Chapter III

The Anatomy of Violence in Coetzee’s Fiction

*I am not a herald of community or anything else....I am someone who has intimations of freedom.... of people slipping their chains and turning their faces to the light.*

*J. M. Coetzee*

3.1 Introduction

The present chapter makes an attempt to come to grips with Coetzee’s novels as studies in the problematics between the coloniser and the colonised. The novels of Coetzee, especially the early novels are commonly referred to as post modern metafiction. Coetzee uses the fictional form in a novel manner to address the political and ethical issues of South Africa. He appears to be very much apprehensive of the political and social situation in his country. Coetzee’s attempt to emigrate to the U.S did not succeed for various reasons. One among them was his involvement in the demonstrations against the presence of the U.S in Vietnam, held on the campus where he was working. He invariably had to return to South Africa where he ventured on an academic career in the University of Cape Town. Naturally, because of the awareness he had about what was going on in the country, and as an intellectual, he addressed the tribulations the society was subject to, through his novels. Kailash C Baral in the introduction to *J.M. Coetzee Critical Perspectives* states thus:

*J.M. Coetzee (1940), the South African novelist and Nobel laureate, among the contemporary novelists is perhaps the only one who is rigorously engaged in exploring the ontological and other issues crucial to the fictional discourse. This engagement is primarily for*
marking his "authorial position", choosing his own voice of articulation and, in particular, locating himself in the complex historical past and in the fractured social present of post-apartheid South Africa.¹

The novels of Coetzee expose the position he takes when he writes about the past and post-apartheid Africa. The state of affairs in his homeland engaged him intellectually. He was conscious that the system of apartheid was a shameful institution. But he did not embark on fighting against it like an activist. His contribution surfaced on the literary level. He took to writing fiction as a vehicle to give vent to his thoughts and misgivings about the whites and to express his anger and frustration against the wrathful governing agencies. He is often termed as an elusive writer. The outcome is his mastery as a writer of fiction. Consequently he received wide commendation both in South Africa and on the international gamut as a significant fiction writer in the twentieth century.

Coetzee as a white South African writer engaged with the confrontation between the ruler and the ruled in his novels. This intriguing theme was the recurrent preoccupation of most of the black and white writers. But the techniques and methods they employed in writing about such themes were different. The genre Coetzee employed was new to South Africa. Hence, he ushered in a new era in fiction writing. Writers and academics admitted that his works were unlike that of the fiction writers of his time. Coetzee situated himself between the solely political writer and the realistic writer. His novels vociferously examine human nature although they are about specific situations or individuals. Though his novels are predominantly about South Africa they also fit into the larger discourse which transcends South Africa.
The impact that the colonial encounter created was traumatic for both the ruler and the ruled. Neither the coloniser nor the colonised experienced happiness in this new order. The coloniser found himself in a land, milieu and climate which were unfamiliar to him. He was positioned in the midst of strange people belonging to a different race with diverse habits, language and so on. He assessed the inhabitants who amused and repulsed him with a very different perspective and this proved to be a strange one for him. Uncomfortable in such a relationship nevertheless, he chose to remain there. The colonised came under the influence of an entirely new people who considered them inferior and treated them in a very high handed manner. These people who took control over them turned out to be very successful in brain-washing them. The colonised felt that the coloniser was out there to usurp his position. The coloniser eventually succeeded in spite of resentment from the natives. The natives however, were powerless to do anything about these altered equations though they were not happy with the white masters. Consequently, the relationship between the two was always very tense and strained.

The coloniser’s main aim was to assert his position in the new set up, establish the fact that he was supreme, convince the natives that they should in any case accept their position and without protest obey the new master. Thus the master-slave dialogue was established. The coloniser’s aim was to maximize his profit in the new zone and make himself as comfortable as he could at the expense of the native and for this he employed varied means, almost always unjustifiable. The natives were victimised. The white man had already shown them that he was undeniably supreme and perhaps even infallible. Such a state of affairs put the colonised in the position of the victim in his land, ironically by people who came from elsewhere. These people gave a semblance of being superior to
them economically and socially and the natives became subject to the highhanded behaviour of the colonisers.

The colonisers established themselves as superior beings within a very short period of time. They were able to usurp the land, the economy in fact, the very being of the natives. They used the natives as cheap labour putting them in segregated compounds near their dwellings in order to avail themselves of their services as and when they wanted. The natives being made to do all the menial work were repeatedly told that they were not fit for anything else. Criticising their habits and their natural mannerisms, feelings of inferiority were indoctrinated in them. The whites emphatically made them believe that they had come to civilize and redeem them. They were told that it was the ‘white man’s burden’ to rescue them from their damnation. It was a very pitiable situation for the colonised, to see people from elsewhere usurping power and wealth. However, they could do nothing as they were vulnerable. The colonisers had already taken away their land and now they even controlled their very being. The slightest opposition from the native was nipped in the bud by the coloniser and he struck terror upon them. The natives were there to obey their masters and this was made very clear to them. The white man would dictate terms and the native had no other choice than to act as he was told.

The colonisers became the perpetrators of violence in such a strained relationship. The very nature of violence was so grotesque that it frightened the wits out of the natives and acted as a deterrent. The whites could bring about univocal submission in the natives easily by a show of violence which brought out the worst in the coloniser. They were easily convinced that violence was very effective in subduing the blacks. Anybody who was defiant was severely dealt with and even silenced forever. In his novels Coetzee
highlights the aspects of violence and torture perpetrated by the dominating class on the natives. He is mainly concerned with what ensued out of such a relationship.

Coetzee, very sensitively, brings out the trauma that the oppressed go through in such a situation. He examines colonialism and the way in which power works under colonialism. It is very evident that it is South Africa that he is referring to, but he does not specify the place or time. Therefore, it could happen anywhere around the world. The oppressor that is, the whites, act like autocrats without commiseration. Their relationship with the natives brings out the latent brutal qualities in them. The wickedness in them surfaces without any restraint and they become synonymous with evil itself. These men have absolutely no feelings for the people whom they have colonised. They presume that the native men and women are uncouth, uncivilised and hence they ought to be treated in a violent manner. They envisage the natives as different beings and believe that ill treatment and pain may not have any effect on them. Hence they treat them with total contempt and recklessness believing that they have the prerogative to be violent and to cause pain to the helpless lot. The show of violence recorded in history during the apartheid era in South Africa is atrocious and unprecedented. The government did its best to hush up all the mayhem by not allowing the brutalities to be reported or talked about.

The white government of South Africa isolated itself from the rest of the world so as not to expose themselves. In fact, it makes people wonder whether human beings can ever be so cruel and pitiless and how a supposedly enlightened and 'civilised' country like Britain, could support such evil for their gain. Coetzee illustrates in his novels that man, though the 'supreme' of all beings, is capable of the worst inhuman acts and can exert violence without any guilt. The coloniser has no feeling of guilt and does not feel
culpable about what he is doing. He believes that what he is doing is right, so there is no question of guilt.

The novels also express the constraints and difficulties faced by a writer living in South Africa. Coetzee, the intellectual and writer of fiction is troubled about and very much against the apartheid regime. His novels engage with this issue. Kailash C Baral, the critic avers “He is not for the radiance of fiction but for its starkness; not to protect the being but to ensure becoming; not to make writing of fiction an end in itself but a means to explore the unexplored; going beyond the real to have the grasp of the unreal in representing the unpresentable.”

His novels are a fine study of exploring reality, thus being able to understand the unreal. Coetzee comments on the relations of power at various levels in South Africa during the colonial period and in the process of decolonization. Although Coetzee came under criticism by many of his contemporaries for not openly reacting against the atrocities perpetrated by the apartheid regime, his novels are a fine testimony to the fact that he is a writer concerned with the oppression that is going on in the society. But his engagement is on an intellectual level. He is not an activist in the true sense of the term. Being a white writer also made things more complex for him. He knew that he also carried the guilt of complicity in him.

Yet, through a reading of Coetzee’s novels we can see the earnestness with which he handles the issue. Only a person, who empathises with the natives, can get beneath the skin of the natives and experience what the native feels. Coetzee substantiates this in his novels and all his novels of the South African period closely examine the feelings of the blacks in his characteristic manner. He is able to put himself in their position and empathise with them without making long statements or writing tediously about their suffering. Coetzee also gives his black characters a very humane outlook and perspective.
They are all very sober individuals even though they are vagrants belonging to the lower rung of society. This seems to be a deliberate attempt on the part of Coetzee so that the whites learn a lesson or two from them. These characters can make the white men hang their heads in shame. Such is the moral strength of these characters who suffer oppression from the whites. They are able to withstand the heinous crimes committed on them by the whites. The white man is incapable of shattering them emotionally. The blacks who are indifferent to the white man and his harsh behaviour seem to be getting the strength to do so from an understanding of the psyche of the white man. In many of his novels, Coetzee engages himself with the question of black-white dialectics. The natives are delineated in a better light than the whites. The whites appear to be vile, gross and base and if at all there is a white man who sympathises with black characters in the novels, we find that he too suffers the wrath of the whites becoming a misfit in the white society. He is looked at with suspicion and is accorded the same treatment that is given to the blacks. There is absolutely no difference. The colonisers are an embodiment of evil itself. Although, Coetzee’s focus is on the black man and his oppression by the whites, the white man’s vicious character surfaces in the course of the plot in the novels. Unwittingly the white man emerges as a villain and he is portrayed as mean and merciless. Kailash C Baral argues “Coetzee’s fictions might have followed different narrative styles or patterns but some basic issues such as writing, authorship, language, domination, marginalization etc. run through all of them.” We see that Coetzee engages himself with these issues in his novels.
3.2 Violence in the Novels of J.M. Coetzee

Coetzee wrote his first novel *Dusklands* in 1974. The title is symbolic of the foggy atmosphere that was settling on South Africa. As Tony Morphet a South African critic in his essay *Reading Coetzee in South Africa* articulates:

The reading, however, convinced me that *Dusklands* was a herald. A new form of narration, a new way of imagination—a new prose had entered South African Literature. The novel is recognised as sounding a new post modernist note in the South African novel, a new fictional engagement with the problems of colonialism at the level of discourse.4

Tony Morphet recalls how Alan Paton another distinguished South African writer had given him the novel *Dusklands* for his perusal, chuckling that he could not make anything of it! But everyone knew that here was a writer with a difference.

Coetzee’s first novel *Dusklands* (1974) breaks away from the hitherto used mode of realistic fiction in South Africa. It was received with both confusion and awe. For the first time academics and readers in South Africa saw a novel which was very different from the likes they had previously read. For the academician, analysing it was a challenge, and for the common reader it was baffling, as they had not until then, come across such a novel. Both the academic and the reader were amused by this new form of writing. But they did not brush it off because they knew that, here was a writer, who had to be read and watched, how so ever intellectually challenging he was. They knew there was something new and unique about this writer. He definitely had a promising career as a writer of fiction and Coetzee proved them right with all the accolades he won eventually. When Coetzee wrote *Dusklands*, the war in Vietnam was coming to an end
and in South Africa there was extreme violence and censorship. Stephen Biko, leader of
the Black Consciousness Movement was banished in 1973. Sharpeville Massacre and the
State of Emergency resulted in further violence in South Africa. Dominic Head remarks
"The typical Coetzean preoccupations are all present in this first novel: the analysis of the
colonizing psyche; the emphasis on textual structures; the challenge to novelistic
conventions; and the self-critique."  

The novel is divided into two novellas well separated in time, though thematically
similar. The first novella posits itself in the twentieth century and the second in the
sixteenth. The first is an account of the Vietnam War as seen by Eugene Dawn, the
protagonist who has been entrusted with the task of writing a report. Eugene lives by
himself, writing the report. It "is a twentieth century narrative of Eugene Dawn, who is
devising a plan for the psychological subjugation of the Vietnamese through the use of
radio broadcasts with devastating effect on his mind." 6 When he submits the report to his
superior, he is dissatisfied with it. He is asked to rewrite the report according to his
superior's requirements as the truth has to be concealed. Coetzee puts across the fact that
history is being distorted. Eugene wants to give a sincere and fact centred report. The
work takes its toll on Eugene. His personal life suffers and he begins to suspect his wife
having a discreet affair. He even feels he is jealous about the man who desires his wife.
His sexual relationship with his wife is uninteresting and lacks vitality. Eugene becomes
insane in course of time and ends up in the mental asylum. The intensity of the demands
of the project that is given to him shatters him. He becomes a victim of the system that he
finds himself in. Dusklands reveals the deteriorating effect violence has on the mind and
body. Coetzee means to say that man is not basically made for mind taxing and
conflicting work. He needs a peaceful atmosphere to live and cannot do so with
confrontation. Both the protagonists of the two novellas succumb to defeat in the face of conflict.

The second novella is the narrative of Jacobus Coetzee, an eighteenth century explorer of Africa who has set out into the wilderness. He is an elephant hunter and his entry into the land of the native is with the intention of amassing ivory and also to exercise control. He believes that his encounter with the natives is an encounter with evil. He has total contempt for the natives, the Hottentots. Although initially he is patient with them, he cannot remain so for long. The façade is soon torn off. All the vile qualities in him surface when he enters into conflict with the natives. In order to assert his superiority the white man embarks on an enterprise of establishing order through violence which becomes reciprocal.

Both Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee are carrying out the colonial project. Both are in a way, like the coloniser. Eugene Dawn is writing a report for the U S Defence department about the Vietnam War. In his description of the Vietnamese throughout his report, Eugene shows them as inferior. Eugene Dawn who is writing a plan for subjugating the Vietnamese through psychological warfare finds himself affected by this work. It has a debilitating effect on his mind. Eugene is so burdened with the work which requires a lot of mental strain that he even goes to the extent of stabbing his son. Likewise Jacobus Coetzee resorts to violence and killing to bring order in a supposedly disorderly world. He is a traveller into the territory of the Namaquas, a native tribe. The savage native is constructed to justify colonial exploitation. Similarly Jacobus portrays Hottentots and Bushmen as inferiors, relegating them to the role of the 'Other'. Both resort to violence. The human body is violated and brutalised. The suffering caused by such a violation is highlighted in the novel. The perpetrators of violence do not go
unscathed. Violence has a dehumanizing effect on them too. The ruthless acts leave a mark on them, in fact a deep scar. They can never see the ‘Other’ as a human being who needs to be treated with compassion. Therefore, they become the target of their violence. According to them anything can be done to the ‘Other’ and they could do so without being questioned. In an interview with David Attwell a critic, Coetzee articulates:

Nevertheless, *Dusklands* didn’t emerge from a reading of Beckett. What was more immediately behind it, was the spectacle of what was going on in Vietnam and my gathering sense, as I read back in South African history but more particularly in the annals of the exploration of Southern Africa, of what had been going on there.  

Coetzee’s reading of the early history of South Africa from the travellers’ tales gave him material for the second novella.

Eugene Dawn carries with him photographs depicting violence by the American soldiers on young Vietnamese girls. These photographs which are a symbol of imperialist violence disturb him. In a photograph of a heavily built sergeant copulating with a Vietnamese girl, the girl looks like a child. Another photograph shows two smiling sergeants brandishing the severed heads of three Vietnamese. Though this is a horrifying picture, the reaction of Eugene Dawn is one which lacks humaneness:

One’s heartstrings may be tugged by photographs of weeping women come to claim the bodies of their slain; a handcart bearing a coffin or even a man-size plastic bag may have its elemental dignity; but can one say the same of a mother with her son’s head in a sack, carrying it off like a small purchase from the supermarket? I giggle.
The third photograph is of a prisoner in a cage and a commander jabs him with a cane calling him a bad man over the microphone. Dawn has an enlarged picture of the prisoner. He describes the eyes of the prisoner:

The glint in the eye, which in a moment luckily never to arrive will through the camera look into my eyes, is bland and opaque under my fingers, yielding no passage into the interior of this obscure but indubitable man. I keep exploring. Under the persistent pressure of my imagination, acute and morbid in the night, it may yet yield. \textit{(DL 16-17)}

Here the desire for domination is very clear. Coetzee is referring to the coloniser’s desire for domination which turns out to be very ironic. Dawn articulates the U.S policy “We forced ourselves deeper than we had ever gone before into their women; but when we came back we were still alone, and the women like stones” \textit{(DL 18)}. Hence domination does not always have the desired effect. The dominating power may feel he has the upper hand, but the reaction may not always be the same as he expects it to be. The women who become like stone are indifferent to the wickedness of the white man. The imperialists find themselves in a ridiculous position. The exercise of brute force does not help them in any way.

The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee, the second novella is a parallel to the account of Eugene Dawn’s report. We see a similarity between the American imperialism and the domination of the white man in Africa. Jacobus goes into the wild with ulterior motives. He goes into the interior in search of ivory. He considers the Hottentots as inferior and their women merely, “a rag you wipe yourself on and throw away” \textit{(DL 61)}. This attitude towards the native woman shows how he sought to establish his superiority as a white man. But he does not see the Dutch woman through the same filter. He cannot just brush
them off. Jacobus sees only monetary benefits in the wild. “Our commerce with the wild is a tireless enterprise of turning it into orchard and farm” (DL 80). So like the white man civilizing the uncivilised natives, Jacobus will convert the wild into orchards and farms so that they bring him income. His assertion of supremacy with the native is also to amass wealth. So the similarity is evident here. The wild for him is a means for amassing wealth. As he looks out for ivory, he thinks of himself as a god-like explorer. However, he reaches a state of baseness when among the Hottentots of Namaqualand he is treated with absolutely no respect. He is called “Long - Nose” (DL 72) much to his chagrin. One of the women performs a lewd dance to irritate him. He has come into Namaqualand with a feeling of superiority and this is not what he expected. When he suffers with the carbuncle, he is forced to retire to one of the huts kept for menstruating women. The natives do not show any concern for him and humiliate him. Jacobus prefers to die rather than be like them because as a white man he could not be in such a situation. Coetzee deconstructs the myth of the white man as a superior being here by showing Jacobus in a humiliating situation. Thus Coetzee de-romanticises the picture that the white man has of himself. The natives do not make much of the white man or show any respect for him. It is only the expression of violence that defeats them.

In order to take revenge Jacobus returns to Namaqualand and kills the servants who have deserted him and also destroys the village. Parag Sarma a writer avers, “Death therefore is a necessary condition for bringing about order and comprehensibility onto an alien geography.”9 In the case of Jacobus Coetzee such a reaction brings out the worst in him. He cannot rest until all his pent up rage is spent. When Jacobus becomes violent he has absolutely no control over himself. In order not to be destroyed by the natives he kills them:
Roaring like a lion and enveloped in spray like Aphrodite, I fell upon them. My claws raked welts of skin and flesh from their fleeing backs. A massive fist thundered one to the ground. Jehovah I fell upon his back, and while his little playmates scattered in the bushes and regrouped, I ground his face on the stones, wrenched him upright, kicked him down (with the ball of my foot, lest I break the toe), wrenched him up, kicked him down... (DL 90)

Jacobus becomes mad in his anger. This uncontrollable violence exhibited is an indication of the frustration of the white man to be accepted as superior. The violence of the Hop expedition in Jacobus Coetzee’s narrative is shocking. However, violence does not leave the perpetrator unaffected. Jacobus says “Through their deaths I, who after they had expelled me had wandered the desert like a pallid symbol, again asserted my reality. No more than any other man do I enjoy killing...” (DL 106). Here Coetzee ruminates that even a wicked man has an element of goodness in him. Violence ruffles the mental equanimity and Jacobus who thinks of himself as a superior being is deromanticised.

Coetzee, through the character of Jacobus Coetzee, reveals that violence takes its toll on the one who resorts to it also. It affects Jacobus tremendously and he suffers mentally though he may not appear to do so. The brutality of Jacobus Coetzee corresponds with Eugene Dawn’s stabbing of his son. Both are acts of violence and self-assertion. This desire for violence in Jacobus is similar to his longing for colonial domination. But both acts demoralize the perpetrator of the violence. The Americans in their subjugation of the Vietnamese try to revalidate their position as imperialistic. This is also the preoccupation of Jacobus Coetzee. The stabbing of his son is narrated in a very impersonal manner by
Eugene Dawn, whereby Coetzee establishes that the discourse of imperialism has such a detrimental effect on the perpetrator of violence.

Thus in these two novellas we see the impact of the white-black encounter. The two narratives signify the theme of domination and subjugation. “Violation of the earth and the beings that populate it is a very strong motif in Dusklands” avers Sarma. The whites are set in opposition to the Vietnamese. The white man tries to define himself in relation to the natives, like the Bushmen and Hottentots. The Bushmen and Hottentots who are portrayed as inferior are, according to the white man, primitive in nature. They are relegated to the position of the ‘Other’. However, it is significant to note that the white man establishes his superiority only by force and aggression. He has no other way to attain mastery over them. He has sophisticated weapons that the native does not have. It is this ability to kill which makes him superior. The domination is exerted through the power of the gun. The native does not have any sophisticated weapon. His indigenous weapons are not a match for the gun. The fear of the gun makes the native submissive. The native never willingly accepts him as superior because a strong resentment reigns in him. However, it is inevitable for him to bow down as the white man is powerful.

Jacobus’ feeling of superiority finally leads to his self-destruction. He cannot accept any lack of deference from the natives whom he considers as his subjects. Any show of impertinence infuriates him and he becomes insane. His barbaric behaviour leads to the killing of his servants. He wants total surrender and acceptance of his authority from the natives and will not settle for anything less than that. When he shows his displeasure he loses complete control over himself and raving madness takes over. He thinks of himself as a demigod and initially though his attitude is patronizing, subsequently he wreaks vengeance on the natives. He justifies it asserting that it is very much necessary for the
redemption of the native. In this context Coetzee comes down heavily on western imperialism.

Attwell in his book *J.M.Coetzee South Africa and the Politics of Writing* posits, “The novel therefore juxtaposes subject-positions within twentieth century American imperialism and eighteenth century Dutch colonialism, finding them co-extensive in their quest for self-realization through dominance.”

There is a similarity between Jacobus Coetzee’s second expedition where he wreaks vengeance on the natives and his servants and Eugene Dawn’s stabbing of his son as the police arrive. Eugene who has taken his son along with him is staying in a motel with his son. He has done this, out of spite for his wife. But she gets the help of the police and tracks him down. Both Eugene and Jacobus cannot tolerate disrespect. The only way they think they can get respect is by a show of violence. This reveals the baseness of their character because violence surely is a cowardly exercise of power. It is only through violence that both Eugene and Jacobus assert their power and both show acts of self-assertion.

Colonisation gives immense power to the whites and they use it to destroy and kill mercilessly. This is exhibited by Jacobus when he brutally shoots his servants, in spite of their agonizing pleas. He has no sympathy even for the servants who have been faithful to him all along. However, a minor mistake or omission on their part brings out all the anger in him. He cannot forgive them as forgiveness is beyond him. He feels he is a superior being and all he wants is the gratification of his ego as he cannot tolerate anything that hurts his ego. Even the heart rending pleas of the servants fall on deaf ears. Overcome by fury nothing changes his decision. The white man is ready to do anything for the sake of establishing his power. Although these servants have been loyal to him, he is undeterred
by their pleas. This is a sure sign of the deep rooted evil in him. He goes away, being sure of coming back to take revenge and this decision to seek vengeance is premeditated. The decision to do away with them is not spontaneous but wholly deliberate. The violence and desperation in him is exhibited through his ghastly acts. All he wants is revenge for having lost his self esteem, for his ego being hurt. In his anger he loses control over his mind, over himself and kills the servants and the natives without remorse. The coloniser makes no distinction between men and children who also become victims of his cruelty. He is heartless with them as well. Their innocence does not move him. When children play tricks on Jacobus, he maliciously bites off an ear of one of the boys. We find such an attitude of the whites towards the youth in the novel *Age of Iron* too. Their acts being heinous, they do not hesitate to resort to violent behavior towards the youth. Coetzee brings out the fact that violence boomerangs on the perpetrator. Jacobus who resorts to violence becomes evil itself.

Jacobus justifies his violence as a projection of the colonizing process, whereby the ‘Other’ has to be subdued by violence. Coetzee in his book *White Writing* lists a number of characteristics that the natives possess according to the travel writers. They are mainly about their physical appearance, dress, diet, medicine, crafts, customs and habitation and so on. These are very different from that of the white man. Accordingly the coloniser tries to identify these characteristics in the natives and when they compare them with the Europeans they (the natives) appear to be inferior in every way. In their physical appearance they are very different from the whites. They are ugly to look at, dirty and carry a stench with them with eating habits which are very different. Moreover, they like to be idle and have very slothful ways. In fact, for the white man the native is everything that he is not; the native can only be a repository of evil and all that is base.
Jacobus, a psychologically deformed character exhibits his acts of uncontrolled violence. He considers himself 'civilised' as opposed to the natives who are 'barbarians'. However, his acts of violence bring out the barbarian in him. He has all the qualities that can easily label him as savage. There is absolutely no fineness about him. He imagines himself to appear as a god-like figure to the natives. All his thoughts are centred on himself as he feels he is an embodiment of all that is the best.

Coetzee does not present any barbaric act of the natives who are constantly subject to violence. These so called ‘barbarians’ have their own code of existence and values which may not be similar to that of the whites. They may not be so sophisticated in their behavior or in their ways. But they do live by certain codes of conduct. Coetzee in his novels seems to advocate that, the natives’ values are even better than that of the whites. He exposes Jacobus who thinks he is superior to the barbarians and has no sympathy for those who have served him, or respect for their women or love for the children. He acts in a brutal manner with everyone, absolutely devoid of character with nothing of the civilised man in him. Unlike the other protagonists of Coetzee’s novels Jacobus is the only white man who undertakes the role of civilizing the natives. All the other white protagonists sympathise with the blacks. So the novel talks about American imperialism and eighteenth century colonialism. “The two stories are complementary even if separated in time and space, but signify the theme of dominance, hegemony and subjugation.”

When Coetzee wrote *Waiting for the Barbarians* the prevailing socio-political conditions in South Africa were very bleak. Though the frontier is unspecified and the protagonist, the Magistrate is unidentified, the novel is clearly about the contemporary realities in South Africa. There is large scale violence between the State security forces
and certain black townships which were always susceptible to violence and riots. A small incident somewhere would trigger a riot. It was as if someone was waiting for the button to be pressed. The riots were of unimaginable proportions. The police had the freedom to shoot the people down without a second thought. The State was there to stand by the police who acted according to its bidding. In such a situation the natives were the hapless victims. The Soweto Riots of 1976 were unparalleled wherein many young blacks including children were brutally massacred. In response to the violent repressive measures adopted by the state the blacks also reacted violently. There was worldwide opposition to what was happening in South Africa. But there was none to question the whites. As the violence spread to different parts of the society the government took more and more repressive measures. People were arrested and detained without any warrant. Many died unnatural deaths and deaths in detention were innumerable.

Many of the writers in South Africa were in detention or exile. The media was suppressed; hence details about the riots could not be published. The foreign journalists were asked to leave the country. Many prisoners died under mysterious circumstances. The death of Stephen Biko in 1977 in detention focused international attention on state-sponsored violence and torture. Coetzee in Giving Offence: Essays on Censorship contends, “The institution of censorship puts power into the hands of persons with a judgmental, bureaucratic cast of mind that is bad for the cultural and even spiritual life of the community.” The censors behaved in a reckless manner. The crime and atrocities in South Africa were not allowed to be reported and the writers were watched scrupulously and anything that would affect the image of the State was curbed heavily. The government had not an iota of remorse or guilt about the suffering they caused and
justified what they did. Every death that happened because of them was made to appear like a natural death or a suicide.

The white regime was so paranoid about the blacks that, "it sought to control the dissemination of signs in whatever form .... Not only books, magazines, films and plays, but T-shirts, key-rings, dolls ... had to pass the scrutiny of the censorship bureaucracy before it could be made public" (GO 34). For this they resorted to the strictest of measures and did not spare anyone. Writers, journalists, reporters all came under close scrutiny. The slightest suspicion was dealt with mercilessly. Everywhere there was a debate about the conditions in South Africa. Coetzee wrote Waiting for the Barbarians during his stay in the United States in 1980. As the time and place in the novel is indeterminate, it gives the novel a highly allegorical dimension. The novel focuses allegorically on the South African condition although it does not overtly refer to it. The events in the novel are universal and can happen anywhere. The way the Government reacts to the blacks is unprecedented. A number of deaths take place under mysterious circumstances in South Africa. Coetzee interrogates power and torture in the novel. The novel received rich response from everywhere and established Coetzee as an international writer.

Coetzee is concerned with the human predicament, whether it is apartheid Africa or post-apartheid Africa. The individual is of prime importance to him. The novel Waiting for the Barbarians received wide publicity and international response. All sympathisers of human rights could identify the novel with what was exactly going on in South Africa which touched the hearts of people everywhere. The work is from a writer, who has first hand experience of the goings-on in South Africa and reading it proved to be an intellectual exercise. Although the novel does not specify any particular place or time, the events in the novel generally represent whatever is happening in South Africa and all
over the world. The novel deals with the theme of apartheid in a singular manner. A Magistrate, the protagonist of the novel is posted in the Outpost of the 'Empire' to collect rent and levy taxes. He is at ease in the frontier land. His relationship with the natives being largely cordial, he does not fear any threat from them nor does he look at them with suspicion. Relations between the Magistrate who is the representative of the Empire and the natives are trouble free as both exist in peace and calm. There is absolutely no tension between the empire and the natives. However as Seth B Pardick speaking about the novel states, "Coetzee is emphasizing the fact that a member of a dominant culture cannot truly see himself as a member of a marginalised culture because the dominant culture's national discourse has tacitly trained him to believe that its dominance is a result of its superiority, or vice versa." Therefore although the Magistrate sympathises with the natives, his position as the domineering person remains, no matter how he sees himself.

Life has been going on at a tranquil pace, the natives do not exhibit any sort of rebellion and the whites have nothing to complain of. But all these do not last long. With the arrival of Colonel Joll and his men of the Third Bureau, an important division of the Civil Guard, things change. Labib, a critic on Coetzee argues, "From the very first appearance of Colonel Joll, then, the reader realises that he personifies the consciousness of the Empire ...he tries to impose himself as the master." Colonel Joll and his men are convinced that the Outpost faced danger from the barbarians. Seth B. Pardick avers, "Joll is essentially the Empire's hegemonic apparatus, bemoaning the inevitable barbarian invasions, stressing the need for a pre-emptive strike, and censuring all those who question the legitimacy of his discourse, particularly the Magistrate." Nothing or no one can convince them that everything was well in the Outpost. They are bent on causing unrest. They cannot believe or accept that everything is going on well. They act on the
rumour that the barbarians are planning an attack. Colonel Joll just acts on suspicion and 
rumour. The origin of the rumour and the reasons for suspicion are not explicit. It is just 
that Colonel Joll wants to believe so and will think so at any cost. It seems to be his whim 
and fancy to be the torturer who would get the ‘truth’ out of the natives. He wants some 
reason to exercise violence on the natives. It is also because of his fear, confusion and 
insecurity that he behaves so. Even though there is no reason, rumour or suspicion, he 
plans to attack them. There is nothing else for him to fear the natives. The threat is only 
perceived by Colonel Joll and his men.

Colonel Joll insists that there is a threat even when the Magistrate tries to convince 
him that there is no threat as such from the so called barbarians. He tries to tell the 
Colonel that the barbarians keep their peace, are harmless and have no plans of an attack. 
However, Joll is not convinced. He does not want anyone to convince him as he has come 
with the purpose of destroying the barbarians and he will do that and leave only after this 
mission is accomplished. Nevertheless in spite of the Magistrate’s sympathy for the 
natives, throughout the novel, he too refers to them as ‘the barbarians’.

The Magistrate becomes a witness to the acts of cruelty of Colonel Joll. He does not 
remain a passive witness. In spite of his attempts to convince Joll, he is not successful. 
An old man and a young boy who supposedly have come to town to seek medical help 
are rounded up by the soldiers and later on Colonel Joll interrogates them, fully 
convinced that they are barbarians. The torture that the old man and the boy are subject to 
is deplorable. However, nothing can stop Colonel Joll who finds pleasure in inflicting 
pain on the two. Unmindful of the fact that he is guilty, all he wants to do is to torture 
them. By inflicting pain on his victims, he wants to send a message of caution to the other 
natives that they too can be subjected to such torment. When the Magistrate asks the
Colonel about extracting the truth from the ‘enemy’ Colonel Joll states, “There is a certain tone. A certain tone enters the voice of a man who is telling the truth.... First I get lies; you see this is what happens- first lies, then pressure, then more lies, then more pressure, then the break, then more pressure, then the truth. That is how you get the truth.”

The torture by Joll leads to the death of the old man. He is bundled up in a shroud and the small boy is made to sleep next to the corpse. However, there is no remorse on the part of Joll or his men. The life of a native is not at all valuable. They ruthlessly deal with the natives to satisfy their desire to oppress them for no obvious reason as such. In exhibiting violence they give vent to their innate need to subjugate the natives.

Coetzee in an article ‘Into The Dark Chamber’ published in Doubling the Point argues, “In the torture room unlimited force is exerted upon the physical being of an individual in a twilight of legal illegality, with the purpose, if not of destroying him, then at least of destroying the kernel of resistance within him.” The white man acts with impunity on the natives. They do not want any act of assertion from the natives. Hence they are subject to torture.

The report of the death of the old man deliberately hushes up the fact that he is actually killed. There is no record of the torture inflicted by Colonel Joll and his men. The torment inflicted on the old man and the young boy is not recorded at all. Such things were common in South Africa during those days. Thousand of blacks were killed in detention. The Magistrate knowing very well that the old man died of intense torture, tears open the shroud and sees that the old man’s beard is caked with blood, his lips crushed and his teeth broken. He gets the corpse removed. The boy is so terribly shaken and terrified that when the Magistrate tries to touch his cheeks he trembles with fear.
In South Africa, maintenance of records of the atrocities committed by the police in connivance with the State was most conveniently ignored. Many detainees in prison, died unnatural deaths and their deaths were hushed up. Steve Biko, a prominent black leader also died under mysterious circumstances while in detention. This brought South Africa under scanner. There was widespread condemnation of the atrocities committed in detention. Hence, Coetzee very obviously alludes to the highhandedness of the police and the government, in the manner in which they handled those natives who were in detention. The police and the government were hand in hand and the natives were helpless. Even though, sanctions against the government were brought in by the rest of the world, the South African government remained undeterred. They were bent on continuing with their policy of apartheid and injustice, not letting go power from their hands at any cost. In fact, they wanted to hang on to power, as long as they could, with the thought that they could do so for a long time more.

The 'Other' was depicted to be cruel, barbaric and hence the Empire, the 'centre', had to take precautionary measures against the barbarians who were the construct of the empire. The barbarian was invented so that the white man could usurp and take over his land and rule. Coetzee states, "There is no woman living along the frontier who has not dreamed of a dark barbarian hand coming from under the bed to grip her ankle, no man who has not frightened himself with visions of the barbarians carousing in his home, breaking the plates, setting fire to the curtains, raping his daughters" (WB 9).

The white man was paranoid about the barbarians. As a result of this paranoia Colonel Joll and his men arrived at the Outpost. The boy confessed to all the statements put forth by Colonel Joll, as he no longer cared about pain and suffering. His stance was one of passivity and surrender to the unbearable torture he was subjected to. The boy had
reached a stage where the torture that he had experienced in the hands of Colonel Joll and his men had wiped out every trace of hope in him. He accepted his lot without any complaint. The unbearable torture meted out to him had killed every fine sentiment in him and he writhed in pain.

However, in spite of it all, he never turned violent. He did not retaliate like the white man Jacobus in the novel *Dusklands* when he was insulted. Coetzee, thus, delineates the character of the black boy who remained quiet even when he suffered extremely, to highlight the reaction of the natives to suffering.

Colonel Joll who is bent upon a raid on the nomads refuses to believe the Magistrate when he tells him that the nomads are harmless and that they only move from place to place depending on the seasons. However, Colonel Joll does not believe this, or rather, he does not want to believe it. After four days the prisoners are brought to the Outpost. The Magistrate tries to dissuade Colonel Joll and also tries to convince the soldiers that these prisoners are not barbarians, but fisher folk. However, Colonel Joll wants to believe that the barbarians are lurking out there. Joll knows very well that in order to establish an identity for himself he needs the native. So the vile native has to be there. The ‘centre’ can have validity only if the ‘margin’ exists. The barbarian has to be created to validate the ‘centre’. So at any cost Joll and his men need to have barbarians who have to pose problems for them, so that they can act. They can thus authenticate their position and find something to work on to establish their distinctiveness.

Colonel Joll interrogates the prisoners and leaves fairly satisfied with what he has done. After the men leave, the Magistrate finds a barbarian girl begging in the town. He takes her to his room and washes her body. Her ankles have been broken by the soldiers and she has also been blinded by them. Rosemary Jane Jolly a critic argues, “His
fascination for the blind barbarian girl stems from this curiosity: he treats her body as a
surface, a map of a surface, a text."\(^{19}\) Even though the Magistrate is sympathetic, he
ironically is like the white man as he is only curious to know how the girl has sustained
the wounds. The Magistrate realises that he has no desire for this stocky girl. Pardick
analyzing the novel contends, "It is clear that the Magistrate finds it impossible to accept
the woman as she is; for the Magistrate, she is incapable of being anything other than
"the Other" or the "deficient body"."\(^{20}\) He finds her some work to do in the kitchen
which makes her happy. He keeps her with him out of curiosity, as he wants to read the
marks on her body left by her torturers and know how she suffered the wounds.

Although he spends time with her, washing her feet and her body, the Magistrate feels
that "the distance between myself and her torturers, I realize, is negligible" (\(WB\ 29\)). He
has no desire for her. He remains indifferent to her and is not sexually aroused by her
presence. Nevertheless, he sleeps with her every night. He is unable to remember how the
girl looks like. Pardick further contends "The very body of the barbarian girl is something
that the Magistrate feels he must conquer, something into which he must insert his
standard-bearing beam and claim in the name of the Empire."\(^{21}\)

When the second group of conscripts of soldiers arrive, the Magistrate tries to
convince the officer that the barbarians are not a threat. However, the young officer is
convinced that they are a threat. The Magistrate remaining sympathetic to the barbarians
argues, "Where civilization entailed the corruption of barbarian virtues and the creation
of a dependent people, I decided, I was opposed to civilization; and upon this resolution I
based the conduct of my administration" (\(WB\ 41\)). The Magistrate, although aware that it
would be detrimental to his existence states, "I wish that these barbarians would rise up
and teach us a lesson, so that we would learn to respect them" (\(WB\ 55\)). Overcome with
helplessness the Magistrate only hopes that the white man is taught a lesson by the blacks as he is the only one among the whites who sympathises with the natives and all he can do is wishfully hope that the natives retaliate. He cannot do anything about his inability to prevent Colonel Joll and his men from unnecessarily torturing the natives. His position being one against so many of them, the only option left for him is to hope for the natives themselves to rise against the whites. Thus the Magistrate in a way has to admit his complicity in the imperial enterprise. Pardick argues further, “The Empire and the national narrative it has created as a means of self-legitimation are, for the Magistrate and other people of the Empire, thought of as something that exists beyond their capacity to question.”

This reminds us of Coetzee’s statement that the white man cannot shed his complicity in what happened in South Africa. He contends, “The whites in South Africa participated in various degrees, actively or passively, in an audacious and well planned crime against Africa.” The Magistrate though aware of his complicity cannot do anything about it.

The Magistrate decides to take the barbarian girl to her people telling her that the physical intimacy between them would end for the time being and she accepts this without any comment. Both of them embark on a long and tiresome journey. Before he goes away with three men he writes a note saying that, he is leaving to repair the damage caused by the Third Bureau and to restore the good will that existed previously between them and the barbarians. When he tells the girl that he is taking her to her people, she shows no sign of joy. The weather is bad and they have to withstand the cold wind. They have brought food with them so they could appease their hunger. But the horse refuses to move one day and the Magistrate has to slash the horse and let it bleed to death.
The Magistrate notices that the barbarian girl is very happy in the company of men of her race with whom she talks joyfully. One day the relationship between her and the Magistrate is consummated. He feels that, it is because they are going to part, that she has come to him and a physical intimacy has ensued. "For Bhabha" avers John Mcleod "the border is the place where conventional patterns of thought are disturbed and can be disrupted by the possibility of crossing. At the border, past and present, inside and outside, no longer remain separated as binary opposites but instead co-mingle and conflict." 24

When the Magistrate returns to the Outpost, he finds that the army is stationed there and the attack against the barbarians is soon to come. The empire suspects that he is one with the natives and he is considered an enemy. Any act of the white man that is in favour of the blacks is seriously dealt with. It is the Magistrate's relationship with the barbarian girl that makes him the object of their suspicion. The warrant officer charges him of "treasonously consorting" with the barbarians (WB 85). Imprisoned in the same room where the natives are tortured, he sleeps day in and day out. Tortured and questioned about the meaning of the wooden slips that are found in his room, he is fed the same food that is given to the common soldiers. Life in the cell proves to be taxing for him. Charges are levelled against him regarding his character and the way he maintains the accounts. The modus operandi of levelling charges is the same as done to the natives.

They suspect the Magistrate of conniving with the natives using the wooden slips. He is asked to interpret the writing on the slips and he uses this opportunity to expose the atrocities of the empire. He is humiliated, punished and tortured. "They came to my cell to show me the meaning of humanity and in the space of an hour showed me a great deal" (WB 126). The whites cause him immense suffering. This is the price he pays for being
sympathetic to the natives. Colonel Joll and his men are unsympathetic to the Magistrate who is made to run naked around the yard, jump back and forth a rope and prodded with a cane when he stopped. He suffers humiliation in the hands of Joll’s men. “It cost me agonies of shame the first time I had to come out of my den and stand naked before these idlers or jerk my body about for their amusement. Now I am past shame” articulates the Magistrate (WB 128). The Magistrate’s morale is completely broken and he suffers alone. This tactic is often followed by the whites to break the natives’ morale. We find a similar episode in Dusklands when Jacobus wreaks vengeance on the Hottentots.

The Magistrate goes through immense suffering and shame on being treated like another native. He is made to wear a smock which is again terribly humiliating for a man to be in a woman’s clothes. They tie his hands behind his back and a salt bag is put over his head and tied around his neck with a string. They hang a noose under his ear and make him climb a ladder kept against a tree. The noose is slipped from his neck and knotted around the cord that binds his wrist and he is pulled up. When he roars and shouts in pain, the men taunt amidst laughter “That is barbarian language you hear” (WB 132). Even the people who once respected him, watch with amusement. The torture meted out to him brings out the ruthlessness in the colonisers. The Magistrate realises that the empire derives its power by distorting justice and legality to get what they want. They look for a reason to exercise violence and establish their superiority.

The Magistrate asks Mandel who has tortured him, “How do you find it possible to eat afterwards, after you have been....working with people” (WB 138). He argues, “I have imagined that one would want to wash one’s hands. But no ordinary washing would be enough, one would require priestly intervention, a ceremonial of cleansing, don’t you think?”(WB 138) This reminds us of Lady Macbeth who tries to do away with her guilt of
murder by constantly washing her hands. That is how the Magistrate feels about Joll and his men. He opines that acts of violence make one's hands unclean and one will have to wash several times to remove the taint of injustice. A man of conscience will not be able to go on with his life without remorse after such torment. However, Colonel Joll and his men have no such qualms. The Magistrate knows that there is no hope for him. He accuses Joll of being the enemy and tells him that the barbarians are innocent.

However, soon Joll and his men are forced to make an ignominious withdrawal. The imperial army being shamefully defeated by the natives, Joll flees out of fear of the barbarians. The Magistrate sees Joll sitting in the carriage and makes it a point to mouth some words at Joll who is looking at him through the glass of the carriage. The barbarians have led them into the desert and vanished. The army has no food with them and finally they are forced to retreat. Coetzee illustrates how violence boomerangs on the perpetrators of violence.

The exit of Colonel Joll and his men from the Outpost is shameful and an act of cowardice. They flee out of fear of the natives. But by then they have already caused the damage to the natives. The Outpost which is until then calm and peaceful has become a centre of violence and suffering. For no reason, the peace loving inhabitants have been disturbed and tortured. Irreparable damage has been inflicted on them. However, the novel ends on an optimistic note. The Magistrate sees children at play in the middle of the square, building a snowman. Thus the Magistrate goes through three different experiences. When Joll arrives at the Outpost he is in charge of the Outpost. Subsequently he is treated like a prisoner and humiliated. With the retreat of Joll and his men, he regains control of the Outpost.
Thus, *Waiting for the Barbarians* echoes the social and political scenes in South Africa. The novel is clear about what violence does to its perpetrator. Dominic Head, a well known critic of Coetzee opines, "This novel about the destructiveness (and self-destructiveness) of an imperial regime — obstructed by one man of conscience has obvious ramifications for the white opponent of apartheid South Africa in 1980, the year of publication." 25

In his non fictional writing, *White Writing*, Coetzee avers, "In one sense, the wilderness is a world where the law of nature reigns, a world over which the first act of culture, Adam’s act of naming, has not been performed.... can be loosely associated with British colonialism and the effort to maintain a border separating a region of order and culture — the colony — from the barbarian wilderness." 26

Coetzee’s idea that the interior is wilderness clearly echoes Conrad. Similarly, the term Outpost has reference to Conrad’s Outpost in the *Heart of Darkness*. Similarities can be drawn between Kurtz’s native woman and the Magistrate’s barbarian girl. Kurtz’s native woman is elegant and composed and has held Kurtz under her sway. Similarly, though the barbarian girl does not enamour the Magistrate, in some way, she binds herself to him. Labib, a critic on Coetzee remarks “to an extent the bond between the Magistrate and the barbarian girl can be seen as a paternal (if patronizing) relationship." 27 He cannot let go of her although there is no physical relationship between them because he feels that he is in a way part of the damage done to her by the Colonel and his men.

Hence in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Coetzee exposes the cruelty and atrocity of the white man. What is significant to note is the effect of such cruelty on the ‘Other’. The so called ‘barbarians’ are more ‘civilised’ than the so called ‘civilised’ white men. The young boy, the old man, the barbarian girl and the prisoners who are tortured, accept their
lot without any show of resistance. Is this acceptance because of helplessness or is it because they accept the vicissitudes of life? The barbarian girl when questioned by the Magistrate does not even want to discuss what the torturers have done to her. There is no anger or sorrow in her, but only acceptance of and resignation to what has happened to her. She narrates, "They did not burn me. They said they would burn my eyes out, but they did not. The man brought it very close to my face and made me look at it. They held my eyelids open. But I had nothing to tell them. That was all" (WB 44).

When the Magistrate asks her "What do you feel towards the men who did this?" she lies thinking for a long time and says, "I am tired of talking" (WB 44). Perhaps many thoughts would have gone through her mind. But she prefers to keep the thoughts to herself. It is not that she is unaffected by what the torturers have done to her. She only chooses to remain silent as she is cognizant that nothing can undo what has been done to her. No one can alter what she has gone through. So she wants to remain silent. This indifference to suffering is that of an evolved person. There is neither hatred nor self-pity. It is total detachment to pain and suffering. By such an attitude, she indeed has a moral victory over the perpetrators of violence. Similarly the protagonist of the novel *Life and Times of Michael K*, Michael displays indifference to suffering. He wants to live a life of solitude and does not want sympathy from anyone.

The barbarian girl has no choice other than to serve the Magistrate. However, she is not subservient in spirit to him. When he ridicules her comparing her to the silver fox he has in his room, she expresses her annoyance at this comparison and lets him know that. She conveys the fact to him that he cannot take her for granted and ridicule her. The Magistrate, therefore apologises. This attitude shows that she could be assertive. In spite of being considered the 'Other', the natives are not without defiance and resistance. The
barbarian girl does not give in to the Magistrate because she knows that he too is no different from the other white men. He is just curious to know about the scars on her body. Coetzee gives his characters such a depth of understanding although they are physically debilitated. In spite of broken ankles and almost being made blind, the girl shows no hatred or vengeance. But Coetzee has shown us how the white man has behaved in *Dusklands* when under pressure. Both Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee have no control over their emotions. Anger turns them mad and makes them vengeful. As against them we have Michael K the protagonist of *Life and Times of Michael K* a native who remains very much in control of his emotions even in adversity.

When the Magistrate speaks to the young military officer about the barbarians who, the officers are planning to attack, the officer makes a mental assessment of him. The Magistrate contends “I think I know what he sees before him, a minor civilian administrator sunk, after years in this backwater, in slothful native ways” (*WB* 54). The whites in their homeland always believe that proximity to the natives will make people of their kind also idle and slothful. They will naturally imbibe the superfluous qualities of the natives by living in their land. That is the whole purpose of apartheid – to segregate the blacks from the whites.

Coetzee in *White Writing*, in the essay ‘Idleness in South Africa’ mentions how the Immorality Act and Mixed Marriages Act is introduced to prevent the whites from marrying the blacks, thereby preventing them to “settle down to more or less idle, shiftless, improvident lives and engender troops of ragged children....”(*WW* 37). Thus Coetzee incorporates whatever he has learnt from his research on the travel stories into his novels. This gives authenticity to whatever he discusses in the novel.

David Attwell in *J.M. Coetzee South Africa and the Politics of Writing* avers:
So the barbarian girl will simply not be delivered up to the Magistrate's probings; her otherness cannot be domesticated...the Magistrate's desire in *Barbarians* brings in train all the dominating implications of the colonial episteme. The desired, female colonised is well known as a trope of colonial discourse, whether she represents the interior and its material riches, the landscape, or the purely psychic abundance of the unknown. In disallowing penetration, therefore, Coetzee both acknowledges and refuses to perpetuate these generalised implications of dominance.\(^{28}\)

By accepting her lot silently, the barbarian girl evolves as an individual, but finally defeats the one in power because violence has no effect on the tortured. She remains undeterred as she has no anger or hatred and keeps all her suffering to herself.

*Life and Times of Michael K* written in the backdrop of the civil war in South Africa is influenced by the political events of the years 1978 to 1982. However, Coetzee is more interested in following the life of an individual called Michael K, who refuses to be part of the system and the war. In all his novels Coetzee centres his plot on the individual rather than on a group of people. Mike Marais, a critic states thus, “Indeed, the novel consists of a series of replicated episodes, each of which brings Michael K into contact with a character who attempts to assert himself by negating K’s alterity.”\(^{29}\) Michael K works as a gardener and lives with his mother who works as a domestic help. However, his mother falls sick and wishes to return to her home town. Michael takes her in a make-shift barrow. As he moves along with his mother he encounters many difficulties because they do not carry a permit to leave the town. All his efforts are to stay out of the war. There is no direct confrontation of Michael with violence. It is only once that he is threatened by a soldier who is only greedy to confiscate the things he is carrying.
The Medical Officer who wants Michael to conform to the system tries to persuade him to open his heart and speak. But Michael refuses to eat and his resistance is only physical. However, he does everything the camp expects him to do. Labib, the critic states, "Michael, however, shows incredible insight and demonstrates he has understood that behind the doctor's facade there hides a coloniser who, in spite of everything, keeps perceiving the ‘Other; as the different ‘Other', thereby constructing him as inferior." Michael wants to stay out of the war and the society. He does not want the company of people as he wants to be by himself. The conflict and violence make no sense to him. In the character of Michael K, Coetzee illustrates that one can live in a society and not be a part of that society; one can live in the midst of war and still not be a party to it. This possibility can become a reality if one is ready to be in solitude and this requires tremendous will power, as it is but human to seek the company of others.

Even in the camps, no violence is discussed by Coetzee. In fact according to the camp authorities, life in the camp is better than in the world outside which is full of violence. However, what Michael desires, is to live away from society, from people, and be close to nature. He achieves this by escaping the camp. He does not want to be a part of the war torn society. He stays away from everything that will lead to a violent way of life. Michael succeeds living in solitude though there are times when he feels like having the company of people. Nevertheless he is comfortable with himself. He remains happy with his way of life although he is exposed to the indignities of the time. He does not expect anything from anyone as he seems to have found a meaning in his life. Throughout the novel we hardly see Michael in conversation. Coetzee only reveals his thoughts to us. Thus we get to know Michael more from what he thinks than from what he speaks.
"The ratio of forces has been inverted; decolonization has begun; all that our hired soldiers can do is to delay its completion." 31 This statement is pertinent to the novel *Age of Iron*. The novel begins with Mrs. Curren being told by her doctor that she is suffering from cancer. This is symbolic of the unrest in South Africa. When Coetzee wrote this novel, turmoil and violence in South Africa was at its peak. When Mrs. Curren returns from the hospital after being diagnosed with cancer she sees a vagrant, Vercueil by name, settled comfortably in a shelter in the yard near her garage. The cancer she is suffering from is symbolic of the unrest that is widespread in South Africa.

Timothy Francis Strode argues:

> It is not insignificant to note here that J.M. Coetzee will offer as one symptom of the breakdown of apartheid the appearance of a vagrant — one of whose cardinal characteristics is his offensive odour — in the backyard of a "respectable" middle class white woman.... *Age of Iron*, for example, will register the unraveling of a spatial strategy, and, simultaneously detail, the fragmenting of sanitised white consciousness. 32

A black would never have dared to enter the space of the white. This would never have happened in South Africa under apartheid. But now the blacks who have started protesting are defiant and assertive. The occupying of the space belonging to the white man is a sure sign of this assertion.

Vercueil becomes a sort of an ‘angel’ for Mrs. Curren who until then has not been involved in the social or political issues of South Africa, living a secluded life. She is an academician and does not have to mingle with the masses. Hence she does not know much about the conflict-ridden society. Nevertheless she is sympathetic to the blacks and
is unlike the whites who look down upon the blacks and treat them as inferior beings. Mrs. Curren’s daughter has left the country and is in the U.S.

Florence, Mrs. Curren’s help, brings her son and two daughters with her. She learns from her that the schools have been burnt down. But all this is not reported as it is censored. Mrs Curren gets to know what is happening around her from Florence and also by watching the black township which she can see at a distance from her house. She is upset that Florence’s son behaves in a callous manner. Florence believes that it is the whites who made them so cruel and is proud of the violent behavior of her son Bheki and his friend. “These are good children, they are like iron, we are proud of them” she says. However, Mrs Curren does not like this attitude of Florence as she feels that it will kill the fine sentiments in the children and there will be no hope for the future. She believes that children ought not to behave in such a manner.

Bheki and his friend while riding on their bicycles are deliberately pushed towards a parked van by two policemen in a van. As a result the friend is unconscious and Bheki is wounded. Atrocities of this kind were common in South Africa. The police were deliberately cruel with the blacks. Coetzee refers to the power that the police wielded in South Africa, dehumanising the people there. Coetzee is not referring just to South Africa. It can happen anywhere in the world when power is used in a distorted manner. Mrs. Curren wants to lodge a complaint against the two policemen. But only parties directly affected are permitted to do so. She finds herself in a helpless position about what is going on in the society, although she knows that the action of the police is totally unjust and unlawful. Coetzee refers to the shooting in the town and how the ‘witdoeke’ are given guns to shoot. This is exactly what happened in South Africa during the unrest. Even the whites who are sympathetic to the blacks could do nothing about such atrocities.
Mrs Curren is one of those whites who finds herself helpless against the atrocities of the whites.

Mrs. Curren sees the town of Guguletu burning. She is distressed to see Bheki lying dead. “We shoot these people as if they are waste, but in the end it is we whose lives are not worth living” (AI 104) she contends. About the violence she writes “You know this country. There is madness in the air here” (AI 117). Mrs. Curren writes about what is happening in South Africa, to her daughter who has no inkling about what she is going through and what is happening in South Africa. Mike Marais opines “After Bheki’s death and her visit to Guguletu, however, Mrs Curren appears to realize that the system of Western values and ethics in terms of which she judges and acts has lost all validity and relevance in the historical context she finds herself.” She finds that the blacks have their own sense of what is righteous. Mrs Curren tries to overcome the unhealthy relationship between the blacks and the whites which is brought in by the practice of apartheid, by trying to love the black boys. Mike Marais further avers, “Since it is the relations of contestation imposed by the state which dehumanise people, it follows that “love”, in undermining the subject-centred consciousness which underpins such relations of power, has the ability to humanise that which has been brutalised.”

In Bheki’s death and in the death of hundreds of black men, Mrs. Curren feels the age of iron will return. Mrs. Curren is surprised that young boys are part of the violence. She tells Bheki’s friend “You are still children. You are throwing away your lives before you know what life can be.... Fifteen is too young to die…” (AI 143). She is in great despair when the police shoots Bheki’s friend in her own home. Finally Mrs. Curren dies in the arms of Vercueil to whom she entrusts a packet to be posted to her daughter.
The novel belongs to the epistolary genre and Mrs. Curren writes to her daughter, as testimony of her last days and of what is happening in South Africa. Mrs. Curren moves from a state of ignorance to knowledge. She is hitherto kept away from the political and social turmoil, being an academic and when she learns about the violence in the society through her maid Florence, whose son and friends are fighting the authority of the whites, she finds herself sympathising with the underdogs. However, she is unable to do anything and she becomes only a witness to the violence around her. The novel expresses her solitude and disappointment. Coetzee delineates a white character accepting the blacks, yet unable to do anything more than that. Many whites in South Africa including writers upheld the rights of the blacks though they could not do anything more than that.

The nation-wide unrest in South Africa in the 1980s finds echoes in the novel. The repressive measures taken by the government were brutal. A series of boycotts were organised by the black youth and children and the white regime targeted them mercilessly. The government controlled the media and there was nothing to watch on the TV or read in newspapers other than propaganda by the white regime.

Mrs. Curren is not interested in turning the TV on. She like everyone else is aware that the real happenings in the society would not be telecast. The people have no access to the truth and reality as the censors have their iron grip on the media where nothing escaped their scrutiny. Coetzee in his novels brings out the various faces of censorship.

Although Mrs. Curren, seems to be pessimistic about the future of South Africa, the fact that she establishes a harmonious relationship with Vercueil, proves that Coetzee is not altogether cynical. There seems to be a better understanding between the two races. Although Coetzee does not specify Vercueil’s race, it is obvious that he belongs to the inferior race. Vercueil is always described as being dirty and smelly. Nevertheless he
does not fall short of humane qualities. He is around whenever Mrs. Curren needs him. She trusts him to post the packet to her daughter after her death, so that her daughter could be aware of what she went through and what exactly had happened in South Africa. Coetzee seems to say that though there may be no hope for the country as such, one can see hope at the level of individuals. The relationship between the white and the black individual, the quality of love between them can definitely heal the enmity between them and in turn heal the society and the country. Here the optimistic approach of Coetzee is evident.

Coetzee’s use of the epistolary genre is significant because Mrs. Curren gets the freedom to put forth all her thoughts and feelings in these letters, to her daughter, who is away from South Africa. In the letters, she opens out to her daughter and we get to know the sufferings she goes through as a white citizen of South Africa. She expresses her helplessness and surprise at the intensity of purpose of the young blacks. She tolerates a black living in her yard. However, he seems to be the only one around in time of need. There is a sense of bonding between them. Throughout the novel, Mrs. Curren is astonished that black parents let their children grow up ready to face violence. She is astonished that the youth are ready to die for freedom and for comradeship. She cannot come to terms with it. However, eventually she acknowledges the complicity of the white man which led to the unrest in the society.

On the other hand in the novel *Disgrace* which is written in the post apartheid era, we see a reversal of violence. This novel is written after the decolonization of the South African state. Being a shrewd observer, Coetzee’s novel echoes the impact of decolonization, although he came under heavy criticism by the government and also fellow writers. It was felt that he was only highlighting something which was not very
predominant, that is, the whites being molested by the blacks. David Lurie is a professor at a University and he is unceremoniously dismissed from service, for his alleged misbehavior towards one of his students, Melanie Isaac. His house is vandalised by miscreants. The post apartheid era, showed much violence and assertion by the blacks. The blacks were out to show the whites what they meant.

David Lurie leaves Cape Town and comes to reside with his daughter Lucy, on her farm. Here, he and his daughter become subject to violence from the blacks. One day under the pretext of using the telephone, two black men and a young boy enter the farm, assault Lurie and lock him up, pour alcohol on him, set fire, and gang rape Lucy. This act of the blacks is deliberate as they want to assert their position in the wake of decolonization. The blacks choose to wreak vengeance on the whites and they are ruthless. They want to show that they are also capable of inflicting violence. No one comes to the rescue of Lucy or Lurie. The three men after shooting the dogs in the kennel drive off in Lurie’s car. Lucy’s neighbour Petrus, a black is nowhere around when this incident takes place. It looks as if he has conveniently been away from the scene of violence. Petrus owns a farm which is adjacent to Lucy’s. He has an eye on Lucy’s land. This is something, which all blacks want. They want to take back the land, which to them, is equivalent to reclaiming power.

Lucy is pregnant, as a result of the rape and decides to keep the child. She agrees to marry Petrus, so that she can get protection. It is agreed upon by him that, she will have the right to stay in her house and nobody will have the right to enter the house without her permission. David is astounded to learn about this compromising gesture of his daughter. But Lucy feels that she has only paid the price for what the whites have done to the blacks all these years. “They see me as owing something. They see themselves as
debt collectors. Why should I be allowed to live here without paying? Perhaps that is what they tell themselves.” Suresh Raval in his essay ‘Coetzee’s Disgrace’ contends “While Lurie does not think he is personally liable for apartheid’s evils, Lucy recognizes that the apartheid was a catastrophic social, economic, and cultural undertaking that caused immense human suffering.” Coetzee was criticised by other writers and also by the government for making Lucy accept her plight. But that nevertheless was the reality. However, the whites did not want to accept the reality as it was a stigma on the image of democratic South Africa.

Decolonisation brought about a reversal in the equations of power. The whites found themselves in a precarious condition as they knew that they were no longer safe in South Africa. Those whites who lived there, lived in constant fear of the blacks. They knew that anything could happen anytime and they had to face the reality. The blacks aggressively waited for an opportunity to settle scores, to teach the whites a lesson and they did it with exceptional zeal. They had absolutely no commiseration for the whites and the whites knew that they could not expect anything less than revenge from the blacks.

The boy who is one among the three blacks who had molested Lucy, is a relative of Petrus, Lucy’s neighbour and has the audacity to return and be part of the party thrown by Petrus for which both David and Lucy are invited. David Lurie cannot contain his anger. However, he has no moral right to accuse this boy. He has also behaved in a similar manner with his student, Melanie Isaacs. He has also misused his power as a teacher. One wonders whether Coetzee advocates that one pays for one’s sins and that was the reason why David’s daughter Lucy, has to pay the price.

The blacks wreak vengeance on Lucy but she shows no anger. Although she is not the same person that she was, we find that she accepts what has happened to her very
submissively. She does not report the rape to the police and she even decides to have the child which is conceived out of the rape. This is a tremendous change that we see in a white. Those who have hitherto acted with impunity are now passive. Lucy even believes that what she is doing is right. The decision to keep the child is also surprising. Why will a white woman want to carry the child of a black and that too one that is a result of rape? Raval avers, “Lucy’s project, insofar as it is a self-consciously conceived project after her rape, appears to be an attempt at atonement for an appalling history of domination and violence.”

Disgrace is a bleak novel, but a powerful one. Lurie comes to a state of self knowledge. The novel draws an uncompromising portrait of the events unfolding in South Africa. Even though apartheid was lifted, South Africa was still not at ease with itself. The blacks were still resentful of the whites and resentment was smouldering. They were seething with indignation, vociferous of their contempt for and anger against the whites which Coetzee captures effectively in his novel. Raval furthermore states “Lucy, unlike Lurie, acknowledges that, as a product and beneficiary of apartheid, she cannot negotiate her position, that it is Petrus who now has moved into a position of authority to rewrite history.”

Having analysed the depiction of violence in the novels we now turn to the relevance of violence illustrated in the novels. The novels clearly demonstrate the binary opposites – ‘us’ versus ‘they’, ‘civilised’ versus ‘uncivilised,’ ‘good versus ‘evil’ and so on. In the novels one witnesses violence that is perpetrated by those who are in a position of power on the powerless. Almost all the novels show the white man exercising his authority but the impact of power varies. Eugene who tries to inhabit a place of omnipotence, finds himself in a pitiable situation. He is constantly chided by his superior. As a father, his relationship with his son does not elicit envy. In other words, in all his positions of power
he appears to be ineffective. His sense of inferiority makes him consciously stab his son, when his wife comes with the policemen to claim his son. The child becomes the victim of his anger and frustration, just as the natives become the victims of Jacobus’ rage at being humiliated. He would never have done that under normal circumstances. This is the result of the imperialistic stance he is propagating by being a party to it. Coetzee dehumanizes the character of Eugene Dawn and Jacobus.

Similarly in the second novella, Jacobus the protagonist too wants to place himself in a position of power. Jacobus thinks of himself as a person who can exercise his power over the natives but soon finds himself in a ridiculous position when he is among them. He becomes very frantic on realizing that he cannot exhibit his power or when he comprehends that the natives are not in awe of him. This is the typical reaction of a coloniser who finds himself in a situation where his power is not acknowledged and the exercise of authority takes a brutal turn. Power brings out the revengeful character of Jacobus but it is not without having an impact on his psyche. He tries to justify the bloodshed by saying, “I am a tool in the hands of history” (DL 106).

Jacobus exercises his power only to keep the distinction between himself and the ‘Other’. His exercise of power is to establish his difference from the ‘Other’ and it also reveals his fear of the ‘Other’. Power is exercised as a tool of defence. He establishes his superiority by a show of violence. By exercising power he treats the natives as inferiors and thereby, gives them the place of the ‘Other’. Both Eugene and Jacobus exercise power by being violent. Juxtaposing these two characters, Coetzee comes down heavily on the imperialistic stand of the West, which finds its expression in South Africa in the inhuman practice of apartheid.
However, in the novel *In the Heart of the Country*, Magda the protagonist seeks a life for herself. She does not try to assert herself as a white woman. She does not want to be one among the forgotten ones in history. As a white woman, she denounces her position of power and tries to have a meaningful relationship with her servants, Hendrik and his wife Klein Anna. She is not one who perpetrates the viciousness of colonialism. Nevertheless, she resides in the state of colonialism which definitely is not her creation. She tries to find a life for herself, but finds no sense of bonding. Her mother is apparently dead and her father estranges himself from her. In fact, she becomes both the victim and the victimiser. Magda’s father, being a white is in a position of power and she lives in fear of her father. He exerts patriarchal power on her. Similarly he wields power on the blacks on the farm and even uses the native woman for his sexual gratification.

Initially, though Magda distances herself from the natives, later on she assumes the role of the subject in relation to Hendrik, her servant. The roles are reversed and Hendrik now inhabits the position of power. Hendrik and Anna even refuse to communicate with her and finally Hendrik rapes Magda. So, even though Magda tries to establish a meaningful relationship with the blacks, the power that she vests in them, by being kind to them is misused. The authority that they have, makes Hendrik misuse it. He indulges in the heinous act of raping Lucy. Hence one wonders whether Coetzee is trying to say that power corrupts a person irrespective of whether he is black or white. Hendrik stands testimony to this. Could it be that he is taking revenge on Magda’s father, his master who had sexual relations with his wife as he stood in a position of power. This probably may be the motive behind Hendrik’s act. At the close of the novel we find Magda trying to communicate with the sky-gods because she has failed to communicate with anyone else.
Coetzee touches upon this difficulty of communication which is a result of the white-black encounter. She cannot commune with her father or the black servants.

The novel *In the Heart of the Country* explores the theme of complicity. Magda, the protagonist looks within her for answers for certain questions regarding the white man’s presence in South Africa. She represents the colonial enterprise. Though Magda’s reports are inconsistent, she exhibits her complicity in the colonial enterprise. In her report about Hendrik and Klein Anna she fails to establish any rapport between her and the black servants. Magda becomes a target of exploitation. She emerges as a construct of the colonial enterprise and an alienated individual, trying to come to terms with her existential problems. The world that she inhabits is a world that is lost to her and the stories she tells which are often contradictory, reveal the thoughts that she debates.

In *Waiting for the Barbarians* violence is perpetrated by the State. The fear that the State has for the blacks makes them self-defensive thereby resorting to violent means to suppress the natives. They feel that their power may be usurped. The government feels that there is a threat to political and social stability, “believing that the situation could lead to the overthrow of white minority rule in South Africa and bring about the end of the world of privilege they had carefully constructed for themselves, the government resolved to hold on to power at all costs.” However, Colonel Joll and his men, representatives of the Third Bureau, who are very suspicious of the natives exercise their power over them. This fear makes them ruthless. They only want to achieve their ends and are prepared to do anything. Coetzee vehemently condemns the atrocities of the white man in the novel. Though the time and milieu is not specified it is obvious that the novel is a critique of the conditions in South Africa. The Magistrate faces the complicity of the white man in the apartheid regime.
Talking about the repressive measures taken by the whites, Coetzee refers to the Miscegenation Act whereby sexual relations between masters and slaves are considered a crime. Coetzee contends, "Its origins, it seems to me lie in fear and denial: denial of an unacknowledgeable desire to embrace Africa, embrace the body of Africa, and fear of being embraced in return." They only want to achieve their ends and for this they are prepared to do anything. Coetzee vehemently condemns the atrocities of the white man in the novel.

In *Life and Times of Michael K*, the State exerts its authority by introducing various laws to curb the freedom of the individual. Michael K cannot leave Sea Point because he does not have a permit. Consequently, the officials stop him. However, not much of power is exerted. The Medical officer tries to exert his power by putting himself in the position of authority and by treating Michael K as the powerless. He tries to persuade him to talk but Michael does not yield. Michael ultimately gains his freedom by escaping from the camp. He thinks "I have escaped the camps; perhaps, if I lie low, I will escape the charity too."

Michael does not want charity from anyone. All he wants is freedom and he achieves this by going back to nature. By a return to nature Michael establishes his freedom. Thus in *Life and Times of Michael K*, the impact of power is negated because of Michael’s resolve not to be dominated. He will not let anyone take his freedom and lives his life the way he wants to. He asserts himself in a very passive manner without clash or conflict. The novel is significant because it is concerned with the suffering and redemption of humanity as a whole.

Coetzee’s *Foe* is a reworking of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. But the Cruso of Coetzee is different from the Crusoe of Defoe. Coetzee rewrites the canonical text of Defoe. In
Robinson Crusoe, Crusoe is in the position of domination and he domesticates Friday. However, the Cruso of Coetzee has a harmonious relationship with Friday. The difference is that Friday's tongue has been mutilated. Labib, the critic remarks about Coetzee:

...on the one hand he uses intertextuality to show that what previous texts were based on was not reality, but simply a construction of it, which was historically and socially determined. In addition, by making readers look at old texts from a different perspective, he achieves a defamiliarization which comes close to achieving what was the aim of structuralism, that is to bring to consciousness what is taken as natural and reveal it as a construct. On the other, he simultaneously refutes some of its fundamental notions such as the idea of 'structure' and the pure linguistic existence of the subject.43

So unlike Defoe's Friday, Coetzee's Friday remains mute. Coetzee does not reveal as to who cut his tongue. Coetzee's Cruso teaches him certain words which are enough for Friday to live in the island. Susan's understanding of Friday is from a position of power. She tries to make Friday speak, just as the Medical Officer in Life and Times of Michael K tries to make Michael speak. She feels she is superior to this native as she tries to teach him to write. But Friday is not interested to learn. Coetzee's Cruso is also different from Defoe's Crusoe. Defoe's Crusoe tries to create a civilization but Coetzee's Cruso is happy with the existing state of affairs on the island. Susan Barton's position in society is also one of the marginalised. Although she is a white woman she is marginalised. When she wants to write her story she seeks out a male writer. She cannot be heard as she is considered inferior to the male. Hence she chooses Mr. Foe to write her story.
Dominic Head, a critic on Coetzee avers, “Where Defoe’s Crusoe is the archetypal imperialist, governed by economic self-aggrandizement, Coetzee’s Cruso is concerned merely with subsistence and sterile work.” Coetzee’s Friday has no ambition. He does not enter into any conflict with anyone. One does not know whether he is happy in the company of Cruso. He lives with him without any confrontation. His relationship with Susan Barton is also devoid of any feeling. He definitely does not show any conflict or dislike. He accepts his position and is contented to be so.

In London, both Susan and Friday are insulted. She is the half-colonised and Friday, the ‘Other’ is the oppressed. Friday’s silence represents the silencing of the ‘Other’ in the colonial discourse. Friday in the novel becomes symbolic of the suffering of the repressed blacks in South Africa.

*Age of Iron* reveals the white woman’s involvement in the violence which hitherto she has kept out of. She finds herself drawn into the turmoil in the society. However, the blacks do not treat her sympathetically. Here, her position of power is lost and even her space and time is taken over by the ‘Other’. For the first time she comes face to face with violence. Mrs.Curren also realises that she cannot have any thought of comradeship. Unlike the case of David Lurie and Lucy in the novel *Disgrace*, who are molested by the blacks, the black man is the one who shows his compassion for Mrs. Curren.

In *Disgrace*, thus we see a reversal of roles of the whites and blacks. Political freedom gives the blacks unbridled freedom. They take law into their hands and do not spare the whites. They take all opportunity to wreak vengeance on the whites. In the assault of Lurie and the rape of Lucy by the three blacks who enter the premises of the whites, Coetzee shows the reversal of power. The blacks during the period of decolonization resort to violence to assert their rights.
Coetzee's novels testify to the sufferings of human beings under the inhuman practice of apartheid where we find domination and subservience. The people who dominate are ruthless, indifferent to human suffering. The suffering is the aftermath of their act but it does not trouble them. They do not feel guilty of having caused the suffering. They cannot empathize with the sufferer or rather they do not want to empathize with the one who suffers. It is the torment meted out by them which puts them in a position of power. In causing suffering they only derive vicarious pleasure. It does not affect them in any way although we as readers are able to see that there is a moral degeneration in the character of those who perpetrate suffering.

However, this suffering is perpetrated because of the empire's fear of the native and the trepidation of its position being unstable in the colony. It was a defensive tactic followed by the whites so that the blacks could not react and take their place. This apprehension in the coloniser led to the suppression of the culture and beliefs of the natives. The natives were told that their culture and beliefs were savage and it was the whites only who could help redeem themselves from such a state of degeneration. The native's religion was shunned and Christianity was introduced to the natives as a religion that could save them from damnation. The empire had to put itself in a position of power. So the native had to be the 'Other' on whom its will could be exercised.

In the first novella of Dusklands, the conflict between the Americans and Vietnamese brings suffering. The Americans use lethal weapons to cause suffering to the Vietnamese. Many are annihilated. However, in the process of writing a report on the propaganda tactics used by the Americans, the protagonist Eugene Dawn also suffers. He loses his mental balance and is sent to a mental asylum. In any colonial encounter, the whites try to convince the natives that they are on a civilizing mission, to lead them from darkness
to light. This is the stance taken by Jacobus Coetzee in the second novella. In order to subdue the natives, he resorts to violence. Initially the natives pay no attention to him. However, when he uses the gun and inflicts violence on them they are alarmed. The Hottentot servants who have deserted Jacobus are brutally attacked, killed and treated as objects without a will of their own. The question that arises is whether in their suffering the natives emerge as better people or not. The distress caused to them is dreadful. It clearly brings out the policy of discrimination followed by the whites. The natives whom Jacobus attacks cannot resist violence because they do not have guns. The white man is able to exert his superiority easily because of the weapons he possesses and he subjects the native to suffering and anguish.

In the second novel *In the Heart of the Country*, the protagonist Magda lives on a farm. The suffering is self inflicted unlike the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* who is made to suffer. No doubt, she is a victim of the whims of her dominating father, but later on, she puts herself in the position of the victimised in her relationship with her servants, Hendrik and Klein Anna. Her suffering is caused by alienation. She fails to understand the meaning of life thereby losing clarity of what is real and what is unreal. She goes into a series of monologues, loathing her lonely existence which makes the novel inward looking. Through her monologues, Magda reveals many things about herself. Though Magda’s reports are inconsistent, she exhibits her complicity in the colonial enterprise. She cannot establish a rapport between Hendrik, Anna and herself. This is symbolic of the white man’s failure to maintain a positive relationship with the blacks. She is raped by Hendrik and left alone on the farm. Her ‘spinster fate’ is supposed to represent South Africa’s international isolation during the apartheid regime. Just as South Africa remained unaffected even by being isolated, no one bothers about Magda’s
isolation. Magda is subordinate to the male in a hierarchical society and she is victimized when Hendrik rapes her. As Dominic Head avers “the coloniser is necessarily the instigator of revolutionary counter violence.”45

In Waiting for the Barbarians, the novel which put Coetzee on the international scene, suffering is the lot of the natives. This suffering is meted out by Colonel Joll and his men who arrive at the Outpost with the feeling that the barbarians would invade their territory any time and inflict violence. The old man dies after being tortured and the boy suffers in silence, the barbarian girl almost blinded and her ankles broken, suffers without showing any reaction. The Magistrate has sympathy for the girl but does nothing beyond this. He acknowledges his complicity. Coetzee by showing the Magistrate’s complicity, means to say that everyone shares the responsibility for the suffering by passively accepting injustice. Coetzee makes a scathing remark through his novels on those people who lived in South Africa, doing nothing about the atrocities meted out to the natives. When Colonel Joll realises that the Magistrate has taken the girl back to her people he feels that the Magistrate has colluded with them against the empire. Hence the torture by Mandel, Colonel Joll’s subordinate.

Although the Magistrate has sympathy for the barbarians, he considers them to be different. His attitude to the barbarian girl is patronising, as his liking for the girl is for his self redemption. So there is only a degree of difference between him and Colonel Joll. The Magistrate perpetrates the concept of ‘we’ and the ‘Other’. He looks after the girl to overcome his guilt in inflicting violence on the ‘Other’. Coetzee’s Waiting for the Barbarians though allegorical in nature is a strong indictment on torture and its implications.
But this is not the case in the novel *Life and Times of Michael K*. The protagonist Michael shows his indifference to suffering. He does not want the charity of anyone. He does not ask for any attention. He wants to keep away from the social and political milieu. It is a war torn South Africa that is projected and there is severe State control everywhere. As Michael takes his mother to her home town she dies on the way. Although he is pacified by the hospital staff, he only wishes that they leave him alone. His suffering connotes acceptance and he does not want sympathy from anyone nor does he expect anything from life. He seems to be contented and without any desires only wanting to be left alone. However, towards the end of the novel he is in the company of some tramps, a man, two women and a child and he seems to enjoy their company.

Michael exemplifies the truism that man is basically alone. The civil war is going on. The blacks are not allowed to move without passes. Michael, when stopped by the police and interrogated for the permit that is required for non whites to move from one town to another, suffers the indignities and the harsh treatment with equanimity. There is absolutely no response from him. His attitude to the acts of the whites is one of indifference. He does not show any sorrow when he is treated badly. It is as if he believes that he is destined to put up with whatever he goes through. K is picked up by the police and sent to a resettlement camp. He escapes from there, as camp life causes a lot of suffering for him. Again, he is caught and sent to the Kenilworth camp. The Medical Officer shows sincere interest in Michael and wants him to open up and tell him his story. However, Michael refuses to be influenced by him.

Coetzee was very much influenced by Kafka and the K in Michael K has allusions to ‘Josef K’ of Kafka which has the theme of alienation. Michael K who has a strong personality is not concerned about suffering and alienates himself from society. No one
can influence him. He only does what he wants to do, unwilling to make any compromise and finally he wins his freedom.

In the novel *Foe*, the silence of the ‘Other’, that is, Friday’s does not imply suffering. He seems to be not bothered about anything. However, this makes us think of the circumstances that led to the mutilating of his tongue. Cruso is quite happy on the island and does not want to go back to his country. On the other hand, for Susan Barton who is marooned on the island, the only thought is to get back to her country. Crusoe’s reluctance to go back leads to his death on the voyage and when Susan does get back to England, she longs to be on the island. Friday is unlike Daniel Defoe’s Friday. His silence is the result of a physical mutilation caused deliberately.

In *The Master of Petersburg* the fictionalised Dostoevsky suffers the loss of his son who perhaps is killed by the revolutionaries. He comes to Petersburg to collect the papers and belongings of his son. He gets involved with Nechaev, a revolutionary and has an affair with the landlady where his step son lived. He feels a sense of loneliness for his lost son. It is after the death of his stepson that he longs for him.

In *Age of Iron*, Mrs. Curren the protagonist of the novel suffers from cancer which is eating her. At the same time the society is also being eaten with unrest and violence. The cancer in her body is emblematic of the cancer in the society that is causing all the turmoil and aggression. Just as there is no cure for the cancer that is eating her bones, there seems to be no cure for the violence in the South African society.

A number of blacks organize themselves against the apartheid government, fearless about what will happen to them. The youth are not afraid to die because they are dying for a cause. The rebels are mercilessly killed and Mrs. Curren cannot understand why the youth offer themselves to the atrocities of the security police.
Age of Iron was written when Emergency was clamped on South Africa. Everywhere repressive measures were introduced. Violent deaths were very common as the State resorted to violent means to suppress any sign of rebellion from the blacks.

Bheki’s death moves Mrs. Curren. So too his friend John’s, although she never liked him. She feels responsible as a white for the suffering of these young men. She feels sad that these young men have never had a happy childhood. It is sad to note that Mrs. Curren has no one to talk to or confess. Vercueil, the vagrant, hardly listens to her talk. Thus this novel deals with Coetzee’s exposure of violence and the impact of it on the protagonist.

After having commented on Coetzee’s views on suffering it is pertinent to discuss Coetzee’s novel The Lives of Animals which argues for the cause of animals that are treated with utmost cruelty by human beings. The novel is in the form of lectures given by one Mrs. Costello, a well known novelist. She is invited to Appleton University to deliver two lectures of her choice. In this novel we have Coetzee’s views on the killing of animals by human beings. Elizabeth Costello has been invited by the university to give two lectures. As she is well known for her novel The House on Eccles Street it is presumed that she will speak on literature.

However, Mrs. Costello chooses to speak on her favourite topic ‘Animal Rights’. She delivers two lectures ‘The Philosophers and the Animals’ and ‘The Poets and the Animals’. As a strong advocate of vegetarianism and animal rights she is appalled by the cruelty meted out by human beings on animals. She feels that human beings do not have the right to be cruel to animals. She is also very much against the eating of meat because she believes that unlike some animals, man does not need to eat meat. She considers that what is happening in abattoirs, in trawlers, in laboratories all over the world is horrifying. She strongly says that the killing of animals is unjustified. At one point Mrs. Costello
equates the killing of animals to the killing of Jews in Germany. She feels that "we are surrounded by an enterprise of degradation, cruelty and killing which rivals anything that the Third Reich was capable of, indeed dwarfs it, in that ours is an enterprise without end, self-generating, bringing rabbits, rats, poultry, live-stock ceaselessly into the world for the purpose of killing them."\(^{46}\)

Costello's daughter-in-law is not happy with what Costello says, she tells her husband that there is no need for his mother to preach her beliefs and that she should keep her thoughts about eating meat to herself instead of trying to make others feel guilty of eating meat. Costello feels that if human beings imagined themselves into the being of animals and put themselves into the place of the victims, they will not want to kill the animals. She believes that sympathy should flow from the heart. "There are people who have the capacity to imagine themselves as someone else, there are people who have no such capacity (when the lack is extreme, we call them psychopaths), and there are people who have the capacity but choose not to exercise it" (LA 35). Thus Coetzee makes Costello speak about the views he has in his mind about the killing of animals. Coetzee himself was a vegetarian and it is very likely that the views expressed by Costello are his too. The technique used by Coetzee in the novel, a lecture within a lecture is unique. In this genre Coetzee is able to take the role of an animal rights activist. The views aired by Costello are very profound and can generate a debate on the rights of animals and the need for human beings to stop killing animals for food.

Costello articulates that the cruelty man shows on animals is because he feels he has the capacity to do anything and get away with it. One of the men in the audience asks Mrs. Costello whether she means that the factories should close down, whether people
should stop eating meat or whether animals should be killed humanely. For this, Costello retorts that one should follow one’s heart.

One of the participants in the Seminar is a Jew and he strongly opposes the comparison of the killing of animals to the Holocaust. Coetzee is cautious when he places his arguments in the novel through the protagonist Costello. We are not sure whether the arguments are his or Costello’s. But ultimately we realize that the book is as much about the use of literature as about animals. Elizabeth Costello is asked by her son whether she really believes that poetry classes will close down slaughter houses. Resigned, she has to admit that they probably will not.

Maren Meinhardt, a critic, commenting about The Lives of Animals opines, “But fiction has the power to disturb and inspire strong emotions, and this book, thoughtfully argued and committed, is certainly a case in point.”\textsuperscript{47}

Coetzee, being a sensitive writer is concerned with human suffering in his novels. The individual is of utmost importance to Coetzee. Almost all his novels explore this theme of personal anguish. By highlighting personal agony Coetzee throws light on the suffering of humanity in general. The individuals he highlights are very ordinary men or women who are just a part of the society. But they are different in their own way. Although they are ordinary individuals, with their strengths, they make the reader think about them seriously. They have their individualistic temperament and the reader responds to them curiously. However, they are all characters who undergo suffering, though the degree of distress they go through varies. This is significant because the novels show how Coetzee responds to the suffering of the ordinary man. All these characters successfully emerge out of the agonising experiences.
Coetzee himself has stated on several occasions that he does not like friction and that he avoids such situations. He is by nature a very solitary person and avoids any sort of friction. The protagonist in *Dusklands* is also a man who does not like to be in a situation which will bring about conflict. He expounds how humiliation can break a human being.

In *Dusklands*, Eugene Dawn, the protagonist is asked to write a report about Vietnam. His superior is not happy with the report he has written. He asks him to revise the report and Eugene feels humiliated. He says “I would not have embarked on the Vietnam Project if I had guessed it was going to bring me into conflict with a superior. Conflict brings unhappiness, unhappiness poisons existence. ...I brood, I am a thinker, a creative person, one not without value to the world. I would have expected more understanding...” (*DL* 2). Similarly talking about his marriage he says “People who believe in themselves are worthier of love than people who doubt themselves” (*DL* 2).

When his superior summons him to his office and speaks about the report, Eugene is apprehensive of the rejection of the report. He is asked to “work revising the tone of your argument” (*DL* 3). Eugene feels humiliated and is upset that his superior has lost his opinion about him “I know I am a disappointment to him, that he no longer believes in me. And when no one believes in you, how hard it is to believe in yourself” (*DL* 15).

Eugene wants recognition and feels that his wife Marilyn does not understand him. He is unhappy about her attitude towards him and even knows that she is cheating on him. Eugene finds his relationship with her humiliating. Their sexual life is dull and unexciting. “Casual sex means to Marilyn four cold feet, foreplay by rote, fingers among her dry wattles, blushes and charity in the dark, the familiar flood of disgrace” (*DL* 12).

Eugene is a disillusioned man because he feels no sense of achievement. Although he has been asked to submit a report on behalf of the U.S Government, he feels that the
activities and presence of the U.S force is not fully justified. He is not happy with the presence of the Americans in Vietnam. When he expresses this in his report he is asked to revise the report.

We also know that Coetzee himself was against the war and he had joined the demonstrations against the war in Vietnam when he was a student in America.

Eugene talks about the torture meted out to the Vietnamese. “Their eyes are closed to the world by a wall of what may be tears. They are ghosts or absences of themselves: where they had once been is now only a black hole through which they have been sucked” (DL 17). They are in a pitiable state because of the way they are treated. The Americans wage a psychological warfare “to destroy the morale of the enemy” (DL 19). The enemies break their morale. “After phases of insecurity and anxiety their subjects settled into a state known as High Threshold, with affect traits of apathy, despondency and despair” (DL 23).

The enemies attack the self-esteem of the Vietnamese not as a group but as individuals. So the victim has no hope and lives in constant fear of who may be the next person to be subjected to torture. “The emotional support of the group falls into irrelevance as he sees that war is being waged on him in his isolation. He has become a victim and begins to behave like one” (DL 23). These are the strategies followed by the colonisers. Much of post colonial literature explores such atrocities of the colonisers. They use violence and terror to subdue the victims.

When Eugene attacks his son with a knife, he is institutionalised and treated by the doctors. Eugene himself says, “intimate contact with the design of war made me callous to suffering and created in me a need for violent solutions to problems of living...that showed themselves in nervous symptoms” (DL 48). Therefore Coetzee illustrates that
mental suffering and stress can lead to crime. The origin of crime is in suffering and humiliation. Coetzee is sadly concerned about what violence can do to man. Man according to him needs to live in peaceful surroundings, as violence is not in his nature. Coetzee believed in the essential goodness of man and that, he is meant for something more enlightening. Coetzee is preoccupied with this idea in many of his novels.

Ania Loomba avers, “Right from its earliest years it (colonialism) deployed diverse strategies and methods of control and of representation.” This was a strategy used by the Americans in Vietnam to break the morale of the Vietnamese. By exposing the individual to torture and violence the Americans broke his mental stability and made him helpless.

In the second part of the Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee, we see the high handed attitude of Jacobus Coetzee towards the natives. We see that his exploits not only dehumanise the natives but also degrades them. He is full of contempt for the Hottentots. They are described in a manner that one would describe animals. He refers to the “Hottentot smell” (DL 57). In White Writing in the chapter ‘Idleness in South Africa’ Coetzee exposes how the travellers have recorded details about the Hottentots. Almost all of them refer to their idleness and sloth. Coetzee quotes Christopher Fryke’s writing of a visit to the Cape in the year 1685. “I made all haste to be gone, because of the nasty stench...” (WW 16).

He has nothing but contempt for the Bushmen. “You have become Power itself now and she nothing, a rag you wipe yourself on and throw away. She is completely disposable” (DL 61). This is the white man’s attitude to the native women. He has absolutely no respect or sympathy for the native or the native women.
However, when Jacobus Coetzee comes face to face with the Hottentots asking for friendship, they do not seem to bother about what he is saying. They only want the presents in the wagon. Jacobus finds himself in a humiliating position. It is the white man who is humiliated by the Hottentots. They want the tobacco. “There was scrambling and jostling in the crowd, and a murmur which resolved into the cry “More! More!”...” (DL 69). Jacobus feels humiliated. “We find our servants treated with scorn, our cattle driven off, our gifts trampled underfoot as of no value. What report of the Namaqua should we carry back to our own people in the south. That they do not know how to welcome strangers and lack all hospitableness” (DL 70).

He promises the Namaquas that he will not be carrying any negative report about them and henceforth they shall “behave like men” and “respect each other’s property” (DL 70). However, the Hottentots are least bothered about what Jacobus says. The act of the woman who moves towards him shaking her body and making a weird noise makes Jacobus fire into the ground. As a result the woman lies flat on the ground, terrified and unnerved and later she scrambles away.

When Jacobus is sick, he is isolated and he feels extremely humiliated. His servants desert him. Only Klawer comes to him. When a boil erupts on his buttock he feels all the more humiliated. “I did not mind dying but I did not wish to die of a putrefying backside” (DL 82). Jacobus’ servants humiliate him with jibes. The white man never wishes to be laughed at by the natives. He endeavours to assert superiority over the blacks. It is to seek revenge on the Hottentots that Jacobus undertakes a second journey to Namaqualand and he kills his servants who has deserted him.

“Through their deaths, I, who after they had expelled me had wandered the desert like a pallid symbol, again asserted my reality” (DL 106). He resorts to violence for the
desertion of his servants. He feels that only through violence and by killing them could he assert his power over them.

The novel *Waiting for the Barbarians*, highlights suffering and humiliation. Coetzee deliberately drops 'the' from Empire which is strategic, as the place could be anywhere. But we know that Coetzee’s empire stands for that period in the history of South Africa when the rulers were especially paranoid. There is a similarity between the death of the prisoners under the custody of Colonel Joll and the death of the prisoners in the apartheid era. Both the natives and the white man suffer humiliation. The Magistrate who is a white man suffers because he speaks on behalf of the natives. He is an odd man out. The very fact that he is compassionate to the natives, invites suffering for him. The white man is constantly afraid of the natives and in the process, they adopt defensive measures to keep them out of their way. Colonel Joll and his men of the Third Bureau arrive at the Outpost as they have heard of the possibility of an invasion by the barbarians. The Empire projects the evil latent in it onto the ‘Other’. The Magistrate tells Colonel Joll “The crime that is latent in us we must inflict on ourselves...Not on others” (*DL* 160). The Magistrate wants to tell Joll that the evil in him should be targeted on himself and not on the helpless barbarians.

The two prisoners are tortured and abused by Colonel Joll. The Magistrate hears painful screams from the granary. He states “At every moment that evening as I go about my business I am aware of what might be happening, and my ear is even tuned to the pitch of human pain” (*DL* 5). The Magistrate is aware of the suffering caused by Colonel Joll but he cannot do anything about it. He is helpless although he knows that the old man and the boy have nothing to do with the raid. However, Colonel Joll enjoys making the old man and the boy suffer. The torture leads to the death of the old man. Colonel Joll has
no remorse whatsoever. He feels it is his prerogative to cause suffering and degradation. For the boy the suffering is so much that he does not respond even to a sympathetic person like the Magistrate. "He rolls on his back and brings his bound hands up before his face. They are puffy and purple" (WB 7). He is appalled by the suffering of the boy. Though sympathetic to the boy he cannot do anything against the Empire.

Colonel Joll and his men cause suffering on suspicion. "The barbarian tribes were arming, the rumour went; the empire should take precautionary measures, for there would certainly be war" (WB 8-9). So the repressive measures are purely an act of self-defence. The boy is made to suffer. The suffering is so much that finally the boy admits that he and the old man and other men have stolen sheep and horses. The Magistrate knows that the confession is made out of duress to escape further suffering. When he asks the boy whether he knows what the confession will mean, "he looks back vacantly at all this vehemence, like someone tired after running a great distance" (WB 11). There is nothing the Magistrate can do. He finds himself in a helpless situation. He cannot stop the suffering because Colonel Joll is powerful. The power that Joll exercises is of immense proportion. He can indict the Magistrate and cause him humiliation and suffering.

Although Colonel Joll is dissuaded by the Magistrate not to attack the natives, he does not listen. He has come with a purpose and he will implement it at any cost. The Colonel has no sympathy for the natives and the desire to cause suffering is uppermost in him. He has come with the sole purpose of conducting a raid and he will not go back with anything less than that. It is as though he gets vicarious pleasure by causing suffering. The Magistrate feels that indulging in torture was like "trespassing into the forbidden" (WB 13).
He wonders about the torture “Does he wash his hands very carefully, perhaps, or change all his clothes; or has the Bureau created new men who can pass without disquiet between the unclean and the clean?” (WB 13) The suffering caused by Colonel Joll and his men is unthinkable for the Magistrate. He cannot picture as to how they can go about with their life after having caused such intense suffering.

After four days of their departure, Colonel Joll sends prisoners to the Outpost who are actually fisher folk. However, Colonel Joll cannot be convinced. They are made to assemble in the yard. The soldiers spend time making obscene comments. The ‘Other’ has already been constructed in the mind of the white man and he is looked at with suspicion. The white man causes suffering to the ‘Other’ as he is in a position of domination. He feels he can do anything with these men as they were helpless. What is interesting to note is that there is no sort of resistance or reaction from the natives. They suffer in silence. They are fed bread and they are happy with it. When the rumour goes round that the prisoners are diseased, the kitchen staff refuse to give them utensils and “begin to toss them their food from the doorway as if they were animals” (WB 21).

Colonel Joll returns from the expedition with “prisoners roped together neck to neck” (WB 22). This description echoes Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Marlowe, the protagonist in *Heart of Darkness* sees the natives walking tied to each other by a chain which passes through a ring on their necks. The suffering of the prisoners disturbs the Magistrate. “The joy has gone from my life” (WB 24) he says. He sees a file of men, barbarians, “tied neck to neck, ...A simple loop of wire runs through the flesh of each man’s hands and through holes pierced in his cheeks” (WB 113). He wants this painful episode to be wiped out so that they can “make a new start, to run an empire in which there would be no more injustice, no more pain” (WB 26). But not everybody in the empire thinks this way. He is
the only one who thinks so and he suffers for this attitude. He is punished by the officers of the Empire because he is sympathetic to the natives.

The barbarian girl who is blinded and whose ankles are broken walks with the help of sticks. This is the torture meted out by Colonel Joll and his men. However, the girl has accepted her suffering. She is not eager to speak of what the men have done to her. She shows no anger towards the perpetrators of the crime. It is as though she has reached a state where she has accepted the wrong doings of the white man. She has become indifferent to pain and suffering. The Magistrate tries to read the marks on her body. However, he is not successful in deciphering it. He keeps questioning her. But she is evasive. The Magistrate’s attempts at reading the marks, is similar to his attempts at trying to read the script on the wooden slips.

The suffering of the girl makes the Magistrate take an interest in her. He “pours the water into the basin, and begins to wash her feet” (WB 30). This act reminds us of the incident in the Bible where Jesus washes the feet of his disciples and also the feet of Judas, who Jesus knows will betray him. The Magistrate does this act of washing the feet everyday. He learns from the soldiers that the girl is beaten by Colonel Joll and his men. He comes to know how the girl has been blinded. Although earlier she is reluctant to speak, she tells him that they made her to look at a red hot fork which blinded her. When asked what she thinks of the men who have caused so much suffering, she evades the question. The barbarian girl is the creation of Coetzee to highlight the passivity of the blacks. She has no hatred or anger against the whites who tortured her. She accepts her plight without even complaining. Coetzee brings out the total state of acceptance by the blacks.
The Magistrate sometimes feels that his behaviour with the barbarian girl is no better than that of her torturers. “I behave in some ways like a lover - I undress her, I bathe her, I stroke her, I sleep beside her - but I might equally well tie her to a chair and beat her, it would be no less intimate” (*WB* 46). Although he sleeps with her every night, their relationship is not consummated. He does not have any desire for her but it is only compassion that makes him bring the girl to his quarters. One wonders whether it makes him feel good by showing her his sympathy. It is only the Magistrate who is sympathetic to the natives on whom atrocities are perpetuated by the whites. He feels disgusted and only hopes that there would be retaliation from the barbarians. This is a thought that comes to his mind. However, he suffers the same fate as that of the barbarians, in the hands of Colonel Joll and his men.

The Magistrate becomes defiant. He is put in the barracks, the same room where earlier the prisoners are put. It is a comedown for the once respected Magistrate. “Many I recognize, but no one greets me” (*WB* 87). He is left by himself to suffer. The Magistrate says “I look forward with craving to exercise times, when I can feel the wind on my face and the earth under my soles, see other faces and hear human speech....Truly, man was not made to live alone” (*WB* 87). These are Coetzee’s views about how man needs the company of other fellow beings. Coetzee, by nature, it is known, is a very reticent person. But he is well aware that man is never made to live alone. The Magistrate understands the meaning of freedom, the freedom to be by oneself, doing things that one wants to do. He values freedom when it is denied to him.

The Magistrate is told about the charges against him. The allegations against the Magistrate are many - that he has not maintained proper accounts and that he has a liaison with a barbarian girl. One of the men who travelled with him while he took the barbarian
girl has given a totally distorted account of what has happened. He even says that the
Magistrate’s purpose is to warn the barbarians of the forthcoming campaign of the Third
Bureau. Coetzee here shows how a case is built up against the blacks in South Africa to
suit the police and their activities against them. Although here, it is the Magistrate, his
plight is similar to the blacks as he has estranged himself from the whites. The Magistrate
is aware that they will use the law against him. He cannot accept the humiliation of
imprisonment. “Then I respond with movements of vertiginous terror in which I rush
around the cell jerking my arms about, pulling my beard, stamping my feet, doing
anything to surprise myself, to remind myself of a world beyond that is various and rich”
(WB 93). The Magistrate cannot live in the cell away from other people.

He is not given clean clothes and the food he is given is only soup, porridge and tea.
In being imprisoned, he realises the value of freedom. When the Magistrate objects to the
torture on the barbarians, he is slapped on the face which sends him staggering. When he
pretends to translate the writings on the popular slips accusing Joll of his atrocities, he is
tortured.

Coetzee means to say that in the colonial enterprise there is no room for sensitivity or
empathy. The colonizers are ruthless. They have no concern for the ‘Other’ and they are
ready to do anything to cause suffering and humiliation. However, the Magistrate wants
to be remembered thus, “in the farthest Outpost of the Empire of light there existed one
man who in his heart was not a barbarian” (WB 114).

*Life and Times of Michael K* is about the life of Michael who faces a lot of suffering
because he is hare-lipped and different from the others. He is brought up by his mother
who works as a domestic help. He grows up in an institution for afflicted and unfortunate
children called Huis Norenius, the rules of which he considers to be his father. In the
midst of the civil war, Michael tries to live in solitude away from people. He works as a 
gardener and when his mother’s health starts failing, on her request, he decides to take 
her to her home-town Prince Albert, where she has spent her youth. On the way he faces 
a lot of obstacles as they do not carry the pass required for coloureds and blacks to move 
from one city to another. The civil war leads to a lot of violence. The house where 
Michael’s mother works is ransacked and the things destroyed. Michael’s mother is upset 
and her employers flee in panic.

He decides to take his mother on a make-shift barrow. He is stopped on the way and 
asked for the permit. He is forced to return to Sea Point where he is treated very rudely 
by the officers. “I don’t care who you are, who your mother is, if you haven’t got a 
permit you can’t leave the area, finished” (MK 23). Coetzee comments on the ruthless 
attitude of the soldiers. Although the police know that Michael and his mother are 
harmless, they do not care about them. Michael’s mother falls ill on the way and he takes 
her to the hospital in Stellenbosch. The nurses on duty are indifferent. When Michael is 
worried about his mother, the nurse yells at him.

Michael is very hungry and when one of the men asks him to get something from the 
bakery, he buys two chicken pies for a rand. “The pie was so delicious that tears came to 
his eyes” (MK 30). When he is told that his mother is dead, he does not know what to do. 
He finds himself at a loss. The second day after his mother’s death, he is handed over two 
parcels, one containing his mother’s ash and the other some clothes for him.

As he goes along, he is stopped by a soldier with a gun and his suitcase is emptied 
and K is robbed of his money. He moves from place to place towards Prince Albert. 
However, he is caught by the police as he is not carrying a permit and sent with others to
work in the railway track. He toils with the rest till midnight and the next day they are set free.

K reaches the Visagie farm and starts living a solitary life there. But when the Visagie son comes there and tries to dominate him, he goes away, as he does not want to lose his freedom. As he moves he is caught by the police and brought to Jakkalsdrif camp, a resettlement camp for those who are unemployed. Coetzee is talking about the various areas in South Africa which the whites reserved for the blacks. In the South Africa of the civil war period, the government set up several camps to keep the unemployed and troubleshooters away from the society. He gets to know about the suffering of the inmates in the camp. The men in the camp are exploited by the Railways and the farmers as they get cheap labour.

Although, for the inmates, being in the Jakkalsdrif camp is favourable, Michael never wishes to be there. He wants his freedom even at the prospect of going hungry. “I don’t want to be in a camp, that’s all” he says (MK 85). Michael does not want to be an object of sympathy and refuses to let anyone show pity on him as he cherishes freedom.

One day all the inmates are taken to a farm to harvest the grain. K’s back hurt terribly and he is angry. But he is helpless. When one of the police stations is burnt, the policemen descend upon Jakkalsdrif camp and start beating up the men, women and children. When the inmates are counted, three are found missing. The captain loses his temper “What are we keeping here in our backyard”, he shouts “A nest of criminals! Criminals and saboteurs and idlers! ...You are ungrateful bastards... Who gives you tents and blankets when you are shivering with cold? Who nurses you, who takes care of you...? And how do you repay us?” (MK 91-92) The inmates are left to fend for themselves. One of the inmates says “That fire was the excuse they were looking for.
Now they are going to do what they wanted -- lock us up and wait for us to die" (MK 94). The whites require only the slightest provocation to attack the natives. It is as if they are waiting to be goaded. By a show of violence the whites try to strike terror in the natives.

This is the attitude of the whites towards the blacks. The blacks very well know that the whites are just waiting for an excuse to wreak vengeance on them. Their only desire is to torture them physically and mentally.

When K escapes from the camp and goes back to the Visagie farm he starts cultivating again. K makes himself comfortable in a hole as he does not want to take a risk living in the farmhouse, for fear of the police. One day some men come and camp near the dam. These are the guerrillas. K almost wants to join these men who are heading for the mountains. However, he stays back. Later one day he is caught by the police, who believe that he is a supplier of food for the men who are planning to attack the whites. They want him to own up. "‘So tell us about your friends’, the soldier said. K shook his head. He was hit a terrific blow in the pit of the stomach and fainted” (MK 122). K tries to convince them that he had nothing to do with the men. “I’m not what you think” he said. “I was sleeping and you woke me, that’s all” (MK 123). But the soldiers do not believe him. The next day Oosthuisen, an officer who has seen Michael K at the Jakkalsdrif camp arrives and he feels Michael is playing games with them. The police leave after they blow up the Visagie farm and lay mines near Michael’s burrow so that they will explode when the men come back and walk on them.

In the second part of the novel, we see the doctor who tries to make Michael talk. He is sure that Michael is not an insurgent and is not growing food for the guerrillas. Michael does not understand why the Medical Officer is so concerned about him. Michael does not yield and refuses to speak. Michael does not feel humiliated and wants to be left
alone. He declines to eat camp food thus showing his defiance. Though he does not resort to violence, he is defiant. The Medical Officer asks Michael to tell the truth and says that he knows that he is not an insurgent. However, Michael still does not speak. When he is questioned about the garden, Michael gives very philosophical answers. Asked for whom he grows the vegetables and whom he gives them to, he replies that they are not his "They came from the earth" (MK 139) and says "What grows is for all of us; we are all the children of the earth" (WB 139). The Medical Officer feels that Michael becomes "an albatross around my neck" (MK 146). Michael refuses to eat camp food and the Medical Officer says that perhaps he eats only "the bread of freedom" (MK 146). Michael’s presence unnerves the Medical Officer. In a way Michael’s indifference is a sort of suffering for the Medical Officer too and later when Michael escapes from the camp, the doctor feels that he too should have followed him.

Mrs. Curren in the novel Age of Iron is suffering from cancer and for the first time she becomes involved with the happenings in society. The blacks are in open rebellion with the whites and it is the youth among them, who are even prepared to lose their life in the course of fighting for the cause of freedom. Mrs. Curren writes about her experiences to her daughter who lives in America.

She gives food to the vagrant who lives in her yard and who calls himself Vercueil. He does not want to work and spends his time drinking and sleeping, looking at his hands. She writes to her daughter, "There were not so many of these homeless people in your time. But now they are part of life here. Do they frighten me? On the whole, no. A little begging, a little thieving, dirt, noise, drunkenness; no worse" (AI 7).

Although she is suffering from cancer, there is in her an urge to help those in distress. Coetzee says "Out of their withered bodies even the old try to squeeze one last drop. A
stubborn will to give, to nourish” (AI 8). In *Age of Iron*, “the police have a free hand under emergency regulations to dispense casual injury or death at random, and they do so; on the other side, the young militants of the townships have resorted to a hardened rhetoric of absolutes, sacrificing their youth to the all encompassing demands of the struggle.” 49 South Africa under apartheid was a chaotic society where acts of violence were the order of the day.

Bheki, Mrs. Curren’s maid’s son and his friend authoritatively take refuge in the space that belongs to Mrs. Curren. They do not even ask her permission to do so. When she questions them, Bheki arrogantly asks her “Must we have a pass to come in here?” (AI 47) Coetzee discusses the squalor of the black settlements and the brutal force exhibited by the police on the black youth who they ruthlessly kill. Coetzee presents how the tenements of the blacks are burnt down and how Bheki and his friend John are gunned down.

Here, the blacks have become, merciless in resorting to violence like the whites. The young boys have no respect for elders. They have total contempt for the whites and are defiant. However, the black woman, Florence does not think so. “These are good children, they are like iron, we are proud of them” she argues (AI 50). Mrs. Curren is also helpless when Vercueil brings a woman home. When she shouts at him, he does not react but only looks at her coolly. The young boys and Vercueil taking advantage of Mrs. Curren’s helpless state walk into her house. Times have changed in South Africa and the blacks are out and out against the whites.

Later when Bheki and John are deliberately hit by the police van on the road, the ambulance is called which takes its own time to arrive. Meanwhile John is bleeding heavily. Mrs. Curren is upset about the behaviour of the policemen and the suffering
caused by them. “It’s appalling, quite appalling. It was the same two policemen who were here yesterday” (AI 61) she says. When John is admitted to the hospital, he is put in a ward with old men. In the same ward is also a mad man ranting and raving and Mrs. Curren finds this atrocious.

Florence receives a telephone call, in the middle of the night that her son Bheki was in trouble. There is shooting in Guguletu, the township where the blacks lived. The shacks are set ablaze. “Like mourners at a funeral they stood in the downpour, men, women and children, sodden, hardly bothering to protect themselves, watching the destruction”(AI 95). Mrs. Curren becomes desperate when she sees the chaos. She fervently expresses her desire to go home to Mr. Thabane, the school teacher. He is angry with her. “‘You want to go home,” he said. “But what of the people who live here. When they want to go home this is where they must go. What do you think of that?’” (AI 97)

Mr Thabane thinks that Mrs. Curren has no concern for the blacks whereas we know that she is sympathetic to them. When Mrs. Curren says that she finds things going on, condemnable, she says, “But I cannot denounce them in other people’s words. I must find my own words myself. Otherwise it is not truth” (AI 99). The reaction she gets from the crowd is “This woman talks shit” (AI 99).

When she sees the bodies of Bheki and four other boys left in the rain, she asks them whether they cannot be shifted. But Thabane answers, “Yes, they must lie there. So that everyone can see” (AI 102). Everybody looks with askance at Mrs. Curren because she is white. Although she suffers, no one really understands her. When she reaches home she cries for Bheki. “Head on arms I sobbed, grieving for him, for what had been taken from him, for what had been taken from me. Such a good thing, life!” (AI 109) This reaction
comes from Mrs. Curren because she knows the meaning of life. She will soon face
death, as she is suffering from cancer eating into her bones.

Mrs. Curren feels desperate about the killing and degradation around her. This is a
sensitive portrayal by Coetzee. The values expressed by Mrs. Curren are nevertheless
Coetzee's too. He means to say that only love and brotherhood can bring about a change
in the world. Being a serious thinker, Coetzee through his characters also airs his views
on life. Although Mrs. Curren does not like John, Bheki's friend, her heart goes out to
him when she sees his suffering, "I must love for instance, this child. Not bright little
Bheki, but this one. He is here for a reason. He is part of my salvation, I must love
him"(AI 136).

Although Mrs Curren tries to impress upon John that his life is at risk, there is no
change in him. He is determined to fight. When Mrs. Curren tells Thabane that she does
not approve of violence and killing in the name of comradeship, he tells her, "I don't
think you understand very much about comradeship"(AI 149). Mrs. Curren answers that it
was "a death-driven male construction"(AI 150). She is horrified when John is shot at by
the soldiers in the room of her house and that she, being white is also a part of the crime
committed on the blacks. Mrs Curren believes that only love can redeem them. Therefore,
she goes out to show her love for the black boys who are attacked.

"A crime was committed long ago. How long ago? I do not know. But longer ago
than 1916, certainly. So long ago, that I was born into it. It is part of my inheritance. It is
part of me, I am a part of it"(AI 164). Coetzee thus acknowledges the complicity of the
whites through his characters. As days pass by, Mrs. Curren is in great pain because of
the cancer. This is symbolic of the way the African society is being annihilated with force
and brutality. Through her suffering, a strange relationship develops between her and
Vercueil, the vagrant. She feels, "There has always been in him a certain hovering if undependable solicitude for me, a solicitude, he knows no way of expressing" (Al 196). Finally she dies in his arms. Mrs Curren’s relationship with Vercueil hints at the hope that peace can be achieved at the level of human beings.

3.3 The Discourse of ‘Othering’ in the Novels of Coetzee

In his first novel Dusklands Eugene Dawn, the protagonist of the first novella sees himself as distinct from the Vietnamese about whom he is writing a report. He describes the Vietnamese as different from himself. He sees himself as one who is entrusted with the civilizing mission. This is similar to the European ‘construct’ of the ‘Other’ as enunciated by Edward Said in his pioneering work Orientalism. “The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying, degrees of a complex hegemony...”

Coetzee had begun writing the novel in the USA where he lived between 1965 and 1971. At the same time in South Africa there was an increase in state violence and censorship. The Black Consciousness Movement was gaining momentum. Coetzee found parallels with U.S. aggression and the Vietnam War. The other novella is about 18th century South Africa based on travel writing. It is about the explorer Jacobus Coetzee who tries to subjugate the Hottentots. Here he also feels that his purpose in entering the territory of the Hottentots is to civilize them.

The Vietnamese are demoralised by the presence of the U.S there. The U.S. has advanced technology that it uses in the Vietnam War. The war strategies are modern, a gas PROP 12 poisons the soil and destroys the land, powerful drugs destroy the people and through the “voice of the father” (DL 21), a psychological impact is brought about. In the second novella, ‘The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee’ we get to know about Jacobus’s views of the Hottentots. He thinks of them as dirty and inferior and savage like. They are
relegated to the position of the ‘Other’. Jacobus asserts his superiority because he carries a gun. When one of the Hottentot advances towards him menacingly, he fires into the air which sends the entire lot scrambling. Jacobus Coetzee has a superior feeling about himself. He thinks he is God. He is merciless when he kills the servants who had deserted him and then he destroys the village completely. He discriminates himself from the Hottentots – “The one gulf that divides us from the Hottentots is our Christianity. We are Christians, a folk with a destiny. They become Christians too, but their Christianity is an empty word” (DL 57).

It is the fear of the ‘Other’ that makes Jacobus Coetzee create an identity that is peculiar to the white man. When he has the festering carbuncle, he has to be in the proximity of the Hottentots and this drains him of all feelings of superiority. Nevertheless he returns to Namaqualand to vanquish them all. Through these two novellas Coetzee comes down heavily on the inhuman nature of violence.

Eugene Dawn, the protagonist in the first novella also tries to establish a rapport with the natives. He says, “We could have loved them: our hatred for them grew only out of broken hopes. We... asked only that they acknowledge us” (DL 17). However, there is a basic antagonism against the Vietnamese. The very act of writing about the war drives him to a troubled mental state and it begins to affect his relationship with people. He has no concern for his wife or his son and the stabbing of his son is the psychological impact of the pressure of his work. So this process of ‘Othering’ has a negative impact on the protagonist. As he writes about the ways and means of subduing the ‘Other’, that is the Vietnamese, the process itself has a debilitating effect on his mind. He loses control over himself and has to be institutionalised. However, he becomes an ideal patient, doing everything the doctors expect him to do.
In the novel *In the Heart of the Country* the protagonist Magda’s father’s relationship with the servants on the farm is one of superiority. The servants are the ‘Other’, they are inferior and they work for the master. The father even finds sexual gratification with the servant’s wife Klein Anna. However, the protagonist Magda who wants to identify herself with the ‘Other’ tries to communicate with them. What Coetzee demonstrates is that in a relationship such as this, there cannot be equality. So eventually, the servant assumes the role of master. Hendrik, the servant becomes the master and Magda the white woman becomes the ‘Other’. She now lives a subjugated life on her own farm. Hendrik’s rape of Magda is an act of self assertion. So if there has to be a master there has to be a slave. The master has to be validated by the slave and vice versa. Magda’s way of communication both in the state of mistress and slave is through monologues. Coetzee here states that there can be no dialogue between the master and slave. It is only one of domination. The process of ‘Othering’ has a very negative impact on Magda. The farm that she owns goes to ruins. She loses track of time. She deteriorates physically and mentally. “I lie here involved in cycles of time, outside the true time of the world.”

Coetzee envisages how the discourse of ‘Othering’ has a deteriorating impact on the individual, whether it is the coloniser or the native. The ‘Other’ cannot exist without having a negative impact. The ‘Other’ becomes subject to exploitation and oppression.

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, we have a clear representation of the ‘Other’. Although the protagonist of the novel, the Magistrate is sympathetic to the ‘Other’, he does not do anything to bridge the gap between the ‘us’ and ‘them’. He knows that he is also a part of the imperial project. The natives are suspected of planning a raid and they are called enemies by Colonel Joll and his men. As Colonel Joll and his men believe that the barbarians are definitely planning to attack the Outpost, they exercise their power
before that is done. For expressing his sympathy to the natives, the Magistrate is also treated as the 'Other'. The atrocities committed on the natives are also committed on the Magistrate. The Magistrate, by a single act of compassion for the natives becomes a suspect. The same violence is let loose on him too and the Magistrate is tortured in an inhuman manner. Thus Colonel Joll and his men will not tolerate any objection to their exercise of power, whether it is from the 'Other' or a white. Therefore, when the Magistrate talks in favour of the natives, he is suspected of helping the natives. When they discover the wooden slips with something written, they feel that the natives have been communicating with the Magistrate. When the Magistrate cries out in pain, he is ridiculed by Mandel and his men. In *White Writing*, Coetzee mentions how travel writers have described the language of the Hottentots. He says that they made a noise like turkeys. Coetzee perhaps has this in mind when Mandel’s men ridicule the Magistrate when he cries out in pain.

In *Life and Times of Michael K*, the protagonist Michael K is the ‘Other’. He has been brought up in an institution where impaired people learn. What is interesting to note is that his ‘Otherness’ is something that he desires. He wants to be outside the society, away from the people and he wants to be close to nature. Therefore he takes refuge in the farm where he grows vegetables. The Medical Officer tries to treat him as if he is the ‘Other’. He refuses to be subjugated. He does not communicate with the Medical Officer. The Medical Officer is not successful in trying to make Michael speak. He is similar to the whites who want to control the natives, but Michael gives no scope for this. The Medical Officer fails to construct K’s ‘Otherness’. Although he appears to be genuinely concerned about Michael he is similar to the coloniser who tries to subjugate the native.
“Michael K rebels against a society which would like to categorize him precisely, and by escaping from all the prisons in which they try to incarcerate him he asserts his ‘difference’, thus becoming suspect to the police.” Michael only wants to be on his own. Thus Michael escapes being made the ‘Other’ by refusing to adhere to the system of the whites. He opts to be in the margins of the society and live his life on his own terms as he detests the company of people. In Jakkalsdrif when a man comes to enquire after him he says to himself “I needed more warning. I should have been told I was going to be sent back amongst people” (MK 74). Thus Coetzee delineates Michael K as a person who abhors human company. He seeks refuge in solitariness, feeling comfortable when he is away from people.

The camps in South Africa are places where the unemployed and vagrants are kept so that they do not pose any danger to civilised society. The civilised society does not want to see the ‘Other’ amidst them. They would rather keep them away. Hence they have these camps. Michael detests the camps and wants to get away from them. He escapes from Jakkalsdrif and goes back to the farm where he starts cultivation again. He works on the land in the night for fear of being discovered. At any cost Michael will not let himself be the ‘Other’. Michael avers “Would it not be better to hide day and night, would it not be better to bury myself in the bowels of the earth than become a creature of theirs?” (MK 106) When the soldiers discover Michael, they assume that he is helping the guerillas. Captain Oosthuizen refers to him as Michaels. He changes his name; in other words the ‘Other’ is named according to the wish of the white man. However, in the camp when the Doctor refers to him as Michaels, Michael asserts that his name is not Michaels, but Michael. The Doctor tries to recreate Michael according to his terms but Michael refuses to allow such colonization of his self. In his frustration in not being able to get any details
from Michael about the insurgents they suspected, the Medical Officer opines "He is not of our world. He lives in a world all his own" (MK 142). Here again the Medical Officer tries to project Michael’s ‘Otherness’. In spite of the Medical Officer showing his concern for Michael, he does not co-operate and even refuses to eat. This is an act of assertion by the ‘Other’. The Medical Officer helplessly says “It seemed foolish to argue with someone who looked at you as if from beyond the grave” (MK 148). The Medical officer expresses his helplessness in trying to wield his influence over Michael. He acts like Michael’s saviour. In the letter he writes to Michael he says “I am the only one who can save you. I am the only one who sees you for the original soul you are. I am the only one who cares for you” (MK 151). Here the Medical Officer takes on the role of the coloniser who thinks he is out in the colony to help the uncivilised. The white man always entertains the thought that their presence in the colonies is to save the natives from damnation. The white man defines himself when he tries to define the native.

Michael soon escapes from the camp and the Medical Officer is happy about it. He even wonders whether he too would have liked to join Michael. Michael finally returns to Sea Point dreaming of living the life of a gardener. Thus, what we see in *Life and Times of Michael K* is that, Michael refuses to yield to the position of the ‘Other’. The Medical Officer is not able to show his sympathy and Michael has no need for it. He lives his life on his own terms. Michael K is above suffering. He embraces the stance of passive resistance and does not allow anyone to dominate him. Whenever he sees any sign of domination, he leaves the place. At the farm when the Visagie son tries to boss over him he goes away without a word. Similarly, he leaves the camps when he is made subject to the whites. He does not like camp life or camp food. He does not like the
rigidity and imposition of discipline there. He lives his life without any confrontation and allows none to gain mastery over him.

Susan Van Zanten Gallagher avers “Coetzee’s account of the end of South Africa is more obliquely rendered in *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983), but he also forecasts that change will occur in South Africa only at the point of a gun, as the novel’s epitaph makes clear. (“War is the father of all and king of all”).” However, with the lifting of apartheid and democratic elections, Gallagher contends “Rather than projecting a world to come, they now depict the anticipations and beliefs of a world that has passed.”

In the novel *Foe* which is a reworking of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, unlike Defoe’s Friday, Cruso’s Friday is made to take the role of the silenced ‘Other’. When Susan Barton is marooned on Cruso’s island, she thinks she has come to the wrong island, an island of cannibals. This is a typical construct of the ‘Other’ by a white man. She remarks she could have lived happily in the company of these brutes – “But who, accustomed to the fullness of human speech, can be content with caws and chirps...” (F 8). Again, it is the white man’s construct that the ‘Other’ has no speech, or if he has it at all, it is uncivilised speech. The white man contends that speech is only their prerogative. They feel that the language that the ‘Other’ spoke is no language at all. It is only sounds, gibberish. However, we note that Friday is not very keen on even communicating either by sign language or words which is impossible for him. Susan tries to find out who has mutilated Friday. She shows him drawings. But there is not even the slightest response from him. This seems to be a sort of defiance from Friday. We do not know what is going on in his mind. His tongue being mutilated he cannot speak. But even his face does not give away anything. She tries to teach him to write English but Friday tries to write in some other language. He draws signs on the slate and then wipes it off before Susan can
make anything of it. There seems to be some resistance on Friday's part to communicate. Labib the critic analyzing *Foe* states, "by refusing to be replaced and to replace himself with language,... Friday overcomes the system." 56

Coetzee's novel *Age of Iron* reflects the South African society in turmoil. Here there is no question of creating the 'Other'. The 'Other' is already an awakened lot. They retaliate with violence and are out and out against the white regime. Here the 'Other' even enters the space of the whites and has no respect for the whites. They act with a dogged purpose of ousting the whites. They are sure of what they want to achieve and they are determined to oust the whites. This is embodied in the character of Vercueil who, comes to occupy a space in Mrs. Curren's house which until then was not for the 'Other'. Mrs Curren who has kept away from the South African politics is drawn to it and she realises that the white autocratic regime has through segregation and exploitation created the conditions of a violence torn society.

Mrs. Curren in *Age of Iron* is dejected about the happenings around her. Although all the schools in Guguletu, a black township are closed down, the radio, the television and the newspapers do not report anything. "In the world they project all the children of the land are sitting happily at their desks learning...." (*AI* 39). She is shocked at the way Bheki and his friend treat Vercueil. She tells her maid Florence. "You told me you admire your son's generation because they are afraid of nothing. Be careful: they may start by being careless of their own lives and end by being careless of everyone else's" (*AI* 48). Here we find that Mrs Curren is concerned about the blacks. But her concern is not appreciated by the blacks.

Florence indicts her. "But who made them so cruel? It is the whites who made them so cruel! Yes!" (*AI* 49) she says. Coetzee abhors violence in any form. The violence in
South Africa will have an impact on the children. Mrs Curren asks Florence “What love will they be capable of? Their hearts are turning to stone before our eyes, and what do you say...? Are you going to blame them on the whites and turn your back?” (AI 50) Bheki, Florence’s son does not want to go to school. “What is school for? It is to make us fit into the apartheid system” (AI 67) he says. Bheki voices the view of many of the youth who revolt against the presence of the police in the schools. Mrs Curren feels responsible for the war torn situation, “A crime was committed long ago......so long ago that I was born into it. It is part of my inheritance. It is part of me, I am part of it” (AI 164). Here again Coetzee stresses on the involvement of the white man in the institution of apartheid. Coetzee time and again raises this idea of the white man’s complicity. In his writings also he refers to the atrocities committed by the white man in the apartheid era.

*Age of Iron* visibly brings out the violence inflicted both by the blacks and whites. The blacks are indignant and the youth hurl themselves against the whites with high ideals of comradeship. Thus in the novels we find Coetzee dealing with oppression, and his characters also use passive resistance to oppression. They resort to silence as a mode of defiance. Michael K also resorts to silence as he does not want to be in a state of subjugation. There is nothing obviously defiant in him. He just does not yield.

In *Disgrace* we see the post apartheid era. This period in the history of South Africa is a tumultuous one with the blacks asserting their rights and resorting to violence. The ‘Other’ retaliate against the whites who have suppressed and oppressed them for long. Lucy, a white woman who wants to keep her farm has to pay a price for the atrocities of the whites. She is gang raped, her house is looted, her dogs shot and her father assaulted. She feels that she is paying a price for the atrocities committed by the whites on the blacks. Here she accepts the ‘Other’ on his terms. Hence there is a reversal of roles in the
post apartheid period. This awareness enables the whites to be conscious of the fact that they are being punished for their wrongs and in a way they accept their lot. Decolonisation is a painful process for the white man. He finds himself in a difficult situation. Lucy’s rape is the price she pays for being white. It is an outcome of the crime committed by the whites against the blacks for several decades.

3.4 Silence as a Tool Against Violence in the Novels of Coetzee

In *The Empire Writes Back* Ashcroft et al say “Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetrated and the medium through which conceptions, of ‘truth’, ‘order’, and ‘reality’ become established.”

What we notice in Coetzee’s novels is that the protagonists, that is, the marginalised ones hardly speak. When they speak, it is the same language of the coloniser. Most of the time they are silent or mute. This silence is deliberate and through the silence, the ‘Other’ shows resistance.

Post-colonial theory was developed because European theory could not “adequately deal with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing.”

Coetzee has abandoned the linear plot, story line, rounded characters and closed endings which we normally find in English Literature. He uses different genres in his novels and all his novels are open ended subject to various interpretations.

Very often in post colonial texts the natives are made to use pidgin especially in the master-slave context to retain social and economic hierarchies. However, in Coetzee’s novels we do not find this. This reveals that Coetzee in his novels engages with the human condition irrespective of class or race. Although he is talking about South Africa, such a situation could occur anywhere in the world.
Silence and passive resistance is seen in the novels of J.M. Coetzee. The idea of passive resistance as a means of opposing evil is well rooted in Indian philosophy. Very often people adopt this to show their opposition to evil. This method was adopted even under the rule of a king. If the people were not happy with the king the entire lot would in a non-violent manner oppose him. Mahatma Gandhi followed passive resistance when he took an active part in public life in Natal. To oppose the atrocities of the whites against the Indians, Gandhi mobilised thousands of Indians to resist the atrocities in a passive and non-violent manner. All the Indians took a solemn oath to practise passive resistance. The politicians of South Africa were uneasy with this stand taken by Gandhi. They condemned it heavily, as they feared that, very soon the natives may use this against them.

In 1906, Mahatma Gandhi led the Indian community in South Africa in acts of passive resistance. On 16th August, 1908, thousands of Indians led by Mahatma Gandhi burnt the passes in a huge bonfire. Soon after, Gandhi had a group of his followers cross the border from Natal to Transvaal which resulted in the imprisonment of Gandhi for 6 months.

On reading the novels of J.M. Coetzee, we can observe that, his characters observe the same form of passive resistance. These characters are going through a personal struggle and at the same time, they are part of a greater struggle against an oppressive regime. In the novels, Coetzee displays how the silence of the people which is a form of passive resistance works against the perpetrators of suffering. Most of the time people want to be left alone when they face a situation they cannot fight out. In such situations silence is more powerful than protests. Silence denies the oppressor of a position of superiority. He cannot exercise his power over the marginalised because there is no reaction whatsoever
from the ‘Other’. The silence may be a form of defiance also. It becomes a weapon in the hands of the oppressed. Through his marginalised characters, Coetzee gives the readers a new perspective on those who have struggled against colonial rule. When Coetzee was awarded the Nobel Prize, the Swedish Academy observed:

“But passivity is not merely the dark haze that devours personality; it is also the last resort open to human beings as they defy an oppressive order by rendering themselves inaccessible to its intentions. It is in exploring weakness and defeat that Coetzee captures the divine spark in man.”59 The natives know that they cannot physically take on the coloniser. The only way they can assert themselves is by non cooperation and wilful acts of resistance.

In the novel Waiting for the Barbarians which opens with the arrival of Colonel Joll to the Outpost, the two natives who have been taken prisoners are beaten and tortured. The Magistrate does not receive any information about the torture from the guards. The guard denies any knowledge of it. He asks the boy but he refuses to speak and stares over the Magistrates shoulder. Then he addresses the old man who tells him that they are not thieves. They have come to the town for medical help. The boy shows him the sore. Both the old man and the boy do not speak much. Their silence is one of passive understanding of the situation. There is little they can do to overcome the disaster they are subjected to.

Colonel Joll remains silent as the Magistrate speaks. Joll’s silence is a conscious one, where he is assessing the Magistrate. Joll also explains to him on how to extract the truth from the ‘Other’. The white man is confident that he can make the blacks agree to anything by using violence.

What we observe in this episode is that the boy and the old man look harmless but Colonel Joll acts out of suspicion. His fear, the Empire’s fear of the native makes him
take such cruel measures. Coetzee in one of the interviews remarks, “At the heart of the
unfreedom of the hereditary masters of South Africa is a failure of love.”

The Magistrate recounts that he could have pretended not to have known anything
about the torture. He could have remained silent. But he cannot remain so. Therefore he
gets embroiled in the whole business. The boy confesses under duress that the barbarians
are planning a war on the Empire. The Magistrate knows that he is made to say all this
under torture. However, the boy has gone through so much of pain and suffering that he
remains passive and silent. The silence here is the silence of surrender, of helplessness
and acceptance.

The only doctor available, an old man, is called to attend to the boy. He puts a
poultice on the sore and ointment on the hundred little stabs. But he does not ask how the
boy sustained the injuries. The doctor is silent because he is afraid to even discuss the
atrocities which everybody knows of. The fear of violence makes people remain silent.
Silence is the outcome of fear for some and for the protagonists in many of Coetzee’s
novels it is a deliberate act to defeat the purpose of the whites.

Colonel Joll and his men bring many of the fisher folk as prisoners and they are
housed in the barrack rooms. They are “sick, famished, terrified, damaged” (WB 26).
When the Magistrate sees the barbarian girl begging in the streets he asks one of the
soldiers to bring her to his room. When he asks about her whereabouts she chooses to
remain silent. He offers to keep her as his help but she goes away. The next day he brings
her to his room and makes an attempt to talk to her. “I prowl around her, talking about
our vagrancy ordinances, sick at myself…” (WB 29).

When asked to show her feet, she slowly unwraps the bandages. He then washes her
feet in a basin of water and sleeps off. When questioned about her eyes and her loss of
sight she remains silent. She does not want to talk about what the torturers had done to her. "What did they do to you?" I murmur. My tongue is slow. I sway on my feet with exhaustion. "Why don't you want to tell me?" she shakes her head" (WB 34). The Magistrate questions her as if he is concerned about her though the real intention is to satisfy his curiosity. The barbarian girl refuses to tell her story. This could be a way of trying to forget all about the torture. It could be an acceptance of her lot, knowing that nothing would come by way of her telling the story. The damage has already been done. This act on her part foregrounds the fact that she resides in a state of indifference. The torture perpetrated by the State and hushed up is found also in the novel The Master of Petersburg where the death of Isaev is referred to as a suicide which Nechaev says is not true. The State concocts such statements. Similarly nothing that really happens is reported in the newspapers in Age of Iron. The people never get to know the truth of the killings and murder committed by the State.

When the Magistrate tries to get the truth out of the soldiers about the treatment meted out to the girl and her father, they are hesitant to talk. One of them gives a few details but the other dare not speak for fear of incurring the wrath of Col. Joll and his men. When the Magistrate asks the barbarian girl about what she thinks of the men who tortured her, she evades the question saying "I am tired of talking" (WB 44). Though the Magistrate sleeps with her, their relationship is not consummated. She gets used to his sleeping away from him in the parlour. The Magistrate says "She adapts without complaint to the new pattern..." (WB 60). Hence Coetzee makes it clear that the native also has a will of her own. The black protagonists of Coetzee are not totally helpless. Even in the helpless situation they find themselves in, they assert their will. Their act of resistance is brought about very calmly without being ruffled.
When the Magistrate is imprisoned in his cell, initially, he feels it is not anything much “to move from the solitariness of everyday existence to the solitude of a cell... but now, I begin to comprehend how rudimentary freedom is” (WB 93). The Magistrate realises the significance of freedom when he is confined to the cell. For him there is no threat from the barbarians. But, for the Third Bureau they are a threat to the existence of the settlement and hence, are the ‘enemy’. They feel that the barbarians may attack any time. So in self defence, the Empire decides to attack the ‘enemy’. The Magistrate asks Mandel how he feels after each session of torture:

Do you find it easy to take food afterwards? I have imagined that one would want to wash one’s hands.... Otherwise how would it be possible to return to everyday life – to sit down at table, for instance, and break bread with one’s family or one’s comrades? (WB 138)

The novel concludes with Colonel Joll and his men retreating and the Magistrate returns to his post. The imagined threat of the barbarians remains unfulfilled. There is no scope for the barbarians to speak at all. They exist as per the construct of the white man. We see them through the eyes of the Magistrate, Colonel Joll and his men. The voices of the barbarians are effaced in the novel and an imperial discourse is constructed. If the Empire is good, then the barbarians are bad. Similarly it was civilization versus savagery, white versus black. The whites are civilised people and as against them, the blacks are an uncivilised lot. If the whites stand for ‘goodness’ the natives are ‘evil’.

The Magistrate, though sympathetic to the barbarians knows his complicity in the gruesome colonial enterprise. “The old Magistrate, defender of the rule of law, enemy in his own way of the State, assaulted and imprisoned, impregnably virtuous, is not without his own twinges of doubt” (WB 118). Just as the agents of the Empire Colonel Joll and
his men leave their marks, by brutally beating the barbarians, the Magistrate says, “I will not disappear into the earth without leaving my mark on them” (WB 123). He wants to help the natives. However, he is not able to do so. On the other hand he is humiliated and subjected to torture for expressing his sympathy for the natives.

*Waiting for the Barbarians* published in 1980 is about the dynamics of torture. This was the time when Steve Biko died in detention under the South African security police and this was fresh in everybody’s mind. The atrocities happening in South Africa find an echo in the novel. Coetzee examines the rhetoric of torture which is perpetrated by the cruel system of apartheid.

In the novel *Life and Times of Michael K* the first thing the midwife notices when the protagonist, Michael K is born, is his harelip. Michael grows up as a passive child, isolated, voiceless. “Year after year Michael sat on a blanket watching his mother polish other people’s floors, learning to be quiet” (MK 3-4). He hardly makes any acquaintance. He could lie down for hours looking at his hands or at the roof. So by nature solitude is Michael’s nature.

In *Michael K* Coetzee repeatedly examines the problems of individuals trapped in repressive societies. He deals with the problems encountered by the protagonist Michael K as he persistently struggles to avoid the detention camps of South Africa. K is at his best when he is by himself, cultivating the land.

The doctor who is fascinated by Michael tries to fill out the silences of Michael K. He says of Michael K that he is not “of our world” (MK 142) and is not aware of the war. However, he wants K to tell his story. “Why is it just you by yourself? Where is your stake in the future? Do you want the story to end with you? That would make it a sad story, don’t you think?” There was a silence so dense that I heard it as a ringing in my
ears. A silence of the kind one experiences in mine-shafts, cellars, bomb shelters, airless places” (MK 140). However, this has no effect on Michael who remains silent. The Medical Officer tells Michael “Give yourself some substance, man, otherwise you are going to slide through life absolutely unnoticed. You want to live, don’t you? Well then, talk, make your voice heard, tell your story!” (MK 140) Even though Michael is asked to speak, he does not do so. He prefers to remain silent. The voice of the ‘Other’ is not heard even when he wants to be heard. In Michael’s case he himself makes a conscious decision not to be heard because he is better off when he is by himself.

K refuses to eat camp food. This refusal is also a form of passive resistance. Michael’s resistance to the wishes of the officer appears to be a physical resistance but not of the mind. The Medical Officer is helpless and he begins to feel that he is wrong when he attempts to monitor Michael’s every movement.

When K finally returns to Sea Point he again becomes the object of charity. “They want me to open my heart and tell them the story of a life lived in cages” (MK 181). But K is aware of his freedom.

“I have escaped the camps; perhaps, if I lie low, I will escape the charity too” (MK 182). Michael K deliberately remains silent in order to resist being dominated. In a way he becomes the oppressor. His silence irks the whites, even the Medical Officer is unnerved by Michael’s quietness.

The relationship between Michael K and the Medical officer is similar to the relationship between the barbarian girl and the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Both seem to be appealing to the other. Although Coetzee portrays Michael as a person who wants freedom, that is freedom to be away from people and from the camps, we are not sure whether Coetzee advocates such a freedom. Man is basically a social being, he is
gregarious, he desires the company of fellow human beings. However, Michael K does not seem to want any company. Nevertheless, he returns to civilization; he comes back to Sea Point where he had lived with his mother earlier. Michael is unable to function in society. He does not have any desire to belong. Coetzee conveys Michael's enjoyment of human companionship most effectively when he describes Michael with the children in the camp. Sleeping outside his hut, he finds the children incorporating his body into their games and takes great pleasure. Michael does not speak or eat anything and he becomes sick. Yet he will not yield.

In the novel *Disgrace*, which is about a professor, David Lurie, Coetzee talks about his fall, his disgrace. David Lurie is 52, has an affair with a student, half his age, who just gives in but refuses to be silent about his overtures. Therefore he faces a trial, refuses to repent and hence is dismissed disgracefully. He goes to live with his daughter, Lucy, who lives on her farm in Eastern Cape. Lucy has a kennel. She also grows and sells flowers at the weekly market. Her neighbour is a black, by name Petrus who belongs to the period of decolonization and nurses a grudge against the whites.

Lucy's assault and rape by three black men is an indication of the period of decolonization when the blacks started asserting for their rights. They put Lurie in the bathroom, sprinkle alcohol on him and set him ablaze. They shoot all the dogs and ransack the house and leave with David's car. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon says "At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect." Lucy is upset but refuses to make a complaint. Her silence is a conscious one. "After the incident Lucy spends hour after hour, lying on her bed, staring
into space or looking at old magazines, of which she seems to have an unlimited store” (D 114).

Owing to her silence and her refusal to complain to the police about the rape, David contends “Like a stain the story is spreading across the district. Not her story to spread but theirs: they are its owners. How they put her in her place, how they showed her what a women was for” (D 115). Petrus returns to his farm. He is conveniently absent at the time of the crime and David has his own suspicion about him.

“As yet Petrus has offered no explanation for his absence. Petrus has the right to come and go as he wishes; he has exercised that right; he is entitled to his silence” (D 116). Here Petrus’ silence can be interpreted as that of an accomplice’s. Petrus has an eye on Lucy’s farm. Fanon says “For a colonised people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and above all, dignity.”

Lucy’s silence and her desire not to level charges against those blacks who have raped her, upsets Lurie. However, Lucy’s argument is that the rape is, “the price one has to pay for staying on? Perhaps that is how they look at it; perhaps that is how I should look at it too. They see me as owing something. They see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors. Why should I be allowed to live here without paying? Perhaps that is what they tell themselves” (D 158).

When Lucy learns that she is pregnant as a result of the rape, she agrees to become Petrus’ mistress in return for protection. Lucy becomes subordinate to Petrus. There is a reversal of roles. She is silenced or rather she chooses to silence herself.
Lucy reaches a stage where she says "Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no right, no dignity" (D 205).

The rape, Lucy knows is an expression of male power and here it is not just male power. It is the male power of a certain race subjugated for so long and which is now retaliating. Lucy knows that with the rape, she is a dead person and life can never be the same for her. Yet she refuses to make it public or complain to the police because she feels no one can understand what she has experienced. "Decolonisation never takes place unnoticed, for it influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally.... Decolonisation is the veritable creation of new men. But this creation owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; ..." 63

In *Age of Iron* Mrs. Curren a retired professor of Classics is diagnosed with cancer and lives during the time of the unrest and chaos in South Africa when the natives are in open rebellion against the whites. As a member of the white class she has been out of the chaos in the country. She has no direct confrontation with the blacks. The novel is in the form of a letter she writes to her daughter who has left South Africa as she cannot live amidst the chaos and anarchy in the society.

Mrs. Curren's disease is symbolic of the cancer that is eating South African society embroiled in a white-black encounter. The white government has intensified its repressive measures against the blacks who are now rebelling against them. Mrs. Curren is drawn into the conflict because her maid's son Bheki and his friend John are up and at arms with the white regime. She sees the two young boys being killed by the whites.

The novel which begins with Mrs. Curren telling her daughter about Vercueil, a vagrant who has taken shelter in her yard, presents the black man entering the space of a
white woman. Vercueil by co-incidence enters her house on the same day the doctor diagnoses her illness as cancer. Therefore, Mrs. Curren considers Vercueil as an angel of death. She describes him thus, “One of the homeless for whom August, month of rains, is the worst month. Asleep in his box, his legs stretched out like a marionette’s, his jaw agape. An unsavory smell about him: urine, sweet wine, moldy clothing and something else too. Unclean” (AI 4).

She asks him to clear off and without a word, Vercueil goes away leaving behind the boxes, an empty bottle, and the smell of urine. Mrs. Curren wonders why she writes to her daughter about this man, whom she will never see. Although Vercueil does not talk to her, there is some sort of bonding. When Mrs. Curren has an attack of pain, he helps her into the house. She tells him that she has cancer. He just remains silent and then comments that her house could be turned “into a boarding house” (AI 10).

One day Mrs. Curren and Vercueil go for a ride in the car. When she asks him questions about himself, he is uncomfortable. He does not answer but becomes restless. She asks him to clear the overgrown garden. At five in the evening she pays him and tells him she can’t proceed with charity. “‘Why?’ “Because you don’t deserve it.” And he, smiling, keeping his smile to himself, “Deserve... Who deserves anything?”” (AI 21) Mrs. Curren is angry and hands her purse over asking him to take what he wants and without any qualms he empties it of thirty rand and some coins. The situation in South Africa has changed. The blacks have started demanding. Things are not as before. When he returns, Mrs. Curren asks him for the money and he returns some notes. She tells him “because the spirit of charity has perished in this country. Because those who accept charity despise it, while those who give, give with a despairing heart. What is the point of charity
when it does not go from heart to heart” (AI 22). When she says this, Vercueil, hardly listens to her.

One day when Mrs. Curren asks him whether he will send some papers to her daughter after her death, he is hesitant but finally agrees to do so. Florence, her maid returns with her son Bheki. She is not happy to see Vercueil. Schools have been closed down. However, nothing is reported in the media.

Of trouble in the schools the radio says nothing, the television says nothing, the newspapers say nothing.... What I know about events in Guguletu depends solely on what Florence tells me and on what I can learn by standing on the balcony and peering northeast: namely, that Guguletu is not burning today, or, if it is burning, is burning with a low flame. (AI 39)

This is how the media is silent. Censorship silences the media, allowing nothing to be reported. This is the time when the State had its iron hold on the media and adopted extreme repressive measures. Bheki and his friend beat up Vercueil while Florence supports them. Mrs. Curren is aghast that Florence encourages such behaviour. Florence blames the whites for their behaviour.

Vercueil, one morning, has a woman with him. When Mrs. Curren asks him who she is, he remains silent. He chooses not to answer. Mrs. Curren is angry when she finds that Bheki and his friend have been sleeping in her car without even asking her. To her question they remain silent. The blacks have started asserting.

Bheki and his friend who are pushed by the police when they are on the bicycle, are badly hurt. However, Florence, Bheki’s mother does not want to make a complaint. “There is nothing you can do against the police” (AI 66) she says. The helplessness of the blacks is revealed here. Yet at the cost of their lives the youth are ready to fight. “What is
more important, that apartheid must be destroyed or that I must go to school?” asks Bheki (AI 68)

Whenever Mrs. Curren speaks to Vercueil he does not seem to be interested to listen. When she talks about her daughter, he sighs. He asks her to tell her daughter about her longing to be touched and looked after.

“Tell this to your daughter, said Vercueil quietly. She will come.”

“No.”

‘Tell her right now. Phone her in America. Tell her you need her here.”

“No.”

‘Then don’t tell her afterward, when it is too late. She won’t forgive you.” (AI 74)

Although Mrs. Curren visits Bheki’s friend in the hospital, he is cold to her. When she touches his hand she “felt him stiffen, felt an angry electric recoil.” (AI 79) Mrs. Curren is shaken when she sees the body of Bheki. When she talks to Vercueil about Bheki’s death there is absolutely no response from him. He seems to be indifferent and when she talks to him about her plight he hardly listens. He is not interested in listening to her ‘confession’. She tells him that she talks to him because she feels he is “an angel come to show me the way”(AI 168).

Towards the end, Mrs. Curren becomes irritable. Vercueil tries to ease the situation. “Don’t worry”, he says, “it’s all going to end. Have patience” (AI 181). Vercueil tells her about how he lost his three fingers. She asks him what he will do when she is gone and he replies he will go on. Mrs. Curren breathes her last in his arms “He took me in his arms and held me with mighty force, so that the breath went out of me in a rush. From that embrace there was no warmth to be had” (AI 198).
Thus, Vercueil and Mrs. Curren have a queer relationship. He does not show any concern for her, but helps her whenever she needs him. Most of the time when she speaks, there is no response from him; at times it looks as if he is not bothered about her at all. It is as if, he has taken the space without any qualms, as a matter of right. He does not expect anything from her. But for Mrs. Curren, he is a consolation and therefore, she puts up with him in spite of his dirty unclean ways. The age of iron is the age of transition and there is violence everywhere.

Although, Coetzee’s marginalised characters are silent and passive, they are strong individuals. In *Dusklands*, it is Eugene who becomes a victim. He is sent to a mental asylum, as he loses his mental equilibrium, in the process of being associated with what goes on in Vietnam – the atrocities of the Americans on the Vietnamese.

Similarly, Jacobus Coetzee who thinks that he can lord it over the Hottentots realises that they do not care for him. When he addresses the Namaquas “as befitted the opening of negotiations with possibly unfriendly powers...” (*DL* 66) they merely become uninterested and drift “out of [his] firm but friendly line of vision” (*DL* 66). When he thinks that they probably regard him as God, he finds that they ridicule him. Finally, he cuts a sorry figure in their midst when he suffers from the carbuncle.

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Magistrate thinks that he is being benevolent to the barbarian girl. Although he keeps her with him, waiting on her, sleeping with her, it is he who becomes obsessed with her. He wonders “What this woman beside me is doing in my life I cannot comprehend” (*WB* 50).

Even the men who are in the camps are capable of inhuman treatment. They are also similar to those who keep watch over them. Coetzee highlights this in the novel when one of the guards is injured and bleeding and none of the inmates help him. It is only Michael
who has sympathy for him. So it does not take much for the oppressed to become the oppressor. Similarly the moment the Medical Officer comes to know of Michael, he feels he is oppressed by his presence. He claims that before the arrival of Michael in the camp he is happy. Michael refuses to talk and the Medical Officer feels as if he is the oppressed. He refuses to eat camp food and the Medical Officer becomes desperate.

It is quite interesting to note that Michael, the ‘Other’ has left such an impression on the Medical Officer that all his thoughts are about Michael. In his letter addressed to Michael he says, “Did you not notice how, whenever I tried to pin you down, you slipped away?” (MK 166) He has not been able to communicate with Michael and that is a failure for the white man to establish a rapport with the colored or black even if he wishes to. The black man (Michael) does not allow it. Communication between the whites and the blacks is beyond the pale of human discourse.

In Age of Iron Mrs. Curren, the protagonist has hitherto kept away from the unrest going on in the society. However, when her maid’s son, Bheki and his friend John, are involved in the fight against the white administration, she is drawn into the struggle. When she sees the atrocities of the police against the blacks she speaks up for the black boys, only to be insulted by the policemen. However, since she is white, the blacks have no allegiance to her. She is insulted by them and in such a situation she feels oppressed. Caught in the turmoil of a fight in the black township of Guguletu, Mrs. Curren wants to go away as she is exhausted. Mr. Thabane, the relative of Florence only rebukes her “when you see a crime being committed in front of your eyes, what do you say? Do you say, ‘I have seen enough, I didn’t come to see sights, I want to go home?’ I shook my head in distress” (AI 98). Mrs. Curren although sympathetic to the blacks finds herself in a trying state. The blacks do not understand her at all. Her condition is oppressive. When
she sees the dead bodies of Bheki and four other youth she feels terrible. It is she who feels oppressed though she was not in anyway involved with their death. However, in the case of Mrs. Curren’s relationship with Vercueil who is also the other there seems to be a sort of affinity towards each other. It is Vercueil who is around to help her out in her last days as she suffers from cancer which debilitates her body. The chaos outside, in the society is similar to the chaos in her body as the cancer cells are eating her up. “I give my life to Vercueil to carry over. I trust Vercueil because I do not trust Vercueil. I love him because I do not love him. Because he is the weak reed I lean upon him” (AI 131). Such is her relationship with Vercueil.

Mrs. Curren knows very well that she dislikes Bheki’s friend, John. However, she says “I do not want to die in the state I am in, in a state of ugliness. I want to be saved. How shall I be saved? By doing what I do not want to do. That is the first step: that I know. I must love, first of all, the unlovable I must love, for instance, this child... He is here for a reason. He is a part of my salvation. I must love him” (AI 136). So for Mrs Curren even the effort to love the blacks has to be premeditated. She has to love them for her own sake.

Mrs. Curren knows that she has to make a compromise. She is no longer the oppressor who is in a situation that is better off than that of the ‘Other’. She is oppressed by the society around her and by her illness. When the police enter her premises and shoot the boy John down, she is helpless. She cannot do anything to protect him. She does not believe that the war that the black youth are fighting will bring in any good. She does not believe in comradeship, as Mr. Thabane, the school teacher calls it. She tells Vercueil “I have been a good person, I freely confess to it. I am a good person still. What times these are when to be a good person is not enough” (AI 165). She knows that she has
to bear the burden of being a white. She is aware that her opinions do not mean anything to the blacks however concerned she is about them.

In the novel *Foe*, which is a parody of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, we have the story of Crusoe and Friday who are cast away on an island. The relationship between Crusoe and Friday is cordial. Crusoe has taught him enough language that is necessary for his use on the island. However, when Susan Barton is marooned on the same island, her attitude to Friday is different. Friday, she realises is mute. She learns that his tongue has been cut. She tries to make him learn to write. When she takes Friday with her to England, he becomes a burden to her. She wants to write her story on the island. But she knows she cannot write the story without the story of Friday and she knows that Friday cannot tell his story. She asks him a series of questions and exclaims “How I wish you could answer!” (F 82) Friday’s silence oppresses her which in fact becomes a burden for her. She is relieved of Friday only when she finds a ship that will carry him to his home country. Until then Friday remains a burden to her. She cannot abandon him. Friday however, does not express any of his feelings. He goes with Susan Barton wherever she takes him.

3.5 The Sense of Isolation in the Novels of J.M. Coetzee: a Pretext to Tackle Violence

Michela Canapari -Labib in the preface to his book *Old Myths- Modern Empires Power Language and Identity in J.M.Coetzee’s Work* avers:

Although his novels often appear to depict a particular situation or a personal story determined by the cultural, political and social circumstances of South Africa, at the same time, they must be read as powerful and incisive statements about human nature, speaking of more
fundamental psychological realities which cannot be seen solely as the result of South African politics.64

Though almost all the novels have been written about South Africa, especially the apartheid and post apartheid era, they have become international literature as they address the human condition. Coetzee’s writing is not primarily concerned with the act of decolonization. He is more concerned about what colonization does to the psyche of both coloniser and the colonised, the oppressor and the oppressed. Coetzee writes against apartheid, violence and speaks for the dignity of man. In his post colonial discourse he does not seek to re-instate the ‘Other’ or the marginalised. Coetzee’s ‘Other’ are evolved persons with infinite patience and endurance. They are passive, silent and isolated and this becomes a weapon in their hands.

Gayatri Spivak who speaks about the silencing of the native, says that the native is silenced by the dominating power. But the natives in Coetzee, we see, have not been silenced; on the other hand they remain silent by choice.

A reading of the novels of Coetzee, the first written in 1974, reveals that the protagonists in the novels are all isolated individuals. He focuses on individuals leading isolated lives. This sense of isolation is out of circumstances, sometimes willed, sometimes by chance.

Eugene Dawn, the protagonist in the novel Dusklands collapses into a state of insanity. He is on a mission writing an analysis of the psychological war in Vietnam for the U.S Defense Department. The preparation of the report makes him enter into a state of self-isolation. The work that he is involved in creates a stressful situation. He is unable to be part of the community, he cannot interact with people especially the ‘Other’. He
kidnaps his son from his wife and when she tracks him down with police officers, he stabs his son and describes it with the same attitude that governs his narrative.

In the second part of the same novel, the protagonist Jacobus Coetzee is a white man entering the territory of the ‘Other’. He is an isolated being. Similar to Fanon’s analysis of the white man’s mind, Jacobus Coetzee is scared of the natives. He stays away from the natives. He thinks the enemy needs to be defeated so that he in turn is not destroyed. However, he is unable to establish his authority among the Hottentots as he falls sick and needs to be in the village under their care. He feels that his privacy has been intruded upon. Once he recovers, he leaves the village and when he returns to Namaqua Land, all he yearns for is revenge which intensifies as he drifts into the world of his interior. He destroys the village completely.

The novel *In the Heart of the Country* revolves around the protagonist Magda, a spinster who lives a life of isolation. She lives on a secluded farm and the novel is written as a sort of journal with many contradicting details. The stories are inward looking. Her father lives with her. She talks of his new bride. She cannot communicate with her father and stays away from the servants of the house. But she is not happy with this seclusion. She laments this isolated state. She hates her father and even fantasises killing him. In this state of isolation she attempts parricide four times. She imagines that the bride who her father brings home will relegate her to a state of nothing. After the death of her father, in order to overcome her loneliness she offers shelter to the servant Hendrik and his wife Klein Anna. She gives up her position of ‘master’ which is taken over by Hendrik and Klein Anna. There is a reversal of roles and Hendrik beats her and even rapes her.

For Magda the only form of communication is her monologues. The monologues are fragmented and she herself is not sure of the tale she tells. She feels alienated and
mentally confused. She tries to communicate with Anna, who answers her only in 
monosyllables. Finally she tries to attain some communication by expressing her sexual 
desire with Hendrik. She even longs to return to the animal state. She tries to imagine 
herself as living outside human society. She thinks of herself as “a beetle”, “a black 
widow spider”. However, she feels the need for community. “It is not speech that makes 
man, but the speech of others” (HOC 125). She tries to communicate with the sky gods 
and her narrative ends by turning away from the messages of the “sky-gods”. “If the truth 
be told, I never wanted to fly away with the sky-gods. My hope was always that they 
would descend and live with me here in paradise, making up with their ambrosial breath 
for all that I lost when the ghostly brown figures of the last people I knew crept away 
from me in the night” (HOC 138-9).

Magda’s isolation has stunted her. She is devoid of all positive feelings and inhabits a 
world of fantasy. Aroma Kharshiing writing about In the Heart of the Country avers, 
“Magda, In the Heart of the Country, is a displaced subject, for she desperately attempts 
to seek and construct a life for herself as the only means to resist her fate. She realises 
that in a colonial condition, all forms of relationship and communication – filial, societal, 
marital as well as the colonial structures of kinship, lack authenticity and reciprocity.”

Hence she finds herself completely alienated from people and her surroundings.

In Waiting for the Barbarians, which is a strongly allegorical text we have the 
protagonist of the novel the Magistrate who is in the Outpost of the ‘Empire’. He leads a 
very isolated life. He sympathizes with the Native. He tries to communicate with the 
barbarian girl. He is a man of conscience. He is aware of his complicity in the Empire’s 
imperialism. He develops an interest in the barbarian girl who has been subject to torture 
by Colonel Joll and his men. He tries to converse with the girl but there is no
communication at all. Even their relationship is not consummated. He is also isolated by
the Empire because he is thought of as a collaborator with the barbarians. However, he is
also not accepted by the barbarians. Isolated physically in the Outpost which is away
from his people and also demarcated as a territory forbidden to the Natives, he
experiences total loneliness when he is imprisoned after he is suspected of liaison with
the natives. It is now that he feels the need for companionship.

At the end of the novel we find the Magistrate in a state of despair and hopelessness.
The narrator experiences a terrible sense of solitude as he is distanced from his people
and is not accepted by the barbarians for whom he had sympathy.

Michael K in *Life and Times of Michael K*, which won Coetzee the Booker, is
different. Michael lives in the civil war torn society, but is not touched or affected by it.
The society is ridden with widespread lawlessness. The downtrodden and the poor resort
to looting and violence whenever they have the opportunity. There is corruption in the
society, exploitation of the labour force by those in power, especially the police. Michael
makes a desperate effort to get away from the company of human beings. He is a victim
of a conflict torn society. Being hare-lipped he is sent to a special school and he lives a
secluded life there. K himself says that he lives in silence. He does not remember his
father and considers the institution Huis Norenius to be his father. Michael’s only
allegiance is to his mother. He sets out to take his mother from Cape Town to Prince
Albert where she had spent her youth with her family. She dies on the way. He feels
suffocated and uneasy when the doctors and nurses try to comfort him. He carries on with
her ashes and scatters it in the farm where she had lived. He tries to find solace in living
the life of a farmer.
He goes back to the farm and starts cultivation. But when a member of the Visagie family who once owned the farm comes back, he abandons his cultivation. He lives in a cave, feeding on roots and insects, avoiding the company of people. He is picked up as a vagrant and sent to a reinstatement camp. He detests life there as he is in contact with people. He escapes from the camp and gets back to the farm. However, again he is found by the police who take him back to the camp. Here he is repulsed by the interest shown by the medical doctor towards him. He refuses to talk to the doctor. Michael is different from Coetzee’s protagonists from other novels.

The protagonists in other novels lament their solitude. But Michael struggles for isolation. He does not want to have anything to do with people. However, despite being alone in the mountains K knows that he cannot escape history entirely. Only silence and absence of society can make Michael happy and give him a feeling of security. However, there is a contradiction in him. When he sees the revolutionaries, he wants to join them in their fun. Magda in the novel *In the Heart of the Country* is uncomfortable in her secluded life unlike Michael K who enjoys living in a state of isolation.

In the novel *Foe*, we have two characters, who have two different attitudes towards solitude. Cruso who accepts his state of solitariness is happy with himself on the island. He refuses to keep a journal and does not make any effort to save himself. He lives in a hut, wakes up and sleeps following the sunrise and sunset. He makes terraces for those who may come later with seeds. All in all, life for him is calm and serene. Susan Barton on the other hand who is also marooned on the island cannot accept her situation. She regrets the lack of human society. The silence around her oppresses her and she longs to get back to civilization. However, when she does get back to civilization she still feels lonely. She feels alienated from other human beings. Mrs. Curren in *Age of Iron*, is
suffering from cancer and leads a psychologically isolated life. In this novel Coetzee portrays the South Africa of 1986 to 1989, the worst years during the emergency. Mrs. Curren, a professor of Classics and now retired, lives a life of solitude. She does not have many friends. The society she lives in is fighting for power. Mrs Curren isolates herself from the violence and unrest in the society, but soon finds herself in the midst of all this when Bheki, the son of her maid Florence, plunges himself into the resistance movement against the whites. She finds herself helping Bheki, nursing his wound and even offering him and his friend shelter in her house. In the novel, the black voices are loud and vociferous. Bheki and his friend are sure of what they want. Florence supports the children condemning the whites and Mr. Thabane, the school teacher is well aware of comradeship.

Mrs. Curren also experiences loneliness because of her disease which is eating her. The imminent death makes her withdraw into herself. Although she feels alienated, she enters into a strange relationship with Vercueil, a tramp who comes to occupy the space outside her house where her daughter once played. Vercueil becomes a sort of a mentor for Mrs. Curren. She does not send him away. He even lives in her house and towards the end she entrusts a bundle of papers to be delivered to her daughter. Vercueil becomes her angel of death. Living in the midst of the social and political situation in South Africa, she needs love to face her illness in her daughter's absence.

Mrs. Curren's disease is symbolic of the extreme deterioration that had set into South African society, torn apart by civil war, and violence. She is in a state of preparation for her death. In the course of it she learns many things. She is shocked that young boys could defy death in the name of defending their identity. She arrives at a new level of existence, thereby forming a new self. When she visits the township of Guguletu where
her maid Florence lives, she, for the first time has an encounter with violence and death. Awareness comes to her. She learns about the need for equality of all human beings and the need for love to preserve the human race.

In *The Master of Petersburg* the protagonist, who is a fictionalised Dostoevsky comes to mourn the death of his son Isaev. He accepts his guilt of abandoning his son. He tries to find out the real circumstances of the death of his son and tries to establish a relationship with his son which he never had when he was alive. He realises he is tied down with remorse till his death.

The protagonist in *Disgrace* is David Lurie, a professor twice divorced. He is forced to resign as he gets embroiled in an affair with a student half his age, who complains against him of sexual harassment. An enquiry is conducted and he is asked to apologise and show repentance. But he refuses to do so. “That plea should suffice. Repentance is neither here nor there. Repentance belongs to another world, to another discourse” (*D 58*). Therefore, he chooses to resign and leaves his town and home to live with his daughter on the farm. Throughout the novel, David tries to come to terms with the new condition. It is the post-apartheid era and there is a reversal in the position of blacks and whites in the society. Although he is in the company of his daughter, he is lonely. He seeks relief helping Bev Shaw in her veterinary clinic where she puts to death old and ailing dogs. Erik Grayson a critic argues, “That Lurie’s new vocation deals exclusively in canine and feline euthanasia only emphasises the remarkable process of existential maturation he undergoes in *Disgrace.*”

The novel *Slow Man*, examines the idea of solitariness from a philosophical standpoint. Paul Rayment, the protagonist is in his sixties. His leg has been amputated as a result of an accident. He refuses to use a prosthesis and chooses to live on his own with
the help of a woman who helps him with the chores, washes and dresses him. He experiences a sense of futility. Coetzee through the character of Paul ruminates about life, man's position and human nature. Paul experiences terrible loneliness. The calamity has "shrunk his world, turned him into prisoner". In his isolation, he says "Live like a hero. That is what the classics teach us. Be the main character. Otherwise what is life for?" (SM 229)

In the novel *Diary of a Bad Year* also, the protagonist, is a single man, a writer in his seventies, who is asked to write about his strong opinions on the happenings in the world. He happens to see a young woman called Anya, in the laundry room of the apartment he is living in. He offers her work as a typist for a handsome sum of money. The real need is not for a typist. He is only carried away by her beauty and youth and wants to have her in his proximity. The thoughts that go on in his mind are those of a man facing old age and of one who does not have any one around him.

The questions that come to the forefront about man's desire for isolation is the desire to understand himself, to find answers to many questions that have long troubled him. Coetzee seems to ask whether man can live in isolation. He wonders whether man can understand himself better in a state of isolation. Coetzee drives home the point that isolation is not something that man can put up with. Nevertheless the protagonists emerge transformed after the isolated state whether it is physical or mental. In the novels that Coetzee wrote after leaving South Africa, he analyses the life of people who lead a life of isolation.

Thus in this chapter the novels of Coetzee have been examined from the standpoint of violence and its impact. The protagonists of Coetzee stand out as exceptional individuals
who mark out their own way of handling violence. They emerge as individuals with a character of their own. Even in their humiliation, they exhibit strength of character.

Thus, we can say that Coetzee is primarily concerned with the violence encountered by his protagonists. He shows us the impact of violence on the psyche of individuals. He explores the nuances of violence and its manifestation. Coetzee’s analysis of violence takes on a spiritual level when he makes his characters passive and silent even when confronted with violence. The violence that Coetzee envisages has a debilitating effect on both the coloniser and the colonised. The violence inflicted on the natives is abominable. However, they handle it in a philosophical manner. Coetzee explores the dynamics of violence with regard to the western and non western people. We also see the impact of violence on the whites just as we see it on the blacks. Coetzee has very carefully presented to us the encounter between the whites and the blacks, bringing out the clash between them very effectively. He has very sensitively drawn a picture of South African society under the apartheid regime driving home the point that aggression has its impact on the doer of the action also. Each novel of Coetzee is an entity in itself representing the South African society of the second half of the twentieth century.
Notes


2. ibid 12.

3. ibid 14.


10. ibid 20.


21 ibid 50.

22 ibid 51.


31. Fanon, preface, 23.


35. ibid 110.


38. ibid 158.

39. ibid 153.

40. Michela Canepari – Labib 86.
41 Attwell, 1992 97.


43 Michela Canepari – Labib 119.

44 Head 114.

45 ibid 59.


49 Attwell (1992) 120.


52 Michela Canapari Labib 101.


54 ibid 389.


56 Michela Canapari- Labib 242.

58 ibid 11.


61 Fanon 74.

62 ibid 34.

63 ibid 28.

64 Michela Canapari-Labib 17.
