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### On Feminism and Identity in J.M. Coetzee Literature: A Critical Analysis from Post-Colonial Perspective

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#### Abstract

As a Noble Laureate, John Maxwell Coetzee has been one of the most important icons of post-colonial writers in feminism literature. This study reveals significant role of women characters in Coetzee's fiction focusing on how the concept of feminism is used through employing women characters for mirroring both gender and racial schism. In Coetzee's fiction, female characters are employed as a typical solution to several issues he wants to reveal according to his own identity and social persona. This study critically scrutinizes Coetzee's selected novels, namely *In the Heart of the Country*, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Foe*, *Age of Iron*, and *Disgrace*. Almost all Coetzee's works mainly focus on the socio-political status of women in Africa with regard to sexism, femininity and masculinity ideologies. In this study, the post-colonial feminism theory has been applied using discursive strategy based on anthropological and sociological analyses to reflect the socio-political scenarios of both Apartheid and Post-apartheid Africa. As its findings put to light the post-colonial black women's treatment by the colonisers and the forms of resisting their hegemony, it is expected that this study will significantly contribute to the researchers whose concern is on feminism as a significant phenomenon in the post-colonial literature.

**Keywords:** feminism, apartheid, identity, Coetzee's novels

#### Introduction

The direction of the 20th-century novel reflects the importance of J. M. Coetzee to English fiction as indicated by the weighty questions persisted in his work discussions. Some of these questions are: how can the 20<sup>th</sup> century history be fictionally depicted in the world of novels? how does his writing direct our understanding of postcolonialism and postmodernism definitions? What does it mean for an author to initiate real commitment to the fiction discourse rather than the discourse devoted for politics? Is there a function for a literary canon (D. Head, 1996)?

In the light of the above significant questions, we find that Coetzee's work reflects considerable influences of both local and international elements. Bridging the gap between the "West" and the so called '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, Teresa 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. (Parry, 1996). With regard to the European literary influence on Coetzee's fiction Watson comments that "Almost all the initial difficulties of [Coetzee's] novels vanish when one happens to have read the same books that he has" (Watson, 1996, p. 25). For instance, reading Coetzee's novels deeply can reflect them as reflexive texts resulted by the influence of European writers such as Lawrence, Dostoevsky, Beckett, Defoe and Kafka.

What could be argued here is that Coetzee's novels destabilise the canon of white South African especially that related to the class and genres. As a believer that white South African pastoral does not authentically represent indigenous Africans, Coetzee's fiction critically locates conflict between black and white in Africa. After the publication of Coetzee's *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 his motivation use 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 might be arisen all related to appropriation and colonization due to the choice of female narrators. It could be argued that by strategizing female narrators Coetzee aims at dramatizing his own self-positioning to effectively depict his social authority as a white male author living in South Africa.

### **In the Heart of the Country: Oppressive Patriarchal Order and Woman Self-expression**

*In the Heart of the Country* (1977) a lonely farmer seeks comfort in the arms of a black concubine. But his embittered spinster daughter Magda feels ashamed; this lurch across the racial divide marks the end of a tenuous feudal peace. As she madly dreams of bloody revenge, Magda's consciousness starts to drift and the line between fact and the working of the excited imagination becomes blurred.

*In the Heart of the Country* (hereinafter known as HC) scrutinizes the evidence of patriarchal suppression in Afrikaner society and its consequences on the life of woman. In the novel, Magda's father represents the oppressive patriarchal order and Magda's struggle stands for self-expression. Writing her own story, Magda uses the language that does not reject the historical and cultural definition of female subjectivity. In his paper, Kehinde (2006) reported that Magda stands for the standard of Coetzee's radical woman who reverses an apathetic portrayal of women reflecting a Freudian justification for her predicament shedding light on public dilemma and her personal experience.

Magda suffers from deep sense of alienation caused by the inability to capitulate her role as submissive daughter who is responsible to fulfill the requirements related to the Afrikaner woman. She becomes a major spokesperson with repeated polemics against Racial segregation and hyphenated identities. In other words, the novel represents the patriarchal norms of considering women as a subordinates with a particular position in the social order. This seems more obvious when Magda's father dismisses her destroying her emotions with harsh words causing a complete feeling of isolation and neglect for her. Her status is reflected through her melancholic soliloquy when she says:

"the land is full of melancholy spinsters like me, lost to history, blue as roaches in our ancestral homes, keeping a high shine on the copperware and laying in jam. Woored when we were little by our masterful fathers, we are bitter vestals spoiled for life. The childhood rape" (Coetzee, 2017, p. 2).

Neimneh, Obeidat, and Al-Mwajeh (2019) critically commented that Magda's language constitutes her sole self-protective escape from cultural and social clutches where her identity is trapped in a language of 'male-controlled discourses,' (p. 21). Therefore, in post-modern texts, Magda appears as a perfect

example of the decentered subject attempting to challenge the margin and counteract the patriarchal culture.

Interestingly, Coetzee represents Magda as an awkward woman who is dominated by her father in the farmhouse space. Such space reflects her marginal status and, thus, assures her single status that has weak construction. Additionally, she has a series of meditations, such as her case as a despondent bachelor who lives in a community of heterosexual hegemony in the South African making her think carefully how she can make the matter of her body to suit the culture of Afrikaner farm. In her daily life, Magda tries to explore identities for single women, rather than the life of dismissed daughter. The only thing that she could discover is the miserable images that appeared from the farm with forgotten devalued parts "*an angry spinster in the heart of nowhere ... in the shadowy hallway ... we are bitter vestals ... a jagged virgin, I stand in the doorway ... in the cloister of my room, I am the mad hag*" (HC 8).

Conversely, Magda later determines that those images are reflections of ambiguous moments which might be changeable in the discourse. She recognizes the potential innate in her body as a single woman, when she approaches the kitchen of farmhouse. The space here reflects the central space of Afrikaner female power. Based on this philosophy, Coetzee wants to reveal that the kitchen is the place from which an African woman such as Magda, plans her radical action for murdering her father to end her oppression. Consequently, she moves out of the ambiguous marginal space to inhabit larger space for making the matter of her body. On this regard, Stone (2003) highlights this reporting that in "the novel, Magda manages to move from a forgotten daughter, who only looms in the margins of the farm, to the 'crazy old queen,' who manipulated the entire space into her own, albeit distorted conception of a community" (p. 138).

Magda killed her father after she is finally convinced that he is responsible for destroying the only way of her life. Nevertheless, several feminist critics such as Dodd (1987) who comments that "rather than interpret[ing] Magda's killing of her father as originating in her inability to take place of Anna in her father's bed, I would suggest that Magda's action can be read as an attempt to overthrow the rule of the patriarch" (p. 159). What could be mentioned here is that by the action of killing Magda's father, Coetzee tries to advocate the indispensable evidence of Amazonian feminism that focusses on man and woman physical equality. In other words, this event reveals that Coetzee strongly stands against inequality of women and gender stereotypes based on women behaviors, looking at them as if they are physically vulnerable and weak. Coetzee visualizes womanhood as projects of enterprising and heroic reflecting that he rejects the idea that claims certain features and characteristics which are essentially masculine or feminine. Wade (2016, p. 122) assured that the novel "presents South Africans and their landscape as a closed system dominated by neurotic structure, of behavior and perception, from which no escape is possible".

The powerlessness is embodied in Magda's character where all the sufferings like, abnegation and social isolation that overcome the amalgamate of African woman. This is clearly obvious through Magda's father who rigid domination especially when he refuses paternal affection to his daughter Magda and keeps her only bound to the domestic sphere. This schism between him and his daughter has resulted in psychological conflict in the person of Magda that ultimately led to killing her father. In this way, Coetzee depicts the disorder, chaos and confusion that illustrate the postcolonial African world which is suffering from the problem of gender dissonance.

As a result, various kinds of specific instincts and mental processes create an individual's personality and, thus, psychoanalysis has been established on Magda's aggravation resulted by defective socialization and patriarchal hegemony than eventually leads to her abnormal psychological condition. In the character of Magda, Coetzee aims at reflecting gender inequality in African society which is deep-rooted since early childhood giving high value to men, and little value to women. This makes Magda mentally unstable and miserable. This could be elicited when she painfully screams depicting Freud's theory of 'lack' through the use of the big 'O' when she says:

I am a hole crying to be whole ... I am ... not unaware that there is a hole between my legs that has never been filled; leading to another hole never filled either. If I am an O, I am sometimes persuaded, it must be because I am a woman (HC 41; 45).

However, the issue is just as Cantor (1994) views that Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country* explores the manifold problems arising from gender dissonance, decolonization, national liberation and ethnic identity. For instance, Magda becomes in a submissive mode after she is raped by Hendrik even though she later knows that he is just driven by his desire of revenge for the years of suppression and subjugation. Poyner (2016) maintained that, in Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country*, rape portrays a historically patriarchal system of 'retribution, revenge and reparations.'

### **Waiting for the Barbarians: The Triangulation of Otherness**

*Waiting for the Barbarians* (hereinafter known as WB) is Coetzee's third novel which is allegorically taken the same name of the poem by the Greek poet C. P. Cavafy, which bargaining the probability of colonization ending, which does not happen. The main theme of the poem is that it portrays the waiting of the decaying Roman Empire for the barbarians to control the government. In the novel, the barbarians are considered as 'a kind of solution' where the evidence of Empire is bound to the 'barbarians' or natives who will fulfill this imperialistic prophecy that is proofed by the presence of enigmatic figure or preconceived Other. Parry (1996) argues that the Empire is dependent upon the other, which means the barbarians for strengthening the state national feeling. Several critics such as Saunders (2001), Canepari-Labib (2005) and Durrant (2012) refer to the novel as an allegory of the regime of Apartheid in South Africa where the issues of oppression and torture are critically dealt with. The novel is an imperialism allegory that deals with the colonialism extension reflecting the South African concerns.

It has been argued that *Waiting for the Barbarians* is more conventional and traditional in approach, especially in terms of postcolonial criticism. For example, Attwell (1993) proposes that there is a 'process of formal stabilization' that reveals more considerable degree of conventionality in narration and time treatment which reveals a traditional approach that may not provide an attempt at realism. Additionally Dominic Head and Dominic (1997) argue that the novel projects the history in a new way, presenting it as 'objectification of history- as-myth', and not as 'an absolute horizon to consciousness'. Additionally, the novel provides a friction between the creating doubt and ambiguity of postmodernist 'voice,' on the one hand, and an alternative 'voice' that conveys the moral concerns of Leavis' Great Tradition, a more stable element representing an 'enduring code of ethics' (Madhok, 2016).

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the magistrate expresses suffering when the Colonel Joll's captives were not the barbarians, he escapes effortlessly. Here is the diversity existence of 'others' where he sees no differences between prisoners "prisoners are prisoners". Using the character as a spokesman, Coetzee critically inquires: "Did no one tell him the difference between fishermen with nets and wild nomad horsemen with bows? Did no one tell him they don't even speak the same language?" (WB, p. 19). As both time and space are two important elements in this novel, critics find several points to discuss and try to interpret the meaning beyond story various events. For example, Saunders (2001) contacts space with foreignness arguing that

"the foreign is always relative to the inside, the domestic, the familiar, a boundary. No entity is inherently foreign; she who is a foreigner in one place is at home in another ... no one escapes being foreign ... Foreignness, moreover, can be a status that one assumes (as does the traveler) that is imposed on one (as under apartheid) or that exists somewhere on the spectrum between these positions" (p. 218).

Therefore, Saunders describes the foreigner as 'one who speaks a different language' just to address the central issues of the novel, and to more importantly explain the connotation of 'other'. Saunders further

contends that foreignness is normally dealt with as something that lacks 'identity' and, therefore, it is placed "outside of proper meaning" (219). Hence, the meaning of problem is a significant issue in the novel, where the need to reflect the magistrate's interaction with the barbarian girl becomes more important because foreignness is eclectically interrelated with the isolation and invasion themes. More specifically, in all acts of invasion, foreignness is evident as it enforces the difference or separation idea and detaches the 'oppressor from the oppressed'. In the novel, Coetzee uses irony as a main tool of conveying his ideas where we find him uses the language of the Barbarian girl with the magistrate. When the Magistrate feels that he is isolated, because of his inability to understand when she speaks to her people, he decides to invade her and then asks her to speak by force. Therefore, the writing of Coetzee for the Barbarians directly reflects the power of post-colonial discourse and makes the notion of Othering construction as a strong platform for explaining the belonging and non- belonging to achieve the nation unity, strength and identity (Gallagher, 1991).

As Al-Saidi (2014) argues, *In Waiting for the Barbarians* reveals the full-force of Coetzee's writing which mainly based on 'sudden easiness and confusion'. In other words, throughout the novel Coetzee easily projects barbarians as people who are a kind of solution and without their existence, as Cavafy says, 'what will become of us?' (Nashef, 2013). Moreover, the Empire is represented as an abstract in the novel which has no time and no place but it renders lots in the style of justice and politics. Specifically, this influence of historical proximity provides the novel its 'universal value'. Loomba (1991) asserts that the notion of the 'Other' is considered as crucial not only for generating the outsider images but it equally critical for establishing the insider, the white European male.

For Coetzee, the colonial rule aims and roles may be different but all are firmly interrelated to each other leading to a common end. Therefore we see him using his character, the Magistrate, to express that "one thought alone preoccupies the submerged mind of Empire: how not to end, how not to die, how to prolong its era" (WB, p. 146). Both the Magistrate and the faithful Colonel are depicted by Coetzee to reveal imperialism works against the identity and how human suffers from identity crisis. For example, we find the Magistrate aspires to keep himself away from the cruel and barbaric acts committed under his authority and in the name of Empire. Gradually, he shifts his identity to become at the end has no relationship with the identity of Empire. Hence, his search of identity results in his full dependence on the identity of the barbarian girl. Claiming that he mends the girl's broken body, the Magistrate, in reality, escapes from colonial identity.

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Coetzee's approach is different compared to those of *In the Heart of the Country* and *Foe* in which woman is the narrator. In other words, the narrator in *Waiting for the Barbarians* is the magistrate through whom we find no reflection on the girl's view point. However, Magistrate's attempts to understand the feminine subjectivity and the girl unravel secrets are adequately emphasized on her inability to communicate in the novel. In the scene, the feminine subjectivity is further focused on where the Magistrate himself gets dressed with a woman cloths by his torturers for bringing disgrace and shame to him. The idea of 'female aesthetic' can be explained to differentiate the dominant forms of understanding. Consequently, it is not necessary that the 'female aesthetic' mean speaking from women position. It can be by any person who represents the feminine subjectivity and criticizes the dominant patriarchal society. Accordingly, change in values as well as the conflicting emotions process which are extended through the relationship of Magistrate with the girl, provides an idea about the woman position so that it becomes easier to the reader to understand how both the oppressor and the oppressed live under the colonial effect. The barbarian girl represents the oppressed, the Magistrate plays the role of the oppressor. The obsession of the Magistrate with the broken body symbolizes the fact that resists the veracity of Empire and the nature of imperialism. For example, what the Magistrate believes about a woman is that her "body is anything but a site of joy"(WB, p. 48).

In the novel, it can be understood that the Magistrate is different from the torturers in terms of dealing with women where he sometimes has positive emotion towards her. Therefore, he says, "*I behave in some ways like a lover - I undress her, I bathe her, I stroke her, I sleep beside her - But I equally might tie her to a chair and beat her, it would be no less intimate*" (WB, p. 43) The Magistrate believes that he has a self-interest in his relationship with the barbarian girl describing this interest as 'questionable

desires'. Poyner (2016) highlights the relationship between the Magistrate and the girl assuring that the desire of the Magistrate for her is based on self-interest, lack of reciprocity and irrational neglect of truth that are all justified by the belief in his altruistic motivations toward her. Hence, the relationship between them mainly based on exploiting her body rather being a mechanism to realize truth reflecting the sever effect of depression.

To precisely consider this science, one can find that by the body of the barbarian girl, Coetzee represents the effect of 'Other'. Though the magistrate desires to invade her body, but finding a way to do so becomes inaccessible and as he is incapable of looking into her, she remains a terrible reminder of his failure making all his attempts to identify the colonized other dissipate. Coetzee tries to reflect how in this era the mentality is preoccupied with the other such as what happens to the magistrate's thoughts when he embraces prostitutes. His mind revisit the body of the barbarian girl saying that "*the body of the other one, closed, ponderous, sleeping in my bed in a faraway room, seems beyond comprehension ... I cannot imagine what ever drew me to the alien body/... without aperture, without entry*" (WB, p. 45). Hence, Coetzee highlights the idea of otherness and foreignness through the magistrate's desire to invade the barbarian girl imagining that she cannot but feel his "gaze pressing upon her with the weight of a body" (WB, p. 60). In this scenario, Coetzee reflect the same echoes when Magda was raped by Hendrik *In the Heart of the Country* "a body lies on top of a body pushing and pushing, trying to find a way in .... What is this man trying to find in me? What deeper invasion and possession does he plot in his sleep?" (HC, p. 117). In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the barbarian girl is found to represent the other and to make the approach of perceiving difference with no subjectivity interference. In this approach, Coetzee reveals that the notion of 'other' is arbitrarily brought to the margins of their own identity. Because of her barbarian status, the Barbarian girl is the typical example of the 'other' in the imperial system where this otherness reached her body to be scarred and deformed because of the imperialist's torture.

According to Bhabha (1990), as a stranger, the barbarian girl stand for the 'silent-other' whose resistance is only through silence. Therefore, in all cases she accepts everything submissively with unreadable text. The tension between the 'silent-other' and someone who wishes to force this person to speak is general phenomenon in Coetzee's fiction. *In Waiting for the Barbarians*, "the narcissistic love-object" is represented by the barbarian girl who becomes vulnerable to be attacked and destroy her identity due to the desire of the magistrate who is fascinated by her otherness. He says,

"I cast my mind back, trying to recover an image of her as she was before... I know that my gaze has passed over her when together with others .... My eyes passed over her; but I have no memory of that passage. On that day she was still unmarked, but I must believe she was unmarked as I must believe she was once a child .... Strain as I will my first image remains of the kneeling beggar-girl" (WB, p. 36).

This indicative visualization reveals the Magistrate recognition of the Barbarian girl, his victim, as an innocent human, as child, which in turn would exclude him from the shame of being a criminal. Yet, he is unable to imagine her face so that he refuses to recognize her as human and sister for all where "*certain movements of the heart became no longer possible to her... turned into a creature that believes in nothing*" (WB, pp. 88-89). Here are two directions the Magistrate has to deal with: one is his ability to recognize the barbarian girl as human and the other is his inability to recall her face even though his series of dreams for which he struggles a lot to understand his contradictory relationship with her. This failure of reciprocity in their relationship makes the Magistrate always imagines her sitting "*in the snow with her hooded back to [him] working at the door of her castle, her legs splayed, burrowing, patting and moulding*" (WB, p. 37). Having a colonial mindset, the Magistrate refuses to accept that he really made the girl extremely unhappy leading to her refusal to accompany again. In sum, *Waiting for the Barbarians* is a critical reflection of self-destructiveness within an imperial regime that is dominated by a man conscience who is strongly affected by the white opponent face-to-face with apartheid South Africa in 1980 (Al-Saidi, 2014). As an allegorical novel, time and place are considered as the main elements through which Coetzee could critically reflect the reality and the effect of imperialism. In this novel, Coetzee draws the triangulation of 'Otherness' as the best way to

see this destruction through revealing how the interaction between ‘self’ and ‘other’ which will play vital roles in changing human values. As a matter of fact, this destruction involves the whole Empire, not only the relation between the Self and the Other. Therefore, in this novel, Coetzee proposes that the illusions of humanitarianism misguide the actual Empire, such as the one represented in the novel, because its rhetoric is based upon dishonesties and unsupportable binaries.

### **Foe: Canonical Formulation**

Like all Coetzee’s novels, *Foe* aims at reflecting the ‘canonical formulation,’ the base of ‘the colonial encounter’ (Gardiner, 1987). As a site of “writing back,” postcolonial literature is often against the dominant discourses of the colonizer and ideological assumptions. Coetzee’s *Foe* comes within the category of postcolonial literary texts as a writing back to Daniel Defoe’s ‘Robinson Crusoe’ (Tiffin & Lawson, 1994). Unlike Defoe, Coetzee ‘writes back’ not just to an English colonial text but rather to all discursive field within which discursive texts continue working in post-colonial worlds. Hence, Coetzee’s *Foe* is a reflection of the nature of colonial appropriation existed in South Africa taking place in the narrative of settler which continues increasing colonial legends (Dominic Head & Dominic, 1997). Myklatun (2018) maintains “The ethical implication of the face-to-face relation motivates a sense of resistance towards the political dimensions of violence” (p. 8). The complicity between political oppression and narrative mode enables Coetzee to demonstrate the oppressive role of policy throughout his texts.

Reading the novel, one can discriminate that Coetzee creates *Foe* as a frame that embraces not only the role of language that reflects the postmodern met fiction, but also to blend the patriarchy and the critique of colonialism and patriarchy using discourses. In other words, *Foe* comes as a response to the fiction that deals with patriarchy and Euro-American domination. In the novel, the position of Friday is habitually predominated by the demands of the greater narrative of postcolonial discourses. Additionally, in the grant narrative of feminist discourse, we find that conflicts that take place in the novel between Susan and Foe in one hand and Susan and Cruso on the other hand get lost. Hence, the overwhelming approach of feminist in *Foe* in the character of Susan Barton, the narrator and protagonist of the novel (MacLeod, 2006).

In his article, Price (2008) assumed that Susan’s narration is not a feminist discourse allegory but it is a reflection of both postcolonial discourse and feminist while Dovey (1988) asserts that Coetzee’s ‘Foe’ offers both the colonized other and female perspective through Susan Barton and Friday. The later views that the postcolonial, postmodern and feminist Discourses are all amalgamated in J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe*” and because the novel is an allegory, every character stands for one of these discourses. Using *Foe* allegory, Coetzee strategizes the other of authority white male Europeans and relates it to canon with a great critique blend of feminism and colonialism to shed light on the white-male European dominations that have largely controlled the literature and scholarship fields. Essentially, it is Coetzee philosophy to employ female narrator in his fiction figure for what was silenced in the outer and real South African Society. In this regard, Wisker (2006) points out that “by focusing on the colonized other and a woman, the novel destabilizes race and gender norms, but more radically challenges that other oppressor, the form of canonical novel” (p. 90).

In Coetzee’s *Foe*, the silence provides space for deep meaning to be located. For example, the conflicting message in Foe speech we hear how silence and absence serve the meaning: “*In every story there is a silence, some sight concealed, some word unspoken, I believe. Till we have spoken the unspoken we have not come to the heart of the story*” (Foe, p. 14). This excerpt reveals that there are silence and blindness within every story and every language to acknowledge that each concept transmits all other words that are different from the concept of ‘silence’. In other word, ‘silence’ is not merely the opposite of ‘sound’, but it rather integrates this opposing concept within it where ‘silence’ becomes meaningless if ‘sound’ is not incorporated within it. In the same way, the ‘sigh’ concept is meaningless; the concept of ‘blindness,’ and, similarly, the word ‘blindness’ come within the word ‘sight’. The final philosophical concept that Coetzee wants to convey is that it is true that each word

differs from its opposite, but, at the same time, there is a strong integration between them even if there is no acknowledgement that each time we speak the unspoken.

Regardless of the narrative power, Coetzee makes it obvious from the beginning where throughout the whole novel, Susan Barton seems having no power. She spent her life completely submissive to the men wishes for nothing except to avoid confrontation, to gain acceptance and to feel significant. Even in her death she reunites with her 'king,' Crusoe. Susan's voice is not stopped by her death and even though she is silent, she tries to Death did not silence Susan's voice for it has been silent from the beginning even though Susan frequently tries to tell herself claiming that she has power. By this image, Coetzee wants his audience to look at Susan as an independent and strong woman who can overcome possible challenges as can roughly be determined through her story. In the eyes of the reader, a precise look into the storytelling discloses the desire of Susan as she wants to be a liberated woman but, when this concept is compared to the male domination, this does not make her strong enough to stand in front of their face. It is true that the feminism ideology seems interesting to Susan but, in reality, her heart is still trapped in the colonial world which is under the male domination. Hence, Coetzee establishes the character of Susan to stand for two ideologies namely the freedom of women with the post-colonial mentality and the women tendency for liberation within the struggle overshadowed by their ambition and desire. The voice of Susan in Coetzee's *Foe* is not only muted by male oppressors but she rather personally chooses to make herself silent to leave an impression for the readers that she likes being unheard by men.

In *Foe*, the narration mode of Coetzee aims at deconstructing the colonial 'truths' through original texts where, in this novel the 'truth' question focuses on Susan and Friday though they are just marginalized figures but not on Crusoe who symbolizes patriarchy and owner of the island. Susan keeps insisting on Friday's subservience reflecting that the absence of the island written account does not prevent colonial discourse to 'write upon' his body. The story moves on projecting the colonialism signs as evident that show Friday status as a slave whose tongue is cut out. In this unique discourse, in Coetzee's *Foe* when involves readers discover that Friday is castrated making them understand how sexual potency is associated with writerly production. In this way, the castration of Friday deprives him to author his life due to his lack of the authority. For Susan, her account 'truth' that she believes in can be implemented by the 'silence' unraveling of Friday's tongue story. Consequently, Susan is totally preoccupied with the possibility of telling the 'truth' of her life on the island of Crusoe. For this reason, she finds it urgent to find Mr. Foe who has the authority so that the events of her story on the island become authoritative and her language becomes more adequate for a job.

In this scenario, Coetzee parallelizes Susan's inadequacy with that of Magda's in *In the Heart of the Country*, when the later feels that the 'father tongue' does not stand for her heart language. The connotation is that women are forced to express themselves according to the language enacted by patriarchal system because they do not have true language as seen in feminist critical theory. This is the reason of why Susan is preoccupied with the feeling that her story can only be authorized by Foe, a male author "*Return to me the substance I have lost, Mr. Foe: that is my entreaty. For, though my story gives the truth, it does not give the substances of the truth.*" (Foe, p. 51). Seeking the language of patriarchy, Foe progressively establishes Susan control and appropriates her story so that she has more power as her work of translating her story into the patriarchy language.

Thus, Susan becomes dominated by Foe where her life is kept in eternal suspension by possessing her at his mercy under the reason of telling her story. Nevertheless, Susan understands that her emphasis on the colonial myth representation as the secrets which Friday guarantees that will reproduce colonial text claiming that Friday "was not a slave, was he nevertheless, not the helpless captive of (her) desire to have (their) story told" (Foe, p. 150). What makes *Foe* distinctive is its direct focus on the racial otherness politics as seen in western - centric feminism. Susan, who believes that Friday lacks ability to represent himself and thus he is unable to tell the 'truth' her story as a suppressed female addressing herself as a 'newborn slave' in the writing realm just same as she describes Friday with 'unborn.' Linking sexuality with authorship, Susan says to Foe: "*It is not I who am the intended (to beget), but you ... I think of you as a mistress, or even, if I dare to speak the word, as a wife*" (Foe, p. 152). On the other hand, Foe speaks to Susan saying "Wait to see what fruit I bear". This indicates that Foe, is the

master of the story who emphasizes his masculine authority to entirely subjecting and silencing Susan. As the protagonist of the story he deserves the title 'master' which is, throughout the text, reflecting his strong relation to both female enslavement and male authorship.

Seemingly, Susan challenges Foe's sexual authority because she is not conscious of her femininity and, though she is entrapped by his authority in her continuous search of getting herself free, she based on the reflection of the writing process and the nature storytelling. Hence, through such reflections Coetzee becomes able to scrutinize the frameworks that outline stories in general, and emphasize the stories of selective nature. This might be the reason why Susan makes a comparison between an author to a painter: "*the story teller, by contrast ... must divine which episodes of his history hold promise of fullness, and tease from them their hidden meanings, braiding these together as one braids a rope*" (Foe, pp. 88-89). Later on, Susan starts having doubts of whether she has the ability to get a "true" account approving that Crusoe is unable to tell his own story having initial confidence in her authority on narrating her own story. Gradually, her power declines moving toward misgivings of 'fiction' and 'reality'.

As *Foe* essentially deals with the language issues, we see that the textual and discursive fields directly or indirectly bring forth the political oppression complicity face to face with narrative mode particularly the ambiguity of the relationship between realism and historicism in South African and European white colonizer's narratives. What makes the scenario more interesting is when, throughout the novel, we see Susan spends everything in her life to get her own identity, the topic of this research. To achieve this purpose, she undertakes many socially necessary identities including that of Mrs. Crusoe which she is imposed to practice it so it becomes possible for her to face scandals of Foe's muse and Friday's mistress. In this way, Coetzee's art of criticism totalizes the various structures of patriarchy using thematic images as effective instruments for understanding his ideas. This seems obviously through the relationship between Susan discourse when she points out her language inability to express human experiences and the identities imposed on her by others. It can be noted that the identities which are imposed on Susan by the story deferent characters and not only Friday and Crusoe, who explain profound seated suspicion in language as a medium used effectively for both communication and knowledge (Dragunoiu, 2001). Hence, it becomes obvious that, as her male hegemony acceptance, Susan accepts these identities. This might be as an attempt to overthrow the male authority and domination as she rejects her own 'self, and substitutes it with a masked 'Other'. Such feminist readings shed light on the authority nature of both the canon and patriarchal structures through the significant role of Susan in the novel. In sum Coetzee's *Foe* is established as a critical writing of a colonialist book that power is infused in it. In *Foe*, Coetzee attempts his rejection to exercise the domination of authority and culture making his texts as facts of power.

### **Age of Iron: Liberation before Education**

Published in the fall of 1990, *Age of Iron* demonstrates continued search of Coetzee for a form that promote truth-telling and introduces an alternative to history manipulations. While knowledge is more realistic in his novels, *In Age of Iron*, Coetzee employs an allegorical and figurative narrative technique taking extended letter for writing his ideas. In this novel, Coetzee designs the character of an elderly Cape Town resident, Mrs. Curren through whom he reflects his final thoughts. Using the technique of impressionistic monologue, Coetzee uses the narrator to reflect African women struggle due to the political unrest. In the novel, the narrator is found to relates her last days' circumstances as days of struggling from bone cancer in addition to painful suffering from the South African injustice being unable to redeem her soul. It is true that Mrs. Curren story exposes her own journey of struggles but it also reflects the situation of melancholy and hopelessness in her country. This makes *Age of Iron* an allegory which is full of apocalyptic images connecting Coetzee philosophy with the actual situation of colonized African countries. In other words, by telling the story of the narrator's death, the writer reveals how the childhood idea is perverted in South Africa during the colonization era implying the hope and future destruction of childhood.

Dealing with the feminism in the post-colonial literature, the main topic of this research, Coetzee's *Age of Iron* (1990) is presented by a female narrator, Mrs. Curren just as the writer's traditional styles in other novels such as Susan in *Foe* (1986) and Magda in *In the Heart of the Country* (1978). As the novel title indicates, the focus is on the political unrest in South Africa during the time of writing the story. As a well-known fact, the eighties period of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was characterized by the black youth powerful resistance which comes in response to the apartheid policies of State. Significantly, in *Age of Iron*, Coetzee continues an earlier preoccupation with the political, psychological and social influences of the apartheid system on individuals.

As characterized in Mrs. Curren figure, the focus of Coetzee is notably different in this novel compared to his earlier fiction. In *Age of Iron*, the intellectual and humanist white South Africans are the focus of the writer and the novel is connected with a particular historical period of time (1986 – 1989) in South Africa, the time in which the novel is set. These years constituted the time of the crisis existed in the townships due to the unparalleled violence. In black protest incidents, thousands were killed and the personal life distortions produced by the apartheid system became more widespread, and both parents and children found themselves unable to function in their traditional roles. Most importantly, the writer reveals that the childhood notion is destroyed in both the system of oppression and the fight for freedom. Gallagher (1991) offers a considerable inventory regarding the apartheid violence, revealing that during rebellion the Soweto in 1976, where, during the sixteen months of protest, official figures list a number of 575 dead in addition to 2,389 wounded in riots and most of the victims were schoolchildren. Because students were on the activism forefront during the Soweto uprising, only nine years later (1985) educational boycotts led by students established one of the most significant black protest battlegrounds. To achieve their demands, thousands of students left school for months, university students boycotted sitting for exams and began with organizing marching in the streets seeking the police units and military withdrawal from campuses. This youth movement was under slogans all call for liberty such as 'Liberation before Education' and 'Liberation now, education later.'

Throughout the novel, the predicament of the protagonist Mrs. Curren's is echoed in Coetzee's analysis of her incompatibility of true self-cynicism and ideal self-grace which she continuously struggles to reconcile. Hence, for the first time, *Age of Iron* powerfully and tangibly engages the political agency depicting a unique portrayal of the oeuvre black voices. Beinart (2001) views that the strength of black resistance comes in response to apartheid such as the States of Emergency from 1985 to 1990 where the opposition to apartheid is globally grown and becomes more effective. Therefore, Coetzee's style of criticism is shifted to focus on the mode and the manner of political commitment and political intractability and that what goes to the heart of the novel through the character of Mrs. Curren.

Most clearly, the age of iron is considered as the law inflexibility that retains the state and regime oppression explaining the sense of development stoppage that described the nationalism of apartheid's reactionary (*Age of Iron* p. 47). Therefore, the *Age of Iron* comes to portray the conflict existed between the state and the black insurgents producing the so-called black-on-black violence while 'white' is identified as "the colour of limbo" by Mrs. Curren (*Age of Iron* p. 85) who is preoccupied by the silenced black voices in the history of apartheid and colonial rule in South Africa. As the narrator and main protagonist, Mrs. Curren, like Magda, performs a monologue, spoken or written, as the whole novel is just a prolonged letter to her daughter. As a critical implication, Mrs. Curren's daughter is used as symbol of the new generation loss being a victim of apartheid in South Africa, several years before migration to North America where she lives now.

### **Disgrace: Passion Destruction**

Published in 1999, J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* is the novel written in post-apartheid South Africa narrating a story of a 52 years old man whose everything is lost after he falls in love with his young student. Passing different phases of his life, the old man finally chooses to end his life with staying with his daughter in the country. However, his struggles are not ended and they even become worse after he and his daughter are attached mentally and physically by intruders. As the main character of the play, this ending is not satisfactory for him so that he later chooses to continue his delayed work.

The novel moves on telling us everything about Coetzee's protagonist as a South African professor of English named David Lurie. First of all, being a man of 52 years old means that he is losing his good looks as he is getting older. Then, more importantly, he committed unacceptable deed causing him loses the respect of people. As a result, it is said that he loses not only his job, but also his dreams of artistic success, his reputation, and even later the power to protect his daughter. The story tells that David gets married twice but unfortunately both of his marriages end with divorce. From his first marriage, David gets Lucy as his only daughter. The novel moves further telling that he is a lecturer teaching romantic literature at a technical university in Cape Town South Africa. As a professor, he is not really satisfied with his job and he feels as he is not fond of teaching. He just teaches for the sake of earning money therefore, in front of his students, he forgets everything including his name.

The novel move on introducing the great blander of David due to his 'disgrace' which happens after he is convinced to seduce Melanie Isaacs, his vulnerable student. Later, this affair reaches the committee of university who are convened to pass judgment from the higher board of committee. As a result, David becomes guilty and he has to whether accept or reject what Melanie accuses him to have done with her. He refuses to apologize in any straight form either to his student Melanie herself or her family refusing to admit what he has done. Rather, the old man David pretends that what has happened is because of uncontrolled passion which he has no power to resist. For him, 'the cupid arrow' is the one who should be blamed and this answer makes the judge annoyed where David seems to be less protective in front of the judge. Therefore, the judge does not allow the lawyer to defend David making him unable to employ lawyer to defend him. Consequently, David finds no way except to resign from his job and during these times, he writes a play (inside the play). As a matter of fact, such events depicts David's life as a life in which pleasure is put as the most significant thing having affair with married woman.

As a political system, Apartheid segregates the color people rights where the white people have full political rights whereas the color (black) people are not allowed to live near white people and they should go to separate schools. When necessary, only limited activities can be carried out. What needs to be mentioned her is that *Disgrace* is written during the post-apartheid but it is still rather not conducive. Therefore, we see that, in the novel, the color people are still suffering and struggling for obtaining their rights to have the same position of the whites. Due to the long time suffering, most of the blacks keep the hatred feeling upon white people. In the *Disgrace*, Lucy's rape is a typical example of that feeling where she tells David how she can disgustfully feel the boy's hatred when she is raped by him. However, although *Disgrace* is composed in post-apartheid era, it does not directly touch political issues where Coetzee does not openly write about the life under apartheid. Rather, his focus is mostly on the events that cause much suffering on the play characters. Recently, *Disgrace* is interpreted from the perspective of post-colonialism where, among Coetzee's novels, it is a typically critical novel because it has a great effect on academic attention both at the level of South Africa and at the international level.

Like any other Coetzee's fiction, *Disgrace* is not an easy book to read showing that he does not accept works to be instruments of any ideology because he believes that an ideal world is coming but it is necessary for him that his readers understand the typical implications of his works. As has been mentioned earlier, *Disgrace* begins with David's sex problem, for which he frequently practiced with prostitute, and because this becomes a habit for him, he then proceeds to commit the crime of destroying his young student future by making an improper sexual relationship with her. As a result of his denied behavior, he is fired from his job and his reputation as a professor falls finding no acceptance from the surrounding society including his colleagues. Therefore, he has no way except to leave Cape Town going to the countryside and stay with his daughter working in a small farm, the place where the real tragedy occurs. In front of his eyes, three black men rapes his daughter, and, at the same time, he is badly hurt both spiritually and physically where both much differ in this tragedy treatment and this what makes David's situation even worse. The novel mainly concludes with the tragedy treatment, his treatment of animals and his writing of a chamber opera.

Certainly, *Disgrace* is full with rich connotations all deal with themes of race, history, politics, gender, ecology and so on. At the same time, the novel goes beyond set values being bound with certain

boundaries which cannot convey everything implicated in the novel. For instance, when coming to the intangible topics such as those related to Lurie's sex and the way David treats animals as well as his literary creations. In the novel, the philosophy of 'Dao' makes it so complicated to anticipate what is beyond all boundaries that have essentially caused all kinds of disgrace not only in the novel but rather, in the whole human civilization. It is just as Coetzee uses his character Davis to tell that the best stance to live in accordance with Dao. On the other hand, the character of Lucy is used in *Disgrace* to show readers the best way of being alive in this world based on her own philosophy of life believing that 'everything comes from being, and being comes from nothingness'. Therefore, we see her declaring: "Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity" (*Disgrace*, p. 205).

## Conclusion

What could be concluded from the above-mentioned critical analysis is the way Coetzee's fiction explores any expected consensus regarding what is denoted by 'history.' In other words, in Coetzee's literature, history is eluded as category in order to be formulated within the fiction discourse. Such procedure is what lifts the work of Coetzee beyond the body of colonial writing. In his fiction, Coetzee associates innovations with the modernity 'colonial world experience' producing the identity novel appropriate for the multinational age by concentrating on the colonial as a generic precursor of multinational. Reflecting the possibility of recasting the preoccupation with colonialism Coetzee's post-colonizer idea diagnoses how the postcolonial writing is engaged with Western influences. This is the effect of postcolonial culture that reflects Coetzee's international resonance as he presents colonialism in a unique worldview that precisely offers the homogeneity of both postmodernity and colonialism.

Coetzee recognizes the written text disavowal at the core of the philosophical dialogue accompanied with the body of disavowal which comes in response with the Platonic thought, and move the sequence with the disavowal of gender and sexual difference (Kelly, 2018). Throughout Coetzee's works, one can feel how, in the philosophical dialogue, the tension between writing and speech is acted out through the performing writer's body. In other words, irony is beyond Coetzee's protagonists where they speak his words as they are scripted for his female writer to recall his public performance and compels readers to seriously take the apparently ironic feminism the novel protagonists such Magda, Susan and Mrs. Curren. Additionally, through the novels one can understand that in African colonial structure, the human relationship distortion is deep-rooted exactly like the case of Magda and the two servants who remain wary of each other. In short, Coetzee has succeeded in proofing his views that in South Africa the racial and gender equality is unfulfilled.

In Coetzee's writing we can see the interrelationship between language and power where both of them are linked with the postcolonial literature. The question here is how the nature of imperial control is controlled by language and how linguistic and cultural hegemony is invariably utilized to deal with colonized people and how the hierarchy is imposed of human values? In Coetzee's fiction, language is used as a medium through which the power hierarchical structure is extended where 'reality', 'truth', and 'order', conceptions are established by the power of the language. This literary approach come in line with the view of Ashcroft (2018) insisting that the relationship between "language and silence, 'normality' and madness, being and 'alterity' in ways that open up new engagement dimensions" (p. 14). Hence, the language issue in colonial discourse is strictly related to the big O (otherness).

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