Abstract: With his political plays, Sir David Hare is one of the greatest names of the international drama. His most popular play of the Middle East is “Stuff Happens”, a theatrical reaction after 9/11. It turns around the ideas of some western political figures to explain the political scene initially in the U.S.A. before the invasion of Iraq. This work comes up with a new idea that the former US President, George W. Bush who is one of the significant characters of the play is a ‘charismatic leader’. The work tries to support that idea through some sociological views of Max Weber.

Key words: charismatic leadership, David Hare, George W. Bush, Iraq war, Max Weber

1. Introduction

David Hare’s thirteenth play for the National in September 2004, Stuff Happens, dramatically responds in twenty-four scenes to all the political questions about the invasion of Iraq. It illustrates the events from the diplomatic manoeuvres of US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, after 9/11 terrorist attacks, up to the declaration of war against Iraq by the George W. Bush administration in March, 2003. Stuff Happens particularly investigates incorrect Iraq politics of the U.S.A. and Britain. Hare validates that “Iraq was the biggest mistake in foreign policy since Suez” (Kampfner 2006:13) in British history. He also attempts to focus on the political mistakes of the US war cabinet about the counterattack strategies against international terrorism. After a four-month work, Stuff Happens becomes a post-modern history play, with its popular theme in the hands of the playwright during the Iraq war.

However, it is impossible to catch on any right answers to the war without examining the personalities and aims of the American and the British political leaders of the play. Stuff Happens makes “visible the irresponsible, self-serving, and irrational qualities of current political leaders” (Wu 1995:178-182) chiefly in the US war cabinet - Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of State Colin Powell, Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice. Theatre-goers certainly foresee the end of the play. However, “we know the end of Lear too, and that’s the part of fascination as we watch the onset of the by no means inevitable” (Bassett 2004). The play causes some arguments and provocations to ascertain international certainties for mankind.

David Hare’s debates around modern history through his three-hour epic play have been analysed under numerous headings by many academicians and critics so far. It is even assumed in several works that the play “is short of a hero” (Riddell 2004), except for Colin Powell, who is always appreciated for being against Hare’s Bush, because of his political stance. But, this work focuses on President George W. Bush, pretentiously considering him the foremost political leader of the play unlike most of the former works. Giving specific details about Weberian ‘charismatic leadership’, it academically constructs a link between Max Weber’s ‘charismatic leadership’ and Hare’s dramatic vision. Thus, it draws the
lines of the leadership that Hare has built through George W. Bush in this semi-verbatim play. It tries to shape the idea that, unlike the real US ex-president, Hare’s George W. Bush is dramatically exceptional, even charismatic.

2. Weberian charismatic leadership

In overall usage, ‘charisma’ is simply the property of being attractive and telegenic. The word ‘charisma’ derives from the Greek charis – ‘grace’ and charizesthai – ‘to show favour’, connoting a talent or grace granted by the divine. In Merriam-Webster, ‘charisma’ is defined as “a spiritual gift or talent regarded as divinely granted to a person as a token of grace and favor and exemplified in early Christianity by the power of healing, gift of tongues, or prophesying”. Originally a religious concept, ‘charisma’ was borrowed into literature in the 1950’s. In the 1960’s, “it found its way into political science. Then in the 1980’s, it was imported into organizational leadership theories” (Nur 1998:19).

In fact, the term came into scholarly usage primarily through the works of German sociologist Max Weber, the founder of modern sociology and the first to critically examine bureaucracies pioneered in Germany during the nineteenth century. In Max Weber on Law in Economy and Society (Rheinstein 1954), Weber postulated that charismatic authority was a form of authority distinct from those of tradition and law. The process whereby charismatic authority becomes transformed, or changed, to any of the other forms of authority is referred to by Weber as the ‘routinization of charisma’. In the original sense of the word, only such phenomenal personages as Jesus or Napoleon would deserve the description ‘charismatic’, but in modern usage, the term is applied more broadly to popular political leaders and cult organizers.

In Weber’s social scientific reformulation, ‘charisma’ is secularized as an objectively historical concept useful for understanding power attributed to exceptionally rare individuals. Weber borrowed the term from Rudolph Sohm (1958), whose Kirchenrecht had in turn copied the notion of charisma from St. Paul to explain how the early church legitimated itself as a durable institution in antiquity. It is frankly defined that “the nature or essence of charisma is Dionysian” (Dow Jnr 1978:84). Nevertheless, the gifted leadership of charisma is expanded “to include all leaders, both religious and nonreligious, who attracted devoted followers through their extraordinary powers” (Hackman and Johnson 1991:181).

As Kim points out, in Weber’s Economy and Society (1978), ‘charisma’ is applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. (Kim 2004:85)

That is why a charismatic leader differs from a conventional man. It is said that:

[A charismatic leader] pulls people to himself like a magnet and makes them follow him with his look, stance and speech; he is open to development, identifies realistic goals and tries to reach them; is not prone to the norms, would like to live on the edge, tries the impossible and takes risk. He lives with a focus on not the duration but the result. It is more important what he will say instead of what he has said. He comes up with new strategies in each occasion. He usually acts like an indispensable to make the crowds believe that things will go wrong if he is not there. He does not leave room for a second person to secure their indispensable position. He is more about showing off; stays on top with his charisma mostly tries
to get people’s appreciation with popularity. He alienates him from the blood pressure of the society. (Ozsoy 2013:90)

Charismatic leadership “is a controversial phenomenon which should always be felt ambivalent. Paradoxical by its very nature, it has been associated with both the most inspiring and the most terrible episodes in human history” (Hurst 1995:112). In some cases, charismatic leaders are arrogant, superior, unfair, and damaging. There are also some examples of those who are modest, democratic, facilitative, and imaginative. For charismatic people illustrate, to a great degree, the human potential for the creation of both good and evil. As such, there is a need for this paradoxical, inconsistent concept to capture something of the enigmatic, contradictory nature: the phenomenon is all too factual.

3. Beyond Stuff Happens

The world does not repeatedly come across great names or charismatic leaders who rule the world. The reason is that there must be some conditions that bring out a charismatic leader in any parts of the world. Charismatic leadership is perceived as emerging under conditions of real or artificial crisis:

The conditions of crisis, chaos and uncertainty that make change an obligation or the current situation hard to live. The great number of people who have the emotions of incapability, fear, resentment, guiltiness and enmity. The overwhelming feeling of insufficiency of the present conditions. An artificial creation of a problem which actually does not exist. The compatibility of the identity and values of the audience with those of the leaders. The presence of a mission that secures commitment. (Ozsoy 2013:92)

There is no doubt that there is an atmosphere of “international crises of war, religion, government, truth and information” (Martin 2006:14) at the very beginning of this century. We are not mistaken if we call this period uncertain and gloomy. Sierz (2011:71) states that “the world of the 2000s was a world of fear.” It is a fact that this chaotic atmosphere has completely altered and re-defined the whole world.

The US administration has encountered the worst tragic atmosphere in the US history at the beginning of the new millennium. The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington killed nearly 3,000 people. This must be considered tragic and chaotic not only for the U.S.A., but also for the whole world. President Bush mentions the terrorist attack in his daily diary, saying that “The Pearl Harbour of the 21st century took place today” (Wright 2011).

It is not by chance that political theatre has emerged again in such a muddled political atmosphere, to mirror what is happening in the world. The new theatre frequently tries to mix verbatim materials with imagined dialogues. David Hare has always aimed at enriching and informing his audience about current historical, sociological and political events through his plays. It is known that he “has turned his face to the Middle East for fifteen years” (Kaya 2013:25). His Stuff Happens also gives every detail of one of the major international crises that the world faces in the Middle East. On March 20, 2003, military forces of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia invaded Iraq. Hare’s semi-verbatim unfolds by putting the public statements of the Bush administration following the attacks of 11 September 2001 and during the run-up to the War in Iraq (the
epistemologically ‘known’) alongside imagined backroom scenes (the alternative paradigm of what’s ‘known’) in order to challenge the accepted history. (Westgate 2009:403)

*Stuff Happens* reflects how the fate of Iraq has been drawn after 9/11 terrorist attacks by some western leaders. Today, the issue keeps its popularity because the political figures in the world have changed, but the Middle East is still in chaos. The chaotic atmosphere of the post-9/11 era has still its black shadow over the whole Middle East. Hare really “[anatomizes] a uniquely Anglo-American realpolitik” (Wolf 2004:6). This is why he intentionally makes his audience focus on it, believing that the Iraq crisis could only be solved by a charismatic leader.

4. A charismatic leader: George W. Bush

In a messy atmosphere, the world needs a gutsy ruler. As “the history of the World is but the biography of great men” (Carlyle 1840), David Hare attempts to motivate his audience, by stating that there may be one powerful and courageous leader that all humanity needs on his stage. He suggests that this leader is George W. Bush. Bush declares that “I could not be governor if I did not believe in a divine plan which supersedes all human plans” (Hare 2005:9). The President believes that he has been chosen by God to rule his country:

My faith frees me. Frees me to put the problem of the moment in proper perspective. Frees me to make decisions which others might not like. Frees me to enjoy life and not worry about what comes next. You know I had a drinking problem. Right now I should be in a bar in Texas, not in the Oval Office. There is only one reason I am in the Oval Office and not a bar. I found God. I am here because of the power of prayer. (Hare 2005:9)

Hare draws attention to the idea that Bush is chosen by God; he is not a conventional leader. Innes (2007:443) calls Bush’s reaching to the top a “divine dispensation”. It is well known that fate is always present on Hare’s stage. That’s why Bush behaves “like an Old Testament prophet” (Hornby 2005:649) throughout the play. Bush declares in his mass demagogies that God will help him to topple his enemies over. Seeing himself as an indispensable leader, he noticeably announces that all his political ideas are inspired by God:

I feel like God wants me to run for President. I can’t explain it, but I sense my country is going to need me. Something is going to happen and at that time my country is going to need me. I know it won’t be easy, on me or on my family, but God wants me to do it. (Hare 2005:10)

Hare intentionally points out that Bush is not only a White House President, but also a keen terrorist hunter. He is described as “a man who is shrewd, distant… totally lacking in self-doubt,” (Hornby 2005:648) and skillful while chasing his enemies. As a charismatic leader, Bush seems that he does not have to clarify anything to the world about what he does:

I’m the commander – see, I don’t need to explain. I don’t need to explain why I say things. That’s the interesting thing about being the President. Maybe somebody needs to explain to me why they say something. But I don’t feel like I owe anybody an explanation. (Hare 2005:10)
Bush begins to behave like an authoritarian leader as long as he does not manage to reduce the anger of his people. According to Hare, the contemporary world faces the danger of decayed intellectuality. Although it is considered that democracy is the best and most common way to govern, the world is controlled by some unskilled political leaders, their administrations, and spin doctors. Hare states that “sometimes I think all the trouble in the World is caused by intellectuals who have an ‘idea’” (Hare 2005:50). He has the notion that the world is in danger because of the ideas and ideals of political leaders who are not good at governing.

Yet, Hare does not wish to make fun of Bush on the stage. He avoids revealing his weak side, like the media do, before the audience. Instead, the playwright consciously portrays Bush in a blurry manner, as the president’s mind is blurry. In an interview, Hare declares that:

[Bush is] dyslexic, but that doesn’t mean he’s stupid. And to confuse an inability to handle language with a lack of intention, when his intentions may be the most significant that any politician has had in the past 50 years . . . It’s worth doing him the credit of trying to analyse what he is trying to do, even if he can’t articulate it himself. (Kampfner 2006: 12)

It is clear that Hare equips Bush with many inauthentic capabilities, though this does not mean that his President manages the crisis well during the play. It is a fact that a charismatic leader has always a chance to rule badly. Like Shakespeare, David Hare appreciates Alexander Pope’s taunting reference to “The RIGHT DIVINE of Kings to govern wrong” (1963 (1742) iv:188) in his Stuff Happens.

However, Hare’s Bush is not the most unsuccessful charismatic leader in British literary history. He could even be described as the brightest leader of the play. Hare intentionally canalises the perceptions of his audience to the US war leader. It is not enough “to offer the American president as a God-fearing moron” (Toynbee 2004); in fact, “far from demonising George W. Bush, David Hare presents him as an all-too plausible character” (Riddell 2004).

Although Hare’s Bush is a charismatic leader, he is never aware of his political fiasco. Bush thinks that he pays attention to the seriousness of the crisis his country has faced, but he has some intellectual weaknesses, just like Shakespearean heroes. He takes the wrong decisions. He is not alert that he takes a lot of risks in the Middle East and Afghanistan. As a commander, he shows his deep anger directly against his enemies. Thus, Bush can also be described as a politician who lacks political intelligence. Having wrong strategies and being politically short-sighted, Bush seems very eager to use US political and military power:

Well, maybe that’s what’s needed. Maybe that’s the best way to get things back in balance. You know, sometimes, in my experience, a real show of strength by just one side can clarify things. It can make things really clear. Now let’s move on. Iraq. (Hare 2005:12)

His words reveal that he is a leader obsessed with power. Hare’s play must be considered a kind of drama of power. Weber points out that:

All political structures use force, but they differ in the manner in which and the extent to which they use or threaten to use it against other political organizations. These differences play a specific role in determining the form and destiny of political communities. (Gerth and Mills 1946:159)
That is why Bush has a kind of hawk-like behaviour, letting all the politics and his politicians clash around him. He seems determined not to listen to the voices against his political stance. He closes his ears to the other politicians around him. Hare suggests that the US administration is led by a totalitarian president who can break international laws whenever he wishes, like most charismatic leaders:

All nations should know: America will do what is necessary to ensure our nation’s security. I will not wait on events, while dangers gather. I will not stand by as peril draws closer and closer. History has called America and our allies to action. Steadfast in our purpose, we now press on. We have known freedom’s price. We have shown freedom’s power. And this great conflict, my fellow Americans, we will see freedom’s victory. (Hare 2005:33)

Bush can also be considered one of the most adventurous US presidents, with his unrealistic plans in the US history. A charismatic leader must think of the results of any political decisions both at a negotiating table and on a battle field. However, Bush, like most charismatic leaders, does not obey bureaucratic traditions. Powell tries to demonstrate that their country cannot be a new Roman Empire, and the President must not behave like a “Roman emperor” (Hare 2005:50-51). But, Bush is really fond of war, unlike Powell. Though there are no concrete evidences showing that there are weapons of mass destruction in the hands of Iraqi leaders, he commands his administration officers to invade Iraq.

However, Bush cannot be regarded as a leader who cares about fame like several other political heroes in history. He does not remind the audience of an Odysseus, who mastered his own pride, always needed ‘kleos’ – fame after each victory on battle-fields throughout his life. It is a Weberian fact that no charismatic leader pursues political fame and money at all. In the play, Bush states that “I’ve said before: this isn’t a popularity contest… It isn’t about being popular” (Hare 2005:53).

It is a surprise to welcome an unusual Bush moulded by Hare’s hands. Unlike his TV portrait, Bush arises as a leader who “constantly achieves his desired ends” (Billington 2004). Hare figures George W. Bush as a leader who is really quiet, patient and spiritual. The playwright little by little allows a change in the sense of describing Bush as someone who has a catchy appeal with “his divine self-assurance and passive belligerence” (De Jongh 2004), and undermines his dangerous tranquillity. The play mostly turns around the other cabinet members, who are under the control of the President. After listening to every word of his cabinet members, Bush always manages to ensure the ideological balance of the meetings. He even manages to persuade the tragic figure of Colin Powell to accept his own ideas. He reaps the harvest in his leadership:

Bush: Colin, I think we’ve reached a fork in the road. We’re at that fork. I don’t think there’s a way round this. These inspections are a distraction. They weaken us. They weaken our purpose.
Powell: In what way?
Bush: We’ve got ourselves into a situation where we’re insisting he’s guilty until he proves he’s innocent. That’s not good. That’s not good for us. He’s making a monkey of us. (Hare 2005:91)

David Hare seems to remind everybody that leadership entails a lot more in Stuff Happens. He is aware that “Charismatic leaders in Weber’s formulation could include political as well as religious figures.” (Giddens 2009:690). As the head of
his country, Bush seems a much more dominant leader than the other leaders of the play. Thus, he is equipped with some of the charismatic leadership features as well as non-charismatic ones, so as not to be straightforwardly erased from the minds. Today, leaders are thought to be a combination of physical look, image, rhetoric, approach, experience, education and family, and they are evaluated according to these potentials on the political market. The playwright makes his audience feel that every leader can do wrong. That is why Bush is partly an unsuccessful charismatic leader on Hare’s stage.

5. Conclusion

No other single sociologist has been more influential in the contemporary understanding of leadership and charisma than Max Weber. Weber considers that “most societies in the past were characterized by traditional authority structure, which were periodically punctuated by bursts of charisma” (Giddens 2009:990) in a disordered atmosphere.

Political drama has always reflected what happens chaotically in the real world. According to Fielding (2009:372), “there is considerable evidence that in certain instances fiction can encourage audiences to think in particular ways about real politicians”; so, “by far the most high-profile account of the war in Iraq was David Hare’s *Stuff Happens*” (Sierz 2011:73). The play is based on both verbatim techniques and fictional narratives. Hare describes his own style when he says that “when the doors close on the world’s leaders and on their entourages, then I have used my imagination” (Hare 2004:v1).

In this imaginative world, *Stuff Happens* neither caricaturizes nor marginalizes George W. Bush, the forty-third President of the US. Hornby (2005:647) points out that “George W. Bush may be the most satirized president since Abraham Lincoln”. The media ridiculed him during both the process of searching for Osama Bin Laden behind every bush in Afghanistan, and of the invasion of Iraq. Hare does not obey rules of the media:

> In the west a journalistic culture… has… led to a curious deformation in society. As citizens, we consider our family, our friends and, most of all, our children as likeable and virtuous. But we are encouraged to consider everyone we don’t know – and most especially those we know only through newspapers – as ridiculous or vicious. To this tendency, this desire to bundle people and thereby to dismiss them, art and death are the most powerful antidotes. (Hare 2010)

David Hare does not attempt to mask the political failures, carelessness and callousness of George W. Bush either. Sotto-Morettini (2005:316) asserts that “Hare’s great men are flawed but they act in good faith”. Among these leaders, Bush is the most outstandingly charismatic one. The playwright “acknowledges a structural debt to Shakespeare’s history plays” (Rooney 2006:25), but he pictures his Bush neither like Shakespeare’s Henry VI, who has no leadership qualities, nor like Richard III, who is more intelligent than Bush. Therefore, “Verbatim, Aristotelian, Brechtian, Shakespearean, Hare’s *Stuff Happens* is all these things. What holds it together is its reach for verisimilitude through the use of verbatim text and its determination to explore how power works” (Fyffe 2010:55) via George W. Bush, the only charismatic leader among forty western black-suited politicians.
References

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