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VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA IN COETZEE'S *DUSKLANDS*

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ABSTRACT

*J.M. Coetzee's novels occupy an important place in South African literature. His protagonists face a violent world and their bodies and psyche bear signs of this violence. Trauma linked with this violence forms an integral part of their life in *Dusklands*. According to Fink, "Coetzee's works display an individual in a country undergoing massive historical, political, and social change and specifically the effects of violence upon such a nation's citizens" (5, *Intimations of Freedom*). Coetzee presents a critical view of the violence ingrained in the colonialist and imperialist minds of the world. He also writes about the sufferings generated by this violence on the victims as well as the perpetrators.*

Keywords: *J.M. Coetzee, South Africa, Violence, Trauma, Protagonists.*

Dusklands (1974) is Coetzee's first published work. It comprises two novellas, "The Vietnam Project" and "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee" which represent brutal inhumanity marking two historical events: the American bombing of Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s and the journeys into the interior of South Africa by white hunter adventurers in the eighteenth century. Both the novellas very graphically represent how violence brutalizes both the perpetrator of violence and its victim.

In *The Cambridge Introduction to J.M. Coetzee*, Dominic Head writes, "Presented as a pair of linked novellas, *Dusklands* associates its portrayal of eighteenth century Dutch imperialism in South Africa with an anatomy of the terror that underpins US policy in Vietnam" (ix). Coetzee's two narratives that are based on the American and Dutch imperialism run parallel to each other and both describe the colonial environment in South Africa. The

protagonists in both the novellas go through both physical and mental agony even though they are not the victims but the perpetrators of the action. Structural violence is an important feature of colonial administrative set up. The colonized not only endure physical violence but are also deprived of necessities of life. They have to live according to the will of the colonizers.

Racial segregation in South Africa began in the colonial times, which anticipated Apartheid; the official policy for racial segregation was introduced following the general election of 1948. The majority of non-white inhabitants of South Africa were ruled over by a minority of whites. The black natives were driven out of their lands, dehumanized and treated worse than animals. Apartheid led to uprisings and protests; there were violent clashes with the authority that were brutally crushed.

In *Dusklands*, 'The Vietnam Project' opens with a quotation from Herman Kahn,

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