

Totalitarian Propaganda in Harold Pinter's *One for the Road*: Reading of Hannah Arendt's Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to yield a critical reading of Harold Pinter's One for the Road (1985) regarding the theorist Hannah Arendt's writings. Seemingly, Pinter's play is one of these pieces that clarifies the principles on which totalitarians depended to widely spread their regimes, notions and dominate the nation or nations. However, the attempt of the paper has been made in analyzing Pinter's text considering Arendt's philosophy. In accordance with One for the Road, it shows how the totalitarians behavior is, how they depended on torturing their prisoners, and how their victims were threatened. It tries to clarify how the citizens or individuals were under unlimited danger that surrounding them while governed by totalitarians. These attempts lead to figure out whether or not Pinter's text and behavior of Nicolas is a propagandist. Moreover, the paper reveals whether terror is a very part of propaganda or not, and how terror ideologically affects an individual.

KEYWORDS

Harold Pinter; totalitarianism; Hannah Arendt; propaganda; totalitarian; One for the Road

INTRODUCTION

He was a playwright, director and actor. He is a Noble Prize winner. As a playwright, he had several dramatist productions; *The Homecoming* (1964), *Betrayal* (1978), *The Birthday Party* (1957), *No Man's Land* (1975) and other plays. Pinter's *One for the Road* (1985) widely concentrates on particular aspects. Regarding Hannah Arendt's totalitarian writings and Pinter's *One for the Road*, this work clarifies the way that totalitarians depended on in torturing and arresting people who don't agree with them, to achieve their totalitarian goals. Arendt's defines Totalitarianism in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* as an ideological weapon employed by a king or a president to control the power of peoples- the main totalitarian goal is to make their authorities wider: It is employed by a leader depending on propaganda and terror which are two sides of the same coin. (Arendt, 1979, pp. 342-352). Hannah Arendt is one of the most prominent political thinkers of the 20th century, she is one the well-known political theorists who contributed to the political field: Theoretically, she has several productions and writings (Vazquez, 2006, pp. 43-45)

The contents of the play: The family, Victor, Gira and their little son Nicky have been detained and cross-examined in a private location by a sadistic police officer named Nicholas. Their crimes have not been mentioned. There is no information about the type of country or government other than what can be inferred from dialogue and actions. Offending Victor by Nicolas is an obvious image of terror and horror. Seemingly, threatening Victor by Nicolas seems villain do, but of course Nicolas has his own motivations to behave so. It is a brutal, totalitarian state. The paper focuses on Totalitarianism because we are on the brink of a nightmare, a new Dark Age which may

encompass the globe as a whole. Reading the text of Pinter's *One for the Road* (1985) leads the reader to realize the principles and fundamentals of a totalitarian leader. Particularly, when Arendt declared what a totalitarian is. As mentioned above, Arendt considers propaganda and terror as two sides of the same coin. Moreover, it could be regarded as a gap because no researcher or critic has clarified the play regarding Arendt's totalitarian writings.

One for the Road (1985) presents well-known terms such as totalitarianism, state oppression, vulnerabilities of opponents, justification of violence, and abuse of class society against individual rights. One of the concepts that this research paper studies is for revealing whether *One for the Road* (1985) is a propagandist play or not. Regarding Pinter's text and the characters' behavior is an essential point that helps prove whether the play is a totalitarian or not. The political play which was written by Harold Pinter contains several appearances of terror. Perhaps, these appearances refer to the way that the totalitarians depended on for achieving their political goals. Considering the events of Pinter's play and regarding Arendt's totalitarian writings, this paper shows the behavior and terror of the totalitarian propaganda. Perhaps, observing the way that totalitarians used is a main concentration that can be obviously recognized. It leads a reader to know how they use propaganda and terror for achieving their goals. It does not matter whether they deal with an animal or human being, it matters whether people threaten totalitarian existence and authority or not. They strive to dominate people who surround them and their states. They can torture psychologically and physically. They even kill if they found out that there is a need to.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper devotes its Clarifications in studying Harold Pinter's *One for the Road* (1985). Researchers have written about this play using various literary theories and philosophies. For instance, in Akdogan's article which is entitled as Politics of Harold Pinter's Dystopian drama: *One for the Road* and *Party Time*, the researcher claims: "One for the Road" and "Party Time" are not specific ideological propaganda, but address the threat of oppression and human rights abuses by portraying power political exploitation." (Akdogan, 2020, p. 332). On the other hand, in *Birthday party* and *one for the road: Reading from the stylistic perspective*, the writer of the paper makes his study and analyzes *One for the Road* stylistically; he says that even the interrogative and affirmative forms used by the investigator "Nicolas" is an intentional process that was employed in order to terrorize the prisoner "Victor" (Sekerci, 2019, p. 768).

Other researchers also studied the play and analyzed it from different perspectives. Moreover, these investigations were performed to clarify the totalitarians regarding Pinter's *One for the Road* (1985). Another researcher also has been investigating, and analyzing the play; "Nicholas considers himself an authority. He is free as long as he is ideologically compliant, or he is an ideological command" (Aydogdu, 2014, p. 5). No researcher has written about Pinter's *One for the Road* considering Hannah Arendt's totalitarian writings. Therefore, this research paper analyzes *One for the Road* (1985) regarding Arendt's writings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The concept of totalitarianism

A reader may raise questions: What is meant by Totalitarianism? What are the principles of the totalitarian? Or, what is the relationship between Totalitarianism and Harold Pinter's *One for the Road*? Hannah Arendt has several totalitarian productions; she is an author

who is mostly interested in writing about totalitarianism. In accordance with Hannah Arendt's totalitarian writings, Totalitarianism can be defined as a movement in which the totalitarian leaders employ their power to keep themselves and their regimes alive (Arendt, 1979, p. 306). Accordingly, power of the totalitarians is horror and terrorizing societies because of their authority. Seemingly, in the playwright's *One for the Road*, they strive to widespread their dominations by the power that is embodied by horror, terrorizing, torture, threatening and making their victims suffer. As mentioned above, this paper proves that terror and propaganda are two sides of the same coin regarding Harold Pinter's text which was entitled *One for the Road* and Hannah Arendt's totalitarian writings.

As known, all the parties and movements like Fascist or Socialist, nationalist or Communist orientation provoke their propaganda, the totalitarian movement also do the same with their propaganda (Arendt, 1979, p. 364). That simply lead us to infer that the political parties and movements do several choices to achieve their goal. Arendt also mentions that one of these movements who After reaching a certain stage of extremism (mainly depending on the degree of despair of the members), terrorism backs up propaganda, the totalitarian movement truly supports the propaganda, and this loyalty is of the organization. Expressed much more horrifying in the propaganda than the liquidation of one physical one of his enemies (Arendt, 1979, p. 364). However, honesty and loyalty of the totalitarian members urge them to commit what is in need of, and use the worst methods of terrorizing, threatening, and committing several horrible ways. The totalitarianism is a political movement, appeared in the world because its leaders have been striving planning for the global regime and controlling the world (Arendt, 1979, p. 380). Accordingly, inferring that the totalitarian movement is a political dilemma is a quite crucial point in this paper. As mentioned above, the political are always ready to do whatever they need for their sake and regimes.

The supreme task of the Leader is to impersonate the double function characteristic of each layer of the movement-to act as the magic defense of the movement against the outside world; and at the same time, to be the direct bridge by which the movement is connected with it. The Leader represents the movement in a way totally different from all ordinary party leaders; he claims personal responsibility for every action, deed, or misdeed, committed by any member or functionary in his official capacity. This total responsibility is the most important organizational aspect of the so-called Leader principle, according to which every functionary is not only appointed by the Leader but is his walking embodiment, and every order is supposed to emanate from this one ever-present source. (Arendt, 1979, p. 374)

A totalitarian leader plays an essential role in training the members of totalitarianism, each one has his own responsibilities that provoke him/her to deal with the outside world and all the difficulties that may surround him/her. Defending the totalitarian principles by totalitarians themselves is a main deed that constitutes their totalitarian personality. Therefore, a personal responsibility forms the charismatic behavior of totalitarians. They have unlimited official capacities that manage them to have the title of "Leaders". These capacities are devoted by totalitarians as a face or a way of loyalty and abeyance. Accordingly, the movement earned its propagandist appearance as a significant organization. These totalitarian images and propagandist powers are presented in Harold Pinter's play (1985). These images have been embodied by the character of "Nicholas". He also appears as the powerful leader who can do anything he likes. Moreover, Nicholas' power and regime makes him as a responsible leader who deals with all the risks that may limits his totalitarian organization.

Ideological Propaganda

The main point that this paper depends on is when Arendt described propaganda and terror as two sides of the same coin. Terror embodied in the play belongs to the same coin that Arendt referred to. The text of Pinter's play depicts terror and frightening which were employed by the totalitarian Nicholas. "Totalitarianism shifted the center of power from the army to the police, and established a foreign policy openly directed toward world domination." (Arendt, 1979, p. 460). Nicholas in Pinter's seemingly is an officer or an investigator who has been torturing and imprisoning the individuals. He is totally eager and interested in terrorizing his victims as a very part of his totalitarian mission. For instance, in the very beginning of the play, Pinter describes the prisoner Victor when he comes in to meet the investigator Nicholas. The playwright says that Victor enters with torn clothes "VICTOR walks in, slowly. His clothes are torn. He is bruised. The door closes behind him." (Pinter, 1985, p. 1). Pinter opens his play leading us to infer that Victor has been tortured and beaten.

It is terror, the totalitarian Nicholas considers terror as a big deal to dominate nations. Ideologically, "basically speaking, totalitarian domination strives to restrict propaganda methods solely to its foreign policy or to the branches of the movement abroad for the purpose of supplying them with suitable material." (Arendt, 1979, p. 343). In accordance with the play, terror is ideologically a suitable material that totalitarian can depend on for performing their plans. Their attempts to restrict their principles in masses are obviously revealed. Therefore, terror is a propagandist material that the totalitarian concentrates on in order to make ideological impact in masses. It is a very part of totalitarian ideology that can not be segmented.

NICOLAS (CONT'D)

He would die, he would
die, he would die for his country,
for his God. And he did die, he
died, he died, he died for his God.
You turd. To spawn such a
daughter. (Pinter, 1985, p. 12)

This speech uttered by Nicholas clarifies several ideological instruments that the totalitarians usually use to achieve their goals. One of these famous instruments is the death for your country. While he has been speaking with Gilla, he repeats the term "die" for more than one time. This repetition is employed for emphasis and effect; he emphasizes that one of their principles is death. If one intends to object or refuse the totalitarians' principles, then their fate is death. They believe death is one of the solutions that they can depend on to achieve their intentions.

NICOLAS (CONT'D)

What do you think this is? It's my
finger. And this is my little
finger. This is my big finger and
this is my little finger. (Pinter, 1985, p. 1)

In the investigator's speech above, he utters his words offensively, he makes the prisoner feel something bad is going to occur. The prisoner Victor listens to him bitterly because of the way that Nicholas speaks with him. Nicholas has been doing nothing but terrorizing Victor horribly. He threatens him ironically by putting his finger in the front of his face or eyes asking him to guess what he has been putting in front of his face. Then, Nicholas

himself shouts “it’s my finger”. He insists and does the same his little finger and waves both fingers in front of Victor’s face. Doing such a thing is a vivid image that symbolizes offense. Moreover, the prisoner does not reply or even utter a word because he dares not to. He has been weak, nothing can be done by the prisoner but listening to what Nicholas has been training or saying. Victor looks unable to perform anything as if he has been under torment and difficulties while he has been prisoned. Ideologically, offence and terrorizing work well. Therefore, Nicholas achieved his goal by making Victor keep silent. In another speech from *One for the Road*, observation of offence and terrorizing is vividly can be recognized.

NICOLAS (CONT’D)

You’re probably wondering where
you’re wife is. She’s in another
room. (Pinter, 1985, p.2)

Then, Nicholas begins addressing Victor by employing Victor’s wife case, telling him or intends to inform him that he can do whatever he likes, even with his wife if it was necessary. Victor’s wife is a prisoner too, she is prisoned aside, away from her husband Victor. Nicholas has been mentioning the case of Victor’s wife in order to make him feel worried. In accordance with Nicholas’ speech above, the attempt of threatening Victor is obviously can be touched. Ideologically and emotionally, Nicholas disturbs him and makes him agree with whatever Nicholas wants. Nicholas’ behavior against his prisoners has been well-known by his victims. Automatically, the prisoners spread the way that Nicholas has been depending on in investigating with his victims. Regarding Arendt’s totalitarian writings, specifically ideology and propaganda, it creates terror horribly. It is a propagandist method or a face of propaganda by which the totalitarians uses to achieve their goals.

Pinter’s Text as a Propagandist One

Victor is still silent; he does not have the adequate capacity to say a word. He has been listening to Nicholas only. Nicholas orders him to sit down, he bitterly does. (Pinter, 1985, p. 2). In another speech uttered by Nicholas saying:

(quietly)

I don’t know you.

NICOLAS

But you respect me.

VICTOR

I don’t know you.

NICOLAS

Are you saying you don’t respect me? (Pinter, 1985, p. 3)

Interpreting the speech above is obviously intended to clarify whether intention of Nicholas is a heinous matter or not. Psychologically, it can be regarded so because its indirect accusation committed by Nicholas is totally observed. Nicholas has the unlimited power to specify whether he intends to kill the prisoner or no. Therefore, he is not in need of others respect. Moreover, Victor is a prisoner, respect is not demanded by Nicholas but frightening him. Away from respect that might Nicholas want, Victor’s answer is always the same- “I don’t know”, he repeats it more than one, that refers to being unable to tell him what feels frankly. He even couldn’t say “yes, I do respect you, Nicholas” as if he was

threatened, frightened and tutored. If Victor has not been tortured because he was an educated man, so he has been hearing about the way that the totalitarian rely on in treating their prisoners or victims. In accordance with Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, it is another face of propaganda. It is a way of frightening people by torturing and threatening others. Therefore, it can be considered as a propagandist text.

Nicholas

I'm prepared to be frank, as a true friend should. I love death. What about you?

(pause)

What about you? Do you love death?

Not necessarily your own. Others.

The death of others. Do you love

the death of others, or at any

rate, do you love the death of

others as much as I do? (Pinter, 1985, p. 5)

After Nicholas' cold terrorizing which was stuffed with scary and threatening, he continues the same way. He tells Victor about the meaning of death. It refers to the heinous terror that Nicholas used to employ with his prisoners and victims. In accordance with the speech above, if it was necessary, Nicholas would not mind to kill Victor. He threatens him that he could kill him. He can do everything he wants. Moreover, nothing stops him. He does whatever he needs for the totalitarians' sake. He does what the totalitarian commands him. Therefore, Victor has been unable to object and even to argue or utter a word that might lead him to be killed or tortured. Actually, the way that Nicholas deal with his prisoners is obvious to them. When Nicholas utters such words, he recognizes that the prisoners will speak about it. They will care for every word they may say or lead them to be killed or tortured. This way confirms how the totalitarian employ their propagandist terror to do whatever they need.

NICOLAS sitting.

GILA standing. Her clothes are torn. She is bruised.

NICOLAS

Why not?

GILA

I didn't know him.

NICOLAS

Why not? (Pinter, 1985, pp. 10-11)

Then, Nicholas meets another one of his prisoners, it is Victor's wife, Gilla. He begins asking her about her husband Victor. The first question he raised "When did you meet your husband?" as if he intends to tell her you will never meet him until you obey me and the totalitarianism. His intentions are clear, that he wishes seeing every individual as a totalitarian. Seemingly, he makes her feel sad for missing her husband because she didn't meet him a long time ago. The way Nicholas speaks to Gilla constitutes an inner conflict about denying her husband "I don't know him". Or, she may know him. But, torment makes her feel afraid to answer frankly because of terror and horror made by the totalitarians.

The Totalitarian Socio-Political Metamorphosis

The totalitarians deform the ethical principles of any political movement. Particularly, their own principles have been deformed into fear, horror and torment. It was known among the prisoners that totalitarians don't mind and nothing stops them torturing and killing their prisoners. It will be known to the individual outside the prison that the totalitarian politics have been changed, and began relying on threatening and frightening as a propagandist. The thoughts of totalitarianism that people knew about have been totally changed or deformed. Fear and horror have been spread among individuals. Therefore, it can be called socio-political metamorphosis, just like most of the political movements; they deformed all the principle that they have been working on.

NICOLAS (CONT'D)

All volunteers. Their
daddies are in our business. Which
is, I remind you, to keep the world
clean for God. Get me? Drink up.
Drink up. (Pinter, 1985, p. 16)

Nicholas reveals that their mission is sacred. They dedicated their efforts for God, no more no less. They don't have other aims to focus on but making the world clean for God. Sometimes, if they were in need of killing, they will never to do so. Several fundamentals the totalitarians relied on to convince their people, prisoners and victims that their principles are sacred. As if Nicholas were telling his prisoner that he has arrested and tortured them for the same goal "making the world clean for God". Moreover, those victims MUST accept the totalitarian goals. This is the how they deal with people and nations as a propagandist method in order to spread and dominate whoever they want to.

CONCLUSION

Regarding Harold Pinter's *One for the Road* (1985) and Hannah Arendt's totalitarian writings led to infer that there is another face of propaganda. Arendt well-known announce is that propaganda and terror are two sides of the same coin. In accordance with Harold Pinter's *One for the Road*, the totalitarians perform or make several methods for their needs and aim. Carelessly, they deal with their prisoners and victims. They obviously spread that they can do anything they want; killing, threatening, torturing people to dominate peoples. It is inferred that this way of terrorizing and killing is the other way of the totalitarian propaganda.

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