Chapter II

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After taking the brief survey of the violence in the African novel and the position of Coetzee in the previous chapter, this chapter attempts to observe Coetzee’s *Dusklands, Foe,* and *Age of Iron.* These novels expose violence. It is proposed to examine the various expressions of violence and to find out how these novels give a call to all the human beings to be human. For the convenience of discussion it is useful to outline first the plot of each work and then analyze the examples of violence in it.

*Dusklands*

*Dusklands* is Coetzee’s debut novel. It is a presentation and critique of the violence intrinsic in the colonial state of mind. It consists of two novellas: *The Vietnam Project* and *The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee.*

*The Vietnam Project*

*The Vietnam Project* is set in the USA around 1970 with America bogged down ear deep in the Vietnam War. It is narrated in the first person. It relates the gradual descent of its protagonist, Eugene Dawn into insanity. Dawn works for the U.S. government agency responsible for the psychological warfare in the Vietnam War. He works in the Mythography section. He is compiling a report called the New Life Project that covers the role of propaganda used by U.S.A. during the Vietnam War. His supervisor, named Coetzee, advises Dawn to write the report with common touch and in a less abstract and more comprehensive style as the audience will be military men, not aesthetes.

Dawn’s wife, Marilyn, does not understand his work and wishes he would take a simpler job so that she could spend more time with him. The fact that Dawn cannot share with Marilyn the documents related to his project increases suspicion for Marilyn and it keeps the couple in a depressing gap at all the times. Dawn doubts that Marilyn has an affair with another man. Theirs is not a happy marriage.
Dawn carries in his briefcase the photographs, which show atrocities against the Vietnamese. He looks at them periodically for inspiration in writing his report. His report covers the psychological influence of propaganda on the affected people as well as the impact on the overall war effort. He is moved by the atrocities but he has to publish the facts for those who lived through it all and for those who will come and hopefully learn from it. For most of the time Dawn is bored with his work.

One day Dawn takes his young son, Martin with him to a motel near the San Bernardino Mountains. He wants to write the report peacefully and without the interruption from Marilyn. For the first four days of their stay Dawn and Martin are very happy but afterwards Martin is bored. Dawn does not know that Marilyn has reported to police that Martin has been kidnapped and that Dawn is in trouble. Unexpectedly, Marilyn arrives in the motel with the police. Dawn holds Martin tightly and the police tell him to put the knife in his hands down but it is not until he feels the fruit knife piercing Martin’s body that he realizes what the police mean. Dawn is admitted in mental hospital for his nervous breakdown. The doctors think that Dawn’s study and analysis of the Vietnam propaganda is responsible for his madness. Dawn is ready for the treatment. He desires to rewrite the report when he recovers. He ends the narration by saying: “I have high hopes of finding whose fault I am” (49).

The main source of The Vietnam Project seems to be taken from a collection of Hudson institute reports published in 1968 entitled Can We Win in Vietnam? : The American Dilemma. It contains the contribution of a group of five writers. The epigraph to The Vietnam Project is taken from one of the contributors, Herman Kahn.

The Vietnam Project notes the dominant American regime’s violence. It causes a great devastation of organized village life. The violence described in the novel harms the Vietnamese psychologically, sexually, and physically. It can be explained by studying the examples of such violence in the novella.

- **Violence : Psychological**

The examples of psychological violence can be noted in the novel. These examples show the inner injuries exerted by the power and force of the war. The novel opens with Dawn’s declaration of his conflict with his manager, Coetzee. He says, “Conflict brings unhappiness, unhappiness poisons existence. I cannot stand
unhappiness, I need peace and love and order for my work” (1). The reference to ‘conflict’ and ‘unhappiness’ states the reality of the life of the Americans, the oppressors. Dawn, who works for the Americans, is not happy and peaceful because the report and its details which he wants to write are so disturbing to his mind that he needs a great peace of mind and mental courage to convey them. It is the consequence of the violence in Vietnam.

Dawn’s superior, Coetzee, knows nothing about Vietnam or about human life in Vietnam. Still he has been put in charge of the New Life Project. Dawn works under his superior’s psychological pressure. It has affected his energy. The Vietnam Project is the centre of Dawn’s existence for almost a year. Dawn fears that Coetzee will reject him because according to him, Coetzee “fears vision, has no sympathy for passion or despair. Power speaks only to power. Sentences are queueing behind his neat red lips. I will be dismissed, and dismissed according to form” (3). Coetzee’s approach towards Dawn proves that the inhuman officers are running the inhuman situations in Vietnam. He says:

> It is unpleasant to have your productions rejected, doubly unpleasant if they are rejected by one you admire, trebly unpleasant if you are used to adulation. I was always a clever child, a good child and a clever child. I ate my beans, which were good for me, and did my homework. I was seen and not heard. Everyone praised me. It is only recently that I have begun to falter. It has been a bewildering experience, though, being possessed of a high degree of consciousness, I have never been unprepared for it. At the moment when one ceases to be the pupil, I have told myself, at the moment when one starts to strike out for oneself, one must expect one’s teachers to feel betrayed and to strike back in envy. The petty reaction of Coetzee to my essay is to be expected in a bureaucrat whose position is threatened by an up-and-coming subordinate who will not follow the slow, well-trodden path to the top. He is the old bull, I the young bull. (5)

Dawn has to work under such an officer who is “in power over” (5) him and who always injures his subordinates. Coetzee represents the oppression in the hierarchy of power structure.

Too much work on the Vietnam Project has disturbed the married life of Dawn and Marilyn. Marilyn has grown more and more jealous of Dawn’s work on the
project. She is unhappy as Dawn does not spend more time with her. There is no love between them and their relationship suffers from doubts and loss of faith in each other’s work. Dawn says:

Marilyn (to whip myself up for a while longer against Marilyn, though it is not good for me) upholds a fixed quantum theory of love: if I have love to spend on other objects such love must be stolen from her. Thus she has grown more and more jealous of my work on the Vietnam Project as I have deepened myself further and further in it. She wishes dull jobs on me in order that I should find relief in her. She feels herself empty and wishes to be filled, yet her emptiness is such that every entry into her she feels as invasion and possession. Hence her desperate look. (I have an intuitive understanding of women though I feel no sympathy for them.) My life with Marilyn has become a continual battle to keep my poise of mind against her hysterical assaults and the pressure of my enemy body. (8)

Dawn’s life with Marilyn becomes a continual battle that disturbs him. So he says, “I must have poise of mind to do my creative work. I must have peace, love, nourishment, and sunlight; those precious mornings when my body relaxes and my mind soars must not be laid to waste by whining and shouting between Marilyn and her child” (8). The psychological strain on Dawn’s family can be noted further in his expression:

Ever since I asserted my inviolability, that poor Martin has stood in as my whipping-boy, enduring the lash of his mother’s tongue for waking her up, for wanting his breakfast, for wanting to be dressed, till storms of fury burst in my faroff head and with red sheets of apoplexy blinding my vision I bellow for silence. Then it is all over: the ropes begin to knot around my body, the primitive, muscular face within my face begins to close off all avenues to the outside world, it is time for me to pack my bag and pick my way through the dogshit on the sidewalk toward another iron day.(8)

Dawn is troubled and suspects Marilyn having extra-marital relations. When Marilyn returns home he gets lost in his suspicion:

Do I catch the whiff of a strange man on her? Unhappy young wives who drive off to a day of unspecified appointments are often
conducting extra-marital liaisons. I know the world. I am curious to know the truth, very curious. What could another man see in this tired, beaten woman? As an exercise I watch her through a strange man’s eyes. New perspectives excite me. My eyes, no doubt, glow. (11)

His suspicion increases when he sees a nude photograph of Marilyn in her black leather writing case on the highest shelf of her wardrobe, the innermost pocket of which used to contain only his photograph. Dawn compares Marilyn with the models. Sometimes he rings Marilyn. When once she does not answer he goes home and peeps through a window to see what Marilyn is doing. He expects that he would be able to catch Marilyn red hand with her lover. He observes:

Marilyn’s Volkswagen was in place, lodged in the carport. I tiptoed to the rear of the house. There is a novel in which a householder is arrested for peeping at his wife. I peeped through the bedroom window. Marilyn sat on the bed dressed in a housecoat, paging through a magazine. . . . My heart went out to her. I longed to stretch a hand through the glass. In the hot sun I crouched and watched, hoping the neighbors would not remark me. (33)

Dawn’s suspicion is the consequence of his mental collapse due to his report writing about the Vietnam War and its terrifying strategies. The Vietnam War has thus caused misery in the married life of Dawn as he is unable to devote time to his wife and child. Dawn’s work has made him behave abnormally with his wife. He thinks:

Marilyn’s great fear is that I will drag her out of the suburbs into the wilderness. She thinks that every deviation leads to the wilderness. This is because she has a false conception of America. She cannot believe that America is big enough to contain its deviants. But America is bigger than all of us: I acknowledge that long before I began to say my say to Coetzee – America will swallow me, digest me, dissolve me in the tides of its blood. Marilyn need have no fear: she will always have a home. Nor, in the true myth of America, is it I who am the deviant but the cynic Coetzee together with all those who no longer feel the authentic American destiny crackling within them and stiffening their marrow. Only the strong can hold course through history’s doldrums. It is possible that Coetzee may survive the 1970’s; but simple natures like Marilyn’s will rot without a core of belief. (9)
While writing the report he opens his mind and says: “I am in a bad way as I write these words. My health is poor. I have a treacherous wife, an unhappy home, unsympathetic superiors. I suffer from headaches. I sleep badly. I am eating myself out. If I knew how to take holidays, perhaps I would take one” (29).

Marilyn thinks that Dawn’s “human sympathies have been coarsened” (9) and he is addicted to violent and perverse fantasies. Her friends believe that Dawn’s psychic brutalization will stop with the end of the war and then he will be tamed and humanized. The relations between Dawn and other persons are not normal. Marilyn connects his behavioural changes with the twenty-four pictures of human bodies that Dawn carries in his briefcase. Marilyn’s fear bespeaks the effects of war reports on Dawn’s psyche. The effect of the horror of the Vietnamese’ suffering actually makes Dawn say that, he might, “one day play out the role of ruined and reconstructed boy” (10). The effect of war can be noted in the mentality of the Americans also as Dawn says, “Marilyn and her friends believe that everyone who approaches the innermost mechanism of the war suffers a vision of horror which depraves him utterly” (10).

While explaining the aims and achievements of propaganda services Dawn plainly says:

In waging psychological warfare we aim to destroy the morale of the enemy. Psychological warfare is the negative function of propaganda: its positive function is to create confidence that our political authority is strong and durable. Waged effectively, propaganda war wears down the enemy by shrinking his civilian base and recruitment pool and rendering his soldiers uncertain in battle and likely to defect afterwards, while at the same time fortifying the loyalty of the population. Its military/political potential cannot therefore be overstressed. (19)

Fear is not novelty to the Vietnamese. Fear has in fact, bound their community together. The Americans break down the community not by attacking it as a whole but by showing each member the prospect of an attack on him as an individual with a name and a history. Dawn explains:

To his question, Why me? there was no comforting answer. I am chosen because I am the object of an inscrutable choice. I am chosen because I am marked. With this non sequitur the subject’s psyche is penetrated. 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. He is the quarry of an infallible hunter, infallible since whenever he attacks someone dies. Hence the victim’s preoccupation with taint: I move among those marked for death and those unmarked - which am I? The community breaks down into a scurrying swarm whose antennae vibrate only to the coming of death. The nest hums with suspicion (Is this a corpse I am talking to?). Then, as pressure is maintained, the coherence of psyche cracks (I am tainted, I smell in my own nostrils). (23)

To rupture the group morale of the Vietnamese is the prime concern of the Americans. Dawn explains:

There is only one rule in Vietnam: fragment, individualize. Our mistake was to allow the Vietnamese to conceive themselves as an entire people huddled under the bombs of a foreign oppressor. Thereby we created for ourselves the task of breaking the resistance of a whole people - a dangerous, expensive and unnecessary task. If we had rather compelled the village, the guerrilla band, the individual subject to conceive himself the village, the band, the subject elected for especial punishment, for reasons never to be known, then while his first gesture might have been to strike back in anger, the worm of guilt would inevitably, as punishment continued, have sprouted in his bowels and drawn from him the cry, “I am punished therefore I am guilty.” He who utters these words is vanquished. (24)

Dawn’s explanation indicates the cruel mentality of the American military to pester the Vietnamese.

The Vietnamese are strong with their mutual relations in family, band, and hamlet. Their mentality is not individualistic. For them, “The rational promptings of self-interest matter less than the counsel of father and brothers” (20). The Americans want to break the resistance of the whole Vietnamese by harming their unity and culture which bind them together. They know “Strength of the enemy is his bondedness” (24). While analyzing such type of relation between colonization and culture, Frantz Fanon in his Black Poets and Prophets says that the colonizer disturbs the value system and institutions and thus “the social panorama” of the colonized “is
destructed, values are flaunted, crushed, emptied” (16-17). Fanon’s observation fits the Americans’ policies against the Vietnamese.

There is a reference to the Vietnamese myth regarding the relation between father and son. The “father-voice” of the Americans wants to put down the rebellion of the band of the Vietnamese brothers. Dawn refers to “Thomas McAlmon’s *Communist Myth and Group Integration: vol. I, Proletarian Mythography (1967), vol. II, Insurgent Mythography (1969)*” (25). Dawn refers to McAlmon’s myth of the overthrow of the father as follows: “In origin the myth is a justification of the rebellion of sons against a father who uses them as hinds. The sons come of age, rebel, mutilate the father, and divide the patrimony, that is, the earth fertilized by the father’s rain. Psychoanalytically the myth is a self-affirming fantasy of the child powerless to take the mother he desires from his father-rival” (25). According to Dawn, in popular Vietnamese consciousness the myth takes the following form:

The sons of the land (i.e., the brotherhood of earth-tillers) desire to take the land (i.e. the Vietnamese *Boden*) for themselves, overthrowing the sky-god who is identified with the old order of power (foreign empire, the U.S.). The earth-mother hides her sons in her bosom, safe from the thunderbolts of the father; at night; while he sleeps, they emerge to unman him and initiate a new fraternal order (II, pp.26, 101). (25)

It is noted that “The weak point in this myth is that it portrays the father as vulnerable, liable to wither under a single well-directed radical blow” (25). But the father-voice of America is invulnerable. The father is represented by a father-voice on propaganda radio programmes. Eugene believes in this voice and says, “Radio information, I ought to know from practice, is pure authority” (14). Further, he explains about the father-voice:

The father-voice is not a new source in propaganda. The tendency in totalitarian states is, however, to identify the father-voice with the voice of the Leader, the father of the country. In times of war this father exhorts his children to patriotic sacrifice, in times of peace to greater production. The Republic of Vietnam is no exception. (21)

The voice of the father utters itself out of the sky. The Vietnamese call it ”the whispering death” (21). The father “is authority, infallibility, ubiquity. He does not persuade, he commands. That which he foretells happens” (21). The Americans use
radio for demoralizing the enemy psychologically because in “limited warfare, defeat is not a military but a psychic concept” (22). Dawn further explains:

But in practise our most effective acts of demoralization are justified in military terms, as though the use of force for psychological ends were shameful. Thus, for example, we have justified the elimination of enemy villages by calling them armed strongholds, when the value of the operations lay in demonstrating to the absent VC menfolk just how vulnerable their homes and families were. (22)

The Americans release the information about the bombing and other details through radio. Print medium is also used by them. About print, Dawn says that it is “sadism” and “The message of the newspaper is: ‘I can say anything and not to be moved. Watch as I permute my 52 affectless signs’. Print is the hard master with the whip, print-reading a weeping search for signs of mercy” (14). Dawn thinks of the human psychology behind the pornography and says, “we write on lavatory walls to abase ourselves before them. Pornography is an abasement before the page, such abasement as to convulse the very page. Print reading is a slave habit. I discovered this truth, as I discovered all the truth in my Vietnam report, by introspection” (14).

Whether it is radio or print, in Vietnam the media is used to hurt the psyche of the Vietnamese. Hence, Dawn says, “all truths about man’s nature” (14) are found in Vietnam. He refuses a familiarization tour of Vietnam when he joins the Project. While he is writing the report he is sure that there is no need to visit the sights of war in Vietnam because he knows that when his words are “transposed into print their authority will be binding” (15). This is how the psychological force is used to reduce the morale of the Vietnamese.

The Americans hope that the Vietnamese will lose faith, grow disheartened, and surrender. But they know that surrender means a fate worse than death. The Americans want to humble the Vietnamese which would render them sterile, so that their “kingdom, no longer fertilized, becomes a waste land” (26). The Americans want to make the Vietnamese “kneel with hearts bathed in obedience” (26). The violence by the Americans makes Dawn hysterical to the extent of murdering his son. While writing the report he confesses:

Do not think it does not pain me to make this report. (On the other hand, do not underestimate my exultation.) I too am stirred by courage. But courage is an archaic virtue. While there is courage we are all
bound to the wheel of rebellious violence. Beyond courage there is the humble heart, the quiet garden into which we may escape from the cycles of time. I am neat and polite, but I am the man of the future paradise. (27)

Dawn further says, “Before paradise comes purgatory” (27). It can be said that the future may be a paradise for the Vietnamese after going through the purgatory by facing the violence. About himself, Dawn says, “Not without joy, I have girded myself for purgatory. If I must be a martyr to the cause of obedience, I am prepared to suffer. I am not alone. Behind their desks across the breadth of America wait an army of young men, out of fashion like me” (27). It means that Dawn and the American army are martyred for obeying the American government. Probably Dawn suggests that they will introspect about their roles in the war and then their minds will be spiritually cleansed of their sins against the Vietnamese.

Dawn gets totally suppressed due to the horror of the war and he is unable to be frank and free with others. So he says, “If I feel cramped nowadays it is because I have no space to beat my wings” (32). He is no doubt a sick man. He confesses:

Vietnam has cost me too much. . . . Inside my body, beneath the skin and muscle and flesh that drape me, I am bleeding . . . .

I am mistaken if I think that Coetzee will save me. . . . His career has been built on the self and its interests. He thinks of me, even me, as merely a self with interests. He cannot understand a man who experiences his self as an envelope holding his body-parts together while inside it he burns and burns. (32)

Dawn knows that the Vietnam War has injured him. He says:

Since February of 1965 their war has been living its life at my expense. I know and I know and I know what it is that has eaten away my manhood from inside, devoured the food that should have nourished me. It is a thing, a child not mine, once a baby squat and yellow whelmed in the dead center of my body, sucking my blood, growing by my waste, now, 1973, a hideous mongol boy who stretched his limbs inside my hollow bones, gnaws my liver with his smiling teeth, voids his bilious filth into my systems, and will not go. I want an end to it! I want my deliverance! (38-39)
He is mentally so injured that he is unable to see his own child as his child in body and flesh but he thinks his child as a “thing” (39). He cannot understand what exactly he is doing while he stabs his son because he says, “I was not myself. In the profoundest of senses, it was not the real I who stabbed Martin” (44). According to Rosemary Jolly, Eugene Dawn’s stabbing demonstrates sadism and masochism. She further states:

He stabs his son, Martin, to prevent his wife from gaining access to the boy. . . . through this act Dawn aims to “preserve” Martin “undefiled,” as it were, by the female “other” whose eradication Dawn persistently desires. Yet in the attempt to conform to his own notion of the perfect father (all-powerful) and the perfect son (entirely submissive to his father’s will), Dawn mistakenly identifies completely with his son, literally confusing his own identity with Martin’s. (118)

The background of the war and his witness to the violence of the war are responsible for Dawn’s breakdown. The above study explains that the violence has injured the minds of both the Vietnamese and the Americans like Dawn. The inner injuries are always detrimental for the normal way of peaceful life. Hence, they must be eluded.

- **Violence : Physical**

The examples of physical violence will demonstrate how the Americans used cruel physical force on the Vietnamese. Physical violence inflicted by the powerful people in the war is always horrifying. The hostility and the rage of the Americans get a hideous expression in the physical violence against their enemies.

Dawn carries photographs regarding Vietnam project with him in his briefcase. The second picture in them is of two Special Forces sergeants named Berry and Wilson. They have given a pose for the photograph by holding the heads of the dead Vietnamese in their hands. While describing the details of this photograph Dawn says:

Berry and Wilson squat on their heels and smile, partly for the camera but mostly out of the glowing wellbeing of their strong young bodies. Behind them we see scrub, then a wall of trees. Propped on the ground before him Wilson holds the severed head of a man. Berry has two,
which he holds by the hair. The heads are Vietnamese, taken from corpses or near-corpses. They are trophies . . . . (15)

Idea of carrying the heads of the dead Vietnamese as trophies reflects the cruel enjoyment of the Americans. Accordingly to Debra Castillo, “J.M. Coetzee’s primary purpose in providing shock photos of an untenable reality is to release the silenced, unimaginable other, . . .” (1114). Dawn imagines something ridiculous about the dead Vietnamese and says:

They have died well. (Nevertheless, I find something ridiculous about a severed head. 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-sized 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.). (15-16)

This fanatical response of Dawn symbolizes the sadistic delight of the colonizers. The murdered bodies of the Vietnamese explicate the physical violence inflicted by the Americans. The dead bodies are like any commodities for them. The sergeants are the representatives of the colonizer. The colonizer, as Aime Cesaire states, “in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an animal, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform himself into an animal” (qtd. in Nandy, 30). Dawn’s thoughts seem to convert him into an animal.

Dawn’s third picture is a still from a film of the tiger cages on Hon Tre Island. The Vietnamese are kept in these cages. The insolence of the people, the filth, flies, and stench embarrass and alienate Dawn. The camp commander with a cane prods into the first cage and calls the prisoner “Bad man” and “Communist” (16). The Vietnamese are like ghosts. They wash themselves and feel dirty, their memory is numb. The Vietnamese prisoners’ physical conditions illustrate their suffering. Their life in the cages puts them below the human plane. The dreadfulness of the photographs is successfully highlighted by Dawn’s perplexed and indecent responses to them.

Quite satirically Dawn reflects that Americans would have loved the Vietnamese if they had accepted them. But they did not welcome and so the Americans “bathed them in seas of fire, praying for the miracle.” Dawn says, “In the
heart of the flame their bodies glowed with heavenly light; in our ears their voices rang; but when the fire died they were only ash. We lined them up in ditches” (17). Dawn explains that if the Vietnamese had walked toward the Americans singing through the bullets; the Americans would have knelt and worshipped the Vietnamese. But the bullets knocked them over and they died. Dawn feels guilty and so he says that the voices of the Vietnamese rang in the ears of the Americans but when the fire died they were only ash.

What happened to the people who are exploited physically can be noted in Dawn’s account:

The brothers of men who stood out against proven tortures and died holding their silence are now broken down with drugs and a little clever confusion. They talk freely, holding their interrogators’ hands and opening their hearts like children. After they have talked they go to hospital, and then to rehabilitation. They are easily picked out in the camps. . . . Their eyes are closed to the world by a wall of what may be tears. (17)

These physically tortured people are like the poisoned bodies and had been “the finest of their generation, courageous, fraternal . . .” (17). They are the cause of all the woes of Dawn. He asks:

Why could they not accept us? We could have loved them: our hatred for them grew only out of broken hopes. We brought them our pitiable selves, trembling on the edge of inexistence, and asked only that they acknowledge us. We brought with us weapons, the gun and its metaphors, the only copulas we knew of between ourselves and our objects. From this tragic ignorance we sought deliverance. Our nightmare was that since whatever we reached for slipped like smoke through our fingers, we did not exist; that since whatever we embraced wilted, we were all that existed. We landed on the shores of Vietnam clutching our arms and pleading for someone to stand up without flinching to these probes of reality: if you will prove yourself, we shouted, you will prove us too, and we will love you endlessly, and shower you with gifts. (17)

Dawn’s question reflects colonizer’s typical deception of entering the foreign land in the disguise of “deliverance” and then exploiting its people. The Americans
demolish enemy villages. Dawn accepts that many of those killed were innocent. The severity of killing the Vietnamese can be noted in Dawn’s comment: “Books have begun to roll out, I know, about the suburban sadists and cataleptic dropouts with Vietnamese skeletons in their cupboards” (10). Peace is brought about by mass slaughter, splitting up of the native culture, uprooting of traditions and elimination of the Vietnamese communities. The civilized West has always justified its rule on its misleading basis of considering the natives to be the brutes, subhuman creatures to be changed into human beings. Hence, Fanon in his *The Wretched of the Earth* states, “The native is declared insensible to the ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values and he is in this sense absolute evil’” (32). It is also appropriate here to quote a reference from Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. In this novel, while missionaries arrive in Mbanta to educate the natives about their false gods, Okonkwo’s friend Obierika tells to Okonkwo, “After a few days a few white men came to the market place which was full and began to shoot. Everybody was killed except the old and the sick who were at home . . . their clan is now completely empty” (129). Achebe shows that the white man acquires power by dividing the native clan and religion. For instance, Obierika tells Okonkwo that the white man “has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart” (162). In the same way the Americans smash the Vietnamese and their unity in the guise of “deliverance.” They believe that they are delivering themselves from the evil around them and also delivering the Vietnamese by bringing them under their shield.

The burden of the work under the great psychological pressure has affected Dawn’s body too. He says, “From head to foot I am the subject of a revolting body. Only the organs of my abdomen keep their blind freedom: the liver, the pancreas, the gut, and of course the heart squelching against one another like unborn octuplets” (7).

Dawn murders his son. Doctors try to find why stress should have driven him to a fatal attack on a child he loved and not to suicide or to alcohol. He holds the fruit-knife in his hand and does not know what he is doing with it. He says, “Holding it like a pencil, I push the knife in. The child kicks and flails. A long, flat ice-sheet of sound takes place” (42). His breakdown is connected with his background in warfare. Too much violence of the Americans depresses Dawn to such an extent that the violence turns on himself, the American man, and in turn, to another white, Dawn’s son. The son is killed as he does not have any “rebellion” against the father-voice
The act proves brutal both for the son and also for the father who loses all his sense. Dawn’s son becomes a prey of his father’s mental bedlam created by the war. He stands as a symbol of the war’s blameless victim. Coetzee suggests that if the authorities do not care for the people’s tranquility of mind, one day they are going to see its repugnant consequences on the children. It is the warning given by Coetzee.

**Violence : Sexual**

Sexual violence is one of the weapons to demoralize and torture enemy. Dawn’s photographs contain one picture which is “openly sexual” (13). It shows Clifford Loman, one time linebacker for the University of Houston, now a sergeant in the 1st Air Cavalry, copulating with a Vietnamese woman. The woman is tiny and slim, possibly even a child. Dawn has given the picture the provisional title “Father Makes Merry with Children” (13). This title indicates the relation between father and daughter, the Oedipus complex. It shows the father, the man as a master and sexual tyrannizer. Dawn is excited and says that “these pictures could be relied on to give my imagination the slight electric impulse that is all it needs to set it free again. I respond to pictures as I do not to print. Strange that I am not in the picture-faking side of propaganda” (13). This example depicts the sexual exploitation of the Vietnamese girls and women.

Dawn is suspicious about Marilyn’s extra-marital liaisons. He gets her photograph in which she is posed nude. The suspicion about her explains that the sexual violence has disturbed the white people’s lives also. Marilyn suffers because of Dawn’s inattentiveness towards her. Her expectation to get Dawn’s love is quite natural on her part but the war and violence make everything abnormal for Dawn. Dawn describes Marilyn as “the swimwear model I married” (39) and thus reduces her to a sexual idol of the world of models. Her name, Marilyn, as Susan Gallagher points out, reinforces this with its echo of “Marilyn Monroe” (70). Dawn’s description of sex with Marilyn focusses on his lack of satisfaction:

> Before the arrival of my seed her pouch yawns and falls back, leaving my betrayed representative gripped at its base, flailing its head in vain inside an immense cavern, at the very moment when above all else it
craves to be rocked through its tantrum in a soft, firm infinitely
trustworthy grip. The word which at such moments flashes its tail
across the heavens of my nerve quite extinguished consciousness is
*evacuation*: my seed drips like urine into the futile sewers of Marilyn’s
reproductive ducts. (8)

Dawn’s mental breakdown has made him not to see the Other as normal human.
Dominic Head, in this connection, comments, “The desire to impose physical contact
on the Other becomes a motif in the book, brutality expressed as a psychological
need. It is clearly significant that this need is presented, initially, as a phallocentric
concern. In the absence of male pleasure, sex is presented, here, as defilement” (31).

Americans expected the total submission from the Vietnamese. When they
faced opposition, Dawn says, “We cut their flesh open, we reached into their dying
bodies, tearing out their livers, hoping to be washed in their blood; but they screamed
and gushed like our most negligible phantoms. 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” (18).

This illustrates the Americans’ ignoble approach toward the Vietnamese women.

It is possible to study the world of Marilyn’s life as a woman. Her role as a
wife of Dawn throws light on the problems faced by women in the private lives
during the Vietnam War. Marilyn’s psychology about Dawn unlocks her mind.
Dawn’s mental loss puts the security of her child at stake. Marilyn fails to save her
child. It can be interesting to study her role as a mother and also a working woman.

- **Violence: Environmental**

America is responsible for the environmental destruction of the Vietnamese
land. The policy of the Americans is “round-the-clock bombing” (28). Sitting in the
library Dawn uses his intellect to send forth the “winged dream of assault upon the
mothering earth herself” (28). He says, “For years now we have attacked the earth,
explicitly in the defoliation of crops and jungle, implicitly in aleatoric shelling and
bombing.” (29). Devastating the earth makes Dawn feel guilty, but being an American
he has to declare gallantly, “Our future belongs not to the earth but to the stars. Let us
show the enemy that he stands naked in a dying landscape.” (29).
Environmental demolition will help neither the Americans nor their enemy. Dawn urges a massive chemical attack on the earth of the enemy country. David Attwell in his book *J. M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing* sees the ultimate application of Dawn’s mythography not as a physical attack on the earth but as “the broadcasting of radio propaganda that manipulates the psychic reflexes built into traditional Vietnamese culture” (43). According to Gallagher, “Dawn urges that the United States should concentrate on forming a counter-myth to the current Vietnamese myth” (57). However, Dawn very clearly states, “I look forward to Phase V and the return of total air war” (28). He imagines an assault on the earth preferably by means of “the soil poison PROP-12” (29). He says:

We should not sneer at spray techniques. If spraying does not give the orgasm of the explosion (nothing has done more to sell the war to America than televised napalm strikes), it will always be more effective than high explosive in a campaign against the earth. PROP-12 spraying could change the face of Vietnam in a week. PROP-12 is a soil poison, a dramatic poison which (I apologise again), washed into the soil, attacks the bonds in dark silicates and deposits a topskin of gray ashy grit. Why have we discontinued PROP-12? Why did we use it only on the lands of resettled communities? (29)

The use of soil poison indicates the possibility of environmental pollution. Dawn points out that the attackers have forsaken the earth-mother by implementing technological experiments on her. Dawn confesses:

We live no longer by tilling the earth but by devouring her and her waste products. We signed our repudiation of her with flights toward new celestial loves. We have the capacity to breed out of our own head. When the earth conspires incestuously with her sons, should our recourse not be to the arms of the goddess of technē who springs from our brains? Is it not time that the earth-mother is supplanted by her own faithful daughter, shaped without woman’s part? The age of Athene dawns. In the Indo-China Theatre we play out the drama of the end of the tellurian age and the marriage of the sky-god with his parthenogene daughter-queen. If the play has been poor, it is because we have stumbled about the stage asleep, not knowing the meaning of our acts. Now I bring their meaning to light in that blinding moment of
ascending meta-historical consciousness in which we begin to shape our own myths. (26)

This confession clearly states the effects of technology on the earth and its environment. The Vietnam War has caused high scale destruction of the land and its environment. The reference to the age of Athene indicates the age of war. But it is totally forgotten that though Athene was the goddess of war strategy, she disliked fighting without purpose and preferred using wisdom to settle the problems. She allowed war only for reasonable purpose and to solve the problems. The Americans do not fight for any reasonable purpose but for their self-interest by destroying the earth.

Through these examples of violence Coetzee underlines the need for humans to be human first; rather than to be hungry for power. Dawn is so much frustrated with the report that he wants to “tear this off” (30). Dawn wants peace. He wants to end the war. About the doctor’s hypothesis of his sickness Dawn 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, infecting me at the same time with guilty feelings that showed themselves in nervous symptoms” (48). Dawn’s failure indicates the end of colonial pressure. Hence, according to Allan Gardiner the title of the novel indicates a sense of “dusk” of the “day” of Empire (174). Dawn fails in his mission as an American but he succeeds in marching to become a deliverer himself by showing the guilt of the Imperial power. He wants to live life peacefully. He says:

When it comes to my turn I point out that I hate war as deeply as the next man. I gave myself to the war on Vietnam only because I wanted to see it end. I wanted an end to strife and rebellion so that I could be happy, so that we could all be happy. If rebellion ceased we could make our peace with America and live happily again. I believe in life. I do not want to see people throw away their lives. Nor do I want to see the children of America poisoned by guilt . . . Guilt was entering our homes through the TV cables. We ate our meals in the glare of that beast’s glass eye from the darkest corner. Good food was being dropped down our throats into puddles of corrosion. It was unnatural to bear such suffering. (48)

Through the news of the war on television the guilt enters the homes of the Americans and they come to know that it is unnatural to tolerate such suffering. The Imperial
terror dominates the Vietnamese and challenges their social consciousness. It is relevant here to quote Ngugi wa Thiong’o who says in an interview, “Fiction should firmly embody the aspirations and hopes of the majority of the peasants and workers. . . . Fiction cannot be the agent of change, people are the agents of the change.” The Vietnamese who are killed brutally and also the victims of the war like Dawn become the agents and forerunners of humanity to bring peace in the world. It is right in the view of Erich Fromm that the “Vietnam war was a symbol of the beginning of the end of the colonial people’s political and military domination by the West” (184). Dawn’s tragedy and the Vietnamese’ silent suffering indicate the beginning of the end of America’s domination.

*The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee*

The second novella *The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee* takes place in the eighteenth century. It is an account of the hunting expedition into the then unexplored interior of South Africa. It is a scholarly publication translated from Afrikaans and Dutch by one J. M. Coetzee. It is edited with an Afterward by fictious editor and historian, S. J. Coetzee. This story is told from the perspective of Jacobus Coetzee, an eighteenth–century Boer frontiersman living in South Africa in the year 1760. The story is based on the journal entries of events and encounters during an elephant hunting trip.

Jacobus, the hero of the novella takes six Hottentots with him. Five are his own men and he hires one, Barend Dikkop. His men are Jan Klawer, Jan Plaatje, Adonis and the Tamboer brothers. After crossing the Orange River, Jacobus meets people from the Namaqua tribe. He seeks permission to hunt the elephant in the land of the Namaqua.

Jacobus gives the Namaqua people many gifts like tobacco and rolled copper. They create a great mess while accepting the gifts. When the crowd is uncontrollable, Jacobus fires into ground at the feet of one woman. He warns the Hottentots not to touch his wagon. Then he travels north. On the way his health fails. He becomes too weak to sit. His eyes ache. He suffers from diarrhoea. He sees that his men are colluding with the strange Hottentots. He comes to know that he has fallen into the hands of barbarian people who are ignorant of the medicines. He is put into one of the Hottentot women’s menstruation huts. His most obedient servant is Klawer. Day by
day the health of Jacobus fails and he suffers from an eruption formed on his left buttock. He is anxious and worried about his health. He dislikes the food served by the Hottentots.

Jacobus comes out of the hut and walks to the bank of the stream but one Hottentot asks him to go back. Jacobus takes it as insult. Once, while he was washing himself in the running water the Hottentot boys make fun of him and take away his trousers. Very angrily Jacobus beats the boys. He screams with rage, snaps his teeth on one boy and heaves erect with a mouth full of hair and a human ear. Naked and filthy he kneels and sobs. The Hottentots are angry and refuse to give him shelter. They ask him to collect his things and leave. Everything from Jacobus’ wagon is stolen. His men except Klawer refuse to accompany him. So Jacobus begins his journey with Klawer. On the way Klawer becomes so sick and weak that he cannot walk or stand. Jacobus is very sorry for Klawer whom he calls his old friend. He decides to travel alone and come back with the necessities for Klawer. On 12 October 1760 he returns to his home.

In the Second Journey to the land of the Great Namaqua we are told about a punitive expedition organized by Jacobus against the Namaqua people. He goes there to take revenge and empties the village, the huts across the stream as well as the main camp, and assembles everyone, men, women, children and the blind, the bedridden. They include his four deserters also: Plaatje, Adonis, the Tamboer brothers. He recovers his stolen guns. The narrative concludes with his execution of the slaves and the massacre of the Namaqua tribe as they have humiliated him through their indifference and lack of fear for him.

In the Afterword, historical details are stated and in the Appendix is the record of deposition made by Jacobus Coetzee at the Castle in 1760. For S. J. Coetzee’s Afterword Coetzee has probably noted the source of an essay by one N. A. Coetzee, who in 1958 published in Historia, South African journal, an essay entitled Jacobus Coetzee: Die Boerepionier van Groot-Namakwaland.

Power over the natives creates violence in The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee. It is, mainly, the revengeful physical, sexual, and environmental violence. It is intended to note the examples of such violence and study them.
- Violence: Physical

There is a reference to the Bushman. It is said that the Bushman is “a wild animal with an animal’s soul” (58). If the Bushmen have a grudge against farmers, they come in the night, drive off as many lambs as they can eat, and mutilate the rest. The farmers kill the Bushmen with a great trick. For example, a farmer from Riebeecks Kasteel uses a trick to drive away the horde led by Dam. Once he learns that Dam’s horde is approaching a spring on his farm to drink. He rigs a gun behind rocks. Overlooking the spring, he loads it with handfuls of powder and a barrel of swanshot and pebbles. Then he leads a tripstring under the sand to a tobacco wallet as Bushmen cannot resist tobacco. Early next morning, over the hills the farmer hears the explosion which kills one male and one female Bush. He strings the male up from tree and mounts the female on a pole and leaves them as warnings. The only sure way to kill a Bushman is to catch him in the open where your horse can run him down.

There is a reference to the physical violence inflicted by the Bushmen towards their own people also. Once Jacobus gets a chance to walk and catch an old woman. He finds her in a hole in the rocks, abandoned by her people, too old and sick to walk. He explains, “For they are not like us, they don’t look after their aged, when you cannot keep up with the troop they put down a little food and water and abandon you to the animals” (59).

The Bushmen are killed only if one can hunt them as one hunts jackal because they vanish and can hide anywhere. Once Jacobus along with the Hottentots picks out the Bushmen beforehand and says, “There were seven men and two boys old enough to carry bows; we split up two to each and left the women and children for afterwards” (59). Jacobus further describes his killing: “My Bushman never had a chance to let on arrow off that day: in the end he simply gave up and stood waiting and I killed him with a ball through the throat” (60).

The horror of the physical violence can be noted in one example where Jacobus states, “A bullet is too good for a Bushman. They took one alive once after a herder had been killed and tied him over a fire and roasted him. They even basted him in his own fat. Then they offered him to the Hottentots; but he was too sinewy, they said, to eat” (60). Another example can be noted with reference to Dikkop. When Dikkop runs with the knife at other men, Jacobus becomes angry and asks him to
leave. Next day Dikkop goes away with a horse, a gun and a flask of brandy. Jacobus finds him, ties his hands to his saddle and runs him back to camp. There he allows the Hottentots to beat Dikkop violently with the sjambok.

When the Hottentots disturb Jacobus and try to steal the things from his wagon, he fires into the ground at the feet of a woman. The woman screams with fright and falls flat. The power of the gun makes the Hottentots weak and so Jacobus says, “The gun is our last defence against isolation within the travelling sphere. The gun is our mediator with the world and therefore our saviour” (79). He also says:

The instrument of survival in the wild is the gun, but the need for it is metaphysical rather than physical. The native tribes have survived without the gun. I too could survive in the wilderness armed with only bow and arrow, did I not fear that so deprived I would perish not of hunger but of the disease of the spirit that derives the caged baboon to evacuate its entrails. Now that the gun has arrived among them the native tribes are doomed, not only because the gun will kill them in large numbers but because the yearning for it will alienate them from the wilderness. (80)

Jacobus’ clothes are taken away by the boys while he is dipping his body in the running water. They prance up and down waving his trousers, daring him to recover them. He becomes angry and he beats them and a massive fist thunders one to the ground and grinds his face on the stones. He reacts violently to the boys who tease him. He grinds one boy’s face on the stones and then he himself becomes a victim of the Namaquas. He says:

Naked and filthy I knelt in the middle of the ring with my face in my hands, stifling my sobs in the memory of who I was. Two children raced past me. The rope which they held between them caught me under the elbows, under the armpits, and hurled me on my back. I huddled in a ball protecting my face. Long stillness, whispers, laughter. Bodies fell upon me, I was suffocated and pinned to the ground. (90)

Jocobs is astonished about the Namaqua Hottentots because after this incident they just say, “‘Go. Leave us. We cannot give you refuge any longer.’”(91). But they do not kill him even after biting the ear of the Hottentot boy. He says:

But were they true savages, these Namaqua Hottentots? Why had they nursed me? Why had they let me go? Why had they not killed me?
Why had their torments been so lacking in system and even enthusiasm? Was I to understand the desultory attentions paid me as a token of contempt? Was I personally unexciting to them? Would some other victim have aroused them to a pitch of true savagery? What was true savagery, in this context? Savagery was a way of life based on disdain for the value of human life and sensual delight in the pain of others. What evidence of disdain for life or delight in pain could I point to in their treatment of me? (97)

Jacobus’s surprise towards the Namaquas can be compared to Marlow’s feeling in *Heart of the Darkness*. Marlow wonders the restraint found in the savages and says:

> Why in the name of all the gnawing devils of hunger they didn’t go for us - they were thirty to five - and have a good tuck in for once, amazes me now when I think of it. They were big powerful men, with not much capacity to weigh the consequences, with courage, with strength, even yet, though their skins were no longer glossy and their muscles no longer hard. And I saw that something restraining, one of those human secretes that baffle probability, had come into play there. (63-64)

Though Jacobus is surprised towards the simple and innocent Hottentots who saved his life; he cannot free himself from his hatred towards them. He decided to take revenge on them for his insult and says: “I might be required to call up an expeditionary force and return in triumph to punish my depredators and recover my property” (98). He cannot believe in the values found in the natives.

In *The Second Journey to the Land of the Great Namaqua* the expedition of Captain Hendrik Hop is described. Jacobus is in this expedition. When they reach there at dawn he sees one girl, a pretty child on her way to the stream with a pot on her head. Jacobus says:

> She heard our horses, looked up, whimpered, and started to run, still balancing the pot, a considerable feat. A shot, one of the simple, matter-of-fact kind I have always admired, took her between the shoulder-blades and hurled her to the ground with the force of a horse’s kick. That first clear death on the ground, its unassuming lack of echo, will yet roll hard and clean as a marble from my dying brain. (100)
This was the beginning of the cruel mission of Jacobus. He says: “We emptied the village, the huts across the stream as well as the main camp, and assembled everyone, men, women, and children, the halt, the blind, the bedridden” (100). He takes a great delight and pride in killing the innocents.

Jacobus cannot forget the insult by his servants. There is an instance where the servants rebel against Jacobus. When the people of Namaqua ask Jacobus to leave their place he calls his servants. He orders Adonis to collect all his things and accompany him but Adonis refuses. Quite angrily he slaps Adonis but Adonis clasps his shoulders and opposes Jacobus. Even Plaatje does the same thing and says, “Master can go” (92). Further he warns him by saying, “Only master watch out who you hit next time” (92). According to Peter Knox-Shaw the execution of these men “would lack all credibility were it not for the act of defiance that incited their master to revenge” (79). It is obvious that the servants’ revolt reflects man’s psychological responses. A distressed individual can revolt and may slip into a state of violence.

Jacobus uses all the force for physical violence against his servants and describes it by saying: “Over them I then pronounced sentence of death. In an ideal world I would have waited the executions for the next morning, midday executions lacking the poignancy of a firing squad in a rosy dawn” (101). Adonis calls Jacobus “father” and begs not to shoot him. But for months Jacobus had nourished himself on this day of violence, because the time is on his side now. When one servant, Tamboer is brought bleeding in front of Jacobus, he says, “I am not going to have this, shoot him, finish it” (104). How he kills Adonis can be noted in his own words:

‘Stand up’, I said, ‘I am not playing, I’ll shoot you right here.’ I held the muzzle of my gun against his forehead. ‘Stand up!’ his face was quite empty. As I pressed the trigger he jerked his head and the shot missed. . . . I put my foot on Adonis’s, chest to hold him and reloaded. ‘Please, master, please’, he said, ‘my arm is sore.’ I pushed the muzzle against his lips. ‘Take it’, I said. He would not take it. I stamped. His lips seeped blood, his jaw relaxed. I pushed the muzzle in till he began to gag. I held his head steady between my ankles. Behind me his sphincter gave way and a rich stench filled the air. ‘Watch your manners, hotnot’, I said. I regretted this vulgarity. (104)

Jacobus kills his four servants: Plaatje, Adonis, the Tamboer brothers. He gives the order to “wipe the village off the face of the earth, do what is fitting with the
Hottentots” (102). He says “My mind bobbed in my body like a bottle on the sea. I was happy” (102). Jacobus faces desertation of his servants. In his essay “‘The Labyrinth of My History’: J. M. Coetzee’s Duskland” Attwell says that the deeper and more salient purpose of desertation is that:

it radically turns the narrative into a game of power, emphasizing the movement of the colonizer-self from assertion, to sharp encounter, followed by weakness and debilitation, attempts at self-preservation (at this point, desertion by servants), followed by recovery and reconstitution of self, and finally, re-assertion (by meting out punishment). (35)

Jacobus is very cruel towards his servants. His exploitation is an expression of his unimpeded temperament. Jacobus justifies his act of killing the Namaqua people because he thinks it is his duty as an intelligent man to kill the people of poor intelligence. He says:

I am an explorer. My essence is to open what is closed, to bring light to what is dark. If the Hottentots comprise an immense world of delight, it is an impenetrable world, impenetrable to men like me, who must either skirt it, which is to evade our mission, or clear it out of the way. As for my servants, rootless people lost forever to their own culture and dressed now in nothing but the rags of their masters. I know with certainty that their life held nothing but anxiety, resentment, and debauch. They died in a storm of terror, understanding nothing. They were people of limited intellect and people of limited being. (106)

It is true that people of limited being became the victims of the exploiters in history. The exploration of the crimes of Jacobus brings such victims to light.

Jacobus asks himself a question: “What did the death of all these people achieve?” (106). But he again justifies himself:

No more than any other man do I enjoy killing; but I have taken it upon myself to be the one to pull the trigger, performing this sacrifice for myself and my countrymen, who exist, and committing upon the dark folk the murders we have all wished. All are guilty, without exception. I include the Hottentots. Who knows for what unimaginable crimes of the spirit they died, through me? God’s judgment is just,
irreprehensible, and incomprehensible. His mercy pays no heed to merit. I am a tool in the hands of history. (106)

The murders by Jacobus are his “sacrifice” for himself and for his countrymen. It reminds of Rudyard Kipling’s poem “White Man’s Burden.” Kipling orders the whites to colonize the savages, which is a burdensome task for the colonizers and says:

Take up the White Man’s burden - -
Send forth the best ye breed - -
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives’ need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild - -
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child. (1-8)

Kipling justifies the war with the people “caught” by the whites because these people are “half-devil and half-child.” Jacobus, too, kills the weak, powerless, unintelligent, and uncivilized people who are “burden” to him. He inflicts the violence on them by calling himself “a tool in the hands of history” (106) and aspires to flee from his crimes.

• Violence : Sexual

In this novella there is no particular example of sexual violence. However, there are references to the colonizers’ relations with the Bushman and Dutch girls and their attitude towards them. Jacobus informs:

Most frontiersmen have had experience of Bushman girls. They can be said to spoil one for one’s own kind. Dutch girls carry an aura of property with them. They are first of all property themselves: they bring not only so many pounds of white flesh but also so many morgen of land and so many head of cattle and so many servants, and then an army of fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters. You lose your freedom. By connecting yourself to the girl you connect yourself into a system of property relationships. (61)
Jacobus compares Dutch girls with Bushman girls and says that a wild Bushman girl is tied to nothing, literally nothing. He further says:

She may be alive but she is as good as dead. She has seen you kill the men who represented power to her, she has seen them shot down like dogs. You have become Power itself now and she nothing, a rag you wipe yourself on and throw away. She is completely disposable. She is something for nothing, free. She can kick and scream but she knows she is lost. That is the freedom she offers, the freedom of the abandoned. She has no attachments, not even the wellknown attachment to life. She has given up the ghost, she is flooded in its stead with your will. Her response to you is absolutely congruent with your will. She is the ultimate love you have borne your own desires alienated in a foreign body and pegged out waiting for your pleasure.

(61)

This example indicates the sexual violence in the colonial rule, the conquest of the natives and the settlement of whites. The non-white women were the targets of the white men for their sexual pleasure. It is true even with the Dutch. According to Pierre L. Van den Berghe, “Dutch boys frequently had their first sexual experience with a slave girl” (321).

The Bushman women were exploited by the colonizers. For example, the account of Jacobus opens with such reference: “Five years ago Adam Wijnand, a Bastard, no shame in that, picked up and trekked to Korana country. He had his difficulties. People knew where he was from, they knew his mother was a Hottentot who had scrubbed the floor and emptied the bucket and done as she was told till the day she died” (57). André Béteille’s explanation will help to clarify about the word “Bastard”:

Intermixtution between Whites and non-Whites took place in the early phase of settlement, particularly in the Cape province. The White settlers in the Cape imported slaves, mainly from East Africa and Madagascar (and also from the East Indies), and there was considerable miscegenation between White men and slave women throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The descendants of these women, whether by White or non-White men, constitute the Coloured population of today, although some clearly have passed into
the White group. The Coloured group includes also the offspring of unions between White men and the indigenous Hottentot women, a sub-category popularly designated as ‘Bastards.’ (122-23)

The word ‘Bastard’ indicates the whites’ attitude towards the offspring of mixed unions. This view shows the colonizers’ selfish ways of thinking about women and sex.

There is a reference to the sexual atrocities inflicted on the natives while the village is emptied. Jacobus’s Griqua soldier chases one girl child of the Hottentot. Jacobus observes:

The Hottentot sat up holding his shoulder. He no longer seemed interested in the child. The Griqua was doing things to the child on the ground. It must be a girl child. I could not think of any of the Hottentot girls I might want except perhaps the girl who had fallen so straight forwardly to the first shot. One could always stroke oneself with an irony like that. (102)

This example represents the sexual violence imposed on the natives by the men in power.

It is believed that if one takes a Bushman woman with a small child she will stay with the man. She knows she has no chance alone in the veld. When a Bushman band moves into a neighbourhood she may try to slip away. “At such times it is safest to keep her under lock and key” (60). This trick against the women speaks about the exploitation of the Bushman women by the whites. During his illness of diarrhea, Jacobus, on one occasion, says, “I evacuated myself heroically over the tailgate” (75) of the wagon. The term, “evacuated” is used by Eugene also to describe the sex with his wife and according to Head, “Through this deliberate association the defilement of woman is connected to the defilement of colonization” (39).

The obsession of Jacobus with sex can be noted in one incident when he is put in a hut. He is restless in the separate hut. He dislikes the food given to him by the Hottentots. He is bored but he says, “I was relieved to find myself growing bored and impatient with my situation. Boredom is sentiment not available to the Hottentots: It a sign of higher humanity” (85). Thus he is proud of his superior white race, even of his boredom. He sees one dance performed by the Hottentots from a distance but in stead of enjoying the dance and getting relief in his boredom he observes:
The dance drew its inspiration from the sexual preliminaries of the
dove: the male fluffs out his feathers and pursues the female in a
bobbing walk, the female trips a few inches ahead of him and pretends
not to see. The dance prettily suggested this circling chase; but besides
depicting the chase it also brought out what lay within it, two modes of
sexuality, the one priestly and ecstatic, the other luxurious and urbane.
Nothing would have relieved me more than for the rhythms to simplify
themselves and the dancers to drop their pantomime and cavort in an
honest sexual frenzy culminating in mass coitus. I have always enjoyed
watching coitus, whether of animals or of slaves. (86)

Jacobus is thus not interested in the cultural programme of the natives. He is
interested in visualizing the actual sex. The reference to his watching the sex between
the slaves indicates the colonizers’ cynical ways of getting sexual gratification.
Jacobus, too, had he not been sick and helpless, probably would have exploited the
native women sexually in the violent way.

There is no major role given to women in this novella. Hence, there is no
possibility of special study of the women’s world in it. However, the references to
women studied under the sexual violence throw light on the colonizers’ attitude
toward the native women.

**Violence : Environmental**

The whites disturbed the pure environment of the African land. For example,
Jacobus states that he slew elephants, hippopotami, rhinoceros, buffalo, lions,
leopards, dogs, giraffes, antelope and buck of all descriptions, fowl of all descriptions,
hares, and snakes. He leaves behind him “a mountain of skin, bones, inedible gristle,
and excrement” (79). He calls this violence as his “life’s work” (79). According to
Michael Vaughan:

The dominant theme of Western civilization is revealed in *Dusklands*
in the form of quest. This quest has a two-pronged object: the
knowledge and control of nature. . . But the path to knowledge
involves the exercise of control: the forms of Nature are broken down
in order to be known. The seeker leaves a trail of detritus, of destroyed
forms. He thus fails to gain ultimate reassurance: he encounters everywhere images of negation, and hence of self-negation. (57)

It is easy for the powerful whites to destroy the African land. Jacobus says:

Savages do not have guns. This is effective meaning of savagery, which we may define as enslavement to space, as one speaks obversely of the explorer’s mastery of space. The relation of master and savage is a spatial relation. The African highland is flat, the approach of the savage across space continuous. From the fringes of the horizon he approaches, growing to manhood beneath my eyes until he reaches the verge of that precarious zone in which, invulnerable to his weapons, I command his life. (80-81)

It indicates that it is easy for the colonizers to master the slaves with the gun. Once they are mastered; it becomes easier to master their land and exploit it as per their needs. The white invaders’ aim was to capture the land of South Africa under the pretence of discovery. It is very clearly stated with reference to the botanical details in the Afterword by the editor, S. J. Coetzee:

The criteria for a new discovery employed by the gentlemen from Europe were surely parochial. They required that every specimen fill a hole in their European taxonomies. But when Bushmen first saw the grass which we call Aristida brevifolia and spoke among themselves and found that it was unknown and called it Twaa, was there not perhaps an unspoken botanical order among them in which Twaa now found a place? And if we accept such concepts as a Bushman taxonomy and a Bushman discovery, must we not accept the concepts of a frontiersman taxonomy and a frontiersman discovery? (116)

Though the editor speaks of the native’s discovery he stresses the discovery of frontiersman also. The colonial history proves that the natives’ nativity in all their fields was suppressed by the colonizers and their discoveries were brought to the forefront under the title of civilized ways of life. The whites are responsible for destroying the flora and fauna of the beautiful environment of Africa.

These examples of violence exhibit the prejudices of colonizers like Jacobus to treat the natives as inferiors. According to Derek Attridge, “These attitudes are most graphically manifested when, having been deserted by several of his servants on his elephant-hunting expedition to the territory of the Great Namaquas, he makes a
return visit to punish them with the utmost savagery” (15). Jacobus pines for revenge on the Namaquas.

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin consider the term ‘postcolonial’ “to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression” (2). Considering this view; it can be said that both the novellas remain the critiques of post-colonial study. All the culture is affected in both the novellas due to the colonial violence. Imperialism in *Dusklands* emerges with its various forms of tyranny in both the sections. In both the parts of the novel Coetzee portrays the picture of colonization. Eugene Dawn stands for the modern intelligent scholar working in purely technological world of the colonial power. Jacobus stands for the colonizer of the very early phase. Both of them unveil the masks of the so called civilized people of the West. *Dusklands* remains an agonizing encounter with the colonial violence. Coetzee’s portrayal of the colonizers in it shows him as a responsible and committed white writer. He depicts the confrontation of colonized and the colonizer. Charles Larson notes such confrontation as a distinguishing characteristic of the Third World novel. What he says about the “situational plot” can be applied to Coetzee’s *Dusklands*: “Ideally defined as a narrative in which the central character’s importance is replaced by a collective group of people undergoing a commonly shared experience” (11-12). The colonized people in *Dusklands* undergo commonly shared experiences of exploitation.

It is possible to examine *Dusklands* from the viewpoint of the Marxist approach. It would be interesting to find out whether Coetzee succeeds in having a grasp on the material circumstances and the historical situation in which they occur. The tyranny of the masters and the extermination can form major topics for the Marxist scholars. The reluctant dependence of the subdued on their persecutors and the relation between masters and slaves can also be studied.

The first person narration of the novel enhances the authentic effect of the novel. The use of the style of reporting by Dawn in the second part of the story makes it more objective and factual. It highlights the statistical, calculated, and ruthless approach of the power toward the underprivileged.

In both the novellas in *Dusklands* the theme of power and power struggle is dominant. They demonstrate what the Vietnam War reports and the exploitation of the
African lands hide. The title of the novel implies that both the United States and South Africa are ‘dusklands’ with the background of Imperialism and colonialism. Dawn and Jacobus emphasize the exploitation by the dominating powers and give a call to humanity by confessing their guilt. For the African, humanity is more important than anything else. In this context what Ezekiel Mphahlele says is clarificatory:

We in South Africa have for the last 300 years of oppression been engaged in a bloody struggle against white supremacy to arrest our human and not African dignity. This latter we have always taken for granted. During these three centuries, we, the Africans have been creating an urban culture out of the very conditions of insecurity, exile and agony. We have done this by integrating Africa and the West.

(247)

The colonized and oppressed in Dusklands fight for their human dignity. The violence in the novel claims the futility of brutality and stresses equality of rights and privileges for all.
Works Cited


After having considered the violence in *Dusklands*, this part attempts to explore the violence in *Foe*. *Foe*, winner of the Jerusalem Prize in 1987, is based on Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. It keeps the characters of Foe, Crusoe and Friday as they are in *Robinson Crusoe*. Coetzee omits the ‘e’ from Defoe’s ‘Crusoe’ and the ‘De’ from Defoe. He introduces a new woman protagonist, Susan Barton. The first name of the heroine of Defoe’s *Roxana* is also Susan.

The novel comprises four parts. It begins with Susan’s memoir. Returning from Bahia, where she has been searching for her daughter; she decides to leave for Lisbon. After ten days the crew mutinies. Bursting into their captain’s cabin, they slew him heartlessly. They put Susan in a boat with the captain’s corpse beside her and set them adrift. She rows with the dead captain all the morning but at last she is tired and could row no further. So she slips overboard and begins to swim and reaches the island to find herself with Friday, the Negro. Friday brings Susan to Robinson Cruso. Friday can’t speak. He has been mutilated. He has no tongue. Who did this or where and how it happened is not told. They are eventually rescued but on their way to England Cruso dies aboard ship due to illness. Susan keeps Friday under her care. She attempts to get money out of her story and drafts a memoir ‘‘The Female Castaway’’ and seeks out the author named Foe to have her story told. Part two comprises Susan’s letters to Foe. These letters never reach him because he is hiding, trying to evade his creditors. She also attempts to send Friday back to Africa but does not succeed. The third part, in the first person narrative, takes place in Foe’s refuge which Susan has succeeded to find. Woven into Friday’s story is the reference to one girl, also named Susan Barton, who claims to be Susan Barton’s daughter whom she vainly sought in the New World. But Susan does not accept her to be her daughter. It ends with Foe and Susan having slept together and Friday, at Foe’s suggestion, beginning to learn how to write. Part four features two first-person present-tense accounts by an unnamed narrator with her/his entry into Foe’s refuge. Both accounts end with this narrator referring to the mouth of Friday who is either asleep or dead.

The novel is a classic encounter between colonizers and colonized. Coetzee places the novel against the traditional model of literature, *Robinson Crusoe*, and examines the conditions under which South African writers have to write. Friday’s silence is a result of all types of violence: physical, psychological, racial, cultural,
colonial etc. The following explanation with examples proposes to prove that world will be better if human beings stop to be violent and let everybody live peacefully.

- **Violence**: Physical, Psychological, Racial, Cultural, Social, Socio-Political, and Colonial

  *Foe* begins with violence. After the captain’s murder by the crew Susan is put in a boat with the captain’s corpse. She gets tired of rowing. When she cannot row further she slips overboard. She swims towards the strange island and is carried by the waves to the beach. After experiencing this violence she meets Friday to be exposed to the violence inflicted on the Negroes by the whites.

  Friday is black, “a Negro with a head of fuzzy wool, naked save for a pair of rough drawers” (5-6). When Susan looks at him she thinks that she has come to an island of cannibals. The very body of Friday gives the proof of physical violence inflicted on him. There are bleeding cracks in Friday’s feet. There is also “a scar like a necklace” (155) on his neck, left by a rope or chain. The scar stands as a symbol of the past injury done to him.

  Friday in his first meeting with Susan helps her. Though he is unable to speak he becomes a silent helper. She says, “He reached out and with the back of his hand touched my arm” (6). He signs her to follow him. When she cannot walk Friday offers her his back and takes her on his back and then ascends the hillside. About his help she says, “I hesitated to accept for he was a slight fellow, shorter than I. But there was no help for it. So part-way skipping on one leg, part-way riding on his back, . . . I ascended the hillside, my fear of him abating in this strange backwards embrace” (6). Susan exemplifies a colonizer who refuses the help from the colonized. Stephen Watson characterizes Coetzee’s such main protagonists as “colonizers who wish to elude at almost any cost their historical role as colonizers” (378). Friday’s is unique example of a Negro, who quite innocently helps a white woman out of only human sympathy.

  Friday’s silence is a result of many hidden atrocities against him. Cruso informs Susan that Friday was a child, a mere child, and a little slave-boy when he started to live with him. He tells stories of cannibals, of how Friday is saved from being roasted and devoured by fellow-cannibals. Susan finds Friday in all matters a
dull fellow, an imbecile incapable of speech. Cruso opens Friday’s mouth and tells her that Friday has no tongue and says, “That is why he does not speak. They cut out his tongue” (23). Susan says that Friday must have been a child when his tongue was cut. When asked who cut his tongue, Cruso answers:

Perhaps the slavers, who are Moors, hold the tongue to be a delicacy. . . Or perhaps they grew weary of listening to Friday’s wails of grief that went on day and night. Perhaps they wanted to prevent him from ever telling his story: who he was, where his home lay, how it came about that he was taken. Perhaps they cut out the tongue of every cannibal they took, as a punishment. How will we ever know the truth? (23)

Cruso says that Friday lost his tongue before Friday came to him. Cruso stands for all the slaves of his time. David Davies states, “The American slave trade and West Indian plantations enjoyed their golden years during the so called Age of Enlightenment” (391). The colonizers livedlavishly in Africa by using the labour of the black slaves.

Friday’s is a terrible story. He is a victim of violence: first a slave and then a castaway. He is robbed of his childhood and consigned to a life of silence. Susan questions about his tragedy to Cruso: “Was Providence sleeping?” (23). Cruso’s answer to it bespeaks his justification for Friday’s tragedy. He says:

If Providence were to watch over all of us . . . who would be left to pick the cotton and cut the sugar-cane? For the business of the world to prosper, Providence must sometimes wake and sometimes sleep, as lower creatures do. . . . You think I mock Providence. But perhaps it is the doing of Providence that Friday finds himself on an island under a lenient master, rather than in Brazil, under the planter’s lash, or in Africa, where the forests teem with cannibals. Perhaps it is for the best, though we do not see it so, that he should be here, and that I should be here, and now that you should be here. (23-24)

Cruso justifies Friday’s condition by putting blame not on the exploiters of Friday but on Providence and keeps himself also away from any responsibility. As Jacobus in Dusklands calls himself “a tool in the hands of history” (106) and escapes from any responsibility; Cruso too shakes away any remorse for the victims like Friday. Cruso uses his authority on Friday and Friday, too, lives with him without any protest. He
uses his authority even on Susan and says to her, “While you live under my roof you will do as I instruct!” (20). But Susan belongs to his race and so she daringly replies, “I am on your island, Mr Cruso, not by choice but by ill luck’ . . . . ‘I am a castaway, not a prisoner . . .’” (20). Later on she asks his pardon for her harsh words but she calls him a ruler in her account of her first visit to Cruso. She says, “I presented myself to Robinson Cruso in the days when he still ruled over his island, and became his second subject, the first being his manservant Friday” (11).

Friday’s mutilation is a secret. It hides many details about the colonial injustice inflicted on him. Susan reacts confusingly to Friday’s mutilation. At the beginning of her stay on the island she is not fair towards him. She does not pay attention to Friday but when she comes to know of his mutilation, her attitude towards him changes. She says:

Hitherto I had found Friday a shadowy creature and paid him little more attention than I would have given any house-slave in Brazil. But now I began to look on him – I could not help myself – with the horror we reserve for the mutilated. It was no comfort that his mutilation was secret, closed behind his lips (as some other mutilations are hidden by clothing), that outwardly he was like any Negro. (24)

Susan says, “I could not speak, while he was about, without being aware how lively were the movements of the tongue in my own mouth. I saw pictures in my mind of pincers gripping his tongue and a knife slicing into it, as must have happened, and I shuddered ” (24). She does not like his coughs and finds herself flinching when he comes near her. Behind his back she wipes the utensils his hands touch although she says that she is ashamed to behave thus. This act of Susan is like the behaviour of the high caste people against the untouchable Bakha in Mulk Raj Anand’s magnum opus Untouchable. While enjoying jalebis in a shop, forgetting his caste, Bakha rushes against on man. The man yells at Bakha and attacks him for touching and polluting him and his clothes. The untouchables were compelled to live a life of hardships in the caste-ridden social systems in India. Susan, too, does not like Friday, his appearance, race, and she holds her breath “So as not to have to smell him” (24). Later on, her attitude towards Friday changes and she thinks of educating and liberating him. Coetzee’s commitment to humanity can be compared to Mulk Raj Anand’s commitment. Anand observed the situation of the untouchables in India. In the same way he knew that even the West though modern and wealthy was not free
from racial conflicts. Hence, he says in *Apology for Heroism*, “We had set our hearts . . . on our liberation and those of other oppressed people, whoever, wherever they were and whatever shape, size and colour” (53-54). *Foe*, too, is a strong say against the suppressed.

Friday’s body is strong and has tolerated the physical violence. Hence, even in the great storm, howling wind or the rain falling in torrents, he is able to sleep like a baby. There is one incident that shows Friday’s calmness of mind. One day Susan spies him and sees that he is not fishing. She says:

After paddling out some hundred yards from the shelf into the thickest of the seaweed, he reached into a bag that hung about his neck and brought out handfuls of white flakes which he began to scatter over the water. At first I thought this was bait to lure the fish to him; but no, when he had strewn all his flakes he turned his log boat about and steered it back to the ledge, where he landed it with great difficulty through the swell. (31)

Very curiously Susan finds out that the white flakes are the white petals and buds from the brambles which are flowering on the island. She concludes that probably Friday offers flowers to god of the waves or observes some other such superstition. It is a mystery for her. About Friday she reflects:

What were you about when you paddled out to sea upon your log and scattered petals on the water? I will tell you what I have concluded: that you scattered the petals over the place where your ship went down, and scattered them in memory of some person who perished in the wreck, perhaps a father or a mother or a sister or a brother, or perhaps a whole family, or perhaps a dear friend. (86-87)

According to Chris Bongie, “Friday’s scattering of petals is a form of writing which Susan is incapable of reading because of its dissimilarity to her own” (271). It is also possible that the modes of expressing the feelings are not known to the colonizers because they demolished the natives’ ways of life and their culture. Hence, probably Susan cannot realize Friday’s expression.

There is one more example of Friday’s mysterious act. It is his interesting dance in Foe’s robes on his body which makes Susan say, “In the grip of the dancing he is not himself. He is beyond human reach” (92). Probably, Susan thinks Friday dances “to remove himself, or his spirit, from Newington to England, and from me
too” (104). We can say that probably through such acts Friday tries to maintain the peace of his mind with which he has tolerated the physical and psychological violence exerted against him. In this connection Cruso’s remark is important as he says, “not every man who bears the mark of the castaway is a castaway at heart” (33). In this sense Friday might be considering himself not a castaway at his heart.

Susan asks Cruso about the laws of his island. Cruso says that laws are made for one purpose only, “to hold us in check when our desires grow immoderate. As long as our desires are moderate we have no need of laws” (36). He further tells her, “On the island there is no law except the law that we shall work for our bread, which is a commandment” (36). Though Cruso’s rule seems to be putting him and Friday on equal footing of the work, Cruso has very well maintained himself to be a master and Friday to be his obedient servant. Because he says, “Friday has lived with me for many years. He has known no other master. He follows me in all things” (37). But Susan wonders to see that Friday does not try to do any harm to Cruso. She says, “What had held Friday back all these years from beating in his master’s head with a stone while he slept, so bringing slavehood to an end and inaugurating a reign of idleness?” (36-37). No violence occurs on their island because as Susan says:

> It seemed to me that all things were possible on the island, all tyrannies and cruelties, though in small; and if, in despite of what was possible, we lived at peace one with another, surely this was proof that certain laws unknown to us held sway, or else that we had been following the promptings of our hearts all this time, and our hearts had not betrayed us. (37)

When Cruso is rescued by the merchantman *John Hobart*, Susan does not want to leave Friday all alone on the island but tells the ship’s master:

> He is a Negro slave, his name is Friday, and he is fled among the crags above the north shore. Nothing you can say will persuade him to yield himself up, for he has no understanding of words or power of speech. It will cost great effort to take him. Nevertheless, I beseech you to send your men ashore again; in as much as Friday is a slave and a child, it is our duty to care for him in all things, and not abandon him to a solitude worse than death. (39)

Thus Susan helps Friday who has saved her, helped her and brought her safe to the island of Cruso. Hena Maes-Jelinek interpretes Susan’s act differently and states that
Susan shows little interest in Friday but changes her attitude when she hears of his mutilation. Then she feels revulsion rather than compassion and thinks that Friday must be rescued but her duty to save him is “clearly the white man’s burden” (235). For Kwaku Korang if Friday is the “child”; he is “a problem child” (191). Friday is described by Susan as “a child unborn, a child waiting to be born that cannot be born” (122).

It is very significant on the part of Friday that though he is tyrannized, exploited physically, psychologically and culturally; he does not behave violently with anybody. On the contrary he helps Susan. Friday’s behaviour emphasizes his non-violent way of behaviour with others. His silence is a lesson to all the tyrants. Is not Friday, a New Africa waiting to be born after a long suffering?

Susan takes Friday to Cruso’s cabin and says to Friday, “Here is your master, Friday. . . . He is sleeping, he has taken a sleeping draught. You can see that these are good people. They will bring us back to England, which is your master’s home, and there you will be set free. You will discover that life in England is better than life ever was on the island” (41). She knows that Friday does not understand the words. But she believes that Friday “understood tones, that he could hear kindness in a human voice when kindness was sincerely meant” (41). She requests the seamen to allow Friday to sleep on the floor at Cruso’s feet. She thinks that the ship and the sailors must be awakening the darkest of memories in Friday of the time when he was taken from his homeland and transported into captivity in the New World. When the seamen bring Friday; Susan says, “when he was brought aboard Friday would not meet my eye. With sunken shoulders and bowed head he awaited whatever was to befall him” (40-41). It indicates Friday’s enslaved submission.

Susan takes Friday with her at her house at the Clock Lane. Friday is taken to be a cannibal staying in Clock Lane. Susan says, “I found three boys at the cellar door peering in on Friday. I chased them off, after which they took up their stand at the end of the lane, chanting the words: ‘Cannibal Friday, have you ate your mam today?’” (55). Friday’s appearance thus creates his image as a cannibal and he becomes an object of exhibition for all. Here the role of the children insists that they enjoy the spectacle of a slave. They are not taught to feel sorry for those who are caged and treated as slaves. If they are not ready to take Friday as a normal human being then in future it is possible that they follow the slavery or give the secondary treatment to
the people like Friday. Coetzee points out the probable peril by deliberately demonstrateing the children’s reaction toward Friday.

Friday “grows old before his time, like a dog locked up all its life” (55). Susan wants to improve and free Friday. But actually how Friday should feel through her efforts can be said by using the words of Paulo Freire:

The oppressed, who have been shaped by the death-affirming climate of oppression, must find through their struggle the way to life-affirming humanization, and this does not lie simply in having more to eat (though it does involve and cannot fail to include having more to eat). The oppressed have been destroyed precisely because their situation has reduced them to things. In order to regain their humanity they must cease to be things and fight as men. This is a radical requirement. They cannot enter the struggle as objects in order later to become men. (43-44)

It is true that Friday and the people of his race were converted into “things” and “objects” by the colonizers. It is the duty of the persons like Cruso and Susan to bring Friday back to the humanity and it is also their responsibility to return to Africa its glory.

Susan wants to bring Friday, “out of darkness and silence” (60). But colonial tendency can be noted when she says, “But is that the truth? There are times when benevolence deserts me and I use words only as the shortest way to subject him to my will. At such times I understand why Cruso preferred not to disturb his muteness. I understand, that is to say, why a man will choose to be a slaveowner. Do you think less of me for this confession?” (60-61). It means that Susan cannot free herself from her wish of subjugating Friday as per her will. It is a confession of a white, a colonizer.

Friday of Robinson Crusoe is different from Coetzee’s Friday. In Robinson Crusoe, Friday is very intelligent and industrious man who is quick to learn everything. He develops all the necessary skills which enable him to execute all the tasks which were formerly done by Crusoe himself. He even learns to handle a gun and a pistol. Crusoe teaches Friday elements of Christian religion and makes him a real Christian. But Coetzee’s Friday learns nothing. Another difference is that Defoe’s Friday is a handsome Carib Indian youth with near European features whereas Coetzee’s Friday is African, a Negro. The only similar thing between Defoe’s and
Coetzee’s Friday is their loyalty and non-violence towards their colonial masters. But in *Robinson Crusoe* we know that Friday is loyal to his master because he has saved his life from the cannibals. The details of Coetzee’s Friday are only those told by Crusoe. We do not know exactly how Friday comes under the control of Crusoe. Coetzee’s Friday does not learn, write, speak or even oppose his master. He is to be studied as an example of colonized African silenced by the colonizer. Coetzee’s Friday is different from Shakespeare’s Caliban in *The Tempest*. Caliban, half animal and half human being, is enslaved by Prospero. Prospero teaches Caliban language but he uses it only to curse him. Caliban never likes to work. Slavery is in his blood. If he is tired of Prospero, he is willing to be the slave of Stephano. He plots against Prospero, has no sense of gratitude. But Coetzee’s Friday is loyal to his master, Crusoe. However, we do not understand whether Friday is a happy slave. Actually Prospero makes only his daughter, his people and his own self happy. But he does not try to make Caliban happy. Caliban is condemned as “as devil, a born devil” ((IV, 162). About Caliban, Prospero says, “He is as disproportioned in his manners / As in his shape” (V. I. 200-01). Shakespeare’s Caliban speaks and learns but he calls himself “as thrice-double ass’ (295) and promises to be “wise hereafter” (237). In this way Caliban is an ass and is not wise. Coetzee’s Friday, too, cannot learn wisely. Both Caliban and Friday share same fate at the hands of the colonizers. But how Friday’s silence can be his weapon to fight the oppression is a different point in Coetzee’s novel. Hence, though *Foe* is a parody of *Robinson Crusoe*, it becomes different from it as Linda Hutcheon defines parody as, “repetition with critical distance, which makes difference rather than similarity” (6).

Friday remains absolutely the Other for Susan because she cannot know any details about his life or his mutilation. She says:

> On the island I accepted that I should never learn how Friday lost his tongue, as I accepted that I should never learn how the apes crossed the sea. But what we can accept in life we cannot accept in history. To tell my story and be silent on Friday’s tongue is no better than offering a book for sale with pages in it quietly left empty. Yet the only tongue that can tell Friday’s secret is the tongue he has lost! (67)

Susan is helpless and cannot get Friday’s story and *Foe* is not interested in description of the island adventure. He says to Susan:
The island is not a story in itself. . . . We can bring it to life only by setting it within a larger story. By itself it is no better than a waterlogged boat drifting day after day in an empty ocean till one day, humbly and without commotion, it sinks. The island lacks light and shade. It is too much the same throughout. It is like a loaf of bread. It will keep us alive, certainly, if we are starved of reading; but who will prefer it when there are tastier confections and pastries to be had? (117)

Foe does not want just “a loaf of bread” of Susan’s story but he wants more “tastier” story. His views indicate his commercial attitude towards his profession. He, like, the colonizers, does not wish to know Friday’s life. Susan tells him, “I told you of my conviction that, if the story seems stupid, that is only because it so doggedly holds its silence. The shadow whose lack you feel is there: it is the loss of Friday’s tongue” (117). But Foe does not reply her. However, later on, Foe insists to teach writing to Friday.

Susan wants to educate Friday and thinks Friday may have lost his tongue but he has not lost his ears and so he can, “take in the wealth stored in stories and so learn that the world is not, as the island seemed to teach him, a barren and a silent place” (59). Susan says:

What I fear most is that after years of speechlessness the very notion of speech may be lost to him. When I take the spoon from his hand (but is it truly a spoon to him, or a mere thing? - I do not know), and say Spoon, how can I be sure he does not think I am chattering to myself as a magpie or an ape does, for the pleasure of hearing the noise I make, and feeling the play of my tongue, as he himself used to find pleasure in playing his flute? (57)

Susan tries to teach alphabet to Friday. She teaches him the words like ‘spoon’ by showing the actual spoon to him. She draws the picture of a house and writes the letters beneath it. She utters the word and takes Friday’s fingers and guides them over the letters. Susan says, “Friday wrote the four letters h-o-u-s, or four shapes passably like them: whether they were truly the four letters, and stood truly for the word house, and the picture I had drawn, and the thing itself, only he knew” (145-46). She then draws a ship and begins to teach him about Africa by drawing a row of palm trees with a lion roaming among them and says: “Was my Africa the Africa whose
memory Friday bore within him?” (146). Then she teaches the word “mother” by drawing a woman with a babe in arms. But Friday does not learn to write. Susan thinks:

Could it be that somewhere within him he was laughing at my efforts to bring him nearer to a state of speech? I reached out and took him by the chin and turned his face toward me. His eyelids opened. Somewhere in the deepest recesses of those black pupils was there a spark of mockery? I could not see it. But if it were there, would it not be an African spark, dark to my English eye?” (146)

Friday’s refusal to learn to write the English alphabet is his rejection to learn the master’s language. It is true, in the words of Roberto González Echevarría that “writing unveils not the truth, nor the true origins, but a series of repeated gestures and ever renewed beginnings” (212). Friday as a representative of the blacks has to wait for the new beginnings. Susan tries to extract the truth about Friday’s tongue by showing him the knife and the sketches of Cruso to know whether Cruso is responsible for cutting his tongue. But Friday does not respond and she grows disheartened. She doubts whether any Moorish slave-trader will be remembered by Friday. “But Friday’s gaze remained vacant” (69). Susan is discouraged and tears up her pictures. She says, “I have no doubt that amongst Africans the human sympathies move as readily as amongst us. But the unnatural years Friday had spent with Cruso had deadened his heart, making him cold, incurious, like an animal wrapt entirely in itself” (70).

Susan takes hard efforts to teach Friday the work of washing clothes but she is unable to teach him. She tells him that Mr Foe is going to write his story. This story will be known to the whole world and then there will be no need for him to stay in a cellar. Friday has lost his tongue but he has not lost his ears, still all the ideas to teach him fail. She teaches him digging and cutting the hedge. Friday takes the shears and cuts in a clean line for his digging is impeccable.

Friday has lost all the emotions of love, care, sympathy or anger. He has only followed his master Cruso. All the efforts to educate Friday fail. Susan says, “bitterly I began to recognize that it might not be mere dullness that kept him shut up in himself, nor the accident of the loss of his tongue, nor even an incapacity to distinguish speech from babbling, but a disdain for intercourse with me” (98).
Friday’s loss of feelings can be interpreted as the result of psychological violence exerted against him by the colonizers.

Susan tries to teach Friday and his tragedy gets more and more prominent. She says, “Oh, Friday, how can I make you understand the cravings felt by those of us who live in a world of speech to have our questions answered!” (79). When Susan looks at the remorseful situation of Friday, she says:

I think of a watch-dog, raised with kindness but kept from birth behind a locked gate. When at last such a dog escapes, the gate having been left open, let us say, the world appears to it so vast, so strange, so full of troubling sights and smells, that it snarls at the first creature to approach, and leaps at its throat, after which it is marked down as vicious, and chained to a post for the rest of its days. I do not say that you are vicious, Friday, I do not say that you will ever be chained, that is not the import of my story. Rather I wish to point to how unnatural a lot it is for a dog or any other creature to be kept from its kind; also to how the impulse of love, which urges us toward our kind, perishes during confinement, or loses its way. (80-81)

Susan is sorry for Friday’s alienation from his people. It is very unnatural survival for a dog to be kept away from its kind. In the same way it is very cruel on the part of Friday to be kept away from the world of his own people although he is not at all vicious. Susan wants to get an answer for her doubt whether Cruso believed that Friday was once a cannibal child or whether he thought that Friday’s craving for human flesh would come back to him.

Friday’s energy of life is crushed. Susan has a significant question about the mystery of Friday’s submission to Cruso. She wants to ask:

Why, during all those years alone with Cruso, did you submit to his rule, when you might easily have slain him, or blinded him and made him into your slave in turn? Is there something in the condition of slavehood that invades the heart and makes a slave a slave for life, as the whiff of ink clings forever to a school-master? (85)

Susan is surprised to see that Cruso is not interested in establishing a colony. She wishes to ask Friday, “If your master had truly wished to be a colonist and leave behind a colony, would he not have been better advised (dare I say this?) to plant his seed in the only womb there was?” (83). Susan’s question indicates the white man’s
thirst for establishing colonies. It also indicates her desire to be a mother of the white man’s child.

Susan guesses that Friday will understand the language of music but Friday does not respond although he is able to play the tune of six notes over the flute and soprano. Susan fails to teach him new tunes. With his own tunes, to Susan, he seemed to be, “in a trance of possession, and his soul more in Africa than in Newington” (98). She says, “Had the cutting out of his tongue taught him eternal obedience, or at least the outward form of obedience, as gelding takes the fire out of a stallion?” (98). As Friday cannot speak; his story will be written by Susan and Foe as they think about him. This is how it can be noted that the colonizers produced stories about the colonized. Susan confesses to Foe:

You err most tellingly in failing to distinguish between my silences and the silences of a being such as Friday. Friday has no command of words and therefore no defence against being re-shaped day by day in conformity with the desires of others. I say he is a cannibal and he becomes a cannibal; I say he is a laundryman and he becomes a laundryman. What is the truth of Friday? You will respond: he is neither cannibal nor laundryman, these are mere names, they do not touch his essence, he is a substantial body, he is himself, Friday is Friday. But that is not so. No matter what he is to himself (is he anything to himself? – how can he tell us?), what he is to the world is what I make of him. (121-22)

These words of Susan stand for colonizers’ achievement of shaping the natives in their own ways. Her statement can be taken as a confession of a white. In the words of Kirsten Holst Petersen, Susan fulfills an, “allegorical role representing white South African liberals” (250). Susan accepts that Friday’s brutal exploitation will be known to the world only through his tongue. According to Teresa Dovey:

It is important to recognize that Friday’s speechlessness does not mean that the colonised subject does not have a voice of his/her own. It suggests, rather, that the colonial subject has no discursive authority within the field of western discourses. If Susan Barton’s feminine discourse, along with its strategic silences, represents the attempt to speak as Other, to evade masculine discourse, Friday’s tonguelessness,
castrated body is testimony to this novel’s resolve not to speak for the
Other. (26)

However, the exposure to Friday’s silence by the white author like Coetzee is a major
achievement and hope in the politics of South Africa and also Africa as a whole.

Susan’s reflection on Friday’s past suggests the optimistic requirement to
look at the blacks. For instance, while traveling to Marlborough Susan comes across
the bundle of the stillborn baby. She sends Friday to bring it. When she sees the baby
she wishes to keep it where it is found. She is afraid that if Friday is a cannibal he will
eat the baby but nothing happens. Susan suggests the way to think about the past of
Friday eventhough he is thought to be a cannibal. She says:

We cannot shrink in disgust from our neighbour’s touch because his
hands, that are clean now, were once dirty. We must cultivate, all of us,
a certain ignorance, a certain ignorance, a certain blindness, or society
will not be tolerable. If Friday forswore human flesh during his fifteen
years on the island, why should I not believe he had forsworn it
forever? And if in his heart of hearts he remained a cannibal, would a
warm living woman not make a better meal than the cold stiff corpse
of a child? (106)

Susan suggests that even if it might be true that Friday was a cannibal, she has to be
blind and tolerant with his past. Because she knows that the hands of the whites are
dirtier than the hands of the cannibals in Africa.

Susan wants to free Friday. She hangs a little bag around Friday’s neck
containing a deed granting Friday freedom. But Friday is unable to understand
anything of the freedom. She writes to Foe, “I have written a deed granting Friday his
freedom and signed it in Cruso’s name. This I have sewn into a little bag and hung on
a cord around Friday’s neck” (99). It is quite tragic that a human being has to wear a
sign to tell others that he is a free being. Susan plans to take Friday to Bristol or to
Brazil. On their way they are taken to be the strollers or gypsies. Susan brings Friday
to Bristol and inquires about the ships going to Africa. At last she goes to one captain
of the ship and shows him the paper hanged about his neck. But she suspects
something wrong and says, “Whether it was the captain’s manner or whether the
glance I caught passing between him and the mate I cannot say, but suddenly I knew
all was not as it seemed to be” (110). She cancels her decision of sending Friday to
Africa because she comes to know that Friday will be sold into slavery again. She
confesses, “I do not love him, but he is mine. That is why he remains in England. That is why he is here” (111). She says, “We have lived too close for love, Mr Foe. Friday has grown to be my shadow. Do our shadows love us, for all that they are never parted from us?” (115). Susan’s view that in spite of her lack of love for Friday, Friday is hers, indicates the subjection of the Africans brought by uprooting them from their land and culture. It indicates the colonizers’ system of mastering the Africans. In the words of Helen Tiffin, Foe is a prominent novel “writing back” not only to an English canonical text Robinson Crusoe “but to the whole of the discursive field” within which such a text “operated and continues to operate in post-colonial worlds” (23). Dissociation of the natives from their lands and making them slaves was a common practice among the colonizers. According to Rosemary Jolly, Susan Barton’s notion of taking Friday to Bristol represents a kind of apartheid approach; “It is another simplistic attempt to recuperation, one which tries to restore both Friday and Susan Barton herself to an impossible original innocence. “Africa” here becomes a territorial metaphor for a kind of heathen prelapsarian Eden capable of containing Friday and thus releasing Susan Barton from her ‘burden’” (11).

Susan stresses that because of Friday’s silence the story seems ineffective. According to Ryszard Bartinik, “The lost tongue seems to stand for all submerged voices, including the native voices of South Africans, without whose presence it is impossible to reach the core of what a country, its people and its culture really are” (55). Susan’s role is to cooperate with Friday and help him to regain his identity. She understands that true life on the island will not be described without giving voice to Friday. She wants to support Friday’s unarticulated version of the story. Susan’s role can be compared to Nadine Gordimer, who, as Coetzee says in Stranger Shores, points to an existence of some demands obliged “upon South African writers created by racial polarisation” (269). The suppressed self-expression of the blacks cannot be expressed by the whites. However, to find out a means to bring into light the atrocities inflicted by the whites, is the need of the blacks as well as the whites. Coetzee suggests taking this as a challenge on the part of the whites. For instance, Susan says, “The story of Friday’s tongue is a story unable to be told, or unable to be told by me. That is to say, many stories can be told of Friday’s tongue, but the true story is buried within Friday, who is mute. The true story will not be heard till by art we have found a means of giving voice to Friday” (118). “Giving a voice to Friday” confirms the suppression of the voice at all the levels: social, moral, cultural, political or any other.
The blacks were not allowed to speak or express their feelings against the whites in their own mother-tongues. They were robbed of their culture and values and were forced to submit themselves to the whites. About their suppression Ngugi wa Thiong’o says:

To control a people’s culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others.

For colonialism this involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people’s culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the colonizer. (16)

It also means that “art” should find out the ways of giving voice to the suppressed and silenced.

When Friday cannot continue to learn writing Susan says to Foe, “Friday will not learn” (147). But Foe tells her that perhaps Friday, “may yet be visited by the Muse” (147). This hope of Foe is significant which suggests the possibility of a new dawn for Africa. To Susan, Foe says, “Do we of necessity become puppets in a story whose end is invisible to us, and towards which we are marched like condemned felons?” (135) He further says:

In a life of writing books, I have often, believe me, been lost in the maze of doubting. The trick I have learned is to plant a sign or marker in the ground where I stand, so that in my future wanderings I shall have something to return to, and not get worse lost than I am. Having planted it, I press on; the more often I come back to the mark (which is a sign to myself of my blindness and incapacity), the more certainly I know I am lost, yet the more I am heartened too, to have found my way back. (135-36)

Foe, who is sometimes not interested in the story of the island, in these lines suggests that he wants to come away from the centre. But he is sure that when in future he will wish to return to the centre, he will be confused. This confusion of Foe may be taken to say that as a white, Foe will have to come away from centre so that the blacks will be at the centre; not at the margin.

Coetzee brings out colonial exploitation by focusing on Friday’s mutilation. Foe says to Susan: “In every story there is a silence, some sight concealed, some word
unspoken, I believe. Till we have spoken the unspoken we have not come to the heart of the story. I ask: Why was Friday drawn into such deadly peril, given that life on the island was without peril, and then saved?” (141). According to David Hoegberg, “Foe is referring here to the silences in Barton’s own story, most notably that of Friday, but his words apply also to silences in Defoe’s text that are the traces of its political unconscious” (87).

Coetzee attempts to explore the levels of Friday’s oppression. Foe tells Susan about Friday’s freedom:

But how is Friday to recover his freedom, who has been a slave all his life? That is the true question. Should I liberate him into a world of wolves and expect to be commended for it? What liberation is it to be packed off to Jamaica, or turned out of doors into the night with a shilling in your hand? Even in his native Africa, dumb and friendless, would he know freedom? . . . . As to Friday, how can Friday know what freedom means when he barely knows his name? (148-49)

Friday who does not know his own name, is not allowed by the exploiters to know anything. Hence, he is not able to understand what it means to be free. Foe again questions Susan: “But you must ask yourself, Susan: as it was a slaver’s stratagem to rob Friday of his tongue, may it not be a slaver’s stratagem to hold him in subjection while we cavil over words in a dispute we know to be endless?” (150). Susan’s reply to this question is “He is not free, but he is not in subjection. He is his own master, in law, and has been since Curso’s death” (150). But Foe tells Susan, “Nevertheless, Friday follows you: you do not follow Friday. The words you have written and hung around his neck say he is set free; but who, looking at Friday, will believe them?” (150). This comment by Foe clarifies that as he and Susan are whites, they have failed to free Friday of his slavery. According to Dick Penner, Foe, “does not lend itself as readily as any of Coetzee’s earlier novels to a reading of South Africa or colonial analogues” (212). However, pretending to humanize the Africans, the so called ‘animals’ for the Western people; the whites followed the practice of using the Africans as slaves. Hence, whether it is Africa or South Africa, slavery was a major form of violence inflicted by the colonizers.

Foe speaks the truth about the colonization. Susan says, “So be it: I am Sinbad of Persia and Friday is the tyrant riding on my shoulders. I walk with him, I eat with
him, he watches me while I sleep. I cannot be free of him I will stifle!” (148). Foe says:

Sweet Susan, do not fly into a passion. Though you say you are the ass and Friday the rider, you may be sure that if Friday had his tongue back he would claim the contrary. We deplore the barbarism of whoever maimed him, yet have we, his later masters, not reason to be secretly grateful? For as long as he is dumb we can tell ourselves his desires are dark to us and continue to use him as we wish. (148)

This statement by Foe emphasizes the way in which the colonizers behaved with the colonized.

Friday’s mutilation unveils the complete life history and tragedy of Friday and consequently of the Africans. The self introspection of Susan becomes significant on the part of whites’ part in it. Jean-Paul Sartre opens the eyes of the whites for their crimes and says in the Introduction to *The Wretched of the Earth*:

Let us look at ourselves, if we can bear to, and see what is becoming of us. First, we must face that unexpected revelation, the strip-tease of our humanism. There you can see it, quite naked, and it’s not a pretty sight. It was nothing but an ideology of lies, a perfect justification for pillage; its honeyed words, its affection of sensibility were only alibis for our aggressions. (21)

Friday symbolizes all the oppressed Africans. His mutilation and his being a slave indicate his submissiveness and such practices were very commonly followed by the Western civilization. If the violence is to be evaded it is relevant to think here of Sigmund Freud’s self-explanatory analysis:

Civilization has to use its utmost efforts in order to set limits to man’s aggressive instincts and to hold the manifestations of them in check by psychical reaction-formations. Hence, therefore, the use of methods intended to incite people into identifications and aim-inhibited relationships of love, hence the restriction upon sexual life, and hence too the ideals’ commandment to love one’s neighbour as oneself □ a commandment which is really justified by the fact that nothing else runs so strongly counter to the original nature of man. (49)
Friday does not remain only the African. His silence becomes the universal silence of all the oppressed in the world. And if all the civilizations check the aggressive instincts of their people no Friday will be silenced.

Literature reflects country’s social, political, cultural aspects. It also expresses the emotional attitudes of the people. Novelists bring the themes of struggles and wars from the source of human history. The African novels reflect the colonial and post-colonial life of the Africans. According to F. L. Lucas, “Depression finds vent in expression. The things of time fall forgotten for the moment among timeless things. Besides, a pen can be like a diviner’s twig; one never knows, till one tries to put them on paper, the things one has at the bottom of one’s mind” (324). The African writers bring to notice the depression caused by the gap between the worlds of the colonized and the colonizer. Hence, their writing does not remain only the expression of the feelings of the Africans. It gets universalized and stands for all the oppressed like Friday in the world. The same type of the universalization can be found for instance in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*. In this novel Roy gives the sufferings of the people like Ammu and Velutha. Ammu suffers as a victim of patriarchal society and Velutha, being an untouchable becomes a victim of the caste system in India because they fall in love with each other. It depicts the treatment given to the suppressed people who are silenced like Friday.

Susan is depicted in the novel as a person always trying to be the author, the male writer and also an authoritarian of her story. But she knows the truth that the only tongue that can tell Friday’s secret is his lost tongue. She says to Foe, “I am not, do you see, one of those thieves or highwaymen of yours who gabble a confession and are then whipped off to Tyburn and eternal silence, leaving you to make of their stories whatever you fancy. It is still in my power to guide and amend. Above all, to withhold. By such means do I still endeavour to be father to my story” (123). Susan forces Foe to write her story. She tries to author her story, however, according to Sue Kossew, “the final power of representation lies with Foe himself” (173). Though Susan wishes to “father” (123) her story and control it, in the later part of the novel her failure to educate or liberate Friday confuses her. She doubts the identity of the girl, named Susan. She as if loses her voice and confesses to Foe:

In the beginning I thought I would tell you the story of the island and, being done with that, return to my former life. But now all my life grows to be story and there is nothing of my own left to me. I thought I
was myself and this girl a creature from another order speaking words you made up for her. But now I am full of doubts. Nothing is left to me but doubt. I am doubt itself. Who is speaking me? Am I a phantom too? To what order do I belong? And you: who are you? (133)

The problem of silencing reaches a culmination in the final section of novel. At the end of the novel; Friday is lying calmly without any movement. The narrator says:

His mouth opens. From inside him comes a slow stream, without breath, without interruption. It flows up through his body and out upon me; it passes through the cabin, through the wreck; washing the cliffs and shores of the island, it runs northward and southward to the ends of the earth. Soft and cold, dark and unending, it beats against my eyelids, against the skin of my face. (157)

Friday’s last silence demands the reassessment of the entire story. It stresses that the tyrannies and cruelties must be averted not by atrocious political controls but by elemental human ethics. According to Derek Attridge, “hauntingly allusive description of the soundless stream issuing from his body is a culmination of the book’s concern with the powerful silence which is the price of our cultural achievements” (67). For Dominic Head:

This ‘slow stream’ is uninterrupted, indicating its irresistible historical necessity. . . . It is an unvoiced history which is acknowledged, a silence with a moral compulsion that, itself, silences the authorial figure who is obliged to cease his narrative in its presence. The novel ends by gesturing towards a post-colonial utopia, through the symbolic release of Friday’s ‘unending’ history, filling first the island, and then the earth itself. In the face of this enormous implication, the complicitous author willingly chooses silence. (126)

The slow stream running through Friday’s mouth flows without any obstruction. It means that the stories of the blacks’ exploitation will be known to all. According to Maes-Jelinek, in the running stream “lies the source of change in South Africa. . . . Coetzee’s . . . fiction is for the first time genuinely open-ended” (241). Friday of Robinson Crusoe is different in many angles from Coetzee’s Friday. According to Zillah Eisenstein, the story of Robinson Crusoe allows for a type of “colonial romance of total devotion and subjugation which speaks choice rather than slavery. The
rescued Carribean Amerindian Friday performs the tale of radical individualism right alongside slavery. The cannibal residue on the island reminds us to call up our false memories of savagery” (44). But Coetzee’s Friday by remaining mute fights slavery as well as shows his resistance to it. Friday’s silence can be considered as a kind of eloquence. He is denied expression; it is a suppression of a human right. His silence is a device to “voice” protest. Friday succeeds in his protest and emphasizes silently that the colonizers must respect the identity of the Negroes and return them their dignity. The Negroes of today are accomplishing Friday’s wish by maintaining their identity. For instance, the news in *Times of India* is relevant to quote here. The news informs that a White House spokesman confirmed that Barack Obama, the United States’ first black president “Chose Black, African Am., or Negro” in responding to Question 9, about the race for the 2010 census questionnaire. The “Negro” was retained on the 2010 form because the Census Bureau of US believes that some older blacks still refer to themselves that way. Obama, the son of a black father from Kenya and a white mother from Kansas, “could have checked white, checked both black and white, or the last category on the form ‘some other race’ which he would then have been asked to identify in writing. There is no category specifically for mixed race or biracial” (1). It means that the Negroes are proud to be what they are and what they fought for. Their silence is thus speaking for their dignity.

*Foe* can be read as a post-colonial novel. Friday represents anti-colonial as well as post-colonial Other in the novel. Almost all the features of post-colonial novel like the displacement, exile, experiment to teach the master’s language, Friday’s resistance to learn to write, hierarchical relationships, and the enslavement are present in the novel. Friday’s tragedy symbolizes the collective experience of the Africans. The resistance is the main feature of the post-colonial novel and Friday’s silence is his powerful weapon of resistance. The struggle for respectable survival is important in post-colonialism. In the same way the barriers in communication between the colonizer and the colonized is a challenging aspect of post-colonial study of this novel.

It is possible to evaluate critically whether *Foe* can be read from the Marxist view. It can be investigated whether the social events in the novel can be analysed from this standpoint. The enslavement of humans in the European masterpiece *Robinson Crusoe* and *Foe* is a key challenge for the Marxist scholars.
It is possible to examine the role of Susan as a female castaway. It would be a topic of study to note how Susan behaves as a woman with both Friday and Cruso. Her struggle to swim and arrive at the island is astonishing. Her traveling at various places is also interesting. Her role as a mother can also be focused on. Her attitude as a white woman toward the Negroes can also be studied. Even her relation with Foe and her world as a woman writer can be observed.

Coetzee’s technique of using Defoe’s novel as a source for his work indicates his mastery of handling the complex relationship between the two novels. The two novels can be studied by highlighting the similarities and differences between them. Among the various types of post-modern fiction, rewriting the old stories is one of the traits of fiction. *Foe* for its feature of rewriting *Robinson Crusoe* exemplifies a post-modern novel which indulges in various types of experimentations in style. The technique of using letters in *Foe* can also be highlighted and studied as the psycho-analytical disclosures.

*Foe* remains an example of the Negroes’ struggle which took a violent form in Africa. The physical, psychological, racial, social, cultural, and other types of violence shattered the political stability of the Africans. The violence crushed the gallantry of the Africans and silenced them. Friday’s story stresses the need on the part of oppressing human beings to be human to end the brutal violence in the world to understand the silences of the subjugated.
Works Cited


**Age of Iron**

Having discussed the violence in *Foe* in the previous part, the present section attempts to elucidate the violence in Coetzee’s *Age of Iron*. This novel differs from *Dusklands* and *Foe*. It deals more unequivocally with contemporary political realities in South Africa. The time period noted at the end of the novel is 1986-89. This period in South Africa is characterized by the anti-apartheid struggle.

Set in Cape Town, *Age of Iron* narrates the agony of Mrs. Curren, a retired classics professor. The story progresses through four parts of the novel. The white liberal protagonist, Mrs. Curren, is dying of cancer. Against the background of violence by the whites and the blacks alike, she remembers her past and her daughter who has left South Africa because of the violence in the country and has settled in America. The novel is designed as an extended letter from the mother to her daughter settled far away. She comes across a beggar, a vagrant Vercueil, whose race is not mentioned. She allows him to stay with her and it is on this very day her cancer is diagnosed. She requests Vercueil to deliver her letter to her daughter after her death. He is reluctant to post the letter. But later on he tells Mrs. Cureen that he will post the parcel for her. After a life dedicated to books and culture Mrs. Curren is dying of cancer and witnesses the murder of her housekeeper Florence’s son Bheki and his friend John. Both are shot by police. After the attack on John at Mrs. Curren’s house in Florence’s quarters Mrs. Curren is upset and runs away and hides beneath an overpass. A gang of children attempts to rob her. She is rescued by Vercueil. He brings her to her house. She continues to live with him while cancer continues its destruction. The violence opens her eyes to the beginning of an ‘Age of Iron’ after the age of clay and stone in which the young boys’ slave parents lived. She is disgusted and shocked by the activities of the regime.

Coetzee focuses on various themes in this novel: the separation of mother and daughter, the tragic end of Mrs. Curren’s life, a metaphor of decay from within, a different kind of friendship between the two persons of opposite races, apartheid and other subjects. He unfolds social and political tragedy in an undeveloped country.

The novel has the background of violence committed by both whites and blacks. The violence can be studied by dividing it into two types: physical and socio-
political. The following examples and their interpretation will explain the nature and extent of violence in which humans can indulge mindlessly.

• **Violence: Physical**

There are many examples of physical violence in the novel. They can be interpreted to explain the tribulations of the regime and the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa.

The novel begins with the references to the black derelicts’ helpless life which is the result of the physical violence inflicted on them. The physical condition of Vercueil states the unhealthy state forced on the people like him. While describing him and noticing him in an alley down the side of her garage, Mrs. Curren says:

> Yesterday, at the end of this alley, I came upon a house of carton boxes and plastic sheeting and a man curled up inside, a man I recognized from the streets: tall, thin, with a weathered skin and long, carious fangs, wearing a baggy gray suit and a hat with a sagging brim. He had the hat on now, sleeping with the brim folded under his ear. A derelict, one of the derelicts who hang around the parking lots on Mill Street, cadging money from shoppers, drinking under the overpass, eating out of refuse cans. 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. (3-4)

There are so many of such homeless people in Cape Town. What is worst is the situation of the roaming gangs of “the sullen-mouthed boys, rapacious as sharks, on whom the first shade of the prison house is already beginning to close. Children scorning childhood, the time of wonder, the growing time of the soul. Their souls, their organs of wonder, stunted, petrified” (7).

Contrary to the life of the black boys, is described the life of the white boys which is full of comfort, health and care. They have, “Swimming lessons, riding lessons, ballet lessons; cricket on the lawn; lives passed within walled gardens guarded by bulldogs; children of paradise, blond, innocent, shining with angelic light, soft as putti” (7). The life of the white children intensifies the ruthless realities of the
black children who are caught up prematurely in the violent battle to put an end to apartheid.

Inwardly, the disease of cancer attacks Mrs. Curren viciously. Her cancer exemplifies her inner physical decay along with the external decay of humanity amidst the violence. She says: “Shrewd was death’s aim when he chose my breast for his first shaft” (8). About her cancer she writes: “An attack: it was just that: the pain hurling itself upon me like a dog, sinking its teeth into my back. I cried out, unable to stir” (10).

She questions:

What do I care for this body that has betrayed me? I look at my hand and see only a tool, a hook, a thing for gripping other things. And these legs, these clumsy, ugly stilts: why should I have to carry them with me everywhere? Why should I take them to bed with me night after night and pack them in under the sheets, and pack the arms in too, higher up near the face, and lie there sleepless amid the clutter? The abdomen too, with its dead gurglings, and the heart beating, beating: why? What have they to do with me? (12-13)

Mrs. Curren’s indifferent observation of her body intensifies her physical suffering. However, she wants to survive and so she loves life because she says, “Despite all the glooms and despairs and rags, I have not let go of my love of it” (13). She wishes that someone should come and soothe her. She writes to her daughter, “I want to be held to someone’s bosom, to Florence’s, to yours, to anyone’s, and told that it will be all right” (40). It indicates her inner need of comfort.

Mrs. Curren keeps her bodily cancer away and steps forward to cure the social cancer eating the Africans physically, mentally and socially. The physical sufferings of the derelicts like Vercueil put before us the picture of the resentment they suffer. About Vercueil, Mrs. Curren observes:

The worst of the smell comes from his shoes and feet. He needs socks. He needs new shoes. He needs a bath. He needs a bath every day; he needs clean underwear; he needs a bed, he needs a roof over his head, he needs three meals a day, he needs money in the bank. Too much to give: too much for someone who longs, if the trust be told, to creep into her own mother’s lap and be comforted. (19-20)
Mrs. Curren’s imagination about how Vercueil would die states the reality of the physical violence in South Africa. She says:

One winter’s night, sooner or later, when the artificial fire in his veins is no longer hot enough to preserve him, he will perish. He will die in a doorway or an alley with his arms hugging across his chest; they will find him with this dog or some other dog by his side, whimpering, licking his face. They will cart him off and the dog will be left behind in the street and that will be the end of that. No arrangements, no bequests, no mausoleum. (32-33)

The confrontation between Vercueil and Bheki’s friend, John marks the awareness of the black boys about dubious life enforced by the people in power. John hates Vercueil for his inactiveness and very angrily takes his brandy away and shouts at him, “‘They are making you into a dog!’ . . . ‘Do you want to be a dog?’” (45). Here “they” refers to all those who are responsible for Vercueil’s vulnerability. The race of Vercueil is not mentioned in the novel. However, John’s statement indicates that Vercueil is, no doubt, a part and parcel of the struggle against whites in power. Whether he is black or coloured is not important because one thing sure about him is that his existence is as much in difficulty as is the existence of children like Bheki and John. Derek Attridge in “Trusting the Other: Age of Iron” says, “As this act suggests, Bheki’s friend is the most strongly delineated exemplar of the new role which the children of the township have found, leading their elders in the revolutionary struggle which has displaced the normal concerns of childhood and reversed traditional parent-child relationships” (106). Vercueil hits John on his neck with the flat of his hand. John strikes back at him and Bheki too joins him. There is blood on Vercueil’s lip. Mrs. Curren goes and stops the scene and warns Florence not to allow strangers in her house. But Bheki’s challenge marks the protest of the blacks. He questions, “Must we have a pass to come in here?” (47). John stands for the nationwide wave of violence among the teenagers in South Africa in 1980s.

Mrs. Curren advises Florence to teach her children not to behave ruthlessly with the elders like Vercueil and not to feel proud about her son’s “generation because they are afraid of nothing” (48). She reminds Florence about the unspeakable things happened in the townships. Florence had witnessed the violence and commented, “I saw a woman on fire, burning, and when she screamed for help, the children laughed and threw more petrol on her” (49). Florence had confessed that, “I did not think I
would live to see such a thing” (49). However, Florence is proud of the children and she calls them “children of iron” (50) who are able to fight with the whites as it is the “age of iron” (50). Florence argues that, “It is the whites who made them so cruel!” (49). On this remark, Mrs. Curren says:

And when they grow up one day . . . do you think the cruelty will leave them? What kind of parents will they become who were taught that the time of parents is over? Can parents be recreated once the idea of parents has been destroyed within us? They kick and beat a man because he drinks. They set people on fire and laugh while they burn to death. How will they treat their own children? What love will they be capable of? Their hearts are turning to stone before our eyes, and what do you say? You say, “This is not my child, this is the white man’s child, this is the monster made by the white man.” Is that all you can say? Are you going to blame them on the whites and turn your back? (49-50)

Florence’s anger is the result of the violence caused to her people. Bheki and John have come from Guguletu where there is a trouble and the police come in and shoot all the time. The children are angry and it is true that children represent the future. The country has to face their anger.

There is an example of physical violence inflicted by the police on Bheki and John. The violence represents the cruelty of the police. While Bheki is on the crossbar and John pedals the bicycle, the yellow police van dashes them and the bicycle collides with one plumber’s truck parked nearby. Mrs. Curren is shocked to witness the scene. There is a deep frown on Bheki’s face, he wets his lips with his tongue over and over; his eyes are closed. Vercueil’s dog tries to lick him, his one shoe is off, and a trouser leg is torn open and wet with blood. With his jacket the plumber tries to staunch the blood that streams down from John’s face. But the flow cannot stop. His flesh across the forehead hangs open in a loose flap. Blood flows in a sheet into the boy’s eyes and makes his hair glisten, it drops on the pavement, it is everywhere. Mrs. Curren says, “I did not know blood could be so dark, so thick, so heavy. What a heart he must have, I thought, to pump that blood and go on pumping!” (62). Mrs. Curren is reminded of her daughter’s injury when she was eleven. She remembers the care she had taken about her daughter’s injury. Now she thinks that it is good that her daughter is not in Africa, “A land that drinks rivers of blood and is never sated” (63). Mrs.
Curren lifts aside John’s sodden blue jacket. Blood runs down his face. Between thumbs and forefingers she pinches together as much as she could but when she relaxes blood pours again steadily. Mrs. Curren says, “It was blood, nothing more, blood like yours and mine” (63). The understanding that the colour of the blood and its very function in human bodies of all races is same, makes Mrs. Curren understand her own role in South Africa more clearly. Her liberal thinking and her disgust with the political order of the country create responsiveness about the need to stop violence and better the situation. She arrives at such understanding only after her introspective thinking. This understanding of Mrs. Curren contrasts with her previous attitude towards people like Vercueil. For instance, she comments on Vercueil: “For a while I stood staring down on him, staring and smelling. A visitor, visiting himself on me on this of all days” (4). Again she says:

The first of the carrion birds, prompt, unerring. How long can I fend them off? The scavengers of Cape Town, whose number never dwindles. Who go bare and feel no cold. Who sleep outdoor and do not sicken. Who starve and do not waste. Warmed from within by alcohol. The contagions and infections in their blood consumed in liquid flame. Cleaners-up after the feast. Flies, dry-winged, glazen-eyed, pitiless. My heirs. (5)

Those who are “contagions and infections” later on turn out to be human beings like herself for Mrs. Curren. She sees, touches, and feels Bheki’s blood and then there comes a shift in her interpretation and understanding of the blacks, the derelicts, and the oppressed. Though they are “flies” she calls them her “heirs” because she knows her position as a white in the land of South Africa.

Florence’s refusal to take Bheki to hospital for the fear of the police implies the gap prevailing between the police and the masses of South Africa. She does not even want to lodge a complaint. Mrs. Curren says, “I am talking about men in power. They must see you are not afraid. This is a serious matter. They could have killed you, Bheki. What have they got against you anyway? What have you and that friend of yours been up to?” (66). Bheki says, “They are not after me. They are after everybody. I have done nothing. But anybody they see they think should be in school, they try to get them. We do nothing. We just say we are not going to school. Now they are waging this terror against us. They are terrorists” (67). The children like Bheki do not want to go to school because in school the regime wants them to be “fit
into the apartheid system” (67). This statement by Bheki puts before us the picture of the racial struggle. Mrs. Curren, who is very conscious about education, says to Florence, “I can’t believe you want your son out on the streets killing time till apartheid comes to an end. Apartheid is not going to die tomorrow or the next day. He is ruining his future” (67-68). But challengingly Bheki questions her, “What is more important, that the apartheid must be destroyed or that I must go to school?” (68). Mrs. Curren is unable to answer his question. She says, “That is not the choice . . . . But was I right? If that was not the choice, what was the choice?” (68). Such expressions make Mrs. Curren more conscious about her role as a white. The police do not register Mrs. Curren’s complaint against the two policemen because she refuses to expose the names of Bheki and John. She refuses because she does not want the boys to be troubled by the police.

John’s strong resistance represents the South African youth’s capacity to bear the physical blows of the whites. He is not found in Woodstock Hospital where he is expected to be. Bheki says, “They are all the same, the ambulances, the doctors, the police” (67). When he is found in another hospital Mrs. Curren goes to visit him. She places some fruit before him and reminds him, “Do you remember me? I am the woman Bheki’s mother works for. I was watching this morning: I saw everything that happened” (78). Bheki does not respond to her. Mrs. Curren says:

I did not like him. I do not like him. I look into my heart and nowhere do I find any trace of feeling for him. . . . This boy is not like Bheki. He has no charm. There is something stupid about him, something deliberately stupid, obstructive, intractable. He is one of those boys whose voices deepen too early, who by the age of twelve have left childhood behind and turned brutal, knowing. . . . While he lay in the street, while I thought he was dying, I did what I could for him. But, to be candid, I would rather I had spent myself on someone else. (78-79)

It makes no difference to John about who Mrs. Curren is. His head is bandaged, and his left arm is strapped against his chest. Mrs. Curren states, “Even when he was at his weakest his body was hard, tense, resistant under my hand. Around this boy I now felt the same wall of resistance. Though his eyes were open, he did not see; what I said he did not hear” (79). She knows her words have no meaning for John because her words are, “The words of a woman, therefore negligible; of an old woman, therefore doubly negligible; but above all of a white” (79). Mrs. Curren’s statement comments on the
position of a white liberal woman in South Africa. She belongs to the group of oppressors for John. Commenting on the colonized woman and the white woman colonizer, Robin Visel rightly states that although the white woman colonizer “too is oppressed by white men and patriarchal structures, she shares in the power and guilt of the colonists” (39).

The other example of the victims of physical violence is the situation at Guguletu. Along with the violence in Guguletu continuous shooting takes place in the bush also. Mrs. Curren accompanies Florence to find Bheki at Guguletu. She sees burnt shanties pouring forth black smoke. The affected people stare at the destruction of their houses. Their sufferings increase due to the heavy rain. Mrs. Curren sees that one man attacks one door and a woman with a baby in her arms comes out of the home followed by three barefoot children and then the whole structure collapses. Violence continues even in this situation. A stone comes sailing out of the crowd and falls with a clatter on the roof of the burning shack. Other hits at the feet of a man who gives a menacing shout. He and his fellows then take sticks and bars and advance to oppose the attack. Mrs. Curren wants to run. She says, “There was nothing I longed for more than to get into my car, slam the door behind me, close out this looming world of rage and violence” (96). She tells Florence’s brother, Mr. Thabane, “‘Yes, I want to go home. I am in pain, I am exhausted’” (97). He says, “‘You want to go home’”, and argues, “‘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?’” (97). He forces her to say something about the situation. Shocked by the terrible sights she says, “‘They are to be condemned. But I cannot denounce them in other people’s words. I must find my own words, from myself. Otherwise it is not the truth. That is all I can say now’” (98-99). One man in the crowd says, “‘This woman talks shit’” (99). She agrees with the man’s reaction and says that to speak of such a situation she needs, “the tongue of a god” (99). She cannot stand there and feels helpless. But Mr. Thabane looks at her and says, “‘There is no need to be afraid anyway’ because “‘Your boys are here to protect you’” (101). This remark comments on the safety of the whites. Besides the example of the burnt shanties and the fire, there are repetitive references to the death and shooting by the police. John Sarev, about fire and death in the novel, says, “Age of Iron, with its apocalyptic imagery of fire and death, suggests that South Africa is dying from the inside, and the wrath of the children is likened to a malignant cancer devouring the colonial bone” (135). There is no peace anywhere in the city.
Florence declares to Mrs. Curren, “‘why the police are coming after the children and chasing them and shooting them and putting them in jail. You must not ask me’” (54). Because Florence puts the blame on the whites. Children are robbed of their childhood. For instance, while going to find out Bheki, a little boy shows a way to him. Mrs. Curren looks at the boy and ponders:

Ten years old at most. A child of the times, at home in this landscape of violence. When I think back to my childhood I remember only long sun-struck afternoons, the smell of dust under avenues of eucalyptus, the quiet rustle of water in roadside furrows, the lulling of doves. A childhood of sleep, prelude to what was meant to be a life without trouble and a smooth passage to Nirvana. Will we at least be allowed our Nirvana, we children of that bygone age? I doubt it. If justice reigns at all, we will find ourselves barred at the first threshold of the underworld. (92)

Mrs. Curren contrasts her comfortable childhood with the childhood of the black children. She confesses the guilt of killing the innocents and is suspicious about her life after Nirvana. She is sure that the whites will be barred at the underworld after their deaths in this world.

Bheki becomes the victim of the brutality and is killed in violence:

Against the far wall, shielded from the worst of the rain, were five bodies neatly laid out. The body in the middle was that of Florence’s Bheki. He still wore the gray flannel trousers, white shirt, a maroon pullover of his school, but his feet were bare. His eyes were open and staring, his mouth open too. The rain had been beating on him for hours, on him and his comrades, not only here but wherever they had been when they met their deaths; their clothes, their very hair, had a flattened, dead look. In the corners of his eyes there were grains of sand. There was sand in his mouth. (102)

Bheki’s death in the “maroon pullover of his school” is tragic. It indicates the sorrowful end of his school life. The physical violence in the novel reminds Dennis Brutus’s poem “Nightsong: City”:

from the shanties creaking iron sheets
violence like a bug-infected rag is tossed
and fear is immanent as sound in the wind-swung
bell;

The sounds begin again;
the siren in the night
the thunder at the door
the shriek of nerves in pain

Importunate as rain
the wraiths exhalé their woe
over the sirens, knuckles, boots;
my sounds begin again. (4-6, 10-13, 18-21)

The creaking iron-sheets from shanties, the sirens, and the boots of police are
common for the blacks of South Africa. Mrs. Curren witnesses all such scenes. Mrs.
Curren shakes, shivers and thinks, “This is the worst thing I have witnessed in my life.
And I thought: Now my eyes are open and I can never close them again” (102-03).
This statement by Mrs. Curren indicates her clear understanding and acceptance of the
racial violence. Mr. Thabane informs her that if she digs the bullets of their bodies she
will find on the bullets the information that they are, “Made in South Africa. SABS
Approved” (103). Mrs. Curren confesses that she is not indifferent to this war and
further says, “‘How can I be? No bars are thick enough to keep it out’” (103). She
even thinks that she has no right to cry there because she knows that she is the
member of the white community. She is inside her community and outside her
community. She says, “We shoot these people as if they are waste, but in the end it is
we whose lives are not worth living” (104). Her “eyes are open” now and she “can
never close them again” because she is shocked to see the violence inflicted on the
blacks. She reaches her car and sees, “Someone had thrown a rock through the
windscreen. Big as a child’s head, mute, it lay on the seat amid a scattering of glass as
if it now owned the car. My first thought was: Where will I get a windscreen for a
Hillman? And then: How fortunate that everything is coming to an end at the same
time!” (104). It indicates the end of the era of getting Hillman cars and also the end of
her own life due to inner and outer cancer. She even imagines: “If someone had dug a
grave for me there and then in the sand, and pointed, I would without a word have
climbed in and lain down and folded my hands on my breast. And when the sand fell
in my mouth and the corners of my eyes I would not have lifted a finger to brush it away” (104). Mrs. Curren imagines dying in the manner like Bheki and accompanying him. She becomes a quintessence of conscience of the whites who feel guilty for the wrong done by their people.

Mrs. Curren does not care for her safety. The military officer on the road wants to help her and warns her not to visit such places. He informs her that the dead ones she has seen are not the only ones who have died. The killings are going on all the time. “Those are just the bodies they picked up from yesterday. The fighting has subsided for the time being but as soon as the rain stops it will flare up again” (106). The officer is surprised to see a white woman in the area of violence so he says, “I don’t know how you got here—they should have closed the road—but this is a bad place, you shouldn’t be here. We’ll radio the police, they can escort you out” (106-07). Mrs. Curren asks the officer a question, “‘Why don’t you just put down your guns and go home, all of you?’” (107). Because she knows that nothing can be worse than what they are doing. According to her, what the officers are doing is worse for their souls also because they are following not the god’s way but that of the devil. She calls herself “a doll” (109) without life. She calls her people, the colonizers as the “doll folk” (112). It is painful for her to witness the violence. She feels: “Grief past weeping. I am hollow, I am a shell. To each of us fate sends the right disease. Mine a disease that eats me out from inside. Were I to be opened up they would find me hollow as a doll, a doll with a crab sitting inside licking its lips, dazed by the flood of light” (112). About her cancer pains, she further says, “Only this creature is faithful to the end. My pet, my pain” (112). Mrs. Curren’s reflections on her physical pain denote both her inner grief as well as the grief outside in the South African society.

Mrs. Curren’s cancer reminds Albert Camus’s The Plague. The exile in it is like an exile faced by Mrs. Curren. The exile in The Plague is due to the plague but the loneliness and the exile from one’s own people is similar to the experiences of Mrs. Curren. She gets exiled due to her cancer which makes her unable to enjoy the normal life and due to her liberal thinking she is not interested in other whites who are oppressors. Hence, she is lonely in the Cape City. She thinks of Florence in her room surrounded by her sleeping children. She writes to her daughter, “Once I had everything, I thought. Now you have everything and I have nothing” (40). Camus emphasizes that only the feeling of love can solve the problems of the loneliness of human beings. Hence, Raymond Rambert in The Plague says: “And that’s my point,
we - mankind have lost that capacity for love . . . Let’s wait to acquire that capacity . . .” (65). Mrs. Curren’s physical cancer and the social cancer of South Africa can also be compared to Srinivas’s leprosy in *The Nowhere Man* by Kamala Karkandaya. Srinivas feels isolation and exile due to his physical leprosy. He is also the victim of racial hatred, the social leprosy in London. Because of the physical pains: “He rebelled, and rebellion exacted its own penalty. His body, disciplined to remain in the background, edged forward and made its grievances known. Aches and pains, quiescent or ignored before, began to claim his attention” (170). The relationship with the non-racist Mrs. Pickering comforts Srinivas. He does not resist but passively becomes victorious spiritually. In the same way, Mrs. Curren’s introspection revives her when she comes in close contact with Bheki, John, Vercueil, Florence, Mr. Thabane, and others like them. Mrs. Curren thinks that after her death, like other whites she will burn well but the people like Bheki will not burn as they are iron people. Innocent children like Bheki are forcefully brought into the war and they die. Hence, Mrs. Curren says:

Now that child is buried and we walk upon him. Let me tell you, when I walk upon this land, this South Africa, I have a gathering feeling of walking upon black faces. They are dead but their spirit has not left them. They lie there heavy and obdurate, waiting for my feet to pass, waiting for me to go, waiting to be raised up again. Millions of figures of pig iron floating under the skin of the earth. The age of iron waiting to return. (125-26)

This is a hope that the blacks will be able to take their land back. What is happening is very shameful to get over it.

Mrs. Curren realizes that the traditional ethics of the Western world is lost in South Africa. She cannot bear the violence. In her dream also she sees, “Hundreds of thousands of men, faceless, voiceless, dry as bones, trapped on a field of slaughter, repeating night after night their back-and-forth march across that scorched plain in the stench of sulfur and blood: a hell into which I plummet when I close my eyes” (138).

Mrs. Curren tries her best to save John’s life. She warns him saying, “You are still children. You are throwing away your lives before you know what life can be. What are you – fifteen years old? Fifteen is too young to die” (143). She advises him to stay away from violence but John answers, “Things will never be normal-” (134). The instinct for battle is strong in him. About battle, Mrs. Curren says, “Battle:
nature’s way of liquidating the weak and providing mates for the strong” (143). She tells John that the men he is struggling against don’t say to each other that one is just a child and so let us shoot a child’s bullet or a play bullet at him. They don’t think of children like John and Bheki as children at all. They are just enemies to be hated. The men in power smile with pleasure when such children fall; they “make another notch on their gunstocks” (144). Mrs. Curren checks her feelings toward John and writes to her daughter: “I do not love this child, the child sleeping in Florence’s bed. I love you but I do not love him. There is no ache in me toward him, not the slightest” (136). Mrs. Curren is “in a fog of error” (136). But she wants to be saved and hence 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. Not bright little Bheki, but this one. He is here for a reason. He is part of my salvation. I must love him. But I do not love him. Nor do I want to love him enough to love him despite myself. (136)

Mrs. Curren thinks that she will get salvation only if she loves the blacks, the people of an age of iron. Mrs. Curren’s confession that she has to love Vercueil because she does not love him is like Susan’s confession about Friday in Foe where she says, “I do not love him, but he is mine” (111). Hence, Mike Marais opines, that Mrs. Curren, “strives to overcome the deformed relations between human beings entrenched by the South African apartheid state’s politics of dominance and subservience through learning to love the “Children of iron” . . . who have been brutalized by these very power relations” (90).

Mrs. Curren, caught in the fog of pain and suffering, confesses to her daughter the truth about her love. About confession, Coetzee in his Doubling the Point says that it is “an underlying motive to tell an essential truth about the self” (252). Mrs. Curren finds an essential truth about herself and gives a second thought to her confession and writes to her daughter, “Therefore let me utter my second, dubious word. Not wanting to love him, how true can I say my love is for you? For love is not like hunger. Love is never sated, stilled. When one loves, one loves more. The more I love you, the more I ought to love him. The less I love him, the less, perhaps, I love you” (137). Mrs. Curren suggests that once the feeling of love enters the human mind
that human being should not make difference between love for one human and the love for others. Because she knows that, at least, in South Africa aggressiveness will not solve the racial problems. The road to peace in South Africa must go through love. Mrs. Curren’s mental struggle after noting the physical violence emphasizes that one must understand oneself first like Cross Damon in Richard Wright’s *The Outsider*. Although Damon is violent against the racial problems, he too, like Mrs. Curren understands the significance of knowing oneself but in a different way. Damon stands in contrast to Mrs. Curren. For Damon only rebellion is an answer for freedom. Damon is found guilty. When the world leaves him alone he understands the importance of knowing oneself and, then, “His rebellious nerves twanged with a terror that his mind sought desperately to deny. He shook his head, his body seething with hate against himself and the world” (12). Mrs. Curren learns not to hate the world around her but she hates herself and wishes in this way to get salvation.

Mrs. Curren attempts to help John when she suspects him of visiting Florence’ room for getting some weapons hidden there. She calls Mr. Thabane and tells him to help the child and not to use him in the name of comradeship. But Mr. Thabane answers, “‘When you are body and soul in the struggle as these young people are, . . . then a bond grows up that is stronger . . . That is comradeship . . . My generation has nothing . . . . That is why we stand behind them’” (149-50). For Mrs. Curren, on the other hand, comradeship is “nothing but a mystique of death, of killing and dying” (150). She knows that John is a poor child who would have probably lived happily as a garden boy somewhere in South Africa. When the police come for inquiry about the pistol Mrs. Curren still desires to protect John and so she tells police that she had given the pistol to him and requests them to close the case of the dead. She even sends message to Mr. Thabane to be careful about the violence and the trial.

The physical violence takes place when John is shot by the police. Mrs. Curren wants to accompany him in the ambulance but the police do not allow her. Shocked by the incident she walks on the road and being tired sleeps behind one concrete pillar. She is disturbed by a group of children who try to push a stick in her mouth to see whether she has a gold tooth. This example indicates the practice of physical violence by the black boys for money. They become brutal as they are the victims of the cruelty around them.

Mrs. Curren’s motherly love for the black children is very significant. She wants to save these children from the violence. She indicates through her approach
that if the children are not saved and protected at this juncture; probably they will never forgive the whites in future. The black children in the novel are very aggressive and ready to rebel without thinking about their lives and prospect. The roles of Bheki and John as the iron children can specially be focused. Coetzee intentionally emphasizes their participation in violence. The role of children as political activists becomes very decisive in the the context of South Africa. It can be a studied as a special feature of the novel.

Coetzee attempts to focus on human values in this novel. All the examples of the physical violence indicate Coetzee’s emphasis on the need of developing love among the blacks and whites. This love includes the emotions of liking and also of tolerance.

- **Violence: Socio-Political**

The anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa became very severe in 1980s. The people of the powerful regime very cruelly exploited the blacks. *Age of Iron* has all the background of the socio-political oppression. There are examples of socio-political violence in it. These examples can be noted and studied.

Mrs. Curren is separated from her daughter due to the socio-political violence in South Africa. It shows that even though Mrs. Curren is a white she has to suffer a great loss in her life and lead the life all by herself. Hence, she is also the victim of such violence. She says:

My daughter will not come back till things have changed here. She has made a vow. She will not come back to South Africa as you and she and I know it. She will certainly not apply to – what can I call them? – *those people* for permission to come. She will come back when they are hanging by their heels from the lampposts, she says. She will come back then to throw stones at their bodies and dance in the streets. (74-75)

Mrs. Curren’s daughter has left her country and settled in America. She does not want to come back. Mrs. Curren’s daughter has faced the apartheid problem by escaping herself from South Africa. But this is not a solution either for the natives or the white
settlers in South Africa. Mutual love among the whites and the blacks will only solve the apartheid problems there. Mrs. Curren witnesses the violence. She says:

Where is my heart in all of this? My only child is thousands of miles away, safe; soon I will be smoke and ash; so what is it to me that a time has come when childhood is despised, when children school each other never to smile, never to cry, to raise fists in the air like hammers? Is it truly a time out of time, heaved up out of the earth, misbegotten, monstrous? What, after all, gave birth to the age of iron but the age of granite? (50-51)

Like the black children, Mrs. Curren’s daughter, is also an “iron” (75) child. Mrs. Curren’s loneliness makes her uneasy and so to her daughter she says, “How I longed for you to be here, to hold me, comfort me!” (5). While recounting Cape Town to her daughter, Mrs. Curren says, “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” (7). But she further informs her daughter that she fears the roaming gangs of such persons. Mrs. Curren knows who are to be blamed for such situation. She says:

Did we not have Voortrekkers, generation after generation of Voortrekkers, grim-faced, tight-lipped Afrikaner children, marching, singing their patriotic hymns, saluting their flag, vowing to die for their fatherland? . . . . Are there not still white zealots preaching the old regime of discipline, work, obedience, self-sacrifice, a regime of death, to children some too young to tie their own shoelaces? What a nightmare from beginning to end! (51)

Mrs. Curren clarified that it is the Afrikaner parenthood which is responsible for the present age of iron, the decade of 1980s. David Attwell observes that during this period South Africa had become, “a society given over entirely to the contest for power” (120). When Mrs. Curren notices the dreadful situation in the city she remembers her daughter and says, “Thank God she is out!” (60). But she feels lonely also without her daughter and her love. She is disturbed by the violence and so she says, her daughter “‘is not an exile. I am the exile’” (76).

The socio-political violence disturb Mrs. Curren. She gives shelter to one of the homeless, Vercueil. Because she knows that when a ragged stranger comes knocking at the door he is never anything but a derelict, an alcoholic, a lost soul. She
wants to give some work to Vercueil because according to her the spirit of charity is perished in this country and “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?” (22). In Gilbert Yeoh’s words, the novel, “parallels Mrs. Curren’s familial love with her charity towards strangers like Vercueil and John, which can be seen as a different form of love arising from her human ethics” (112).

Vercueil speaks very sparingly in the novel. His name is also differently pronounced by Mrs. Curren. She describes: “‘His name is Mr. Vercueil’ . . . ‘Vercueil, Verkuil, Verskuil. That’s what he says. I have never come across such a name before. I am letting him stay here for a while’” (37). The uncertainty of the name seems to be deliberately used to intensify the lack of social concern and identity on the part of the whites for the colonized. Vercueil does not succeed in doing major work for Mrs. Curren. She thinks:

Why do I give this man food? For the same reason I would feed his dog (stolen, I am sure) if it came begging, for the same reason I gave you my breast. To be full enough to give and to give from one’s fullness: what deeper urge is there? Out of their withered bodies even the old try to squeeze one last drop. A stubborn will to give, to nourish.

(7-8)

Mrs. Curren develops a motherly feeling for Vercueil. She even says, “When I write about him I write about myself; when I write about the house I write about myself” (9). Mrs. Curren’s attitude towards Vercueil as a derelict, changes slowly. She does not like Florence calling Vercueil “A good-for-nothing” (48). She warns Florence that Vercueil is her “messenger” (48).

Mrs. Curren knows it well that due to the social and political circumstances around Vercueil, she cannot predict about Vercueil’s behaviour toward her. She says to him, “There is something I would like you to do for me if I die. There are some papers I want to send to my daughter. But after the event. That is the important part. That is why I cannot send them myself” (31). But Vercueil is reluctant and says, “I don’t know” (32). However, later, on Vercueil makes his uncertain commitment and says, “‘I’ll post your parcel for you’” (33). But Mrs. Curren knows that Vercueil “will make no promise. And even if he promises, he will do finally, what he likes” (32).

Mrs. Curren wishes strongly that her daughter must read what her mother has written about the life in South Africa. In a way, it is her wish that her letter should be
read by all so that the truth about the atrocities inflicted by the whites is known to the whole world. She writes to her daughter, “If Vercueil does not send these writings on, you will never read them. You will never even know they existed. A certain body of truth will never take on flesh: my truth: how I lived in these times, in this place. . . . If there is the slightest breath of trust, obligation, piety left behind when I am gone, he will surely take it.” (130). Later on she says, “I give my life to Vercueil to carry over” (131). She also confesses her inclination of mind to correct the wrongs done by the whites and so she says, “Because I cannot trust Vercueil I must trust him” (130). Mrs. Curren suggests a way of finishing the socio-political violence by only loving the blacks. In the words of Neil Lazarus, the trust intended by Mrs. Curren is, “sacrificial – or at least potentially sacrificial for its outcome cannot be known in advance” (150). Pity and love for the other members of the human race who struggle in their dejected social life must not obscure the necessity for love and forgiveness for oneself. The capacity to trust springs from the capacity to love. And trust for the things not seen becomes most vigorous in case of Mrs. Curren.

Mrs. Curren is kind toward Vercueil because he is a victim of the socio-political oppression. But she has a very clear understanding of her role. About her help to Vercueil she reflects:

> Easy to give alms to the orphaned, the destitute, the hungry. Harder to give alms to the bitter-hearted (I think of Florence). But the alms I give Vercueil are hardest of all. What I give he does not forgive me for giving. No charity in him, no forgiveness. (*Charity? Says Vercueil, Forgiveness?*) Without his forgiveness I give without charity, serve without love. Rain falling on barren soil. (131)

It is very clear that Vercueil, as a representative of the oppressed will never forgive the oppressors. He is silent, does not speak much. But as Benita Parry says, Vercueil, “means more than he says” (153). He stands for all the silenced victims of colonization. But his behaviour with Mrs. Curren, though she is white, is, very human and caring. His role fits Paulo Freire’s opinion regarding the task of the oppressed. According to him the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed is “to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. The oppressors who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed for themselves. Only power that springs form the weakness of the
oppressed will be suffering strong to free both” (21). Vercueil’s silent suffering seems to be a hope of liberating himself and his oppressors.

Media, being under control of the whites, is used to popularize their views. What is shown on television reflects the socio-political misery and its result in violence. Mrs. Curren says the television displays only:

The parade of politicians every evening: I have only to see the heavy, black faces so familiar since childhood to feel gloom and nausea. The bullies in the last row of school desks, raw-boned, lumpish boys, grown up now and promoted to rule the land. They with their fathers and mothers, their aunts and uncles, their brothers and sisters: a locust horde, a plague of black locusts infesting the country, munching without cease, devouring lives. (28)

Mrs. Curren does not want to watch these politicians and allow them to enter her home through the medium of television because, according to her:

Legitimacy they no longer trouble to claim. Reason they have struggled off. What absorbs them is power and the stupor of power. Eating and talking, munching lives, belching. Slow heavy-bellied talk. Sitting in a circle, debating ponderously, issuing decrees like hammer blows: death, death, death. Untroubled by the stench. Heavy eyelids, piggish eyes, shrewd with the shrewdness of generations of peasants. Plotting against each other too: slow peasant plots that take decades to mature. The new Africans, pot-bellied, heavy-jowled men on their stools of office: Cetshwayo, Dingane in white skins. Pressing downward: their power in their weight. (29)

The politicians described by Mrs. Curren do not wish to solve the socio-political problems and are indifferent to the deaths of the innocents. Hence, they are the political cannibals of South Africa. Such politicians indicate the unforgiving realities of the country. Coetzee powerfully brings them into novel. What Nadine Gordimer says is right when she says, “If you write honestly about life in South Africa, apartheid damns itself” (81).

The socio-political violence has ruined the peace of the mind of Mrs. Curren. Very agitatingly she says:

I want to rage against the men who have created these times. I want to accuse them of spoiling my life in the way that a rat or a cockroach
spoils food without even eating it, simply by walking over it and
sniffing it and performing its bodily functions on it. It is childish, I
know, to point fingers and blame others. But why should I accept that
my life would have been worthless no matter who held power in this
land? Power is power, after all. It invades. That is its nature. It invades
one’s life. (117)

Mrs. Curren’s remarks on the power and its impact reaffirm the vices of the apartheid.
Whichever may be the political party; the power affects it. The power invades and
rules the weak. About power what Michel Foucault writes can be quoted here:

Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And
not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always
in the position of simultaneously undergoing or exercising this power.
They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are also elements
of its articulation. In other words, individuals are like vehicles of
power, not its points of application. (98)

In South African situation power is implemented through a net-like organization. Mrs.
Curren’s inner life is as distorted and overwhelmed as her outer life. Coetzee suggests
that the colonial power has to pay the price of its crime not only in getting terrified by
the blacks but in getting its own people also collapsed psychologically.

The socio-political violence has disturbed African schools and children.
Florence informs Mrs. Curren that all the schools in Guguletu, Langa, and Nyanga are
closed. The children have nothing to do. They just run around the streets and get into
trouble. For this reason she has brought her son Bheki from Guguletu as she can see
him in front of her. When the troubles in the schools begin Mrs. Curren comments on
it to Florence by saying, “We would have thought it madness to burn a school
down” (39). Florence’s answer is, “It is different today” (39). About the trouble in
schools, the television and the newspapers say nothing. They become, on the other
hand, the instruments of oppression controlled by oppressors. Hence, what Mrs.
Curren knows about events in Guguletu depends solely on what Florence tells her and
what she can learn by standing on the balcony and peering northeast to Guguletu. She
reflects: “Of trouble in the schools the radio says nothing, the television says nothing,
the newspapers say nothing. In the world they project all the children of the land are
sitting happily at their desks learning about the square on the hypotenuse and the
parrots of the Amazonian jungle” (39). What she knows about, for example, about
Guguletu from standing on the balcony is that Guguletu is not burning but she knows the truth that it is burning. She wants to cry: “I too am burning!” (39). She is burning inwardly due to cancer and outwardly due to the socio-political violence.

The socio-political instability is the cause of the blacks’ anger toward the whites. There is one example where Mrs. Curren is angry with Florence because her children along with the newcomer John create a great noise and disturb her. She warns Florence that she does not want to turn her “home into haven for all the children running away from the townships” but the response to this statement by Florence is: “But why not?” (54). This question indicates the anger of the blacks toward the whites who are responsible for creating violence everywhere. The whites who are in power are careless. This can be noted in the situation when Mrs. Curren goes to lodge a complaint against the policemen who pushed Bheki and John on the road. She knows that if she discloses their names the police will punish them and not the driver of the police van. Police get the complaint lodged only of those parties who are directly affected. Mrs. Curren says to the police “You won’t let me lay a charge because you say I am not affected. But I am affected, very directly affected. Do you understand what I am saying?” (85-86). She is upset and thinks: “Perhaps I should simply accept that is how one must live from now on: in a state of shame. Perhaps shame is nothing more than the name for the way I feel all the time. The name for the way in which people live who would prefer to be dead” (86). Mrs. Curren’s feeling of shame for the violence in South Africa indicates its brutal level. About the police, Florence rightly says, “‘There is nothing you can do against the police’” (66). Mrs. Curren looks at Bheki’s wound and thinks whether his wounds can be considered as “Honorable wounds? Would these count on the roll as honorable wounds, wounds of war?” (66). Bheki, just a child playing on a bicycle is knocked down by the police van indicating the socio-political terror. In “Literary Form and the Demands of Politics: Otherness in J.M.Coetzee’s Age of Iron” Attridge says:

Mrs. Curren’s realization of the otherness of her servants is a shock to her liberal principles and classical education; but this lack of understanding is primarily a forceful demonstration of the need for political action to transform social relations whereas the incomprehensibility of Vercueil makes an insistence that a rationalistic and instrumental view of politics is not enough for the achievement of a genuine transformation. (208)
The socio-political life of the blacks is destroyed by the whites and hence they are not interested in anything except fighting for their freedom. About the country Mrs. Curren says:

We who marry South Africa become South Africans: ugly, sullen, torpid, the only sign of life in us a quick flash of fangs when we are crossed. South Africa: a bad-tempered old hound snoozing in the doorway, taking its time to die. And what an uninspired name for a country! Let us hope they change it when they make their fresh start.

(70)

The situation in hospital is also not comfortable. About the hospital where John is admitted Florence says, “They have put him with the old men in the hospital. It is too terrible. There is one who is mad, who is shouting and swearing all the time, the nurses are afraid to go near him. They should not put a child in a room like that. It is not a hospital where he is, it is a waiting room for the funeral” (77). Nothing is safe in Cape Town due to the socio-political violence. For instance, when Mrs. Curren accompanies Florence to Guguletu and Site C, Florence warns Mrs. Curren, “If people wave to you to stop, or if you see things in road, you must not stop, you must drive on” (89). This warning indicates the dangers on the roads. There is one example of worst socio-political condition of the prisoners. It is said that the prisoners “plead with the firing squad, they weep, they joke, they offer bribes, they offer everything they possess: the rings off their fingers, the clothes off their backs. The soldiers laugh. For they will take it all anyway, and the gold from their teeth too” (26). This reference indicates the unhealthy practices of the regime and the conditions of the prisoners.

Bheki and John are the victims of social war in South Africa. About the war, Mrs. Curren says:

I still detest these calls for sacrifice that end with young men bleeding to death in the mud. War is never what it pretends to be. Scratch the surface and you find, invariably, old men sending young men to their death in the name of some abstraction or other. Despite what Mr. Thabane says (I do not blame him, the future comes disguised, if it came naked we would be petrified by what we saw), it remains a war of the old upon the young. Freedom or death! Shout Bheki and his friends. Whose words? Not their own. (163)
Mrs. Curren wants to save the children and tells them, “Save yourselves!” (163). But she is doubtful about herself and so she questions Vercueil:

Whose is the true voice of wisdom, Mr. Vercueil? Mine, I believe. Yet who am I, Who am I to have a voice at all? How can I honorably urge them to turn their back on that call? What am I entitled to do but sit in a corner with mouth shut? I have no voice; I lost it long ago; perhaps I have never had one. I have no voice, and that is that. The rest should be silence. But with this – whatever it is – this voice that is no voice, I go on. On and on. (164)

Sue Kossew compares the voice of Mrs. Curren with the voice at the end of *Foe* and comments: “While the voice of the colonised (worldlessly released at the end of *Foe*) has become a shout, a slogan, the voice of the coloniser has become less and less audible. The mother’s voice has been silenced: the child no longer needs to be directed” (176). Mrs. Curren feels guilty as a white and hence, questions her identity and role in the land of the blacks. She says, “But now I ask myself: What right have I to opinions about comradeship or anything else? What right have I to wish Bheki and his friend had kept out of trouble? To have opinions in a vacuum, opinions that touch no one, is, it seems to me, nothing. Opinions must be heard by others, heard and weighed, not merely listened to out of politeness” (163). Her opinions have no weight and hence no black will take her thoughts seriously.

Mrs. Curren is ashamed of herself as a part of the whites’ crimes. So she says, “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 part of it”’ (164). She even confesses, “Though it was not a crime I asked to be committed, it was committed in my name”’ (164).

At the end of the novel Mrs. Curren is close to Vercueil on her bed. She says, “For the first time I smelled nothing. 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” (198). It indicates Mrs. Curren’s extreme sickness as well as the white’s sickness. Mrs. Curren’s position can be compared to Pozzo’s position in when he goes blind and Lucky mute in Samuel Becktt’s *Waiting for Godot*. Pozzo does not drive Lucky but follows him abjectly. The rope becomes shorter. Pozzo, in this plight, is sharply aware of the horror of his condition. Perhaps this is an indication of the shift of human power and domination. Pozzo says to Vladimir, “It’s abominable.
When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day like any other day, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we’ll go deaf, one day we are born, one day we’ll die the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you?” (82). Mrs. Curren’s reliance on Vercueil also indicates that one day the position of the white dominators and the dominated blacks will change. The Africans will get back their rights and their land. Vladimir voices the hope that Godot may come to save them and says, “Hope deferred maketh the something sick, who said that?” (2). Originally this is stated in the Proverbs in the Bible as “Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life” (13.12). The South Africans also have to sustain their desire and hope to witness the full bloom the tree of freedom.

The socio-political violence inflicted by whites makes the hell of South Africa. So Mrs. Curren questions, “Why has it ever been necessary that hell be a place on its own in the ice of Antarctica or down the pit of a volcano? Why can hell not be at the foot of Africa, and why can be creatures of hell not walk among the living?” (110). Mrs. Curren hates the violence by the whites as well as by the blacks. She is worried to see that so many of the blacks, inspired by comradeship are engaged in killing the whites and wasting their energy. She says to Mr. Thabane:

The Germans had comradeship, and the Japanese, and the Spartans. Shaka’s impis too, I am sure. Comradeship is nothing but a mystique of death, of killing and dying, masquerading as what you call a bond (a bond of what? Love? I doubt it). I have no sympathy with this comradeship. You are wrong, you and Florence and everyone else, to be taken in by it and, worse, to encourage it in children. It is just another of those icy, exclusive, death-driven male constructions. (150)

Mrs. Curren’s views about the violence in South Africa reveal her compassionate attitude to look at the discrimination in society. She suggests the whites to learn to love the blacks. What she feels can be quoted in Rousseau’s views about the goodness in human beings and their society. According to him, compassion is a natural feeling, which by moderating the violence of love of self in each individual, contributes to the preservation of the whole species. He further says:

It is this compassion . . . which, instead of inculcating that sublime maxim of rational justice, Do to others as you would have them do unto you, inspires all men with that other maxim of natural goodness,
much less perfect indeed, but perhaps more useful; *Do good to yourself with as little evil as possible to others.* In a word, it is rather in this natural feeling than in any subtle arguments that we must look for the cause of that repugnance, which every man would experience in doing evil, even independently of the maxims of education. (226-27)

Rousseau suggests catering to the need of creating the feelings of compassion in society. Mrs. Curren wishes to transform the society in South Africa on the same line.

It is possible to examine Mrs. Curren’s role as a woman. Her world as a mother is also important. Her cancer can be taken as an extended metaphor. It would be possible to study her sensibility towards the victimized and helpless around her. Her sympathy towards children and her genuine sense of concern for them can also become a topic of study. She can be a focus of study to note the attitude of a liberal white woman toward the blacks. She can even be deemed as the South African land suffering from the cancer of apartheid.

It is possible to read this novel from the Marxist point of view. The novel presents a clash between the powerful and the weak. The social, ideological, and political power structures are responsible for the insurgence amongst the masses. The system of education and role of children in the post-apartheid era becomes an imperative issue in the novel. It would be interesting to investigate whether Coetzee succeeds in satisfying the Marxist attitude and expectations.

*Age of Iron* as an extended letter is a novel technique used by Coetzee. Through it he succeeds in unfolding the strange events of Mrs. Curren’s dying days. It would be possible to critically interpret the novel by concentrating on the form of letter used by Coetzee.

*Age of Iron* can be studied as a post-colonial novel. It reveals the domination of the imperial power even in the post-apartheid era of South Africa. It illustrates the reality of apartheid situation. It is essential to understand South Africa’s political crisis as Njabulo S. Ndebele says, “The past, no matter how horrible it has been, can redeem us. It can be the moral foundation on which to build the pillars of the future” (155). The new Africa is to be built on the basis of humanity. According to Fiona Probyn:

South Africa will only grow again after it goes through a type of radiation treatment, thereby destroying the infection, the infectious and the infected. . . . Though Elizabeth links her own death to the death of
the old South Africa, there is no assurance that her death will lend society its “cure.” As Elizabeth suggests throughout her narrative, she “caught” cancer and she also transmitted it; the ills of the social body will not die with her.” (223)

In spite of such interpretations, here it is right to quote Colin Gardner, who while appreciating Alan Paton’s *Cry, the Beloved Country*, the most famous anti-apartheid novel, says, “Understanding and reconciliation and mutual recognition of the other human feelings . . . have become central to the idea of a newly constituted South Africa” (19). *Age of Iron* suggests solutions on the same lines to the chaotic apartheid past of South Africa. Florence says to Mrs. Curren that Vercueil is “rubbish” and “good-for-nothing.” But, Mrs. Curren declares, “He is not a rubbish person” and she further adds, “There are no rubbish people. We are all people together” (47). In the feeling of “all people together” lies the answer and hope of the future of South Africa. It is Mrs. Curren’s humanistic call for loving others and also acquiring love from others. The novel makes us aware of the need to uproot the racial and inhuman differences for the well-being of the human race; it succeeds in giving a call to be human.
Works Cited


