Chapter 3

Imperial Hegemony in Global Politics: An Alternative View of Oppressor and Oppressed in Wallace’s Select Plays

“In a rich moonlit garden, flowers open beneath the eyes of entire nations terrified to acknowledge the simplicity of the beauty of peace.”

- Aberjhani

While examining capitalism as a system of oppression of the labour classes in America, Wallace also turns her attention to global politics. “Politics”, Wallace argues, “invariably serves the interests of various offstage forces, powerful cowards who never witness the damage from which they prosper unless they’re trapped by the quarantine of a plague, spectators to a teenage suicide, or witnesses to the murder of innocents on the other side of the world” (qtd. in Zacher). Wallace traces her interest in war as in capitalism to the place of her upbringing: “In Kentucky we have a saying, ‘Thank God for Mississippi’, because Mississippi is the poorest state. I’m interested in war and violence because, in Kentucky, a state of violence and war is inflicted daily on the majority of people through poverty and the class system” (qtd. in Bayley). She also asserts that being a woman is not a handicap for her writing about the war: “I have never liked the idea that women can’t write about war . . . when we know for a fact that some of our great war writers never set foot on the battle field” (qtd. in Bell 114). She writes in an essay published in the London Guardian,
Today it is, once again, war and empire. And it is with these monstrosities that we [playwrights] should engage in one form or another. What would Euripides, Marlowe or Brecht have done?
They would have made these times strange, to use a Brechtian formula, so that an audience could see their society a new and possibly act on those new visions. Why settle for a lesser goal? (qtd. in Julian)

In her plays, Wallace views global politics in a different way, stressing a more intimate way of perceiving things:

That millions of innocent women, men and children in Africa have died because of the rampant greed and criminal price hiking of multinationals is not sexy, but it is intimate. That thousands have died and many thousands more have been maimed in the Middle East by U.S bullets and shrapnel is again certainly not sexy, but surely very intimate, as is the fact that the bullets that enter the bodies of Palestinian children, fired by Israeli soldiers are paid for by American taxes earned by American workers who dream of fishing, baseball and sex. (“On Writing” 101)

Through an examination of the interconnectedness and intimate relationship between American, British and Middle Eastern lives, she argues for the necessity of a more intimate form of transnational resistance to neoliberal globalization and militarism and brings to the fore the effects of global political events on the smallest spaces of distant lives, exposing the underlying systems of
oppression. Edward Said comments upon the imperial intentions of the United States:

The American experience . . . was from the beginning founded upon the idea of ‘an imperium – a domination, state or sovereignty that would expand in population and territory and increase in strength and power’. There were claims for North American territory to be made and fought over (with astonishing success); there were native peoples to be dominated, variously exterminated, variously dislodged; and then, as the republic increased in age and hemispheric power, there were distant lands to be designated vital to American interests to be intervened in and fought over . . . (Said 8)

This contemporary form of imperialism displayed in the politics of America is ethically questioned in some of Wallace’s plays. Said asserts that “. . . so influential has been the discourse insisting on American specialness, altruism and opportunity that ‘imperialism’ as a word or ideology has turned up only rarely and recently in accounts of United States culture, politics, history” (8). Among these recent voices that try to “turn up” the notion of imperialism is the literary voice of Naomi Wallace, who questions the allegedly unselfish humanitarian American approach in its recent wars.

In summer 2002, Naomi Wallace led a group of six playwrights, along with Kia Corthron, Tony Kushner, Robert O’Hara, Lisa Schlesinger and Betty Shamieh into occupied Palestine to meet with theatre artists there and learn about the
conditions under which Palestinian artists and people worked and lived during the
Second Intifada. The following year, *American Theatre* published a series of
responses from the playwrights, remarkable in the different ways in which they
constructed the narratives of their contacts with occupied Palestine. For instance,
Tony Kushner saw the experience through an analysis of his Jewish American
identity: “Because I went with a diverse group of people, I say things I might have
missed and because I am a Jew. I think I saw things others didn’t see” (Corthron
31). Similarly, in a comparison of human rights abuses against Palestinians and his
own African American experience, Robert O’Hara wrote the word “I fifty-one
times in responding to the conditions of Palestinians” (Corthron 31).

The Palestinian American Betty Shamieh created parallel narratives
between her own life growing up in America and the life she didn’t feel she would
be strong enough to endure had her parents stayed in Ramallah (Corthron 71).
However, they are a stark contrast to the closing narrative in the article, that by
Naomi Wallace. She is the only one of the writers to use an Arabic word, referring
the *debka*, a traditional dance; the only one to draw from the literary heritage of
Palestine, quoting now-deceased poet Mahmoud Darwish; and one of only two,
alongside Lisa Schlesinger, to quote someone that the group encountered,
providing the words of a twelve-year-old girl who told Wallace, ‘Yes, I throw
stones at tanks. But I would rather play . . . When I grow up, I want to be a doctor’
(Corthron 71). Wallace wrote not only of her reaction as an American. But also of
her obligation as an American:
To visit the Occupied Territories, the West Bank and Gaza as theatre writers is not simply an exercise in forging links between ourselves and the Palestinians. Rather, it is to realize that we, as Americans, are, on an intensely intimate level, already fused, through the overt involvement of our government, with the history of these people . . . We are not, I thank the gods, only ourselves and our own personal experience. We are also what happens to one another. (Corthron 31)

George Potter comments:

. . . the idea that ‘We are also what happens to one another’ would also seem like a *modus operandi* for the playwright, whose oeuvre stretches not just from performances around the world, but also to the American-Mexican border to the wards in Iraq and Palestine and to the struggle of union organizers. (para 2)

War is a state of armed conflict between societies. It is generally characterized by extreme collective aggression, destruction and high mortality. The word “war” came into existence in the Mesolithic period. It is said that approximately war is 14,000 years old. Nearly 5000 years before the military activities started in the globe. The advent of gun powder and the technological advancement took war to an important place in the world. Now the war has taken control over the individual as well as the society. Naomi Wallace is concerned about how people are destroyed in the world because of the outcome of war. Some
of her plays deal with the wars that America was involved in – the Vietnam War, the Persian Gulf War and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Vietnam War (1960-1975) is seen as the most unpopular American war in the 20th century. It nearly killed 60,000 Americans and 2 million Vietnamese. Between 1945 and 1954 the Vietnamese waged an anti-colonial war with France. In this Vietnam got 26 billion as financial support from the U.S. The French were defeated, which was followed by a peace conference. At this time Vietnam and some other nearby countries got Independence. Through this Independence Vietnam was divided into two countries as Anti Communist South and Communist North. In this time U.S supported the southern government and sent 2000 military advisors and in 1963 the number was increased to 16300. In this war southern Vietnamese lost the fertile Mekong Delta. To keep the prestigious power of America the U.S President Lyndon Johnson organized a war in which the air force strikers attacked North Vietnam. The next U.S President Richard Nixon advocated the Vietnamization and gave greater responsibility to the South to fight with the North. Nixon ordered to destroy the Communists in Cambodia. So they started to protest against the war. From 1968 to 1973 many efforts were made to end the conflict. Finally in January 1973, an agreement was drawn to vacate Americans from South Vietnam and to release the American prisoners of war. As a historian note:

High profile opposition to the Vietnam War turned to street protests in an effort to turn U.S. political opinion. On 15th October 1959, the Vietnam moratorium attracted millions of Americans. Riots broke
out at the 1968 Democratic National Convention during protests against the war. After explosive news reports of American military abuses, such as the 1968 My Lai Massacre, brought new attention and support to the anti-war movement, some veterans joined Vietnam Veterans Against the war. The fatal shooting of four students at Kent State University in 1970 led to nation-wide University protests. Anti-war protests ended with the final withdrawal of troops after the Paris Peace Accords were signed in 1973. South Vietnam was left to defend itself alone went a fighting resumed. (Yilmaz 145)

In April 1975, South Vietnam surrendered to the North and Vietnam was again reunited. Even now some Americans claim that the American effort in Vietnam was a sin, a blunder mistake, and ask whether this war was necessary for a noble cause. So on the American side, interfering in this war was a total waste.

The Persian Gulf War (1990-1991), is variously known as First Gulf War, Gulf War I, Kuwait War, first Iraq War or Iraq War. This war came into life when the American army interfered in the Arab Oil matters. Middle Eastern oil has enchanted global powers and global capital since the early twentieth century. Its allure has been particularly powerful for the United States. The world’s largest oil reservoir is in Kuwait. Saddam Hussein, leader of Iraq ordered to invade Kuwait because the world economy (oil economy) was in the hand of Kuwait. So Iraq owned Kuwait and expanded its power in Kuwait. On 3rd August, the United Nations security called Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait and on 6th August the
council imposed a law that no country should have trade link with Iraq. Iraq was not worried and bothered about it. Iraq tried to conquer Saudi Arabia because this country is the world’s largest oil producer and exporter. At this time the Western countries along with the U.S gathered and contributed forces to defeat Iraq. Meanwhile, in Iraq Saddam had some military troops in Kuwait to fight against the U.S. On November 29th council ordered to use force against Iraq if they did not withdraw from Kuwait till January 15, 1991. Saddam refused to withdraw from Kuwait and so the U.S sent their military power to Iraq and air strikers too joined in this. For the next few weeks the bombardment went on. The U.S destroyed Iraq’s communication network, government buildings, weapon areas and oil refineries. The U.S again started to destroy Kuwait and some important areas in Iraq. By the continuous fight the U.S captured Kuwait. Now the U.S army concentrated on destroying the whole area of Iraq and so they entered through Saudi Arabia and started to fight with guns and tanks. Iraq collapsed completely. There are no official figures for the Iraqi military operation.

But the U.S. gave the impression that they did not want to destroy Saddam. Former President George Bush wrote that trying to eliminate Saddam Hussain during the Gulf War in 1991 would have incurred in calculably human and political costs,

Trying to eliminate, extending the ground war into an occupation of Iraq, would have violated our guideline about not changing adjectives in midstream, engaging in ‘omission creep’, and would have incurred incalculably human and political costs.
Apprehending him with probable impossible. We had been unable to find Noriegia in Panama, which we knew intimately. We would have been forced to occupy Baghdad and, in effect, rule Iraq. The coalition would instantly have collapsed, whereas deserting it in anger as other allies pulling out as well. Under those circumstances, there was no viable “exit strategy” we would see, violating another of our principles. Furthermore, we had been self-consciously trying to set a pattern for handling aggression in the post-Cold War. Going in and occupying Iraq, thus, unilaterally exceeding the United Nations mandate, would have destroyed the precedent of international response to aggression that we hoped to establish. Had we gone the invasion route, the United States would conceivably still be an occupying power in a bitterly hostile land. It would have been dramatically different – and perhaps barren – outcome. (489-90)

During the Persian Gulf War, relation between the United States and the Palestine Liberation Organization soured when PLO chairman Yasser Arafat supported Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait and its threat to attack Israel. Following the U.S victory in the Persian Gulf War, the U.S president George H.W Bush and Soviet President Michael Gorbachev sponsored a peace conference in Madrid to address the conflict between Israel and Palestine. The conference in 1991 rejuvenated the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Over the next two years, the United States and other nations moderated discussions between Israel and
Palestinian leaders and in 1993, Israel and the PLO reached a land-for-peace deal in Oslo. Under the so-called Oslo accords, Arafat recognized Israel’s right to exist and renounced the use of violence against the Jewish state. In return, Israel promised to allow for Palestinian self-rule in sections of the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

However, Israeli and Palestinian peace efforts waned over the years. Violence began to creep back into the landscape of the Palestinian-Israeli relationship, and by early 2002 it had grown such that it had a name – the second Intifada. It witnessed an Israeli reoccupation of Palestinian West Bank and Gaza towns and villages, in response to attacks by Palestinians on Israeli targets, and the deaths of dozens of civilians on both sides. A major byproduct of the renewed strife was a significant shift in the U.S policy towards the Palestinians, specifically their leaders. Arafat, one of the most frequent visitors among foreign leaders to the Clinton White House, became unwelcome in Washington, perceived by the Bush administration as the Israelis saw him – a terrorist.

Angry about what had been done to Iraq in the Gulf War of 1991, playwright Naomi Wallace researched for two years before writing *In the Heart of America*, exploring the interconnectedness of things: violence and politics, racism and war, class and desire. She was interested in the ‘American way’ of war, how language is used to inspire and underline aggression, how racism is used to dehumanize the ‘enemy’, how language of war is made erotic and enticing. She writes, “War is, on one level, a simple question of how to best tear as many bodies
apart in as little time as possible, and necessarily not about freedom and liberation” (qtd. in CHASS).

As Said explains of the American attitude during the 1990 Gulf war, “. . . in the American view of the past, the United States was not a classical imperial power, but a righter of wrongs around the world, in pursuit of tyranny, in defence of freedom no matter the place or cost. The war inevitably pitted these versions of the past against each other” (5). Such imperial reasoning is displayed in Wallace’s *In the Heart of America* in order to unite and justify the political intentions of dominance and expression of both the Gulf and Vietnamese wars.

The play is set between two different eras: the first Gulf War of 1990 and the crux of Vietnam in 1969. A young Palestinian woman, Fairouz Saboura, is questioning an American soldier about the whereabouts of her brother, Remzi, who was in his first tour of duty. Craver Perry was with Remzi in the Gulf, but he is evasive with answers to Fairouz’s inquisition. Wallace also opens plotlines as memories of Craver and Remzi come to life. Craver from Kentucky, is considered “white trash” while Remzi is an American of Palestine descent. These are only labels as the young men grow closer, fall in love and have a secret affair. Within this structure lies their commanding officer, Lieutenant Boxler, trying to train the duo for combat. Using their differences against them, Boxler pushes his men to the limit, telling them to harness their anger for the enemy. Boxler has issues of his own as a spirit imbues his body while another ghost is there to haunt him. The spirit of William Calley, who massacred more than 500 civilians at My Lai in 1968, is
using Boxler as a vessel, while Lu Ming is trying to haunt Calley down, for murdering her infant daughter in Vietnam. Lu Ming finds somewhat of an ally in Fairouz as they both search for answers leading up to some bitter confrontations.

On entering the theatre, the audience sees a stretch of sand, a dugout and a duckboard walk. An ordinary American bedroom sits on a higher level. The contrast is significant. As the action begins, scenes merge into each other. Time and space are fluid. Sometimes we’re in 1991, sometimes in 1968, sometimes in Kentucky, Iraq, Georgia or Vietnam. Characters are introduced, realistic but not necessarily real. Fairouz and Remzi Saboura are Palestinians. Their family, uprooted when Israel was founded, moved to America and settled in Atlanta. Fairouz is full of hate. She clings to her Arab identity. Her brother Remzi has grown up as an American. He joins the Army in 1991 and is sent to the Middle East during the Persian Gulf War. His buddy is Craver Perry, a working class kid from Kentucky. Craver has an almost sexual obsession with weapons – their names, their specifications, their capabilities to kill and maim. The fact that they will be used against flesh-and-blood people doesn’t seem to enter his mind.

Lieutenant Boxler of the U.S Special Forces is the embodiment of the warrior spirit. Lue Ming is a soldier, too, a Viet Cong officer. She survived the My Lai massacre, but her 3-year-old daughter was killed. There is no plot, no linear story. Situations unfold before the audience one after another. Themes keep recurring. Fairouz is not sure if Remzi is alive or dead. Having had no answers from the Army, she seeks out his Army buddy, now back home, but Craver doesn’t
want to rake up unpleasant memories. Remzi and Craver psych themselves up for combat, visualizing their deaths, the deaths of buddies, the finding of the bodies.

Tough, insensitive Lieutenant Boxler gives Remzi and Craver a lesson in brutal conduct towards prisoners. He also awakens Craver’s memories of his father, a coal miner whose lungs were destroyed but who had to keep working. His purpose is to make Craver angry. It doesn’t matter what he is angry about; anger makes for a better soldier.

BOXLER: . . . You two Barbies, you think just because you push me around a little I’m going to spill my guts? You’re nothing but piss-ants with one hand tied behind your back.

(Craver shoves him, and he falls over)

REMZI: One hand tied behind our backs?

(He strikes Boxler. Craver strikes him, too)

BOXLER: You two dandelions aren’t getting anywhere. Hey, baby doll, yeah you, the one with the dark skin, are you a half-breed?

REMZI: No, But you are. (He kicks Boxler in the stomach) You fucking sandnigger.

BOXLER: From what I can see of your face, you’re a sandnigger yourself.

(Remzi kicks Boxler again)

What a farce: a sandnigger killing sandniggers.
(Remzi keeps kicking until Boxler lies still. Some moments of silence)

REMZI: Sir? Did I hurt you, sir?

(Boxler doesn’t move)

CRAVER: Oh shit.

(Remzi and Craver free Boxler’s wrists and uncover his eyes. Boxler springs to his feet, unharmed)

BOXLER (To Remzi): That was good. For a first time.

(Suddenly he punches Remzi in the stomach. He collapses) Pity is what you leave behind you, son, back home, tucked under your pillow with your teddy bear and girlie magazine. Now get to your feet, you stinking Arab.

(Remzi starts to get up, but Boxler pushes him over with his foot. Remzi attacks Boxler; Boxler restrains him).

That’s it. That’s it. Now hold on to it! Hold on to that anger. Stock it.

Cuddle it, and when the right moment comes take aim and let it fly.

A soldier without anger is a dead soldier. (America 1. 6. 69-103)

In the midst of the campaign, Remzi and Craver have a homosexual affair. Lue Ming is looking for Lieutenant Calley so she can confront him about My Lai. Lieutenant Boxler mutates into Calley. Lue Ming describes the massacre from her point of view, Calley from his. Having seen combat, Remzi is becoming disillusioned, questioning the war and shirking his duties.
Wallace focuses on two specific American wars that were initiated through idealized political validations but were imbedded with imperial intentions towards the other side. Wallace implies throughout her play how America’s claim of fighting against communism, tyrannical regimes and for the good of the people is all a rationalization used to cover the real imperial intentions of America as a dominant power.

In scene three of the second act, Boxler, a Lieutenant in the American Army during the Gulf War, sees the apparition of Lue Ming and lives her torturous incident all over again in front of the puzzled Remzi and Craver, confusing the wards and losing his sense of time and place:

BOXLER: Shut your squawking, bitch.

(Call) Hey, you two troopers. Over here on the double.

*Remzi and Craver enter. It seems we’re in the desert again*

Remzi, what’s the best way to make a woman talk?

CRAVER: The dozers are cleaning the area, sir.

BOXLER: Get on with it. What dozers?

REMZI: We’re mopping up.

BOXLER: I said make her talk!

CRAVER: Can you tell us where Saddam’s minefields are?

BOXLER: This is Vietnam, son.

REMZI: We’re in Iraq, sir.

BOXLER: This is Panama City!
CRAVER: We have the Dragon M – 47 assault missile, sir. Couldn’t we use that instead?

BOXLER: Duty is fact-to-face confession, son. Between two people. You and the prisoner.

LUE MING: (To Craver): Haven’t we met before?

BOXLER: Remzi. Go get her kid. It’s in the hut.

REMZI: What hut, sir? We’re in the middle of a desert?

BOXLER: Get her fucking kid and bring it here, or I’ll cut his dick off.

REMZI: What kid, sir?

BOXLER: What kid? There’s always a kid.

LUE MING: The child is right here, In my arms.

(They all look at Lue Ming.) (America 2. 3.29-62)

Boxler’s puzzlement about his current battle reflects the similar violent circumstances of both wars he participated in, thus suggesting a unified American imperial hegemony that governs America’s international relations. “There is always a kid”, he asserts, pointing out how the two wars he is confusing produced the same casualties and created the same horrors under ever unchanged imperial claims of seeking peace and justice.
In a later scene in the play, Lue Ming’s ghost, as a victim of war, faces Boxler’s ghost, as the “soul” of war. Boxler describes himself saying:

BOXLER: . . . I go from war to war. It’s the only place that feels like Home. I didn’t kill your daughter. Calley did. I was inside him, looking out, but I didn’t pull the trigger.

LUE MING: You watched.

BOXLER: What else can a soul do but watch? We’re not magicians.

LUE MING: Is it terrible?

BOXLER: It tears me apart.

LUE MING: How long will this go on?

BOXLER: World without end. (America 2. 8. 47-59)

Boxler, as the “soul” of war, makes of every soldier a haunted person, occupied by the phantom of the battle, thus becoming a machine that kills and destroys.

The surreal nature of the play and its episodic incidents that create multiple realities throughout prevent the drama from reaching any type of cathartic end. The play ends with a scene that is not much different from the opening one, as we see Fairouz and Craver have one of many casual conversations scattered throughout the play’s text. This open – ended, non- cathartic format deprives the audience of any sense of dramatic relief, sending them back to reality with unresolved political dilemmas and a burdensome guilt for their
either active or passive sense of participation in the circle of violence. (El-Sawy 55)

In an interview with John Istel, Wallace talks about the main guiding concepts to the writing of her play:

One of my leads into the play was thinking about the body in love and in war. While war is intent on destroying the body, love supposedly has a capacity to reconstruct or rediscover the body’s sensuality. The body is central – and vulnerable – in both love and war. The question is: how does the body’s sensuality or sexuality survive in the fact of systems designed to destroy it – either war or late capitalism. (25)

The play stresses the physical manifestation of violence, displayed in the deformities of the characters, especially the females. Fairouz, for example, has a deformed foot that is sometimes taken care of by her brother Remzi, and often hated, despised and made fun of also by him.

Remzi’s violent behaviour toward his sister’s deformed body symbolizes the act of American imperial war, which is often advertised as an act of political correction intended to restore lost rights and rectify wrong situations, as Remzi himself is trying to do with his sister’s physical disability. However, his supposedly reforming violent act directed toward her deformity further offends
her wound rather than heals it: a dramatic gesture that hints at the political hypocrisy of America’s imperial wars. (El – Sawy 48)

Although Fairouz’s deformity is not a result of war violence, it may be seen as a symbol of the crippling power of imperial war. Fairouz often tries to practice her walk which Lue Ming tries to imitate, resulting in scenes of two limping women trying to stabilize their strides, signifying the efforts of their respective nations, Palestine and Vietnam, to recover from the war. In a conversation between Fairouz and Remzi, Wallace establishes a connection between Fairouz’s deformity and her social and political isolations:

REMZI: You’re going to blame me that no one wants to marry a girl with a gimpy foot.

FAIROUZ: My foot is deformed, but my cunt works just fine!

REMZI: You have a mouth full of dirt, sister. What is it you want from me?

FAIROUZ: What I want? (She speaks some angry lines to him in Arabic)

REMZI: Gibberish, Fairouz. Save it for the relatives.

(Fairouz speaks another line of Arabic to him)

I’m not a refugee. It’s always somewhere else with you, always once removed. I am not scattered.

FAIROUZ: If I could go to war with you, I’d shoot my enemies first, then I’d shoot the one who made them enemies. (America 1. 5. 94-109)
This conversation reflects how Fairouz’s physical deformity cripples her both socially and politically in a symbolic parallelism to the political handicapping of Palestinians, resulting from years of violent battling, which destroys the nation’s social life and its ability to physically defend itself.

In one of the most horrific incidents of violence against civilians during the Vietnam War, a company of American soldiers brutally killed the majority of the population of the South Vietnamese hamlet of My Lai in March 1968. Though exact numbers remain unconfirmed, it is believed that as many as 500 people including women, children and the elderly were killed in the My Lai massacre. Calley was given a hero’s welcome for ordering the slaughter, rape, and burning of an entire village. Higher – ranking U.S. Army officers managed to cover up the events of that day of a year before revelations by a soldier who had heard of the massacre sparked a wave of international outrage and led to a special investigation into the matter. In 1970, a U.S. Army board charged 14 officers of crimes related to the events at My Lai; only one was convicted. The brutality of the My Lai killings and the extent of the cover – up exacerbated growing antiwar sentiment on the home front in the United States and further divided the nation over the continuing American presence in Vietnam. This incident is highlighted in the play through Lue Ming, one of My Lai victims. Lue Ming appears to crawl out of nowhere and follows Boxler everywhere because he contains the soul and viciousness of Calley and his crimes. The following dialogue between Lue Ming and Boxler brings this out:

BOXLER: A unit of the American Division’s 11th Light Infantry Brigade entered.

LUE MING: Attacked.

BOXLER: Attacked an undefended village on the coast of Central Vietnam and took the lives.

LUE MING: Murdered

BOXLER: And murdered approximately five hundred old men, women and children. The killing took place over four hours.

Sexual violations.

LUE MING: Rape, sodomy.

BOXLER: Anatomical infractions.

LUE MING: Unimaginable mutilations.

BOXLER: Unimaginable. Yes. By the time I went to trial, public opinion was in my favour. T-Shirts, buttons, mugs. One company wanted to put my face on a new cereal.

LUE MING: And my daughter?

BOXLER: It’s over now. They say it’s over?

LUE MING: The past is never over.

BOXLER: The war is over.

LUE MING: Which one? (America 1. 5. 27-48)

In one instance, Lue Ming tells Fairouz the story of her long beautiful black braid that was cut off by an American soldier:
LUE MING: . . . Rush always gave me gum, juicy fruit gum. He called me his little sis. Once he gave me a ribbon to put in my hair. I had very long hair, beautiful, thick hair that I wore in a braid down my back. *(Beat)* But one day Rush didn’t bring any gum and he took out his knife and cut off my braid.

FAIROUZ: Was it a slow knife? Serrated are slow.

LUE MING: Oh no, it was a quick knife, a Rush knife, and he strapped my hair to the back of his helmet. His friends laughed and laughed. Rush looked so very silly with his camouflage helmet on and this long, black braid hanging down his back.

FAIROUZ: It was only hair. *(America 1. 7. 25-38)*

Lue Ming’s slashed braid signifies the violated humanity in war in the form of physical and / or mental mutilation of the spirit and / or body, but more importantly, it refers to women’s sexual violation, as hair is a strong symbol of a female’s beauty. Lue Ming describes the soldier’s knife as a rush knife, corresponding with the soldier’s own name, which signifies the war’s non-amendable destruction. Lue Ming’s slashed braid is not “only hair,” as Fairouz indicates; it is a physical sign that proclaims the victor and the vanquished.

The character of Lue Ming further connects the Vietnamese and Gulf wars in their violent content that is the substance of their imperial hegemony. Wallace is
trying to establish a comparison in the audience’s consciousness between the imperial intentions of these two wars, their parallel circumstances and comparable results. As she has noted, “The US in general cultivates an amnesia, as if, when historical events are over, they no longer have any relevance. The Gulf War was inextricably linked to various wars, including Vietnam” (qtd. in Bayley). The bibliography that follows the printed text of the play contains twenty two historical texts which she has referred. Moreover, Wallace acquainted herself with the language of war before writing the play:

At the beginning I was covering myself. And I had to educate myself about military weaponry, because the Gulf War was supposed to be a new kind of high–technology ‘clean’ war. The language of war fascinates me, the way it’s used to obscure rather than to bring clarity. The names of the weapons are extremely cynical – there’s one called ‘Sad Eyes’. It’s a way of making us think those weapons are our pals. So I began to think, how does one take the language of war and transform it into a language of love?

And what are the repercussions of that? (qtd. in Bayley)

The play In the Heart of America exemplifies the rhizomic structure of society through its overlapping incidents and collage like scenes. The play “Jumps around in time, presents simultaneous characters, [and] uses ghost characters” (Istel 25). Wallace states: “Wherever there is a present moment, the past is also present, although it’s usually invisible. That’s what draws me to the theatre – the ability to put different times on stage and see how they collide or how they
resonate with one anther – how the past tells a story within a present story” (qtd. in Istel 25).

Wallace goes back in time to “unlock the complexities of the present” (Gardner “Mythic” 4). Edward Said opines that “appeals to the past are among the commonest of strategic in interpretations of the present” (3). Both Fairouz and Lue Ming bring their deformed mothers from the past into the present:

FAIROUZ: There’s always a parallel. Did Mother ever tell you how she broke her hip before she came to America?

REMZI: She fell down when she was running away from the soldiers . . . .

FAIROUZ: No. She was running towards the soldiers.

REMZI: I’ve have heard this so many times it’s a sweet little lullaby that could rock me to sleep. So Mother saved Father and they broke her hip with a rifle butt. Crack, crack. Bone broke. Hobble, hobble for the rest of her life. What do you expect me to do, hobble around for the rest of my life? (America 1. 5. 17-28).

Here Fairouz is able to see the parallelism between her present state and her mother’s past state. Similarly Lue Ming traces a parallel between her mother’s past injury and Fairouz’s present injury:

LUE MING: You should meet my mother; she has one foot.

FAIROUZ: To see the toes.
LUE MING: she stepped on a mine on her way for a piss.

FAIROUZ: Not the toes, but the hooves. They said I had hooves for toes. Devil’s feet.

LUE MING: It was March 16, 1968.

FAIROUZ: Devil’s feet.

LUE MING: Why, you weren’t even born then, were you?

(America 1. 4. 42-49)

Such mixing of episodes creates multiple realities which may be characterised as the principles of connection and heterogeneity, the principle of the rhizome postulated by Deleuze and Guattari.

Also, in the play, Wallace makes the spirit of William Calley, who massacred more than 500 civilians at My Lai in 1968 imprint the body of Lieutenant Boxler who is a commander in the Gulf War of 1990. This is a clear instance of Deleuzian deterritorialization and reterritorialization or the orchid-wasp concept. Wallace here presents the state of “Boxler becoming Calley” and “Calley becoming Boxler”.

BOXLER: Calley is still alive and well in Georgia, only I’ve run out on him. I’m his soul. Calley’s dead soul.

LUE MING: His soul?

BOXLER: Yes, his soul and I’m homeless.

LUE MING: I don’t believe in souls.

BOXLER: Neither do I, but here I am. I go from war to war. It’s the only place that feels like home. I didn’t kill your daughter.
Calley did. I was inside him, looking out, but I didn’t do it. I didn’t pull the trigger. (*America* 2. 8. 42-50)

The principle of deterritorialization and reterritorialization or the concept of the rhizome is exemplified in the collision of not only the past and the present, but also of different places and people. Lue Ming who encounters Craver in a motel is confused as to where she is:

LUE MING: I was homing in on a small jewelry store in Columbus, Georgia. Is it Georgia?


LUE MING: And you’re not Calley?

CRAVER: Are you Chinese?

LUE MING: Oh no. I was born in Hanoi.

CRAVER: What are you doing here?

LUE MING: I’ve never left my country. I’m a real homebody.

(*America* 1. 2. 10-18)

In a conversation between Fairouz and Lue Ming, we see Lue Ming being mistaken for Fairouz’s brother Remzi:

FAIROUZ: . . . Are you listening to me?

LUE MING (*Answering as Remzi*): Yes, I am, Fairouz. I’m listening.

FAIROUZ: Go say good-bye to Mother. She’s in her room, and she won’t come out. She says they’ll kill you. Just like they killed Father.
LUE MING (As Remzi): That was an accident, and you know it. He fell onto the lily pads and into the pond and drowned.

FAIROUZ: His face was messed up. As though he’d been hit many times.

LUE MING (As Remzi): Water can do that to a face.

FAIROUZ: I’ve told Mother that, Remzi. Over and over I’ve told her that it’s the Iraqis you’re going off to fight, but she keeps saying (speaks in Arabic and then translates) “They’ll kill him. The Yankees will kill him”. Silly woman.

She’s all mixed up. (America 1. 8. 28-44)

The mother’s confusion of the wars is echoed in many places in the play, where the Gulf War, the Vietnam War and the Second World War are all intentionally brought together just to show the futility of war which results in unnecessary destruction, caused by American imperialistic intentions and glossed over as a necessary war on terror.

The military camp in the play may be said to be a heterotopia where ethnic and class differences melt. Remzi, a Palestinian-American, tells Craver:

REMZI: On the streets of Atlanta I’ve been called every name you think of: pimp, terrorist, half-nigger, mongrel, spic, wop, even Jew-bastard. And to these people in this camp it didn’t matter a damn that I was some kind of a mix. Some kind of
something else, born some place in a somewhere else than
my face said. Or something like that. (*America* 1. 9. 65-71)

Wallace also conveys through the play that settlers in the United States
undergo deterritorialization and reterritorialization of identities. For instance,
Fairouz Saboura is confused about her hyphenated identity as seen in the following
dialogue:

LUE MING: . . . So you’re Arab?

FAIROUZ: American.

LUE MING: American?

FAIROUZ: Arab.

LUE MING: Make up your mind!

FAIROUZ: I’m a Palestinian-Arab-American. From Atlanta.

(*America* 1. 10. 56-71)

In Deleuzian terms, principles of connection and heterogeneity found in such
hyphenated identities may be associated with the concept of the rhizome.

The play *The War Boys*, written and published in the year 1993, may be
seen as an unflinching study of racism and sexism, the twin bulwarks of the same
oppressive system. The play starts in the U.S. border with Mexico, with three boys
Greg, David and George. They were friends from their school days and now they
were appointed by the U.S army to see whether the illegal immigrants run through
the way. But sometimes they chase people for their fun. During the course of the
play, the young vigilantes come to realize that they are as vulnerable and as helpless as the immigrants they chased across the border.

For Wallace, *The War Boys* represents a space where a border is literally represented and where boundaries of identity are constantly being broken and reformed. David is the white, college-educated son of privilege. Greg is working-class and a high-school dropout, and while bi-racial (white father, Mexican mother), he questions his identification as Mexican-American. George is a white “home boy”, part of a lower class that in many ways is opposite to David, but also to Greg. Identity boundaries blur for these young men: while David and George are both white, they belong to very different class hierarchies. Wallace is exploring the historical fissure of the “melting pot” mythology of America, which has always been fractured as new Americans grapple with their evolving identities.

The play takes place on a deliberately bare set where a barbed wire fence, a visual metaphor for the American West and its mythology, is minimally represented, meant to suggest a border. In the guise of a “game”, using their spotlights to focus on phantom migrants illegally crossing the border, Wallace takes the three young men on an American journey of approaching manhood. During their “game”, the boys act out a casual cruelty with physically violent actions, including slapping each other across the face, seeing which one can last the longest before falling over. They tell monologues of stories that may be true or may be imagined. The violence of these young men is not limited to each other. They target the imagined migrants, or the “other”, as they attempt to cross the border.
They act out a scenario of what they would do to a “phantom” Chicana coming across the border. During these games, the war boys verbally assault each other to expose vulnerabilities. The uneducated, lower – class white male character, George, quickly falls out of the power hierarchy as real conflict begins to develop between David and Greg. By the end of the play, the games have become truly violent as George and David combine forces to physically attack Greg. Greg has the last monologue of the play, a chilling story of class, privilege, sexual awakening, family identity and confusion, and American identity, told through acts of violence.

In Wallace’s poem, “Preparing for War”, published the same year as *The War Boys*, she uses the metaphor of a young man preparing for a drag race, linking young male activities such as car-racing, to a type of pre-war conditioning for the violence of war. The boys use each other’s bodies to act out physical and sexual violence, as in this monologue by David:

> She was my . . . friend.

*(David takes off britches, lays them out . . . The shape of a person is now laid out on the floor.)*

. . . Now, which one is me? This one? *(To self)* or that one? *(To suit on floor)* Or is that old sis lying there? *(Beat)* Sis and I were from an aspiring middle class neighbourhood. Even as kids we were smart enough to keep our eyes on the nest rung of the ladder.

*(While David tells the following. George crawls into David’s space, climbs onto the clothes and does push –ups over them. . . George*
flips over on his back and is motionless. David stands over him . . .

Kneels over George’s body. George is lifeless.) (War 775-802)

In Greg’s final monologue, he uses David’s body to illustrate the violence done to Evalina, the female character in Greg’s story. Later in the scene, when he acts out the scenario of his parents’ domestic violence, he uses David’s hand to illustrate how his mother hit him: “Greg moves to David, takes David’s hand, and uses it to smack himself in the fact. David tunes in to the role and now plays Greg’s mother. . .” (War 1541-1543). Greg explains, in Spanish, that he no longer wants the violence, the “fighting” that has been going on. Greg rejects American culture and attempts to give its symbol, the “MADE IN THE USA” gun, back to David as he says “you can have it back”(War 1671). David refuses to accept it and Greg drops the gun at his feet.

The play may further be said to be set on three borders — the border between Mexico and the United States, the border between adolescence and manhood and the border between fantasy and reality. This U.S – Mexico border is the heterotopia in the play, where boundaries of identity are broken. David is the White member of the privileged class, Greg is a Mexican-American, even conscious of his bi-racial identity and also uneducated working class, while George is from a White lower economic class. These boys play games of violence in which they switch roles, thus blurring the class and racial boundaries. In Deleuzian terms, these characters subvert the traditional molar lines of binaries, destabilizing the distinction between fixed identities, and take lines of flight along molecular lines. For instance, the
fixed grid of capitalism advantages the moneyed class represented by David and the underprivileged ‘other’. David boasts about hiring a Mexican woman as maid and role-plays the event, with Greg, the working class Mexican-American taking on the role of the maid.

DAVID: How can I help you, miss?

GREG: Oh, Mister Gringo. I want to work. I like work.

(David trips Greg and pushes him to his knees.)

DAVID: So you like to work?

(George gets into game, David and George both interrogate Greg)

GEORGE: What kind of work?


DAVID: What for?

GEORGE: What for?

GREG: For pretty clothes?

DAVID (Smacks Greg in the head): Stupid answer. Try again. Why do you want money?

GREG: I’m hungry. (Beat) I’m starving. (War 1341-1354)

But soon after, Wallace makes the characters switch roles and David is compelled to take on the role of the maid:

GREG: So you want a job, huh? ( Strikes him hard) I’m talking to you. You want a job?

GEORGE: Do it again, Greg.
(Greg strikes David again)

GREG: Well, if you’re going to work for me, you can’t wear those fancy shirts. (Rips David’s shirt open. David is passive, as though stunned) Nice, _chica_. Really nice. Here in America-

(George pulls on David’s hair and spits on him)

-We know how to appreciate a nice piece of foreign work. (_Beat_) How does it feel, baby? How does it feel to be on the bottom, with your ass in the dirt? Want to come home with me and scrub my tub? I’ll buy you a green apron. (_War_ 1403-1416)

This inversion of class position is represented by the “lines of flight” as postulated by Deleuze and Guattari.

Towards the close of the play the Mexican-American Greg emerges as the one who occupies the more advantageous position in the power-grid than the pure American David. He tells David, “The show’s over . . . I’m your nightmare now, your very own one-hundred percent, all American pure beef wet back and I’m gonna stay right here, light up this border, . . . but how about from the other side this time” (_War_ 1642-1651). Thus the U.S-Mexican border in this play can be termed as Foucaultian heterotopia, a counter-site, a site of resistance and subversion. The violence in which the boys indulge is seen by a critic as an offshoot of consumerist culture which represses human feeling:

Consumerism is a metaphorical substitute for desire and the result of this repression of human feeling is violence. George and Greg
strike out against others because they lack power. All of them act in a racist manner, because it makes them feel good, feel strong, if only for a moment. They feel they’re on the right side-in this way, basic human needs are perverted by culture. (Sierz N. pag.)

Naomi Wallace’s *The Fever Chart: Three Visions of the Middle East*, is a collection of three one-act plays, set in the Gaza Strip, West Jerusalem, and Baghdad. Wallace went to Jerusalem with the British director David Gothard in 2002, to set up a tour for six American playwrights. The tour was arranged, and the six of them spent a week there, meeting theatre artists in Israel and Palestine. They witnessed firsthand the unimaginably oppressive and dangerous situations under which the dramatists worked, especially in the Occupied Territories. This experience resulted in the writing of some plays by Wallace about the Middle East. *The Fever Chart* is comprised of three pieces which were separately written and performed over five years and first combined in 2008. As a critic has pointed out, “The Middle East offers perhaps the ideal site from which to consider the political and aesthetic commitment of Naomi Wallace’s theatre” (Waterman 155).

The first piece, “A State of Innocence” was written by Wallace for a theatre in Scotland, 7:84. In a conversation with Claire MacDonald, Wallace speaks about the genesis of the play:

I’ve been deeply interested in the Middle East for many years now. I have family there, on both sides: Palestinian family through marriage, and my great, great grandfather was a rabbi. . . I wrote
about a zoo in Rafah that had been bulldozed by the IDF [Israeli Defence Forces]. This brutal, ridiculous action of destroying a children’s zoo stayed with me. Many of the animals were killed by the dozer’s treads. The turtles were crushed. I have a thing about turtles. I grew up in a rural area in Kentucky. My father often rescued box turtles from the roads and brought them home for us to play with, and then release. I’ve always admired these slow and careful creatures. But the main incentive for writing the play was a factual account of an Israeli soldier who was shot by a Palestinian sniper in a doorway in Gaza. The Palestinian mother of this home held the Israeli soldier while he died. That story sparked my interest.

(93 - 94)

Yuval, an Israeli soldier, fell asleep on duty and was made keeper in the zoo in Rafah, southern Gaza. There he meets Um Hisham, a Rafah woman, who knows his name. It is the story of a meeting between two intimately related people from either side of the Israeli occupation. It begins with tension between the two parties, brought by their preconceptions of one another:

YUVAL (Threatening): . . . Are you a terrorist?

YUVAL: Don’t get playful with me. You want to throw me in the sea.

UM HISHAM: I just might. But I can’t get to the sea. Seventeen and a half checkpoints keep me from it. (*Fever 9*)

He challenges her as a terrorist, and she mocks him. She has something that belongs to his mother, she tells him. They are joined by Shlomo, an Israeli architect who designs for power and thrives on the ruins, he is surveying. He and Yuval place Um Hisham on Shlomo’s tool chest and circle gaily around her, enacting the “wall and tower housing model”. Shlomo chants: “The Homa Umigdal, the Wall and Tower, was our very first architectural model for the family home. Homa Umigdal! Homa Umigdal! Homa Umigdal! . . . This model was the cradle of the nation, the very nest and egg that made the desert bloom” (*Fever 11*). From the tower, Um Hisham mocks them, seeing only Palestinians. She sees the Homa Umigdal only as “a machine of invasion” and not a protective mechanism.

The Homa Umigdal is a type of collective settlement built by the Israeli soldiers as a stronghold to withstand Arab attacks during 1936 – 39. These settlements were built overnight to overcome mandatory emergency regulations against building of new settlements. The invention of the Wall and Tower system is attributed to Shlomo Gur, founding member of kibbutz Tel Amal (now Nir David). The system was based on the fast construction of pre-fabricated wooded moulds, which would be filled with gravel and enclosed with barbed wire fencing. In average, the enclosed space formed a yard of $35 \times 35$ metres (1 dunam). In the yard
a pre-fabricated wooden observation tower and four shacks, providing housing for a “conquering troop” of around 40 people, was erected. The name of the Israeli architect in the play seems to be intentional. It is ironic that Shlomo suggests that the animals in the zoo could be protected by the Homa Umigdal model:

\[\ldots\text{since we cannot remove this zoo to a hilltop, which is where one is truly safe, we shall have to squeeze it into the Homa Umigdal model.}\ldots\text{They [the animals] will feel safer. Happier. The fear of a terrorist attack can put an animal off its food. Bad for business. I will propose to the government that each animal have a Wall and Tower. (Fever 12)}\]

The behaviour of the zoo animals, who lose parts at night, but regrow them in the day, gives Shlomo and Yuval pause. “Where are we?” (Fever 13) they ask. They recount past Zionist and other heroics to reassure themselves, which Um Hisham criticizes knowingly. She tells Shlomo the location of some fresh ruins, which she knows intimately. He dashes off eagerly to inspect them. Um Hisham knows Yuval’s life in detail, including his tank, his unit’s destruction of the zoo, songs familiar to him, and details of his home. She reminds him of his mother’s belonging which she has. Yuval is perplexed and wary. Shlomo returns, frustrated at not being allowed to see the ruins. An Israeli soldier was killed there, and inspection is prohibited. Yuval tells Um Hisham that Palestinians are murderers. Um Hisham tells them of the killing of her daughter by an Israeli sniper. Shlomo laments noble past causes, now lacking. Yuval discovers that he didn’t want to be a soldier. It is dusk; the animals will begin their diurnal cycle. Yuval is nervous, and
wants them both to leave; Shlomo does, but promises to return the next day, and Um Hisham knows he will. She finishes telling Yuval of his life and fate and his mother’s possession. Um Hisham is the only innocent, and the only one with knowledge. Shlomo, and Yuval are guilty, and innocent only of knowledge, for which they pay, forever, in the ghost zoo where the animals dismember themselves nightly, and re-member themselves daily.

Set in the middle of the Second Intifada, the play begins with the tension between the people on either side of the occupation, tensions that cause a young soldier to believe that even a middle-aged mother is a threat to him because she is Palestinian. However, the structure of occupied violence returns when Um Hisham explains to Yuval how she knows who he is, telling him that soldiers in his unit beat her husband because they could not find weapons in Um Hisham’s house. Yuval stopped the beating, and, to thank him, Um Hisham made him a cup of tea. However, as he put the cup of tea to his lips, a single bullet from a sniper pierced his head. When he dropped to his knees, he looked to Um Hisham and said, “Hold me”, which she did, telling him in the zoo, “Three minutes. It took you three minutes to die. Everything I have despised, for decades – the uniform, the power, the brutality, the inhumanity – and I held it in my arms. I held you, Yuval. (Beat) But it should have been your mother. We should hold our own children when they die” (Fever 23).

Um Hisham continues to explain that because Yuval died in her house, the Israeli military bulldozed the house and arrested her husband, and that the zoo they
are in is the one that lives on in their minds, where she can visit Yuval as she visits her daughter.

In this way, “A State of Innocence” explores the closeness between the occupier and the occupied, and how their lives, and deaths, are inextricably linked to one another and are even tied together after death. And, as with the other plays, it provides an image of the oppressed providing comfort to the oppressor, showing humanity in spite of the occupation; in this play, though, the Israeli soldier had also shown a moment of compassion to Um Hisham, a moment that would cost his life, as crossing the borders of political divide, sadly, too often does. However, as Wallace writes, it is only in those moments of crossing, in the creative transgressions, in the most intimate forms of transnational community that a better world can be imagined, that vision can exist, in the mind, on stage, or in life. The inverse of this is an idea that Wallace understands when she states, “What could be more intimate or personal than the fact that we get up in the morning, kiss our loved ones, go to work, come home, pay our taxes – and those taxes from our daily labor are used to kill you and you and you, and I never saw your face nor knew your name” (“On Writing” 102). If the violence of occupation is formed from the product of our daily lives, the resistance to such violence needs to take an equally personal form.

The action of the play takes place on the Gaza strip, a space of dispute between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Shlomo remarks on the Jewish attitude quoting from their policy: “Move, run and grab as many hilltops as you can to
enlarge the Jewish settlements because everything we take now will stay ours. . .
everything we don’t grab will go to them” (*Fever* 14). Wars are a consequence of
human greed and avarice which Wallace condemns in her plays.

In “A State of Innocence”, a bulldozed zoo is the setting but it is an unreal
space with ghostly characters. The animals are given names to give a realistic
touch to them – Shadack Winko is a porcupine; the two emus are named Tricky
Beak and Horton; two camels have the names Fairway and Hoboken Bromwell;
there are two ring-tailed cats Buddy and Briggs and three water buffalos
Chesterfield, Erkle and Alfalfa. One puny monkey is named Dingleberry Dibbit.
The peculiar thing about these animals is that they lose some parts every night
which grow again in the morning: “The emus are missing their toes. The ring-
tailed cats have no tails. The water buffalo. Their long ribs have fallen out of their
bodies so their sides have collapsed” (*Fever* 13). Here the unreal space overlaps
the real space. The bulldozed zoo is a ruined space, over which Shlomo attempts to
construct his architectural structures, but fails in his attempt. He exclaims in
exasperation: “The soldiers wouldn’t let me past to measure the new ruin. How the
hell is an architect to get work when they won’t let me inspect the property?”
(*Fever* 19). The zoo is a space of innocence, a place of relaxation and enjoyment
for children which is destroyed mercilessly by the forces of violence and
destruction.

The second piece, “Between This Breath and You”, tells the seemingly
impossible story of an Israeli woman that has been given the lungs of a Palestinian
youth killed by an Israeli soldier. However, though Wallace’s play speaks of a seemingly impossible coming together of her characters, the play was based on an actual event, as Egyptian critic Nehad Selaiha noted in her review of the Cairo performance. In fact, *The Guardian*, whose story on the event was projected between segments of the Cairo production, quoted the Arab family involved as stating “that peace and a desire to alleviate the suffering of others was uppermost in their minds. But looking exhausted and still stunned by the twin demands of Ahmed’s death and the Israeli embrace, they also speak of their decision as an act of resistance” (qtd. in Potter).

The vision foregrounds an encounter between Tanya, a 20-year old Israeli Jewish woman, and Mourid, a Palestinian man in his forties from the West Bank. It takes place in the waiting room of a medical clinic in Tel Aviv, where Tanya is a health worker. Mourid is deliberate and self-possessed, but has an urgent need to meet Tanya, to whom he has an intimate connection. This is the most important thing in his life, and gives him power over her. Tanya tries to dismiss him; the clinic is closed, he must come back the next day, she might call the police. She examines him briefly but finds nothing obvious. They talk past, and then to, each other. As the nature of his presumed connection becomes clear, she becomes angry, and Mourid exercises his power over her. She is stricken, recovers, flies into a towering rage, and humiliates him in a racist way. He begs her to stop. She relents, acknowledges her weakness, and is stricken again. But Mourid doesn’t want revenge, only to help her live in the unique way his connection to her allows him. Their acquaintance begins a second time, on this new basis.
Mourid mysteriously unravels details of Ahmed’s life beside what he knows of Tanya’s life, asking her, “How often do you stay behind to lock up? To play with the stethoscope? To talk with a patient after hours, pretending you can be of service?” (*Fever* 37). Mourid then explains that Israeli soldiers had made his son clean dirt from their tanks with a broom because children had been throwing dirt. Then, they shot him in the back of the head and the pelvis, saying Ahmed had been carrying a gun. It is remarkable that an Israeli lives through drawing breath from a Palestinian. She looks into the eyes of the father of him who gives her breath to live. However, this intimacy, the speaking of the child’s death, is broken when Mourid tries to explain to Tanya that his son’s lungs were transplanted inside of her, an idea that Tanya works hard to reject. Thus, Mourid explains to her the situation in detail:

The donor organs had to be transplanted within six hours after being removed. While you were under general anaesthesia, the surgeon made an incision across your chest, beneath the breast area and removed your lungs. Then the surgeon placed the new lungs into your empty chest cavity and connected the pulmonary artery of the new lungs into your empty chest cavity and connected the pulmonary artery of the new lungs into your vessels and airway. Drainage tubes were inserted to drain air, fluid and blood out of your chest for several days to allow the lungs to reexpand. With oxygen. Sweet, cold oxygen. And here you are beautiful Tanya. (Beat) My son is inside you. (*Fever* 45)
Initially, Tanya responds to this story with outright denial, and, as Mourid continues to insist that it is Ahmed’s lungs inside Tanya, she turns to revulsion, spitting on him, and later telling him, “Had your son’s lungs been inside me, I am sure, absolutely sure, that I would have rejected them” (Fever 46). Finally, she attempts to disgust Mourid, declaring, “When I laugh, your son laughs. When I sing, your son sings. . . . But that would also mean your son was present last night . . . I picked a stranger up after work. A sweet, eager young man. He fucked me so hard I thought he’d break me in half,” continuing on after Mourid tries to interrupt her, “Don’t worry. Things went smoothly. Your son gave me good air when I sucked cock. Good Jewish cock” (Fever 50). In this way, Tanya attempts to invert the intimacy expressed by Mourid, using the fact of Ahmed’s lungs not to show the closeness of their lives, but to try to sicken and repel Mourid. “Ahmed’s lungs . . . are both a site of occupation and a means of animation, insofar as they enable the expansionist capacity of the Zionist state through its conscription to the sustenance of Israeli life” (Waterman 160). Just as the bullet from the Israeli soldier took the beauty of Ahmed’s life to try to stop Palestinian resistance, so too does Tanya try to use the beauty of the gift she was given to try to end Mourid’s words. In the end, though, just as the Israeli state has not been able to expel all the Palestinian bodies from its system, no matter how many have been killed, Tanya learns that she must also depend on Mourid to learn to breathe again after an asthma attack:

MOURID: . . . You must slow your breath down. Let it gather its force again. Like this.

(Mourid breathes in a long, slow breath)
As though the air has become fluid and you are drinking it in.

(Mourid breathes in again, demonstrating)

TANYA: I can’t. (Beat) I can’t.

.............................................................

TANYA: Mourid Kamal. Why do you want to help me?

MOURID: Because you are. My son.

(TANYA looks at Mourid. Mourid raises his head slightly; Tanya copies him. It is clear that he is leading this breathing lesson . . .

(Fever 52 – 3)

This process is mediated by the janitor, Sami, a Mizrahi (Arab) Jew in his thirties. The Ashkenazi (European) Tanya treats him like a menial, an overtone to her racism against Arab gentiles. Sam’s humility is his virtue; he is a charming, child-like, babbling character, in love with Tanya above his station, but invested with magical powers. These are revealed in a parable about fish biology which hints at the connection between Tanya and Mourid, and his mop, which is like a magic wand, collecting all the detritus of life, and thus able to create new life, he claims. He tries with his mop to recreate the life that binds Tanya and Mourid, and mops them up and down, presaging their transformation. “His magical whimsy relieves the extreme tension between Tanya and Mourid, but also highlights their transformation. Israel’s Ashkenazi Jews are fatally stricken; only by acknowledging their common life with the Palestinian Arabs can they recover; the Mizrahi Jews can aid that recovery” (Clark). The intimacy between the occupier and the occupied is at the heart of all the visions within The Fever Chart.
The third piece, “The Retreating World,” is set in Baghdad, after the 1991 Gulf war, under the draconian US-led sanctions regime. Wallace wrote it after reading an article by John Pilger called “Squeezed to Death” about an Iraqi man in Baghdad who said he had to sell his how pigeons to survive. It features a single character. Ali, an Iraqi pigeon hobbyist in his twenties. Ali carries a book, the essential artefact of civilization, but libraries are sold for a pittance, their paper is used mundanely, and Ali uses his book a comic prop. The book is an English one about keeping pigeons, which is really about keeping life, he explains. Through birds and books, Ali recounts life in Baghdad, like an eloquent mourning dove, his favourite bird. The trees die for lack of electricity and clean water in a city of three million, because the needed equipment is embargoed, so every month 5,000 birds die, small and soft and helpless. Iraqis cannot write in protest to the UN because pencils are forbidden. Ali’s grandmother, “rotted from the waist down” after developing an infection in her leg, for lack of “little pink pills of penicillin” (Fever 62). Fuel – air explosives, napalm, cluster bombs and depleted uranium munitions containing 900 tons of radioactive waste were not embargoed under the laws of war in 1991. Ali was marching, next to his best friend Samir, with 700 other common soldiers, toward a US Unit, hands high in surrender, when Samir and almost all the rest were massacred in a hail of fire:

As we walked towards them – this is documented – the commander of the U.S. unit fired, at one man – an anti-tank missile, a missile meant to pierce armor. At one man. The rest of us, arms
still raised, stopped walking. I remember. I remember. \((He \ slowly \ lowers \ his \ arms.\)\)

I could not. I could not recognize. My friend Samir. A piece of his spine stuck upright in the sand. His left hand blown so high in the air it was still falling. Then they opened fire on the rest of us. \((Fever \ 65)\).

Ali, who survived, sold his childhood treasures, an aunt’s birth spoon, an uncle’s watch, before selling his books, his Arabic Shakespeare, then his English, and only then his birds, one by one, retrieving the bones from the buyers after their meals. He rattles them in a bucket, reaches in and throws out a handful, all the retreating world has left him.

Early on, his advice on raising pigeons dovetails into the state of Iraq after nearly a decade of sanctions: “Never name a pigeon after a member of your family or a dear friend. \((Beat)\) For two reasons: pigeons have short lives – and when a pigeon named after an uncle dies, this can be disconcerting. And second: these times are dangerous for pigeons – they can be caught and eaten” \((Fever \ 58)\). This style of mixing the intimacy of books and birds from his personal life, with the violence unleashed on an entire nation continues throughout the play, such as when Ali begins to speak of the Gulf War, saying,

\[\ldots\ \text{We hid in bunkers for most of those weeks. Cursing Saddam when our captain was out. Cursing the Brits and the Yanks the rest of the time. And I missed by birds. But birds were prohibited in the}\]
bunkers. Prohibited. Prohibited by the laws of nations as were the fuel – air explosive bombs, the napalm – Shhh – the cluster and antipersonnel weapons. Prohibited, as were the BLU – 82 bombs, a fifteen – thousand – pound device – Shut up! – capable of incinerating every living thing, flying or grounded, within hundreds of yards . . . And me I missed my birds. The way they looked at me, their eyes little pieces of peace sailing my way. (Fever 61)

Similarly, after Ali eats part of one of his books, he declares,

... Books can also, in extreme times, be used as sustenance. But such eating makes for a parched throat. Many mornings I wake and I am thirsty. I turn on the taps but there is no running water. A once – modern city of three million people, with no running water for years now. The toilets are dry because we have no sanitation. Sewage pools in the street. When we wish to relieve ourselves, we squat beside the dogs. At night, we turn on the lights to read the books we have forgotten we have sold, but there is no electricity. . .

(Fever 64)

The play ends in a moment of intimacy, when Ali picks up a bucket and holds it up for the audience, declaring, “These are the bones of those who have died, from the avenue of palms, from the land of dates. I have come here to give them to you for safekeeping. (Beat) Catch them. If you can” (Fever 67). As he lifts the bucket out over the audience, they are not met with bones of dead Iraqis, but “hundreds of white feathers” (Fever 68). Thus, instead of fully horrifying an audience that helped
construct Iraqi suffering, he, like Mourid, provides a gift of beauty, a moment to breathe and hope together, to know that the space between the lives of the oppressor and the oppressed is thinner than the space between feathers falling from the sky.

The 2006 Lebanon war fought between the Hezbullah terrorists and the Israeli forces forms the backdrop of Wallace’s ten-minute play “One Short Sleepe”. Like “The Retreating World”, this play also features a single character, a young Lebanese man, Basheer in his early twenties. He is seen digging a hole in the ground with a shovel. Basheer, a student of entomology, and his little sister Ghada lost their lives in an air-raid during summer 2006. Basheer describes the event:

It was the second raid. My mother couldn’t get back home. She was with her mother, safe, across town. My dear father was on our roof. His legs were at the bottom of the stairs. And Ghada had an ant at the end of her body. At the end of her body, on the end of her finger. And she was singing or weeping, singing or weeping, and I told her to stop. . . . I said: . . . “Shut up. . . . Ants can’t be pilots.”

The noise of jets is silence. Until they are done. And when they are done, grace closes its door. (Fever 73,74)
Basheer’s intimacy with insects like the spider and the ant is mixed with the violence unleashed in a war. The spider’s weaving of the web is identified with the steering of the aircraft by the pilots:

For the spider then stands on tiptoe, raises its opisthosoma, its abdomen or end, as high as it can in the air and sends out a stream of silk from its youthful spinnerets. . . . Then the spider lets go – and pilots the craft through the breeze. . . . This tiny, perfect aircraft may travel long distances, even out to sea, perhaps to end up on foreign soil. Or, if unlucky, to spin its thread on a wave. A wave.

That’s how they came for us.

Wave after wave, the pilots, covering the ground . . . .
Covering the ground with four million cluster munitions. Covering our streets, our roofs. The bomblets lay their hard fruit in the broken road. And they were made not by God, as the spiders are, but by hands: soldering, cutting, screwing, polishing, testing. ([Fever 72])

In her interview with Claire Macdonald, Wallace has expressed her interest in space: “. . . Space . . . and claims on space, have very much been an interest of mine . . . I also look at who history of . . . material space, at who stood there and why, who got shoved off and who didn’t, and at all the ghosts of that space” (94). She also reports on her interview with the Israeli journalist Amira Hass: “We had been talking with her about the struggle over space and about how everything had been piled up: the historical claims, the mystic claims and the religious claims, and Amira Hass said to us, ‘of course it’s about real estate with papers from god’” (94).
The action in *The Fever Chart* takes place “in a sort of purgatory between the inferno that currently consumes the Middle East and the unspoiled garden that might have been there before” (Thielman). The imperial hegemony establishes a harsh dichotomy of binary opposites in the Middle East --the terrorist Palestinians and the law-abiding peace establishing Israelis. Wallace breaks this dichotomy through characters who take lines of flight from the fixed grid of molar lines. For instance, Um-Hisham refers to herself playfully as “Palestinorist, Terrestinian, Palerrorist” (*Fever* 9). There can be no binary opposites, but only a human mixing of both.

The setting of “A State of Innocence” is the heterotopic space of the zoo in Rafah in Gaza, the contested space between Israel and Palestine. It brings together into a single space things that are not usually together- porcupines, emus, camels, ring-tailed cats, water buffalos and monkeys, and also a Palestinian and an Israeli. This is a dream place, as the zoo has already been bulldozed by the Israeli Defence Forces and Um-Hisham and Yuval have already been killed. Shlomo mistakes them for mother and son, and there is also confusion of places as obvious in the words of Shlomo: “Mother and son. Like the land and the settler – though the one’s from Brooklyn” (*Fever* 10).

As Um Hisham held Yuval as he died like a mother would her son, there is a collation of identities, Um Hisham becoming Yuval’s mother and Yuval becoming Um Hisham’s son. In other words, it is a Palestinian becoming an Israeli and an Israeli becoming a Palestinian. The Deleuzian model of the orchid and the
wasp is applicable here, as Wallace envisages “another” space, where all distinctions imposed by an imperial hegemony dissolve. Moreover the setting is a space between reality and unreality, with ghost characters appearing to be real, parallel to Foucault’s mirror-space.

“Between This Breath and You” is another instance of the orchid and the wasp model, an exploding of two heterogeneous series on the line of flight composed by a common rhizome. An Israeli woman has been given the lungs of a Palestinian youth and this is another instance of an Israeli becoming Palestinian and a Palestinian becoming Israeli. Wallace here conjures up a dream-like state, where opposites are transformed into each other until crime and punishment, as well as guilt and innocence become impossible to separate. It is an interdependence that defies politics in order to affirm life.

From this investigation of global politics from a Foucaultian and Deleuzian point of view, the study moves to demystification of gender boundaries and the epic dramaturgy employed by Wallace in highlighting these issues.