

Child Abuse in Contemporary Drama: A Comparative Study in Edward Bond's *Saved* and Ali A I-Zaidi's *Fourth Generation*

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Abstract:

The issue of violence has become the subject of much attention. Violence can include physical assault such as hitting, pushing, shoving, etc., causing severe harms such as psychological harm, maldevelopment, abuse or deprivation. Child abuse or child maltreatment is a kind of violence committed by a parent or a caregiver (e.g., babysitter, teacher), which are far more harmful and costly both to persons and to society. It threatens children's survival and development.

The current study tries to explore the major dramatic theme of child abuse presented in the two different British and Iraqi plays. Recently, the world has witnessed many calamities and crises at all levels mainly in politics and society. This theme reflects issues at the heart of society but which whenever presented on the stage cause shock and denial. Violence is an important and urgent tool of theatrical art which is almost always a response to life.

This paper will take a look at the plays of two contemporary British and Iraqi writers; Edward Bond and Ali Al-Zaidi. Both have always argued the topic of violence, particularly child abuse in their plays to make us critically aware of why and how we can respond to life. Their writings have been affected by political, social, economic and environmental conditions, making them expose reality and provoke man, restore and formulate reality in a new way.

Key Words: Violence, Child abuse, maltreatment, negligence, *Saved*, *Fourth Generation*.

إساءة معاملة الأطفال في الدراما المحاطرة: دراسة مقارنة بين مسرحية "إنقاذ" لـ إدوارد

بوند و"جيل رابع" لعلّي الزيدّي

هند صباح عبد الصاحب بلال

قسم اللغة الإنكليزية/ كلية التربية/ جامعة الكوفة

المستخلص:

يعدّ العنف إحدى الظواهر المجتمعية المنتشرة في غالبية مناطق العالم، ولا تقتصر على عبارة القوة الجسدية كالضرب والدفع، بل قد تكون لفظية أو حركية تصدر من طرف ما تجاه طرف آخر، فتلحق به الأذى النفسي والجسدي وما إلى ذلك، مما يسبب أضراراً جسيمة. وتعد سوء معاملة الأطفال مثالا على العنف الذي يرتكبه أحد الوالدين أو غيرهم من مقدمي الرعاية (على سبيل المثال، جليسة الأطفال، المعلم) بحق الأطفال.

تناقش الدراسة الحالية الموضوع الدرامي الرئيسي لسوء معاملة الأطفال في المجتمعين البريطاني والعراقي. لقد شهد العالم مؤخرًا العديد من المصائب والأزمات على جميع المستويات بشكل رئيسي في السياسة والمجتمع. لذا يعكس هذا الموضوع القضايا التي تكمن في صميم المجتمع كالعنف الذي عادة ما يسبب الصدمة للجمهور فهو أداة مهمة وعاجلة للفن المسرحي الذي هو عادة مرآة الحياة. سنتلقى هذه الورقة البحثية نظرة على مسرحيات الكاتبتين المسرحيين؛ إدوارد بوند وعلي عبد النبي الزبيدي. لقد ناقش الاثنان دائمًا موضوع العنف، وخاصة إساءة معاملة الأطفال في مسرحياتهما التي تتأثر بالظروف السياسية والاجتماعية والاقتصادية والبيئية، مما جعلهم يمثلون الواقع بكل بشاعته ويستفزون الإنسان ليعيدوا ويصوغوا الواقع بطريقة جديدة.

الكلمات الدالة: العنف، سوء معاملة الأطفال، قسوة التعامل، الإهمال، انقاذ، جيل رابع.

1. Introduction

Post the Second World War, the world has been observed to be affected socially and economically by wars and its politics. Violence in 1960s was considered to be massive. People were not as secure as they are observed today.

Among those playwrights who have been interested in staging war and violence is Edward Bond. He has made a revolutionary change in the overall drama industry. His work includes the distinct nature of the presentation of violence which helps the community to understand the events happening around.¹

Considering Edward Bond's work, it was completely bounded for the adults. It is likely that Bond's experience of a war-ravaged childhood and post-war alienation left a harsh mark upon him and a deep wounded experience can't be healed.² Among those violent issues, Bond tackles child abuse in *Saved* (1965). *Saved* is one of his plays to address the problem of social justice and violence. Likewise, Ali Al-Zaidi stages child abuse phenomenon in the Iraqi theatre particularly in *Fourth Generation*³. He experienced the traumas of both losing his elder brother at the Iraq-Iran war and shocked by bombing the civilians during that war. He is an outstanding contemporary Iraqi playwright, tackling the turbulent social and political issues since the eighties of the past century. Both playwrights compose formally creative dramatizations presenting violent issues on the stage.

2. Child Abuse

Child abuse is a harmful act or failing to do an act that puts a child at threat of harm. This kind of abuse can be physical, sexual or passionate. Psychologically, neglecting a child or denying his needs is another form of child abuse.⁴

There are many interrelated factors underpin the causes of child abuse and neglect. The history and features of the abuser, the abused child himself, and the family can all contribute. It is most likely that the abuser himself was once an abused child.

In some cases, abusers lack the training and competencies needed to raise a child, which gives the chance to the act of abuse, providing insufficient parental function models for future generations. Children who have low birth weight, poor health, disability, or otherwise perceived as different are more likely to be victimized in the family. Other factors of abuse include marital discord, home violence, joblessness and

poverty, and social isolation. Moreover, lying, disrespect, disobedience, low performance in school and destroying property are the most important motives for abuse and punishment.⁵

Child abuse can be physical resulting in real physical mischief or have the chance for damage. It can also be sexual abuse or emotional abuse in which there is lack of the supportive environment, needed for the emotional competence and development of a child. This kind of abuse includes various acts such as mockery, belittling, bullying, terrorizing deterrence, rejection, discrimination and any non-physical types of unsociable treatment.

Moreover, neglecting a child by both parents or one of them is another type of child abuse. In many cases poor health and educational reasons as well as emotional development are the main factors. It is important to point that neglect can occur only in cases where reasonable resources are available to the family or caregiver which makes it different from poor living circumstances.⁶

2.1 Child Abuse Theory:

The researcher adopts Gil (1970) The Sociocultural Theory of child abuse in describing child abuse in the two plays. This theory presents a complex conceptual framework which employs a set of forces, dimensions, and circumstances to explain child abuse. Gil defines five main forces that push persons to act aggressively against children. These include the environmental chance forces, environmental stress forces, insufficiency in functions related to emotional, intellectual, social and physical areas for the care-takers or the abused children or even both. Furthermore, troubled family atmospheres involving complex relationships between spouses and/or rejection of children. By combining these forces, Gil concluded that child abuse is multidimensional.⁷ He states the essential dimension as "the general, culturally determined permissive attitude toward the use of a measure of physical force in the caretaker-child interaction, and the related absence of clear-cut legal prohibitions and sanctions against this particular form of interpersonal violence".⁸

The second dimension is concerned with child-rearing attitudes, traditions and practices. Gil advocates the generalization that non-white families and/or those who have poor socioeconomic status employ bodily punishment more frequently. Chance environmental forces compose the third dimension. It is when a child accidentally hurts himself physically due to the existence of hurtful objects in his way. Thus, what might be an accident turns to be not because child's actions are not responsible particularly in unsecure environment. The fourth dimension is related to the environmental stress factors which are related to conditions of poverty, unemployment, and inadequate housing. These factors lead to losing self-control and "may contribute thus to the uninhibited discharge of aggressive and destructive impulses toward physically powerless children, perceived to be of stress for real or imaginary reasons."⁹ Finally, all forms of physical, social, emotional, and intellectual deviance functioning in the abuser, the child and the family they belong to constitute the last dimension.¹⁰

1. Child abuse in Bond's *Saved*

Violence is shown as a dramatic strategy by Edward Bond in which he has initiated the showing of the completely dare scenes of death, killing and torture. His dramas have been very unpredictable depicting hurting and odd scenes. In his play, *Saved* (1965),¹¹ Bond tries to be highly controversial with respect to violence. He has chosen some of the most important concepts of presentation which caused the audience to be shocked.

Saved expresses a story of two young adults Len and Pam who are preparing to have sex without knowing each other previously. She indifferently has a love affair with him. Pam shortly goes to have a new lover, Fred but Len's obstinacy does not allow him to leave Pam's parents' home. Len does not change and always remain loyal to Pam in spite of her giving birth to Fred's undesirable child. Pam's parents are shown to be in bad terms. They have not spoken to each other for a long time which indicates the reason behind the unstable and unconfident personality of Pam. They have not been successful in raising her in a good way. Their marriage has been based on poor communication and complete negligence. The lack of familial relationships and affection between family members are obvious from the beginning of the play. Psychologically, Pam now is an adult who lacks passion for not being raised in an emotional atmosphere.¹² She and Len seem to be not known even their names because when Len asks Pam about her name she responses "Don't be nosey".¹³

Moreover, the father, Harry, acts passively towards his daughter. This boredom and lack of interaction between the father and his daughter seems to be reflected and even strengthened by the same unfruitful connection between him and his wife, Mary. Indeed, Harry's going out to work and Mary's coming back home suggests their misunderstanding, lack of familial relationship, and inconsistent life. Bond's purpose is an attempt to present a realistic portrayal of a lifestyle which is completely controlled by certain social conditions.¹⁴

Among a number of scenes, the abandoning of the unwanted child of Pam is considered as one of the shocking scene for modern theatre. The play showed a complete neglect of a child. Throughout the play the baby is treated as an object. It wails itself to sleep every night while the mother is busy watching T.V. *The baby screams with rage . . . she turns up the volume.*¹⁵

According to Gil's Sociocultural Theory of child abuse, the neglect and lack of passion needed for the growth of a child results in reluctant, cold-blooded and emotionally unstable adult like Pam. The latter does not have control over her sexual needs that her best boyfriend accuses her of having sex with almost all of their friends. Pam also lacks self-confidence that she insists on loving someone who is obviously uncaring figure and such a womanizer. It is Fred that she insists to be her baby's father though he denies that asking her to prove it. Due to the circumstances in which she has been grown, Pam is not expected to be physically and psychologically ready for the role of motherhood. The child was heard to be crying offstage several times with complete ignorance from the part of his mother. The young mother cannot feel the responsibility towards her child.

When Fred breaks up with Pam once and for all, she storms off the stage, leaving their baby behind in a climactic moment of neglect. Pam has proven herself to be an exceedingly irresponsible mother already. Their disturbed relationship worsen the matter more that she goes even further by leaving the child alone in the park.

Pam refuses to be a mother, in consequence redefining the concept of family. She wheels the baby on to the Park solely as an excuse to persuade Fred to see her. The baby is drugged with aspirins so that it'll be quiet.

Leaving the baby with a group of bullying adults including the probable father, Fred, shocks the audience who would not expect any physical violence towards the baby. Mike, Fred, Colin, Pete and Barry do not seem to consider the baby as a human being. Barry takes the baby's pram and pushes it and then frightens the baby when bursting the balloon attached to the pram. Barry is doing that joyfully while singing the following song:

Rock a bye baby on a tree top,
When the wind blows the cradle will rock,
When the bough breaks the cradle will fall,
And down will come baby and cradle and tree
an' bash its little brains out an' dad'll scoop
'em up and use 'em for bait.¹⁶

Violently, Pet pulls the baby's hair and Barry pinches it. Each takes a turn hitting the baby.

To enjoy themselves more, they all start stoning the baby. Mike takes out some matches, lights them, and throws them in the pram that finally the baby is dead and they all run off the stage. Pam comes back on and picks up the pram without bothering herself looking at the baby. Hence, the play is marked with violence against children which makes it a best demonstration of the underlying animalistic brutality to children.

The scene of baby-killing is completely horrible. The baby has been tortured before his death. Those bullying adults want to prove their manhood with doing violent, aggressive, and brutal deeds. Some of them consider it as a kind of entertainment. They realise that Fred has remained apart from the game; they urge him to throw the stones at the baby. He hesitates but then relents, and others join him. The scene has been shocking for the audience.

What is more cruel is to see Len who, from the beginning, has shown some care attitudes, may be, towards the baby— remains hidden, passively watching and without eventually attempting to stop Fred and his friends from their collective killing. Len confesses his inaction to Fred in scene seven:

LEN. I saw.
[...]
I was in the trees. I saw the pram.
FRED: Yeh.
LEN: I saw the lot.

FRED: Yeh.

LEN: I didn't know what t'do. Well, I should a stopped yer.

FRED. Too late now.

LEN. I juss saw.

FRED. Yer saw! Yer saw! Wass the good a that?¹⁷

Len, then, is not different from the other killers for keeping silent over the violence he was witnessing. This may suggests Bond's deliberately contradictory portrayal of Len as a passive and unresponsive individual who, despite his efforts to support Pam and her family's harsh conditions, is ultimately incapable of reacting.

Accordingly, the death of the baby is not presented as an individual assassination, rather; it is an economic and social murder, since it emerges as a consequence of the tough living conditions society imposes on lower-class people like Fred and his friends. Again the factors of this kind of child abuse is based on culturally and environmentally stress factors as discussed previously.

Significantly, the play was completely based on the cruel realities of the society who is blamed to be involved in building the negative change inside people. In time Pam seems indifferent about her child her entertainment, the same thing for the bullying adults who are supposed to be considered the relatives of baby's parents. They cannot overcome the wanting of entertainment of killing the baby.

2. Child Abuse in Al-Zaidi's *Fourth Generation*:

Ali Al-Zaidi is a prominent Iraqi playwright who employs themes of violence, particularly child abuse, to present a major issue which is war. In a form of comic drama, Al-Zaidi portrays a poor family of beggars who choose to physically abuse their male children causing them eternal handicap in an attempt to avoid war. Those new handicapped children will not have to be involved in war when they become grown up young men because of their handicap. Their physical nature would not allow them to be soldiers. Thus, they are saved from being killed, bombed, burned or even smashed into pieces during war.

This horrible act is but a depiction of the miserable reality of the Iraqis' life during the last twenty years of the twentieth century. A father with one arm, called Abu Dra'a has lost the second arm during war, prefers to cut the left arm of his new born baby to save his future as he thinks. Abu Dra'a resembles the Second Generation is encouraged by his blind father to do this abusive act. This Blind Grandfather stands for the First Generation. He has lost his eyesight during a former war also. However, the child's mother refuses this horrible act against her beautiful baby begging her husband not to harm him in that way which would turn him to be like his father; with one arm. She asks him not to destroy her baby's life. Abu Dra'a yells at her that she has not experienced war and the terrible death one can see there.

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 Draa: He will grow up, quickly grow up and find it waiting for him!

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

Abu Draa: I will cut it ...¹⁸

There are scenes in which the play have mentioned that early exposure to violence as well as terror of the war would may result in shaped themes in his work.¹⁹

Al-Zaidi portraits an aggressive image for a quite baby wrapped in a piece of cloth watching his father who took his small left hand and cuts it with a chopper. That innocent scene of the baby turned to blood shedding and tears in an attempt to shock the audience who might not believe that the father can really do it.

In another scene, Abu Dra'a tells the blind Grandfather that his idea of cutting parts has been welcomed by the village people who also have started cutting their children's parts.

Al-Zaidi is a master of techniques. He knows how to vex the audience to urge them to understand his message. Thus, we can see a sudden fall of a leg followed by an arm, which is really shocking. The village people are all physically abusing their children. They seem to follow the strategy of Abu Dra'a. They are all convinced that this act would save their children's future from the nightmare of war. Al-Zaidi gives examples on the tongue of Abu Dra'a:

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).²⁰

Another terrible example of child abuse is the dumb Son who stands for the third generation. It seems that his father caused him to be dumb intentionally in order not to suffer like his father and his grandfather in war.

The new born baby who represents the fourth generation will not be the only victim. The spectators are horribly expecting child abuse for all other new born male babies. Therefore, when the mother, at the end of the play, announces that she is pregnant again, her dumb son shrieks astonishingly the letters (p-r-g-n-a-n-t), which means there would be another terrible crime and another victim. Thus there would be a whole generation without parts; it is the fourth generation.

3. Discussion:

In the introduction to the Methuen edition of *Early Morning*, Bond states that he writes about "violence as naturally as Jane Austin wrote about manners. 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."²¹ Although Bond recognizes that

violence shapes our society, he, nevertheless, thinks that we have to stop behaving violently to secure our future. In other words, it is most likely that the violence found in human societies is not a natural or even an essential condition. One can see that the violence witnessed in Scene Six is sickening, as is the violence regarding the manner in which Pete killed the boy with his van.

In *Saved*, the community was young adults of the 1960s English people. Their language was not so pure neither so slang but a distributed type which involved expression, lack of childishness, maturity, built adultery and many other related concerns.²² It is highly crucial to understand that Edward Bond has avoided the unreal content in his plays to enhance the productive presentation of the reality based picture.²³ *Saved* investigates the lives of the oppressed working class youths by a cruel economic and social system which are not able to give their lives meaning and lead society to plunge into brutal violence. Pam in *Saved* is a product of barren world and has turned emotionally barren since she feels no love or compassion for the child.

Similarly, *Fourth Generation* of Al-Zaidi reflects reality. The intensification of violence towards the baby is almost unthinkable, showing a symbolic aspect, in spite of the play's insistent realism. To see a group of young adults who torture a baby and ultimately murder him is quite unconventional of what a typical audience might expect from the action of a play; thus, the act becomes representative of a certain kind of brutality and unrestrained cruelty. The baby symbolizes the more vulnerable members of the society, and the bullying men denote for the savage society. Hence, the play is examining the limits of human cruelty by staging horrible and daring acts.

Likewise abusing children by parents in Al-Zaidi's *Fourth Generation* reflects a difficult and violent scene that the audience witnesses. Al-Zaidi criticizes war consequences such as the poor health of the surviving soldiers as they become disabled or handicapped and what might follow of family disintegration. He arouses the case of individual and social struggle. The father and the grandfather chose to physically disable their new born baby in a way to avoid war. They chose a very deteriorating life and miserable future to him and to the next generation. They prefer to turn a whole generation to be disabled to avoid war atrocities.

In spite of the horrifying violence of the murder of Pam and Fred's child, the play continues rather casually, and the characters seem unbothered. When Pam goes to visit Fred in jail, she is completely on his side and unconcerned about the death of the baby. Even after he blames the baby's death on her, she suggests ways that she might be able to help him win his trial. Then, Len reveals that he saw what happened, but does not imply that he is going to speak up. In comparison to Len, the Blind Grandfather encouraged Abu Dra'a to go on his plan of cutting his baby's arm.

As Bond grows up in a country has been devastated by wars, so he is forced to be aware of the potential for violence and disruption from an early time. Air raids make him feel disturbed to see the shrapnel in the streets and feeling sorry to observe the rubble of the destroyed houses in which he has once been. Such kind of violent activities leads him to react when an explosion in a park stripped the streets bare of leaves. This is the reason which makes Bond write the baby's killing in *Saved*. There was always the possibility

that violence could explode in a society who lived under severe conditions and social alienation.²⁴

Indeed, it is a very horrible and a bitter reality that Iraqi people had chosen such a way to avoid war. Preferring to be a handicapped or disabled and suffering the pain of this for the rest of life or a child is obliged by his parents to be speechless, handicapped or blind as a kind of protection to him from war.

The shocking events in both plays become more astonishing because the characters treat them as just a casual encumbrance. Bond's and Al-Zaidi's characters are seemingly never fazed by the horrible events that occur in the play which creates a dull structure, in which horrible things happen over and over again. The characters have an almost an aesthetic effect in that they can kill a baby or cut his parts without feeling regret. When the bullying adults were founding pleasure in stoning the baby, Abu Dra'a was also happy as he was trying to portray a saved future for his newly born son.

Furthermore, the lack of care and concern of how little the characters toward the victimized child is one of the most shocking components of the play. the baby's crying is a motif recurred through the play where the baby continues to cry, then chokes, then screams, then cries again but no one does anything to help. This motif shows how ignored and neglected the baby is, care about one another and the tragedies of their lives.

In time the baby of Pam and Fred rejected by all the characters in *Saved*, the new born baby of Abu Dra'a was an unwelcomed boy during that time except his mother who was happy despite their miserable living conditions.

When Pam's baby was suffering neglect from his parents who did not think of his future, Abu Dra'a's eldest son was also suffering from neglect. Being physically abused that he becomes unable to speak, he is growing up alone now without being paid attention from anyone.

Critically, *Saved* has been seen as unsuitable play for kids. Some critics has called for banning this play for staging reality in such a brutal. In *The Guardian*, Costa criticized the baby stoning scene with "cold disgust," "ugliest," "nastiest," and "most sickening and revolting" act. He states that he "wanted to show that we are destructive of human values". Costa shows Bond's response about *Saved* saying that 'The people who are killing the baby are doing it to gain their self-respect, because they want to assert human values'.²⁵

4. Conclusion:

The twentieth-century world was full of violence, famine, genocide, despair, and loss of communication in everything. Playwrights came to use theatre as a way to stimulate people to realize the injustices of their society through agitating the audience against corrupt political systems and social situations.

Violence is a huge part of both plays particularly in the form of physical aggression. As *Saved* is infamous for staging one of the most shocking scenes of violence in stage history, *Fourth Generation* is dare enough to suggest a new generation who would get safe from war though disabled. Cutting the arm of a new born baby by a chopper is not less cruel than stoning a baby to death.

The terror of a futureless society is dramatized in *Saved* through the metaphor of child-murder which is considered as one of the nerve-racking scenes performed in modern drama. The hope of society is refuted when a baby is numbed into a comatose state by its mother and stoned to death by a group of idiotic youths including the baby's father.

In time that *Saved* demonstrates the negative impacts that are affecting the life of the young adults, and children. *Fourth Generation* shows the bad effect of war on the future of new born generations. Child abuse is considered to be the epic presentation with shocking scenes. It is an observation that Edward Bond and Ali Al-Zaidi have made a revolutionary change in the overall drama industry. In time *Saved* reflects Edward Bond's life experience to exposure the violence of war as well as the experience of fear, Al-Zaidi's characters are prototype of real society groups who have lived the woes of wars and their bitter consequences.

In a nutshell, violence is the natural result of the dehumanizing aspects of the society the physical and psychological twisting humans' life to fit the work pattern of the industrialized world.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

There are no conflicts of interest

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