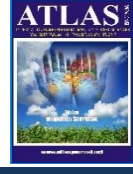




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THE CONCEPT OF “OTHER” IN HEART OF DARKNESS, THE MOMENT BEFORE THE GUN WENT OFF, AND THE FIRST PARTY

HEART OF DARKNESS, THE MOMENT BEFORE THE GUN WENT OFF VE THE
FIRST PARTY ADLI ESERLERDE “ÖTEKİ” KAVRAMI

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ABSTRACT

This study primarily focuses on the concept of “other” in three different selected works (Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad, The Moment Before the Gun Went Off by Nadine Gordimer, and The First Party by Attia Hosain) and it is aimed to show how otherness occurs in colonized regions. The dominance of the colonizers on the colonized people creates the feeling of otherness although the colonization period has ended. That means; material oppression may seem to be ended, however, the psychological effect of colonization on the once colonized people still proceeds. It is clearly observed in the selected works that in any case of the otherness, the feeling of oppression is inevitable for the “other”.

Key Words: Colonialism, other, self, dominance, oppression

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, öncelikle, seçilmiş üç farklı eserde(Heart of Darkness, The Moment Before the Gun Went Off ve The First Party) “öteki” kavramına odaklanmıştır ve sömürgeye maruz kalmış topraklarda “ötekilik” kavramının nasıl oluştuğunu göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Sömürgecilik dönemi bitmiş olmasına rağmen, sömürgecilerin sömürülen insanların üzerindeki baskısı ötekilik hissini yaratmaktadır. Bu da şu anlama gelmektedir; materyal baskı ve zulüm bitmiş gibi görünmesine rağmen, bu sömürgeleşmenin psikolojik etkisi hala devam etmektedir. Açıkça görülmektedir ki ötekiliğin oluştuğu her durumda baskı ve zulüm kaçınılmazdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sömürgecilik, öteki, kendi, baskı, zulüm

1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper, three chosen works will be studied from the aspect of “other” in relation to postcolonial theory. These three works are *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad, *The Moment Before the Gun Went Off* by Nadine Gordimer, and *The First Party* by Attia Hosain. In these three works, we see the colonized people as the others because “after the colonization, colonized people feel themselves as inferior; besides this, colonizers make them see that colonizers are civilized, rational, and intelligent when compared with the colonized people” (Bolat, 2014: 16). Ngugi wa Thiongo touches upon this in his work *Petals of Blood* and he stresses out how colonizers causes the feeling of inferiority. “The education we got had not prepared me to understand those things: it was meant to obscure racism and other forms of oppression. It was meant to accept our inferiority so as to accept their superiority and their rule over us” (Thiong’o, 1991: 165). Lois Tyson also mentions how Europeans see themselves and “others”:

The colonizers believe that only their own Anglo-European culture was civilized, sophisticated. Therefore, native peoples were defined as 'savage, backward undeveloped'. Because their technology was more highly advanced, and they ignored or swept aside the religions, customs, and codes of behavior of peoples they subjugated. So, the colonizers saw themselves at the center of the world; the colonizers were at the margins (Tyson, 1999: 366).

This situation creates binary oppositions, self (the west-colonizers) and other (the east-colonized) occur.

Before mentioning how the concept of other is studied in the selected works, in the first part of the paper, I will give brief information about the concept of "other", and in which conditions otherness occurs.

The concept of "other" is a complex term that should be studied from a multifaceted perspective. For a full understanding of the term, its relation with other concepts, such as power and knowledge, should be taken into consideration. And it should be focused on that otherness can be seen in many various forms; white and black or white and non-white, Muslim and Christian, rich and poor, civilized and uncivilized etc. The list can be longer, but the main point is that when an individual or society or a group define itself as "we", the people who are not "we" will be "they"; and this situation will create the concept of "other". As a result, "they" will be the others. Zygmunt Bauman makes a clear identification of these kinds of dichotomies as follow: "Woman is the other of man, animal is the other of human, stranger is the other of native, abnormality the other of norm, deviation the other of law-abiding, illness the other of health, insanity the other of reason, lay public the other of the expert, foreigner the other of state subject, enemy the other of friend" (Bauman, 1991: 8). Apart from Bauman, Simone de Beauvoir also asserts that:

Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought. Thus it is that no group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself. If three travellers chance to occupy the same compartment, that is enough to make vaguely hostile 'others' out of all the rest of the passengers on the train. In small-town eyes all persons not belonging to the village are 'strangers' and suspect; to the native of a country all who inhabit other countries are 'foreigners'; Jews are 'different' for the anti-Semite, Negroes are 'inferior' for American racists, aborigines are 'natives' for colonists, proletarians are the 'lower class' for the privileged (Beauvoir, 1989: 9).

The meaning of "other" is determined by the people, that is, it is human being who created the "other" in his thought and periphery. However, it should not be ignored that power relations play an important role in the occurrence of "self" and "other". Andrew Okolie shows and explains this relation as follow:

Social identities are relational; groups typically define themselves in relation to others. This is because identity has little meaning without the "other". So, by defining itself a group defines others. Identity is rarely claimed or assigned for its own sake. These definitions of self and others have purposes and consequences. They are tied to rewards and punishment, which may be material or symbolic. There is usually an expectation of gain or loss as a consequence of identity claims. This is why identities are contested. Power is implicated here, and because groups do not have equal powers to define both self and the other, the consequences reflect these power differentials. Often notions of superiority and inferiority are embedded in particular identities (Okolie, 2003: 2).

Since the colonizers have the power, the colonized people become “others” in their relation to the colonizers, who are represented as “self”. And colonialism is a good example to show how power makes “othering” easier. It should also be pointed out that the concept of other is not related with the numbers of people in a group. In a colonized region, although colonizers are minority and colonized people constitute the majority in the society, it is the colonizers who control and rule over the majority because of the power they have. Thus, while the minority becomes the “self”, the majority becomes the “other”.

2. THE CONCEPT OF OTHER IN HEART OF DARKNESS, THE MOMENT BEFORE THE GUN WENT OFF, AND THE FIRST PARTY

Heart of Darkness is a good example in which otherness is reflected in a vivid way. Throughout the novel, we see a kind of comparison between the Africans and Europeans. From the general context, it can be deduced that African people are the “others” for the Europeans, who see the Africans as barbaric, savage, uncivilized, and illiterate. Even the title of the novel creates a kind of otherness; Africa is seen a dark region while Europe is a white place. This dichotomy also shows how otherness occurs from the beginning of the novel.

The African people are seen as the “other” in the novel; even they are seen not as human beings, on the contrary, like material or object. Following lines show this situation: “Black figures strolled about listlessly pouring water on the glow, whence proceeded a sound of hissing, stream ascended in the moonlight the beaten nigger groaned somewhere” (Conrad, 1994: 50). Marlow’s first description of the native people also indicates how he sees them: “A lot of people, mostly black and naked, moved about like ants” (Conrad, 1994: 27). Marlow goes on his description and this makes clear that he sees them as “others”.

A slight clinking behind me made me turn my head. Six black men advanced in a file, toiling up the path. They walked erect and slow, balancing small baskets full of earth on their heads, and the clink kept time with their footsteps. Black rags were wound round their loins, and the short ends behind wagged to and fro like tails. I could see every rib, the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope; each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them, rhythmically clinking. Another report from the cliff made me think suddenly of that ship of war I had seen firing into a continent. It was the same kind of ominous voice; but these men could by no stretch of imagination be called enemies. They were called criminals, and the outraged law, like the bursting shells, had come to them, an insoluble mystery from the sea. All their meagre breasts panted together, the violently dilated nostrils quivered, the eyes stared stonily uphill. They passed me within six inches, without a glance, with that complete, deathlike indifference of unhappy savages (Conrad, 1994: 28).

Marlow sees native people as criminal and savage, because of this, he even cares about the distance between him and them. However, towards to the end of the novel his thought on black people changes. “They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now,—nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom” (Conrad, 1994: 31). Although his perception of black people has changed, the feeling of otherness is felt in his description. They are not human beings any more but black shadows for him. We get the feeling of mercy in Marlow’s statements, but, at the same time, othering is also seen by defining them as black shadows.

In *The Moment Before the Gun Went Off*, we see a sharp and striking criticism against the apartheid regime in South Africa. In the work, the drastic disintegration in the society is depicted distinctly. Nadime Gordimer shows the relation between white and black people,

who are others for each group. Because of the apartheid regime in the country, the existence of “others” becomes inevitable.

Main character of the story is Marais Van der Vyver, who is a white farmer in South Africa. He shot one of his farm laborers by an accident and the boy, Lucas, dies. Upon this event, the conflict in the society begins to rise, because a black laborer was killed by a white farmer. People in the society think that he killed the farm boy of pure cruelty. Upon the death of the boy, Marais is aware of the fact that “the papers at home will quote the story as it has appeared in the overseas press, and in the back-and-forth he and the black man will become those crudely-drawn figures on anti-apartheid banners, units in statistics of white brutality against the blacks quoted at United Nations” (Gordimer, 2003: 1). He also knows that “none of those people at home who want to destroy the white man's power will believe him” (Gordimer, 2003: 1). The reason of this is the drastic distinction in the society; between black and white people. If a black boy was shot by a white man, it was no accident, because the blacks are the others for the white, and white people can do everything they want against the blacks.

In the story, is clearly understood that Marais regrets because of the accident, although other people do not believe him. After the accident he goes to police station and says that: “There will be an inquiry. There had better be - to stop the assumption of yet another case of brutality against farm workers, although there's nothing in doubt - an accident, and all the facts fully admitted by Van der Vyver. He made a statement when he arrived at the police station with the dead man in his bakkie” (Gordimer, 2003: 1). He even cries because of the incident. “Beetge will not tell anyone that after the brandy, Van der Vyver wept. He sobbed, snort running onto his hands, like a dirty kid. The Captain was ashamed for him, and walked out to give him a chance to recover himself” (Gordimer, 2003: 1). Although there is racism and apartheid in the society, Marais is not a racist and he sees Lucas as one of his friends. In spite of the fact that people in the society, blacks and whites, regard each person who does not belong to their group as “other”, Marais do not think in the same way with the public. He asserts that:

He was my friend. I always took him hunting with me: Those city and overseas people don't know it's true: farmers usually have one particular black boy they like to take along with them in the lands: you could call it a kind of friend, yes, friends are not only your own white people, like yourself, you take into your house, pray with in church and work with on the Party committee (Gordimer, 2003: 1).

The thing that Gordimer touches upon in her story is that “otherness” exists in people’s mind and it survives by the social factors. However, it is not true every time as it is in the story of Marais who sees black people as his friends. It is human being who creates the borders and barriers among people, and creates his own “other”.

In *The First Party*, the concept of other is also employed by Attia Hosain. The young woman, who is the main character that Hosain portrays, is the “other” in the story. We see how she is seen as the “other” by the people in the party. She feels like a stranger, because she understands that she does not belong to that place. She is the “other” for the western people in the party. On the other hand, it should be pointed out that the western people, especially the women, in the party are the others for the young wife. The quotation in the story shows how young wife sees them as other; “She drew her sari over her hands, covering her rings and bracelets, noticing the other’s bare wrists, like a widow” (Hosain, 1953: 54).

Upon entering the party hall, the young wife feels that she does not belong to that place. Her behaviors and feelings show that she is like a stranger in the party, and she is the “other” for the western people in the party. The statements of the woman in the party show how she sees

the young wife. “Shy little thing, isn’t she, but charming, said the woman as if soothing a frightened child” (Hosain 54). She calls the young wife as a “thing” which indicates othering of young wife. “Another woman came and sat beside her and with affection put her hand on her head. Tired, child? The compassion of her voice and eyes was unbearable” (Hosain, 1953: 58). The behaviors of people in the party make a psychological pressure on the young wife, and this condition pushes her to the margin and makes her “other”. “The young wife wishes to be left unobserved and grateful for the diversion when the other guests came in” (Hosain, 1953: 58).

Young wife is also aware that she is not similar to them, and also they are not similar to her. This situation makes the young wife “other”, because she is not the one who has the power to make herself superior to them. Because of their attitudes, “she shrank into her chair, lonely in her strangeness”. Not the majority of the people in the party are strange but it is the young woman who is recognized as strange and other.

3. CONCLUSION

In this paper, the concept of “other” in three chosen works has been studied. Although representation of “other” changes in three works, the people who are seen as “other” are the same; that means, they belong to same group of colonized people who have no power to control and rule their own lives. All these people are included in the same group because “the Orient and Orientals [are considered by Orientalism] as an “object” of study, stamped with an otherness” who have no difference from each other (Said, 1978: 97). The colonized people may be part of different regions and societies; however, the feeling of “otherness” they experience is the same. No matter how different forms of the concept “other” are seen, it is their destiny from which they cannot escape.

In any case of the otherness, the feeling of oppression is inevitable for the “other”. Although the form of the oppression is disguised, it is always the “other” who has been positioned as subaltern and inferior to the “self” or “them”. On the other hand, it should also be pointed that as a result of the dominance by the “self” or “colonizers”, the “other” lives the situation of awakening and shows his resistance to the “them”. Resistance and rebelliousness become the natural reflexes of the “other”; and he tries to create his own “self” by othering the dominant powers.

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