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Ziyad Shakir Loaybi

Asst. Prof. Thamir R. S.  
Az-Zubaidi (Ph.D)University of Wasit  
College of Education  
For HumanitiesEmail:  
thrashid@uowasit.edu.iq

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## Dismantling Fabricated Reality in Sam Shepard's State of Shock

## A B S T R A C T

This paper investigates Sam Shepard's States of Shock in which the playwright explores family relation during an international crisis, war. As male identity is noted as a recurring theme in Shepard's plays, the paper examines masculine identity in States of Shock. As depicted in the play, Colonel and Stubbs, the main characters in the play, struggle to negotiate their personal identity prisms. As such, we explore this issue via the lens of social identity to address the primary constructs in the play. Although taking as its setting a family café, the events in the play transcend this both temporally and spatially through the two characters' battle for male identity at the war front lines. As such, we argue that through the characters of Colonel and Stubbs, where the former promotes war mythologies regardless of the suffering of the traumatized soldier, Stubbs, the play presents a critique of American myths of war.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31185/eduj.Vol51.Iss1.2906>تفكيك الواقع الملقق في مسرحية حالات الصدمة لسام شيبيرد<sup>1</sup>

\* \* أ.م.د. ثامر راشد شيال الزبيدي

\*الباحث: زياد شاكر لعبيبي الزبيدي

جامعة واسط / كلية التربية للعلوم الانسانية

## الخلاصة:

يكشف هذا البحث مسرحية حالات الصدمة لسام شيبيرد حيث يستكشف الكاتب المسرحي العلاقة الأسرية أثناء أزمة دولية وهي الحرب. نظراً لملاحظة الهوية الذكورية كموضوع متكرر في مسرحيات شيبيرد، يكشف هذا البحث الهوية الذكورية في مسرحية حالات الصدمة. كما تم تصويره في المسرحية، فإن العقيد والجندي ستابس هما الشخصيتان الرئيسيتان في المسرحية اللتان تكافحان للتفاوض على معايير هويتهما الشخصية. على هذا النحو، فإننا نكشف هذه المشكلة من خلال

عدسة الهوية الاجتماعية لمعالجة التركيبات الأساسية في المسرحية. على الرغم من تناولها في مقهى عائلي، إلا أن الأحداث في المسرحية تتجاوز هذا زمانياً ومكانياً من خلال معركة الشخصيتين من أجل الهوية الذكورية في الخطوط الأمامية للحرب. أيضاً، نجادل بأن المسرحية تقدم نقدًا لأساطير الحرب الأمريكية من خلال شخصية العقيد والجندي ستابس، حيث يروج الأول لأساطير الحرب بغض النظر عن معاناة الجندي ستابس المصاب بصدمة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** حالات الصدمة ، هوية ، حرب ، سام شيبيرد .

## Introduction

Masculinity is a socio-cultural construct that refers to what society expects from men (Senaha, 2006). Understanding the aspect of identity politics around the male child, particularly what is commonly referred to as the notion of an ideal man, requires an understanding of masculinity. Lemon (1992) claims that masculinity has frequently been in crisis as a result of the fundamental mismatch between modernity's main principles of human equality devoid of gender considerations and the patriarchal role that men are expected to play in society. Although the problem of masculinity is frequently disregarded, Senaha (2006) claims that literary investigation of American history via male prism's perspectives might reveal the feature of idealization of masculine identity. The main purpose of this paper is to examine Sam Shepard's portrayal of the challenges American males encounter in their struggle for identity in *States of Shock* (1998) with regard to selected plays earlier in his career. The play's focus is Colonel and Stubbs, an impotent war veteran and a wounded soldier, visiting a café to grieve the death of Colonel's son. As the play progresses, doubts arise as to whether the son was indeed deceased. Colonel had created his son's death, Stubbs says several times in the play, and as a result, he creates two sons, one who is a military hero and the other who "died while trying to salvage his son's life" (Shepard, 1993, p. 161).

## Social Identity Theory

Trepte and Loy (2017) claim that social identity explains intergroup behavior. As a result, social identity theory describes and predicts some intergroup behavior based on perceived group features or status differences and the capacity to transfer from one group to another (Hogg, 2020; Davis, Love, & Fares, 2019). However, according to Bruskin (2019), the descriptions contradict situations in which social identity theory is applied to broader theorizing about human social identities. Organizations can affect an individual's behavior if they change his or her concept of identity, which is derived from emotional attachment and knowledge of the group (Caricati & Sollami, 2018; Davis, Love, & Fares, 2019). Social conduct, according to social identity theory, aims to modify people's attitudes while interacting within the groups. As a result, there is a distinction between intergroup and interpersonal conduct. According to Haslam et al. (2020), interpersonal conduct is totally shaped by individual qualities and interpersonal interactions between two people. As portrayed male characters in Shepard's *States of Shock*, male characters such as Colonel, who ardently believes in the American battle fronts, battles for male identity by attempting to promote war mythologies at the expense of traumatized young people like Stubbs.

### **Male Identity Struggles in *States of Shock***

According to Falasiri (2016), in *States of Shock*, the relationship between a young man and his father takes on legendary proportions and socio-political dimensions as the play progresses. Indeed, Colonel, who is both iconic and astute in the military, is a firm believer in war myths that men have created and perpetuated. Hassan (2015) and Bryer and Madachy (2003), note that Colonel believes in the order and distinctiveness of American ideology and experience. Men in societies strive to assert their dominance in every sector of life, as dictated by masculinity ideals. In *States of Shock*, the young person, Stubbs, is a handicapped martyr figure. Yet, according to Colonel's story, Stubbs was a war hero because he tried heroically to protect Colonel's son by using his body as a shield against enemy fire; nevertheless, the missile passed through him and killed Colonel's son. When the play opens we see that Stubbs is confined to a wheelchair and is pushed by Colonel into a family café to attend his son's anniversary. There, Stubbs gradually recalls reality, which differs dramatically from the Colonel's story. As the play conveys Stubbs appears to be Colonel's son, whose death is fabricated to validate the fathers' myth of war. Moreover, he is a war hero but an escapee who was shot by fellow countrymen while attempting to flee the battle. We argue that both Colonel and Stubbs are victims of America's political system. The father clings to patriarchal and pre-Vietnam beliefs of the noble American military. Colonel has failed to recognize the myths' irrelevance and bankruptcy despite the fact that the paralyzed young man living in the post-Vietnam reality of trauma and tragedy is his son.

*States of Shock* intentionally and wittingly criticizes the administration of the US military invasion of Iraq and the compliant, as well as the complacent reaction of Americans to the war (Nordmann & Wickert, 1998). Similarly, Bryer and Madachy (2003) point out that *State of Shock* is a play that depicts the Vietnam style and serves as a wake-up call for the Vietnam generation, which was deafeningly silent when Iraq was invaded. *States of Shock*, however, reveals more than an agitated and angry political tract, as Parvin and Razieh (2016) contend. It is a work dedicated to portraying highly traumatized states of consciousness. Furthermore, despite the usual heavy-handed political metaphor and symbolism, as well as its tempo and tone, Al-Rashedi and Nilofer (2018) note that *States of Shock* displays striking theatrical energy and imagery, indicating no significant regression. Shepard writes on the Vietnam War purportedly to articulate and show the painful state of human and national crises that remains the era's legacy, presently known as postmodern America (Al-Rashedi & Nilofer, 2018; Matlak, 2014). The painful aspect of this era is dramatised in the play through war veteran Stubbs who wheeled himself to the stage, pulling up his sweatshirt to reveal his empty and gutted self to the audience; all of Shepard's various traumatized and bruised heroes, in their various manifestations of the individual crisis, are instantly recognizable as members of the Vietnam generation in their various manifestations of the individual crisis. Various theatrical critics, on the other hand, see the inextricable link between Shepard's portrayal of American identity and his own personal experiences. Bottoms (1998), for example, uses Shepard's life experiences to provide a chronological overview of the plays' analyses, resulting in an insightful connection between the playwright's life and his characters. Similarly, Abbotson (2002) points out that many critical analysts have found it difficult to comprehend Shepard's plays without considering the biography of "the writer of

the plays” (p. 293). In this way, Shepard’s plays appear to be profoundly anchored in his own life and experiences. Similarly, Bryer and Madachy (2003) argue that the link between Shepard’s plays and his life is unavoidable, and that his perception of men’s inaccessibility to American identity is a significant problem that males face.

Shepard’s *States of Shock* depicts, Tekinay (2019), depicts a hole underlying America’s values of order and patriotism, in the sense that what American young soldiers experienced while serving in the wars contradicted the public’s faith in American values. As illustrated by the character, the father, when the sons return from the war, their loved ones’ egocentrism confronts them (Tekinay, 2019). Colonel despises his deformed son, portraying him as someone who is unable to accept the facts and accept his role as the father of a disabled child (Tekinay, 2019). Yet, Stubbs’ portrayal changes dramatically in the middle of the play when he grasps Colonel’s word and threatens to cut his head. The terrifying reality that he can keep a weapon high above Colonel’s head embodies his exciting recovery of ability. While traveling on the ground of the café with the Diner-Glory Bee, Stubbs reports on his miraculous healing (Tekinay, 2019). This is further depicted in the play when Stubbs eventually regains his memories and starts relating what happened on that fateful day (Bryer and Madachy, 2003). Colonel was present on the day of the battle, according to Stubbs, who is impacted by his returning thoughts: "The portion I remember—the bit that’s coming back—is this... (on his knees, to Colonel.) It’s your face. Your face resting on my face. Looking down. [...] You’re lying with your face. Smiling and lying at the same time. Your denial’s bare face. Colonel is confronted with Stubbs’ desperate condition, and Stubbs denounces Colonel for abandoning him. The play with Colonel sitting in the terrible chair that Stubbs was confined to, an image that suggests that the American character addressed by Colonel is the real invalid, whereas Stubbs the American has reclaimed, though temporarily, the opportunity (but not the affirmation) to play a public character (Matlak, 2014).

*States of Shock* is a political play that is heavily influenced by a nihilistic, depressing attitude. Sam Shepard, according to Al-Rashedi and Nilofer (2018) and Bryer and Madachy (2003), plays a nihilist role in *States of shock*, clearing the terrain that belonged to the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. Shepard has focused on the dysfunctional characteristics of family and its aggressive male members since the 1970s, when he wrote *Curse of the Starving Class* (1979). The use of physical and verbal aggression by masculine characters in these plays indicates a reworking of mythical heritage, which manifests the concept of evolution brought about by Darwinism’s dissipation of societal values. Because these characters are depicted as military heroes defined by masculine wrath and violence, these plays appear to attack American Machismo in wartime circumstances. This aggression has an impact on traumatic experiences, and the violent heritage appears to be carried down to their sons’ generations. According to Nordmann and Wickert (1998), *States of Shock* shows a pervasively prejudiced American experience, and the work can only be understood when placed within the framework of America’s myths, dreams, landscapes, and values. It refers to the conflicts masculine males face as they strive for societal ideals (Nordmann & Wickert, 1998). When opposed to ideal meetings, Shepard appears to be interested in generating the appeal of a monster in this play, implying that the irony is exhibited at the center of the play via the naive construing of character that the protagonist confronts.

Colonel and Stubbs come in for the death commemoration of the former's son, who was saved by Stubbs from the jaws of artillery fire. After he enters the café on a wheelchair, Stubbs expresses his helplessness and powerlessness by revealing his chest scar saying: "My Thing Hangs Like Dead Meat!" (Shepard, 1993, p. 150). The cast of the play comprises Glory Bee, an inept waitress, and a white couple. Despite the fact that masculinity as a gender typology can be regarded from a variety of diverse, pluralistic perspectives, Matlak (2014) maintains, have remained unchanged in current communities around the world. Furthermore, the idealistic cowboy image is referenced in American ancestry history through Colonel's words:

We can't forget that we were generated from the bravest stock. The Pioneer. The Mountain Man. The Plainsman. The Texas Ranger. The Lone Ranger. My son. These have not died in vain. These have not left us to wallow in various states of insanity and self-abuse. We have a legacy to continue, Stubbs. It's up to us. No one else is going to do it for us. Here's to them and my son! A soldier for his nation! (Shepard, 1993, p. 14).

Colonel here is an incarnation of the myth of the American spirit which has to continue through him and others who observe the significance of the enemy for their survival: "WITHOUT THE ENEMY WE'RE NOTHING" (Shepard, 1993, p. 147). As such, Colonel's words signify the extent to which national identity and personal identity are linked. Any objection to this is countered with violence. Ample evidence is Colonel's attempt to discipline Stubbs with belt: "Your arrogance is a slander on all that I stand for. All that I've slaved for. It's not just me, Stubbs. It's the principles. The entire infrastructure that you cast aspersions on... when I thrash you, you must remember this" (Shepard, 1993, p. 27). Stubbs is like a wayward child being beaten by an abusive parent in order to shape him to the desired image. Colonel, According to Katherine (2007), is modeled after Doc, a character in *La Turista*. Doc is shown as a guy who is adamant about enforcing his will on others. Colonel wants to realign Stubbs' character to fit to his will in the same way as Doc attempts to create the character of his creature (Bryer & Madachy, 2003). Yet, Stubbs refuses to surrender which inadvertently exacerbates the two males' struggle for identity. This is further portrayed in the play when Stubbs' takes Colonel's saber and appears ready to behead him.

Shepard's plays depict a milieu in which protagonists struggle paradoxically within American society. They are depicted as unable to achieve any kind of identity and lacking the expected norms and characteristics of the American mythical character (Bryer & Madachy, 2003). The characters in *States of Shock* are constantly trying to figure out who they are and where they came from. The discussions between Stubbs and Colonel metaphorically support their positions as embodiment qualities of both the young and old by demonstrating socio-political realms combined with legendary dimensions (Parvin & Razieh, 2016). Their identity politics and societal paradigms indicate a search for oneself, which frequently ends in futility, and the concept of heroism, which is often illusory when put to the test. The playwright alludes to the paradoxical reality as a result of how American literature, culture, and history have perpetuated the idea of historical events being sanitized to celebrate self-sufficiency, the spirit of pioneering, and emphasizing the sad, violent, and exclusionary realm of American history. According to Bryer and Madachy (2003), such an unreal depiction instills in

Shepherd's characters an insatiable desire for escape, which is characteristic of American society. According to Al-Rashedi and Nilofer (2018), Shepherd's works reveal an American identity represented by a sturdy, strong figure of the cowboy, pioneer, and farmer, implying that the concept of identity can be effective by appreciating the past's role in influencing the future. Most of Shepard's plays, notably *States of Shock* and *Kicking a Dead Horse*, according to Parvin and Razieh (2016), focus on popularly renowned figures that portray Americans as cowboys. These cowboys are heroic legendary figures in American culture, demonstrating the mythical heroes that American sons want to emulate in order to achieve an idealized societal image of the middle class (Parvin & Razieh, 2016). Real masculinity in America, like these American cowboys, must symbolize a raw, unadorned, and self-evident natural reality of the world. Furthermore, Al-Rashedi and Nilofer (2018) acknowledge that Shepard portrays American identity as intrinsically violent, and that most Americans do not have access to it.

### **Fabricated Reality in *States of Shock***

Characters in Shepard's early works struggle to either embrace or suppress their sense of Americanism, but these efforts are ultimately useless. As a result of their failure to reconcile how they see American identity with real-life contacts in America, these characters either engage in self-defeating activities or in utter self-escapist behavior (Bryer & Madachy, 2003). Furthermore, because murder is at stake, sons and fathers are at each other's throats in the horrific human scene. According to Bak (2010), the father's figure was at the core in Shepard's earlier works, but the father's position was subservient to the son's as the main character. The father is the protagonist in *States of Shock*, while the son serves as the antagonist. The son, Stubbs, strangles his father to death in *States of Shock*. In this respect, Colonel presents a vision of the father's bleak future together that is both lovely and terrifying (Bryer & Madachy, 2003). Because Colonel despises and abandons his disabled son, he is unable to embrace Stubbs and accept the truth. It is shown that there is a hole beneath the importance of patriotism and order in American culture. According to Al-Rashedi and Nilofer (2018), the combat experiences of sons sent to foreign places destroy faith and conviction in fundamental American principles. When the son goes home, he is confronted by his family's self-centeredness. Stubbs, paralyzed, whipped, and beaten, depicts gruesome visions. Stubbs' address to his father, "I remember the day you forsake me and You invented my death," confirms the tragic depths of the American psyche, which is unable to penetrate the truth and swims in a sea of narcotizing narcissism (Shepard, 1993, p. 41).

In *States of Shock*, Shepard refers to the national identity through the use of clothes, iconography, and language (Bryer & Madachy, 2003). Colonel, for instance, enters the stage dressed in a variety of outfits, indicating that, while *States of Shock* was written to criticize America's failure in terms of masculine identity, the playwright intends to address a wider audience (Bryer & Madachy, 2003). Stubbs' look, according to Parvin and Razieh (2016), reveals his function as a Christian-like martyr who resurrects technologically after surviving a direct hit from approaching artillery. Stubbs' appearance in the play reveals his role as a war invalid who is pushed onto the stage by Colonel's actions (Shepard, 1993, p. 6). Stubbs is portrayed as a victim who was forced to submit to American pressures to meet benchmarks

that define the country's identity. Various critics say that Shepard's *States of Shock* continues to approach the question of male identity by repeatedly bringing the concept of the American psyche into a crisis through deliberate confrontation (e.g. Mirowska, 2017; Tekinay, 2019). While the play intends to address the euphoria surrounding national unity following the Gulf War, as well as elucidate the American public's neglect of the Iraq-based conflict's unrestrained destruction, Mirowska (2017) argues that it also offers the perspective of American male identity in a post-Vietnamese perspective, as evidenced by Colonel and Stubbs. Colonel's defensive reproach is an attempt to restore America's legacy and strength in the eyes of the world (Bryer & Madachy, 2003). Colonel's words to Stubbs not only show attempts to retain national character's authority and validity, but they also demonstrate the purposeful building of this identity in a significant way. Furthermore, in order to maintain its symbolic significance, Colonel works hard to reestablish the idealistic image of the pioneer/cowboy.

Furthermore, according to Creedon (2013), Shepard's *States of Shock* is a symbolic dramaturgy that spans layers of tiered representation in which the author responds to the Gulf War. Shepard broadens his artistic vision in this play, moving away from focusing on the microcosm of the family, as he did in previous plays, to focus on the greater framework of American identity, as illustrated by military deployments in the Gulf War (Creedon, 2013). Similarly, Katherine (2007) claims that Shepard explores the recycling of archetypal conflict between the father and the son in *States of Shock*. Colonel's character in the play is described as "dressed in a strange ensemble of military uniforms and paraphernalia that have no apparent rhyme or reason" (Shepard, 1993, p. 34). According to Creedon (2013), the restaurant war is mimetic because it incorporates diabetic factors into the conflict and, as a result, produces a constant state of war. Despite Colonel's best efforts to reject his son under the guise of familial friendship, he expresses paternal bondage by nursing him, changing his linens, emptying his bladder bag, and cleaning their fingernails (Shepard, 1993, p. 165). All of these details hint to a culture of war between the two protagonists in a family feud. Colonel's outfit also represents the fact that he is a synthesis of all wars (Bryer & Madachy, 2003). Colonel's loss of temper or embodiment of war arises between him and Stubbs as he physically and verbally strikes out, and the accompaniment of his violence with "an explosion" that is heard off-stage, coupled with the lighting up of cyclorama of war fireworks (Shepard, 1993, p. 152). Shepard makes a link in this scenario that shows the conflict outside the diner and the struggle within Colonel. When he is opposed by Stubbs, Colonel responds by saying: "the United States and its all ideologies have disappeared," (Shepard, 1993, p. 158). As portrayed through Colonel's character, American manhood is defined by masculinity and sexual conquest, as well as Gothic mystery, indicating that Stubbs is gravely hurt (Senaha, 2006). The reason is unmistakably linked to his personal characteristics. Colonel allegorically "slaughtered" his son by denying him. He adopts disavowal as his son's personal mantra.

Referring to Stubbs, Colonel tells Glory Bee: "This man specifically tried to save my life by blocking his body from the coming gunfire," (Shepard, 1993, p. 11). Colonel's statement implies that Stubbs is a hero who has sacrificed his life to save another soldier, Colonel's son. Then Colonel endeavors to recreate the snapshot of his son's death. Colonel

carries a schoolbag stuffed with model ships, planes, tanks, and soldiers. He carefully places them on the table, trying to recreate the conflict between his son's death and Stubbs' injury. Stubbs is represented by the red toy soldier sued by Colonel. Red can be a symbol of his bleeding wound or a scarlet letter of shame, both of which are significant. A white soldier, on the other hand, stands in for Colonel's son. According to Al-Rashedi and Nilofer (2018), this is an example of the "white-washing" of the truth that is occurring in American society. Stubbs' investigation into Colonel, on the other hand, was ineffective because all of Stubbs' attempts to resurrect his memories inevitably return to the terrible event: "When I was hit" (Shepard, 1993, p. 12). Then, he adds, "The part of me that goes on living has no memory of the parts that are all dead," equating his repressed memory phenomenon to oppression and bereavement (Shepard, 1993, p. 13). For traumatic victims like Stubbs, repression is a subconscious, instinctive method to psychological survival. The repression of Stubbs' recollections does not seem effective. Stubbs does not recover quickly enough to contribute to the investigation of what occurred on the battlefield.

### **Male Identity and Violence of War**

The violence perpetrated by the two characters derives from their fear of a higher authority usurping power and challenging their male identity. They consider their conflicting situations as scenarios in which they can fight for power and survival, just like they would if they were battling an enemy on foreign soil (Parvin & Razieh, 2016). Shepard depicts the pervasiveness of the military's immense power in *States of Shock*, as the conflict outside the cafe resulted in the restaurant manager's death and the cook's injury, resulting in a food delay (Shepard, 1993, p. 160, 163). Furthermore, save for Colonel, all of the characters wear gas masks by the end of the play. These gasmasks are designed to keep them safe from an impending onslaught. However, in this case, the adversary does not appear to be a foreigner, but rather someone from inside (Parvin & Razieh, 2016). Colonel's act of bringing Stubbs out to dinner is intended to assist him in realizing his son's death while he searches for the identity of the killer(s). Colonel moves the toy soldiers on the table in an attempt to include Stubbs in the quest for answers, and in the battle's reconstruction. Stubbs claims that it was "friendly fire that took us out" (Shepard, 1993, p. 169) and accuses Colonel of being the enemy. Stubbs also mentions seeing Colonel's fabricated and smiling face saying: "Your bald face of denial" (Shepard, 1993, p. 181). His condition of war originating within the family, which connotes within American society, differs from the way Shepard depicts battles in the plays *Curse of the Starving Class* and *The God of Hell*, in which the enemy originates from the greater community (Shepard, 1993, p. 177). Male identity has been noted as a recurring theme in Sam Shepard's plays. He portrays the male gender as continually striving for identity and acceptance into American society. The ongoing quest for acceptance drives most of the male characters to fight to demonstrate their masculinity (Matlak, 2014). Despite the fact that the war in this play takes place outside of American territory, the issues it addresses are closely connected to male mentality and psyche; it comments on fathers' reactions when their sons are injured or returned disabled. It is necessary to argue that males are required to bear pain in order to maintain their identity in society, as seen by American soldiers' participation in conflicts (Matlak, 2014). This viewpoint is derived from both the traditional

perspective of male dominance over females. This aligns with the findings of Bryer and Madachy (2003), Al-Rashedi, and Nilofer (2018), who find that American male identity is difficult to access and exposes men to violence in order for them to express their masculinity. As a result, the dramatist portrays America as a country where inhabitants are unable to attain essential characteristics such as individuality. On their journey to redefining themselves, men are subjected to difficult experiences, which leads to escapism.

Stubbs' participation in war demonstrates an aspect of heroism that follows the attitudes of the cowboys. On his return, however, he is doomed to self-realization of the American image of heroism as being illusory because Colonel warns him that "there are certain things that are irreversible, Stubbs. Irreversible. Now sit down and stop trying to be a hero" (Shepard, 1993, p. p. 36). The inference is that the harms that American guys suffer in order to exhibit their maleness cause them to suffer negative and lasting consequences. As a result, his idea of heroism is shattered when he becomes crippled and mentally unfit. His injuries are demonstrated by his repeated raising of his shirt to expose the red gaping wound, as well as his declarations that "the middle of me is all dead; the 'core' is dead" (Shepard, 1993, p. 14). As a result, his idealization of his views contrasts with his earlier image of becoming a super cowboy simply by participating in war. This character appears to be a solid believer in the nobleness of mythological wars and American identity, but his victimhood as a trapped human in America's hyperreality emerges (Bigsby, 2000). Colonel's support of American ideals is demonstrated when he retaliates to Stubbs' strange comment on America's decline, "America has vanished," to which the latter responds, "DON'T TALK FOOLISHLY! That's a blasphemous statement!" (Shepard, 1993, p. 20). It demonstrates his commitment to American values. As such, it is difficult to identify national identity and even self-confidence when culture is "destroyed." Katherine (2007) argues that until the great narrative is shattered, subjectivist societies will lack a united identity. As a result, Stubbs tries to negotiate an identity in this chaotic society by sticking to national and traditional myths. As a witness of how war turned out, all the country's ideologies vanish for Stubbs. Shepard frequently refers to the unifying effect of national symbols throughout his career, and feels that identity and meaning are "Past." It is a return to the myth of the American spirit and character. "In our essentially material and profane culture", Shepard writes in this play, "we have desacralized the past and seem unable to replace our old legends with any viable new ones" (Shepard, 1993, p. 235).

### **Defeating Conservative Ideology**

According to Bryer and Madachy (2003), Shepard investigates American society and male identity in a very different approach than showing a linear aspect of advancement in terms of how he portrays America and the multiple contradictions that his plays convey. Although Shepard's fictional protagonists advance in their discourses, they reflect the unique transitions they go through while attempting to relate to their idealized images of American identity. The debilitating outcomes that vividly map males' participation in wars as a perceived precursor to attaining societal identity and acceptance are vibrantly expressed by the excerpt, "I'm eighty percent mutilated... the part of me that goes on living has no memory of the parts that are all dead" (Shepard, 1993, p. 14). The extract describes the soldiers'

exasperating experiences as a result of their sacrifice for their nation, and how they seek society's recognition in return.

Based on the preceding discussion, it can be inferred that national identity and personal identity are linked. Critics argue that whether an author sees America as a state of mind, a fiction, a myth, a metaphorical space, a geographical location, a set of cultural codes, or an ideology, that vision constructs an autobiographical discourse and establishes a sense of self (Clum, 2002; Nordmann & Wickert, 1998). According to Al-Rashedi and Nilofer (2018), destroying one's culture makes it impossible to express national identity and, more shockingly, a feeling of self. The playwright attempts to represent Stubbs' state of mind and circumstance in a fractured society in which he is alone. Bottoms' (1998) ideas demonstrate that when conventional narratives are shattered, the subject or society loses its sense of self. Because he is constantly confronted with a changing world, the postmodern man tends to doubt the rules' validity. His physical state and remark cast him as a direct victim of the struggle to reclaim the country's identity. As an invalid, his spiritual state reflects his physical state during the time of America's identity crisis. The invalid tells other two clients and the white couple, "The middle of me is all dead...the core. I'm eighty percent mutilated. The part of me that goes on living has no memory of the parts that are all dead" (Shepard, 1993, p. 14). Indeed, Stubbs' inability to reclaim the legitimate identity he craved was a result of his insecurity (Shepard, 1993). Audiences in the twentieth century can only recognize the pasts generated by popular pictures and media stereotypes. Colonel's uniform is a mix of World War One and American Revolutionary War military uniforms.

The fundamental myths regarding national identity, according to Nordmann and Wickert (1998), explain the main ideological notions that might conjure the full field of connotation. This causes a schism throughout society: these myths are political. These are not harmless stories, as the term "myth" implies, but pictures that transform culture, whose feelings transcend their immediate setting and embed themselves in the world's safe story. This is the most basic national identity myth. It is a cultural re-establishment (Nordmann & Wickert, 1998). "Shocking" and "Break the Horse," like most of Shepard's works, focus on popular Idols-American cowboy roles. In American culture, the hero cowboy is a legend. An enthusiastic nature lover, President Theodore Roosevelt, called the cowboy "a man" who will not offend himself lifelessly, and who is always ready to avenge his mistakes. It is a quality that is an important value to the country that is "changing the speed and accelerating the pace of life" (Shepard, 1993, p. 6). As a result, Stubbs adds to national and traditional beliefs in order to negotiate a secure identity in this unstable environment.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has addressed how the unstable conflict that exists between the world's bitterness and strangeness and human beings' wish to feel at ease in the world. As suggested in this paper, Stubbs represents reality in all of its bitterness, brutality, and strangeness. Through the character of Colonel, the play depicts the desperate attempts to cope with the challenges of the world in numerous dimensions. The white couple in the play and Colonel

are portrayed by Shepard as narcotized individuals who are attempting to avoid nihilistic sorrow. The older generation, symbolized by Colonel, is shown as clinging to past myths and illusions. Old characters in the play, including Colonel, remain sheltered in their naiveté, reverting to their usual extreme insensitivity and egoism to the face of the outer world; the people retreat into private cocoons. American society imposes certain values on its inhabitants, with war and slavery taking precedence. However, as addressed in this paper, war and bloodshed suffocate the American people's hopes and dreams.

*States of Shock* is a response to the censure of Americans' complacent and cooperative reactions to the military attack on other countries by the US government. It depicts a disinherited son's battle for identity in a harsh world, as well as a confrontation between him and his father. The father, on the other hand, is a firm believer in military legends, which he propagates. Stubbs presents a weak martyrdom, unheroic, and unimposing nature of the younger generation participating in violent engagements. The struggle is a metaphor for the American people; it is a battle between fathers who wage wars and sons who are expected to participate in them. Furthermore, the play depicts a big clash between young people's shattered post-Vietnam realities and patriarchal American military views. The American way of life is characterized by a never-ending expansionist war. As Shepard demonstrates, fathers will continue to struggle to sustain their patriarchal mythologies, while sons will be called upon, reluctantly or unconsciously, to address their fathers' unwholesome aims.

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