

THE TRACE OF VIOLENCE ON NOVELS: VIOLENCE IN “WOMEN WHO BLOW ON KNOTS” AND “THE SOUNDS OF BANANAS”

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ABSTRACT

This work about the phenomenon of violence which is as old as the human history elaborates its reflection on novels. It attempts to examine the way violence is located, how it is treated in and its contribution to novels by utilizing the books of Ece Temelkuran, “*The Sounds of Bananas*” and “*Women Who Blow on Knots.*” The types of violence are determined based on Artun Unsal’s and Charles Tilly’s categorizations. In this context, it is concluded that violence is the main topic of both novels and violence takes part in the plot in a realistic narrative and in an intensive manner.

Keywords: Violence, Novels, Creation, Human

INTRODUCTION

Rooted in Antiquity, novels were about war and heroic stories which reflected the martial spirit of the medieval society. The romances of the chivalric literature were the core of the modern novel. This modern novel emerged in conjunction with Renaissance. The transforming class structure of this feudal period in Europe was superseded with new classes who gathered in cities and worked as merchants. The medieval system of belief and values had collapsed and a new world order was established. Along with modernity, novel was the creation of human who became conscious about being an individual (Arslan, 2007: 11, 12).

Novel, arising as a middle class epic with 18th century realism in philosophy and empiricism in psychology, is the continuation of a tradition in terms of essence and form. In the light of the sense of reality of the neo-realist philosophy, the traditional novel features the human reality and values in a particular time and space. Thus the universal human of the epics and tragedies became a social type in the traditional novel. In traditional novels, which contain the elements of

plot lines, characters and thoughts as in classical tragedies and epics, the novelist dramatizes the social fact he/she wants to teach through the words and behaviours of the characters (Kantarcioglu, 2004: 27, 28).

In the 18th century, the individual's belief in itself and its reason began growing and the bourgeoisie created the "Philosophy of Enlightenment" which is a distinctive world view. The bourgeoisie class, struggling for long years in the seemingly unchangeable feudal society to achieve its economical, legal and social rights, considered knowledge as the biggest power and the belief in human reason supplanted religious belief in this period. While the individuals' belief in themselves and their mind increased, they were left alone with their fate. This formation originated the modern novel; and the novel has become a means of communication which includes individual philosophies and connects one individual to another (Arslan, 2007: 22).

Among literary genres, novel is a comprehensive genre which embraces humans both in individual and social contexts. Humans appear in novels with their inner world, subconscious, emotions, ideas and dreams within the cultural, sociological and historical facts that surround them. Novels treat the whole or a part of human life as subject. What is important is how the chosen part of life is narrated (Sağlık, 2010: 19-20). Novels have a wide range of topics in the context of dealing with individuals in their socio-economic conditions and their personal lives. Every fact pertaining to humans and societies can play a part in literary fiction. One of these facts is violence.

Violence is the individual or collective act of bad behaviour, either apparently or implicitly, directly or indirectly, physically or emotionally, legally or illegally (Büker and Kıran, 1999: 23). Social disorder and aggression underlie violence. Disorder, aggression and violence have escalated each other through the history of humanity. In general, violence manifests an extreme state of feeling, the intension, and harshness of a fact, and a rude and unkind behaviour. In particular, it denotes offensive acts, brute force and misuse of physical strength; acts of destruction; attacks with sticks, stones and weapons, and activities which are harmful for individuals and the society (Köknel, 1996: 20). It is seen that individual and social violence have many natural, physical, psychological and social causes. Köknel (1996: 15) emphasizes that there are unlimited relations and interactions among these reasons and people consider offensive acts, stemming from psychological defence mechanisms, to be right and justified in different times and places. Thus offensive behaviours and acts of violence occur as consequences of feelings such as anger, worry, and fear. Certainly the occurrence of violence as a defence mechanism doesn't mean it can be legitimated. It should not be overlooked that violence emerging at individual, social or international levels might cause irreversible results in these planes.

At whatever level it occurs, violence doesn't have a single form. While the concept of violence suggests physical violence in the strict sense, violence does also have economic and psychological dimensions. While physical violence is an act against bodily integrity of individuals, economic violence is about property damage. Nonetheless, psychological violence also takes the forms of putting intense pressure on individuals, intimidating or frightening persons etc. In his work, "*An Extended Typology of Violence*" (2010: 35), Artun Unsal approach violence as private and collective violence and also classifies types of violence as falling under a crime or not. Unsal discusses fatal (murder, assassination, poisoning, death sentence etc.), bodily (deliberate battery or injury), sexual (rape) violence as crime under the scope of "private violence"; while regarding suicide and accident as violence that is not crime. According to Unsal's typology, the violence of a group against individuals (terror, media terror), violence inside a group (tribal fight, mass suicide, fight inside an organization), inter-group violence (blood feud, fights among tribes, sports fan fight etc.), violence of a group against the government (political or mafia terror, riot, street fight etc.), state violence (human rights violations, oppression, genocide, racial discrimination etc.) and international violence (war) are parts of collective violence. And Tilly (2009: 32-34) classifies violence as violent rituals (shaming ceremonies, public executions, gang rivalries, struggles among sports fans...), coordinated destruction (war, collective self-immolation, some kinds of terrorism, genocide, politicide...), opportunism (looting, gang rape, revenge killing...), brawls (small-scale battles at sporting events or street fights), individual aggression (single-perpetrator rapes, assaults, robberies...), scattered attacks (sabotage, assaults of governmental agents, arson...) and broken negotiations (demonstrations, protection rackets, governmental repression, and military coups).

As is it seen from Tilly and Unsal's classifications, violence as a multifaceted phenomenon in whatever forms such as being private or collective, physical or psychological, loud or silent, symbolic, ritual, political or economic, it is not only exist in modern societies. Trend (2008: 21-22) remarks that the phenomenon of violence has been at stake from the day that hunters engraved their adventures on cave walls. From the beginning of humankind, violence has been prominent in telling stories in every period. Egyptians, Sumerians, Minoans and Babylonians depicted events of violence. In the classical works of Egypt written 3000 years ago, the narrative was developed through violence. Military conflicts, assassinations, massacres, sexual assaults and natural disasters are ruthlessly treated in Iliad. It is also seen in works like Odyssey, Oresteia, Theogony and King Oedipus. Genocide, war, human sacrifice and various disasters are narrated in the Old Testament. Yet the works of Dante and Shakespeare are also full of elements of violence. As a crucial element of storytelling for centuries, violence has appeared in the mythology, works of literature and art, tales and theatres of many nations. Thus it is possible to say that violence is as old as the history humanity.

METHOD

Violence, which has been a subject in many works of literature and art in the past, is also a part of arts of cinema, painting, sculpture as well as works of literature like novels, poems and stories in our present day. It is considered worth examining how violence is treated as a theme in these works, what it contributes to the works or which dimensions are at stake. Therefore this study discusses how violence is treated in novels. In this context, the novels “The Sounds of Bananas” and “Women Who Blow on Knots” by journalist/author Ece Temelkuran are examined. The reason for choosing these two books is that Ece Temelkuran had written these two novels at the time this study was conducted. Since her other works in the style of essays was not examined because of being out of scope of the study. Violence is approached in a broad sense as in Tilly’s and Unsal’s classifications and is examined in context of how it is treated in and how it contributes to the novels. During our readings, the types of violence in the novels are determined and how these types are treated is tried to be examined.

FINDINGS AND COMMENTS

The story of *The Sounds of Bananas*, which is the first novel of Ece Temelkuran and published in 2010, takes place between Beirut and Oxford. The experiences after the civil war in Beirut and the influences of the war on people are presented in the book. The novel based on the events during and after the war we can even see the traces of war in the parts that narrates the daily lives of the characters. Despite the novel features collective forms of violence, we also find private violence forms. In this context, we see war, traces of war, bomb attacks and police violence in the novel that Tilly and Unsal consider in terms of coordinated destruction and international violence. Battery, murder, assassination are mentioned to the extent of physical violence. And psychological violence occurs in connection with ideological violence, anger and the psychological scars of war.

The author puts both the physical and psychological effects of war between the lines of *The Sounds of Bananas* with an ordinary expression. For example, as in these lines of the first part of the book: “...*The Palestinian Anwar, who earns more than other guys getting 30 dollars in exchange for 12 hours work, says he is 14 years old. While Anwar, who is one of the hundreds of children working at the tunnels of Gaza that open to Egypt, explains how two of his friends were killed as a result of gas pumped in the tunnels by the Egyptian government against smugglers...*” (Temelkuran, 2010: 13). This case continues throughout the book; with a word or sentence, war is referred and the impact of war on humans is presented in almost every page of the book. From this and similar lines, it is evident that war was engraved in their daily lives and speeches.

“That day, a twelve-year-old boy without legs had hurled himself into bullets by running with his hands. Another one had left his fate sealed by Beirut.” (Temelkuran, 2010: 87). “Her neck was broken when they brought her. Israeli aircrafts killed your mother on 17th July 1981. What I wanted the most was to hold her neck. She even didn’t have a chest that I could bury my face in to cry. Your mother was so silent because she was hit by her neck.” (Temelkuran, 2010: 191). These samples were taken from the letters of the father of Filipina, the hero of the book. Especially in these letters, the expression of war and its traces appears more than in the other parts of the book. However, the violence starting in the first pages remains until the last page. It is possible to say that it is inescapable to deal so intensely with violence in a book about war. The intense expression of war is considered usual in order to present war and its traces in a realistic manner and with all the aspects of the destruction caused by war.

“Marwan saw the car. Through his elbows trying to protect his head at the ground, his eyes reached the eyes of Jan. His view was shaken while being kicked from his back but still gazing at Jan’s eyes. Jan stayed behind the wheel. He was afraid. He feared not to save Marwan but a Syrian. His fear wore on. The kicks hesitated as Marwan ceased to utter any sound. Those who beat started gradually to look at each other. When those who beat someone together start to look at each other, they start to pull themselves together. After seeing the hesitation, Jan opened the door slowly. Marwan saw that slowness. Jan saw that he saw it. He slowly walked to the scene. Those who beat gave up laughingly beating, with fear. They were gone when Jan’s shoes stood in front of his face. Jan leaned with his face in front Marwan’s face. Marwan laughed. He laughed badly. Hesitating to laugh, Jan’s mouth opened. And then did Marwan spit his blood in the middle of his mouth.” (Temelkuran, 2010: 232).

We also see ideological violence along with physical violence in these lines. “Racial discrimination” classified by Unsal under state violence is witnessed in the sentence “*He was afraid to save a Syrian*”. However, in the pages of the novel where a demonstration against Israel takes place (Temelkuran, 2010: 63), the Palestinians chant “death to Israel!” Here again we see the distinction of ideological violence/racial discrimination. War is not a form of violence that only has physical dimensions. By underlining racial discrimination, the author also reveals one of the reasons of war. The phenomenon of war is addressed as a whole in the novel with its physical, psychological and ideological dimensions. Thus the reality of war is visualized in the reader’s eye with all its aspects and the catastrophe caused by such violence becomes perceivable in all its dimensions.

In *The Sounds of Bananas*, Temelkuran reveals the despair of people in face of state violence. She shows how they were caught and died in the middle of war while trying to escape from it. It should be indicated that war, armed violence or bomb attacks are not legitimized in the novel; contrarily, we see how people who have nothing to do with government policies at all are affected by war. At that point, we can see the prevailing idea in the book that people are generally desperate in face of war.

It must be stated that the destruction physically caused by violence and the bloody face of war given in an open and broad expression might irritate the reader. But it can be said that the author adopts such openness in order to demonstrate the reality of war in all its aspects and with a realistic approach.

Ece Temelkuran's novel published in 2013 with the name *Women Who Blow on Knots* is about the main character Madam Lilla chasing the case of an honour killing with the Egyptian Maryam, Tunisian Amira and another main character who is a Turkish journalist. The book which is about the journey of four women who basically set off to commit a murder features the problems of all the characters which they escaped from and the reasons lying behind these problems. The elements of violence in the book are: state violence, family pressure, psychological violence, physical violence, armed violence, murder and suicide. In this context, we predominantly witness the types of private violence in the novel.

While elements of violence appear occasionally along the course of events in the book, the act of murder that Madam Lilla intends to commit is justified on the ground of Madam's life and what the person she wants to kill has put her through. At this point it is certainly at stake whether Temelkuran intends to justify violence or not. Yet it will not be true to claim that the author has such purpose, but it can be suggested that someone who will read the book and has led a life similar to Madam might be influenced by the book and feel justified to commit a murder.

Each character of the book actually escapes to Tunisia from the violence they had been exposed to in their own lives. Thus what brings the characters together is their escape from violence and what makes them setting out on the same journey is their way to violence. At this point we it can be said that violence constitutes the backbone of the novel. However the elements of violence are not presented as intense as in *The Sounds of Bananas*. The novel features psychological violence, state violence and family pressure rather than physical violence.

The elements of physical violence are given with a few lines while we see the elements psychological violence or state violence in more detail. In section 26 of the book, for instance, the conflict between the revolutionaries and the police at Tahrir is described as follows: "*There are fights again tonight at Tahrir and it is reported that one of the young protesters was kidnapped. The young were giving statements with their confused and passionate look, telling that they were betrayed by the Army and that their friends were killed and wounded by the bullets of vagrant looking civil soldiers.*" (Temelkuran, 2013: 364). In these lines depicting state violence we can see physical violence. While state violence is presented, we can see that physical, psychological and ideological violence are intertwined throughout the novel. Physical or armed violence are not given with an intense expression in the book. Nevertheless, these elements of violence come up in unexpected moments in the course of events and draw attention.

Hence these affect the readers and have an impact on them and invigorate the course of events by ending stability.

Other elements of violence in the books are about self-harm and inner conflict. “... *The commander-in-chief girl suddenly stand straight were she sits. She unties the buttons of her shirt, piercing a hole between the overlapping layers of fabric on her chest. Finally she reaches her flesh, looks at the junction of her two breasts. She grabbed with her fingers first and then scratched with her nails, then a bit more... She is searching for her heart in her flesh, like searching the head of a boil. If she could find and take out her heart, she would squeeze and do away with that painful boil.*” (Temelkuran, 2013: 159). “*I am not angry. That’s because I knew that Maryam was talking to her broken heart. She kicks her own heart by getting mad because of being hurt for the same reason, as if she was arrogant...*” (Temelkuran, 2013: 357). These and similar instances, where we can see the physical and psychological violence of the individuals exerted on themselves, add dimensions to the novel within the course of events. Thereby the novel goes beyond the story of persons who set out only to commit a murder and what they experience on their journey and gain a psychological depth.

The expression of the murder that Madam Lilla wants to commit, which is the other main theme of the book, is presented briefly like the other elements of physical or armed violence. Nonetheless, it is important that the main subject of the book is about a murder, that is to say pursuing violence. Although the fact of violence is given through the plot in a manner not to disturb the reader, it should not be ruled out that the subject of the novel is “violence”. Even though the elements of physical and armed violence are presented briefly, the narration before the event and structure of the event make the moment of violence more effective. This enhances the impact of violence. That the expression of violence is not permanent doesn’t mean that violence is unimportant throughout the events and that it doesn’t leave its impact on the reader.

CONCLUSION

Violence emerged in various forms in every moment of life since its beginning from the archaic periods. Not only in its physical form, violence can occur in its psychological, ideological, individual aspects and in the forms of sexual or racial discrimination. Violence, in which the individual is not only the agent or victim but is also exposed to it as witness, contemporarily plays a part in the present time particularly in the mass media with different aspects and kinds. Violence appears almost every day in the televisions or sometimes in the first or third pages of the newspapers.

As a source of news for the mass media, violence is also an important research topic for sociologists. However it is a phenomenon also treated by art and artists, and features in art

works. Violence, which is a part of literature from the beginning of the oral narrative period, has been a subject in the era of writing; it has been a subject on its own as well as being incorporated in the work. Violence which takes place in literary genres as poems, stories and tales has also been a part of novels.

The novels of Ece Temelkuran are examined to reveal how violence is approached and how it contributes to the novel which is a literary genre as well as a mass medium. It is seen that the fact of violence plays an important part in the two novels discussed in this context.

The Sounds of Bananas features the experiences after the war with Israel. And *Women Who Blow on Knots* is about four women who move to kill someone. In this context, the main subject of both novels is about violence. While violence has a wide coverage in *The Sounds of Bananas* and is predominantly featured in its collective dimension, it is presented with its psychological dimension as well in *Women Who Blow on Knots*. The way violence is inserted in the narration of both books is prominent. The unexpectedly occurring violence particularly in *Women Who Blow on Knots* converts the narration beyond from being monotonous. But this doesn't mean that violence is affirmed. Because of that *Sounds of Bananas* is based on collective violence causes the novel to have an intense narrative. Even though violence is the main subject in *Women Who Blow on Knots*, it is less visible in comparison with *Sounds of Bananas*. Violence is an element here which occurs in necessary moments of the course of events and complements the plot. It can also be added that the struggle for the liberation and survival of women, included in novels which is about women and features violence against women, might raise the awareness of readers for this violence. This case certainly doesn't justify a murder. Both novels emphasize that any kind of violence being physical, psychological or ideological influence the human life negatively. Almost every day do we witness a different aspect of violence or indirectly hear about violence. In spite of having an awareness generally of physical or collective violence we can say that we overlook the other dimensions of violence. That we don't witness or are exposed to these sorts of violence at stake are certainly effective on this matter. In this context, the novels of Temelkuran raise awareness for many aspects of violence. Yet it is understood how much the types of violence we don't notice or which don't draw our attention in the daily life does in fact affect individuals and can appear in every moment and every part of our lives.

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