

## Ideologically Challenging Entertainment (ICE)

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### Abstract:

Ideologically Challenging Entertainment (ICE) is entertainment that challenges 'us vs. them' ideologies associated with radicalization, violent conflict and terrorism. ICE presents multiple perspectives on a conflict through mainstream entertainment. This article introduces the theoretical underpinnings of ICE, the first ICE production and the audience responses to it.

The first ICE production was *Two Merchants: The Merchant of Venice* adapted to challenge ideologies of the Arab-Israeli Conflict. A mixed-methods study of audience responses explored whether this production inspired audiences to shift their ideological views. Each performance included two versions of the adaptation: a Jewish dominated society with an Arab Muslim minority, contrasted with an Arab Muslim dominated society and a Jewish minority. A mixed-methods study of audience responses explored whether this production inspired audiences to shift their ideological views to become more tolerant of differences away from ideological radicalization.

Of audience members who did not initially agree with the premise of the production, 40% reconsidered their ideological views, indicating increased tolerance, greater awareness of and desire to change their own prejudices. In addition, 86% of the audience expressed their intention to discuss the production with others, thereby encouraging critical engagement with, and broader dissemination of the message. These outcomes suggest that high quality entertainment – as defined by audience responses to it - can become a powerful tool in the struggle against radicalised ideologies.

**Keywords:** Ideologically Challenging Entertainment; The Arab-Israeli Conflict; Terrorism; Ideology; Radicalisation; Extremism; *Two Merchants*; Conflict; Genocide; Theatre

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## Introduction

It is now clear that the coming decades will be defined by a war in the shadows [...] This enduring battlefield will have no definable frontiers, no apparent or visible enemies and these battles will be waged not only physically but also ideologically and across the virtual domain (Aldis & Herd, 2007, p. 3).

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ideological tensions and conflicts began to dominate social and political life. Both World Wars, the Cold War, Apartheid, the Arab-Israeli conflict and terrorism can all be clearly linked to ideological or religious motivations. Many scholars accept that ideology plays a significant role in some conflicts, including terrorism, oppression and genocide, although the extent of the role of ideology is frequently – and heatedly – debated (Aldis & Herd, 2007; Browning, 1992, p. 216; Chalk, 2007; Goldhagen, 1996; Harff, 2003, pp. 62-63; Herf, 2006; Kiernan, 2007; Waller, 2002, p. 183). The purpose of this paper is to introduce Ideologically Challenging Entertainment (ICE) as one technique for challenging elements of ideologies of fear that support oppression, violent conflict, atrocities, terrorism, and genocide. Understanding not only the role of ideology, but also the nature of the ideological considerations of all ‘sides’ of an issue is essential to creating effective Ideologically Challenging Entertainment.

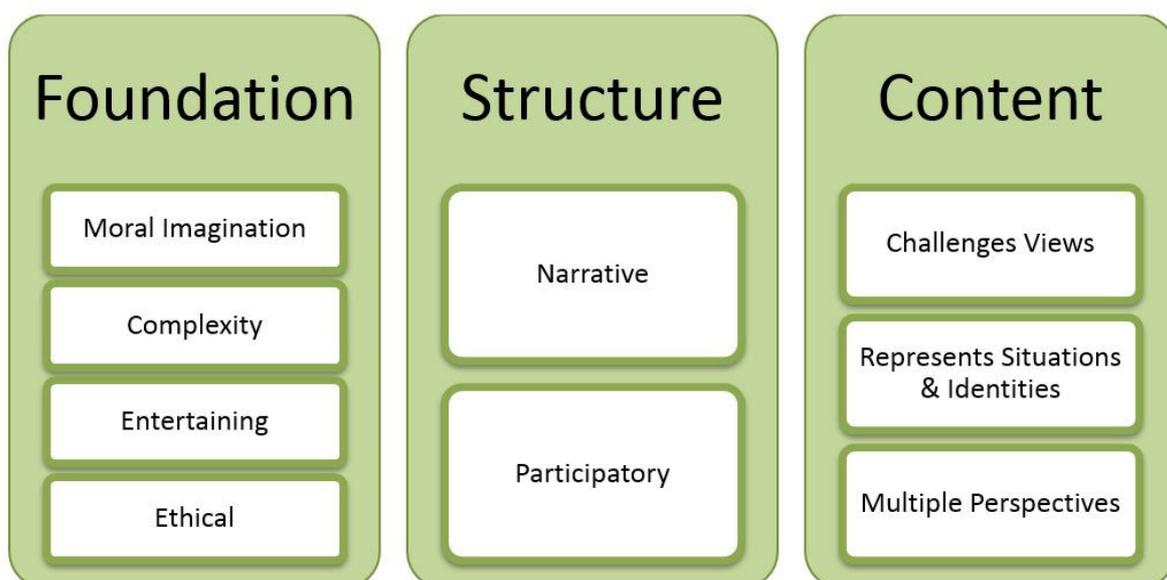
Definitions of ‘ideology’ vary depending on the source one consults and the academic context in which one works. For this research, I am characterising ideology as a system of beliefs, philosophies, principles, values, concepts, ideas and theories that form the world-view for a political, social, economic or cultural group or program. Ideology helps us define and understand our world, creating a lens through which we evaluate what is good, bad, right and wrong. Ideology is, in some ways, a combination of history, culture and religion. Every individual views the world through a lens that, by this definition, can be called ‘ideological’. Despite this, the concept of ‘ideology’ is often thought of as something the

‘other’ has, not something we possess ourselves. Perhaps this phenomenon is due to the usually innate understanding of one’s own ideology in comparison with the effort it requires to understand the ideological views of the other – much like people mistakenly believing that only ‘foreigners’ speak with an accent, ‘we’ do not. I argue that we all connect with one or many ideologies, and that such ideological allegiances change and evolve as we do.

ICE is a form of entertainment designed to challenge the ideological views that support radicalization and violent conflict. ICE has a broad foundation based on theories and practices from a range of disciplines including, but not limited to, History, Sociology, Political Science, International Relations, Psychology, Genocide Studies, Conflict Resolution, Theatre and Applied Theatre. While a detailed discussion<sup>1</sup> of each of the theories drawn upon to create ICE is beyond the scope of this article, they have resulted in a set of principles which, when combined, create a cohesive approach to creating ICE that is applicable to a number of entertainment formats and genres.

Figure 1 offers an overview of some of the principles upon which ICE is based.

**Figure 1: Founding Principles of ICE**



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ICE is designed to inspire the ‘moral imagination’ as a means of questioning and opposing one-sided ideological perspectives of conflict in which the actions of one’s own community are glorified and those of the ‘enemy’ are vilified (Bar-Tal, 2000, p. 359). ‘Us vs. them’ perspectives support the divisions between conflicting groups rather than encouraging the relationships that are necessary for reconciliation. John Paul Lederach describes the moral imagination as a way wherein individuals can imagine a world in which they are in relationship with their perceived enemies, acknowledging the interdependency of all people – regardless of the side of a conflict with which they are affiliated (Lederach, 2005, p. 5). These interrelationships form a foundation for common ground, greater understanding, and reconciliation when the individuals and communities involved in conflicts recognise them. The moral imagination that can enable this recognition is a fundamental construct underlying ICE: our ability to encounter multiple sides of a conflict through theatrical presentations of them in relationship with one another, and to confront our own prejudices, thereby resisting the pressure towards violence and oppression that such beliefs exert. Given this emphasis on representing multiple perspectives and bridging seemingly opposing viewpoints, it is logical that a second foundational principle of ICE is that of embracing complexity; understanding that conflict is complex and addressing those issues cannot be simplified and remain effective.

In addition, this form of entertainment distinguishes itself from other uses of creative media to address issues surrounding conflict through its emphasis on ‘entertainment’ and on the responses of the audience to determine the efficacy of an ICE production. This focus on audience responses is connected to the need for ICE to be practiced ethically. More detailed discussions on the importance of entertainment and ethics to ICE are included later in this article.

With these broad principles forming the foundation for ICE, some more specific requirements for an effective ICE production include the need for a narrative form that

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engages the audience and makes it possible for them to respond to and interact with the performance and other audience members. Narrative structures could apply to theatre, film and television as well as video games and role-playing games. ICE should challenge the existing views of the audience, defying stereotypes and raising questions about our assumptions. In order to do this, ICE productions have to be researched thoroughly, to enable them to accurately and fairly represent the relevant identities and situations. Finally, ICE productions should represent multiple and even opposing perspectives on a conflict. While many approaches to socially engaged arts favour a polemical approach, ICE is dedicated to finding connections between opposing viewpoints, thus countering the polarisation and radicalization that can result from one-sided presentations.

### **Efficacy of Entertainment**

What can 'entertainment' offer to conflict management beyond the extant social, political and economic interventions? Educational programs, joint professional initiatives and 'exchange' programs, in addition to economic and political proposals, are all used to address ideological, social and cultural differences contributing to conflict. ICE is not intended as a replacement for these practices, in fact, it will likely be more effective if used in conjunction with them.

While the efficacy of ICE relies on the combination of all its elements, one key theory underlying the persuasive potential of entertainment is narrative persuasion: the process of conveying persuasive messages within narrative forms. Incorporating persuasive content into absorbing, engaging and entertaining narratives can result in highly stable and persistent attitude changes (Appel & Richter, 2007, p. 128). The mechanism by which narratives become persuasive is 'transportation', a process that allows for the 'melding of cognition and affect' (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 719).

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Transportation is what theatre artists call the ‘suspension of disbelief’; the willingness of an audience member to not only accept a fictional world but, in many cases, to be imaginatively transported into it. For the time in which we are involved with that imaginary universe, the real world fades and even disappears (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 702), including the elements of the ‘real world’ that may challenge a persuasive message in the narrative (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 702). The world of a transportive story can feel exceptionally real and can evoke both cognitive and emotional responses, with high emotional content often increasing the likelihood of the story being persuasive (Appel & Richter, 2010, p. 129). Similarly, it is clear that empathy plays an important role in eliciting attitude change (Mazzocco, Green, Sasota, & Jones, 2010, p. 366). The illusion of a ‘real’ world created by a transportive story, combining its cognitive and emotional impulses can result in an almost experiential component to the process of narrative persuasion (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 719). Experiential learning is one of the most efficient and enduring forms of attitude change and in imitating it, transportation capitalises on this type of influence (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 702).

The experiential component of narrative persuasion is only one element that explains its efficacy. Audience members who are transported into a fictional world are far less likely to generate counterarguments against any persuasive messages they encounter within that narrative as they have already accepted the truth of that world (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 702). Studies testing the efficiency of transportation in changing attitudes, indicate that transportation is associated with story-consistent beliefs. In other words, after being transported by a narrative, people are likely to change their beliefs to match those advocated within the story. This has been demonstrated to be effective using a range of different media (print, television and film are the most common) and incorporating a variety of persuasive messages, including films with highly controversial messages (Igartua & Barrios, 2012, p. 518). In fact, there is some indication that narratives may be particularly useful when the

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inclination to counter argue is strong, such as with messages involving controversial or ideological themes (Green, 2008, p. 48). One study, which explored the effects of a *Law and Order* episode on beliefs relating to capital punishment, found that in some cases, the transportation effect was able to effectively suppress the existing ideological beliefs of the audience, inspiring beliefs and views consistent with the storyline of the episode, rather than those previously inherent in the audience (Slater, Rouner, & Long, 2006, p. 249). Studies such as these reinforce the belief that, as long as the story remains absorbing, the political content should have no negative impact on the persuasiveness of the narrative (Knowles & Linn, 2004, p. 179). In fact, these recent studies demonstrate that narrative persuasion is likely to be an exceptionally effective method of countering those attitudes that people are most unwilling to change (such as firmly held ideological or political beliefs) (Knowles & Linn, 2004, pp. 178-179).

### **Ethics of Persuasive Entertainment**

Two ethical questions are fundamental to the practice of ICE. Do theatre practitioners – or any artists – have the right to use what we know to be an exceptionally powerful persuasive medium to communicate our values to an audience that, in most cases, is not aware of the persuasive intent and unprepared to resist? Alternatively, does the persuasive power of entertainment negate the individual's responsibility for their own actions when those actions are influenced by the entertainment?

In answer to the first question, if one wants to challenge – even counter – the propaganda and ideologies of repressive regimes, the response to such ideologies is not to present an 'opposing' view, but rather to introduce a series of alternatives designed to encourage individuals to make an active choice. Presenting multiple perspectives on a conflict, rather than a single view, encourages audiences to question, to debate and to decide for themselves which perspectives they wish to support.

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Regarding issues of responsibility: the power and persuasiveness of entertainment does not negate personal responsibility for one's actions. We are bombarded with persuasive messages every day, from other individuals, from the media, entertainment, literature and education. These influences help to inform our ideological beliefs, often in ways of which we are not always aware. Individuals are always free to question the information they receive, to ignore it, to refute it, and most importantly, we are free to act or not act on it. ICE that offers multiple perspectives implicitly requires audience members to question the material and perhaps even to engage critically with the issues.

Given these ethical questions, are existing polemical entertainment examples inherently unethical? Of course not; there are, unquestionably, many powerful and persuasive examples of entertainment that may not present multiple perspectives, but are still respectful of opposing views and are ethically sound, just as there are many ethically questionable productions advocating increasing polarisation in the name of peace. The intention of this analysis, however, is not to critique the exceptional work being done by other artists (or even the ethically questionable work being created by probably well-meaning individuals), but rather to introduce a new structure that can help to mitigate some of the potential ethical pitfalls inherent in this kind of work.

Regardless of the model one follows to create socially relevant entertainment, the concept of responsibility for the effects of what one creates can be somewhat murky and is a common question when discussing the influence of the media. For example, if one believes that violence on television inspires violence in reality, are the creators of violent television implicit in the violent crimes they allegedly incite (Watson, 2004)? The legal precedents are somewhat unclear in this regard. Hate speech is illegal in many parts of the world, as is incitement to commit genocide illegal under international law (United Nations, 1948) and while some precedent for the legal responsibility of the media in the process of incitement

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does exist (International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, 2004), would a similar interpretation apply to entertainment as a less direct form of communication?

The literature on Applied Theatre and Theatre for Development acknowledges that ‘there is a danger in assuming that our work is ethical just because we are interested in solving problems fairly or in helping people to assume responsibility for their lives’ (Barnes, 2011, p. 131). One of the key ideological principles behind ICE borrows from the physician’s oath to ‘do no harm’ (Barnes, 2011, p. 136). Unfortunately, this is also one of the most challenging aspects of these interventions; while the ideal is to help, or at least to do no harm, there is often the potential hazard of making a bad situation worse with an entertainment-based intervention. Audiences are unpredictable, and what works well for one or 100 audiences may be a disaster for the 101<sup>st</sup> (Kerr, 2009, p. 180).

Ethical principles extend beyond legal ones or those provided in official policies and it is my assertion that regardless of the legal implications, those who create entertainment exert tremendous power and influence over their audiences. Such influence does not obviate the personal responsibility of audiences. Nor, however, does personal choice eliminate the responsibility of artists for the effects of their work. Art should be used with tremendous regard for its power and the effects it can have. ICE, like any other intervention, should incorporate ethical practices.

### **Embrace the Complexity of Conflict**

Any intervention that intends to inspire change in the real world needs to be clearly applicable to the real world. Understanding the situation itself and connecting it to a given community, while a promising start to the creation of ICE, is not entirely sufficient, particularly when one is addressing questions relating to ideology. It is not enough to understand what has happened, or even how it happened, one must also understand ‘why’. Moreover, in controversial, entrenched conflicts even understanding the truth of ‘what’ has

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happened can be problematic. 'In periods of war and conflict, societies and nations tend to develop their own narratives, which from their perspective become the only true and morally superior narrative' (Adwan & Bar-On, 2004, p. 514).

A polemical approach is undoubtedly easier for artists (just as it is for politicians and journalists), but complexity can enhance the audience's experience and is more likely to inspire the kind of 'moral imagination' ICE hopes to generate. Some persuasion theorists also suggest that not only can pluralistic narratives be beneficial, but even conflicting and contradictory viewpoints can enhance persuasive efficacy. A recent study on the relationship between counter-factual thinking and narrative persuasion suggests that inspiring counter-factual thinking within narratives enhances the persuasive effects of narrative persuasion (Tal-Or, Boninger, Poran, & Gleicher, 2004). Connecting ICE to the situation is not simply a case of connecting a single narrative in a production to a single perception of a situation – it requires attempting to connect to multiple perspectives, many of which may appear to be 'counter-factual' to some audiences and factual to others. This is the discipline of paradoxical curiosity; of recognising a truth that includes contradictions and goes beyond the imposed duality of conflict (Lederach, 2005, p. 37). This process is part of what challenges an ideology, rather than supporting it.

Just as conflict situations generate multiple possible interpretations of actions, facts and situations, the identities of those involved in such conflicts are similarly complex. Every individual connects to multiple group and individual identities (D. Moore & Aweiss, 2004, p. 32). Furthermore, how others perceive individuals and groups also plays a role in how one defines that 'identity'. In the process of creating ICE, it is essential to examine not only the relatively objective views of identities, but also the imagined identities present in the conflict. Imagined identities can include stereotypes, archetypes and myths that are often more 'real' to people involved in the conflict than any objective truth.

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Community identity is closely connected with individual identity. People see themselves within their community; they see their experiences reflected in the community narrative. Given the pluralistic nature of identities, however, it is often difficult to predict which facets of the identity of a group or individual will have the most influence over attitudes and behaviour. In some situations, people choose which social identity gains prominence in their own individual identity based on the elements of the social identity that dominate public discussion or debate. For example, when religious conflict is dominant, people associate more strongly with a religious identity; when national rights are debated, people define themselves along national lines (D. Moore & Aweiss, 2004, p. 32). Similarly, dominant aspects of societies will also influence dominant characteristics of individual identity. For example, in societies in which religion plays a dominant role, religious identity becomes more important and holds greater influence over the individual (D. Moore & Aweiss, 2004, p. 30). Likewise, in societies under a perceived or real threat, identities tend to become more nationalistic (D. Moore & Aweiss, 2004, p. 30).

Imagined identities are similarly multifaceted, with individuals and groups creating images of themselves and their own communities as well as of the 'other' or the perceived enemy. One way to conceptualise these imagined identities is through the lens of a branch of psychology dealing with images or archetypes – archetypal psychology. Archetypal psychology, as envisaged by its leading expert, James Hillman, is, simply put, the study of images, archetypes and myths as they relate to the soul or psyche. In this form of psychological analysis, one uses images to begin to understand the psyche. As understanding of the psyche increases, one is better able to understand and interpret images. Descended from Jungian studies of archetypes as patterns emerging from the collective unconscious, Hillman's archetypes are collections of images and myths evoking powerful emotional responses. Unlike Jung, Hillman suggests that any image can be archetypal (T. Moore, 1990, p. 26) and that such images are the fundamental bases of psychic life (Hillman, 1975,

p. xvii). Such images can offer insight into both the ways that people ‘imagine’ conflict and themselves within it, as well as how they imagine their perceived enemies.

There are some common archetypal images in conflict situations that can further our understanding of the nature of the relevant imagined identities. In developing one’s own identity, the most common images that emerge are those discussed previously – the community as strong, honourable and fighting for a just cause - and the belief in the victimisation of one’s own community. The image of the ‘other’ or the enemy is perhaps a more obvious and familiar concept; the common images being the other as the ‘aggressor’ (perpetrator, attacker, etc.), as a manipulator, the dehumanised ‘other’, and the other as somehow associated with that which we consider absolutely ‘evil’. In addition, there are some interesting similarities in how the physicality of the other is imagined.

This ‘us vs. them’ imagery is perhaps the most familiar representation of conflict ideology. These imagined identities appear to lack nuance or subtlety and often seem to advocate a polarised view of the conflict divided along Disney style images of good and evil. Such imagery has power – which is what makes it so popular in art and entertainment – but it lacks the complexity that ICE has to embrace if it is to be successful. Understanding these images cognitively can help artists to resist the urge to instinctively revert to them when creating ICE, and can even begin to subvert the audience’s expectation of the familiar in ways that will encourage them to question their on preconceived ideas. For example, the recent Hollywood trend towards re-imagining traditional ‘villains’ as the heroes of familiar stories is one way to apply images associated with ‘heroes’ with characters we believe to be villains and even ascribing heroic motives to villainous actions. A similar approach applied to an entrenched ideological conflict can help audiences to imagine their perceived enemies as something other than villains.

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## Parallel Narratives & Multiple Perspectives

There are a myriad of possible ways to create ideologically challenging entertainment that embody the principles outlined above. Selecting the best approach will depend on the needs of the specific issues one is attempting to address and the skills and resources one has available. One approach, that of the use of parallel narratives, has been applied to the study of the history of the Arab-Israeli Conflict. The ideological climate surrounding perspectives on the Arab-Israeli conflict has become so polarised that finding common ground between the various narratives is, at present, almost impossible (Adwan & Bar-On, 2004, p. 514). Given this difficulty, Sami Adwan and Dan Bar-On posit that it may not be necessary – as a first step – to present a common historical narrative or find common ground between the conflicting sides, but rather that the initial process of reconciliation should encourage the acceptance of different perspectives on the same facts (Schechet, 2009, p. 20). They utilised this model to create – in collaboration with a number of Israeli and Palestinian educators – a revolutionary textbook in which ‘each side, Palestinian as well as Israeli, presents its own narratives’ (Adwan & Bar-On, 2004, p. 515). The textbook, titled *Side by Side: Parallel Histories of Israel-Palestine* literally presents two, often conflicting, narratives of the Arab-Israeli conflict side by side, with the Israeli narratives printed on the left hand pages and the Palestinian on the right. This textbook countered what the authors perceived as the existing trend in educating about the conflict in which the narrative of the ‘other’, if presented at all, is ‘presented as being morally inferior. The enemy is depicted as faceless and immoral, with irrational or manipulative views’ (Adwan & Bar-On, 2004, p. 515) *Side by Side* offered an opportunity to children to know, not only the narrative of their own people, but also those of their ‘enemies’. When the textbook was offered to schoolchildren, the result was surprise that spurred great interest and curiosity (Adwan & Bar-On, 2004, p. 519). In other words, presenting parallel narratives inspired students to seek greater knowledge and unlocked the

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possibility for them to recognise the relationships between their own identities and those they perceived as their enemies.

The use of parallel narratives is only one possible approach to the principle of representing multiple perspectives. While there are a number of possible ways to create art that embodies this principle, there are some considerations important for artists to recognise. The most obvious of these is the need to present parallel perspectives without privileging one or another. If one adapts the approach used by Adwan and Bar-On, is it possible to perform two or more narratives simultaneously? If not, how does one choose which narrative is presented first? Similarly, if one is presenting multiple narratives, is it possible to ensure that the artistic quality and entertainment value of both are equivalent? Even something as subjective as the attractiveness of the performers can influence how a performance will be received. Similarly, how can one be certain that one's own biases are not being imposed onto the production when one may not even recognise that they are biases?

Another potential area of caution is what Gil Troy calls the 'epidemic of even-handedness' (Troy, 2002, p. 122). Troy's 'epidemic' is based on his perception that in an attempt to appear 'fair' or 'unbiased', authors, academics, politicians and other interested participants ignore or minimise acts that are, unquestionably, morally reprehensible (Troy, 2002, pp. 122-123). It is possible, however, to recognise multiple perspectives and the validity of opposing narratives without undermining ethical standards. For example, recognising that multiple parties involved with the Arab-Israeli conflict have committed acts of terrorism (defined, in this case, as violent acts intentionally committed against civilians with the intent to inspire terror among the population) does not minimise the opposition one may feel towards terrorism. Moreover, it is not biased to recognise that such acts may be more officially and publically condoned by one side or another when one has credible evidence to support those assertions.

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Opposing atrocities is no more an indication of bias than recognising victims may be. This becomes an indication of bias only when the atrocities of one's own 'side' are ignored and the victimhood of the 'other' is negated. Anybody approaching a discussion from a particularly polemical viewpoint, however, is likely to accuse any attempt at recognising the legitimacy of the 'other' as contributing to the epidemic of even-handedness.

A final challenge in presenting multiple narratives is that, when addressing long-term, entrenched ideological conflicts, it is possible that neither the narratives themselves nor the presentation of them will result in a message of 'hope' for the future being incorporated into the narratives themselves. In many of the interviews conducted prior to the opening of *Two Merchants*, the desire for a presentation that offered hope for the future was a common theme. This concept also emerges in the work of Cohen et al. in which one of the challenges they present for performance aimed at conflict transformation is that it might imagine a possibility for reconciliation and forgiveness (Cohen, Gutierrez Varea, & Walker, 2011, p. 171). While there may be potential for ICE to imagine the possibility for reconciliation, another alternative is to create narratives that individually do not explicitly state hope for the future, but when viewed in combination with other perspectives leave the audience able to imagine a path to a peaceful future. In this model, the audience takes the final step of connecting the perspectives, rather than the performers.

### Applying Ideologically Challenging Entertainment

Creating an intervention that honours the complexity of the difficult issues ICE aims to address can create a navigational hazard akin to walking a high-wire maze in gale-force winds. As valuable as the theoretical foundations of ICE may be, ultimately the test of an approach of this nature is in its application and the audience responses. The first application of ICE was a theatrical production titled *Two Merchants*. *Two Merchants* was an

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adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* designed to challenge some of the ideological underpinnings of the Arab-Israeli Conflict. The original script was abridged to the length of a one-act play (approximately one hour) and performed twice every night. The two versions of the play were interpreted differently based on a single variation in the socio-political structure of the play: in one version (known from this point on as the Muslim Dominated World (MDW)), Shylock, Tuball and Jessica were Jews in a predominantly Arab or Muslim society (changed from the original in which the dominant culture is Christian). In the other version (the Jewish Dominated World (JDW)), the social structure was inverted, with Shylock and Jessica becoming Muslim Arabs in a predominantly Jewish society. The order in which the two versions were performed alternated every night. *Two Merchants* was performed as part of the Theatre at UBC's (The University of British Columbia) 2011-2012 season. Including the preview and the matinee, there were 11 performances with each performance also involving data collection for a mixed-methods audience response study.

The decision to present *Two Merchants* in Vancouver, rather than elsewhere in world, was one based on a combination of factors including both ethical and practical. A production designed to inspire discussion, debate and critical engagement with conflict related ideologies could, theoretically, aggravate existing tensions. If one assumes that theatre has the power to affect an audience on an ideological level, without previous studies to offer guidance, one has to also assume that the impact of a production could be to encourage a stronger peace ethos, as intended, or could have the unintended consequence of aggravating existing conflict based views. Without any significant body of audience response research on ideologically challenging entertainment, it was impossible to be certain that the production – however well-intentioned or planned – would not inflame an already tense situation if performed in a location with volatile links to the conflict. Consequently,

performing *Two Merchants* in a location not directly linked to the Arab-Israeli conflict seemed prudent.

### *Two Merchants* and ICE

The model for ICE makes it clear that choosing the right play for an intervention of this nature is an essential part of the process. Firstly, the play needed to be entertaining enough to be ‘transportive’ for the audience. Without this quality, it was less likely that the play would have any of the desired impact. In addition, the play needed to represent the relevant ideological issues, individual and community identities, ‘us vs. them’ imagery, relationships within and between groups, the range of perspectives contributing to the conflict and the complexity of the issues and identities. Moreover, as much as possible, the play needed to be unbiased in the sense that it should not convey a clearly pro-Jewish or pro-Muslim bias: in this context, a proxy for a pro-Israeli versus pro-Palestinian bias.

In order to create a play that would have the necessary transportive effect on the audience, I judged it necessary to use an existing script rather than attempt to write one. It was imperative to use a play that had already demonstrated its ability to engage, entertain and excite an audience, ensuring that any obstacles to transportation or aesthetic quality of the production were the result of the performance - or my direction - rather than the script.

Furthermore, in order to avoid the perception of bias (or the imposition of an imaginary bias), I wanted to use a script that had been written prior to the Balfour Declaration of 1917.<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that any play written after that date is automatically biased on the Arab-Israeli conflict (on the contrary, I would posit – without any evidence – that most plays written in the last century have been written without any consideration of the Arab-Israeli conflict). My concern was that a common accusation levelled at people who attempt to intervene in intractable conflicts – no matter how unbiased their intentions – is that they

are biased towards one side or another. While some may choose to level that bias at me individually (although I actively try to avoid such bias), I had hoped to avoid the possibility of such an imposition on the script itself by choosing one that could not have possibly had any relationship to the current conflict.

*The Merchant of Venice* seemed an obvious choice. Written long prior to the Balfour Declaration, Shakespeare could not have been biased on the current conflict. The play provides frequent references to both anti-Jewish and anti-Christian prejudices and the behaviour of the characters creates a story in which one of many legitimate interpretations is that there is no real hero – almost all the characters can be seen as unpleasant, prejudiced, manipulative and merciless. Similarly, almost all the lead characters have moments when they can be portrayed as genuinely sympathetic, kind, generous and caring. It also has an undeserved reputation for being antisemitic - undeserved because it is no more antisemitic than it is anti-Christian and because it mitigates both anti-Jewish and anti-Christian tendencies with powerful reminders that both Jews and Christians are simply human and actually not that different in many respects.

As a means of displaying complex relationships and ideological perspectives, *The Merchant of Venice* is ideal - it displays extremely complicated relationships between religions, demonstrates both the hatreds that can emerge and the reasons why those hatreds should be discarded, and it does not portray one side as better than the other. It also reveals the profound love for one's own beliefs, culture and community as well as powerful relationships between friends, family and lovers. While the play originally focuses on Jewish-Christian relationships, the Christianity revealed in the original seemed like it could be relatively easily converted into Islam (if one can excuse the imagery), with minimal loss to the meaning, the power of the play, or Shakespeare's poetry. The play also lends itself (admittedly not without some problems, as will be discussed) to inverting the two religions, with the Jewish minority becoming a Muslim minority.

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Moreover, while the play (and Shakespeare by extension) has been accused of antisemitism, whether such a prejudice exists has been debated almost since the play was first produced. This debate became apparent to me during my Masters research on the Nazi use of theatre during the Holocaust. Despite its antisemitic reputation, the Nazis did not consider *The Merchant of Venice* to be a particularly useful play for their propaganda. It was, in fact, highly problematic for them. They had a great deal of difficulty reconciling Shakespeare's eloquent attempts to humanise Shylock. When the play was produced by the Nazis, there were heavy cuts and changes made to the text and story to avoid these 'problems' (Symington, 2005, p. 248).

Further research revealed that *The Merchant of Venice*, and specifically the character of Shylock, has been the subject of intense debate for many centuries. Discussions of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, and specifically the character of Shylock, vary significantly in interpretation and response. Shylock is alternately professed to be a hero, villain, (J. Gross, 1992, p. 321; Rowe, 2005, p. 65) and victim (K. Gross, 2006, pp. x-xi). He is perceived as a perfect representation of a Jew ((Bloom, 1991, p. 22) (quoting Victor Hugo)) and as a gross stereotype with no basis in reality. There are assertions that this is the only one of Shakespeare's plays that was 'of his age' rather than transcending time (Bloom, 1991, p. 7), contradicted by claims that Shylock is the ultimate proof that Shakespeare lived 'beyond his age' ((Clarke, 1865) as cited in (Bloom, 1991, pp. 17-18)). Politically, *The Merchant of Venice* has been 'claimed' by both Israelis and Palestinians as a narrative supporting their respective 'causes' (Bayer, 2008, pp. 466-467). Moreover, many authors, in conducting their analysis, imply, suggest or state outright that their interpretation is the only 'true' interpretation of the play/Shylock based on Shakespeare's original text (the actual text of which is, ironically, generally not debated). In many ways, it appears that the play in general and the character of Shylock in particular have become a kind of projective test in

which the interpretation of its meaning appears to reveal more about the analyst than about the play itself (Yaffe, 1997, p. 23).

Creating *Two Merchants* necessitated balancing a number of often conflicting requirements. In addition to balancing the academic and artistic requirements of the production, *Two Merchants* aimed to represent a range of ethno-religious, cultural, ideological and political identities, based on those most closely affiliated with the Arab-Israeli conflict. While the parallel narratives offered a superficial impression of presenting only two views, the complexity and variation of the characters within each version belied this view.

The character choices, design elements, directorial vision and even script adaptation were all tailored to suit the needs of ICE. Whether that involved the use of realistic costuming, even when that choice may be misread by audience members as culturally inaccurate or the inclusion of symbolic elements in the script designed to connect with ideological elements of the conflict, every aspect of the production was consciously and carefully linked to the ICE approach outlined above.

### **Impact of ICE and Two Merchants**

Five different data collection methods were used to explore audience responses to *Two Merchants* including observation; a questionnaire; informal post-show discussions; interviews and focus groups. The data collection process took place during and shortly after (within weeks of) each performance, depending on the method utilised. At each performance the audience was observed, including video recording one section of the house; they were asked to complete a questionnaire and invited to participate in some informal, un-moderated discussions after the show, which were recorded using digital audio recorders.

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Audiences were also invited to volunteer to participate in either an interview or focus group discussion.

The data was analysed using an integrative, mixed-methods analysis approach which ‘integrates various data analytic procedures for a seamless transfer of evidence across qualitative and quantitative modalities’ (Castro, Kellison, Boyd, & Kopak, 2010, p. 342). Such an approach depends on a unified approach to the study in which all data is conceptualised within a single unified framework (Castro, et al., 2010, p. 344). The analysis involves a cyclical process of qualitative analysis leading to quantitative analysis, which then informs further qualitative analysis (Castro, et al., 2010, pp. 348-355). The cycle ends with a qualitative recontextualisation of the combined qualitative and quantitative results.<sup>3</sup>

## Results

Including the preview and the matinee, there were 11 performances of *Two Merchants*. The preview performance featured the JDW first (chosen by coin toss), with the order alternating with every performance. In total, 67% of audience members saw the show on a weekend (Friday or Saturday nights). In total, 860 people saw *Two Merchants* over its run (including the preview).<sup>4</sup> Of these, 448 completed questionnaires resulting in an overall response rate of 52%. Ten people completed individual interviews and there were an additional two focus group discussions, both taking place within classroom environments with 22 participants in one and 6 participants in the other. Despite having an equal number of performances with either the Jewish or Muslim Dominated Worlds first,<sup>5</sup> approximately 62% of the respondents watched a performance in which the act containing the Jewish Dominated World was performed first.

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While the overall response rate – the number of questionnaires submitted as a percentage of the total number of people attending the show – was 52%, the average response rate – the mean of the response rates for each performance – was somewhat higher at 59%. The discrepancy is primarily due to a significantly lower response rate on opening night, however, there is also a strong indication that higher house sizes, as on opening night, result in lower response rates. The correlation is significant at the  $P < 0.01$  level using the Kendall tau rank correlation coefficient.

The audience response data was analysed using an integrative mixed method analysis process involving a cyclical process of qualitative analysis leading to quantitative analysis, which then informs further qualitative analysis (Castro, et al., 2010, pp. 348-355). The cycle ends with a qualitative process that creates a ‘story’ from the combination of one round of qualitative and one round of quantitative analysis.<sup>6</sup> The qualitative coding was conducted using a combination of content and thematic analysis using both *a priori* codes and an empirical coding strategy. Using this approach, the key themes discussed in this analysis emerged from the content of the audience’s responses to the questionnaire in combination with key ideas derived from earlier research and literature reviews.

The key outcomes explored through this process focused on whether the audience would reconsider their views after seeing their production, their intentions to discuss the play with others and the inclusion of discussions of ideology, role reversal, theatre and the Arab-Israeli conflict in audience responses. Furthermore, the audience attitudes towards the show were a significant predictor for most of the regression analyses and consequently, will be discussed in more detail in this section. Finally, I will include the results of the qualitative analysis of one recurring pattern prevalent in the data – that of contradictory responses.

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## Reconsider Views

In total, 40% of participants who did not explicitly state their pre-existing agreement with the values they perceived in the play said they would or might reconsider their views after seeing *Two Merchants*. The most frequently recurring theme in discussions of how participants would reconsider their views was ideology (85% of those who said they would reconsider their views mention ideological issues such as discrimination and stereotypes, increased understanding or tolerance, and justice in their explanations). Of those who mentioned the Arab-Israeli conflict in their explanations, 54% said they would reconsider their views. In all cases, participants who reconsidered their views did so in the direction of increased tolerance or a greater awareness of different perspectives. No responses to any question on the questionnaire indicated that an audience member became less tolerant after seeing the production. Many of the issues discussed in response to this question have been included in the analysis of subsequent themes of ideology, role reversal, theatre and the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>7</sup> In addition to these, however, audiences were explicit in their descriptions of how the show influenced their own prejudices:

RV: Participant 8: Coming from a community (Campbell River) of 30000 with a substantial first nations population, I have certain beliefs about this population. There are many stereotypes towards this group, many of which I believe in because I have seen them in reality. I question whether or not these fulfilments of stereotypes are noticed because they are the minority and it is a common belief. (E.g. would I notice and make a remark to myself if I saw a drunk, loud, white man causing a scene downtown) (18, M, JDW)

RV: Participant 135: It has inspired me to re-consider in the sense as to how I view Judaism and Islam and how stereotyping shouldn't be the main factor in a decision because a fault can come about in any religion (18, F, MDW).

For those who did not reconsider their views, the most commonly recurring theme for discussion was theatre (57% of those who said they would not reconsider their views discuss theatre in their explanations). Further details and examples of comments reflecting these views can be found later in the discussion of 'theatre'.

In addition, 17% of respondents to the question of whether they would reconsider their views mentioned religion in their explanations. While many of these comments overlapped with issues that will be discussed in subsequent themes, participants focusing their comments primarily on religion discussed its importance or value.

For those who did reconsider their views, participants gained an increased awareness of the role that religion can play in people's lives and conflict.

Participant 348: It will make me realise how important religion is in some people. For some people it can mean the world whereas other people can't really care about it neither do they live their lives according to their religion. It also makes me remind about all the hate and discrimination existing in our world (19, F, JDW).

Those who did not reconsider dismissed religion as unimportant, or irrelevant.

Participant 260: Religion should never be the reason for hatred, this has always been my view. I don't see the necessity in religions. As beliefs should be guided by an individual only by him or herself, not cause of a religion (18, M, JDW).

Participant 317: The major inter-religious conflicts of history have always struck me as futile and frustratingly meaningless. This play just portrays people's tendencies to hold grudges, dehumanize anybody marked as 'other' and the endless cycle of violence it creates (24, F, MDW).

Finally, several participants reported being inspired to further their own education, usually in relation to the Arab-Israeli conflict or the broader context of current events in the Middle East.

Participant 415: I am aware of the conflicts, but choose not to identify with them on a personal level. However this show has in fact inspired me to follow up on situations and understand the relations more clearly (18, F, JDW).

A regression analysis revealed two significant predictors for whether participants would reconsider their views. Positive attitudes to the show and identification with any religious or spiritual beliefs both predicted that participants would be more likely to reconsider their views.

**Table 1: Binary Logistic Regression: Reconsider Views**

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables	$\beta$ (Beta Value)	Wald	p Value (Significance)	Exp( $\beta$ ) (odds ratio)
Reconsider Views	First Act	-.008	.002	.963	.992
	Age	-.296	2.725	.099	.744
	Sex	-.258	.748	.387	.772
	Multiple Ethnicities	.287	.737	.391	1.333
	Western Ethnicity	.006	.000	.989	1.006
	Religion	.959	4.699	.030	2.609
	Importance of Religion	.069	.144	.705	1.072
	Read Merchant of Venice	.303	.839	.360	1.354
	Seen Merchant of Venice	.046	.015	.904	1.047
	Attitude to Show	1.630	27.647	.000	5.105
<b>Overall Model Evaluation</b>					
		-.324	5.406	.020	.724

### Talk With Others

A total of 86% of participants said they would talk with others about the show. 44% of respondents to this question said they would discuss ideology and 67% said they would discuss theatre when talking about the show. Most of the concepts present in responses outlining what participants stated they would discuss will be included in explorations of other themes later in this article. One issue not explored elsewhere is participants' intentions to focus their discussions on the research itself. 12% of participants said they would discuss

the research with others. The nature of the remarks focused on discussions of the concept of theatre as a means of promoting discussion and comments on the novelty of the approach.

Two significant predictors of whether participants said they would talk with others about the show include the audience’s attitudes to the show and their age. Participants with positive views of the play were more likely talk about it than those with neutral or negative views. Similarly, younger audience members were more likely to talk about the play than their older counterparts.

**Table 2: Binary Logistic Regression: Talk with Others**

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables	$\beta$ (Beta Value)	Wald	p Value (Significance)	Exp( $\beta$ ) (odds ratio)
Talk with Others	First Act	-.084	.165	.685	.919
	Age	-.511	6.412	.011	.600
	Sex	.568	2.390	.122	1.765
	Multiple Ethnicities	.081	.037	.847	1.085
	Western Ethnicity	.068	.023	.879	1.070
	Religion	-.017	.001	.974	.983
	Importance of Religion	-.114	.292	.589	.892
	Read Merchant of Venice	.070	.028	.867	1.073
	Seen Merchant of Venice	.790	2.607	.106	2.204
	Attitude to Show	1.514	23.993	.000	4.543
<b>Overall Model Evaluation</b>					
		1.835	110.300	.000	6.263

## Ideology

Approximately 70% of participants mentioned ideological issues in their questionnaire responses, making it the most frequently discussed theme in the responses. Most participants mentioned ideology in relation to the ways in which they would reconsider their views or the reasons why they would not. The key ideological themes that emerged in discussions relating to the show were connected to discrimination, prejudice and

stereotypes, and concepts of race and culture. Some participants were eager to use the play to challenge the discriminatory views they perceived in others:

Talk: Participant 281: I actually want to discuss ya'lls version of the play with my dad. He loves Merchant but has conservative (Texas version) views of the Middle East (22, F, JDW).

Talk: Participant 366: [I will talk with others about] the views the world has about the two groups and how they are stereotypical and wrong (18, F, MDW).

While others recognised their own prejudices through the production:

RV: Participant 337: Some discomfort came up as I realised some of my prejudices towards certain groups. Seeing this play made me feel uncomfortable in seeing that division and viewing as separate has the potential to create conflict (27, F, JDW)

RV: Participant 304:....At 1st I stereotypically assumed certain roles were placed for certain reasons - i.e. The Jew as the merchant, and then when the roles were changed I realised my own bias (21, F, MDW).

Audience members commented on common ground we share regardless of a racial, religious or cultural backgrounds:

RV: Participant 219: Cultural differences are just that - cultural differences - and as much as these are not fully understood or appreciated, this play illustrated (through Shakespeare) the humanity needed to appreciate one another as people, fellow human beings. Mercy and forgiveness are highlighted through the text to remind us that there are better options than greedy vengeance (43, M, MDW).

The only significant predictor of whether participants would discuss ideology in their responses was the audience members' attitudes to the show. Once again, audience members

with positive views of the play were more likely to discuss ideological issues in their questionnaire responses.

**Table 3: Binary Regression Analysis: Ideology**

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables	$\beta$ (Beta Value)	Wald	p (Significance)	Value	Exp( $\beta$ ) (odds ratio)
Ideology	First Act	.193	1.712	.191		1.213
	Age	-.058	.137	.711		.944
	Sex	.208	.626	.429		1.231
	Multiple Ethnicities	-.026	.008	.931		.974
	Western Ethnicity	-.506	1.864	.172		.603
	Religion	-.554	1.956	.162		.575
	Importance of Religion	-.195	1.492	.222		.823
	Read Merchant of Venice	.031	.011	.915		1.032
	Seen Merchant of Venice	.178	.278	.598		1.194
	Attitude to Show	.730	10.609	.001		2.076
<b>Overall Model Evaluation</b>						
		.911	44.986	.000		2.487

### Role Reversal

As one of the most unusual and arguably most memorable aspects of the show, 45% of the questionnaire participants commented on some aspect of role reversal (the use of parallel narratives through the repetition of the same script with different interpretations). Discussion of role reversal can be broadly categorised into comments relating to the content, the structure of– and reality behind the play. Audience members discussed three main concept-related themes: developing greater empathy, concepts of multiple perspectives and common ground, and the idea of being a minority in a different majority culture. Participants discussed how the dual structure of the play inspired greater empathy and helped them recognise the common ground between the conflicting parties and the need to seek that common ground in attempts at resolution.

Talk: Participant 168: Tell them that this play showed different perspectives of humanity; than any group of people can 'other' another group; that we need to embrace our similarities rather than create a divide of differences (21, F, JDW).

RV: Participant 62: It will allow me to have more empathy towards the plights of the Muslims in the world. I have limited knowledge of Muslim hardships and this gave me a detailed picture of those hardships. I will be able to understand those hardships better through seeing this show (18, M, MDW).

Some participants also connected the production to their own personal histories, including one rather extraordinary comment from a South African ex-pat:

RV: Participant 106: To learn more about my own South African cultural background and the Apartheid my family suffered through. I have always considered my family to be the 'victims', but never considered the 'opposing' side (25, F, JDW).

The only significant predictor of whether participants would discuss role reversal was their attitudes to the show. In this case, however, participants were more likely to discuss role reversal if they had negative attitudes to the show. When this was the situation, participants focused on the repetition of the two scripts as something redundant, boring, or, in their view, disconnected from the reality of the conflict as they perceived it.

**Table 4: Binary Logistic Regression: Role Reversal**

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables	$\beta$ (Beta Value)	Wald	p Value (Significance)	Exp( $\beta$ ) (odds ratio)
Role Reversal	First Act	-.002	.000	.986	.998
	Age	-.187	1.925	.165	.829
	Sex	.175	.628	.428	1.191
	Multiple Ethnicities	-.415	2.715	.099	.660
	Western Ethnicity	.210	.515	.473	1.234
	Religion	-.304	.870	.351	.738
	Importance of Religion	-.107	.629	.428	.899
	Read Merchant of Venice	.144	.342	.559	1.155
	Seen Merchant of Venice	-.210	.541	.462	.811
	Attitude to Show	-.592	8.761	.003	.553
<b>Overall Model Evaluation</b>					
		-.250	4.585	.032	.778

## Theatre

69% of audience members discussed theatre in questionnaire responses that did not specifically solicit responses on this theme. Audience responses included comments relating to the adaptation, the quality of the production, specific elements of the play, the relationship with Shakespeare's original and comments on Shakespeare in general.

The adaptation and the quality of the play were the most frequently mentioned concepts in these discussions. The nature of these remarks varies significantly depending on the question to which they were responding. Within questions related to whether participants would reconsider their views, the nature of the comments also differs between participants who said they would reconsider and those who said they would not. Those who said they would reconsider, tended to view the adaptation favourably, appreciating the relevance of the modern context and the reinterpretation of Shakespeare's script.

RV: Participant 21: While I know the story of the *Merchant of Venice* before seeing *Two Merchants* I had never thought about the story outside of fiction or outside of Venice of 400 years ago. Seeing

*Two Merchants* has made me realise just how applicable the relationship between Shylock and the Christian 'protagonists' is today and in different cultures. It will cause me to think more about justice in general and justice in cases in which there is a distinct minority-majority based on culture or other factors (19, F, JDW).

In contrast, those who said they would not reconsider questioned the validity of the modern interpretation and disapproved of the changes made to the original play.

RV: Participant 354: *The Merchant of Venice* alone is enough to inspire a change in views - views of human nature and the power of avarice. The addition of allegory about the Arab-Israeli conflict only muddies the original message (23, M, JDW).

In contrast with the comments emerging from the Reconsider Views question, most people who said they would talk about the adaptation expressed favourable views of it. When discussing whether they would reconsider their views, there were no comments on the quality of the play from participants who said they would reconsider. Participants who said they would not reconsider, however, commented on the play in a frequently unfavourable light.

RV: Participant 149: This production makes no argument as I see it. The script evokes modern issues of tension in the Middle East but stops at evocation. The doubling of the script has little pay off, I find. The message of equality could be made far more economically. Even the actors had little new to do in the second half (35, M, JDW).

When asked what participants would discuss with others, on the other hand, most participants who mentioned the quality of the play focused on the aspects of the production they appreciated, emphasizing high quality performances by the actors, the interpretation and strong production values.

Talk: Participant 301: [I will talk about] how brilliant it was. I don't think in my wildest dreams I'd have even imagined *The Merchant of Venice* acted in this way! (50, F, MDW)

Participant 165: The actors were amazing and inspirational. Very well presented. Gave a wonderfully strong message. Powerful emotions (21, F, MDW).

Unlike the other themes explored here, no significant predictors for whether participants would discuss theatre emerged from the regression analysis.

**Table 5: Binary Logistic Regression: Theatre**

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables	$\beta$ (Beta Value)	Wald	p (Significance)	Value	Exp( $\beta$ ) (odds ratio)
<b>Theatre</b>	First Act	-.070	.238	.625		.933
	Age	-.130	.785	.375		.878
	Sex	.091	.136	.712		1.096
	Multiple Ethnicities	-.465	2.842	.092		.628
	Western Ethnicity	-.314	.893	.345		.730
	Religion	.423	1.309	.252		1.527
	Importance of Religion	.068	.200	.655		1.070
	Read Merchant of Venice	.157	.344	.557		1.170
	Seen Merchant of Venice	.353	1.300	.254		1.423
	Attitude to Show	-.335	2.072	.150		.715
<b>Overall Model Evaluation</b>						
		.665	26.281	.000		1.944

### The Arab-Israeli Conflict

The Arab-Israeli Conflict, despite being the focus of the issues explored in *Two Merchants*, is the smallest of the main themes discussed by audiences. 31% of participants mention the Arab-Israeli conflict in their questionnaire responses.

When participants mentioned the Arab-Israeli conflict, the key concepts they address overlap with those explored in the role reversal sections of this chapter, including recognising the multiple perspectives involved in the conflict, indicating greater empathy

for relevant ethnic or religious groups, and developing new perspectives on the conflict as a whole. Likewise, there were participants who disagreed with the representations in the play. Beyond these themes, discussion of the Arab-Israeli conflict, like discussions of Theatre, primarily differed based on the question to which participants were responding. When discussing reconsidering views, participants appeared to dismiss the conflict as ‘futile’, ‘irrational’, ‘needless’ and ‘meaningless’.

RV: Participant 317: The major inter-religious conflicts of history have always struck me as futile and frustratingly meaningless (24, M, MDW).

When asked what participants would discuss with others, however, respondents focused on understanding the conflict.

Talk: Participant 329: [I will talk about] the root of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and their views on its origin (19, F, JDW).

The regression analysis revealed one significant predictor: participants who had not seen a production of *The Merchant of Venice* were more likely to mention the Arab-Israeli conflict in their responses. It is noteworthy that a similar relationship does not exist between participants who had read *The Merchant of Venice*.

**Table 6: Binary Regression Analysis: Arab-Israeli Conflict**

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables	$\beta$ (Beta Value)	Wald	p Value (Significance)	Exp( $\beta$ ) (odds ratio)
Arab-Israeli Conflict	First Act	-.085	.337	.562	.918
	Age	-.164	1.078	.299	.848
	Sex	-.032	.016	.900	.969
	Multiple Ethnicities	.206	.519	.471	1.229
	Western Ethnicity	.344	1.023	.312	1.410
	Religion	-.173	.202	.653	.841
	Importance of Religion	-.152	.941	.332	.859
	Read Merchant of Venice	-.059	.046	.830	.943
	Seen Merchant of Venice	-.929	8.090	.004	.395
	Attitude to Show	.153	.413	.521	1.165
<b>Overall Model Evaluation</b>					
		-.773	34.359	.000	.462

### Attitudes to the Show

The audience's attitudes to the show was a significant predictor for four of the six dependent variables discussed here (reconsidered views, talk with others, ideology and role reversal) and was the only predictor that was significant for more than one dependent variable (main theme). More than half the audience (55%) expressed clearly and almost exclusively positive views of the play; a further 30% expressed views that combined positive and negative characteristics or were neutral. Only 15% of the respondents expressed predominantly negative views of the play.

### Contradictions

One common feature of the responses to all of the main themes was the presence of contradictory views within the audience. What one audience member perceived as insightful, another thought was mundane; what one perceived as good theatre, another thought was theatrically boring; an experience one person thought was educational, another

found patronising. The responses to *Two Merchants* reveal highly polarised views amongst audience members. While the division of perspectives was by no means an equal split, for almost every (if not every) opinion represented in the audience responses, there was an opposing view expressed by one or more other audience members. Table 7 includes examples of some of the most prominent contradictions among audience responses.

**Table 7: Polarised Responses within Reconsider Views**

<b>Ability of Theatre to Influence Audiences</b>	
Participant 278: ...don't know yet...but theatre has the power to do so (18, F, JDW)	Participant 65: no, its just a play (71, M, JDW)
<b>Value of Repeating the Same Script Twice</b>	
RV: Participant 76: I have always held a great interest in the politics of the Middle East. Reading Robert Ash is as common a daily practice as strong coffee every morning. [Seeing] the two POVs back to back was an excellent tool to immediately see and feel the extremes of the situation (55, M, MDW).	Participant 10: I didn't think there was enough contrast between the two versions to really trigger any insights as to whether it made a difference whether the merchant was a Jew or Arab (55, F, JDW)
<b>Audience's Prior Experiences with Similar Conflicts</b>	
Participant 86: I didn't know that much religious hatred still prominently existed (19, M, JDW)	Participant 230: Being brought up in Canada and living in Hong Kong, racism is easily seen everywhere. Nothing changes (19, Unknown, MDW)
<b>Connecting The Merchant of Venice with the Arab-Israeli Conflict</b>	
Participant 428: A wonderfully inventive adaptation that reframes the act of witnessing the transferable identity of the victimized other ('Jew' or 'Arab'). We are familiar with the interpretive problem of the play (i.e. Is the Shylock/Kalev character a victim or victimizer? This UBC version brilliantly connects this interpretive challenge to the contingency of the historical situation (52, M, JDW)	Participant 56: I have comment about the choice of transposing the play in Palestine-Israel. It does not work. 1) Usury and antisemitism are relevant in Europe i.e., it would not work in the M.E. if we were dealing with Arabs and Jews. Palestinians and Israelis have political issues not racial (66, F, MDW)

### Limits of the Research

The first and perhaps the most prominent limit of this study is the fact that, as compelling and powerful as the data may be, it does not formally prove that this intervention had any impact on behaviour, nor does it demonstrate any long term influence.

This research makes no claim to having a representative sample. Using a theatrical audience recruited in the same way that any theatrical audience is obtained made the possibility of a representative sample impossible. In addition, one of the audience members at *Two Merchants* raised an additional sampling concern with the suggestion that a study such as this only attracts audience members who are already sympathetic. The wide range of responses to *Two Merchants* including both glowingly positive and hateful and aggressive comments suggests that this is an inaccurate assumption. While many of the positive comments have already been mentioned, one example of a particularly virulent response included the following:

This is the most stereotypically exploitative piece of shit I have ever seen. Congrats you assholes managed to [steal] that crown from Jerry Springer. That's right this play is a lower form of entertainment than garbage television programs. If any of you ever persue [sic] any thing [sic] else in this field I will murder all of you...

It should be noted that, while there were a number of critical comments, the degree of violent aggression noted in the above example was, thankfully, extremely rare. Several classes in three different departments in the Faculty of Arts were also required or strongly encouraged to attend the show. This likely explains why so many audience members were under 21 years old. These participants were among those who were the most affected by the production. It is possible that they would not ordinarily choose to attend such an event and, consequently, were more affected by it. This suggests that future productions should attempt to broaden their audiences beyond those who traditionally attend theatre.

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Integrating with other educational programs seemed to be an effective way to do this, although it is far from the only option.

There were a number of obstacles to overcome in creating this study that will likely continue to be problematic for future research. The first of these are the academic preconceptions about using entertainment, particularly theatre, as a mechanism for socio-political engagement of this kind. From the perspective of those familiar with this kind of work, the idea that theatre has a significant impact on the audience and society is common knowledge. This belief was, in fact, justification for some of the opposition to this study; why would one study something that has been an established truth for hundreds, if not thousands of years? In other disciplines, however, the preconceived notions are exactly opposite; with many academics expressing extreme disbelief that theatre might have any impact on conflict ideologies. In other cases, there appears to be some significant prejudice against theatre as an academic discipline. When I was applying to do my PhD, one potential supervisor from the department of Political Science (at a university that shall remain anonymous), when I mentioned that I did my bachelor's degree in Theatre responded: 'Well that's not a selling point.' It is hoped that this study, in addition to challenging the ideologies of the Arab-Israeli conflict, also challenges the academic ideologies that oppose this kind of research.

A final obstacle to this study, and probably the most problematic for future research, is financial. The funding limitations in the Arts and Social Sciences are hardly a new issue facing academics. There are, however, some special considerations for entertainment-based research. The data from this study leaves little doubt that the quality of the production has an impact on audience responses. While it can be argued that good entertainment does not have to be prohibitively expensive, with audiences accustomed to Hollywood movies and multi-million dollar productions on Broadway and The West End, attempting to even approach that level of production value is often costly. Obtaining funding to create a

production like *Two Merchants* would have been almost impossible if the department of Theatre had not included the show in their season and encouraged their students to contribute their time in exchange for course credit.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

The production of *Two Merchants* not only implemented the ICE model, but also demonstrated that the model can coexist with conventional, entertainment-based theatrical practice in which the experience of the audience determines the entertainment value of the production. The audience response research firstly demonstrated that ICE can have a significant impact on the ideological views of the audience members. It confirmed that such a production can inspire substantial discussion and debate that extends beyond the boundaries of the audience members who attended the production. It creates a starting point for research into the most effective staging techniques and ideological interventions. Similarly, it provides the initial steps to refining our understanding of the best demographic characteristics of audiences to which such productions can be targeted. Finally, the research further reinforced that the efficacy of ICE is linked, inextricably, to the audience perception of it as a 'good' production.

The audience responses to *Two Merchants* offer a wealth of insight into the potential for entertainment to challenge radicalizing ideologies. With almost 40% of audience members who did not already agree with the premise of the production stating their intentions to reconsider their views after seeing *Two Merchants*, there is strong evidence to suggest that productions of this nature have the potential to challenge existing, even entrenched, ideological views. After seeing *Two Merchants*, many audience members gained increased awareness of their own prejudices, recognised the persecution and discrimination faced by

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minority groups and increased their awareness of the potential for unjust laws to perpetuate and codify injustices.

The attitudes to the show expressed by audience members were a significant predictor for almost every one of the outcomes measured in this analysis, emphasising the importance of the entertainment quality of the performance. Regardless of its academic or ideological content, the production is far more likely to encourage thought, debate and even ideological change if it is appealing to the audience. This finding is not at all surprising from a theoretical perspective. Audiences who do not respond positively to the production are unlikely to be ‘transported’ into its imaginary world and, consequently, will likely be unmoved by any persuasive content.

This is further supported by the direction of the influence of attitudes to the show. Positive attitudes predicted the audience’s likelihood to reconsider their views, talk with others about the show and mention concepts related to ideology in their questionnaire responses. These are all measures of audience engagement with the content of the production, its message and ideologically challenging themes. Negative views of the show, on the other hand, predicted audience’s likelihood to discuss role reversal. The discussion of the role reversal for participants with negative views of the show focused on issues related to the structure of the play or the research – not the content. In other words, when people liked the play they were able to engage with the content, when people disliked the play, they focused on its technical elements.

It is clear from *Two Merchants* that the quality of the production, as perceived by the audience, is directly linked to its persuasive power. Unfortunately, perfecting a mechanism for reliably creating highly entertaining productions is something that artists have been struggling with for millennia; there is no formula that will guarantee a positive response to a production. Even a good script, great cast and fabulous director can result in a deeply disappointing experience for the audience. That being said, a few millennia of theatre, and

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more recently film, television and video game history make it clear that the best, most entertaining productions create an immersive imaginary world, which creates the opportunity for audiences to transport themselves into the story and be affected by it. Elements such as a fluid boundary between the audience and performers can help to support and enhance this process.

With regards to *Two Merchants*, the audience's comments indicated several contributing factors to the positive experience of many audience members. These included the Shakespearean foundation for the script, the quality of the acting, the engaging and interesting ideological content and the innovative research. Unfortunately, it is not now, nor is it ever likely to be possible to create a production to which every audience member will respond positively.<sup>8</sup> Individual tastes and experiences will always influence the unique responses of each audience member and, much as artists may try, we cannot please every audience member. However, several thousand years of theatrical practice combined with the far smaller body of knowledge created in this research reaffirms that it is not a single element but the combination of all of them that helps to create a positive audience experience.

## Conclusions

While this research does not and cannot answer the numerous questions it inspires, it does answer many of the more profound, foundational questions of the efficacy of ICE. Firstly, this research combines several different disciplines, theoretical perspectives and approaches to create a unified, cohesive model for the creation of ICE. This offers a new approach to creating ethical entertainment to challenge ideologies, which emphasises presenting multiple perspectives without advocating for any of them. This is a new contribution to the

existing body of practice. Furthermore, ICE requires that the audience responses to the production become the primary measure of its efficacy.

When audiences encounter themes, within an imaginary world, that counter their ideological beliefs, they respond in a variety of ways. Some recognise their own views in the play while others see unfamiliar, disliked or disbelieved perspectives. For those who find harmony between their own beliefs and those they perceive in the production, the play is an opportunity to reinforce those views. For the rest of the audience, some reconsider, some resist, and others doubt the truth of the views in the play. People often react with intense emotions ranging from amazement to disdain, and gratitude to anger. The different responses reveal a great deal about the tremendous potential of ICE to engage audiences on ideological issues, particularly those related to conflict, ethno-religious and socio-political tensions. For some audiences, ICE can be a transformative experience, one that engages the moral imagination and invites them into a world in which the perspectives and beliefs of the 'other' are given equal weight with their own. It can inspire dramatic changes in prejudices that have been held for a lifetime. In these cases, ICE is an exceptionally powerful mechanism for challenging the beliefs that are fundamental to ideological conflict.

In addition, the intensity of the emotions expressed by audience members, coupled with both the strong resistance and extreme gratitude expressed by some participants suggest that not only is ICE powerful, but it is necessary. The lack of understanding, misconceptions and prejudices expressed in the audience responses serve to highlight that *Two Merchants* appeared to fill a void, one in which the conflict is addressed in an inclusive rather than polemical manner. Too often, the loudest voices are those advocating a single position. It is apparent that while such voices serve their purpose, there is also a need for more inclusive views.

While the presentation of multiple views was perceived as brave and challenging by some, other audience members dismissed it as yet another representation of that which we all

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already accept – that multiculturalism and tolerance are an integral part of our society. Those audience members were convinced that the audience responses would reveal that nobody in the audience could possibly disagree with the views in the production; that prejudice was not a part of our society and that, as a result, the play was, if not useless, at least targeted at the wrong audience. While I wish that the values of tolerance and multicultural acceptance were as prevalent as these audience members believed, the audience responses (and a preponderance of other social, economic and academic data) did not support this assertion.

This kind of simple dismissal of the issues raised in *Two Merchants*, while not common enough to allow for any statistical measure, was not unusual. While some dismissed these issues as irrelevant in a multicultural society, others saw no value in religion in itself, or as a contributing factor, to the conflict. Such responses reveal a disturbing tendency to disregard or even disparage the conflict and those for whom it holds meaning. How can a conflict with such international ideological connections be resolved when people can simply ignore it? In some cases, there is even a distinct impression of perceived superiority for doing so.

These outcomes offer both challenges and hope. It will be challenging for those fighting ideological intolerance to break through the existing prejudices, myths and indifference that make even engaging in a discussion on the subject difficult. The fact that so many responded with willingness to reconsider their views, however, offers hope that ICE, carefully crafted to suit the audience and perhaps to challenge these specific obstacles, can be beneficial in this context.

### **The Future**

The possible applications for ICE are both exciting and extensive. With the knowledge of its potential efficacy and the cohesive model for its creation developed in this study, ICE

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can be used to challenge a range of ideological concerns. Many countries are facing a struggle in the shadows against increasing radicalization and their own populations being recruited into international terrorist organisation. ICE is one intervention that could be designed to inoculate populations against the insidious ideological propaganda that contributes to this kind of radicalization. In combination with existing strategies, ICE can help to address ideologically vulnerable populations before they are radicalized to the point of violence, working towards genuine prevention.

Beyond its applications to challenging racism, prejudice and stereotypes, it could also be used to encourage productive dialogue on controversial issues such as the pro-choice vs. pro-life debate, gay marriage and religion vs. science. It can provide a forum for promoting discussion and sharing information on complex and sensitive medical research such as stem-cell research or genetic testing. ICE can also be used to teach about some of the moments in history that prove difficult to address in classrooms. The Arab-Israeli conflict is one example, but so are the histories of the Canada's Indian Residential schools, North American colonialism, the histories of prejudice and genocide in countries experiencing the shame and trauma of those events. Just as it can be used to teach, it can help in the reconciliation process. Understanding the views and experiences of 'the other' are essential to lasting reconciliation and this study clearly demonstrates that ICE is a remarkably effective mechanism for inspiring at least the start of that understanding. In fact, any element of life in which ideology – broadly defined – plays a role, can be engaged with ICE. With all its possibilities, it is easy to forget that the potential to teach, encourage tolerance, reveal multiple perspectives and help in reconciliation, is mirrored in the ability of the same techniques to promote conflict, hatred, fear and violence. Part of the inspiration for this research was the knowledge that entertainment has been and still is used to promote ideologies of fear and intolerance. In many ways it is easier to create entertainment that encourages fear – there is no need for the complexity of multiple perspectives or the

challenges of respecting views with which you may not agree. The same techniques that make ICE such a potentially powerful medium are already being used to support individual ideological perspectives, some of which support violent conflict, oppression and terrorism. For decades and, in some cases, centuries, we, as a society, have been struggling with issues of violence, intolerance, ideological war and fear. In a speech given when I was a child in South Africa under Apartheid, a fellow student stated that there are no blueprints to follow in seeking solutions to the racial, social, economic and political problems we face. ICE does not offer a blueprint, nor does it offer a magical cure, but it offers one more weapon in the struggle.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> A detailed discussion of this literature can be found in: (Chalmers, 2014, pp. 23-138)

<sup>2</sup> The Balfour Declaration was a British document stating ‘His Majesty’s Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish People, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object...’ (Gilbert, 2008, p. 34) This official promise to create a ‘national home’ for the Jews in Palestine is sometimes viewed as the origin of the modern Arab-Israeli conflict. (Schneer, 2012) While the origins of the conflict undoubtedly extend far further into history than 1917, the Balfour Declaration was the official beginning of the process of creating the modern State of Israel and consequently a defining moment in the creation of the conflict as it exists today.

<sup>3</sup> A more detailed discussion of the methods used in this study can be found in (Chalmers, 2015)

<sup>4</sup> This number is only approximate because we do not have an actual house count for the only matinee performance. The performance was sold out, but not everybody who had a ticket attended the show. The house size included for the matinee is based on the best estimates of myself and the observer who, while not recording observations, did attend the performance.

<sup>5</sup> If you include the preview performance which had 35 audience members attending there were 6 performances with the JDW first and 5 performances with the MDW first. If you exclude the preview, there were an equal number of performances of each version.

<sup>6</sup> A more detailed discussion of the analysis conducted in this study can be found in (Chalmers, 2015)

<sup>7</sup> Throughout this chapter, comments from the question on reconsidering views are marked by RV; Talk with others are marked with Talk; and comments from other questions are marked with Other. I have also noted participants’ age, sex (male (M), female (F), and Other), and the version of the production they saw first.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Positive responses’ refer to: overtly positive language such as ‘well done’, ‘good job’, or ‘excellent’ (which may be ‘extremely positive’); thoughtful reflection on the issues reflected in the play; and constructive suggestions within an otherwise thoughtful or positive response. ‘negative responses’ refer to: clearly negative language such as ‘terrible’, ‘horrible’, ‘patronising’, etc; commenting on the issues or themes in a way that is clearly sarcastic or otherwise insincere; repeated complaints such as ‘the statue got in the way’, ‘I couldn’t hear

the actors', etc. Coders were also asked to follow their instincts if a response 'felt' positive or negative in the absence of any other specific criteria. The coding was done on a 5 point scale from extremely positive to extremely negative with an additional option for responses that were impossible to classify. Three different people were asked to code this variable. In the cases where there was disagreement between the coders, the response with the most agreement was selected (for example, if two coders rated a response as 5 and the third as 4, the response was coded as a 5).