

EXPLORING THE EVILS OF IMPERIALISM AND KLEPTOCRACY IN O'NEILL'S *THE EMPEROR JONES*: A CRITICAL STUDY

Rashed Mahmud

Assistant Professor

Department of English, Pabna University of Science and Technology, Pabna - 6600,
Bangladesh

ABSTRACT: *O'Neill's 1920 tragedy "The Emperor Jones" criticizes the capitalist-imperialist American society and its occupation and exploitation of other countries. In the play, O'Neill condemns the white people's dominance and their abuse of power over the non-white people for capitalist and materialistic interests. The play stages the rise and fall of Brutus Jones, an African-American ex-Pullman porter and fugitive convict, who becomes emperor and possessor of great wealth on a small Caribbean island through his knowledge of deception and corruption that he acquires during his ten years of services to the white people in the United States. Jones exercises absolute power over the natives, turns into a powerful dictator, takes on kleptocratic practices and financially exploits and squeezes the ignorant natives dry. The play depicts what happens when a person like Jones internalizes the dominant system of power and then proceeds to continue it in his own territory once he gets the opportunity to do so. The study attempts to explore the evil aspects of imperialism and kleptocracy and their repercussions on the innocent natives of the West Indian island. It also investigates O'Neill's stance on the white people's dominance, their hypocrisy and exploitation of the non-white populace around the world.*

KEYWORDS: Imperialism, Kleptocracy, White Man's Burden, Social Darwinism, Abuse of Power, Economic Exploitation

INTRODUCTION

The American dramatist and Nobel laureate Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953) is hailed as one of the most outstanding American playwrights of all time. He is credited with introducing realism, especially psychological and social realism in the American theatre and thereby liberating drama from the profit-oriented and commercial melodramas of excessive emotionalism and sensationalism prevalent in the contemporary American theatre. With suggestive expressionism, shocking realism and utmost sincerity, he dominates the American theatre throughout the early twentieth century and boldly projects the difficult and controversial issues of the American society. He intrepidly declares: "I am going on the theory that the United States, instead of being the most successful country in the world, is the greatest failure" (qtd. in Clark 152). In his writings, he criticizes the persons who wrongly glorify the capitalist-imperialist American society and impulsively acknowledge it as flawless. He condemns the notion of American success, mainly success in money-making, which is associated with riches, position and power predominated by rush, phony idealism, absolute monopoly and excitement. His social perspective covers different complicated issues

of modern American society, and his plays describe the ideas and conflicts of the early twentieth century and deal with the social and economic aspects of modern era (Gupta 2).

As a keen observer of the society, O'Neill finds out that one section of the world thinks itself as the owner of all powers and legitimizes oppression and domination over other sections of the world. That section establishes itself as superior, holds the absolute right to dominate others, and regards others as inferior class who has no right to challenge or revolt; whose only way to survive is to surrender and obey. O'Neill opines that this dominant system, i.e., racism, capitalism and imperialism, legitimizes all forms of oppression and exploitation within its area of authority. In his works, he questions such dominance and attempts to unmask the evil aspects of this supremacy. His *The Emperor Jones* (1920) challenges the concept of Empire in general, and questions the validity of the United States' occupation and exploitation of other countries in particular. The play depicts the rise and fall of Brutus Jones, a stowaway and Negro ex-pullman porter, who becomes an emperor and owner of great wealth on a small Caribbean island through deception and corruption. Jones occupies the island, exercises absolute power over the natives, turns into a powerful dictator, and financially exploits and squeezes the ignorant natives dry. The play shows what occurs when a person like Jones internalizes this dominant system of power and then proceeds to continue them in his own territory once he gets the opportunity.

The play is set "on an island in the West Indies as yet not self-determined by White Marines" (O'Neill 2). Even though O'Neill never mentions the name of the island in the play, his depiction of the island resembles the United States' occupation of Haiti, an act of imperialism which was vehemently criticized by O'Neill's progressive political circles in New York. The United States occupied and ruled Haiti from 1915 to 1934. O'Neill found interest in Haitian history just before the United States' occupation. Few years later in 1919, he heard a story about the Haitian President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam (1859-1915) who ruled Haiti from 4 March to 27 July 1915 and who created a myth that he bore a charmed life and his rebellious subjects would "never get him with a lead bullet" but a silver bullet and he "would get himself first with a silver one" when the time comes (O'Neill x). But the native rebels turned the myth a false one and killed him in 1915. The story provides O'Neill the idea to compose the play to project his lifelong contempt for American materialism, imperialism and economic exploitation of the occupied countries. O'Neill regards the President Sam's defeat as the ethical and actual failure of American imperialism. Through the play he severely criticizes imperialism and kleptocracy, reveals its contradictions, and shows how a Blackman turns into a dictator under the White Man's education and how he acts as an evil imperialist.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since its premiere in 1920, O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* has received much attention of the critics for its historical and social significance. Though the play was performed a century ago, still today the play is able to retain its glory and the critics' attention. Critics are captured by its still relevant themes and innovative dramatic devices. The existing studies largely focus on its expressionistic aspects, social and racial issues, power plays, comparative approaches, psychological analysis and ethnicity-related inquiries. Many scholars emphasize on the play's expressionism and expressionistic style, like Clara Blackburn's article which explores the continental impacts on O'Neill's expressionistic plays as he ventures to "project his own soul,

his inner self, on the stage” (111). Busch and Jones attempt to demonstrate “the influence Strindberg exerted upon O’Neill’s expressionistic plays” and show how “O’Neill’s admiration for Strindberg was manifested” in the play (129). Some scholars like Steen attempt to reflect on “racial subjectivity and whiteness” in the play (339). In his “Genuine Negroes and Real Bloodhounds”, Aoife Monks explains that *The Emperor Jones* uses blackface to embody African American identity, and it is viewed as a representation of race disparity on stage. Iranpour and Basirizadeh study the play “in Power and dissidence” and try to show how O’Neill “scrutinizes the situations of the Afro-Americans and challenges the concept of power and authority in the White American ideology” (37).

Among several comparative studies, Canton shows *The Emperor Jones* and *Porgy and Bess* by George and Ira Gershwin as inspirations for Langston Hughes and William Grant Still’s *Troubled Island*, implying that both the play show the rise and fall of a black emperor in the West Indies. Bogard examines the parallel and similarities between *The Emperor Jones* and Ibsen’s *Peer Gyant* and concludes, “in its dramatic form and in many aspects of its theme, the primary source of O’Neill’s play is, unexpected Ibsen” (136). Xiaojuan compares the play with *Macbeth* and shows how Macbeth’s thirst for power and Jones’ craving for worldly gains “result in their destruction” and how “they are mercilessly mocked by fate, and become the victim of the then society” (42). Wenqian examines the trauma theme in the play and shows the symptoms of trauma indicated by “the Afro-American who struggles to resist oppression while denying his identity and parodying his exploiter which ultimately pave the way for his own doom as an outcast of both the black and the white community” (116). Besides, there are a great variety of critical essays that explore several other issues.

However, though plenty of articles on *The Emperor Jones* exist in the academia, which deal with the aforesaid analyses and other issues, no writing seems to offer a detailed evaluation on the issues of imperialism and kleptocracy in the play except Mary A. Renda who explains the play as “a radical critique of imperialism as economic exploitation” (187). In the course of examining their studies, the scholars only give fragmented explanations on white dominance, power play, imperialism, economic exploitation, disillusionment and so on. The present study attempts to reveal the evils of imperialism and kleptocracy and their repercussions on the innocent natives of the West Indian island, and shows O’Neill’s stance on the white people’s dominance, their hypocrisy and exploitation of the marginalized community all over the world.

METHODOLOGY

The study uses qualitative content analysis method. The paper, at first, clarifies the key terms– imperialism and kleptocracy with their chief features and practices in order to locate and explain their presence in the play. It relates the play to historical context and thoroughly examines the inner meaning. Then it shows how the playwright depicts and condemns them, and how he sympathizes with the marginalized group who are affected by these two policies of exploitation. At last, the paper attempts to analyze the playwright’s stances and offers conclusive comments. To conduct the research, Eugene O’Neill’s text, *The Emperor Jones* has been taken as a primary source. As secondary sources, a great variety of related books and critical essays on O’Neill and *The Emperor Jones* have been studied and cited where

applicable. Besides, some printed and online journal articles have also been studied and their thoughts have been infused with proper citations where necessary.

DISCUSSION

Imperialism

The term 'imperialism' refers to the strategy or policy of a nation state to expand its domination, power and supremacy over other territories and their population, usually by military occupation or by capturing socio-cultural, economic and political dominion. Even though the term is related to the Western colonial expansion of the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, its origin dates back to the Romans or much earlier. The concept has achieved considerable attention in modern times. It has often been depicted in various literary works to show the imperialist's ethical and moral degradation, dehumanization, exploitation of the native inhabitants in their own country, a total rejection of their identity, customs and beliefs by the occupational forces. Though some writers have advocated the policy of suppressing the binary others, the other writers have exposed the dark faces of imperialist invasion. They have shown that the imperialist's propaganda of helping the backward and weak people is a complete lie; rather, it is their ploys to steal and exploit the colonized countries' properties.

In fact, imperialism is a devious strategy designed by the Western countries to expand their dominion over the third world countries and rule their inhabitants. Through this scheme, the powerful Western countries enslave the vulnerable populace living in backwardness, especially the Africans in their own countries and exploit their resources in the name of extending civilization and preaching religion and doing missionary work. The imperialists use religion as a tool to subjugate the native inhabitants of the occupied countries. The imperialist policy is justified by the creation and spread of the 'White Man's Burden' and 'Social Darwinism' that provide the Western countries an opportunity to interfere in the occupied countries' internal affairs and exploit their wealth and force the inhabitants to work as laborers on their own lands. The 'White Man's Burden' theory provides the imperialists the sufficient grounds and justification to continue their dominion over the rest of the world. It explains that the civilized white men are under heavy burden to extend their helping hands to other human beings who are vulnerable and live in backwardness; it is their sacred duty to enlighten them and make them civilized. The theory is very much close to the American perception of 'Manifest Destiny' that asserts that the Americans have a responsibility to be a supportive state for other weaker nations such as the Africans. The concept of 'Manifest Destiny' accelerates the United States' territorial expansion and legitimizes the forceful expulsion of the native Africans and other communities from their own lands. And the 'Social Darwinism' theory, which asserts that some humans are naturally superior to others and that the sturdiest or fittest people survive and thrive in the society, categorizes the white people as superior human species that have the right to dominate and rule the other non-white, i.e., black people under the justification of the natural selection. This theory helps the imperialists justify their imperial interventions in the affairs of the third world countries and make the inferior race suffer from poverty, discrimination and racism.

Kleptocracy

Kleptocracy is a form of non-democratic regime with crooked and oppressive rulers who exercise their power to exploit the subjects and wealth of their own or occupied countries with a view to increasing their personal properties and strengthen their absolute powers. The Kleptocrats misappropriate the state resources at the cost of its citizens. They are the most notorious kinds of rulers who make use of their power over the state machinery and wealth to facilitate their personal financial and political interests, causing serious violation of human rights and the backwardness of the country. They exercise their power and influence to obtain graft, bribery and undue favors at the cost of the people and direct the state funds to themselves, their relatives and allies. These types of rulers utilize their political influence to make laws to support themselves and often break those laws without any remorse or hesitation. They also invest money outside the country and secretly transfer public funds to their foreign bank accounts so that they can use them when they are dismissed from power.

The Kleptocrats are unaccountable rulers who amass enormous wealth and power ignoring the interest of the common people, and squander the country's money on luxury items for their own consumption and extravagances. As the Kleptocrats misappropriate money by exploiting the public funds, they often engage themselves in money laundering scams to minimize the inconsistent accounts and impose excessive taxes and other duties which become unendurable for the citizens and degrade the quality of their lives. So, Kleptocracy is actually rule by the thieves. In this form of governance, the rulers strategically embezzle the state resources for their personal interests. Engulfed by greed and hyper-corruption, Kleptocracy obstructs the human, social, economic and overall development of many countries.

The Plot and the Historical Background

First performed by the Provincetown Players in New York City in 1920, O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* provided "several *firsts* in American theatre history: the Provincetown Players' first major hit, the first major role for an African American actor on the *legitimate* Broadway stage (in houses where the audience was still racially segregated), and the play that secured O'Neill's place as a writer for the high-art, experimental theatre worthy of international attention" (Steen 343). The plot centers round Brutus Jones who escapes to a small island of the West Indies where through deception and corruption he exploits its inhabitants and turns into an Emperor. His despotism and oppressive rule make the natives aware of their sufferings and they rebel against him. The play stages the final day and horrific death of Brutus Jones.

Structurally, the play is a one-act tragedy containing eight scenes that are organized in sequential order without any subplot. It begins in the afternoon and ends by the dawn of the next day. Though the action moves forward and backward in time in keeping with the thought processes of Jones, the attention is focused on him throughout the play. The first and last scenes are realistic scenes; in between there are six expressionistic scenes that show the crucial personal and racial past of Jones in the form of hallucinations. The first scene stages the past of Jones essential for understanding his present. The last scene depicts the off-stage murder of Jones and different reactions of Smithers and the natives. Through expressionistic

style, the play enacts what happens in the mind and soul of Jones under the strain of external incidents and circumstances.

The play begins when the natives are at the point of rebellion against Jones. Jones has exercised absolute power over the natives, imposed heavy taxes and other duties, accumulated ample wealth, deposited lots of money in a foreign bank and secretly kept tinned foodstuff and other belongings under the white rocks to use in his hard times. His repressive activities have marginalized the natives to such extent that they have turned rebellious. To save himself, Jones starts a pre-planned escape which will take him to Martinique, a place where he can restart his life and live freely. But in the deep jungle, he cannot locate his secretly kept belongings. In the jungle, his personal and racial memories, and the beating of tom-tom strike terror into his soul. He gets panic-struck, forgets the route and returns to the edge of the forest where he starts his journey, and where the mutinous natives wait to kill him. The natives kill him by a silver bullet which they prepare from molding some silver coins. Ironically, all through his stay in the island Jones runs after the coins, and the natives kill him by those coins.

O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* is a commentary on the United States' occupation and exploitation of Haiti and U.S. imperialism throughout the world. It explores the duplicity, indignity and ethical degradation of American occupation of Haiti. As Mary A. Renda explains, O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* "provides a window onto U.S. America's renewed fascination with Haiti in the 1920s" and it conveys "a radical critique of imperialism as economic exploitation" (187). In 1915, the United States leads a military attack in Haiti to demonstrate its power and frighten Germany which had strong hold on Haiti. As Haiti was located in close proximity to Florida, for many years America had an interest in the island to make a military base. When Germany suffers a defeat in 1918, America takes full control of Haiti and extends its Empire. During that time, it develops the infrastructure, sets up National Guards, recruits Haitian impressed labor to achieve its goal, and strategically makes economic policies to use a large portion of Haiti's wealth to pay back loans to the United States and France. Therefore, Brutus Jones happens to stand for the United States' cognition that it was actually exploiting Haiti, and the Afrians' defeat of Jones suggests a possibility that the American occupation would be overthrown.

Elements of Imperialism in *The Emperor Jones*

The beginning of the twentieth century observes the emergence of the United States as a top-ranking imperial power around the globe. As Manheim remarks, "The United States' defeat of long-time colonial power Spain in 1898 solidified its own status as an imperial power" (100). With the defeat of Spain, the United States takes hold of Spain's longstanding colony of the Philippines and there after a whole lot of different territories all over the world. America becomes a global power, interferes in the internal affairs of many countries, takes vital diplomatic measures in East Asia and Africa, and plays dominant roles in the First World War. Thus, the United States starts extending its empire to gratify the thirst for authority and greed for wealth of other countries, especially the potential countries of Asian and African continents in the name of spreading civilization. O'Neill sees this craving for power as one of the most cherished goals of all human beings throughout history, and condemns this tendency of seizing power and its abuse in his works. In the words of Virginia

Floyd, “In O’Neill’s viewpoint man’s social affairs and ambitions for social reform seem just as a disguise for a will to power” (240). O’Neill depicts this propensity for absolute power and lust for wealth in his *The Emperor Jones* and unveils the evil sides of America’s imperialist aspirations.

Jones’ occupation and exploitation of the West Indian island resemble the European’s occupation, colonization and exploitation of the African countries. To extend their empire, the Europeans and Americans needed to occupy and rule the countries which were full of natural resources that could enrich their treasury. In *The Emperor Jones*, Brutus Jones, an African-American ex-convict, takes control of the island in the same way the United States occupies Haiti. Just as the American occupiers collect money from the land and its inhabitants, similarly Jones accumulates as much wealth as he can. In his conversation with Smithers, he says that he has favored his friends and associates to steal from the natives, and that he has passed the laws against it and at the same time he remains indifferent to those who violate the laws. As he refers, the laws that he has established are not applicable to him or his associates. Moreover, Jones imposes heavy tax and other duties on the natives similarly as the occupiers overtax the lands they occupy.

Jones also acts as a typical colonizer or imperialist whose only goal is to collect money at the cost of the inhabitants. Like the colonizers, he teaches the natives his own language– English and learns the language of the occupied island so that he can rule and exploit the natives without any difficulties. He tells Smithers, “And ain’t I got to learn deir lingo and teach some of dem English befo’ I kin talk to ’em? Ain’t dat wuk?” (O’Neill 9). Linguistic knowledge gives Jones the authority to implement his power, and he uses it to fulfill his imperial interests. And he informs the Cockney trader that he has adopted the role of the emperor for utilitarian purpose, the show of his emperorship is only to deceive the natives and divert their attention so as to achieve his own goals. He says:

You didn’t s’pose I was holdin’ down dis Emperor job for de glory in it, did you? Sho’! De fuss and glory part of it, dat’s only to turn de heads o’ de low-flung, bush-niggers dat’s here. Dey wants de big circus show for deir money. I gives it to ’em an’ I gits de money. (O’Neill 7)

Just as the imperialists are unwilling to colonize and settle in the occupied countries, and their target remains fixed at exerting geo-political, economic and ideological dominance over the occupied lands, and they merely want to exploit their resources and extend their influence over the concerned territories, very much in the same way, Jones is neither interested to settle in his occupied island nor he is after the glory of the emperorship and the show of royalty. He is, as he says, “after de coin” (O’Neill 15).

Like the colonizers and imperialists, to rule and subjugate the natives effectively, Jones also maintains a safe distance and separates himself from his subjects. Neither in the United States nor in the West Indian island, he develops any social links with anyone (Gupta 29). Besides, he does not even show any respect for the natives whom he rules; rather, he rebukes and despises the native islanders. He tells Smithers, “Think dese ign’rent bush niggers dat ain’t got brains enuff to know deir own names even can catch Brutus Jones?” (O’Neil 13) Like his white superiors in the States, Jones disdains the natives and thinks that he has the right to rule

the islanders because he has improved his qualities by associating himself with the white civilization.

To justify their occupation and rule, the imperialists created and spread the 'White Man's Burden' theory and utilized the existing 'Social Darwinism' theory. They also used religion as a tool that played a vital role to subjugate the native inhabitants of the occupied countries. In the play, Jones utilizes all of the above theories and practices to rule and exploit the natives. In fact, he acts as a white agent. In other words, being a black man, he wears the white mask. As Bogard explains, "Jones's acts of will, his pride, and his conscious individuality as Emperor are the false masks of a white savage" (141). Jones' rise to wealth and power, from a stowaway to Emperor and possessor of great wealth in two years, has been achieved by his knowledge and shrewdness that he acquired during the ten years when he worked as a Pullman porter in the United States. There he heard the white quality talk and adopted their ways. "If dey's one thing I learns in ten years on de Pullman ca's listenin' to de white quality talk, it's dat same fact" (O'Neill 8). From the white passengers' discussion, he has attained the white values and practices, and has acquired the knowledge about how to gain power.

O'Neill creates the character of Jones as a man of shrewdness and intelligence. He explains that Jones is a man of strong will, self-reliant and confident that rouses respect. "His eyes are alive with a keen, cunning intelligence. In manner he is shrewd, suspicious, evasive" (O'Neill 5). Jones' 'cunning intelligence' is seen in his self-created myth of the silver bullet which scares the natives and helps him lead them as he wishes. When Smithers tries to downgrade him saying that his immortality was merely luck, Jones answers that that was not luck but his shrewdness, as he says, "I got brains and I uses 'em quick. Dat ain't luck" (O'Neill 8). Jones' vigilance in anticipating the islanders' rebellion and his taking preparation for that in advance also suggest his cunningness and ability to read human behavior. With the knowledge and shrewdness that he has ingested from the whites, Jones achieves "a white man's name, an occupation" and assumes "the responsibilities of law, judgment and punishment" (Bogard 141). Therefore, he thinks that he carries the White man's burden within himself and convinces the natives that being a knowledgeable and civilized person, it his duty to civilize them.

The imperialists used 'Social Darwinism' theory to apply Darwin's theory of evolution in a negative way. Under this cover, they established a set of ideas which ensured benefits to the Western countries. They argued that some human beings are naturally better than others; therefore, the strongest people survive, flourish and exercise power in the society while the weakest accept dominion. They claim that they are innately better, enlightened and civilized and therefore superior to other human beings around the world. In the play, as it is evident, Jones regards himself as superior and denigrates the natives in the same way as the white imperialists denigrate the non-white people. His association with the white culture has taught him to hate the black people. He regards his intellect and civilized manner as the basis of his superiority to the islanders. He utters such sentences like, "Is you civilized, or is you like dese ign'rent black niggers heah?" (O'Neill 23) Throughout the play, in spite of being an African himself, Jones dehumanizes the natives and address them as "niggers," "common niggers," "trash niggers," "fool woods' niggers," "sneaks," "po' niggers," "flung, bush niggers," and "black trash." In his conversation with Smithers, Jones also tries to establish his superiority

over Smithers, he says, “Talk polite, white man! Talk polite, you heah me! I’m boss heah now, is you fergettin’?” and “I accepts yo’ apology” (O’Neill 6). Jones’ treatment of the natives resembles the Westerners’ treatment of the Africans. As Fanon observes, “For colonialism, this vast continent was the haunt of savages, a country riddled with superstitions and fanaticism, destined for contempt, weighed down by the curse of God, a country of cannibals” (211). Thus, Jones, under the white’s education, thoroughly believes in the notion that the natives are his inferiors who can be poorly treated.

As mentioned earlier, the imperialists misused religion that played a vital role in the subjugation and dominance of the natives of the occupied lands. They established churches, converted new persons, and thus, extended their Empire. They spread the imperial nation’s language through religious, educational and other interactions. In this way, they expanded their cultural values. In the play, as it is seen, Jones pretends to do missionary works. Though he spreads the news that he does missionary work for the church, in reality, he runs after wealth. His missionary work is a pretension. As South African clergyman and theologian Desmond Tutu remarks, “When the missionaries first came to Africa, they had the Bible and we had the land. They said, ‘Let us pray.’ We closed our eyes. When we opened them, the tables had been turned: we had the Bible and they had the land” (qtd. in Banerjee 255). Tutu’s statement reflects how the Christian missionaries played a dominant role in the exploitation of the African people. It also highlights the deception that the missionaries of the imperialist countries would use to help the occupation. Jones so-called missionary work for the Baptist Church and his subsequent deception clearly reflect the scenario that Tutu describes of the European and American missionaries. When Smithers accuses him of renouncing his own religion—Christianity and taking on the islanders’ religion, Jones replies that it is part of the game. He says, “I pretends to! Sho’ I pretends! Dat’s part o’ my game from de fust” (O’Neill 15). He further says, “It don’t git me nothin’ to do missionary work for the Baptist Church. I’s after the coin, an’ I lays my Jesus on de shelf for de time bein’” (O’Neill 15). Jones explains that as he does not get any benefit from doing missionary work for the Church, he temporarily lays his Jesus Christ—his Bible on the shelf and chases after money. He does not allow his ethics or morality to stand in the way of his unethical means of amassing wealth.

Elements of Kleptocracy in *The Emperor Jones*

Jones service as a Pullman porter in the States for ten years gives him an opportunity to stay close to the white men and listen to the white quality talk that helps him achieve shrewdness, competence and philosophy of self-interest. Like the white men, he develops utilitarian attitudes and exploitation skills which guide him to the position of emperor within two years. After attaining power, Jones forms such a system of governance that is very close to Kleptocracy. His rule is, in fact, a rule by the thief. Through misrule and exploitation of the natives, Jones and his associates continue earning money without any check and balance. In his regime, neither any sign of accountability and rule of law is seen, nor any laws are enforced to control corruptions. He formulates sham laws for the country and forces the natives to abide by them while he himself does not comply with them. When Smithers tells him, “you’ve broke ’em all yerself just as fast as yer made ’em,” he replies, “Ain’t I de Emperor? De laws don’t go for him” (O’Neill 8). Jones explains that as he is the emperor, he can pass the laws but those laws are not applicable to him; he is above the law.

To thieve the state property and exploit its resources, the Kleptocrats maintain an unholy nexus with the corrupt persons. In the play Jones and Smithers form a smooth relationship within the power structure. They help each other not for the sake of the country and its people, but for their crooked personal interests at the cost of the country and its people. At one point of their conversation in Scene One, Smithers discloses that he has aided Jones to ascend the throne: “You was glad enough for me ter take yer in on it when you landed here first” and “I give yer a start, didn’t I?—when no one else would” (O’Neill 6-7). In reply, Jones says that in return “I done de dirty work fo’ you—and most o’ de brain work, too, fo’ dat matter—and I was wu’th money to you” (O’Neill 7). Jones says that he has repaid his debt to him by being indifferent to all the illegal activities that Smithers has been running within the island without any legal embargo. He further says, “I’s e paid you back all you done for me many times. Ain’t I pertected you and winked at all de crooked tradin’ you have been doin’ right out in de broad day? Sho’ I has—and me makin’ laws to stop it at de same time!” (O’Neill 7) Jones reminds Smithers that he has allowed him to run his illegal business with the natives by overlooking them and by passing fake laws for the latter’s interest.

Just as the Kleptocrats regard the state resources as their private properties and squander money on luxury items for their own consumption and extravagances, and embezzle money by exploiting the public funds and impose extra-taxes, similarly Jones wastes away money, misappropriates the state resources and imposes excessive taxes that become unbearable for the citizens and debase the quality of their lives. Jones does not want power and glory; he only wants wealth. He represents the greed of the Kleptocratic rulers who extort money from the people and profit from their subjects by overburdening them with heavy taxes. The island’s corruption and appalling condition are obvious in the words of Smithers when he says, “Look at the taxes you’ve put on ’em! Blimey! You’ve squeezed ’em dry!” (O’Neill 8). In reply Jones says, “No, dey ain’t *all* dry yet. I’s e still heah, ain’t I?” (O’Neill 8) Jones’ reply suggests that he is not satisfied with his accumulation of money yet, and his further stay in the island reflects that he is looking forward to exploiting the natives to their last piece of coins.

Jones’s transfer of money to a foreign bank and his plan of safe escape mirror the activities of the typical Kleptocratic rulers who invest money outside the country and secretly transfer public funds to their foreign bank accounts so that they can settle there and use them when they are dismissed from power. Jones understands it well that his emperorship may not last long and that he will have to leave the island sooner or later. He tells Smithers, “I ain’t no fool. I knows dis Emperor’s time is sho’t. Dat why I make hay when de sun shine. Was you thinkin’ I’s e aimin’ to hold down dis job for life? No, suh! What good is gittin’ money if you stays back in dis raggedy country?” (O’Neill 10) Jones is very smart and cunning; he does not want to settle in the savage island. He adds that when he will find the natives rebellious against him, he will resign from his emperorship and flee away. For this reason, he deposits his money in a foreign bank and plans his safe escape to Martinique. As part of the plan, he also secretly hides “tinned grub buried on de edge o’ de forest” (O’Neill 16) and other belongings so that he can use those in the time of escape. He also tells Smithers that in the name of going on hunting several times, he has made a survey of the forest and kept a gunboat anchored at the other edge of the forest. Once he escapes the forest, the boat will transmit him to Martinique. He says, “[The boat] picks me up, takes me to Martinique when she go dar, and dere I is safe wid a mighty big bankroll in my jeans. It’s easy as rollin’ off a

log” (O’Neill 13). Jones believes that freedom and wealth await him in Martinique, and he will be safe and sound once he reaches there.

O’Neill’s Stance on Imperialism and Kleptocracy

The Emperor Jones criticizes the impact of imperialism on the occupied countries and its populace. It emphasizes on the negative effects of imperialist occupation, kleptocratic practices and exploitation that maim a country and its economy. O’Neill criticizes the harsh laws and exploitation that torment and dehumanize the weak Africans in their own lands. Through the depiction of Jones, O’Neill expresses his contempt for imperialism and capitalism. O’Neill blames the seizure of power and extension of empire by force and unfair means. His indictment of absolute power and the United States’ exploitation of other countries is evident in the conversation between Jones and Smithers when Jones says, “Dere’s little stealin’ like you does, and dere’s big stealin’ like I does. For de little stealin’ dey gits you in jail soon or late. For de big stealin’ dey makes you Emperor and puts you in de Hall o’ Fame when you croaks” (O’Neill 8). Through Jones’ statement, O’Neill explains the fact that in practice big stealing is far more profitable than little stealing. Jones may be an untutored chain gang fugitive, but there is no difference between him and the big thieves who are holding down big positions in the United States’ power structure. In the play, O’Neill unmasks the hypocritical nature of the United States’ assertion to bring peace and stability and the deceitful nature of its territorial expansion and occupation that claim to protect the small countries’ rights of self-determination. The play depicts “an American occupier and a foreign trader “bleedin the country dry” (Twa 78).

In the play, O’Neill criticizes the prevalent white ideology that holds the belief that the nonwhite people are uncultured, lazy, inactive, and therefore unimportant figures who deserve subjugation. He challenges the white man’s dominance and through the depiction of Jones as emperor shows that the non-white people– black men are not as lazy and dull as they are shown to be; if they are given the opportunity, they can be dominant figures like Jones. In the play, he demonstrates the success of a black man who turns imperialist and practices kleptocracy. Jones attains the ideas about power and its abuse from the white people; for ten years he had been under the white’s education and learnt the strategy of governance from them. As he says, “If dey’s one thing I learns in ten years on de Pullman ca’s listenin’ to de white quality talk, it’s dat same fact. And when I gits a chance to use it I winds up Emperor in two years” (O’Neill 8). Jones claims that he has attained his knowledge and shrewdness from the white people whom he had served in the States. As John Gessner asserts, “When Brutus came in power he actually followed the white’s pattern of tyrannical ruling” (156). Therefore, when O’Neill blames Jones for his exploitation of the natives, the blame indirectly transfers to the white people who are the creators of such tyranny and exploitation.

O’Neill’s tone in *The Emperor Jones* implies that he is compassionate to the sufferings of the natives who are marginalized, victimized and enslaved by the social class and by the established rules of the dominant system (Nafiseh and Basirizadeh 43). As a close observer of his socio-political context, O’Neill depicts the terrible and hypocritical nature of the American occupation and exploitation of the natives in Haiti. As he was against white dominance, forceful occupation, exploitation and the corrupt teaching of imperialism, he stages the defeat of Jones at the end of the play to suggest a possibility that the American

occupation would be overthrown. Jones accepts the evil sides of the white's education; he trades his soul in order to earn money. "He dooms himself by pretending to be something he is not: he adopts the trappings of white society, talks their talk, and embraces their religion" for the coin (Abdo 33). Instead of decolonizing or liberating himself and the others, he subjugates and abuses the innocent natives and turns into a cruel oppressor. In the words of Peter Saiz, Jones tragedy "lies in his succumbing to recreating the oppression of the Whites on his own people. Jones, who has the potential to be a liberator, is, after all, just another enslaver" (36)

O'Neill aims to terminate such dictatorship and therefore stages the defeat of Jones. He shows Jones as a victim of his inner sense of guilt. Jones realizes that he is responsible for the brutality with which he ruled and exploited the natives. The natives' retribution is therefore inevitable. Jones gets frightened at the thought of it. When the natives plot against him, he starts his pre-planned flight through the forest with the background thump of tom-tom that starts at a regular pulse beat and progresses faster and louder. As Doris Falk explains, "O'Neill's use of the tom-tom beating first at the rate of normal pulse, and then gradually faster until it stops at the moment of Jones's death implies the process of resistance" (93) of the natives against the dominant power structure. The sound of tom-tom makes Jones paranoid and loses his track in the forest in spite of his claim that he knows the jungle so well. He starts hallucinating one phantom after another from his past. These phantoms or formless fears reflect his past, his fears and his hidden motives. To dismiss these spirits and fears, he fires his six precious bullets. The apparitions that Jones notices emerge from his personal and collective unconscious respectively. As he struggles to pass through the jungle, he gets more and more disoriented, his majestic attire becomes tattered, and he loses his mind, until the concluding scene when he gets killed by the native chief Lem's soldiers. The natives kill Jones with silver bullets which they prepare from molding some silver coins. The natives take revenge on Jones by his much adored coins.

O'Neill depicts Jones not simply as a criminal who perpetrates atrocities against the innocent persons and the natives. He represents the American black persons who are the victims of social evil. In the play, O'Neill does not merely re-enact Jones' past but associates it with the history of his ancestors. Along with his personal past, O'Neill combines the collective memory which Jones did not undergo himself. Jones' irreversible past appears itself and brings out of his unconscious the sufferings of his ancestors by the whites, the social heritage of slave trade, the humiliating labor of a Negro in the services of the white men, and his superstitions. The forces of hereditary and environment do not affect Jones' consciousness till he loses his royal nature and becomes divested of his assumed majesty. Only when he gets terrified by the visions of his personal crimes and the crimes committed against his ancestors, he begins to remove his emperor's uniform and his masks of self gradually and confronts his destiny— his tragic end.

CONCLUSION

O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* criticizes the capitalist-imperialist American society and its occupation and exploitation of other countries. In the play, O'Neill condemns the white's dominance and their abuse of power over the non-whites for capitalist and materialistic interests. He depicts an African-American ex-Pullman porter and a fugitive convict named

Jones who becomes emperor and possessor of great wealth through deception and corruption. Being in power, he forms such a system of governance that is very close to Kleptocracy. Through misrule and exploitation, he and his associates continue earning money without any check and balance. Jones exercises absolute power over the natives, turns into a powerful dictator, and financially exploits and squeezes the ignorant natives dry. His despotism and oppressive rule make the natives aware of their sufferings and they rebel against him. When the natives plot against him, he starts his pre-planned flight through the forest. But in the forest, he encounters the phantoms from his personal crimes and his collective memory which make him paranoid, disoriented and almost naked. In the final scene, the natives kill him with silver bullets which they prepare from molding some silver coins.

O'Neill depicts Jones as a tragic character who is oppressed by the whites in the States and who chooses to be a puppet of the white socio-economic structure that has persecuted him and his ancestors in the past. While he could liberate himself and the others from the oppression, instead of doing that, he subjugates and abuses the innocent natives and turns into a cruel oppressor. He internalizes the dominant power structure and imposes it on the native West Indians who belong to his own race and the same exploited class. In spite of being persecuted by the white men, getting opportunity he wears a white mask and starts exploiting his own race, the other black people, rather than protesting the oppression. Thus, he entangles in a vicious circle and goes on upholding, instead of eliminating, the very white dominance that has ruined his life. He becomes both exploited and exploiter at the same time and reenacts the crime by enchaining and oppressing the natives of the West Indies. But eventually his journey of life ends and he collapses as a wretched person. He has killed everyone who seemed to be an obstacle in his way. Ironically enough, even though his material aspiration knew no bounds, he has to leave the world as an ordinary human being. Finally, through the tragedy of Emperor Jones, O'Neill perhaps forecasts the tragic end of the white people who are the creators of dominance, tyranny and exploitation of the non-white persons all over the world.

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