

Plotting as a Tool to justify the Psychological and Physical Torture in J. M. Coetzee's 'Waiting for the Barbarians'

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Abstract – *The present paper is a deep study of the Imperialist rule in an 'unknown land' described in J. M. Coetzee's 'Waiting for the Barbarians' and particularly aims to look at the unjust and inhuman ways adopted by them to protect and shield their power as well as the Empire's physical boundaries. The research paper also intends to study the physical and mental atrocities done on the native people and the awful effects of this treatment on the innocent and naive people.*

Key Words: *Exploitation, Torture, Apartheid, Plotting*

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INTRODUCTION

The oppression of the blacks was the result of the British Imperialism in the 1900's and eventually it had a lot of negative impacts on African countries, especially South Africa. When the continent of Africa was going through the process of decolonization, freeing the different countries from racist philosophies and principles, South Africa was turning towards racial discrimination. It happened after the World War II, when apartheid occurred and this segregation legally allowed the whites, who considered themselves much superior to the native South Africans, to oppress the blacks. This segregation is not as same as others because in the case of apartheid, the majority race is oppressed by the minority race. This unfairness and differentiation against non-white or non-European people had a major impact on the Africans who were forced to change their ways of life. Because the Europeans found it very difficult to live harmoniously with people of a diverse race than themselves, the blacks were forced to use different public restrooms, work for not the same wages, along with many other ways of isolating themselves from the white people. Isolation was practiced at various spheres of life. Transport and civil facilities were segregated. Black buses stopped at black bus stops and white buses at white ones. Trains, hospitals, and ambulances were set apart for both the races. Because there were fewer white patients, white doctors preferred to work in white hospitals and conditions in white hospitals were much better than those in frequently congested and understrength black hospitals. It sparked a lot of opposition and internal conflicts within the country. So, the major part of the history of South Africa, particularly of the colonial and post-colonial eras, is

characterized by culture clashes, violent territorial clashes between European settlers and indigenous people, dispossession and repression, and other racial and political tensions. During the 1970s and 1980s, internal confrontation and resistance to apartheid became more and more militant, instigating Ruthless suppressions by the ruling National Party administration and extended factional violence that resulted in leaving thousands dead or in captivity. It is at this context, during the apartheid era that J. M. Coetzee wrote his much acclaimed novel, 'Waiting for the Barbarians'.

'Waiting for the Barbarians' is a postcolonial novel and predominantly deals with the encounter between the European settlers and the indigenous colonized people. It apparently shows the variation between the superior culture of the colonist and the native culture. It replicates the impacts of colonial persecution on the oppressed and the oppressor. The author invites the readers to read the novel as an allegory of the apartheid regime in South Africa dealing with the issues of torture and oppression. It is also an allegory of imperialism, an extension of colonialism. The protagonist of the novel is the long time Magistrate of an unspecified settlement who denounces the Empire and doesn't really support the ways in which the native people are treated and tortured. In fact he becomes the native's voice of protest as they are silenced by the cruel deeds and acts of injustice by the colonizers. The representatives of the fictionalized empire show sadistic elements through their acts of violence and find pleasure and happiness in inflicting torture on the so called enemies. Torture is one of the foremost instruments used by the colonizer to keep the colonized under control and the novel shows how it becomes both an instrument of persecution as well

as power at the hands of the instillers of oppression. As Fanon puts it, 'The native's back is to the wall, the knife is at his throat (or, more precisely, the electrode at his genitals): he will have no more call for his fancies.' (Fanon, 56). The existence of the colonized is at the mercy of the colonizer. The colonized people turn into slaves in the hands of their tormenters, being ensnared in the colony's boundaries. Though the violence on the colonized in 'Waiting for the Barbarians' novel is inflicted physically, the major motive is to mentally keep them under threat and submission. Therefore, this violence and torture is used as a legitimized means to sustain the colonial power. This article is a genuine attempt to expose the infliction of torture and violence on the natives as part of a plot by the representatives of the Empire to maintain their power and how they justify these unjust acts at the pretext of protecting the physical boundaries of the state.

PLOTTING AS A MEANS TO JUSTIFY THE EXPLOITATION AND TORTURE

The officers of the Bureau try to justify the suffering and pain inflicted on the natives by declaring that the barbarians are planning to invade or attack them. The inhumanity or torture executed on the natives are atrocious and unimaginable. Colonel Joll is the personification of the devil himself as he used to torture the natives severely. He used to torment the natives to the extent that some died in the process of interrogation. The old man who is tortured succumbed to death. The Magistrate is shocked to see the miserable state of the old man as he sees, "The grey beard is caked with blood. The lips are crushed and drawn back, the teeth are broken. One eye is rolled back, the other eye-socket is a bloody hole." (Coetzee, 12) Eventually, Joll's way of torturing the native people shows the ineffectiveness of his cruel ways which he uses to extract the information about the barbarians. Joll's plotting against the natives becomes obvious when he comes up with the theory of barbarians planning to attack the Empire. The victims suffer immensely in the hands of Joll when he thrusts them to give information which they do not have.

The cruelty is clearly visible when the Magistrate goes to see the boy and the guard informs him about the ways how they tortured the boy, 'Just a little knife, like this; He spreads thumb and forefinger. Gripping his little knife of air he makes a curt thrust into the sleeping boy's body and turns the knife delicately, like a key, first left, then right. Then he withdraws it, his hand returns to his side, he stands waiting.' (16)

The Magistrate is the only person with a fair understanding of the evil plans of the officers of the Bureau, and it is through him that we learn about the plotting against the natives. He doubts the very motives of the officers of the Bureau. He hints towards the conspiracy or plotting done to further demean and disgrace the indigenous people.

"Of this unrest I myself saw nothing. In private I observed that once in every generation, without fail, there is an episode of hysteria about the barbarians. There is no woman living along the frontier who has not dreamed of a dark barbarian hand coming from under the bed to grip her ankle, no man who has not frightened himself with visions of the barbarians carousing in his home, breaking the plates, setting fire to the curtains, raping his daughters. These dreams are the consequence of too much ease. Show me a barbarian army and I will believe." (14)

None of the acts of torture and brutality are successful or seem mustering up the key information about the activity of the barbarians. Joll's unkindness and brutality towards the indigenous people are some of the means to justify his painful ways to protect the interests of the Empire.

PLOTTING AS A MEANS TO KEEP THEIR POWER AND TERRITORY

The people working under the Empire are continuously occupied to make sure that there is no upheaval or toppling of the power that they have. They work meticulously to protect the territory which is in their control. They invent a way to suppress and exploit the natives by accusing them of planning an attack against the Empire. This provides them a reason to humiliate and torture the so-called barbarians. The false information about the natives planning an attack is used as a key to safeguard their territories. The people in the Empire are really worried about the attacks done on their people by the barbarians,

"But last year stories began to reach us from the capital of unrest among the barbarians.

Traders travelling safe routes had been attacked and plundered. Stock thefts had increased in scale and audacity. A party of census officials had disappeared and been found buried in shallow graves. Shots had been fired at a provincial governor during a tour of inspection.

There had been clashes with border patrols. The barbarian tribes were arming, the rumour went; the Empire should take precautionary measures, for there would certainly be war." (13)

Colonel Joll's only motive is to safeguard the interest and territory of the Empire. He does not mind torturing and killing the people to protect the land which is under the Empire rule. The so-called threat of attack from the barbarians is a part of the conspiracy and plotting which gives them all the rights to perpetrate pain and suffering on the native people in the name of saving their territory.

CONCLUSION

As can be observed by the intensity of violence inflicted on the people in the novel, violence has been the fundamental factor of colonialism. Colonial rule, racial discrimination or liberation-struggle movements, let it be any sphere, violence had always been a pivotal component in the history of Africa. Most importantly, as apartheid became legal, it became a blend of both psychological and physical violence inflicted on the native people. It affected both their physical as well as mental stability. In this way, the perpetrator of violence manages to keep the victims under threat and under the pretext of the possible attack by the barbarians, they accomplish their secret objective to keep their Empire intact and avoid any internal uprisings.

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