

“Act of God” by Joan Baxter

Joan Baxter’s “Act of God” revolves around the consequences of a water cut experienced by Jillian, a white woman who came to Africa to help the inhabitants of a small village. Due to this deliberate water cut, the villagers are forced to obtain unhealthy water from a tank. At the end of the story, Aisha, an African girl, drowns in it. As the action progresses, Baxter portrays Jillian’s changing spectrum of emotions, emphasizing her insecurity, her anger towards the water company and her guilt towards the Africans. Through **setting** and **characterization of Jillian and Aisha**, the author suggests that when people are placed in a destabilizing situation, stuck between oppressor and oppressed, their quest for a sense of belonging and their often irrational feelings may become their main driving force.

The short story takes place in a fictitious African village, thus providing the reader with the idea that it could happen anywhere. [Consequently, it shifts the focus from the actual geographical setting to the struggles and feelings of the people who live in it.] The post-colonial world in which the action occurs gives rise to a series of conflictual situations. The **main conflict** opposes the water company and the Africans. Their interests are at opposite ends of the spectrum: the latter need the water whereas the company owners would rather sell it to make money. Bukari, Jillian’s driver, refers to these rich people as “the Talon water mafia—the men who owned tanker trucks—(who) could sell water to people and ‘grow fat’.” The anger that is expressed is shared by Jillian, who directs her rage towards her own industrialized country in addition to the water company. Ironically, at one point she is also angry at Aisha who tries to fetch water from her tank. [Her indignation towards the oppressing company owners translates into her momentary rage against the oppressed Africans.] The African struggle against the company extends to the authority of the newly independent government. When Jillian asks why the people do not protest against the water...