Biopolitics in J.M. Coetzee's Disgrace and Waiting for the Barbarians: Archives of Bodily Movements in Modernity

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Biopolitics in J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace and Waiting for the Barbarians*: archives of bodily movements in modernity.

By

Gregory Marcus

A Thesis
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Biopolitics in J.M. Coetzee’s _Disgrace and Waiting for the Barbarians_: archives of bodily movements in modernity.

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By examining the allegorical ways which bodies are produced and their movement controlled within J.M. Coetzee’s works, *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace*, this thesis follows the shifting paradigm of power from apartheid’s presumption of unity of the state to the rainbow nation’s constitutional declaration that its citizens are “unified in [their] diversity” and equal under the law. In my chapter on *Waiting for the Barbarians*, I argue that the state creates a fiction of unity which allows the state to invoke claims of emergency and suspend the law; within this suspension, an economy of sacrifice functions to cleanse the state of its misdeeds in the eyes of its citizens. In my second chapter, I argue that *Disgrace*’s character’s dramatize how legal equality and rituals of reconciliation fail to create unity and instead inscribes the characters into a secular economy of sacrifice and cycles of violent enmity.
DEDICATION

To my parents and my sister.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my Committee Chair Dr. Andrea Spain for all of her patience and help throughout my process of becoming an academic scholar. I also would like to thank Dr. Peter DeGabriele and Dr. Kelly Marsh who have helped me become a better close reader and more nuanced writer. All of my coworkers and the department, in general, have been kind enough to put up with me and even aid me in my process of writing this thesis.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

J.M. Coetzee’s work provides a lens through which to examine the movement and management of bodies within South Africa. *Waiting for the Barbarians* was published in 1980 during apartheid, and the novel depicts a state of emergency for fear of an invasion which fails to materialize and echoes the apartheid government’s repeated declarations of states of emergency. Critics generally see *Waiting for the Barbarians* as an allegory of apartheid South Africa and look to the Magistrate as the key to the state’s salvation. In contrast, *Disgrace* is based on and published in a post-apartheid South Africa, and, while many critics view *Disgrace* as commentary on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its failures, it is just as widely read by scholars of animal studies, trauma theory, and ethics studies. This thesis advances readings of both books as allegorical in nature. I forward an allegorical reading of the state’s biopolitical management of populations, highlighting the underlying architecture of modern politics articulated by Georgio Agamben, Hannah Arendt, and Achille Mbembe. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, as noted briefly by Keith Leslie Johnson, a straightforward biopolitical “state of exception” paradoxically allows the government to suspend the constitutional law to enforce the rule of law, whereas in *Disgrace*, post-apartheid South Africa exemplifies a subtle Foucauldian biopolitics that depends on a rationalized racism that is pervasive on all fronts. These two books are never put into a dialogue about the biopolitical changes that
occur through South Africa’s transition. The shift in the biopolitical nature from apartheid to post-apartheid is exemplified in these two novels, and the shift shows how two systems of government that appear to be dissimilar can foster the same barbarism. As Walter Benjamin says, “the ‘state of emergency’ in which we live is not the exception but the rule” (275). The “state of emergency” as rule creates enmity between populations through each constantly perceiving danger from the other(s). According to Foucault, this constant perception of danger creates a “mutual contempt or hatred between races” (Society 258). Rationalized racism provides the justification for the characters in Disgrace to act as if there is a continuous series of crises resulting in the states of emergency (although never declared). Through these two books, I map out the subtle shift of biopolitical architecture from that of the open apartheid–and literal states of emergency–to a more subtle and hidden, and therefore more insidious, Foucauldian biopolitical framework. These various forms of bio-power, the obvious “state of exception” and the more pervasive Foucauldian biopolitical framework, elucidate how varying power nexuses of a nation in biopolitical modernity work. My analysis will be of interest to scholars of South Africa, scholars of J.M. Coetzee, as well as a larger audience of readers and thinkers of biopolitical modernity. The underlying biopolitical character (the potential for civilized atrocity) remains even as political modernity exhibits various biopolitical structures. Consequently I argue, the exceptional South African transition marks a shift from the state-wide framework to an institutional framework that is a reduction in the quantity of bodies within the individual purviews but with an increase in the number of entities that survey the bodies.
The basis for these forms of biopolitical states is what philosopher Giorgio Agamben in *Homo Sacer* calls “bare life.” He posits bare life as the base of modern society, upon which modern (Western) governments operate. Bare life is biological life, required by the state to function, but it is simultaneously and paradoxically excluded from the state. That is to say, it is life that still lives, but has no political existence. This is life whose only measure in society is the body it inhabits, any labor or use value that might be harvested from it, and the space that body consumes. In Coetzee's *Disgrace* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*, bare life is made conspicuous as the protagonists are forced out of political society while they are paradoxically being retained in society as a physical shell of their former selves. These bodies end up confronting the status of animals, or other humans treated as animals, and other beings that share their paradoxical excluded-included status in relation to society (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 21). It is in the moments when life is laid bare and “the being” of life is reduced that the bodies are most vulnerable. The very determination of the state of life of the body becomes a function of government, and, therefore, the movement or containment of these bodies.

I examine how biopolitics is invoked in *Disgrace* and *Waiting for the Barbarians* to understand how the movement of bodies is facilitated across Coetzee’s works. To help my reader understand the shifting biopolitics in J.M. Coetzee’s work, in addition to the work of Giorgio Agamben, I will use Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality: Volume 1* and his 1975-76 lectures, published as *Society Must be Defended*, and Achille Mbembe’s “Necropolitics” to help position myself in the discussion of the biopolitical. In *Waiting for the Barbarians* the focus is on
a state’s direct control, the obvious state of exception; in Disgrace, the biopolitical has become normalized, racialized, and integrated within local power nexuses.

**J.M. Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* and State Biopower**

In Coetzee’s 1980 novel, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the focus is the official state’s functions. The local Magistrate (the narrator) attempts to look after all the people, both citizens and “barbarians” within his jurisdiction; he is the representative of the state, called the Empire, for this “agricultural settlement” (5). His rule is interrupted by Colonel Joll, whose task is to ensure the safety of the state. In his function as representative of the state, Colonel Joll tortures captured barbarians to find out the “truth.” He maims the bodies without regard to individual rights or human rights. These acts of exception are not unusual for Colonel Joll’s job. The Magistrate attempts to alleviate some of the abuses of bodies, but often all he can do is dispose of corpses. He begins to care for and wash one of the maimed; he sees her not as a normal body, but one of exception. However, the Magistrate as the representative of the law cannot understand the state of exception, which is completely outside of the law.

The Empire in the novel uses the concept of emergency to suspend the rule of law; I argue it does so in the same way that South Africa repeatedly declared states of emergency because of a perceived state of siege, thus justifying the state of exception within the legal framework of government¹. The state of emergency becomes simultaneously a state of siege and a state of exception, a condition Agamben asserts as the norm rather than the exception in modern politics. When the Magistrate is arrested for

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¹ See examples from Bob Drogin, Alan Cowell, and South African History Online
failing to treat the barbarians (regardless of social grouping) as a threat to the state, it becomes clear that the barbarians have been declared enemies of the state and justification for the state of emergency within the Empire. The Magistrate attempts to interfere with Colonel Joll’s campaign, and the Magistrate is himself subjected to the exception. The state of siege allows the Empire to aggressively confront perceived enemies, both within and without. Mbembe’s explication of the relationship in modernity between “the state of exception and the relation of enmity” can help foster an understanding of this political moment of sovereign power in the novel (16). The state decides what populations are internal enemies of the state; these populations become included-excluded figures stripped of all protections and rights. These populations of bare life become the fulcrum that the totalitarian biopolitical framework leverages to manipulate power. The Magistrate is shown by Colonel Joll, through torture, that the Magistrate’s life is not his own to dictate, but that he lives at the whim of the state. To further cement this, at the end of the torture Colonel Joll forces the Magistrate to live by taking the Magistrate to the brink of death and then refusing to kill the Magistrate. The Magistrate is left to understand and integrate his new position within society: bare life—the man whose life is forfeit, but continues to live at the will of the state.

**J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* Post-Apartheid Sacrificial Economies**

In *Disgrace*, after a long string of affairs during which David Lurie “existed in an anxious flurry of promiscuity, David encounters a committee formed by the university (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 7). The university formed the committee in response to a complaint about David’s sexual activities and abuse of power. The committee is an allegory to the TRC and confessionary disciplines in modernity in general. It seeks to elicit a confession
from David to focus the enmity on David’s actions and not the corrupt structure of the university. When David refuses to become the target for the population’s enmity willingly, the university uses disciplinary power to expel David from academia: he feels like he has been banned from that life. David is asked to sacrifice his privacy and sovereignty to remain a part of the university structure. David’s counter-argument is that he has rights, and he attempts to assert his sovereignty. However, in the post-apartheid South Africa, his rights no longer trump those of others. Even so, David feels that he has personal sovereignty, that he has rights and self-government over his own body. Through his refusal to undergo the reconciliation ritual, David attempts to position himself as a sacrifice. David becomes self-exiled from academia and the urban world; his office and desk reclaimed and reallocated to a new body. Upon his return months later to retrieve his personal items, no one recognizes him. David’s body has lost much of its privileged status within the political framework. That is to say, he has been replaced seamlessly with another body. Both David and the Magistrate are forced out of normal society, the Magistrate because he refuses to accept the state of exception and David because he fails to comply with the normalization of mass bodies that are regulated by the disciplinary power and the secular economy of reconciliation.

While he is exiled from his previous life, David still thinks of himself as the sovereign in charge of his decisions. In this state of mind, he travels to the country to stay with his daughter, Lucy. At Lucy’s farm he encounters two sheep soon to be consumed; he realizes that no matter what action he does, two sheep are going to be eaten. While David acknowledges his fallen position, his position is still one of privilege; consequently, he over-identifies with the animals on the farm. Lucy and David are
assaulted and robbed; in response to the assault, David attempts to demand confessions from Lucy, Petrus, and other people. These confessions are framed within David’s narrative of personal affront to him. Within the narrative, Lucy’s abuse is only framed in terms of the damage it does to David. David confronts Petrus about the assault numerous times; these demands for confessions, not of guilt, but of complicity results in Petrus invoking the state of emergency to protect “his people.” I show how this repeats the university’s exhortation to confess and David’s earlier claim to sovereignty, and it results in David reacting with enmity toward Petrus and “his people.” Additionally, this leads Petrus to claim sovereignty over the rural area that encompasses Lucy’s and his farm to keep the peace in place of the police.

While David’s attempts to control the confessionary narrative results in increased enmity, Lucy refuses to confess or ask for a confession. The assault is much harder on Lucy, and she refuses to allow David to coop her suffering into his narrative. Indeed, many scholars read her as passive for not demanding a confession, but instead of continuing the cycle of enmity, I argue that her choice to sacrifice herself attempts to break the cycle of violent enmity. While it does leave her in an exposed state of bare life, and she gives up her land, her sovereignty, and parts of her history; she becomes the third wife of Petrus and through this marriage becomes part of “his people.” Rather than the act of one of the many institutions claiming sovereignty, Lucy’s own actions decide that she becomes another face in the multitudes who can be killed, but not sacrificed.
CHAPTER II
THE WILL OF THE STATE TO ORGANIZE BODIES IN J.M. COETZEE’S
WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS

*Waiting for the Barbarians* tells a story of an empire’s use of extraordinary measures, which seem to exceed the law, to control the bodies of citizens and barbarians within its purview. These powers are justified by the perceived threat of a barbarian invasion. Using the work of Hannah Arendt, Giorgio Agamben, Michele Foucault, and Achille Mbembe, I attempt to work out the difference between the Empire’s law and the justification and implementation of emergency powers that the Empire paradoxically legally authorizes to protect the law. Biopower and the resulting creation and destruction of bare life appear to be only the result of extremis, but I argue that the allegorical novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* shows how quickly colonial thinking can become genocidal. Therefore, it is not the exception, or special case, but instead a fundamental assumption of modernity that justifies the expendability of certain populations to protect the law. The resulting bodily detritus is left in an exposed situation and defies reincorporation into the state as other then the abject. To understand the functioning of modernity, this chapter will trace the thinking of the Magistrate representing the law of the Emipre, Colonel Joll’s use of emergency powers to protect the law, and the journeys of the resulting bodies who have been victim to the extralegal methods of bodily discipline.
The setting is a dusty little border outpost at the edge of an empire. The citizens of the Empire living at the outpost interact mainly with the barbarians and rarely are visited by anyone from the Empire proper. The Magistrate is the nominal leader in charge of enforcing the law of the Empire throughout the outpost. The Magistrate describes himself: “I am a country magistrate, a responsible official in the service of the Empire, serving out my days on this lazy frontier, waiting to retire. I collect the tithes and taxes, administer the communal lands, see that the garrison is provided for, supervise the junior officers who are the only officers we have here, keep an eye on trade, preside over the law-court twice a week” (Coetzee, Waiting 8-9). The Magistrate acts as the embodiment of the Empire’s law; he is responsible for all the people of the outpost (including the military). His job appears to be easy—he just enforces the law without question. However in opposition to the law, a visiting colonel, Joll, arrives at the outpost “under the emergency powers” in response to a state of emergency (1). The emergency seems to be the capital’s fear of a barbarian invasion. These emergency powers grant the colonel “every assistance” that the Magistrate can provide in order to protect the Empire, even if the colonel has to go outside of the law to uphold the law (4). The story could be representative of many places within our contemporary moment, but specifically, J.M. Coetzee’s Waiting for the Barbarians has been read as allegory and critique of South African Apartheid. For example, critic Arne De Boever says, “apartheid South Africa is usually considered one of the most important states of exception of the twentieth century; a textbook example of a situation or state in which the exception became the rule and the law became permanently suspended” (70). Since the state of exception became the rule, those forced outside of society’s protections by the apartheid law became de facto
“barbarians.” In the novel, the colonel’s job is to “find out the truth. That is all he does. He finds out the truth” (Coetzee, *Waiting 4*). He is positioned outside of the law’s reach by the state of emergency, and ostensibly, his job is to discover the truth behind the emergency. What he actually does appears to violate causality. He creates the emergency that was the official authorization for his job. J.M Coetzee’s parable raises questions.² Within the biopolitical modernity, how can the truth discovered outside of the law be compatible with the law? And secondly, at what point can the legality of the law be questioned? In my reading, I will show that the extraordinary power that Colonel Joll is granted is not compatible with the law, but his power is justified by the law. While the law still exists, it is paradoxically suspended to allow the enforcement and protection of the law by a citizen who should be held accountable to it. Instead, under the jurisdiction of an emergency the citizen claims higher authority over the law. To do this, I will examine how the emergency in the novel places people outside of the law, with some people being beyond its reach, while other people are forced outside of the law’s protections.

A brief examination of the specificity of South Africa is pertinent to the questions of legal illegality raised by the parable. Regarding the states of emergency in South Africa during the 1960s, Stephen Morton writes that “noted anti-apartheid activist Alex La Guma suggests that the emergency highlights the fact that the suspension of civil liberties for the South African population is the raison d’état of the nationalist

² As many critics claim; for example Shadi Neimneh claims *Waiting for the Barbarians* is an allegory of South Africa, Barbara Eckstien claims that *Waiting for the Barbarians* is South African is historical and social contexts, and Sarah Winter writes that *Waiting for the Barbarians* has a “reputation as an allegorical work of fiction that evades historical reference” (261).
government and its apartheid policies rather than the exception” (491). That is to say, while ostensibly the emergency is in response to a crisis, instead the crisis is the result of the emergency declared by the Nationalist government. The shift in causality from an outside threat to the very government as the cause of the emergency and resulting suspension of the law shows that the apartheid government’s authority is outside of the law, which by definition the government represents. Directly contradicting the idea of a republic, over 90% of the population was not allowed to vote or have legal representation. The divide between the claims of unity and equality and the reality of apartheid atrocities was sutured over by the exclusively white government’s propaganda that South Africa was a group of “multiple nationalities” existing in a “democratic federalism.” The ontology of constant emergency resonates with the Magistrate’s musings about the cause of the emergency in the novel: “Unless we are the enemy” (Coetzee, Waiting 90). The enemy of the Empire might be the Empire itself.

While I read the novel as an allegory, I do not read it as exclusive to South Africa. I further read apartheid South Africa’s unequivocal naming of itself as a metonym for biopolitical modernity. Biopolitical modernity is a view of modernity in which politics no longer assumes the protection of all citizens but functions on the principle that some of its citizens are expendable. The logic of expendability results in the state demanding that its citizens inscribe themselves into quantized relationships with the state even as

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3 For a further examination of this so-called democratic segregation see Anne McClintock and Rob Nixon’s article “No Name Apart: The Separation of Word and History in Derrida’s ‘Le Dernier Mot du Racisme’” where they argue that apartheid South Africa attempted to obfuscate the racist nature of apartheid by cloaking it in terms of separate but equal developments.

4 Jacques Derrida claims in “Racism’s Last Word” that the openness of the name “apartheid” is the ultimate example of racism as a political system.
they simultaneously and physically constitute the state.\textsuperscript{5} This process of inscription results in a doubling of the citizens, once as defined by political relationships and once as physical bodies. The self-identification of the population into quantized relationships through disciplinary techniques creates enmity between different groups, as they compete for resources within society. I will rely heavily on the work of Giorgio Agamben and Achille Mbembe to delineate the biopolitical nature of the Empire as an allegory of apartheid South Africa, and biopolitical modernity in general, and to argue that once a body or group of bodies has become victim to extra-legal methods, the reincorporation of these bodies cannot take place within the law. In the novel, once expelled, the unnamed barbarian girl, the Magistrate, and the other tortured prisoners are unable to move back into society as subjects; instead their bodies’ physicality becomes their defining measure. In contrast, the actual torture chamber and the torturer seamlessly exist within and without of the law.

Modernity, torture, and apartheid South Africa all rely on the assumption of expendable life; Agamben uses the term “bare life” to express the paradoxical concept of life that is required for modern societies to function at a fundamental level, while that same life is simultaneously excluded from society’s protection by the very structure of society. Agamben’s work shows that the sovereign (either a single person or an entity that wields power under law while being outside of the limits of law) can decide on the

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{5} Borrowing a term from physics, a quantum is a system of discrete states. When examined, each aspect of a particle can only be one of those limited states. I refer to the way that disciplinary normalization procedures invariably demand that the subject define his/her self within a limited set of choices. Rather than passively go through life, we are actively forced to decide and declare our sexuality, social groupings, job specialization, and many other questions that are assumed to bring about a full subject, as well as an individual identity. In demographics, when the choice is allowed to be written in, it results in the discrete category of “other.”}
state of a person or group of people. By seemingly arbitrary decisions involving borders, racial groupings, and perceived value or threat, stateless people come into existence.6 Bare life, like the stateless person who has been cast out of, or denied entry into, society can be killed without the death being termed “murder.”7 Obviously, a widely assumed paradigm of “civilization” is that government exists to protect its citizens, particularly from being killed; police are supposed to uphold the law. Agamben asserts the government and police are allowed to operate outside of the law with the justification of enforcing the law or protecting society. Agamben reaches the conclusion in Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare life that “[t]he Camp, which is now securely lodged within the city’s interior, is the new biopolitical nomos of the planet” (99). The camp as integral to the city is seen is Johannesburg’s Hillsborough neighborhood, which is mirrored in Waiting for the Barbarians when the central section of the city becomes a prisoner camp. While both areas are within the city, they are outside of the law.

Building on Agamben’s work, Achille Mbembe’s “Necropolitics” uses contemporary political entities as examples of this paradigm of suspension of law by the law as evidence of this facet of government in modernity. “Necropolitics” analyzes actual instances of biopolitical power being wielded by biopolitical states or entities that are not the state or even related to the state. Mbembe also draws on Hannah Arendt’s work to

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6 In regards to the rise of Nationalism, Hannah Arendt shows that nationalism leads to the axiom that “only nationals could be citizens, only people of the same national origin could enjoy the full protection of legal institutions” (274). Since, the nation is a constructed object, the various populations are constructed with “equal arbitrariness” (269). The arbitrary choice of who to include or exclude leads to stateless people.

7 Examples of killings within society that do not count as murder, include the poignant poem “In Detention” by Christopher van Wyk and Liberation Chabalala which is a posthumous collection of Alex La Guma’s writing from New Age. In particular, the section “State of Emergency” by La Guma captures the bifurcation between citizens and mere bodies. He says, “The 20 000 detainees, their wives and children, employees and employers, all suffered an injury … [a]ll of us suffered arrest without warrant, imprisonment without trial” (146)
examine the way enmity functions synergistically with biopolitical power. Biopolitical dispositsifs, in the Foucauldian sense, apply biopower to manipulate life in modernity through shifting enmity: the enmity creates fictionalized terror and the threat of death in opposition to an arbitrary “other.” This death is not only a specific individual’s death, but the death of a created population by a real or fictional threat. A response to such a threat often requires the invocation of emergency powers and extraordinary measures; the invocation can easily involve acts of terror and the possibility of genocide against a fictional population. Mbembe shows that these powers not only combat the imaginary threat, but concurrently construct the threat. Once emergency powers have been invoked, and populations perceived as a threat reduced to bare life, what can be done by the apparatus to reincorporate the bodies of those it cast out? The expulsions range from individuals to entire segments of the population. South African reporter Alex Le quotes a prisoner’s wife describing the released prisoner after ten days in an apartheid jail, “He looked like a ghost when he came out” (Le Guma 16). The reincorporation of these bodies is the larger scope of the democratic transition of South Africa; it went from a state in which the majority population was dehumanized, to a state in which the law requires all citizens to be treated equally and presumably human.

To explore the movement of bodies in Waiting for the Barbarians, critic Sarah Winter uses Agamben to explain the construction and functions of the Magistrate’s outpost. After the army has begun their campaign in the novel, she claims it is the state of emergency that transforms the outpost into a camp. She argues that Waiting for the Barbarians is allegorical specifically for British, colonialism, and the novel represents the play between English common law and colonial law (“The Magistrate” 272). Winter
claims that “a separation between legal authority and legality, or the rule of law” exists as a result of this play between laws. In the play between laws, she finds hope and claims that, “The persistence of both legal institutions and the standards by which they are judged to have failed and lost legitimacy, however, implies that legality might still be restored” (262). While the idea that legality might be restored sounds reasonable, Mbembe’s argument is that the colony is itself founded on the suspension of law. Rather than the “separation between” two kinds of law, the suspension of law is the end result of colonial law. To restore “legality” in such a situation, the first question is, whose legality? If it is the legality of the colonized people, the Empire would have to withdraw from its colonies, but if it is the legality of the Empire that must be restored, its very existence is the negation of the legality of the colonized people, and therefore it also must withdraw from its colonies; in either case the foundation of the Empire is at odds with legality. By examining the Magistrate’s and the Empire’s citizens’ treatment of the barbarians, it can be argued that they already live in a state of exception caused by the very presence of the outpost that negates their history and claims to the land; in other words, its existence already denies them sovereignty. Winter’s argument supposes a qualitative difference between the two forms of British law. As the Magistrate himself begins to think at the end of the novel, “I wanted to live outside history. I wanted to live outside the history that Empire imposes on its subjects, even its lost subjects. I never wished it for the barbarians that they should have the history of Empire laid upon them” (Coetzee, Waiting 109). The Magistrate questions his own complicity in the dehumanization and colonization of the barbarians. Winter claims that the novel “attempts to supplant or correct the unjust law of empire” (“The Magistrate” 280).
Conversely, I argue the Magistrate represents the law of the Empire and colonial modernity and Colonel Joll’s rule is legally outside of the law that founds it. Paradoxically, Colonel Joll represents the Empire legally, but not the law itself. Simultaneously, the Magistrate grants Colonel Joll status as extralegal authority and fails to understand the extralegality of Colonel Joll and therefore the law. In other words, whereas Winter argues that the novel presents an historical progression, ostensibly on its way toward a more just goal, I am arguing that the novel presents the paradoxical nature of law in modernity, which bases its authority, and the human rights it bestows upon its citizens, on exclusion and presents a picture of Western colonialism that can be called imperialism, paternalism and even apartheid.

Within the authority of the law, Critic Shadi Neimneh shows the relationship of the body’s individual journeys and pains to the larger entity of state. In "The Visceral Allegory of 'Waiting for the Barbarians': A Postmodern Re-Reading of J.M. Coetzee's Apartheid Novels." Neimneh questions the limits of allegory in traditional western critical works. He defines an allegory as an intellectual device that replaces literal meaning with a contextual meaning. In particular, Neimneh claims that bodily allegory, in general, is rooted in a specific suffering body’s affective abilities. Therefore, rather than a story short on details and heavy on morals, instead the story is rooted in the material body’s suffering, which allegorizes the historical moment through affect. This “visceral allegory,” according to Neimneh, works in opposition to the national allegory that Fredric Jameson famously defines all postcolonial novels as (“Imperial” 696).

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8 Barbara Eckstein similarly argues that Waiting for the Barbarians cannot be reduced to a particular place, but that the tortured bodies represent specific political instruments.
Waiting for the Barbarians accomplishes this opposition by being “self-conscious allegories in a subversive sense” rather than literal allegories (697). In other words, Neimneh argues that Coetzee’s works question themselves as they purport to represent an allegorical nation. Rather than a traditional allegory that shows typed characters purported to represent the actual people of the nation, instead, the material suffering that occurs prevents the fiction of a unity between the characters in the novel and direct correlation with the larger world. Therefore the focus on the treatment of bodies in the novel tells the allegory of bodies moving through the Empire.

While the bodies’ experiences provide an allegory within and against the national allegory, Carrol Clarkson looks at the way in which words attempt to portray the body’s experiences. Clarkson examines the limits of language to describe events; the limit is similar to how events occur in the suspension of the law, but are incomprehensible to the language of the law. Her work focuses on understanding the unfamiliar or alien through language as an individual endeavor. The limit of the law’s language to describe events hides understanding of events and places that occur outside the law. Clarkson claims, “this extralinguistic truth is aggressively suppressed by the Empire, through the act of supposedly ceding it a sense in the language of the derided other,” so the very nature of the Empire is not compatible with this truth, yet the Empire still needs this truth to function (120). I assert that the same extralinguistic truth that is suppressed in an emergency is also that of bare life at the very heart of the Empire and empire in general.

The question of what language can express comes out in J.M. Coetzee’s own musings, “Into the Dark Chamber: The Writer and the South African State” describes the torture chamber as “a site of extreme human experience, accessible to no one save the
participants” and the “torture room provide[s] a metaphor, bare and extreme, for relations between authoritarianism and its victims.” In Coetzee’s article, the “torture chamber” relates to an “extreme human experience” with a limited number of observers (362). Coetzee goes on to say that the author of fiction regarding torture faces two major issues with the depiction of torture. The first is in regards to the state, rather than “ignor[ing] its obscenities or else reproduce[ing] them” instead one must figure out “how to image torture and deaths on one’s own terms,” (363-64) and the latter is, how to portray the “person of the torturer” without doing so in a stereotypical way that denies all meaning (364). My argument posits: What if the “dark chamber,” rather than a metaphor for a certain relationship, or an inaccessible site, is instead the metonym of society in modernity? The torture chamber is no longer container to a specific physical location, but the chamber can be anywhere with little or no pretext. Perhaps the fascination with the torture chamber is not from estrangement, but from an uncanny similarity. Indeed, as my second chapter argues, the state no longer has a monopoly on the relationship that the chamber presupposes.

Using Waiting for the Barbarians as a case study in extralegal affairs of the state, Coetzee’s own depiction of torture can be examined. To begin, torture as a means of discovering the truth is problematic, even aside from the ethical issues. Studies demonstrate a person in enough pain will often say whatever he/she thinks the torturer wants to hear.⁹ Since either a person or part of the bureaucratic apparatus makes the

⁹ See Bond, Charles F. Jr., and Bella M. DePaulo’s "Accuracy of Deception Judgments" for an in-depth review of reliability of people’s ability to determine the truth of others.
determination of whom to torture, torture becomes an exercise in circular logic. They only torture those whom the state or apparatus has already decided have information or are guilty. Consequently, the torturer puts the question to the victim, while already knowing the response he or she wants. Or to say it another way, torture can be used as a method of conditioning the victim. The use of torture presupposes an emergency that requires extralegal methods to clear up. The use of torture echoes Achille Mbembe’s conclusion on apartheid, its addition to “terror formation is its concatenation of biopower, the state of exception, and the state of siege” (22). In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the law allows for the concept of an emergency that supersedes the law; Colonel Joll invokes the emergency in response to a fictionalized enemy; and that results in a state of exception that authorizes Joll to use torture. In torturing his victims, Joll conditions them to say what he expects. In regards to the rationale behind torture, Mbembe says, “[the system of power] also labors to produce that same exception, emergency, and fictionalized enemy” (16). The lawful system of power seeks to maintain and prolong its paradigm of law using extra-legal means. The torturer appears to become the font of truth; the torturer’s brutal actions are obscured by his/her victim’s suffering and subsequent coerced complicity. The law in the novel seems only to be capable of recognizing the body and confession it has prescribed from the victim, not the actions leading up to the confession. The “truth” that the torturer reveals is not the truth of the law, but a different truth: the truth of the body as bare life. Colonel Joll’s logic appears to be that while the mind can lie, the body (specifically through pain) becomes the path to truth. However, torture

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10 Saul M. Kassin and Cristina T. Fong claim that “those who underwent training were less accurate than naïve controls” at determining the veracity of subjects’ statements “though they were more confident and cited more reasons for their judgments” (499).
seems to be blunt biopolitical truth: in torture the body is reduced to its bare minimum, without any agency or will. Rather than truth originating from a font inside the individual, the “truth” is inscribed on the body through pain and the possibility of permanent maiming. The damage to the body broadcasts the fact of difference between it and the “normal” bodies’ of the citizens. I will further explain the importance of bodily difference that is the result of extralegal action in my reading of the novel.

So far, I have explored the theoretical background for my reading. I argue that a biopolitical framework undergirds apartheid South Africa and modern states in general. Modern states function by the construction of fictionalized notions of “the enemy” that enables the state to legally supersede or suspend the rule of law, paradoxically creating the fictionalized enemy that was the supposed proximal justification for the prior gap in the law. I will examine how the Empire in the novel defines and creates the “barbarians” and the alleged threat that ensues, as well as the way specific bodies move within and without the legal framework of the supposedly unified Empire as part of my overarching thesis argument.

What is a Barbarian?

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the torturer is examined from the perspective of legal authority, the Magistrate. Colonel Joll’s indiscriminately collects natives to interrogate. Upon getting a better look at the prisoners, the Magistrate notices the makeup of prisoners is of “nomads and fisherfolk together” (Coetzee 27). They are two separate peoples, yet they are treated by the state as a single population, that of the “other.” To Colonel Joll, a barbarian is defined as a homogenous group of people who are not citizens. The Magistrate’s inquiries into Colonel Joll’s actions, highlights the problem of
reconciling the law with extralegal methods. For example, the Magistrate questions Colonel Joll on the issue of torture, "‘What if your prisoner is telling the truth,’ I ask, ‘yet finds he is not believed? Is that not a terrible position? Imagine: to be prepared to yield, to yield, to have nothing more to yield, to be broken, yet to be pressed to yield more! And what a responsibility for the interrogator! How do you ever know when a man has told you the truth?’” (5). The Magistrate shows his naivety; he is concerned with the torture victim. Attempting to parse the logic behind Colonel Joll’s application of torture, at first it seems that the point of torture is to render the victim truthful, but instead only the torturer knows the truth that is expected from the victim. Contrary to the logic that torture elicits the truth from the victim, instead, the victim is tortured until the victim learns the truth. Therefore the emergency, explicitly stated in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, allows the use of torture to paradoxically illegally enforce the law. The “truth” that results from torture appears to be the post hoc construction of a “fictionalized enemy” that justifies the use of torture in the first place.

The extra-legal nature of the inscription onto the flesh leads to a biopolitical issue -- once the body has been marked permanently as outside of the protections of the state, how does the person become re-admitted once the threat has been repealed?¹¹ The movement of bodies out of society’s protection and acknowledgement as a subject into the abject state of bare life is not just the limited to the torturer. The Magistrate’s historical and archeological curiosity gives voice to the biopolitical interpellation of the Empire. The Magistrate seeks refuge from both the tedium of administration and the

¹¹ Like, for example in South Africa, in the case of Japanese citizens being granted the status of “Honorary whites” it takes an act of law to change the status of peoples within the system, but the individual’s status is determined by invasive acts of inspection and documentation.
current emergency in archaeological interpretation. Outside of his outpost are the remains of an earlier settlement that is covered in sand. His ability to indulge in his eccentricity is one of the perks of being in charge of the outpost. The dig serves two major purposes for the Magistrate. It provides an intellectual activity to stimulate him and supplies a source of trophies to decorate his house. The ability to indulge his imagination and ruminate on the possible histories of the place helps him to identify his place and position in regards to the Empire. The Magistrate claims their history as his own as he displays his trophies. The Magistrate ponders: “Perhaps when I stand on the floor of the courthouse, if that is what it is, I stand over the head of a magistrate like myself, another grey-haired servant of Empire who fell in the arena of his authority, face to face at last with the barbarian” (17). He uses the past as a way to mediate and understand his present. He envisions that these past people share the same lifestyle and concerns as people in his outpost. They too, in his musing, are on a constant watch for barbarians. He retroactively colonizes the past; he sees history as a repetition of the present.

To the Magistrate, history becomes the canvas with which he can distance himself from the current crisis and play out possibilities. For instance, he ruminates: “Perhaps ten feet below the floor lies the ruins of another fort, razed by barbarians, peopled with the bones of folk who thought they would find safety behind high walls” (17). In his mind history is constructed as a binary between “civilization” and “barbarians,” with the idealization of the “innocent” people behind the walls of the civilization. The barbarians are always posited as the force that is intent on the destruction of the civilization, while civilization protects itself and its progress using any means, even civilized atrocities. As the representative of the law of the Empire, the Magistrate’s vision of the civilization is
one of constant siege from “barbarians.” This siege from the barbarians is not an inevitable threat, but one of the undergirding ideologies in modernity: “a fictionalized enemy” and the “. . . perception of the existence of the Other as an attempt on my life, as a mortal threat or absolute danger whose biophysical elimination would strengthen my potential to life and security” (Mbembe 16,18). I argue that this idea of barbarian threat is inscribed in the cultural imaginaries which are then imagined as history, and the imagined history of the Empire justifies the invocation of the emergency.

According to the Magistrate, the “barbarians” are constructed as the opposition to the state, but in the daily administration of the outpost the Magistrate insists on the harmlessness of the actuality of the “barbarian” peoples. The two views appear to be mutually exclusive, which leads to tensions between the Magistrate and the colonel. The Magistrate tells Colonel Joll, “[t]hese are the only prisoners we have taken for a long time. . . . This so-called banditry does not amount to much. They steal a few sheep or cut out a pack-animal from a train. Sometimes we raid them in return. They are mainly destitute tribespeople. . . .” (Coetzee, *Waiting 4*). The barbarians are positioned as those to be pitied rather than as a threat. Indeed, the Magistrate makes clear that they are not even adept at banditry. Later on, he again admonishes the colonel for his second group of captured barbarians; this time it is “fishing people.” He says, “[y]ou are supposed to help him track down thieves, bandits, invaders of the Empire! Do these people look like a danger to the Empire?” (19). To the Magistrate’s experience, the actual barbarians are considered ridiculous threats. They are definitely not “invaders of the Empire,” nor do they even qualify as bandits or thieves. Their only crime is not being citizens of the Empire. Conversely, the Empire has invaded the barbarian’s land with the Empire’s
border outposts. Since the Empire is the one with records, archeology, “history” and therefore truth, only it is able to tell the story, and consequently position itself as the native. By the chance of birth, the barbarian tribes are excluded from the rights of the Empire.

In the Magistrate’s experience, the barbarian peoples are not threats; instead they are trading partners. The Magistrate at first appears to side with the natives’ productivity, but later, the Magistrate exhibits a disturbing paternalism towards the natives. He notes that since the colonel’s expedition, “[t]here have been no barbarian visitors this year. It used to be that groups of nomads would visit the settlement in winter to pitch their tents outside the walls and engage in barter, exchanging wool, skins, felts and leatherwork for cotton goods, tea, sugar, beans, flour” (43). The barbarians were treated as trade partners. They bring their handmade goods enjoyed by the outpost dwellers, “particularly the sturdy boots they sew” (43). The barbarians’ work was prized because of the workmanship. Disregarding the evidently skilled labor that the barbarians’ exhibit, the Magistrate displays paternalism in regards to the barbarians’ ability to navigate “civilized” entertainment:

I have also tried to keep the taverns closed to them. Above all I do not want to see a parasite settlement grow up on the fringes of the town populated with beggars and vagrants enslaved to strong drink. It always pained me in the old days to see these people fall victim to the guile of shopkeepers, exchanging their goods for trinkets, lying drunk in the gutter, and confirming thereby the settlers' litany of prejudice: that barbarians are lazy, immoral, filthy, stupid. Where civilization entailed the corruption of barbarian virtues and the creation of a dependent
people, I decided, I was opposed to civilization; and upon this resolution I based
the conduct of my administration. (43)

He is worried about the barbarians’ virtue. He imagines the barbarians representing
something innocent that needs to be protected from civilization and civilized atrocities.
The assumption of innocence and consequently the inferiority of the barbarian people,
prevents them from being considered equals or even able to determine their own future.
However, the word choice he uses to refer to them, “these people,” shows that he
distances himself from them. While he may think they are people, they are not his people,
and he must protect them from themselves, and indirectly from the modern world. The
reasoning that he displays is that of a colonial power: if they are allowed to drink, then
they will become dependent on the alcohol, and they will stop living their own lives,
instead becoming indigent within the outpost. The Magistrate’s paternalism also is
supposed to help the barbarians to keep from acting like the citizens’ stereotyped view of
them as, “lazy, immoral, filthy, stupid.” In his logic, the Magistrate has to protect the
barbarians from their own desires and weaknesses; since the barbarians need protecting,
the people of the Empire cannot be “lazy, immoral, filthy, stupid.” Therefore, there must
be a separation between the two populations that he, as magistrate, will enforce. The
enforced separation of the native people for their own good, without their input or
consent, exemplifies the colonial nature of the Magistrate’s administration. Even as he
explains his protective reasoning, he also thinks, “I say this who now keep a barbarian
girl for my bed!” (43). He worries about the barbarians being corrupted, stereotyped, or
taken advantage of by the people of the outpost, yet he does the same. In his colonial
paternalism, rather than protect the barbarians, he instead preys upon them under the guise of the benevolent father.

To reiterate, the barbarians are depicted in two ways. First, the barbarians are under the magistrate’s paternal guidance. Secondly, the barbarians become the symbol of a threat to the Empire by Colonel Joll and the Magistrate. As I have demonstrated, the barbarians are viewed inconsistently between people, and even within the Magistrate’s own thoughts. Indeed, the barbarians are not even a singular people, but many different groups of people arbitrarily lumped together as “barbarians” by the representatives of the Empire. Continuing to examine the Empire through the viewpoints of the Magistrate and Colonel Joll, the question of what creates “truth” in the sphere of the state is examined as they battle to control the narrative of the Empire.

The Search for the Source of Enmity in *Waiting for the Barbarians*

In Colonel Joll’s search for truth, he needs bodies with which to work, so he commences an expedition to discover more about the natives by capturing some of them. He sends back a group of the soldiers with prisoners taken from the pacifist fisher folk. These prisoners are targeted and captured because, as explained by one of the soldiers, “[w]hen they saw us coming they tried to hide in the reeds. They saw horsemen coming so they tried to hide. So the officer, the Excellency [Colonel Joll], ordered us to take them in. Because they were hiding” (19-20). The fishermen are guilty because not because of violence or infraction, but because they tried to hide from horsemen. The fisherfolk know that the nomads are horsemen and raid their community, so the training of experience results in the fishermen hiding when they see horsemen. Despite the fact that hiding has become a survival method for the fisherfolk, having internalized the logic that “the
natives” are corruptible if not already corrupt, Colonel Joll determines guilt, not through testimony, but by his own assumptions. To Colonel Joll anyone who hides is guilty. Therefore, merely hiding from the police/military force becomes a crime. The Magistrate calls this logic “[t]he reasoning of a policeman!” (20). The colonel can only think of the fishermen generally as barbarians. If they do not react as he expects them to, it is their fault and simultaneously evidence of their guilt. Upon being told that the fishermen have no value as prisoners Colonel Joll says, “[p]risoners are prisoners” (24). He is inflexible in his thinking still, and he follows his logic when he refuses to reclassify the fisherfolk. Beforehand they were potential threats, but now they are prisoners, and all prisoners by his definition are the same. In Colonel Joll’s hands, they are all subject to bodily interrogation.

Even before they reach Colonel Joll’s interrogation chamber, the barbarian bodies are worked upon and reworked into the “other.” They are “tied neck to neck … stark naked, holding their hands up to their faces in an odd way as though one and all are suffering from a toothache” (119). The barbarians’ bodies become a part of the apparatus to make them docile. What the troops have done is install a “simple loop of wire [that] runs through the flesh of each man’s hands and through holes pierces in his cheeks” (118). The barbarian’s bodies are physically augmented with wire to make them – and those next to them – inhumanly passive. The slightest motion would cut the tender and already sore flesh from the piercings. The piercing of the flesh shows the disregard for the integrity of the barbarian bodies. To the soldiers, the barbarians are just animals – rendered inhuman – that need to be led, have no rights and no voice in how their bodies are treated or used. The “civilized” peoples’ primary objective is the easy transport of the
bodies of the prisoners. Not only does this wire make them easy to transport, but it also allows all of the prisoners to be controlled by a single soldier that “slowly pulls the cord tighter and the prisoners bend further until they are kneeling with their faces touching the pole” (121). The prisoners are made completely docile. They are even beaten in this position until the soldiers “grow tired” (122). The wire piercing keeps the prisoners in place the entire time. They have no ability to even try to shield themselves from the blows. The bodies are in complete submission, regardless of what the person feels or thinks. The application of discipline and pain to control the movement of their bodies is an overt display of biopower by the state. They have been reduced to an abject state, that of bare life, which only interacts with society through their physical bodies. Literally, those within society control the prisoners through the physical manipulation of their bodies.

The reworking of the physical bodies into the “other” or constructed native of the colonial Empire’s law is manifest in the complete submission of the prisoners. The performance of their manipulation is a means of “othering” them, both to the population of the city and inside the captives’ own minds. The treatment they receive, and are forced to endure, separates them from their oppressors, and their constructed inferiority becomes inscribed upon their bodies through scars, broken bones, and damaged nerves by the practices of their captors. The forced passivity culminates with the prisoners being beaten by the crowd of citizens. There is an assumption by the crowd that civilized men, human beings, fight back, or, at least, they shield themselves from blows. These prisoners are shown through these bodily practices to be of a different species. After the prisoners have been completely reduced to objects of scorn by the citizens, Colonel Joll “holds a
hammer, an ordinary four-pound hammer” that he plans to use on the prisoners. The Magistrate shouts, “No! No! No!” and “Not with that. … You would not use a hammer on a beast, not on a beast!” (122,123). The prisoners are being treated worse than beasts. The sole purpose of the prisoners is to be a spectacle for the townsfolk and to construct the “otherness” of the prisoners. Therefore the barbarians have a human appearance but are depicted as a macabre parody of humanity. They become an existential threat to The Empire by their very existence as inhuman. They are shown to be less than human, they are forced to sit still for beatings, and the captors/tormenters suffer no repercussions for their violent acts.

While the Magistrate attempts to intervene on behalf of the barbarians, he ends up also receiving a public beating. No one helps him, because in his empathy and concern for the abject bodies, he becomes abject himself. By defending the dehumanized bodies, the Magistrate forces the crowd to decide who is human. In this moment the crowd refuses to recognize their own inhumanity, instead projecting it upon the Magistrate and the prisoners. The projection of inhumanity and the resulting enmity becomes that which allows the “civilized” crowd to claim to be human in comparison.

Similar to the citizens of the Empire failing to come to the Magistrate’s aid, they do not object to the broken and used up bodies left behind the colonel. Earlier in the novel, before the Magistrate was deposed, the Magistrate is required to legally dispose of the bodies when Colonel Joll is finished with his search for truth. The Magistrate has to “summon the guard and ask him to make a statement” that is “required by the letter of the law” (6). In the Empire, one of the Magistrate’s duties is to fill out paperwork about the events that occur in the outpost. The law requires documentation. In the Foucauldian
conception of an examination, the “apparatus of writing” makes the individual a “describable, analyzable object”; “it is no longer a monument for future memory but a document for possible use” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 191-2). The information about the body is recorded and becomes the political residue of the physical body. After the Magistrate gets the guard to sign the statement, he asks if Colonel Joll’s officer instructed the guard on what to say. The guard’s answer is “yes, sir” (Coetzee, *Waiting* 7). Here in the Magistrate’s office, Colonel Joll’s use of his power to lie to the law is visible; the lie becomes historical “truth” as represented by the Magistrate’s paperwork, which obscures the actual events. The paperwork is truth in the disciplinary workings of the Empire, and, while the Magistrate knows that the guard lied, there is no spot on the paperwork or in society for that information. Historical truth becomes what Colonel Joll dictates. Since Colonel Joll is positioned outside of the law during the “state of emergency,” what he defines as truth supersedes what actually happened. The Magistrate asks the guard for the “truth,” but this “truth” has no place in the law.

To get to the truth, Colonel Joll describes his mission as, “I have a commission to fulfil [sic], Magistrate. Only I can judge when my work is completed” (13). He is saying that he has a job of national importance to do, but he is above the legal framework, so he alone can judge when it is accomplished. He is legally commissioned to be outside of the law without oversight. This exceptional mandate of power shares the same logic as torture. In both torture and truth, only Colonel Joll can decide when and if he has found what he seeks.

While the Colonel is mandated by the state to discover the “truth,” the Magistrate works within the law to discover the actuality of Colonel Joll’s actions. The Magistrate
decides to inspect the area where the interrogation occurred. He was told his presence was not needed or welcomed by the colonel. The Magistrate thinks, “I enter the hut holding the lantern high, trespassing, I realize, on what has become holy or unholy ground, if there is any difference, preserve of the mysteries of the State” (7). Here the ground has become sacred, but the Magistrate does not know how to value the sacred state. Not only was the Magistrate barred from the observation of the ritual, but the ritual involves an extrajudicial element. That is to say, it is outside of the purview of the law and literally the view of the law. Torture is thereby positioned as something that the law does not and cannot recognize, yet it exists, and by existing, preserves the “mysteries of the State.” The Magistrate attempts to penetrate this, asking, “[d]oes he wash his hands very carefully, perhaps, or change all his clothes; or has the Bureau created new men who can pass without disquiet between the unclean and the clean?” (14). The problem of normality in the faces and actions of the perpetrators of atrocities has been raised by Hannah Arendt in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* and in numerous works by Coetzee himself.\(^\text{12}\) The Magistrate is looking for a physical sign of the torture on the torturer. He muses about the “new men” who can pass easily “between the unclean and clean.” These “new men” are able to pass between society’s legality and a space without the covenant between the sovereign and the subject. Or, perhaps he is an atavistic man, a man whom Agamben might call “loup garou” (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 105).\(^\text{13}\) Like the colonel, the loup garou is able to appear as man and beast, but is neither

\(^\text{12}\) See: Coetzee’s “Into the Dark Chamber: The Writer and the South African State” in *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews.*


\(^\text{13}\) The French word for werewolf. Which is a being that is both man and animal and at the same time neither.
man nor beast (105). To the Magistrate, this might seem like a new creature because it is not recognized within the law. Since the colonel can simultaneously be within the law and outside of the law, he can be unrecognizable to the Magistrate. What happens outside of the law stays outside of the law, leaving the Magistrate no basis for his understanding of this creature.

After examining Colonel Joll for evidence of his atrocities, the Magistrate examines the colonel’s discarded bodies. Upon the completion of Colonel Joll’s visit, the Magistrate has a second group of discarded prisoners to deal with. They have been tortured and therefore emptied of value to the colonel, and, without any secrets to reveal or impart. The Magistrate mediates on their behalf:

My first action is to visit the prisoners. I unlock the barracks hall which has been their jail, my senses already revolting at the sickly smell of sweat and ordure, and throw the doors wide open. “Get them out of there!” I shout at the half-dressed soldiers who stand about watching me as they eat their porridge. From the gloom inside the prisoners stare apathetically back. “Go in there and clean up that room!” I shout. “I want everything cleaned up! Soap and water! I want everything as it was before!” The soldiers hurry to obey; but why is my anger directed at them, they must be asking. (Coetzee, Waiting 26-27)

The Magistrate hurries and attempts to integrate the prisoners back within the law from, what I argue, is an example of the camp in the Agambenian sense. This camp is different from a prison or jail. The camp is not part of “penal law”; the camp is outside of the
“normal order” (Agamben *Homo Sacer* 19). They have been exposed to the exception of the law both through torture and the camp, and the Magistrate works to erase the evidence of a gap within the law in the paperwork. The prisoners’ torture was withheld from the law. Much like the forged paperwork, the physical evidence of the torture and mistreatment of the prisoners seems to demand a response from the Magistrate, but at this point, the Magistrate is unable to understand or formulate an ethical response. Instead his anger is directed at the soldiers, for they are complacent, but his anger is also directed at himself because he is ultimately, under the law, in charge of the outpost and intuits his work differs from that of Colonel Joll’s in degree rather than kind. He orders the soldiers to attend to the prisoners: “One of the women has to be helped. She shakes all the time like an old person, though she is young. There are some too sick to stand up” (Coetzee, *Waiting* 27). The torture has physically altered their bodies; in the same manner that the state of exception altered their political position. The woman who has to be helped by the soldiers, is young, but shakes like an old woman, and many cannot stand on their own. This torture is manifest in physical and mental alterations; that is to say, it has permanently affected their ability to interact with the world around them. The alterations are caused by torture which the law cannot recognize, yet he wants to remedy the situation. The Magistrate reasons, “[w]hat they have undergone in these five days I do not know” (27). He cannot fathom what has happened. To the Magistrate and the law, the torture committed by a citizen under the power of the law is unimaginable, unknowable, and completely outside the bounds of knowledge.

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14 As the harrow operator explains that he can sentence prisoners as he wants, while “other courts cannot” because they operate with oversight (Kafka 198).
While the knowledge continually escapes him, the Magistrate is drawn to the examples paraded in his face by the Empire. The groups of native peoples have both become “sick, famished, damaged, terrified” (27). A “zone of indistinction” is the result of the “state of emergency’s” suspension of the law; the zone is defined as a place where binaries breakdown, and then what are considered within society and law to be separate entities or opposed forces are instead shown to be indistinguishable (Homo 19). These two peoples are both reduced to bare life and are in a “zone of indistinction.” This is a place where differences become meaningless. Examples from the novel include fisherfolk or nomad, guilty or innocent, whole or violated, human and inhuman, and alive or dead. This place of compressed binaries is abhorrent to the Magistrate. He thinks:

It would be best if this obscure chapter in the history of the world were terminated at once, if these ugly people were obliterated from the face of the earth and we swore to make a new start, to run an empire in which there would be no more injustice, no more pain. It would cost little to march them out into the desert (having put a meal in them first, perhaps, to make the march possible), to have them dig, with their last strength, a pit large enough for all of them to lie in (or even to dig it for them!), and, leaving them buried there forever and forever, to come back to the walled town full of new intentions, new resolutions. (27)

During his introspection, the Magistrate contemplates mass graves and the genocidal removal of an entire population, to his thinking, a problem population. In other words, his

15 Agamben states, “Once their fundamental referent becomes bare life, traditional political distinctions … lose their clarity and intelligibility and enter into a zone of indistinction” (Homo 72)
earlier logic of colonial paternalism easily slips into contemplations of genocide.\(^\text{\textsuperscript{16}}\) He supposes that by removing the barbarians, the so-called civilized people could make a truly equal and modern world; a world without injustice in this sense would be a world without dissent. The presumption is that if you removed all the “others” from your bios, then it would run in harmony. But, the very act of slaughtering a problematic people is an atrocity, a war crime. An empire without injustice would simultaneously be founded by an act of genocide. In a truly biopolitical state, the literal foundation would be the expulsion and destruction of life deemed “ugly”; while concurrently, the act of destruction is imagined to bring a state of “no more injustice” into existence. Within such a state where the overt act of exception is the founding measure, the exception is indelibly etched into its very substrate; concurrently, the state is charged with the protection of its citizens and their rights. In contrast, the creation of a state is an inherently othering act, it includes those within its borders and excludes those without. They have truly become expendable populations at this point. The Magistrate continues to ruminate on the possibility of genocide:

\begin{quote}
But that will not be my way. The new men of Empire are the ones who believe in fresh starts, new chapters, clean pages; I struggle on with the old story, hoping that before it is finished it will reveal to me why it was that I thought it worth the trouble. Thus it is that, administration of law and order in these parts having today passed back to me, I order that the prisoners be fed, that the doctor be called in to
\end{quote}

\(^{16}\) Agamben, in \textit{Homo Sacer}, states, “If there is a line in every modern state marking the point at which the decision on life becomes a decision on death, and biopolitics can turn into thanatopolitics, this line no longer appears today as a stable border dividing two clearly distinct zones” (72). In the Magistrate’s ruminations, the slip between genocide and stewardship of life is easily observed, even as he attempts to draw a clear line between the two.
do what he can, that the barracks return to being a barracks, that arrangements be
made to restore the prisoners to their former lives as soon as possible, as far as
possible. (27)

The Magistrate seeks to distance himself from the “new men of Empire” who may not be
new. He believes in the “old ways” of the law; the law was sacrosanct, and, that the law
functioned with the fiction of a homogenous bios. He knows that you cannot wipe the
slate completely clean by going outside of the law to make the law function smoothly.
Unlike for Joll, for the Magistrate the truth of the law overrides concerns for “clean
pages.” In such an empire, the paperwork is without gaps where people are removed from
the protections and even the records of society. Naively, he seems to think that the people
who have been reduced to bare life can be easily reabsorbed within the legal segment of
the Empire. Once the government declares someone bare life and strips them of all
protections under the law, how does the law acknowledge and reintegrate them? The law
does not have provisions to strip people of their rights and humanity, nor does it have
provisions to grant those who have had their humanity denied the return of human status.
The colonel has no problem stripping the rights away from people and even entire
populations, but, to him, when he has finished with the barbarians, there is nothing but
empty and stateless bodies left to be disposed of by the law. By attempting to fix this
space of extralegal use of power with the law, the law has to acknowledge what it
allowed to happen. The law cannot acknowledge what happened because it was outside
of the law, and if it was codified it would negate the very nature of the law. This
extralegal space is witnessed in the gaps of the Magistrate’s paperwork. Without a legal
framework to strip protections from people, the law flounders as it tries to remedy the consequences.

In an attempt to remedy their situation, the Magistrate orders the prisoners to be fed and looked over by the doctor, but that too just presumes that they are merely bodies within the Empire, and there is a physical equivalency that can be offered in exchange for the experience of torture, as a means to reintegrate or repatriate. Consequently, the Magistrate attempts to reincorporate the barbarian girl, but his relationship with the barbarian girl is intensely problematic. He never refers to her by name, or even inquires as to her name. Like the objects he collects from his excavations, the Magistrate claims the girl’s body as an object of study. He has decided: “It has been growing more and more clear to me that until the [torture] marks on this girl's body are deciphered and understood I cannot let go of her” (35-36). He is not interested in her as a fellow being. His interest in her as a sexual object is intermittent; indeed, “[t]he erotic impulse, if that is what it has been, withers; with surprise I see myself clutched to this stolid girl, unable to remember what I ever desired in her, angry with myself for wanting and not wanting her” (37). The magistrate is both drawn and repulsed by the torture-marked body. Like Colonel Joll, her body has passed out of civilization and back within, but unlike Colonel Joll, her body is permanently marked by the experience. The Magistrate thinks that he can somehow understand what happened to her by knowing how the markings came about. This assumes that the body markings are the only thing that happened in the torture room, or that the body holds some “truth.” The search for meaning within the body is akin to Colonel Joll’s rationalization of the power to extract the truth from the body through torture. The experience itself, which is different from the physical scars, is
unknowable to him at this time. In a moment of insight, the Magistrate ruminates on his treatment of the barbarian girl:

But with this woman it is as if there is no interior, only a surface across which I hunt back and forth seeking entry. Is this how her torturers felt hunting their secret, whatever they thought it was? For the first time I feel a dry pity for them: how natural a mistake to believe that you can burn or tear or hack your way into the secret body of the other! The girl lies in my bed, but there is no good reason why it should be a bed. I behave in some ways like a lover--I undress her, I bathe her, I stroke her, I sleep beside her--but I might equally well tie her to a chair and beat her, it would be no less intimate. (49)

The Magistrate realizes that the body surface only tells part of the story. He sees the parallels between his obsession with finding meaning in the torture marks, and with the act of torture on her body to gain secrets. However, the Magistrate still does not look beyond the surface; the markings are nothing in themselves, but are only meaningful when joined with experience. While the act of torture leaves physical marks, that is not its purpose; the markings on the bodies are just incidental. Nor are the marks what make the bodies taboo: a battle scar is a badge of honor; a torture scar is a badge of shame.

Months after the torture occurred, the Magistrate continues his search for what happens outside the law; he goes beyond bodies and examines the room that was used as a torture chamber seeking physical traces of the torture. The outpost is so small that the torture room was a repurposed room from the barracks. After it has been reinstated as a barrack, the Magistrate orders “the four soldiers who are quartered there drag their chests out on to the gallery, pile their sleeping-mats, plates and mugs on top of them, take down
their strings of laundry” (40). The room is able to house torture and later become a banal place where soldiers are quartered. The Magistrate notices: “It is clean, it is swept daily, it is like the floor of any room. Above the fireplace on the wall and ceiling there is soot. There is also a mark the size of my hand where soot has been rubbed into the wall. Otherwise the walls are blank. What signs can I be looking for?” (40). He is searching for a marking, something that would make manifest the activities that had occurred in the room with Colonel Joll. Both the torturer and the torture room are left unmarked demonstrating the ease with which a person, place, or society can slip from law into a state of exception and back into law without leaving any lasting physical evidence of the perpetrators or actions that occurred. The same absence is found on the courtyard that was the prisoners’ detention camp. These absences also reinforce the biopolitical nature of the state of exception. Agamben shows how the “state of exception” can be an “extratemporal and extraterritorial” space; a transient state that can come and go without leaving any evidence on the bodies and spaces it employs; conversely, the bodies who are subject to the exception become broken, marked, or non-existent outside of the sight of the law.

While he cannot understand the broken bodies and the untouched room, the Magistrate becomes torn between curiosity about the marks of torture and his desire to repatriate the barbarian girl. When he decides to return her to her people, he claims, “I sleep more easily and even detect within myself something like happiness” (66). The journey to return the girl to her native people allows the Magistrate to feel like he is doing something good for the girl and the other barbarians. Upon telling the girl the decision: “She gives no sign of rejoicing” (66). He makes the decision unilaterally. The
girl is positioned as a passive object in the Magistrate’s world. Upon meeting the barbarians, the Magistrate realizes that he has “never before met northerners on their own ground on equal terms” (82). In his thirty years at the frontier outpost, he has never treated the natives as equals. He always has been in a position of unspoken superiority to them. The Magistrate demonstrates a paternal colonialism that needs to mediate all the interactions the barbarians have with the townsfolk to protect the barbarians. While he means well, he perpetuates the stereotypes of the barbarian as somehow inferior to the citizens of the Empire, and the barbarians as incapable of having responsibility or agency. The mediation in their affairs only creates a perceived dependence on him, rather than allow the barbarians to learn from their mistakes and grow as people, and the fact of the mediation precludes the townsfolk opening a dialogue with the barbarians as equals.

The relationship between the Magistrate and the natives is intensely colonial. The Magistrate’s attitude and the Empire’s in general perpetuates the idea and therefore creates the reality of the lack of humanity of the barbarians and justifies the colonel to operate on the barbarians as outsiders. Mbembe claims: “That colonies might be ruled over in absolute lawlessness stems from the racial denial of any common bond between conqueror and the native” (24). Therefore the Magistrate’s paternal “safeguarding” of the barbarians is a denial of commonality that stems from the same impulse that the colonel’s justification for torturing the barbarians is rooted in. While the results of the two different ways of treating the barbarians are not remotely equal, they both deny them humanity, and the Magistrate’s method justifies the colonel’s suspicion of the barbarians as others and absolves the colonel, in his mind, of the moral issues. Hannah Arendt makes the argument that since the natives “behaved like a part of nature” they were not considered
human, and therefore, “when the European men massacred them they somehow were not aware they had committed murder” (*The Origins* 191-192). The case Arendt is talking about happens to be of the Boers in South Africa. The novel highlights the ambivalence in colonial structures of just what is at stake in the colony. On one hand, Colonel Joll’s treats the natives as surplus life, and on the other, the Magistrate’s positions the natives as inferior to the Empire’s citizens. The barbarian comes to represent resources, physicality, threats, and objects of pity, but not equal beings. Conversely, the Magistrate is a citizen of the Empire, indeed he is the nominal leader of the outpost and representative of the Empire at the start of the novel, but the emergency powers of Colonel Joll allow the Magistrate to be deposed, stripped of his rights, and tortured for the emergency. To combat the fictionalized enemy, Colonel Joll attacks both outside and inside the Empire.

**The Magistrate’s First-Hand Experience of the State of Exception**

Leading up to the Magistrate’s deposal, he returns to the outpost after repatriating the barbarian girl, and he is apprehended by the soldiers at the threshold of the outpost. His captors are not sure how to treat him; he is a prisoner, the Magistrate, and a citizen of the Empire. His fall from grace is an example of how Agamben’s state of exception functions as a “zone of indistinction between outside and inside, exclusion and inclusion” (*Homo Sacer* 181). The state of exception applies to the natives; additionally, since it creates indistinct zone, the exception functions within the outpost and therefore on citizens as well.\(^\text{17}\) The Magistrate goes from the nominal leader of the outpost to a

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\(^\text{17}\) Agamben notes how, for example the English and Boer war, allowed “a state of emergency linked to a colonial war is extended to an entire population” (*Homo 95*). The result is the entire population of the outpost becomes subject to the exception, or Colonel Joll’s authority, justified by the purportedly external war. The emergency overrides the prewar laws as matters of survival of the state.
prisoner stripped of all his rights within seconds. The Magistrate is charged: “You have been treasonously consorting with the enemy” (Coetzee, Waiting 90). What makes it treasonously as compared to regularly consorting with the enemy? The word treasonous is from a “phrase right out of a book” (90). But, there is no actual charge on paper; it is an act of exception to the law that removed him from the sight of the law. The word is selected to “other” the accused. It instantly re-categorizes the Magistrate as no longer a citizen, but an outsider at the level of threat to the very existence of the state itself, at least according to Colonel Joll’s logic. Following the use of emergency powers and Agamben’s notes on the resulting confusion between fact and law that I unpacked earlier, once he is labeled as such within the state of emergency, he is a threat to the state. Thereby, the charge of treason resulting in the justification of all lawful and even extraordinary measures to contain the threat. The feeling of enmity is the same as Mbembe and Arendt have discovered in similar governments. He is not truly accused, so there is no recourse. The Magistrate replies to the colonel, “We are at peace here…we have no enemies… .Unless I make a mistake….Unless we are the enemy” (90). The zone of indistinction works both ways; the Magistrate is excluded from the population, while the law that he represents becomes the enemy of the state. The Magistrate therefore becomes a traitor to the Empire and loses his legal and social claim to humanity.

With the sudden reversal of the Magistrate’s status to enemy of the state, the colonel and his men justify keeping the Magistrate locked in a tiny cell twenty-three hours a day. While he acknowledges that, “[n]o one beats me, no one starves me, no one spits on me” he still begins to lose touch with his humanity (99). Over time the psychological effects of being isolated begin to wear on him. In fact, he thinks: “If I was
the object of an injustice, a minor injustice, when they locked me in here, I am now no more than a pile of blood, bone and meat that is unhappy” (99). Even to his own perceptions, he has ceased to be a political entity, and is now merely a pile of “blood, bone and meat;” that is to say, a physical body. When he later is released, the people he runs into treat him like he “disappeared and then reappeared, and in between was not part of the world” (147). Like the Magistrate’s earlier failure at finding meaning in torture and the resulting marks, the population does not understand what happened when the Magistrate was a prisoner of the state. The Magistrate’s political existence was suspended upon incarceration. He disappeared from the world; the indignities and tortures that happened to him become unspeakable by the townsfolk. While in the colonel’s custody, his only existence was his body within the camp. Upon his release, he is told by the colonel’s second in command: “But you are not a prisoner. You are free to go as you please….How can you be a prisoner when we have no record of you? Do you think we don’t keep records? We have no record of you. So you must be a free man” (144). Even within the law, the Magistrate is a non-entity during the time of his incarceration. When he is eventually released, there is no record of him, so there is no record of his offense, torture, or even the location of his body during his time of exception. He is accepted into society, even as his experience as a body within the camp is expelled from the population. Clarkson’s examination of the limits of language to convey an experience, as well as Neimneh’s “visceral allegory,” becomes evident by the failure to understand the Magistrate’s experiences upon his return to society. The Magistrate’s body becomes the unspeakable truth.
While his life is exposed to the exception and outside of society’s protection, the Magistrate claims to learn what humanity is. That is to say, by being denied humanity, the Magistrate is forced to confront the nature of being, and just what is at stake in being human. The warders torture him, and he continues his search for meaning in the marks and actions that he observes. What he comes to learn is, he “is not the center of their universe” (133). To them, torture is merely a job. His being is inconsequential to them; they merely perform actions on his body. He describes the torture process as, “[w]hat I am made to undergo is subjection of the most rudimentary needs of my body: to drink, to relieve itself, to find the posture in which it is least sore” (132). The body is controlled at the most basic of levels. The use of Foucauldian disciplinary methods serve to make the body aware of its status as a body within space. Any pretense of individual sovereignty is discarded; the body becomes the sole concern of both the state and the individual. Indeed the Magistrate learns:

They were interested only in demonstrating to me what it meant to live in a body, as a body, a body which can entertain notions of justice only as long as it is whole and well, which very soon forgets them when its head is gripped and a pipe pushed down its gullet and pints of salt water are poured into it till it coughs and retches and flails and voids itself. (132)

The torturers are inscribing upon him that he is a physical body within the world. His inner state is inconsequential; the point of this exercise is to show how the immediacy of the body eclipses the political being. They are not interested in what he knows, or wants to say, or even what they want him to say. All they seemingly seek to accomplish is to rid the Magistrate from any notions that his own will has any power, even over his own
body. The Magistrate feels that his torturer, “deals with my soul; every day he folds the flesh aside and exposes my soul to the light; he has probably seen many souls in the course of his working life; but the care of souls seems to have left no more mark on him than the care of hearts leaves on the surgeon” (136). The Magistrate is still seeking some kind of meaning in the works of torture. He feels that a soul can be discovered behind the flesh, but it seems to be his political being; the part of being that has been nurtured by society, and the part that, as Foucault says, is “an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question” (Foucault, *The History* 142). Therefore it is not his soul, but his own conception and relation of his quintessential self in society that is exposed by its very negation. And, therefore in his mind, he learns what it is to be a living being within a body.

The training goes on for weeks on end; he always continues to accept the torment rather than give up. He thinks about relief from this state of existence, but he decides, “[t]here is no way of dying allowed to me, it seems, except like a dog in a corner” (Coetzee, *Waiting* 134). In his thoughts, the only escape he can envision from the biopolitical mechanisms of the state is that of bodily death. The death of his body is the one place beyond the limits of the current state’s power configuration, but the death will not be a noble one, or even one likely to be recognized by the state any more than the death of an animal. His life, within society, has been reduced to the duration of his body on this planet. Shortly after this revelation on the Magistrate’s part, he is led up a ladder with a noose on his neck and only “a woman’s calico smock” on his body (134). While the noose is getting tauter, he philosophizes on the nature of the event unfolding around him:
But of what use is it to blame the crowd? A scapegoat is named, a festival is declared, the laws are suspended: who would not flock to see the entertainment?

What is it I object to in these spectacles of abasement and suffering and death that our new regime puts on but their lack of decorum? (137)

The Magistrate’s forgiveness of the crowd seemingly echoes the moment in the Christian Bible when Jesus forgave the sins of everyone, but rather than forgive, the Magistrate chooses not to blame them. He forgoes blaming them not for any intrinsic aspect of their behavior but because it would be a waste of his time and effort. The way society is shaped the forced “othering” or “scapegoating” allows the citizens to cast aside all their sins on to the Magistrate by an act of enmity.18 By targeting the Magistrate with their hatred, the scapegoat ritual functions as a retroactive denial of their collusion with the “enemy.” The Magistrate has through his defense of the barbarian prisoners been their champion within the Empire. His policies for the past thirty years have been comparatively barbarian friendly, as friendly as a paternal colonial presence can be. In the eyes of the state the barbarians are the enemy, the outsiders, and as the colonel decided, a threat to the very existence of the Empire.

In an effort to shift the “sins of the people” on to the Magistrate, he is denounced by all of his former subordinates (Samolsky 462). The Magistrate is called to his former office, where he is told “I am going to read to you from the depositions we have gathered, Magistrate … so that you will have an idea of the gravity of the charges against you” (Coetzee, Waiting 96). The charges are never mentioned. Earlier he is accused of

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18 The original scapegoat existed in a ritual from Yom Kippur where the sins of the tribe were cast off on to a one of two goats, while the other was allowed to “escape” to the desert.
treasonously consorting with the enemy, but he never is formally charged. Indeed his entire experience is outside of the lawful court system. In this exchange, innuendo and snippets of vague statements are recited to the Magistrate; such as: “he contracted a liaison with a streetwoman. …because the woman in question had been patronized by the common soldiers and figured in numerous obscene stories,” and “his purpose had been to warn the barbarians of the coming campaign”; as well as, “His conduct in office left much to be desired. His decisions were characterized by arbitrariness…” (96). All that the depositions show are what the warders want them to show; no supporting statements are read, or any mitigating or contextual circumstances examined. Only vague statements are presented as justification for his ordeal. The Magistrate appears to understand the nature of these statements as coerced, after he is released, he learns he “is not without friends, particularly among the women, who can barely conceal their eagerness to hear” his story (146). He seems surprised that people are willing, even eager to re-admit him into society, but the people do not talk about his ordeal. Both the Magistrate and the townsfolk have to “pretend that the voice [they] hear[s] is not the voice of the man who swung from the tree shouting for mercy loud enough to waken the dead” (147). I argue that since he was reduced to bare life and excluded from society during the time of the tree hanging incident, it was not the voice of the “man,” but the voice of the body that issued forth. The voice of the “man” is the voice within society, and the same voice cannot speak the language of the body. On the venture into the dark chamber, what one finds seems to be only a banal man doing his job. Even the chamber itself exists without leaving a mark upon society. As the Magistrate demonstrates, the legal, and linguistic
conventions of society cannot capture what goes on in the chamber, but the body becomes inscribed with a truth that is excluded from society.

The use of bio-power throughout the novel follows Agamben’s state level theorization of states of exception. It is overt and justified by threats to the state. The threats are constructed in such a way as to position the very existence of the Empire as being what is at stake. The risk of annihilation provides the justification for the state of emergency and the suspension of the law. In the novel, the very acts of exception create the forces that threaten to destroy the state. Enmity generally functions reciprocally, justifying not only the state’s hostility, but creating hostility toward the state from those whom the state is hostile to. Even the Magistrate’s reign of benevolent paternal colonialism stresses and solidifies the separation and inequality of the different peoples. So, the colonial state does not seem to foster atrocities on the scale that the state of exception does, but the colonial state lays the justification for the state of exception. Like enmity, the state of exception is applied to populations outside of the Empire and to the internal citizens of the Empire. In both cases, what starts as a defense of the state becomes the threat to the state; the threat created by the defense retroactively is used as evidence that justified the defense in the first place. To end on the Magistrate’s words to his accuser: “Unless we are the enemy” (90).
CHAPTER III
J.M. COETZEE’S DISGRACE: BODIES NAVIGATING POST-APARTHEID
SACRIFICAL ECONOMIES

J.M. Coetzee’s Disgrace is set in a post-apartheid South Africa. The characters navigate the new political discourse of equality within a democratic nation, claiming inclusivity for all peoples. While the state maintains equality of law applied to the citizen, in this chapter I will draw on the theoretical work of Hannah Arendt, Achille Mbembe, and Giorgio Agamben in regards to modern political relationships to argue that, paradoxically, the practice of equality under the law necessarily fails to guarantee the rights, protections, and dignity of the liberal subject. The failure of the new nation to guarantee equality enmeshes Disgrace’s characters within a shifting landscape of conflicting claims to sovereignty that culminates in the question of where individual agency resides. In particular, the figures of Melanie, David, Lucy, and Petrus dramatize living within this volatile landscape, which acts as an allegory for modern democratic countries. The institutional and personal claims to sovereignty, such as those made by Petrus, members of the University, and David, utilize enmity to define “others,” and enmity becomes the justification for a “cleansing” of local territory even if the cleansing is not erasure of life as in Waiting for the Barbarians, but merely the removal, or disentrancement of certain bodies from a territory. Within these territories defined through exclusion by enmity, the machination results in equality without equity, what I
term, “biopolitical equality,” which refers to the lowest common factor between differing peoples: the body as a replaceable spatial object within a biopolitical system. Within the novel for example, David encounters two sheep and ponders how to save the sheep from being eaten, but David realizes that no matter what he does, two sheep are going to get eaten. These sheep represent the assumption of bodily equality since no matter what David’s agency, two sheep will be slaughtered and eaten. The sheep represent a sacrifice that society demands from its citizens; while slaughter may be avoided on the personal level, others, in this case sheep, will seamlessly fill their place. The realization that his agency only affects his own position, and seems to preclude the possibility of self-sacrifice as a way to affect change in those around him, underlies the fallout from David’s refusal to cooperate with the disciplinary committee; he thinks of his refusal as a sacrifice which results in his subsequent removal from the university where another professor seamlessly fills David’s office. However, Lucy’s exhibits self-sacrifice when she attempts to renounce her social privileges; the reunification of her status causes her body to be equal to other people that society has positioned as expendable. I will examine David’s and Lucy’s progression through a presumably democratic South Africa to explore the ways in which racialized and gendered bodies have the possibility of being expelled and re-integrated into society through an economy of reconciliation. The secular form of reconciliation is facilitated by the disciplinary tools that Achille Mbembe names “necropower.” Necropower is defined as an apparatus that functions through the unending production and elimination of surplus bodies within a constant state of exception. Whereas David’s disgrace elucidates secular confession’s normalizing function, Lucy’s self-sacrifice offers the possibility of escape from the violence of enmity
that is constantly reproduced in *Disgrace*, post-apartheid South Africa, and liberal democratic countries globally.

This chapter will examine the way in which rituals of confession are supposed to bring about reconciliation, but instead are disciplinary apparatuses that inscribe the subject and narrative in terms of enmity. These rituals are shown to shift enmity away from the institutions and instead focus it on individuals. After David is expelled from the university and seamlessly replaced, he encounters enmity in rural enclaves. David refuses to sacrifice his feelings of superiority and fails to understand the necropolitical enclaves where sovereignty is not decided by the state. In contrast, Lucy is able to self-sacrifice her position in society and break the cycle of violent enmity by crossing the threshold of biopolitical equality and entering into another enclave.

Contemporary South African scholar Arne De Boever conceives of states of exception as causal mechanisms that perpetuate from the totalitarian apartheid government into the present and the future of South Africa. Indeed, he claims, “that apartheid’s state of exception produces only more states of exception, even after South Africa’s new national sovereignty—which aims to situate itself after the state of exception—is declared” (70). While De Boever conceives of a connection between the past and present states of exception, he argues that it is causal rather than a fundamental component of modernity, as argued by Agamben. In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben explains that “the idea of an inner solidarity between democracy and totalitarianism” underlies modernity (13). Furthermore, in his *The State of Exception*, Agamben states “the voluntary creation of a permanent state of emergency (though perhaps not declared in the technical sense) has become one of the essential practices of contemporary states,
including so-called democratic ones” (2). The very nature of modern politics rests of the state of exception, and it is therefore deeper than a causal link; it is a constitutive underpinning, a premise of the state or political entity in modernity. Within a modernity of constant exception, Mbembe shows how enmity is deployed as the deciding factor between “those who must live and who must die” (17). Since life and death are decided by the application of enmity (17), the violent enmity precludes the agency necessary for self-sacrifice while demanding secular sacrifice. Enmity involves a perceived existential threat towards a person, group, or population within the state, and is used to justify the use of extraordinary violence to preemptively neutralize the “threat.” Contrary to the prevailing conception of liberal democracy that presumes people are free to decide their own destiny within a just legal system, I argue, following Agamben and Mbembe, that the state of exception in perpetuity, whether explicit or implicit, is the norm for society in modernity exemplified by the depiction of post-apartheid South Africa in Disgrace. Decisions are made both at the level of the state and institutional legal systems, and these decisions function on the level of the bodies of the citizens; while criminal acts are presumed to be resolved by rituals of reconciliation, instead a prerequisite of enmity lies below the surface.19

During apartheid South Africa, invoking the “safety” of nation was what presumably justified the state of emergency. In post-apartheid Disgrace, no longer is the appeal to emergency an exclusive function of state, or a unified population, but smaller

19 These decisions are enforced by Foucauldian disciplinary practices of normalization, where populations or arbitrary construction seek to maintain their “uniqueness.” These groups are defined by who gets cast out. The question becomes, not what your group can do for you, but what you can sacrifice to maintain your group.
groups can invoke a similar authority to exceed the law through appeals to enmity. Patrick Walter names these groups “enclaves” (5). Achille Mbembe has named this phenomenon “Necropolitics.” In his essay of the same name, Mbembe claims institutions, without relying on the authority of the state, are able to wield the power of life and death. This power is applied by “appeals to exception, emergency, and a fictionalized notion of the enemy” (16). Mbembe states that people within modernity have been conditioned to think of even, “[t]he perception of the Other as an attempt on my life,” and as enough to justify the “biophysical elimination” of the Other (18). The mere fact of the Other’s existence becomes perceived as an attack with the intent to kill, and the only answer is the application of “biopower,” the power to dictate the life or death of individual bodies, on the Other. The constructed nature of the “Other” means this floating signifier can be applied to populations, groups, and even individuals within the group of “equal citizens” in a manner that is constantly subject to change and does not rely on the state to define it. When segments of the country’s population are in fear of other segments, there can be no constant unity of purpose, but only a unity of shifting enmity that can be focused internally or externally. Walter further clarifies this as “[r]ather than a struggle between clearly defined political subjects, then, necropolitical violence responds to the situation of decentralization and instability by attempting, through spectacles of brutality, to delineate these political subjects” into bare life and existential threats (6). Focusing on invocations of enmity in Disgrace by David, Petrus, the university, and various other organizations, I will look at examples that demonstrate the arbitrary separation of the demos, where those considered citizens and threats are fluid. These arbitrary constructions of citizens and threats are often along class, race, and gender categories. I argue this separation and
consequent enmity is caused by the presumption of an equal liberal subject within lawful modernity. Finally, I will examine how the South African discourse of “reconciliation” evoked in the novel fails to replace the economy of sacrifice. Disgrace dramatizes how post-apartheid South Africa ironically demands secular sacrificial rituals of cleansing in place of the reconciliation that the confessional is purported to bring, and I will argue that these rituals of reconciliation are ineffective to bring about resolution between populations within the landscape of necropolitical sovereignties. Instead, necropolitics produces an exacerbation of enmity, as shown by the University committee’s and activist groups’ singular vilification of David, Petrus’ view of David as a threat to his existence, and David’s development of enmity toward Petrus in response to Petrus’s declaration of separation of “his people” in the rural demos. However, while David fails to break the cycle of enmity and develop a connection with his fellow human beings, David does develop a connection to the animals, and in the end, Lucy’s self-sacrificial refusal to continue the cycle of enmity offers a potential escape from modern necropower.

The failure of the ritual of reconciliation, the confessional, in Disgrace, I argue, is similar to modern democracies. Disgrace’s allegorical nature allows the novel to act as a case study of a democratic nation; in which, implicit states of emergency function as the normal justification for political actions. Many critics read Disgrace as unequivocally allegorical to South Africa or modernity; some critics, like myself, further narrow the allegorical reading to an allegory of a modern democratic nation in which the characters’ decisions are not allegorical. Scholar Shadi S. Neimneh’s reading of “the peculiarity of the body in Disgrace” to South Africa exemplifies the characters as South African citizens who do not represent others within a larger allegory of modernity (“The
Visceral” 1569). Neimneh’s reading both claims *Disgrace* as an allegory of modern
nations, and preserves the individual characters’ uniqueness and un-allegorical nature. In
particular, Neimneh is concerned with the boundaries between the human and the animal.
Michael Chapman claims that Coetzee’s works, especially *Disgrace* “[shift] the emphasis
from Coetzee as South African writer to Coetzee as world writer” (105), arguing
Coetzee’s corpus of literature describes modernity in general rather than merely in one
country. Other scholars, such as Christopher Conti, argue for a “striving for allegory” in
*Disgrace*, not just a South African allegory but one of modernity itself (473). Similar to
Neimneh’s reading, Conti’s reading argues that in all of modernity, all citizens, not just
those in South Africa, become subject to guilt for the exploitation of others. The question
of how to clear the air when “secular confession cannot untangle itself from self-
deception” is raised in regards to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and
confessionary practices in general (475). Conti seems to ask, while confession in a
religious context grants release from your sins by the grace of God, what earthly
authority can grant the same? Critic Alyssa Stalsberg Canelli finds two allegorical threads
within *Disgrace*. She traces Lucy’s lesbian identity in the novel, proving that the national
reading is simultaneously an allegorical reading of South Africa and that Lucy’s
decisions throughout the novel are individual and unallegorical. Therefore, Canelli shows
Lucy’s lesbian identity and agency are separated from how she is inscribed within the
national discourse. The multiple potentially allegorical strands are similar to those in
Maria Lopez’s article; she is careful to locate and limit her allegorical interpretation to
microcosms within South Africa rather than reading the novel as South Africa. She finds
the arbitrary divisions within the novel are more than unique South African problems, but
a more cosmopolitan grouping of problems between peoples. I argue that David’s choices are his alone and do not represent a larger picture, but David, Lucy, and Petrus are embedded within an allegorical modernity where the exception has become the governing principle.

Confessions and the Production of Enmity through Narrative

The TRC’s reconciliation ritual ushered in the biopolitical shift from apartheid to a liberated South Africa, and the shift mirrors the turn of modernity that holds a legal presumption of equality for all citizens. Apartheid South Africa, echoing the social control of totalitarian states that developed during the first half of the twentieth century, instituted an ostensibly scientific racism that paradoxically dehumanized large segments of populations through individuation and classification. During apartheid South Africa, population control functioned through the intense examination, disciplining and documentation of people as arbitrarily racialized and regulated by the government or citizens representing the government. From apartheid’s totalitarian techniques that constrain and organize populations, power relations in the “New South Africa” shift to a subtler, and diffuse, albeit still biopolitical orchestration. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission exemplified how public acts of confession are presumed to bring about reconciliation, but in actuality, function to normalize populations within a legal presumption of equality.20 Within the text, the exhortation to confess is first applied to

David by a university committee, then later to Lucy and Petrus by David. The entity that asks for a confession frames the confession within a narrative that tells the listeners how to understand the confession; similarly, the TRC’s narrative was one of truth and reconciliation, so each confession was positioned within the narratives of secular amnesty and a Christian doctrine of forgiveness, exemplified by the figure of Desmond Tutu. Similar to Susan Arndt, Elizabeth S. Anker, and Jennifer Rickel, I read the university’s committee as a representation of the TRC. 21 Akin to the TRC’s jurisdiction of certain crimes, David’s sexual assault of a student becomes the subject of official university discourse. The university committee frames the narrative as a confession, and they want him to “express contrition,” “an admission that [he was] wrong,” and “accept his guilt” (Coetzee, Disgrace 51-52). Moreover, the committee suggests that since David has not consulted a lawyer, that “a priest, for instance or a counselor” might be helpful for him (52). The form of the inquiry into David’s affair is conducted by a secular committee of his peers. The committee is not an official government sanctioned body; indeed, it is an alternative to direct government regulation. Justification of the committee’s powers is through the evocation of an emergency. In this case, the emergency is the entire student body is presumed to be at risk from David’s predatory nature. The student David raped is Melanie. Her father, Isaac, makes the claim that the university is supposed to be a safe place for the demos’ children, instead they are put at risk by David’s actions. David’s actions against one student become justification to protect all students from him.

The committee’s disciplinary function allows it to define the subject, in this case David. David’s position as a white male professor grants him status in society that his victim, Melanie, a young, female, and dark-skinned woman does not have. Later in the chapter, I will examine David’s reasoning in regard to Melanie’s social status. Within a necropolitical world, the body’s position within arbitrarily designated populations (race, class, gender, nationality, etc.) becomes the basis for rights and privileges. Focusing solely on the body as the basis for rights fails to take into account the historical and societal structures that position the bodies and in many cases exclude certain arbitrary populations from equal status. Many Liberal discourses function by limiting or focusing on only certain bodies. Looking at the structures of discipline, Sarah Winter shows the limits of embodiment as a metric for human rights. Rather than define rights, Winter claims “these human rights texts illuminate the paradoxes of embodied vulnerability through representation of rape, torture, abuse, and physical torment” (“Disembodied” 854). These representations explicitly show the failure of liberal discourse to guarantee rights. However, she claims, stereotypical representations of abuses fail to capture or leave a lasting impression on the reader. They may momentarily create sympathy, but without understanding of the cause behind the abuses, the readers are left with no lasting impression. Continuing to examine human rights in *Disgrace*, Elizabeth S. Anker shows that, “*Disgrace* exposes human rights to be indebted to an individualist logic” (*Human Rights* 234). The depictions of abuses in *Disgrace* are able to make the reader aware of the cause of the abuses by highlighting the functioning of examination and classification that simultaneously defines the individual and makes apparent the need for human right to the individual. At once the individual is defined, but this definition paradoxically strips
the individual of agency. Anker works towards the question of representation and witnessing within a Foucauldian disciplinary society; in her later work Anker uses the many instances of “human rights” and “rights” in post-apartheid writings to question the effectiveness of the terms in regards to uplifting humanity in a post-apartheid South Africa. This appears to echo Arendt’s work in the chapter “The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man,” in which she delineates the shift from the “inalienable rights of man” to the reduction of humans to “some specimen of an animal species, called man” (The Origins 291, 300). Arendt’s work follows how the usage of words like “human rights” and “rights” became dehumanizing significations of difference. If these rights were inalienable, then logically, they should not need to be invoked.

While Anker and Winter delineate the limitations of the body as a basis for “rights,” critic Jennifer Rickel teases out the shift from a Hegelian idea of subject formation to a Foucauldian method of discursive formation showing the limits of disciplinary methods, specifically confession, to allow agency. Rather than working towards a more inclusive humanity, she shows the “inadequacy of the testimonial narrative voice to transform the conditions about which it speaks” (161). Within the modern conception of human rights, the confession narrative becomes a limiting factor to the types of stories that can be told. The way the subject confesses determines the position of the narrative; rather than addressing human rights, the confession produces a certain type of subject. After the home invasion and sexual assault at Lucy’s farm, Rickel

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22 See page four of my second chapter for a more in-depth explanation of the paradoxical nature of disciplinary apparatus to define and limit the subject.
claims, David’s attempt at “telling a story in which Lucy is figured as an object of ownership in a struggle between men on varying sides of a political conflict” preconceives her story as part of his story (171). Indeed, the narrator colonizes the story and removes the agency of the one confessing. David’s narrative of confession positions the entire incident as an attack upon himself and his property. Lucy’s trauma, in his narrative, becomes his own.

While Rickel shows that the confessional narrative limits the agency of the one confessing, Frank England looks at how silence or the refusal to confess is an act of agency. England claims that even as Lucy’s body is inscribed by the socio-political moment, she decides how the inscription happens by her silence. While her father, David, demands actions from her, she refuses. Instead, her body “may speak a different, even if unpalatable, socio-political and moral discourse with strong, if discordant, theological overtones” (105). In England’s view, Lucy’s action of keeping silent and keeping the baby and the land allows her to take agency over her own actions and relationship with the new South Africa. Lucy’s choice of how to relate to the new South Africa, England claims, takes “in the context of the history of racial subjugation and oppression in this country” (105). Rather than confess the details of the rape, Lucy chooses to keep her story private rather than become part of another story. Her body’s relationship with the new South Africa realizes a new story that refutes continual violence and enmity as the result of apartheid.

Evan as Lucy refuses to confess within the prescribed narratives and writes her own, David is also confronted with an exhortation to confess within a narrative. The committee insists David give a public confession to combat David’s predatory nature. A
confession, in this instance, is not a guilty plea, but a Foucauldian exhortation to tell his narrative of the events within the framework of the confessional. He refuses, claiming that the guilty plea is “as far as [he is] prepared to go” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 55). Akin to the justification for the TRC, the committee feels that the “wider community is entitled to know” David’s side of the story (50). Through the narrative of public good, the focus shifts from justice for Melanie to a public spectacle. The confession is no longer between man and god, but instead functions to appease the community. While the committee claims they have “no powers,” they relentlessly demand a confession from David (47). To “understand” and “treat” David for his abnormality, they must first hear all of the sordid details of the affair. The committee does not invoke authority as part of the national government, but it still justifies its authority on the basis of the public good. One of the committee members says, “Don’t you think … that by its nature academic life must call for certain sacrifices? That for the good of the whole we have to deny ourselves certain gratifications?” (52). The dossier created by the disciplinary committee simultaneously functions to uphold David’s uniqueness, and to position the subject within biopolitical modernity’s conflicting sovereignties. It also presupposes a sacrifice of agency rather than a physical sacrifice on the part of the subject. The narrative framing of the justification as acting on behalf of the public shifts the blame from the university’s

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23 Rachel McCoppin’s article "Acceptance Of The Other: Reconciliation In J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace.*" *Atenea* 31.1/2 (2011): 53-65. Points out the limited truth that that can be uncovered; and that reconciliation is a personal narrative that the university committee, as an allegory for the TRC, fails to achieve.

24 Michel Foucault details a similar case in “About the concept of the ‘dangerous individual’ in nineteenth-century legal psychiatry” *Power.* Edited by James D. Faubion. Translated by Robert Hurley and others. 176-79 1994. Print. In this account, Foucault references a case where the defendant pleaded guilty but refused to speak about himself. Similar to David’s refusal to express contrition, the defendant’s failure to provide context derailed the trial. Foucault shows that the trail is not about guilt or innocence; instead it has become to be about “the criminal” (178).
patriarchal structures onto only David. The incitement to speak for the public good positions the university as the defender of the public and obscures the discourse about the power structures within the university that, as the character Dean Aram Harkin implies, allows these types of cases (white male professors sexually assaulting their othered students) to happen with fair regularity. The result of the structure of the confessional narrative is enmity from the public directed towards David personally; he is depicted as the threat to the students.

In the shifting to enmity through confessional techniques, many women on campus vocally criticize David’s actions, while the only men who vocally protest David’s actions are Melanie’s father and boyfriend. Regardless of the evidence that David’s actions were wrong and caused harm, David strangely refuses to credit Melanie with filing the charges, or even the agency to do so. He says “She isn’t responsible. Don’t blame her” (45). Yet paradoxically, he says that she is “Twenty. Of age. Old enough to know her own mind” (45). So on one level, David thinks it was not quite rape, but also that Melanie has no responsibility or blame in her actions against him. According to David, Melanie was simultaneously able to know what she wants and forced to file charges against him. David’s paradoxical reasoning gives Melanie the right to consent to sex with him, but withholds the right to not consent to sex with him. David’s reasoning would make sense if he did not grant her the same protections and rights as he takes for granted. Instead of her, David blames the other men in Melanie’s life: “There was a battle of some kind going on behind the scenes that I wasn’t privy to. There was a jealous boyfriend. There were indignant parents. She must have crumpled in the end” (45). David’s racist and misogynistic biases are projected onto Melanie; she is assumed to be a
passive being; it is not her, but the men around her who force her to do their bidding.

David normalizes himself within the male population by projecting the passivity of females as an excuse for his actions. David finds fault in the complaint against him, as a white male, but he also says, “I have stated my position. I am guilty” (49). Therefore, it is not the veracity of the charges that he objects to, but the fact that Melanie was able to file a complaint. The issue is not about guilt, but the biopolitical position within society; like critic Anker states “Rosalind [David’s ex-wife] cynically reminds us that compliance was wholly within his capacity—and thus an option disallowed the majority of South Africans” (*Fictions* 159). David’s refusal is white privilege; he would have been reincorporated into the system, but his refusal to comply does not result in a prison term or other criminal punishment.

While David refuses to confess, the victim’s father frames the rape as a threat from the university towards his family and the community at large. He says, “[w]e put our children in the hands of you people because we think we can trust you. If we can’t trust the university, who can we trust? We never thought we were sending our daughter into a nest of vipers” (*Coetzee, Disgrace* 38). The threat suddenly is not merely David, but he comes to represent an entire nest. Rather than an issue between David and his victim, the rape becomes a safety issue of the entire student population, justifying the formation of a institutional committee to resolve the threat. The committee is using confessional disciplinary power to manage David’s sexuality, while at the same time, making a disciplinary decision about the normality of David. With the perception of David’s act of rape as a threat to the entire student body, the committee’s job is to contain the threat within campus.
In response to David’s actions, there is a reciprocal side of the enmity. The gendered difference of opinion to the severity of David’s punishment exemplifies how differently arbitrary groups of people perceive the rape. David thinks that his colleagues, specifically the female ones, want to remove him. To David, there is an unbridgeable difference in ethics between men and women. He thinks that the chair of his Department, Elaine Winter, “has never liked him; she regards him as a hangover from the past, the sooner cleared away the better” (40). David feels out of place in this new paradigm of reconciliation; he feels persecuted for his desires and his sexual identity, which he equates with being “a servant of euros” (52). It does not matter if the persecution is real or just in David’s head, David feels that the threat justifies his defiance of the committee. Aram Harkin, the vice-rector, tries to tame David’s persecution complex. Harkin tells David after the initial meeting, “Speaking personally, David, I want to tell you you have all my sympathy. Really. These things can be hell” (42). Harkin attempts to invoke a connection to David, a “male chumminess” (42). This gesture of brotherhood by the Vice-Rector implies that similar allegations happen with fair regularity, and while they “can be hell,” they eventually go away without permanent damage to the male perpetrator. David consults a lawyer who suggests that David should get “a woman to represent” him and advises that a “private settlement” will allow David to escape with his career still in existence (42). The lawyer additionally suggests David give a concession to mitigate the damage. David is told to get a female lawyer as his representative in this case. While, genders are equal under the law and the university’s codes, in the realm of the committee, gender has become a mitigating factor in David’s case. The skill of the lawyer is secondary to the gender.
The female members of the university staff and student populations in the novel band together to protest David’s actions; conversely the reaction of the male members seems to be understanding and supportive. From the women in the novel, the response seems to be a concern for unethical behavior on his part towards Melanie. Coincidently, it is “Rape Awareness Week” on campus, and “Women Against Rape WAR” delivered a note under his door saying “YOUR DAYS ARE OVER, CASANOVA” (43). The group’s acronym is literally “war,” which presupposes the use of emergency powers to protect the population. WAR evokes a life or death battle to protect women on campus, while excluding non-women from the issue, and thereby turning a supposedly private legal case into the female public’s concern. WAR is not battling to change the university’s power structures, or reform the university, but instead, WAR is invoking enmity (in the sense of personal hatred) towards David as a method of policing the populations within the university. The university and the WAR group on campus have expressed interest in punishing David’s actions but not the system that allowed them. There has been no official police involvement, no government inquiry, even as the press covers the story. The rape is public knowledge and discourse, but kept outside of the government’s lawful jurisdiction.

Akin to the TRC’s offering of amnesty for confession of political crimes, the pathologized individual takes the focus for the university’s systemic issues. This first appears to resemble the idea of the sacrificial scapegoat that I argued in chapter one was the basis for cleansing in a totalitarian state. The systematic methodology used in the pathologizing of the individual also strives for the reincorporation of the individual within the system. While the individual takes on the blame for the system, the system
recycles the individual from pathological to normal and reinstates the individual as a member of the system, even as the systemic violence, specifically violence against women, is continually reproduced. The individual becomes a metonym for the power structure’s failure, and is treated for this failure. At first, this functions as and appears to be scapegoating; but, rather than expelling the body as a scapegoat, instead of physical sacrifice, the system reincorporates the body. The university handles not only the pathologization and treatment/discipline, but also the discovery process which frames the discourse about the affair so that the public knows how to interpret the ritual. David’s case is portrayed not as part of a system that allows for the abuse and rape of students, but that of a sick individual who needs to be reeducated. David is told to go to, “Sensitivity training. Community service. Counseling. Whatever you can negotiate” (43).

Systematic recycling of the individual in an extralegal manner bypasses the law’s presumed equality and replaces it with biopolitical equality; rather than equal rights under the law, the bodies become reduced to the status of equality for the machinations of the system. In the past during apartheid, biological extermination or removal was the method of correcting the system. The scapegoat functioned on an individual level parallel to genocide at the population level (individual cleansing verse ethnic cleansing). Just as the deployment of torture in *Waiting for the Barbarians* is not about guilt or truth, in *Disgrace* confession functions within a narrative that is not about individual truth or guilt.

Once David has been expelled from the university for refusing to particulate in the ritual of cleansing, David visits Lucy on her farm. They become the victims of a home invasion: David is assaulted and burned, and Lucy is raped. David implores and demands confession in attempts to control the narrative about Lucy’s rape. Indeed, he
even demands a confession from Lucy. Similar to Melanie, Lucy is the victim of rape, and similar to how David believes that Melanie was pressured to confess the details of the crime and file a complaint against him, David demands that Lucy confess the details of the assault and file charges: “Why aren’t you telling the whole story, Lucy?” (110). Later in the narrative, he also asks, “Lucy, my dearest, why don’t you want to tell? It was a crime. There is no shame in being made the object of a crime. You did not choose to be the object. You are an innocent party” (111). David uses a double standard when the victim is his daughter, and he is not the perpetrator. David thinks that his use of force to have sexual intercourse with a young girl is not rape, but when the perpetrators are black, it is by definition rape. Since it is rape, in David’s logic, Lucy needs to report it. In the aftermath of the rape, David attempts to get Bev Shaw, a friend of Lucy’s to help him, “Bev Shaw responds only with a tense shake of the head. Not your business, she seems to be saying. Menstruation, childbirth, violation and its aftermath: blood-matters, a woman’s burden, women’s preserve” (104). David understands the refusal to talk about the rape in gendered terms, rather than as Lucy’s agency and not part of the narrative that David attempts to create. Even after the Lucy is raped, David still does not think of his actions toward Melanie as rape. His name was misspelt in a newspaper in the novel, so a chance typo by the newspaper grants David anonymity. The typo in Lucy’s last name prevents the press from connecting the two events. Indeed, “he is glad that no connection is made between Ms. Lourie’s elderly father and David Lurie, disciple of nature poet William Wordsworth” (116). The events are different, not because the crime or law is different, but because the groups of people involved are different. Both events are adjudicated outside of the law. Gender, race, and kinship all become more important than the actual
law; claims to sovereignty and protection are invoked in the incidents. I argue that biopolitics supersedes the event, allowing multiple claims to the truth of the matter, thereby exemplifying Foucault’s assertion that “modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question” on the scale of populations and individuals within the state (Foucault, *The History* 143). Questions of whose right it is to confess, or demand a confession, to hear a confession, and to decide on penance or retribution are fluid between enclaves; people might come together in one instance and fluidly separate in another: the only thing constant is movement of people.

In an attempt to sort out the fluid jurisdictions, David, Lucy, and Lucy’s neighbor Petrus discuss the role of the police in the state. David expects the country to “fix” his situation. David expects “justice” for the crime perpetrated on him and Lucy, without granting the same privilege to his victim. David states, “the police are over stretched, as I’m sure you know” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 115). Petrus is a native South African. After apartheid ended, he worked for Lucy, until he was able to purchase land from her. Petrus was away on business during the home invasion and rape. Petrus refuses to accept any guilt or responsibility that David attempts to place on him; in response, Petrus says, “[t]he police must find them and put them in jail. That is the job of the police” (119). The police function as an arm of the state. The apartheid police enforced the normalization of a racialized hierarchy among the citizens; after the shift to a democratic South Africa with the presumption of equality under the state, the police no longer officially presume guilt by skin color. The police cannot handle all of the crimes in the country. While it is the nominal job of the police, the police are shown inadequate at normalizing justice between equals. After apartheid ended, David has no more rights in the eyes of the law than
Petrus. Petrus knows the police can no longer arrest him or his “people” because of David’s word alone, but David does not understand equality. Petrus has not risen to David’s former level of privileged white male, but David has been brought down to a level of legal equality with Petrus’ new status. David once again attempts to demand justice, upon encountering one of the rapists at a celebration of Petrus’ new home. David makes a scene, insisting on calling the police, but Lucy responds, “David don’t do it. It’s not Petrus’ fault. If you call the police, the evening will be destroyed for him. Be sensible” (133). While calling the police is an option; there is no physical evidence of the crime and only David’s accusation. Within a state that presumes equality under the law, David’s word is equal to that of Pollux, or Petrus, or Lucy.

Within the new South Africa, the police’s job is not to punish those who violate the racial hierarchy; instead, Lucy makes the argument that “[w]ith regard to the police, let me remind you why we called them in in the first place; for the sake of insurance. We filed a report because if we did not, the insurance would not pay out” (134). The police are not positioned as a route to justice or the return of stolen property. Instead the police become an entity that proves the veracity of their claims of damages to the insurance companies. They are the source of an official bureaucratic report or an addition to the dossier of the crime. Petrus also argues that, “the insurance will give you a new car” (137). The car is a replaceable mechanical convenience. It can be replaced with another one without any major inconvenience. David argues against this line of reasoning, asking Petrus for information to “pass on to the police” so they can “investigate and bring [Pollux] and his friends to justice,” and “[w]e can’t leave it to insurance companies to deliver justice. That is not their business” (137). David’s argument assumes that the
police will investigate and find the man guilty, and it is Petrus’ duty to assist the police. David has the presumption that because he is white and male the police will do as he imagines regardless of the available evidence, while simultaneously arguing that replacing his car would be an act of justice. Petrus additionally argues that he is “the one who must be keeping the peace” (137). In addition to the police and the insurance companies, Petrus is in charge of governing the people in the area. He has filled a vacuum that the over burdening of the police has created in South Africa. He cannot and will not do as David demands. Events soon conspire to bring the police into David’s life. David is notified that his car “has been recovered” and that “[t]wo men have been arrested” (153). Upon reporting to the car impound yard, David discovers “[t]hey have a Corolla, but it’s not mine” (155). And David himself says, “In any event, the trail is cold. Our friends aren’t going to be caught, not with the police in the state they are in. So let us forget about it” (155). After arguing for justice with Petrus and invoking the specter of the police, David concedes that the police have little time and effort to invest on the relatively minor, as reported, incident. The failure of the police to find his vehicle is compounded by their lack of attention to detail; they attempt to return the wrong vehicle to him. The police would happily close the case and let him drive home in the wrong car; in a sense this congruence of cars echoes the idea that insurance would provide justice by replacing David’s car. Rather than the enforcers of equality, the police are shown to be an inept bureaucracy that provides documentation rather than action.

While the police are shown to be ineffective at distributing justice, the local people compete for sovereignty within the landscape. These shifting bodies, I argue, are an example of Achille Mbembe’s “war machine,” or groups who committee
necropolitical violence and are elusive in nature, but operate over large areas. For example, the men who rape Lucy apparently disperse into the countryside; only one of them resurfaces in the novel within a different enclave. The countryside is host to shifting enclaves of people whose composition and allegiance can shift at a whim. The artificial separation that occurs within South Africa is the progression from apartheid to a new tribalism. The people of the South Africa are not united in their humanity, as David reasons, “[t]hough they are his countrymen, he could not feel more alien among them, more of an imposter” (191). David does not fit in with many of his countrymen, yet he claims them in a general sense as countrymen. Again, this is seen when David confronts Petrus, Lucy’s neighbor:

Petrus: “You come to look after your child. I also look after my child.”
David: “Your child? Now he is your child, this Pollux?”
Petrus: “Yes. He is a child. He is my family, my people.”
David: So that is it. No more lies. My people. As naked an answer as he could wish. Well Lucy is his people. (201)

Claims of kinship denote separation in this free and post-apartheid society. Once one side claims protection over their “people,” the other side reactively makes a reciprocal claim to its “own” people. These two claims reinforce each other by forcing them to exclude the other, and each population simultaneously creates a space of exclusion. Citizens within the country no longer are presumed to recognize the rights, privileges, and even humanity of their fellow citizens.
Precipitation of a Solution in the Aftermath of Disgrace

On the matter of equality in modernity, Hannah Arendt states that it is “precisely this new concept of equality that has made modern race relations so difficult” (The Origins 54). The focus of equality tends to shift towards a prescription of normality; people failing to conform becoming defined as abnormal and therefore are excluded from the population of equals. Equality under the law presumes to remove difference in class and status between people, and the visible “differences become all the more conspicuous” (54). Arendt argues that forced equality inflames rather than quells racial enmity. As the state is founded on the requirement that all lives are equal under its law, the state has to enforce this equality. Arendt continues, “it is because equality demands that I recognize each and every individual as my equal” that intergroup fights where the equality is denied “take on such terribly cruel forms” (54). In the novel, tribal unity has superseded national unity, and the conception of national unity is fractured and no longer even imaginary protection from atrocity. Each arbitrary enclave seeks to protect its own members from outsiders, who by definition are a threat to the enclave’s existence. In other words, each tribe of people can invoke an emergency at the perception of outside interference.

The potential for misunderstanding, atrocity, and separation is seen in the text, but some of the characters’ actions give hope that common ground can be reached. These actions give hope that enmity can be averted, or reconciled in this landscape of conflicting claims of subjugation of the bodies within South Africa. While the conception of equality exists in law, Mbembe states, in regards to political theory’s biased view of modern democracies, “the ultimate expression of sovereignty is the production of general norms by a body (the demos) made up of free and equal men and women” (13).
Mbembe’s articulation of the prevailing political theory’s conception of democracy places “free and equal” and normative in a contradictory position. Producing norms inherently creates inequality between the norm and the abnormal; and he claims “the exercise of reason in the public sphere” forms modern political theory’s idea of sovereignty (13). The presumption of equality within a normative social sphere assumes the needs of the supposedly equal subjects to be the same or at least not abnormal, so that the equal subjects can equally exercise their reason. Also, in contrast to the prevailing view, Mbembe argues, “the general instrumentalization of human existence” constitutes politics (14). Instead of citizens relying on shared reason, they rely on a shared orchestration of life. Political scientist Mark B. Salter’s explication of Agamben’s work reinforces the link between the individual’s examination and the orchestration of life. He states that, “[i]t is those first acts of examination, obedience, and confession that establish the fundamental relationship between sovereign and subject, between the body politic and a particular body” (168). Biopolitics requires subjects to classify themselves. Furthermore, Salter claims that disciplinary measures are at the heart of Agamben’s articulation of modernity, such as examination and confession. Continuing to problematize the prevailing view, Hannah Arendt argues in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that, “formal equality before the law” results in the opposite effect and creates racial conflict (12). Therefore, according to Arendt, physical differences become more prominent in discourses of power. It is through disciplinary procedures of examination and confession that the university committee attempts to reintegrate David, and it is confession and examination that David attempts to use on Petrus.
These differences are defined through disciplinary measures; Salter has unpacked Foucault to show how examination, including confession, defines the subject; moreover, the dossier created determines the population(s) the subject is a member of. The rainbow nation’s pride is in the variety of different populations which are guaranteed equal treatment under the law. Populations of equals attempt to ensure their survival within the state of South Africa. While the issue may appear to be black and white, Stephen Silverstein seeks to complicate David’s relationship to the demos in Disgrace. By drawing on Susan Arndt’s work on the construction of race, Silverstein complicates the enmity within the novel with the argument that David Lurie is written as a stereotypically South African Jewish man. David “comes to ‘look Jewish’ through a process by which social conceptions of Jewishness reflect back Jewish physicality and morals […] David’s Jewish stigmata are ‘summoned up’ to promote his exclusion from ‘the new South Africa’” (85). David is representing whiteness but simultaneously outside of the normative presumption of whiteness; thereby increasing the diversity presented in the novel, and makes the bodily equation of South African otherness no longer simply black and white. Susan Arndt’s work also attempts to show the way that racialized populations become defined; she focuses on the constructed whiteness of the characters in Disgrace. She notes that whiteness functions as both a category of privilege and a historical category. Using bell hooks’ and Toni Morrison’s work, Arndt shows how a presumption of equality, “negates the politics of difference insofar as it refuses to acknowledge that processes of racialization have irreversibly produced a symbolic order of race which, to the present day, assigns people social positions in a politically powerful way – which applies to blackness just as much as to whiteness” (174). Society and history inform the
construction, and therefore, any attempt to ignore race, such as legal or institutional
equality, results in the perpetuation of inequality. Assumed equality under the law
becomes inherently unequal. Arndt applies this racial constructedness to David Lurie in
_Disgrace_. David’s race is never mentioned within the novel, but there is the assumption
of whiteness. While he preys upon women of color at the beginning of the novel, David
fails to understand the social positioning that facilitates his predatory behavior.

While David’s whiteness is in question, he still attempts to perform whiteness,
from David’s perspective, Petrus’ power reaches its peak when Petrus makes an offer for
Lucy’s farm. Petrus says, “I will marry Lucy” (Coetzee, _Disgrace_ 202). This marriage
will be the third that Petrus is a part of, and it will cement his claims to Lucy’s land, as
well as grant Lucy status. One of the terms for the deal is “then the child becomes his
too” (204). Petrus is the authority on the farm; he sets the terms and laws. The laws are
enforced by his authority alone; there are no bared weapons, fences, or any of the obvious
trappings of power. David states his objection as, “Legally it’s not workable” referring to
both the fact that Petrus “is already married...there are two wives” and Lucy’s legal
ability to maintain sovereignty on her farm after it is in Petrus’ name (204). As David
himself has observed, the police are not able to enforce justice, and Petrus has become a
“big man” in charge of enforcing peace in the area (204). Rather than relying on the state
or even local police to enforce the nation’s laws, people enforce their own tribal law. As
Petrus’ offer to be his third wife shows that marriages are arranged to multiple women to
consolidate power and land. Territory and people become what is at stake in the enclave.
Within the macrocosm of the country, a constant state of emergency looms, and the
power is distributed in enclaves where the key factor is not national citizenship, but
familial or tribal ties. The very determination of humanity is based upon “your people,” no longer the relation to the state, but to other populations with no privileged status guaranteed by law to any group. Granting Lucy the privilege of joining his people allows her to paradoxically gain her humanity at the expense of her sovereignty; Petrus will protect her physical body at the expense of leaving her “[w]ith nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity” (205). Lucy becomes enmeshed within Petrus’ domain as an equal to the other members of the enclave, subjects of Petrus.

While Lucy is able to adapt to this life, David still fails to understand that Lucy has made a choice. Alternatively to David’s constructed narrative, Lucy has decided to bear the child from the rape. Scholar Herrick articulates the rape of Melanie as a sacrifice in David’s mind that results in the subsequent sacrifices of his job, his daughter, and his dog. Herrick reads a metaphorical death and resurrection in Lucy’s sacrificing of herself to bear the rapist’s child. As Herrick claims, “Coetzee’s use of the tropes of confession and sacrifice are deeply intertwined” (87); however, she focuses on the religious sacrificial aspects with only a cursory examination of the possibility of a confession from David to the reader. I argue, that the secularization of confession as a means of bodily control is the driving force that limits the agency of self-sacrifice. In this contemporary moment, sacrifice is no longer made to appease a god, or to repeat Christian theology in a post-secular world, but the teleological claim of reconciliation instead regulates the movement of bodies, and self-sacrifice seems to offer a possibility that an ethical decision can be made; alternatively, the failure to act ethical merely perpetuates necropolitics.
In a modernity governed by the bodily equality of biopolitics, exhortations to confess and sacrifice are limited by society’s arbitrary valuations of differing bodies. Agamben’s sovereignty is that which “becomes indistinguishable from” life (*Homo Sacer* 13). Therefore, if death is the limit in biopolitical modernity, and bare life is “life that cannot be sacrificed yet may, nevertheless, be killed” (13); then logically the potential of self-sacrifice seems limited or non-existent in some cases. Mbembe claims, “to kill or to allow to live constitutes the limits of sovereignty” (11). In Mbembe’s necropolitical articulation of sovereign power, defying the sovereign’s decision is possible by self-sacrifice or refusal to be killed. In the novel: Lucy says, “I’m pregnant” (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 197). She asks the rhetorical question, “Should I choose against the child because of who the father is?” (198). Lucy’s statement questions one of the assumptions of racial biopolitics. She wants to control the way in which her child will be examined and categorized and therefore inscribed into South African modernity. This is the other moment, besides her sacrificing her status to join Petrus’ “people,” that Lucy escapes from the cycle of enmity. Lucy argues that the child should be free from the weight of history, whereas David wonders, “What kind of child can seed like that give life to, seed driven into the woman not in love but in hatred, mixed chaotically, meant to soil her, to mark her, like a dog’s urine?” (199). David cannot separate the event of the rape from the event of the child. To David, the conception was an attack, and therefore logically to him, the child is part of the attack. To David, Lucy’s child becomes an existential threat to him. To Lucy, “[g]uilt and salvation are abstractions. I don’t act in terms of abstractions” (112). Abstractly, the child is related to the rape and rapists, but in terms of events, the child is separate from what his or her parents did. Without acknowledging the political
enmity of the event of rape, Lucy fails to return the enmity, instead choosing to keep the child and eventually join Petrus’s family. She gives up her enmity and her land. She gains a supposedly safe space for her and her child, kinship with Petrus’s tribe, and equality of being with nothing. Looking at it through the conception of bare life, Lucy appears to accept the position of bare life and material equality as a way of subverting the cycle of enmity. While Lucy does seem to be able to escape the cycle of enmity by inscribing herself into the new power relations, she is reduced to bare life through her sacrifice of her privileged position.

Lucy’s agency in sacrificing contrasts to David’s losses; his position is eventually reduced, but not through ethical self-sacrifice; instead, David’s self-sacrificial act results from his inability to understand his loss of privilege and re-inscribes the necropolitical system. Throughout his journey in the novel, he continually claims that he is unable to conform to society. At different times he says, “His temperament is fixed, set,” “I am beyond the reach of consoling,” and “I’m old-fashioned” (2,49,66). While society has changed from apartheid’s assumption (or legally enforced) singularity of identity or belief, to a society where confession allows for reintegration of bodies, David is unwilling to place his faith in the system. Instead, he consistently alienates rather than adjusts to those around him. Conversely to his alienation from his fellow humans, he finds “[a] bond seems to have come into existence between himself and the two Persians [sheep], he does not know how” (126). These sheep are there to feed Petrus’ party; they serve no other purpose in society. The bond David feels towards them is not to raise the sheep up to his level. I claim that the bond only forms because David’s stubbornness against adjusting to society brings him closer to the position of sheep in society. He
begins to lose the presumption of a sense of personal grandeur that seemed to underlie his refusal to participate in the new South Africa’s economy of reintegration. His sense stems from the presumption of apartheid South Africa as well as the former law which upheld the privilege of white South Africans as innate, and the constructed racial hierarchy positioning and limiting the other South Africans based upon appearance. David says, “Lucy may be able to bend to the tempest; he cannot, not without honor” (209). Rather than sacrificing to reach parity with his fellow South Africans like Lucy, or participating in the ritual of public confession to be symbolically cleansed and reintegrated into society, instead David is slowly reduced in privilege; as he is unwilling to retain his job, his house is robbed, his position at the university is filled and his belongings reduced to the contents of a box, his car is stolen, he is badly burned and left for dead, and his daughter does not listen to his advice. His “honor” prevents him from cooperating with the system, but he is able to be metaphorically killed, or at least pushed out of his social position, without any outward consequences. The sheep are the beginning of his new found awareness of his place in society that culminates with his identification as a surplus body, albeit still a white body. David claims, in the space of South Africa, “[t]he problem is with the people she lives among. When I am added in, we become too many. Too many in a small space. Like spiders in a bottle” (209). To be forcibly reduced to a position of equality, equality under the law as well as material equality, David rents a small room and no longer has his own property. This gives David an understanding of his place in society, but not a purpose. Instead his purpose becomes that of “losung ... the old, the blind, the halt, the crippled, the maimed, but also the young, the sound – all those
[animals] whose term has come” (218). He is a shepherd, not of animals, but of corpses. He shepherds them outside of modernity; he does not murder them, but he still kills them
CHAPTER IV
CONCLUSION

J.M. Coetzee’s work bridges the transition from apartheid to a democratic government that claims all of its populations as equal citizens. The South African government terms the transition as “exceptional” because it was a peaceful change of government, but, as my reading shows, while the transition was peaceful, it did not remove the underlying biopolitical elements. While the government has ceased to butcher and deny its own citizens, the potential for such civilized atrocities exists. I argue that the shift from a totalitarian government to a democratic government also shifts the focus from the government’s examination of the differences between people to an institutional panoptic society that focuses on the difference between populations that are equal by law. *Waiting for the Barbarians* shows the Empire’s violence to both its own population and those it claims are outsiders even as both people mingle. The arbitrary boundaries are used as justification for the separation and enforced unity on the citizens. This thesis is not here to understand the reasoning behind the preemptive declarations of emergency, but instead to show how the justifications for the actions of the government’s emergency are instead created by the reactions from the government’s actions. Indeed, the state of exception, and the state of siege are shown to preexist the threat that the government claims as justification for invoking the state of exception. The unity of the population becomes what is at stake in these manipulations. The argument could be made that this
presumption of the need for unity within the *demos* originally comes from Plato’s *Republic*: that somehow a state at unity with itself will not be at war with itself. Agamben argues that the very act of modern state construction is the creation of a population that is made separate by the exclusion of other populations. Therefore, the population of the state is assumed to be in unity while at the same time is an arbitrary construction based on geography, politics, presumed ethnicity, race, or other arbitrary factors. So while the presumed unity allows the state to protect its citizens from the outsides, it also has a duty to maintain the fiction of unity. The protection of the fictional unity leads to internal cleansing of the populations; in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, it is seen in how fast the colonel turns inward on the population that he is ostensibly attempting to protect by his invocation of the emergency measures. But even as seen in the Magistrate’s conception of paternalism, the slip to genocide is merely a difference in quantity, not of quality.

Upon the transition from a state enforced unity to a democratic state with equality for all populations, the law is charged with equally treating all of the populations that encompass its citizens. Instead of the desired effect of South Africa being “united in our diversity” (South African Government), the unity is enforced within the differing groups of people supposedly united under the constitution. Rather than the state enforced unity I elucidated in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the arbitrary groupings within the state attempt to use the same sense of emergency and exception that the Empire did. As I have shown in my chapter on *Disgrace*, the landscape in post-apartheid South Africa is divided by non-exclusive groups in a patchwork of sovereignties that can invoke the emergency at will justified by the protection of their people from an imaginary threat. Often the response to the imaginary threat takes the form of enmity from the population towards the
threat. In *Disgrace*, I teased out the ways that enmity is used through disciplinary practices to shift the conversation away from power structures towards another group or person. Instead of looking for real reform, instead it becomes about protecting the population from a certain person or group. That is not to say that David is not guilty, but that David’s guilt is enabled by the university’s structure in which the women and men of the disciplinary committee are willing to reinstate him as a professor if he goes through a “reeducation” program. While David’s private life would become public discourse, he would be recycled into the same predatory position that led to this current crisis. Upon his self-exile to the rural areas of South Africa, David finds the police unable to enforce his personal conception of justice and social hierarchy, so he attempts to do so on his own. Furthermore, the police cannot guarantee justice and instead are shown to deal in congruent replacement of objects, similar to how Petrus posits how the insurance companies work. Within this framework of legal equals, David’s racist accusations against Petrus result in Petrus defending “his people” at the expense of other peoples. Showing David’s racist conceptions of danger posed by Petrus result with Petrus defending “his people” from David’s threats. Eventually, this results in David increasing his enmity and defending “his” own people from Petrus’. One act of racist enmity from David grows into justification for separation and defense of entire groups of peoples; of course, this is within the context of post colonial modernity that Achille Mbembe has shown is the refinement of colonial and plantation practices.

While David and Petrus escalate their enmity towards each other’s “people,” Lucy, instead, offers to sacrifice her autonomy to Petrus. Her refusal to employ disciplinary measures to position her trauma within the larger society is also a refusal to
participate in the racialized enmity that David and Petrus succumb to. Her marriage deal with Petrus allows her to be under the protective umbrella of his “people” rather than increase the enmity. The move to be included within Petrus’s “people” costs Lucy her land, her history, and her autonomy. This allows for Lucy to sacrifice her position and privilege within society to come down to a level where equality with the other is possible on the level of bodies in space or biopolitical equality. Rather than lift others up to her level, Lucy has to sacrifice her own position. According to Hannah Arendt, legal equality results in increased racialized violence as the minor differences become more important. It appears that legal equality fosters enmity by refusing the take cultural context into consideration which leads to other institutions taking justice into their own hands; in \textit{Disgrace}, the university committee, David, and Petrus, at times, all attempt to exert sovereignty over others outside of the law. Many times the justification for these maneuvers is a fictional threat towards a constructed group of people. Rather than protecting herself by fearing another group, Lucy attempts to meet the group on the level of biopolitical equality. She becomes another body within Petrus’ sovereignty; she is without pretensions of her own worth, and Petrus becomes responsible if she lives or dies.

The main problem within both \textit{Waiting for the Barbarians} and \textit{Disgrace} is shown to be the porous nature of seemingly solid legal boundaries. When the exception to the law becomes the unexceptional case or governing force, every political decision can take on the force of a life or death struggle. An individual’s actions, such as those of the Magistrate, or David, come to represent a political issue of life or death, the cases in the novels are the Magistrate’s helping a maimed barbarian girl, David’s demands for a
confession from Petrus, and David’s abuse of power at the university. All of the cases are tried outside of the existing legal framework, or as David claims the expectations of the committee are “beyond the scope of the law” (Coetzee, Disgrace 55. Each case would have a corresponding legal basis for prosecution, but the import of the cases has been made so high that the existing legal framework does not recognize the extraordinary nature that is perceived by populations. Within this paradigm, the law exists to merely document and provide evidence that something occurred. In Waiting for the Barbarians, the Magistrate wrote into law what the colonel dictated, and in Disgrace, the police provide David with proof for his insurance claim. With the law relegated to making history, the invocation of the legal exception become commonplace.

This application of the exception is not limited to Coetzee’s novels, or South Africa. It occurs everywhere; for example, the state of Louisiana has made a law protecting police lives informally called “Blue Lives Matter” (Conlon). In response to African Americans demanding equality from the police (i.e. that one’s skin color is not justification for acts of exceptional violence), the police and state government in Louisiana made certain occupations more protected under law. This is an example of enmity increasing when a group of people want to be treated equally. A claim of equality becomes a threat to the existence of an arbitrary population, in this case an occupation-based population. Our own university has been in the past year embroiled in deciding what to do with the flag of the state of Mississippi. Until the summer of 2016 there were four state flags, with the confederate battle flag in a corner, on campus (Harris). The debate is heated between those who view the flag as a reminder of slavery, and those who view it as part of their heritage. It is over 150 years after legal slavery and our country
still reacts with enmity towards equality, *Disgrace* was written only 7 years after apartheid.

How does one make Lucy’s choice in such a political system? The problems with attempting to raise a group up to equality seems rooted in granting rights to a group that was previously abject bare life. When the Magistrate, in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, attempts to repatriate the maimed barbarian girl, it is perceived as a threat to the Empire. When Melanie and Petrus, in *Disgrace*, assert their rights, David perceives it as an attack against him. It therefore seems that equality leads to enmity. However, when Lucy gives up her privileged status to become equal to Petrus’s “people” it seems to break the cycle of violent enmity. Lucy becomes equal to them at the level of the body. She gives up her lands, rights, privileges and enters into biopolitical equality with them. Does Lucy become bare life, or is it a different state of being? Agamben’s definition of bare life seems more apt to the Magistrate’s fallen state at the end of *Waiting for the Barbarians*. The Magistrate was reduced to bare life through the actions of others, Lucy chooses to sacrifice herself. While she then becomes subject to murder without repercussions, she already was a sacrifice. So rather than bare life, she becomes life who refuses to participate in the secular economy of reconciliation.
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