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"We Are All Terrorists." The Representation of Terrorism, Violence, and Abuse of Power in Selected Shakespearean and Post-9/11 Plays

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“WE ARE ALL TERRORISTS.” THE REPRESENTATION OF TERRORISM,
VIOLENCE, AND THE ABUSE OF POWER IN SELECTED SHAKESPEAREAN
AND POST-9/11 PLAYS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Title: “We Are All Terrorists.” The Representation of Terrorism, Violence, and Abuse of Power in Selected Shakespearean and Post-9/11 Plays

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This dissertation aims at highlighting the transhistorical nature of the abuse of power, violence, and specifically the production of terror in western culture. I want to argue that “we”—westerners and non-westerners alike—can be all labeled terrorists, an accusation that has been reserved solely for the Arab/Muslim other after the 9/11 attacks. This dissertation employs an analogy between selected Shakespearean plays that present different acts of terrorism—violence, intimidation, and religious manipulation—and plays written in reaction to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The intentional choice to focus on these two historically distinct periods—Renaissance and twenty-first century—is dictated by the desire to show how these forms of terrorism are continuously adopted and practiced by the West.

The dissertation will utilize a theme-based approach. The first chapter, “Introduction,” starts with trying to reach the most satisfactory definition that fits the purpose of this study among the different political-related definitions of the term ‘terrorism.’ Then, I will explain the relationship between “terrorism” and “drama.” Both share the same feature of theatricality that relies on the interaction with audience through the effect of the terrorizing spectacle. The second chapter, “Theatre of War,” discusses the ethics of war and its destructive and terrorizing nature in both Shakespeare’s *Henry V* and David Hare’s *Stuff Happens*. The third chapter, “State Terrorism and Political Violence,” focuses on the notion of ‘state terrorism’ that results in the

traumatization of the less powerful in both Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and Victoria Britain and Gillian Slovo's *Guantanamo: Honor Bound to Defend Freedom*. The muted victim delivers a written testimony to his trauma. The fourth chapter, "Theatricalizing the Other," approaches Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Yusef El Guindi's *Back of the Throat* and explores the coercive racial profiling of the non-western other who, being disempowered, has nothing but vocalization to show resistance. The "Conclusion" presents to the reader the findings of this dissertation and suggests how the thesis of the continuity of the west's production of terror across ages can be applied to other texts from the same or other historical periods.