'LIVING IN THE BORDERLAND': COLONIALISM AND THE CLASH OF CULTURES IN THE FICTION OF J. M. COETZEE

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Streszczenie
Differences among cultures are present in the lives of people in many countries. Intolerance and antagonisms cause civil strife, chauvinism and violence where mutual acceptance and consensus do not regulate social life. The discords dividing people into fanatical factions are also deepened by a lack of understanding. People do not care to learn about other cultures therefore they cannot get an unbiased picture of them. They usually think their own cultures to be superior and which consequently should be emulated by others. Moreover, the situation is worsened by the fact that there is often almost no communication and dialogue among different cultures present in the same country.

Languages unite and separate people at the same time. Sometimes they become impenetrable walls which "protect" us from looking into other cultures. It is so because we try to impose on others our whole way of life and thinking whose essence is contained in a language. We claim that our language is best and that other languages are unrefined, funny or that "do not resemble human speech at all" as the popular saying goes.

J. M. Coetzee as a writer and trained linguist perceives the situation profoundly, being also a South African. He is sharply aware of linguistic, class and cultural differences which form an intricate matrix of borderlands in his country. The concept of borderland is crucial to J. M. Coetzee's fiction. It may be defined as a meeting point or territory, in a more or less metaphorical way, between or among languages, genders, cultures and social strata. Usually, an uneasy equilibrium is retained in the territory which often breaks down in the days of riots and struggle. Moreover, the delicate balance of the borderland may be strained by colonialism or a colonial past, which may deepen the chasm between white people of Indo-European origin and other cultures and races.
In his novels J. M. Coetzee probes into the problems of borderlands by placing his main characters, who are predominantly white, in these areas at a time of unrest. He observes how their points of view change and how they themselves change in the midst of strife. Usually in the course of these changes they attain a higher degree of objectivity than they had previously but the price they have to pay for this is high. Some characters, like Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee in *Dusklands* refuse to change and stay entrenched in their Eurocentrism, while Susan Barton in *Foe* and Magda in *In the Heart of the Country* eventually give in to patriarchalism, betraying both their femininity and their understanding of non-European cultures.

Every novel by J. M. Coetzee shows a clash between cultures from various points of view, ranging from the 18th century to the Vietnam War to a South Africa of the near future, from Boers to Englishmen, from rural to urban, etc. The author also uses different narrative techniques and settings to elucidate and elaborate the problem of borderland.

The aim of this study is to examine the theme of the clash of cultures and the notion of borderland in all J. M. Coetzee's works as well as the narrative techniques and devices which underpin his fiction.

The framework which will underpin the whole dissertation will be the notion of colonialism which will be probed into at the three levels of philosophy, history and literature. The philosophical point of view will provide the necessary theories and premises which prompted the development and sanctioned existence of colonialism, especially with emphasis on the clash between the Judeo-Christian tradition and non-European, non-western traditions. The historical dimension will allow me to trace the origins, rise, pinnacle and fall of colonialism, concentrating on the African experience. Subsequent to this, African and South African literature, being a product of colonialism and an answer to it, will offer us an insight into the minds and thoughts of people who were involved in
propagating colonialism and who suffered from it. These three elements will serve as a background against which I will investigate colonialism and the clash of cultures together with postcolonial problems as represented in the fiction of J. M. Coetzee by means of an analysis of his novels.

The first chapter will be devoted to an outline of the history and philosophical premises of colonialism, followed by a critique of colonialism in the light of the works by B. L. Whorf, M. Eliade, J. Campbell, and others; the social, economic and cultural consequences of colonialism will be presented with emphasis on intolerance and xenophobia which are - paradoxically - a cause and effect of racism which was sanctioned and embedded in the legal structures in South Africa. The importance of colonialism for African and South African literature will also be reflected upon.

The next chapter will present an overview of colonialism in African and South African literature. It will be stressed that colonialism is a modus vivendi of the literature because it prompted its development and accordingly provided the literature with innumerable exemplars of atrocities and oppression which could and had to be expressed in a way that would be noticed by the world and colonizers. Using the overview as a background, I will contextualize the fiction of J. M. Coetzee against the more general, thematic and geographical background.

The third chapter will offer a discussion of the critical apparatus to be used in analyses of J. M. Coetzee's novels. It will include a description of the concept of the borderland and an overview of allegory - the writing technique which J. M. Coetzee extensively employs in his works, and which enables him to attain a fairly high degree of objectivity and universality in his novels, despite the fact that he deals with controversial and emotive concepts such as colonialism, apartheid and racism. The other part of this chapter will concentrate on the theme of colonialism and consequently on the clash of cultures which constitutes the main focus of J. M. Coetzee's novels, and will be complemented by the author's opinions on colonialism as published in his critical writings.
Chapters 4 - 9 will be analyses of the six novels the author has published to date.

_Dusklands_ (1974) is a diptych formed from two long novellas which are linked by the problem of colonization. The first novella, entitled _The Vietnam Project_, was most probably influenced by the author's lengthy sojourn in the US. It is a quite "un-Coetzeean" piece of writing because the main character - Eugene Dawn - is not fully engaged in the clash of cultures. Safely based in prosperous America he works on a project which has as its aim the improvement of the quality of psychological warfare against the Viet-Cong. However, it is enough for him to enter mentally into the borderland between the American and Vietnamese cultures. Later on the conflict is transposed onto his relations with his family and people around him alienating him, from society, and consequently leading to his mental disorder.

In the second novella, _The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee_, the clash of cultures is depicted in the typical South African environment of Namaqualand in the early days of colonial expansion. Jacobus Coetzee is, like Eugene Dawn, a proponent of Western superiority and colonization. He ventures North of the Cape Colony under the auspices of the Dutch East India Company. He perceives himself almost to be God-like and demands of the natives to treat him accordingly. But they ignore him and his bombastic behaviour. Then they tend him in his illness, treating him like an ordinary man of their community. He cannot forgive them for this and after his recuperation and return home he comes back to Namaqualand to pacify the village and its inhabitants in order to regain his lost pride.

_In the Heart of the Country_ (1977) is set on a farm in the Karoo - which as a kind of geographical borderland between a mountainous desert and the beginning of the interior - symbolizes the contents of the book. From the few mentioned elements, such as primitive planes, for example, one may
infer that it is the beginning of the 20th century. The farm is literally in the middle of nowhere, at the frontier - the borderland of the white civilisation, still expanding to capture new territories. The farm houses the spinster Magda and her tyrannical father, the old baas. The attitudes and physique of the father resemble those of Jacobus Coetzee, but actually the former is older. He uses the uneasy equilibrium between white masters and black servants to exploit the uneducated couple of blacks who work for him, even to the point of taking Hendrik's wife as his mistress. Magda, whom one might call more liberal in her attitudes, tries to reject her unwanted status to become equal to her servants whom she wants to be just people, and not servants any more. However, she does not understand them. It is because of her ignorance of their culture that her efforts are doomed to fail and she is left to await her death in isolation and solitude.

Waiting for the Barbarians (1980) is a universal parable about the impossibility of mutual understanding between two different cultures. The aged Magistrate of a tiny frontier town of the huge Empire is caught unawares by a sudden change in imperial policies. He has always wanted to be on peaceful terms with the harmless barbarians who now, for some unexplained propaganda and political reasons, are presented as bloodthirsty enemies of the Empire, who must be obliterated for its sake. The Magistrate, who fully realises the absurdity of this line strives to oppose the "barbarians from the capital" to keep up the old equilibrium but to no avail. The unnecessary conflict with the ghost-like barbarians evading battles and misleading imperial troops into disaster plunges the whole borderland into chaos.

The Magistrate's opposition to decisions of higher instances causes his degradation and final incarceration and torture. Although in the whole commotion of retreat he is freed and regains his position as the only suitable and willing person to administer the town, he feels no link nor obligation to serve the Empire any more. But on the other hand he cannot identify himself with the culture and values of the other side of the conflict - the barbarians. Eventually, he finds himself nowhere, neither a
part of the Empire nor of the barbarian society: "a man who lost his way a long ago but presses in along a road that may lead nowhere" (WB: 156).

*Life and Times of Michael K* (1983) is set in a future South Africa beset with civil strife. It is not explicitly stated but most probably it is a conflict between the class of white masters and the class of black servants, between the Judeo-Christian tradition, European culture and the cultures of non-whites. Michael K, a coloured simpleton travelling through South Africa, is caught in the claws of the struggle. His constant escapes from camps in which he has been placed by white authorities are a silent accusation of apartheid and a voice of protest against the inhumanity of this system. Wholly preoccupied by his only passion - gardening - and unsophisticated as he is, he is able to tell liberty from subordination and his odyssey in search of the former never ends. At last he cannot be incarcerated any more when he apparently dies at the end of this novel.

The next novel, *Foe* (1986), is quite different from its predecessors. It is a re-telling of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* with an added feminine dimension which is conspicuously absent in the famous original. Robinson Crusoe is a paragon of colonialism. In the small scale of his little island he creates almost a perfect colonial kingdom in which he enslaves tongueless Friday. He employs Friday in all kinds of menial tasks like the meaningless construction of terraces for future colonizers who may have the foresight to bring seeds along. Robinson Crusoe taught Friday only very few English phrases to be able to subject Friday to his will without giving Friday the whole richness of the English language which he could use as a tool of dissent to question and oppose Robinson Crusoe. Susan Barton, as an 18th century woman, is also deprived of many freedoms exercised by men of that time, and that is why she sympathises with Friday and his plight. However, she gives in to memories of Britain and at last manages to return, bringing Friday along, apparently against his will. In this way she reduces him to a popular perception of a savage. The clash of cultures in the novel is depicted by the patriarchal oppression of women in the person of Susan Barton and non-whites in the person of Friday. And at the end of *Foe* the protest of these underprivileged groups of people is expressed by the soundless cry of Friday.
In his latest novel Age of Iron (1990) J. M. Coetzee shows a South Africa of the near future or even of the present. The book is set in the days of struggle. Militant young comrades fight the oppressive system of apartheid. The townships are inflamed with regular violence. People are murdered and mugged everywhere, and burglaries and car thefts have become "normal" events of everyday life. The main character - Mrs Curren of English descent who in liberal tendencies resembles the Magistrate, gets to know that is terminally ill. She has always opposed apartheid in thought but only now, in the face of imminent death she has enough courage to express her attitudes actively. However, being a part of white society she cannot understand the blacks although she helps and sympathises with them. She cannot subscribe to the sheer brutality and death mystique of comradeship. Therefore, like the Magistrate, she finds herself torn between the two worlds, unaccepted by either of them, rejecting apartheid and not being able to espouse black values and methods of the struggle.

In the conclusion a broader view of the books by J. M. Coetzee as a whole is offered in the light of their universality and specificity. Subsequently the clash of cultures and changes in South Africa will be depicted and the dissertation will end with a discussion of a prognosis of social change as represented in books by J. M. Coetzee.

In the dissertation the following abbreviations to denote J. M. Coetzee’s books are used:

D - Dusklands (1974)
HC - In the Heart of the Country (1976)
WB - Waiting for the Barbarians (1980)
MK - Life and Times of Michael K (1983)
F - Foe (1986)
NOTE:

1. Lewis Nkosi proves the colonial roots of African literature in his book *T(uks and Masks*. He states that "modern African literature as such can be said to have achieved its present status concomitantly with the maturation of the long struggle for political independence and the achievement of the modern state in Africa" (Nkosi, 1981: 1). This somewhat vague opinion which links African literature with colonialism does not emphasize the latter element enough, but is made much more precise and honest in another place in the book: "the best of African literature reflects a former colonial dependency" (Nkosi, 1981: 2).
INTRODUCTION

Some of the ideas propounded in the preface will be reiterated here as a starting point.

The clash of cultures and the precarious existence in the borderland form the basis of J. M. Coetzee's fictional world. To fully understand the meaning and implications of these notions, it is necessary to investigate their origins in more detail. Colonialism is the framework which will underpin the whole dissertation and will be investigated on the three levels of philosophy, history and literature. The philosophical point of view will offer the indispensable basis for the task - theories and premises which prompted the development and sanctioned the existence of colonialism, especially with emphasis on the clash between the Judeo-Christian tradition and non-European, non-western traditions. The historical dimension will allow us to trace the origins, rise, pinnacle and fall of colonialism, concentrating on the African experience. Following this, African and South African literature will be considered as both a product and an answer to colonialism, and will offer us insight into the minds and thoughts of the people who propagated colonialism and those who suffered because of it, and now in the postcolonial era have to face the problems it created.

In this exploration of colonialism and the concomitant clash of cultures in the fiction of J. M. Coetzee, three theoretical tools will be used: the notions of borderland and a clash of cultures, together with the idea of Judeo-Christianity which underlies European culture and civilisation. The Egyptian, Biblical, Greek, Roman and Christian roots of western civilisation which mingled together in the basin of the Mediterranean will be viewed as the common ground that shaped the European identity and mentality.
After the formative Middle Ages when the Judeo-Christian tradition spread all over Europe creating a certain feeling of unity of the Western world which allowed the European nations to resist the invasions of Islam and the Mongols, the defensive attitude changed into an offensive one following the successes of the crusades and expulsion of the Saracens from the Iberian Peninsula. The age of great geographic discoveries which marked the end of the Middle Ages marked the beginnings of modernity in Europe and was soon followed by the rise of the seaborne empires of Portugal, Spain, and later of the Netherlands, France and England. The rise of the empires superseded mediaeval universalism with patriotism and nationalisms, and was concomitant with the rise of primitive capitalism. The qualitative jump from feudalism to capitalism was possible only because of the intensification of development and production by the exponentially growing needs of modern centralized states. The development of the new economic system into a fully fledged expansive capitalism was prompted by rapid progress in natural sciences which resulted in the industrial revolution which formed basis of the modern world. However, capitalism being very labour-intensive in order to exist and develop, had to be provided with more and more cheap labour force and raw materials. The demands could not be satisfied by the economic potential of Europe therefore the ideal solution was offered by the slave trade and colonialism. The more extensive and more appropriately used (exploited) colonial possessions a metropolis has the more powerful it was. Later, with the rise of the industrial revolution and the rapid development of transport and mass production, colonies, besides being the source of cheap labour force and raw materials, also became markets for the goods produced in metropolis. It was the beginning of imperialism. The relentless economic expansion of Europe used Christianity as a kind of "cover-up" to add some legitimacy to the process. White colonizers who were at the forefront of this great operation (besides conquering new lands) had to aim at converting and civilising the peoples of the lands, and finally started to perceive the natives as inferior. It was caused by the fact that European settlers could not notice anything that indigenous inhabitants could offer them. Everything which was not a product of the Judeo-Christian tradition was considered evil or inferior and therefore had to be obliterated or at least suppressed. This contempt for non-European achievements and the
xenophobic fears resulted in the philosophy of racism, and centred on the concept of the purity and superiority of the white race. Through centuries the philosophy bred intolerance which culminated in the rise of the Third Reich together with its factories of death to exterminate people of "unsound racial origins".

But even before Nazism, Hitler and Alfred Rosenberg (another influential theoretician of racism in the Third Reich) the idea of superiority of the white race was prompted in Great Britain by the ideas of Charles Darwin. He was not a racist but his theories were used by pseudo-scientists to develop "scientific racism" in the 19th century. The most important among the "scientists" were a German anthropometrist Blumenbach (Bronowski, 1973: 367) and a Frenchman Joseph-Arthur comte de Gobineau whose works provided the very racist basis to the world-views of Houston Stuart Chamberlain and Rudyard Kipling. They further developed gobineism, i.e. "scientific racism" in their writings, applying it to literature and politics. They were the most active proponents of racism, thus forming a tip of the iceberg because the vast majority of the British society (among others the famous Cecil Rhodes) in the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century subscribed to this ideology of the supremacy of the white race, which resulted in the fact that "Great Britain [was] responsible for the growth of the most racist colonial society that the world has ever known" (Van den Berghe, 1984: 362). This presupposed superiority was very helpful in explaining the fact why England had to colonize overseas territories, viz. to teach descendants of Shem (Semitic peoples) and especially of Ham (blacks) how to live in a "human way" in accordance with the Holy Book. The British settlers and soldiers more or less consciously perceived themselves to be propagators of the only true faith, and moral and cultural deliverance to these "poor unhappy savages" living without any knowledge of "chastity", "modesty", "our Lord", "Christianity", "conscientious work", "leisure", "Gospels", "Christian love", "good manners" etc. Sometimes if the role did not suit the whites when the colonized caused too many troubles, were not good slaves, or their culture was too different and unpredictable, it was enough to represent them to the world as non-humans. As non-humans they could not have souls, and the land they inhabited was quite ironically perceived to be uninhabited, and in this way
the Byzantine politics of the British Empire was taking an easy shortcut. The officials did not have to win the favours of the local chiefs and manoeuvre them into signing some unintelligible pieces of paper which later showed its tremendous power when the white man was coming to build fences and to possess land. But when the indigenous people were considered to be non-humans, as it happened in the case of the Aborigines in Australia, they were treated as if they were animals and settlers killed them off. The extreme picture of such planned extermination is provided by the Black Wars in Tasmania (Meston, 1958: 106).

Almost the same fate met the Native Americans, nowadays assimilated or closed in the confines of reserves. At first the Indians were strong enough to oppose advances of the Englishmen, but it was not the gun that defeated them but small pox, "fire water" and the change of environment caused by the introduction of agriculture so they could not live in their old ways any more.

The same happened in South Africa where - at an early stage of colonization - the Khoi were obliterated and the San decimated by diseases of European settlers (Heyns, 1988: 59). They also lost the economic competition with whites and blacks which additionally contributed to their extinction (Heyns, 1988: 59). On the other hand, unlike the above-mentioned continents Africa was theoretically most suitable for colonization from a moral point of view, as inhabited by "incorrigible" Hamites, but the continent was not as sparsely populated as the New World or Australia, so as a matter of fact colonization of the Dark Continent was much more difficult and was never completed. Moreover, the climate and environment almost across the whole continent were prohibitive to prospective European colonizers. So Africa, though known from Antiquity, was the last continent to be colonized, first serving as a stopover between Europe and the colonies in Australasia and Asia, and later as a huge market to European products, and a source of cheap labour and fabulous mineral riches. But the history of the southern tip of the continent which was populated by descendants of Dutch, German and Huguenot settlers, is even more distinctive.
They gave birth to the pious nation of the Afrikaners who were consolidated by a rigorous unacceptance of any foreign authority above them, be it the Dutch East India Company or the United Kingdom. But the Afrikaners truly originated in the Age of the Great Trek after the Cape colony had been captured by the British. In the course of their wanderings into the interior they crossed semi-deserts, rivers, mountain ranges, and veld constantly fighting with the natives, to wrest survival from the land or to perish. Not surprisingly, the Great Trek was likened to the long journey of the Jews from the Egyptian slavery to Palestine. After the Afrikaners had founded their own independent states they began to think about them as their promised land and about themselves as the nation chosen by God.

The Voortrekkers thought of themselves as Israelites, to whom the land was given directly from God, and blacks fitted the role of the Canaanites very well, being the supposed descendants of Ham. They became slaves of the farmers - patriarchs who owned everything and everybody in their self-contained universes: "wife, sons, daughters, tenants, servants, beasts and the land" (WW: 69). Sometimes being so powerful, and following and fulfilling the will of God who chose them in the light of the doctrine of predestination some individuals - while not openly, but certainly in their actions - mistook themselves for God himself, like Jacobus Coetzee - an archetypal Afrikaner from J. M. Coetzee's Dusklands.

But it was not an easy task to be rulers of South Africa. It is the only one of the British "white colonies" where (unlike in Canada, America, Australia and New Zealand) European settlers did not manage to outnumber the natives. Therefore, under the combined pressure of British expansiveness and the black race which posed the very danger of "watering down" their "pure blood" into a nation of coloureds, they separated themselves from the blacks in every domain of human life only accepting contacts based on the pattern of domination, master-servant relationship. Consequently, "[f]or the concepts man/husband and woman/wife, Afrikaans uses man and vrou for whites, jong and meid for
other people. For boy/son and girl/daughter it uses, for whites, seun(tije) and dogter(tije)...but, for other people, klong/klonkie and meid(ije) (WW: 131). This linguistic separation after the introduction of apartheid in 1948, together with the appropriate legal apparatus of the Group Areas Act, Bantu Education Act, Land Act, Immorality Act etc., was also reflected in South African English usage where a town/city is an urban area inhabited by whites, and township by non-whites, and irrespectively of age a black maid is always called "girl", and a black man "boy".

Like in the fossilized social structures of the Middle Ages the very fact of birth in a family of a particular colour determined the future of a man, closing him in a bantustan or a township if he were black, or providing him with partial or all freedoms and rights of a modern citizen if he were born into a white family. Such a situation almost automatically ascribed one's social status to master-servant relations.

In South Africa there were almost no interracial friendships, let alone marriages (that is, until 1991 when the Registration Act was repealed) which were looked upon with disgust, and in which the people found themselves under such social pressure, which combined with cultural differences caused life to be unbearable for spouses alienated from their families and milieus. This had to lead to divorces, emigration and reinforcement of the myth that "mixed" marriages are undesirable, immoral and unlawful. The assumptions held by extreme whites are that they are the descendants of Japheth while God - through the mouth of Noah - told Hamites to be their servants and slaves. Although through the good news of Gospel He teaches whites to show them charity but does not intend whites to marry them. It would be anathema for the concept of the "purity" of white blood. Miscegenation is a sin and debauchery, and eventually it brings unhappiness and degeneration as is vividly depicted in the books of Sarah Gertrude Millin:

[c]hildren will be born 'with shame and sorrow in their blood'. Begetting such children is a sin, one that opens the way for 'the vengeance of the Lord for the sins of the fathers'. The vengeance may take many forms: the birth of a throwback to a darker ancestor, for example, or the crippling
of the individual by a contempt for his ancestry that is 'one of the nails in the cross that the black-blooded bear' (Millin in WW: 136-162).

What is also significant is that white invaders looked upon blacks and other people of colour as potential danger to purity of white blood as

[once black blood has entered the line, 'there can be no more white children'. No matter how white the guilty one's line may grow, his ancestral secret will not be safe: the 'vagarities of heredity' may at any time proclaim his shame to the world (Millin in WW: 152).

Black people and mulattoes, or people of other races together with mixed offspring, were described as coloured in opposition to "pure white" people. One could also turn around axiom of this reasoning telling that it is white blood that "infests" "purity" of black blood. But from a logical point of view, and to avoid these rhetorical meanders of propaganda, one should talk about sets of white people, black, yellow and red, and their intersections, or separate sets of mixed offspring to be just in one's observations.

The above situation pertains to the South Africa of the late 1940s - 1960s because more lately, under the pressure of the world public opinion which was made conscious of the problem of racism by the events in the south of the USA at that time; and thanks to local democratic and reform-oriented movements apartheid underwent a slow dismantling which was completed at a quicker pace after the groundbreaking speech which President F. W. de Klerk delivered on 2 February 1990. Although the shadow of apartheid will linger in the "New South Africa" for decades still to come, the ultimate scrapping of Land and Registration Acts in 1991 opened the road to democratic co-existence of all South Africans regardless of how diversified their cultural, ethnic and racial backgrounds may be.

During the centuries of European history (which in school textbooks is equated with the history of the world) this Judeo-Christian concept of the white man's superiority above other races and nature alienated Europeans from natural environment in the process of urbanization and
isolated from different cultures, leading them into the solipsism of Eurocentrism. They perceived other peoples as savages without culture and faith because these ideas could only mean European culture and Christianity. Therefore, the cultures of other peoples were savagery and their religions - paganism. Consequently it was popularly believed that it was the Europeans who were bringing the light: the good news about the only true God and His Son who died on the cross, books, table manners, languages "appropriate for interhuman communication", and paradoxically, also enslavement. They were taking away the land from its inhabitants who were made to work in a protestant fashion which could only bear leisure, never free time and the way of living day by day. They had to teach natives that they are not supposed to waste time since time is money, and money means success and success means salvation. Then they would have had to teach natives what the words: "waste", "time", "success" and "salvation" mean but they never did. Supposedly, it was enough if they were converted and could react properly to commands and were obedient.

Indigenous peoples who were so forcefully alienated from their own heritage and beliefs could not easily accommodate western ways and forget their cultures to be ruled by Europeans. Therefore, after all kinds of colonial wars: from the Conquista, to the Indian wars, to the Maori wars, to Blood River, hatred was always present in European - non-European, white - non-white, master-servant relations. It could not be the other way around. For instance, can we imagine to be deprived of the Bible, Homer, Shakespeare, our concepts of time and history? Perhaps not, but it is exactly what happened to the peoples who were colonized by Europe. The result was not a clash of western culture with a non-culture (as it was claimed by colonizers who considered native cultures just savagery) but of western culture with a different culture. It was always the most difficult part of the truth to understand by whites who could not and still cannot often perceive other cultures as equal to theirs without wantint to impose on them their own patterns of thinking and morality. Dealing with cultures from this prescriptive point of view they entrench themselves deeper and deeper in their Eurocentrism. This is very often still the case today despite a lot of research (e.g. A Study of History by Arnold Toynbee, Masks of God by Joseph Campbell) which were not to
evaluate but to understand and to describe other cultures fairly and objectively as it is only possible, constantly bearing the fact in mind that their own culture all the time influences and distorts their point of view being imbedded in the very tool of interhuman communication - language\textsuperscript{5}.

After a certain time rebellious and proud peoples of all continents were subjected to the European will, defeated by more sophisticated methods of extermination and centralized control achieved with the help of technology. To survive they had to adopt some western ways and subsequently they lost their own heritage in the painful throes of detribalization. Already outside one hierarchy of values but still not in another one, they found themselves in the twilight of alienation where everything is relative and unstable like life, love and death in townships. This feeling of spiritual emptiness, void and social disorder struck a note of discontent among the partially westernised colonized. They began to play white games of politics inside the boundaries drawn by the western law or gave themselves to some spiritual and mystic movements\textsuperscript{6} dwelling on traditional wisdom. But the latter were perceived as ridiculous and unfashionable and were quickly extinguished with the gun and asylum. So what was left was politics.

This instrument of power and manipulation caused the decolonization of almost all colonies after the end of the Second World War. But what remained after the era of colonization in Africa reminded one of a dream of a crazy cartographer. The whole continent was divided on the map with a ruler, pencil and eraser by the industrial barons of Europe without taking into consideration interests and antagonisms of native peoples. Therefore the problem of boundaries combined with detribalization and partial westernization resulted in an endless cycle of civil strife, coups d'etat, dictatorships and autarchs treating the countries as their own dominions. Also after the departure of old rulers the old pattern of domination was not dropped but still prevails, now posing as nationalism, which can also be called black racism when its aspect of adversity towards whites is taken into consideration. Tribalism also still takes its toll and it is a common phenomenon that the tribe of a present life president or the
like exploits other peoples who live in the same country. This bleak situation of continuous unrest was even worsened by the two imperialistic players: the USSR and the USA wrestling for power in Africa and eventually contaminating it with the ideologies and arguments of whites which used to ravage Europe for centuries. Thus in Africa there are almost predominantly corrupted rulers in a false attire of one of the European philosophical systems which are equally foreign to the African mind.

All these problems are widely reflected in African literature which has difficulties to transcend the present political realities in order to venture in the field of "pure art". It is almost impossible when everyday one sees injustice, poverty and death around oneself. It would be escapism, rejection of one's roots (in the eyes of fellow countrymen) in favour of a nice dwelling in the ivory tower. Therefore African authors tend to be monothematic, predominantly writing about the same thing - Africa. But it is normal that at first one expresses one's tragedies and hopes which constitute the everyday life of oneself and one's people. African writing is ensnared by the problems of contemporaneity and will be able to disregard them to a greater extent only when economic and tribal tensions have been settled more or less to everybody's content. However, that aim seems to be far away from the "here and now". This is especially visible in South Africa - this Gordian knot of different cultures, races, religions and nationalities which have not become so homogeneous to be melted into one nation like America but are far too interdependent to be dismantled like the Soviet empire.

J. M. Coetzee reflects on the postcolonial problems of South Africa in his writings in which he employs the ancient trope of allegory to attain objectivity and universality. One could say that the author succumbs to the temptations of world literature, disengaging himself from the present tensions and difficulties in his country. But he is a white person, he cannot think in black ways. He is a descendant of Europeans and though he realizes the limits set by Eurocentrism he is not able to transcend them - his language and himself. It is impossible. On the other hand the author does not want to devote his novels to the local colour. Also he usually
does not write politicised books, though his last novel *Age of Iron* seems to be somewhat tendentious because it describes the present political unrest in South Africa. Consequently the novel is less objective than the previous achievements of the author because it does not depict any positive changes, emphasizing hopelessness and unhappiness only. So far the writer has always managed to speak with an objective voice in his fiction.

The characters from J. M. Coetzee's books are placed in the middle of turmoils, dramatic changes and ordeals - clashes of cultures caused by the aggressive expansion of the white world. Inhabiting the no man's land they observe the struggle of cultures which after the periods of colonization, decolonization and imperialism entered the postcolonial age of cultural domination when indigenous and local cultures are replaced with artifacts, icons and fetishes of the Anglo-American world. J. M. Coetzee, probing into cultural borderlands, does not claim like Nadine Gordimer to be "a White African and not a European in Africa" (Matola, 1990: 13). He knows that such a statement would be a gross hypocrisy. Because having been brought up in the ethos and heritage of the West he is not able to disengage himself from them completely and identify himself with non-European cultures in order to write on the cultures objectively. He tries to avoid prejudice and bias by putting his almost exclusively white characters in contact situations between cultures and people of different skin-colours. They dwell in no man's land and are suspended in the void between the two worlds. The void is a cultural borderland of doubts, temptations, illuminations. In such borderlands his protagonists are far enough removed from western civilization to be able to look at it more objectively, and are close enough to local cultures - which are being destroyed by the expansion of the West - to be able to empathize with them even to the point of trying unsuccessfully to become a part of the cultures. The characters have to pay a high price for attempting to transcend the borders of cultures. They become estranged from western civilization, abandoned and ostracized by friends, families and laws, and yet not accepted and invited to become members of native societies. They are inhabitants of the borderland. Some of them, like for instance Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee from *Dusklands*, despite anything, stick to western attitudes, wreaking havoc in their own lives in
the case of the former, or giving themselves to killing and destruction of
the natives like the latter who revenges in this way his own weaknesses
and the lack of understanding of the indigenous people who "dare" to
treat him like an ordinary, bombastic man who thinks himself to be a kind
of godhead. Jacobus Coetzee, having a rifle and some prerogatives from
the far-away Dutch East India Company, considers himself to be an
overlord of all the natives he meets, and punishes them for the fact that
they did not want to listen to and obey him, in his rage and
bloodthirstiness mistaking himself for the God of the Old Testament. His
attitude of contempt and disregard towards the natives is typical of a
frontier colonialist for whom the cultural borderland between European
settlers and indigenous inhabitants was not something to be
comprehended or reflected upon but just another piece of land to be
conquered.

This early colonialism represented by the figure of Jacobus Coetzee is
reflected in modern times by the imperialism which is presented in
*Dusklands* via the theme of the Vietnam War. Eugene Dawn is a
conscientious officer of a large research institute working towards the
development of anti-Viet-Cong psychological warfare. He lives a
peaceful life of a civilian in prosperous America and seems to have
nothing in common with Jacobus Coetzee. But because of the nature of
his work he has had to enter mentally the borderland clash between
European and non-European cultures represented by the US and
Vietnam in the state of war, and like Jacobus Coetzee his aim is not to
understand or get to know Vietnam objectively but to destroy it. This
hideous desire destroys his life and family throwing him into the
borderland between sanity and madness which reflects the mental
damage caused among the Americans by the failure of the Vietnam war
which on the physical plane considerably ravaged the South-East Asian
country. These two elements of psychological malaise and physical
destruction constitute the postcolonial trauma of ex-colonial powers and
ex-colonies.

In *In the Heart of the Country* Magda lives on a farm in the arid veld of the
Karoo which in itself is very symbolic and significant for the novel as a
The borderland between mountains, desert and the beginning of the interior; between life - water and death - drought. This farm is a far-flung outpost of the western civilization and is also the borderland which suspend her between the two worlds of whites and blacks, leaving her alone and desperate. As a daughter of the bauws she is isolated from the black culture, while on the other hand she has almost no contact with white neighbours engrossed in their own matters (like her father) who anyway live too far away to socialize with Magda. In this situation she is doomed to remain a spinster and to dream her terrible fantasies of parricide because of her unfulfilled femininity which was suppressed by these circumstances and harsh rules of protestantism. She is barren, she feels herself to be a wasteland, and because of this she is driven to adultery with Hendrik, a married black man. In this unlawful rite of passage, after having murdered her father, she becomes very close to her black servants reflecting her desire of shifting from master-slave relations to relations based on equality - which also symbolizes a shift from colonial to postcolonial times. Here, J. M. Coetzee metaphorically represents the mingling of white and black cultures which gave rise to the Afrikaans-speaking coloureds. They might be the "third path", like the Metises in Latin America, but subsequent isolation and clash between black and white cultures without any significant intermingling, was too vivid, too much centred on emphasizing differences, too much embedded in the infertile soil of the "ethos of white purity" and racial hatred strengthened by the "proofs" of 19th century science. Therefore Magda has to lose and - already living in the borderland between reality and fantasy - she crosses the borderland between normality and insanity in despair, and is consequently left alone to face her madness, awaiting death.

Being placed in the borderland between two completely different worlds, or cultures in the state of conflict J. M. Coetzee's lonely characters oppose the billowing and unstoppable tide of change and conflict in Waiting for the Barbarians and Life and Times of Michael K. The figures are alienated, taken unawares by an acceleration of events which destroy their peace and ways of life.
The Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* is left alone by a U-turn in policies of the Empire which manages to reach him even in a tiny frontier settlement, destroying the old equilibrium. Like an embodiment of H. D. Thoreau’s ideals described in *Civil Disobedience*, the Magistrate finds the Empire’s cause wrong and opposes it, sympathising with the barbarians. Then he undergoes Kafkaesque ordeals of elusive terror, leading to a dubious end, full of equally possible readings: "I leave it feeling stupid, like a man who lost his way long ago but presses on along a road that may lead nowhere" (WB: 156). He is lost in the borderland situation, having rejected the Empire’s colonial ideals and not being able to follow the barbarians’ ways of life, lost in his quest for the third path - a speck balancing between the hammer and the anvil of the two clashing worlds, cultures. In this way the Magistrate symbolizes liberals and intellectuals who besides being in the borderland between two cultures, suddenly find themselves in another borderland, the no man’s land of transition between colonialism and the postcolonial age when it proves that their liberalism from colonial times of the “empire” is not sufficient and on the whole is out of context in the new situation.

Michael K in *Life and Times of Michael K*, being most probably a coloured, is a living embodiment of the borderland between black and white worlds. Moreover, as a retarded person he dwells in another borderland between normality and madness. He leaves everything he knows (on a journey resembling the terrible and unintelligible way of Joseph K. from Kafka’s *The Trial*, through the misty-dusty world of Prague courts to his dubious end). However, Michael K. is not so sharply intelligent as Joseph K. He tends to take life as it comes in a South Africa beset by revolution, with social structures crumbling under the pressure of civil strife. This clash between the worlds of whites and non-whites may be likened to an allegorical presentation of the fall of the old colonial (apartheid) order and emergence of a new postcolonial order. In this transitional period when everything is suspended and in limbo, Michael K’s wanderings in search of better life lead him to mountains where he has visions like a mystic. He is down-to-earth and relies on his instincts, which do not betray him like people do.
Kafka's court system from *The Trial* is superseded in J. M. Coetzee's novel by a society and its institutions which want to take Michael K. captive: "I have escaped the camps; perhaps if I lie low, I will escape the charity too" (MK: 249). And his only dream, his sense of life is to be free and farm, to be what he really is - a gardener. Is the world going to let him fulfill his dream, to go his own road while everybody is demanded to take sides in this future South Africa torn by a civil war?

In *Foe* - a re-telling of *Robinson Crusoe* from a woman's point of view - there is a conflict between feminine and masculine elements which is more evident than in *In the Heart of the Country*.

Susan Barton is perhaps J. M. Coetzee's only strong female character, a woman who overcomes patriarchalism as presented in the person of a weak Robinson Cruso. On a deserted island he strives to keep up his protestant workaholic ways, employing himself and Friday in useless but time-killing tasks. He cannot change his behaviour, even in a different cultural setting. Therefore he is ridiculous and unable to listen to other cultures which are symbolized by the tongueless figure of Friday whom he "colonizes" and enslaves, making him work together with the help of a basic English reduced only to functional commands. It is the fear of the self-made one-island-one-slave kinglet that Friday having absorbed more concepts of Western civilisation would be able to communicate him his story and to oppose his will.

So as a matter of fact the island on which the three protagonists live is an experimental borderland between European and non-European cultures, female and male elements, and between the old colonial (Robinson Cruso) and new postcolonial (Susan Barton) attitudes toward cultures of indigenous peoples subjugated by European metropolises.

But Susan Barton, being a real woman, far from the fetters of English patriarchalism can adapt and survive. She even thinks she understands Friday, but she is mistaken. She returns to England to tell her story.
through the pen of a man-of-letters and brings Friday along against his will, reducing him to a popular perception of a poor savage and to a curious exhibit. Thus, in a way she gives in to the patriarchalism and betrays her femininity and understanding of non-European cultures.

In this novel the clash of cultures is represented by the conflict of colonial and postcolonial attitudes, and between interests of non-European cultures and white liberalism what is graphically depicted by opposition of Robinson Cruso and Friday when Susan Barton, with the help of mariners, forces them to board the ship sailing to England. The subsequent death of Robinson Cruso symbolizes the demise of colonialism. However, in my opinion, the most important problem of this book is the lack of communication between cultures, and understanding of non-European cultures by whites may they be adherents of colonialism or liberalism.

In *Age of Iron*, the old and lonely Mrs Curren finds herself in the South Africa of *Times and Life of Michael K* but even closer to nowadays, more detailedly depicted and less allegorical. It is a South Africa of civil unrest which represents the clash between European and non-European cultures and marks the uneasy transition from the "colonial" times of apartheid into an unsure tomorrow of the postcolonial era when hopefully "separate development" is to be superseded by fruitful co-existence. Having learned that she would die of cancer soon she begins to perceive the South African reality differently since she is not placed only in the borderland between two cultures but also in the borderland of twilight between life and death. Death is so close to her that she manages to discard the Western masks of consumerism and workaholism striving to peer into the life of the blacks whose youth choose to perish in a struggle she does not understand.

We are under the impression that she could enter the black culture and mingle with it with the help of Mr Vercueil who as a white vagabond on the social plane is closer to blacks than to whites where he is automatically placed by his European heritage and skin-colour. As an
Afrikaans-speaking person Mr Verceuil could also facilitate Mrs Curren’s understanding of the borderland between Afrikaans and English which governs the linguistic and cultural reality of South Africa. But it is too late, she is on the verge of dying. Anyway, the possibilities are just another illusion since her liaison with Mr Verceuil is not based on equal rights because it is Mr Verceuil who is needed by Mrs Curren. He seems to symbolize the possible coming of domination of the poor, underprivileged blacks, a radical change in the master-servant pattern in postcolonial, post-apartheid South Africa. And what is significant is that he is not presented as vulnerable, powerless and meek like Friday in *Foe*, it is he who is going to survive Mrs Curren, whose death may symbolize the incipient end of colonial white liberalism.

NOTES:

1. The chapter is predominantly a personal precipitation and speculation based on philosophical ideas and on my reading of such books as (full details are furnished in the bibliography):

   CAMPBELL, J. The Masks of God

   COETZEE, J. M. White Writing

   ELIADE, M. A History of Religious Ideas: From the Stone Age to the Eleusian Mysteries (Vol. 1.)

   ELIADE, M. History of Religious Ideas: From Gautama Buddha to the Triumph of Christianity (Vol. 2.)

   ELIADE, M. History of Religious Ideas: From Muhammed to the Age of Reforms (Vol. 3.)

   TOYNBEE, A. A Study of History

2. The term "metropolis" is used here to denote a mother state of a colony, a state with colonial possessions (Murray, 1978:400).
3. This notion is at present being propagated again as the Afrikaners face the change of the 'new South Africa. More on this subject can be found in the following books (publication dates are not available):

HABERMAN, F. Die Herkoms van ons Blanke voorouers

STEENKAMP, B. Wie is uitverkore

STEENKAMP, G. J. Die wonder van die uitverkiesing

STEENKAMP, G. J. Die wonder van die verbonde

VOGEL, W. K. Die Grense van die Volke

The books can be obtained from:
Orde van die Verbondsvolk
Posbus 1777
Bainsvlei 9338
tel. (051) 5-2394

4. The problem of marriage and love transgressing the barrier of race in the South Africa of the 1950s where the Immorality Act was still in power, is dramatically depicted in Too Late the Phalarope by Alan Paton. However, it must also be noted that this act was repealed in 1990 which along with the repeal of the Registration Act in 1991 liquidated all legal obstructions applying to marriages across the colour lines.

5. Language, Thought and Reality - an essay by the renowned American linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf shows how a language changes and distorts perception of reality hindering contacts and understanding among individuals across cultural lines which almost automatically causes misunderstandings, uneasiness and conflicts. The essay was published in the book under the same title which is enumerated in the bibliography of this dissertation.

6. An exemplar of such movements is the Ghost Dance in the USA. It was considerably developed and popularized by the last and most significant prophet of this movement Wovoka (c. 1856-1932), also called Jack Wilson (Anon., 1984a: 757). "Wovoka reported that God had instructed him that if the Paiute people lived a loving and peaceful life and performed certain ritual songs and dances, the white settlers would depart and the Paiute's land and livelihood will be restored (Anon., 1984a: 757). The Ghost Dance spread widely among American Indians, influenced the Sioux outbreak of late 1890 and "culminated in the massacre at Wounded Knee, S.D., where the 'ghost shirts' failed to
protect wearers, as promised by Wovoka" (Anon., 1984b: 525)

7. The conflict between African tradition dominated by European reality is vividly described by Arnold Toynbee: "The reaction [of Asia and Africa] against an aggressive Western imperialism has resulted in the successful political emancipation of these societies from an alien dominion or domination; but the external impact of westernism, in the shape of the imposed apparatus of political and economic colonialism, has dissolved only to become transformed into an internal conflict within this societies between the alien civilisation and the indigenous ethos" (Toynbee, 1979: 139-140).