FROM GEORGE ORWELL'S *SHOOTING AN ELEPHANT* TO CIVILIZED EVIL OF LITERATURE: IMPERIALISM

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Literature is a way of representing real life. With the help of many works and writings, we can experience various aspects of life. There are several themes in literature and one of them is evil. This subject can be found as either a direct meaning or sub-meaning in the artworks. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, evil means, as a noun, morally bad, cruel, or very unpleasant, and the condition of being immoral, cruel, or bad, or an act of this type. Violence, insult, discrimination, and pressure can be seen as examples of evil. Each of these terms can be either stand alone as a topic or all of them can be subdivisions of a different main title, such as imperialism. Even though the term imperialism is a subject alone, it consists of all the terms mentioned above, and being a colonialist act makes it a type of evil. This paper aims to clarify how imperialism is an important term to the subject of evil in literature, through the *Shooting an Elephant*, which is an essay written by George Orwell.

*Shooting an Elephant* is an essay based on George Orwell's own experiences as imperial police in Burma, now known as Myanmar, situated in Southeast Asia. Story of an elephant which ran into a bazaar, destroyed some houses, and, finally, killed by Orwell, is told in the work. In *Shooting an Elephant*, Orwell represented how imperialism affects a country and its people. This work is cut out for telling the feelings of both the oppressor and the oppressed sides under British Imperialism. Yet, the evil beneath imperialism title is an indisputable truth, and we can call the term imperialism as the evil of civilized age because of the suffering and pressure it caused. The actions like violence, insult, discrimination, and pressure can be easily seen in that work. The evil we are going to talk about is neither oppressors nor oppressed people, they are just tools of imperialism. Because the system of imperialism affects both sides though it is not completely comprehended by large numbers of people.

The essay begins with a confession about author's himself. "In Moulmein, in Lower Burma, I was hated by large numbers of people," (Orwell, 2003, p.23). This can be an example for the Burmese's attitudes towards Imperial Police. The keyword in this sentence is 'hate'. Like every other feeling, hate is a consequence of actions, too. Yet, it reflects ill-treatment. Orwell's being an imperial policeman can be the greatest reason for hate towards him because he is a

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part of the imperial system and can be seen as a representative of it. Moreover, the Burmese faced with serious poverty and a lack of political and religious freedom (Orwell, 2003), and that is why Orwell was hated by many people like every other imperial policeman. Thus, the feeling of hate and having lack of political and religious freedom shows how imperialism is evil and does discrimination on local people. To put it in a different way, imperialism dominates human life, builds an hegemony, and prevents their religion and takes their rights so as to make them passive characters against imperialism.

Imperialism does discrimination on the local people and propels them to hate from the officers of the imperial system, but these are not the only effects caused by it. In the same way, insult can be counted as the second point in the Shooting an Elephant, triggered by the Imperialism. According to Orwell, the Burmese had nothing to do against the British Empire and they were not brave enough to raise a riot (Orwell, 2003). Yet, like every oppressed society, the Burmese tried to find a way that they could console themselves, and they started to insult the women when they were defenceless. Following citation from the Shooting an Elephant clearly indicates the situation. "No one had the guts to raise a riot, but if a European woman went through the bazaars alone somebody would probably spit betel juice over her dress." (Orwell, 2003, p. 23). This action may be considered as a passive-riot done by the Burmese, but there is another question that must be argued: What would happen if those people were not under British rule and this European woman was a tourist? This question is crucial because circumstances may have an impact on people actions, and if conditions change, everything can be much more different. This example shows how imperialism deforms human relations and how makes people different than who they are. With this destructive feature, the term imperialism is not something different than the devil that is evil itself. That is to say, imperialism can be stand alone as a topic which is a part of evil.

Another point indicated in the essay is violence. Being limited and becoming oppressed one in your own country cannot be welcomed by the local people. That is why there is nothing more understandable than a defenceless and poor society's tendency to violence. This violence may occur anytime and anywhere in daily life, in other words, those people just need a chance to do something. Orwell's following statement is an example of violence by the Burmese:

As a police officer I was an obvious target and was baited whenever it seemed safe to do so. When a nimble Burman tripped me up on the football field and the
referee (another Burman) looked the other way, the crowd yelled with hideous laughter. (Orwell, 2003, p. 23)

This action may seem no effect on imperialism, yet it is especially important to locals because it is another type of passive-riot that satisfy themselves. In addition, another point which must be considered, in that citation is the phrase "As a police officer". It is easily understood that the oppressed people's problem is imperialism itself. Thus, everything that represents the imperial system is a target for oppressed people as it is mentioned above. Of course, oppressors tend to violence, too. Orwell obviously indicated the traces of humiliation as in the following example:

The wretched prisoners huddling in the stinking cages of the lock-ups, the gray, cowed faces of the long-term convicts, the scarred buttocks of the men who had been flogged with bamboo's—all these oppressed me with an intolerable sense of guilt. (Orwell, 2003, p. 23)

However, with the help of this citation, the oppressor role in imperialism should be questioned, because they are part of a system and they have no chance to categorize the orders as good or bad. They might have been used to do dirty works of the Empire as Orwell says above, and all these actions might have affected the others who have oppressor role like Orwell. These two situations reflect how imperialism corrupts peace in society and forces people to hate and humiliate each other. Namely, every conflict in this society has its roots from rule of British imperialism which has a malevolent characteristic as every other imperial rule.

As it is mentioned hereinabove, in the 3rd paragraph, the Burmese live under harsh conditions in which they have no proper rights and religious freedom. Living under imperial rule and having a lack of political and religious freedom can be best explained by one word: Pressure. Yet, the question is how did imperialism gain such power to put the pressure on the Burmese? To answer this question and make it clear, a short citation from Shooting an Elephant should be evaluated symbolically. This evaluation is so easy that through the following citation it is clearly going to be done. "I took my rifle, an old .44 Winchester and much too small to kill an elephant, but I thought the noise might be useful in terrorem". (Orwell, 2003, p. 24). The elephant can be considered as representative of the Burmese society because it is a huge animal and can match with a massive society, and the rifle can be seen as representative of the ways

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2 *in terrorem* Latin: for terror
that imperialism used to control this massive society. As Orwell said, a .44 Winchester is too small to kill an elephant, but his aim to use it not to kill. He aimed to frighten the elephant, by the way, he would be able to manipulate it. This is the way Imperialism used. In other words, frightening and controlling people through fear is the main method to gain such power to create an environment based on pressure. Imperialism destroys peace among society and propels people to feel uncomfortable all the time. To put it in a different way, with the fear they are exposed, the Burmese people may have an imagination about how elements of imperialism is powerful and invincible. That is why this situation may be called as psychological violence which serves the same aim with pressure. This oppressive method and way of acting is proof of evil beneath imperialism.

To sum up, this paper examined how evil theme represented with imperialism in literature and tried to prove it through citations from George Orwell’s essay *Shooting an Elephant*, which is a masterpiece which obviously represents the evil beneath imperialism that affects both oppressor and oppressed sides and makes them different than who they are. In other words, the source of all the problems is imperialism's itself, not the elements of it. Every line of the *Shooting an Elephant* clearly states that imperialism is a shame of the civilized world and a system of suffering. That is why, imperialism can be called as 'civilized' or 'modern' evil that consists of violence, insult, discrimination, and pressure, although it cannot match with the term civilization. Yet, it is obvious that effects of imperialism and the actions triggered by it, can easily match with term evil. In other words, imperialism becomes an important part of evil in literature.

REFERENCES