

# **Imperial Power and the Denial of Native Authority in English Colonialist Discourse**

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## **Abstract**

My paper studies the issue of power and empire in the colonialist discourses of Rudyard Kipling, Edward Morgan Forster and Joseph Conrad. It focuses on the consolidation of the English imperial power in the Orient at the expense of the native power structures. Therefore, two main interrelated issues are developed. First, the writers celebrate the encroachment of the English political power in the Orient. Second, they deny native rules by their focus on the idea of Oriental despotism and misrule as the essential factors that incite the decimation of the native rule. This process of denying the native authority is accompanied by the subject people's obedience to the colonial authority. I have concluded my paper with drawing parallels with contemporary issues, analysing an official discourse by George W. Bush as an instance. In his "Iraq War Discourse" (2003), Bush denies native authority in Iraq and reiterates nineteenth century Orientalist discourse about Oriental despotism and its replacements by the blessings of Western "democracy".

## **Introduction**

Discourse and rhetoric cannot be dissociated with power. Discourse, in Foucauldian terms, suggests the idea of power, and rhetoric is appropriated within discourse so as to justify power. The most important aspect of power is that which exists between the rulers and the ruled. This prevails within the sovereign state and its subjects; it also prevails in an imperial context where an

imperialist power rules over a subject country. To legitimise and consolidate their power, the rulers always refer to rhetoric and ideology which are reflected within discourse. This paper is not concerned with the discourse that is produced within the sovereign state; it deals with that which accompanies the imperial domination of the Orient by the Western powers, namely colonial discourse which consolidates this power. This consolidation expresses itself through a variety of perspectives like the adoption of ideologies of difference through which the colonised subjects are maintained in states of inferiority. Another way of consolidating this domination involves the celebration of the Western political power and the denial of native authority. Thomas Metcalf (1994) observes that in order to consolidate their imperial rule, the British devised ideologies of difference thanks to which they maintained the Indians and other subject people in an inferior position. Once the 'different' was created, the British were to "sustain a system of colonial authority" (Metcalf, 1994: 113) which replaced the native authority. They considered India, for instance, as a land "forged by despotism" (Ibid. 66) that had to be evinced by the British imperial power.

This paper proposes to study the issue of the implementation of the British imperial power in the Orient and the denial of the native authority in the imperialist discourses of Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad and Edward Morgan Forster. The point is that the three writers celebrate the British political power in the Orient through a denial of the native political structures. Within their texts is the idea that they associate the British with political superiority and the Orientals with political inferiority. This inferiority is shown through an emphasis put on the prevalence of tyranny and misrule in the colonial countries, which are replaced by more organised and representative

political structures brought by the British. Considered in this light the writers adopt within their texts imperialist rhetoric that provides a justification for the imperial domination.

After the Indian mutiny of 1857, the British established direct rule in India and created what was called the British Raj. This implied that native power structures were replaced by the British power structure. In the Malay Archipelago, the British were following another policy, which involved the workings of British political expertise in the service of so-called 'incompetent' native rulers. The colonialist discourses of Kipling, Forster and Conrad cannot be dissociated with these political structures as they were directly or indirectly integrated within them: Kipling wrote for the conservative *Civil and Military Gazette* and *The Pioneer*; Forster worked for an Indian native prince as private secretary, which suggests the idea of indirect rule; and Conrad worked for the British Merchant Marine, which was part of the British imperial structure, before he became a writer. To study this issue, reference will be made to a selection of Kipling's and Forster's writings about the British Raj along with Conrad's writings about the Malay Archipelago. As far as theory is concerned, it is clear that the paper will be based on Edward Said's postcolonial theory as it is developed in his *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). Within these two works, Edward Said observes that Western writers have aligned themselves with their expanding empires within the framework of Orientalist discourse. This involves a process through which: the colonised subject is codified as an 'inferior' Other; the imperial power is celebrated; and the native authority is denied.

## Discussion

Within this paper are developed two interrelated points. First is the exercise of the British imperial power over the Orientals as it is developed in the Orientalist discourses of Kipling, Forster and Conrad. Second is the denial of native authority which is the direct consequence of the first. The process of implementing the British imperial power in the Orient needs consolidation, and the writers refer to the denial of the native structures of power as an ideology for that purpose. In fact, the native political structures are dealt with in terms of despotism, misrule and instability which incite a need for their decimation and replacement by more representative and democratic power structures.

### **The Consolidation of the British Imperial Power in the Orient**

Edward Said observes that the consolidation of empire is marked by the idea of power which is “elaborated and articulated in the novel” and short story (1994: 97). Kipling’s Indian fiction makes a manifest celebration of the British power in India. He pays due respect to the British Raj, whose power is worked out through an organised body of the British imperial agents helped by some Indian natives. In *Kim*, the British imperial system is depicted as a highly organised political structure. It involves primarily the services of the British colonial administrators who are attributed the names of *sahibs*. Besides, some native agents named the *babus* are nominated to help the British officials in their governance. The British secret services are also involved in the novel. This British political structure rules over India with the iron fist. It interferes, for instance, in the affairs of the native states. When the native kings conspire against the British authority in India through their uprising against one of its agents namely Mahbub Ali, the reaction is immediate and authoritative.

This means that the native is not allowed to rise against the authority of the imperial power. One of them says, “By Gad, sar! The British government will change the succession in Hilás and Bunár, and nominate new heirs to the throne” (Kipling, 1994a: 369). They should obey the authority of the imperial power because it is considered as beneficial for them. Another pertinent example of the exercise of the British authority over the Indians and the denial of their authority is depicted in a passage which involves Kim, the English, the lama and a native policeman named Dunnoo. The policeman addressing to the lama says,

‘Do not sit under that gun’ [...] ‘Huh! Was Kim’s retort on the lama’s behalf. ‘Sit under that gun if it please thee. When didst thou steal the milk-woman’s slipper’s, Dunnoo?’

That was an utterly unfounded charge sprung on the spur of the moment, but it **silenced** Dunnoo,

(Kipling, 1994a: 22; emphasis added)

What one understands from these words is that Kim is endowed with the power to “silence” the policeman who has no other solution but accept his retort. Kim not only denies the authority of policeman but also exerts his white authority over him. Besides, he plays the protector of the weakened lama as the policeman was exercising his repressive power over him.

In a similar way, in Forster’s *A Passage to India*, the Anglo-Indians consider themselves as the Ruling Race that does everything so as to avoid the rise of the natives against their power. In fact, after the 1857 mutiny, the officials started to change their policy in India. The officials are in India to keep peace and maintain the British Raj. In the novel, Forster portrays the British Raj in miniature. Chandrapore is “presented as a representative centre of British India, and used as a literary device to a microcosmic view of the Raj at work” (Ganguly, 1990:

33). This “microcosmic view of the Raj” is presented through the services of officials like Mr Turton, Mr McBryde, Major Callendar and Ronny. These in turn are related to the Indian princely states by the Viceroy. In the novel, Turton is the collector of taxes, McBryde the Superintendent of Police, Callendar the Civil Surgeon and Ronny the new city Magistrate. All of these officials are figures of English power in India: the power of finance, the power of discipline, the power of knowledge and the power of justice, respectively. As far the judicial department is concerned, Rooney tells his mother, “I am out here to work, mind, to hold this wretched country by force” (Forster, 1979: 50). It means that he and his fellows are serving the Indians. The narrator believes in this,

He spoke sincerely. Every day he worked hard in the court trying to decide which of two untrue accounts was the less untrue, trying to dispense justice fearlessly, to protect the weak against the less weak, the incoherent against the plausible, surrounded by lies and flattery. That morning he had convicted a railway clerk of overcharging pilgrims for their tickets, and a Pathan of attempted rape. He expected no gratitude, no recognition for this, and both clerk and Pathan might appeal, bribe their witnesses more effectually in the interval, and get their sentences reversed. It was his duty.

(Ibid. 50)

The narrator believes in the importance of the implementation of the English justice in India. They administered Chandrapore as a district among the number of districts that India was divided into during the time of the British Raj. Historically, it “was divided into 250 administrative districts and the duty of the administrators was to ‘maintain law, order and to collect revenue’” (Ganguly, 1990: 33). There are two important

aspects of the administration of these officials. First, their rule is race-bound. Second, it is governed by the traumatic experience of the 1857 Indian uprising. These two features contribute much to the impediment of cultural and racial understanding in Anglo-India and the widening of the gap between the ruler and the ruled; this imports much to the general framework of Forster's imperialist attitude of the Raj. He reproduces the imperial vision that the people of India need to be maintained within an imperial system that is much important to them as to the imperial power. However, it is within a system that favours dialogue between the coloniser and the colonised that this rule can be maintained.

In addition to the idea of *A Passage to India*, Forster's "The Life to Come" shows the use of the missionary impulse for political aims. This is achieved through missionaries who have managed to make themselves rulers over colonised subjects only thanks to their missionary work. Mr Pinmay is representative of this category of imperial agents. He makes himself *powerful* in the village thanks to his conversion of the natives. Indeed, as soon as he converts the natives, their locality is transferred into an integral district of the empire, and Mr Pinmay is appointed the administrator of "the new district" (Forster, 1972: 69). This denotes a process through which territories are transferred into the rule of English imperial agents thanks to the missionary work.

It is this same process that is the central concern of Conrad's *Lord Jim*. By virtue of Jim's intellectual, political and military powers and the awkward circumstances in which he finds the people of Patusan, he becomes their lord protector. Thanks to these powers, he is deified by the Malays of Patusan when he arrives there. This can be explained by what he does for them. He finds the people in turmoil because of the tyranny of their rulers, the internal factions and the external threats, so the

people consider him as their white saviour since “there could be no question that Jim had the power” (Conrad, 1994: 207). This is understood in the way he appeared to them, seeming “like a creature not only of another kind but of other essence. Had they not seem him come up in a canoe they might have thought he had descended upon them from the clouds” (Ibid. 174). As a British in the Orient, Jim brought both his knowledge in military organisation and the British modern arms or guns thanks to which he manages to protect the natives against their despotic rulers and Brown, a ferocious Dutch man, who came to the shore for trade whatever the means. When a group of warring natives were endangering the lives of other natives it is said that Jim managed the group easily and successfully,

Jim took up an advantageous position and shepherded them out in a bunch through the doorway: all that time the torch had remained vertical in the grip of a little hand, without so as a trouble. The three men obeyed him, perfectly mute, moving automatically. He ranged them in row. “Link Arms” he ordered. They did so. “The first who withdraws his arm or turns ahead is a dead man”, he said. “March!” They stepped out together, rigidly; he followed,

(Ibid. 228)

It is clear from the above that the warring men are voiceless and inactive in the face of the white saviour. The way he addresses to them also shows another kind of power, coercive power which is generally associated with military power. In addition to Jim’s military power, he is endowed with intellectual faculties and a sense of organisation that the natives are in need of. He brings stability to Patusan, which was like “a cage of beasts made ravenous by long impenitence” (Ibid. 182), and where “utter insecurity for life and property was the normal conditions”

(Ibid. 174). Fortunately, “he had regulated many things [there]” (Ibid. 168). The people of the shore consult him in political matters. When Jim goes away from Patusan for some days, the people were being attacked by the dangerous natives. Dain Warris, a clansman educated by Jim, could not protect his fellows, for “[h]e had not Jim’s racial prestige and the reputation of the invincible, supernatural power. He was not the visible, tangible incarnation of unfailing truth and of unfailing victory” (Ibid. 272). Aware of their weakness and Jim’s power, the chieftains of the village go farther in trying to find counsel in the dwelling of the absent Jim. It is this belief which “guided the opinions of the chief men of the town, who elected to assemble in Jim’s fort for deliberation upon the emergency, as if expecting to find wisdom and courage in the dwelling of the absent white man” (Ibid.). It means that they lack these two important elements, but they find support in Jim. It also shows that were he obliged to leave or were he killed, they would certainly pay the ultimate price. The people of the village are aware that if the white man were to leave they would become easy a prey to ferocious people like Brown. The latter also knows that if he manages to kill Jim, he will become the lord of the island. It is said that thanks to Jim’s skills he became “the virtual ruler” (Ibid. 207) of Patusan. The idea that his rule was “virtual” suggests that Jim did not rule the natives without consulting their will. It means that it is representative rule, which goes against the idea of tyranny and despotism, associated with the native authority.

### **The Denial of Native Authority**

The implementation of the British imperial power in the Orient involves a process through which the native structures of power are denigrated. It is maintained within the British colonial discourse that given the natural penchant of the Indian rulers to

despotism, there is nothing as advantageous and as positive as the implementation of a kind of democratic system in the land to be imposed upon the indigenous people by the British imperial authority. Kipling, Conrad and Forster consider that native regimes need to be decimated because they involve misrule, despotism and corruption, insecurity and instability. For Edward Said, “authority [...] means for ‘us’ to deny the autonomy of ‘it’” (Said, 1995: 32). Kipling totally adheres to this view as he denies the native authority in India. This is shown in his insistence on the idea of despotism. In *Kim*, for instance, this is effected through the *METAPHOR* of native policemen headed by an Englishman. This suggests that this native structure of power should be led by the English power because “native police mean extortion to the native all India over” (Kipling, 1994a: 276). The idea of “native police” directly alludes to native rule; their disposition to “extortion” is the appropriate aspect of their despotic behaviour. This illustrates the natives’ predispositions to behave only for their personal interests, whereas their subjection to the British would make things righteous. Kipling shows that the Indian rulers cannot represent their people because they are naturally predisposed to act despotically.

It is within a despotic regime that political instability and insecurity flourish. Therefore, the writers *EMPLOT* their texts in such a way as to show that the implementation of the imperial regimes brings harmony and stability to the natives. For instance, Forster in “The Life to Come” observes that the English power as it is implemented through the missionary work is beneficial to the natives at the political level. Before the planting of the cross in the central India tribes, there were usual clashes among the different villages of the region. Also, the people suffered from vile misrules. Fortunately, Forster says, the missionary work has

come “to teach [them] to rule [their kingdoms] rightly” (Forster, 1972: 72). They also managed to evince the “inter-tribal war[s]” (Ibid. 74) which were shaking the life within the region. It means that unless the British interfered in the internal affairs of these people, only a situation of instability due mainly to native misrule would prevail. Similarly, Conrad makes Jim as the British regulator of the affairs of Patusan. When he arrives there he finds the people suffering from the tyranny and oppression of their Sultan. The latter is depicted as “an imbecile youth with two thumbs on his left hand and an uncertain and beggarly revenue extorted from a miserable population and stolen from by his many uncles” (Conrad, 1994: 173). He is a tyrant who does not hesitate to extort the riches and property of his subjects. He is an impotent ruler since he does not manage to cope with the antagonism of his uncles. The worst that can be said of these uncles is that they are more despotic than the young sultan. For instance, it is said of the Rajah Allang that he was

the worst of the Sultan’s uncles, the governor of the river, who did the extorting and the stealing, and ground down to the point of extinction of the country born Malays, who utterly defenceless, had not even the resource for emigrating.

(Ibid. 174)

The Sultan and his uncles are considered as typical Oriental despots who do by no means care about their people. Under the power of the despot, the people suffer from insecurity, not to mention their poverty-stricken states. Worse of all they have nowhere to flee from this tyranny. Burnhan (1995) observes that the “oriental despot is better seen as a figure of power” (Burhan, 1995: 85). The Rajah and even Doramin, the despots with whom Jim fights “are transparent figures of [the] detested despot” (Burhan, 1995: 85). “Politically, the ‘primitive’ was in the grip of

either anarchy or despotism; social control, if any, was exercised by the most savage tyranny, by the despotism of custom or by religious trickery” (Street, 1975: 7). Conrad depicts this same state of anarchy as the Sultan has no power and his uncles exert grab upon the people. Therefore, Jim’s intervention is more than needed. He manages to regulate many things in Patusan thanks to the imposition of his political skills to the people of Patusan. Richard Ruppel observes that “the rule [...] he imposes is thoroughly benign because his vision of the ideal is one of harmony and justice” (Ruppel, 1998). This ideal of justice and harmony for all is contrasted to despotism’s happiness for the minority.

Conrad conveys almost the same vision of Oriental despotism as Rudyard Kipling’s idea of native police extorting the natives and John Stuart Mill, who insists upon the need of the Indian people for the British Rule to protect their lives and their properties against their despots. He is all the more similar to Sir Hugh Clifford’s idea of Malay “vile misrules and a government which so is incompetent and impotent” (1898: 124) and their replacement by an “administration that presses equally upon all alike” (Ibid.) In the nineteenth century, the misfortunes related to native rule in the Malay Archipelago required the intervention of the British “to impose a Western-type stability onto an ancient heritage of changing political fortunes” (Yeow, 2009: 48). This idea of Oriental despotism started to impose itself as a reality when in the sixteenth and seventieth centuries, scholars and travellers discovered that a common feature of the Oriental societies of Asia, the Near East, China and India was this “despotic strength of their political authority” (Wittfogel, 1957: 1) as well as a monopolisation of the sources of wealth especially the land (Ibid.). Therefore, when the project of colonial

expansion started, the imperialists used this feature as a justification for their undertaking, especially as they spoke about decimating native regimes through the implementation of Western structures of power.

The result of the decimation of the native regimes by the imperial structures is the submission of the natives to the authority of these foreign structures. Authority in *Lord Jim* is an important trope. His authoritative power is considerable. Jim becomes the 'lord-protector' of the natives. Since "[h]e loved the land and the people living in it with very great love [and] was ready to answer with his life for any harm that should come to them" (Conrad, 1994: 295), the Patusans are very obedient to him. Besides, Jim's political and military expertise makes him always obeyed. For instance, he manages to unite the people against the old Rajah, whom they could defeat thanks to their obedience to and trust in Jim's power. It is said that after having plotted against the old Rajah, "Tuan Jim gave his orders and was **obeyed**" (Conrad, 1994: 297; emphasis added). Jim's authority coupled with the natives' obedience to him entails the denial of native authority. Like Conrad, Kipling in "The Man Who Would be King" observes that one of the most important steps towards power is to bring protection, security and stability to a lost people like those of Kafiristan. Dravot observes that he and Carnihan came to "make Kafiristan a country where every man should eat in peace and drink in peace and 'pecially **obey us**" (Kipling, 1953: 181; emphasis added). The word 'obey' is associated with the mission of bringing peace and security to the people of Kafiristan to emphasise the importance of the mission for the sake of power. It also means a denial of the native authority that is to be replaced by that of the two English subjects. In "His Chance in Life" (1888), Kipling points out the importance of not being

disobedient to the imperial authority, through the *SIMILE* of the native as a child. He observes that it should never be forgotten that “unless the outward and visible signs of Our Authority are always before a native he is as incapable as a child of understanding what authority means, or where is the danger of disobeying it” (Kipling, 1994b: 81). It means that the natives need to be obedient to the imperial power in the same way as children need to accept the authority of their parents.

### **Conclusion**

As a conclusion, it is clear that Kipling, Forster and Conrad consolidate the British imperial power in the Orient at the expense of native power structures. They celebrate the encroachment of English political power in the Orient. As a consequence of this, they deny native rules by their focus on the idea of Oriental despotism, misrule and corruption as the essential vices that incite a decimation of native rule. This process of denying native rule is accompanied by the subject people’s obedience to the colonial authority. This shows the extent to which British Orientalist discourse is committed to the political power of the British Empire. It also shows the deployment of ideological devices to consolidate this power.

Perhaps it is pertinent an idea to draw parallels with contemporary issues, analysing an official discourse by George W. Bush as an instance. George W. Bush, in his address to the nation dated to September 7<sup>th</sup> 2003, shows a denial of Iraqi authority in the same way as it was done for Oriental colonised countries in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in colonial discourse. Saddam's regime is associated with tyranny and despotism under which terror is encouraged. Therefore, the United States is viewed as the right power to defend the oppressed people of Iraq. "In Iraq, we are helping the long suffering people of that country to build a decent democratic society at the center of the Middle East" (Bush, 2003). It means that the United States gets rid of Saddam's regime to be replaced by a process through which democracy had to replace terror and tyranny. And this "undertaking is difficult and costly – yet worthy of our nation" (Ibid.). He associates his country with what can be termed "America's burden" of bringing the blessings of democracy to Iraq and defeat the "[e]nemies of freedom" (Ibid.). This is understood in the association of human and material sacrifice with the war in Iraq, as if the United States were forced to interfere in the internal affairs of a country, classified among the most dreaded in the West as well as the most hankered after given its oil reserves.

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