



SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE MECHANISMS FROM BOURDIEU'S PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Through ages, violence has taken many forms, direct and indirect, hidden and apparent, starting with physical violence in its simplest form passing through different kinds, until reaching symbolic violence that takes many manifestations to include all forms of intangible violence that harm others through language, speech or different expressions. Symbolic violence is a modern concept that originated in the second half of the 20th century in the works of the French Sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu. This concept has received widespread attention and become the focus of many sociological analysis studies that have dictated dominance, power, and class differentiation. Symbolic violence is mysterious and hidden violence, is concealed behind many socially, culturally, ideologically and, religiously behaviors. This type of violence is reflected in our daily lives using many methods to control others, possess their hearts, and enslaving them as well.

This research paper aims at identifying violence and its various types in general. Furthermore, to shed more light on the concept of symbolic violence and its three mechanisms practiced in societies from Bourdieu's perspective using the descriptive research approach.

Key words: Violence, Symbolic Violence, Mechanisms

INTRODUCTION

Symbolic violence is not as straightforward as direct physical violence. However, it is hidden under ordinary masks and systems of traditions, statements, and discourses engraved in the minds of people. The most prominent examples of such indirect violence are like a subdivision of (East and West), and labels: third world countries, developing countries, or backward countries. (1)

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This represents valuable judgments symbolizing the progress and superiority of Western societies, and the submission of these countries to their system of control. The theory of symbolic violence for Pierre Bourdieu is the most obvious and consistent. Therefore, this theory is the masterpiece of all of his work on the study of social phenomena. He utilized all his cognitive and methodological tools to show that society is struggling not in a purely material form as classical theories of sociology -the thesis based on Marxist analysis- but he says there is a symbolic conflict, which is of great importance in the management, operation, and construction of the social order of any society.(2)

Based on a group of procedural concepts and cognitive tools, Pierre Bourdieu tried to read the structure of Western society and disclosed various mechanisms of domination, hegemony and symbolic violence. Consequently, symbolic violence is associated with authority and community field, in the sense that the government is practicing violence against individuals and groups through a range of institutions such as (media, school, art, religion, etc.) (3)

Therefore, we will try to stand in this article on the concept of symbolic violence and its mechanisms from Bourdieu's perspective.

Violence

From the primitive period till the modern era, sociologists have been used to address the phenomenon of violence as a sociological human phenomenon that accompanied the existence of human beings as a behavior related to the animal instinctive aspect "love of survival" and control over nature and its material goods. The human being had to use violence in any positive movement in life, such as looking for food "hunting", self-defense against predators, and sexual activity. Starting from "Freud" the psychological school divided instincts into two trends that direct the organism and supply it with vital energy, the whims of life (Eros) and the whims of death (Thanatos). The first is the source of sexual energy responsible for every positive emotional and sympathetic relationship and rapprochement, unity and grouping with others. The second: aims to destroy and disintegrate the living being, and both instincts are in an open conflict internally and externally. The explosion of violence is due to the loss of human "capricious adaptation" that is, the loss of instinctive curbs of his aggression. Therefore, violence in this regard is related to the direct threat that targets human self-existence if it lives in a primitive society that is not governed by regulations and laws. (4)

The concept of violence is one of the social concepts that are difficult to understand and define comprehensively. This is due to the complexity and overlap of the violence phenomenon. Violence has multiple images and forms, has various motives and reasons, and different levels of practice. Violence is any verbal or physical act, or coercion directed at



someone causing physical or psychological harm or deprivation, and puts the person in a lower rank. (5)

The World Health Organization defines violence as “The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either result in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation” (6).

The definition used by the World Health Organization associates intentionality with the committing of the act itself, irrespective of the outcome it produces. Excluded from the definition are unintentional incidents – such as most road traffic injuries and burns. Moreover, The Webster dictionary stated that one of the meanings of violence is practicing physical force for deliberately harming others. This harm might be either materially through physical force by beating or morally humiliation through intentionally insulting, abusing, and defamation. (7)

To conclude the definition of violence, according to the glossary of social sciences terms, refers to that phenomenon represented by the excessive use of force illegally by an individual or a group of individuals. This occurs with the intent of forcing others to obey their desires or apply their ideas and visions of different life affairs. This results in serious social consequences causing chaos in society, feelings of hatred, and hostility spread among the population. (8)

Types of Violence

The World Health Organization divides violence into three broad categories:

- Self-directed violence that is divided into two subcategories, suicidal behavior, and self-abuse.
- Interpersonal violence that subdivided into Family and intimate partner - community-violence.
- Collective violence also subdivided into Social violence, Political Violence, and Economic violence. These three broad categories are each divided further to reflect more specific types of violence: 1-physical 2- Sexual 3- Psychological, and 4- Emotional. (9)

The Concept of Symbolic Violence

The concept of symbolic violence is one of Bourdieu's most brilliant intellectual discoveries.

It represents the cornerstone of his intellectual property. He is known for this concept, which introduced him and his frequent works. Bourdieu defines the concept of symbolic violence in his book (Practical Sense) as: “It is soft violence, hidden and invisible. It is unknown to its practitioners and victims at the same time. This violence is reflected in emotional, valuable, moral, and cultural practices. This violence involved symbolic instruments such as language, images, signs, semantics, and meanings.” It is often revealed in the shadow of a moral symbolic practice against its victims. (10)

Another definition of symbolic violence by Bourdieu in his book Male Dominance: “It's quiet and transparent violence that penetrates the threshold of sight, so the eye doesn't fall on it and is not even seen by its victims.” This violence is based on strengthening the partnership between the victim and the executioner in a pattern of perceptions, visions, sayings, meanings, concepts, and ideas. (11)

To provide a simple perception of symbolic violence and to identify its characteristics or implications, and features, it can be easily compared to physical violence in terms of their respective effects. Physical violence affects the victim physically in rights, interests or security, etc. However, in symbolic violence, the victim is psychologically harmed in a sense of self-security, quietness, dignity, respect, and sobriety. (12)

Classification and Aspects of Symbolic Violence by Bourdieu

Pierre Bourdieu classified the symbolic violence into four categories, and they are as under:

- 1- Understatement: It is a behavior characterized by superiority and discrimination, devalue others or those of less social status, and represents such behavior with contempt and arrogance.
- 2- Valuable denial: This factor is the denial of the capabilities and skills of individuals, to control them, limit their capabilities, and to suppress their energy and talents.
- 3- Psychological deprivation: It is to take over the rights of others, their social and professional advantages. Not to mention being deprived of the opportunity to express their thoughts and opinions.
- 4- Declared aggressive expression: This is represented by the use of symbols, verbal signs, and physical expressions indicating the aggressor's strength and imposing his domination on others. (13)

Violence Mechanisms from Bourdieu's perspective

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Bourdieu's violence mechanisms are reflected in the means by which this violence is practiced.

In a book jointly authored by Passeron and Bourdieu about the education system, Bourdieu considered the school systems and laws as a mechanism of this violence, which develops one class at the expense of another. Bourdieu has also criticized male dominance as a mechanism for such violence. He has spoken also about the power of language as one of the dangerous mechanisms for this kind of violence. On the other hand, his distinguished book on television, which considered as a means of controlling and practicing this violence. (2)

Through such books, he focused on these mechanisms that considered extremely dangerous to tear the gap between classes in society. To conclude, for obtaining balance in a society, these mechanisms must be criticized and got apt treatment to help the community gain its balance.

1- The education and the educational system: school as a mechanism for the practice of symbolic violence

A school is a form of oppression and cultural normalization, as cultural oppression takes the form of symbolic violence. Therefore, the psychological effects of this kind of violence are more severe and dangerous than other forms of violence. Bourdieu says; for decades, physical violence has become forbidden in various countries. That is why school institutions today are gradually starting practicing symbolic punishment such as contempt, marginalization, undervaluation, neglect, and irony. (14)

On that basis, he assured that symbolic violence is most prevalent in school assessment situations, especially examinations, where the smart and weak students are placed in a single conflict. Thus, the children of illiterate and poor people are in a malicious struggle with the children of intellectuals and rich. Accordingly, it is drilled to the poor children the idea that they are weak and quietly led to a massacre. (2) This is due to convince them in a hidden and symbolic manner that they are unable to survive. Consequently, this makes them a spectrum of culturally and socially neglected.

2- Word Power: Language as a Mechanism for Domination and Symbolic Violence

“Language is the pickaxe of educational activities and is an effective tool in shaping symbolic violence. Thus, influencing the formation of emerging minds in a class form, mythology, languages, arts, and science are symbolic tools for building knowledge. Therefore, symbolic



systems as tools of knowledge impose themselves as the authority to build and produce reality symbolically.” (2)

In this regard, Bourdieu believes that language -as a discourse- is a dangerous mechanism and is not less dangerous than other mechanisms for practicing symbolic violence in particular.

At the same point, he adds: "In fact, the use of language, I mean the content of the speech and at the same time how it is delivered depends on the social status of the speaker. As the latter, controls the extent to which he/she uses the language of the institution and the use of legitimate official speech (...), the spokesperson is misleading. (14)

Regarding this trend, Bourdieu declares that the official language depends on the social status, and its ability to control and keep the controlled people under the circle of subjugation.

It can be said that language is not just a discourse, but is an ideology that relies on the strength of the entrusted speaker with cultural and symbolic capital that increases its linguistic influence.

Unlike the people who have no status, their language, and rhetoric, even if based on the same linguistic structure, becomes discourse without effect. Only a marginalized speech that has no place in the community structure. Bourdieu and Passeron directly affirm and declare about the symbolic power of language and symbolic violence that the pedagogical act is primarily a symbolic linguistic act. Thus, any educational activity is objectively a kind of symbolic violence, as a force imposed by a particular social entity, and the language here is as a mechanism of automatic control of domination. (2)

3- Media and Communication: Television as a Mechanism of Symbolic Violence

Through a serious study entitled: Television and the mechanisms of manipulation of minds, Bourdieu raises his subject about television, concludes that this machine, if not subject to the orders of the bourgeoisie, is subject to the government, but it is a tool in both hands. Thus, television is a mechanism in the hands of the dominant and superior. It plays a very important role as it keeps the controlled people restricted in the same places. In this sense, Television is an instrument that works to widen social gap in society. That is how this mechanism offers a favor to the bourgeoisie. Simultaneously, it keeps practicing symbolic violence on poor people and lower classes. As a symbolic instrument of violence, Television destroys the values that are good for building a cohesive society and increases moral values that only concern to one class rather than the others. (20)

CONCLUSION

We have tried in this research paper to highlight the notion of symbolic violence by comparing it with abstract violence and its various types. Besides, presenting the four

characteristics and categories of the symbolic violence, and simplify the most three important mechanisms from Bourdieu's view that involving symbolic violence in societies, namely: 1) school and educational system, 2) language, and 3) media represented by television. Then how these tools to influence society through this pleasant, soft and imperceptible violence that does its work on people continuously without interruption, which considers as one of its most important characteristics in contrast to physical violence.

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