

I. Introduction: Coetzee vis-à-vis Apartheid Era South Africa and the Design of the Dissertation

This research study tries to explore the political irony in the postmodern fictions, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) and *Age of Iron* (1990) of the postcolonial South African author, John Maxwell Coetzee, by applying the perspective of politics of irony which is directed at attacking the persistent ideology of dehumanization that the apartheid system adopted as its characteristics. To show the politics of irony in the novels, I have attempted to justify my presumption of Coetzee's attack on the dehumanizing, exploiting inclination of colonial apartheid regime by drawing the concept of politics of irony developed by Linda Hutcheon in her book, *Irony Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (1994), from the perspective of the marginalized victims. Apart from Hutcheon, the ideas developed by other theorists such as Paul de Man, Kierkegaard and others are also constituted to reinforce the analysis.

Before analyzing the texts, it is referential to connect a brief historical background of apartheid era in South Africa. Richard Hunt Davis defines 'apartheid' as the policy of racial segregation to bypass the certain group of people from political rights and mainstream of the society. The word 'apartheid' denotes the meaning, 'separateness' in Afrikaan language. It describes the rigid racial division between the ruling white minority population and non-white majority population that was formally started by the then The National Party (NP) which introduced apartheid as the part of their campaign in the election of 1948. Along with the victory of the NP, apartheid was adopted as the governing political policy of South Africa that continued until early 1990s. The apartheid law classified people under major three groups: White, Bantu or Black Africans and Colored or people from mixed descent. Laws prohibited races from social contact, public facilities and denied any representation of non-

whites in the national government. People, who opposed the government, were taken to the police state.

There had been long history of racial segregation of and white supremacy even before the apartheid was constitutionalized in South Africa. In 1910, parliamentary membership was limited to whites and the legislation passed in 1913, restricted black ownership to 13% of South Africa's total area (Davis 2008). Because of this racial discrimination, African National Congress (ANC) was founded to fight against those unfair government policies. After apartheid was made the official policy in 1950s, the ANC declared that "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white," and revolted to throw out the apartheid. Consequently, the government banned all black African political organizations including ANC.

From 1960s to 1970s, the government made apartheid as the policy of separate department. Blacks were called 'Bantustans'. Increasing violence strikes, boycotts and demonstrations by opponents of apartheid and the overthrow of colonial rule by blacks in Mozambique and Angola forced the government to relax some of the restrictions. From late 1970s to mid 1980s, the government started a series of reforms that allowed black labor unions to recognize and permitted some political activities by the opposition. The 1984 constitution opened parliament membership to Asians and coloreds but it continued to exclude black Africans who made up 75% of the total population (Davis 2008). The increasing revolt in the urban areas and the pressure of the external force compelled the government to end the apartheid policies. In 1990, the new president, F.W. de Klerk proclaimed a formal end to apartheid with the release of ANC leader Nelson Mandela from the prison and the legislation of the black African political organizations (Davis 2008).

Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* depicts the oppression of the unnamed

empire to the native South African ethnic minorities considering them to be barbarians. The novel's narrator is the magistrate, the chief administrator of a small town on the frontier skirted by nomadic barbarian people. As a colonial agent, the magistrate holds a prime responsibility of awakening a painful and ambivalent process of the empire that allows having deep understanding of imperialism to emerge. The magistrate's sense of complicity to the so called term 'barbarian' is the key and vital aspect of the novel's ethical stance. The magistrate develops an ambivalent interest in one of the tortured victims, a young 'barbarian' girl who has been nearly blinded with broken ankles by the torture of empire. Living together with that girl, the magistrate recognizes the factor of inhuman torture and oppression and begins the journey of self discovery. He feels guilty for being the employee of the empire and decides to help the wounded girl go up to the community of her own people. It is against the interest of Colonel Joll who stands as the faithful representative of the regime, appointed to suppress the nomads. As Joll interrogates and tortures barbarian prisoners, the magistrate becomes increasingly sympathetic towards the victims. When the magistrate comes back from the desert leaving the crippled girl, he is imprisoned for treasonously consorting the enemy and he is himself subjected to torture and humiliation by Mandel, the supporter of Colonel Joll. Hitting on magistrate's chest, Mandel shouts, "You bastard! You fucking old lunatic! Get out! Go and die somewhere!" (*Waiting for the Barbarians* 168).

In spite of such barbarian actions, manner and the use vulgar language, the empire never finds out the barbarians it is waiting for nor does the magistrate hesitate to anticipate his action. Innocent natives like the fishermen, the nomads, the prisoners and invisible enemies are tortured who are always 'the barbarians' in the magistrate's narrative. The barbarian enemies are not found in the desert and the native prisoners

never display any barbaric behavior. The magistrate repeats the word 'barbarian' frequently. So as Boletsi Maria states, "Even more, its incantatory repetition points to the excess of the empire's discursive regime which contaminates its truth by overstating them" (79). Finally, "having failed to engage the barbarians successfully, the army abandons the town, leaving the freed magistrate to resume his official functions" (Craps 61). At the close of the novel, the magistrate and the remaining inhabitants of the outpost await the arrival of the barbarians.

Coetzee's novels *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Age of Iron* are the reflections of the imperial and apartheid sociopolitical picture of South Africa under which the native South Africans were subjected to pass the life in torture and subjugation. Because of the use of powerful language to portray the graphic picture of his contemporary society, Coetzee's novels have become popular among the readers. The novels have been interpreted and analyzed with different perspectives by the critics. As a prize winning novel, *Waiting for Barbarians* has acquired huge popularity, so it has drawn critical attention of the relatively young South African authors and other critics. Commenting on the empire with reference of the novel, Irving Howe opines, "True, the empire is abstract, timeless, and placeless but through the scrim of empire *Waiting for the Barbarians* renders a moment in our politics, a moment of our injustice" (www.nytimes.com/books).

In London review of the novel, Bernard Levin judges Coetzee as, "Mr. Coetzee sees the heart of the darkness in all societies and gradually it becomes clear that he is not dealing in politics at all, but inquiring into the nature of the beast that lurks within each of us" (www.nytimes.com/books). Although Lavin's view might be to generalize the common inner barbarian instinct of human beings, it could be directed to apartheid regime of South Africa to the context of this present fiction.

Similarly, Boletsi Maria, evaluates Coetzee's fictional works as: "Coetzee's novels have often been accused of being apolitical and not addressing explicitly the historical situation in South Africa. However, the kind of novel, he describes here is not ahistorical" (82). In my opinion, impartial narration of the events is itself historical that depicts the apartheid history in fictional way. Talking about the border between the oppressed and oppressor in South Africa during apartheid era, Gregory O'Dea opines, "Border: in Coetzee's novel, borders are defined and attacked, questioned and crossed, made to stand for what is within and what is without. Borders are the demarcation of a fatal dichotomy that has guided of all human history: the differentiation of US and THEM" (6). The colonial apartheid draws a demarcation for segregating natives from participating in casual activities because they are gazed in term of otherness. Prejudices and biasness have created the gap between the power and powerlessness.

The novel is the reflection on imperial terror, preemptive warfare, torture and prisoner abuse published at the height of apartheid era. To prove this, Stef Craps asserts highlighting the scene of torture enforced by imperial apartheid:

The empire's desire or need to "author" the colonial other, to impose an identity upon them, is revealed most clearly in the scene in which a group of barbarians is herded into a public square to be whipped and beaten. Before inviting the crowd in attendance to join the soldiers in thrashing the prisoners, Joll grabs a piece of charcoal and inscribes the word "enemy" on their naked backs. (62)

This description clearly portrays the scenario of the people's condition in South Africa under imperial apartheid. It is the apotheosis of highest level of cruelty and the denial of humanity of its victims.

For victim, torture means the "transformation of the person into flesh" (Amery qtd. in Spencer 175) but for torturers it is the way to control the victims, no matter whether they are guilty or innocent. The critics' attention has been tended on the magistrate's growing awareness of his knowledge in the imperial mindset targeted to the barbarians. He wants to understand what the scars on their bodies mean. The scars in the tortured girl's body, turns him to be more benevolent. He sees a clear gap between him and Joll, "the distance between myself and her torturers, I realize, is negligible; I shudder" (29).

Robert Spencer, the professor of the University of Manchester, in his scholarly article "J.M. Coetzee and Colonial Violence" evaluates the entire novel in terms of humanism, imperialism, torture and violence as:

The topicality of J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) is due firstly to its capacity to demonstrate that torture is made possible not just by the criminality of its perpetrators and the connivance of policymakers but also, ultimately, by a pervasive ideology of dehumanization. Secondly, by virtue of its first person narrative form, *Waiting for the Barbarians* recounts in the voice of the colonizer a gradual process of confusion, introspections and remorse that enables the reader to experience closely rather than merely witness from a distance an exemplary process of self-questioning. (173)

Spencer's criticism clearly posits the ambivalent complicity of the apartheid rulers and the policymakers who develop the pervasive ideology of dehumanization but they remain confused with the process they follow, that self-questions to themselves and ironically, the readers find the perpetrators incapable to answer the question.

Similarly, *Age of Iron* depicts the horrible picture of oppression against the

ordinary people, especially the blacks by the apartheid regime in South Africa. The events are narrated by an elderly white lady Mrs. Elizabeth Curren, a retired classic lecturer who is suffering from terminal bone cancer. Mrs. Curren narrates the events in the form of letter to her daughter who lives in America due to the political disturbance in South Africa. Having been familiar with immediate context of school boycotting of the black students with the rallying slogan "liberation before education" and the protest against the radical politicization of education, Mrs. Curren maintains her humanistic educational ideals. She supports Bheki and John's protest of the discriminating educational system and expresses deep concern in their murder of the police force. Finally, she befriends with black people and her perception of apartheid regime and the white supremacy is changed in negative way.

Critics have given their views in regard of the novel with different angles. Bob Mustin delivers his critical view pointing to the aim of the novel as:

An early novel in Coetzee's list of achievements, *Age of Iron*, depicts the author's distaste for apartheid, the revolution against it, and gives prescient hints of what was to come of South Africa after Mandela. Coetzee has always seemed to this reader an idealist, harping eloquently against human imperfections and the flawed institutions created by such faulty people. (www.goodgrads.com)

Mustin's version analyzes the Coetzee's forecasting of the harmonious South Africa after Nelson Mandela led the nation, as *Age of Iron* opposes the way faulty people shatter the society with their imperfect hegemony that relativizes the context narrated in the novel.

Rachel Ann Walsh, on account of the South Africa's 1985-1989 state

emergency, relates Mrs. Curren's narrative in *Age of Iron* referencing the human suffering and universal humanism as:

Age of Iron overturns the authorial construction of maternity and universal humanism that so dominate Curren's narrative. In doing so, the novel mirrors Coetzee's admission that responding to the other involves being overwhelmed both by a sense of one's complicity as a witness and by one's hopelessness in the face of reality of the neighbor's suffering. (180)

According to Walsh, *Age of Iron* focuses on the affinity between maternity and humanism that Mrs. Curren wants to highlight for the promotion of universal need of humanity to foster the humans in pain. But it is so much saddening situation to be unable to do anything to soothe other's suffering even after deeply realizing the need of it that Mrs. Curren experiences in the novel. She cannot fully exercise her maternity for humanism due to the power of tyrant political system.

But Michael Marais forwards the strengths of the narration that ultimately projects the possibility of ethical community Coetzee utters in his interview suggesting:

Age of Iron, however, is ultimately an optimistic novel. For example, Mrs. Curren, even when she reflects on what seems to be the determinism of her "doll's life" in the repressive community of which she is a part of aware of the idea of an alternative, ethical community, an awareness which eventually translates into the realization that it is possible to escape this determinism. (12)

Very ideally, Marais digs out the bright and strong outcomes of the powerless narrator being one of the members of the repressive community. The term 'determinism' refers

to the denial of the possibility of free will that stops Mrs. Curren from making marginalized to be free and fine. But her dream of translating determinism into ethical community is strong, so ultimately, inevitable.

The major factor behind Coetzee's motive to write *Age of Iron* is the political relation between self and other. In politics, there is always danger that the ethics may be forgotten or suppressed since it can serve as its own justification. But in the politics, the ethical is tyrannical. It is due to the political contamination, apartheid reign lost its ethical stance. Dealing upon the nature of apartheid in association of the novel, Edward Jordaan writes:

Apartheid South Africa was an extreme case of politics dominating ethics. During these times, the interpersonal ethical relation became virtually impossible to maintain. The subject and other were constantly forced into racial categorization of the apartheid system, an objectification that persistently obscured the ethical uniqueness of persons. . . . During apartheid there was a continuous and predictable falling back on inhumane rules. (30)

Jordaan's historical portrayal of apartheid South Africa arouses the bitter contempt against the human wilderness that comes on the surface after forgetting the ethical stance. This reference has been directed toward the Coetzee's purpose of writing the novel to attack apartheid, ironically.

By analyzing Coetzee's narratives, this project aims to identify the political irony that Coetzee has implied to hit upon the then Imperial apartheid regime in South Africa. In both novels the narrators are whites, the magistrate from empire and Mrs. Curren, native South African but speak in favor of blacks. Spotlighting on the politics of irony how Coetzee has attacked the dehumanizing motive of the apartheid South

Africa in his novels *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Age of Iron* is the main focus of this study. The project also aims to pit on how continuing history of police-state violence traumatized black South African families through the attribution of white narrators.

The dissertation is a library-based research; it has used a closed discursive analytical style which has drawn on the concepts of political irony and the technical terms related to these fields. As the study gives sustained attention to pervasive dehumanization via politics of irony in the texts, it has followed the lead of theory of politics of irony particularly theorized by Linda Hutcheon in her latest book, *Irony's Edge* (1994) that deals upon the broad area of irony moving ahead from the more traditional definition of irony that considers it to be opposite of what something is said. The part of the main theoretical framework also comes out of Hutcheon's claims on politics of irony. The idea of the critics like Paul de Man, Beerendra Pandey, Maria Boletsi, Stef Craps, Rebecca Sounders, Tory Urquhart and so forth have also been supportive to a great extent.

This dissertation problematizes how irony is directed at attacking the pervasive ideology of dehumanization that characterized the apartheid-era South Africa and it presumes that the use of political irony attacks such exploiting tendencies from the perspectives of marginalized victims. Coetzee ironizes by letting the white characters narrate the events from the side of blacks opposing the white post colonial supremacy.

In the process of finding out the solution of the problem and proving my presumption, I have divided the thesis into five chapters. In the first chapter, I have introduced my dissertation with its thesis statement, short history of apartheid South Africa, very brief synopsis of the texts, literature review and the design of the thesis.

In the second chapter I have discussed on irony's poetics and politics on the basis of the theoretical modality developed by Linda Hutcheon, specifically and Chapter third analyzes the political irony in Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*. In the fourth chapter, I have presented the arguments on politics of irony in Coetzee's another novel, *Age of Iron* and in the last chapter I have concluded my research dealing upon Coetzee's attack on the apartheid trying to answer the research question and prove my hypothesis.

II. Irony: Its Poetics and Politics

In this chapter, I have tried to show the linkage between irony and poetics and the politics of irony particularly with reference to the theory promoted by the Canadian scholar, Linda Hutcheon in her book, *Irony's Edge* (1994). Besides, other relevant arguments of various critics have also been involved and considered to reinforce the analysis. Does irony resemble the qualities of poetics? Literally, poetics refers to the study of poetic works that is specially related to poetry. Furthermore, poetics is the theory of all literary discourse. The old prevailing view among the people holds the thought of seeing language inherently literal. Henceforth, people consider that figuratively spoken or written language is also similar to the language of ordinary life thinking that human mind is generally described in simple, non-metaphorical terms that reflects the truth of the world. But poetic assertions are distinctive from true knowledge, therefore it can be figurative.

In broader sense, the terms 'figurative' and 'poetics' resemble the same meaning. That's why their language comprises similar characteristics including different rhetorical devices such as metaphor, metonymy, personification, simile, image, irony and so on. In this sense, analyzing something poetically is different thing from ordinary thinking as Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr. in his book, *The Poetics of Mind* opines, " To think or speak poetically is to adopt a distorted stance toward the ordinary world , one that is held in disdain by most philosophers, scientists, and educators"(1). The scientists and others may contempt poetics because of its distorted stance and the indirection in meaning that the scientists do not use. Irony, metonymy, metaphor constitute basic schemes by which people conceptualize their experience and the external world. The common notion of people that the figurative language is only related to literary work is not fully correct. Though the language of great poet

could be much more creative than that of the utterance of most of the ordinary speakers, both of them make use of the same figurative schemes of thought that goes beyond literal meaning that may refer the poetics. To the great extent, the characteristics of irony can be similar to the poetics. Unlike the more traditional meaning to view irony as antiphrasis, it can cover as board area as poetics itself. That is to say, irony could be categorized as the other form of poetics.

Even though poetics is considered to be the creation of highly intellectual and capacitated mind, ordinary people also naturally think in poetic ways to make sense of their general experience even without knowing about it, theoretically. Similarly, every speaker uses irony frequently in their everyday speech, in the form of sarcasm. At that moment, we are judging the events as ironic because of an awareness of the peculiarity between expectation and reality even though other participants in the situation might be blind of what is really happening. Poetics relates the aesthetic dimension of any discourse rhetorically so does the irony as Stephen Davies says, "The effect of the world or existence is inherently ironic which requires investigation. . . . We need to understand and assess the surprisingly frequent claims that irony is the center to serious literature" (Davies 378). So Ronald Barthes claims irony to be "the essence of writing" (qtd. in Culler 86).

Normally, irony has been categorized to be one of the tropes of the figure of speech that is used to convey the meaning the opposite of what is actually said. But it would not be good idea to confine irony within this narrow definition because irony doesn't necessarily need to convey the opposite meaning of what is said. Davies Stephen clearly presents his logics, "So usual definition needs double amending. While an ironic trope must convey something that vividly contrasts with what is literally meant by the words, this need not to be the 'opposite' of the latter" (378).

Hence, irony's meanings can be multiple similar to the poetics. It has similar kind of attraction like criticism via mimicry. Irony is recognized only by people with the appropriate knowledge, insight and intimacy with the speaker or author. With the absence of these features, the motive of the writer is misunderstood and the core pinpoint of irony can be misfired. The mismatched perception of the audience and the target of the creator may locate irony out of its proper position. In *A Modest Proposal*, Jonathan Swift advocates the Irish underdog people by referring them to sell their babies to well-to-dos for killing and eating. Actually, his purpose is to ridicule the solutions to the Irish problems offered by contemporary politicians in Ireland but the readers take it as serious recommendation and Swift is condemned for giving such cruel suggestion. Here, the poetics, the irony of the text is perceived rather with literal meaning, so the intention is misfired. From this instance, it is assumed that "irony aims to express fairly unspecific attitudes than to communicate particular beliefs" (Davies 379). In this regards, it is essential for the readers to know about the plurality of meaning in a single text and the author's purpose is most probably corrective rather than misleading.

Irony is such poetic device that occurs even without intention of the ironist and the ones who perceive it, as Karl Solger calls irony "the most complete fruit of the artistic understanding" (qtd. in Schmitt 115). Like the poetics, irony is also the sense of art itself which can be observed in any types of literary works either prose or verse, fictional or non-fictional. To support this statement, Keirkegaard argues, "Since "actuality" is itself ironic, it is the writer's duty to take a "negative" distanced stance toward it" (380). There can be gap between the author's effort to convey a certain message in the text and the way the readers presume the meaning from it. The honest author admits this gap confirming that the meaning of work is not governed by the

author. It is the readers' right to see irony in the text associating to their own feelings and experiences rather than worrying about author's purpose of writing. This concept is more relevant to the ideology of deconstruction that talks about the plurality of a text's meaning and its nature of holding multiple centers. Similarly, irony in a text may not be identical when it is read by the readers of various levels. Thus, irony locates in reader's mind, no matter the text might or might not be ironic in itself.

Broadening this sense of irony Stephen Davies further writes:

There is irony no doubt, in a virgin writing a novel of torrid sexual passion, but it need not to be an ironic novel. . . . We should note how much of our familiar concept of irony is being left out in the claim that all writing is ironic and in the recommendation that the authors should therefore write in a self-consciously ironic manner. (380)

Needless to say, all writers have purpose to write but the intention is hidden within the text. For that they use poetic devices such as metaphor, simile, symbol, image and so forth. They aspire that the readers would be able to capture the indirect ideas. But it could be only the author's projection about the readers' understanding of his/her intention. Readers, on the other hand also have the purpose of reaching the way the author desired to convey but there could be gap between the intention and understanding. What's more, the reader creates the meaning by analyzing the text even if it may be contrastive to the author's intention. Hence, the author's intended message indirectly expressed in the text and reader's understandings of the text are both the ironies. Therefore:

There may be gap between what the author intends and the meaning of his or her text, and a gap between the ironic speaker's intention and the meaning of her words. . . . it is certainly not part of our ordinary

understanding that an ironist must fail to communicate what he or she intends to. (Davies 381)

This diversity between the addressor and addressee's intention and understanding strengthens irony because both parts are valid. For more clarification about the position of irony, Clarie Colebrook concludes, "There is always a certain irony, always a predicament of disjunction between what is and what one means, both for oneself and for others" (174).

There are, in fact, many important features of the writer's situation, context, need, influence of certain literary traditions and things to inspire him or her to write. But it is not desirable, obligatory or even possible for the author to keep reminding the readers of all these aspects of literary enterprise. Because of the changed circumstances, the reader may internalize the meaning different from the author's plan to convey. In both sides, irony's role is vital. It helps all literary production to be surviving from generation to generation. In this sense, like poetics, irony beautifies and stabilizes the works of art.

Thus, irony is the powerful and all-round motor of entire rhetorical system. It is so fundamental that it would not be justifiable to confine it within a trope. Unlike other devices like metaphor, metonymy, symbol and so forth, irony's role is general, not particular. All texts are the parts of irony as Beerendra Pandey in *Crosscurrent* stresses, "All texts become fundamentally unreadable, hopelessly locked into uncontrollable irony whose displacements is impossible to stop" (262). The view is reinforced by Paul de Man, defining irony more elaborately:

So irony doesn't stop. . . . There is irony when language starts to say things you didn't think it was saying, when words acquire meanings way beyond the one you think you are controlling and start saying

things that go against your quest for meaning or admitted intension. So irony is so fundamental, that, for me, it is no longer a trope. Irony is generally called a trope of tropes, but actually irony is a disruption of a continued field of tropological meaning. So all people who write on irony try to limit its meaning and singularly fail to do so. It's uncontrollable because it is just that: it has to do with the lack of control of meaning (Moynihan qtd. in Pandey 263).

This definition expands the coverage area of irony. For being one of the most significant literary devices, irony holds interdisciplinary aspects in literary productions. Irony is nowhere and irony is everywhere. There must be someone to see irony in relation to his/her social schooling in the text as Linda Hutcheon says, "Irony is always a social and political edge. Irony depends upon interpretation; it happens in the tricky, unpredictable space between expression and understanding" (*Irony's Edge*). And, "irony has been located and explicated in literature, the visual arts, music, dance, theater, museum displays, conversation, philosophical argumentation, and the list could go on and on" (1). Because of its dynamism and omnipresence in all kind literary and non-literary works, irony's role can be similar to the poetics.

Hutcheon radicalizes irony by emphasizing on its politics in literary and non-literary discourse. Irony is beyond the particular defined boundary. Its coverage area is wider than other tropes of literary devices. Hutcheon contrasts irony from other devices and indicates the place where the politics of irony gets heated as:

Unlike metaphor or allegory, which demands similar supplementing of meaning, irony has its evaluative edge and manages to provoke emotional responses in those who get it and those who don't, as well as in its targets and in what some people call its victims. This is where the

politics of irony get heated. (2)

Hutcheon might mean that other literary terms may have certain purpose to deliver the message to the receiver whereas irony has general way of conveying the information, adopted after evaluating the works of art. She puts forward the idea that the scene of irony involves the relations of power based in relation of communication which unavoidably involves touchy issues such as exclusion and inclusion, intervention and evasion. Whatever issues there could be, irony can't be irony if it is separated from interpretation, so Hutcheon further argues, "Someone attributes irony; someone makes irony happen" (6). Though "the major players of the ironic game are indeed the interpreter and the ironist" (11). Irony is chiefly the matter of interpretation because the addressor's intended message might not be understood in the same way by the designated addressee. This is why irony is "risky business" (Fish, qtd. in Hutcheon 11) and this is why the language used to talk about irony is often the language of risk: irony is "dangerous" and "tricky" (Lejeune qtd. in Hutcheon 17), for ironist, interpreter, and target alike (17). Hutcheon's clinical point is that: "Politically and culturally, irony can be dangerous stuff, which cannot be tied down either to the ironist's intention or to formal qualities of language. It is always open to interpretation, misinterpretation, or no interpretation at all" (Hutcheon qtd. in Phiddian 253). It happens because there is no uniformity between intention, understanding and the way people perceive it. Hence, there is an obvious gap among these groups. Irony exists within these gaps. The gap creates the distance between said and unsaid. The said is the content, the author expresses his explicit ideas using language and the unsaid is the ironist's implicit assumption, the irony, the interpreter may get the ideas as he/she intends to share.

Referring Paul de Man's thought on irony Beerendra Pandey clarifies the

irony's extensive territory, "Irony, to de Man, is not a trope, a mere device which is in principle interpreted in accordance with the speaker's intention or the truth-claim, but the very disruption language poses to understanding" (256). According to C. Belsey, irony is "no less authoritative because its meanings are implicit rather than explicit" (qtd. in Hutcheon 28). Moreover, the same or differently perceived ideas of the readers after interpreting the text could also be the irony. Both of these encoding and decoding process of unsaid has been made possible due to the politics of irony.

Hutcheon's fundamental principle about irony could be that it is an event which is inferred by the reader or spectator or listener, rather than a formal trope of language or a deliberate message from the artist. This insistence makes the important point that:

Irony is in the eye of the beholder, and allows us to see the event of irony occurring, with all its nuances of ascribed intention and necessary activations of latent intertextual knowledge, but it also creates a nagging and sometimes ponderous presence in the text.
(Phiddian 251)

So, beholder must have the ability to see irony in the text. The text of the artistic creation and the text or acquired ideology in the reader's mind get mixed and new idea is created, that is irony. Whatever ideas the reader sees in the text either grasping the intention of the ironist or goes astray, both are ironies. This unbound, unrestricted and interdisciplinary nature in all sectors is irony's politics.

There can be potentiality of problem with any use of irony because of the distance between said and unsaid ideas: "between the intended irony that goes unperceived and unintended that becomes irony by being perceived, there is room for many kinds and degrees of misunderstanding, misfire and puzzle, as well as of

understanding and complicity" (Chambers qtd. in Hutcheon 14). Hutcheon focuses that "even if an ironist intends an irony to be interpreted in an oppositional framework, there is no guarantee that this subversive intent will be realized" (15). Such position and role of irony may make people feel uneasy. Irony is said to irritate "because it denies us our certainties by unmasking the world as an ambiguity" (Kundera qtd. in Hutcheon 14). "It can also mock, attack, and ridicule; it can exclude, embarrass and humiliate" (14). Thus, irony can be problematic, in inelegant term it can be responsible to "complexify"; it can never "disambiguate"(13). This may cause frustration while treating "the semantics of irony from its syntactic or pragmatics" (Pratt qtd. in Hutcheon 13). However, irony is in favor of reality. Though in indirect way, irony targets to advocate the truth. This is why irony is associated with intellect rather than emotions. Intellect supports the truth even if it may sometimes be bitter but emotion might not be the same due to its delicacy and flexibility. Evaluating the positive outputs of irony, Hutcheon comments, "Irony works in a positive and constructively affirmative way is usually held by those who also see irony as a powerful tool or even weapon in the fight against a dominant authority which irony is said to work to destroy" (26). Hence, irony's politics is directed in quest of the truth, in favor of the people in injustice protesting the dominant authority.

Irony has certain strategic goal, process and medium to deliver the message. Irony exists in particular discursive community that comes out of some context and there is the position of the ironist targeting the audience. In each community, there are seen and unseen activities, the seen ones are in general supposed to be intended positively whereas the unseen or hidden ones may be troubling the marginalized group. These underworld misconducts cause complications and complexity in social development. Irony always plays a vital role in flashing out these underworld parts

advocating the rights of the voiceless within discursive communities.

It would not be justifiable to explain irony in terms of any simple antiphrastic semantic model or theory of substitution. Operating more inclusively and differentially, irony's indirect meanings are born of rubbing of the edge of the said or seen against the plural edges of unsaid or unseen. There is conflict between haves and have-nots in each discursive community. The powerful group dominates, suppresses and oppresses the powerless one. Irony's purpose is to expose such anti-social misbehaviors in order to establish the equality and equity in the society. That is to say, "irony causes de-centering by functioning in two different ways: as a tool in the hands of the marginalized for a pointed counter-discourse and as a tool of resistance when operating from . . . the hybrid space" (Pandey 264). Showing the ironies referring to the exhibition in the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Canada entitled "Into the Heart of Africa" and indicating the dominating role of British Empire in Africa in terms of language, race gender, education and so on, as Hutcheon views:

Race and nationality, of course, were primary community-defining factors, but so was timing of viewing and background knowledge: it mattered whether you attended in the first few months, before the controversy erupted, or after; it mattered how much you know about the conflict and where you had got your information about it. The discursive communities to which viewers belonged determined how they might construct ironic meaning from the exhibition's objects and text. (171)

In the passage above, Hutcheon talks with reference to the African collection of the museum that was the first complete showing of the African collection of the museum, but what began with good intentions ended with protesting by the members of the

African Canadian community, court sanction against them by the museum encounters between demonstrators and the police that led criminal charges being laid. The African-Canadian community saw none of their own cultures in the exhibition, and, indeed, only a re-run of the old story of white man's oppression. They protested bitterly because the demonstration with positive purpose is perceived by the viewer in terms of racism. Hutcheon studies the contexts, reads the exhibition, and shows how the irony, however deliberately intended, need not have happened for African-Canadian viewers. With her eye on the ebb and flow of irony, she does not seek to justify or excuse anyone in what seems to have become a very highly charged situation. Here, the function of the management in the discursive community, the irony is misread or misfired by the audience. The degree of that understanding is possible side of the issue, the testimony to the affective charge of irony's edge. Therefore, the serious disagreement after evaluating any function is also the irony although there may be widespread disagreement about the interpretation from the side of ironist.

The political nature of irony is related to the western concept to self and the other while linking to postcolonial concept. The colonialist images in the past about themselves had been "in a certain style of paternalism, authority, objectification and imperialist grandeur" (Colebrook 155). The so called guardians were conscious about the politics of speaking about others and keeping relationship with them. "The image of other is always decided, collected and determined from a governing and colonially complicit point of view" (155). Postcolonial writers have ironized the colonial dominating conduct imposed to others for sensitizing them. While viewing the colonizing gaze to others ironically, it has been failed to achieve its aim as the colonized are not the same as what they think them of to be. Analyzing the idea of

Hutcheon, Colebrook points out the post-colonial act of irony for clarifying the crimes of colonialism saying:

Not only are there some issues that might deserve more respect than others, such as the genocidal crimes of colonialism, there are also risks inherent in such post-colonial acts of irony and self distancing. . . . One speaks the language of colonialism and reasons ironically in order to display its violence, force and delimited viewpoint. (156)

This passage makes the point that there are risks of irony while distancing between self and other in relation to post-colonial act of irony and self distancing because people may use irony to show different issues such as language, genocidal crimes and other aspects of life that people need to be exposed to.

The irony's role in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Age of Iron*, the primary texts of this analytical study, is relevant to mention to this postcolonial context. The first of these novels attacks the unnamed colonial regime in South Africa that adopts violence, torture, racism and segregation to control over innocent native community of the blacks. Coetzee's irony powerful in transforming the false ideology of the colonial agents of their understanding about so called 'barbarians' they are waiting to destroy. Ironically, the novelist creates a white colonial employee, the magistrate who finally realizes the futile effort of the colonial empire and turns to support the marginalized victims.

Similarly, the attack of the irony against the apartheid rule during 1980s South Africa is also targeted to the then colonialism in *Age of Iron*. The tactfulness of the author is prevailed in pleading the white South African lady Mrs. Curren, to talk in favor of native South African blacks. She sees the apartheid system similar to her terminal bone cancer as Michael Marais points out, "Mrs. Curren's illness should be

construed as a metaphor for the erosion of selfhood by the structure of power" (9). In both novels, Coetzee ironically attacks the power supporting the victimized. This example indicates that irony aims to promote the human rights parenting the downtrodden needy people via literary texts. The detail analysis of these texts in relation of the political nature of irony is given in chapter three and four of this research.

Hutcheon presents the basic functions of irony which result both positive and negative impressions to the commentators. Ironies seem to exist in certain discursive communities where they are originated from. "Irony may create communities, as so many theorists argue, but I have also suggested that irony is created by communities, too" (51). Irony can have minimal affective charge to maximal affective charge ranging from reinforcing to aggregative. In between, Hutcheon places the charges of irony like 'complicating, ludic, distancing, self-protective, provisional, oppositional and assailing' (My emphasis). Each of these charges of irony relates distinct function, i.e. the charge 'reinforcing' may have emphatic/precise function and decorative/subsidiary one. Other functions can be inclusionary or exclusionary, corrective or destructive, transgressive or insulting, non-dogmatic or evasive, humorous or irresponsible and so forth (Hutcheon figure 2.1 45). These functions are the multiple edges of irony that posit it as vibrant agent to view upon the world with multiple lenses. When one edge of irony comes on the surface others are obscured, that's why "Irony's edge in other words can blur edges too" (48).

As it has multidimensional functions to perform, irony need not always be taken with strongly emotive and moral accent. Instead, it could be neutral in terms of cognitive principle. But Hutcheon thinks it is necessary to insist on the continued existence of some emotive accent to irony as well as continuing presence, even after

New Criticism, of some satiric, corrective functioning of irony. That is to say, it is difficult to confirm the precision of irony within particular area. It may be called intellectual attitude, an aristocratic and even anti-social on the part of the ironist.

Paul de Man lectures on "The Concept of Irony," which is the title he borrows from Kierkegaard, who wrote the best book on irony, called *The Concept of Irony*. To de Man this title itself is ironic, because he thinks irony is not a concept. He has anthologized this idea in his book, *Aesthetic Ideology*. For de Man irony is not a concept, there is fundamental problem in categorizing it as a concept because it is uncannily difficult to give the particular definition of irony while seeing the historic aspect of the problem. So, "It seems to be something inherently difficult in the definition of the term because it seems to encompass all tropes, on one hand, on the other hand, very difficult to define as a trope" (de Man 164). Historically, de Man focuses that the renowned theorists on 'irony' like German aesthetician Friedrich Solgar, August Wilhelm Schlegel, Hegel and Kierkegaard do not seem to have propounded the concrete definition of irony. They seem to have engaged in refuting on the ideas put forward by their counterparts. For instance, de Man refers Kierkegaard's conclusion on irony and questions, "Why Kierkegaard in his theoretical task of understanding the concept of irony, should have defined it finally as 'absolute infinite negativity'," so "Irony itself opens up doubts as soon as its possibility enters our heads" (166).

Irony does have performative function, it consoles, promises and excuses. For these reasons, irony is neither within particular definition nor is comes out of any concept. Irony is everywhere not just in a specific passage. De Man's analysis makes irony even much broader and wider. It cannot be confined within straightforward semantic inversion as antiphrasis or saying one thing and meaning its opposite. It

needs to rethink about its straightforward meaning of substitution said by the unsaid opposite. Looking at irony's nature, it is significant to consider it with kinship between it and other tropes such as metaphor and allegory. It is the trope of the tropes. Thus, irony is a political issue and its politics is prolific, it has unlimited ways to outlet with unlimited possibilities.

Considering the thoughts of different theorists, it is assumed that irony is more than one evaluates it to be. Moreover, Hutcheon talks about the communicative process of irony with its semantic characteristics in three points: relational, inclusive and differential. The first of these shows the relationship between people, i.e. ironist, interpreter and targets, apart from the meaning i.e. said and unsaid. For that reason, "Ironic meaning comes into being as the consequence of relationship, a dynamic, performative bringing together of different meaning makers, . . . with the critical edge of judgment" (56). Inclusive characteristic of irony proposes the ironic meaning all the way through a number of suggestive images. The interpreters may see multiple images in the same text according to their conceptual background. They may supplement their own image in different ways but they may prove it to be useful none the less.

Quoting from Scheidemann's, *Experiment in General Psychology*, and referring the image entitled 'Rabbit or Duck', Hutcheon compares the inclusive nature of irony to "ducks and rabbits of ironic meaning, . . . whether you see a bird's bill or a long pair of ears in the extended shape issuing from the central mass" (57). She suggests that it comes to the ducks and rabbits of ironic meaning as our mind perceives them in whatever form. In this sense, the inclusive pleasure of irony may be similar to jokes and puns that might then be seen to reside "precisely in the discovery of two or more different principles of coherence in an utterance thought to be single

or homogenous" (61). The third, the differential aspect of ironic meaning suggests that irony operates where "the sign points to something that differs from its literal meaning and has for its function the thematization of this difference" (de Man qtd. in Hutcheon 62). Ironic meaning forms when two or more than two concepts are brought together like ducks and rabbits. That's why "unsaid is other than different from the said" (62). The differential aspect of irony is obviously distinctive from other forms of literary device like metaphor. Metaphor is rooted in the naming function of language "while irony is based on the communicative function" (Scholes qtd. in Hutcheon 62). However, both of these tropes are semantically plural and independent.

The theoretical references of the scholars in this study indicate the politics of irony. The place from where the irony starts off is the community, "it is the community that comes first and that in fact enables the irony happen" (85). It is context dependent. The circumstantial, textual and intertextual circumstances are the contexts of irony. Both ironist and interpreter are the products of certain community so they are exposed to some sort of social context. They can meet at any number of different areas such as, "rhetorical, linguistic, aesthetic, social, ethical, cultural, ideological professional and so on" (94). There are discursive communities like certain families and professions, within which the immediate context strikes the mind of the textual maker and the text is composed with certain meaning to be identified by the interpreters. Hutcheon says that all irony happens intentionally, "whether the attribution be made by the encoder or the decoder" (92). Interpretation is the intentional act of the interpreter who makes the irony happen with intensive evaluation of the text. In other words, "seeing and hearing irony is itself an intentional act that makes irony happen" (112). Thus, irony is a "matter of unspoken understanding" and it is the matter of "ideological complicity- an argument based on

shared understandings of 'how the world is'" (Chambers qtd. in Hutcheon 95). Irony, being vague term, difficult to define, being omnipresent in all genres of literary and nonliterary world, as a corrective tool for false doers, it is significant poetic device and integral part of social change. Hutcheon concludes her study, "Whether it will become too dangerous, too risky is for the future to decide. Will there ever be another -safe- "age of irony"? Did one ever really exist"? (196).

Summing up, irony resembles the features of poetics and its politics is sharp with multi-sided edges to cut with. On the one hand, irony is cold and disgraceful to those who it thumps upon. On the other hand it is warm and graceful for those who it fosters to by advocating their human rights. The gist if the analysis is that irony is on the side of the marginalized group. Irony locates its position in the unsaid meaning hidden within the said one flashed out from the decoder or interpreter. Viewing historically, irony is found to be always targeting to create progressive modification with the purpose of bringing equality and equity in the human world. Irony comes out of the discursive communities or the components of the society such as family, neighbor, friends, profession etc. In the preceding two chapters my efforts will be concentrated in applying the politics of irony in Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Age of Iron*. The politics of irony in both novels has been obviously directed in condemning the then colonial and autocratic apartheid reign during entire 1970s and 80s South Africa. The most significant achievement of Coetzee's irony is its role in transforming the white colonial agent and the native white in the side of the black victims.

III. Political Irony in *Waiting for the Barbarians*

Waiting for the Barbarians by J. M. Coetzee, first published in 1980, depicts an exploration of a horrific world of oppression, torture, callousness and human suffering of an entire historical period of South Africa during the late twentieth century. Because of the humanistic motive of the novelist towards marginalized group, the narration of the events has received almost undisputed compliments for its story. In this research, my efforts have been directed to examine the novel with the eye of irony, specifically political. The story of the novel begins with the magistrate dealing upon the horrifying scene, "I have never seen anything like it: two little dices of glass suspended in front of his eyes in loops of wire. Is he blind?" (*Waiting for the Barbarians* 4). The names of the town and the empire are unspecified, on the frontier of which the magistrate lives. He meets colonel Joll, the head of a secret service, who has been sent to this remote region to wage war against nomadic people who are called 'barbarians'. There is not any reference to the racial characteristics, neither of the barbarians nor their civilized counterparts.

The narrator sees the difference between barbarism and civilization, which is a major theme in classic Greek drama and in philosophy. Related to this theme, there is a searing description of man's cruelty to man. To support this statement Dominic Head asserts to evaluate the colonel as, "Joll presides over a regime of terror, involving interrogation and torture, and the directive to discover the 'truth' predetermined by empire's ethos. This is the base imperial drive for self-assertion, satisfied by the subjugation of those who are identified as the barbarian other" (Head 49). The long term waiting for the imaginary barbarians gives the colonel extra fear and feeling of insecurity. The magistrate realizes his futile waiting for the barbarians after he encounters with so called barbarian girl. The earlier transformation of the

magistrate in the side of the barbarians, i.e. the native South African people and long term illusion of the colonel about these people are contrastive that makes the magistrate to be self victimized from his own colonial side. Finally, finding no intended barbarians colonel Joll decides to leave the colonized country. The colonel seems to be changed not because of the protest of the native people nor any other external factor; he is transformed by his own colonial colleague, the magistrate. This self reflective aspect in the novel is ironical.

The title “Waiting for the Barbarians” is taken from a line from the Greek poet Constantine P. Cavafy. The poem emphasizes the ceremonial trappings and magnificence of empire - a legislative senate, an enthroned emperor, the dazzling show of its consuls the contrived rhetoric of its orators. In Cavafy's poem, critics have ventured to discover connection between the poem's context and contemporary events in Egypt, where Cavafy lived. According to the interpretation of Straitis Tsirkas the barbarians in the poem are the people of Egypt including Greek and other foreign communities in the country. Those people wanted to be saved from "civilization", the British Empire, which had been ruling Egypt since 1878 (Boletsi 83). Spotlighting on the darkness of colonial folly to the context of the poem, Maria Boletsi discloses the history of real events:

The disappearance of the barbarians in the poem alludes the brutal crushing of Mahdist rising- an Islamic revolt that took place in September 2, 1898. They suffered approximately twenty seven thousand casualties, while the English counted forty three dead. The barbarians therefore did not exist any longer. (83)

The passage denotes that Cavafy wrote the poem to rhetorically historicize empire's misconducts against the campaigner of freedom suspecting them as barbarians.

Similarly, in Coetzee's sense, to write *Waiting for the Barbarians* is inclined to historicize the apartheid's anti-human actions to a particular group of people.

In the novel, the identity of the people to which the empire refers with the term 'barbarians' stays unclear. The barbarians, against whom the empire sends its expeditionary forces, are supposed to be violent nomadic people, planning to attack against the empire. "However, the expeditionary forces never seem to reach these people" (85). The empire often marginalizes or exterminates the indigenous populations rather than merging with them. They transplant and internalize old world culture and traditions including language as the tool of dominating the margins.

The novel's narrator is the magistrate of the settlement and it is his process of awakening a painful and ambivalent process that allows deep understanding of imperialism to emerge. Wanting to read the signs of the barbarian girl's body he washes her crippled feet and then the rest of her body. But he cannot read her, and she cannot put her pain into words, he understands. Though he is attracted to the girl, he cannot consummate his sexual desire. He can neither penetrate her forcefully and willfully nor merge with her sympathetically. However, living together with that girl, the magistrate recognizes the torturer and begins the journey of self discovery and decides to leave her to her independent people in distant mountain. When he comes back from this dangerous winter journey, he is imprisoned for "treasonously consorting" with the enemy (77). As a prisoner, he soon becomes the body in pain. He is himself tortured and humiliated by the representative of Colonel Joll. The torture makes him formulate an image of the barbarian girl before she was disfigured and, examining the balanced site where she and other were tortured during the colonial's visit two months ago.

The empire never finds out the 'barbarians' it is waiting for. Innocent people

like fishermen, farmers and underdogs are imprisoned and punished instead. Finally, The Third Bureau garrison abandons their mission disrupted by tactics of the elusive nomadic people. Thus, it is the self formulated lacuna of the empire which "transforms the empire's statement about itself into an uncertainty, into the question that can be answered affirmatively or negatively, into a proposition inhabited by truth or by error"(Saunders 230). Ironically, the readers find the followers of the empire turning to be 'barbarians' that is proved by their attitudes and activities. The colonizers are quite unable to see the irony of their position as invaders in the homeland of the barbarians. They fail to recognize themselves as foreigners, and instead assume their superiority, legitimacy, and indisputable right over the natives and the land of the native inhabitants.

By depicting the dark inhuman picture of the South African society during the postcolonial apartheid period, Coetzee intends to transform the social, political and economic hegemony of the whites over often marginalized or exterminated indigenous population into more humane, bringing solidarity between white and black Africans. Imposing the dehumanized policy to the natives as Rebecca Saunders points out, "apartheid policy a place that physically separates people by "race" and black peoples by ethnicity, a justificatory policy for rendering African statutory foreigner in their native land, stripping them of political rights; prohibiting them from owning land and maintaining them in the role of "migrant workers" in urban areas (233).

The empire makes them foreigner in their native homeland. African land is turned into wasteland. Statistically, "It is a dumping ground for the 3.5 million African forcibly removed from their homes to purify "white areas"; it is the contrived geography that radically disrupts family life separating working men from their wives and children" (Saunders 233). The policy forces thousands to travel as far as two

hundred miles a day to and from work that compels them to spend about a quarter of their income on bus fare. People from black communities have to survive in an inhospitable space of poverty fighting with disease, starvation, seeing the highest rate of infant mortality. Coetzee's aspiration in the novel would be to change social and political ideology to transform wastelands into homelands. As the novel was written under apartheid colonial regime, his narration is implicit therefore, ironical. He must have considered the then social and political scenario probably for his own sake.

Linda Hutcheon's view on irony is relevant here: "...irony's indirect meaning were born of rubbing the edge of the said against the plural edges of the unsaid- in such a way that sparks were certainly created for some viewers" (171). Coetzee signals his readers to think of the unsaid meanings in his narration. Peter van der Veer points out that a true expression of violence cannot be articulated, for victim lacks a history. The narrative of the victim's counterhistory is always created by and in the service of the state, he argues, and the evidence provided by the victim is necessarily fragmented, giving us "no plot, no narrative, only leads that go nowhere" (qtd. in Urquhart 5). The political irony of Coetzee in the novel could be to go between the lines and expose the unwritten/ unsaid history of the victims falsifying the written/said history about them. After reading novel, the readers visualize the real sharp edge of irony targeting to the marginalized group over the shadowed elusive edges. But the magistrate has the history as a colonial agent. He desires to escape the history that empire has imposed; he feels this must involve living "outside history that empire imposes on its subjects, even its lost subjects" (206). He wants to create an alternative framework for history and narrative though he is incapable of doing so because he is neither fully anticipated by the barbarians nor he is faithful in the eye of the empire, the irony.

Coetzee, the white South African native, chooses the magistrate, the white colonial agent as the narrator of the novel. The perspective might be to make colonel Joll be self reflective and self guard his futility in destroying the alleged barbarians. It is the trick of Coetzee to narrate the events through a white magistrate for transforming the white colonial rulers and the native whites, supporting the tortured black ones. The implicit ideology of Coetzee could be ironical dimension for humanizing the dominator by making them realize that the barbarians are no more barbarians but the integral part of the society to live and work together. The novel is written in particular context using discursive strategy that are the parts of irony as Linda defines, "irony is a discursive strategy that depends on context and on the identity and position of both the ironist and the audience" (187).

To bring analogy between this statement and the context of the novel, the novelist's discursive strategy could be to renovate the false beliefs of the colonial agents toward the barbarians and the context is the callous torture over armless and harmless ethnic group of South African people under apartheid colonial time. The purpose of this irony is to refute the futility of white colonizer via the voice of white character in narration. Linda views that "irony lies upon intention: lies are not usually intended to be interpreted or decoded as *lies*; on the contrary, ironies are really ironies when someone makes them happen" (64). Coetzee deals upon the events leaving the responsibility to interpret the meaning to the interpreter, ironically to grasp his intention. To the context of the novel, the intentionality of the ironist could be to fill in the mind of the oppressor with the supreme value of humanity with the portrayal of South African picture under apartheid.

Waiting for the Barbarians is directed against the dominating South Africans and in favor of the furtherance of human rights of the blacks. From the beginning of

the novel, the narrator uses the term 'barbarian' repeatedly in the almost same way that is used within the discourse of the empire to refer the natives as colonial subjects and to its invisible but dangerous enemies. "The word runs like fire from neighbor to neighbor: "*Barbarians!*" (138). This obsessive repetition of the word 'barbarian' by the narrator draws attention of this practice of appropriation through repetition and points to the citation of the word as the very mechanism of the consolidation of its power. The language of apartheid is characterized precisely by that "fundamental dislocation of words from their objects" that "South African government has perfected a specialized political vocabulary which, while saying one thing means quite another" (Saunders 232). This is a kind of linguistic colonialism which creates otherness to the natives in their own land which is obviously the violation of human rights. There are countless instances of the abuse of the authority by the colonial agents, colonel Joll and Mendel, the warrant officer. Mendel herds a group of nomadic barbarians into a public square where they are beaten and slaughtered like dumb beasts. "Before inviting the crowd in attendance to join the soldiers in thrashing the prisoners, Mendel seizes a piece of charcoal to inscribe in their naked backs in bold letter word *ENEMY*" (141). With reference of the violation of human rights in this present novel by quoting the Giorgio Agamben's theory of testimony analyzed in Stef Craos's ethics of testimony as:

Agamben's phenomenology of testimony can be seen to shed light on the witnessing work undertaken by Coetzee in this Text. On the one hand, the tortured barbarians are comparable to the *Muselmanner*, the true who cannot speak their suffering. On the other hand, the narrator - protagonist is in an analogous position to the survivor who, like Levi bears witness and gives testimony. (61)

The tortured and murdered bodies in the holocaust under German Nazi regime (1941-45) were the testimony for human rights campaigners. The mutilated silent bodies were telling the grim inhuman stories caused by the torturer and murderer. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the captured barbarians' crippled bodies are the testimony because they can't speak against the injustice they are bearing. They have been the prototype of the *Muselmann* to the context of South Africa. The colonizers have created the situation of unsayability even if the barbarians are innocent and want to tell the story of their pathetic situation. This sort of unspeakability is the extreme violation of the human rights for which the empire is responsible. The crippled body of the nearly blinded girl, battered bodies of the fishermen, and ironically tortured body of magistrate are dehumanized and these events are not historicized, either by the then apartheid regime. "My wrists are caught behind my back and tied." "The time has come Magistrate", Mendel whispers in my ear. . . . I am sure I can smell liquor on his breath" (157). It is obviously, the biopolitics of the empire. Here, Coetzee's irony lies in his favor of protecting these people's human rights. He has been successful in bringing into light of the hidden human agonies.

In the beginning part of the novel, when the magistrate describes the strategies of the colonel, he is obsessed with discovering the meaning of the created situation. He studies and internalizes the way the colonel acts as a raider and mapmaker who uses his strategies to finish the underdog natives in the name of hypothetical barbarians. He tries to explore what is to be of the empire and what is to be of the barbarians. He reflects on Joll after he witnesses the colonel, torturing the boy and his father:

Looking at him I wonder how he felt the very first time: did he, invited as an apprentice to twist the pincers or turn the screw or whatever it is

they do, shudder even little to know that at that instant he was trespassing into the forbidden? I find myself wondering too whether he has a private ritual of purification, carried out behind closed doors, to enable him to return and break bread with other men. Does he wash his hands very carefully, perhaps, or change all his clothes; or has Bureau created new men who can without disquiet between the unclean and the clean? (19).

The narrator imagines Joll in the moment of transition trespassing from the one region to another, from the "clean" to the "unclean" from innocent to "forbidden"(Jolly 71-72). Joll, in this sense wants to consider him as a clean agent coming from clean territory to clean the unclean territory. But the magistrate doubts whether he has the private ritual of purification carried out behind closed doors, to break bread with other men. His self physical and spiritual cleanliness is indefinite but he seems to engage in the process of cleaning the colony by torturing the so-called unclean barbarians. Ironically, with the perspective of human rights- every person has the inherent dignity that must be saved; the colonel's manner, in actually clean territory of South Africa is dirty. This sort of brutal savagery is highly disgraceful.

Both Colonel Joll and unnamed magistrate are the colonial agents. However, their ideological representations are contrastive. The magistrate seems to be loyal to the barbarians whereas the colonel is hard and stubborn. But none of them are familiar with the language of nomadic people. The magistrate's imperial temperament is not fully changed until he lives together with the barbarian girl. Had he transformed him before, he would have tried to learn their language. He regrets not being able to understand the girl and not making her understand him due to his apathy in studying the native language during his long settlement there. Nonetheless, the magistrate has

been Coetzee's mouthpiece to forward the voice of the natives. Typically, colonel Joll is portrayed as the violator of human rights. Yuan Yuan assesses him and the magistrate as:

Colonel Joll represents the violent reader of the empire; he violates the natives to assert the desire of the state and the authoritative meaning of the empire while the magistrate represents the impotent reader of the state; he reads with irony and ambiguity that constantly undermine his authority of speech. Neither Colonel Joll nor the magistrate possesses the key to decode the native language and, henceforth, they resort to different method of persuasion to allow or disallow the conversation to occur. One finds it in violence whereas the other in seduction, both impotent. (76)

The speech of the natives is forced into extreme. As a result, the speeches he compels from them are either "cryptic silence" or "the screaming pain"(Yuan 77). The colonel rationalizes his method of searching for the truth in this way, "First get lies, you see-- this is what happens -- first lies, then pressure, more lies, then more pressure, then the break, then more pressure, then the truth. That is how you get truth" (10).

In this context, under colonialism, violence and torture become the state strategies to read the other. "Waiting for the barbarians means that the colonial subject is waiting for the Other to emerge in the subject, for the actualization of the repressed desire in the subject of the state (Yuan 77). In "The Presence and Absence: Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*," Lance Olsan remarks, "At the core of the plot in Coetzee's text is the absence of the barbarians, towards which events always move" (qtd. in Yuan 78). To explain this analysis Yuan argues, however that if we consider what constitutes the barbarism, we might see that barbarism resides in the

colonial unconscious of the empire. Therefore, "it is not the absence of the barbarian, but the presence of the barbarian in the colonial unconscious of the empire that moves the narrative and generates the tales of terror" (78). It is the empire's metafictional imagination that is beyond the reality. Ironically, "the word 'barbarian' becomes a self reflective concept of designating that barbarism is not at all related to native people, but perpetuated by the residing in the colonial unconscious of the state and overdetermined by the repressed desires of the empire" (Yuan 78).

In the novel, the narrator expresses his inability to do something that keeps him on the position as an authority. He shows his ambivalent character that can neither openly support the barbarians nor revolt against the higher authority organizing the natives. Such ambiguous nature of his official position to the empire and the social contact of the people constantly interrogate his own authority of speech and question his unconscious desires of standing in favor of the victims. "I lose myself in the rhythm of what I am doing. I lose awareness of the girl herself. There is a space of time which is blank to me: perhaps I am not even present" (34). It makes the readers think about his limited perspectives, restricted cognitive framework and ironic claim to truth of both his impotence and paralysis of the official language. Ironically, the position of the entire empire and the dumbfounded role of the magistrate come side by side together. In this sense, the magistrate himself can be the symbol of confused colonial regime. Therefore, "The magistrate is both the symbol of the empire and its victim", as Lois Parkinson Zomara comments in the article, "Allegories of power in the Fiction of J. M. Coetzee." He can neither escape the political system he is in, both part and apart, he is condemning, nor can he set himself totally apart from the barbarians. For more clarification to bring analogy between dilemmatic character of the narrator and the empire itself in ironic way, Albert

Memmi in *The Colonizer and Colonized* says, "A colonizer who rejects colonialism does not find a solution for his anguish in revolt. If he does not eliminate himself as a colonizer, he resigns himself to a position of ambiguity" (qtd. in Yuan 79).

With the interpretations mentioned above, it would be good idea to look upon Coetzee's notion on the basis of the events narrated in the novel. Coetzee dramatizes the arbitrariness of law of all human definitions of justice, in brief but dramatically, intense sense of resounding. Under colonial rule, law is either suspended or it is used in favor of colonizers. The history of the progressive establishment of justice is inseparable from, in fact, is merely another name for the history of war of vengeance. Joll asks the magistrate to read the wooden slips covered with foreign characters which Joll predicts as information relevant to the alleged uprising of the barbarians. Taking up a slip that contains a single character the magistrate explains, "It is the barbarian character *war*, but it has other sense, too. It stands for *vengeance*, and, if you turn it upside down . . . it can be made to read justice. There no knowing which sense is intended" (122). The law and justice are interpreted from the perspective of the powerful ones for their sake. Here, the gesticulation of the meaning by the colonel is negative while the magistrate seems to be loyal. Ironically, both of them are quite unfamiliar with the language used in the slips. So, Michael Valdez Moses' analysis would be contextual to present here:

If we accept the magistrate's deconstruction of an entire set of significant distinctions -- between liberalism and authoritarianism, between the rule of law and rule of force, between western self and non-western Other, between torture and truth, between civilization and barbarism-- then we must take an extremely dim view of possibility of historical process, of the development of a genuinely humane society.

(123)

Coetzee's purpose to write the novel is targeted to create the genuinely humane society. But the people in power are not transformed unless their faults are publicized. It has been great effort of Coetzee to write such eye opening novel even within apartheid era in South Africa. He wants to change the western notion of supremacy as "west and the rest," the rest as Other who are categorized to be barbarians or uncivilized. In the novel, Joll ignores the evidence of the cultural difference among the indigenous peoples and instead uses torture to generate evidence against them, thus reducing them to bodies in pain and proving that they are indeed barbarians who, he believes, threaten the civilization. But the magistrate gestures just toward such a realization and tries to transform him taking the side of the voiceless people. He utters his changed attitudes as:

It is the fault of Empire! Empire has created the time of history.

Empire has located its existence not in the smooth recurrent spinning time of the cycle of the seasons but in the jagged time of raise and fall, of beginning and end, of catastrophe. Empire dooms itself to live in history and plot against history. (177)

Here, Coetzee is successful in making the colonel contemplate about himself being reflective about his role; he plays during his stay in the colony. He leaves the colony letting the native people probably, to create their history.

In the novel, the role of irony is notable. Irony can be sometimes political. In general, political irony can be viewed as a sense of oppositeness or contrast in speech or writing that is related to politics. In this study my concern is to centralize on the role of irony in literary texts in digging out the meaning that are below the surface. Irony can be political because of its dynamic nature in interpreting the literary and

non literary texts. M.H Abrams in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* defines dramatic irony as, "Situation in a play or a narrative in which the audience or reader shares with the author knowledge of present or future circumstances of which a character is ignorant; in that situation, the character unknowingly acts. . . .but not all the ways the character intends" (99). This definition is referential in Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* in relation to the behavior, Colonel Joll exhibits in the name of the barbarians. The audience or the reader notices his folly but he is simply unaware of what he does. The colonel thinks whatever he has done to control the alleged barbarians is good and justifiable. But in the evaluation of the readers he is cruel, inhuman and great violator of human rights. The function of irony is to make the audience see the unseen messages.

Waiting for the Barbarians explores the gaps between the said and unsaid ideas by using the contradictory force of language to seek out the truth of political turmoil in apartheid South Africa. As a postmodern writer, Coetzee's use of the irony favors postmodern world of textuality, where signs coexists without conflict, hierarchy or tension. Linda Hutcheon's concept of irony is more radical. In her book *Irony's Edge* she opines that irony has an evaluative edge and messages to provoke emotional responses in those who get it and those who don't, as in its targets and in what some people call its victims. This is where the politics of irony gets heated. The scene of irony involves the relations of power based in relation of communication. It unavoidably involves touchy issues such as "exclusion and inclusion, intervention and evasion" (2). The focused issues of irony, she puts forward are gender, race, class or sexuality. She says, "Irony isn't irony until it is interpreted such as --at least by the intending ironist, if not the intended receiver" (6).

While contextualizing Hutcheon's theory to *Waiting for the Barbarians*, it can

be observed analogously. Coetzee has indicated the power relations between the empire and native South African people in subjugation. The tyranny of the misused power marginalizes the natives. In the novel, colonel Joll uses the power or follows the empire's order to control over the natives considering them as so-called 'barbarians' whom he believes as the invaders. But later, the colonel is proved to be false because he does not find the barbarians he is waiting for, to whom he considers to be the main enemies of the empire. It has been the narrator's ironical motive to show this fallacy of the empire for distancing the natives from itself. Coetzee's intended group he supports in the novel is the South African blacks but he is the native white who writes in favor of the human rights of the nomads who are naive, so powerless. Thus, the politics of irony resides in creating the white colonial agent, the magistrate, as the narrator to support the subalterns.

IV. Politics of Irony in *Age of Iron*

Coetzee's *Age of Iron*, written in between 1986 and 89, published in 1990, marks another turn in his depiction of violence during the worst years of the state emergency in the late 1980s South Africa. The novel is set in Cape Town in which Coetzee gives witness to the atrocities committed by the regime and depicts the brutality of the security forces. He also shows the rise of militant youth groups of black opposition in the township who come out of from their suppressed position for protesting the domination of the apartheid regime by boycotting the white-run schools and involving in the struggle for liberation. The events are narrated by an elderly white lady Mrs. Elizabeth Curren, a retired lecturer who is suffering from terminal bone cancer.

Mrs. Curren narrates the events as an extended letter addressing to her daughter who has left South Africa for America to avoid the complicity of living under the regime, she loathes. She is living in America comfortably with her family. Mrs. Curren adopts an alcoholic black strange vagabond on the day, her illness is diagnosed. The stranger is a vagrant whose race, origin, and even name remain ambiguous to her. She names him Vercueil, shelters him and he becomes the good attendant to her life. She keeps Florence, the black maid with three children. She evaluates them and reads the hearts of these black people, analyses and finds the shadow of her daughter in them. In the letter she writes to her daughter, "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" (*Age of Iron* 7). When she finds Vercueil in the living room asleep keeping the hands between his knees, she tries to wake him up lovingly remembering the language she would use to her daughter, "Come, my darling, it's time to get up!" (52).

Mrs. Curren is morally shocked by the murder of two black boys, Bheki and John. She describes the boy's condition after she gazes upon the seriously wounded and dead bodies of Bheki and other four youths attacked in the casualties of Crossroads, "Florence slid a hand under Bheki's head. Slowly he sat up. One shoe was off; a trouser-leg was torn open and wet with blood" (56-57). After Bheki dies she informs, "Bheki is in the ground', I said. He is in a box in a hole with earth heaped on the top of him. He is never going to leave that hole. Never, never, never" (131). She generalizes the event as: "A country prodigal for blood" (57). "The dry earth soaking up the blood of its creatures. A land that drinks rivers of blood and is never sated" (58). These bitter experiences speed up her understanding of her complicity in the political structure of her country. Studying the historical context, she understands that it is colonial history and specifically, Afrikaner Nationalism that has produced this political interregnum of resistance, this 'age of iron' in which normal human relations are distorted. The politics of irony positions in the rise of ethical consciousness and its consequences that the white protagonist Mrs. Curren attempts to reassess, reformulate and restore her relations with the oppressed marginalized others.

Mrs. Curren sees South Africa as a big mess. She says that she got robbed three years ago, "Three years ago I had a burglary (you may remember I wrote about it). The burglars took no more than they could carry" (24-25) and that she had bars installed on her windows as "a precaution against future burglaries" (25). It makes her feel like an endangered animal/bird in the zoo, "A dodo quaking in her nest, sleeping with one eye open, greeting the dawn haggard" (25). She finds her in place of dodo that is insecure even in its nest. Under the tyrant rule, she sees everything unsystematic, disorderly and messy no matter whoever they may be, whites or

blacks. Mrs. Curren's description of horrifying scene to her daughter in the letter, in the beginning of the novel proves this, "There is an alley down the side of the garage, you may remember it, you and your friends would sometimes play there. Now it is a dead place, waste, without use, where windblown leaves pile up and rot" (3). The scene, she narrates signals analogously to the apartheid regime that converts South Africa into the waste land by stepping on the human rights of black people. Her coming into contact with the political violence and oppression of the late 1980s South Africa adds and makes her focus on others. Having seen or known about the deaths of thousands of innocent naive citizens, and imagining her impending death she realizes the value of life and she replaces herself in place of others. Ironically, her terminal breast/bone cancer makes her understand that life is equally valuable to others as it is to her.

The diagnosis of her cancer with the investigation of Dr. Syfret is symbolically parallel to Mrs. Curren's identification of the coldhearted treatment of the then regime that has been the cancer for native black Afrikaans. She internalizes this reality after she comes to the contact of the vagabond, Vercueil. Looking at his appearance she comments on his status, "Of having no children in the world but also of having no childhood of his past" (10), as if he entered "our world from absolutely foreign sphere" (Levinas qtd. in Jordaan 23). She imagines the pathless past of Vercueil due to the insensitive leadership in tyrant political system. Vercueil stands for the prototype of black South Africans under apartheid. He is the image of the other in the seeing of post colonial eye, the man without ground, without care, without identity and without any possession within his own motherland. He is always viewed as other, a foreigner. Analyzing Linda's view of irony with reference of otherness Claire Colebrook states:

The image of other is always *decided*, collected and determined from a governing and colonially complicit point of view. However, this decision to present the colonizing gaze ironically, by repeating all its demeaning and objectifying images, failed to achieve its aim; many of the indigenous viewers of the exhibition saw the images as one more presentation of the western view of its others. (155)

Under apartheid era, the future of the blacks was determined by the white colonial rulers. In *Age of Iron*, the children of black natives are imposed to study the course designed by the whites in which the values and norms of black communities are intentionally excluded. They are forced to go to school even if they dislike. Bheki criticizes the authority, "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" (61). This is the voice of protest, the black teenage boy utters against prevailing school education system. They are always viewed as others within their own motherland. Moreover, this western notion about them is proved to be false because the colonial agents do not experience any dire motives from the tortured ones. They do not gain anything special by suppressing them, either. Thus, *Age of Iron* is successful in imparting messages to the rulers to realize the uselessness of their futile actions against the naive. That is to say, they are helped to transform from wicked notion to much humane.

There is a wall that obscures Mrs. Curren, a white South African, to observe blacks and the apartheid rule. She represents the native white South Africans. The wall is their confused understanding about apartheid and the native blacks. They are in dilemma about their own position and the way they need to determine their

perception of the rulers and the black people. Mrs. Curren deserves that confusion about her role play in the society with her black neighbors till the time she lives with black minorities. She is sensitive about black people's needs that are destitute by the apartheid rule in South Africa. While travelling with Vercueil in her car to the hillside, he asks her to let off, she describes his condition as:

The worst of the smell comes from his shoes and feet. He needs socks. He needs new shoes. He needs bath everyday; 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 truth be told, to creep into her own mother's lap and be comforted. (17)

If Mrs. Curren is the role model for South African whites, Vercueil can be the model character to represent the entire subalterns of the same nation. Mrs. Curren's realization of the basic needs of the black people justifies her transformation of her attitudes towards them. The phrase, 'Mother's lap,' in the quote, signifies the motherland. It has been her ideal imagination to create an equitable and identical society with all types of people. Her description of Vercueil's needs could ironically be the need for the nation itself. Hence, Coetzee's politics of irony locates in transforming Mrs. Curren, the representative of South African whites, from her dilemmatic temperament to straightforward vision in favor of humanity to the downtrodden ones in order to humanize the oppressors over the oppressed ones.

Mrs. Curren's limited knowledge about black race is due to her schooling widely within European tradition and being within the boundaries of neighborhood and other areas prescribed by whites-only in South Africa. She assumes that blacks in the area would be helping other blacks instead of attacking them. Such

assumption is her ignorance of the division within the black community and from general belief in black solidarity. She finds her in the classroom as a student instead of the feeling of being former teacher. The teaching items are oppression, violence and poverty. The body of the black is the main text to be read and interpreted. After learning the text well she says, "I thought: 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). Most probably, her eyes are open to see the human value under apartheid and its deformations of the human spirit. Stating the then national policy of South Africa, John D. Brewer and Gavin Cawthra point out, "South African police made a policy of using or encouraging black 'vigilantes' generally those blacks who stood to gain most from the status quo or to lose most for radical upheaval" (qtd. in Hoegbreger 36). Mrs. Curren knows this policy and understands that those vigilantes are misused by the regime to suppress themselves who are ignorant about the purpose, hence are indulging for immediate benefit. She is changed with gaining many ideas of the apartheid rulers and the black natives.

Mrs. Curren's transformed positive attitudes about the black natives could holistically be targeted to African whites to whom she pleads to be friendly with their black counterparts. Coetzee locates his irony in Mrs. Curren's role of speaking the voice of the voiceless and segregated people. She tries to speak the voice of unspeakable by encouraging them to speak and raising their voices by herself. She gives confidence to Vercueil, "You have to become someone other than yourself" (109).

Coetzee's *Age of Iron* preserves the idea of humanity that could protect South Africans from dehumanizing influence of the cycle of the violence in the society regardless the color of their skin. The entire apartheid period in South Africa has

been named as 'age of iron'. The word 'iron' signifies the meaning of hardness, stiffness, inflexibility, solidity, injurer, insensitive power and many more. The title of the novel signals the negative impression to the readers while reading the text associating the context to the oppressors of the apartheid as the iron for the marginalized ones to hit upon. Mrs. Curren wants to dissolve the iron in order to create new shaped tool that would be used for constructive tasks.

Coetzee uses Mrs. Curren as surrogate author to reveal the protesting tone of innocent people. The letter to her daughter serves as a metaphor for the alternative transcendental mode of writing. She is conscious about saving the history of the underclass people. Her letter is the real history of the marginalized that is never historicized by the power as Marias signals, "*Age of Iron* therefore does not retreat from history it merely refuses to supplement it. Instead, the novel seeks to revise history through acting upon the South African reader in history" (20). Mrs. Curren is anxious about the possibility of losing the revised history she has included in the letter that she wants to send to her daughter in America. She concerns that her daughter receive the letter after she dies and writes, "If Vercueil does not send these writing 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" (119). She loves these words as much as she loves her life and tells her daughter, the intended reader, "This is my life, these words. . . . These words as you read them, if you read them, enter you and draw breath again" (120). The words she has written are rare because she writes in favor of the loser wishing to make both sides winner. She wants to establish solidarity between blacks and whites in South Africa. To bring this unity, the role of the state has been the main obstacle. Commenting upon the novel in the same circumstance Michael Marais opines:

Fittingly, then *Age of Iron* portrays its putative writer's rehabilitation of self as a metamorphosis into the text. It is consequently an ontogenetic novel which does not so much speak of its own coming into being as of its protagonist's becoming an oppositional text, one which counters that of the state. (16)

In the passage, Marais talks about the author's changed roles in the novel. He has been the raiser of the issue whose focus signifies in countering the state rather than much highlighting the narrator. He enters into the text and plays role via his mouthpiece and vibrates the surroundings in favor of creating the society of justice.

Another ironical dimension Coetzee locates in the novel is the contestation between fiction and history, tension between the novel and history, between irony and iron. In general, 'fiction' is defined as made up story. It is dominated by imagination rather than reality or it is related to would be reality though its origin can be the fact which has no real existence. But history should be based on factual events without imagination. In fact *Age of Iron* also consists of the elements of fiction as its plot moves ahead. During the apartheid rule the history is being written but it has been far from the fact, so it is false history. In their history the marginalized ones have been excluded. The torture, they are obliged to have, is not included in the history. Regarding the affinity between reality and history Johan Geertsema argues, "The terms 'reality' and 'history' refer to the same thing, or that some hierarchical order is implied. Rather, reality may be said to inhabit history, in a way similar to the habitation of both fiction and history in language" (99). History is reality, the real, to the extent that history is "fundamentally non-narrative and nonrepresentational" (Jameson qtd. in Geertsema 99).

Coetzee sees gap between South African history and the reality. He finds

crisis of confronting and textualizing that real history, that history which has not been textualized, which exists outside the text; the history of subalterns, marginalized, voiceless and no name people. Coetzee seems to have written the novel in order to fill up that gap by historicizing the unwritten history of the unspeakable intending to draw people's attention to see their real picture, think about pathetic position and make effort to preserve their human rights. With this perspective, *Age of Iron* can be judged as historical fiction of entire apartheid era in South Africa.

Mrs. Curren narrates the history that is unimaginable seeking for justice even under dictatorship. The situation shows that freedom in South Africa is unimaginable though it is a must for all. Mrs. Curren is obliged to think that freedom is another name for unimaginable and says, "I have no idea what freedom is, Mr. Vercueil. I am sure Bheki and his friend had no idea either, perhaps freedom is always and only what is unimaginable" (150). Imagining unimaginable is simply impossible, undesirable or at least it would be ironic. Therefore, "Imagining the unimaginable would be to colonize it with meaning and reason; to be able to imagine the unimaginable would be to destroy that unreachable sphere of freedom and make it part of the realm of necessity" (Geertsema 91).

In *Age of Iron* Coetzee uses irony to attack the dehumanizing, exploiting tendencies of the apartheid regime from the perspective of the marginalized victims. Irony undermines authority that abuses its authority by oppressing the voiceless and marginalized people. The torture and oppression against black South African people, even to the school students by apartheid rule, is the great abuse of the authority that Coetzee attacks in the novel. The first significant thing to consider is the race of the author and the surrogate writer of the letter, Mrs. Curren. Despite the fact that both

of them are white South Africans, they support and advocate the human rights of the black victims. She proves her to be an impartial viewer and analyst who is bold enough to tell the truth living even within undemocratic system. She comments the political system to be orthodox, the creator of indifference in all sectors as:

To stupefy: to deprive of feeling; to be numb, deaden; to stun with amazement. Stupor: insensibility, apathy, torpor of mind. Stupid: dulled in the faculties, indifferent, destitute of thought or feeling. From *stupere* to be stunned, astonished. A gradient from *stupid* to *stunned* to *astonished*, to be turned to stone. The message: that message never changes. A message that turns people to stone. (26)

The repressiveness of the apartheid state is coded by the figure of indifference that underscores this oppressive condition. The narration of Mrs. Curren highlights the intention of the state to its subjects to control them. It is the tone of protest, ironically. Everywhere, there's bafflement, indifference, insecurity and terrifying surrounding. The state control is targeted to voiceless people who are obliged to be as dumb and tolerant as stone. Mrs. Curren compares their condition the same as animals, "Rabbits', I said, 'they used to my domestic's son. . . . Creatures that can't talk, that can't even cry"(18).The novel has been set during the last days of apartheid, when anger and violence prevailed throughout South Africa that affected, particularly, the margins. The entire social structure deserves "The benefit of the doubt" (73).

The novelist historicizes the events supporting the powerless underclass even at the time there is still apartheid regime. It has been his great audacity in endeavoring to protect the human rights of South Africans all in all. Mrs. Curren correlates the title of the novel with different ages of human civilization, "The age of iron, after which comes the age of bronze. How long, how long before the softer ages return in their

cycle, the age of clay, the age of earth?" (46).

Historically, during the Iron Age, people had hard life with limited resources for easing the complications of usual life, but life in South Africa during the apartheid, has been made complicated due to state control to people's freedom and the torture to naive and docile citizens. Mrs. Curren remembers Florence's utterance and refers, "But do you remember what you told me last year, Florence, when these unspeakable things were happening in the townships? You said to me, "I saw woman on fire burning and when she screamed, for help, the children laughed and threw more petrol on her" (45). Such inhuman actions are the usual and regular patterns of the state. Sympathy and support in human suffering are no more in practice from the side of regime. Many of the native whites are raising voice against the blacks. There are not dead souls but living people who are forced to live without hope of prosperity or respect by the complicated system of residency and employment laws that constitutes apartheid. This is the irony that the novelist tactfully creates a white narrator to transform those people who have considered the colored citizens as their enemies. Thus, the politics of irony in Coetzee's fiction is powerful in releasing the strong messages for other whites and the apartheid regime in order to humanize them by accepting the existence of marginalized as humans, similar to them.

Mrs. Curren's only one daughter's escapism to the USA leaving a widow mother alone in South Africa creates the situation for her to get mixed with the black peoples. The daughter's distraction could be taken as a kind of selfishness. Despite the fact that she was born as white South African, she is reluctant to take part in national social and political issues. Ironically, if she represents the majority of white South Africans, their love for nation is shallow and insincere. The attack of terminal cancer in Mrs. Curren's body, her encounter to black circles, her old age and her need for

support leave her in ambivalent position in case of love. She is confused whether to love kin or the strangers. While she feels abundant love for her daughter, she experiences an absence of love for the strangers like John, "I love you but I do not love him. There is no ache in me toward him, not a slightest" (132). She appears to be confronted with a deficiency in her love and faced with the test of loving different persons. She characterizes her daughter selfsame extension of her body, "And you, flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood, bleeding every month into foreign soil" (59).

Here, the fragmentation between her body and emotion can be analyzed in terms of secular and maternal love respectively. After she loses the bodily energy due to her illness and age, she understands the significance of human proximity that is real and wishes fulfilling. When she is in physical crisis her daughter's abstract love does nothing to her. She has to get support from black folks like Vercueil and Florence. The more she is weakened by her physical criticality the more she realizes the value of human relationship regardless the caste, class or ethnicity. Mrs. Curren's maternal and humanistic discourses endeavor to address the country's political crisis. They are also the discourses that aspire to conduct themselves in the name of love. Bringing analogy between Mrs. Curren's love and emergency politics of apartheid period Gilbert Yeoh relates as:

Though humanistic discourse is prominent in her narrative, it is her maternal discourse that is pre-eminent. *Age of Iron* is replete with familial imagery, especially of mother and child, and Mrs. Curren's maternal rhetoric occurs not only in relation to her daughter but, in seeming omnipresence, permeates her engagement of emergency politics. (109-110)

As Mrs. Curren's love to her daughter remains unfulfilled because of impossibility of

getting together, having love from the state under the emergency for ordinary people is out of their access. The apartheid regime for black community has been far from love even when they are living within the same geographical territory. Neither Mrs. Curren can exchange love with her daughter nor can the government be stronger suppressing the native blacks, permanently. Giving much value to the daughter living in USA by a mother and ruling over South Africa valuing western colonial concept to rule over natives, stepping on their rights, are both impractical and far from the reality.

Although the cause of Mrs. Curren's daughter's emigration is the political instability of South Africa, the cause of unloving the lovable is the apartheid regime itself. The familial affinity between a mother and the daughter is not possible to exhibit being together because of the distance of their habitation. In contrast, because of negative attitude, the regime becomes reluctant to establish good affinity with the marginalized ones. The irony's politics in the novel has been to make both sides to understand the value of solidarity in all regardless the class, caste and other aspects of the South Africans, particularly. In this regard, Coetzee has been successful in formulating and transferring humanistic ideology that the nearest ones must be the dearest to both South Africans and the authority of apartheid.

The theory of the politics of irony forwarded by some scholars is referential in association of *Age of Iron*. Political irony underpins the powerless ones reading between the lines and spotlighting on their pathos. Beerendra Pandey expresses his logic in this matter as:

Political edge of irony arises from the said and the unsaid. The unsaid is related to the repressed, marginalized and colonized. . . . The unsaid does get said in hidden way as the negative residues of a repressed

history. Discursive irony can thus be linked to the question of writing alternative histories and unearthing repressed trauma. (266)

The narration of the events in the fiction is the said idea that deals upon the happenings in the South African political and social setting under emergency. The reader's estimation and realization of the impact of the narration is the unsaid one. The unsaid ideas are targeted to repressed group, the black people under apartheid. The power of the unsaid is stronger as Hutcheon says, "The said and unsaid, which takes on meaning only in relation to the other. Admittedly, this (like most) is not a relation of equals: the power of the unsaid to challenge the said is the defining semantic condition of irony" (57). The implicit support of the novelist and the narrator, the unsaid is the strong challenge to the said description of the events happening. The narrator's advocacy to the marginalized and her transformed notion for ensuring their human rights are the unsaid. Coetzee's irony, therefore, creates the environment to the readers to read and get ideas of the traumatic history of marginalized side for sensitizing the white community that whatever apartheid rule has done is against the humanity. Referring the notion of W.E.B. Du Bois, on political irony regarding the white stereotyping about the black, Beerendra Pandey further asserts:

Political irony, which functions to rehearse and yet revise the white stereotyping of the Afro-Americans, meditates between two opposite poles: if the stereotyping by the whites leads the blacks to the sad reality of always looking at one's self through the eye of others, the ability to see a quality that many people in majority cultures lack; they cannot get enough distance from themselves to turn the irony inward, that is, to laugh at their own whiteness. (266)

Coetzee's intended motive in the novel has been to substitute the common and

inclusive ideology of global human value over the white supremacy and their stereotyping notion of west and the rest. He is sincere enough about this stereotype and wants to reverse it because this thought has become the cause of troubling and dehumanizing the blacks. The purpose of irony could be corrective. Hence, irony's politics in *Age of Iron* is to correct the misunderstandings and to create solidarity and feeling of brotherhood between the whites and the blacks. Furthermore, Coetzee is bold enough to expose the callous manner of the apartheid agents with the purpose of transforming them into people with humanity.

Hutcheon opines that irony comes out of the discursive community within which there is immediate context and the author creates the text. Irony comes into the surface via interpretation of the critic as she views, "perhaps the ironic intentional function is one activated and put into play by the interpreter" (117). And "to see irony anywhere is the result of interpretive labor performed through learned skills" (116). While connecting this thought to the goal of the writer, the discursive community could be the South African social phenomenon, the context is the domination of apartheid to the marginalized people and *Age of Iron* is the text. There has been great gap between whites and non-whites; Coetzee endeavors to fill up through this novel. The text consists of both said and unsaid ideas. The unsaid one sought out by the interpreter is the irony. Thus, the politics of irony in the novel plays powerful role in cynically criticizing the torture, callousness and brutality of apartheid South Africa, advocating the human rights of the marginalized blacks, waiting for rights, respects, equality and inclusion.

V. Conclusion: Coetzee's Attack on the Apartheid

After analyzing the politics of irony in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Age of Iron* from the perspective of the theory of Linda Hutcheon in her book, *Irony's Edge*, my dissertation has tried to prove how irony is directed at attacking the pervasive ideology of dehumanization that characterized the apartheid-era South Africa. I have also attempted to rationalize the presumption that Coetzee's use of political irony attacks the dehumanizing, exploiting tendencies of the apartheid regime from the perspective of the marginalized victims. The project has been centralized to analyze the above mentioned novels using political irony to prove, how continuing history of police-state violence traumatized black South African families during the imperial apartheid reign. Coetzee observes the political turmoil of 1970s and 1980s South Africa against black ethnic group as a witness. He finds them to be segregated to live in some particular homelands. Coetzee, the white South African native writes in favor of marginalized black victims using the white protagonists as his mouthpiece. Hania Nashef's analysis of *Waiting for the Barbarians* justifies this statement, "Playing the role of sympathetic colonizer, the magistrate takes it on himself to deliver the barbarian girl to her people, an action that propels him into a process deterritorialization resulting change in his state" (25). Similarly, Susan Van Zanten Gallagher adds, "As Joll interrogates and tortures Barbarian prisoners, the magistrate becomes increasingly sympathetic toward the victims" (Gallagher 278). Ironically, Coetzee has attacked the callousness of the colonial apartheid era intending to establish the solidarity by transforming the cruelty into humanity.

During the historical period of South Africa in between 1948 and 1994 there had been the racial segregation under which the rights, associations, and movements of the majority black inhabitants were curtailed and Afrikaner minority rule was

maintained. The civil, political and legal rights of the majority group of inhabitants had been suspended. Racial segregation was enforced through legislation by the National Party governments. The entire period of 'apartheid era' detached certain ethnic groups from mainstream culture suspending their social and civil rights due to ethnic prejudices. Even at the time when most of the countries in the world were practicing to preserve the human rights of all sorts of people at the end of the twentieth century, South African natives, especially the blacks were struggling for ensuring their rights to live as respectful citizens. The main factor to create such situation was the apartheid which sparked significant internal resistance and violence segregating them from education, medical care, beaches, and other public facilities and providing blacks with poor services that were often inferior to those of white people.

Coetzee's novels and his protagonists' role, analyzed in this dissertation serve as the agents to attack the dehumanization of the colonial apartheid regime. His purpose is to transform all South Africans to advocate the slogan, "Society for All" regardless the caste, creed, gender and so on. As a poetic device, the position of irony in both novels, *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Age of iron* is a landmark to ensure the transformation, intended. Tactfully, Coetzee creates the environment of speaking in favor of the victims through the white colonial agent and the white native South African to ironize both white groups wanting to suppress the naive black people. Coetzee himself admits, "Torture has exerted a dark fascination on me and many other South African authors" (Coetzee qtd. in Gallagher 277). The torture, that South African writers witnessed, pleaded them to write against it but they were under the restriction to write freely for their own security. Gallagher refers Coetzee's objection to realistic depiction of torture in his fiction:

Because he thinks that the novelist participates vicariously in the atrocities, validates the acts of torture, assists the state in terrorizing and paralyzing people by showing its oppressive methods in detail.

Yet, these acts must not be hidden either. . . . Again, the author needs to find a middle course between trivializing and glamorizing the figure responsible for inflecting pain. (277-78)

For the justification of this statement Coetzee himself suggests, "The true challenge is how not play the game by the rules of the state, how to establish one's own authority, how to imagine torture and death on one's own terms" (qtd. in Gallagher 277).

Writing against the tyrant power living within the same territory is really challenging and risky job. Coetzee wrote both of these novels within apartheid era so he seems to have been balancing his narration but he is courageous enough in flashing out the dark sides of the apartheid regime dealing upon the merciful condition of the stigmatized black people.

While viewing Coetzee's attack on the colonial apartheid in *Waiting for the Barbarians* it would be contextual to connect the views the critics. They see the novel as an important endeavor to evade the issue of wild justice erasing distinction between empire and barbarian, between the oppressor and the oppressed. David Attwell posits, "*Waiting for the Barbarians* allows for the hope of a reconstruction of the subject outside the empire/ barbarian dichotomy" (Urquhart 4). Similarly, Susan VanZanten's reading of this novel finds "hope in restorative justice and the narrativization of oppression. . . . truth telling and giving the victim a voice constitute justice (4). The magistrate plays the role of "temporary father interpreter" (4) for the victims who creates "as complete picture as possible" (4) of oppression. Thus, by constructing the history of the oppressed from fragmentary evidence Coetzee speaks of violence and

oppression and reconstructs an ethical order. All these efforts of the novelist have directed to articulate at attacking the apartheid for promoting humanism in South Africa.

In *Age Iron* too, Coetzee carefully narrativizes the vulnerability of bodies in terms of the calculation of the biopolitical axis of the human being. He constitutes the subject by clearly indicating the responsible agent to the suffering of other's body, which cannot react having been forced to be in the position of a subaltern. Underlying the novel's portrayal of colonial history as the apartheid state's text, Michael Marais evaluates the novel as the powerful text that "dramatizes the impact of this corrupt social context on the individual South African, the manner in which it distorts his or her essential humanity" (2) or as Coetzee himself accepts to have its "psychic representation in a deformed and stunted inner life" (Coetzee qtd. in Marais 2).

Coetzee in his "Jerusalem Prize Accepting Speech" discloses the situational shortcomings of South African literature with reference to the then social and political context, written under apartheid age, "less than fully human literature, unnaturally preoccupied with power and the torsions of power, unable to move from elementary relations of contestation, domination, and subjugation to the vast and complex world that lies beyond them . . . it is literature in bondage " (Coetzee qtd. in Marais 2). This analysis of Coetzee illustrates the way how apartheid regime discouraged writers from openly bringing the social phenomenon into their texts. However, Coetzee seems to be bold enough to signal the underworld misconducts of apartheid agents ironizing the narration. Mrs. Curren, the narrator of the events speaks against the ruler's cruel treatments targeted to support the ethnic minorities. She adopts a black tramp Vercueil, befriends with black maid Florence, protests in the murder of Bheki and John, the black school students and compares apartheid to her own terminal cancer.

These and other several evidences presented in the novel are after all, Coetzee's attack on the apartheid.

Coetzee's use of irony in both of the novels is chiefly targeted to transform the dehumanized nature of colonial apartheid regime and some of the white natives into more humane. His story telling through white narrators from the perspectives blacks to promote their human rights has been the prime concern of Coetzee to transform the colonial apartheid to stand in favor of its victims. The magistrate, in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and Mrs. Curren in *Age of Iron*, one colonial agent and the other South African native, both whites, both living under oppressive apartheid rule, wholeheartedly support the naive, suppressed ethnic group transferring messages to those who go against the humanity. Such attempt of Coetzee might be intended to pressurize the then apartheid governments of South Africa to see all human beings with the gauge of equality.

The politics of irony in both novels, *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Age of Iron* is unique in formulating multivalent meanings. However, this thesis questions the irony that attacks the insidious human nature that challenges the entire human society from being peaceful and flourishing. While reading these novels ironically, it requires studying the context of South African discursive community. Coetzee narrates the social context with the intention of altering the criminal motive of the power emphasizing on human value. Most commonly, irony stands in preserving the rights of voiceless or unspeakable. In the novels, Coetzee's politics of irony functions to secure the rights of so-called internal outsiders either named as 'barbarians' or 'people in homelands' under colonial apartheid. The act of dislocating the rightful natives from mainstream background due to the prejudice on the basis of color of skin, promotes racism. Irony condemns such instinct in both novels by exposing and hitting

upon the erroneous belief and misconducts of white dominated apartheid while sensitizing people about the need of preserving the human rights of the voiceless people.

For these reasons, Coetzee's attack on apartheid in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Age of Iron* in Michael Marias's sense is targeted to correct the folly of the power for the purpose of "preserving the idea of humanity that could protect South Africans from the dehumanizing influence of the cycle of violence in their society" in order to "preserve the marginalized idea of humanity" (14). Through the spotlight on the imperial and apartheid mistreatment over humanity, the novelist unpacks the hidden underworlds activities of political games. The magistrate's co-living with black tortured girl, his exertion to serve her and read her as an innocent naive girl, his realization of the futility of the empire to wait for hypothetical barbarians and his decision to take back the girl to her respective community are the instances of Coetzee's motive of transforming the barbarian practices into the civilized one. Similarly, Mrs. Curren's living together with black minorities like a tramp Vercueil, her efforts to read their condition as humans, her seeing of the image of her daughter in black friends and her protest of the apartheid against intolerable torture are also the instances of attempts for transformation.

Thus, Coetzee's use of irony in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Age of Iron* has been successful at attacking the pervasive ideology of dehumanization, exploiting tendency of apartheid regime from the perspective of marginalized victims. The politics of irony is strong in Coetzee's putting forward the white narrators as the agents of speaking through the perspectives of blacks.

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