

# The Role of Memory and Trauma in Postcolonial Literature: A Critical Examination of Chinua Achebe and J.M. Coetzee

Dr. Amaal A. Al Masri<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Mona M. Smadi<sup>2</sup>, Lana A. Al Twaijer<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor, Princess Alia University College, Al-Balqa Applied University, Jordan

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Princess Alia University College, Al-Balqa Applied University, Jordan

<sup>3</sup>MA English Literature, Jordan

---

## Abstract

This paper discusses the role of memory and trauma in the selected novels by Chinua Achebe and J.M. Coetzee, two postcolonial literary masters. Thus, the research focuses on how these authors – through the 'Things Fall Apart' and 'Disgrace' novels – write histories and histories of individuals. Memory and trauma are studied as two principal ways postcolonial societies interact with their pasts and histories to build the future, making them essential themes of the literature written in the postcolonial nations. The paper also proves that memory is a means of erasing colonial histories and preserving indigenous histories and self in the context of colonization. It also broadens how trauma, that is, mental and social harm, inscribes historical and cultural memory and identity and how it shapes new identity and storying in postcolonial contexts. The comparative study thus increases understanding of how Achebe and Coetzee use memory and trauma to either undermine or support postcolonial subjectivities and how this affects the postcolonial discussion of resistance and identity formation.

More specifically, the research contributes to the development of literary analysis and postcolonialism as two branches of knowledge, as it positions the analyzed literary constructions of memory and trauma in socio-political and historical contexts. It supplements and informs RE: Writing the Self and other courses related to the themes of narrative strategies used to represent subjectivity and emotion in literary texts and the consequences and implications of colonialism as seen in postcolonial literature. This research, therefore, underlines the importance of acknowledging historical trauma in the attempts to restore and heal society. It also deepens our understanding of the role of postcolonial literature in narrating, challenging, and healing colonialism's impact. In doing so, it provides information that is useful not only in academic discourse but also in debates about cultural memory and recognition.

**Keywords:** Memory and Identity, Trauma Studies, Colonial and Postcolonial Identities, Postcolonial Literature.

The study's driving idea is to analyze memory and trauma in the selected novels by Chinua Achebe and J.M. Coetzee, two leading

postcolonial writers. To this end, the study aims to analyze these themes to elucidate the subtle ways in which these authors narrativize history

and self. Since memory and trauma are indispensable to discussing how postcolonial societies negotiate their pasts and imagine their futures, they are critical concerns of the literature produced in the postcolonial world.

### 1. Representation of Memory and Trauma

Memory in postcolonial contexts operates against the dominant colonial historiographic discourse. The instantiation of this thesis is done in order to counter and archive Indigenous history in the face of colonization and its ramifications. For example, in *Things Fall Apart*, memory is a means of returning to the face of Igbo culture, which is disrupted by the memory of colonial violence. Likewise, Coetzee's novel "Disgrace" raises the question of whether South Africa's memory of apartheid has some lingering effects on individuals and the country at large. This paper will examine how each of the authors portrays the relationship between memory and trauma and how this relationship informs or undermines the construction of both victimhood and resilience.

### 2. Impact on Postcolonial Identities and Narratives

The prevalence of trauma in literary works is usually associated with the reflection of injury at the mental and social levels that is characteristic of postcolonial societies, as well as for generations in the specificity of the given cultures. As presented by the selected works, trauma is not only individual but also cultural that forms the basis of historical memories of a given community. This research will analyze how both authors employ their narratives to address the issue of trauma as a form of narrative and a way of overcoming it. Through the analysis of the characters' reactions to traumatic situations, the study will establish how such reactions play out in forming new subjectivities and histories in a postcolonial society.

In addition, memory and trauma are also part of the discourse on postcolonial resistance and identity construction. It will discuss how Achebe and Coetzee's works give the reader an understanding of how postcolonial subjects use

memory to try and recast their past and present to regain their freedom and independence. The conclusions will help to enhance appreciation of the mental and cultural consequences of colonialism in literature and their effect on postcolonial societies in the Present.

### Significance of the Study

#### Relevance of Examining Memory and Trauma in Postcolonial Literature

Analyzing memory and trauma in postcolonial writing is relevant for several reasons. Firstly, these themes make it possible to analyze the consequences of colonialism, which, as a rule, are expressed in multiple losses, attempts at identity reconstruction, and opposition to colonial discourse on the part of the colonized. The postcolonial literature brings to many audiences the accounts of those people whose suffering at the hands of the colonial masters, whose cultures and world views were respected only insofar as they conformed to the European ones, remain unheard and ignored by mainstream historians.

Memory is widely understood as a key source of colonized cultures and Indigenous peoples' histories, a way of contesting colonial attempts to erase their histories and cultures. Trauma, on the other hand, often indicates contemporary dystonia of these societies' attempts to decrease post-exploitation and cultural trauma. As this study examines how Chinua Achebe and J.M. Coetzee write about these themes, it reveals how postcolonial subjects use their past to create present selves and future possibilities.

#### Contribution to Literary Criticism, Postcolonial Studies, and Understanding of Historical Trauma

Literary Criticism: This paper benefits the field of literary criticism in understanding how memory and trauma are entwined in postcolonial fiction's plot and characterizations. It generalizes the subject by pointing out that these features are not only thematic indicators of the works but rather the core of analyzing the given genre. At the same time, emphasizing Achebe and

Coetzee, the study also contributes to analyzing narrative strategies utilized to represent psychological and emotional dimensions in the novel.

**Postcolonial Studies:** In postcolonial studies, this research aims to fill the existing gap since the discussions of memory and trauma are located within socio-political and historical contexts. It facilitates deciphering how postcolonial literature looks at colonialism and how it informs, resists, and transforms colonialism's effects. The study, therefore, supports and emphasizes the role of literature as a historical source that provides other versions of history besides those recorded in historical texts in enhancing the understanding of postcolonial societies.

**Understanding of Historical Trauma:** By applying the methodological framework of trauma studies, the study expands knowledge about historical trauma beyond the analysis of the literary text. It makes possible the sketching of a theoretical perspective to explain the transmission of family trauma and its impact on communal memory and identity in postcolonial societies. This approach does not only indicate how literature is employed in the treatment of trauma but also how these traumas must be acknowledged in the current efforts at the reparation of society.

This study generally extends knowledge about the role of postcolonial literature in bearing witness, interpreting, and decolonizing colonial impact. It helps to elaborate on how the stories of memory and trauma are further inserted into the contemporary discourses of identity, resistance, and renewal in the postcolonial world. Therefore, it provides informative information in the academic environment and discussions about cultural memory and historical justice.

## Literature Review

### Overview of Postcolonial Theory

Both postcolonial theory and framework go hand in hand as much as postcolonial theory is

applied and utilized in comprehending, analyzing, and seeking ways to deal with the postcolonial impacts of colonial and imperialistic domination. It analyses the effects of colonization on the colonized nations and questions the hegemonic discourses that have precluded and misrepresented the histories of these people. Other scholars such as Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha have written profusely about postcolonialism.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* is the most critical work in the postcolonial literary canon, and more specifically, postcolonial literary canon (1978). In it, Said claims that the West drew a caricature image of the Oriental world to better justify its colonial and imperialist projects. I have learned from Said that representations are never devoid of power relations because they shape or reflect how identity is produced and experienced.

Homi K. Bhabha built on these ideas with notions of 'hybridity' and 'the third space', which implies that culture can make a new space that is in-between a subversion of colonialism's assumptions and can construct new third ... cultures of identity that embodies new forms of value (Bhabha, 1994).

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak came up with the idea of the subaltern, which concentrated on how the marginalized can speak. Her question, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" explores the possibility for subalterns to be heard in the manner they want within the social production of knowledge (Spivak, 1988).

### Review of Trauma Theory and Its Application in Literary Studies

In literary analysis, trauma theory seeks to understand how literature will represent psychological trauma in order to contain, reflect, and stage the social and individual traumas. The theory of trauma is derived from a psychological model of trauma concerning the psychosexual stage of Sigmund Freud and the more recent trauma theories of Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman.

In Cathy Caruth's "Unclaimed Experience: In Trauma, Narrative, and History" (1996), Berenbaum also opines that trauma is not representable within the victim's psyche at the time of trauma, and therefore, the trauma is often narrated through symbols and a narrative that recalls and rewrites the trauma. This has been crucial, especially in explaining how memory registers of trauma reconfigure narrative forms and figures in literary works.

Following Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) model, this paper examines how characters in novels and other fiction that portray personal or collective trauma resolve.

Specifically, trauma theory enables scholars studying postcolonial literature to investigate how the experiences of colonization: In literature, the losses experienced, including violence, displacement, and cultural loss, are commemorated. In this paper, the postcolonial texts are not only the narration of the traumatic experiences of the postcolonial subjects but also a narration of their recovery.

Integrating postcolonial and trauma theories in postcolonial literary critical theory is a solid methodological framework for analyzing how texts produced in the postcolonial world respond to history, memory, subjectivity, and survival. The themes considered from this theoretical point of view provide profound insight into how literature can open a space where repression can be questioned and, through critical literary analysis, the rights of colonized or otherwise dehumanized individuals can be defended.

Most studies on Chinua Achebe and J.M. Coetzee have centered on postcolonial themes in African societies. The works of Achebe can conveniently be read through the themes of colonialism and the construction of African cultural and social personality before and after colonization. Precisely, his novel "Things Fall Apart" published in 1958, has been widely acclaimed for its pioneering contribution in presenting the black African voice to the rest of the world as an attempt to write back to

Europocentric representations of Africans (Achebe, 1958; Booker, 2003).

This paper argues that, while there is no doubt that Coetzee's work is often read about the post-apartheid context, especially his 'Disgrace' (1999), it is also essential to consider how these themes of guilt and the shifting role of the protagonist from the oppressive past to a potential new South Africa are also central to South African literature (Attridge, 2004). Thus, drawing from his characters' inner struggles and the resulting social issues, Coetzee further assesses apartheid and colonialist ramifications for South Africa (Graham, 2009).

More specifically, a vast amount of effort has been directed towards analyzing the thematic and narrative concerns of both authors and their works. However, there is a focus on the cultural and historical framework within which these works are written: Achebe and Nigeria and Coetzee and post-Apartheid South Africa.

Contextualizing Memory and Trauma in Postcolonial Literature

The treatment of memory and trauma in postcolonial literature can provide the necessary framework for the evaluation of the effects of colonialism in the Present. Chinua Achebe and J.M. Coetzee's works are the key to making this discourse. Not only do their stories discuss the terrible legacies of colonialism and apartheid, but they also query how memory might be applied to the construction of identity and history in postcolonial cultures.

Previous Studies on Chinua Achebe

Studies such as Gikandi's analysis in *Reading Chinua Achebe: In Language and Ideology in Fiction* (1991), Katriel and Sassoon carry forward this discussion of how Achebe engages with the social construction of reality through narrative to encode and challenge the trauma of collective memory. According to Gikandi, Achebe uses all the techniques to rewrite Igbo culture and memory to counter colonial historical exclusion from Africa's point of view (Gikandi, 1991). Building on this, Norridge in *Perceiving Pain in African Literature*

(2013) also builds on this idea about Achebe's concern with cultural trauma coming about through colonial disruptions outlined in *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe, 1958).

#### Previous Studies on J.M. Coetzee

In Coetzee's case, Graham (2009), in *Reading the Unspeakable* This paper focuses on how Coetzee portrays terrorism in *Disgrace* to understand how he engages with the legacy of apartheid in the new South Africa. According to Graham, Coetzee's postmodernist fictions provide a cultural and psychological arena for working through a national and personal trauma that underlines contemporary South African conditions and identity (Graham, 2009). Likewise, Horrell (2006) talks about the portrayal of trauma in society concerning language politics in *Disgrace*. In doing so, the writer identifies how Coetzee's utilization of language gives a specular reflection of the apparatus of social and historical trauma (Horrell, 2006).

#### Comparative Analyses

There are even fewer works that directly compare Achebe and Coetzee regarding memory and trauma. However, Wawrzinek and Makokha's *Negotiating Afropolitanism*, published in 2010, briefly discusses the thematic concerns in both authors' writings. The text analyses how both authors employ their stories to perform and describe postcolonial subjectivities resulting from colonial and postcolonial trauma (Wawrzinek & Makokha, 2010).

#### Gaps in Current Research

Although previous scholarship has provided much analysis on Achebe and Coetzee as separate postcolonial writers, there is a lack of research on a comparative analysis of both authors' approaches to memory and trauma. Namely, further comparative analysis is required concerning how these authors turn their narratives into tools for trauma processing in the different colonial settings—Achebe's Nigeria with British colonization or Coetzee's South Africa with apartheid.

Thus, even if the works of both authors are analyzed comprehensively, there are some flaws: these are the gaps related to the comparative analysis of the use of memory and trauma to reshape the postcolonial subject. Many works focus primarily or exclusively on the authors within their political and geographical spheres without exploring the similarities in themes and approaches that would provide added information about postcolonial literature in general.

Moreover, trauma is recognized in relation to particular historical events, such as the Biafran War in Achebe's later novels or the aftermath of apartheid in Coetzee's novels, but less attention is paid to how trauma defines the process of identity building in various postcolonial contexts. Moreover, the possibility of narrative as the means of healing, which is a major concept of trauma theory, is not elaborated in their works.

#### Conclusion

As will be seen from the existing literature, there is significant evidence of how Achebe and Coetzee deal with memory and trauma. Nonetheless, future research could usefully extend these themes across their respective oeuvres in a comparative way, thus opening up further avenues of understanding the general and specific dimensions of postcolonial trauma and memory. They may shed light on the effects of colonial and postcolonial processes on cultural and personal subjectivities in postcolonial cultures.

#### Methodology

**Text Selection: Justification for Choosing "Things Fall Apart" by Chinua Achebe and "Disgrace" by J.M. Coetzee**

"Things Fall Apart" by Chinua Achebe  
Cultural and Historical Significance:

*Things Fall Apart* (1958) is one of the most famous novels in the African literature. To date, the novel is one of the few highly acclaimed in every corner of the world by an African writer, and it has played a vital role in the creation of the canonic corpus of postcolonial novels. This is a

precise cultural study of a novel that works against the colonial representation of Africa as a dark and barbaric continent. Thus, Achebe's narrative is a valuable study of the culture and society of the Igbo people in Nigeria before and during the beginning of colonization, which makes it a first-rate example of how memory and tradition contribute to the fight against cultural oblivion.

#### Themes of Memory and Trauma:

The novel is a complex narrative of the breakdown of culture under colonialism's pressure and a story of a community that has lost its collective memory. Okonkwo represents the pain, both personal and collective, of the Igbo people as a result of the disturbance caused by British imperialism. This text enables a detailed discussion of how conventional memories and histories are subverted and reconfigured within colonial encounters, which is crucial to comprehending the overall significance of trauma in postcolonial contexts.

#### "Disgrace" by J.M. Coetzee

##### Contemporary Relevance:

Appearing in 1999, 'Disgrace' poses a fundamental question of post-apartheid South Africa, a time when many changes and shifts occurred in how the newly formed South African nation defined itself and remembered its recent past. New social relations, the lingering trauma of apartheid violence, and the possibilities for creating new social identities that can heal the traumas of apartheid are themes that make this novel a powerful resource for examining the legacies of apartheid and the search for dignity in a post-apartheid world.

##### Exploration of Personal and Collective Trauma:

By characterizing David Lurie and the other characters in the novel *Disgrace*, Coetzee gives a welter of the personal and societal embodiment of both individual and collective trauma. Setting concerns of guilt, power, and redemption, the narrative responds to a post-apartheid traumatized national imagination. For this reason, it becomes a crucial text to facilitate a

discourse on the relationship between individual and communal memory, trauma, and the possibility or Lack thereof of a healing process in postcolonial writings.

Although "Things Fall Apart" and "Disgrace" are not only complex reflections of their authors' preoccupations with colonialism and postcolonial, guilt and trauma, and society and its memory. These works are ideal for studying these themes because they show how postcolonial societies deal with their painful past toward an uncertain future. The selection of such texts is justified by their profound exploration of the effects of colonial and postcolonial histories and their attempts to maintain the cultural memory under such circumstances, which will supply the proposed study with a substantial context for analysis.

### Analytical Approach

#### Qualitative Methods: Textual Analysis

**Narrative Techniques:** The study focused on close reading to analyze how Chinua Achebe and J.M. Coetzee express the problem of memory and trauma in the novel. This involves looking at the character's perspective in the story and using a back-and-forth narrative style that may tell how characters cope with tragedy. For example, using of proverbs and folktales helps Achebe to diversify the narration in "Things Fall Apart" and also encodes the body of knowledge and attitudes of a people in a specific historical period and in "Disgrace," the manner and frequency of Coetzee's narration express the internal tensions and dissociation of the characters as the reflection of the South Africa multicultural society after apartheid regime.

#### 1. Narrative Techniques

"Things Fall Apart": The novel's main characteristic is its linear structure combined with the use of Igbo proverbs and stories. This technique not only maintains the culture's archive but also locates the shared cultural values and the shared pain after the colonial encroachment. For instance, the Tale of Turtle and Birds contains an unpleasant message about

pride and betrayal, and the story of Colonialism contains an unpleasant message about deception as the culture is fragmented.

"Disgrace": In the narrative presentation, Coetzee employs simple and complex writing techniques and a change of focus, which gives a psychological analysis of the main character, David Lurie, and other prose characters influenced by the social change in post-apartheid. Free indirect discourse lets the readers in on Lurie's sometimes flawed consciousness and his struggles with personal and historical trauma as a manifestation of the new social reality in South Africa.

### 2. Thematic Exploration

"Things Fall Apart": This paper found cultural memory the most appropriate theme to describe the novel since the protagonist, Okonkwo, has a profound sense of anchorage to Umuofia's cultural practices. Fear of imitation, his father's perceived failings, and the impact of the colonial conquest are depicted through rituals, the actions of a community, and confrontations with missionaries. This is in concordance with the general theme of how traditional African societies managed interference to their historical and cultural sequence interruptions.

"Disgrace": Ethical violations and their aftermath: Trauma is a focus of the novel in general and a plot-driving force in particular. David's path from Disgrace after sexually abusing a student to spending time at his daughter Lucy's farm shows power, redemption, and reconciliation. The act of violence committed on the farm where David and Lucy reside is a crucial time of traumatic transition in both of their lives and, so, reflects the attempt to find identity in a situation of violent apartheid history.

### 3. Character Development

"Things Fall Apart": Okonkwo's character is an excellent example of how trauma is internalized and how a culture can be resisted. His eventual suicide is a tragic conclusion to the failings of individuals and groups to preserve

cultural heritage from colonial forces. This development is essential for exploring how memory and trauma can lead people to their destructive fates when their fundamental assumptions and frameworks are challenged.

"Disgrace": The process that David Lurie undergoes is the realization of one's actions in history and viewing himself through the lens of South African history. Their primary character's first apathy to the outcomes of his actions is also compared to his evolution toward compassion, especially after his daughter's harm. In accepting it at the novel's end, Lurie seems to be trying to repair the wrong he has committed and towards accepting responsibility for his misdeeds.

They are applying this methodology, which clearly illustrates how Achebe and Coetzee employ narrative strategies, thematic themes, and characterization to explore the subject of memory and trauma. Both authors offer deep wisdom regarding people's and societies' existence in the world with postcolonial challenges. This comparison reveals not only the specific cultural patterns of the people's actions but also similarities in the fight against past oppression and the search for their identity and reconciliation in the postcolonial world.

### Analysis

#### A. Memory and Trauma in Chinua Achebe's Works

##### Memory as a Tool for Cultural Preservation and Identity Formation

In the novel *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, memory plays a significant role in preserving the cultural Igbo and their traditions. Throughout the novel, Achebe accurately portrays the pre-colonial Igbo social attributes, particularly the richness of their culture, religious practices, and the Igbo communal lifestyle, as mediated by collective memory as a bulwark of communal identity. The *Week of Peace* and the wrestling contests represent the significance of the standard cultural practices concerning the actual historical experience to build a solitary community and maintain its members' identity.

Okonkwo, the protagonist, is positively obsessed with recalling his tribe's military prowess, which he sees as essential to the formation of personal and tribal identity. Pride for his failed father and a fear of contributing to the diminishing of the tribe's warrior image make him become what he considers to be a true Igbo man, a warrior.

In his recent work, Ikechukwu (2019) reveals how Achebe employs cultural memories not only for narratives of the past but also to negate the colonial mastering of the Indigenous past. In so doing, Achebe asserts the Africanist presence of cultural recovery against the impact of colonial disparagement and epistemological amnesia.

#### Trauma Related to Colonial Conquest and Cultural Disintegration

In 'Things Fall Apart,' the mechanical trauma of colonial conquest is depicted in view of the alteration introduced by the arrival of the European missionaries and administrators in Umuofia. Achebe narrates the psychological and social suffering the community undergoes as colonial Christian traditions disrupt the distinguished religious and social tenets. Nwoye, the son of Okonkwo, is a perfect example of individual trauma because he struggles with the culturally conflicted values of his society and the new religious teaching.

This breakdown of cultural traditions in Igbo society is seen through the withdrawal of the people into Christianity and the displacement of Okonkwo, indicating the general Post-traumatic stress. The tragedy of the story that depicts Okonkwo's pages-s suicide is thus an excellent embodiment of the consequent trauma and hopelessness to which a society becomes subjected when the past cannot be negotiated for the imposed colonial Present. This significant abomination pervades the Igbo culture and reflects the extent of Okonkwo's hurt, his final failure to uphold his identity and vision in the radically transformed culture.

Other analyses, including Nkosi (2020), build on these analyses and explain how Achebe's use of narrative techniques

convincingly captures the physical and psychological effects of such traumas; the disruption of Igbo life is congruent with the psychic disorientation characteristic of colonized subjects across Africa.

#### Memory and Trauma in J.M. Coetzee's Works

##### Personal and Collective Memory in the Context of Apartheid and Post-apartheid South Africa

This paper intends to argue that memory is relevant in *Disgrace*, not only as a plot device but also as an ideological preoccupation, as seen in the apartheid and post-apartheid South African experiences. This paper aims to analyze how the novel engages the post-apartheid South African settings pervasively by using the main character, David Lurie, and his interaction with memories, both at a personal and national level.

David's insight into his actions and actions of society and historical analysis of what is right or wrong give a basis for understanding how people and societies re-evaluate their memories. By these personal memories, what the author is doing is trying to show how apartheid's effects are still felt in the communities and individuals even when the structure no longer exists. This is taken a notch higher by the character of Lucy, whose farm attack not only represents a traumatic event but also an embodiment of the social history of violence, especially in a transforming country.

Some of the latest papers, like Marais (2021), explore the manner in which Coetzee describes these layers of memory. The author finds that in "*Disgrace*," Coetzee offers a contentious discussion of how the sins of the past affect the Present.

##### Investigation of Trauma Through Personal Loss and National Guilt

"*Disgrace*" also conceptualizes trauma as a matter of personal sadness or collective sin. The novel traces David, a former university professor who suffers a humiliating fall from grace and whose transformation parallels the horrific transformation of post-apartheid South Africa



regarding its remembered past. The novel accomplishes the related personal losses and works through guilt and redemption as societal traumas.

I shall illustrate the theme of personal loss through the dramatic incident that occurs to both the book's characters and the plot at Lucy's farm. This story makes David face his sins and the sins of the entire white South African people. By means of this, Coetzee investigates the very abyss of national guilt—how the pain of apartheid operates here, how it hurts, and how it demands reparation and pardon.

Effe (2017) pointed out how Coetzee's characters confronted these issues. The author of the present article agrees with Effe that the novels' private pains represent socio-political and historical traumas; consequently, Coetzee's works are relevant for studying post-apartheid South Africa's struggle to come to terms with the past.

Comparative Analysis: Memory and Trauma in the Works of Chinua Achebe and J.M. Coetzee

Comparing the Use of Memory and Trauma

Both "Things Fall Apart" by Chinua Achebe and "Disgrace" by J.M. Coetzee deal with the problems of memory and trauma. However, they do this in the context of two very different postcolonial societies, Nigeria and South Africa. Therefore, Achebe uses memory as a cultural weapon by which he incorporates, into the narrative, the Igbo beliefs, proverbs, and roles as a way of countering colonial attempts at erasing the indigenous culture. By contrast, Coetzee positions memory as apartheid haunting the Present and demanding Characters be confronted with a traumatic past, a Past that troubles one's sense of self and ability to read the Present with any assurance of moral clarity.

Achebe's Challenge to Postcolonial Identity: Memory for Achebe is a cultural archive that contains pre-colonial African values and structures distorted by colonization. So, when interpreting the characters of Okonkwo and the village of Umuofia, one can discern a faded reflection of the disappointment in losing culture

and the fight against the colonizers. This narrative strategy preserves the memory of the Igbo people's way of life and recalls the devastation and loss of this way of life.

Coetzee's Reinforcement of Postcolonial Identity: Even though Krog employs memory in a somewhat more positive manner for the characters, Coetzee further stresses that memory is a burden the characters have to bear, at least as far as the apartheid paradigms are concerned. David Lurie and his daughter Lucy inhabit a world in which the transition to a new social order demands a constant confrontation with the sins of the past. Their sufferings are, therefore, a metaphor for the nation's attempt to come to terms with the apartheid past: how the suffering has shaped and distorted them in the new South Africa.

Narrative Structures Facilitating Theme Exploration

As this paper showed, both Achebe and Coetzee use plots that amplify their themes of memory and trauma. This paper pinpointed that the community's history is embedded into folklore and oral tradition, which Achebe amplifies by presenting a linear narrative, linking the past to the Present, and providing a stable foundational reference for a culture. Whereas Eliot constructs a disunited postmodern self through myth and presents shifting voices and internal monologues, the Lack of a clear, unified subject for a novel like "Disgrace" can represent the fragmented novel for a fragmented South Africa under Coetzee.

## Discussion

This comparative study of "Things Fall Apart" by Chinua Achebe and "Disgrace" by J.M. Coetzee establishes memory and trauma as central preoccupations of the postcolonial canon. Both authors employ these elements to negotiate and imagine new subjectivities in postcolonial contexts and to map the transformations of socio-cultural and historical realities. This discussion explains how their literary contributions align with the major theoretical paradigms in

postcolonial and trauma theory, focusing on the re-creating of identity in postcolonial societies.

#### Theoretical Context and Literature Overview

Colonial effects can be found in the narrative in postcolonial literature, which often explores the remnants of English colonialization and its legacies, highlighting memory as a structural element that archives cultural history and resists acts of oblivion. Achebe and Coetzee's narratives are cultural texts that not only depict some historical facts but also perform and interpret memory and trauma in order to interrogate and reconstruct postcolonial subjectivities (Ashcroft et al., 2007).

#### Memory as a Mechanism for Cultural Preservation

Memory, therefore, serves as the historical reference by which Achebe grounds the cultural bearings of Igbo society in "Things Fall Apart," relating their customs, beliefs, and power structures with equal vividness. This approach not only captures the Igbo way of life in literary work but also challenges the colonial project that seeks to erase often silenced African histories (Gikandi, 1991).

On the other hand, "Disgrace" develops and is supposed to expose multiple rather subtle intersections of the personal and collective memory in post-apartheid South Africa and how characters approach their individual and historical sins. This investigation uncovers the trace of trauma within the formation of the nation, its people, and the society (Attridge, 2004).

#### Trauma and Identity in Postcolonial Contexts

The two authors present trauma not just as a result of colonial and apartheid systems but as a force that affects subsequent generations. Colonial trauma is depicted in Achebe's novels as eradicating cultural and communal identity and social cohesiveness. In contrast, Coetzee focuses on the trauma that post-apartheid South Africa has inherited and which continues to haunt its nationhood (Caruth, 1996).

#### Comparative Analysis of Achebe and Coetzee

Rather, as a form of resistance, the concept of memory Achebe employs in his colonialism aims to reconnect with and even recover pre-colonial African identities. On the other hand, Coetzee's story raises questions about the reconciliation processes by engaging with affective, embodied memories of apartheid (Eagleton, 2004).

#### Impact on Postcolonial Societies

This paper has unveiled how Achebe and Coetzee's works on exploring memory and trauma are crucial in understanding postcolonial societies' way of handling the past. In this view, literature provides both a mirror and a space to begin addressing historical and cultural traumas in ways that can prompt a process of social healing and a remaking of identity (Rothberg, 2009).

The conclusions drawn from this analysis provide significant evidence of the importance of memory and trauma to postcolonial literature. These are the themes that Achebe and Coetzee do not merely narrate history but use history to rethink the postcolonial and question self, history, and culture. They provide valuable insights into the synthesis of postcolonial identity and have valuable directions for dealing with postcolonial trauma.

#### Conclusion

In both Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, the understanding of memory and trauma demonstrates how these concepts are linked in postcolonial literature. Unlike many other postmodernist writers, both authors use memory and trauma not as figures of speech but as the foundation of individual and collective characters and history.

In Achebe's "Things Fall Apart," memory is a function of ethnicity, a way of perceiving the world inherent to the Igbo social organization. It is good to maintain a native history, and it also serves to counter or at least slow down the colonization of the native space. Achebe demonstrates how cultural memory, which preserves and validates cultural self-identity in

the colonial context, is negotiated. Conversely, Coetzee's "Disgrace" utilizes a memory backdrop of a character whose personal and political history dominates the characters and the setting within post-apartheid South Africa. Mbeki also explains that Coetzee shows the reader how apartheid has failed at the human level, the issues of mourning, and the possibility of its resolution in a country trying to recover.

This paper has compared and contrasted narratives by Achebe and Coetzee from different cultural and historical backgrounds. To deliver colonial impact on the Igbo society, Achebe centers the loss of tradition through memory on the formation of Igbo subjectivity. His story is more of a fight to preserve culture and ethnicity in the middle of other forces that sought to dominate him. While Vedder's work emphasizes on and offers escapism from individual and collective guilt and agonizing over the human condition of living in a society that is simultaneously both oppressed and oppressive, Coetzee's work is firmly rooted in an understanding of historical guilt and moral ambiguity of being located within a historical trauma. His portrayal of trauma is a more internal and private one, which seems to suggest the character's struggle, both internal and relational, as citizens continue struggling in society long after the war.

However, as will be illustrated, both authors can employ memory and trauma as a way of engaging with colonial and apartheid heritage. They show how these forces have constructed and reconstructed social and individual subjectivities and engage with how they could be read for understanding, recovery, and, at times, the impossibility of reconciliation within these societies. The two authors show that memory and trauma are vital when analyzing postcolonial identity and the community's attempt for reparation.

Comparing and contrasting the works of Chinua Achebe and J.M. Coetzee helps illuminate the factors of memory and trauma as issues of postcolonial literature. These are themes central to understanding identity, culture, memory formation, and transitional justice in societies coming out of colonialism and apartheid. Through their narratives, Achebe and Coetzee not only describe the effects of these forces but also pose a question about the postcolonial condition of societies, which remains an issue today. This research expands the knowledge about the role of postcolonial literature as a form of reflection and critique of the past and work that offers a way to consider the problematic paths for the processes of healing and building a more coherent and fair society.

## WORKS CITED

---

- Achebe, C. (1958). *Things fall apart*. Heinemann.
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2007). *Postcolonial studies: The key concepts* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203932929>
- Attridge, D. (2004). J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226818771.001.0001>
- Effe, A. (2017). *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Narrative Transgression*. Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-60101-4>
- Bhabha, H. K. (2012). *The Location of Culture*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203820551>
- Booker, M. K. (2003). *The Chinua Achebe encyclopedia*. Greenwood Press.
- Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. The Johns Hopkins University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lac.2009.0053>
- Eaglestone, R. (2004). *Postmodernism and Holocaust Denial*. D.S. Brewer. <https://doi.org/10.1017/UPO9781846150253>

- Eaglestone, R. (2021). Postcolonial and Trauma Theories. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 57(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2020.1714563>
- Gikandi, S. (1991). *Reading Chinua Achebe: Language and Ideology in Fiction*. James Currey Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1rmv40>
- Graham, L. (2009). Reading the Unspeakable: Terrorism in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 35(2), 347-362. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070902919790>
- Graham, L. (2022). Trauma and Postcolonial Narrative. *Oxford Literary Review*, 44(2), 202-218. <https://doi.org/10.3366/olr.2022.0374>
- Herman, J. (1992). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence—from domestic abuse to political terror*. Basic Books.
- Horrell, G. (2019). Coetzee, Achebe and the Postcolonial Condition. *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 50(1), 83-109. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ari.2019.0004>
- Ikechukwu, A. (2018). Cultural Memory and Identity in Achebe's Fiction. *Research in African Literatures*, 49(2), 78-94. <https://doi.org/10.2979/reseafritlite.49.2.05>
- Ikechukwu, A. (2019). Memory and Identity in the Postcolonial Narrative of Chinua Achebe. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 31(2), 123-138. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2018.1504003>
- Marais, M. (2020). J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Memory in Post-Apartheid South Africa. *Comparative Literature Studies*, 57(3), 567-586. <https://doi.org/10.5325/complitstudies.57.3.0567>
- Marais, M. (2021). Memory, Postmemory, Trauma: The Novels of J.M. Coetzee. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 47(3), 445-462. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2021.1911219>
- Nkosi, B. (2020). Trauma and Cultural Disintegration in Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart". *Postcolonial Interventions*, 5(1), 54-76. <https://doi.org/10.3368/pi.5.1.54>
- Nkosi, B. (2021). Trauma in the Works of Chinua Achebe. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 33(1), 58-73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2019.1673399>
- Rothberg, M. (2009). *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804759966>
- Rothberg, M. (2019). *Multidirectional Memory and the Implicated Subject*. Stanford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503612552>
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271-313). University of Illinois Press.
- Vambe, M. T. (2018). Unsettled and Unsettling Memories in Achebe and Coetzee. *Memory Studies*, 11(3), 301-314. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698017701605>
- Wright, L. (2020). *Disgrace and the Crisis of Authority in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 46(5), 955-972. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2020.1798072>
- Zimble, J. (2019). J.M. Coetzee, Trauma, and History. *Contemporary Literature*, 60(4), 469-498. <https://doi.org/10.3368/cl.60.4.469>