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Questioning History, Nationality and Identity in Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Credible Witness*¹

Summary

The aim of this paper is to examine the Anglo-American playwright Timberlake Wertenbaker's approach to the issues of history, nationality and identity in her play *Credible Witness* (2001), and to discuss the significance of these concepts in our modern world through a close analysis of the play. In *Credible Witness*, the playwright brings together people from diverse countries, such as Sri Lanka, Algeria, Eritrea, Somalia and Macedonia in a detention centre in London, and via the stories of these asylum seekers, and particularly through the dramatic encounter between Petra, a Macedonian woman with strong nationalistic pride, and her son Alexander, a history teacher forced to seek refuge in Britain for political reasons, Wertenbaker tries to demonstrate "what happens to people when they step outside, or are forced outside, their history, their identity" (Aston 2003, 13).

Key words: Timberlake Wertenbaker, *Credible Witness*, asylum, history, nationality, identity, shift in identity, shift in history, sense of belonging

O zgodovini, nacionalnosti in identiteti v drami *Verodostojna priča* Timberlake Wertenbaker

Povzetek

Prispevek na podlagi poglobljene analize drame *Verodostojna priča* (*Credible Witness*, 2001) angloameriške dramatičarke Timberlake Wertenbaker obravnava njene poglede na vprašanja o zgodovini, nacionalnosti in identiteti ter na pomen omenjenih pojmov v sodobnem svetu. V *Verodostojni priči* avtorica v zbirnem centru v Londonu na enem mestu zbere ljudi iz različnih dežel, kot so Šrilanka, Alžirija, Eritreja, Somalija in Makedonija. Skozi zgodbe omenjenih prisilcev za azil, še posebej dramatično srečanje med Petro, Makedonko, polno nacionalnega ponosa, in njenim sinom Aleksandrom, učiteljem zgodovine, ki si je iz političnih razlogov prisiljen poiskati zatočišče v Veliki Britaniji, poskuša Wertenbakerjeva pokazati, "kaj se zgodi z ljudmi, ko izstopijo, so prisiljeni izstopiti, iz svoje preteklosti, iz svoje identitete" (Aston 2003, 13).

Ključne besede: Timberlake Wertenbaker, *Verodostojna priča*, azil, zgodovina, nacionalnost, identiteta, sprememba identitete, premik v zgodovini, občutek pripadanja

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1. Introduction

Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Credible Witness* (2001), which was written at the turn of the twenty-first century, at a time when the re-emergence of political theatre in Britain had started to be discussed, is a play that addresses the issue of political asylum. In the play, Wertenbaker brings together refugees from diverse countries such as Sri Lanka, Algeria, Eritrea, Somalia and Macedonia in a detention centre in London. She presents the individual stories of the asylum seekers who are trying to find shelter in a country that does not belong to them. However, while presenting the stories or 'histories' of the refugees, Wertenbaker does not confine her play to the subject of political asylum. Trying to demonstrate how history and identity shift each time a person changes his or her country, she also questions history, nationhood and identity, and asks "to what extent [one's] national history forms [his or her] identity" (Myerson, "A Play").

In the play, the protagonist Petra Karagy, who is an old Macedonian woman with a strong sense of history and intense patriotic feelings, comes to England on a false passport to find her son Alexander, who has left his country to find refuge in Britain after being physically violated in his homeland for his political beliefs. Yet the moment Petra arrives in England, she is taken to a detention centre, where she meets many refugees from many different national, cultural and ethnic backgrounds – all trying to find protection in Britain. As the play unfolds, Alexander's identity as a history teacher, who, in his new life in Britain, is "no longer the nationalist man he was brought up to be" (Sierz 2011, 116) and is therefore rejected by his mother, contributes to the discussion of the issues central to the play, such as the multi-layered nature of history, shifting identities along with the shift in history, and the sense of belonging in a transnational world.

When Wertenbaker's *Credible Witness* was first staged at the Royal Court Jerwood Upstairs Theatre in London in 2001, the play received a mixed reception. While some theatre critics found the play to be too dense in its thematic focus (Jonathan Myerson), too didactic in its style (Kate Basett), and "more like an intellectual drama than theatre" (Halliburton, "Women's Refuge"), several other critics expressed their appreciation of the play and the playwright, stating that it was "the most moving – the most compassionate – new play for many months" (Macaulay, *London Theatre Guide*). According to Michael Billington, the theatre critic for *The Guardian*, "Wertenbaker's ideas [were] fascinating" ("Credible Witness") and Benedict Nightingale for *The Times* commented that "intelligence is everywhere, not least in the play's definition of history itself. [...] I can think of few if any dramatists who could give so rounded an account of so immediate yet permanent a topic" ("Reviews").

At this stage, it could be argued that it is not surprising that Wertenbaker could discuss such "big issues" (Billington, "Credible Witness") as history, nationality, identity and the sense of belonging, which have always been issues to be explored in her drama. These are treated densely in such a way as to invite the audience/reader to be critical about these concepts which have traditionally been regarded as fixed, unchanging and inflexible, since Wertenbaker herself comes from a culturally mixed background as an Anglo-American dramatist, who grew up in the French-speaking Basque country (Gömceli 2010, 69-70). Moreover, Wertenbaker herself has 'crossed borders' several times, as a 'guest' in countries like Greece, France, and the US until settling in England more than two decades ago. Thus, as Elaine Aston, too, observes, Wertenbaker's experience as an "outsider"

enables her to “critique dominant ideologies of identity and notion” (2003, 8), as well as allowing her to approach the concept of history in a critical way—an approach which she believes playwrights of the twenty-first century should adopt, as she said in her 2002 talk at an international conference held in Brussels on contemporary Anglophone drama and multiculturalism.

In her paper presented at this conference, “Dancing with History”, where she examines “the playwright’s involvement with and relation to history, his –or [...] her –dance with history” (ibid., 17), Wertebaker conveys the idea that “history is not progressive, it is not certain” and that “it is no longer even a narrative” (ibid., 20), and concludes with the remark that in the new century “history will no longer be the agreed narrative of certain countries, but some general principles, scientific ones that can be examined” (ibid., 22). Thus, she invites the playwrights of the twenty-first century to ‘dance with history’, and to be “in dialogue with history –histories” (ibid.).

2. Shifting Histories, Shifting Identities

Appropriate to its thematic focus, *Credible Witness* opens in a “small archaeological dig in Northern Greece” (Wertebaker 2001, 185), where Alexander Karagy, the Macedonian history teacher, is examining archaeological excavations together with his pupils. The stage set in this scene, as designed by Es Devlin, is in the form of a “semi-circular, high-walled walkway, with an open-space centre” (Jongh, “Refugess in Fairy Land”), which functions as a “constant reminder” (Jane Edwardes, “Reviews”) of the circularity and multi-layered nature of history. Furthermore, it is significant that Wertebaker chooses to place her characters, the history teacher Alexander Karagy and his pupils, at an archaeological dig, since archaeology, as pointed out by Philip Kohl in his article “Nationalism and Archaeology” (1998), plays an important role in the “construction of national identities” (ibid., 234), and it is through archaeology that “in the process of nation-making the past is ‘invented’ or ‘rediscovered’” (ibid., 225). During this excursion, aimed at giving the children an awareness of the multi-layered nature of history through the examination of archaeological remains, Alexander shows his pupils how “a new history [was] built on top of old histories” (Wertebaker 2001, 185), pointing at the layers of the Iron Age, the Bronze Age and the remains and traces of five thousand years of Macedonian history. Then, warning the young learners that they will be “poor, and flat” if they “lose [their] history” (ibid., 186), he gives them an assignment: “Now I want you to go into your villages and discover other layers. No, not by digging up your gardens – uncover the bands of your history through the witnesses” (ibid., 185).

Having established his identity as an idealistic and nationalist history teacher, Alexander asks his pupils to explore Macedonian history through the discovery of histories other than their own. He advises them to discover these by listening to the stories/histories of their grandmothers and of old men –the ‘witnesses’, whose histories might not have been recorded, which in the end is aimed at teaching them that “the act of remembering must include the remembrance of histories other than our own” (Aston 2003, 14). However, promoting Macedonian identity among the younger generation via his profession in a country where this is not approved and insisting on teaching Macedonian history “as independent from Greek history” (Schmitt 2003, 77), Alexander encounters physical violence in his homeland, and thus he is forced to flee his country. With this experience, Alexander starts his own quest in Britain as a man in exile, which gives him the opportunity to re-evaluate his political beliefs and his dependence on Macedonian history outside the boundaries of his country. During his three-year exile in Britain, where he works in a community centre helping refugee children remember their histories and identities, Alexander gradually becomes attached to his new country while distancing himself from his Macedonian identity. In the end, he comes to realise that

his life and identity have largely been shaped by the demands of his national history and that he has to release himself from the constraints of his own history in order to be able to develop a new and broad understanding of history and national identity.

In the community centre, he first instructs the refugee children not to “forget [their] history” and to “have the courage to be complicated” (Wertenbaker 2001, 212), by which he means to guide them into critical thinking about history, and thus give them an awareness of the existence of histories other than their own, which is “a central pedagogical task” in what Giroux names as “border pedagogy” (quoted in Phillips 1998, 49-50) in his work *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education* (1992). Accordingly, the history teacher promotes the recognition of “other histories”, besides encouraging his students to “interrogat[e] [...] the complexity of their own histories”, and “in this perspective, culture is not viewed as monolithic or unchanging, but as a shifting sphere of multiple and heterogeneous borders where different histories [...] intermingle” (quoted in Phillips 1998, 50). Thus, following the line of ‘border pedagogy’, Alexander in his teaching of the refugee children aims at making them see that there are other histories besides their own, as opposed to the “unquestioning acceptance of a monolithic homogeneous, dominant historical narrative” (Phillips 1998, 50), without neglecting to point out that they should not forget their own histories. Yet, later, in another scene, when one of his students asks him why he is not fighting for his country, Alexander replies: “It was never a country, Henry, it’s a name, a feeling – I’ve buried it for a while” (Wertenbaker 2001, 204), revealing his emotional detachment from his country.

The reason behind his rejecting his own country, however, is not only his enforced immigration to Britain after his physical violation in his homeland, but also the fact that he cannot legally prove his identity in the new country where he is seeking political asylum, since his birth was not recorded in Greece when, for political reasons, Greek priests refused to baptise him with a Macedonian name. Having failed to prove his identity, and rejected by the British authorities, Alexander laments the loss of his name, in other words, his identity:

Today, we will lament a name, the name Alexander Karagy. It was a name given to a child in baptism in a village that was then Yugoslavia but is now in a country the Greeks refuse to call Macedonia. The child grew up in what is now the very north of Greece, but is also called Macedonia. The child became a teacher who himself respected the emotive forces of names, the way history reverberates in a few letters, and he spent many years teaching the meaning of that complex, bitterly over fought name: Macedonia. But some people in his country didn’t like this, and six months ago the teacher was forced to flee to England, which he could do only by borrowing someone else’s name. He believed it would not take him long to get his true name back. [...]. But today, your teacher has been told the name Alexander Karagy does not exist, never existed. It seems the name is in no records, nowhere. [...]. Let us cry for the name Alexander Karagy (ibid., 196-97).

By losing his name, a name which indeed is the ‘reverberation of history in a few letters’, Alexander, the proud descendant of Alexander the Great, also loses his Macedonian identity and is thus reduced to a “nonperson” (Matthews and Chung 2008, 6), a homeless exile without history, who does not know where he belongs. As Julie Matthews and Kwangsook Chung state, “mourning and grieving are not about forgetting but about accepting a loss which changes us forever” (ibid., 9). In this respect, it can be argued that Alexander’s lament for the loss of his identity is indicative of his acquiescence in his new life in exile, which eventuates in his detachment from his nation, culture and history. As conveyed by Mary Caputi in her reading of Julia Kristeva’s book *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1987), identification between a person and a specific culture

develops in the subject “the sense of being at home, of being known by others”, and while the presence of such identification enables the subject “to experience cohesion”, the absence of it makes him or her “degenerate into a state of melancholia (in which identification and desire have been thwarted)” (1996, 690). Having lost his Macedonian identity and country, with which he once experienced identification, Alexander indeed falls into a state of melancholia in the absence of this identification, and laments his loss in his new identity as a ‘nonperson’ in a land foreign to him. Yet he knows that as an exile in Britain he must come to terms with his loss of identity and “love and respect his new country” (Wertenbaker 2001, 188) in order to make it his “future home” (Schmitt 2003, 77), so he tries to make the refugee students in the community centre cognizant of this condition, saying: “an exile learns to love and respect his new country. But this will not happen until the exile has lamented his loss” (Wertenbaker 2001, 188).

Like Alexander, the refugee children in the community centre experience an identity crisis, yet while Alexander’s suffering is rooted in the loss of his Macedonian identity, the young refugees, Ali, Henry and Anna suffer from identity shifts over which they have no control. Ali comes from Algeria, but he cannot remember his real name as he was renamed, in other words, ‘given’ a new identity by the authorities representing power, each time he had to change countries. So not knowing ‘who’ he really is, Ali finds himself in a constant state of *becoming* someone rather than *being* someone. The following speech by Alexander reveals Ali’s history:

Today, we cry for Ali, even though his name is not Ali. Ali came to England two years ago with the name Michel Jeune. That wasn’t his name either, but it is easier to get into England with a French name than an Algerian one. When it became clear that Michel Jeune didn’t even speak French he was put in a detention centre and there he was called Gene because no one could pronounce Jeune. He was only fourteen so he was sent to a hostel where they called him John and then to school where someone decided he was Michael Young. Now Ali answers to any name, Mike, John, Nigel, Young, Old, Hey, You. We call him Ali because at least Ali is an Algerian name (ibid.).

Unlike Ali, Henry from Eritrea knows his name, but he does not tell his name to anyone, as it reminds him of his national identity and his country, which he associates with the execution of his parents and brother to which he had been a witness –the incident which “paralysed” (ibid., 191) him. Thus they cry for Henry’s “frozen memory”, hoping that one day “the wound [will] heal” and he “will tell us his secret name” (ibid.). At the end of the play, in the “Epilogue”, Henry divulges to us his name as ‘Abdillahi Hassan’, which suggests a reconciliation with his own national identity. Soon afterwards, Anna announces that they still call him Henry, as “no one can pronounce his real name” (ibid., 238), which implies that his Eritrean identity will not be recognised in his new Western country.

By tackling the issue of national and cultural identity via the stories/histories of the refugees, in *Credible Witness* Wertenbaker not only reveals the flexible and “discontinuous nature of identity” (2008, 13), as Matthews and Chung observe, but also the “kinds of identities [...] produced by voluntary or forced displacement” (2008, 2-3). Furthermore, she tries to explore the emotional consequences of losing or changing one’s national identity and not knowing where to belong. As an Anglo-American dramatist who herself comes from culturally mixed roots, Wertenbaker states that “in a fluid and rapidly changing world” and at a time when the “world is trying to redefine itself”, “the feeling of uncertainty is deeply uncomfortable”, and admits that she herself “felt a sense of discomfort” (2001, vii), not knowing where to belong. Hence in the play she asks whether we really know who we are in a “shifting world” (ibid., viii).

In *Credible Witness* while all the refugees, including Alexander Karagy, no longer know which identity to adopt or what their real identities are, Petra Karagy is the only character who does not feel herself caught in a dilemma about her personal and national identity, which results from her strong dependence on her national history. “A superb embodiment of maternal and nationalistic pride” (Billington, “Credible Witness”), Petra Karagy is portrayed as a figure who “hold[s] on to her history as tightly as her handbag”, and “Wertenbaker asks: how much does history matter? Might it turn out to be excess baggage?” (Kellaway, “Really Losing the Plot”).

Like the community centre, where Alexander finds out about the histories of the ‘others’ and the similarities between his story and their stories, the detention centre where Petra encounters adult refugees from Sri Lanka, Algeria, and Somalia, functions as a place to awaken her to the realities of a transnational world where it is not only people who circulate but also history and culture (Matthews and Chung 2008, 1). Thus, both the detention centre and the community centre become a “borderland where individual and nation, past history and present situation, oppression and freedom clash, and however imperfect they are, [they] function as places where people meet and experience healing and change” (ibid.). Like Alexander, Petra, who is obsessed with her national history, undergoes a transformation in her views of history and national identity as a result of her experience in the detention centre, where “different ‘histories’ are locked together”, eventually revealing through the “exchange of different histories” that history “shifts” (Aston 2003, 11).

When Petra first appears on stage, in her encounter with the immigration officer at Heathrow Airport, she proudly introduces herself as the descendant of Alexander the Great. Nevertheless, in her first direct contact with a foreigner in a foreign land, she bitterly discovers that the glorious Macedonian king who conquered lands and established a mighty empire means little to people who are not part of this ancient history. What is more, even his name and identity are different in this country: to the immigrant officer, he is an Indian god named “Sikander the Great, Sikandra Basha” (Wertenbaker 2001, 186), and to the Algerian refugee who claims that he knows Alexander the Great, he is “Al Skender al Adeen. Alexandria” (ibid., 192). In her confrontation with the officials at the airport and later at the detention centre, Petra discovers that they have not even heard of Macedonia, which she regards as a kind of insult to her nation, and upbraids the immigration officer: “You have disappeared my son and now you try to disappear my country. I do not believe you do not know Macedonia” (ibid., 187).

Since Petra comes from Macedonia in Northern Greece but is English and Bulgarian by descent, even her roots are not purely Macedonian. Yet proud that she married a “pure Macedonian” (ibid., 222), she insists on defining herself as a Macedonian while regarding her English ancestor, her great-grandfather, only as a “fertiliser” (ibid., 223). According to the immigration officer at the detention centre, however, Petra Karagy is of Greek nationality, since he sees her home country as part of Greece, to which Petra immediately reacts: “We call it Macedonia, Mr England. [...]. It is now inside the Greek border. When I was born, it was inside the Bulgarian border, its history is Macedonian” (ibid., 198). Thus, she implies that *this* (ital. my own) history determines the national identity of its people as Macedonian. Hence, in *Credible Witness* the issue of national identity, which, in Elsie’s words, “always has the capacity to provoke argument and debate, especially perhaps among peoples who share many similarities yet who are divided by political boundaries” (ibid., 1), becomes another major theme. In Petra’s endeavour to make the immigration officer recognise her Macedonian identity, Wertenbaker displays how a nation’s identity can change depending on a shift in geographical borders determined by political strategies, which later become one nation’s history. By drawing the readers’ attention to the shift in history,

Wertenbaker conveys the idea that there cannot be a single reading of history in a fluid world where boundaries keep changing.

When Petra meets the Algerian refugee Aziz in the detention centre, the playwright once again brings this issue into the debate. Irritated by Petra's obsession with her national history, Aziz rebels: "You think you're the only one with history? My grandmother died planting a bomb against the French. [...] French history says it's my grandmother's fault and English history says Algerian history doesn't exist" (ibid., 206-07). By disclosing in Aziz's protest the postmodern view that history is a plural narrative and that "there are many competing histories" (quoted in Phillips 1998, 41), Wertenbaker draws our attention to the plurality and subjectivity of history. Indeed, a word which derives from the Greek words 'historein', meaning 'to narrate', and 'histor' which means 'to judge', as observed in Schmitt's research (2003, 107), history is defined as "a chronological record of events, as of the life or development of a people or institution, often including an *explanation* of or *commentary* [ital. my own] on those events" (*Free Online Dictionary*, under "1.a"). When Aziz attracts Petra's attention to the ambiguity in historical knowledge by emphasising that the historical event in which his grandmother was involved has different interpretations in French, Algerian and English history (the last even denies the existence of Algerian history), he verifies the idea that the past is open to many different interpretations which can never be objective, and that each nation has its own truth about the past; as a result, it can be argued that there are "no reliable criteria for assessing which of two opposing historical interpretation of past events is correct" (Evans 2008, "The Postmodernist"). This leads us to question the certainty and reliability of history, and in *Credible Witness* Wertenbaker upholds the postmodern view that history creates diversity and multiplicity of knowledge, leading to total indeterminacy, and that there is no ultimate definition or interpretation of history.

The climax of the play, which is the moment when Petra Karagy and her son Alexander meet each other at the detention centre after an enforced separation of three years, is the scene where the dramatist renders how our understanding of history undergoes a change. As Michael Billington observes, in this scene full of recriminations, Petra and Alexander meet in a "confrontation of irreconcilable attitudes: the one embodies an intransigent Macedonian nationalism, the other the necessary assimilation of exile" (*Credible Witness*). When Petra eventually discovers that her son, whom she brought up to be a nationalist and who "insisted he would teach [their] true history to all Macedonian children" (ibid., 220), has not only imbibed his new country but also lost his belief in the weight of history, she feels her greatest disappointment. In his confrontation with his mother, Alexander reveals that he no longer believes that it is worth devoting one's life to history: "I came here puffed with my history, Mamou, do you know what I found? Everyone who comes here has a rich and bloody history on their shoulders. [...] in England [...] they don't even use the word history, they call it heritage" (Wertenbaker 2001, 220) he asserts. Blaming his mother for having raised him with patriotic stories of violence, he makes a confession: "[Y]ou put me to bed with stories of Macedonian heroism. You sang me lullabies of blood and hatred. [...]. Sometimes, from here, it looks like madness this obsession with Macedonia" (ibid., 221). Shocked by the change in his feelings about their Macedonian history, Petra reacts: "You're nothing without your history. [...]. What kind of a life is there when you're a nobody, without a past, without a name, without a heart [...]. We have nothing to do with this country –we are not part of its history. You're nobody here. Nobody" (ibid., 222-24), to which Alexander replies in a melancholic state: "What was I before? A link in the chain of a bloody history" (ibid., 224). Seeing that her son has already detached himself from his national, cultural and historical background and that he rejects the country that once nurtured him, Petra immediately reacts, regarding this as her son's betrayal of his own country and nation, in other words, his roots, so she disowns him.

Analysing Julia Kristeva and Vamik Volkan's psychoanalytic reading of national identity in her article "National Identity in Contemporary Theory" (1996), Mary Caputi concludes that "national identity, apparently bound up with solely ideological and geopolitical issues, in fact emanates from the psychotic dynamics of splitting begun in childhood" (1996, 691). Quoting from Kristeva, she further states that "national pride is comparable, from a psychological standpoint, to the *good narcissistic image* that the child gets from its mother and proceeds, through the intersecting play of identification demands emanating from both parents, to elaborate into an ego ideal" (quoted in Caputi 1996, 687). According to Kristeva then, national pride can be equated with the good narcissistic image, which is associated with the mother. Correspondingly, refusal of the good narcissistic image in the process of 'splitting', which is examined in detail in Volkan's analysis of this process, means the rejection of the mother, which according to this theory developed by Kristeva, is equal to the disavowal of one's national pride. Consequently, it can be argued that in this scene of confrontation between the mother and son, Petra's instant decision to disown her son largely results from her sense of having been betrayed as a mother, rather than from her nationalistic feelings.

However, soon after rejecting her son, Petra comes to realise that her maternal love for her son is above her national pride. Revealing that her own understanding of nationality and history, too, will undergo a change similar to Alexander's, she asks regretfully: "I cursed my only son because he would not stay inside his history, but what is Macedonia to me without my son?" (Wertenbaker 2001, 226). Indeed, in the last scene of the play, it is Petra –the only character with nationalist pride and a belief in history–that voices Wertenbaker's postmodern view of history. Addressing the English immigration officer Simon Le Britten, whose name symbolically "represent[s] the British nation in a language that records the medieval invasion and redirection of British national and linguistic identity by the Normans" (Freeman 2007, 137), Petra concludes: "History shifts, we can't hold it. Simon, when we turn to you, don't cover your eyes and think of the kings and queens of England. Look at us: we are your history now", and the scene comes to an end with Simon "*keep[ing] hold of her hand*" (Wertenbaker 2001, 236), suggesting their reconciliation and hope for a multicultural future predicated on mutual tolerance and understanding.

At the end of the play, through the words of a border-crossing child, Wertenbaker voices in the "Epilogue" her call for a new understanding - "a new theory" (Wertenbaker 2002, 22) - of history that would lead not to discrimination or othering among nations, but would cover the history of the whole human race, eliminating racial and national prejudices. In this scene, the Bosnian girl Anna, one of Alexander's pupils in the community centre, who has also had to exist in an identity 'given' to her as a refugee child, but who is proud of her excellent knowledge of English history, appears on stage. Promoting the idea of "universal history" (quoted in Kohl 1998, 237), she addresses the audience: "When the Serbs came to our village, we all froze. Hysterical paralysis. What makes people freeze at certain moments of history? Hysterical paralysis? Historical paralysis? If we understand it, can we prevent it? You understand what I'm looking for? Not this country's history, or the one I came from, but the common mechanism" (Wertenbaker 2001, 237).

3. Conclusion

As a concluding remark, it can be stated that in the discussion of her major themes in *Credible Witness* Wertenbaker upholds a cosmopolitan view, which requires "a broad understanding of other cultures and customs, and a belief in universal humanity" (Anderson 1998, 267). In the play, she not only questions the relationship between history, nationality and identity and what each of these concepts means for the individual and society in a transnational world, but she also promotes

an understanding of national identity that is based on “tolerance and acceptance of difference” (Caputi 1996, 688), and a new, and perhaps a ‘utopian’, understanding of history. This would be a history free from ethnocentrism and national prejudices –one that would embrace all humanity, showing respect for difference and all national, cultural and ethnic identities. On the whole, inviting the reader/audience to approach and see the concepts of history, identity and nationality from such a cosmopolitan perspective, Wertenbaker in *Credible Witness* voices the message that, in our new century, we should have the courage to ‘dance with history’ –a message which she repeated at her talk in Brussels a year after *Credible Witness* was staged at the Royal Court:

You can keep the history you come from, you can adopt another, you can have none. You can, in other words, choose your dancing partner, you don’t have to wait, to be asked for a dance. You can find your partner, you can dance parallel, you can keep changing and dance with several partners. [...]. [S]o, let’s dance with history (2002, 22).

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