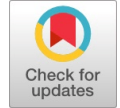


Representation of the ‘Other’ in Literature and Popular Culture: A Comparative Study of J.M. Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* and the Television Series *Game of Thrones*

Kaushik Bhuyan



Abstract: The study of the binaries like the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ has been topic of discussion among various literary and critical theorists. In addition to many others, Postcolonial theorists have always shown a key interest in the study of the binaries like- coloniser and colonised, light and dark, good and bad and so on. Till the twentieth century the Europeans established colonies in the Asian, African and American continents, and this establishment is called ‘colonialism’. However, after the Second World War most of the colonies gained independence, and this gave way to the ‘Postcolonial era’. This end of the colonial order, led to the emergence of the discourse known as ‘Postcolonial’ theory. Postcolonial theory attempts to study the position and representation of the natives during the colonial times. Frantz Fanon, who can be called as one of the earliest Postcolonial theorists, in his *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), tried to study the position of the natives in colonial times. With the theorist, many postcolonial writers also tried to portray the colonial world in their works, and one such writer was J M Coetzee. This paper will try to study the presence of the binaries in colonial world through Coetzee’s fictional work *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), by reading it through the insights of Fanon. In addition the paper will also use the medium of popular culture, in the form of the television series *Game of Thrones* (2011-19) to analyse the binaries outside the colonial context.

Keywords: Other, Colonial, Postcolonial, Binaries, Barbarians, Wildlings.

I. INTRODUCTION

Just as the Second World War was a significant event in world history, one of its end products - the gradual end of the colonial world was also a significant event. This resulted in – “political independence of many states in Asia and Africa. In temporal terms they were called ‘postcolonial’, suggesting ‘after the colonial’” (Nayar 7) [12]. This gave way to the emergence of ‘Postcolonialism’, which Pramod K. Nayar calls- “the theoretical wing of postcoloniality”. Leela Gandhi, offers her remark about Postcolonialism that –“It is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of

revisiting, remembering, and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past” [4]. This interrogation brought out many new aspects of colonialism, and one of these aspects was oppression of the colonised at the hands of the colonisers. In this context Nayar says, “colonialism was not only a system of military, economic, and social oppression, but also a discourse about the domination of another race”.

Colonial establishment brought the presence of two groups or races. Postcolonial theory in their interrogation also found that racial prejudices are coded into the literary texts written by the writers of colonial ideology. This shows how the colonial powers considered the natives as their binary opposites or the ‘other’. The creation of the ‘other’ is done through a process called ‘othering’. In other words othering is “the process of creating the ‘other’. ‘Othering’ is the work of persons who discriminate and it has also been the work of social scientists and philosophers” (Mountz 328) [10]. The racial discriminations that the colonisers created against the ‘Other’ are something that postcolonial theorists try to explore in their texts [11]. Frantz Fanon was one of the pioneer postcolonial thinkers, who in his works argue how colonialism –“dehumanised the native” (Nayar 23). He in detail discussed process of dehumanisation in his work *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961).

Fanon in his book points that- “The colonial world is divided into compartments”. By compartments, he in a way seems to point out how social and racial groups were labelled on the basis of their differences. So, this means that the colonial world is not a simple straightforward world. In this work he also tells that the construct of the compartments was not based on ideology, but rather on violence. He says that-

The colonial world is a world cut in two. The dividing line, the frontiers are shown by barracks and police stations. In the colonies it is the policeman and the soldier who are the official, instituted go-betweens, the spokesmen of the settler and his rule of oppression (Fanon 38) [2].

Again, in the context of the colonial world, he tells that- “This world divided into compartments, is inhibited by two species”. This shows that in the colonial world there are two groups of people, where one is oppressed through force by the other. One of most very important remark fanon makes in this work is that he claims that: “The colonial world is a Manichean world”. The terms “‘Manichaeism’ and ‘Manichaeism’ in the book seem to figuratively suggest a synonym of the more general term “dualist” with respect to a philosophy and worldview. The most obvious dualist

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outlook being that of the settler's, who looked at the natives as the 'other' of their 'self'.

Along with the theorists like Fanon and the others, many postcolonial fiction writers also tried to demonstrate the colonial world in their works. The early postcolonial literature from 1950's – 60's, according to Nayar were "marked by themes of nationalism and euphoria of decolonization" [13]. The idea of decolonization was something that was also discussed by Fanon in his work. In order to attain decolonization which is freedom from colonial rule, Fanon wants the natives to use the tool of violence which he believes created colonial oppression. Fanon states that-

The violence which has ruled over the ordering of the colonial world, which has ceaselessly drummed the rhythm for the destruction of native social forms and broken up without reserve the systems of reference of the economy, the customs of dress and external life, that same violence will be claimed and taken over by the native at the moment when, deciding to embody history in his own person, he surges into the forbidden quarters (Fanon 40).

With time the forms of the postcolonial literature also started evolving. The novelists introduced many new forms in their novels. Nayar calls the period after of 1970's as an experimental one where writers like – "Salman Rushdie, Buchi Emacheta, Ben Okri, Bessie Head, J. M. Coetzee, and others began to play with the form of the novel" (220-221). This can be seen in Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), where he uses an unknown and unnamed geographical location to illustrate the colonial world. Reading his novel through Fanon's ideas may help readers to draw a clear picture of the colonial world where one race was oppressed by another.

There also lies a possibility of analysing this 'othering' of one group of people outside the colonial world. To investigate into the matter taking recourse to fiction might end up showing the picture of the real world. It would not be wrong to call *Game of Thrones* (2011-19) as one of the most popular television series ever made. It is based upon George R.R. Martin's fictional book series *A Song Of Ice and Fire* (1996-2011). It is a fantasy series based on fictional events from the way early 200 and 300 AD's, long before colonialism came into practice. However, one thing that was there were foreign invasions and conquests. The conquest was not like British or European colonialism as they did not set up colonies as such, but the creation of two groups was inevitable. Historian Tom Holland states that *Game of Thrones* "plunders real events from ancient world to the middle ages to produce a heady cocktail of drama" (Guardian) [5]. So, although being a fantasy, it has its roots in real events. The series features many kingdoms and clans. A close reading of it may help in finding whether these kingdoms and clans were equals, or whether they worked on binaries of the 'self' and the 'other'.

II. THE 'OTHER' IN WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS

J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), is set in an unnamed location as is narrated through the voice of a first person narrator in the form of a magistrate. Fanon's

world of compartments, inhibited by two species can be seen right at the start of the novel. Two men were accused of being thieves and were to be investigated by Colonel Joll, who was from the Third Bureau, which in the novel is an important division of the administrative capital in the novel. The magistrate introduces the colonel to the two men who were caught as – "This gentlemen is visiting us from the capital. He visits all the forts along the frontier" [3]. So, this shows the presence of two types inhabitants- ones who live in the capital, and the ones who live by the frontier. Just as Fanon said that in the colonial world, the police officials are the spokesperson of the settlers, here Colonel Joll appears as the spokesperson of the Capital. Nayar tells that the Postcolonial writers introduced narrative strategies in their works where – "critique of empire and imperialism may be made" (220). By this remark, in the very opening scene Coetzee seems to present a picture of the colonial world that Fanon talked about.

Fanon's 'Manichean world' can be traced in this novel through the difference between the Capital and the ones who live beyond its frontiers. Fanon says that- "The governing race is first and foremost those who come from elsewhere, those who are unlike the original inhabitants, 'the others'". These others are assumed to be 'evils' and are called as 'barbarians'. The ones living beyond the frontiers lack facilities and the Capital does not even allow them to get them. Their genuine visit to the Capital is also considered a crime. This becomes clear when one of the two men caught pleads his innocence –

Excellency, we know nothing about thieving. The soldiers stooped us and tied us up. For nothing. We were on the road, coming to see the doctor. This is my sister's boy. He has a sore that does not get better. We are not thieves (Coetzee 3-4) [1].

This shows the pitiful condition of the ones who lived beyond the frontiers. This also shows how along with the racial differences 'othering' is also done through the ideas of location and geography.

In his book Fanon also mentions about decolonization through violence, which calls for a rebellion, and this expectation of a rebellion is what seems to make the Capital or the empire paranoid of the 'barbarians'. The 'barbarians' perhaps were the natives of that land, although there is not a direct reference to it. They were tired of being exploited and were preparing to get back what was theirs'. This perhaps led to the rumour that – "The barbarians were arming, the rumour went; the Empire should take precautionary measures, for there certainly would be war" [8]. The magistrate confirms the paranoid state of the Empire by saying that – "once in every generation, there is an episode of hysteria about the barbarians" [9]. In the Manichean world, Fanon also tells that the settler- "seeks to describe the native fully in exact terms he constantly refers to the bestiary". This bestial reference can also seen in the novel when the magistrate warns Colonel Joll that – "The barbarians you are chasing will smell you coming and vanish into the desert while you are still a day's march away" [12]. Like that, it can be seen how the natives

reduced to the figure of animals.

One basic difference between Fanon's and Coetzee's depiction of the colonial world is that- Fanon gives a general view of the settlers, whereas through the figure of the Magistrate, Coetzee seems to point that not all settlers were completely against the natives. The magistrate learns how Colonel Joll and his men were torturing the nomads whom the Empire called 'barbarians'. He feels pity for them and this emotional state is even more elevated when he meets the blind barbarian girl. Two guards told the magistrate that- "You know that she cannot walk. They broke her feet". This shows the cruelty of the Empire against the 'barbarians' or their 'other'. The Magistrate takes the girl home to heal her, and even forms a kind of love affair with her. He also learns from the girl that she was not but made blind. She tells how a man brought something of burning metal before her eyes, and she tells how -"After that I could not see properly any more".

The Magistrate also learns that the Empire was trying to push the barbarians from the frontiers towards the mountains. This is when he says that- "The people we call barbarians are nomads, they migrate the lowlands and the uplands every year, that is their way of life. They will never permit themselves to be bottled up in the mountains". This seems to indicate the actual picture of the barbarians, they had no bad intentions, and their visits to the frontiers were just to maintain their trade and earn their livelihood. However, the Empire's paranoia created an entirely different picture of the barbarians.

Another significant event in the novel is when the magistrate decides to return the girl to her home. This was in a way a rebellion from someone who was a part of the Empire. He wrote a letter to the Third Bureau and told them - "to restore some of the goodwill that existed before, I am undertaking a short visit to the barbarians". The journey was not easy as they travelled through a difficult terrain and also faced difficult weather conditions and the scarcity of food. Finally they complete the journey, but when the Magistrate meets the barbarian tribes he was not at ease as they -"have crossed the limits of the Empire.". This was not a simple event as he knew that he had risked his life by both going to the lands where he was not supposed to go.

Another addition is made into the binaries of the Manichean world after the magistrates' return. A warrant officer accuses the magistrate that- "You have been treasonously consorting with the enemy". This makes it clear that the Empire considers the barbarians or the 'other' as the enemy. The officer or the spokesperson of the Empire also accuses the magistrate on the grounds that "his purpose had been to warn the barbarians of the coming campaign". The Empire considers the magistrate as a rebel and as a consequence he was imprisoned and he experienced a brutal form of punishment. His punishment became a public spectacle where he was made to stand naked and perform various tasks. He even reached a position which he exclaims as- "Now I am past shame". He then exclaims that -"I would rather die than go on".

The magistrate continues to plead his innocence, "I want to say that nothing passed between myself and the barbarians concerning military matters. It was a private affair. I went to return the girl to her family. For no other

purpose". He tells that his sole purpose for doing that was because he felt that- "no one deserves to die". However, no one believed him and his punishment continues. This shows the hopeless state of the natives. Even if some settler is willing to help them, he too is punished. This in a way explains why the settlers were so hesitant to help the indigenous people or at least maintain a cordial relationship. Most of the settlers believed in the theory of Manichaeism and worked on its principles. Still, Coetzee's representation of the magistrate shows that not all the settlers were same.

Fanon in his book also talked about decolonization through violence and that is what happened in the text. Towards the end of the text tells that there were- terrible rumours everywhere: that the force has been lured into the desert and wiped out; that unknown to us it has been recalled to homeland, leaving the frontier towns for the barbarians to pick like fruit whenever they choose to (Coetzee 142).

The magistrate tells it hard to believe that the expedition that was meant to wipe the barbarians, eventually led to wiping out the forces of the Empire. Although the Empire was not entirely wiped out, they were forced to retreat. In a way this retreat of the Empire celebrates Fanon's ideas of decolonisation. In the end the magistrate expresses that- "No one can accept that an Imperial army has been annihilated by men with bows and arrows and rusty old guns who live in tents and never wash and cannot read and write". However, the Empire, as earlier mentioned being not entirely eliminated shows that violence may have won a battle for them, but the war was far from over. It can be seen that most of the ideas that Fanon expressed in his *The Wretched of the Earth* can be witnessed in the novel except his general perspective about the settlers. In addition Coetzee also portrays a more realistic side of the idea of decolonization. Whether these ideas were Coetzee used Fanon's ideas deliberately or not is uncertain; but the use of his principles can be undoubtedly observed.

III. THE 'OTHER' IN GAME OF THRONES

Game of Thrones (2011-19) has been a global phenomenon that has captured a large fan base. Based on George R.R. Martin's book series *A Song Of Ice and Fire* (1996-2011), the television series is structured around seven kingdoms, which are competing against one another to conquer 'The Iron Throne'. The series has many plots and sub-plots, and in a way all the kingdoms see its competitor as the 'other'. However, all these kingdoms have a general perspective of the people living beyond the frontier. Fanon's military frontiers can be seen in the form of one of the most crucial structures in the series named 'The Wall'. It is situated to the north of Winterfell, the Northern kingdom. 'The Wall' is believed to protect the kingdoms from 'White Walkers', but their long absence creates a new enemy. As a result the people who were living beyond the wall, known as 'The Wildlings', became the new enemy. Fanon's 'Manichean World' can be clearly seen, where the dividing line is a wall, and the ones living beyond it are the 'other'.

The series uses a lot of fantastic and mythical elements in the form of



dragons, white walkers and so on. Still, all these elements are only tools to add up to the main story line of the series. In his interview to *Rolling Stone* Martin shares that- "I take stuff from the Wars of the Roses and other fantasy things, and all these work around in my head and somehow they jell into what I hope is uniquely my own". So, all the things that one sees in the series in not merely an imagination. Like most other things, he also took inspiration from historical events for the plot regarding 'The Wildlings'. In the same interview Martin shares how he came up with the idea of 'The Wall'. He tells that he was inspired to create 'The Wall' after he visited the border of England and Scotland and saw the 'Hadrian Wall'. The Hadrian wall was built by the Romans to protect themselves from Scottish tribes. Martin shares how-

For the Romans at that time, this was the end of civilisation; it was the end of the world. We know that there were Scots beyond the hills, but they didn't know that. It could have been any kind of monster (Rolling Stone).

The same can also be seen in the series where 'The Wildlings' are perceived as 'monsters'. Again, Martin's words suggest that just like in Coetzee's work, here too the 'othering' is done mainly on the basis of race.

Fanon's 'Manichean World' where the settler looks at the natives as 'animals', can be reflected in the series. The context is not however of a colonial world; but of a world that saw foreign conquest but still the representation remains comparable. Again, Fanon's general outlook of all the settlers in absent in the series, just like in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Most of the Westeros (the land where all the kingdoms were located) despised 'The Wildlings' and this is seen from the very beginning. They are referred as the 'other' and 'not like us' by most of Westeros. Still, there are characters they see no difference. One such character is Tyrion Lannister who in his conversation with Benjen Stark tells that- "I believe that the only difference between us and the wildings is that when the Wall went up, our ancestors happened to live on the right side of it" (season 1 episode 3) [7]. This shows that only actual difference between people of Westeros and 'The Wildlings' is on the basis of geography. Geography interestingly can also be seen as another base for the creation of the 'other' just like in *Waiting for the Barbarians*.

This difference on the basis of geography is most probably created through one of the most essential components of both Human and Political Geography, and that is 'territory'. Many scholars and researchers have provided their insights on how 'territory' is not just merely an area under a state, kingdom or political entity's jurisdiction, and it has many other political connotations. One such scholar was John Hickman, who in his work *Space is Power: The Seven Rules of Territory* discusses how humans and state are both influenced by the idea of 'territory'. Hickman calls that humans are territorial in nature and therefore how he expects "polities to claim territory their rulers believe is the most valuable" (Hickman 7). This seems apparent in *Game of Thrones*, where the entire Westeros is trying to claim authority of the most valuable territory. This is however not in the case of 'The Wildlings' as they only want to be a part of the most valuable territory, so that they can remove their tag as the 'other'.

As mentioned earlier the entire Westeros did not recognise 'The Wildlings' as the 'other'. This recognition of 'The Wildlings' being same as everyone seems to be reflected mostly through the character Jon Snow and his actions. He was a man of the Night's Watch, a name given to the guards who protect 'The Wall'. In season 2, episode 6 he takes an important decision of not killing a wildling named Ygritte. Jon Snow can be compared to the figure of the Magistrate, as he too rescued someone who is considered as the 'other'. Just like the Magistrate, Jon Snow too forms a relationship with Ygritte. Ygritte however, was not so simple and straightforward as the blind girl. Instead of Jon Snow taking her back home, it was she who lured him into the Wildlings' territory and convinced him to join them.

When Jon snow reaches their territory it can be seen that it is not only 'The Wildlings' who call themselves 'The Free Folk' that are looked as the 'other'. 'The Wildlings' too despise the people on the other side of the wall. They even have a name for the men of the Night's Watch, whom they call 'crows' for their black attire. Jon Snow, there also meets Mance Rayder, the king beyond the wall. Mance Rayder wants to know Jon Snow's intention of joining and betraying the Night's Watch. To this Jon Snow replies that he saw a 'White Walker' and therefore he tells that- "I want to fight for the side that fights for the living" (season 3 episode 1). Things later take a different turn as it turns out that Jon Snow was only acting as a spy. He had his allegiance to the Night's Watch and warns them about the attack after his narrow escape from 'The Wildlings' territory.

Fanon's concept of decolonization through violence can also be witnessed in the series. The rebellion was however not against colonialism but rather to end territorial oppression and finding a safe haven. His time at the wildlings' territory lets Jon Snow learn about their plans. This eventually helped the men of the Night's Watch to protect Castle Black, their fort. Jon Snow knowing the future attacks are a certainty goes to Mance Rayder for a truce. Mance Rayder tells Jon Snow that- "We're not here to conquer. We're here to hide behind your wall" (season 4 episode 10). This shows that Mance Rayder or 'The Wildlings' were not trying to overthrow anyone, rather they were just seeking a safe place to protect themselves from the 'army of the dead'. The possible truce ends as an army led by Stannis Baratheon capture Mance Rayder and the wildlings army is left with no leader.

Things again took a turn after Jon Snow is elected as the Lord Commander of the Night's Watch in season 5, episode 2 for his bravery in the fight against 'The Wildlings'. This was not a very popular decision as half of the Night's Watch was against him as they came to know about his affair with Ygritte. Further on, in season 5, episode 5 remembering the words of Mance Rayder, Jon Snow announces to open the gates for 'The Wildlings'. This decision faces a lot of questioning to which Jon Snow replies that - "We can learn to live with the wildings, or we can add them to the army of the dead" (season 5 episode 5) [6]. The argument seems fair to everyone as more dead people would mean more soldiers in the army of the



dead, which led by the Night King was marching towards Westeros. Jon Snow with the help of Tormund Giantsbane was able to bring 'The Wildlings' for the first time on the right side of the wall.

This decision although historic had its repercussions. Even if Jon Snow was the Lord Commander, there were other powerful men who were dissatisfied with his rule. Therefore, just as the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* was punished, Jon Snow too was punished for helping the 'enemy'. His punishment was much serious as he was stabbed to death by the ones who did not agree with his decision and justified their action by saying "for the watch" (season 5, episode 10) with every stab. Luckily, Jon Snow was resurrected back to life by a witch named Melisandre, in season 6, episode 2. Jon Snow hangs the ones who stabbed and his death was in a way a blessing in disguise for him.

Jon Snow was able to gain the trust of 'The Wildlings' as he was even killed for helping them. To strengthen his army in the fight against the Night King, he recruits even more 'Wildlings'. 'The Wildlings' were then even given entrance in Winterfell. Jon Snow by uniting the north and the ones beyond the wall was accepted as the 'King in The North' and 'King beyond The Wall'. The Northern Kingdoms, which were assisted by wildlings; Queen Daenerys Targaryen along with her dragons, Dothraki and Unsullied army; the Iron Borne; Arya Stark and others were able to defeat the Night King. This shows how the oppression against 'The Wildlings' was unjust, and how they could live and fight together with the other forces of Westeros against a greater threat. This in a way shows the binaries of 'self' and the 'other' as irrelevant as every human is the same, but it is only realised at the time of jeopardy and threat.

IV. CONCLUSION

In the end, after analysing both the works of fiction, it can be seen that Fanon's 'Manichean World' is not only a colonial world; but a world where the powerful forces oppresses the ones without power. Both the works show how the ones in power classify the ones who are not like them as the 'other'. The difference may be of location, dress, colour or other habits. However, both the works reject Fanon's general view of the colonial world. This is illustrated through the characters of the Magistrate and Jon Snow who try to unite the opposing classes, and are even punished for their deeds. Jon Snow eventually is successful, unlike the Magistrate. This victory that Martin portrayed in his work is often criticised, as people believe he has a soft side towards the refugees.

Another important distinction between both the works can be seen in the fact that 'The Barbarians' except the girl do not have a voice, which is not the case with 'The Wildlings', as one is able to hear their perspectives. Again, even though the barbarian girl has a voice it is not as assertive as the voices of Ygritte, Mance Rayder, Tormund Giantsbane and others. Another difference is that 'The Barbarians' although not completely decisive, are able to defeat the settlers (oppressors); but the same cannot be said about 'The Wildlings'. One more noticeable difference can also be seen outcome of the respective battles. A momentary victory of

'The Barbarians' may be because, being a Postcolonial writer Coetzee tried to showcase the possibilities of decolonization. 'The Wildlings' were defeated unlike 'The Barbarians', but they were able to live alongside the rest of Westeros. This may be because Martin perhaps wanted to show how refugees and other citizens can dwell together. Although the reason is uncertain both the works show how dangerous 'othering' is. Due to certain differences one group considers the ones unlike them as the 'other'. Fortunately, a reader or a viewer can understand this problem through these works, and perhaps these are small attempts to highlight the importance of unity among the human society which may help it to achieve victory over more serious problems.

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Representation of the ‘Other’ in Literature and Popular Culture: A Comparative Study of J.M. Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* and the Television Series *Game of Thrones*

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