

# THE FEMALE CHARACTER: A POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE OF THE SELECTED NOVELS BY J.M. COETZEE

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SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

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THE FEMALE CHARACTER: A POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE  
OF THE SELECTED NOVELS BY J.M. COETZEE

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## DEDICATION

This modest work is dedicated to my compassionate mother.



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## ABSTRACT

John Maxwell Coetzee has established himself through his intellectual contribution to the postcolonial feminism literature and South African slavery epoch. His novels can be read as a reflection on Black and white women subjugation in all its complexity, commenting upon many positions typical of radical feminism. From the perspective of the colonizer, the woman was doubly feminized by codes of race and gender. This research aims to investigate the Black and white female Other from the postcolonial feminist perspective of Coetzee's selected novels namely, *Dusklands*, *In the Heart of the Country*, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Foe*, *Age of Iron*, and *Disgrace*. To achieve this objective, the postcolonial feminism theory was applied using discursive strategy as a method for textual analysis to reflect the socio-political scenarios of postcolonial South Africa. The study further reveals how white colonisation subjugated both white and Black females of South Africa resulting in a moral crisis of the white male colonisers. The research findings revealed Coetzee's ability to reflect colonial patriarchy as an ideology that discriminated against Africans and Black and white females alike. However, the findings also revealed the forms of resistance employed by the subjugated females in order to break free from the oppression imposed on them. Based on the findings, it could be concluded that, although race and gender are social constructs, they continue as an identity imperative constituent in contemporary South Africa. Consequently, in discussing race and patriarchy, specific significance was given for the white and black women status as a critical issue for individual development and vital theme for investigating their setting. By drawing on the postcolonial patriarchal context it could be implied that this study will significantly contribute to future research on patriarchy and postcolonial patriarchy, as important phenomena in other postcolonial literature.

**Keywords:** apartheid, white and black women, patriarchal dominance, postcolonial feminism





## WATAK WANITA: PERSPEKTIF POSTKOLONIAL FEMINISME DALAM NOVEL-NOVEL PILIHAN KARANGAN J.M. COETZEE

### ABSTRAK

John Maxwell Coetzee telah menempa nama melalui sumbangan intelektualnya kepada sastera feminisme pasca-kolonial dan zaman perhambaan Afrika Selatan. Novel-novel Coetzee dapat dibaca sebagai refleksi penaklukan wanita kulit hitam yang memfokus kepada kedudukan khas feminisme radikal. Penyelidikan ini bertujuan mengkaji suara wanita kulit putih dan hitam slain dari perspektif feminism patriarki pasca-kolonial dari novel terpilih Coetzee, iaitu: *Dusklands*, *In the Heart of the Country*, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Foe*, dan *Age of Iron*. Untuk mencapai objektif ini, teori feminisme pasca-kolonial diterapkan dengan menggunakan strategi diskursif untuk mengungkap dan menghuraikan senario penjajahan paskakolonial Afrika Selatan. Kajian ini turut mengungkap bagaimana Coetzee menunjukkan kemampuannya untuk mencerminkan sistem apartheid yang digunakan sebagai peraturan yang mendiskriminasikan orang Afrika dan wanita kulit hitam dan kulit putih. Berdasarkan penemuan hasil kajian ini, juga didedahkan bentuk penentangan yang digunakan oleh wanita yang ditindas demi melepaskan diri dari penindasan ke atas mereka. Dapat disimpulkan bahawa, walaupun bangsa dan jantina merupakan produk pembinaan sosial, ia tetap juga menjadi konstituen penting identiti kontemporari di Afrika Selatan. Oleh itu, dalam membincangkan mengenai bangsa dan patriarki, penekanan khusus perlu diberikan kepada status wanita kulit putih dan hitam. Hal ini perlu menjadi isu penting dalam pembangunan individu dan tema penting untuk menyelidiki keadaan mereka. Melalui kupasan perlakuan wanita kulit putih dan hitam pasca kolonial oleh penjajah dan bentuk penentangan terhadap *hegemoni* budaya dan jantina mereka, dapat disiratkan bahawa kajian ini akan memberi sumbangan besar kepada penyelidikan masa depan terkait ilmu feminisme pasca kolonial dalam sastera paska kolonial yang lain.





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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION



This chapter introduces the background of the study, the statement of the problem, objectives and questions of the study, theoretical/ conceptual framework as well as the significance and limitations of the study. This chapter provides an insight on the actual status of black women in apartheid South Africa. The chapter begins with a brief background of the study paying a special focus on John Maxwell Coetzee as a Noble Laureate and how he has depicted the lives of Africans, in general, and black women in South Africa, in particular. The chapter then proceeds to shed some light on the research problem to determine the gap that will be bridged by the study. Then, the objectives of the study are stated and, consequently, the research questions are determined. The chapter then stated the rationale of the study and specifies the scope and the significance of the research. Next, the study limitations are stated and the



structure of the study are also explained in this chapter. After that, the terms used in this study are defined. Finally, this chapter ends with a conclusion.

## 1.2 Background of The Study

Injustices and oppression have always been part of human history. Therefore, this inhumanly phenomenon has always been utilized by many writers in the production of their creative works. One such writer is John Maxwell Coetzee from South Africa. Coetzee has written many novels with the aforementioned themes as the crux of his writing creativity.

During the apartheid era, South Africa, was associated with racism and racial sexism, where black women gradually developed racial gender discrimination. Women were morally identified as inferior to men in all cultural standards (Hutson, 2007), and within the context of racial sexism, Janoory (2019) states that “indigenous women became objects of manipulation by the coloniser in order to demonstrate colonial moral superiority ... her body became an object of discursive contestation between male coloniser and male colonised alike” (p. 19). Different cultural backgrounds, women subjugation, excessive use of power of the regime, and gender impartiality had stirred up a constant conflict that lasted for a few centuries. The current study attempts to explore this issue of South African women and examines how they are being perceived in J. M. Coetzee’s novels.

Aydemir (2012) states that “to be a black woman is more different than to be a woman” (p. 438). In Coetzee’s novels, one can elicit his unique ability to shed light on



the oppression that influences the black women and constitutes a great barrier of gaining freedom to move forward in the African society. The novels depict a true picture of the nature black women's role in the South African community in which the gender segregation is the main aspect of inequality. From his novels, Coetzee aims at highlighting the lives of black women in patriarchal systems that aim to destroy their life. In the past, the world was constrained to take note of the life of South Africans in view of the outrageous routine with regards to politically-sanctioned racial segregation and gender practice audaciously planned out by the rulers. A country that is endowed with precious stone but racially segregated was shifted from interesting culture to horrible awareness across the globe.

This enigmatic place where dreams, illusions, and nightmares convey cultural and social messages had been developed around the core of racial and gender discrimination, leading to polemical turmoil and profoundly disruptive ideological discourses. Retained to the heart of this socially divided and ideologically malevolent society was a huge social space shot through with rough and unstable cross streams (Meer, 2007). It is difficult to exaggerate the essential certainties that the writing of literature and art of this land developed around suppression, resistance, and dissent. At the moment, different races and ethnics make up the hybridized South African culture that are significantly committed to the deep-rooted literary promises and development of a heterogeneous social and literary setting.

In the light of the above significant points, Coetzee's work is found to reflect considerable influences of both African and English literature. Bridging the gap between the "West" and the 'Third World,' his novels are so steeped in the dominant



western literary traditions. Critics like Parry, (1996), in her critical essay, questions Coetzee's postcolonial credentials arguing that he does not have the ability to craft any additional characters beyond Euro-centric discourses because his fictions are preoccupied by western cognitive frameworks (Parry, 1996, p. 150). Relatively, Dovey describes Coetzee's work as an 'allegorized theory' that has emerged through the works of European theorists and philosophers such as Levi-Strauss, Lacan, Foucault, Rousseau, Irigaray, Freud, Derrida, etc. (Dovey in Parry, 1996, p. 50). With regard to the European literary influence on Coetzee's fiction, Watson(1996) comments that "almost all the initial difficulties of [Coetzee's] novels vanish when one happens to have read the same books that he has" ( p. 25). For instance, Coetzee's novels are reflexive texts that are resulted by the influence of European writers such as Lawrence, Dostoevsky, Beckett, Defoe and Kafka.

Consequently, it could be elicited that Coetzee's novels also undermine the white South African canon especially that associated with class and genres. As a writer who believes that white South African pastoral does not accurately represent indigenous Africans, Coetzee's fiction critically uncovers the conflict between black and white in Africa. Initially, after publishing his *Age of Iron* (1990), the problem of feminism was emphasized as another phenomenon which had never been critically highlighted (Elmgren, 2019). Therefore, the issue of feminism increases his motivation to use women as representative narrators. According to Graham (1996), Magda in *In the Heart of the Country*, Elizabeth Curren in *Age of Iron*, Susan and Barton in *Foe* are the most three effective female narrators in Coetzee's novels. As a novelist, several questions might be related to colonization and appropriation because of the selection of female narrators. According to Watson (1996), by strategizing female narrators,





Coetzee dramatizes his own self-positioning to effectively portray his social authority as a white male author who lives in South Africa.

It is a well-known fact that South African literature has often represented racial resistance as depicted in Coetzee's literature. There is a significant difference in how blacks are depicted in the writings of white authors and the representation of whites in black writing where the white writing stresses that people cannot be stereotyped as depicted by authors, while the black writing demonstrates the stereotype. Cullhed (2006) argued that the people in South Africa are essentially categorized into two classes. The first class comprises those who are comfortable and rich but they are fearful. The group of people who are poor constitutes the second class and they are pathetically oppressed, confused, neglected, unarmed and restless.



The issues and themes addressed by Coetzee's novels are related to postcolonial and apartheid reflecting the severe oppression the colonizer. His novels are colonial discourse addressing problems like otherness, racial segregation, exclusion and exile, censorship, torture and brutality. They enunciate the relationship of the people of South Africa to the land and reflect women's position in the society of South Africa. Moreover, Coetzee's writing mainly deals with ethico-politics of writing, where over the course of three decades his novels have reflected the hostile culture and violence towards women of both races in South Africa.

As apartheid belongs to the past, its consequences remain to be dealt with as it still faces several political and social dilemmas. These dilemmas are far from being overcome and are recurring themes for country writers to be published through their





literature. In spite of all of Coetzee's novels in this study still deal with the past, the researcher reveals that these novels portray characters who recognize that dwelling in the past deactivates the process of reconciliation. Hence, the characters realize that in order to make a better future possible, they need to reject hatred which still exists among contemporary South African society. Besides, they need to plant the seed of forgiveness which will allow them to live harmoniously. To achieve this, this study will examine Coetzee's selected novels namely: *Dusklands* (1974), *In the Heart of the Country* (1976), *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), *Foe* (1986), *Age of Iron* (1990), and *Disgrace* (1999). Throughout these novels, this study reveals how South African women of both races, whites and blacks, are inhumanly exploited due her gender and race.



sexism, where women ethnicities and cultures had gradually been affected by gender discrimination. Women were morally identified as inferior to men in all cultural standards (Meer, 2007). Various cultural backgrounds, women subjugation, excessive use of power of the regime, and gender impartiality had stirred up a constant conflict that lasted for a few centuries. The study attempts to explore this issue by investigating issues relate to both white and black women in South Africa and examines how they are being perceived in J. M. Coetzee's novels. With his vision about the truth is prominently highlighted, Coetzee utilises his characters as the medium to tell the truth. For instance, in *Disgrace*, Coetzee uses David Lurie as his mouthpiece saying "excuse me for talking in this way. I am trying to be frank" (John M Coetzee, 2019a, p. 166).





Despite being a white writer, Coetzee's depiction of apartheid's brutality and its traces in post-apartheid South Africa obviously leans to the subjugated and oppressed blacks. From his novels, it seems that Coetzee main target is separating history from politics. For this purpose, his novels *Age of iron* (1990), *In the Heart of the Country* (1997) are set in apartheid era. *Disgrace*, on the other hand, is set in post-apartheid era. In this context, like Attridge (1996) states that "Coetzee's novels are remarkable, if oblique, parable of, among other things, the contemporary political situation in the Republic of South Africa" (p. 23).

In apartheid South Africa women were divided along the lines of their race and ethnicity being dealt with based on their colour, blacks or whites. The writers of this self-divide nation were subjected to the same inhuman treatment that often includes suppression and disappearances that reflect the actual status of their societies. They lived under the oppressive gender and racial discrimination that exacted a heavy toll on their conscience and psychic health. Besides, the despotic laws in South Africa influenced the nature, quality and content of art work to be produced where writers become at high risks as soon as they manipulate the actual life of the Africans. The repressive regime required from its subjects an explicit commitment to the ruling class, which left the writers with no option except the self-impose silence on the painful realities of the community.

The uncontrollable desire to write is often found to be in the forefront of the escapists' literature. Some of these writers turned to ordinary medium as shown by the writings of Laurens van der Post. Other writers like Olive Schreiner, Percy Fitzpatrick, Carey Slater, Eugene Marais, J. D. Du Toit, and Uys Krige delightfully chose to focus





on natural beauty of the countryside. The reference to the harrowing and brutal violence and suffering of South African people is disturbingly absent from the literature of these worst of times of the apartheid era. As Mphahlele (1962) argues in *The African Image* that “as long as the white man’s politics continue to impose on us a ghetto existence, so long shall the culture and therefore literature of South Africa will continue to wither away, to drop lower and lower; and for so long shall we in our writing continue to reflect only a minute fraction of life” (p. 109).

J.M. Coetzee is one of the most prolific white writers coming out of apartheid South Africa. His publication of *Disgrace* (1999), for example, not only won Coetzee his second Booker Prize but also the African National Congress (ANC) government’s recognition. *Disgrace*, is used “as a historical witness to the persistence of racism among white South Africans” (Attwell, 2002, p. 87). It is used as an oral submission to the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) of inquiry into racism in the media. According to Attwell (2002), the whole public outcry was nothing but an “overheated discussion about what is the least complex and, arguably, least interesting area of the novel’s performance: its socially mimetic function” (Attwell, 2002, p. 23). In spite of all these oppositions, Coetzee became a Nobel laureate where in 2003, he won the Nobel Prize for Literature. After establishing himself as a great writer, the ANC was the first to congratulate him for his success. With exposing the truth that racism still prevails in post-apartheid South Africa, his stand on truth telling can be linked to the character. As a matter of fact, every racist ruling looks for easy and clinical solutions to the problem it is faced with. Mostly, due to lack of imagination, the regime chooses to have recourse either to everlasting enslavement or to genocidal extermination of the subjugated people. As declared by Moyana (1989), it was only the





economic consideration and the need for a cheap labour force that stopped the ruling Boers from resorting “to Hitler’s methods of mass extermination, but they are already committed to a course of slow but equally murderous economic genocide” (p. 89).

Nevertheless, the deprivations suffered by the native black women led to destroying the victim’s soul, making way for a progressively increasing aphasia. The loss of voice gradually contributed to the erosion of the cultural space once occupied by the native women. In this regard, Gordimer (1973) argues that, in the African culture, the “man’s inner being is enriched as the substance in an integrated community grows fuller, that literature draws its real sustenance in the long run” (p. 36). This led to an aggressive censorship project when women are victimized by the men predominance. South African natives were torn off from their roots and this practice of extirpation has proved mortally destructive to the lifestyles of natives. The black women were forbidden to accompany their husbands who worked in the cities under the colonial rule, which emotionally and physically atomised the tightly-knit African society.

However, there is no scarcity of conscience and guilt-ridden liberal individuals from the white community who have not been embarrassed of expressing their contrition at and resentment with the offensive scheme of things. This repulsion and disapproval is explained in the works of white writers. Their writing often reveals a sense of their desire for change and reflect their helplessness to achieve that (Attridge, 2002). In their works, white writers reflected clear signs of a losing battle with the inherent guilt residing at their hearts where their writings are more to the side of blacks just as seen in Coetzee’s writing. To face the apartheid system is to have tried to come to terms with a frustrating indisposition. The sympathy resulted by apartheid silenced





all the voices of both whites and blacks, by sheer force, and the stories were stopped from being narrated in South Africa as a land of brutality and repression.

The name of J. M. Coetzee figures most prominently among the white writers who are counted and stood up for the cause of a shared human destiny (Attridge, 2002). Coetzee's novels can be dealt with as allegories that deal with various forms of brutalisation and oppression that happened under the apartheid rule in South Africa. In his novels, Coetzee employs a collection of well-developed strategies, techniques and subterfuges of disguise so aptly that his novels often fly in accordance with the radar of censorship. Coetzee's techniques of suppression extensively applied in his writings often go undetectable for what they are as an apartheid unsparing criticism. In his article, Attridge (2002) uses the expression "oppressive silence" that is assumed to be central to the allegorical fiction of Coetzee. This overwhelmingly powerful thematic preoccupation conveys a universal quality to Coetzee's writings for which several researches haven't devoted one of them is this study.

From Coetzee's novels, he seems to achieve the desire to separate history from politics. Attridge (1996) asserts that "all Coetzee's novels are remarkable, if oblique, parables of, among other things, the contemporary political situation in the Republic of South Africa" (p. 152). For example, In *Disgrace*, David Lurie, a white professor in a university relives the apartheid time where he could exert his weight over any woman he desired. And he ends up sleeping with his colored students and is accused of rape. On the other hand, his daughter is raped by a black man and she decides to keep the baby that creates the image of the present and the future that remedies past violence. As Lucy says "I am prepared to do anything, make any sacrifice, for the sake of peace"





(Coetzee, 2019a, p. 208). This study reveals that, through the character of Lucy, Coetzee wants to tell the way to adapt to the changes in the country is to make a ‘fresh start,’ regardless of skin colour. Salih and Janoory (2019) commented that in Coetzee’s fiction, language is functioned as a medium through which the hierarchical structure of power is extended where ‘reality’, ‘truth’, and ‘order’, conceptions are proven by the power of the language.

Coetzee’s novels imply his impulse to record the voice of females and heterogeneous black experience in its own resistant voice. Based on his own social philosophy, Coetzee looks at female aesthetic as not only the indicator of the condition of women but also of any person who speaks out against the overwhelming patriarchal society. Therefore, the core of his novels is criticizing the colonization of the female, the Blacks, and Black women. For example, Coetzee found himself in such a context where, according to Parry (1996), people believe that the black woman is ‘made by white man’ constituting the typical meaning of slavery.

Parry (1996) argues that:

A writing which negotiates the tensions between the female self, still largely conceived as wife and mother, and the affiliation to being black, within narratives which foreground the immediate conditions and social forces making for woman's multiple oppressions, both criticises patriarchal relations extant within traditional structures and transgresses the preoccupation with the black urban experience by calling upon the epistemological and linguistic resources of new disrupted peasant societies (p. 56).





This kind of image is what Coetzee aptly depicts in his novels where black women are always found to be helpless, powerless and even valueless, just as symbolized by the black woman, Melanie in *Disgrace* with the white man, David representing several centuries of colonial history in which black women were debauched with impunity. Coetzee recalls the argument by McDowell (1989):

For black women, there is an inherent contradiction in the very word “home.” ... Where is home for starters? Can you call a country which has systematically colonized your countries of origin, one which refuses through a thorough racism in its institutions, media and culture to even recognize your existence and your rights to that existence – can you call this country “home” without having your tongue inside your cheek? (p. 71)



### 1.3 Statement of The Problem

From 1948 to the end of apartheid in 1994, several writers emerged to break the silence against racism where segregation between black and white was legally imposed. After being silenced, the black consciousness growth significantly affected writers who examined the interference with their identity as an inevitable product of human exploitation and discrimination. For black South Africans, the essential tool to establish a just social order and to end apartheid was knowing the history of their oppression and the continuing struggles against it. Thus, the relationship between literature and history was particularly relevant in the production of the writers of South Africa whose history was one of the oppressions.





A section of South African literature has often depicted racial friction. Nevertheless, there is a kind of transformation in the representation of blacks in whites writing for the purpose of reflecting how the life of blacks is depicted in the literature of white authors. In other words, the white writing emphasizes that the black writing substantiates the stereotype in the Republic of South Africa which is mainly divided into two social categories: whites who are rich and comfortable, and blacks who are poor, oppressed, restless and confused. Janoory (2019) aptly embodies the situation asserting that:

In the period of Western imperialism, indigenous women had always borne the heavier burden of oppression and marginalisation, being the subordinate of both her own culture and the alien power. While being subordinated within her culture by patriarchy she was also oppressed by colonial patriarchy as the weaker sex of the marginalised Other. Thus, from the perspective of the coloniser she was doubly feminised, by racial and gender codes. Within the colonial worldview she was at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Therefore, in this sense, the indigenous woman was doubly marginalised, both by the familiar and the foreign (p. 19).

It is only recently that women's role in the literature of South Africa has been given some acknowledgment. Formerly, the account of women's political association, their efforts for freedom from subjugation, for community rights and, significantly, for gender fairness, was mostly disregarded in literary texts. Not only did nearly all of these older texts incline greatly towards white political policies to the disadvantage of studies and interaction of whites with other racial groups, but they also centered on the struggles and achievements of the black men (often on their armed resistance to



exploitation by white leadership) practically leaving the black women out of South African history (Belgacem, 2018; Elmgren, 2019; Janoory, 2019).

What could be argued here is that Coetzee's novels destabilise the canon of white South African literature especially that related to class and gender. As a believer that white South African pastoral does not authentically represent indigenous Africans, Coetzee's fiction critically locates areas of conflict between black and white in Africa. Additionally, after the publication of *Age of Iron* (1990), the issue of feminism, was highlighted as another aspect which had never been critically focused on (Amadi, 2018; Belgacem, 2018; Elmgren, 2019). Hence, the aspect of feminism raises Coetzee's motivation to use the characters of women as typical narrators. According to Graham (1996), three of Coetzee's novels have female narrators namely, Magda in *In the Heart of the Country*, Elizabeth Curren in *Age of Iron* Susan and Barton in *Foe*. As a writer, complex questions related to appropriation and colonization due to the choice of female narrators are highlighted. It could be argued that by strategizing female narrators as the dominant voices in the narrations Coetzee aims at dramatizing his own self-positioning to effectively depict his social authority as a white male author living in South Africa. Furthermore, black women who constitute half of the population of South Africa, have been silent for too long in literary books (Graham, 1996). Although the desire of writing on black woman is now to a degree being tackled, as manifested in Coetzee's texts, there is still a big gap in our knowledge on the condition of South African black women. It is high time that critics put the record straight on the suffering of the black women in South Africa.



Accordingly, based on the great space occupied by female characters and the role they played in different plots of Coetzee's novels; an insufficient attention was paid to their suffering by his critics. The objectives of this study are to uncover and examine the female suffering from the beginning of white colonization passing through to the apartheid regime to the conjured democracy in South Africa. It also attempts to investigate the sub-alterity of black women, the oppression inflicted upon them, the resistance of women to the patriarchal and hegemonic power, and the psychological impact of this oppression on women of South Africa. This research deals with the transition of African women focusing on J. M. Coetzee's descriptions of women, both white and black, in relation to the colonisation in the following six novels, namely, *Dusklands* (1974), *In the Heart of the Country* (1977), *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), *Foe* (1986), *Age of Iron* (1990), and *Disgrace* (1999).

The rationale of these novels lies in the fact that they have the potential to argue about both black and white women otherness in the South African context and how it was formed. Moreover, these novels depict the power relation that controlled the internal and external situations which constitute the psyches of women in South Africa. Specifically, these novels have been chosen because they reflect the society's disorder as portrayed by J. M. Coetzee revealing the atrocity and violence that were extravagantly practiced against South African women. In other words, these selected novels steadily characterize the patriarchal domination and colonial hegemony that symbolise the real aggression which motivated Coetzee to record the actual situation in South Africa for the coming generations.



The current research is particularly appropriate in studying the condition of women in South African literature. The fictional works of J. M. Coetzee is a landmark in which analysing the suffering of the women of both races during and post independent South Africa is used. Both women had suffered many layers of discrimination and hardship that made them angry and become frustrated at having their freedom of movement restricted by patriarchy and apartheid policies. These important issues are the target of this study to be critically analysed and highlighted.

#### 1.4 Objectives of The Study

The objectives of the study are:

1. To analyse how patriarchy and colonial patriarchy converge to inscribe violence and domination against the white and black women in J. M. Coetzee's selected novels.
2. To explore the forms of resistance utilised by the white and black women against the Othering process of patriarchy and colonial patriarchy in J. M. Coetzee's selected novels.
3. To articulate the issues of narration of Coetzee to convey the gendered and racial themes based on the selected novels.

## 1.5 Research Questions

The research aims to answer the following questions:

1. How does patriarchy and colonial patriarchy converge to inscribe violence and domination against the white and black women in J. M. Coetzee's selected novels?
2. What are the forms of resistance utilised by the white and South African women against the Othering process of patriarchy and colonial patriarchy in J. M. Coetzee's selected novels?
3. How does Coetzee articulate the issues of narration to convey the gendered and racial themes based on the selected novels?

## 1.6 Rationale of The Study

The basic rationale of this research is to shed light on the specific forms of women "Other" in J. M. Coetzee's *Dusklands* (1974), *In the Heart of the Country* (1977), *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), *Foe* (1986), *Age of Iron* (1990), and *Disgrace* (1999). All these novels argue about the course by which the otherness of women, both white and black, was shaped. There were many internal and external situations and power relation that managed the construction of unease in the psyches of women. J. M. Coetzee portrayed this society's disorder by showing the violence and atrocity inflicted upon women that had a greater impact on their psyches. Besides, these selected novels gradually characterized the colonial hegemony and patriarchal domination that represented an adverse intuitive impulse which is motivated by writers'



perceptions that might be internally and personally arisen. The practical defence withdrawals only occurred in respect to outward stimuli and not in respect to inner instinctive stresses. Accordingly, women's psychic anxiety originated from exterior experience (stimulus). Women went through tragic experiences, leading to progressively a kind of aphasia. In a developing process, the violence imposed upon women took a final stage in determining victims' behaviours. It was affected by repression and what it produced in the psyche (Madhok, 2016). As a result, women's behaviour became abnormal when they are confronted with inner repression and painful and undesired feelings.

Coming back to the point, the focus of the current study is to elucidate how Coetzee uses his unique ability of depicting the life of black and white women by putting his women characters in the light of his own understanding as a postcolonial author who excessively writes self-conscious texts. He places his women characters in a colonial situation to draw the real status of life and to reflect the typical definition of feminism in his novels. Nevertheless, it has been argued that women characters are also instrumental in Coetzee's ongoing accompanied various fictional modes, such as allegory and satire, throughout his different explorations (Madhok, 2016). Hence, the rationale of the study is to reveal how women narrators have enabled Coetzee to explore his own responsibility as a white male writer with South African nationality. Consequently, through the counter voices of women which come as a reflection of his alter egos and the interrelationship between them, he tries to create his own persona which is distinctive from Coetzee that we know. As readers, we can just connect our own impressions about Coetzee, the writer and the characters in his novels where, as explained by Head (2009), he is "intellectually independent, ethically sensitive, yet





acutely conscious of the complicities and ambivalences that surround him, as an academic and as a novelist” (p. 21).

## 1.7 Scope of The Study

The study is limited to analyse six novels of J. M. Coetzee’s writing based on the Postcolonial Feminist Theory. The selected novels are the most relevant novels wherein the females are the central characters and the novels mostly revolve around their suffering. The researcher chooses these six novels because they trace the portraiture of black and white women suffering in different stages starting with violence imposed on the weaker element of the society moving to the resistance of women from their marginal state reaching to the impact of the external behavior of violence and atrocity such as attack and rape upon the inner self of women which destroyed them emotionally, morally and socially.

Therefore, this study attempts to investigate various positions and roles of black and white female characters in Coetzee’s novels as an ideological counterview to the discourse of patriarchy and apartheid. It also argues about the fabricated narrative of the hushed, muted women as a marginalized subject. As has been mentioned earlier, the novels are *Dusklands* (1974), *In the Heart of the Country* (1977), *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), *Foe* (1986), *Age of Iron* (1990), and *Disgrace* (1999).





## 1.8 Significance of The Study

The salient significance of this study lies in the fact of projecting an intellectual and academic writer in the body J.M. Coetzee. Head (2009) strongly positions Coetzee as a great writer who has intellectual independency, ethical sensitivity, acute conscious of the ambivalences and complicities around him as a novelist. The study's focus is to elucidate the use to which Coetzee puts his women characters in the light of his being a postcolonial author who writes excessively self-conscious text. His women characters, placed in a colonial situation do make a case for feminism in his novels. However, they are also instrumental in Coetzee's ongoing and various explorations of fictional modes. Coetzee has been enabled by his women narrators to explore his own ambivalence and complicity as a white male South African writer.



Initially, the selected novels were hardly studied in the light of postcolonial feminism. There was less attention paid to Coetzee's relentless interest in exposing the development of women situation and its stages throughout his novels. The significance of this research lies in that it aims to trace the development of black and white women suffering in different stages starting firstly with uncovering the violence and repression that was imposed on them as the weaker element of the society. Secondly, the study shed some light on the resistance made by the women from their marginal state. Thirdly, this research contributes in revealing the impact of the external behaviour of violence and atrocity such as attack and rape upon the inner-self of women; these violent acts destroyed them emotionally, morally, and socially. In other words, the significance of this research lies in identifying Coetzee's narration issues as a white writer who tries to reveal the gendered racial themes through his fiction.





It is in view of the above that this research therefore, offers a textual discussion of different aspects of women's sufferings, marking the elements of environment utilized by Coetzee. On the contextual level, the research incorporates atrocity, violence, alienations, anxiety, neurosis, and paranoia apparent in the novels. The research, thus, proposes a debatable argument that the selected works might expose the negative effects of atrocity, violence, alienation, neurosis, and paranoia on human psyche. They caused precarious sequences on human psyche that played an integral role in causing psychic effects such as phobia, communicative illness, and schizophrenia (Head, 2009). The thesis will uncover critical areas in the post-colonial literature that many researchers have yet to explore in Coetzee's novels.

This research is restricted to only six novels by Coetzee. Although only six novels are being used to reflect the actual status of apartheid and its impact on the black and white women, they are relevant and sufficient enough to cover the research objectives. These novels bring about the distinct characteristics that help explain the reasons behind the social problems faced by the characters and how discrimination based on race and colour takes place in the characters live.

Moreover, these novels are highly admitted as the most effective novels by Coetzee which are widely accepted as the best social phenomenon representative in South Africa. Hence, the issues discussed in this research are mainly bound to the writer (Salih & Janoory, 2019). The selected novels portray the painful life of women through

the process, discussion and interaction among the characters including the historical background connected with issues depicted in the novels.

Last, but not least, the six selected novels are rich thoughts and ideas especially those related to apartheid and feminism. However, due to the barrier of time, this study has been devoted to shed some light only on analysing the most salient issues related to South African women, whites and blacks.

### 1.10 Structure of The Study

This thesis has been divided into six chapters through which an attempt to explore the various women's role and position was carried out. The first chapter provides a thorough background to the research paying a special focus on South Africa and it equally introduces J. M. Coetzee as a writer who mirrors the reality of South Africa. The research problem has been stated in this chapter and the objectives of the study has also been specified. This chapter also includes the significance of study and the research limitations. The second chapter is a literature review that gives a brief summary of critical literature produced in the previous studies. Theoretical background related to feminism and postcolonial theories are also enlightened in this chapter proving the development of feminism and postcolonial theories and how they are related to reflect the actual status of the South African woman. The research methodology is further explained in chapter three which includes research strategies, research method/approach, research process, data analysis, ethical consideration, and limitations.

Next, the fourth chapter aptly examines the issue of violence and atrocity imposed and inflected upon black women. It explores the image of women seen from the men's eyes, especially the way white men who looked at women. The chapter involves two of Coetzee's novels, which are *Dusklands* (1974) and *In the Heart of the Country* (1976). The chapter centres on the motive to explore the dynamics of power as an essentially authorial obligation that engenders an organically thematic offshoot of oppression. Chapter Four comes in in response to the first research question.

Chapter Five is concerned with forms of resistance utilised by the white and black women against the Othering process of patriarchy and colonial patriarchy in J. M. Coetzee's selected novels. This chapter focuses on the following novels, *Foe* (1986), and *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) that further explore another dimension of women resistance such as intentional silence, the form that the self-muted subject chose to fight his or her war with.

Chapter Six comes in response to the third research question. It focuses on the issues of narration of Coetzee as a white writer who attempts to articulate the gendered racial themes based on the selected novels. Moreover, the chapter intends to deal with psychological impacts on women that led to the suffering mind into retreating. It examines the stressfully structured silence of women in Coetzee's novels especially in *Age of Iron* (1990) and *Disgrace* (1999) in which the characters encountered psychological adversities and trauma with especial reference to *Dusklands* (1974) when projecting Coetzee's point of view on the colonial enterprise that overwhelms black women in South Africa.

Finally, the study ends with a conclusion that summarizes the issues discussed in the core chapters, and the achievement of J. M. Coetzee. In other words, the study conclusion focuses on representation of women in Coetzee's works that has reflected the colonial history. The history that showed women's sufferings as a unique trauma that marked the beginning of colonial account later developed into a measured resentment, as a form of resistance, and with advent of emergency where such women situation turned into a traumatic experience.

## **1.11 Operational Definition of Terms**

### **1.11.1 Definition of Subalternity**

In critical theory and postcolonialism, the term subaltern designates the populations which are socially, politically, and geographically outside of the hegemonic power structure of the colony and of the colonial homeland. In describing "history told from below", subaltern was coined by Antonio Gramsci, notably through his work on cultural hegemony, which identified the groups that are excluded from a society's established institutions and thus denied the means by which people have a voice in their society. In this study, the term subalternity refers to black women of south Africa.

### 1.11.2 Definitions of Apartheid, Sociology and Patriarchy

In this study, the term ‘Apartheid’ refers to the racial segregation in South Africa specifically in terms of colour and gender. The term ‘Sociology’ refers to any society governed by such a system. (Collins English Dictionary). On the other hand, ‘patriarchy’ is used to show the various types of severe aggression practised against women in South Africa.

Patriarchy is defined as a social arrangement that promotes hierarchies and grants economic, political and social power to one group over the others (Mary-Anne, 2011, p. 2). It is essentially masculine and hierarchical by nature. By patriarchy, this study does not only mean the subordination of females to males, but the “whole structure of Father ruled society: aristocracy over serfs, masters over slaves, kings over subjects, racial overlords over colonized people” (Ruether, 1983, p. 61). According to Ackerman (1992), “classical patriarchy refers to the domination of the male over the female, children, servants and slaves” (p. 95). Hence, it could be stated that all forms of sexism, racial, cultural and social domination are caused by patriarchy (Ruether, 1983, p. 20). Additionally, patriarchy refers to structures and ideologies which promotes the exploitation as well as domination of the weak and the powerless people including black women, the main topic covered by this study. Therefore, patriarchy can rightly be described as empire, a spirit of lord less domination, created by humankind. Colonial patriarchy, on the other hand, is white male colonial subordination of non-white women within the context of Western ideological dichotomy (Spencer-Wood, 2016).



## 1.12 Conclusion

This chapter has been devoted to provide a clear overview of the study including the research problems and the objectives of the study. The research questions have also been specified in this chapter followed by the rationale, scope and significance of the study. The chapter then proceeds to explain the limitations of the study and then projects the structure of the study. The chapter ends with a brief definition of the terms used in the study and a conclusion. The six novels that will be extensively discussed shed some light on how Coetzee dwells on the troubles of patriarchy and postcolonial patriarchy despite the democracy achieved in South Africa in the early nineties of the 20th century. This study shows that despite reliving the past, Coetzee, in his novels, does reveal that all characters recognize that discrimination and subjugation come in

