectively, which problematise contemporary Britain. Her intense plays act up as powerful testimonies of silenced groups whose suffering need to be articulated and be listened to. Furthermore, her use of urban, poetical, fragmented, and even ungrammatical language puts at the forefront stories which are usually uncomfortable to listen to in order to deliver an ethical message of care for the other.

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## Introduction

Globalisation has led to a sense of worldwide ‘compression’ – cultural, economic and technological (Harvey 1990: vii). In particular, the mass media constantly circulate the horrors that take place in both the Western and non-Western world to European societies, which are still assimilating the impact of two World Wars, various twentieth-century genocides and the consequences of the collapse of Eastern-block communism. However, most of the time, people in Britain, and in the West at large, react by detaching themselves from the cruelties and atrocities that people elsewhere experience in order to avoid becoming morally involved. Notwithstanding, some contemporary British playwrights have chosen not to ignore this reality but rather make it the subject matter of their plays. debbie tucker green [sic], a multicultural and poetic voice, whose work is connected in some ways with that of the ‘in-yer-face’ playwrights of the 1990s, focuses on domestic and street violence in *dirty butterfly* (2003) and *random* (2008) respectively in order to reflect on the lack of emotional involvement and the selfishness which intoxicate contemporary globalised society. tucker green’s plays display a unique aesthetic sensibility, use poetic and fragmented language as a distancing device and, crucially, set up a relationship structured around testimony/witnessing between the audience and the characters and events on stage.

In his influential book *Postdramatic Theatre*, originally published in German in 1999 and translated into English in 2006, Hans-Thies Lehmann argues that, in the face of contemporary society’s lack of ethical commitment and profound individualistic apathy, theatre can contribute something which the mass media falls short of, namely, the activation of the spectators’ ‘response-ability’, that is to say, their capacity to get involved and respond critically and ethically (2006: 185). On their part, Dori Laub, co-author with Shoshana Felman of the seminal *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, reflect on the importance of the listener in the process of giving testimony, because he/she becomes “the

blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed ... [so] the listener ... has to be at the same time a witness to the trauma witness and a witness to himself ... [or herself and] must listen to and hear the silence” (Felman and Laub 1992: 58). Although the book does not discuss the testimonial process in relation to theatre – while it does pay some attention to narrative and poetry – it is no doubt clearly relevant to what Lehmann calls the ‘theatre situation’, that is, the ‘joint text’ that emerges out of the interaction between “the behaviour onstage and in the auditorium” (Lehmann 2006: 17). In the ‘theatre situation’, the spectator is at the same time the observer of the play and of his/her own reactions, thus becoming a double witness, potentially aware of his/her own position as a testimony of the violence that takes place on stage.

Taking the above reflections as a starting-point, the object of my Master’s dissertation consists in the analysis of the connections between contemporary British theatre and ethics, with a focus on the different ways in which the testimonial and witnessing figures operate in debbie tucker green’s *dirty butterfly* (2003) and *random* (2008). Specifically, I intend to analyse the ways in which both plays interrogate some of the effects of globalisation by turning spectators into witnesses of domestic and street violence. Likewise, I propose to examine the devices tucker green uses – silences, a poetic and fragmented language and Caribbean patois rather than explicit images of violence – to impel spectators to locate themselves in the ‘here and now’, ‘response-ably’ (Lehmann 2006: 134-85) face-to-face with the testimonial process.

It is worth noting that so far no academic monographic study of debbie tucker green’s plays has been published, although a great number of critics, theatre professionals and academics have paid special attention to her work. Aleks Sierz, author of the seminal book *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (2001), theatre reviewer for *Tribune* and Visiting Professor of contemporary British theatre at Rose Bruford College, London, stands out among them. Likewise, Jenny Topper, former artistic director of the Hampstead Theatre; Deirdre Osborne, member of the Black Theatre Association (US), director, theatre producer and lecturer

in theatre at Goldsmiths College, University of London; Lynnette Goddard, author of the monograph *Staging Black Feminisms: Identity, Politics, Performance* (2007) and Senior Lecturer in the Department of Drama and Theatre, Royal Holloway College, University of London; and more recently Elaine Aston in her contribution to *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary British Playwrights* (2011), among others, have devoted attention to tucker green's work and expressed admiration for her plays.

In Chapter 1, I briefly comment on the sociocultural, economic and political situation of contemporary Britain. I reflect particularly on the effects of globalisation and the all-encompassing presence of the mass media and technologies of communication, as well as on the reasons for the so-called 'ethical turn' and the growing preoccupation with the sense of moral disengagement that contemporary Britain – and the 'first world' at large – is experiencing. Chapter 2 is devoted to a discussion of ethics and its relation with the notions of the other and the Lévinasian 'face' of the other, as well as the role of the speaker as testimony and the listener as witness of traumatic experience. I also examine the connections between theatre and ethics and the different perspectives from which they have been studied in recent times. Chapter 3 focuses on contemporary black British writing since the early 1990s and, more specifically, on contemporary black British theatre. In Chapter 4, I explore the ways in which debbie tucker green's *dirty butterfly* (2003) and *random* (2008) make use of the testimonial and witnessing figures as well as some estranging devices in order to interpellate the audience about domestic violence and street violence. Finally, in Chapter 5 I draw some final conclusions.

In order to carry out my investigation, I have relied particularly on the work of Emmanuel Lévinas and Zygmunt Bauman, who have re-thought the meaning of ethics within contemporary society in the wake of the horrors of the Holocaust; on Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman, whose influential work reflects on the testimonial process and its relation with literature; and on Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006) and Nicholas Ridout (2009), who provide insights into the relationship

between testimony/witnessing, ethics and theatre.

## 1. Contemporary Britain and Globalisation

Since the end of WWII, British society has undergone profound social, economic, political and technological changes which, in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, have been intensified by a worldwide process of globalisation. The overthrow of some geopolitical and sociocultural barriers after World War II led to huge waves of immigration reaching Britain, a process which, especially from the 1980s onwards, has significantly reshaped the concept and perception of British cultural identity.<sup>1</sup> The gradual incorporation of “South Asian, Caribbean and African traditions [...] into mainstream British culture” (Bastida 2008: 165) and the emergence of various social movements trying to “articulate blackness as an historical rather than as a natural category” (Gilroy 2002: 309) and aiming at putting an end to racial discrimination and segregation led to British society starting to reflect on what being British means and to interrogate the idea of “interpreting Britain as a ‘single’ cultural voice [...] based on a common national identity” (Bastida 2008:167).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, since the 1980s British society has been dealing with particular intensity and self-awareness with “questions of plurality, hybridity and fragmentation [and] the need to rehabilitate itself in order to confront adequately the challenges of a new century” (Bell 1998: 152).

At a political and economic level, the collapse of Eastern-block communism and the

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<sup>1</sup> After World War II, massive waves of immigrants, coming from Africa, the Caribbean and East Asia “chose Britain as their destination [...] given their better knowledge of the language and culture as a result of colonial education and the right of British citizenship granted to all members of the Commonwealth by the 1948 National act” (Bastida 2008: 162).

<sup>2</sup> Many anti-racism laws have been passed in the UK, like the Race Relations Act (1968, 1976 and 2000), or the Equality Act (2006, 2010). Also, many organisations and projects such as Show Racism the Red Card (1996), the bRAP (1999), The Glasgow Anti Racist Alliance (1998) or the EKTA Kettering (1999/2000) support diversity and equality, and aim at fighting segregation and discrimination. Nowadays, according to the Civil Rights Movement organisation, “racial discrimination is a legal offence in the UK and civil and human rights are afforded to every man, woman and child. Racial discrimination includes discrimination on the grounds of colour, race, nationality and ethnicity. [...] It is also an offence to discriminate on the grounds of religion, sexuality, gender and disability. Discrimination for any of these reasons can lead to legal consequences” (Crystal 2010).

subsequent market liberalisation and trade expansion propitiated the hegemonic supremacy of so-called global capitalism or ‘turbocapitalism’. The creation and gradual consolidation of supranational organisms such as the UNO (1945), the UNESCO (1945) or the European Union (1958) has not only marked clear “distinctions between international consciousness and imperial control” (Bell 1998: 154), but it has also impelled transcultural communication and political linkages among democratic or soon-to-be democratic countries. Moreover, global capitalism has provided consumers with ‘free’ choice within a wide range of options and that has prompted an accelerated international competition in which technology, among other sectors, has advanced and innovated by leaps and bounds. As Dan Rebellato notes,

global capitalism’s internal drive to innovate and rationalise is an enormous spur to technological innovation [...] I have seen the emergence of the home computer, the Internet and email, the mobile phone, soft contact lenses, and the iPod [...] all of which were helped into existence by capitalism. (2009: 31)

For better or worse, in global capitalism the new and the ephemeral prevails over the durable and “[o]ver the territorial/urbanistic/architectural engineered space, a third – *cybernetic* – spacing of the human world ha[s] been imposed with the advent of the global web of information” (Bauman 1999: xxvi). In a world in which time has become a valuable commodity, the internet has facilitated access to abundant, faster and easier ways of accessing information which is “in general [less] subject to censorship or restrictive regulation” (Dower 2006: 1). It has also led to the development of virtual buying and selling and to new ways of communicating and socialising instantly with people from all over the globe.<sup>3</sup> In short, globalisation has opened up many competitive, communicative and transnational possibilities, has widened the scope for technological innovation, and has spurred economical growth in the (Western) world at large.

Nevertheless, the effects of globalisation have obviously not all been positive. Issues such as

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<sup>3</sup> In social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Hi5 and Myspace or in blogs, the boundaries between the public and private domains are blurred, for people quite literally ‘expose’ their opinions, feelings or private lives.

ethnocentrism, ecological disasters, overpopulation, growing inequality and poverty and prejudices against immigrants or the worrying presence of asylum seekers raise huge controversy and social uncertainty. There seems little doubt that environmental damages have been triggered, at least partly, by the economic and political drive of globalisation:

Due to population growth and rapid industrialisation, environmental resources such as groundwater and water in lakes and rivers and clean air in many places have become scarce resources. Industrial discharges of untreated effluents into water bodies and emissions into air have deteriorated the quality of water and air respectively. Negative intertemporal externalities occur when exhaustible resources are depleted and when renewable resources are harvested at rates greater than the regeneration rates. (Sankar 2004: 2)<sup>4</sup>

As is well known, sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman describes globalisation as the era of ‘liquid modernity’, characterised by an unstable state of constant change and by the prevalence of compulsive consumerism.<sup>5</sup> Bauman is critical of the way the world has turned into a “consumer feasting in the affluent North and a deepening sense of desperation and exclusion in a large part of the rest of the world arising from the spectacle of wealth on the one hand and destitution on the other” (2007: 49). Paradoxically, individualism predominates as “the moral code of modern life” (Elliott and Lemert 2006: xxvi) in our globalised world. Contemporary societies are increasingly less traditional and more self-reinventive, malleable and dynamic (Elliott and Lemert 2006: 4) and the (Western) pursuit of material happiness and perfection intrinsically connects society with consumerism, competitiveness, privatisation and constant physical and aesthetic reshaping.

All in all, globalisation has brought “the world closer together and ma[de] nations, economies and cultures increasingly interdependent”, while at the same time it has fostered

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<sup>4</sup> Negative externalities are the collateral impacts of such an accelerated economic expansion, which affect both the environment and social welfare significantly.

<sup>5</sup> Bauman claims that liquids can work as a metaphor for our contemporary globalised world, for “liquids, unlike solids, cannot easily hold their shape [and] fluids, so to speak, neither fix space nor bind time [...] liquids are constantly ready to change shape” (Bauman 2002: 4). In contrast, ‘solid modernity’ – the modern period – was based on rigid political, social and economic structures. Bauman additionally claims that unlike ‘solid modernity’, in ‘liquid modernity’ “society engages its members primarily in their capacity as consumers rather than producers” (Bauman 2002: 7).

“massive economic expansion and technological innovation [but also] inequality, cultural and social tumult, and individual alienation process” (Mowlanda 1998: 22).

### **1.1. Individualism, Diversity and Politics in Britain**

In a sense, globalisation is the acceleration and intensification of a worldwide tendency towards ‘compression’ and growing interconnectedness that can be dated as far back as the 16thc, with the start of European colonial expansion (Steger 2005: 26). As is well known, Britain was at the forefront of this process from the start. Crucially, the individualistic spirit that underpins globalisation was intensively promoted in Britain by the various Conservative governments from 1979 to 1997. As is well known, Margaret Thatcher notoriously claimed that “there is no such a thing as society [...] [t]here are individual men and women [...] and people must look to themselves first. It’s our duty to look after ourselves and then to look after our neighbour” (qtd. in Arnot, David and Weiner 2001: 45), and the economic and social policies that the Conservative governments implemented were focused on promoting individualism and materialism rather than paying attention to “the redistribution of wealth or the elimination of social [...] inequalities” (Arnot, David and Weiner 2001: 4). However, after the almost twenty-year long Conservative term of office, neither the victory of New Labour in the 1997 election – which raised high political expectations – nor the optimistic exaltation of ‘Cool Britannia’ – the notion that art, design and the Britpop revolution would energise the country anew – were able to stop the identity crisis initiated with the dissolution of the Empire in the wake of World War II.<sup>6</sup> Broadly speaking, the global economic crisis and political disappointment – partly due to Tony Blair’s active support of the USA military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq with the aim, he argued, of inserting Britain in the global arena – made the political pendulum move

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<sup>6</sup> The phrase ‘Cool Britannia’ was coined in the 1990s as a pun on the patriotic song ‘Rule, Britannia’ and, as Chris Rojek explains, “it refers to the purported renewal of vigour in the lifeblood of the nation [...] and an exercise in political location and cultural recognition that sought to exploit culture, art, music, fashion, comedy and film and present them as evidence that Britannia was reinventing herself from the crabby dowager in recent Conservative era” (2007: 24).

back to the Tories in 2010.<sup>7</sup> But beyond the political shift, the general discontent and scepticism as regards a positive social, economic and political change have led to a visible political apathy in Britain, with only a 61.3% turnout in the 2005 election and a 65% turnout in the 2010 election – one more sign of the general disconnection from social matters and the individualism fostered since the 1980s.

In addition, as mentioned above, the incorporation of new ethnic and cultural forms has led to a reshaping of British identity, although “the reaction on the part of the white majority was certainly not always positive” (Bastida 2008: 164). Britain has always been a multi-identity country because, as Bernard Crick claims,

for a long time the UK has been a multicultural state composed of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and also a multicultural society made up of a diverse range of cultures and identities, and one that emphasizes the need for a continuous process of mutual engagement and learning about each other ... In other words, dual identities have been common, even before large scale immigration. (Crick 2004)

Yet, the United Kingdom has increasingly become a plural and diverse country since the 1960s. According to the 2001 census, “6.7 million people in Great Britain (or 11.8% of the total population) were from ethnic minorities. Of these, 4.6 million (or 8.1% of the total population) were from non-White ethnic” (Commission for Racial Equality 2007).<sup>8</sup> Many thinkers have reflected on the fact that “most of the time, European is still likely to be synonymous with ‘white’” (Gilroy 2002: xxvii), while minority groups, even the “two succeeding generations of the locally-born descendants, are trapped in the vulnerable role of perpetual outsider” (Gilroy 2002: xxxiv) and, therefore, stuck in a state of non-belonging. Conversely, white mainstream,

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<sup>7</sup> Tony Blair argued throughout his term of office that globalisation “promised nothing less than the renewal of social democracy” (Mullard 2007: 150), that their government would defend the “battle between progress and reaction”, and that “the war on terror is about global exercise of moral purpose [...] a battle about modernity” (qtd. in Mullard 2007: 87).

<sup>8</sup> In the UK 2001 census, minority groups – those who chose the category ‘other than White’ – could define themselves as either ‘mixed’, ‘black African’, ‘black Caribbean’, ‘black other’, ‘Indian’, ‘Pakistani’, ‘Bangladeshi’, ‘other Asian’, ‘Chinese’ or ‘any other ethnic group’ (Commission for Racial Equality 2007).

multicultural and mixed-raced identities are realities that coexist within the re-configured field of British national identity. It has not been easy for minority groups to deconstruct racist stereotypes and to defend the authority of individual experience without falling for essentialist discourses.

All in all, multi-ethnicity still creates tensions and the integration of minority groups is one of the central anxieties of the new millennium in Britain and elsewhere. Different research studies highlight “the covert racism of local authority housing policies and allocation procedures, as well as the poor quality of housing given to black tenants compared to white tenants” (Barn 2001: 9). Also, in some areas of Britain

schools tend to become racially segregated, that is, almost exclusively Asian, Caribbean or white. Consequently, there is limited everyday interaction amongst different racial groups of young people. (Barn 2001: 11)

Moreover, while Britain is one of the most multicultural countries in Europe, there is growing fear of terrorism, partly initiated by “the devastating events of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the second wave of mass asylum-driven immigration into Britain” (Cowley 2005). The train bombings in Madrid on 11 March 2004 and the suicide bombings in London in July 2005 should also be mentioned in this connection among other events.

The ongoing ‘war on terror’ perpetuates separation, ethnic alienation and fear of the other. Racial bigotry is still a major concern in Europe, one that multicultural Britain tries to confront through national and international laws protecting minorities as well as through bodies like the Race Equality Foundation (1995), the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2007) or One Workplace Equal Rights (2007).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> In the UK the “Race Relations Act 1976 and all of its amendments and extensions protect individuals from being discriminated against in employment on the grounds of colour, race, nationality, religious beliefs or ethnicity”; at the international level, “the United Nations’ International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination is the main international document to address the issues of racism and racial discrimination”

### 1.1.1. Gender Violence

Domestic violence “is the largest cause of morbidity worldwide in women aged 19–44, greater than war, cancer or motor vehicle accidents”(Home Affairs Committee 2008). As Keir Starmer, director of Public Prosecutions and Head of the Crown Prosecution Service, points out, “it has been with us for a very long time, yet it is only in the last 10 years that it has been taken seriously as a criminal justice issue” (Robins 2011). More concretely, “1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men in the UK will experience domestic violence at some point in their lives” (Home Affairs Committee 2008) and every week, two women are killed by their partner or ex-partner. The police receive a range of 570,000 calls from victims of abuse each year and up to 57% of such women have been repeatedly victimised (Women’s Aids 2009a). Different researches have proved that domestic violence is gender specific, for women are more likely to become victims of abuse and sexual violence and “32% of women who had ever experienced domestic violence did so four or five (or more) times, compared with 11% of [...] men who had ever experienced domestic violence; and women constituted 89% of all those who had experienced 4 or more incidents of domestic violence” (Women’s Aid 2009b).

Nevertheless, despite the prejudiced idea that there is such a thing as a typical profile of domestic violence victims – often described as poor black young women – and that black people are more likely to be related to (domestic) violence, there seems to be no correlation between race and domestic violence and any woman can experience domestic violence regardless of race, ethnic or religious group, class, disability or lifestyle (Women’s Aids 2009a). Indeed, statistics have shown that “there was little variation in the experience of inter-personal violence by ethnicity” whereas poverty and youth raise the probabilities of abuse (Women’s Aids 2009a). Women who suffer the mistreatments by their mates often find it difficult to leave their homes and ask for help. The reasons might be diverse but all of them are connected to fear and

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(Morrisey 2010).

hopelessness:

Whilst the risk of staying may be very high, simply leaving the relationship does not guarantee that the violence will stop. In fact, the period during which a woman is planning or making her exit is often the most dangerous time for her and her children. Many women are frightened of the abuser, and with good reason, as it is not uncommon for perpetrators to threaten to harm or even kill their partners or children if she leaves [...] A recent survey revealed that whilst 20 per cent of women admit they have lived, or do currently live in fear of violence, more than half (52 per cent) told researchers they'd be too embarrassed and ashamed to tell their friends, and 59 per cent said they would not tell their families. (Women's Aids 2009a)

Very often there is news on domestic violence but, mostly, the media only reports such tragic events if they have resulted in death and/or if they are intrinsically connected to “notions of race, class and age” (Greer 2007: 41). This biased coverage stems from “a tendency for the news media to polarise women in sex crime cases into either [...] ‘ideal’ and ‘undeserving’ victims”; this way, gender abuse myths are perpetuated and “do much to maintain traditional patriarchal stereotypes of femininity, masculinity and ‘appropriate’ female sexuality, while doing little to challenge prevailing myths about rape and tackle the problem of male sexual violence against women” (Greer 2007: 40-1).

One of the most notorious cases of gender violence was Clare Wood's murder in 2009. She met her boyfriend, George Appleton, through a social network and she was unaware of the fact that he “had three previous convictions under the anti-stalking Protection from Harassment Act 1987, and had kidnapped a previous girlfriend at knifepoint” (Travis 2011). Clare was threatened and attacked by Appleton several times, and she also made several calls to the 999 emergency phone number before being murdered. Some years later, the Independent Police Complaints Commission found out several instances of negligence in the investigation of the case by Manchester Police. The population was shaken by the news and the idea that British women were unprotected raised the alarm of many organisations. Clare's father, Michael Brown, has launched a campaign called ‘Clare's Law’ “to allow people to find out whether new

partners have a violent past” (BBC News 2011a) and Theresa May, the Home Office Secretary and Minister for Women and Equality, supports the initiative and wants to investigate how effective it would be for people to have “the right to know whether a new partner has a history of domestic violence under proposed legislation” (Travis 2011).

Many domestic murders have taken place since Clare Wood’s death – Mary Russell, a 81-year-old woman who was killed by her husband in Essex – she had made “eight 999 calls over the preceding seven months” – (Taylor 2011); Zandra Maxwell-Nelson, a woman who was stabbed to death by Nathaniel Brown, her ex-husband, in front of their children in Tottenham in April 2011; the former policeman Melton Mowbray killed his wife and his daughter and also killed himself in December 2011. These are not isolated cases, for gender violence continues to be a serious issue in Britain and beyond. Thousands of women are being threatened, abused and killed by their boyfriends, husbands or ex-partners, and many organisations such as Women’s Aid (1974), Women and Girls Network (1987), The National Centre for Domestic Violence (2002), Tender (2003) or Solace Women’s Aid (2007) are working in Britain nowadays to help and protect victims of domestic violence and to promote gender equality.

The present British government recognises eight types of gender violence – domestic violence, sexual violence, forced marriage, honour crimes, prostitution, trafficking for sexual exploitation, stalking, female genital mutilation – and has developed a strategy to raise awareness and to support victims of gender violence by expanding the definition of domestic violence, by protecting women and children from repeated abuse and by providing adequate services to help victims overcome their experiences (The Rights of Women 2010). Nevertheless, the recent reforms implemented by David Cameron’s government involve cuts in legal aid which, according to Stephen Cobb QC, chairman of the Family Law Bar Association, will mean that “600,000 people will no longer receive legal aid, [...] 54,000 fewer people will be represented in the family courts annually and there will be 75% fewer private law cases in

court” (qtd. in *Guardian* 2011b). The government have stated that “if there is evidence of domestic violence, child abuse or forced marriage, [they] are absolutely clear that legal aid must remain available [and] that’s why £400 million is available each year for these cases” (qtd. in *Telegraph* 2011). However, the Rights of Women organisation have insistently protested against such cuts, for they claim that

the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Bill (LAPSO) in its current form will remove meaningful access to justice from women who have experienced and are at risk of gender-based violence and abuse including domestic and sexual violence, trafficking, sexual exploitation and forced labour. [...] LAPSO removes almost all legal aid for private family law cases. The Government has announced that legal aid will be retained for private family law matters where domestic violence is an issue, in recognition of the need to ensure that victims of domestic violence are protected. However, this will simply not be the case owing to the restrictive definition of domestic violence used in the Bill and the unrealistic evidence of violence that victims will be required to produce. (Rights of Women 2012)

The government’s proposal states that the victims of gender violence will have to provide objective evidence of their abuse and there will be “a twelve-month time limit to each of the evidential criteria” (Rights of Women 2012). However, less than a 24% of the cases of domestic violence are reported to the police and, many times, the women who experience domestic abuse find it difficult and need time to admit the situation they are undergoing and to ask for help. Thus, this new reform implies that “at least 46% of domestic violence victims will be ineligible for legal aid because the evidence that they will be required to present is dangerously restrictive” (Rights of Women 2012).

Nevertheless, Home Secretary Theresa May decided to launch a consultation which will last until March 2012 on whether the definition of domestic violence is right, or it should include ‘coercive violence’ and violence on people under 18 as part of the definition (Travis 2011). Such consultation may imply a big step towards recognition of the dangers of prejudging,

undermining or ignoring the victims of gender violence and acknowledging that such abuse can potentially happen to everyone.

### **1.1.2. Racism and Street Violence**

Inter-ethnic disturbances – like the Bradford riots (2001), the Oldham disturbances (2001) or the Birmingham race riots (2005) – including racially motivated street murders in Peckham, Lambeth and Southwark, among other areas of London, have been and continue to be one of the central conflicts in contemporary Britain. According to the British Crime survey (BCS), only “[i]n 2000-2001, 53,090 racist incidents were recorded by the police in England and Wales” and “the Institute of Race Relations (IRR) recorded 124 killings with racial motivations in England, Scotland and Wales across the period 1970-2003” (Cottle 2004: 7). Moreover, in 2003, “there were 31 youths aged under 20 charged with a gun-related murder in London” (Shukor 2007) and the number rose to 76 in 2006. As Ravinder Barn explains in her “Black Youth on the Margins: A Research Review”, ethnic minority people who “worry about racial harassment” have had to adopt different strategies such as “‘avoiding going out at night’, ‘making home more secure’, ‘visiting shops at certain times only’, ‘stopping children from playing outside’ and ‘avoiding areas where mostly white people live’” (2001: 58) in order to protect themselves from street crime.

The media have often been accused of only paying attention to street crime “when crime victims come symbolically to represent a problem that resonates with and potentially affects many in society – school safety, racist violence, knife crime” (Greer 2007: 32-3). Indeed, as Chris Greer points out, media coverage of street crime has been, for decades, scarce, racially biased and even sensationalistic:

The under-representation of young people as victims of street crime is even more pronounced for those who are non-white. [...] The everyday experiences of black people as victims of crime and racial prejudice seldom make the headlines. [...] For some, including the

Chief Commissioner of the London Metropolitan Police, Sir Ian Blair, the explanation was sad. The British news media are institutionally racist in how they report murder. [...] Demographic characteristics such as class, race, gender, age, and sexuality can at times determine news media interest in a fairly straightforward manner. (Greer 2007: 24, 31 and 36)

Among the numerous killings that took place in Britain between 1970 and 2003, the case of eighteen-year-old black student Stephen Lawrence – stabbed to death by a white gang on 22 April 1993 in Eltham, a conflict-ridden area of London where a number of unprovoked race murders had already taken place – grabbed both national and international attention. On 7 May 1993, the initially arrested suspects, Gary Dobson and David Norris, were released on bail, for the CPS (Crown Prosecution Service) declared that the evidence was not conclusive (Weaver 2007). After some initial investigations, Lawrence’s family complained “that the police [were] not doing enough to catch Stephen’s killers” and in 1997 “a Police Complaints Authority report on the original police investigation of Stephen’s murder identi[ed] ‘significant weaknesses, omissions and lost opportunities’” during the police’s follow-up of the case (Weaver 2007). In 1999, the McPherson Report ratified the Lawrence family’s suspicions:

The inquiry into the failure of the original police investigation to find and convict Mr Lawrence’s killers, which reported in 1999, became a key moment in the modern history of criminal justice in Britain. Concluding the force was ‘institutionally racist’, it made 70 recommendations and had an enormous impact on the race relations debate, from criminal justice through to all public authorities. (BBC News 2011b)

On 5 May 2004, the CPS announced, once more, that “there [was] insufficient evidence to prosecute anyone for Lawrence's murder” (Weaver 2007). However, Gary Dobson and David Norris were called to stand trial again as recently as 18 May 2011 “accused of being part of a racist white gang that ‘targeted and killed’ the black teenager Stephen Lawrence because of the colour of his skin” (Dodd 2011). As reported by the BBC, on the defendants’ clothes,

scientists found 11 fibres that matched Stephen Lawrence’s clothing, and one found on the collar appeared to include blood [...]. This blood appeared to match Mr Lawrence’s DNA, as did blood found in an

evidence bag that originally held the jacket. (BBC News 2011a)

Even so, such scientific evidence was once again challenged and the trial was expected to last until January 2012 (BBC News 2011c). As recently as Tuesday, 3 January 2012, Gary Dobson and David Norris were declared guilty. The case, which had remained unresolved for more than 19 years, is now finally closed. Nevertheless, as Hugh Muir claims in his very recent article “Stephen Lawrence Verdict: Catharsis at Last, but What Next?”, published on 3 January 2012, “before his death, Stephen Lawrence was just another teenager who deserved the chance to build a life. There are as many kids like him about today” (Muir 2012).

All in all, the murder of Stephen Lawrence has probably become one of the most notorious mass-mediated race murders. As Simon Cottle explains, his story crossed from the private to the public arena and while he was initially “reported as a ‘sign’ of racist murder, that is, a signifier connoting the particularity of the murder and the aftermath, through sustained media representation [it] became a potent ‘symbol’ both encapsulating and speaking to much wider concerns and feelings” (Cottle 2004: 61). Initially, national television and many mainstream newspapers, such as the *Guardian*, the *Independent* or the *Times*, either ignored the case or “covered the murder [...] in the relatively matter-of-fact terms of news reportage, albeit informed by their respective press idioms and views of ‘race’ politics” (Cottle 2004: 78). This suggested that “evidently, a racist murder in England was either too commonplace or too lacking in news interest to warrant national television interest or universal press attention from all Britain’s mainstream papers; nor did its news value extend to Scotland or Northern Ireland” (Cottle 2004: 74). In contrast, minority or regional media, such as the weekly black newspaper *The Voice*, followed the case step by step and signalled it “as part of a pre-existing and widening breach opening up between the black community and Britain’s political apparatus with the seeming inability to address the rising tide of white racist violence” (Cottle 2004: 79-

80).<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, with the

bombshell decision announced by the CPS [in May 1993] not to prosecute the prime suspects [...] a breach opened up paving the way for a period of mounting crisis that would progressively position Stephen Lawrence as a major public concern within mainstream media discourse and wider society. (Cottle 2004: 89)

Hence, the media put Stephen Lawrence's case in the spotlight and it "entered into a contested field of public discourse and representation" (Cottle 2004: 20). The case not only interrogated the police force's efficiency but it also initiated a public debate on issues such as "'race' or racism, criminal justice and law" (Cottle 2004: 63) and it led to a rethinking of concepts such as equality, solidarity, and even a re-examination of Britain's cultural identities:

It reached into the bowels of state and society, where no institution or powerful figure was seemingly immune from public scrutiny and criticism. Mediatized, the Stephen Lawrence case helped to expose the 'profane' reality of racist violence and inequality in contemporary British society and also served, in some quarters, to promote 'sacred' solidarities that aspired to a future society without racism. Mediatized, the case served to reenergise core and contested values of civil society and focused, at least for some, future visions of a more inclusive multiethnic, multicultural society. Mediatized, the name of Stephen Lawrence became, and has remained to this day, a potent symbol for the injustices experienced by and perpetrated against Britain's minority communities. (Cottle 2004: 2)

Unfortunately, the 'public crisis' that took place in Britain in the wake of Stephen Lawrence's case did not stop street crime (Cottle 2004: 54). On Friday, 16 February 2007, the *Guardian* published an article by Hugh Muir titled "Random Violence Leaves Five Dead and Locals in Fear", which described several street murders in South London which appeared to be unprovoked and which had caused consternation, bewilderment and fear, and had left South Londoners with the "perception that gun law now prevails" (Muir 2007). Muir began by referring to the earlier murder of Damilola Taylor, a black boy who was only 10 years old and was killed with a broken bottle in Peckham on 27 November 2000, and then listed four recent

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<sup>10</sup> On 22 October 2009, the BBC published an article titled "Violent Crimes 'Wrongly Classed'" in which it was stated "that more than a third of the cases from [a] sample of 479 incidents had been wrongly categorised as not warranting further investigation" (BBC News 2009).

cases – on 3 February 2007, Javarie Crighton was stabbed to death in his own house; on the very same day, James Smart-Ford was shot in a disco; some days later, Michael Dosunmu, a 15-year-old schoolboy, was killed by mistake in his bed, for the murderers confused Michael with his brother, “who *they* believed had cheated them out of proceeds from security van robberies, and also wanted revenge following the murder of another man a few days earlier” (Sturcke 2008); and on 14 February 2007, 15-year-old Billy Cox was shot in his bedroom while he was sleeping. The article points out that gangs, crime and drugs occupy the streets and “the fear extends to primary school children [...] The only common strands are the proliferation of guns and the fact that the shooters and their victims are getting younger” (Muir 2007).

Noticeably, the word ‘random’ is present throughout the article.<sup>11</sup> Muir argues that the “prognosis is bleak” and highlights the fact that “this is not a situation that could reasonably be described as gang warfare and the identified groups do not appear to be playing any obvious role in the current spate of murders”, which demonstrates that “the picture is chaotic; the violence random” (Muir 2007).

On 13 October 2007, the *Mail Online* published a controversial article by David Matthews titled “Every Teenage Killing is a Tragedy – Never Surrender to ‘Murder Fatigue’”, in which he suggested that despite the fact that “given [their] propensity to be working-class, [black people] have to deal with being doubly voiceless” (Mathews 2007), their lack of commitment also adds up to black people’s invisibility within Britain:

the ‘won’t vote, don’t vote’ apathy of many black voters means they have been jettisoned from the political process. The black Press [sic], for what it’s worth, no longer has the campaigning edge it once had, so is largely ineffectual when it comes to pushing gun and knife crime up the news agenda. When black newspapers like *The Voice* or the *New Nation* whimper, nobody listens. (Mathews 2007)

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<sup>11</sup> The article was published one year before debbie tucker green’s *random* was premiered. Similarities with the play in content and language as well as in the title – both contain the word ‘random’ – indicate that debbie tucker green might have been responding to the article and its content when writing the play, among other things.

At the same time, the article also condemned British society as well as the media for their apathy towards black youth violence:

Just as people complain of reaching ‘donation fatigue’ with each new global disaster, so many are at the point of ‘teen-murder fatigue’. All too often the victims and the perpetrators are poor, black, urban. Who cares? [...] During a recent meeting with a television executive, in which I tried to pitch the merits of an investigation into this spiralling gun and knife problem in the capital affecting mainly black youths, he dismissed the phenomenon as simply ‘something they do, isn’t it?’ and not worthy of precious TV time. (Matthews 2007)

In fact, apathy and silence perpetuate street violence and marginalisation. In 2009 and 2010, numerous street killings took place in London. Among them, on 25 March 2010, Sofyen Belamouadden, who was 15 years old, was chased and murdered in Victoria Station underground, London, by a gang. Some days later, the promising 17-year-old football player Godwin Lawson was stabbed to death in Hackney, East London, an area where “fighting among youths [...] was not uncommon”:

the stabbing [...] occurred in the same part of London where 17-year-old Jahmal Mason-Blair died from knife wounds last May. [This] will raise fresh concerns about gang violence in the UK’s inner cities. It was the fifth fatal stabbing in the capital this year. (Doward 2010)

Most recently, on 11 April 2011, 15-year-old Negus McClean was stabbed to death in North London while he was trying to protect his 13-year-old brother from a street gang (Davis 2011). Only on 26 December 2011, a number of street killings took place in England. The 19-year-old student Catherine Wynter was stabbed to death while she was babysitting her niece and nephew at her sister’s house in Borehamwood, and no obvious reasons have been found. Also, Anuj Bidve, a 23-year-old Indian student, was shot to death by a stranger in Manchester and, according to Chief Superintendent Kevin Mulligan of Greater Manchester Police, the case is now being treated as a ‘hate crime’ because of “growing perceptions in the community” (Bingham 2011). In Oxford Street, London, 18-year-old Seydou Diarrassouba was also stabbed to death as a result of a street fight. As the *Guardian* published two days later, “hours after

Diarrassouba was killed, a 21-year-old man was stabbed in the thigh at the junction of Oxford Street and Regent Street” (*Guardian* 2011a).

The murders of Stephen Lawrence, Damilola Taylor, Javarie Crighton, Michael Dosunmu, Billy Cox, Sofyen Belamouadden, Godwin Lawson, Negus McClean, Catherine Wynter, Anuj Bidve and Seydou Diarrassouba are some of the cases of street crime which have taken place in Britain in the last years. A key concept is the fact that, “at a time of widespread intolerance, anxiety and fear of the unknown ‘other’”, it remains the case that the media has often been selective in its representation of crime victims and so “much news coverage of criminal victimization both reflects and reinforces social divisions and inequalities, and in so doing feeds into the wider structures of power, dominance and subjugation from which they derive” (Greer 2007: 43).

## **1.2. Globalisation and the Mass Media<sup>12</sup>**

The contemporary world can be defined as ‘the age of information’. The mass media spread information across the globe and make it possible for people to be constantly aware of events that take place in both the Western and the non-Western world. Consequently, newspapers, television and the radio are often described as effective means of dissolving international barriers and facilitating global interconnections. Similarly, the media are seen as potential “agent[s] for political and social change [...] through their instantaneous and broadranging dissemination of pictures, words and music to all parts” (Bykowsky et al. 1993: 4). The media transcend geopolitical boundaries and, thus, may make transnational relations both more extensive and intensive. The media have crucially contributed to globalisation by bringing cultures closer, which has led people to try “to address oneself to the Other in the language of the Other” (Derrida qtd. in Herbrechter 1999: 311). By incorporating new forms of

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<sup>12</sup> Section 1.2 focuses on the mass media rather than information technologies because the former illustrate more fully the argument on ethical unresponsiveness that is central to this dissertation. The mass media make it impossible for the audience to engage in dialogue, whereas some information technologies enable their users to respond to some extent.

consciousness, the media have made it much easier for immigrant populations to develop culturally hybrid identities, that is, to reconnect and keep bonds with their root countries and cultures while carrying on a new life in their foster country.

It has also been argued that bringing cultures closer can lead to cultural homogenisation and the subordination or even disappearance of minority cultures. In any case, there seems no doubt that connections among countries have greatly intensified, for if time and space were once obstacles to global interconnectivity, those obstacles have been eroded with the spread of instantaneous means of communication. For Lewis Mumford, though, the digital technological revolution has not only ‘compressed’ time but it has also fragmented attention:

One further effect of our closer time co-ordination and our instantaneous communication must be noted here: broken time and broken attention. The difficulties of transport and communication before 1850 automatically acted as a selective screen, which permitted no more stimuli to reach a person than he could handle: a certain urgency was necessary before one received a call from a long distance or was compelled to make a journey oneself: this condition of slow physical locomotion kept intercourse down to a human scale, and under definitive control. Nowadays this screen has vanished: the remote is as close as the near: the ephemeral is as emphatic as the durable. While the tempo of the day has been quickened by instantaneous communication, the rhythm of the day has been broken: the radio, the telephone, the daily newspaper clamour for attention, and amid the host of stimuli to which people are subjected, it becomes more and more difficult to absorb and cope with any one part of the environment, to say nothing of dealing with it as a whole. (qtd. in Rantanen 2006: 50- 51)

There is always something happening at one point or other of the planet and people’s attention is constantly called to such events, for one same message can be sent to the whole globe instantly and “the media remind us that the world never sleeps, even if its audience does” (Rantanen 2006: 50). Such intensification of input overwhelms people with information – from civil wars, international terrorism and natural catastrophes to street and domestic violence – which results in a “distantiation, quasi interaction and monological mass-mediated experience”

(Rantanen 2006: 11).<sup>13</sup> The impossibility of a *dialogic* connection between the media and their audience makes it even harder to cope with the overexposure to information. Thus, even though we are now much more aware of the horrors and catastrophes that other people suffer daily, there is a growing tendency towards ethical disconnection and emotional unresponsiveness.<sup>14</sup> As Rebellato points out, amorality, together with inequality and externality, is one of the main negative outcomes of globalisation (2009: 37). This lack of moral purpose towards the other turns him or her into a ‘stranger’, allegedly responsible for our individual and collective uncertainties. Thus, international terrorism and the economic recession accentuate racism and hostility towards immigrants, for they are seen as potential enemies who increase unemployment, collapse public health or distort the ‘national identity’ of a country.

The mass media, by “separat[ing] our perception from our personal experience [and] constantly bombarding us with images which either seem to have nothing to do with our experience (fantasy films) or seem to do so but do not (reality TV)” (Ridout 2009: 56), give rise to adiaphorisation or moral neutrality towards cruelty.<sup>15</sup> The distance that separates the speaker from the audience leads to dissociation from what one sees, listens to or reads. We have become so accustomed to images of extreme violence, which are intertwined with images of daily routine, that in order to “stave off the ‘viewing fatigue’ they must be increasingly gory, shocking and otherwise ‘inventive’ to arouse any sentiments at all or indeed draw attention” (Bauman 1998: 149). To this is added, in ‘liquid modernity’, the absence of one single ‘master narrative’ to control knowledge and the truth. While the wide range of newspapers, television channels and radio programmes potentially allows the audience to gain a more global

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<sup>13</sup> In his book *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989), Bauman coined the concept of ‘distantiation’, and he pointed out that it “removes the individual both from having to make a moral choice and having to face the consequences of his or her actions. It allows for the application of necessary cruelty by bureaucrats without them having to face or feel the consequences of her actions” (Bancroft 2005: 26).

<sup>14</sup> This “includes showing detachment and lack of involvement with the victim and interacting only if absolutely necessary. It also includes failure to express affection, caring, and love toward the victim” (Linda Mills qtd. in Turvey 2009: 307).

<sup>15</sup> ‘Adiaphorisation’ is a term coined by Bauman to refer to social indifference. In an ‘adiaphoric’ society, people “are exempt from the competence of the socially promoted ethical code and declared ‘morally indifferent’” (Bauman 1993: 30).

perspective of what is happening worldwide, the boundaries between what is ‘good’ and what is ‘bad’ have become hazy and we have been desensitised by frivolous images of war, of people dying of either AIDS or hunger in Africa, or of terrorist attacks. Empathy is on the wane because, indeed, “capitalism has naturalized alienation” (Edward Bond qtd. in Reinelt 1996: 79) and, thus, ethics is undergoing a period of (worldwide) crisis.

## **2. Ethics today**

While ethical questions have always been part of human existence, ever since the first civilisations emerged (Ridout 2009: 1-25), the basis of ethics was thoroughly transformed with the rise of modernity and the Enlightenment. In pre-modern times, religion remained the most important source of moral ‘truth’ and ethical value, but this changed from the 16thc onwards with the birth of humanism and the development of the Enlightenment, which has been defined as “a process through which reason was to be applied to all aspects of human existence, above all, in the name of freedom [and which] believed that reason as opposed to superstition or dogma was the one sure basis of a free and just society” (Osborne 1998: 1). Those new concepts profoundly transformed the role of ethics within society. The importance of the individual self increased enormously and that “autonomous individual would have to be able to produce, for herself, an ethical law that would also be applicable to everyone else, bearing in mind that ‘everyone else’ comprises a collection of other autonomous individuals” (Ridout 2009: 38).<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, ultimately only the ethical values derived from the European bourgeoisie were taken to be ‘universal’. Thus, the modern model of ethics was intrinsically connected with the “rational bourgeois subject” (Ridout 2009: 38) and did not contemplate otherness or difference; rather, they tended to be suppressed and ignored. However, as Bauman notes, nowadays there is

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<sup>16</sup> As Ridout explains, this discourse is based on Immanuel Kant’s ‘categorical imperative’, which was based on the idea of “regulating the actions of the individual by way of the needs of the collective, or of managing the relationship between the particular (individual) and the universal (humanity at large)” (Ridout 2009: 37).

not the “comfort of the already-existing norms [...] to guide me [and] to reassure me that I have reached the limit of my duty and so spare me that anxiety which I would account for a ‘guilty conscience’” (Bauman 1993: 52). Previous ethical traditions were based on pre-established moral values that dictated what was right and what was wrong so that individuals might fulfil their quest for ethical righteousness. Those codes, however, are no longer plausible in ‘liquid modernity’, for social forms are too ephemeral for strong, solid positions to crystallise and “[i]ndividual exposure to the vagaries of commodity-and-labour markets inspires and promotes division, not unity” (Bauman 2007: 2). Bauman believes that the free market has enhanced inequalities and that nowadays it is more difficult to establish indisputable parameters of justice, given the fact that societies are now materially and intellectually wide open to one another and, thus, different ethical paradigms intertwine with each other. The fear of violence, uncertainty and instability has created the perception that it is necessary to be safer, even at the cost of being less free.

## **2.1. Lévinas and the Face of the Other**

The Holocaust was decisive in bringing about a radical ethical shift. As Ridout notes, the systematic mass murder of European Jews, among other ethnic and gender minorities and political dissidents, meant the collapse of the Enlightenment narrative of ‘progress’, for the industrial, technological and economic developments that were supposed to bring prosperity, peace and harmony “to a liberated humanity” were used for the extermination of otherness in “a sinister and irrational outcome of the attempt to secure human domination over the world by means of processes of rational organisation” (2009: 50-51). The discourse on blood purity and the fascist movements that existed in many countries at the beginning of the 20th century – based on the notion of the supremacy of the self at the expense of the subjugation of the rest – led to the collapse of ethics as they had been conceived since the dawn of modernity.

For the Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas, the emphasis on the self, “on ‘being’ or

‘Being’ was the root of the problem. Philosophy would have to start again without ‘being’” (Ridout 2009: 52). Lévinas claimed that the self needed to be decentred from “the place from which the human subject had previously displaced God” (Ridout 2009: 53) so that a new focus on the other might replace it. Lévinas resituates ethics around the other because it is in the face of the other that the self becomes ethically responsible – the face-to-face encounter with the other enables the “recognition of mutual vulnerability which encourages relationships based on openness, dialogue and respect for difference” (Ridout 2009: 54). Pushing aside the Enlightenment Cartesian ego, Lévinas claimed that we are social beings and in the face-to-face encounter the reciprocal gaze obliges us to be aware of the other’s problems and to take responsibility for him or her. The other sets the limits of my freedom. For Lévinas, recognising the Other prevails over knowledge and truth. Thus law and caring justice need each other in the process of recognising and acting ‘response-ably’ towards the other.

## **2.2. The Speaker as Testimony and the Listener as Witness**

In their seminal book *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, Felman and Laub argue that

testimony has become a crucial mode of our relation to events of our times – our relation to the traumas of contemporary history [...] As a relation to events, testimony seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference. (1992: 5)

The speaker who is giving testimony of an event needs to articulate his or her traumas – however entangled and even incoherent his or her discourse may be – in order to free him or herself from the oppressive state of silence that prevents him or her from coming to terms with his or her experience. On his or her part, the listener should be willing to take on the responsibility of witnessing the experience of the speaker in order to help him or her heal and overcome the trauma. The listener, though, needs to be fully conscious of his or her position as

a witness, because “the listener [...] partakes of the struggle of the victim with the memories and residues of his or her traumatic past” (Felman and Laub 1992: 58).

In addition, the listener/witness should also be aware of four other important aspects of the process. First, that the victim's testimonial speech will be fragmented, distorted by fear and full of silences which the listener must also listen to. Second, as Felman suggests, that it will be precocious and uncontrolled:

[The witness] has got to speak, almost compulsively [...] He, thus, speaks in advance of the control of consciousness; his testimony is delivered in breathless grasps: in essence, it is a precocious testimony [...] he speaks in advance of knowledge and awareness and break(s) through the limits of its own conscious understanding. (Felman and Laub 1992: 21-22)

Although the act of testifying is a quest for truth, it is full of gaps and ruptures that the listener/witness can contribute to filling in with his or her reflections and interpretations. Third, the listener “must be at the same time a witness to the trauma witness and a witness to him/herself” (Felman and Laub 1992: 58). Fourth, the listener will probably experience different states through the process of witnessing – defensive feelings, fear, anger, paralysis, discovery of wondrous aspects of him or herself. The listener is not only bearing witness to the speaker's speech and to him or herself as a listener, but he or she is also witnessing the process of witnessing itself. He or she has to be ready, in other words, to listen to somebody and be able to be with him or her during the process while simultaneously remaining partially distant, so that he or she can form his or her own critical view and listen to his or her own conclusions. Both the speaker and the listener create a shared experience for, through the narration of his or her story, the speaker “makes possible something like a repossession of the act of witnessing [and] this joint responsibility is the source of the re-emerging truth” (Felman and Laub 1992: 85).

Thus, Felman and Laub claim that the act of giving testimony requires a Lévinasian face-

to-face encounter between a speaker/testimony and a listener/witness, and there “needs to be a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an other in the position of the one who hears” (1992: 70) and takes responsibility for the victim/speaker’s narrative. Such a face-to-face encounter implies a ‘here and now’, an active presence and participation of the two ‘faces’ in which the reciprocal gaze enables the self to see the ‘face’ of the Other, so that both can establish an ethical connection.

### 2.3. Witnessing: Literature, Theatre and Television

Literature is arguably one of the most effective ways of representing and rethinking identities, cultures and traumas as well as of reconnecting language with the traumatic events of history. Indeed, many people who have experienced a traumatic event and have felt the need to bear witness to it as a means of survival and reconciliation with their past – such as Paul Celan or Primo Levi, among others – have found in narrative and poetry a means to “decanonize the silence, to desacralize the witness and, in doing so, to enact the *liberation of the testimony* from the bondage of the secret” (Felman and Laub 1992: xix; emphasis original).<sup>17</sup> As Felman points out, “contemporary works of art use testimony both as the subject of their drama and as the medium of their literal transmission” (Felman and Laub 1992: 5). Testimonial narrative and poetry give a voice to the witness, who thus has the chance to “transgress the confines of the isolated stance, to speak for other and to others” (Felman and Laub 1992: 3). This turns the writer into an ‘unqualified testimony’, that is, a fictional voice whose narration fails to be fully objective but who, through the very process of narrating, bears witness and speaks for those who do not want to or cannot, and puts history in conjunction with imagination and subjectivity. As

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<sup>17</sup> Paul Celan pointed out that he wrote poems such as ‘Todesfuge’ or ‘Radix, Matrix’ so as to give his “particular historical reality and his literally shattering experience as a Holocaust survivor” and “to speak, to orient [himself], to explore where [he] was and was meant to go, to sketch out reality for [himself]” (Paul Celan qtd. in Felman and Laub 1992: 25). His poems represented a way of bearing witness of his experience in a labour camp during the Nazi Germany. Also, Primo Levi’s first novel, *Se Questo è un Uomo* (1956) bears witness to his eleven months in a concentration camp at the end of the Second World War to provide documentation of his experience in a concentration camp. Some of his subsequent novels like *La Tregua* (1963) were also accounts of his experience.

Felman and Laub argue, “literature bears testimony not just to duplicate or to record events, but to make history available to the imaginative act” (Felman and Laub in Van Bohemeen-Saaf 2004: 1). In “Philomela’s Tongue: Introductory Remarks on Witness Literature”, Horace Engdahl claims that the literary testimony provides a more intimate and less anaesthetic version of an event than history, which he regards as distant and too analytical:

Historical explanations are a kind of anodyne. Feelings aroused by human suffering are put to rest when what happened is seen as a logical sequence of cause and effect and therefore to some extent inevitable. The victim’s reality is broken off from our own and posted to another region of being: the region of historical events. That happened, we tell ourselves, but in a different reality to our own. Only testimony with its perpetual present tense and its direct touch can lift out of us this delusion and destroy the semblance of necessity, logical end, and meaning. It does this not by clarifying: the witness talks of something that is incomprehensible in the hope that someone else will make it possible to understand and with the certainty that any explanation must be rejected as inadequate. In the revolt against explanations, testimony and literature are unified. (Engdahl 2002: 10)

Thus, literature prompts the testimony to become the voice of an experiential reality, of a reconnection of history with personal experience, and seeks to find a listener/reader who is prepared to bear witness of what he or she has to say. Correspondingly, the reader actively agrees to pay attention to what the testimony has to say, and he or she simultaneously becomes a witness of the story as well as a witness to him or herself.

Seen in the light of the above as well as of the points made in the preceding section, unlike narrative or poetry, theatre enables a more direct face-to-face encounter of the speaker and the listener, so that the latter has the possibility of responding ‘here and now’ through the active ethical gaze. Like narrative and poetry, theatre has always been an important part of Western culture and it has been repeatedly re-shaped by a whole spectrum of traditions. In the Series Editor’s Preface to *Theatre & Politics*, Rebellato claims that

theatre is everywhere, from the rituals of government to the ceremony of the courtroom, from the spectacle of the sporting arena to the theatres of war [and] across these many forms stretches a theatrical continuum through which cultures both assert and question themselves

[...] Over the past fifty years, theatre and performance have been deployed as key metaphors and practices with which to rethink gender, economics, war, language, the fine arts, culture and one's sense of self. (Rebellato in Kelleher 2009: vii)

Admittedly, although theatre maintains “a surprisingly stable cultural place in society next to technically advanced media” (Lehmann 2006: 18), it is not currently as central as it used to be, due to the spread of the technological media, which have gradually replaced theatre's position as sources of entertainment. Television has been defined as “live witness realized” (John Ellis qtd. in Saether 2008: 223) because it transgresses the limits of time and space and allows the audience to see what is happening in other parts of the world. Television has become a central part of our daily life, to the extent of having become one of the axes of Western popular culture. For Bauman, television has “conquered the earth and its inhabitants” for it has made a major impact “on the way we act and think” (Bauman 2002: 158). Indeed, in ‘liquid modernity’ television is a widely accessible, multifarious, highly successful way of show-casing (a version of) the world, for it is fast, constantly changing and it does not require full attention. Additionally, the emergence of ‘live broadcasting’ has melted reality and fiction together in such a way that nowadays “the world seen is [many times] the world as-seen-on-TV” (Bauman 2002: 158). To John Durham Peters, ‘live broadcasting’ represents “the category closest to the real-life experience of ‘being there’” (qtd. in Saether 2008: 223). Nonetheless, even live broadcasting clearly falls short of getting the spectator to be fully aware of his or her position as witness, because television “separate[s] our perception from our personal experience by constantly bombarding us with images, which [creates] ... passive recipient[s] of [this] media saturation” (Ridout 2009: 58) rather than active, fully-engaged listeners/witnesses.

Theatre, in contrast, has the power to place performers and spectators in the same place at the same time in a simultaneous ‘face-to-face’ encounter, where the active gaze enables a reconnection of “perception and experience” (Ridout 2009: 58). As Lehmann states, “theatre is the site [...] of a real gathering, a place where a unique intersection of aesthetically organised

and everyday life takes place”, a place where “the emission and reception of signs take place simultaneously” (Lehmann 2006: 18). This highlights theatre’s ethico-political potential, its capacity to impel the audience to reflect on the world and its contingencies:

Theatre inserts its ethical questions into the lives of its spectators in a situation in which those spectators are unusually conscious of their own status as spectators, and thus as people who may exercise ethical judgement. It also takes place in the presence of spectators who are aware of their status as spectators who are engaged in reciprocal spectatorship. We watch ourselves watching people engaging with an ethical problem while knowing that we are being watched in our watching (by other spectators and also by those we watch). Because so much ethics is concerned with questions such as the relationship between how people seem and how they are, this situation of mutual spectatorship raises the ethical stakes in theatre in a way that is not quite possible anywhere else. (Ridout 2009: 15)

Theatre, in other words, possesses the capacity to activate the ‘response-ability’ of the audience towards the events they are witnessing and it “can awaken in its audience a feeling of ethical responsibility to the people suffering” (Ridout 2009: 58). Theatre invites the spectator to respond critically to what he or she sees and to reflect on the other and/or on the self through the other. Through the ‘face-to-face’ encounter, the spectator/witness is encouraged to encounter the character/testimony “in a recognition of [their] mutual vulnerability which encourages relationships based on openness, dialogue and a respect for difference” (Ridout 2009: 54). Seen in this way, theatre represents a thoroughly ‘ethical’ way of listening to the other, of “accept[ing] an ethical responsibility for the other” (Ridout 2009: 64) that is dependent on ‘being there’ because, for Lehmann as much as for Lévinas, as Ridout notes, “presence matters” (Ridout 2009: 64).

### 3. Contemporary British Theatre from 1990s

Even though over the 1960s, 70s and 80s new theatre voices such as Caryl Churchill, Edward Bond, Martin Sherman, Peter Brook or Tom Murphy, among others, had already initiated a more aggressive and confrontational theatre (Sierz 2001: 17) which challenged censorship and social taboos, the rise of so-called in-yer-face theatre in the 1990s, was a turning-point in the history of British theatre.<sup>18</sup> Political theatre in Britain was reinvigorated by the many new voices who entered the theatrical arena. They proposed “blatantly aggressive provocative” (Oxford English Dictionary qtd. in Sierz 2001: 4) stories which “take the audience by the scruff of the neck and shake it until it gets the message” (Sierz 2001: 4) in an era which, as noted above, is known as the era of disengagement:

Contemporary political theatre acknowledges the basis of the current mood of disengagement by questioning and invalidating many of the ideas and practices that have constituted political activism. At the same time, it challenges indifference to politics by articulating issues of great immediacy in forms that signal their urgency. It contests apathy and cynical detachment through its example of engagement, and involves audiences in thinking about social and political issues without advocating particular ideologies to frame interpretation of those issues. The rich variety of new writing that has reinvigorated political theatre in Britain since 1995 offers a striking exhibition of current perspectives on public life and citizenship of the nation and world. (Kritzer 2008: 218)

1995, of course, was the year when Sarah Kane presented her first play, *Blasted*, which gave rise to a public controversy, and determined the advent of in-yer-face theatre, which would last until the very end of the new millennium.<sup>19</sup>

At the beginning of the 20th century, Antonin Artaud had already pointed out in his *Theatre of Cruelty: First Manifesto* (1932) that “[t]he theatre w[ould] never find itself again

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<sup>18</sup> Theatre censorship was “[i]ntroduced in Britain in 1737, modified in 1843 and, from 1909, governed by parliamentary guidelines, strict rules controlled the nation’s stages” (Sierz 2000: 11) not until 1968 that theatre censorship was abolished.

<sup>19</sup> See Graham Saunders (2002) *‘Love me or Kill Me’: Sarah Kane and The Theatre of Extremes* (Manchester University Press: Manchester) for further information on the controversy that *Blasted* generated.

except by furnishing the spectator with the truthful precipitates of dreams, in which his taste for crime, his erotic obsessions, his savagery, his chimeras, his utopian sense of life and matter, even his cannibalism pour[ed] out on a level not counterfeit and illusory, but interior” (Antonin Artaud qtd. in Sierz 2001: 14). Similarly, in-yer-face theatre, a concept coined by Aleks Sierz and “consolidated via his journalism and a website” [and] with his [...] book *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (2000)” (Osborne 2007: 222), aimed at an ‘experiential’ mode of audience address that “strongly suggest[ed] what is particular about the experience of watching extreme theatre – the feeling that your personal space is threatened” (Sierz 2008: 25). Playwrights began to critically examine contemporary British society through “the staging of taboos, extreme violence, representations of graphic sex acts” (Osborne 2007: 222). This elicited an (initially) outraged response on the part of both of mainstream critics and the wider audience. The aim, however, was to elaborate an ethical discourse on society and awake a critical consciousness in the audience:

Most in-yer-face theatre challenges the distinctions we use to define who we are: human/animal; clean/dirty; healthy/unhealthy; normal/abnormal; good/evil; true/untrue; real/unreal; right/wrong; just/unjust; art/life. These binary oppositions are central to our world-view; questioning them can be unsettling. [...] In-yer-face theatre forces us to look at ideas and feelings we would normally avoid because they are too painful, too frightening, too unpleasant or too acute. [...] Experiential theatre is potent precisely when it threatens to violate that sense of safety. (Sierz 2001: 6)

Thus, in-yer-face theatre avoided facile dichotomies and tried to “present violence without moral condemnation” and not to “invoke a simple oppressor-victim opposition, but consider the complexities involved in both positions” (Kritzer 2008: 114). Also, this theatre was fully conscious of the potential of the ‘face to face’ encounter and the ‘here and now’ situation and used theatre to force the audience to “become complicit witnesses”:

[I]n real time with real people acting just a few feet away from you, not only do you find yourself reacting but you also know that others are reacting and are aware of your reaction. Subjects that might be bearable when you read about them in private suddenly seem

electrifying when shown in public. Compared with the rather detached feeling of reading a playtext, sitting in the dark surrounded by a body of people while watching an explicit performance can be an overwhelming experience. When taboos are broken in public, the spectators often become complicit witnesses [...] For while no one believes literally in what is shown onstage [...] many spectators will invest emotionally in it. [...] And because the actors are always real people breathing the same air as the audience, the public tends to empathize strongly with it. (Sierz 2001: 7)

Despite the fact that in-yer-face theatre was profoundly influenced by Brecht's theatre and, in general, "by earlier eras of theatre, the in-yer-face plays do not express a sense of continuity" (Kritzer 2008: 30). Instead, they opt for a rejection of the past and they choose to present "a frank and sometimes frightening portrayal of their generation as a political force" (Kritzer 2008: 30).

In-yer-face theatre represented the awakening of a young generation of playwrights such as Antony Neilson, David Elridge, Mark Ravenhill, Patrick Marber, Phyllis Nagy or Sarah Kane, and many others, who "injected a dose of blatant extremism into British theatre and changed theatrical sensibility" (Sierz 2001: 10). Even though their writing varied in perspective and content, they all "sho[wed] a common impulse to confront audiences with the presence of the post-Thatcher generation" (Kritzer 2008: 62). They interrogated and even parodied Thatcher's discourse on the free market, individual autonomy or the importance of authority and "characters representing the post-Thatcher generation show[ed] disdain rather than respect" (Kritzer 2008: 66).

However, in-yer-face theatre tended to ignore issues such as racial tensions, hybridisation or multiculturalism, in spite of the racially-based conflicts that had been taken place during Thatcher's term of office period and had persisted subsequently. At the turn of the century, a new number of young dramatists "instead of replying directly to the in-yer-face dramatists [...] joined the generational debate by revising its terms" (Kritzer 2008: 79). Those playwrights chose to redirect their concerns towards questions of cultural identity/ies and relatedness, as

well as ethnic or class minorities – issues which were seldom present in in-yer-face theatre:

The in-yer-face plays, by ignoring issues of race, region, class, or ethnicity, mirrored the view of British society implicit in the refusal of the Conservatives to address such issues, despite race riots, strikes, and growing economic divisions during the Thatcher years. Younger playwrights whose political commitments arise from their experiences as members of a minority race or culture have placed issues of race, ethnicity, and class at the centre of the generational divide that metaphorically represents the British nation. Their plays make visible these sources of identity and conflict by situating questions of history, identity, and choice within specific social or geographic communities. (Kritzer 2008: 79)

Thus, since the dawn of the 21st century, ethnic minority British playwrights have sought to represent the experiences of ethnic groups within Britain, the ways in which their identities are constructed and the way in which their voice has often been marginalised. As Amelia Howe Kritzer points out in *Political Theatre in Post-Thatcher Britain: New Writing, 1995-2005*, it has not been easy for ethnic minority British playwrights to gain visibility and so “theatre based on the identities and experiences of non-whites British people has been slow to develop” (2008: 79). Few theatres have paid attention to minority ethnic playwriting in Britain, and neither has it been easy to gain the attention of white audiences:

Currently, only four companies focus on the experience of ethnicity in Britain. Tara Arts, founded in 1977, focuses on the cultural heritage of British Asians. Talawa Theatre Company, which began producing plays in 1986, develops new writing by British dramatists of West Indian and African descent. Tamasha Theatre, founded in 1989, has sought out new plays based in the experiences of Asians in contemporary Britain. Nitro Theatre Company (formerly the Black Theatre Cooperative) mounts occasional music theatre productions written by and featuring black artists. None of these companies operates its own venue, but their productions have been crucial in nurturing the development of black and Asian theatre artists. The Theatre Royal Stratford East, the Tricycle, and the Hackney Empire, in addition, actively address non-white audiences. The Royal Court has introduced such playwrights as Mustapha Matura, Hanif Kureishi, and Winsome Pinnock, and the National has premiered recent work by playwrights of colour. (Kritzer 2008: 79)

Indeed, as Kritzer claims, multiethnic Britain has been and continues to be a reality and, thus, “unresolved tensions arising from racism and ethnocentrism [...] constitute important elements

of contemporary British politics” (Kritzer 2008: 79). It is such conflicts that are addressed by many contemporary black British playwrights, whose work deal with inter-ethnic conflicts and racial tensions.

### **3.1. Black British Theatre**

Black British dramatists have been marked, for many decades, by invisibility, difference and otherness. Until the 1990s, black playwrights had dealt with issues such as “origin, migration, displacement, diaspora, arrival and otherness” (Peacock 2008: 48) in their plays. However, second-generation black dramatists not only interrogated concepts such as ‘assimilation’ or ‘otherness’ but they also used “theatre to express their frustrations about being born and brought up, but not accepted in Britain” (Wambu 2011). Initially, contemporary black British dramatists had focused mainly on “the change of identity from one generation to the next in families who have immigrated to Britain” (Kritzer 2008: 80) and the experience of the following generations of black British who, far from succeeding in the process of assimilation of mainstream British culture, felt the need to rediscover themselves through their in-between and often unstable position within contemporary Britain. At the turn of the century, a new wave of young black writers emerged, though, and this time they presented a new drama which would give black writers access to

the white-dominated means of representation to offer a presence and a voice for those who, because of their race, ethnic origin and history, have been considered by the white majority and, indeed, often by themselves, to be outside mainstream culture. (Peacock 2008: 48)

Those young black British dramatists, who “in all spheres of expertise [...] encountered roadblocks on their routes to development and practice” (Osborne 2007: 223), had to struggle not to go unnoticed within mainstream culture and to find a unique style of writing which

wouldn’t be marginalised as ‘Black’, ‘Commonwealth’ or any other kind of literature that put it at the edges. It would be a fully fledged member of the broad range of British writing. These young writers

were critical insiders not outsiders, and had moved from post-colonialism to multicultural Britain. (Wambu 2011)

As a result, contemporary black British dramatists chose to define their identity as the result of a process of hybridization (Peacock 2008: 49) and focused their attention on “third-generation teenagers and their place within a hybrid urban culture” (Peacock 2008: 53). From the urban lifestyle, rap music and gang culture, potent subcultures emerged and were considered “a way of continuing an open sense of black collectivity in the shifting, changing beat of the present” (Homi Bhabha qtd. in Peacock 2008: 49). However, this also led to a “nihilistic black-British subculture of violence [...] and gun crime” (Peacock 2008: 53-54) which, as has been previously said, represents a major problem within multicultural Britain. Despite the difficulties in making their voice heard, contemporary black British playwrights have increasingly overcome silence and have been able to place audiences face-to-face with the most uncomfortable side of racism in Britain.

While silence and lack of visibility have been huge obstacles in the development of black British theatre, representationalism – the expectation that ethnic minority writers have to represent one sole black identity with which all black people would feel identified – has also been a source of conflict for ethnic minority dramatists:

[D]ramatists seeking to have their work produced at the end of the twentieth century face the familiar conundrum of representationalism vs. artistic individualism – a constraint that their white counterparts simply do not have to face. (Osborne 2007: 224)

Black theatre has often been expected to be ‘black’ and ‘urban’. As Lola Young claims, “there is the complicity on the part of black people too, who view anything that isn’t ‘street’ to be ‘inauthentic’ and not ‘really black’” (qtd. in Osborne 2007: 224). As a result, black playwrights have faced the need to find a unique aesthetics and form, which, by being different from ‘white theatre’, “will have the power and influence to move forward” (Cross qtd. in Peacock 2008: 225). Contemporary playwrights who belong to minority ethnic groups are trying to redefine

their

national identity as much as they articulate issues of individual identity [and] make visible what has occurred but has not been fully recognized: the development of a heterogeneous cultural landscape in which there are various patterns of connection and separation. (Kritzer 2008: 95)

At the same time, and “in contrast to [...] the first in-her-face playwrights”, contemporary black British playwrights seek to “communicate an interest in the future and a sense that they stand at the beginning of a history yet to be written rather than at the end of one that has been discredited” (Kritzer 2008: 96). They see in theatre an active way of problematising the violence and multicultural tensions that have been taking place in Britain in the last decades.

In 1998, Richard Norton Taylor and the Tricycle Theatre presented one of the most challenging tribunal plays on racial issues that had been performed so far.<sup>20</sup> *The Colour of Justice*, a play which focused on the murder and the subsequent trial of Stephen Lawrence – a case that has been mentioned in the previous chapter – “made a major public impact [and] it [still] stands out as one of the most successful attempts to use theatre to make an issue visible” (Kritzer 2008: 156). *The Colour of Justice* dealt with issues such as loss and, despair, and strongly suggested that the police force sometimes act according to a racially motivated unfairness. The staging of the trial in the form of a ‘tribunal play’ managed to get the audience involved and invited them to become critical about the case. The success of this and other

tribunal theatre lies in the opportunity it gives the audience to consider individual actions, see and hear those individuals defend their actions, and participate in judgement. This means of presenting issues thus functions in a unique way to involve audience members. The evidence may be vivid and even dramatic, but the memorable experience consists in drawing one’s own conclusions on the basis of hearing and considering the evidence. (Kritzer 2008: 158)

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<sup>20</sup> Richard Norton Taylor is a white British journalist, current security editor of the *Guardian*, and playwright, whose play, *The Colour of Justice*, was one of the most prominent plays within the ‘Tribunal plays’ produced by the Tricycle Theatre, North London. ‘Tribunal plays’ are based “scrupulously on transcripts from high-profile inquiries [...] and are set in faithful reproduction of the courtroom environment. They recreate the public occasion that ‘happened’ and was purposefully fashioned to find the ‘truth’ about controversial events” (Botham 2009: 36). Such plays are highly influenced by ‘Verbatim theatre’, which emerged in Britain on the 1960s and 1970s and which was based on people’s actual words and thoughts connected to their lives.

Norton Taylor argued that theatre is “‘a medium complementary to newspapers’ that ‘can lead to a greater understanding of how we are governed and what is being said and done on our behalf’” (qtd. in Kritzer 2008: 159) and that

the value of the play lies in the directness of using only words spoken in the proceedings, rather than second-hand descriptions, and the completeness of a finished story, as opposed to the day-to-day reporting of pieces of the story. (Kritzer 2008: 159)

Thus, Norton Taylor chose theatre as a way of eliciting a critical response to the Stephen Lawrence case and to racial harassment at large. As Michael Billington points out, the play “really showed the potential of verbatim theatre: that it could operate simultaneously as source of information, work of art and instrument of social change” (Billington 2007: 385). Similarly, David Hare claimed that

[Norton Taylor] laid before a live audience all the subtleties and intricacies of British racism, all its forms and gradations, with a clarity which I had never seen emulated by television, documentary or newspaper. The play seemed not just a rebuke to the British theatre for its drift towards less and less important subject matter: it also seemed to expose other forms by the sheer seriousness and intensity with which it was able to bring the theatre’s special scrutiny to bear. (qtd. in Billington 2007: 386)

In 1999, black playwright Roy Williams’s *Lift Off* examined “race relations through the lives of urban youths who not only accept black culture, but also admire and emulate a particular black stereotype” (Kritzer 2008: 83) and believe that they must endure pain to become part of a gang. At the turn of the century, Williams “shift[ed] his focus from issues of identity within the Afro-Caribbean community to exclusion of Afro-Caribbeans from the concept of British identity” (Kritzer 2008: 158) and presented *Sing Yer Heart Out for the Lads* (2002), a play which “highlights the illusionary aspect of national unity” but also the constant racial tensions which problematise any sense of British ‘togetherness’. One year later, Williams’s *Fallout* (2003) premiered at the Royal Court Theatre Downstairs; the play which, distantly echoed the Stephen Lawrence case, addresses the story of a black-to-black unprovoked murder and the dubious

attitude of the police to “make its viewers consider aspects of 21st century British society and its black teen sub-culture in a fresh light” (Fisher 2003). Like Williams’s plays, Kwane Kwei-Amah’s *Elmina’s Kitchen* (2003) and *Fix-Up* (2004), both premiered at the National Theatre, are also “written in realistic style and take a complex view of individuals involved with the ongoing creation of Afro-Caribbean culture in Britain” (Kritzer 2008: 92).

Most recently, *Look to the Sky* (2011) written by Courttia Newland is a vivid, fresh, urban play which “deals with issues of knife crime, drugs, family and friendship” (Nutland 2011) as experienced by contemporary British youths through a highly poetic, urban language. The play was nominated for the Alfred Fagon Awards 2010 and it has been performed in London in the Half Moon Young People’s Theatre, The Broadway, Tara Studio and The Albany among others. Such plays exemplify the efforts of black British playwrights to gain visibility and to be included as part of the wider notion of British culture by putting at the forefront issues such as multiculturalism, belonging and exclusion, racial tensions and violence. Nevertheless, despite black British playwrights’ demand for attention and their evident will to take part in the reshaping of post-Thatcher political theatre,

[i]n the first decade of the new millennium, white men continue to maintain hegemonic sovereignty in the realm of theatre despite recent governmental arts policies [and] contemporary media coverage highlighting the need for greater diversity. (Osborne 2007: 224)

While black British theatre is gradually moving from the margins to the centre of British culture – “in terms of the British stage there is a black in the Union Jack” (Sierz 2006: 187) – many black playwrights have noted that “increased visibility might be one thing, [but] it does not equate to any real increase in institutional power – black artists are still utterly dependent on white-run institutions” (Wilkinson 2010). The debate on visibility and oppression is an ongoing one and, as the *Guardian* posted in February 2010, it has been transferred to the blogosphere, where black and white playwrights and critics discuss the contingencies of racial difference and

power within the theatrical arena.

### **3.2. Black Women's Theatre**

If contemporary black British dramatists have generally found it difficult to gain a place in the British theatrical arena, black *women* dramatists are still one of the most invisible minority groups within British theatre. And yet, black women playwrights, who have been struggling for decades to erase the indelible mark of being sexually and racially discriminated on, articulate a potential counter-discourse by “deconstruct[ing] significations of authority and power exercised in the canonical text” (Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins qtd. in Osborne 2007: 226) while recreating a multiplicity of identities stemming from the black experience. Even today, as Deirdre Osborne states, “the staging of Black British women’s drama, in particular, still remains, at best rare [and] sex, gender and race disadvantages appear to fuse more acutely in this context than in other arts disciplines” (Osborne 2007: 226). However, black British women playwrights continue to fight for and to try to preserve the (still lesser) recognition they have reached.

The Black feminist movement that emerged in the United States in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement (1955–1968) and led many black feminists to ‘grab the microphone’ to “free all women: women of colour, working class women, poor women, disabled women, lesbians, old women – as well as white, economically privileged, heterosexual women” (Smith 1982: 49), meant a huge step towards the eradication of sexism and racism and the recognition of the black experience. Most black feminists supported the idea of establishing a common collective identity and defending it in front of the white supremacist ideology while, at the same time, acknowledging the diverse identities which make up the ‘black experience’. Many black feminists articulated discourses on the importance of experience. This was the case of bell hooks [sic], an iconic black feminist, who argued that “there is a radical difference between a repudiation of the idea that there is a black ‘essence’ and recognition of the way black identity has been specifically constituted in the experience of exile and struggle” (hooks 1993: 1993).

Likewise, numerous black American playwrights aimed at proving the validity of their writing and developing a new aesthetics. One of the examples is ntozake shange [sic], whose *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf* (1974), a play/choreopoem, not only had an enormous impact in the theatrical arena but it has become an inspirational source for many American and European dramatists. The play explores womanhood, blackness and plurality, as well as experiences of discrimination, violence and abuse, and it intertwines music, poetry, dancing, thus creating a unique piece which became widely recognised as a masterpiece.

Following this line, the first black women's theatre company in Britain, Theatre Black Women, was created in 1982 by Bernardine Evaristo, Patricia St. Hilaire and Paulette Randall. Later on, in 1985, Talawa Theatre Company – one of the most salient black theatre companies in Britain – was founded by four black women in London as a reaction to the “lack of creative opportunities for actors from minority ethnic backgrounds and the general marginalisation of black peoples from cultural processes that was prevalent at the time of the Company's inception” (Talawa Theatre Company 2011). During the 1980s, black British women dramatists, who acknowledged the problems of labelling their theatre as feminist or non-feminist and preferred being described as writing from “women's perspective” (Goodman 1996: 132), had the opportunity of “transforming the gendered rhetoric of belonging in new ways” (Joseph 1999: 111), for before this period, “the discourses of identity and belonging in black British cultural production were predominantly male narratives foregrounding male subjectivity” (Joseph 1999: 111). Thus, black British women playwrights, especially from the 1990s on, “created their own vanguard in relation to mainstream theatres” (Peacock 2008: 226) and aimed at voicing their dissatisfaction with the fact that “the majority of images of black women represented on stage reiterate [stereotypical and] heterosexist ideas” (Goddard 2007:1). As Lynnette Goddard points out, following bell hook's ideas on the crucial role that the mass media

play in shaping the representation of black female identities,

the key to changing views about black humanity therefore lies within the power afforded by the representation of ideas [which] have to first be presented in our imaginations before they can be present in our lives, which is particularly crucial for representations of the ‘other’ that need to work towards decolonising institutionalised ideas about race, gender and sexuality and imagine new ways of seeing. (2007: 5)

Consequently, black woman’s theatre made use of theatre’s potential to explore “cultural identity, holding within it the possibility of recognising the ways that we think about each other” (Goddard 2007: 1) and, thus, of subverting stereotypical imaginaries on black female figures.

With the new millennium, a second wave of black women dramatists has emerged who celebrate their in-between position in relation to the mainstream culture, while they explore new sensibilities not only linguistically but also aesthetically. This new group of black women playwrights focus on

the exploration of the politics of identity in the here and now, whose starting point is not the West Indies, but London, and sometimes encompasses white characters. It is recognition, as Hall suggests, that cultural identities are hybrid and ‘undergo constant transformation’ [...] At the beginning of the new millennium, [...] there is also a hybrid approach that does not privilege racial difference but explores, from a black woman’s perspective, gender, social and domestic relationships. (Peacock 2008: 63)

Recent black female dramatists do not seek to defend the early feminism that helped women gain visibility and which was, most of the times, a central issue in the first wave of black women’s theatre. Rather, they examine individual lives and address all types of audiences, regardless of their race or gender, while they seek to resituate black women’s theatre from the margins to the centre of British culture in order to both challenge the idea that black female playwriting was not worth listening to in the context of a “white-led cultural production in Britain”, and to include ethnic minority “audience members in traditionally ‘all-white on the

night' mainstream arenas of performance" (Osborne 2010: 26). Moreover, they

effect substantial forays into dismantling the identity-politics or issues-based contingencies in which Black drama in Britain traditionally has been housed – to the point of claustrophobia. Additionally, their *dramatis personae* challenge assumptions, expectations and stereotyping regarding age and race in relation to casting. In contrasting ways, they produce sustained experimentation with form, style and subject matter to assert black experience as more universal than marginal. (Osborne 2010: 32)

The new drama written by black women addresses both the personal and the political and breaks away from "a status quo that privileges white males without indicating or interrogating key shifts in late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century British theatre" (Osborne 2010: 204).

Playwrights such as Dona Daley, Jackie Kay, Patience Agbabi or Winsome Pinnock

provide compelling examples of the key ways in which contemporary women dramatists articulate sensibilities and perspectives – arising from their positions within culture and theatre – that are distinct from those of their male contemporaries. Their plays [...] experimentally and linguistically take drama down new routes in the indigenous British theatrescape. (Osborne 2007: 226)

#### 4. debbie tucker green [sic]: *random* and *dirty butterfly*

Among the many neo-millennial British women playwrights, debbie tucker green has been praised and acclaimed as representative of the new wave of black British playwriting that has recently emerged. Humorously, Lynette Goddard highlights "the 'auto-correction' feature on MS Word<sup>→</sup> that unfailingly imposes capitalisation on tucker green's name" (Goddard 2007: 230) and on the titles of her plays. Indeed, her unique and stylistically challenging voice is made evident in the use of the lower-case when she writes her own name or the title of her plays, which echoes US black writer ntozake shange, or the feminist bell hooks, both of them intentionally uncapitalised to highlight the primacy of their work over their own selves as

writers.<sup>21</sup>

The number of characters that appear in tucker green's plays is small. The props are usually minimalistic and the duration of the plays is short. Her language is radical, concise, highly poetic and musical. She intermingles frenzied repetitions with overlapping dialogues, challenges standard English grammatical rules and gives great importance to punctuation marks and silences. Moreover, dialects and urban accents are very much present in her plays, for most of her characters are West Indian black British people. Although sometimes criticised, her linguistic style, which mixes "patois, choreo-poetical, and non-grammatical syntax [...], qualifies for Kristeva's revolution in poetic language" (Osborne 2007: 226). Indeed, her voice comes from her experience as a black British woman who has been in contact with the urban speech style that characterises black people – mainly of Caribbean descent. As she herself has pointed out, the language of her plays reflects the way "people speak. [...] Listen to a group of kids: just repeat and repeat and repeat [...] 'It's hot outside; it's really hot, innit? I bet it's really hot.' So 'suddenly you've got half a page of dialogue'" (tucker green qtd. in Sierz 2010). Moreover, her style signifies to her commitment to giving a voice to marginalised groups and including them as part of the picture of British society and culture:

tucker green's plays tend to be delivered via internal monologues or dialogues that uncompromisingly jar (both in content and rhythm) against the familiarity of social realism. Their linguistic remorselessness and rawness are simultaneously alienating and compelling. She resists the imposition of Standard English, a fact that led one white male critic to mimic and deride it in his review of *dirty butterfly* as 'Ali G-style patois [...] not so much ethereal as absurd. A no-go zone innit' (Cavendish 2003), thus ignoring the emotional throb that this pared down language pounds out in delivery. Whilst acknowledging her radical voice and style [...] tucker green revives and revitalises the techniques of her woman dramatist forebears. Their innovations are embedded in her texts and, yet, taken in new directions. (Osborne 2007: 231)

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<sup>21</sup> The American poet and dramatist e.e. cummings's editors also chose to uncapitalise his name so as to evoke to his unusual writing style.

Her plays actively talk about ethnic minority groups who experience violence on a daily basis and whose tragedies go unnoticed by the media or mainstream society:

Obviously I'm a black woman, so I know the conversations I've had with my friends. With Zimbabwe, we were like 'You know what, if it was them, they'd make sure it was on the news, they would sure [sic] it was flagged up 24/7 if it was white people'. So that's from my standpoint, but obviously my standpoint is different to somebody else's standpoint, maybe a white person's standpoint (tucker green in Peacock 2008: 60).

In terms of the content, she chooses very traumatic, unpleasant, extremely controversial topics for her plays, such as domestic violence and voyeurism (*dirty butterfly*, 2003), incest (*born bad*, 2003), sexual tourism (*trade*, 2005), rape, child soldiers, AIDS and lapidation (*stoning mary*, 2005), racial prejudice and street crime (*random*, 2008) and international conflicts (*truth and reconciliation*, 2011). Unsurprisingly, she admits that she feels attracted to violence or, as she states, stories which "are quite mundane. Then they just get darker. I'm interested in normal situations that become dark. I find it intriguing; it's all out there" (tucker green qtd. in Sierz 2010). Nevertheless, despite the disturbing nature of the topics she deals with, tucker green refrains from using sordid or unpleasant images. Instead, she foregrounds language and the power of the imagination, which can make the audience feel even more uncomfortable than explicit violence.

tucker green's theatre is also strongly influenced by Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre. Brecht stated that in epic theatre "no appeal is made to the spectator's capacity for empathy. The art of "epic theatre consists in arousing astonishment rather than empathy" (Benjamin 2003: 18). Brecht's 'V effect' of 'Verfremdungseffekt' – also known as the alienation or distancing effect – consisted in a series of devices, such as having the actors remain detached from the characters' emotions, inviting the audience to critically examine the characters' actions, or using interruptive sounds or lights, which aimed at preventing the audience from falling into the process of emotional identification with the story. For Brecht, distancing becomes

necessary to all understanding. When something seems ‘the most obvious thing in the world’ it means that any attempt to understand the world has been given up [...] The epic theatre’s spectator says: I’d never have thought it – That’s not the way – That’s extraordinary, hardly believable – It’s got to stop – The sufferings of this man appal me, because they are unnecessary. That’s great art: nothing obvious in it – I laugh when they weep, I weep when they laugh. (Brecht 1993: 217)

Like Brecht, debbie tucker green attempts to break across the fourth wall and uses language and props to alienate the audience from the characters so that they can respond critically to the stories she presents. At the same time, she manages to enhance the complicity between the actors and the audience, whose expectant eye is empowered to construct a personal opinion. Echoing Brecht’s ‘Lehrstükem’ or ‘learning plays’, tucker green’s plays “[re]present the current society and the social conditions of [violence] in order that we may involve ourselves in the process of theatre-as-learning” (Reinelt 2004: 53).

Furthermore, tucker green is part of a new and very contemporary group of playwrights who “tend to focus more on the interpersonal relationships between characters in urban multifarious (multicultural, multiracial, multifait) communities to ask complex questions about the world we live in now” (Goddard 2009: 96) instead of talking about the experience of emigration or exile, as previous black playwrights had been doing. Her plays “incorporate the linguistic innovations and the thematic complexities that texture contemporary Black British women’s drama to charge British theatre with an extraordinary challenging aesthetics” (Osborne 2007: 239). Moreover, her theatre has contributed to black British women playwrights’ growing visibility within the context of contemporary British theatre, although they still run the risk of going unnoticed. Her political views move far away from both the mainstream concept of British identity and from racial essentialisms:

[tucker green] refuses to speak of her own ancestry, although her family appear to have come from Jamaica, and is unwilling to reveal her date and place of birth, considering that her origins are irrelevant to an understanding of her work. Nevertheless, tucker green [...] recognizes that her desire and ability to offer a different perspective

are consequent on her ethnic origin and cultural location. (Peacock 2008: 59-60)

She combines black and white actors and actresses and explores different settings, so as to prove that her theatre addresses not only black audiences, but human beings at large, because her stories deal with marginalisation and discrimination as much as with insolidarity, prejudices, sorrow and violence, which affect “London today irrespective of race” (Goddard 2009: 308).

This dissertation will argue that tucker green’s plays have the potential to awaken spectators’ ethical ‘response-ability’. Spectators are exposed, through her plays, to stories of suffering. Lehmann claims, when the audience enters a theatre, they become aware of their situation as witnesses, sitting face-to-face with the speaker and actively agreeing to listen to the horrors which are the subject matter of tucker green’s plays – knife crime, domestic violence, racism. Thus, tucker green forces the audience to respond to the plays by putting them in the uncomfortable situation of being ‘here and now’ with the actors and actresses who, through the performance, bear witness to horror. Thus, the audience simultaneously observes and listens to the testimony while is being observed. This leads the audience to become active witnesses and to respond critically to issues that are being largely ignored in contemporary Britain. Specifically, tucker green’s *dirty butterfly* (2003) and *random* (2008) deal with domestic violence and street crime respectively, two central sources of conflict in contemporary Britain, and interrogate the reaction of British society and the media to such events, which take place almost on a daily basis. Both plays articulate a critical view on prejudices and violence, from a neo-millennial black British woman’s perspective that steers clear of avoiding essentialist attitudes.

Many critics have linked debbie tucker green with the in-yer-face theatre and, more concretely, with Sarah Kane. Nevertheless, although “her poetic depictions of uncomfortable emotions are similar to the visceral and experiential [in-yer-face] trends”, her theatre “departs from such in-yer-face theatre conventions” (Goddard 2009: 306), and it is more connected to the new wave of “young playwrights whose political commitments arise from their experiences as

member of a minority race or culture [and who] have placed issues of race, ethnicity and class at the centre” (Kritzer 2008: 78), which, as has been previously mentioned, were not in the in-yer-face agenda. In fact, tucker green admits to have been much more influenced by black writers such as ntozake shange and Louise Bennet, and musicians like Lauryn Hill, Bob Marley or Beverly Knight. With all of them, she shares a local colour in their plays, and intertwines politics with lyrical realism and musicality.

#### **4.1. *dirty butterfly* (2003)**

Domestic violence has been for many decades and continues to be a controversial issue in contemporary Western society. debbie tucker green’s first play *dirty butterfly* unfolds a story of domestic violence, abuse, fear and silence. It explores the role of both the victim and the perpetrator while it suggests that knowing about and having the capacity to change an unfair and exploitative situation do not always lead to actual action being taken about it.

*dirty butterfly*, which was “shortlisted for the Alfred Fagon Award for playwrights of Caribbean descent” (Goddard 2005: 377), premiered in 2003 at the Soho Theatre, London. The play is divided into two parts, one long scene and an epilogue, and there are three characters – Jo, a white woman whose husband abuses her, and Amelia and Jason, Jo’s black neighbours, who witness, from their flat, Jo’s abuse. While tucker green has used generic names in her plays many times – as in *born bad* (2003), *random* (2008) or *stoning mary* (2005) – the character’s specific proper names in *dirty butterfly* emphasise “that they are portraying personal, rather than socially or culturally predicated responses” (Peacock 2008: 61). The play opens with a specification of the skin-colour of the characters, something which, despite Peacock claims to be “irrelevant to the concerns of the play” (2008: 61) potentially challenges the prejudiced idea that black people are more likely to be violent, as well as that domestic violence is more common within black families. Jo, the victim of abuse, is white whereas the neighbours are black:

### **Characters**

AMELIA, *black*

JASON, *black*

JO, *white* (tucker green 2003: 2)

Then, a series of stage directions are given. The presence of all the actors onstage for the duration of the play's long scene is required – even if Jo and Amelia/Jason are supposed to occupy different spaces in 'reality' – and the sitting arrangement for the audience is supposed to surround the actors. Such disposition prompts the rupture of the fourth wall, so that, the audience is immensely involved in the performance and invited to become an active part of it. Furthermore, spectators are able to follow the actions of the actors closely. At the same time, the actors' "*dialogue is always between each other and never to the audience*" (tucker green 2003: 2); while being watched, they are also able to watch the audience. This way, both actors and audience become aware of the fact that they are being watched and, thus, become witnesses of the other and witnesses to their act of witnessing.

In addition, in the opening stage directions, tucker green specifies that,

*/ denotes where the dialogue starts to overlap. Throughout this section options can be taken regarding who is talking to who and when, with varying implications for the characters. The form of the piece has been left open for these choices to be made.*

*Names appearing without dialogue indicate active silences between characters listed.*

*Music track: 'Secret Place' by Jhelisa (from 12.inch, not album version). (tucker green 2003: 2)*

The slashes that denote overlapping dialogue, as well as the 'beats' (short sentences) that constantly interrupt dialogues and the pauses mirror Caryl Churchill's style – as Goddard points out, Churchill's "invention of the overlapping dialogue has [...] influenced [tucker green's] own dramatic strategies. In this respect, tucker green revives and revitalises her [Churchill's] dramatic strategies" (2007: 231). The constant repetitions, the use of silences and frequent interruptions, and the British-Caribbean 'ungrammatical' turns of phrase, are also central to tucker green's writing.

The story starts with the three characters onstage. Jo, the white woman who is a victim of domestic violence, repeatedly cries out “Sorry... I’m sorry... sorry...sorry I’m sorry...” (tucker green 2003: 3) to her husband, and the only wall that separates her from her neighbours, Amelia and Jason, does not prevent them from overhearing her pleas and her sufferings.<sup>22</sup> Even though the main part of the play takes place, from what is understood, in two different flats separated by a thin wall, this illusionistic border “is dissolved in a merging of their consciousness” (Osborne 2007: 233). The characters address each other and comment on each other’s reactions and thoughts as if the physical wall did not exist:

AMELIA. See, so –how bout, Jo, you tryin t’ mek the effort –

JO. I did.

AMELIA. Some piece a effort to try to shut the fuck up?

Bietcha lip or sumthin.

JO. He does that for me.

AMELIA. Hodja tongue.

JO. He does that for me an all.

[...]

JO. Heard you the other side still, still trying not to be heard...

JASON. I won’t go nowhere.

AMELIA. You shoulda come, Jase.

JO. But you’ve gone, Amelia.

You’ve got up, you’ve got out and you have left. (tucker green 2003: 12)

Nevertheless, Amelia and Jason take very different attitudes to the situation they are undergoing:

AMELIA *starts to sing, increasing her volume to try to drown out the repetitive sound of JO.*

JASON. Sssh.

*They both stop.*

*Beat.*

JO picks up AMELIA’s melody.

JO. Hmmm, you ever?

JASON (to AMELIA). You ever –

AMELIA (to JASON). you ever got that feelin –

JO. you ever –

AMELIA. Got that reckless kinda feelin?

JASON. You ever –

AMELIA. got that can’t find something to match your mood kinda feelin – you ever got that, Jase?

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<sup>22</sup> Even though the text mentions the fact that there is a physical wall separating Jo’s flat from Amelia and Jason’s flat, this wall is not physically present on stage in the performance of *dirty butterfly*.

JO. You ever –  
JASON. Found yourself doin somethin you can't help.  
AMELIA. You ever –  
JASON. Gotcha self doin something you can't stop.  
*Beat.*  
'Melia?  
AMELIA. No. (tucker green 2003: 3)

Whereas Amelia constantly tries to avoid hearing Jo, and she claims “I’m not going up to hear – [...] *She*. [...] bleedin thru” (tucker green 2003: 7), Jason becomes obsessed with hearing Jo and “listens through the thin wall, secretly aroused” (Goddard 2005: 377). Amelia complains about the disturbance that hearing Jo creates in her routine:

AMELIA. [...] See – how bout she lettin me get back to the normal  
that I  
know.  
The mornins that I knew.  
JO. –  
AMELIA. How bout that then?  
How bout her mornins not infringing on mine? (tucker green 2003: 4)

Amelia sleeps on their sofa, because it is her only way of escaping Jo’s noise. Amelia is full of resentment and jealousy, and blames Jason, for he chooses to be upstairs to hear Jo rather than come downstairs with her. In her interior monologues and her conversations with Jason and even when she meets Jo, Amelia ridicules and denigrates her neighbour Jo and judges her cruelly. She selfishly ignores Jo’s suffering – “I can’t stand you. I can’t stand the you and your him nex door to me. You and your bad both a yers nex door to me – you and your bad – sex – nex to me – nex door to me, nex door to my bedroom” (tucker green 2003: 8). The relationship between Amelia and Jason has been severely damaged by the situation and by the fact that he has organised his life around the events that take place in their neighbour’s house. Amelia resents being disturbed by such unsettling noises of violence and reproaches both Jo and Jason that the situation has led her to a state of physical and mental breakdown:

JASON. How bout you not sleepin on your sofa?  
AMELIA. How bout you makin it to your bed?  
JASON. How bout you makin it up your stairs –

AMELIA. how bout that them Jay?  
 JASON. You ever / tried doin what I –  
 AMELIA. My sofa ent no sofa bed. And my downstairs ent no  
 bedroom. But I can sleep on it –  
 [...]  
 AMELIA. got used to it good.  
 [...]  
 AMELIA. And I wash in my downstairs sink –  
 JASON. You don't have to  
 AMELIA. do my teeth in there and all.  
 JASON. You don't have to.  
 AMELIA. And you don't have to sit up there, be up there. Jason.  
 It's not compulsory.  
 JASON. Unlike the art a sleepin in your front room.  
 AMELIA.  
 JASON.

(tucker green 2003: 5)

Despite their different reactions, neither Amelia nor Jason try to help Jo or even save themselves from the situation. Rather, they become silent witnesses, perpetrators of the physical abuse that Jo suffers – late in the play, Jason says, “maybe I coulda phoned like I should, but I forgot I didn't have your number. And maybe I regret I never called round like I could but I forgot I don't even know you. And I'm still next door” (tucker green 2003: 34). Meanwhile, Jo is trapped in her tragic situation, constantly scared of doing anything that could bother her partner or making a noise that could wake him up while he sleeps:

JO. you ever wanted – to piss?  
*Beat.*  
 AMELIA. no.  
 JO. Proper get the urge to power piss.  
 AMELIA. *No.*  
 JO. Got the ultimate – do it or die, have to go – piss?  
 AMELIA *glares coldly at JO.*  
 Hold it in for the longest time convincing yourself you don't  
 really wanna – butcha got no choice an / haveta –  
 [...]  
 JO. And I look beside me to / check –  
 [...]  
 JO. I sneak a peep, shift a touch, ease up –  
 JASON. from under.  
 JO. Ease out.  
 JASON. from beside him  
 JO. and creep out

[...]

JO. You ever woke up wishin this day to be your last.

You ever wondered that?

[...]

JO. Felt like badness gone wrong – the insides of me carryin on wrong like they’re looking for a way out. And I felt I just wanted to get this day started cos this new morning was already looking old. (tucker green 2003: 12, 13 and 23)

Domestic violence has become so common that we seem to have become desensitised to the images and stories that are frequently present in the media. In 2002, the Royal College Psychiatrists’ Council Report on domestic violence claimed that “a recent British crime survey reported that about one in four women (23%) and one in seven men (15%) had been physically assaulted by their partner at some point in their lives” and that “[w]omen are at greatest risk of violence from their partners if they attempt to leave them” (Mezey et al. 2002: 7). In many cases, the ‘co-dependency’ that is created between the victim and the perpetrator, and “the daily threat to physical and psychological integrity gradually undermine the victim’s capacity to exert any resistance or to oppose the wishes of the partner” (Mezey et al. 2002: 7). In *dirty butterfly*, Jo does not seem to be able to leave her mate, even though every day she wakes up thinking that he is going to kill her. She is also aware of the fact that both Amelia and Jason are accomplices to her abuse and critical of Jason’s voyeuristic behaviour: “I hear him hearing.../ I hear him hearing me hear. / And he knows it” (tucker green 2003: 14). Nevertheless, Jason remains silent, obsessively listening and not helping her. Jason incarnates the ‘bad witness’, for he is paralysed by being “complicit for his own purposes” (Peacock 2008: 62). Nevertheless, Jo seems to be aware of the fact that she is being listened to and, whereas she is the victim in her relationship with her partner, she becomes the perpetrator of Jason’s obsession. Jo knows that she has a certain power over Jason, for he acts in accordance to Jo’s noises and silences.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Although several critics have compared debbie tucker green with Sarah Kane, she has often claimed to “know her work but the language is completely different” (tucker green in Sierz 2010). Nevertheless, despite the aesthetical differences, like *dirty butterfly*, Kane’s *Blasted* (1995) also interrogates the roles of the victim and the perpetrator and deals with a crisis of witnessing. In both plays, silence and alienation perpetuate violence and the

Hence, the three characters are brought together by their proximity and become accomplices of each other, for “trapped in a cycle of poverty and racial discrimination, Amelia and Jason cannot escape the dark and compelling world of their neighbour Jo, who in turn cannot seem to break from the reality of her own horrors” (Terrell 2010). The three individuals’ lives are shattered and their state of paralysis makes change and help impossible.

Towards the end of the play’s one long scene, the tone gets more aggressive and darker. Jo, Jason and Amelia’s voices discuss the way in which Jo’s abuse has trapped Jason, and Amelia accuses Jo of having control over him and of being fully conscious of Jason’s obsessive voyeurism. All of them show themselves unable to empathise with each other, although they are fully aware of how much they all suffer. Instead of helping each other move forward, they are trapped in mutual rebukes:

JASON. ... You got me been there for d-d-days  
AMELIA. You got him addicted you have.  
[...]  
JASON. You got me not eating. Not sleeping.  
You got my ear against our wall.  
JO. Why don’t you walk?  
AMELIA. You got him hooked you have.  
JO. Even to another room  
AMELIA You got him so I don’t see him.  
JASON. You got me d-d-disgusted with myself daily  
AMELIA. You got him where you wanted, Jo.  
JASON. Disgusting myself daily.  
JO. You disgust me.  
[...]  
JASON. Hourly disgusted and disgusted I’m still here and enjoying  
my disgust and knowing I’ll s-s – / stay.  
[...]  
AMELIA. You knew he was listening –  
JO. did I?  
AMELIA. You knew he’d / hear  
JO. *and*?  
AMELIA. *And* – you knew what you wanted him to hear knowing he  
would stay he would stay and you knew what that would do. (tucker  
green 2003: 35-36)

---

characters become bad witnesses in “a world filled with sexual, racial, and political violence both at home and abroad” (Solga 2007: 369).

The epilogue clashes with the evocative images of complicity and inexplicit but suggestive violence, for “the poetic structure of the main section of the play is replaced by [...] shocking realism” (Peacock 2008: 62). The music – S Club 7’s “Don’t Stop Moving” – the smell of coffee and the rain outside contribute the more realistic atmosphere. The setting moves from the two ‘separate’ flats to a café – a white and shiny floor, in the performance, which is “clinically clean” (tucker green 2003: 38) – where “Amelia cannot avoid Jo’s predicament and is literally brought face to face with its nature when she is obliged to wipe out Jo’s blood, the result of sexual abuse, from the floor of the café [...] before the arrival of her employers” (Peacock 2008: 62). Yet, Amelia persists in her selfish carelessness:

AMELIA. Look what you’re doin – where you’re dripping – look at my floor!  
JO. Look at me.  
AMELIA. No  
JO. Look at me  
AMELIA. Wha’ for?  
JO. Look what he / done –  
AMELIA. why? Jo?  
JO. Let me show you *Amelia* –  
AMELIA. nah, cos – again – thank you – and – no./So.  
Jo. Amelia –  
AMELIA. I don’t wanna see. I don’t need to see. I don’t have to see – you. Yeah. (tucker green 2003: 40-41)

Eventually, Amelia sees Jo’s reflection on the floor and notices the blood dripping between her legs, and gives her sanitary towels to stop the bleeding. Amelia’s attitude, is, at first, devoid of solidarity or empathy. She refuses to empathise with Jo even though she is in desperate need – “You’re trouble you are, you know that [...] Big capital T., you know that” she tells Jo (tucker green 2003: 41). Nevertheless, futher on, Amelia offers Jo a place to sit and a glass of water and sits with her. The fact that Amelia is situated face to face with Jo makes it almost impossible for Amelia not to get involved in the situation, which “has even become “part routine for both of them” (tucker green 2003: 45).

The epilogue stands as a forceful critique of the way in which contemporary British

society turns away from any involvement with situations of domestic violence. The play has an open ending that leaves the characters in a perpetual state of hopelessness, for it gives the “impression that nothing will change and the abuse will go on” (Peacock 2008: 62), unless somebody awakens his or her ‘response-ability’ and decides to help her.

tucker green’s *dirty butterfly* challenges the moral desensitising to the violence shown in the media by forcing spectators to engage in a reciprocal gaze with the actors, who testify in front of the audience for all the victims of domestic violence who cannot speak up. It is an aesthetically original play which deals with the very controversial topic of domestic violence and

makes the audience complicit in the action of the play by requiring the performance to be in the round, and conveying immediacy by not establishing a realistic location for the first scene. The characters address each other in a rhythmically poetic rather than literal manner and each member of the audience must construct his or her own narrative. (Peacock 2008: 62)

Critics and spectators have both praised and criticised the play –debbie tucker green has admitted to having seen people walking out of the theatre and one woman even suffered a heart attack while watching the play (tucker green in Sierz 2010). Yet, her “portrait of contemporary societal fragmentation touched a nerve” (Basset 2003), for it is politically committed and it manages to force the audience to reflect on the prevailing moral apathy towards domestic violence.

#### **4.1.1. Language: The Said and the Unsaid**

tucker green plays with language in powerful ways. Language moves in many directions in her plays, evoking violence without explicitly showing it, as well as beauty, passion and discomfort. All characters use a fresh, idiosyncratic and poetic language which, as some critics noted, may be difficult to turn into at the beginning, yet keeps the spectator attentive and concentrated on what is being said. To a great extent, language is used as a mechanism of

alienation, since the constant incorporation of distracting stylistic elements – beats, overlaps, repetitions – withholds any catharsis from the audience (Goddard 2007: 233).

The dialogues “cut straight through the excess of normal speech to simply state what the character needs to say, and it is certainly a need with these characters rather than a want” (Binns 2010). Amelia’s rage and aggressiveness are expressed through her fragmented language and reproaching tone, which expands to encompass the three characters as the play darkens up. Also, Jason’s guilt is sometimes externalised through his stuttering, which indicates the difficulty he experiences about making sense of his obsessive state:

JASON. I shoulda gone to my b-b / (bed).  
AMELIA. I know.  
JASON. It’s my own f-f- / (fault).  
AMELIA. I know, Jason.  
[...]  
JASON. unusual fighting back – and I – I can’t... I c-c-can’t...  
[...]  
JASON. ‘... f-f / f-f...’  
AMELIA. *Jason!*  
JO. Believe him didja?  
*Say it!*  
AMELIA. Jo!  
JASON. f-f / f-f  
JO Believe *him* didja?  
*Say it!*  
JASON. F-f-fuck off. (tucker green 2003: 12, 18 and 30)<sup>24</sup>

The unspoken – the silences in the play –, also become pivotal, for they indeed speak volumes. Silence carries various meanings in the play. For Jason, silence is connected to listening; it is through silence that he can listen to Jo’s ill-treatment:

JASON. I – I...  
JASON *listens*  
AMELIA. Jason.  
JASON. What?  
[...]

---

<sup>24</sup> In *Beyond The Pleasure Principle*, Sigmund Freud put forward the concept of trauma and how it affects people who have suffered from a traumatising experience. Such people, Freud explained, present a compulsive repetitive behaviour because, in most cases, the traumatising experience has been unassimilated (Freud 1922). Thus, another possible reading of Jason’s compulsive repetitions and his stuttering might be to see them as the result of a repressed traumatic experience somehow connected with the abuse of Jo.

AMELIA. JASE –  
JASON. Sssshh! (tucker green 2003: 23)

In this respect, silence eternalises violence and abuse. Furthermore, as tucker green explains in the initial stage directions, names without dialogue refer to active silences, which may point to the characters' unspoken intentions, which are either impossible to articulate or too hurtful to express. As Samuel Beckett believed, "silence is therefore the only medium left for [the characters] to transcend time, to communicate the incommunicable and to better inform the audience about indecisiveness, uncertainty, confusion and fear" (Besbes 2007: 148). Finally, silence can also potentially represent the site where the spectator's intimate feelings and critical responses take shape. Overall, silence acts as a distancing device which, by interpellating the spectators, can activate their ethical 'response-ability'.

#### **4.2. *random* (2008)**

debbie tucker green's *random* was first staged in 2008 at the Royal Court Theatre, one of the most emblematic non-commercial theatres in London, considered to be a hotbed of new dramatists.<sup>25</sup> Only one actress, Nadine Marshall, directed by Sacha Wares, played all the main characters, generically named as Sister, Brother, Mum, Dad, and Teacher on an almost bare stage, "lit simply with a harsh white spotlight. Each character is identified by discrete accents and by slight movements in her body stance" (Goddard 2009: 300). The stage directions at the beginning of the play specify that the actress who performs all the characters must be a black woman, which emphasises the fact that street crime is much more common among black people. Thus, the audience find themselves face to face with the singular presence of the black speaker/actress and nothing else distracting their attention from her words.

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<sup>25</sup> The Royal Court Theatre has been identified with new and shocking writing, especially since the "legendary first night of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* on 8 May 1956 at the Royal Court" (Sierz 2000: 15). For further information on the history of the Royal Court Theatre, see Devine, Harriet (2006) *Playwrights at the Royal Court Theatre, 1956-2006* (London: Faber and Faber) or Roberts, Philip (1999) *The Royal Court and the Modern Stage*. (Cambridge University Press).

The play is divided into two parts and the structure and texture of the dialogues recall poetry or song lyrics rather than a theatrical piece. At the beginning of the published text, tucker green specifies that

*Dialogue in () is to be spoken.*

*Dialogue in [] is intention, not to be spoken.*

*Italicised sentences in () are stage directions.*

*Part Two is listed in the text; however, the play is to be performed straight through without any break.*

*This text went to press before the end of rehearsals and so may differ slightly from the play as performed. (tucker green 2008: 2)*

This anticipates that form, including silence and style is as crucial as the content, for “every comma, hyphen, semi-colon, full stop, and even spaces between lines carry meaningful intentions” (Goddard 2009: 307). Furthermore, unlike in *dirty butterfly*, here the unnamed characters suggest that “identity is not portrayed as cultural, with its potential for change, but generic” (Goddard 2009: 61), which enhances the perception that the play’s story, although intimate and personal, is nowadays happening to many black people, and it could really happen to anyone.

The play is constructed around alienating effects whose aim is to expose the race-motivated atrocities that take place recurrently in the streets of Britain, to create situations that unsettle the spectator, and to play with audience expectations in order to show reality from “a viewpoint other than that prescribed by the British media” (Peacock 2008: 60). The play is aesthetically disturbing, for it consists of a series of effects – the bare stage, the single actress playing all the characters, the urban patois language varying from character to character, the poetic structure, the rhythmic speech, the hasty repetitions or the playing with ungrammatical sentences, often interrupted by unspoken intentions – which prevent the audience from getting emotionally involved in this highly absorbing story:

[h]aving one actress play all characters through the unadorned staging and the everyday clothes and vernacular speech and movements of

this actress [...] sets the conditions for how the show communicates with its audience. These conditions include an exposure of the theatre itself: the bare boards of the stage, the back wall, the spectators at their ease in the un-darkened auditorium, at least at the start of the play. (Kelleher 2009: 20-21)

It is precisely through the distance that is created that the audience may be able to notice the play's ethico-political impact.

*random* invites the audience to conceive the actress as a worker committed to testifying for those who cannot.<sup>26</sup> By 'becoming' many people herself, she opens up a space between her and the audience, a space which may incorporate the spectators' 'response-ably' critical gaze. Furthermore, the "un-darkened auditorium" engages the spectator even more in the process of witnessing, for he or she becomes aware of his or her situation as a member of an audience who, at the same time, is being watched 'here and now' by the testimony (the actress on stage).

The play opens up with Sister, who describes the beginning of what, apparently, is one more routine day for her and her family. Sister bickers with Brother on ordinary teenage sibling conflicts:

SISTER '...You awake?'  
BROTHER this one can't be inna my dream.  
SISTER 'You awake –'  
BROTHER nightmare.  
(BROTHER *kisses his teeth.*)  
SISTER 'I can borrow y'phone?'  
BROTHER 'I'm sleepin.'  
SISTER 'This room stinks –'  
BROTHER 'come outta it then –'  
SISTER 'so I can borrow y'phone – an' you ent sleepin – you sleepin?  
– how come yu sleepin all now? – mek mi borroe your phone –'  
BROTHER 'you credit-less – your problem.'  
SISTER 'Wanna use your sim in it – ennit –'  
BROTHER 'find a next phone – or a next man yeh?'  
(*Beat*)  
SISTER 'I'ma 'llow that. Yeh?'

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<sup>26</sup> The view of actors as workers is a characteristic of postdramatic theatre, as conceptualised by Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006). In postdramatic plays, Lehmann claims, the actors follow Brechtian conventions: they become workers, rather than artists, who narrate stories with a didactic purpose (2006: 138).

(BROTHER *kisses his teeth.*)

‘Thass an answer? Thass your answer?’ (tucker green 2008: 5-6)

Throughout the first pages, the dialogues are informal, lively and humorous. Elements such as the alarm clock which rings insistently, “Brother [...] taking five extra minutes in bed, and cheekily explaining to his Teacher why he is twenty minutes late for school [or] Mum’s concern that neither of her children have eaten enough or dressed adequately” (Goddard 2009: 301), Sister’s complaints on her job, the annoying clients who “chat their shit” to her (tucker green 2008: 15), or on the fact that her man has not called her build up the picture of an everyday familiar routine. Nevertheless, the normality is disrupted when SISTER receives a message: “‘Come home.’ What I thought was from my man is from my mum. “‘Come home.’ / What I thought was from my man / is from my mum. / ‘Come home. Now’ / One message from her” (tucker green 2008: 23).<sup>27</sup> When she gets home, the police are there and she learns that her brother has been killed in the street for unknown reasons.

When the police officers arrive, Sister recalls her Mum saying that Dad makes the prejudiced assumption, often circulated by the media, that if the police is at a black family house, it must be because somebody has got into trouble. In his review of the play, Paul Taylor pointed out that tucker green is “skilled in bringing you up against your prejudices. On hearing that two police cars were parked outside the family home, I automatically assumed that the brother had got into trouble” (2008). Jane Edwardes’s, review also claimed that “the immediate assumption is that the son has got into trouble. He has, but not of his own making”. As Lynnette Goddard states in her article “‘Death never used to be for the young’: Grieving Teenage Murder in debbie tucker green’s *random*”, “[t]here is an underlying assumption that the white boys are innocents caught up in coincidental attacks, whereas insinuations of links to gang cultures and street assassinations are prevalent in reports of the murders of black boys” (2008: 305).

Sister, Mum and Dad feel threatened by the presence of the “Two a them Police cars /

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<sup>27</sup> Throughout the play, the text’s layout changes from verse-like to prose and vice versa.

park outside / our yard” and hope that “[m]aybe this someone else’s trouble” (tucker green 2008: 24-25).

When the police officers enter the house, both Mum and Dad become defensive, as they feel intimidated by the police’s invasion of their private space:

MUM Dark boots and heavy shoes –  
    beatin down my  
    for best carpet  
    without a second thought...  
    from them.  
    Outside shoes ent worn in this house –  
    an’  
    ‘no I don’t wan’ no cup a tea.’  
    An’  
    ennit for me to offer? [...]  
DAD an’ no – mi nah want no cup a tea –  
    thass fe us to offer –  
    an’ no  
    mi noh wan’ fe sit. Neither.’ (tucker green 2008: 26-27)

Even though Mum, Dad and Sister are reluctant to believe what the police tell them – “How yu know iss him – how yu know he was there – how yu know iss not somebody who favour?” (tucker green 2008: 32) – their resistance is beaten by the fact that Brother has been unprovokedly stabbed to death “in a random altercation in the street during his school lunch hour, marking the shift of tone as the play enters the less familiar terrain of the immediate routine of post-murder rituals” (Goddard 2009: 301). The biased attitude of the police officers is revealed through Sister, for they hint that Brother might be part of a gang:

SISTER How y’know he ent juss late? How y’know ent with he’s spars –  
    Spars?  
    Friends – man dem – mates – bredrins –  
    no...  
    not a ‘gang’  
    Why you here?  
    Why you sittin here? (tucker green 2008: 32)

The police officers’ attitude with the family and vice versa reflects the often uncomfortable, distant, sometimes racially biased relationship between the families of the victims of random

street murders and the police. Specifically, the play echoes the case of Stephen Lawrence, discussed in chapter 1 above, in which the family's growing distrust of the police investigations led them to publicly denounce the police irregularities and to carry out their own private investigation. The following account of the growing breach between the Lawrence family and the police investigation is worth quoting at some length, for it throws light to the kind of situation which *random* alludes to:

On 23 April, Neville Lawrence made short statement at a press conference calling for witnesses to come forward [...]. Following their son's murder, the Lawrences became increasingly concerned that the police were not pursuing his killers as determinedly as they should, and as time moved on they became angered by the treatment they received from the police. Only one of the two assigned police liaison officers had been trained in the sensitive task of how to treat families of murder victims, and it was apparent that the Lawrences were not being kept in the picture. Moreover, [...] Doreen and Neville Lawrence had also heard from Stephen's friends that the police seemed intent on trying to establish that Stephen or Duwayne were in a gang, and therefore that the murder was gang-related. (Cottle 2004: 12)

The first section in Part Two of the play focuses on Sister's subjective descriptions of the events, following the news of the murder, including the process of identification of her brother's corpse and his horrific state. Even though the play does not stage any image of violence, the language is raw, highly descriptive and unpleasant – it stimulates the imagination in such way that it makes the witnessing experience much more sordid than any explicit image of violence:

SISTER But his been  
cut thru  
with a chunk of him gone  
now.  
He had an eye  
two.  
Now he got juss one.  
They try to pretty it up  
mek it look like he winkin...

But  
 you can't pretty up whass horrific Y'not meant to.  
 His mout'  
 Look like a clown –  
 Now  
 Wider than it should be.  
 It slashed so much on a one side  
 from there  
 to there.  
 That juss he's face. (tucker green 2008: 35)

Increasingly, the play becomes entirely female-led and, even though Mum's voice is occasionally present in Part Two, Sister becomes the main narrator of the day's events and the one who bears witness of the family's suffering and their grief. The play, then, speaks

from the perspectives of the black women family members – a reminder, perhaps, that although relatively few black girls are losing their lives to street violence, it may be the women (like Sister and Mum) who are left to pick up the pieces. Such an impact on the grieving family is captured in Sister's poignant reflection of a life cut short, in her noticing how quiet the house has become and wondering why Brother will never come home again. (Goddard 2009: 305)

The tone of the play saddens and gets more intimate, subjective and violent and the act of witnessing is thematised. The situation is described through Sister's witness. She describes the way the crime scene has become a “street shrine [...] flowers / candles / cards / T-shirts / tags / teddy bears / Coke an' crisp / the flag of our island / Garvey's colours of Africa – / a note from his form teacher / signed with a smile...” (tucker green 2008: 40) and the way “Passerby passes by / don't look once” as well as “Baby women [...] ask braken as brazen baby women do / ‘Is it true he was your brother?’” (tucker green 2008: 39) or the schoolmates, who are “witnessin something they shouldn't” (tucker green 2008: 41). Also, she criticises the absolute “silence shouting the loudest. / Cos it seems that / now no one wanna witness / when happened” (tucker green 2008: 45). Likewise, Sister is highly critical of the attitude of the press, “pressin / the picturesque for a bite. / Their – blue-eyed reporters / shielding their zeal / for a – ‘good’, ‘urban’

story / stepping into there sides / askin foolish questions / soundbitin so-called ‘solutions’” (tucker green 2008: 41) and sensationalising his brother’s death. She describes a “hard-lookin ‘hoodie’” who “under the cloak of Adidas / is a brotha / whose eyes don’t stop flowin. / Wet raw / with weepin. / But.../ [the press] don’t show that bit tho”, because it does not confirm to the stereotype of ‘black-to-black’ violence (Kelleher 2009: 28). Eventually, Sister comes to the painful conclusion that, after all, “[d]eath usedta be for the old” (tucker green 2008: 42) or, at least, it “never used to be for the young” (tucker green qtd. in Goddard 2009: 299).

#### 4.2.1. Silence

The interplay of silence and voice plays a crucial role in *random*. First, Brother only through Sister’s impression of him of course, speaks at the beginning of the play – his voice is then violently silenced. Thus, most of Brother’s particularities are conveyed through the accounts provided by Mum’s and, especially, Sister’s voices. Likewise, Dad’s active presence fades away at the end of part one; for he remains in the background of the scene, unable to speak. He ‘speaks’ through his eyes, which his daughter gazes at and seems to be able to read:

SISTER Dad tryin to say something.  
 Dad’s tryin to say something  
 but  
 ...nu’un won’t [come out]  
 I watch him.  
 Watch him.  
 ...He’s embarrassed.  
 I watch his embarrassment.  
 I can’t look away. (tucker green 2008: 37)

Mum’s anger at the press is expressed through silence because, as she claims, she “don’t got nuthin nice to say. / Nu’un polite / nu’un / broadcastable / nu’un / righteous / nu’un forgivin” (tucker green 2008: 42). Sister highlights the deep silence that surrounds them while they are in the police car, which is only interrupted by the police officers, who have “to ask directions / The only thing breakin the heavy silence” (tucker green 2008: 38), and the silence of the “schoolpeeps” who “stand there. / Nuff. / In a heavy silence. / With their – / MP3 wires

dangling / their / mobile phones / on silent” (tucker green 2008: 40-41), in contrast with the sensationalistic press who, ignoring the family’s grief, brazenly keep asking Sister questions. Nevertheless, the most resounding silence is that of the witnesses of the murder, which hinders the police investigation of the case:

SISTER I lissen  
and I hear...  
(*Silence.*)  
I hear – an juss get –  
(*Silence.*) [...]  
Whole heap a witness  
Police say [...]  
Whole heap a peeps  
on road  
was present.  
But I lissen –  
hard –  
an’ still I hear...  
(*Silence.*)  
Silence shoutin the loudest  
Cos it seem that  
now no one wanna witness  
what happened  
To my Brother. (tucker green 2008: 45)

This is a harmful silence which points in two directions. The witnesses do not want to bear witness to Brother’s murder, thus complicitly perpetuating violence through their silence. At the same time, the silence also manifests Sister’s own inarticulacy in the face of the anguish and grief brought about by the witnesses’ silence for, without their testimony, the investigations cannot be carried out:

[Sister] bemoans the lack of people coming forwards to act as witness. Sister’s description of the reluctance of witnesses suggests an archetypal ‘wall of silence’, which can hinder police investigations because communities are either too scared or caught up in a false sense of loyalty to report what they see. Her speech also typifies tucker green’s trend for showing that silence amounts to complicity in violence, abuse and murder. (Goddard 2009: 304)

Due to the absence of the witnesses’ testimony, only Sister’s voice acts as the testimony of who her brother was and how events unfold after the murder. Sister’s voice becomes frenzied and the

verse-like structure of the monologues somehow acts as the metronome of the play, marking the pace and the rhythm, sometimes rushed and sometimes slow. The ungrammatical phrases echo rap singers dub poetry and the back chat of urban youths:

SISTER I'm told  
not to touch it –  
not to hook it back –  
not to phone out –  
not to answer it –  
not to go near it –  
Dad's had enough  
'but –'  
he don't wanna hear  
'but –'  
he don't wanna hear me  
'but –'  
don't wanna hear what I got to say (tucker green 2008: 34 and 47)

Throughout her testimony, spontaneous and subjective, Sister remains “true to herself, sceptical of display of emotion [and she] forc[es] us to see the terrible cost of [random knife] attacks” (Taylor 2008) without falling into sensationalist sentimentalism. Sister becomes, thus, a ‘good witness’ to the events of the day, as well as to her own experience of her love for her brother, her sorrow for the unprovoked murder, the helplessness and uncertainty of not knowing who killed her brother, and the unbearable feeling of accepting that Brother is not coming back:

Fuck this cycle of shit.  
And his poster of Halle  
hangs over his bed  
both of us clockin  
It's as empty as it will be  
now.  
So I take a deep –  
(*inhales*)  
and don't wanna lose strength  
of his bedroom su'un.  
Ever.  
And the house is quiet...

Y'know?  
The house that never was...  
is well quiet.  
[...] Random don't happen to everybody  
So.  
How come  
'random' haveta happen to him? (random 2008: 49)

As Felman and Laub note in relation to the act of testifying for the witness “has got to speak, almost compulsively” and his or her “testimony is delivered in breathless grasps [...] and in advance of knowledge and awareness” (1992: 21-22). Sister’s voice is indeed not only often ungrammatical, but also elliptical, so that within the gaps between what is being said and what remains just under the surface, the spectator is impelled to incorporate his or her responses to this unsettling story.

All in all, *random* interrogates the sometimes coldly amoral attitude of the media and the police, as well as prejudiced assumptions towards minority ethnic groups. It also requires the audience to rethink the violence that underlies a supposedly multicultural Britain, seeks to challenge a growing social insensitivity, and to awaken empathy towards the other:

*random* takes the audience into a visceral, emotional experience for 50 minutes, on an issue we might have become so accustomed to hearing about that we continue our everyday lives, and might no longer notice the yellow and blue police boards asking for witnesses. Brother is killed in his lunch break, typically an hour long; as Kate Kelleway writes in *The Observer*, ‘random lasts for 50 minutes but how long does it take to end a life?’. (Goddard 2009: 306)

If so many teenagers are being killed in the streets and so many prejudices are hindering the eradication of street violence, *random* proves that there is “something going on in the world that should not be happening” (Kelleher 2009: 20). Through her very political work, enhanced by the distancing effects, tucker green puts at the forefront an uncomfortable piece of Britain’s reality and invites the audience to interrogate society’s general insensitivity towards the other.

#### 4.2.2. Politics and Ethics

The play introduces the audience into the most intimate reactions to street crime, while challenging preconceived ideas on black youths. The disappearance of any male voice as the play develops enables the predominance of a female perspective towards random street crimes. The play links the actor and the spectator in a long ethical and political connecting thread, for the spectator is there to witness the character's personal testimony of an occurrence, which, at the same time, has taken place in many black families:

What has happened here in the theatre [...] is that something has been shown, something has been said, has been brought into appearance, which might not otherwise be shown or spoken of. Let's say the 'politics' begins here. However, this bringing into appearance has been done in that complex way the theatre specialises in, which has to do with the ones who are here, who are on the spot, standing in for the others who are not. The ones standing in are the actors and spectators, for example, who turned up this evening to participate in the show, but they are also the characters themselves, whose lives have been ruined, who are standing in for, or representing, all the other people whose lives have changed in this way. (Kelleher 2009: 26)

Indeed, the story alludes to the numerous random street murders that have taken place in Britain over the last few decades and condemns both existing prejudices on black youth murders, and the silence of those whose voices are needed to bear witness. Crucially, the play "concerns also the 'judgments' we make – as spectators, as collaborators in the event – upon the thoughts and feelings that this event has provoked in us" (Kelleher 2009: 29).

In short, as has been previously said, the play solicits the spectators' reciprocal gaze and demands a justice based on care for the other who suffers and whose voice is barely allowed to be heard or simply suppressed. Just like *dirty butterfly*, *random* asks for the activation of our 'response-ability' as spectators, our capacity to develop a critical response to knife crime and the way in which British society mostly ignores it, for "street robberies and random assaults are now so common that people rarely bother reporting them to the police, and in recent years stabbings and shootings have become everyday occurrences" (Livermore 2007).

## 5. Conclusions

Globalisation has inevitably led to such a degree of worldwide interconnectivity that “what we do (or abstain from doing) may influence the conditions of life (or death) for people in places we will never visit and of generations we will never know” (Bauman 2008: 71). Nevertheless, morality and ethics do not seem to have moved in the same direction. Violence, hatred, rivalry and selfishness are still very much present and have led to thousands of acts of cruelty, ranging from international wars, genocides and terrorist attacks, to marginalisation, racial harassment or domestic violence. As Bauman claims,

[w]ith the world’s dense network of global interdependence, we cannot be sure of our moral innocence whenever other human beings suffer indignity, misery, or pain. We cannot declare that we do not know, nor can we be certain that there is nothing we could change in our conduct that would avert or at least alleviate the sufferer’s fate. (2008: 72)

Globalisation has also entailed a growing competitiveness which has impelled an increasing sense of alienation and individualism. In the case of Britain, this is added to the economic crisis, the widespread political disappointment and apathy, and the growing fear of newcomers, who usually belong to ethnic minority groups and who, even after generations of residence in Britain, are still treated as outsiders.

Philosophers like Lévinas or Bauman have tried to refocus the ethical values towards justice and care of the other. However, this is only possible by “building and rebuilding interhuman bonds, the will and the ability to engage with others” (Bauman 2008: 189) – only by engaging in the face-to-face encounter with the other, we can become ethically responsible. When the other (the speaker) bears witness of his or her suffering, the listener needs to become actively ‘response-able’ for his or her position as a witness and to the other’s testimony, as well as a witness to himself or herself. It is only thus that the listener’s very act of witnessing may led to a critical re-thinking.

According to Walter Benjamin, the media and even literature involve “relaxed audiences”, which fall short of stimulating the active ‘response-ability’ of the listener/reader. Theatre, Benjamin pointed out, sets up a face-to-face encounter between the speaker (actor/character) and the listener (spectator) in the very same place – the theatre – and at the same moment, the audience, by listening to the speaker can turn into critical witnesses:

‘Nothing is more pleasant than to lie on a sofa reading a novel’, wrote one of the epic authors of the last century. The remark suggests the degree of relaxation which a narrative work can give to its reader. If we imagine a person attending a dramatic spectacle we tend to visualise the opposite. We see someone who, with every fibre of his being, is intently following a process [...] In most cases, this audience [...] will quickly feel impelled to take up an attitude towards what it sees. (Benjamin 2003: 15)

British 1990s in-yer-face theatre aimed to intensify the spectator’s active response through the use of radical, explicit, and even stage images and language. The theatre of Debbie Tucker Green, which is sometimes linked with the work of in-yer-face playwrights, pursues a similar objective albeit leaving aside explicit images of violence incorporating a fragmented, urban, dialectal highly lyrical language instead. In an interview with Sierz, Tucker Green claimed, “if you hate the show, at least you have a passion” (Sierz 2010). Thus, her objective is to awaken a ‘relaxed’ audience and turn them into critical spectators/witnesses. Her success lies in her ability to vividly evoke the unsaid and the silenced marginalised groups.

*dirty butterfly* (2003) brings a controversial story of domestic violence, power and obsession close to the spectator. *random* (2008) puts street crime at the forefront, one of the most complicated issues contemporary Britain is having to face. Both plays are short in duration and make an unsettling yet innovative use of language to stimulate the audience by foregrounding uncomfortable but very real issues that contaminate contemporary British society, which often either ignores them or reacts to them on the basis of prejudiced assumptions, which are enhanced by the media’s biased reporting of events. The actors/characters’ bearing witness of the tragedies that they have experienced also forces the

audience to become witnesses of their testimony and, at the same time, to be aware of their own act of witnessing. Hence, her plays can potentially activate their 'response-ability' and, thus, contribute to a social change towards the ethics of care.

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