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A LOOK INTO AUTHORITY AND OBEDIENCE IN TIMBERLAKE WERTENBAKER'S PLAY "OUR COUNTRY'S GOOD "

Göksevenin ABDAL*

Abstract

While sailing towards the waves of hierarchy and authority, neither men nor women knew of their unfortunate fate on a deserted piece of land where no traces of civilisation had been encountered before. The characters in Timberlake Wertenbaker's play "Our Country's Good" did not know what was awaiting for them behind the grey clouds of the ocean. In this paper, the aim is to demonstrate power relations in terms of authority and obedience between characters of the play coming to for with efforts to interact with one another after a long-lasting voyage to Australia. In the first part of the paper, the characters and setting are analyzed with a focus on main concepts from post-structural and post-colonial ways of thinking. In the second part, references to authority and obedience are shown and analyzed with an insight into everyday life of the characters in the play. With this two-phased process of analysis, it has been concluded that imposition of power on people through the colonial way of life makes people identify themselves with the roles of strong/weak, logical/emotional, civilized/natural helping the oppositions win over them on this new, shattered piece of land.

Keywords: Post-structuralism, Post-colonialism, Literary Analysis, Discourse, Post-colonial Theatre.

Introduction

Timberlake Wertenbaker is a British playwright focusing on relations between authority and oppression in her works in the light of the concepts of sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, nationality and language. She creates blurry lines in terms of the aspects of personality showing that every character cannot be perfectly identified as good or bad, and that being good or bad can only provide a limited amount of perception regarding the personal traits of the people since people are more complicated and sophisticated than they are thought to seem. In the first part of this paper, the play "Our Country's Good" by Timberlake Wertenbaker is tried to be analyzed in terms of boundaries and associations among the characters in the play based on the terms of alienation, pressure, internal conflicts, suppression, power, hegemony and sexuality with a focus on the approach put forward by the conceptual thoughts of post-structuralism and post-colonialism,

Written by Timberlake Wertenbaker based on George Farquhar's play "The Recruiting Officer," "Our country's Good" is a play narrating the events taking place shortly after some "chosen" people with "unlawful" acts in their pasts are sent from the land of the British Empire to a new land on a far corner of the world to found a colony and to disseminate the language, beliefs, lifestyles and traditions of their former master. In the play, Wertenbaker tries to imply the effect of authority and manners of resistance against the authority through symbolizing each character for a certain value of humanity. She breaks all the personal traits into pieces and surprises the readership with on-going changes in the identity and selfhood of the characters by making tracks for post-structural explanations for personality and by deconstructing post-colonial references to race and nationality. Since post-structuralism is totally against the collection of the forms under certain scientific titles and headings, and debates that no one ever has had the pretention of being capable of getting to know the world as a whole, every intention to understand, utter and comment upon the meaning of the universe seems subjective and is subject to changes under reasoning and presence of every human being. In the second part, depending on the main concepts discussed under post-structural and post-colonial ways of thinking, a framework regarding obedience and authority is drawn upon excerpts showing the tension between characters in the play under the influence of colonial way of life.

After the process of analysis, it has been understood that when the concepts of authority and obedience are analyzed through the main concepts in post-structuralism and post-colonialism, one happens to find certain insights into boundaries and associations in human nature in connection with questionability of rooted notions of sex, race and class. This paper aims to demonstrate the perceptual variabilities among people with different backgrounds by breaking the bias originating from the schematic representations regarding the 'other' in people's everyday lives.

* Res. Asst., Istanbul University, Faculty of Letters, English Translation and Interpreting, abdalgosevenin@gmail.com

1. Traces Of The Boundaries and Associations In "Our Country's Good"

Our perception of the world and people around us is very much dependent on divisions and classifications rather than positioning human existence in natural unity and oneness. The way we structure our lives, identities and societies is an interrupted current rather than an easy-flowing flux. We create "others" to reach easy definitions and make people and things legitimate. The legitimacy of the whole world depends on the illegitimacy of its "other" half. For Baudrillard (1991: 33), the oppressed half would create new ways of resisting against the superior side but again will have no chance but to surrender since it does not hold in its hands the means of oppression which gives way to the legitimization of every kind of pressure and alienation. The play, based on George Farquhar's "The Recruiting Officer," opens with a scene where characters, assigned by the British Empire to colonise a far island in the middle of the ocean, discuss the future of a possible community of pickpockets, prostitutes, murderers and criminals on the same piece of land. Throughout the play, these characters, namely Arthur Philip, Ralph and Harry, try to stabilise the conflicts and fights among the other emasculated characters from lower classes and to find a solution to provide these people with the chance to adapt to this remote piece of their country inhabited by an unknown people they have never encountered anywhere before. According to Block and Somers (1999: 71), economy plays a key role in the institutionalization of authoritorial mechanisms that provide a ground for the sovereignty of hegemony which is an essential part of the post-colonial views. Other characters, namely Liz, Mary, Duckling, John Arscott, Robert and James Freeman, realize the roles casted to them by the authoritorial structure of the newer society formed by the blurring motivation to represent their homeland in an illusionary world. Lefevbre (2010: 61) also supports this by referring to men and women embedded in everyday life in one side and sociable, naive and intellectual men and women in the other. In "Our Country Is Good," the first side in the play is formed by the characters serving for the Empire and the other side belongs to the ones sent away by the monarch into an obscure land for punishment. These two sides conflict with each other in their efforts to either break or balance the limited way of distraction forced upon each and every individual on the island. There is a meagre struggle for domination by the authoritative figures while the captivated convicts put up an unforeseen fight against this legitimized retainment through their stupendous ambition towards being a part of the social life.

So as to realize the ideals of their country, almost all the characters in the play seem to obey the authority and to internalize the hegemony imposed on them by these very unprecedented circumstances after the seemingly agelong journey to nowhere in the middle of the sea despite their discontent with this newer piece of land. They remember the looping past but have no choice but to adapt to the contemporary situation. At this very point, their will to be liberated and endurance for being united no matter what the time brings about with itself demonstrate the sacred and secret motivation behind bringing civilisation to the land of the tamed people. Eagleton (1996a: 191) maintains that ideology tends to mask, suppress or distort the natural results arising from freedom and to represent the positive aspects of it. This idea has so successfully been conveyed to the concious of the convicts that they assume they are the representators of the source culture and makers of future generations while they do not take everything into account very seriously since they have been chasers of unlawful acts of murder, theft, seizure, rapes and killings. That is why when the characters are together on the stage, the concept of inequality is wiped off from their lives because they are now equal in spite of the fact that some of them have higher military rankings than some of the others. For Eagleton (1996b: 157), everyone that has the responsibility of carrying the economic system on their shoulders is aware ideologies are not only used to reflect the things you do, but also to justify them; thus, people with this responsibility never refrains from it. It can be deduced that post-structuralism extends a hand, at this very point, to crumble these artificial networks of power and hegemony. It brings out the self-justifying binary oppositions to uncover systems of hegemony and "colonialism" that has penetrated into almost every human perception and relation: Man over woman, white over black, straight over gay, beautiful over ugly, rich over poor, developed over underdeveloped, etc.

As scenes pass and acts change, the characters enjoy more of the authonomy granted to themselves by the means of their roles in the play. They get used to the language, setting, and conscience that free them off their prejudices and break into pieces the discrepancy interposed between them by this hegemonical way of thinking and perception. When we think in parallel with post-structuralism, we see that with its tools of dismantling the naturalized and internalized, post-structuralism focuses on breaking through the norms and rules created and supported by the discursive elements of the governing power and every other object that serves broadening its coverage. According to Foucault (1987: 29), the best way to hinder people from resistance is to put prohibitions and to legitimize these prohibitions through the laws and gradually maintain them in the societal life in time so that people would see them as a natural part of their lives. The characters, by undervaluing this exclusionary structure of life based on differences in social class, gender, sex, race and etc., soften their stiff and hard-to-change attitudinal patterns and presuppositions from their

backgrounds. Thus, they show all efforts to make unavailing the ambition to preserve and impose the hegemonical way of looking. By this way, desires are rescued from all kinds of impositions that are shaped by a chain of command. However, from a post-colonial point of view, desires shall be controlled by the hegemonical power of the society forced into the ideal structure of life where every other gender category not conforming to the ideal and normative masculinity is looked upon. Habermas (2012: 148) states that moral responsibilities are used to provide a solution to the conflicts between authority and the other since they have the potentiality to soothe the inner energy to resist. This ideal is realized through the concept of logocentrism in which forms and acts are interpreted in their way of being logical or appropriate to the mind of an ideal man, thus making it far from being real and having no authentic touches from the material world. Therefore, the characters hesitate to question their own being once more in the process of change and see this change as an incompliance with the order of God by reason of having internalized the Puritan moral codes into their everyday life which contradict with their existing situation as they have been convicts of unlawful acts in their homeland.

Centering the sentiment of heterosexual white men, post-colonial way of thinking intends to demonstrate the local indigenous peoples as deficient, perverse, mistaken and immoral which in turn justifies this practice of colonisation to win them over his round. For Lefevbre (2010: 147), symbols become more blurry in time but give a rise to the existence of state and money which become the real power in turn. But, in Wertenbaker's version, we see the Aboriginal Australian as a symbol of wisdom assisting the audience through each act. With an insight into humans' nature and way of being, he appears as a reflection of Eastern men but this time with a power to give a shape to the flow of events in the play. We see the sovereignty of the West on the East is broken with an indigenous man being a narrator and a story-teller in the centre of attention. This notion strengthens the opinion that there is nothing anachronically transmitted but diachronic tales and narratives varying across every single person in society. It is rather artificial to presume that each and every person interrelates to one another with same strict ties. Through the instrumentality of self-reflexivity, post-structuralism destroys this patronising frame drawn upon the legitimacy of the collective mind brought out by a group of men shadowing over the diversified contexture of other race, gender, nationality, social class categories. Foucault (1999: 47) states that relations between authority and its self is way beyond the societal relations and it is embedded in rationalization by every individual in the society so it legitimizes itself through the internalization and imposition of this notion in societal grounds.

Generally, in post-colonial writing, westernized heroes and main characters are shown to be merciful, gracious and easy-going towards all faulty and primitive acts conducted by the men living in the wilderness. These primitive tendencies are healed by the heroes who graciously struggle to teach and show generousness for providing all the things the colonised needs and liberality for all diversities that form the colonised society. The coloniser hero generally insists on his own religious and moral attitudes to become the real authority and talk for him in his actions in everyday life of a colonised needy-indigent person. At this stage, legitimization of the superiority of the colonised is the basis of all kinds of discriminative thoughts and actions taking place here and there. According to Lefevbre (1998: 113), organizations and institutions that legitimize each other on the state level on a "material ground" directs the integration of the bodies under one category with a direct impact on social activities; the bureaucracy used in order to control this mechanism forcefully puts his hand on social formations by creating the hierarchical relations between perfect and faulty, superior and lower, literate and illiterate. In contrast, in the play "Our Country Is Good" being a human is more important whether you are a criminal or not since every individual has fallacies, every individual is tested with bad decisions, every individual is initiated into crime in their lives. Therefore, in the play, the characters are persistently reminded through the dialogues that committing a crime is possible in every way and hegemony and rankings one may obtain in life cannot cover the value of one's life. When the time the play "The Recruiting Officer" was written and staged is considered, it can be easily noticed that the public space was weaved with very strict and conservative social norms and religious rules in that time so there was almost no space left for sexual freedom and secularism. The play bears some traces both from this notion and from the mentality that the existence and authority of a state is beyond everything. In this study, the main aim is to re-discover the relations between authority and obedience in the play "Our Country Is Good". In the following section, the cases will be presented in accompany with the excerpts from the play so that the framework of authority and obedience will be drawn upon a sound basis which will give the readership the opportunity to discuss and re-consider the discursive elements through the words uttered and the actions taken by the characters.

2. Going Beyond The Concepts Of Authority And Obedience In "Our Country's Good"

The story in the play is based on the play "The Recruiting Officer" written by the playwright George Farquhar. Farquhar was himself a recruiting officer assigned by the British Empire to a town called

Shrewsbury. In the original version, he attempts to tell the process of recruiting soldiers exploiting sexually and socially the other characters from lower classes. In Wertebaker's version, the players are re-interpreted in their way of being and given internal conflicts which keeps them away from having one-sided personal traits making the play multi-dimensional. For Sigal (2013: 156), Wertebaker decenters the narrative's authority through 'shifting frames of narrative style that convey several possible meanings in the gaps, tensions and fissions within the text by breaking the tight relation between players and play, stage and audience. Each character has their unique personality and conflicts reflected through the words and dialogues. Sometimes they speak of being liberated, sometimes of being exploited, sometimes of being united, sometimes of being captivated, but each one uttering these in their own manners. These moments provide us with the chance to gain an insight about the characters and their interrelations to one another which draw the main frame in the play in the end.

Collins: This land is under English law. The court found them guilty and sentenced them accordingly.

There: a bald-eyed corella. (p. 2)

In Act One, Scene Three, Collins refers to the authority under the power of the state by mentioning the English law. The law is used to legitimize the punishments of the convicts to be sent away to a remote island on the ship. Here, one can infer that the authority is kept through the high officers like Collins, Ralph and Harry and hegemony be maintained with the motivation backed by the privileges used against the other characters as a means of imposition and exploits. By doing so, the power of the monarch is forcefully reminded and memorized in the same way as it is on the homeland. Gonzalez and Martinez-Garcia (2014: 98) state that positive sides of each sex were given importance since natural qualities brought about a separation between these two sex categories insisting on women's being emotional and oppressed while men's being logical and powerful.

Sideway: Top of my profession, Mr Clark, pickpocket, born and bred in Bermondsey. Do you know London, Sir, don't you miss it? In these my darkest hours, I remember my happy days in that great city. London Bridge at dawn – hand on cold iron for good luck. Down Cheapside with the market traders – never refuse a mince pie. Into St Paul's Churchyard – I do love a good Church – and begin work in Bond Street. there, I've spotted her rich plump, not of the best class, stands in front of the shop, plucking up courage, I pluck her. Time for coffee until five o'clock and the pinnacle, the glory of the day: Drury Lane. The coaches, the actors scuttling, the gentlemen watching, the ladies tittering, the perfumes, the clothes, the handkerchiefs. (p. 12)

In Act One, Scene Five, Sideway tells his story to Ralph by referring to his personal history back home and his will to make a fresh start on this piece of land. He mentions his underground life back in the homeland remembering all the ways of crime he has been into since he was a child. He talks about himself as a guy with social constraints and tendency to break the laws. He has always had some problems with the environment he has lived and people he has encountered. Therefore, this time, he wants to close the pages of the past and turn the white pages to a brand new future when he may bear the opportunity to be remembered as a gentleman. Gregori (2015: 9) suggests that the contemporary discourse of happiness reflects itself in one's will to overcome problems and challenges in life which was a paradigm showing itself in 'trial' narratives in the eighteenth century.

Tench: We are talking about criminals, often hardened criminals. They have a habit of vice and crime. Habits are difficult to break. And it can be more than habit. An innate tendency. Many criminals seem to have been born that way. It is in their nature. (p. 18)

In Act One, Scene Six, Tench says these to Philip referring to the idea of law and its implication in the society which are accepted to be fundamental for the order and authority. The idea that criminals become criminals on the moment they are born is an essentialist view on life implying the origins and genes determined by the law of God. God's power is absolute and the fate people are born with is designated by God. Thus, over monarch's power, the sole power is associated with God and heavenly beings. If one wants to make a gradation based on power, the first is God, the second is the monarch, and then comes himself/herself. It is maintained by Wilson (2003: 96) that the features related to the tamed people with scandalous societal roots were often humiliated based on their tendency to commit a crime and to create crisis in the society by making good-will hunting on the grounds where they will hide their wild sides in a very artful manner.

Philip: The theatre is an expression of civilisation. We belong to a great country which has spawned great playwrights: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson, and even in our own time, Sheridan. The convicts will be speaking a refined, literate language and expressing sentiments of a delicacy they are not used to. It will remind them that there is more to life than crime, punishment. And we, this colony of a few hundred will be watching this together, for a few hours we will no longer be despised prisoners and hated gaolers. We

will laugh, we may be moved, we may even think a little. Can you suggest something else that will provide such an evening, Watkin? (p. 21)

In Act One, Scene Six, Philip says these to Tench while talking about how civilization can be conveyed to others and how less civilized people can get motivated towards being more civilized. This will be realized through the help of authority ensured by the officers who would teach the lower classes to be civilized by forcing them to learn to read and write. Art can even be a tool in the hands of the authority. For Philip, showing sympathy for others is to just a means of imposing one's being superior to them. Authority is legitimately used for creating class distinctions which will in turn strengthen the idea of separating the social classes in the public space. According to Keiser (2015: 1092), soldiers and servants feature as a mechanism to maintain the authority in the society since they have been seen and abused on their manner of materiality and mindlessness matching their animal spirits which, in turn, will be harnessed by a military ranking or a command by their superiors.

Duckling: I don't want to be watched all the time. I wake up in the middle of the night and you're watching me. What do you think I'm going to do in my sleep, Harry? Watching, watching, watching. JUST STOP WATCHING ME. (p. 27)

In Act One, Scene Seven, Duckling says these words to Harry while talking about their relations. Harry is always chasing and materializing her while using physical power and limiting her space to keep her under control so that his envy will be ended. Here, the authority has been realized through the gender roles as it happens in every category of power and hegemony the weak is oppressed by the strong. Achinstein (2002: 433) declares that oppression of the women is seen through the eye of Holy God who is shown as the evidence of male superiority in life until when women gain consciousness about their way of being oppressed and turn into active agents reflected in their exchange from passive persecution and active agency.

Ketch: When I say my prayers I have a terrible doubt. How can I be sure God is forgiving me? What is he will forgive me, but hasn't forgiven me yet? That's why I can't die. Not until I am sure. Are you sure? (p. 36)

In Act One, Scene Nine, Ketch says these words to Ralph while talking about who stands on the axis of power in the society. Ketch questions the existence of authority solely given to God and looks for alternatives which will make him look as a disobedient figure neither following Puritan ethics nor obeying moral codes from religious way of life. He disobeys the Puritan way of ethics based on the perception of God and imposition of religious ethics on the way of thinking in public spaces. In most occasions, he confesses that he does not feel guilty for questioning the very presence of an unknown power. Craig (2015: 50) states that when a character in a play starts to question the very existence of authority maintained by means of other people, that character is generally excluded or detracted from big roles but rather given small roles and short statements which endure the subservience of him/her for the greater superiority of the men in authority.

Philip: If you break conventions, it's inevitable you make enemies, Lieutenant. This play irritates them. (p. 56)

In Act Two, Scene Two, Philip says these words to Ralph while discussing about possible ways of punishment for the convicts who will disobey the authority in the future. Therefore, violence will bring other violent acts with itself. By maintaining the authority by violence and killings, one will destroy the unity in the community by enemizing and alienating the "other" and creating riots against itself. According to Markley (1998: 5), unpunished crimes would be perceived as an injustice reliving a nightmare of national humiliation so it would be essentially natural to legitimize the moral and political authority with the integration of national identity and violence within each other.

Philip: A play is a world in itself, a tiny colony we could almost say. (p. 60)

In Act Two, Scene Two, Philip says these to Ralph while talking about the play they have chosen to recruit the convicts into civilized individuals which will be example to the tamed people living on the island. It is to say that the world like each individual in the colony is also fictionalized by human beings into small pieces. World is a place where hegemony and authority create small segments of communes. People can bring together power only if they organize and create communes. Although the authority creates oppression and pressure on people from lower classes, disobedience recovers itself in people's motivation for becoming figures of challenge and resistance against hegemony. Martinez-Garcia (2014: 183) states that the publicity was used as a tool to impose social roles on the people while this notion becomes invalid in theatre since this gives a chance to characters to create a public persona through which they will navigate the social scene with their virtuous lifestyle and unwillingness to be recognised as tamed.

Mary: Am I doing it well? It's difficult to play a man. It's not the walk, it's the way you hold your head. A man doesn't bow his head so much and never eat at an angle. I must face you without lowering my head. Let's try it again. (p. 78)

In Act Two, Scene Nine, Mary says these words to Ralph while rehearsing the roles they have been assigned to. Mary complains that she cannot be a full man and bring to life the role she has been given. One can see the internalization of gender roles in the society and expectations from a man walking, standing, looking. Gender categories are strictly separated giving the men a superior position compared to women with their being stronger and more obedient to the authority than them. According to Gonzalez and Martinez-Garcia (2014: 98), the established church saw women as a threat to the social order since it anticipated that women were lustful, disobedient and irrational. This imposition becomes realized in the lives of the women portrayed in the play.

Arcscott: 'If any gentlement soldiers, or others, have a mind to serve Her Majesty, and pull down the French King; if any prentices have severe masters, any children have undutiful parents; if any servants have too little wages or any husband too much wife; let them wife; let them repair to the noble Sergeant Kite, at the Sign of the Raven, in this good town of Shrewsbury, and they shall receive present relief and entertainment. (p. 91)

In Act Two, Scene Eleven, Arcscott says these words to Ralph and Caesar while opening the play to the audience. This has the feature of a moral for the audience saluting the unbeatable strength of the British monarch and making a voice for hegemonical power endowed to the royal family to have a hand over the ordinary citizens. This does not leave almost any place for questioning and a cursed fate awakens for those who question this very essential element of the society where nothing but the truth is written with the command of an authoritorial central government ruling the country. Kabalek (2014: 16) declares that while transitional figures tend to behave the authoritorial figures are invisible, the authoritorial figures designate the political and social realm by misrepresenting and denying existence of the other in official records of history which, after all, causes these transitional figures to lose their legitimate ground for resistance against hegemony and to obey the power.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, segments of obedience and authority underlying the words and phrases in the text can easily be realized with the help of post-structuralist analysis which breaks hegemonical relations under categories and criticize them for collecting every character under one shallow category through the binary opposition of governing / governed and underestimating uniqueness of the features associated with every character. This implication comes from the axis of post-colonial thinking which tend to assess the convicts based on their past formed by social constraints and victimization. This view is closely linked to the post-colonialist tendency to strengthen the ties between strong and weak, illuminated and tamed, literate and illiterate. This is maintained in the punishments of the convicts that try to turn the past pages to a brand new future feeling lost in the disequilibrium of the authoritorial colony. Reminded all the ways of crime and illegality through the play, the characters keep in mind their fate determined by their origins and genes which can never be changed and challenged in a world governed by the law of God. Thus, they scarcely encourage themselves to disobey but discourage one another to be a part of the feeling of unity which is harshly imposed with the means of the play they have been handed to. One can realize that art can be a toy for providing the continuity of the hegemony and authority. Although post-colonialism sees this motion as a disinfective way of turning the ill-minded people into broad-minded individuals, it can be deduced that this idea is based on the feeling of sympathy for others is to just a means of imposing one's being superior to them. Post-structuralism criticizes every kind of authority blocking the conscience of the individuals by creating class distinctions which will in turn strengthen the idea of discrimination in the public space. Since ranking is a form of oppressing people from lower classes, obedience grows as much as possible with the internalization of categories in the society and expectations from both genders. While post-colonialism seems to empower the weak, it uninterruptedly imposes the superiority of the mind and logic self thereby legitimizing the hand of help thrust out to the seemingly indigent one which in turn necessitates the intervention of the dominant force since the required level of civilization will never ever be realized without its empowerment. One can witness that in a history class, in a bus queue, in a waiting room, in various spheres of every day life. History has been written thus and so.

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