

Symbolic violence and structural violence



This week's readings are composed of the topics of structural violence and symbolic violence. Galtung and Farmer's perspectives on personhood and conflict relationship are built around the concept of the "structural violence". In general terms, structural violence means sociopolitical inequalities emerge out of the structures. In addition to them, Bourdieu and Bourgois & Schonberg bring new perspective by looking at the debate from different angle with the term "symbolic violence" which means gender inequalities emerges out of the embeddedness of female subordination by male in daily life.

Galtung first discusses the concept of violence in his 1969 article of "Violence, Peace and Peace Research" and displays the relationship and difference between direct/personal/with subject and indirect/structural/without subject violence. In his article "Cultural Violence" (Galtung, 1990), it is defined as "any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form" (p. 291). In Pierre Bourdieu's article, we analyze how symbolic violence influences the gender relations by being embodied in the daily life habits of an agent. We may add that culture sometimes play a legitimizing role to strengthen symbolic violence. In my country, Turkey, there is still the "honor killings" phenomenon in the name of "culture", which actually includes cultural and symbolic violence. It is a somewhat direct violence but also somewhat symbolic for the rest of the society and male-female relations. Galtung's prescription against those types of violence is clear; establish negative (the absence of direct violence) and positive (absence of structural and cultural violence) peace (p. 183).

In his article of " Gender and Symbolic Violence", Pierre Bourdieu looks at violence in a different perspective than Galtung and builds relationship between violence and gender. According to him, hegemonic power and the domination of this power on its victims can be called " symbolic violence". The male domination over the female can be strengthened with the help of the concepts, language, and symbols used in daily life habits. He does not mean to reduce the importance of physical violence, instead, focuses on the construction of misrecognition through the dominant discourses in various types of socio-cultural domination. Misrecognition is " confirmed" by dominant discourse and is embodied in women's body with " hidden symbols". As he mentions this symbolic violence is most of the time unnoticed-partly unconsciousness- because the " victims" of this violence may not recognize it, or become silent because of their subordination or they feel daunted against the violence. His prescription is explained as "...radical transformation of the social conditions of production of the dispositions that lead the dominated to take the point of view of the dominant on the dominant and on themselves."(p. 342).

Paul Farmer's " personhood" is much more related to structural issues. In " On Suffering and Structural Violence", he tries to understand the mechanisms which cause social forces from poverty to racism to be embodied as individual experiences (p. 281). He argues that what happens to Acephie and Chouchou - the former dies because of AIDS and the latter dies because of political violence- are two different versions of structural violence. He reaches the conclusion that inequality of power and its implications on the poor are because of the structural arrangements of

dominant powers of the world. " Silence of socioeconomically poor people" is because of the dominant power relations and its reflections on Third World countries. According to him, what happened to Acephie and Chouchou is explained as; " these afflictions were not the result of accident or of force majeure; they were the consequence, direct or indirect, of human agency"(p. 286) He also mentions that when people are suffering because of poverty, their access to health, food, and shelter are limited because of their social status. His prescription is much more related to the " humane" and offers global precautions. He thinks that instead of debating " cultural differences", the social inequalities should be reduced. The precautions should focus on reducing global poverty, by so we can break the link between social violence and " social acceptance of poverty".

After the discussion on historically reproduced structures of social inequality and the deficiencies of accessing to health care which is a basic human right in Third World countries in Farmer's article, we witness similar arguments in Philippe Bourgois and Jeff Schonberg's book of Righteous Dopefiend. The authors give us a portrayal of the sufferings of the homeless and heroin addicted community of Edgewater from their own personal participant observations. In general, the book is so impressive because of the use of photographs, transcripts of recorded conversations and the authors' participant observations. The authors display the daily experiences of these heroin addicted-homeless people and analyze anthropologically those experiences. In the book, we see how those people suffer but also try to hang onto life one more day by involving in burglary, day labor, panhandling and so on.

The book is constructed on the themes of how violence is seen in childhood, community of addicted people, in gender relations, in race issues, sexuality, power inequality, and so on. In the book, one of the main arguments is that while we enter into twenty first century, neoliberalism has produced a strata of rich people but also a strata of “ lumpen” in United States. Those people who couldn't adapt themselves into the changing system are marginalized and exposed to the structural violence and victimized. They are Edgewater dopefiends now. On page 320, the authors mentioned that the burden of lumpenization is more severe in nonindustrialized societies. They add that there is not only power inequality and poverty issue but also poverty is being “ punished” which is actually the extension of symbolic violence. Authors borrow from Bourdieu's concept of misrecognition and symbolic violence (Bourdieu 2000) and apply it to Foucault's power/knowledge relationship. According to them, “ policy debates and interventions often mystify large scale structural power vectors and unwittingly reassign blame to the powerless for their individual failures and moral character deficiencies.” (p. 297). Here we see that, the heroin addicted-homeless people of Edgewater, Sanfransico, are not only excluded from the whole social network and locked up into their own social network but also blamed on them for their failure. Although the book criticizes so much of health care system and the role of structural forces on the suffering of those people, I believe I would be happy to read ethical considerations of the authors during their research.

In conclusion, this week's reading were so impressive and must be thought on more. In addition to that, I believe what they are theorizing must be put into practice and the awareness on structural, cultural and symbolic violence

must be increased with policy recommendations. Or the project/practice areas should be determined and implemented by the field experts.