

Power Relations in Dennis Kelly's DNA

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ABSTRACT:

Power is a prerequisite for relationships. These connections may be made between individuals or groups. One will get the upper hand in the power relation, dictating the other's behavior. For instance, in a parent-child relationship, the parent will typically control the child's behavior. The objective of this study is to investigate the impact of the social and religious background on peoples' behaviors. Foucault's concept of power relations is the method that will be applied on Dennis Kelly's play DNA to show the impact of the group on individual, and the strong over the weak. This play raises questions about the behavior of individuals whether their violent act is an outcome of the power relations, or it is in their biology to act in such a violent way. By explaining the role of Foucault's power relations (groups, parents, and society), the study concludes that the environment surrounding individuals definitely affects their behaviors. The absence of laws and parents' role in the play side by side with the power of the group give the opportunity to the characters to engage in criminal acts and create innocent criminals.

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Introduction:

In 2000s, Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) had become a key tool for police in preventing and solving crimes. This allows the police to identify the suspect by using DNA discovered at the crime scene. This is an example of using science to compile proof which can be utilized in court. Even if someone is declared innocent, keeping DNA records became allowed in 2001 (Inchley, 2016).

Besides, Kelly wrote *DNA* during a time when the world was experiencing violent killings of people, invasions, colonizations, conflicts, revolutions, and persecutions. On September 11, terrorist aircraft struck US soil, leaving over 3000 people dead. Kurdish buildings in Erbil, Iraq, were assaulted in February 2004; 117 people died as a result. 52 passengers lost their lives when the London transit system was assaulted on July 7, 2005 (7/7). Additionally, Adam's treatment may allude to nations' dubious, possibly illegal, responses to these attacks,

which have been referred to as the (War on Terror). *DNA* contains further references to the War against Terror. For instance, Adam is brought up a hill, echoing the transport of prisoners to secret locations like Guantanamo from Afghanistan and Iraq. Also, Adam's abuse and torture bring to mind the infamous photographs that US soldiers shot in 2004 of degraded Iraqi captives at Abu Ghraib prison. The black masks that Guantanamo inmates were made to wear come to mind when Phil puts a plastic bag on Brian's head (Finburgh, 2017). The play is first introduced at the National Theatre in 2007. It consists of four acts and takes place in three different settings: a street, a field and a wood. It is about a group of teenagers or gang who started bullying a little boy called Adam. He is subjected to punches, cigarette burns and finally thrown stones at him, he falls down the hill. To find a solution to this problem, the group ask the help of Leah and Phil. Phil is a smart man who puts a plan to hide what they have done by giving a role to each one to play. He asks Cathy, Danny, and Mark to go to Adam's house and take something from his clothes as DNA evidence. Richard should take Brian to the police to tell them about a fat man with bad teeth who showed him his willy in the woods. Mark and Cathy should cover DNA from a random man by making him touch the jumper that carry the DNA of Adam. Then John Tate goes to the police and informs them that he saw Adam with a fat man in the woods. Everything goes according to the plan, until the police in the second act catch a man who supposed to have kidnapped Adam. The group try to understand how a man who doesn't exist could be arrested. Cathy admits that she recovered DNA from a man corresponding to the description given by Phil. Phil threatens Brian to throw him from the hill if he does not go to the police and identify the man. The situation ended up by accusing an innocent person who will spend his life in the prison. A few days later the group discovered that Adam was still alive in the wood and he refuses to go home. Phil shows Cathy how she should make sure that Brian, who has gone mad, suffocates Adam with a plastic bag. Leah tries to stop them from killing Adam for the second time, but Phil says that if anyone finds Adam alive, the truth will be revealed. Leah leaves the town without giving any information about her destination. So, Phil finds himself alone immersed in his silence.

Discussion:

According to Foucault, power relations have a double role, productive and repressive at the same time. He argues that human rights and power relations "can both have empowering and oppressive effects" (Solheim, 2018, p. 20). Accordingly, the teenagers maintain the interest of the group. These power relations are also oppressive because they sacrificed Adam for the benefit of the majority. Also, the absence of relationships, such as parents, gave teenagers the opportunity to make their own law. These youngsters become closer to one another and occasionally self-regulate by using violence and bullying. To them, this course of action makes more sense than accepting the limitations set by adult society. In his lectures "Society Must be Defended", Foucault differentiates between old discourse and new discourse. He claims that:

The new discourse ... is a revolutionary discourse – a discourse that can justify a revolution. The old discourse sustained the monarchy and justified the rule of a king.... The new discourse inverted the old discourse, and told the violence and submission experienced by the losers. This is the reality of any revolutionary discourse that depicts the current government as abusive and unjust (cited in: Solheim, 2018, p. 21).

The group has the option to establish its own rules, and they work hard to establish their own values within the community. Despite the fact that people appear to live like free individuals, there are rules and norms that restrict their behaviors. The group has the option to establish its

own rules, and they work hard to establish their own values within the community. It would appear that young people behave against common sense in Western civilization, the popular opinion, and our opinion are shaped by the society in which we live (Inchley, 2016). They commit mistakes and get more and more entangled in the gears of a system they have built for themselves, a system in which they are imprisoned, guilty and innocent, and compelled to hold their elbows. They will go to whatever lengths to conceal their crime since it is socially unacceptable, even if it means going farther and further into the unacceptable. The perpetrators of Adam's murder might be named, clearing those who did not actively engage or were not present when the crime was committed of any suspicion. Rather, they attempt to subvert the legal system and commit error after error in the name of the group's solidarity. This is due to the fact that they view adult society as a restriction rather than as a structure designed to safeguard the community. As they are not connected in any way to the murder, Phil and Leah were unable to get involved in this story. Despite the fact that they first fear the group, they feel more connected to it than they do to the adult world and join the team without hesitation. Before knowing what the problem is, Leah said to John Tate "if we have done a thing, which we haven't, but if we have then we did it together" (DNA, 2008, p.12). It makes more sense for them to assist youngsters who are similar to themselves, than to expose them to the adult world in the name of a questionable Manichaeism. As they are guilty, they do not even examine the legitimacy of Adam's murder. Because they were asked for help, Phil and Leah assisted their fellow group. When Leah brings up the subject, the need to ensure the survival of the groups will be used to justify Adam's second murder. Although Kelly's victims are silent but there are always characters trying to resist power. Brian who refuses to go and identify the suspect man can be considered as an example of the character who resists the cruelty of his group. From his first appearance in the first act, Brian was crying most of the time. When John Tate asks Richard, Danny, and Cathy about which side they have chosen, they all choose John Tate's side, but when it is Brian's turn to choose a side, he says "we should tell someone" (DNA, 2008, p.12). This is a clear answer that he does not want to be involved in their crime. Also, he hides himself from the group and refuses to go and identify the suspect man. As explained by Foucault in "*The Subject and Power*", resistance can "bring to light power relations, locate their position, and find out their point of application and the methods used" (Cited in: Solhiem, 2018, p. 20). This resistance helps to discover the position of each character within the group. Despite his resistance to the group's cruelty but he was unable to surpass Phil's authority. Also, Phil's threat to take Brian up the grill and make him face the same fate as Adam, pushes Brian to be as a follower of Phil. As much as he resists as much as Phil presses on him. The difficulty of choosing between his desire and the group's desire led Brian to lose his sanity. The gang members take advantage of Brian's weakness, just as how the chimpanzees bit off the injured chimp's hand (DNA, 2008).

Moreover, the teenagers appear to be isolated and do not have a sense of belonging to society, therefore the gang gives them a sense of identity. This enables John Tate to maintain his leadership as when he says that everyone wants to be like them and everyone in the school is scared of them. One can see the uncomfortable relation between the members of the gang in the sense that their relationships are built on fear from the leader of the group (Inchley, 2016). This situation brings to the mind of the reader William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* in 1954, which was one of Kelly's most influential books. Following a plane crash during World War II, a group of secondary school students are abandoned on an isolated island. Ralph is chosen as a leader but a conflict with Jack and his group soon develops. The boys' attempts to self-regulate go horribly wrong as bullying turns into torture and murder (Finburgh, 2017).

Similarly, the absence of parents and police leaves the teenagers in charge with tragic results. In the woods, they are isolated from the outside world, from society and parents. Laws of the strongest will apply, because laws of society are absent. People should be protected by society because without it the rules of the powerful prevail. Kelly examines this hierarchy of authority inside the gang, that any member having varying degrees of power based on their place within the group. Stronger members of the group can influence others through peer pressure, which encourages more impressionable youngsters to engage in risky or reckless behavior. Adam is the best illustration of the negative impacts of social pressure because he steals vodka, allows the group to burn and pound him, and runs across the highway in an effort to be accepted. Adam was a victim of the irrational, animal-like acts that characterized his group (Inchley, 2016).

Furthermore, one of Leah's monologues has the potential to condense the entire drama into few lines. Dennis Kelly does not intend to convey a message with this quote; instead, he once more poses existential queries regarding how people perceive themselves. Tom Saunders, head of youth theatre Birmingham Rep, argues that:

The young people in the play are a microcosm of a wider society and by calling it *DNA*, Dennis Kelly poses a question about whether or not these behaviours are societal and learned, or whether these behaviours are just in us all.' (Inchley, 2016, P. 1).

At the end of the first act, Leah's reveals to Phil that, in contrast to what we have usually believed, chimpanzees are not our closest relatives. This comes right after Phil has given his advice to the group's members on the situation of Adam's murder. As if Leah tries to connect the behavior of Phil to that of chimps. According to a program she watched, bonobos are genetically even more similar to humans. Leah goes on to say that as a result of this mistaken assumption, people prefer to act in violently dominating ways toward their peers, mimicking chimpanzee social behavior and enhancing it with the notion of the group that submits to the dominant male. Chimpanzee social rules, which dictate those of humans as a result, may go as far as torturing or killing someone who is stigmatized for any reason in order to maintain complete dominance. As Leah explains: For years we've thought that chimps were our closest living relative, but now they're saying it's the bonobos. Bonobos are the complete opposite of chimps. When a stranger bonobo approaches the pack, the other bonobos all come out and go 'Hello, mate. What you doing round here? Come and meet the family, we can eat some ants.' And if a bonobo damages its hand, whereas the chimps'll probably cast it out or bite its hand off, the bonobos will come over and look after it, and they'll all look sad because there's a bonobo feeling pain. I saw it on a programme. Such sadness in those intelligent eyes. Empathy. That's what bonobos have. Amazing really, I mean they're exactly like chimps, but the tiniest change in their DNA... The woman was saying that if we'd discovered bonobos before chimps our understanding of ourselves would be very different "(*DNA*, 2008, P.16)

Through the above speech, Leah struggles to inspire even a glimmer of empathy in Phil by connecting human behaviors to that of bonobos. He does not say anything and, as usual, seems uninterested in the subject of Leah. She tries to understand the group's aggressive treatment of Adam. Just like the play's title which raises questions about the behavior of individuals whether their violent act is an outcome of the power relations, or it is in their biology to act in such a violent way (Inchley, 2016). However, what does not stop her from becoming involved in the case to try to solve it and keep the deception hidden, is her love for Phil and also because of her empathy. She loses her calm when she sees Phil's lack of interest and tries to provoke him

with all the ways to get a reaction from him "You're unreal. I sometimes think you're not human." (*DNA*, 2008, P.16). Since Phil does not have the empathy, so he is just like the chimps.

However, throughout her explanation about genetic neighborhoods and social behaviors, Leah never stopped thinking about the situation that they are living in "We're in trouble now. We're in trouble now, Phil. Don't now how this'll pan out. Trouble now." (*DNA*, 2008, P.17). Her speech echoes the violent situation of the group, at the level of her involvement in the death of one of their own. It resonates with the tensions caused by games of domination: Phil takes power at the expense of John Tate, a priori the dominant individual because the most violent if we follow the behavioral logic of chimpanzees. But Phil reveals himself ultimately to be more dangerous than John Tate, not by his immediate violence, but by his intelligence and his Machiavellianism which lead to a form of violence. It is honest to note that Phil's plan involves creating the impression that Adam was abducted by a pervert who would then abuse him before killing him, even if this is not explicitly stated. In this instance, sex is still viewed negatively while also serving as a cover for Adam's death by his companions.

Her monologue, at the end of act one in front of Phil, tackles fundamental issues including happiness, death, and human behavior. She repeatedly tries to break Phil's perpetual silence by attempting suicide, by sexual references, by explaining the behavior of Bonobos and by threat to leave him. Leah characterizes the social interactions of bonobos as orgiastic and cruel, and if we follow her line of thought even further, as something that is ultimately situated far from the humans that these youngsters are since they do not rely on it to govern their social communication.

After putting an innocent man in prison, Leah asks Phil, "Do you think it's possible to change things? . . . D'you think we're doomed to behave like people before us did?... If you change one thing you can change the world. Do you believe that?" (*DNA*, 2008, P.25-26) He replied "No" (*DNA*, 2008, P.26). He used deceit and cruelty to achieve his goals. While some people consider this behavior to be evil, others view it as plausible. When confronted with these issues, Phil adopts Machiavelli's ideas. Despite what may appear to be reasonable conditions, Phil's plans always result in worse circumstances. His apparently splendid solutions complicate the problem and lead to new troubles (Trenson, 2010). Brian, who was scared of identifying the accused man to the police, found himself forced to follow Phil's orders because he threatens to kill him "if you don't help us we'll kill you" (*DNA*, 2008, P.24). Foucault was concerned "to examine how power relations of inequality and oppression are created and maintained in more subtle and diffuse ways through ostensibly humane and freely adopted social practices" (Cited in: Sharma, 2015, p. 4). This clearly demonstrates that the discourse of a strong person like Phil, can not be challenged. Since Phil's discourse is crucial and dominating, Brian is forced to comply with his commands and thus becomes a helpless victim of this dominance.

However, Kelly's play makes the argument that violence is a natural trait of everyone, in which these teenagers are capable of murder (Finburgh, 2017). Even Leah murders her animal. She declares that this was her happiest moment when she killed her mouse and hide it in her Tupperware container "Jerry. I killed him. I took him out of his cage, I put the point of a screwdriver on his head and I hit it with a hummer. Why do you think I did that?" (*DNA*, 2008, p.19). Although she criticized Cathy for her increasing violence, but she herself admits that she enjoyed killing her animal.

In the third act Adam is still alive. This unexpected finding is what complicates this act. Because their cover-up plan will be revealed and Adam's continued existence will be known, if any one knows about Adam's existing.

LEAH: Brian's on medication. Did you know that? Phil? Did you know that they've put Brian on medication? No answer. Yep, Brian's off his head, John Tate hasn't been seen in weeks, and the postman's facing the rest of his life in prison, but, you know, omelettes and eggs, as long as you've your waffle, who cares. (*DNA*, 2008, P.29)

Leah means that to prepare omelettes, one should break some eggs. She refers to a more offensive interpretation of the phrase "the ends justify the means" in Kelly's play *Osama the hero*, which means that to achieve one's goals, one must make a sacrifice. The play witnesses much sacrifices than expected especially in this act, as Brian is taking medication, an innocent victim will spend the rest of his life in prison, and Cathy has increased her violence. To avoid getting into any more difficulty, they have all experienced psychological suffering. They make an effort to select the most straightforward solution, one which causes the least harm to themselves, for every problem, even if it means hurting others (Trenson, 2010).

Phil prioritizes the needs of the group over the needs of the individual. The easiest course of action is to murder the youngster because all his prior plans were predicated on the notion that Adam was dead. Adam now poses a threat to them "if he comes back our lives are ruined. He can't come back," (*DNA*, 2008, P.35) therefore Phil decided to kill him. Since Adam is dead in the mind of the people so killing him will not be a case as Phil explains "He's dead. everyone thinks he's dead. What difference will it make (*DNA*, 2008, P.36). He takes advantage of Brian's naivety and Cathy's violent lust to allow Brian to suffocate Adam. This is the biggest of the first three acts, which each had a problem and a Machiavellian solution. The sacrifices committed up to this point have yielded more fruit than the outcomes (Trenson, 2010). Phil sacrificed Adam to save his group "I'm in charge. Everyone is happier. What's more important: one person or everyone?... PHIL: If he comes back our lives are ruined. He can't come back, Cathy" (*DNA*, 2008, P. 35). Cracking some eggs actually produces a waffle. It represents Phil's aims. Smashing the eggs is the same as making the postman bear responsibility towards something he has not done, and in act three Adam truly dies. While making his waffle, Phil is unable to eat it. Obviously, this indicates that the perfect condition he is attempting to create is not achieved (Trenson, 2010).

Conclusion:

The play demonstrates the possibility of the power to change from one hand to another. With the absence of the laws and parents, the teenagers create their own rules which based on power domination. After torturing Adam, they find themselves obliged to obey the powerful gang leader. John Tate lost his position to Phil, since he was unable to solve the problem. Phil in his turn puts up a plan to hide their crime, but it ends up in wrong way.

Overall, abusing an individual for the safety of the majority is the justification behind the second murder of Adam. Since Adam is dead in the mind of the society, therefore killing him will not make a difference. To achieve their desires, the teenagers should give a sacrifice, but they do not expect that this sacrifice will lead to a series of other sacrifices: accusing an innocent person, Brian becomes mad, increasing the violence of the group especially Cathy, killing Adam for the second time and the departure of Leah.

علاقات القوة في مسرحية دينيس كيبي الحمض النووي

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ملخص البحث:

القوة هي شرط أساسي للعلاقات. حيث يمكن إجراء هذه الروابط بين الأفراد أو الجماعات. يحصل المرء على اليد العليا في علاقة القوة، مما يقوض سلوك الآخر. على سبيل المثال، في العلاقة بين الوالدين والطفل، يتحكم الوالد عادة في سلوك الطفل. الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو التحقيق في تأثير الخلفية الاجتماعية والدينية على سلوكيات الناس. مفهوم فوكو لعلاقات القوة هو الأسلوب الذي سيتم تطبيقه على الحمض النووي لمسرحية دينيس كيبي لإظهار تأثير المجموعة على الفرد، والأقوى على الأضعف، وتثير هذه المسرحية تساؤلات حول سلوك الأفراد ما إذا كان فعل العنف الذي قاموا به هو نتيجة لعلاقات القوة، أو في بيولوجياتهم يتصرفون بهذه الطريقة العنيفة. من خلال شرح دور علاقات القوة لدى فوكو (المجموعات والآباء والمجتمع)، خلصت الدراسة إلى أن البيئة المحيطة بالأفراد تؤثر بالتأكيد على سلوكياتهم. إن غياب دور القانون وأولياء الأمور في المسرحية بالإضافة إلى قوة المجموعة يعطي الفرصة للشخصيات للانخراط في أعمال إجرامية وخلق مجرمين أبرياء.