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العدد الثالث

والأربعون

الوجه الآخر للحرب: الصدمة بين الأجيال في مسرحية علي الزبيدي الجيل الرابع

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المستخلص:

إن الحروب والأنظمة الدكتاتورية القمعية هي لعنة دمرت المجتمع البشري. حيث انهم لم يقدموا لمستقبل البشرية بشكل عام والأطفال بشكل خاص سوى عالم مضطرب من الفوضى تلاشت فيه القيم الأخلاقية والدينية والاجتماعية، مما جعلهم بلا مأوى ويعيشون حياة بائسة من الفقر. مسرحية "الجيل الرابع" للكاتب العراقي علي عبد النبي الزبيدي (١٩٩٧)، هي دراما بارزة تصور الدكتاتوريات التي أنتجتها السياسة والتي جعلت من العراق ساحة حرب. حيث ان هذا الواقع المرير الذي عاشه العراق خلال الحروب ألهم الزبيدي لتوثيق تلك الكوارث والوفيات والمخاوف التي انتهكت حقوق الإنسان والأطفال من أجل العيش بكرامة من خلال أحداث المسرحية. ان المسرحية هي تصوير لأعمال العنف والوحشية التي حدثت في المجتمع العراقي نتيجة لسلسلة من الحروب المتعددة في العراق منذ الثمانينيات. يتناول هذا البحث موضوع بتر أعضاء جسم الإنسان كحل للهروب من الآثار السلبية للحرب وتبعاتها من خلال نظرية الصدمة بين الأجيال.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأطفال، الجيل الرابع، تقطيع أوصال الجسم البشري، نظرية الصدمة بين الأجيال، الحرب، الدكتاتوريات القمعية. وطرائق التدريس للعلوم الأساسية



**The Other Side of War: Intergenerational Trauma in Ali Al-Zaidi's
Fourth Generation.**

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Abstract:

Wars and oppressive dictatorships are curses that have devastated human society. They have provided the future of humanity in general and children in particular with nothing but a turbulent world of chaos in which moral, religious, and social values have vanished, causing them to be homeless and live a miserable life of poverty. Ali Abdulnebi Al Zaidi's play *Fourth Generation* (1997) is a notable drama portraying the dictatorships produced by politics that made Iraq a war zone. The bitter reality of Iraq during these wars inspired Al Zaidi to document the catastrophes, deaths, and fears that violated human and children's rights to live in dignity through the events of the play. *Fourth Generation* is a depiction of violent and brutal actions that have taken place in Iraqi society as a result of a sequence of multiple wars in Iraq since the 1980s. This paper tackles the theme of human body dismemberment as a solution to escape from the negative effects of war and its consequences through the intergenerational trauma theory.

Keywords: Children, *Fourth Generation*, human body dismemberment, intergenerational trauma theory, war and oppressive dictatorships.



Introduction:

Violence and Child Abuse:

Children are gifts from God and must be preserved and cared for. Their rights should be taken into consideration by their parents and society. Children are the future generation of a country. Their future relies on the stability of their social surroundings. Every child has the right to be free and protected from any form of abuse or violence. According to human rights legislation, a child is legally recognized and protected from the time he is still in his mother's womb, ensuring they receive the best education and health from parents, society, and the country. Childhood should be a time of joy and play rather than being victims of violence. Children often suffer abuse from friends, relatives, and others, a serious issue that requires all stakeholders' attention.

Child abuse is any action, behaviour and gestures by another person adult or child that causes considerable damage to a child. It can be physical, sexual or emotional, but can just as often be about a lack of affection, care and attention. WHO (2002) defines child abuse and neglect, or child maltreatment, as all forms of physical or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or neglectful action, or commercial or other mistreatment ensuing in definite or possible harm to the child's health, continued existence, growth or self-esteem in the circumstance of a relationship of accountability, trust or authority.

Recently, the world has experienced numerous catastrophic events at all levels, particularly in politics and society. Child abuse is one of the greatest concerns that society faces, yet when it is performed on stage, it is denied and causes shock. Child abuse, often known as maltreatment, occurs when a parent or an adult (e.g., a babysitter or teacher) commits violence against an infant or child, causing an imminent threat to their life and health. (Gil,1970. p.135)



"Child abuse is the recurrent infliction of physical or emotional injury on a dependent minor, though intentional beatings, uncontrolled corporal punishment, persistent ridicule and degradation, or sexual abuse, usually committed by parents or others in charge of the child's care". (Suyantono, 2013. p.23).

Violence is a prevalent form of behavior among humans worldwide; its consequences might be physical, psychological, or both. Violence may be committed by people, particularly adults, who are constantly engaging in violent behaviors due to a variety of factors, such as war, and has several harmful consequences for both individuals and society as a whole.

Violence is a crime committed using physical force that renders the victim helpless. Violence can be psychological, physical, social, and sexual due to a lack of protection and supervision. Every year, the number of cases of child abuse is increasing significantly, indicating that there is a severe issue. (Weda, 1996, p. 108). Child abuse is a deeply concerning issue that can have a profound relationship with intergenerational trauma. Trauma and child abuse have become common concerns in literature, and writers frequently employ their works to investigate and raise awareness concerning these serious situations. Numerous works of literature tackle the psychological and emotional effects of trauma and child abuse on people and society as a whole, since they have a long-lasting effect on humanity. (Huraerah, 2007, p. 47).

Psychological violence includes a "behavior that intended to intimidate and persecute, threaten or misuse authority, limit out of the house, supervise, take the rights of the child, spoil the child, isolate, verbal aggression, and constant humiliation" (Harisa, 2012). It is not easy for others to recognize this type of violence, but it is possible for the victim to feel it. The impact of this violence will cause discomfort for the victim and reduce their self-esteem.

Children constitute the most vulnerable and affected segment of society, and the most entirely dependent on adults. It is the fault of adults that children



end up in areas of natural disasters or military operations, becoming hostages and victims of physical, sexual, and psychological violence. This effect can occur throughout the entire life of the child and lead to psychological consequences such as the inability to communicate with peers, as well as a decrease in the intensity of anxiety and learning disorders. The violence that a child is exposed to also has effects that can harm their psychological state, including melancholy and anxiety, an increased risk of suicide, and dissociative identity disorder. (Alekseeva, 2007, p.15)

Violence also includes social abuse, neglect, and exploitation of children. Neglect refers to neglectful behavior that fails to give suitable attention to child growth, such as being ostracized, banished from the family, or not receiving necessary education and health care. Child exploitation demonstrates mistreatment and discrimination or child abuse by society or family, such as a child who is forced to do something related to economic, social, and political aspects without taking into account the opportunity for protection by the child's psychological, physical, and social status, or forced to do household chores that exceed their limit. (Howe, 2011)

This causes a division of the violence's impact into levels. The first fatality at this level occurs when violence leads to death. The second level is serious; the violence experienced by the victims is menacing. This state is severe enough to inflict long-term harm and requires careful medical treatment, such as fractures and burns. The latter level is physical violence that leads to a traumatic condition. (Huraerah, 2007: pp. 48–49).

War Trauma: The Psychological Consequences of War

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, trauma is "A mental condition caused by reversed shock, especially when the harmful effects last for long time or trauma is an unpleasant experience that makes you feel upset or anxious". Therefore, trauma is a phrase that refers to psychological wounds or shocks that cause significant, long-term harm,



usually resulting in neurosis. Trauma is also a physical reaction to potentially dangerous events, often accompanied by feelings of loss of control, powerlessness, and fear, potentially causing long-lasting negative effects on functioning and well-being. Trauma theory integrates perspectives from several critical schools, including psychological, ethical, memorial, historical, social, individual, philosophical, and aesthetic. As Roger Luckhurst's "Mixing Memory and Desire: Psychoanalysis, Psychology, and Trauma Theory" states: "trauma study now includes many fields, focusing on psychological, philosophical, ethical, aesthetic questions about the nature and representation of traumatic events"(Luckhurst, 2006. p.497).

Trauma can construct cognitive and behavioral processes, modifying how people perceive and interact with the world. Children raised in trauma-affected homes can internalize negative attitudes and behaviors, expanding the cycle of dysfunction and abuse. Trauma is characterized by frustration, anxiety, restlessness, disorder, irritability, memory of previous experiences that restrict progress, and a lack of psychological stability. Trauma is considered a metaphor for existence since it affects an individual's daily life. These types of events are generally life-threatening and often lead to a closer relationship between violence and death. Although the etymological definition of trauma is related to suffering and physical wounds, such harm is not limited to the scope of the human body. Still, it includes all the traumas of the psychological society of the entire nation. Dye, 2019. p.19)

Trauma, a Greek word meaning wound, evolved to refer to emotional and psychological scars from violent or problematic incidents. War trauma refers to the psychological effects of war, often resulting in severe psychological trauma. Any traumatic experience caused by military combat is recognized as war trauma, and all war trauma can lead to physical disability and psychological disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder. In her article "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History," Cathy Caruth describes trauma as confusing experiences and other contrasting behaviors, she says:



"Trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden catastrophic events, in which the response to the events occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled receptive occurrence of hallucination and other intrusive phenomena. The experience of the soldier faced with sudden and massive death around him, for example, who suffers this sight in a numbed state, only to relive it later on in repeated nightmares, is central and requiring image of traumatic our century". (Caruth, 1996, p. 181)

Focusing on the association between trauma theory and other disciplines highlights the need to integrate socio-political and ethical perspectives to provide an essential explanation of this subject. Traumatic circumstances and experiences overpower the normal human adoption of life. When an individual experiences trauma, his body may adapt by adjusting new genes or behaviors, and some of these changes can be passed on to their children. However, these changes are not definitive but adaptable and can be rewritten according to life experiences and actions. The trauma experienced by earlier generations is transmitted to subsequent generations through genetics, family dynamics, cultural narratives, and societal structures; this can be discussed through the intergenerational trauma theory. (McLoughlin, 2018, p. 76).

Generational trauma, also known as intergenerational trauma, refers to the "passing down of traumatic experiences or stressors from one generation to another". Intergenerational trauma may be transmitted through changes in parenting behaviors, which could be biological, social, psychological, and/or a mixture of all three. According to the preceding extracts, psychological trauma is usually associated with the experiences and psychology of victims. Intergenerational trauma refers to the transmission of and behavioural and emotional responses across generations stemming from older relatives or ancestors who experienced severe trauma or persecution. (Berger, 2014, p.75).

Political systems which allow violence to persist for decades, as well as social structures and historical grievances, often create social institutions that



promote inequality and increase suffering. For example, institutional racism, economic injustices, and discriminatory policies based on historical events can all contribute to persistent stress and trauma in marginalized individuals. Therefore, the stories in the play symbolize Iraq's social history. As a consequence, this play is a social documentary that provides an accurate depiction of numerous disastrous events in Iraq's history while also memorizing the misery and sorrow that Iraqis experience in everyday life throughout wartime.

Transmission of trauma is another key point of generational theory. Past generational trauma (intergenerational trauma) may have an impact on current performance. Trauma exists in humans and is transmitted from one person to another through physical, psychological, and environmental means. Trauma has become more prevalent in the modern world since the lives of contemporary men cling to imagination, hallucinations, flashbacks, and fantasy. Jeffrey Hartman's essay, "On Traumatic knowledge and literary studies" has clarified this issue as he points out that "where there is a dream, there is trauma". (Hartman, p.546).

Cultural and social implications are other aspects of intergenerational trauma. The intergenerational trauma explored in the story might be intertwined with broader cultural and social issues. For example, the characters might grapple with questions of identity, belonging, and the legacy of historical injustices within their community. According to Freud, who explored the trauma theory, he associated trauma with cultural and historical development in addition to the hysteria study. In his acclaimed book "Unclaimed Experiences" James Berger discusses the Freudian method of trauma theory. He says:

"Freud's earlier idea, in studies in hysteria, concerned the dynamics of trauma, repression, and symptom formation. Freud held that an overpowering even, unacceptable to consciousness can be forgotten and yet return in the form of somatic symptoms or compulsive, repetitive behaviors. This initial theory of trauma and symptom



became problematic for Freud when he concluded that neurotic symptoms were more often the result of repressed drives and desires than of traumatic events. Freud returned to the theory of trauma in beyond the pleasure principle, a work which originated in his treatment of world war combat veterans who suffered from repeated nightmares and other symptoms of their wartime experiences". (Berger, 1997, p. 570)

This study aims to illustrate the association between trauma exposure and child abuse, taking into account several trauma-specific characteristics. It highlights the effect of war trauma on four generations of *Fourth Generation* (1997) within the framework of the intergenerational trauma theory from Judith Herman's perspective in her book *Trauma and Recovery* (1992). The play reflects the bitter Iraqi reality, as written by the Iraqi playwright Ali Abdualnebi Al-Zaidi, who witnessed all the social, political, and economic changes and their psychological and physical effect on Iraqis. The play deals with violence that occurred as a result of the atrocities of the Iraqi war and its traumatic consequences. Although this violence takes different forms, it has the same devastating effects on the lives of its involved. It illustrates how children and women are subjected to brutal and inhumane trafficking due to war. Herman points out that they "feel unsafe in their bodies. Their emotions and their thinking feel out of control. They also feel unsafe in relation to other people" (Herman, 1992, p.113).

The paper also examines the different forms of abuse suffered by Iraqi families and the character's different reactions to trauma and their ability to heal within the trauma framework based on the intergenerational trauma theory. The characters in the story might exhibit symptoms of trauma despite not having directly experienced the traumatic event themselves.



The Open Wound of Bodies and Space: Intergenerational Transmission of Abuse

We humans are the most complex and puzzling of living creatures. We can create, nurture, protect, educate and enrich. Yet we also degrade, humiliate, enslave, hate, destroy and kill. A man can tenderly hold his newborn and moments later beat the baby's mother. Violence permeates our history. In all societies and in each culture, past and present, violence has played a role in shaping our sociocultural evolution. While no society has been able to break free from violence, there is tremendous variation in the type and degree of violence across cultures and time. In some cultures, random street violence has been suppressed with oppressive institutional violence, in others, interfamilial violence is rare but intra-familial violence – violence to wives and children – is rampant.

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Humans are the most complex and confusing of all living beings. We can create, , protect, educate and enrich. However, we also dehumanise, enslave, despise, hate, and destroy. It is possible for a man to hug his infant with tenderness and then beat the child's mother. Our history is rife with violence. Violence permeates our history. In all societies and in each culture, past and present, violence has played a role in shaping our sociocultural evolution.

In our modern world, people witness daily violence as a result of devastating wars that turn humans into monstrous creatures. As theatrical productions become part of the country's national history, contemporary works are crucial in shaping people's cultures and behaviours. Authoritarian administrations, a succession of brutal wars, military occupation, civil



turmoil, and ongoing political corruption have all had a significant impact on Iraqi theatre. These conditions had a profound effect on that theatre as Aleks Sierz indicates the idea that "theatre is a public forum which offers a particular effective means of conveying notions of what is national and what is alien. Most playwrights not only reflect and refract the reality around them; they sometimes anticipate and second guess the future"(Sierz, 2011. p. 1). However, certain authors established a major modern theatre to reflect vital parts of Iraqi culture by conveying ideological, political, and social aspects. In addition to psychological trauma, the play may also portray instances of physical trauma suffered by the characters, such as injuries sustained in conflicts. Violence can be described as the use of physical force that causes or is intended to inflict harm.

Contemporary Iraqi theater exposes the depth of the people's tragedy. It has the necessary tools for feeding deep rebellion in the minds of the recipients. Ali Abdualnebi Al-Zaidi is a revolutionary Iraqi playwright. His play *Fourth Generation* is one of the most controversial works that appeared on Iraqi stages due to how the writer staged violence in presenting his plays. The play was inspired by the Iraqi-Iranian war, which caused unbearable atrocities to Iraqi society at that time. Al-Zaidi reflected the horrors of war, which lasted from 1980 to 1988, and the violence it caused in the people. His unique courage in bringing this issue to the Iraqi stage, particularly in the crucial period of the 1990s, certainly shocked the audience with its subject matter at its first performance.

This drama explores several themes of terror, anxiety, and death. It highlights many years of turmoil and war that ended just a few years ago, capturing numerous events having direct and indirect connections to Iraqi conflicts and their societal consequences. Due to its subject matter, this play constituted a threat to the Iraqi theatre in the 1990s. As Al Zaidi points out, it was written in light of the effect of war on the author's life since he was a part of a society that experienced the 1980s, the Iraq-Iran War, the 1991 Gulf War, and the economic sanctions that Iraqis endured for thirteen years following, as he states:



"I was watching the reactions of the recipients and listening to their words, as they expressed their surprise that such a play with its dangerous dialogue and open opposition to the oppressive political regime was being publically performed. Many of them told me that it was an extremely risky adventure to stage the play at that time, as it condemned and mocked the authorities, their disastrous wars, and their violent acts against Iraqi citizens, perpetrated by the dictator of that time" (Al Amil, p.2).

In "*The Fourth Generation*", Al-Zaidi does not regard war as a distant political issue but as a continuous heritage that shapes the psychology and lives of children born in its aftermath. The title itself is the key to transforming war into a normal event and a permanent state of existence. Al-Zaydi portrays war as an inherited legacy, and the children in this play do not experience war as an isolated disaster but inherit its consequences: fear, poverty, disability, and displacement. This framework emphasizes that the wound of war extends far beyond the battlefield and far beyond the generation that lived through it. This framework emphasizes that the scars of war extend far beyond the battlefield and far beyond the generation that lived through it.

The children in this play are depicted as victims forced to internalize the brutality of war before they can fully grasp the concept of peace. Their innocence is a victim of a war-torn world.

The children in this play grapple with concepts far beyond their years. They are victims, forced to absorb the brutality of war before they can fully grasp the concept of peace. Their innocence is stolen, replaced by the struggle for survival. Their childhood is trapped in a frantic search for meaning amidst the chaos; they are victims of a war-torn world. Their existence is woven with threads of trauma, leaving them eternally scarred by a harsh reality they were never meant to endure.

"*Fourth Generation*" offers insightful perspectives on contemporary Iraqi life. Al-Zaidi discusses one of the most contemporary important



sociopolitical issues: human trafficking, which is also known as modern slavery. He has addressed human trafficking as a human rights issue. The severity of this issue in recent years originates from the fact that it is increasingly linked to the globalization of the world economy, which is a result of international politics. This play is a serious and purposeful study of how wars have great impacts on Iraqi people through the phenomenon of four generations of Abu Arm's family. Horror, fear, insecurity, violence, and death, as well as other painful experiences, reflect people's traumatic lives. Therefore, this research focuses primarily on how these traumatic narratives represent Iraqi society across a certain period of history. (Sierz, 2001, p.5)

Recently, the subject of violence has received an extensive amount of attention, especially child abuse. Violence is a crucial and urgent weapon of theatrical art and frequently a reaction to reality. Physical assault, which includes striking, pushing, and shoving, may end in serious consequences such as abuse, psychological harm, deprivation, or maldevelopment. Al-Zaidi addresses the issue of violence, specifically child abuse, to raise awareness of how we deal with and view it. His writings were influenced by social, political, environmental, and economic factors and uniquely revealed and challenged harsh realities. He intends to illustrate the brutality that dominated Iraqi society in the 1990s. Thus, according to Olga Bolzek, "the demonstration of violence in in-yer-face theatre is impossible to overlook or ignore. It shows naked pain, suffering, humiliation, and torturous death. Violence is shown literately as well as figuratively" (Bolzek, 2010, p. 5).

In "*The Fourth Generation*," intergenerational trauma and child abuse are intertwined and passed down through generations; abuse is the mechanism that perpetuates and renews trauma over time. Al-Zaidi explains that trauma is not merely a memory, but is actively transmitted through the way children are treated. Rather than portraying children as symbols of hope for the future, Al Zaidi characterizes them as confirmation of the war's destruction, and living evidence that conflict is reshaping society at its most powerless level. In this play, the author tries to present a group of people and their repercussions through their reflections on the tragedy of war and its effects



on ordinary people. Iraqi dramatists undoubtedly continue to respond to their country's transforming political situation, contextualizing it within the extensive past of a culture that dates back to the dawn of civilization.

Al-Zaydi utilizes a heightened political awareness to address the critical issue of war, particularly child abuse, through themes of violence. The story delves into the lives of individuals suffering from the traumas of their ancestors, with these traumas being passed down to subsequent generations through child abuse, affecting their mental, emotional, and even physical health. The play explores a family consisting of a blind grandfather, a one-armed son (Abu Dra'a), the mother, a dumb grandson, and an infant who was only a few hours old. The grandfather represents the first generation, who lost his sight in a previous war; his son Abu Dar'a represents the second generation, who also lost his arm during the war. He decides to cut off his newborn's arm to save his future, as he believes. His blind father encourages him to commit this cruel and evil crime.

The third-generation child, the dumb son, is a tragic example of child abuse; obviously, his father intentionally made him dumb to avoid suffering like his father and grandfather. The new baby, who stands for the fourth generation, will not be the last victim, as spectators anticipate child abuse for all other new male babies born. The next generation is still feeling torn and grappling with the psychological scars of their ancestors. They experience feelings of loneliness, leading to internal conflicts, identity crises, and self-doubt, and conform to the complexities of belonging in their society.

Al-Zaidi depicts a beggar family brutalizing their male offspring physically, causing eternal disability to avoid war. Due to their physical impairment, these new handicapped youngsters will not be forced to fight in wars when they become men. Their physical traits would make them unsuitable for military service. As a result, they stay away from burning, bombing, killing, or even fracturing into pieces during battles. This terrible act is nothing but a depiction of the miserable reality that Iraqis are experiencing during this period of the last twenty years of the twentieth century. Through the



fragmented bodies, the author symbolizes a fractured society that has lost its cohesion, where violence is not only physical but is also produced over time.

The play explores the lasting impact of war on individuals and families across four generations. It delves into the psychological and emotional toll that war can have on individuals and how this trauma can be passed down through generations. Although Iraqis are accustomed to seeing people with missing limbs as a consequence of decades of war, terrorism, and brutality, the condition portrayed on stage may be disturbing. This is one of Iraq's taboo issues. People are conscious of it, but they never publicly discuss it.

The play begins with a scene of celebration, which is punctuated by screams and cries of anger and sadness during the birth of a new child into the family. The father, Abu Dra'a, decides that the arm of this new child must be amputated to ensure a decent life for him because men must beg in order to support their families since begging is the only means of livelihood for men to provide for their families. Al-Zaidi's narrative delves into the brutality and senseless violence of modern warfare, challenging readers to confront the human cost of conflict through vivid imagery and storytelling.

Al-Zaidi points out that the fourth generation inherits bodies already traumatized by past catastrophes, stressing that violence does not end with a ceasefire but continues in physical memory. The physical dismemberment reflects the long-lasting consequences of mass violence. Fragmented bodies reflect the disintegration of supporting political and social structures that have been destroyed by war. War, violence, and systematic abuse leave individuals psychologically and symbolically scarred. Thus, the mutilated body becomes a historical document, bearing the marks of events that preceded the individual's own life.

Authority figures, such as political leaders and parents, usually seem oppressive rather than protective. They are justifying cruelty as tradition, discipline, or a necessity for their survival. Al-Zaidi reveals how society masks abuse as a consequence of poverty, particularly in societies plagued by conflicts. However, the mother begs her husband not to do such a heinous



act against her innocent child. She begs him not to ruin her child's life by making him have one arm like his father. The Mother is the only character who objects to the practice of amputation which she denounces as inhuman and unnatural: "By doing this, you are deforming beauty, turning beauty to ugliness. You are changing the law of nature that you call for. This is a crime" (Al-Zaidi, 2005. p.60).

Unlike Abu Dra'a, the mother still hopes her child will have a better chance in the future. Abu Dra'a shouts at her, saying that she has not experienced the brutality of death and the consequences of war.

Mother: He is still too young for wars.

Abu Dra'a: He'll grow up soon; he'll grow up soon to find it waiting for him!

Mother: Not all those who entered the fire were killed. (Al-Zaidi, 2005. p.p.63-64)

Despite the mother's protest, she is obliged to consent to amputation herself, losing her arm and accepting the amputation of her infant son. Although Bond acknowledges the impact of violence on society, he advocates for a shift away from aggressive behavior for a safer future. Human society's violence tends not to be a natural or essential condition, highlighting the sickening scene of a baby's arm chopping. "Violence shapes and obsesses our society, and if we do not stop being violent we have no future... It would be immoral not to write about violence." (Bond, 1983, p. vii)

Mother: Leave the child out of your black thoughts (scream at him) Let him...

Abu Dra'a: (screaming at her) To whom I leave him? To whose? To be cut by shrapnel? To die hungry on one of the sidewalks of our city? For whom do I let him to spend nights without dinner? For the mothers who destroyed their children's lives with their passive emotions?

Mother: He is still young to be involved in wars.

Abu Dra'a: He will grow up, quickly grow up and find it waiting for him!

Mother: (screaming) No, you will not cut it.



Abu Dra'a: I will cut it ...

Violence has a huge part in the play, precisely in the physical form of aggression. The play is famous for staging one of the most shocking scenes of violence in the history of the stage. Al-Zaidi depicts this aggressive scene of a calm child wrapped in a cloth as he watches his father cut off his small left hand with a chopper. That innocent image of the child turned into bloodshed and tears in an attempt to shake the audience's conscience, who may not believe that a father could actually do this. Al- Zaidi revealed that his texts often focus on everyday life and highlight the dark corners of it.

"*The Fourth Generation*" uses the idea of the dismembered human body as a prominent metaphor for political violence, psychological trauma, and the fragmentation of identity across generations. Rather than being merely an illustration of physical brutality, the physical tearing in the play carries symbolic significance, revealing how authoritarian power, war, and inherited traumas sever the individual's relationship to themselves, their history, and their future. In fact, child abuse becomes a form of trauma and a learnt behaviour. The trauma was passed down through generations as normalized. It is not merely abstract or psychological; it is embodied in how children are raised and abused. In this play, children do not inherit trauma genetically; rather, they acquire it through fear, violence, and emotional deprivation. While adults who experienced oppression and war reproduce these conditions within their own families.

Abu Dra'a initiates a campaign in the city, urging the amputation of human limbs to survive and avoid continuous fights, despite Mother's objections about the brutality of this idea. Abu Dar'a declares that his thought of cutting off parts was welcomed by the villagers. This campaign attracts an enthusiastic reaction from the city, and people begin to follow Abu Dra'a's advice by cutting off their own and their children's limbs. According to the journalist Neriman Othman's opinion, "this shows the extreme extent of hopelessness in which people of that city have become defeatists and



surrender to the fullest" (Othman, 2009). They even establish the business of exporting these limbs to other cities.

The play deals with the injustices and horrors of human trafficking, a modern form of slavery. This crime represents a debasement of our humanity and should disturb everyone. It is a global issue that threatens public health and causes violence and organized crime. This is a serious societal crisis that damages the whole social fabric. Al-Zaidi masterfully manipulates the public, drawing up shocking examples of villagers physically abusing their children, following Abu Dra'a's strategy, believing it will save their future from war. He uses these examples to provoke public outrage. Despite being portrayed as disabled, the characters accept their deformities, and ironically, they call it a "safe future". **Abu Dra'a**: "I received some delightful reactions, Dad. They said that it's a perfect procedure to guarantee the future of their sons" (Al-Zaidi, 2005. p.65).

The play reveals a tendency among its characters toward deformity, suggesting that, in addition to the characters' deformities, the play's structure itself is also distorted. Al-Zaydi claims that he deliberately creates this distorted form to demonstrate defiance of the surrounding reality. Therefore, the distorted structure of the play reflects the distorted circumstances of its characters, as the destruction inflicted on society reached its peak. Thus, Al-Zaydi believes that the physical deformities of the characters symbolize the spiritually disabled souls of the Iraqi people. As he refers in an interview saying that:

"we are facing spiritual handicap basically; a rebellion against concepts and a confusion of definitions, a total chaos that invades human beings here. In other words, there is a tangible mental and physical handicap, in addition to the more important spiritual handicap that paralyzes humans' beings and makes them live in a limited horizon that destroys their lives". (Interview 2014, 5)



Al-Zaidi employs deformation to recall and critique a brutal truth, employing the play's deformed structure to emphasize the profound collapse of society. Furthermore, the imagery presented in the play ensures its audience understands the meaning of the depicted physical deformities. Although the play is often categorized as absurdist theatre, Al-Zaidi's revolutionary spirit and confrontational style distinguish his plays. Rather than depicting absurdity, Al-Zaidi uses theatre to confront the audience directly with uncomfortable truths and distorted reflections of themselves.

Abu Dra'a: Our neighbor cut three of his children's arms ...

Abu Dra'a: Our other neighbor decided in a moment of great and extreme faith that he would blind the eyes of all his family members ... Imagine, my father, the whole family cannot see. Imagine this beautiful sight.

Abu Dra'a: One of them asked the butcher to cut off his right arm and then said to him happily: (Cut the other, cut it off) (Al-Zaidi, 2005. p.65).

By the fourth generation, abuse is no longer seen as harm but rather as a survival necessity. Many of the adults are themselves abused children who now wield power over the next generation. This recurring cycle illustrates how neglected trauma transforms pain into brutality. Child abuse is a highly epic, dramatic performance with shocking scenes. Symbolically, the abused child represents a country that is exhausted by war. These are the messages Al Zaidi attempts to convey to audience members who may still believe in the illusion of Iraq's peaceful future. He also implies that violence continues and is a part of every family as long as they choose to tolerate it, which he clarifies in his plays.

"He tries to create a reality out of an assumption, in spite of the strangeness of the subject matter I present. [...] I think that the atmosphere of the war of the eighties and the practices of the oppressive authorities against human beings in Iraq were the strong incentives to write this hell in a reading that is almost



shocking for the recipients and the authorities as well" (Al Amil, p.2).

Fourth Generation is bold enough to propose a new generation that would be safe from war, even if disabled, as cutting a newborn's arm is crueller than stoning it to death. Thus, the play exemplifies Sierz's definition of 'in-yer-face' theatre in that it forces Iraqis to confront painful and stressful realities. Furthermore, by attending the performance, Iraqi audiences were compelled to confront their fears about the government. "That is why they avoid them for good reasons—what [these ideas] have to tell [them] is bad news: they remind [them] of awful things human beings are capable of and of the limits of [their] self-control" (Sierz, 2001, p. 6).

Abused children grow into traumatized adults who perpetuate harm. *Fourth Generation* is a mirror of reality, yet the aggressive violence against the infant is symbolic. It explores the limits of human depravity by depicting horrific and daring deeds. The play depicts a group of people torturing and chopping a newborn, which is unusual for a standard audience. Therefore, the act represents violence and cruelty since the infant represents the most vulnerable members of society, while the father represents a cruel society. The horror of a futureless family is dramatized through the metaphor of the amputation of a child's arm, which is considered one of the nerve-racking scenes performed in modern drama.

Abu Dra'a's new baby was an undesirable child, except for his mother, who was pleased despite her dreadful circumstances in life. Al Zaidi's portrayal of violence and deformity is heightened by omitting names and identifying characters by familial position or physical deformity, suggesting that names may not hold significance in their lives, and because their existence is a mistake, thinking of a name is an inefficient use of time.

Abu Dra'a: What shall we name him?

Grandfather: Nothing, nothing... another craziness is breaking into the corners of this house.



Son. (Continues to laugh)

Abu Dra'a: What shall we call him, then? [...]

Grandfather: Names, names, names... Nobody calls us by our names; names

are mistakes, too, that we stick on our sons' foreheads.

Abu Dra'a. I will name him; will you allow me?

Grandfather. Madness, madness, madness, madness, madness...

Abu Dra'a. (Shouts) Unknown... I'll call him "unknown".

Grandfather. I'll leave you with your Unknown and go out. Charity givers

are waiting for me on the pavements. They are awaiting my gracious hand on which they put their miserable gifts.

(Exits)

Abu Dra'a. It's a wonderful name. (He repeats the name loudly till the echo

of his voice fills the house.) Unknown, Unknown, Unknown....

Son. (His laughter becomes like weeping and severe moaning)
(Al-Zaidi,2005, p.p. 3-4).

Children become symbols of a nation's self-destruction; their innocence of hope is fractured by abuse. This challenges the sentimental view of childhood and highlights how abuse steals not only their security but also the future. The unknown is the name for the new baby, since Abu Arm finds no other appropriate name for his infant. The unknown name is a bitter sarcasm to indicate the abuse of Al- Zaidi's characters. In addition, the play is a black comedy, which is extremely frightening and distressing for an otherwise reserved Iraqi audience. The play can be a compelling testimony play that explores themes of identity, heritage, and the intergenerational influence of a family's journey across different generations, tracing their experiences, traumas, and transformations.

The Fourth Generation addresses the circumstances of oppressed children who are subjected to a catastrophic economic, political, and



social system that fails to provide their life meaning and pushes society into violent conflict. The play might investigate how trauma is handed down from one generation to the next. The first generation may have been traumatized by war or displacement, which has had long-term consequences for their descendants, showing worry, despair, or difficulties in their relationships. It is not just a story about children being abused but of a society that continues to perpetuate it. Abu Dra'a is the result of a barren environment and has grown emotionally barren since he has neither love or sympathy for his children as Ali Adel refers "in this brutal time everything is possible and it is not strange that the father would abandon his fatherhood to think of a mad solution for his baby son so that he would not be taken by the destructive war machine and its horror". (Adel, 2011).

The Dismemberment in this play is not confined to one generation, but is repeated as an inherited ritual. The fourth generation does not witness violence as an exception, but as an inherited rule. This repetition transforms distortion into a cyclical structure rather than an isolated act. Each generation not only inherits stories of violence but also bodies predisposed to submission and fear. The grandfather represents the author's mouthpiece. It is a horrible and cruel fact that the Iraqis chose this route to avoid conflict. The parents' choice for the infant to be handicapped and endure the associated suffering for the remainder of their lives is a horrible matter that happens over and over again. The father and grandfather disabled their newborn baby to avoid war, resulting in a deteriorating life and a miserable future for the next generation. These characters treat the children as just a casual encumbrance, forcing them to be silent, disabled, or blind; even they can kill a baby or cut his parts without feeling regret.

The child's body and psyche constitute a historical archive. The violence perpetrated against them reflects past traumas of oppression, war, and societal collapse, making abuse a conduit for historical memory. Abu Dra'a seems very happy with the portion of his son's bright and secure future. Furthermore, one of the most startling aspects of the play is the



family's lack of empathy for the abused child. The infant's crying is a continuous motif throughout the play, as the baby keeps on crying, chokes, yells, and cries again, but still nobody does anything to help him. This accident describes how the infant is disregarded and neglected, with a reference to the tragedies in his life. Furthermore, the oldest child had been neglected too. Exposure to physical violence to the extent that he is unable to speak, receiving no attention from anyone.

The playwright employs theatre as a means to stimulate the audience to recognize the injustices of their community against corrupt social conditions and political systems. The opening words invite the audience to protest, raise their voices, and encourage people to stand up against tyranny: "Hey, you speak up; you, the dead... (the shouts become louder) Nothing but quiet songs" (Al-Zaidi, 2005, p.2). There are screams outside that explicitly state how many Iraqi people endure and scream in anguish, yet their screams are ironic and go unheard since they are internal rather than public.

Then Al-Zaidi addresses the audience with a direct inquiry regarding their world: "Craziness, the world is full of craziness. What shall we do, we who are destined to own a little piece of mind?" (Al-Zaidi, 2005, p.2). Each generation can symbolize distinct eras, reflecting different social, political, and cultural changes shaping their identities and influencing their relationships with the world around them.

Although the grandfather asserts that they are the only logical people in the world who still have some logic inside their heads, such assertions set the stage for the rest of the illogical series of actions that appear to be acceptable to the characters, such as when the public declares its support for Abu Dra'a's idea of amputation. The grandfather satirically depicts their reaction as that of the dead trying to come back to life:

Grandfather: Reactions of the dead... that can move toward life.

Abu Dra'a: They supported my idea. I didn't hear one single objection.

One



of them said that I am the pioneer in this field. Another assured me that these ideas are big and will build the country, and what made me happy is that one of the men said that he'll write about me and my ideas and that I am a national wealth to be proud of. **Grandfather:** You have the honor of being the pioneer in the coming operations of the cutting (Al-Zaidi,2005, p.11).

Al-Zaydi examines war from the perspective of children to demonstrate that its greatest tragedy lies not only in death but also in the distortion of the life itself. The play asserts that when children raised up knowing only conflict, war has effectively destroyed their future before it even emerges. Therefore, such a horrible deed of amputation is only logical for such characters. Thus, according to Abu Dra'a, when the purposes are positive, it does not matter how hideous the actions are: "When the intentions are good, the actions are good too. I'm not aspiring to a personal gain or benefit out of this, but I am trying to live up to my responsibility as a father" (Al -Zaidi, 2005, p.10). Therefore, this logical aim of Abu Dra'a in cutting off the mother's arm and amputating his own baby's limb is a justification for the entire city's practice of amputation.

Abu Aram's illogical thinking leads him to compare his family to a lamb. Consequently, driven by his paternal responsibility, he believes he must cut off his newborn son's arm to protect him from the horrors of war he has witnessed. He recounts how he initially regarded his father cutting off the lambs' ears as a cruel act, but later understood it as a merciful act to protect their health, thus explaining his father's practice of marking and protecting his flock. "When the lambs became fat, my father used to cut off their ears. I used to say that my father was a cruel man. But when I grew up, I



understood that he was very concerned about the lives of his lambs" (Al-Zaidi, 2005, p.59).

Abu Dra'a experiences during the war ingrained in him a painful viewpoint, leading him to the following conclusion: "He is my son... He was conceived in war and born at a time of preparation for another war. He'll grow up in the middle of a third war, and get older in a fourth war, and live at the beginning of a fifth war, and die, and be cut into pieces by the end of a sixth war, and will be resurrected again at the beginning of a seventh war and reformed at the beginning of a war... " (Al-Zaidi, 2005, p.p.59-60)

Therefore, the play suggests that when war affects the fourth generation, it is no longer just a historical incident but a failure of the whole society. Violence arises from society's dehumanizing factors, which involve the physical and psychological manipulation of human life to conform to the industrialized world's work patterns. It is a notable drama portraying the dictatorships produced by politics that made Iraq a war zone. The play is a chilling depiction of the horrific reality of war, diving into the depths of anguish and brutality endured by those trapped in its grasp. The story delves into the harsh aspects of battle, bringing attention to the psychological, physical, and emotional toll it takes on both fighters and civilians.

Child abuse is not just a symptom of psychological trauma but a system for transmitting it. Being surrounded by such traumatic memories leads to manipulation of their subsequent behavior and actions. These painful memories can traumatize these people and their reactions are explored and analyzed once they find themselves in similar situations that remind them of what they have been through. Abu Dra'a recounts his memories of the brutality he witnessed throughout the war, especially the dismembered body parts of the dead. Traumatic parents may struggle with forming secure attachments or exhibit inconsistent parenting behaviors, potentially leading to emotional neglect or abuse for future generations.



"I entered [the fire of war], woman; it's merciless. (Shouts) Oh God, I saw them, how they were mutilated, their heads being pierced, their chests, their eyes. You are talking about things that you haven't seen; you didn't breathe the smell of gun powder that is yeasted in my lungs. I don't want him to see what I saw, rotten dead bodies; others that are burnt; others turned into ashes. I saw their heads fly away from their bodies; how men returned to their wives with no manhood, ruins of men. I saw how their wives took second husbands because they refused to sleep with dead bodies..." (Al-Zaidi, 2005, p.10).

It is important to mention that throughout the 1990s, there were many reports of soldiers causing bodily harm to themselves to request leave from the army, which was extremely humiliating and harsh. Other tales about soldiers who broke their limbs or legs for this reason were common anecdotes among Iraqis at the time. Al-Zaidi's drama pioneered the theme of self-dismemberment as a means to escape from the consequences of the war. Its exploration of this dangerous concept sparked widespread controversy under the repressive Iraqi regime of the 1990s, leading to the play's exclusion from the festival.

In Al-Zaidi's play, the violated human body becomes a central theatrical device through which social traumas and political injustice are exposed. However, he presents physical suffering as a means of awakening political consciousness. His play is significantly restrained; he could not remain silent about such violent events in society, as he satirizes his people's silence and criticizes their acceptance, which he embodies on stage to demonstrate the harshness of the country's predicament during those years.

The experiences recounted in *Fourth Generation* serve as a stark reminder of the profound suffering endured by individuals and communities torn apart by war. From the devastating loss of loved ones to the psychological trauma inflicted by relentless violence, Al-Zaidi captures the full spectrum of human anguish in the face of war's relentless



onslaught. The play's exchanges and tensions address family relationships, tradition vs. progress, and the quest for meaning in a rapidly changing society. The characters in the play are multidimensional and complex, reflecting many aspects of dreadful history while adjusting to a new way of life.

Through the lens of his personal experience, Al-Zaidi underscores the structural violence and systemic injustices that perpetuate cycles of suffering and war. He attacks the complex dynamics of power and oppression that provoke wars, revealing how innocent people get caught in the machinations of political and ideological warfare. Therefore, when the story ends with a surprise twist of events when the mother reveals that she is pregnant again, her dumb son cries astonishingly the word "(p-r-g-n-a-n-t)", which implies another horrible crime and another innocent victim. As a result, the fourth generation would be without parts. As Othman denotes,

"this defeatist mentality dictates to them that there is only one way to escape war disasters, and that is by destroying themselves. Therefore, they do not wish for a new life to be born. Yet nature refuses their decision, and the Mother is pregnant again, in hope that a fifth or sixth generation would see light, with full limbs and the ability to speak" (Othman, 2009).

The play concludes with a moral message: when the child abuse is frequent, it becomes uncontrollable. Al-Zaydi asserts that the child becomes the site where history refuses to end. He highlights the cyclical nature of trauma, which is passed down through generations, leaving its victims trapped in an inescapable cycle of suffering. Al-Zaydi points out that the dysfunction within the family of Abu Dar'a is not only a series of isolated accidents but rather an indication of deep-rooted social ills.

By highlighting the darker aspects of war, the play forces readers to confront painful truths about the human cost of battles and to reconsider their beliefs



about the nature of war. It serves as a poignant reminder of the desperate need for peace and reconciliation in a world torn apart by violence and suffering. Through confronting the past, the characters can find ways to break the cycle of trauma. According to Al- Zaidi, "theatre can never die; that is why he has high hopes that a future generation will change reality for the Iraqi society and theatre" (Interview, Al Amel). Hope is the last message of the play: "Tomorrow is a new day; the slogan that people must believe in and the lesson we should keep in mind is going on and protesting loudly on stage whenever needed"(ibid).

Conclusion:

Intergenerational trauma refers to the transmission of trauma experiences and their effects across generations. It suggests that the impact of traumatic events, such as war, genocide, colonization, slavery, and other forms of systematic violence, can be passed down through familial and societal structures, affecting subsequent generations' mental, emotional, and even physical well-being. The theatre focuses on exposing the harmful impacts of violence to attract financial and psychological support for those people. Individuals start behaving violently towards each other and themselves in response to challenges and government oppression, leading to increased crime. The play delves into the long-term effects of war on families and individuals, exploring the psychological toll and intergenerational trauma. Al-Zaidi uses this lens to shed light on the lasting impact of historical injustices on communities, emphasizing the complexity of trauma and human resilience. In conclusion, the playwright effectively portrays a modern society plagued by violence stemming from various conflicts. Wars inevitably damage societies, impacting people's social, domestic, and psychological well-being.

In *The Fourth Generation*, dismemberment of the human body symbolizes an effective metaphor for political oppression, historical trauma, and generational repetition. Al-Zaidi transformation of the physical mutilation into a language of loss, revealing how violence not only destroys bodies but



also history, identities, and the future. The dismembered body is represented as a haunting symbol of a society that is unable (or unwilling) to heal, where the trauma survives by being inscribed on the flesh and transmitted throughout generations.

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