



A Postcolonial Analysis of J.M. Coetzee's Two Novels: *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Life and Times of Michael K.*

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Summary: Colonialism is a type of domination in which political, racist, economic and cultural issues are imposed on the colonized groups through the medium of exploitation, degradation and torture. For centuries Western nations, their supreme position and imperial power, exploited the colonized economically and culturally by destroying their traditions and culture. The term 'post-colonial' was originally used by the historians to describe the period after colonization. This study focuses on J. M. Coetzee, one of the pioneers of South African literature, and his two novels *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) and *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983) as post-colonial literary texts.

Keywords: Post-colonialism, Colonialism, J. M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Life and Times of Michael K.*

Özet: Sömürgecilik, sömüren bir grubun sömürülen üzerinde istismar, yıkım, eziyet ve şiddet kullanarak, politik, ırkçı, ekonomik, kültürel açılardan hâkimiyet ve egemenlik sağlamasıdır. Yüz yıllar boyu Batılı devletler, ekonomik ve kültürel baskı kullanarak siyahî yerli halkı sömürmüşler ve kendi tahakküm ve egemenliklerini kullanarak onların haklarını, gelenek ve göreneklerini hiçe saymışlardır. 'Sömürgecilik sonrası dönem' terimi ise tarihçiler tarafından bu dönemden sonra ortaya çıkan süreci tanımlamak amacı ile kullanılmıştır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, eserlerinde sözkonusu dönemi anlatan ve Güney Afrika'nın en önemli yazarlarından biri olan J. M. Coetzee'nin *Barbarları Beklerken* ve *Michael K. Yaşamı ve Yaşadığı Dönem* adlı romanlarını Sömürgecilik Sonrası Edebiyat kapsamında incelemektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sömürgecilik sonrası, Sömürgecilik, J. M. Coetzee, *Barbarları Beklerken*, *Michael K. Yaşamı ve Yaşadığı Dönem*.

INTRODUCTION

Colonialism is a process during which dominant groups employ their supreme power and domination over the colonized people through the medium of exploitation, degradation and torture. In this respect, colonialism as stated by Bill Ashcroft (Ashcroft et al. 2000: 42), "is the system by which dominant groups in society constitute the field of truth by imposing specific knowledges, disciplines and values upon dominated groups". For the sake of constructing a national unity and consciousness, white colonial identity and imperial powers exploited and violated the colonized people economically and culturally by disregarding their traditions, values and culture and replacing them with their own values. In relation to racist problems Ashcroft (Ashcroft et al. 2000: 46) states that "in colonies where the subject people were of a different race, or where minority indigenous peoples existed, the ideology of race was also a crucial part of the construction and naturalization of an unequal form of intercultural relations". Together with political and economic propagandas, literary representations also played an important role in the construction of imperialistic behaviors and ideas of colonial powers. After "the long and frequently bloody process of dissent, protest and rebellion to secure their independence" (Ashcroft et al., 2000: 50), colonial and postcolonial works came out as a result of the relationship between literature and history.

The term 'postcolonial' was originally used by the historians to describe the period after colonization. In literary criticism it has been used since the late 1970s to discuss the various cultural, political, and linguistic effects of colonialism. As a term, postcolonialism "has subsequently been widely used to signify the political, linguistic, and cultural experience of societies that were former European colonies" (Ashcroft et al., 2000: 186).

In his book *Reading the Novel in English 1950-2000*, W. Brian Shaffer (2006: 17) classifies English-language novels into three groups according to their relation to history and the issue of colonization. The first group includes "novels from countries in which literature and culture are British or demonstrate a significant degree of continuity with that of Britain". The second group, which is related to the concern of this present study, includes "postcolonial Anglophone

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novels, which emanated from formerly subject, British-held colonies in which the majority of the inhabitants had been living in situ for centuries. Such formerly colonized nation includes present-day Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and Uganda” (2006: 17). Included in the second group of English-language novels, South African literature has been dominated by two outstanding novelists: J.M. Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer. Nadine Gordimer is the first South African novelist who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1974 for *The Conversationist*. She has an Afrikaaner background. Similarly, J. M. Coetzee, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2003 and many prestigious literary awards, comes from a family of a mixed German and Jewish background. Being internationally well-known authors, Gordimer and Coetzee have focused on the problem of apartheid in South Africa. Coetzee, as a white novelist writing about South Africa, is described by Attwell as: “writing not as a citizen of the First World but of the Third—or perhaps the First within the Third—and therefore, like other white South African writers, he faces the problem of cultural authority” (Attwell, 1993: 4).

Regarded as important postcolonial writers, their main emphasis is mostly on the opposition of colonizers (oppressors). However, Coetzee has been criticized by Nadine Gordimer for being far from presenting direct and straightforward historical and political doctrines and ideas. In a similar way, Vaughan criticizes Coetzee for not offering a solution to the problems of colonialism: “Coetzee thus casts himself in the role of diagnostician of the malady of Western culture who is unable to propose any cure for this malady” (cited in Marais, 2000). About *Life and Times of Michael K*, Gordimer explains her dissatisfaction as follows:

the unique and controversial aspect of this work is that while it implicitly and highly political, Coetzee's heroes are those who ignore history, not make it. Coetzee, while fiercely moved far beyond commonplace understanding of their plight, does not believe in the possibility of blacks establishing a regime that will do much better.” (cited in Meritt, 2006)

Gordimer criticizes the hero of the novel, Michael K. as being passive and incapable of articulation his ideas clearly: “an idea of survival [. . .]outside a political doctrine” (cited in Meritt, 2006). As a response to Gordimer's criticism, Coetzee declares that:

one writes the books one wants to write. One doesn't write the books one doesn't want to write (. . .) The book about going off with the guerillas, the book in the heroic tradition, is not a book I wanted-to-write, wanted enough to able to bring it off, however much I might have wanted to have written it - that it to say, wanted to be the person who had successfully brought off the writing of it. (cited in Meritt, 2006)

J. M. Coetzee was born in Cape Town on 9 February 1940. He had a family who spoke both English and Afrikaans. He attended the University of Cape Town, graduated with B.A. degree in 1961, and began his working as a computer programmer in London. By completing his PhD at the University of Texas in 1969, Coetzee returned to the University of Cape Town where he became a professor of English Literature in 1972. Coetzee left South Africa and moved to Australia in 2002. When Coetzee published *Disgrace* in 1999, he was criticized and attacked for the story of a disgraced university professor who loses his job at the university because of a sexual relationship with a student. The President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, reportedly said of the book: “South Africa is not only a place of rape” (cited in Meritt, 2006). Coetzee's move to Australia is widely linked to these reactions. He declared his reason for immigration in an interview: “an interview is perhaps not the best medium in which to explore moral or intellectual complexities. And leaving a country is, in some respects, like a break-up of marriage. It is an intimate matter” (cited in Meritt, 2006).

As a successful novelist and linguist, Coetzee is sensitive and faithful to the colonial history of his native country. This sensitivity has led Coetzee to talk about the universal struggle between the oppressed and oppressor as a main thematic perspective in his narratives. In postcolonial writing, he justifies the position of the other by revealing the damaged and deformed South African life under apartheid.

J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*

Published in 1980, *Waiting for the Barbarians* is J.M. Coetzee's third novel. After its publication, the novel received the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, the Geoffrey Faber Award, and the CNA Literary Prize in 1980. Referring to the Greek poet Constantine P. Cavafy's poem with the same title, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1904), Coetzee's novel, in general, tells about unknowable barbarians who never arrive or exist. The novel, in fact, does not give an explicit account of South African history but rather it is a successful allegorical representation of apartheid regime in any place in the world.

The setting of the novel is an unspecified geographical place where the readers are told the story from the voice of unnamed magistrate who serves as a binary model of self/the other. The issues of colonizer/the colonized, torturer/tortured, self/the other are used recurrently in the novel. The title of the novel creates the sense of disturbance and pain. The novel opens with the arrival of Colonel Joll with a band of soldiers from the Third Bureau to declare their superiority over the invisible barbarians. In this respect, in the beginning of the novel, there is an encounter between the colonizer/colonized, and the oppressor /oppressed.

The major plot of the novel is both related with the Empire's persistent efforts to construct a label (barbarians, foe, etc.) for the other and the colonized other's consistent resistance to such attempts. As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that the native folks of the area do not fit the role of "barbarian" and "foe" that the Empire has constructed for them. Refusing to be included in the history of imperial colonizer, throughout the novel, the colonized other attempts to remain as an absence, a lack and invisible in the colonial record of the Empire.

In order to prove its position as a superior and civilized nation and culture, Empire attempts to validate the existence of the native inhabitants of the area. In fact, since the barbarians are being awaited any time and everywhere in the town, in each reported attack or case of rape or plundering, they are immediately blamed for the illegal act- guilt, crime or burglary without, any evidence. When the magistrate is sent to prison, a soldier talks about them as: "Barbarians. They cut away part of the embankment over there and flooded the fields. No one saw them" (Coetzee, 2004: 108).

Although the barbarians are nearly invisible in the area, the soldiers of the Empire degrade, torture or suppress the inhabitants even the fishing folk, falsely believing that they are barbarians. Pursuing the barbarians to prove their colonial power over them, Colonel Joll and his soldiers capture twelve prisoners, believing that they are planning to attack the Empire. Colonel Joll exhibits the prisoners in the town square of to prove the existence of barbarians: "Stooping over each prisoner in turn he rubs a handful of dust into his naked back and writes a word with a stick of charcoal. I read the words upside down: ENEMY . . . ENEMY . . . ENEMY . . . ENEMY." On the back of his prisoners, he writes the word "ENEMY" (Coetzee, 2004: 115) but the magistrate narrates that the marks left by the charcoal are being erased shortly after being inscribed. It proves that to erase the existence of the other in the history of imperial powers is impossible and this is the result of nameless fear that threatens every conquering Empire in the world.

In the first part of the novel, torture is discussed but not described explicitly. In the first and the later parts of the novel, Colonel Joll, who is described as ruthless and merciless, interrogates the natives in the town, and labels them as "barbarians" and he thinks that they are a great threat to the town and the existence of the Empire. Colonel Joll's way of interrogation by using torture is a similar process that occurs in the historical process of colonization that is, between the torturer and the tortured, the colonizer and the colonized, the self and the other, etc. Shaffer (2006: 126) states that Colonel Joll's "interrogation is the Bureau's euphemism for torture [. . .] and, Joll [. . .] appears to take pleasure in his gruesome work". The definition of 'torture' in the United Nations' Declaration against Torture, adopted in 1975, reads:

Torture means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted by or at the instigation of a public official on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or confession, punishing him for an act he has committed, or intimidating him or other persons. (Wenzell, 1996)

In this respect, victims that are exposed to torture and suppression will have to confess to anything when pain becomes beyond endurance. Torture has also the ability to limit or stop the voice of the victims who are not able to speak of the self anymore. Since tortured people become passive and inactive, they lack the ability to defend or talk about their identities and their rights. When Colonel Joll prepares to interrogate a father and a child, accused of supporting the attacks of barbarians, the magistrate asks him "How do you ever know when a man has told you the truth?" (Coetzee, 2004: 5). Behaving as a God-like being, Colonel Joll has an ability to get the truth from the tone in the voice of the victims and he explains the way of his interrogation as: "First I get lies, you see- this is what happens- first lies, then pressure, then more lies, then more pressure, then the break, then more pressure, then the truth. Pain is truth [. . .]" (Coetzee, 2004: 5).

In the town, the magistrate is the only authority until Colonel Joll, from the "Third Bureau" arrives with a group of soldiers. Although belonging to white dominating society, the magistrate lives in peace with the natives in the town in an undefined world of "barbarians". In the novel, the magistrate expresses the situation of the town to Colonel Joll as: "there is not much crime here" (Coetzee, 2004: 2), "we are at peace here, we have no enemies" (Coetzee, 2004: 85). In the novel the existence of barbarians, which are feared by the Empire, is vague. In relation to the existence of the barbarians in his town, the magistrate says:

I observed that once in every generation, without fail, there is an episode of hysteria about the barbarians. There is no woman living along the frontier who has not dreamed of a dark barbarian hand coming from under the bed to grip her ankle, no man has not frightened himself with visions of the barbarians carousing in his home, breaking the plates, setting fire to the curtains, raping his daughters. These dreams are the consequence of too much ease. Show me a barbarian army and I will believe. (Coetzee, 2004: 9)

The attacks and violation of invisible barbarians are always expected in the town though nobody has ever seen them. In general, Great powers want social groups to live apart from each other because they fear of the integration of these groups which would be a threat for their existence and power. Although the magistrate is a member of the empire and he has been in charge in the town for years, he is not disturbed by the idea of the unification of the barbarian tribes. He says: "Show me a barbarian army and I will believe" (Coetzee, 2004: 9). The colonizers have always a tendency to colonize the unknown since unknown has no stabilized and defined culture. In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1978: 36) says that:

There are Westerners, and there are Orientals. The former dominate; the latter must be dominated, which usually means having their land occupied, their internal affairs rigidly controlled, their blood and treasure put at the disposal of one or another Western power.

The magistrate, who is not disturbed by the existence of barbarians, also becomes an enemy for his own people and a victim and is being imprisoned and tortured by the soldiers of the Empire. Having been cursed as a traitor for his non-existent cooperation with the barbarians, the magistrate is imprisoned and pushed into death. His position and authority in the town are lessened to a simple object whose existence is ignored by Colonel Joll and his soldiers. As a peacetime governor for this town, the behaviors of the magistrate indicate that he revolts against the violence and the torture that the soldiers of the empire employ against the native folk. When he is interrogated by Colonel Joll, the magistrate accuses Colonel Joll of being the real enemy. "Those pitiable prisoners you brought in – are they the enemy I must fear? You are the enemy; Colonel [. . .] You are the enemy, you have made the war, and you have given them all the martyrs they need- starting not now but a year ago when you committed your first filthy barbarities here" (Coetzee, 2004: 125). In this respect, "it becomes clear that the "civilized" are the real barbarians in Coetzee's novel; the more they insist upon their difference from the "barbarians", the more barbarian the civilized themselves become" (Shaffer, 2006: 131). Relating the bad effects of violence over the colonial other D. A. Masolo says: "Violence . . . is the instrument of alienation. In all its three (physical, psychological, and cultural) aspects, violence has been ably used by Western powers to alienate and dominate black people. The colonized blacks were alienated both materially and mentally" (2000: 36).

Another victim who falls into the Empire's ruthless hands is a barbarian girl who is brutally tortured and disabled during her questioning session by the Colonel Joll. The magistrate finds the blinded and crippled barbarian girl

begging against the trunk of walnut trees. When he takes her to his house, he finds that the scars and the traces of torture on the body of the girl are unbearable. The magistrate says: "It has been growing more and more clear to me that until the marks on this girl's body are deciphered and understood I cannot let go of her" (Coetzee, 2004: 30). In his relation to the barbarian girl, the magistrate tries to eliminate the sense of otherness and understand the signs of torture on her body. The magistrate decides to return the barbarian girl to her people which can be regarded as a protest against the rules of the Empire. In his every attempt to question how she is tortured, the barbarian girl remains silent. When she is finally convinced to answer the reason of her blindness, the magistrate is still discontent. The magistrate tells:

I take her face between my hands and stare into the dead centres of her eyes, from which twin reflections of myself stare solemnly back. "And this?" I say, touching the worm-like sear in the corner. "That is nothing. That is where the iron touched me. It made a little burn. It is not sore." She pushes my hands away. "What do you feel towards the men who did this?" She lies thinking a long time. Then she says, "I am tired of talking." (Coetzee, 2004: 40-41)

During her stay at the magistrate's house, there is a ritual of washing the disfigured feet of the barbarian girl that repeatedly occurs in the novel. When he is confronted by the body of the tortured girl, symbolically, he desires to purify himself and to clear away the feeling of guilt and dirtiness that the barbarian girl has been exposed to. One evening, while he is massaging her face, he recognizes the traces of torture that have left marks near her eye: "I notice in the corner of one eye a grayish puckering as though a caterpillar lay there with its head under her eyelid, grazing. [. . .] Between thumb and forefinger I part her eyelids. The caterpillar comes to an end, decapitated, at the pink inner rim of the eyelid. There is no other mark. The eye is whole" (Coetzee, 2004: 33). The Magistrate belonging to the dominating world of the oppressor may try to behave "as the girl's savior that he tries to purify her after she has been defiled, first at the hands of Joll and then by living as a prostitute" (Urquhart, 2006). Believing that the empire is a great threat to the existence of barbarians, the magistrate always disapproves the rules and order of the empire and believes that it is the Empire itself that deserves to fall.

Finally the magistrate decides to return the girl to her own people. It becomes very hard to reach to the mountains where the barbarian girl lives. The journey ends with the girl being handed over to several men on horse. However, when he returns to the town, his position in the town is reversed. He is no longer the magistrate of the town but a prisoner who is subjected to the same degrading torture and oppression as being employed to the barbarians. The magistrate endures terrible tortures and pain which may help to strengthen his tie of common human values and senses with the barbarians. After his own experience of torture, the magistrate finds a similar caterpillar-like scar that he observes near the eye of the barbarian girl, under his eye.

At the end of the novel, the magistrate concludes that the invasion of the Empire to prove its power over the native folk represents the possibility of colonial process of erasing the presence of non-Western people and denying the existence of alternative histories. Thus, the significance of the place for another culture is lost and the people who live there are reduced to non-existent inhabitants. Throughout the novel, the torture, violence, oppression and degradation that colonial and imperial actions imposed on the native inhabitants of the town who are struggling to live in peace among themselves can clearly be seen. The characters - the magistrate, the barbarian girl and fishing folk are forced to live out the boundaries of their native lands. Refusing to be included in the history of imperial colonizer, throughout the novel, the colonized other attempts to remain as an absence, a lack and invisible in the colonial record of the Empire. At the end of the novel, the magistrate, who is still struggling to comprehend the traumatic events, concludes his experience for the lost history of the colonial other as: "I wanted to live outside history. I wanted to live outside the history that Empire imposes on its subjects, even its lost subjects. I never wished it for the barbarians that they should have the history of Empire laid upon them" (Coetzee, 2004: 169).

J.M. Coetzee's *Life and Times Michael K.*

J. M. Coetzee's fourth novel, *of Life and Times Michael K.* (published in 1983), won Britain's Booker Prize and Jerusalem Prize for the Freedom of the Individual in Society. Told from the perspective of the colonized rather than colonizer, *Life and Times of Michael K* was a great success for its emphasis on human condition in general and the protagonist's unconscious search and wish for freedom. Atwell (1993: 89) describes the novel as "a novel about a

subject who, miraculously, lives through the trauma of South Africa in a state of civil war without being touched by it". Although Coetzee does not specify the race of the protagonist and does not tell about the setting of the novel directly, the country described in the narrative is a place in which there is a civil war. In the novel, there is also no direct implication about the color of the protagonist of the novel. However, the places that Michael K is detained reluctantly- railway gang, resettlement camp, rehabilitation camp-are associated with places where nonwhite South African people have suffered. Rather than emphasizing the exact setting or historical or political doctrines and ideas, Coetzee's way of narration becomes more universal and general in *Life and Times of Michael K.* Freeing his novels from a determined historical and political doctrines and surroundings, Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K.* presents common human values, struggles and problems in general terms.

Coetzee divides the narration into three chapters in which the first and the last chapters are told from the perspective of an unspecified narrator. The second chapter is told through the voice of a medical officer in Kenilworth where Michael K. is kept under a clinical observation. The medical officer who tries to formulate and decode Michael in hospital becomes the voice of silent Michael. Michael, who remains silent and feels disturbed in the hospital, is treated as a precious stone which must be discovered and appreciated. The novel opens with the birth of the protagonist, who has shortcomings at birth: "The first thing the midwife noticed about Michael K when she helped him out of his mother in to the world was that he had a harelip. The lip curled like a snail's foot, the left nostril gaped" (Coetzee, 2004: 3).

Contrary to a protagonist who is trying to achieve great success through many adventures and heroic deeds in his process of becoming, Michael thinks of himself "not as a something heavy that left tracks behind it, but if anything as a speck upon the surface an earth too deeply asleep to notice the starch of ant-feet, the rasp of butterfly teeth, the tumbling of dust" (Coetzee, 2004: 97). In relation to Michael's silence and inarticulation of his ideas clearly, Atwell (1993:100) states that: "K is not a representative figure who models certain forms of behavior or capacities for change; rather, he is an idea floated into a discursive environment that is unprepared to receive it". Throughout the novel, Michael prefers consciously or unconsciously living outside politics and history to living in nature, in his alleys, farms, mountains, etc. Michael creates himself an inner world where he feels freedom, release and exhilaration. Michael is described by the medical officer in Kenilworth as a simple, ordinary and slow-witted man who is unable to articulate his own state of feelings, emotions explicitly: "He is a poor helpless soul who has been permitted to wander out on to the battlefield" (Coetzee, 2004:141).

Even at the time of his mother's death he keeps on his silence and reticence. When the nurse informs him of his mother's death, he explores his uncertainty and despair non-verbally: "He clasped his hands stared hard at his feet. Was he expected to say something? He separated his hands and clasped them, over and over" (Coetzee, 2004: 3).

Michael is repeatedly able to escape from the iron laws of his country and he returns to nature which is gentle, merciful and compassionate towards him. Surviving in a place far away from society and civilization, Michael feels relief and serenity in nature. When Michael K is detained in Jakkalsdrift, he raises questions himself about the hosts (may implicitly refers to South Africa's white government) and parasites (may implicitly refers to nonwhite South African people) (Post, 1986).

It was no longer obvious which was host and which parasite, camp or town. If the worm devoured the sheep, why did the sheep swallow the worm? What if the hosts were far outnumbered by the parasites. . . . Could the parasites then still be called parasites? Parasites too had flesh and substance: parasites too could be preyed upon. Perhaps in truth whether the camp was declared a parasite on the town or the town a parasite on the camp depended on no more than on who made his voice heard loudest. (Coetzee, 2004: 116)

He always rejects being categorized and classified by people who have touched him barbarously. Michael, without a social status, is a lonely, friendless and fatherless man, Anna K leaves him alone at an early age, so Michael tries to fill in this gap in his life by dedicating his whole life to grow plants and pumpkins that he regards them as if his children. In this respect "K's pumpkins and melons become his family, his brothers and sisters, suggesting, in attenuated form, the possibility of community"(Atwell, 1993: 97). Michael explains his affection towards the

pumpkins as: "I am like woman whose children have left the house, he thought: all that he remains is to tidy up and listen to the silence" (Coetzee, 2004: 111).

While people in his country are trying to defend their lands against the destructive forces of guerillas, Michael K goes on watering and protecting his pumpkins and melons against the attacks of donkeys and goats. Refusing to be involved in the colonial history of dominant powers, Michael K is a man who wants to be ignored by the men who are involved in the war to shape and make the history. He feels freedom rather than imprisonment when he lives out of time and history. When Michael is accused of helping the guerillas and is interrogated in the hospital by the major, he rejects being involved in the war:

Tell us the truth, tell us the whole truth and you can go back to bed, we won't bother you any more. The silence lengthened Noel did not speak, passing the whole burden to me. 'Come on Michaels,' I said 'we haven't got all day, there is a war on!' At last he spoke: 'I am not in war' (Coetzee, 2004: 138)

Michael K as a simple gardener tries to build an invisible tie and connection between the earth and him. He feels better himself when he is in outdoors-in nature- than being kept in indoors or settlement camps. He spends all his time and effort to grow pumpkins and melons:

The pumpkins grew. In the night K would creep about, stroking the smooth shells. As time passed he permitted the hope to grow up again in his breast that all would be well. He woke during the day and peered out over the acre. Among the seeds he had sown had been a melon seed. Now the two pale green melons were growing on the far side of the field. It seemed to him that he loved these, which he thought of as two sisters, even more than the pumpkins, which he thought of as a band of brothers. (Coetzee, 2004: 113)

Through the silence of Michael, the medical officer insistently labels him with different labels:

He is like stone, a pebble that, having lain around quietly minding his own business since the dawn of time, is now suddenly picked up and tossed randomly from hand to hand" (Coetzee, 2004: 135)
When I passed an hour later he was asleep, his mouth nudging the pillow like a baby's. (Coetzee, 2004:135)
Who is Michaels but one of a multitude in the second class? A mouse who quit an over-crowded, foundering ship. Only, being a city mouse, he did not know how to live off the land and began to grow very hungry indeed. (Coetzee, 2004: 136)
He is a poor helpless soul who has been permitted to wander out onto the battlefield . . . (Coetzee, 2004: 141)
He must be a polevaulter- that is what I thought. Well, you may not be a polevaulter, Michaels, but you are a great escape artist, one of the great escapees: I take off my hat to you! (Coetzee, 2004: 166)

Michael's dedication himself to silence and inarticulation throughout the novel may lead him to explore his identification of the self at the final chapter because he consciously describes himself as: "I was mute and stupid in the beginning, I will be mute and stupid at the end. There is nothing to be ashamed of being simple" (Coetzee, 2004: 182).

The novel ends with the evasive Michael who sees himself returning to his farm. The farm where he sprinkled the ashes of his mother like a seed can be seen the end of his cycle. He imagines himself as finding water by mending the broken water pump. Here Michael combines the two important elements- farm and water- in order to survive in his peaceful nature beyond history and politics. The narrator concludes:

He, Michael K, would produce a teaspoon from his pocket, a teaspoon and a long roll of string. He would clear the rubble from the mouth of the shaft, he would bend the handle of the teaspoon in a loop and tie the string to it, he would lower it down the shaft deep into the earth, and when he brought it up there would be water in the bowl of the spoon; and in that way, he would say, one can live. (Coetzee, 2004: 184)

CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze J. M. Coetzee, one of the pioneers of South African literature, and his two novels *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) and *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983) in terms of postcolonial discourse. After he had published his first novel *Dusklands* in 1974, J. M. Coetzee was acclaimed as an important novelist who in his fiction spoke out the African colonial conditions and revealed damaged and deformed South African life under apartheid. South Africa is one of the most brutally and violently exploited territories. For centuries white colonial identity and its supreme position and imperial power exploited the native inhabitants of South Africa economically and culturally by destroying their traditions, values and culture. The black nations were doomed to live in slums in terrible conditions while whites lived in the most modern areas and conditions. While Africans were struggling with poverty, hunger, unemployment, illnesses, the minority whites were busy with their idea of colonization. In this respect, when human beings are imprisoned and controlled both physically and mentally, it is quite normal for them to experience self-alienation and identity crisis.

Published in 1980, *Waiting for the Barbarians* is J.M. Coetzee's third novel. The story is narrated through the voice of an unnamed magistrate who serves as a binary model of self/the other. The magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* is not disturbed by the existence of barbarians, and he also becomes an enemy for his own people and a victim and being imprisoned and tortured. In the novel the existence of barbarians, which are feared by the Empire, is vague. The attacks and violation of invisible barbarians are always expected in the town though nobody has ever seen them.

Told by the perspective of the colonized rather than colonizer, *Life and Times of Michael K* is a great success for its emphasis on human condition in general and the protagonist's unconscious search and wish for freedom. The protagonist of the novel is a simple man aged thirty-one with distorted facial features, including a harelip and uneven nostrils. In *Life and Times of Michael K*, time of the event and the name of the country are not mentioned directly, rather they create a rather slippery ground for the reader. Freeing his novels from a determined historical and political doctrines and surroundings, Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* is mostly situated in a vague geographical setting. Throughout the novel, Michael prefers consciously or unconsciously living outside politics and history to living in nature and in his alleys, farms, mountains, etc. freeing himself from the limits and bondage of the corrupted and confused society. Michael created himself an inner world where he feels freedom, release and exhilaration. While people in his country are trying to prevent their land against the destructive forces of guerillas, Michael K goes on watering and protecting his pumpkins and melons against the attacks of donkeys and goats

Both *Life and Times of Michael K* and *Waiting for the Barbarians* share some similarities on the level of thematic and structural. Both the magistrate and Michael K are not adventurer characters who are willing to be included in the process of changing of the history. They live in peace and feel freedom when they are not obliged to obey the rules and order of the oppressor society. The magistrate is content with his peaceful life in the town, similarly Michael as a simple and ordinary gardener feels relief and serenity in nature. The colonizer has always thought of the colonized as an object waiting to be domination, exploitation, and manipulation so he becomes a kind of creation of the colonizer. Before the arrival of the colonizer, he was nothing; he was shapeless and he was in a kind of a chaos and corruption; however, the arrival of the colonizer ceased the chaos and gave shape and order to the colonized and his world.

The theme of torture is also dealt within two novels. K, who releases himself from the bondage of the rules of the society, is being thrown into deep silence by his torturers. Likewise, the barbarian girl, tortured by Colonel Joll and his soldiers, refuses to speak about herself. The medical officer in *Life and Times of Michael K* and the magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* are the characters belonging to white dominating society. Both of them try to cure and treat their patients' scars and offer remedy for their pains. Medical officer continuously tries to feed Michael offering him different kinds of food; similarly the magistrate repeatedly washes the shapeless feet of the barbarian girl. They probably both feel guilty themselves in the name of the tortures. So, by curing their scars and ceasing their pains, they would feel a kind of purification, relief and peace of mind.

Michael's determination to return to his farm repeatedly and the magistrate's resistance to stay at the frontier with the natives coincide at a common point. They both try to live in peace and serenity in their places where there are no rules, obligations, oppressors, and torturers. Both characters exhibit human devastation wrought by state power.

In *Life and Times of Michael K* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*, time of the event and the name of the country are not mentioned directly, and these abstractions created a vague and elusive idea for the reader. Nevertheless, both novels are set, directly or indirectly, in the political turmoil that South Africa have suffered in the apartheid period. Although, J.M. Coetzee has been criticized as being less straightforward and direct in his novels than other South African novelists, he has created characters and events that are parts of South Africa. The heroes and events that the author portraits relate with a universal struggle between the oppressed/ oppressor, the violator/ violated, the torturer/ tortured, the self/ the other.

In *Life and Times of Michael K.*, although Michael's color is not directly stated, the places that Michael K is detained, reluctantly- railway gang, resettlement camp, rehabilitation camp-are associated metaphorically with grounds where nonwhite South African people have suffered. Similarly, in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the group that is unknown to anyone in the town is regarded as an element of threat for the Empire. In both of the novels, both Michael and barbarians are invisible enemies for the Empire which are governed by white men.

Both novels present a portrait of the colonized and the colonizer as dictated by the Western hegemonic, racist, and discriminatory discourse in which the colonizer always think of himself as idealized and idolized since he is dominant and supreme but the colonized undergoes a kind of alienation and degradation because of the imperialistic behaviors of the colonial powers.

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