



## The Convergence of Gender, Ecological, and Colonial Oppressions: A Postcolonial Ecofeminist Examination of J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*

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### Abstract

**Background:** Postcolonial literature increasingly highlights the entanglement of gender, ecological, and racial oppressions, yet much scholarship still treats these dimensions separately, limiting systemic engagement with interconnected subjugations. **Objective:** J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* presents a narrative terrain where female bodies, land, and animals are simultaneously subjected to colonial and patriarchal power. This study aims to examine how the text constructs the "Triple Other", women, land, and animals, as mutually reinforcing sites of oppression and explore the intersections of colonial, gendered, and ecological domination. **Methods:** Guided by a postcolonial ecofeminist framework, this research conducts a qualitative close reading of the barbarian girl's bodily injuries, shifting borderland landscapes, and depictions of animal suffering. The analysis focuses on narrative strategies of corporeality, spatiality, and nonhuman suffering to uncover structural intersections of domination. **Results:** Through these scenes, the study identifies symbolic patterns and ethical interventions that expose the systemic workings of power. The analysis demonstrates that the female body, the border environment, and nonhuman life operate as linked grounds through which empire enforces its hierarchy of livability. **Conclusion:** By integrating human and nonhuman oppression, the study advances postcolonial ecofeminist readings beyond single-axis approaches. It contributes a model for examining interdependent violence and fosters cross-disciplinary discussions of relational life.

**Keywords:** *Animals; Land; Postcolonial Ecofeminism; Waiting for the Barbarians; Woman*

### Introduction

The dominant worldview that subordinates nature, women, and the "other" forms the ideological foundation of structural violence, such as gender oppression, colonialism, racism, and ecological destruction. As Gain (2025) argues, "the colonial matrix of power recognizes ecological destruction and coloniality as intertwined". The colonial and postcolonial history of South Africa exemplifies this logic of domination. As one of the most influential South African writers of the post-apartheid era, J.M. Coetzee's novels powerfully expose the identity crises, ethical dilemmas, and complex power dynamics between human and non-human life generated by this historical inertia. Since its publication, *Waiting for the Barbarians* has drawn sustained critical attention. Most studies focus on its critique of imperial power and ethical complexity (Brazal, 2021). Recent work has taken this discussion in several directions.

Mukherjee (2023) foregrounds the idea of liminal spaces as fragile but significant zones of agency, while Sinha (2021) traces how racial and gendered hierarchies shape embodiment, viewing, and

consumption. Pinto (2025) complicates the picture further by highlighting the instability of interracial and cross-power encounters. Lutfi (2022) turns instead to discourse, suggesting that language itself participates in the reinstatement or dismantling of empire. Although these studies have opened productive lines of thought, most of them remain primarily human-centered. The land, animals, and other non-human presences, which are so persistent in Coetzee's text, rarely appear as agents shaping imperial order or trauma under colonial rule. While prior scholarship often treats ecological, gender, and racial dimensions separately, this study adopts a postcolonial ecofeminist lens to examine how these dimensions are entangled to reveal a relational logic of oppression and resistance. Such an analysis has broader implications beyond literary study. By examining how Coetzee represents the interplay of power, ethical responsibility, and relational hierarchies across human and non-human actors, this study contributes insights relevant to contemporary education, organizational governance, and social policy. It highlights the ethical challenges of recognizing marginalized voices, navigating interdependent systems, and fostering equity and sustainability in real-world contexts. This approach underscores literature's potential to inform ethical reflection and practice across disciplines, providing readers with a framework to consider interconnected forms of oppression and possibilities for coexistence.

This gap signals the need for an approach that attends to the material and ecological dimensions of power. The study responds to this absence by adopting a postcolonial ecofeminist lens, treating women, land, and animals not as parallel categories but as entangled sites where domination and resistance cooperate. The aim is to extend current scholarship by foregrounding ecological and cross-species vulnerability, thereby broadening the critical vocabulary available to Coetzee studies.

The introduction situates the study within current scholarship and identifies the need for a more integrated ecofeminist perspective. The methodology outlines the close-reading and symbolic approaches used to trace the intersections of woman, land, and animal. The results section presents three central findings concerning gendered embodiment, the reinscription of land, and animal vulnerability, followed by a discussion that reflects on their wider implications for Coetzee studies. The conclusion demonstrates how this reading broadens existing interpretations by foregrounding trauma across both human and non-human spheres.

## **Literature Review**

Since its publication, J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* has attracted extensive critical attention. Scholars largely recognize the novel's critique of colonial oppression and ethical dilemmas, though they differ in emphasis on power, gender, and ecological dimensions. Concerning the relationship between imperial authority and borderlands, Biti (2023) highlights the instability of frontier spaces and the fluidity of imperial governance. He argues that "Coetzee strategically 'unpours' and 'deterritorialises' this peripheral state of exception, spreading its iconic plastic effects all over the 'sacricant' territory of history", underscoring the arbitrary and authoritative oscillations of power. Similarly, Mukherjee (2023) introduces the notion of "liminal landscapes", noting that these intermediate spaces are both dynamic fields formed by the identity of others and provide the possibility of micro resistance, which suggests that the oppressed can exercise strategic agency and moral choice within these spaces. From a historical perspective, Dagamseh (2022) observes that the operations of imperial power both persist and vary across historical contexts. He contends that "Coetzee symbolically examines colonial discourse, the contrast is different in the discourse of Empire, and the failure of a liberal humanist to achieve success with or against the neoliberal tide, emphasizing that the novel exposes the contradictions inherent in colonial discourse and the dilemmas faced by liberal humanists through symbolic representation. While these studies converge on the analysis of power structures, they tend to neglect the role of land, the natural environment, and non-human actors in the exercise of imperial power, revealing a notable gap in ecological considerations.

Regarding the interplay between gender and power, Bonsu and Mensah (2022) highlight that female subjects retain subtle forms of agency even within oppressive environments. They note that "while objectification and 'other' are characteristic of the representation of women in the text, violence against them is constructed through fear and torture and resisted mainly through silence", emphasizing the

nuanced ways in which women navigate systemic oppression. Similarly, Neimneh (2022) explores the complex dynamics between the Magistrate and the “savage girl”, observing that Coetzee “subverts dominant gender boundaries, aligning oppressive patriarchal practices with imperialism while undermining hegemonic ideologies that construct gender through the figure of the enigmatic other”. Taken together, these studies converge on the mechanisms of gender oppression and the articulation of female subjectivity. However, they predominantly concentrate on human-centered analyses of gender relations, leaving the interwoven oppression of women and non-human entities, such as land and animals, within power structures largely unexplored, thus opening a space for further investigation from an ecological feminist perspective.

In addition, Sinha (2021), from the perspective of “food witnessing”, observes that “these gazes originate from violent impulses within a complex racial and gendered setting, and mimic a cannibalistic desire to consume the Other”. The narrative of food, violence, and witnessing thus illuminates the profound psychological impact of imperial violence and the ways in which other identities are constructed. Similarly, analysis of Pinto (2025) about interracial relationships demonstrates that Coetzee “portrays a post-colonial scenario that highlights the problems of resistance as well as the ambiguity and contradictions surrounding the interactions between the colonizer and colonized, man and woman and the oppressor and the oppressed”, revealing the multidimensional complexity of relations between imperial power and the ruled, including the intertwined influences of gender, race, and social identity. While these studies have considerably advanced our understanding of power dynamics, they remain limited in addressing the ecological dimension and the role of non-human life within these structures.

The analysis drawn by Lutfi (2022) underscores the role of language and identity construction in imperial oppression, noting that “Coetzee employs the destruction of the empire as a liberation to ordinary people willing to get rid of all their life burns and live normally and equally”. This highlights Coetzee’s use of discursive strategies to engage readers in reflecting on the operations of power. While Lutfi’s study provides a detailed examination of discourse and identity, it does not fully address the interconnected dimensions of ecology, embodiment, and gender oppression.

The existing scholarship has made significant strides in analyzing power structures, mechanisms of gender oppression, and forms of micro-resistance. Nevertheless, systematic attention to land, animals, and other non-human actors remains limited, leaving a critical gap in the literature. This limitation opens an avenue for research from a postcolonial ecofeminist perspective. Accordingly, this article approaches *Waiting for the Barbarians* through postcolonial ecofeminism, treating women, land, and animals as mutually intertwined sites of oppression. Such a perspective not only engages with ongoing debates on power, gender, and narrative resistance but also offers a novel ecological lens, thereby extending the theoretical and conceptual boundaries of Coetzee studies.

### **Theoretical Framework: Postcolonial Ecofeminism**

Postcolonial ecofeminism, as an interdisciplinary critical framework, emerged in the 1990s through the convergence of ecofeminist and postcolonial “in concepts of women and nature with the ultimate aim of ‘decolonization’ in mind” (Brazal, 2021). It challenges the systematic objectification of nature, women, and marginalized groups by exposing intersecting structures of oppression. Its aim is to construct a mode of critique that integrates gender justice with ecological ethics. Ecological feminism was first introduced by Françoise d’Eaubonne, who emphasized that “the relations between the sexes” can be defined as “humanistic and ecological issues at the same time” (Badoux, 1974). Shiva and Mies (2014) argue, “the resource-grab that is essential for ‘growth’ creates a culture of rape - rape of the Earth, of local self-reliant economies, of women. The only way in which this ‘growth’ is ‘inclusive’ is by its inclusion of ever larger numbers in its circle of violence”.

They criticize the dual exploitation caused by developmentalism in the global South, where nature becomes an extractable resource and women’s bodies a site of productive control. Their perspective helped ecofeminism move beyond early essentialist associations between women and nature, highlighting instead that the “woman–nature” link is historically and politically constructed.

In the 1990s, Plumwood (1991) launched a systematic critique of Western rational traditions, focusing on entrenched binary oppositions such as reason/sensibility, culture/nature, and human/animal. She argued that these binaries are deeply embedded in hierarchical structures of gender, race, and species, resulting in the systematic marginalization of women, nature, and animals in modern discourse. Her theory of the logic of Othering played an important role in shifting ecofeminism toward poststructuralist approaches. At the same time, Carol Adams's (1995) theory of *The Sexual Politics of Meat* argues that the objectification and redefinition of women and animals as consumable commodities are interlinked, highlighting a structural isomorphism between gendered and species-based forms of oppression. This insight pushes ecofeminism toward a deeper critique of the power structures underlying modernity. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Gaard (2011) introduced the concept of "intersectional ecological-feminist approach", arguing that this approach frames issues like gender justice, interspecies justice, indigenous rights and more "in such a way that people can recognize common cause across the boundaries of race, class, gender, sexuality, species, age, ability, nation".

The introduction of the postcolonial dimension has expanded the critical horizon of ecofeminism, as "The colonial matrix of power recognizes ecological destruction and coloniality as intertwined" (Gain, 2025). This perspective helps to draw attention to the multidimensional entanglement of land dispossession, bodily discipline, and discursive hegemony throughout imperial history. In 1988, Vandana Shiva published *Staying Alive: Women, ecology and Development*, in which she writes about the women in rural India who "had put the life of the forests above their own and, with their actions, had stated that nature is indispensable to survival". This text "identifies women in the Global South as having a shared experience in facing environmental degradation and resistance under a patriarchal colonial system" (Nair, 2025). The postcolonial dimension not only reveals material forms of domination, such as land dispossession and the disciplining of women's bodies, but also foregrounds the less visible discursive structures that sustain them. While Shiva exposes how colonial development projects reshape ecological and bodily relations, postcolonial theorists remind us that these material practices are inseparable from representational and narrative control. In this sense, Spivak (2023) well-known question, "Can the subaltern speak?", extends ecofeminist inquiry to the domain of voice and silence. She urges scholars to examine how colonial power manufactures epistemic erasure and renders both women and the environment unheard within dominant narratives.

Overall, postcolonial ecofeminism possesses distinct critical characteristics and methodological value. It emphasizes an intersectional logic within critical inquiry, focusing on how gender, race, species, and class interact to construct systems of oppression within specific contexts. postcolonial ecofeminists reject the single-axis approach that isolates ecological or gender issues. They critique the systematic marginalization of life under anthropocentric and rationalist paradigms and stress the importance of symbiosis and ethical coexistence between human and non-human life. Their goal is to dismantle the hegemony of colonial discourse by exposing how women, nature, and animals are collectively constructed as disposable resources. They advocate for the reclamation of language and narrative agency by oppressed subjects. They challenge the entrenched hierarchies of life through literature, philosophy, and cultural practices, and exploring ethical possibilities for coexistence among diverse life forms by promoting a reconfiguration of value systems. As a cross-disciplinary critical approach, postcolonial ecofeminism offers a powerful theoretical fulcrum for analyzing the interwoven relationships among the "woman–nature–animal" triad under colonial history and patriarchal systems. It also provides a systematic path for examining the ethical conditions and silencing mechanisms that shape marginal life within literary texts.

### **Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative literary analysis grounded in postcolonial ecofeminism to explore the entangled oppressions of women, land, and animals in the novel. This approach provides a structured lens for examining how colonial authority and patriarchal norms are encoded in the narrative (Jabeen, 2026). The analysis concentrates on the intersection of the female body, the natural environment, and animals with imperial control to highlight the ethical and symbolic dimensions of oppression. Passages were selected for their narrative significance and their capacity to illuminate the ways in which power,

violence, and ethical dilemmas are interwoven. Close reading is employed to identify the textual strategies through which dominance is enacted, while attention to metaphor, imagery, and narrative structure helps trace parallels between human and non-human subjugation.

The analytical procedure is organized into three interconnected steps, each operationalizing the postcolonial ecofeminist framework. The first step examines the barbarian girl's body as a locus of colonial and patriarchal control to reveal mechanisms of oppression. The second step analyzes the borderland landscape, approached as both a physical and discursive space shaped by colonial governance, where ecological regulation and gendered metaphors reflect broader hierarchies of authority. The third step addresses the position of animals in the narrative, exploring their co-victimization under imperial power and the ethical implications of human–non-human interactions. Across all three steps, intersectional coding and ethical interpretation are systematically applied to uncover the complex interplay of domination, voice, and resistance embedded in the text.

By presenting the analysis in this stepwise and integrated manner, the methodology links theoretical principles directly to textual interpretation to provide a clear and replicable framework for examining the entanglement of oppression in the novel. This approach ensures that the subsequent discussion is firmly grounded in both the postcolonial ecofeminist perspective and concrete textual evidence and bridges theory and practice in a cohesive and ethically informed reading of the novel.

## Results

### ***Intersectional Oppressions of the Female Body: Colonial Violence, Gendered Subjugation, and Ethical Aphasia***

In the postcolonial context, the female body functions as a concentrated site of intersecting oppressions. San and Bonsu (2022) highlight that female subjects retain subtle forms of agency even within oppressive environments. They note that “while objectification and ‘othering’ are characteristic of the representation of women in the text, violence against them is constructed through fear and torture and resisted mainly through silence,” which emphasizes the nuanced ways in which women navigate systemic oppression. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* provides a particularly vivid dramatization of how such intersecting systems of power are enacted upon women.

The barbarian girl's corporeal injuries can be identified as the most immediate material evidence of imperial violence, confirming the theoretical expectation of the female body as a nexus of intersecting oppressions. When the Magistrate first examines her feet, he notes: “her feet are swaddled, shapeless. They are broad, the toes stubby, the nails crusted with dirt” (Coetzee, 1999). This meticulous depiction transforms her body into a metaphorical map of imperial domination, where physical injury materializes territorial and political subjugation. Coetzee then provides further detailed descriptions of her physical injuries: “the left is turned further inward than the right, that when she stands, she must stand on the outer edges of her feet. Her ankles are large, puffy, shapeless, the skin scarred purple” (Coetzee, 1999).

These details do more than register physical pain. Scholars such as Scarry (2020) note that physical pain functions as a language of the unrepresentable, preserving in the body what political systems attempt to erase. The barbarian girl's broken ankles illustrate precisely this dynamic: they bear witness to the state violence that the Empire insists never occurred. Through Coetzee's painstaking attention to swollen joints, bent bones, and darkened scars, corporeal injury becomes a counter-archive that unsettles the Empire's narrative of civility and lawful order.

The subsequent bathing scenes expose another dimension of domination – one enacted not through overt brutality, but through intimate, tactile control. The Magistrate recounts: “My hands run up and down her legs from ankle to knee, back and forth, squeezing, stroking, moulding... I wash slowly, working up a lather, gripping her firm-fleshed calves, manipulating the bones and tendons of her feet, running my fingers between her toes...holding a leg between elbow and side, I can caress the foot with both hands. I lose myself in the rhythm of what I am doing” (Coetzee, 1999).

Poyner (2016) points out that the Magistrate's touch, though seemingly compassionate, reproduces the same asymmetrical power structure that injured her body in the first place. This analysis confirms that intimate gestures in the text function as mechanisms through which colonial and patriarchal control are enacted, further validating the postcolonial ecofeminist reading.

The physical acts continue to extend upward: "Light as feathers they stray up the backs of her thighs and her body yields when I nuzzle my face into her belly or clasp her feet between my thighs.... She yields to everything" (Coetzee, 1999). The girl's yielding does not indicate intimacy but rather the absence of agency within an embodied regime of domination. His "losing himself" in the rhythm of touching her reveals not empathy but what Hawkins (2012) calls ethical consumption, "a gendered and environmental act", in which the colonizer uses the colonized female body to sustain his own moral self-image. The Magistrate does not merely wash her feet. He reads her body as an imperial text. The girl's body becomes a pliable medium-kneaded, arranged, and interpreted by someone who simultaneously recognizes and refuses her subjectivity. These passages illustrate the totalizing reach of colonial and patriarchal domination, as the girl's body becomes both a site of suffering and a medium through which imperial and gendered power is exercised.

Coetzee's depiction of the barbarian girl highlights the female body as the nexus of colonial, gendered, and ethical forces. Her wounds, contorted posture, and enforced compliance materialize violence, record subordination, and expose the contradictions of imperial paternalism. The girl's near-silence shifts attention from language to flesh, making the body itself a site of testimony and resistance that challenges the Magistrate's interpretive authority. In this context, Neimneh (2022) observes that Coetzee "subverts dominant gender boundaries, aligning oppressive patriarchal practices with imperialism while undermining hegemonic ideologies that construct gender through the figure of the enigmatic other", a reading that underscores how the novel links bodily subjugation to broader systems of power. Her corporeality thus functions simultaneously as colonized terrain, gendered object, and ethical signifier, documenting interlocking violences while gesturing toward the possibility of transforming colonial hierarchies. Coetzee's text "identifies women in the Global South as having a shared experience in facing environmental degradation and resistance under a patriarchal colonial system" (Nair, 2025).

### ***The Writing of Land Power: Racial Governance, Gender Metaphors, and Ethical Imagination***

Land in the novel is never neutral terrain, but a structure of power written through gender, race, and imperial desire. "Land, fashioned as colonial property, is a central aspect of the power structure of colonialism" (Dang, 2021). Based on this analysis, it is evident that Coetzee dramatizes this process by showing how the borderland is simultaneously a site of imperial authority and ethical tension, reflecting the intersection of spatial, racial, and gendered hierarchies. The border space in *Waiting for the Barbarians* presents a violent rupture in the process of colonial expansion. Empire obsessively seeks: "How not to end, how not to die, how to prolong its era. By day it pursues its enemies. It is cunning and ruthless; it sends its bloodhounds everywhere. By night it feeds on images of disaster: the sack of cities, the rape of populations, pyramids of bones, acres of desolation" (Coetzee, 1999).

Concerning the relationship between imperial authority and borderlands, Biti (2023) highlights the instability of frontier spaces and the fluidity of imperial governance. He argues that "Coetzee strategically 'unpours' and 'deterritorializes' this peripheral state of exception, spreading its iconic plastic effects all over the 'sacricant' territory of history". It is clear that Coetzee's narrative encodes these affective dimensions to render the border as a charged space of colonial anxiety and gendered control. Within this logic, the empire delineates borders under the pretext of a barbarian threat.

The border in Coetzee's narrative embodies ambiguity and ethical tension. It is not a pure wilderness, but a spatial realm marked by narrative blankness and uncertainty. The former Magistrate repeatedly expresses his indifference and detachment from the frontier: "I have not seen the capital since I was a young man" (Coetzee, 1999). "I am a country magistrate... serving out my days on this lazy frontier, waiting to retire... Show me a Barbarian army and I will believe". These statements articulate the liminality and uncertainty of colonial space and highlight the ethical and narrative ambiguities the Empire

produces. Consequently, the border is no longer a space where civilization has yet to arrive, but rather a site of power saturated with racial violence and gendered norms. As Dagamseh (2022) observes, “Coetzee symbolically examines colonial discourse, the contrast is different in the discourse of Empire, and the failure of a liberal humanist to achieve success with or against the neoliberal tide”. Situated in a state of in-between, this frontier bears the accumulated weight of historical oppression, yet it also quietly fosters the possibility of new forms of coexistence, offering a fragile but meaningful ground on which alternative relationships may grow.

Through land narratives, Coetzee explores postcolonial ecological ethics – not as harmony after trauma, but through engagement with an irreparable historical legacy. Coetzee’s textual strategies render land both ethically and politically significant to confirm the intertwined concerns of ecological, gendered, and colonial domination. These literary landscapes converge on a central proposition: the ethical significance of land lies not in the question of ownership, but in whether it can accommodate the coexistence of diverse life experiences. As Plumwood (2002) critiques, modernity addresses the relationships between humans and nature, men and women, colonizers and indigenous peoples through a binary structure of dominance and subordination. Coetzee recentres the land to reinsert those cast as others into the ethical logic of place. Here, land is a shared terrain of ethical practice among living beings, not merely a physical marker of imperial boundaries. This shift marks Coetzee’s attempt at ethical reconstruction through a postcolonial ecofeminist lens.

### ***The Ethical Position of Animal Otherness: Co-Victimization, Racial Projection, and the Symbiotic Dilemma***

If women and land reveal the mechanisms of gendered and spatial oppression, animals in Coetzee’s novels also reflect complex ethical challenges. As Deka (2022) argues, Coetzee portrays animals “in ways that neither gloss over their oppression by human beings nor use them as blank screens for projecting human ideas or presumptions”. Coetzee emphasizes the embodied nature of both humans and animals, granting them moral significance that parallels human suffering. In a similar vein, Geçikli (2023) argues that Coetzee’s novels adopt an anti-speciesist perspective, giving animals a voice while questioning hierarchical divisions between species. Brings (2024) adds that this ethical attention to animals is entwined with postcolonial and racial power dynamics, suggesting that animals are situated within broader social and political tensions rather than being mere objects of human concern. These analyses indicate that Coetzee positions animals at the centre of the ethical landscape of his postcolonial world, making their presence integral to understanding the moral stakes in his narratives.

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, animals occupy a complex ethical position as “others” whose suffering is inseparable from broader structures of oppression. They are both co-victims, entangled with women and racialized groups under colonial and patriarchal power, and instruments through which imperial authority asserts dominance. At the beginning of the text, Coetzee presents a hunting scene that exemplifies this dual function, as recounted by the Magistrate: “He [Colonel Joll] tells me about the last great drive he rode in, when thousands of deer, pigs, and bears were slain, so many that a mountain of carcasses had to be left to rot (“which was a pity”). I tell him about the great flocks of geese and ducks that descend on the lake every year in their migrations and about native ways of trapping them. I suggest that I take him out fishing by night in a native boat. “That is an experience not to be missed,” I say; “the fishermen carry flaming torches and beat drums over the water to drive the fish towards the nets they have laid.” He nods (Coetzee, 1999).

This scene exposes the structural and ethical dimensions of violence: the mass slaughter is normalized as “sport,” while the disposal of carcasses underscores the systematic devaluation of nonhuman life. The indifference embedded in this spectacle is not incidental but symptomatic – violence becomes legible only when life is already deemed worthless.

Another striking scene features a warhorse: “We redistribute the loads... at the sight of the knife its eyes roll... With the blood spraying from its neck... it totters... before it falls” (Coetzee, 1999). In this moment, the animal is not only sacrificed for imperial expediency but also becomes a silent emblem of the violence that pervades the frontier. Its unnarrated and unacknowledged suffering mirrors the erasure

and expendability of both human and non-human lives under colonial rule. As such, Coetzee positions the animal not as a peripheral figure, but as a vital, ethically charged presence that reflects and intensifies the novel's critique of imperial brutality. This dying horse, like the barbarian girl with a shattered ankle, is stripped of the "right to exist" within the imperial order, revealing what Deka (2022) calls "a hierarchical code of racial violence against the human-animal continuum". Thus, animals are positioned not as peripheral figures but as ethically charged presences that intensify the novel's critique of imperial brutality.

In Coetzee's literary-ethical landscape, animals are no longer mere metaphors or incidental presences. They occupy the intersection of oppressive systems, subjected to the same disciplinary forces of species, gender, and race as women and non-white groups. They are silent witnesses to violence and ethical subjects challenging established hierarchies. These "non-verbal life forms" raise profound questions about anthropocentrism and the civilizational narratives it upholds. Coetzee does not offer reconciliation. Instead, he demands a sustained ethical self-interrogation: how does one live alongside beings who cannot be fully understood, represented, or redeemed? At this threshold, where human empathy meets its limit and where domination reveals its most brutal clarity, Coetzee situates the animal as both mirror and crisis. Their suffering forces the narrative beyond colonial humanism toward a fragile, unresolved ethics of coexistence, completing the tri-part analytical movement from body, to land, to the more-than-human world.

These analyses show that *Waiting for the Barbarians* renders colonial domination across three intertwined sites of injury: the female body, the frontier landscape, and the animal world. The female body makes aggression visible in the most immediate and tangible form. The land, meanwhile, reflects the long-term logic of occupation and uncertainty. The treatment of animals exposes a quieter but persistent extension of domination beyond the human sphere. Rather than treating these domains discretely, the narrative lets them bleed into one another: trauma on the body echoes displacement on the land, and both reverberate in the suffering of animals. This layered structure, it is argued, is what allows the novel to reveal the depth and reach of imperial violence.

## Conclusion

This study, informed by postcolonial ecofeminist thinking, explores *Waiting for the Barbarians* with particular attention to how the novel places women's bodies, frontier landscapes, and animals within a single grid of domination. As the analysis progressed, it became clear that these three domains do not exist in isolation. Rather, they echo and reinforce each other. The girl's injured body mirrors the scarred borderlands, and both resonate with the slaughtered animals that appear almost routinely in the narrative. This parallel is not coincidental; it suggests that what is violated is not just one life but an entire ecology of lives.

The motifs of the blind girl, the shifting frontier, and the scenes of animal killing may initially appear symbolic, but upon closer inspection, they function as integral mechanisms within the narrative structure. These elements naturalize exploitation, making harm feel ordinary, even permissible. Coetzee exposes how empire extends itself not only over human subjects but also over territory, flesh, and nonhuman beings. In this layering of injury, a relational map of oppression emerges, revealing how value, survival, and vulnerability are distributed unevenly through colonial logic. The novel demonstrates how such oppression sustains itself through repetition, normalization, and the collapse of distinctions between the human and the nonhuman.

The key contribution of this research lies in bringing women, land, and animals into a unified analytical framework, rather than examining them separately as many previous studies have done. While existing scholarship often focuses on gender, ecology, or alterity individually, this study foregrounds their simultaneity and mutual reinforcement. It argues that Coetzee intertwines human and nonhuman suffering to articulate a more nuanced, layered critique of power.

Coetzee's narrative strategies challenge ethical boundaries and prompt a rethinking of the ontological hierarchy between human and nonhuman life. Literature, in this case, does not simply represent trauma

– it provokes an ethical interrogation of how harm is structured, distributed, and normalized. This study affirms the continuing relevance of postcolonial ecofeminism and suggests new directions for future inquiry. By reframing women, land, and animals as a Triple Other within colonial discourse, this research reveals them not as three parallel victims, but as a fused site of extraction, violation, and silencing. Recognizing this triadic configuration offers a framework for rethinking oppression itself as multi-layered, co-constituted, and ecologically entangled.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors affirm that there are no conflicting objectives.

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