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LANGUAGE OF VIOLENCE IN HAROLD PINTER'S *MOUNTAIN LANGUAGE* WITH REFERENCE TO THE KURDISH EXPERIENCE IN THE NORTH OF IRAQ

Introduction

Literature is an extraction of human experiences which infuses thoughts and emotions. As the imitation of life, it is educative and gives us insight into the nature of reality. The nice and harsh reality, both equally illustrated through novels, poems, and plays. Drama affects the human spirit; it exposes our conditions in a way that changes our views of ourselves and the world around us. Pinter's drama seeks to challenge our insights of ourselves as victims. He presents a way out of oppression and domination for us as members of the audience and society. The truth perhaps is forever vague. The only way forward for Pinter's characters, and for us as citizens, is to forge a new path, to resist being controlled and misrepresented, and become truly independent. This is what we can see in the selected play *Mountain Language*; the masterpiece which is studied and analyzed so many times that in different directions, yet still, it needs further investigation.

The play consists of four scenes written in 1988. It opens with a very painful scene. A line of women have been waiting outside a prison for eight hours in snowy weather to see their men. Those women are not to use their own language spoken in their city (the mountain) because the political authorities consider it dead. The captors keep some dogs to bite any person who tries to speak the mountain language. The story of the play shows how much violence is used against those women and the people of the mountain in general. The violent acts are against human beings, Kurds, the use of native language, and women. Very similar situations can be associated with this four-scene act play, as if Pinter illustrates the violence experienced throughout the years in Kurdistan north of Iraq. As if he had a vision of when writing this play, a vision of the Kurds in this particular part of Kurdistan.

The paper attempts to show the identical situations in the play and in the real world experienced by the Kurds in that particular area where the researchers are from. They are true representations of the Kurds in the north of Iraq and have

witnessed all the acts of violence throughout the years. A linguistic analysis to the language of the play will show the close similarity between the violence in the play and the violence experience of the Kurds in the north of Iraq.

Language of Violence in the Play

Language is a weapon that is used for exciting tactics in a series of human encounters. Speech is warfare, fought on behalf of thoughts, feelings and instincts (Brown 1972: 18). Language in Harold Pinter's plays is paradoxical in that critics have both claimed that it reveals and hides the underlying message and motives of the author and the characters. Almansi (1983) claims nihilism on the part of Pinter and blames language:

Like many of his contemporaries on the continent, Harold Pinter is a writer who refuses to broadcast a message to the world. He is an author without authority, a communicator in the paradoxical position of having nothing to say. (...) For him, as for the post-modernist world generally, it is language that provides the supreme obstacle (Almansi 1983: 11).

Billington, on the other hand, seems to believe that Pinter sees language as a tool to bring actual meaning out of supposedly random or nonsensical situations:

(...) what Pinter sees is that the language we use is rarely innocent of hidden intention, that it is part of an endless negotiation for advantage or a source of emotional camouflage (Billington 2007: 124).

Since the paper examines carefully the topic of discursive violence, the main principles of violence is expressed in language. Further on, there is an analysis of the main verbal and nonverbal tools that are used in the language of the play making it powerful and used as a means of violence while summarizing and describing various linguistic strategies. Pinter's language is analyzed intensely in order to examine his very personal use of language that expresses the acts of violence. Pinter uses his language that is based on the principles of the absurd drama. The main characteristics of Pinter's highly personal style but describes also how Pinter's characters use their language in order to win the floor over others, and what power battles they lead.

Moreover, by analyzing extracts from *Mountain Language*, we can notice specific sentences and phrases through which violence is expressed, allowing the readers to understand the workings of discursive violence deeply. As the issue of violence expressed through language is very complex, we come to be aware that the main principles of violence and violence relations leads to the acts and work-

ings of violence. It is spectacular that violence is everywhere; it is born from itself and it is universal in every setting and in all encounters between humans. The disquieting use of violence in language strong and linguistically considered a skillful use. Thus violence rules and system of violent relations and acts which is a very important topic to be discussed in the real world.

The Analysis

There are four scenes in the play, they all take place in and around a frighteningly campsite. The first scene is in a prison wall where an elderly woman accompanied with a younger woman. They have come to meet a male prisoner there. A group of women who want to visit their imprisoned husbands are standing at a prison wall, they are harassed continually. They have been standing there for eight hours in the snow. They are questioned by a sergeant and an officer. One of the women is bitten by a dog. The officer tells the women that their language, specifically that of the mountain people, is prohibited and that their husbands are enemies of the state:

Officer: These women, sergeant, have yet committed no crime!

Sergeant: Sir! But you are not saying they are without sin?

Officer: Oh, no. Oh, no. I'm not saying that!

Sergeant: This one is full of it! She bounces with it!

In the above, the words 'crime' and 'sin' are used with violent actions represented by language. The dialogue shows how much they are eager to accuse the women of violent actions, though they have not done anything and might not ever. The persistent repetition of the same question is reverberated by an equally stubborn echo of the same answer, thus mocking the formal procedure of questioning. The same thing happened to the Kurds in the north of Iraq during questioning by the Iraqi regime. Without any crime or sin, they were convicted, later on imprisoned, tortured, and hanged. A true representation of violence against humanity.

The sergeant constantly asks their names. The young woman once disobediently says to the sergeant, "we have given our names." Her refusal to answer his senseless demands prompts the officer to give his attention to this young woman. When the officer notices the mark of bite on the elderly woman's hand he asks, "who did this?" The young woman answers, "A big dog.":

Officer: Every dog has a name! They answer to their name! They are given a name by their parents and that is their name! That is their name! Before they bite, they state their name. It's a formal procedure!

In contrast to the dogs who have names, the men and the women who are being tortured have no names. This is yet another act of violence and discrimination of human beings. Dogs are far better than those human beings because they have names, because they have identities. The situation of the Anfal Kurds who killed were thrown to ditches without identities. Stayed buried in these ditches for years, until found out by the Kurdish authorities. Only bones without identities.

People speaking in mountain language are to be converted from their language. For their language is not accepted in the dictatorial state. Although suddenly the rule of prohibition is changed and mountain people are allowed to speak their own language, the old woman is no longer able to utter any single word. She does not react to any word of her son who now speaks in their mountain language:

Sergeant: Your husbands, your sons, your fathers, these men you have been waiting to see, are shithouses. They are enemies of the state. They are shithouses.

Officer: Now here this. You are mountain people. You hear me? Your language is dead. It is forbidden. It is not permitted to speak your mountain language in this place. You cannot speak your language to your men. It is not permitted. Do you understand? You may not speak it. It is outlawed. You may only speak the language of the capital. That is the only language permitted in this place. You will be badly punished if you attempt to speak your mountain language in this place.

In the play characters are surpassed by language and are either demolished or changed and forced into previous language, indirectly or clearly implicate a ruling system. In the above the expressions 'they are shithouses', 'they are enemies of the state', 'you hear me?', 'it is forbidden', 'it is not permitted', 'do you understand?', 'you may not speak', 'it is outlawed', and 'you will be badly punished' are used in violent language. This is another kind of violence and terrorism. This kind of language is an instrument of violence. Those characters do not have the right to speak and if they do it should not be in their own language. A similar situation occurred in the north of Iraq; Kurds were not allowed to speak, they did not have voice in anything. They were also forbidden to speak in Kurdish. Schools and governmental facilities used Arabic language only, till 1977, when the Iraqi regime decided to allow some Kurdish schools to be established in certain conditions. These schools were weak and constantly harassed by the government. Violence against the identity of Kurds, since language is a part of individual's identity and autonomous speaking individuals is an essential part of humans' rights. Language of violence occurs when the meaning is frustrated and hidden from the audience. So, violence is considered as the usurpation of individual's capacity to speak, and thus think, freely. Halabja and chemical bombard-

ing only happened because they are Kurds. What other reason there could be? An event that traumatized Kurds and muted them.

When the young woman declares herself as Sarah Johnson and says: "I have come to see my husband. It is my right. Where is he?" The officer wants to show her papers and declares that: "He is in the wrong batch." This heartless statement ends her claim to meet her husband. Moreover, her attempt to specify herself by stating her christened name also gets reduced to nil. Their constant anxiety on her physical features shrinks her further into a commodity. This shows the harassment against women, the violence against gender, and how they are treated only as physical objects rather than human beings. What happened to Kurdish women in two horrified situations considered to be the most shocked events that could happen to women. During Anfal women and young girls were separated from the men in their families to be dislocated, sexually abused, deprived from their dignity, and sold to other countries.

The second scene is in the visitor's room. The elderly woman has brought some supplies for her son. Repeatedly she is forbidden by the guard to talk in mountain language which is supposedly dead: "Forbidden! Forbidden forbidden forbidden! Jesus Christ! He jabs her with his stick as she could not speak but the mountain language." The repetition of the word 'forbidden' is an emphasis to the function of violence in language. Her son is also repeatedly insulted by the guard for his insolence. Language which is the medium of expressing feelings is nullified by state-authority in the play. The mother with a broken heart tries to comfort her son: "When you come home there will be such a welcome for you. Everyone is waiting for you. They're all waiting for you. They're all waiting to see you."

Words of comfort used by the other to her son in the above, shows that he will never be set free. This is what desperate people do. Pinter suggests that there is no possibility of a reunion between the son and his family in future. The situation of Kurds showed a scene of hostility and violence which was dominant to strengthen the performance of the great suffering of the victims in during the rule of the Iraqi regime during that time. Hope was represented in the comfort words people shared amongst each other. Just like the words declared by the mother to her son.

The third scene mirrors the voice of Pinter in a world ruled by dictatorships. The scene is called 'Voices in the Darkness'. *Sara* (the young woman) stumbles upon a hooded man accidentally. She could not recognize him because of the darkness. The sergeant uses the F word consistently, he harassed, expels an absurd effort to divert Sara's attention from the fact that the hooded man is actually her husband. He tells her that she has been sent in through the wrong door, due to the computer's mistake. Sara is shocked to see that her husband has been tortured with cruelty to an extent that he cannot stand still. Pinter is revealing the ugliness

and the cruelty of the prison authorities. Sara's husband is about to collapse when the Sergeant, in an attempt to reduce Sara's terrible shock, says:

Yes, you've come in the wrong door. It must be the computer. The computer's got a double hernia. But I'll tell you what – if you want any information on any aspect of life in this place we've got a bloke comes into the office every Tuesday week, except when it rains. He's right on top of his chosen subject. Give him a tinkle on one of these days and he'll see you all right. His name is Dokes. Joseph Dokes.

The terms (torture, stand still, F words) are all word of violence used against mankind. This shows that all kinds of violence verbal, physical, and moral are used. The same thing happened to Kurdish prisoners who were imprisoned without committing any crime. They were imprisoned because they were Kurds.

Later Pinter shows that Sara is aware of the moral weakness of those sexually-corrupt officials. So, she offers herself in order to save her husband.

The fourth and final scene of *Mountain Language* is the most traumatic. It is the visitor's room. The authority and the men who are in power have changed their mind about the language used by the characters. They change their decision arbitrarily. Previously the prisoner and his family were forbidden to speak their language because their language was 'dead'. Without any reason, this once dead language became alive getting mercy of the power of the authority. But the prisoner's mother failed to speak in spite of her son's repeated attempts.

Prisoner: Mother, you can speak. (Pause)

Mother, I'm speaking to you. You see? We can speak. You can speak to me in our own language.

The term 'dead' in language means not living anymore. It is God's will that determines who lives and who dies. When the authorities decide that a particular language or human being must live or die, they violate the rules of God. They do that by using the actions of terror and violence. They decide when a language dies or lives again, the same as what happened to Kurdish language. They decide who should die and who should live. Just like what happened in Shingal, when human beings decided that other human beings should be killed, departed, and women went to slavery.

The prisoner then falls from his chains to his knees and begins to gasp and shake violently. The sergeant interprets this behavior of the prisoner to the guard: "Look at this. You go out of your way to give them a helping hand and they f... it up."

The words (chain, falls, knees, gasp, shake, and violently) are used in language to validate the weakness of human beings when they are imprisoned, debilitated, tortured, harassed, and abused. Kurds suffered all these and more. The play, as

a whole, is the extension of the world we (Kurds in the north of Iraq) inhabit. Pinter is not offering us the comfort that we witness and are witnessing something hopelessly outlandish and isolated. His message is that it can happen anywhere in this world; it happened to us, it can happen to you. Since we are living in this cruel world created by the violent acts of human beings, any act of cruelty can be performed by an individual to another individual anywhere in the world.

Conclusion

The language of violence in the play the relation between the characters and the outer world of the Kurds in the north of Iraq. The human individuals represented in Kurds are subjects to the tyrannical operations of language and action, and are being victimized by their rigid rules.

Language often functions as a philosophical tool to dominate and destruct the subjects, as we see in *Mountain Language*. The character as the prisoner of the rigid system of language is controlled by the structure and is not able to think beyond its severe rules.

The language of violence acts as an important component in defining the power relations and the usurpation of control over human subjects in social and personal contexts. The result and effect of the autonomous and violent play of language is the destruction and disfigurement of the human voice, as represented in *Mountain Language*.

The acts of violence whether performed against the characters in the play or Kurds in real life demonstrate the following facts:

The use of the language of violence to weaken and break human beings and deprive them from the simplest rights.

The moral corruption of the tyrannical systems.

The absence of justice.

The violation of women's rights.

The use of desperate measures to save the loved ones.

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Summary

Language of Violence in Harold Pinter's *Mountain Language* with Reference to the Kurdish Experience in the North of Iraq

Literature is a creative work of art transported through the medium of language. It is a medium which reflects the contemporary issues of the society, issues that involve economy, politics, struggle, leadership problems, matters of security, and violence. This means that there is a relationship between art and life; hence, literature deals with people and their experiences in a given environment. Harold Pinter is a literary artist who is seen as a committed person who uses his work to advocate for a classless society, satirize the evils of corruption, exploitation and oppression; and push the victims into a struggle towards release from all the forces that weaken their existence and language. Pinter's play pursues to test our perceptions of ourselves as victims. Whenever any act of violence performed against us as Kurds, we remember this outstanding play that truly represents all the violence against us; against humanity, culture, language, and women.

This paper, therefore, aims at showing the relationship between Pinter's *Mountain Language* and the true experience of Kurds in the north of Iraq. This is done through the linguistic analysis of the language used in the play. It also, represents the strong and close ties between literature and life through the medium of language.