

”Michael Visagie-40-CM-NFA”:

Analyzing the ethnicity of the main character in  
J.M. Coetzee's *Life & times of Michael K* (1983)

Bachelor's thesis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Nobel-voittaja J.M. Coetzeen vuonna 1983 julkaistu Life &amp; Times of Michael K on yksi kuuluisimmista apartheidia kritisoineista teoksista. Vaikka päähenkilö joutuukin jatkuvasti sorron kohteeksi apartheidin aikaisessa Etelä-Afrikassa, hänen etnisyyttään ei paljasteta suoraan. Michael K:n ulkonäöstä kerrotaan vain, että hänellä on huulihalkio ja ainut viittaus hänen etnisyyteensä tapahtuu koodina. Romaania on analysoitu monesti aiemminkin, mutta luennat ovat perustuneet ennakko-oletuksiin Michael K:n etnisyydestä.</p> <p>Tutkimuksessa Coetzeen romaania analysoidaan lähiluvun keinoin. Michael K:n kokemuksia verrataan Leonard Thompsonin Etelä-Afrikan historiaa käsittelevän teoksen apartheidista kertoviin osiin. Tavoitteena on osoittaa, että romaanin päähenkilöä syrjitään, ja että hän kuuluu alempaan sosiaaliseen luokkaan.</p> <p>Luenta toi esiin Michael K:ta lähes jatkuvasti häiritsevän syrjinnän ja heikon sosiaalisen aseman. Analysoidut tekijät voisivat yksinään sopia myös valkoiseen identiteettiin, mutta niiden yhteisvaikutus viittaa äärimmäisen vahvasti ei-valkoiseen identiteettiin. Tarkkaa määritelmää päähenkilön etnisyydestä on kuitenkin mahdotonta romaanin tiedoilla tehdä.</p>	
Asiasanat – Keywords Coetzee, ethnicity, close reading	
Säilytyspaikka – Depository	
Muita tietoja – Additional information	

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

J.M. Coetzee has become one of the most, if not the most recognised South African writer. Two of his novels have won the Booker prize (*Life & Times of Michael K* and *Disgrace*) and he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2003. *Life & Times of Michael K* is rather a typical novel for the first part of Coetzee's career, which mostly dealt with South Africa and apartheid. While others like *Waiting for the Barbarians* dealt with the issue more allegorically, *Life & Times of Michael K* is rooted in reality, even though it does depict a fictitious civil war. After the end of Apartheid Coetzee's writing has moved both to more general and personal subject matters.

The first (and practically the only) thing that is told about Michael K's appearance is that he has a cleft lip. The quote (Coetzee 1983: 70) in the title of this study does seem to be a reference to the ethnicity of the main character (CM seems to stand for Coloured male) but the listing also gives Michael K a wrong last name, so it cannot be completely trusted. The decision to, for the most part, omit the ethnicity of the main character is a conspicuous one since the novel is set in perhaps the most ethnically preoccupied society in history. Earlier critiques have operated from the assumption that Michael K is not white. While the novel is a popular subject for in-depth readings concerned with (but not limited to) post-colonial studies and for example the role of the Other (a South African academic jokes in a column that foreign exchange students write “made-to-measure papers about the Ethics of the Other” (Twidle 2012)), the current study addresses only the undisclosed ethnicity of the main character.

The present study will be a close reading of the novel with the purpose of the study being to prove that Michael K is not white. The reading is mostly concerned with Michael K's dealings with officials and his social status. The study only deals with ethnicity as it relates to the power dynamics of apartheid and should not be considered a thorough study into race or ethnicity in general.

## **2 BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 Apartheid**

Apartheid was a system of racial segregation that was in effect in South Africa from 1948 to 1994. During apartheid, the South African population was divided into four racial groups: White, Black, Coloured and Indian (Thompson 2001: 187). Out of those four groups, Whites were given a privileged standing in society and the law stated that white interests came before those of the “lesser races”. While the apartheid system was only introduced in 1948, racial segregation had been in effect in South Africa since colonial times (Thompson 2001: 187).

Apartheid, which had originally been a political slogan, was developed by the National party and especially by one of their leaders, Hendrik Verwoerd, into a thorough program of social engineering (Thompson 2001: 187,189). In addition to wanting to maintain White superiority, the National party also wanted to improve the standing of Afrikaners in relation to English-speaking Whites (Thompson 2001: 188). This led to many South African institutions being “Afrikanerized” (ibid.).

The division of South African population was done according to the Population Division Act in 1950 (Thompson 2001: 190). In cases where the parents in a family were put in different categories, family life became impossible since the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 and the Immorality Act of 1950 had prohibited marriages and sexual relations between members of different racial groups (ibid.).

The ultimate aim was to move the non-white population to (eventually) ten different small “homelands”, called Bantustans, while the white population formed a single English- and Afrikaans-speaking nation. Under the Groups Areas Act urban zones were designated to certain ethnic groups which led to numerous non-white inhabitants being forced out of their homes when Whites were given new areas for occupation (Thompson 2001: 194). Some studies estimate that between 1960 and 1983, over 3,5 million people were forced out of their homes and often into the homelands. The vastness of this number coupled with smallness of the area reserved for the homelands led to massive problems with overpopulation (ibid.).

## **2.2 Race, ethnicity and racialization**

The racial terminology used in this study is derived from directly from apartheid legislation. It should be noted, however, that UNESCO published a statement in 1950 (the same year that the Population Registration Act came into effect in South Africa) suggesting a shift from using the term “race” towards using the term “ethnic group” (The Race Question: 6). The report also categorically renounced the existence of any hierarchy of different races (UNESCO 1950: 3).

The Oxford English Dictionary defines ethnicity as “the fact or state of belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition” (ethnicity, n.d.). This definition is not extremely thorough but works for the purposes of this study. Defining ethnicity is a major question in sociology and does not seem to have one exact answer. My aim is not to discover the exact ethnicity of the main character but rather to find the racial group, as per apartheid, in which he seems to belong.

There lurks a danger in using the apartheid definitions of race without addressing the issue of racialization. Omi & Winant describe racialization as extending “a racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice or group (1986: 64). As an example of racialization Omi & Winant describe the process of reducing the numerous ethnic identities of African slaves in America into the singular racial category of “black” (ibid.). This process is very similar to what happened in South Africa (Thompson 2001: 190). The danger here is that the analysis reproduces the racialization inherent in apartheid, due to its reliance on the main character's interaction with society.

### **3 RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS**

The aim of the present study is to determine, to a reasonable degree, the ethnicity of the main character of J.M. Coetzee's novel. While the exact ethnic group would be almost impossible to discern, some observations can be made.

There are two questions that the study tries to answer:

- 1) Due to the interconnectedness of race and class in South Africa during apartheid, whether Michael K belongs to a lower class?
- 2) Is Michael K clearly discriminated against?

### **4 DATA AND METHODS**

#### **4.1 Data**

The selected data for this thesis is a novel called *Life & Times of Michael K* by J.M. Coetzee. Published in 1983 the novel is a story of a man trying to leave Cape Town and go to his mother's birthplace in the countryside. The name of the novel and many themes in it are connected to Franz Kafka's 1925 novel *The Trial*. The novel is set in the real South Africa somewhere around the period of its publishing but does contain fictitious elements such as a civil war. Divided into three parts, the analysis is based on the first one which chronicles Michael K's journey from Cape Town to the countryside. The other two parts are not covered. This follows the general guideline that close reading should not be done to a whole novel (Pöysä 2010: 341).

While the analysis would appear rather shallow it should be noted that almost all analyses and critiques of the novel thus far have taken the main character's non-white ethnicity as a given. Therefore it would seem that a thorough analysis of the ethnicity is important. As mentioned above the ethnicity is also one of the most salient features due to being omitted in a novel set in a society based on racial divisions.

The reference work that will illustrate the historical reality of apartheid South Africa is *A History of South Africa* by Leonard Thompson. The book offers a very comprehensive history of South Africa from the colonial times to the present day. The connection between the oppression found in the novel and the real historical situation will hopefully become apparent in the analysis.

## **4.2 Method**

This study will utilize close reading in the analytical process. I will pick out the instances in the text where the main character experiences discrimination and compare these instances with the real historical social context in South Africa during apartheid. This is called a cultural close reading. The analysis will therefore not focus on the structure of the text itself but rather on how it reflects reality. The main part of this analysis will look at the main character's (Michael K) interactions with state authorities (police, army, state officials) and other civilians, whether they be from the same social class as him or not.

Close reading in itself is not a rigid set of analytical methods but rather a range of available angles and concepts for analyzing text (Pöysä 2010: 335). The responsibility is with the reader to select the ones that are relevant to the selected text and the purpose of the study. This freedom of choice offers an analytical framework that is free of advance assumptions but can also mean that the analyst has the possibility of selecting only the concepts that support their hypothesis. The current study aims to prevent this issue by forming a coherent analysis and also addressing conclusions that would differ from the analysis.

The key issue around which the analysis is based is the apartheid legislation. As mentioned above the analysis focuses on the main character's interactions with state officials whose actions, it appears safe to assume, are based on the official policy of the state. It is then salient to analyze also the legislation and historical reality in South Africa during the time. The novel does not include much in the sense of, for example, cultural details that would allow for a coherent analysis. Another issue is that of social class which in apartheid South Africa (and to a somewhat lesser extent in modern South Africa) could not be separated.

The current study does not aim to be a literary analysis or critique of the novel as a whole but rather could be considered a historical reference work for the uninitiated of the original novel. Therefore the analysis balances between literary and historical study.

## **5 SUMMARY OF EVENTS**

The novel is split into three parts. The first (and by far longest) and last ones describe Michael K's (whose full last name is never revealed) journey from the point of view of an omniscient narrator, while the middle one is in the form of an internal monologue by a medical officer looking after K.

When the novel begins, Michael K is working as a gardener for the Cape Town city council. After he receives word that his mother, Anna K, has been hospitalised, he starts planning a trip to the countryside to a farm where Anna spent her childhood. At first Anna is reluctant to leave, but after the neighbourhood she lives in is ravaged in a riot she finally agrees. Due to not being able to secure travel permits they leave on foot, Anna travelling in a makeshift cart built by Michael.

After a false start (having to turn back before even a day's travel) they start making their way to Prince Albert, the place where Anna grew up. After a few days of travel Anna is hospitalised again due to her poor health. Anna dies in the hospital and after a few days of loitering aimlessly Michael decides to continue to Prince Albert with the ashes of his mother.

Along the way, Michael is caught by police and sent to work for the railways. After the work is done, Michael boards the train going toward Laingsburg, from where he continues on foot. In Prince Albert Michael asks around for a farm belonging to a family whose name he cannot remember properly. He is sent to a Visagie farm a short way away from town, which he finds abandoned with no clue as to what happened to the family living there. He starts farming beans and pumpkins on the farm and buries his mother's ashes. A while later the grandson of the Visagie family shows up on the farm and tries to turn Michael into his servant. When the Visagie's grandson sends Michael into town he decides to run away instead.

Michael goes up into the mountains surrounding Prince Albert and lives alone for some time. After a while he decides to go into town and is caught and sent to a resettlement camp called

Jakkalsdrif. The residents of the camp are made to work for the local farmers. Guerillas in Pince Albert torch some building in town, after which the Jakkalsdrif camp is searched by police. Michael decides to escape.

Michael returns to the farm which is abandoned again. He plants new crops to replace the ones that died while he was away. Deciding to be extra careful this time, Michael hides his farm and builds a small shelter into a hillside, avoiding the farm buildings. Having eaten less and less along the journey from Cape Town, Michael's health keeps deteriorating. Michael sees what he believes to be guerillas and is later found by the army. The army accuses him of supplying the guerillas and he is taken into custody.

The second part of the story begins after Michael is sent from an internment camp to a rehabilitation camp due to his poor health. At the rehabilitation camp Michael refuses to eat and the medical officer fears he will die. The camp is emptied due to it being turned into an internment camp in the near future, although Michael remains due to his health. He decides to escape, again.

The last part sees Michael back in Cape Town. He meets a man and his two "sisters" one of whom the man pimps. After spending a night with the three people, Michael returns to the apartment his mother used to live in and finds it in use as both a storage and an apartment. The tenant is not home so Michael waits them and begins planning his return to the farm.

## 6 ANALYSIS

The analysis presented here will focus on five different aspects of the novel: social class, freedom of movement, forced labour/captivity and Michael K's dealings with both the police/army and other South Africans. These aspects intersect quite a lot, so this separation serves only the purpose of giving the analysis a proper structure, rather than showcasing independent parts of the novel. Apartheid legislation, as is usual for legislation in general, went through changes but the analysis aims to base itself in the situation of 1983 when the novel was published.

### 6.1 Social class

From the beginning of the novel, it is clear that the Ks are a working class family. Michael himself works as a gardener, having previously also worked as a night attendant at a public lavatory (Coetzee 1983: 4). Michael's mother Anna is a domestic servant by occupation (Coetzee 1983: 4, 6) and her parents worked on farms when she was little; her father, it seems, as a farm hand and her mother as a domestic worker (Coetzee 1983: 7-8).

Even though Anna K has employment, she cannot afford to live on her own. Instead she has a room under the stairs in the building in which she works. It is mentioned that the room is meant for air-conditioning equipment rather than human occupation and it has no lights or ventilation (Coetzee 1983: 6). Michael does not have an apartment either, instead living in a hostel (Coetzee 1983: 16). Another reason, besides money, for not having permanent apartments in Cape Town could be the official apartheid policy of non-Whites being citizens of Bantustans and only allowed in White areas as temporary workers, even though major cities in South Africa could have huge non-white populations (Thompson 2001: 193).

Both of the Ks have been educated, at least to some extent. Anna went to school for a while and Michael attended a state institute, Huis Norenius, for children with special needs instead of a regular school (Coetzee 1983: 4). The novel describes how the children in the institute were taught basics of reading and writing but also a lot about manual labour. Learning to prepare for a life of manual labour would have been common for non-white children who

attended even regular schools. Before the South African government started to create the legislative framework for apartheid, they had left Black children to their own devices, which meant that they had to hope for a place in a mission school. The government noticed, however, that the mission schools taught Black children about equal human rights and other “dangerous ideas”. Therefore, they passed the Bantu Education Act in 1953 in which they took control of the education of black children. In the government schools, Black children were taught about their place in the society in accordance to the apartheid ideology. After this, the South African government also started to control the education of Coloured and Indian children. The money spent on Black, Coloured and Indian education was a fraction of that spent on White education (Thompson 2001: 196-197). This lack of resources is shown to the reader when Michael K reminisces on how the children at Huis Norenius were always hungry, which turned them into animals who would steal food from each others' plates (Coetzee 1983: 68): This echoes the very real concern shown for the effects apartheid had on non-White children. A UN report about South Africa raised concerns about the criminal behavioural patterns that South African children might have to adopt as a survival mechanism (Thompson 2001: 201-202).

Another indicator of the Ks' lower social class is the lack of quality in public services that are available to Michael K and his mother. While health care for White South Africans was of the same standard as in rich European countries, Blacks had to settle for a much lower quality of care (Thompson 2001: 201, 203). This is evident in the novel when Anna K is admitted into a hospital in Cape Town and she is not afforded even her own room and must stay in the corridor for almost a week. To further the sense of low quality, it is mentioned that the nurses in the hospital have scarcely any time to afford to her due to the amount of victims of violent crime that are also staying at the hospital (Coetzee 1983: 5). When Anna is hospitalised again, this time in Stellenbosch, she does get to stay in a ward but the ward is overcrowded (Coetzee 1983: 29). The lack of resources in the hospital becomes even clearer when a nurse tells Michael that she has to work such long hours that when she gets home from work she falls asleep with her shoes still on (Coetzee 1983: 28).

When Anna K is admitted out of the first hospital, she and Michael take a bus to her home but the bus has no seats (Coetzee 1983: 6). Buses in South Africa were also segregated (Thompson 2001: 197) and it seems that throughout history buses have had a special position as symbols of segregation. The idea that the state was not obliged to offer equal facilities for “subordinate races” was a central one for apartheid. Initially courts tried to prohibit unequal

facilities but the Parliament of South Africa passed the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act to legalise this form of discrimination (Thompson 2001: 190).

## **6.2 Freedom of movement**

When Michael K. and his mother try to leave Cape Town to go to the countryside, they encounter problems with one of the cornerstones of apartheid legislation. During apartheid, South Africa had an extensive internal passport system that only applied to the non-white population. As mentioned above, the official government policy was that Blacks are citizens of their respective homelands and can only stay in the European areas if needed for workforce. When the usefulness of a Black worker expired they were often “returned” to their homelands even if they had never lived there in the first place (Thompson 2001: 193). While the pass laws only applied to Black men at first, they were expanded to include Black women in 1961 (Thompson 2001: 209).

Michael K is told, when tries to buy a train ticket, that he cannot expect to board a train without permit to leave the Cape Peninsula police area (Coetzee 1983: 9). The application for the permit is then lost in the bureaucratic process which means that Michael and his mother have no hope of leaving Cape Town by train (Coetzee 1983: 19-20).

Michael then encounters problems with same issue when he decides to leave by road. He and his mother are turned away at the first checkpoint on the first attempt (Coetzee 1983: 22-23) and are forced to take back roads to be able to sneak out of the city (Coetzee 1983: 23-24). When Anna dies, one of the first questions the hospital official asks is whether Michael has her travel documents (Coetzee 1983: 31). Avoiding the checkpoints becomes a recurring event for Michael due to his lack of travel permit (Coetzee 1983: 35, 40). Eventually the lack of travel permit leads to the arrest of Michael and him ending up in forced labour.

Enforcing the apartheid legislation demanded an enormous amount of bureaucracy, as seen in the novel in the form of a separate office building for “Relocation” alone. In 1977 over 500 000 Whites and over 800 000 Blacks were employed in the public sector . Needless to say, most of the top spots were occupied by Afrikaners (Thompson 2001: 199).

### 6.3 Forced labour

There are a few instances in the novel where Michael K is forced into penal servitude. The first instance is when the police catch Michael travelling without a travel permit (Coetzee 1983: 40). He, along with a hundred or so other prisoners, is put on a train and sent down along the line to repair damage to the railway line caused by an earth slide (Coetzee 1983: 41-44). Michael is never told the reason for having to work on the railway line. Michael then manages to slip off when the work on the railway line is complete (Coetzee 1983: 44).

The second instance of forced labor is when he leaves the Visagie farm and is arrested in Prince Albert (Coetzee 1983: 70). After being arrested he is taken to a “resettlement camp” called Jakkalsdrif (Coetzee 1983: 73). The camp is guarded by the military (Coetzee 1983: 73) and the inmates are expected to work for their living (Coetzee 1983: 81). The other inmates in the camp explain to Michael that the camp is not penal servitude (Coetzee 1983: 78) or at least not as bad as a camp in Brandlvei to which the inmates who do not co-operate are sent to. The occupants of the camp are sent to work for the railways and local farmers but the inhabitants of Prince Albert dislike having a resettlement camp so close to their village (Coetzee 1983: 81-82). The inmates can choose not to work, at least to some extent. However, when the brother-in-law of the local captain of police requires workers, there is no option but to go to work (Coetzee 1983: 86).

This follows the above mentioned policy of only allowing non-whites in the white areas of South Africa as temporary workers. When Michael talks to one of the camp guards, the guard explains to him that the camp is not a prison but still if Michael tries to leave he will be shot (Coetzee 1983: 85). According to another inmate, when the camp was opened they were offered proper homes instead of having to live in the streets but the health situation grew bad extremely quickly. According to the inmate there is no doctor in the camp and the only reason the camp officials are willing to make any sort of effort for the well-being of the inmates is that the officials do not want to get upset from seeing the inmates turning sick and dying (Coetzee 1983: 88).

## **6.4 Police and army**

One important aspect of the apartheid society that is apparent throughout the novel is Michael K.'s fear of the police. South Africa had a very well equipped police force that had the responsibility of enforcing the apartheid regime. The police (of whom in 1977 55% were white in a predominantly black nation) had been given extensive power with a plethora of political laws that allowed them to arrest and interrogate people with little or no cause and keep them in solitary confinement indefinitely with only access to government officials. The police did not have a duty to announce the names of the people they had arrested and judges were not allowed to investigate how the police used these broad powers (Thompson 2001: 199-200). The South African government also had a powerful military at their disposal. By the late seventies the military absorbed 21% of the national budget and every young White man had to complete two years of military training (Thompson 2001: 200).

Michael's mother starts worrying about the police even before they leave Cape Town (Coetzee 1983: 19) and when they leave they are subject to continuous harassment by the police. As mentioned above, their first attempt to leave Cape Town is stopped by police who question them for the permit to leave the city. Later when they are sleeping in an alley Michael has to cover his mother's mouth so that a passing police van would not notice them and arrest them (Coetzee 1983: 27). When Michael is travelling alone the police stop him and rummage through his stuff for no reason at all (Coetzee 1983: 33-34) while one soldier actually robs him with the pretext of checking his papers while accusing Michael of being a thief. The soldier also threatens to shoot Michael without any provocation (Coetzee 1983: 36-37). There are no instances of a positive encounter with either the army or the police during the whole of the novel.

## **6.5 South African citizens**

Michael K also has a difficult relationship with regular (presumably) white South Africans. White South Africans were taught by the apartheid regime that they were superior to the "lesser races" and there was very little in their daily lives that would cast doubt upon the official theology (Thompson 2001: 198, 200-201). Afrikaners were surrounded for their entire

lives by state propaganda and due to their unique language they could not rely on foreign sources of information (Thompson 2001: 198).

One example of this difficult relationship is when Michael's mother dies and he tries to find employment as a gardener. The novel states that Michael K. starts to shrink from the *distaste* the white house owners show towards him as he visits their homes asking for work (Coetzee 1983: 33). Later when Michael is walking through a seemingly abandoned farm he starts imagining getting shot without warning for trespassing (Coetzee 1983: 39).

Another instance of discrimination from civilians comes after Michael has worked on the railway line and tries to enter a shop. A shopkeeper shoves Michael out of the shop and locks the door in front of him and a few other men who try to enter. Michael tries to convince the shopkeeper by holding a banknote against the window but she does not react at all (Coetzee 1983: 44-45). Michael is then threatened by a land owner a few pages later when said land owner finds him sleeping on his property (Coetzee 1983: 46).

After this, Michael seems to develop distrust towards even the regular people since he refuses a truck ride from a farmer and decides to hide when the truck has passed out of seemingly a fear of being reported to the police (Coetzee 1983: 49). When Michael K. finally arrives on the farm, his peace is disturbed after some time when the grandson of the farm's owner arrives. The grandson immediately tries to introduce the traditional relationship of a white land owner and a black farm hand. When Michael leaves the farm he reminisces that the grandson "tried to turn him into a body-servant" (Coetzee 1983: 65) which follows a line in Thompson: "Wherever White encountered Black, White was boss and Black was servant (2001: 200-201)".

While in Jakkalsdrif, another inmate tells Michael of how the denizens of the nearby town of Prince Albert dislike having the camp so close their town which is seen the way they raise prices whenever people from the camp go to town to shop (Coetzee 1983: 81).

A positive encounter with other South Africans happens when Michael has arrived in Laingsburg after being forced to work for the railways. A stranger invites Michael to his home where he has dinner with the strangers family and stays for the night (Coetzee 1983: 47-48). The family appears to be working class but no clear indication of their racial group is given in the text.

## 7 CONCLUSION

As mentioned above, when analyzing Michael K's racial identity it should be noted that in South African society, during the apartheid, race and social class could not be separated from each other. White South Africans, especially the Afrikaans-speaking population, held all the positions of power in South African society and most of the wealth. Also the whole apartheid legislation was aimed at limiting the rights of Blacks, Coloureds and Indians while maintaining the rights and privileges of Whites. Therefore proving that Michael K is not White has to be done through proving that he belongs to a lower social class and that he is the object of discrimination from government officials. Also the ideological construct of white superiority in Michael K's encounters with regular South African civilians will be addressed.

As can be seen from the analysis, Michael K is in a very disadvantaged position in the apartheid society. While the white population of South Africa lived a life of middle or upper class luxury, Michael comes from a family of domestic servants and farm hands and he himself cannot afford a proper apartment with the wage of a gardener. This clearly posits Michael K in the lower classes which would have been the lot of most non-whites in South Africa during apartheid. He has, however, received a decent amount of education since the novel states that he graduated from the special institution he attended at the age of 15 (Coetzee 1983: 4). That is not to say that he received a professional competence, not to even mention the possibility of receiving higher education.

The apartheid legislation is also clearly aimed against Michael's rights instead of ensuring them. The seemingly simple plan of moving away from Cape Town to the country for a life of peace and quiet is hindered from the beginning by the travel permit legislation. Internal immigration is often times considered an important part of a citizen's personal rights. Michael K is not a free man in his own country. Having to deal with the travel permit bureaucracy was solely the problem of non-whites. White citizens could travel at will and were not expected to carry travel permits.

While the novel does not show the condition of public services for the higher class the reality is that white South Africans had the benefit of receiving, for example, high quality health care and education. This is in stark contrast with the conditions at the hospitals where Anna K is admitted. A lack of food and hospital staff are things that white South Africans would have not needed to worry about. It should also be noted that White South Africans received

excellent education while Michael's school mostly concentrated in teaching simple forms of manual labour. On a general level Michael K and his mother have to survive on a lower standard of living than the ruling racial class.

Perhaps the clearest signal of Michael's position in the society is his relationship with the repressive state apparatus. While in most civilized societies citizens can rely on the police for protection, the novel shows how Michael K has to worry about the police constantly. There are no instances in the novel where an encounter with the police is seen by Michael K as a positive matter. Instead Michael has to worry about the possibility of physical violence, loss of property and the loss of his personal freedom. In fact, both cases of forced labour come as a result of an encounter with the police who realize that Michael K. does not have a permit to be travelling outside of Cape Town. It should be emphasized that Michael's fear of the police does not stem from his own criminal behaviour. Aside from breaking the rules of the unethical apartheid legislation, Michael K is a somewhat upstanding citizen. He does not steal or cause bodily harm to others. The whole issue of forced labour is also something that would not be acceptable in a civilized society while in the novel the regular citizens are happy to accept slave labour to help their own economic needs. Besides some political prisoners, the forced labour in apartheid South Africa would probably have been done by non-whites.

Michael's dealings with other South African citizens show a divide in social position. White South Africans were taught from a very young age about their own superiority compared to the "lesser races". This can be seen in the way that Michael is treated. Michael is shown a lack of respect that is seemingly caused by the mere fact of his existence. The above mentioned examples of this dealt with a shopkeeper and a couple landowners who due to their higher economic standing would most probably have been Whites. Michael K only seems to find companionship among other victims of discrimination, for example other workers during his time in forced labour.

Regarding the research questions, the answer to both of them seems to be a resounding yes. He belongs to a lower social class and is constantly discriminated against, by both state officials and civilians. The exact racial group he belongs to is impossible to discern, but the analysis clearly points to a non-white ethnicity.

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