



ISSN: 1994-4217 (Print) 2518-5586(online)

Journal of College of Education

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obstruction , dark
images ,devastating
effect.****Article info****Article history:**

Received 7.jan.2023

Accepted 17.mar.2023

Published 29.May.2023

**Iraqi Political Theater: More than a Comment****A B S T R A C T**

This study aims to shed light on the Iraqi political theatre , and how the political events especially war effected the on the theatrical works. The researcher chooses the Iraqi playwright Ali Abdul nabi Az-Zaidi as representative .The study gives short introduction on the Iraqi political events starting from 1980`s , then it deals with (Rubbish) (Qummama) and this play shows the destruction of Iraqi social life after long eight years of war , the play tells the story of a solider comes back from a war with an obstruction to find that his wife and mother have lost their chastity and worked as Prostitutes. The play is full of dark images which show the devastating effect of war on both human and society .

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31185/eduj.Vol51.Iss2.3183>

المسرح السياسي العراقي : أكثر من مجرد تعليق .

للباحثة : فاطمة شاكر خلف

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الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى إلقاء الضوء على المسرح السياسي العراقي ، وكيف أثرت الأحداث السياسية وخاصة الحرب على الأعمال المسرحية. وقد اختارت الباحثة الكاتب المسرحي العراقي علي عبد النبي الزبيدي ممثلاً عن المسرح العراقي ، وقدمت الدراسة مقدمة موجزة عن الأحداث السياسية العراقية ابتداء من الثمانينيات ، ثم تناولت مسرحيه (قمامة). تظهر هذه المسرحية الدمار الذي تعرض له المجتمع العراقي و الحياة بعد ثماني سنوات طويلة من الحرب ، تحكي هذه المسرحية قصة جندي عاد من حرب وقد تعرض إلى أعاقه ليجد أن زوجته ووالدته قد فقدتا عفتهم في الدعارة. المسرحية مليئة بالصور القاتمة التي تظهر التأثير المدمر للحرب على كل من الإنسان والمجتمع.

الكلمات المفتاحية : المسرح السياسي ، الحرب ، أعاقه ، صور مظلمة ، التأثير المدمر.

Introduction

Ali Abdel-Nabi Az-Zaidi (1965-), A well-known Iraqi playwright whose theater is distinguished by its use of shocking realism and complicated symbolism in an attempt to draw attention to contemporary Iraqi dilemma using very simple language and rich characters to reach his goal. His play collections include *The Eighth Day of the Week* (*Thamin Ayam al-Usbu'*; 2000), *The Return of the Man Who Has Not Been Absent* (*Awda al-Rajul allathi lam Yaghib*; 2005), *A Show in Arabic* (*ArdhbilArabi*; 2011), and *The Divine Plays* (*The Divine Plays*; 2012). (*Al-Ilahiyat*; 2014).

“O folks, I write with a crazy head so that I can comprehend what is happening,” (Az-Zaidi 2021) explains in his letter. He tends to express the dark side of the human soul that is crushed by the wars that hit his country several times since the 1970s. The war that resulted in the death of his brother and forced him to stand by and watch soldiers burn to death, a scene that hit him deep and that same fire burnt his soul as he explains in an interview prepared by the researcher. The agony of these wars played an important role in the production of al Zaidi theater, just as the First World War was an influential fact in the production of rebellious writers with their ideals which had its impact on the structure of the dramatic text. And those who dismantled all of the dimensions of the Aristotelian system and its circumstances, as well as the customary templates that were in place, and who left closed spaces, closed endings, purposeful hints, closed interpretation, and closed logical language in their wake. (Az-Zaidi, Abdel- Nabi. Oct. 2019)

Az- Zaidi highlights the conflict and its impact on the Iraqi man and drama, starting his expedition from the 1980s, a hectic era in the Iraqi contemporary history when the Iraqi-Iranian war took place and lasted for eight long years, passing by the Gulf war and moving towards the 2003 Fall of a regime towards another that pushed Iraq towards the unknown. During these long forty years 1980-2020 both theatre and drama addressed various topics related to everyday life; war and injustice whether political or social. While he criticized the act of war and the power of the governing authority, and its terrible manifestations, Az-Zaidi wrote about all of the emotional states that may come to those involved in battle in an abstract manner with a uniquely ludicrous style. (Az-Zaidi) says, "As I claim, the banner of the Iraqi ridiculous has not been torn and has not vanished as long as the human being is oppressed and violated in the reality of what is happening" (Fares, 2016.).

Plays that shed light on human agony caused by war are known for their shocking images and ugly pictures of human tragedies. *Rubbish/ Qumama* (written in 1995 yet not published till 2005) is a play about tragedies of the Iraqi-Iranian war 1980-1988. Sherif, a young man filled with the hopes of future and married to Afaf is taken forcibly to a war that he does not understand its goals or reasons. He comes back with nothing lost in every sense of the word, he lost his youthful energy, years in a meaningless war together with his two legs. Coming back to a present that is more tragic than the war he used to survive, now he has to survive the fact that his mother and wife turned into working as prostitutes for living. They refuse to welcome him unless he accepts to work as their pump. And so he finally does.

This is play is in one act, the events of the play take place in a space that does not surpass the size of a huge hall in the house where the play is being performed. A number of plays have been written about frustration, and one of these is *Rubbish*, It is distinguished by a solid plot with a dramatic structure, as well as in terms of subject matter, nature and intensity of suspense, as well as in its treatment of the circumstances of the characters who have experienced frustration. He lives, and his frustration either comes out or remains silent, as we see in the play with three characters; Sherif, Afaf, and the mother. Each one experienced frustration in a different way; the mother who lost her son, after a while she adopted negatively with this lose refusing to welcome him and expressing feelings of rage rather than agony. Afaf, the wife who loses her husband in the first days of her matrimony, dehumanized by her environment to be a tool for pleasure to the creatures around her (Alubaidi, 2014).

Az-Zaindi cleverly draws the welcoming scene of the meeting between Sherif and his two women. Coming back from war injured and had his legs amputated, his mother and wife, after a long absence during which he was confined to a wheelchair, had forgotten about him.

Sherif: I have beautiful memories here.

Afaf: Ha! I sensed that. Crazy; he is crazy.

Mother: (*Yelling at him*) Get out. You can go to the nearest infirmary.

Sherif: I thought that you would hold me off the ground and on your shoulders when you saw me. But they seem unable to carry dead bodies.

Afaf: We haven't seen you before.

Sherif: it's an old story.

Mother: And pushed your story toward us?

Sherif: I know the road very well.

Afaf: Since when?

Sherif: My whole life. I used to run around this house as a child, moving from one room to another, having fun, playing around, laughing. But I grew up...2

...

Sherif: Don't you recognize me?

Afaf: Recognize you, should we?

Mother: Who are you?

Sherif: (*shouts with joy*) I am Sherif... Sherif...

(*Rubbish/Qumama, 2016, p.6-7*)

Interviewed by Ammar Abdul Khaleq in 2021, Az-Zaidi says that Ideas cannot be legitimized, and that those who believe that their ideas must be should bring originality together with change and novelty. "We are imprisoned by fear. That is why the script of

Rubbish/Qumama and other plays are classified under the title of the illegitimacy of any religious, political or social ideas. Man must not fear any type of authority whatever the title.” Az-Zaidi invites the writers to think and deal with various subjects putting in mind that fear is nothing but a chain that a writer must get rid of; “do not look back, this is the secret where *Rubbish/Qumama* is finding the freedom of expression.”

In 1995, the date when this play was written Iraq was under sanctions due to the policies of the regime, in addition to the destruction in the social structure caused by the 1980's war, what followed destroyed and ruined what is left. The play is nothing but an indirect comment to what happened and is happening to the individual crushed by his everyday facts. Sherif is a representative of generations who had to depart their dream of a normal safe future to suffer the war and what followed. His physical loss is a symbol of his inner deformity and it represents the agony he had to experience during his captive as a prisoner of war. He comes with high hopes yet he is crushed by the reality he is now facing. Thus the writer is calling for freedom of expression, he is discussing the idea of commenting on politics under siege. A playwright cannot be creative when fearing authority. Here is Sherif trying to reflect his dilemma at a time of social deterioration.

MOTHER. Sherif? A name with no meaning for me, I don't remember.

AFAF. You are not allowed to repeat this word here again. Beware! They'll kill you. This is a forbidden word. It can cause all our death, even the other houses around us, the houses beside them, and the ones beside those... (p.5)

Symbolically the name of the young man reflects important values; chastity, honesty, chivalry, purity, and it also refers to the royal origin of a man/family. All these values are deformed. The writer gives hidden messages through the names. Afaf, the wife, whose name refer to a chaste virginity and honor, works as a prostitute, which is darkly ironic. She even does not choose her costumers; “There is a shortage of costumers, I am not telling a secret, you... our work has started to deteriorate. What does it mean then for us, for example...? I mean, for example, we need to accept... Look, we need to accept and receive leftovers like you!” (p.3). She refers here to the fact that man is deteriorating to become a ‘nothing’. Being a professional prostitute, she had to accept every cargo presented by the market, and it seems that the market are bringing bad fish to her net. Az-Zaidi explains, “I know that theatre begets deep questions, thus I am a writer engaged in questions that have been created out of the distressing human reality in which I find myself, and have come from my role as a horrified witness to countless tragedies.”(Az-Zaidi,2020) We live in a horrific reality where we are being killed off, as seen in the cancellation of the show and of our existence in general. And thus, the question in the text may have been just a little ahead of its time, and thus asks difficult questions and gets embroiled in hot debates, and this is what the text truly wanted to accomplish. He added, “These are my blogs. They are cries to the world that I am not as horrible as I appear, and I am certainly not as bad as some will assume or accuse me of being.” (Al –Zaidi 2020). Instead, I am an Arab playwright who, born out of a myriad of unanswered questions and an increasing sense of paranoia and fear caused by the harsh reality I was thrust into, desires merely to use that little period to place a legacy of optimism and joy into the world (Baquer, 1985).Az-Zaidi tends to shake the audience beliefs

in the pictures normally accepted by everyday common man to comment on the political facts lived by that man.

MOTHER. Sherif?!

SHERIF. Have you forgotten me?

MOTHER. My only son was lost many years ago in one of those stories that used to be told by old mothers to their little children every night. A story that is called war.

SHERIF. I am your child, Sherif. What a joy seeing you, both, again. My lovely wife, Afaf.

AFAF. Sherif... Where have you been?

SHERIF. That's a long story. A mine has taken my legs off. And when I woke up from the coma I found myself a prisoner of a war that I didn't know why I was involved in.

MOTHER. You've changed a lot; your face, body, hair...

SHERIF. I lost a lot of blood.

AFAF. (Sarcastically) Congratulations, lucky wife, here comes your heroic husband, returning dead. What a joy.

MOTHER. (Shouts hysterically) Hey, everyone, look my son is back, back after ages of absence. Hey, men, let's celebrate his return. (Yells as if at a funeral) Hey people, the body of my son is back.

SHERIF. This is the shock of my return, I understand that. How happy I am to see you. How wonderful for us to find each other after all this time, to find a chest that can hold you inside and help you cry out all these years of loneliness and alienation. (Foolishly) How are you?

MOTHER. (Firmly) Why did you come back like this, Sherif? You should have returned as you left this house.

SHERIF. I didn't have the choice.

MOTHER. Your excuses are always unsuitable for your age, you, men!

AFAF. (Looking at his missing legs) Where are your legs? SHERIF. I forgot them in this holy land of war.

MOTHER. You shouldn't have returned.

SHERIF. (Coldly) I came back for you, mother. Come here and hug me, hug your only son quickly. (He tries to move towards her.)

MOTHER. (Shouts) Get away! SHERIF. (Embarrassed) How? How should I get away, when I came only for your sake? (Addressing Afaf) You, my dear wife, why this coldness? This is your lover, returning home. Come to me, Afaf, my dearly beloved... I'm back at our home; my childhood dream, my

friends, my memories, and the good people of our street. I returned to make up for all these years of being away and for all they have deprived me off.

AFAF. Whatever they deprived you off is much less and easier to deal with than what they deprived us off.(p.5-6)

Az-Zaidi would start each play with something inflammatory, which allowed him to be even more expressive of the general public's views on current events, while at the same time conveying the complexities of his theatrical character. Az-Zaidi was characterized with more psychological notions than other authors, in a simple but often boring manner which he full of surprising confrontations that give the reader a fearful and anxious expectation rather than tension. In short, he summarizes that the writer could reflect on the experiences and ideas that are evident in everyday life in the single theatrical text he wrote; references were thus affected by the story he told, his global reading, and his personal experiences, as well as knowing that his writing came about in different economic, political, and social conditions in his home country. The writer explored the topics of his plays during the Iraqi war and so portrayed psychologically crippled characters who were in a social and political decline, against all forms of oppression, and supported freedom. He sought to propel the reader into a mood of elation and curiosity. Despite offers and solutions, their ambiguity leaves room for confusion, misinterpretation, and changing perception. (Fares, 2016).

Mother: I prayed a lot and prayed to God for her to come back, I prayed to Him until my prayers were tired of me, for me, for what, for me, dearly. Your mother is a rotten paradise.(p.12)

When the house becomes a prostitution den and the area becomes the entry and exit point for a large number of men till a guy enters the handicapped chair without legs and inspects the various portions of the house, the mother and Afaf (the wife) are particularly affected. He is taken aback by all of the changes that have occurred in the house; otherwise, he is the role that is being played by another actor Sherif. The husband who has been absent from this location for a long time. Even his personality altered and became distinct from what he was before entering (Sharif) into this world, which is distinct from the one he had previously been into (Rosen, et al, 2012).

The war and its tragedies, as well as the repression and arrests that the Iraqi man had to endure under the previous regime, had significant consequences for the manifestation of the concept of frustration in the characters of the play of Rubbish, particularly in the face of waiting and the lost hope, which was the manufacturer of chronic frustration in the characters of the play. With the help of words that have no meaning or through words that have a profound and enigmatic meaning, Az-Zaydi disrupted the horizontal and vertical dramatic structure and shattered the traditional storyline, where he also toyed with fractured worlds and places, in addition to the terrible silence (Baqer, 1985).

The concept of frustration is necessary for the three characters (Sherif - Afaf - the mother) in the play (Rubbish) from the beginning of the events until the end of the play, beginning with the title, where he likened the characters to (Rubbish) and employed the Rubbish bag in livelihood, shroud (death), and filth (litter), as well as behavioral and moral filth.

Az-Zaidi linked the concept of (frustration) with the concept of (waiting), and he made the characters wait for nothing from the beginning of the events until the conclusion of the events, which is what we find in the play (Qumama), in addition to the fact that he presented the long-awaited present absent character, who, although she appears on the stage, is absent in her behavior, and this is what we find in the play (Qumama), in addition to the fact that He did everything correctly. Despite the fact that (Az-Zaidi) in the play (Rubbish) proposes a confined environment that takes place inside a house that contains several doors, everyone feels incredibly nihilistic because he proposes the language of rejection in the words of his three characters, Az-Zaydi created one of his characters in the play "Qumama" unwell and frustrated, and this dissatisfaction follows her and stays with her until the end of the play, and she is unable to get rid of it. Apart from creating a mental state of frustration for the three characters in his play (Rubbish), he also physically handicapped one of them, Sherif, which rendered her unable to deal with the frustration and face it, but rather succumbed to the inevitable in the face of immorality and corruption for the sake of money and their own lives' long-term viability (Az-Zaidi, 2019).

Rubbish play is one of the plays that exposes a dark aspect of the life of an Arab person, particularly in nations that have been ravaged by conflict for an extended period. This play shock us with a painful truth, the ugly reality of war, whose destruction is not limited to destroying cities and tearing people apart, but also wreaks havoc and ruin on the human soul, causing us to find ourselves in the presence of a special type of human being, a type whose humanity has been lost to the ravages of time and war. With everything that has been gone (Az-Zaidi, 2019).

Sharif, who has been away from home for years due to the war and who abandons his bride a month after they are married, a fact which is highlighted by Az-Zaidi. The author tells us that in combat, a man loses his limbs and turns to pieces and rips, and a person loses his humanity, and everyone transforms into furious monsters as a result of their experiences. In his return with his wheelchair, an amputee Sharif finds that his home has become suspect, and his wife Afaf has been transformed into a prostitute. Despite his attempts to convince his mother to change her mind, the cruelty of Afaf, and their rejection of him, and their insistence that this is the only way for them to survive, nothing works, and the existence of this square being "honorable" is not commensurate with their work, because it is no longer a human being or a man, but simply Rubbish (Rosen, et al, 2012).

The writer had intended to refer to her as Afaf, who afterwards became a prostitution victim. Perhaps this is a particularly terrible model for women in our society, particularly when it comes to the abuse of women against women. In any other case, you'll end yourself on the road to destruction like Afaf. Az-Zaidi intends to use such names Afaf and Sherif in order to show that the Iraqi families were destroyed by the absurd wars, sons, fathers, and brothers became pimps in families that were renowned for honor, originality, and love, and in another text, the father cuts off the arm of his son due to the originality of his story to save him from joining that war (Mahmoud & Radi, 2020).

The text is the subject of examination and analysis. Throughout the book, the author presents a question that contains the answer inside its folds, along with innumerable apparent and hidden implications, the query being: What has war done to us? It is necessary

to consider the professional identity of an entire generation, or maybe two or more generations, of the dead, incarcerated, disabled, widows, and bereaved in order to provide an answer. Additionally, there are orphans, a nation of ripped people, or those looking for graves, prosthetic limbs, or a second or third degree marriage among others. Every character in *Rubbish\Qumama* is a freak or queer, and the entire piece is about the social ramifications of war, including the absence of a sense of motherhood, the mother rejects her returning son, and the loss of love after the wife expels her husband. Beneficiaries who have been abandoned, battered, and defeated. The paradox dominates the mechanism of text formation, giving it significant symbolic overtones as a result of its prevalence. Sharif's escape from death and his return are countered by the mother's dialogue "my son's funeral has returned"(p.5) which reflects her agony and pictures the death in life situation families suffered from in Iraq during the 1980s and 1990s. For these fragmented temporal extensions to be effective, memory must be used as a means or instrument to elicit linguistic structures and expressive patterns from the participants.(Rosen, et al, 2012).

AFAF: (sarcastically) Congratulations to you, dear wife, your hero husband has returned from the dead, how happy I am for you.

MOTHER: I am so happy for you. Male hysteria ensues as my son returns home after a long absence. Let us men celebrate his return together tonight.(p.5)

...

SHERIF. (From inside the bag) I am back, finally back, mother. You, my dear wife, Afaf, can you hear me? This house has always filled me with warmth. Is it invaded by cold too? (Screams) Mother, haven't we got enough bags? I was born in bag and lived in a circle of bags. And here you are again, putting me a bag again. This house can't include my manhood anymore. Can you receive a man who was stained by war, my wife? Do you worry that your bed will be invaded by an old whiteness? You pure woman! You used to be a very small thing, who knew nothing but love. Love. Your words were so little 'my dear husband, my Sherif, my love, my soul'. Was your love killed by the long dagger of waiting? (Screams) My wife... Look back at me, you might remember this husband who is made of memories, dreams and crazy hopes. I am nothing now, except for a stray sharp edge that is lost looking for a piece of white flesh to settle down in. Mother... You used to be the mother of our whole street. In your lap, all children would hide when running away from their parents. You, pure woman, what a huge sadness has made you leave your motherhood for something else. Where is your shyness? (Screams louder) Take me out of this bag! (p.19).

Here Az-Zaydi announces his desire for liberation and salvation by searching for a safe haven for his body aching with the pain of the mother after war

AFAF. What are you doing? MOTHER. (Referring to the bag) Making a new wedding dress for my son. (*They go to the room where SHERIF is. We hear screams and shouts. They come out pushing the chair. SHERIF is in the rubbish bag trying in vain to fight.*). (p.18)

Az-Zaidi(2019) uses shocking contrasts in the characters' positions, such as the shocking refusal to return to Sharif after an absence worthy of celebration, because these situations necessitate a new discourse that necessitates an updated dramatic perspective that meets with a diverse narrative vision, so that the theatrical performance has enough space and time to influence the recipient's taste and quarrelsome prospects.

The burial service for the son, the author places the majority of the information about the setting of the events and the moral decline of the place where the main character will be placed at the beginning of the text, without committing himself to any dramatic structural logic, because it transcends all of the determinants of the Aristotelian structure, which is why it is placed at the beginning of the text. As can be seen in the juvenile structure of the text, the metamorphosis of any character in the book at any time we desire into a narrator, preacher, warrior, or lover is now accompanied by a visual body, allowing us to perceive what is happening (Shabout ,2018).The sack here refers to birth, death, ruin, battle, and captivity as examining the body of the text *Rubbish\Qumama* reveals the moral decline left by war in the body of the family the mother, and wifeboth reject Sharif ,the absent man, as he after his return.(Fares ,2016)He was a heavy legacy of a memory destroyed by fears of war and hunger that overshadowed the entire locality and not only Sharif's house, it was the collective fear which people fought in his shadow in order to re-create the place, and a narrative text that is told and must be dealt with.

Mother: Do you really wish to breach the law of this place by reaching manhood so late in life, Ego?

A CUSTOMER SAYS: I am one of the heroes who possessed super-manly masculinity.

Mother: Either you repent and announce your innocence of your former masculinity, or you must leave silently, for this realm only accepts the remains of dead men.(p.11)

It is necessary to have a high level of knowledge of the dramatic code rules that are addressed by reference rules in order to go through the process of refusing or rebelling. It is this link that determines the relationship between theatrical performance and the frames of reference established by it, just as the bags are a symbolic parallel to the ruins of corrupt places and the distortions of bad times(Fares, 2016).Az-Zaidi is pushing his audience hard to shake their beliefs in the regime to see how it ruins the deepest human feelings a mother has towards her son. Family bonds are destroyed and deformed in other cases; the Iraqi people all remember the day a mother was honored by the leader and president during the 1980s when she handed over her only son to the military court to be executed because he fled his duty as a soldier. Az-Zaidi is targeting such feelings and more, a parent who wishes his sons to die so that he would have the honor of meeting the president is another shocking image that haunted the TV shows at that time. This type of propaganda formed the horrible environment the playwright is picturing in his theater.

Conclusion

political theatre is a type of theatre that uses performance to raise awareness about political issues and to promote change, and Iraqi political theatre is clear example about how the political events effect on the dramatic works that were produced. Ali Abdul Nabi Az-Zaidi one of the famous Iraqi playwright who shows the effect of war on both human and society . one of his plays is (Rubbish) (Qummama) which shows the suffering of a soldier who lost not only his legs but also the chastity of his family ,though the action of the play seems to be social but it really reflected the dark impact of war on both Iraqi human and society.

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