



Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi,
The Journal of Social Sciences Institute
Sayı/Issue: 39 – Sayfa / Page: 77-90
ISSN: 1302-6879 VAN/TURKEY

Makale Bilgisi / Article Info
Geliş/Received: 15.01.2018 Kabul/Accepted: 23.02.2018

TOM STOPPARD'IN OYUNLARINDA KOMÜNİZM ELEŞTİRİSİ

CRITIQUE OF COMMUNISM IN TOM STOPPARD'S PLAYS

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Öz

İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonrası savaşın bittiği sanılsa da pratikte farklı şekillerle devam ettiği görülmüştür. Bunun başlıca örneği, Amerika ve Rusya arasında, daha doğrusu kapitalizm ve komünizm arasında cereyan eden soğuk savaştır. İngiliz oyun yazarı Tom Stoppard bu önemli siyasi konuyu sahneye taşıyan yazarlardan biridir. *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* (1978) oyununda, Sovyetler Birliği'nin politik sistemine karşı olan bireyleri ve bunların sahte teşhislerle akıl hastanelerine kapatılmasını mizahi olarak anlatılır. *Squaring the Circle* (1984) oyunu ise konusunu bir Doğu Bloku ülkesi olan Polonya'da başlayan önemli bir işçi hareketi olan ve dayanışma anlamına gelen Solidarnosc'ten alır. Yazar, bu iki oyununda olduğu gibi oyunlarında çoğunlukla sansürlere, yasaklara, baskıya ve adaletsizliklere değinir.

Bu çalışma, yukarıda adları anılan oyunlarda, yazarın komünist yönetimlerin eleştirisi yanısıra İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonrası başlayan Soğuk Savaş'ın tarihsel arka planını; 20.yy'da tüm dünyayı etkisi altına alan komünizm düşüncesi ile Sovyetler Birliği ve komünist rejimle yönetilen öteki doğu bloku ülkelerinde uygulanan bazı politikaları incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tom Stoppard, Doğu Bloku, Soğuk Savaş, Sosyalizm, Komünizm.

Abstract

Following the World War II, even if the war seemed to come to an end, in practice it went on in different forms, notably the cold war between the USA and Russia, namely between capitalism and communism. English playwright Tom Stoppard is one of those writers who stage this crucial political issue. *Every Good Boy Deserves Favor* (1978) tells the story of those who are against the political system in the Soviet Union and falsely diagnosed with mental illnesses in a humorous way. *Squaring the Circle* (1984) takes its subject from Solidarnosc, an important worker movement that began in Poland, an Eastern Bloc country. The author generally refers to censorship, prohibitions, oppression and injustice in his plays, as in these two plays.

This study is aimed at examining, in the above-mentioned plays, the historical background of the Cold War Era which began after the Second World War; the idea of communism which affects the whole world in the 20th century and some policies applied in the Soviet Union as well as the writer's critique of the communist regimes.

Keywords: Tom Stoppard, Eastern Bloc Countries, Cold War, Socialism, Communism.

Introduction

Throughout history, races, tribes, nations or civilizations have always competed with each other to have the power. The result of these conflicts are either disaster for one side or victory for the other. This struggle from the primitive era to the present day has manifested itself in different forms over time. Due to ideological, religious, political, or some other reasons, humanity has seen many different outcomes in these struggles. The Second World War, one of the worst of these, and one of the most important events that shaped the politics and balance of power of the world in modern era, following events that progressed after it, revealed the polarization on earth which would continue till 1990s.

With this article, some of the historical events that followed the Second World War and the war that led to the polarization that mankind has experienced in modern times; some important ideologies and concepts such as perestroika; some of the notorious government policies carried out the Soviet Union; Tom Stoppard's literary personality and political ideas; and finally repressive and totalitarian ruling methods in Poland and the Soviet Union together with the exploitation and abuse of some concepts such as religion, nationalism, justice and propaganda will be examined in the plays *Squaring the Circle* and *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*.

1. Cold War Era

A new sense of world order that emerged with the end of the Second World War pit the two super powers of the world, United States and the Soviet Union against each other. Germany and many European states, devastated after the fall of Hitler, needed financial assistance from powerful countries to reconstruct their countries. For this reason, both the United States and the Soviet Union tried to implement their own style of ruling or ideology by supporting these damaged countries. In a project called the Truman Doctrine by US President Harry Truman in 1947, the reconstruction of countries that had undergone major disintegration after the war was considered. The project also aimed at providing financial and military assistance to the countries that were under the threat of communism. The aid plans for Greece and Turkey were considered first. However, the Soviets' military and financial aid in return for the propaganda of communism made the American government take a more comprehensive step to launch the Marshall Plan. This plan was implemented based on financial and military assistance to 16 European countries. Similarly, the Soviet government implemented Molotov Plan, a proposal of Soviet foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov in 1947, which was projected to support Eastern European countries, whereby the west and east of Europe turned into a common ground of propaganda of the two super powers.

After the Second World War, Germany was occupied by the triumphant countries such as the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and France. This, which would result in the separation of Germany by a wall in 1961, was not only the separation of Germany, but symbolically of a divided world. In 1961, the East German government, officially known as the German Democratic Republic, and the Soviet Union built it to prevent the western ideas from entering communist east part and to prevent the transition of any kind from the eastern bloc to the western. This wall was a symbol of reflecting the violence of the ideological detachment in the world. Similarly, NATO (1949), established as a military union among western European countries, and the Warsaw Pact (1955), established as a counterattack by Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, were distinct polarization examples. Also during this period the first military encounter of the Cold War appeared in Korean peninsula.

The "peaceful coexistence theory" put forward by the Soviet Union, during the ruling of Nikita Krushchev, the head of state after Joseph Stalin's death, can be considered as the first alleviation attempt in the Cold War era. This step caused an ideological separation inside

the socialist bloc. This attitude, contrary to the basic principles of Marxism, led to the split of the Soviets & Chinese.

In the Eastern European countries, which were thought to be the satellite or puppet states of the Soviet Union, some civil commotions began to weaken the Soviet Union during the Cold War. For example, the reform demands of people in Czechoslovakia called Prague Spring (1968) were quelled bloodily by Moscow. Another civil commotion that was launched by shipyard workers in Gdansk, Poland in the 1980s under *Solidarność*, which means unity, was one of the biggest blows to the Soviets. This movement, under the leadership of a shipyard worker named Lech Walesa, reached millions with the support of the western world and the Catholic Church. Both Polish and the Soviet government were rendered desperate and the victory of the workers against a government ruled by socialism was the first ideological loss in the Warsaw Pact. Poland encouraged and inspired many other states inside the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe after its transition to a democratic system which accelerated the collapse of the Soviets in the 1980s.

Despite long struggles in the 1970s, the Soviet Union's fiasco in Afghanistan, demolition of the Berlin Wall in 1989, economic crises in the Soviet Union and eastern bloc and people's desire for reform, falling behind the U.S.A. in space race and technological developments, putting some reform policies such as Perestroika and Glasnost into practice by the last president of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev to save the country and the failure of these policies made the Soviet Union collapse at the beginning of the 1990s. "Perestroika" is the term used to describe the process of change. It may be translated as restructuring, or radical reform, or even revolutionary transition. Perestroika is significant because it is a comprehensive and theoretically based policy of change... (Lane, 1992: 11). The radical changes made by Gorbachev in a socialist state could not prevent the country from dissolution. Gorbachev and his government faced with the former failures or mistakes made by the former first presidents of the Soviet Union which caused the collapse of the country. People living in the Soviet Union started to be aware of the catastrophes and abuses by the communist party members along with increasing financial and political crisis. It was a real radical transition from a totalitarian state to a changing one through new reforms and radical policies: "The means to achieve such acceleration mark a radical break from previous thinking and practice" (Lane, 1992: 11).

2. Critique of Communism in Tom Stoppard's Plays *Squaring the Circle*

Written by Tom Stoppard in 1984, *Squaring the Circle* stages the rise and fall of a civil commotion, Solidarność, in Poland in the 1980s. Lech Wałęsa, who is the leader of this movement, appears in the play along with the other important figures in Poland and the Soviet Union such as the Polish presidents Edward Gierek, Stanislaw Kania, Wojciech Jaruzelski and the Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev. The ministers in the Polish government and volunteers of Solidarność movement are other characters in the play.

Solidarność emerged in Poland in the late 1970s. It means unity which refers to the disobedience of the workers against the oppressive communist regime in Poland. The play has four parts in parallel with the historical development of the resistance.

In the first part, with the title of The First Secretary, the play begins with the conversation between the Soviet and Polish presidents, Brezhnev and Gierek, in the summer of 1980. In this part, the Polish president learns about the revolt in a shipyard in Gdansk, North of Poland. There are not any speeches of Walesa in this part. However, in the second part, named Solidarity, the movement becomes famous all around the country. In the third part, Congress, Solidarnosc gains power over the oppressive communist party of Poland and the Soviets. Besides, Solidarnosc holds its first congress in this part where Walesa is chosen as the first president of the movement. In the last part of the play, named General, the fall of Solidarnosc through the military law (1981), which is commanded by the president and general Jaruzelski, is put on the stage.

In the play, there are different point of views for criticising the Soviet ruling and its impact on Poland as an eastern European country. Whatever the party orders is a necessity for all people in a communist country. If the regime survives in a communist state, so does the party, for the communist party has the leading and totalitarian role over society.

To carry out the internal requirements of rapid industrialization by means of a Stalinist dictatorship requires rigid discipline and compliance. For what is involved is the politics of squeezing people by increasing their productivity while their expectations of change depressed. Again, this is the opposite of the early priority of economic motivation. In Stalinist theory, to increase productivity and also to keep people their levels of consumption as they are forced production. (Wheeler, 1957: 639)

In the play, a usual civil disobedience is seen as a reason of declaring the state of emergency. Because all different ideas against the communist state is seen as a danger for the regime's continuity, the precautions are very dissuasive too. A very similar oppressive method is applied by the army and the government:

SZYDLAK: Send in the police, the state security...

KANIA: There's no public disorder

SZYDLAK: A strike is a public disorder. In fact it's illegal. If the police can't handle it send in the army.

JARUZELWSKI: To do what? I said in 1970 that I wouldn't order Polish soldiers to shoot Polish workers.

SZYDLAK: But they did shoot. The army and the police. And the strikers went back to work. (33)

Walesa also emphasizes in the play that the party is the sole power and a force beyond individual freedom of thought of the Polish society: "...But we can't move faster than the Party lets us. You understand. The Party must have the leading role. That is Communism" (71). General and the first secretary of the communist party, Jaruzelski, gives a speech in the parliament where he emphasizes the necessity of applying the military means to solve the problems in the country as a sign of dominance of oppressive methods of the regime.

JARUZELSKI: In the Central Committee, even in the Politburo, there are voices asking us to set our democratic system aside until peace is restored. What I will ask of this assembly is to prepare for itself for a situation where I will have to come to you and ask for emergency laws. There are 12,000 on strike in the textile mills. If the independent union cannot control its anarchists, we will have to find some other way... (85) Such problems as unfair distribution of income and the class distinction in the country are also the issues criticized by the playwright. Gierek, the president of the state, brings caviar as a gift to the Prime Minister, Babiuch while ordinary people live under hard conditions (30). Although these rulers have more than they need, they try to justify getting valuable items in exchange for their services for the party. The debate on the numbers of goods between Szczepanski, who is responsible for the media, and Gierek, shows the injustice in Poland too:

GIEREK: How many cars do you have, Maciej?

SZCZEPANSKI: Cars, I don't know Who's counting?

GIEREK: Kania.

SZCZEPANSKI: Kania? And what does he make it?

GIEREK: Eighteen.

SZCZEPANSKI: Eighteen? Well, Comrade, you know...as Chairman of the State Committee for Radio and TV one has to get about.

GIEREK: How many houses? An aeroplane. A yacht. A health club staffed by young women with unusual qualifications. Yes, Comrade Kania has a file on you.

SZCZEPANSKI: That's his job.

GIEREK: Yes. He undoubtedly has a file on me too. How much was that little object you presented me with on my sixty-fifth birthday?

SZCZEPANSKI: Well, it was gold. All right-who built your country house? Twenty-three million zlotys. We serve the Party. The Party reward us... (39)

In a dialogue between the Polish President Kania and Soviet President Brezhnev, what Kania says is a kind of self-criticism of the party. This dialogue emphasizes the shift from a Marxist-Leninist thought to the dictatorship, where personal interests matter, is expressed by the playwright:

...BREZHNEV: (Shouts) Respect! (Jabs a finger at KANIA.) Do you know how you got into this mess?

KANIA: Comrade First Secretary, we must have strayed from the Leninist path...

BREZHNEV: You got into this mess by getting into debt to capitalist bankers! (76)

The dictatorship of communist party in socialist states has generally been a matter of criticism by the anti-Soviet thinkers. Lenin thought that revolution by the proletariat must be handled by an organized communist party which caused the totalitarian orders by the administrators and rulers in the future of socialism:

Throughout the civil war the Communist Party gained in influence until it became a state within the state. War encouraged quick, clear, effective decisions on major issues, rather than long deliberations and consultations. A habit of command developed among party leaders. Victory in war, some Communists argued convincingly, required coordination and the swift implementation of central state directives, but the soviets were by their nature local organs. The party was better suited to play the role of overall coordination and direction. At the end of 1918, a new party organ was created -- the Political Bureau, or Politburo. (Suny, 1998: 127)

Throughout the history of Marxism, there have been some changes according to the different point of views of presidents or governments in different socialist states. Some socialist states were also criticized for leaving the Marxist way of thinking by the other socialist states like the Soviet and China split:

Marx's claim was an exaggeration when he made it in the middle of the nineteenth century. By the middle of the twentieth century it had become almost an understatement. That is not to say that the 'Communism' which held sway in so many countries bore much resemblance to anything Marx had envisaged. There was a wide gulf between the original theory and the subsequent practice of Communist rule. (Brown, 2009: 9)

The abuse of religion has always been a kind of solution methods by some governments throughout the history. In Poland, where the Catholic Church and Christianity in general have an important position, the state has suppressed religion after the establishment of communist regime in 1945. However, when the government is faced with the dilemma, they seek a way to solve it through the clergy. Because Gierek thinks that the clergy can influence people, he keeps in touch with the cardinal in the play:

GIEREK: Father, there will be blood. They won't listen. They will lose everything. You must talk to them before it's too late.

WYSZYNSKI: The Politburo?

GIEREK: The workers! The strikers! They demand things which cannot be given.

WYSZYNSKI: They demand nothing which is not their right. It is you who must listen. Or there will be blood. You will lose everything. (46)

Propagandas, lies and exaggerations are some of the political methods used in repressive regimes. In the play, during one of Jaruzelski's visits to tradesmen, placing goods on the shelves temporarily is a kind of deceit by the rulers:

NARRATOR: (*Voice over*)...sometimes to shops.

(*There is busy activity in the shop. Groceries of all kinds are being hastily unpacked from boxes and placed on empty shelves. When the shelves look fairly full, the PRIME MINISTER and his ENTOURAGE are seen to enter the shop. There is much handshaking and smiling as the GENERAL passes through.*)

JARUZELSKI: And how is the food distribution?

PARTY OFFICIAL: It is working very well, Comrade.

JARUZELSKI: Good, good.

(*He passes rapidly through. As soon as he has gone all the groceries are quickly removed and repacked.*) (69)

The Warsaw Pact member states were a sort of satellite states of the Soviet Union. For this reason, Soviet military interventions were very common in all possible confusions in eastern European countries. In the play, Soviet president Brezhnev exemplifies this pressure to say

that problems with the Soviet tanks will take the stage where the problems can not be solved:

GERMAN MINISTER: ...These publications, openly printed and distributed by Solidarity, are an attack on socialism, an attack on everyone here, and I tell you this, Comrades, if the day comes when we in the German Democratic Republic allow the publication of filth like this, then you are free to assume that we objectively agree with it.

BREZHNEV: You know, we had our very own Soviet free trade union. I forget his name. He is in a lunatic asylum now, poor fellow... You see, a Communist party which cannot defend itself is no damn use, that is the problem. If it cannot defend itself, it must be defended. (66)

Another dialogue that exemplifies Soviet pressure and domination is the apology of President Jaruzelski to the Soviet Marshall at the end of the play. The playwright emphasizes this hierarchy with two characters, the one who forgives like a father and the other who abases himself:

JARUZELSKI: Forgive me, Marshal, we prefer to think of it as a regrettable outcome.

KULIKOV: We all forgive you, Wojciech. (94)

Every Good Boy Deserves Favour

Every Good Boy Deserves Favour (1977) focuses on the abuse of psychiatric science applied for political criminals, namely anti-Soviet dissidents. This method aims at intimidating dissidents from society by diagnosing them as mentally ill:

The investigation by the U.S. delegation provided unequivocal proof that the tools of coercive psychiatry had been used, even in the late 1980s, to hospitalize persons who were not mentally ill and whose only transgression had been the expression of political or religious dissent. Most of the patients interviewed by the delegation had been charged with political crimes such as “anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda” or “defaming the Soviet state.” Their offenses involved behavior such as writing and distributing anti-Soviet literature, political organizing, defending the rights of disabled groups, and furthering religious ideas. (Bonnie, 2002:137)

In the play, there are two characters with the same name Alexander Ivanov in an asylum in the Soviet Union. In the play they are named Ivanov who is a real insane and Alexander who is sane but questions the communist system and regime’s failures in the play. Thus, because of his political views, he is confined to a cell. Ivanov thinks himself as an orchestra conductor in the cell. “... By the time *Every Good Boy* was performed, the play had been transposed to a Soviet

psychiatric hospital where a prisoner of political conscience is confined alongside a patient whose psychiatric symptoms consist of believing he has a symphony orchestra...” (Delaney, 2001: 32).

While the doctor wants to persuade Ivanov that he is not an orchestra conductor, he wants to control Alexander’s ideas which are against the formal socialist Soviet thinking. He tries to hear Alexander’s confession that he is a real lunatic through insistent therapies. The doctor is informed by a Soviet colonel and he is supposed to bring Alexander in line with the party’s ideas.

Alexander’s son Sacha and his teacher are two other characters in the play. The teacher talks to Sacha like a sergeant and she tries to put pressure on Sacha. Sacha is also expected to accept that his father is a lunatic. Alexander maintains hunger strikes and this annoys hospital management because the death of a person with hunger strike in an asylum may create a negative effect of the Soviet Unions and a chance of propaganda in the west. Therefore the doctor finds a clever solution by mixing Ivanovs and at the end of the play, the colonel meets two Ivanovs and asks questions to them mistaking their identities. In this way Ivanov denies that he is a dissident and Alexander denies that he has an orchestra, so sets them free in order to save the communist party from a potential scandal. The play emphasizes the victorious end for a courageous character against a totalitarian regime.

Alexander was put inside an asylum by the Soviet government intentionally. He is a dissident and knows the reason for his imprisonment. He is sent to different asylums to get far away from Soviet society for his thoughts against the Soviets. He says he is defamed:

IVANOV: What the hell are you doing here?

ALEXANDER: I was put here.

IVANOV: What for?

ALEXANDER: For slander. (104)

Although Sacha is a small child, he is dictated with socialist propaganda and orders by the teacher as an example of coercive persuasion of an individual in a totalitarian state at a very young age. In the play, as it is already mentioned, Sacha is threatened with lunatic’s end in the Soviet Union:

SACHA: I don’t want to be in the orchestra.

TEACHER: Open the book. Pencil and paper. You see what happens to anti-social malcontents.

SACHA: Will I be sent to the lunatics’ prison? (105)

It is implied that in an oppressive regime, false accusations are used to eliminate potential dissidents who are seen as threats. In this part of the play, Alexander is charged with groundless allegations and these claims are imposed upon Sacha to show that his madness is proved by his own son. Also Sacha does not accept the allegations for his father, and declares his honesty:

TEACHER: So this is how I am repaid. Is this how it began with your father?

First he smashes school property. Later he keeps bad company. Finally, slanderous letters. Lies. To his superiors. To the Party. To the newspapers....To foreigners....

SACHA: Papa doesn't lie. He beat me when I did it.

TEACHER: Lies! Bombarding Pravda with lies! What did he expect?
(110)

The aim of these asylums is to intimidate the dissidents in the Soviet thought. In this part of the play, the playwright emphasizes the bad conditions of the asylums in the Soviet Union through the comments and statements by Alexander:

...but the regime is stricter, and the male nurses are convicted criminals serving terms for theft and violent crimes, and they beat and humiliate the patients and steal their food, and are protected by the doctors, some of whom wear KGB uniforms under their white coats. For the politicals, punishment and medical treatment are intimately related. (115)

During the Cold War, the clash between the superpowers forced them to show their own countries as the ideal places in terms of justice, technology and economy. The slightest failure in their images could result in catastrophic results. Therefore, propagandas were quite important. In the play, the Soviet asylum is not an appropriate place for the death of Alexander. Due to the potential expansion of the death news of dissidents in asylums in the western world, the Soviet administrators are ordered to make them live. In the conversation between Teacher and Sacha, Teacher emphasizes his mandatory job to keep Alexander alive:

TEACHER: Sacha. Did you persuade him?

SACHA: He's going to die.

DOCTOR: I'm not allowed to let him die.

SACHA: Then let him go.

DOCTOR: I'm not allowed to let him go till he admits he's cured.

SACHA: Then he'll die. (122)

Conclusion

Since the beginning of history, the struggle and survival of mankind in nature has left its place in political, religious and economic struggles in a growing and developing world as time passes. From the most primitive society to the most modern one, survival and fight for superiority were some of the most basic targets by the humanity. However, some events and their outcomes had critical effects and inevitable results for the radical changes in society in the history of man. There have always been critical events that have shaped the world but some of them caused global disasters.

Many people have heard and used the term “Cold War” in their lives, but it was first used after the Second World War which was one of the most influential periods of the twentieth century. During the war, the fight was against the Nazi ideology in the world. However, after defeating Germans and ending the war, the super powers of the world, the U.S.A and the Soviet Union started a battle between ideologies. The great unarmed propaganda battle between the United States of America and the Soviet Union has always been known as the most critical ones in history that could have resulted in a Third World War.

The clash for getting the sole superiority in the world resulted in close calls which was sometimes criticised not only by politicians, but also intellectuals and writers in terms of the policies that were followed by the super powers. Especially communism and the Soviet Union were under fire by the western world.

British playwright Tom Stoppard also criticised the communist ruling and oppressive methods applied by eastern European countries and the Soviet Union both in some of his works especially after 1970s. In his play, *Squaring the Circle*, he argues the civil commotion by the shipyard workers in Poland, Solidarnosc, through the historical development of the movement from the beginning to the end. He also criticises the confinement of dissidents into asylums with fake diagnoses in the Soviet Union in *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*. Although Stoppard declares his adverse thoughts against communism and the eastern world, he insists that his aim on writing such plays was for the critique of totalitarian regimes all over the world.

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