
The Role of Violence in Graham Greene's *The Quiet American***Key Words: Violence, Explosion, Vietnamese.****Asst. Lecturer: Noor Saady Essa****General Directorate of Education in Diyala****noorsaady83@gmail.com****Abstract**

In *The Quiet American*, the theme of violence is regarded as a major one in the novel. Generally speaking, violence is the state in which specific group of people is exposed to rough unwarranted force. This paper reflects the violence that the Vietnamese witnessed in their daily life during the 20th century by the interferences of other powerful cultures as the American's. It also shows that violence is related to the process of hegemony on the other cultures. In addition, It examines the effects of such hegemony as well as the violence that the Vietnamese culture witnessed.

Graham Greene's Life

Henry Graham Greene (1904-1991), was one of the most famous leading English novelists in the 20th century. His childhood was full of troubles. He had suicidal intentions since he was maltreated by his school classmates due to his father's position as a headmaster. Greene lived a painful life and he expressed his inner feelings in his writing, arguing that: "the creative writer perceives his world once and for all in childhood and adolescence, and that his whole career in an effort to illustrate his private world in terms of the great public world we all share" (Greene, *Lost Childhood* 14-15).

As a journalist, Greene travelled a lot to the political disordered countries where the danger of death was spread. He won several literary prizes including the 1941 Hawthornden prize and Britain's order of Merit in 1987. According to Evelyn Waugh, : "Mr. Greene is a story-teller of genius. Born in another age, he would still be spinning yarns" (Sherry 69). Like Marie Beatrice Mesnet, Greene thinks that : "only through violence and hell are we brought to faith and heaven" (*Graham Greene* 12). In addition to that, Greene tackles that evil and virtue coexist in man naturally.

During his lifetime, Greene was influenced by the political affairs when most parts of the world were controlled by Britain. Moreover, Greene's writing tackles political themes as he states:

... My period of Catholic novels was preceded and followed by political novels. It's a Battlefield and England Made Me were political novels. I was finding my way... The Quiet American and The Comedians are political novels. One has come full circle in a way (Donaghy 79).

In his works, Greene presents violence, injustice, and cruelty. He tried to escape life since it is full of violence. Greene was a correspondent in countries where political violence was perceived, saying:

I hadn't the courage for suicide, but it became a habit with me to visit troubled places, not to seek material for novels but to regain the sense of insecurity which I had enjoyed in the three blitzes on London – 1951, three months of travel in Malaya during the Emergency as a correspondent of Life; 1951 – 1955, four winters in Vietnam reporting the French war for the Sunday Times... the furthest escape of all to a leper colony in the last days of the Belgian Congo (Greene, *Sort of Life* 140).

Greene tried to defend man against the politics of the ruling countries. *The Quiet American* (1955) is an outstanding example of the works in which Greene expresses his disgust to the violent Americans in their way of victimizing Vietnam. It also presents the picture of Vietnamese who are controlled by the other cultures. The novel deals with the themes of war, violence, and pity.

Violence in *The Quiet American*

Violence means one's physical or psychological destruction to others. *The Quiet American* tackles the American violent interferences in Indo-China. It was published during the Vietnam war. In this respect, Greene argues: "Literature may thrive on political disturbance, if the disturbance goes deep enough and arouses a sufficiently passionate agreement or denial" (*Lost Childhood* 63). Moreover, during 1950s, Greene feels uncomfortable by the events of war and violence. According to Brian Thomas, in *The Quiet American*, there is: "a note of agitation and uncertainty in his novels... an inclination to see things from the viewpoint of the betrayer rather than that of the victim" (*Underground Fate* 53).

The Quiet American is Greene's personal experience when working as a correspondent in French Indochina (1951-1954). Its aim is to search for the truth. In *The Quiet American*, Fowler, the British correspondent in his fifties, fights against the American young spy, Pyle, to prevent the latter's love and marriage for his beloved phuong. Concerning her hesitation between Fowler and Pyle, phuong: "accepts life as a process in which there is a havoc" (Sykes 550).

The Quiet American concentrates on America as the main interest, in which "America is a crassly materialistic and innocent notion with no understanding of other peoples" (Davis). In addition to that, Stephen Whitfield describes *The Quiet American* as: "a terse and indelible novel that blends morbid psychological insight, philosophical reflection on human fallibility, epigrammatic flair, concise reporting and political prescience, fortuitously swirling within the vortex of history" (*Limited Engagement* 86). In this novel, Greene portrays the different attitudes of the two people from different countries and their situations towards Vietnam. Pyle is the representative of the negative

American political situation towards the Asian culture, whereas his counterpart, Fowler, is the representative of Greene's protest against the dirty American attitude.

Fowler describes American reporters as: "big, boyish, and middle-aged, full of sour cracks against the French" (Greene, *Quiet American* 23). ^{All the} subsequent quotations references to the novel are taken from this edition, with the abbreviation (QA) and the page number

^(s). Fowler rejects the American reporters' way of recording about the Vietnam war. He states that they are obliged to write information that is unreal about the war, saying:

After an engagement had been tidily finished and the casualties removed from the scene, they would be summoned to Hanoi, nearly four hours' flight away, addressed by the commander-in-chief, lodged for one night in a Press Camp where they boasted that the barman was the best in Indo-China, flown over the late battlefield at a height of 3,000 feet (the limit of a heavy machine-gun's range) and then delivered safely and noisily back, like a school treat, to the Continental Hotel in Saigon. (ibid 24).

The American correspondents used to entertain their readers rather than conveying real information about the war. Fowler and Pyle have different cultures and attitudes even in their love for phuong. According to Fowler, phuong is: "a certain hour of the night and the promise of rest" (ibid 12). He also describes her as the source of happiness in his life, saying: "to take an Annamite to bed with you is like taking a bird: they twitter and sing on your pillow" (ibid 13). Fowler and Pyle struggle to get the beautiful native girl, Phuong. For them, Phuong, is an object for sexuality.

As much as violence is concerned, Pyle, the American missionary, participates wickedly of the bomb's explosion in Saigon, killing the civilians. Yet, according to Philip Toynbee, the American Pyle is not involved in the bombing, however: "His blunders would have taken a different and higher minded shape with results perhaps no less calamitous" (Heart of Matter 115).

The novel shows the violence which is represented in the United States of America through the actions of General Thé who works for the sake of the American CIA in Vietnam. General Thé performs the act of explosion in which many innocent Vietnamese people die as: "Those bicycle bombs. They were a good joke, even though one man did lose a foot. But, Pyle, you can't trust men like Thé. They aren't going to save the East from Communism. We know their kind" (QA, 49).

When perceiving the sound of the explosion, Fowler mentions that: "The explosion had been so close that my ear-drums had still to recover from the pressure" (ibid 95). Fowler portrays this act stating that: "Another joke with plastics" (ibid). Pyle believes that there would be a procession after the

explosion. Anyhow, he is described as: "he'd have to get his shoes cleaned before he saw the Minister" (ibid 101).

The Quiet American is regarded as: "one of the first novels to present America as a source of the world's evils, a characterization that, by now, has a common place even in the works of America's own novelists" (Gorra 81). Moreover, Pyle: "belongs to the American Economic Mission" (QA 24).

Violently, Pyle kills the innocent people, the civilians, accusing the Communists for that. Greene expresses that the American mission which is pretended to be helpful is forged. The Americans fill the children's toys with an explosive material. So, instead of helping people, the Americans cause their death.

The French violence is hot while the Americans' is cold because it is indirect. Pyle claims that the aim of his mission to Vietnam is to spread liberty. In fact, pyle sends fake information to America, deceiving them by fake reports, and telling them what happens in Vietnam. Greene states that the: "naivety and the confusion behind the American presence in Vietnam with a clarity which no other novel has yet attained" (Gorra 145).

Hence, the United States' values and traditions are imposed on Vietnamese: "They 'll be forced to believe what they are told; they won't be allowed to think for themselves" (QA 119).

Throughout their conversation about strength and control, Pyle feels worried that his country would lose the cold war. Fowler sympathies with the civillians mentioning: "We have brought them up in our ideas. We taught them dangerous games ... we are waiting here, hoping we don't get our throats cut. We deserve to have them cut" (ibid 120).

Fowler says that the Americans do their best to support violence and bombing, yet, they do this indirectly by encouraging the French achieve their desires. According to Norman Rockwell, *The Quiet American* is: "an obvious piece of Hate-American propaganda and a bitter tirade" (America 10). He also refers to Fowler as: "an opium smoker. When not hitting the pipe... he became so sad" (ibid). So, violence and destruction are the outcomes of the Americans.

Fowler comments on the explosion saying:

That day all over Saigon innocent bicycle-pumps had proved to contain bombs which had gone off at the stroke of eleven ... It was all quite trivial –ten explosions, six people slightly injured, and God knows how many bicycles...Bicycle bombs made a good headline. All of them blamed the Communists. I was the only one to write that the bombs were a demonstration on the part of General Thé (QA 120).

On the one hand, the Americans convince people that the Communists are the reason behind the explosion. On the other hand, Fowler establishes relations with the Communists to punish Pyle and get rid of him. He also expresses his sorrow, noticing the corpses of the victims due to the explosion.

Violence spreads not only by using bombing and explosive children's toys, but also by throwing napalm on people. In this process, the pilot, Captain Trouin, says: "Who knows? In those reaches of the river we have orders to shoot up anything in sight" (ibid 89). He also adds that: "We have to go on fighting till the politicians tell us to stop" (ibid 90). Captain Trouin also uses napalm to kill people in the village where he is born, he states:

I do. The first time I dropped napalm I thought, this is the village where I was born. This is where M. Dubois, my father's old friend, live. The baker—I was very fond of the baker when I was a child—is running away down there in the flames I've thrown. The men of Vichy did not bomb their own country. I felt worse than them (ibid).

This shows the Americans' violence. In *The Quiet American*, Greene tries to portray the violence that the Americans pretend to be innocence. Bosley Crowther comments on Pyle's character as: "a rather officious diplomatic type, meddling much more than was healthy in Vietnamese politics" (Crowther).

For Greene, it is the Americans' interference that impose violence on the innocents. The United States of America, wish to use violence against the weak countries. In fact, Greene searches equality and justice in the society he lives in, saying: "If I live in a capitalist country, I feel Communist; if I am in a Communist country, I feel a capitalist" (Greene, *Yours*, 145). Yet, according to Walter Allen, *The Quiet American* is an anti-American novel that it is hated by the Americans saying: "a crassly materialistic and innocent nation with no understanding of other peoples" (Davis). In addition to that:

It would be idle to pretend that *The Quiet American* is going to be palatable to a majority of readers in this country. In his novel of the war in Indo-China, Greene expresses a criticism of America and especially of American behaviour in foreign affairs that is widely held, if not openly stated, by a great many people outside the United States (Allen 344).

The explosion that is done by the Americans in Vietnam causes the bloodshed of the innocent children and women as: "There mustn't any American causalities" (QA 96). Pyle is the person who plans violently and without responsibility towards innocent people thinking that: "There was to have been a parade" (ibid). Where as he pretends that he doesn't know that the parade is cancelled. In his essay "politics in the novels of Graham Greene", Anthony Burgs argues that the Americans are not naive and they try to throw their guilt on the Communists. Pyle is guilty and the evidence is his prevention for phuong

to go to the place of the explosion as he knows it very well, saying: "I told her to keep away this morning" (ibid).

Pyle is killed by anonymous that: "he might have been murdered by the Vietminh. They have murdered plenty of people in Saigon. His body was found in the river by the bridge to Dakow-Vietminh territory" (ibid 15). Fowler says that: "He was murdered by the Communists" (ibid 17), and, before his death: "he had been responsible for at least fifty deaths" (ibid 12). According to William Spanos:

Pyle's unconcealed contempt for French colonial rule and his conviction in the virtue of US actions in Indo-China embodies an imperial imaginary that not only distinguishes the US from an old Europe but also endows it with a moral authority that historical imperialism has never had in its overseas operations (Who Killed Alden Pyle 4).

Fowler doesn't like politics saying: "I don't know what I'm talking politics for. They don't interest me and I'm a reporter" (QA 56). Fowler prefers to be neutral. He thinks that: "the responsibilities of the west signify nothing to him, it is impossible to avoid individual responsibility if at the same time he is to remain human" (ibid 125). Thus, he likes the word "correspondent" because he refuses involvement in politics. Fowler just wants to report information objectively saying: "the job of the reporter is to expose and record" (ibid 23). Eventhough Fowler wishes to be neutral, he sees that the end of Pyle which is his murder is inevitable.

When perceiving the sound of bombing and witnessing the death of the innocent Vietnamese, Fowler becomes unable to report news, saying: "Being there on the spot, perhaps I got a bit shocked," he also comments: "I can't think of the thing in terms of a cable" (ibid 175). When thinking that Pyle is naive but supports the bombers indirectly, Fowler mentions that: "What's the good? He'll always be innocent, you can't blame the innocent, and they are always guiltless. All you can do is control them or eliminate them. Innocence is a kind of insanity" (ibid 163).

Fowler describes Pyle that he cannot tell lies, saying: "he was one of the most inefficient liars I have ever known – it was an art he had obviously never practiced" (ibid 109). He also describes him stating: "I never knew a man who had better motives for all the trouble he caused" (ibid 74). He also adds:

He was as incapable of imagining pain or danger to himself as he was incapable of conceiving the pain he might cause others.... Yet he was sincere in his way: it was a coincidence that the sacrifices were all paid by others.... (ibid).

The struggle between Fowler and Pyle to win the love of Phuong represents the fight between the two powers to occupy Vietnam. Eventhough Fowler loves the young Vietnamese beautiful girl, Phuong, he cannot marry her since he is already married. Fowler's religious dimension refuses the second marriage. So, for him, Phuong is a source of comfort for the sake of his selfish desires. He desires her physically.

Hence, Fowler is indifferent to phuong's desires saying: "I don't care for her interests. You can have her interests. I only want her body. I want her in bed with me. I'd rather ruin her and sleep with her than, than... look after her demand interests" (ibid 59). On the contrary, Pyle can manage his love and desire of marriage for phuong well. Pyle wants to express his love for phuong by going to the battlefield to tell Fowler about that. Moreover, Phuong's desire is to get safety with the man who loves her. For Phuong, Pyle is better than Fowler as the latter cannot marry her. Pyle always shows his love for Phuong even when dancing with her in front of Fowler that: "He is holding her body so far away that you expected him at any moment to sever contact" (ibid 40). Pyle wants to be: "with her hanging her and kissing her face" (ibid 36).

When telling Phuong about Pyle's murder, Fowler tries to understand her reaction. Phuong expresses her sorrow and in response to that, she says:

Passionate love isn't in their nature. It's a cliché to call them children but there's one thing which is childish. They love you in return for kindness, security; the presents you give them they hate you for a blow or an injustice. They don't know what it's just like walking into a room and loving a stranger (ibid 95).

When answering about Pyle's murder, Fowler confesses that he has nothing to do with his murder stating that: "Not guilty, I said. I told myself that was true. Didn't Pyle always go his own way? I looked for any feeling in myself, even resentment at a policeman's suspicion, but I could find none. No one but Pyle was responsible" (ibid 18). Fowler thinks that because of Pyle's involvement in the bombing, he is killed by the revengers. He is asked more and more questions concerning Pyle's assassination, he exposes what is hidden in his heart saying:

You can rule me out, I said. I'm not involved. Not involved, I repeated. It had been an article of my creed. The human condition being what it was, let them fight, let them love, let them murder, I would not be involved. My fellow journalists called themselves correspondents; I preferred the title of reporter. I wrote what I saw. I took no action even an opinion is a kind of action (ibid 28).

Fowler tells about Pyle's murder as he knows information very well saying: "They killed him because he was too innocent to live. He was young and ignorant and silly and he got involved" (ibid 31). Fowler's opinion is that by

murdering Pyle, innocent Vietnamese can be saved. That's why Fowler is obliged to compete with the revengers to kill Pyle. In this respect, N. Eishiskina, the Russian scholar, argues that: "Pyle's amoral political ideology knocked Fowler off his neutral position" (Romany Grekhema 163). For Fowler, his violent deed of helping in Pyle's murder is better than the violence that is committed by the latter himself.

Despite Pyle's deny of committing the guilt of explosion, Pyle's plan to keep Phuong away from the bombing is indicated by this quotation: "I warned her not to go... I told her to keep away this morning" (QA 161). This means that he is responsible for this violent deed. Fowler reproaches Pyle mentioning:

You've got the Third Force and National Democracy all over your right shoe. Go home to Phuong and tell her about your heroic dead there are a few dozen less of her people to worry about (ibid 162).

Pyle is deceived by Thé, the leader of the Third Force when he supplies him with explosive material. The innocent Vietnamese are the victims of this violent attack. When speaking about the explosion, Pyle refers to it as if it is just a mistake. Fowler accuses General Thé saying:

Do you expect General Thé to lose his demonstration? This is better than a parade. Women and children are news, and soldiers aren't, in a war. This will hit the world's press. You have put General Thé on the map all right, Pyle. You've got the Third Force and National Democracy all over your right shoe (ibid).

However, Pyle is indifferent to the deadly mistake that he does it. He expresses the outcome of his deed as: " It was a pity, but you can't always hit your target. Anyway, they died in the right cause... In a way, you could say they died for democracy" (ibid 179). Pyle believes that this violent deed helps to achieve democracy. This makes Fowler angry. Moreover, under the name of democracy, Pyle enters Vietnam with good intentions, yet his mind and thoughts are poisoned by the violent plans they achieve through killing the innocents.

Conclusion

The theme of violence is presented in *The Quiet American* in the way of how the Vietnamese are victimized by the other violent cultures like the Americans'. Violence indicates man's physical or psychological damage by other controlling people or systems. *The Quiet American* was presented to express Greene's anger against the American interferences in Vietnam.

Fowler, the British correspondent, represents Greene as he criticizes the American power which is imposed on Vietnam. Pyle, the American missionary, represents the American culture. Both Fowler and Pyle love the Vietnamese girl, Phuong. They admire her sexually and try to win her and control her feelings.

Their love for Phuong is a controlling one and this represents the other cultures control and violence against the innocent Vietnamese people.

The kind of violence that is used by the Americans is indirect. Pyle, who claims that his coming to Vietnam is for help, expresses his fake feelings throughout his violent deed of explosion. In his opinion, some innocent people should be victimized in order to achieve liberty. Thus, Pyle commits a deadly mistake with cold blood. In consequences, he is killed and his killing is considered as a revenge for his participation in the explosion. For Fowler, Pyle's death is important to get rid of the Americans' violence and interference in Vietnam.

دور العنف في رواية الأمريكي الهاديء لغراهام غرين الكلمات المفتاحية: العنف، الانفجار، الفيتناميون.

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الملخص

يعد موضوع العنف موضوعاً رئيسياً في رواية الأمريكي الهاديء. بشكل عام، العنف هو الحالة التي تتعرض فيها مجموعة معينة من الناس لقوة قاسية لا مبرر لها. يعكس هذا البحث، العنف الذي شهده الفيتناميون في حياتهم اليومية خلال القرن العشرين من خلال تدخلات الثقافات القوية الأخرى مثل الثقافة الأمريكية. كما يظهر أن العنف مرتبط بعملية الهيمنة على الثقافات الأخرى. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، ان البحث يدرس آثار هذه الهيمنة وكذلك العنف الذي تشهده الثقافة الفيتنامية.

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