

Imperialism and Gender in J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*

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Abstract

Considering how power relations govern the construction of race and gender, this article looks at the ambivalent relationship between the Magistrate and the "barbarian" girl in J. M. Coetzee's novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), exploring intersections between imperialism and gender and negotiating how issues of representation are implicated in questions of identity construction. It highlights how identities inflicted by gender are constructed in imperial discourse: first by the colonizer who speaks the language of power and inscribes on the colonized meanings serving imperialism; second by the humanist colonizer who fails to relate to the other on equal terms except for a position of "feminized" weakness; and third by the resistant colonial subject eluding imperial constructions yet still manipulated in language. Between the discourses of pain and humanism, the colonized body remains a malleable yet impenetrable object of colonial discourses. Coetzee subverts dominant gender boundaries, aligning oppressive patriarchal practices with imperialism while undermining hegemonic ideologies that construct gender through the figure of the enigmatic other.

Keywords: Imperialism, Gender, Identity, Hegemony, Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*

1. Introduction: Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Gender

Postcolonial literatures have been read as oppositional, challenging colonial assumptions, exposing biases, and questioning colonialism's relationship with issues of class, gender, and race. Moreover, intersections between postcolonial and feminist theories are staples of modern literary theory. In the words of Deepika Bahri (2009), gender and the question of woman have been at the core of postcolonial studies "from its inception, intertwined with the broad concerns of postcolonialism, but also revising, interrogating, and supplementing them" (p. 195). On the other hand, Linda Hutcheon (1989) has argued that postcolonial literature and criticism share with feminism certain "political agendas and often a theory of agency that allow them to go beyond the postmodern limits of deconstructing existing orthodoxies into the realms of social and political action" (p. 150). Political motivation gives both approaches an edge over postmodernism because of the latter's ambivalence of being discursively complicit with what it critiques (Hutcheon, 1989, p. 150) and its metafictional, poststructuralist ploys. In this sense, feminism and postcolonialism become concerned with a theory of metalanguage agency and countering structures of discursive and lived oppression. Apparently, they are more historical (and more political) than postmodernism.

Questions of power, voice, marginalization, and representation are common preoccupations for feminist and postcolonial critics, and so are questions of marginalization. In the words of Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back*, women share with the colonized "an intimate experience of the politics of oppression and repression" as well as a forced position to "articulate their experiences in the language of their oppressors" (1989, p. 172). Postcolonial and feminist theorists often compare women to "colonized subjects who are defined by the 'male gaze' and are thus reduced to stereotypes and subjected to the long-lasting social and economic effects of colonialism" (Bressler, 2011, p. 158). Inverting power structures of domination and questioning forms of power are legitimate ends in both approaches. The constitution of identity in language and power discourses gives both approaches much theoretical parlance and political motivation. Poststructuralist feminists have paid attention to "historical specificity in the production, for women, of subject positions and modes of femininity and their place in the overall network of social power relations" (Weedon, 1987, p. 135). On the other hand, postcolonial critics like Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak have attempted to deconstruct Western hegemonic discourses, exposing how cultural identity is contingent and anti-monolithic. Commenting on conceptual and theoretical analogies between both approaches, Lois Tyson argues that problems of identity for women and the colonized, restricted access to political and economic power, and ideological domination are common problems for both subjugated groups (2006, p. 423).

Some critics like Wail Hassan (2003) have considered the intersections among racial, colonial, and patriarchal discourses, which makes it essential for postcolonial critics to question the category of gender (p.309). The result is an ambivalence in gender spaces as impacted by variables of racism, colonialism, and patriarchy. Such factors and power relations often destabilize gendered identities (Hassan, 2003, p. 309). In other words, the manly position of the colonizer "demands for its confirmation (for its 'having' of the phallus) that the colonized accept through the performance of masquerade the feminine subject position that constitutes the being of the phallus" (Hassan, 2003, p. 310). The master-slave dialectic which often characterizes imperial relations, or is imposed on them, can yet be reversed when the reluctant colonizer performs the feminine gender roles projected on the colonized.

Along a relevant line of thought, Edward Said (1979) discusses in *Orientalism* the imperialist discourse of Orientalism and speaks of imperial relations in similar terms of "varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (p. 5). Said contends that colonial discourse represents a masculine West dominating a feminized East; he describes the famous encounter between Flaubert and the Egyptian courtesan Kuchuk Hanem which resulted in an "influential model of the Oriental woman; she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. *He* spoke for and represented her" (1979, p. 6; emphasis original). Flaubert's position of mastery in relation to Kuchuk Hanem was not "an isolated instance" in imperial history for Said; "It fairly stands for the pattern of relative strength between East and West, and the discourse about the Orient that it enabled" (1979, p. 6). He, being a wealthy and privileged male, easily dominated her sexually and culturally. Said's argument exposes the representation of the Oriental in feminized ways by mainstream power discourses. Offering a gendered understanding of Orientalism and a prototypical discussion of imperial gender relations, Said exposes imperial culture's disparagement of the Oriental woman whereby the Orient is penetrated, appropriated, and silenced in European power fantasies. The ability to appropriate discourse and represent the other is a tool in both colonial relations and gender ones.

In the words of Ann Stoler (1998), in colonial studies "sexual domination has figured as a social metaphor of European supremacy" (p. 346). However, the sexual hierarchies and myths advocated by colonial discourse were actually made problematic and ambivalent in cases of miscegenation and concubinage, with sexual taboos freely broken and affecting both the colonized and the colonizer morally, physically, and socially. Since imperial relations have been frequently examined in light of gender ones, the inversions and resistance involved in both are worthy of analysis. Chandra Mohanty (1984) has argued that some Western feminist texts have often produced the Third World Woman "as a singular monolithic subject" (p. 333). This inadequate ideological construction of the non-Western Woman as the Other constructed in the hegemonic discourse, feminist or colonialist, privileges Western and First-World Woman over native or colonized woman, thus exercising discursive and historical forms of power. Colonization, Mohanty contends, and despite its problematic and sophisticated nature, "almost invariably implies a relation of structural domination, and a suppression—often violent—of the heterogeneity of the subjects(s) in question" (1984, p. 333). This domination, in one form, is an attempt at the codification of the Other, and it conflates Western feminist discourses with imperialism. Mohanty's argument is relevant when attempting to understand the relationship between the Magistrate and the "barbarian" girl in J. M. Coetzee's novel, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980). (Note 1) As a sympathetic colonizer, the Magistrate fails to codify her or bring her into the imperial homogenizing logic in its treatment of racial and ethnic differences. He ends up manipulating and confirming her "otherness." Colonel Joll also fails to contain the girl's otherness, simply dubbing her and the other prisoners as an "ENEMY" of Empire (p. 115). The triangular nexus among the "barbarian" girl, the Magistrate, and Colonel Joll forms the basis for the intersection among gender, race, and patriarchal power relations as well as the subversion of conventional gender norms in colonialist discourse.

While Said has discussed imperial gender relations governing the interactions between privileged white masters and native women, Gayatri Spivak has further complicated such gender relations with respect to colonizers on the one hand and native men and women on the other hand. In her discussion of woman as the subaltern, Spivak (2002) suggests that "the subaltern could not 'speak' because, in the absence of institutionally validated agency, there was no listening subject" (p. 24). It is the first-world Anglo-American intellectuals and the academic world that can serve as one validating institution giving voice or lending attentive ears to the subaltern. While intellectuals and critics have a responsibility of knowing and revealing society's Other, they should be aware of contradictions and ambivalences in their position, i. e. "the possibility that the intellectual is complicit in the persistent constitution of Other as the Self's shadow" (Spivak, 1988, p. 75), thus allowing the oppressed to speak for themselves rather than silencing them. Ambivalently, the critic/intellectual can be "hegemonic" and "oppositional" (p. 75). The risks of having first-world intellectuals speak for the Other are serious since this Other is heterogenous and this misrepresentation is a form of "epistemic violence" for Spivak (1988, p. 76) involving the construction of the colonial subject as Other. The British who ended this Hindu practice of widow self-immolation in India early in

the 19th century, the Sati practice, seemed to be saving the oppressed brown woman from the brown man. She emerges as the victim of double colonization, what Spivak called "patriarchy and imperialism" (1988, p. 102). Spivak maintains that postcolonial intellectuals "learn that their privilege is their loss. In this they are a paradigm of the intellectuals" (1988, p. 82). She concludes that in a colonial context, the subaltern does not have access to history and cannot speak and that "the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow", and thus more marginalized (1988, p. 83). Interestingly, Spivak clarifies that the elite class of privileged intellectuals shape the image of the subaltern and appropriate their voice: "What must the elite do to watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern? The question of 'woman' seems most problematic in this context. Clearly, if you are poor, black and female you get it in three ways" (1988, p. 90). The subaltern, in such conditions, cannot speak, get heard, or get read. In Coetzee's novel, the "barbarian" girl embodies Spivak's subaltern while the Magistrate, a reader of the classics and a figure with literary ambitions, assumes the role of the "postcolonial intellectual" complicit with hegemonic power structures.

Critics have argued that imperialistic endeavors have changed forms and targets, yet their essence has remained as "extended control, power and influence" (Cuddon, 2013, p. 358). Drawing on the rubrics of imperialism stated here, we can argue that the relationship between the Magistrate and the girl conforms to yet revises imperial relations prescribed above. Apparently, the imperial master dominates the "barbarian" girl physically and sexually; however, she remains the enigmatic other he could not fathom or bring to his imperial codes. This eccentric relationship stages the overlap between imperialism and gender. Importantly, this article stages the gaps and contradictions in the Empire's discourse, particularly looking at the gendered relationship between a powerful Empire assuming the master's position with relation to its colonial subjects or even imperial agents who sympathize with the Other and thus get cast out of its hegemonic codes and power centers. As many theorists of gender and sexuality (like Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Louis Althusser) have pointed out, identity is "an ongoing process of construction, performance, appropriation, or mimicry" (Castle, 2007, p. 102). There are ideologies, discourses, and apparatuses which contain and regulate identities. The site of both power and discourse, identity is staged in a performance imposed on the Magistrate whereby he is tortured and forced to mimic the "barbarian" girl in a sense, wearing a woman's smock and getting humiliated in public. Coetzee's novel dramatizes not only the double oppressions of race and gender but also exposes imperial nationalistic rhetoric as one rooted in discourse and ideology, i.e. the construction of the subject away from economic, historical, and material conditions and more towards ideology, language, and racial stereotypes. *WB* exposes how imperial powers impose their understanding of gender not only on the colonized but also on their agents who sympathize with the colonized, which makes gender a fluid constructed category, a tool in power relations.

2. Imperialism and Gender: The Magistrate, Colonel Joll, and the "Barbarian" Girl

Defining gender has been a challenging task since it is often viewed as a difficulty "whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time" (Butler, 2000, p. 311). Expounding his stupendous project of explaining the interplay of power in societies and the entry of the body and relevant social institutions into political relations, Michel Foucault contends that his main objective has been to expose the objectification of the subject, "to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects" (1982, p. 208). In an interview with Alessandro Fontana and Pasquale Pasquino, Foucault maintains that "the state consists in the codification of a whole number of power relations which render its functioning possible" (1984, p. 64). Discussing the modes of the objectification of the subject and identity formation, Foucault explains the dividing practices the subject undergoes like confinement, isolation, and classification: "the subject is objectified by a process of division either within himself or from others" (1982, p. 208). In a Foucauldian sense, the Empire in Coetzee's novel constructs gender identity as an effect of power relations. The gendered subject is made the target of disciplinary forces and normalizing tactics and thus becomes manipulated by state "bio-power." Both the "barbarian" girl and the Magistrate are subjected to imperial dividing processes which are part of their subject formation and identity construction. Throughout the novel, questions of gender are rooted in various forms of power relations: domination, intimidation, manipulation, and masquerade. Therefore, they can be subverted and deconstructed based on who wields this power and over whom.

In a pivotal scene, the Magistrate encounters an unnamed girl, a foreigner left behind after days of imprisonment and torture and after other prisoners leave the frontier settlement. The novel's substantial treatment of gender relations revolves around this nexus between the colonized and the sympathetic colonizer who also acts as the ethical narrator. According to Laura Fisher (1990), Coetzee's writing conforms to the "female aesthetic" as he uses some female narrators and shows tolerance for the female characters in his fiction (p. 36). While in novels like *Foe* (1986) and *In the Heart of the Country* (1977) Coetzee relies on female narrators to point to possible ways of writing back to patriarchal discourse through female voices, he employs in *WB* a male narrator who, despite his

limitations, is sympathetic toward the "barbarian" girl and who ultimately identifies with her once he is brutally tortured by the Empire he serves.

Half blind and with broken ankles at the hands of Colonel Joll and his assistants, the girl could not leave the frontier settlement with the surviving prisoners. The Magistrate is thus placed in a difficult encounter with the girl. While she is helpless and weak, he is the privileged imperialist despite his apparently humanist and liberal beliefs. In the words of bell hooks (1984) in *Feminist Theory*, "Being oppressed means *the absence of choices*. It is the primary point of contact between the oppressed and the oppressor" (p. 5; emphasis original). Since the girl has no options of resistance or departure, her relationship with her "guardian" assumes a power relations nature. The Magistrate and Colonel Joll manipulate the girl both directly and indirectly. Torture and sexual manipulation are two instances of the hegemonic exercise of imperial power. To draw on bell hooks again, "domination and control are the ultimate expressions of power" (1984, p. 88). This prevalent form of the exercise of power is often discussed in feminist circles as the clearest manifestation of being oppressed. Imperialist, capitalist, and patriarchal considerations are in the Magistrate's favor in this unfolding relationship with the girl. While feminist criticism, especially in its sociological dimensions, has been labelled as "studies of power" (Dobie, 2012, p. 114), postcolonial studies have been viewed as studies on manifest as well as subtle forms of subjection. The Magistrate, Colonel Joll, and the girl are all involved in a complex and multilayered web of power relations.

Significantly, the girl is described in stereotypical terms befitting the colonized natives. To the observing Magistrate, she has "the straight black eyebrows, the glossy black hair of the barbarians" (p. 27). Feeling guilty for her pain, the Magistrate begins a ritual of washing and oiling her body, accepting her in the barracks kitchen as a maid. The care he shows toward her as an imperialist is not much different from the act of exploiting her body perpetrated by the torturers: "I feed her, shelter her, use her body, if that is what I am doing, in this foreign way" (p. 32). His caressing of her body makes it a fetish object he holds in his arms to lull himself to sleep. He projects his fears and anxieties on this foreign body, trying to understand her story and what exactly happened to her. This tortured body becomes the site of the ethical and ideological encounter between the imperialist settler and the colonized. His intimate oiling and massaging of this broken body counter the torture it was subjected to. The explicit violation of her tortured body by the Empire finds an echo in the Magistrate's attentive gestures of care, a masked form of manipulation and expiation. His acts of guilty conscience can be understood in light of Memmi's (2003) contention that the "benevolent" colonizer who does not accept colonization is trapped in a mentally difficult situation, trying "to refuse its ideology while continuing to live with its actual relationships" (p. 64). Those incompatible power relations between the colonizer and the colonized are a source of anxiety and feelings of contradiction for this "benevolent" colonizer because he is complicit with such systems of oppression, he detests yet is powerless to change. To spare the girl a life of begging in the streets of the frontier settlement, the Magistrate gives her a job of cleaning and cooking. He acts not as what Spivak called "white men saving brown women from brown men" (1988, p. 297) in her description of the British reaction against the Sati practice in India but as the white man saving the native woman from the white man.

However, and despite his acts of care, the Magistrate remains an imperial agent constructing the body of the other in negative terms of negation and mystery. The Magistrate speaks of the girl sleeping in his rooms as the "alien body" (p. 45) and views her as "incomplete" (p. 45). He is basically confronted with a hermeneutical impasse in dealing with this body of the girl. In fact, he cannot view her as a full human being, despite his apparent sympathies toward her. Instead, he continues to see her in stereotypical terms as a native woman with uncommon resilience, strange habits, and different looks. The Magistrate keenly observes her different features: her black eyes, broad mouth, black hair, and straight eyebrows (p. 27). Due to his guilty, "bleating conscience" (p. 29) and his sense of complicity with her torturers, he takes her in to his rooms. Despite his initially good intentions of saving the girl, the Magistrate assumes what Katrak (1989) called Western intellectuals' complicity in "an endeavor that ironically ends up validating the dominant power structure, even when they ideologically oppose such hegemonic power" (p. 256). Like Colonel Joll and Warrant Officer Mandel, the imperial torturers the Magistrate detests, the Magistrate is also complicit in the construction of the girl's identity as the other despite his liberal stance and tolerant ideology. Discussing the interrelationship between patriarchy and imperialism, and in the context of discussing the sexist and racial oppression of black women by both white and black men, bell hooks quotes John Stoltenberg's article "Toward Gender Justice" in which he describes the main features of patriarchy under which men dictate cultural norms of power and privilege and are "the arbiters of identity for both males and females" (qtd. in hooks, 1984, p. 99). While Joll reduces the girl to a maimed, tortured body of an enemy and a prisoner, the Magistrate constructs her body as that of the sexually enigmatic other. It is in her silence and reticence that the girl resists the imperial manipulation of her identity. However, she risks, in the process, confirming her status in the eyes of the Empire as the obscure yet fascinating other.

The Magistrate's liaison with the "barbarian" girl negotiates the relationship Mohanty (1984) has articulated between *Woman* as "a cultural and ideological composite Other constructed through diverse representational discourses" and *women* as "real, material subjects of their collective histories" (p. 259). His attempts to construct her identity and read her story of torture render her as a text he wants to decipher. Moreover, the Magistrate constructs her body as the exotic, unfathomable body of the other despite his humanist discourse and apparently benevolent intentions. Nevertheless, the novel recounts the resistance of this "alien" body to all forms of framing and linguistic domestication: "It has been growing more and more clear to me," the Magistrate complains, "that until the marks on this girl's body are deciphered and understood I cannot let go of her" (p. 33). The Magistrate acts as the empowered agent defining and decoding the colonized body. He seems to realize the use of language and discourse in colonial domination and resistance, desiring to read the marks of torture on her body and understand the nature of his ambivalent desire toward her. His attachment to her is somewhere between the ethical impulse and the erotic one, never direct. He views his body and the girl's as "diffuse, gaseous, centerless, at one moment spinning about a vortex here, at another curdling, thickening elsewhere; but often also flat, blank" (p. 36). There is something featureless about the girl that the Magistrate cannot understand. He sees her body as "blank," "incomplete," and "alien" (p. 45). Comparing her with the inn girl, the bird-woman, he occasionally visits, he confesses: "The body of the other one, closed, ponderous, sleeping in my bed in a faraway room, seems beyond comprehension" (p. 45). In his desperation at the resistance of the girl to him and the distance between them, he complains: "What do I have to do to move you?" (p. 47). Her blank features and masked face do not give him the assurance he needs for his own identity as a master. Through the figure of the Magistrate, Coetzee makes us conscious of the use of colonial discourse to ingrain biases in the name of "universal humanism" (Cuddon, 2013, p. 551). While this discourse serves the colonial masters, Coetzee's novel teaches us that it never touches the essence of the colonized. Regardless of the biases, cruelties, and sympathies of this discourse, the core of the identity of the colonized remains impenetrable and inscrutable.

Interrogating his ambivalent desire to the barbarian girl as a lover and torturer, the Magistrate is anxious that with this woman "there is no interior, only a surface across which I hunt back and forth seeking entry" (p. 46). He is constructing her body as the secret body of the other, as the blank text he cannot contain or leave a mark on. He calls her "an obdurate form" sleeping next to him (p. 50) and is ethically disturbed by her presence in his life: "What this woman beside me is doing in my life I cannot comprehend. The thought of the strange ecstasies I have approached through the medium of her incomplete body fills me with a dry revulsion, as if I had spent nights copulating with a dummy of straw and leather" (p. 50). In Spivak's famous terms, the subaltern cannot speak as the "historically muted subject" (1988, p. 295) appropriated, misunderstood, or misrepresented by those in power. The Magistrate cannot remember the girl's face before torture, which indicates the resistance of the colonized subject to the male, phallogocentric, and patriarchal gaze of the imperial agent represented by the Magistrate. Instead, he sees a blank "empty" space next to her father when they were brought as prisoners (p. 52). In his dreams, he frequently sees a hooded figure building a snow castle in an empty town: "The dream has taken root. Night after night, I return to the waste of the snowswept square, trudging towards the figure at its centre, reconfirming each time that the town she is building is empty of life" (p. 57). In his description and in his dreams, she is an inadequate body scarred, tortured, and crippled. On the other hand, her people will see her as marked, as the property of a stranger. He recalls the girl when he sent her back to her people "with her black hair braided and hanging over her shoulder in barbarian fashion" mounting a horse (p. 132). He sadly realizes that however kindly she may get treated by her own people, she will never live a normal life as the property of a stranger now (p. 148). The "barbarian" girl is constructed by the Magistrate as the alien other, "closed, ponderous" and "beyond comprehension" (p. 45). He is aware that she was oppressed and dehumanized by her torturers and seducers alike and that his sensual pity toward her is not much different from the cruel administrations of pain perpetrated by Colonel Joll. Moreover, her own people will reject her for what she went through in terms of bodily abuse and sexual exploitation by the imperialists. Thus, Coetzee's *WB* articulates the double colonization or oppression women suffer from in colonial and patriarchal contexts as well as complex levels of hegemony.

Passive and enigmatic throughout, the girl remains beyond imperial codes of power and discursive manipulation. When the Magistrate asks her about what her torturers did to her and expects her to show him her broken feet, he says: "She neither helps nor hinders me" (p. 29). When he asks her about her feelings towards those who tortured her, she avoids him saying she is tired of talking (p. 44). His erotic desire toward her is equally ambivalent. Failing to move her, he thinks of "the image of a face masked by two black glassy insect eyes from which there comes no reciprocal gaze but only my doubled image cast back at me" (p. 47). He sees her as a blank face with no interior. Trying to remember her next to her father on the day they were brought to the settlement, he sees only "a space, a blankness" (p. 51) but in his dealings with her he sees her as a stocky, "obdurate form" (p. 50). In his dreams, she is still invisible and fragmented; just a hooded face building an empty town in a snowy landscape (p. 57). He sees

her body as maimed and scarred yet fails to see her essential humanity. In a sense, the girl figures the ruptures and gaps in the Empire's hegemonic discourse, the otherness that resists imposed domestication and identity manipulation. In the Empire's bipolar discourse, the other is negated and dehumanized. However, such are easy ways out of an adequate and rational understanding of the other on equal terms.

Another critical dimension to be considered is Coetzee's dramatization of the ambivalent position of the complicit intellectual whereby the sympathetic colonizer furthers the political oppression of the colonized as woman. In the words of Katak, "Often, with the best intentions, Western intellectuals are unconsciously complicit in an endeavor that ironically ends up validating the dominant power structure, even when they ideologically oppose such hegemonic power" (1989, p. 256). The Magistrate realizes that the distance between himself and the girl's torturers is "negligible" (p. 29), and that his "bleating consciences" (p. 29) is not actually helping the tortured girl. His claim that nothing links him with her torturers (p. 48) and his elation that his bond with the Empire is broken (p. 85) are attempts to ease his conscience because he realizes his affinity with the Empire: "For I was not, as I liked to think, the indulgent pleasure-loving opposite of the cold rigid Colonel. I was the lie that Empire itself when times are easy, he the truth that Empire tells when harsh winds blow" (pp. 148-149). It is the Magistrate's sexual intimacy and his ethical entanglement with the "barbarian" girl which make him think in such terms. His humanistic, liberal discourse (i.e. his belief in the dignity of human life, the value of human civilization, law, justice, and peace at all costs) is not effective. He reads the classics in his spare time (p. 41), shows a concern for civilized behavior and cleanliness (pp. 2, 26), asks for a quiet life and times (p. 8), orders his men to feed the prisoners and medically attend to them (pp. 19, 26), and believes in peace regardless of the cost (p. 15). His escape from a patriarchal Empire subjugating nomads and fishing folks (including women and sick children) is often sleeping in the inn girl's arms (p. 24), which is another form of patriarchal sexual mastery. It is noteworthy that the Magistrate uses animal-related imagery to describe the woman he visits in the inn, calling the inn girl his "little bird-woman" (p. 45). Before his problematic desire to the "barbarian" girl, he used to view the female body as an object he can possess and easily manipulate, especially when youth and vigor worked to his advantage.

The Empire in Coetzee's novel uses the barbarian other to identify itself and strengthen its position of domination. Said has used this logic in his study on *Orientalism*, by suggesting that "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (1979, p. 3). However, and in the process, the imperial mindset views this other as the irrational, sensual opposite of the rational, civilized West. Imperialism, like Orientalism, remains a way of forming authority over and dominating the other. One level of what Said described as "varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (1979, p. 5) is patriarchal and sexual domination. While Said cites the famous case of Flaubert's encounter with the Egyptian courtesan Kuchuk Hanem as a manifestation of unequal power relations between the West and the East (1979, p. 6), he equally articulates the disparity in gender power relations between the privileged Western man and the silent subaltern woman. Similar patterns of unequal power relations between the imperialists and the barbarians are evident in Coetzee's novel. The Magistrate's access to the girl's sexualized body is symbolic of this mastery just as Joll's manipulation of her tortured body figures this same mastery.

For Colonel of Police Joll, the body of the other gets constructed in power and pain. The more power the torturer exercises, the more pliable this body gets. The "barbarian" girl is literally made the enemy Joll is after through the infliction of pain. As Joll sees it, there is a certain tone that enters the voice of a prisoner when telling the truth under exposure to torture (p. 5). Pain is the means of arriving at undoubtable truth for Joll. Answering the Magistrate's ethical dilemma on how to know whether the tortured prisoner is telling the truth rather than faking it to avoid punishment or simply telling the truth but is not being believed and thus punished more, Joll responds: "First I get lies, you see...first lies, then pressure, then more lies, then more pressure, then the break, then more pressure, then the truth" (p. 5). His logic is that the barbarians are the "ENEMY" (p. 115) and that prisoners are prisoners. Joll embodies the confirmations and certainties the Empire employs to ascertain its privileged status over the barbarians. His Manichean understanding of otherness is being opposed to the imperial Third Bureau division of the Civil Guard he represents. The dark glasses he wears as he appears early in the novel represent the mask he shrouds his identity with as well as his negation of otherness. In the eyes of the Magistrate, Joll remains one of the Empire's "devotees of truth, doctors of interrogation" (p. 9). The prisoners he sends from his frontier raids to the settlement are treated in this same logic of ruthless investigation and torture. When Joll leaves to report his findings to the Empire's capital, the Magistrate discovers that he had already practiced those stratagems on the barbarian girl and her father. While her father died under torture, she is left behind crippled and half-blind. The girl tells the Magistrate that Joll used hot iron to touch the center of her eyes and that her ankles were broken in the process. When Joll brings a new round of captives, he applies a "simple loop of wire" through "the flesh of each man's hands and through holes pierced in his cheeks" (p. 113), which sickens the observing Magistrate. In

preparation for a bloody beating, Joll writes the word "ENEMY" with a piece of charcoal on the backs of the kneeling prisoners (p. 115) in an attempt to contain their otherness. Then and after the word is erased with the prisoner's blood and sweat, Joll holds a hammer to crush their feet. He tries to reduce them and the girl to a position of otherness, to being the incarnation of the maimed, deformed enemy.

Unlike the Magistrate's intimate gestures, Joll's direct violence constructs the girl as the Empire's dehumanized other and as the incarnation of enmity. Joll's logic in dealing with otherness is reducing the signified to the signifier and thus bridging the gap between conceptual and symbolic enmity. He imposes on his victims the meanings and articulations he is entitled to as a more powerful agent. However, those meanings never get authenticated by the muted, overpowered subjects. Through brute force, Joll assumes that he can forge both gender relations and imperial ones as he pleases. He conflates the gendered subject with the overpowered "barbarian" prisoners. The exercise of power, for Joll, necessarily creates the feminized, weakened enemy of the Empire.

3. Imperialism and Gender in Alternative Contexts: Gender Subversion

Although the relationship between the Magistrate and Joll on the one hand and the "barbarian" girl on the other is a good manifestation of the overlap between gender relations and imperialism, there are other contexts in the novel which can be studied in such terms. In this section, I primarily focus on the Magistrate's reaction to imperial stratagems of torture perpetrated on prisoners and his own position as a victim of torture with "feminine" attributes. To better identify with the girl and feel her pain, the Magistrate acquires a new gender identity, that of the cross-dresser. Simultaneously, this section fosters a poststructuralist view of gender as malleable, fluid, and subversive of limits, confirming a human essence transcending gender boundaries and exposing the rootedness of gender in questions of social and political power.

Coetzee's novel aligns the oppressions of patriarchy with those of imperialism while simultaneously undermining both. Early in the novel, the Empire exercises supreme and patriarchal authority over its captured prisoners. While the Empire tortures a sick boy and his old uncle who came to the frontier settlement for medical treatment, it is the Magistrate who identifies with their position of weakness and subalternity. The Magistrate realizes that he assumes the position of a "mother" comforting the sick boy from "his father's spells of wrath" (p. 8). He casts himself in the weak position of a sympathetic mother and casts the Empire in the position of the ruthless patron. This scene underscores his complicity with the interrogators: "It has not escaped me that an interrogator can wear two masks, speak with two voices, one harsh, one seductive" (p. 8). Commenting on the beating phantasy (experienced by hysterical patients or obsessional neurotics) and the pleasure attached to it, Freud contends that it was difficult to decide whether this pleasure was "sadistic or masochistic" (p. 181). Moreover, feelings of guilt and shame were often attached to such a phantasy (p. 179). Having observed the bloody aftermath of torture on those prisoners, the Magistrate has mixed feelings towards them. Identifying with them places him in an effeminate position against the masculine imperial role of Joll and his assistants. However, and since this identification occurs at the mental or psychic level with no visible signs, it remains a form of sympathetic imagination whereby gender is a way of thinking or a sense of being with no paraphernalia.

Since the Empire accuses the Magistrate of conspiring with the Empire's enemies, the so-called "barbarians," the Magistrate is publicly tortured and humiliated. Significantly, the Empire equates him with the barbarian girl, assigning masculinity to the imperialists and taking it away from its opponents. In the words of Genevieve Lloyd, there are no pure male or female identities existing independently of sociopolitical power: "With gender there are no brute facts, other than those produced through the shifting play of the powers and pleasures of socialized, embodied, sexed human beings" (p. 145). In this sense, gender is an expression of power relations in society. Difference from the imperial mindset and ways becomes an instance of powerlessness. On one day, Mandel hands him "a woman's calico smock" (p. 128) to put on. The maids laugh at him as the smock reaches only halfway down his thighs. The Magistrate performs, in a sense, a travesty of the drag queen's performance of femininity for a purpose of entertaining audiences. When his hands are tied behind his back, Mandel tells him: "Do your best to behave like a man" (p. 128). Then they force him to climb a ladder attached to a mulberry tree and leave him to swing in the air. This scene of floating in a woman's clothes and being naked beneath the smock makes the Magistrate identify with the tortured barbarian girl and see her on equal terms of pain and suffering. Moreover, weakness and impotence implicitly identify the Magistrate with women in the eyes of the Empire. After his mock hanging, he is pulled up through his tied wrists. Mandel "slips the noose from my neck and knots it around the cord that binds my wrists" (p. 132). In symbolic terms, the Magistrate's identification with women indicates and intensifies his otherness, which is a basic point of contention for many feminists and postcolonial critics. In the words of Bill Ashcroft et al., in many societies, "women, like colonized subjects, have been relegated to the position of 'Other', 'colonised' by various forms of patriarchal domination" (p. 249). Looking at the intersections of race and gender, Maria Lugones speaks of "the coloniality of gender" and discusses how men who have been

"racialized as inferior, exhibit to the systematic violences inflicted upon women of color" (p. 1). Gender relations are ordered against colonial relations of power and subordination. For the Magistrate, gender becomes a state of mind intensified by appearances and visible tokens, i.e. the marks of torture on his face as well as the woman's clothes he is forced to wear. In its harsh treatment of both the "barbarian" prisoners as well as the "disloyal" Magistrate, the Empire relegates otherness to feminized weakness and impotence, thus privileging patriarchal control.

4. Conclusion

Early in the novel, one soldier tries to take one barbarian prisoner from the barracks yard, a woman, inside, only to get pelted with stones by other prisoners (p. 21). This attempted rape, if this is the case, hints at gender relations within an imperial context. The Empire's men sexually exploit women from the nomads and aboriginals. They cast the colonized in the position of sexual victimhood and place themselves in the position of the sexual aggressor or potential rapists. Trying to escape a violent Empire, the Magistrate, in turn, resorts to the inn's girl. Since his apartment is above the storehouse and kitchen close to the yard where the prisoners were kept, his reaction to the cries of pain is an escape into the arms of another woman. In such erotic encounters, the Magistrate is not burdened with guilt contingent on his complicity with the barbarian girl. He easily asserts his masculinity with the bird woman of the inn: "Another day and another night I spend away from the Empire of pain. I fall asleep in the girl's arms" (p. 24). There are no problems with his desire for this woman or his pleasure in her, unlike the "barbarian" girl of whom he says: "There is no link I can define between her womanhood and my desire" (p. 46). It is ironic that the Magistrate could not relate to the girl on equal terms throughout her stay with him. It is only from a position of "feminized" weakness and victimhood that he could identify with her. His story (the first-person account he narrates) is the liberal humanist's counter discourse against the Empire's imposed one.

Power relations which have governed discussions of gender bonds are also integral to discussions of imperial relations. As far as the Empire exercises power, it can freely assign masculine and feminine attributes among its subjects and enemies. Hence, gender in this novel emerges as an effect of imperial power relations, as a construct rooted in ideology, language politics, discourse, and questions of representation. However, both patriarchal and imperial discourses fail to adequately construct the gender identity of the colonized. Authoritative and paternalistic as they are, such discourses are reductive, never relating to the other on commensurate or fully humane terms. Coetzee's novel not only subverts dominant gender boundaries but also questions the alignment between hegemonic ideologies like patriarchy and imperialism in the construction of gender relations.

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Notes

Note 1. Coetzee, J. M. (2000). *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Vintage. All subsequent references to this novel will be included in parentheses in the text. The novel's title will be abbreviated as *WB*.

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