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THE FEAR AND HATRED OF TURKS IN *THE EUROPEANS: STRUGGLES TO LOVE**

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Abstract

This study examines how Turks are depicted in Howard Barker's *The Europeans: Struggles to Love*. Focusing on Europeans' historical ties with Turks, who posed an immense threat to the future of Europe and Christian world until the seventeenth century, it suggests that very little has changed since then in terms of Europeans' political relations with Turks with references to contemporary world. Dealing with such issues as freedom, violence, sexuality and history in his plays through which he aims to 'disturb' the audience about what is happening in 'the real world', Barker indirectly appeals to minds of audience to re-think and re-evaluate all forms of discrimination in contemporary Europe.

Keywords Europeans, Turks, Fear, Hatred, East vs West.

Introduction

Howard Barker, one of the most prolific contemporary British playwrights, has written not only a good number of plays for theatre, television and radio but also poetry, in which he discusses the function of art in relation to individual freedom, social pressure and state violence. According to Barker, "the play is not a lecture and therefore owes no duty of lucidity or total coherence" (Barker, 1999, 55), which is directly in contrast with other contemporary political playwrights, who, he believes, have been engaged with entertaining and giving lessons. Instead, Barker "creates a theatre which offers a deeper imaginative opposition to society through

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speculations involving a questioning relief from prevalent social ideas” (Rabey, 2006, 13). He reflects the social pressures and taboos imposed on individuals through violence, fear and anxiety instead of joy and pleasure. Having studied history at university has made direct contributions to his artistic career. As Barker acknowledges in an interview with Lamb, his “political sense derives from the past, and [he] view[s] the present from the perspective of the past, at least as [he has] constructed it, in imagination” (Barker, 2011, 39). Placing historical events at the centre of some of his plays’ plots, he invites the audience to re-evaluate the history in the contemporary world. *The Europeans: Struggle to Love* is one of the plays, in which Barker brings a historical event into the central focus. The play is set in Vienna after the siege in 1683, when the Holy Roman Empire, supported by such mercenaries as German and Spanish forces as well as the Poles, drove the Ottoman Empire out of central Europe. The play mainly deals with the holy victory of Starhemberg, the defender of Vienna and Imperial General, who saved Christian Europe from Islamic Turks; and Katrin, a Viennese citizen who was raped, maimed and impregnated by some unknown Turkish soldiers. It also tells of Leopold’s main concern to establish a national art through which Holy Roman Empire could sustain the unification. Leopold, the Emperor of Habsburg Monarchy, aims to use art as a cure to ameliorate the Europeans like Katrin, who experienced atrocities as well as traumas during and after the siege. In Rabey’s words, the play is “a harrowing love story set in the aftermath of Islamic-Christian cultural war, and dramatizing the power of the individual to re-perform and subvert the political mayhem which political systems impose on people” (Rabey, 2006, 15). This study focuses on fear and hatred of Turks in the play with references to contemporary world. It aims to show that although the European unity defeated and repulsed Turks from central Europe in the seventeenth century, neither the fear nor the hatred of Turks have come to an end. This study also suggests that Turkey, as the heir to the Ottoman Empire, is still being felt as a threat to cultural legacy of Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman Europe.

The Representation of Turks and Its Reflections in *The Europeans: Struggles to Love*

At the very beginning of the play Leopold asks the painter to draw a picture of the defeat of Turks after the lengthy siege of Vienna. The picture comes to symbolise the national art, which the Emperor uses as an instrument not only to heal the sufferings of war and leave the chaotic atmosphere behind but also to consolidate the Europeans against Turks.

OFFICER: (*Observing.*) The Turks! The Turks!

LEOPOLD: (*Unmoved.*) Fuck them.

(*Some fire. The OFFICERS sheath their swords. The PAINTER paints. LEOPOLD kneels.*)

Oh, God, I thank, oh, God, I stoop, let all this Muslim flesh manure Christian ground, oh, God, I bow, let all this scrag of Islam bring forth crops to feed the lowest labourer and he shall situate the crucifix above the lintel of the door and hang his weapon on its hook, and in the frosty fields his child shall kick the Tartar skull that ploughs dislodged – (*The Europeans, 91*)

Celebrating the victory of Holy Roman Empire over the Ottoman Empire, Leopold uses a language which discloses how much hatred they have grown for Turks and how happy they are now to have sent Turks off the continent. As the Turks’ withdrawal from Europe has started, the Europeans are not under any threat and they can live freely in their land, which comes to mean that Europe is reborn out of Turkish blood and flesh. The Turks have been driven out, the unity of Christian Europe should maintain and they shall never give an opportunity to any outsiders such as Turks and Muslims to lay claims to the land. From now on Europe is the sole domineering power and owner of continent. If any outsiders happen to attempt to capture the land, they will be slaughtered and their flesh will be ‘manure’ for peasants who will grow crops to feed them. The



reason why the Europeans hate the Turks and are blissful to send them off now dates back to the Middle Ages when the Crusaders fought against Seljuks, other Turkish peoples, who showed a great resistance in Anatolia and prevented the unification of Western and Eastern Christians.

LEOPOLD: Look at the prisoners, how they tremble like reeds on the lakeside as soon as their brothers come near, like a wind they come and go –

YOU LOST

YOU LOST

No fucking Seljuk lancer will cut you free, Ali! Draw them, record their bewilderment, they cannot understand why their god's quit, draw them! (*The Europeans*, 92).

One of the main goals of the Pope Urban II was to capture Jerusalem, a holy city for Christians, defeating the Turks (the Seljuks) who were standing as a barrier between the Eastern and Western Christian world. The Christian world failed to unite and the division between Christians gave rise to the deepening of Catholics and Protestants, who would see each other as heretics. Yet now as in Leopold words "It is the first and I daresay the last occasion [the Europeans] have managed" (*The Europeans*, 93) to unite against Turks. As a matter of fact, the Turks being defeated in Vienna by Holy Roman Empire, another form of crusaders, meant revenge of former crusade wars for the Europeans.

The defeat of Turks is so crucial for the Europeans that they must act strategically and coordinately with each other. For this reason, Wallachia, a disputed region between the Turks and Habsburgs, plays a key role in the war.

STARHEMBERG: We are going to Wallachia.

SUSANNAH: Wallachia? Why?

STARHEMBERG: To inspect the forts.

SUSANNAH: What forts?

STARHEMBERG: Within whose compass New Europe is to breathe. Under whose benign regard the vines may ripen undisturbed, and marriages be blessed with endlessness... (*The Europeans*, 147-148)

It is clear from Starhemberg's remarks that without the possession of Wallachia, Europe is no longer safe. Since Holy Roman Empire soldiers cannot win the war alone, they need to be assisted and supported by other Christian states. This Christian alliance in Europe against Turks has turned out to be a victory for the Europeans.

EMPRESS: London. Copenhagen. Amsterdam. The Poles have saved five million women [...] I mean the very fatuous pattering in Paris is predicated on the Poles, the spears of superstitious peasants keep their words aloft, the Turks would soon shut down their salons, in the harem with the bitches says the Seljuk, oh, you are getting up, we have to make an entry to the city and give thanks, God knocked Allah over this time...

(*She sinks down beside him.*)

We have in one day an Empire back which stretches from the Alps to the Baltic, I thought, I fully thought, we would die in a seaside hotel, Leopold, kiss my ugly mouth and I'll kiss yours –

LEOPOLD: They are looking – the staff are –

EMPRESS: I do not give a piss for them, kiss me in this screaming sea, this swamp of horrid dead, we have Europe back... (*The Europeans*, 94-95)

It is actually with the help of the Poles who have saved the Europeans from the Turks. This war has transferred from a political one to a religious one. From the Empress' words it is understood that the Turks are shown as people who raped European women, spreading Islam to the continent,



colonising them and leaving nothing to survive for the Europeans. Through the eyes of Europeans, this triumph does not merely mean saving of lands. At the same time, they have saved their honour, otherwise Turks would take European women captive and exert sexual harassment. The traces of this fear can be seen when Katrin reveals her hatred and revenge for Turks.

KATRIN: OH, COME ON!

(With a sudden inspiration.)

Listen, this is madness, this is proof! I dream, I passionately dream, of some pretty valley in the Danube where a Muslim girl is kneeling to the East. She bows to Mecca, she spreads her Turkish things, her Turkish mirror, her Turkish mat, and threads the Transylvanian flowers through her hair when down like wind swoop Christian troopers rancid with the saddle and STAKE HER TO THE GROUND WITH KNIVES, her naked haunches, her perfect breasts they slash into a running sieve of blood, all channels red, all drain of horror, what satisfaction could I have from dreaming only my Turks die? No, revenge must be upon the innocent. Now, am I mad? (*The Europeans*, 98)

As she has been raped and disfigured by some Turkish soldiers, Katrin feels no hesitation when expressing her desire to take vengeance on all Turkish women. For Katrin, who never forgives her violators, any Turks, be them innocent or not, could be exposed to any kind of violence or atrocities.

No Legitimate Rights in Europe

Another issue that is directly related to Turks is Katrin's pregnancy and her desire to give a birth in public. After Concilia is born, Starhemberg returns the illegitimate daughter, "to her creators" (*The Europeans*, 155) and cuts all organic ties between the Europeans and the Turks. Europeans still fear that Turks, as non-belonging and inherent threatening force to European values, are potentially able to seize these territories. Thus, by taking Concilia from her mother and giving her back to her Turkish fathers, Starhemberg not only symbolically shows that from now on no Turks could claim any legitimate rights in Europe but also "reject[s] reconciliation between East and West" (Alied, 2014, 140). Yet the sub-title of the play – Struggle to Love – comes to imply that no matter what has happened in the course of history, individuals, communities and/or societies who are of different opinions can co-exist and co-habit peacefully through love. Focusing on the fear and hatred for Turks in the play, the playwright indirectly invites the audience to think that minorities are not the groups of people to be afraid of and should not be seen as others in Europe. Using obscene and obscene language and creating disturbing as well as graphic imageries, Barker does not aim to enlighten, preach or give audience a clear message. What he does through this style is to draw the audience's attention to the hate crimes, atrocities, fascism, xenophobia and ethnocentrism in contemporary Europe. Thus the "audience, forced to re-view, re-feel, a 'wrong' action, is provoked and alerted, and launched unwillingly into consideration..." (Barker, 1999, 60) that under such circumstances "[i]t is not a happy time" (*The Europeans*, 133) for Europeans. Considering that the play was written at a time when Europe was debating to establish the European Union under which the Western and Central European countries would unify, use a common currency – the Euro – and remove the borders, such issues as fear and hatred raised in the play directly appealed to the contemporary European audience. Through the image of Turks, the audience was invited to re-assess and re-think any form of racism and discrimination against outsiders, in other words those who did not share European values. Focusing specifically on representation of Turks in the play, their work force or money could be used in the interest of the European Union.

LEOPOLD: Then float the new economy on [Turkish treasure and the Jews]. Enough, and thank you for your opinions, I weigh them all, I seem brusque, I seem shallow but



in privacy I mediate profoundly, you must take that on trust, of course. (*The Europeans*, 103)

After the Turkish siege of Vienna, the Habsburg Monarchy would establish an economy based on what the Turks and Jews, in other words the outsiders and non-Europeans, had left. On the one hand the remaining Turks would work as “doormen, dustbin porters, café keepers and the like” (*The Europeans*, 93). On the other hand, the state would use the capital and money of “Jews, [who] never left” (*The Europeans*, 103). The non-Europeans, who did not go back home and had to stay there, have lived as the others. Those who remained in Europe worked for the domineering power and provided their work force for the state. The relation of this scene with the contemporary Europe is that when the European Union was established they would need labour force and thus would have to employ and rely on Turkish or non-European labour force. In other words, the economy of EU was mainly going to run with those who they feared and hated. The ideology that Leopold adopted in the seventeenth century in Europe has almost not changed since then and seems not to change in the near future, for European identity is “based on its Judeo-Christian religious and Greco-Roman political heritage [and] Turkey lacks this heritage [so] it is unsuitable for...” (Grigoriadis, 2006, 152) European values. Unless Turks prove full commitment to these values and internalize them, there is very little room for them in Europe. The cultural clashes and differences between Europeans and Turks have triggered prejudices and misconceptions in Europe. These bias which have grown out of fear and hatred have been an obstacle to develop more mutual intercultural relations and have pushed Europe to be engaged with Turks mainly on trade and security issues. The dilemma is that, as in the case of Turks, Europe can neither go further without those who they fear and hate nor can they live with them. As Susannah, the sister of Katrin, says “I don’t know. We often choose to live with those we hate, so I observe. And those we think we love, we soon grow to hate” (*The Europeans*, 100). There is still an ongoing and rising discrimination in Europe against the outsiders. As Marija Pejčinović Burić, secretary general of the Council of Europe, claimed, “Europe is facing a shocking reality: antisemitic, anti-Muslim and other racist hate crimes are increasing at an alarming rate” (qtd. in Bayraklı and Hafez, 2020, 9), Europe has turned into a “Hell” (*The Europeans*, 111), where Turks and other minorities feel threatened.

The play includes representatives of state power (Leopold, the Empress, Ipstein and Hardenstein), army (Starhemberg), religion (Orphuls), society (Katrin), art (Painter), science (Arst and Felix) and non-Europeans (Jemal Pasha) among others, each of whom is a typical character as seen and perceived through the eyes of Europeans. When Starhemberg, as the mouthpiece of Imperial army, taunts his counterpart, Jemal Pasha, about Turkish military failure, he, by overgeneralizing, accuses all Turks of being brutal and ferocious.

STARHEMBERG: Why have your attacks all fallen off? You are good at rushing things but bad at standing under fire. Is that the personality of Turks, or the poor quality of officers? (Pause.) And always you maim. Coolly, maim. This sickened me for some years, because I thought a cruel act done in temper has its own excuse, but this slow hacking has not even the decent motive of a butcher.

JEMAL: The ceaseless propaganda of the Christian church has stirred up subject races, some of whom we have convincing proof are cutting off parts of their bodies to discredit Ottoman authorities. (*The Europeans*, 153)

Though Jemal Pasha explains the reason why Turks besieged Vienna, he gives no answers related to Katrin’s having been impregnated and disfigured. Turkish characters have been given little voice to answer allegations against Turkish soldiers. Jemal Pasha as the representative of Turks is threatened to be killed including other Turkish captives and hostages by imperial soldiers if he refuses to take Concilia, which implies that Turks have accepted the act of rape and brutality against Europeans. The experience that Jemal Pasha has had—feeling obliged to accept the accusations made by Europeans— becomes an example for minorities like Turks and other non-



European communities who are given little voice to express and defend themselves when they are under pressure. This scene also reminds the contemporary audience of the position of minorities and serves as an implicit warning against the rising racial intolerance and social pressure towards non-Europeans in Europe.

Conclusion

Having written the play in 1987 and staging in 1993, when the debate about closer European integration was at its highest, the playwright dealt with issues such as racism, fascism, xenophobia, discrimination against the non-Europeans through images of Turks. The use of images of Turks in the play is important in that Turks have taken place as brutal, cruel and barbaric in the collective memory of Europe. Placing such catastrophic elements as pain, violence, rape and death at the centre of the play, Barker appeals to the subconscious of audience and aims at creation of anxiety among them. As pain is the main theme of national art to restore traumas in Vienna after the war, these shocking and disturbing scenes as well as anxiety become instruments to provoke the audience and force them to re-consider all forms of discrimination that roam about in Europe. The play also “examine[s] the complexities and cruelties involved in a European state of identity, shifting conventional structures of perception to expose certain bindings of people through pain...” (Rabey, 2009, 242) and thus serves as a reminder to such social sicknesses as xenophobia, racism and fascism in Europe.

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