Dicle Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi

DÜSBED

Sayı / Issue: 38(2025), Sayfalar / Pages: 90-102

Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article
Received / Başvuru: 01.08.2024

DOI: 10.15182.diclesosbed.1526154
Accepted / Kabul: 05.02.2025

DISABILITY AS AN ALLEGORY OF COLONIALISM IN J.M. COETZEE'S *FOE*

J.M. COETZEE'NİN *FOE* ROMANINDA SÖMÜRGECİLİĞİN ALEGORİSİ OLARAK ENGELLİLİK

Ersoy GÜMÜŞ*

Abstract

This paper explores the use of disability as an allegory for colonialism and its consequences in J.M. Coetzee's novel *Foe*. By referring to colonial and postcolonial literary criticism, the study claims that disability is used allegorically to represent the broader silencing and marginalization of colonized peoples. It also investigates how Coetzee underscores the erasure of the colonized voice and identity through physical and psychological violence which results in disability. The analysis also delves into the relationship between the metaphorical colonizer and the disabled colonized, the former of which perpetuates the suppression of latter's autonomy and cultural expression by making use of the colonized's disability to justify the colonizer's violent acts. Besides, by framing disability within postcolonial criticism, the study reveals the intricate power dynamics and dehumanization inherent in colonial contexts. Thus, the paper ultimately attempts to show how Coetzee's *Foe* uses disability to critique colonialism, illustrating the profound and lasting impact of colonial oppression on individual and collective identities.

Keywords: disability, colonialism, postcolonialism, J.M. Coetzee, *Foe*.

Öz

Bu makale, J.M. Coetzee'nin *Foe* romanında sömürgecilik ve onun sonuçları için bir mecaz olarak engelliliğin kullanımını incelemektedir. Sömürge ve postkolonyal edebi eleştiriye atıfta bulunarak, çalışma engelliliğin, sömürgeleştirilmiş halkların daha geniş bir bağlamda susturulmasının ve marjinalleştirilmesinin temsili olarak kullanıldığını iddia etmektedir. Coetzee'nin, fiziksel ve psikolojik şiddet yoluyla sömürgeleştirilenlerin seslerinin ve kimliklerinin silinmesini nasıl vurguladığını araştırır. Analiz ayrıca mecazi sömürgeci ile engelli sömürgeleştirilmiş kişi arasındaki ilişkiyi ele alır; sömürgeci, sömürgeleştirilenin engelliliğini kendi şiddet eylemlerini meşrulaştırmak için kullanarak, sömürgeleştirilmiş kişinin özerkliğini ve kültürel ifadesini bastırmaya devam eder. Ayrıca, engelliliği postkolonyal eleştiri çerçevesinde ele alarak, sömürge bağlamlarında içkin olan karmaşık güç dinamiklerini ve insanlıktan çıkarmayı ortaya koyar. Böylece, makale nihayetinde Coetzee'nin *Foe* eserinin engelliliği, sömürge baskısının bireysel ve toplumsal kimlikler üzerindeki derin ve kalıcı etkisini göstererek sömürgeciliği eleştirmek için nasıl kullandığını ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelime: engellilik, sömürgecilik, postkolonyalizm, J.M. Coetzee, *Foe*.

Öğr. Gör. Dr., İstanbul Üniversitesi, Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu, ersoygumus@yahoo.com.tr, ORCID: 0000-0002-3919-336X

INTRODUCTION

Disability, in its broadest sense, can be defined as a condition that restricts a person's participation in any sphere of life. More precisely, it refers to any physical, sensory, or mental conditions that limit a person's activities that most people conduct in daily life. However, as it is a fluid term, two critical models approach disability from different perspectives and represent how it is considered. On the one hand, according to the medical model, disability is the consequence of a physical condition or an illness, and it is part of a person's body that decreases the individual's life standards and causes some explicit drawbacks. On the other hand, the social model draws a sharp distinction between impairment and disability by alleging that while the former is "a form of biological, cognitive, sensory, or psychiatric difference that is defined within a medical context," the latter refers to the socially constructed norms which cause impaired persons to suffer from oppression, discrimination, or even hate crimes (Sherry, 2007, p. 10). In this regard, Barker states that disability does not "reside in the body," but it is "a notion of difference from what is perceived to be 'normal' in terms of health and embodiment" (Barker, 2015, p. 101). Also, Michael Oliver, the forefather of the social model, clarifies the discrepancy between impairment and disability by highlighting the fact that "disablement is nothing to do with the body." In contrast, impairment stands out to be "nothing less than a description of the physical body" (Oliver, 1996, p. 35). As a repercussion of social norms, disabled bodies are/could be excluded and marginalized, which ultimately hinders their productive participation in society and pushes them into different agonies, including poverty and psychological problems.

Disability has long been investigated as a significant condition in applied health sciences, where it is believed to require a medical solution. However, it was not a common theme in earlier literary works. Likewise, in different periods, disability and disabled individuals carried varying cultural connotations. It was in the medieval ages when disabled persons were believed to be cursed, which made them go through miseries of life due to their quasi-sinned nature. Not much differently, in the Elizabethan Age, disability was widely accepted as "a sign of moral impairment," a bias that led many to believe that "people with physical disabilities are evil and who are mentally ill were wild and animal-like" (Vijayan, 2021, p. 17). On this, Tremain states that "responses to impairment vary between historical periods and cultural context," a notion endorsed by the fact that while some people with impairments could, at least to a certain extent, participate in social life, some others might be exposed to exclusion depending on the dominant ideology of the age or the perception of the society in which they live (Tremain, 2001, p. 617).

However, it was around the second half of the 20th century when civil rights movements helped disability studies build up momentum in critical discourses, and thus, disability has started to be viewed as a both social and political issue rather than being a personal stigma. For this reason, disability studies spring as an interdisciplinary field, which collaborates with various research fields such as race studies, cultural studies, or postcolonial studies, where it mainly enables readers to investigate and perceive how "power and oppression have been administered in a variety of contexts" (Jin, 2022, p. 1939). Among them, postcolonial criticism, in particular, offers enough room to investigate and examine different aspects of power relations in colonial and postcolonial contexts, which makes possible postcolonial themes such as diaspora, alienation, marginalization, or exile to be used as a trope in disability studies. As Ania Loomba explains, despite the prefix 'post,' postcolonialism does not signify the finale of colonial period; on the contrary, it refers to new ways and forms representing the colonial legacies whereby colonial domination is implemented (Loomba, 2005, p. 12).

Used allegorically in postcolonial texts and contexts, disability comes into focus as a narrative device that makes it possible to tell striking stories, particularly about colonialism and its consequences. Transcending mere physical or mental disabilities, representations of disabled bodies in those stories refer to the "damage, inequality, and power and its abuses in the postcolonial world" (Barker, 2015, p. 100). Discussing disability as an allegory, Barker states that colonialism appears as a disease that corrupts the national body. Thus, a disability that emerges from colonial politics symbolizes "dysfunctionality" in postcolonial contexts (Barker, 2015, p. 100). In addition to the allegorical use, disabled bodies may manifest themselves physically as a bare result of colonial and postcolonial politics. That is, the effects of colonialism, particularly the oppression it bears, and such troubles as wars, violence, or migration in postcolonial communities are claimed to create countless numbers of disabled bodies. As a postcolonial critic and a psychiatrist, Frantz Fanon, in his work *The Wretched of the Earth,* indicates that "colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence" (Fanon, 1963, p. 61). As a corollary of colonial violence, disability or mass disablement can be seen in different colonial and postcolonial societies, which can be elucidated through Congo, where the hands of enslaved Congolese people were systematically amputated in the late 19th century. What is more, Fanon describes decolonization also as a "violent phenomenon," which indicates that colonial histories as a whole, regardless of colonial or postcolonial eras, denote the histories of violence, which somehow create disabling

environments (Fanon, 1963, p. 35). Moreover, colonized societies are also exposed to the disabling effects of economic and social circumstances as well as institutions and services, all of which are molded through colonial interactions or colonial rule. Thus, disability comes to the fore as the allegory of colonial evil, which deconstructs the social order in the colonial and postcolonial societies. As a consequence, it can be stated that disabled bodies and representation of disability are/may be found both in postcolonial societies and postcolonial works "where human bodies and minds are rendered especially vulnerable by ongoing states of socio-political disorder, economic factors, and by infrastructural problems" (Barker, 2015, pp. 100-104).

The South African-Australian author J.M. Coetzee focuses on colonialism's the multi-layered devastations. The aim of this study is to examine Friday's disability, one of the main characters in Coetzee's novel *Foe*, published in 1986, both as a destructive consequence of colonialism and as a symptom of the exploited colonial subject whom the colonizer attempts to reshape.

1. Friday's Muteness in *Foe*

J.M. Coetzee's fifth novel, *Foe*, is a reworking of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. While the plot of both books includes the story of Robinson Crusoe living on a deserted island, Coetzee differentiates his work through the addition of a female castaway, Susan Barton, the author Foe, who is the parody of Daniel Defoe, and some other minor characters. However, the main difference lies in his portrayal of Friday, which significantly diverges from Defoe's depiction of the same character. While Defoe's character Friday can speak, learn Crusoe's language—English—and thus express himself to Defoe's readers, Coetzee's Friday is depicted as mute, rendering him unable to articulate his own story or experiences. Mute characters in colonial and postcolonial literary works are presented to symbolize the suppression and marginalization of indigenous populations by colonial authorities. The silence of those characters is often used to reflect the broader silencing of colonized voices, cultures, or identities. In a not-too-different manner, the character Friday in Coetzee's work is described as "a dark shadow" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 5) from the very first pages of the novel, a discourse used to marginalize or dehumanize the colonized individuals and societies. Besides, at first sight, Susan describes Friday as a man who is "black: a Negro with a head of fuzzy wool" and has a "flat face, the small dull eyes, the broad nose, the thick lips" (Coetzee, 2010, pp. 5-6). Susan's stereotypical description makes it clear that Coetzee's Friday is physically a typical African, which makes him "the genuine Other of this text" (Head, 1997, p. 123). This marginalization gains greater significance when considering that Friday is not only a Negro but also mute. The underlying reason for Friday's muteness is implied to be colonial violence, which has been a pervasive and systemic aspect of

colonial rule, manifesting itself in various forms and profoundly impacting colonized societies. Encompassing physical, psychological, economic, and cultural dimensions, colonial violence aims to subjugate and control the indigenous population. *Foe* presents various possibilities regarding the underlying reason for Friday's muteness. One of these is whether Cruso—as the island's master figure—is responsible for Friday's mutilation. However, a more plausible reason is colonial control and dehumanization, which result in physical violence. This is the version Cruso recounts to Susan: "He has no tongue. ... [The slavers] cut his tongue" (Coetzee, 2010, pp. 22-23). In this regard, Friday's muteness can be seen as a metaphor for the deliberate suppression of the colonized people's voices through physical violence of the colonizers. Likewise, Head indicates "this mutilation is, in various ways, a figure for colonial repression" (Head, 1997, p. 120). Just as Africa is depicted in colonial discourse as a "headless figure" (Mbembe, 2001, p. 3) as well as being associated with "absence, lack, and non-being" (Mbembe, 2001, p. 4), Friday as the colonized individual emerges as a victim of colonial violence who is silenced and unable to narrate his own story due to the lack of his tongue. In short, Friday becomes the embodiment of a double fold of otherness due to his race and his disability.

The colonized lands and the people living in these geographies have often been depicted as sources of fear for Western colonizers. Although there are various reasons for this, the fundamental causes that also reinforce the colonial discourse include the unknown nature of the lands intended to be colonized, the association of these regions with evil spirits due to their propensity to cause diseases, and the assumed presence of cannibals. From the moment Susan arrives on the island as a castaway, she harbours the fear of arriving at a cannibal island or being visited by cannibals. However, what makes Susan more terrified than these is Friday's mutilation. In other words, her fear intensifies and reaches a climax when she learns about Friday's mutilation, and she reacts "with the horror we reserve for the mutilated" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 24). What Susan feels is not only fear but also disgust or revulsion as she says, "I caught myself flinching when he came near, or holding my breath so as not to have to smell him. Behind his back I wiped the utensils his hands had touched" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 24). Susan's fear and revulsion can be seen as implications of racism and ableism. Thus, through Susan, who has "an allegorical role representing white South African liberals" (Head, 1997, p. 119), Coetzee radicalizes the colonial perspective of othering and marginalization of the colonized. Not different from Africa, which was called The Dark Continent due to its unknown nature and seen as a source of fear, Friday is seen to "be unknowable" and thus creates an

"ambiguity that symbolically ties in with incompleteness" (Wojtas, 2024, p. 118). In other words, like Africa, which was labelled The Dark Continent and regarded with fear due to its perceived mystery and impenetrability, Friday represents an enigma that remains beyond comprehension. His unknowability creates a sense of ambiguity, reflecting an incompleteness that aligns with colonial attitudes toward the "unknown" as unsettling and threatening. This ambiguity around Friday mirrors colonial projections onto unfamiliar lands and peoples, reinforcing the othering process by portraying them as incomprehensible and inherently incomplete.

Since the colonial powers imposed their languages, ways of life, and values—in short, their cultures—on the colonized societies, the unique local cultures and indigenous ways of life of the colonized people were eroded and eventually erased. When examined in this context, mute characters emerge as a metaphor for the loss of voice, the deprivation of autonomy, and the inability to articulate the experiences, especially the forced colonial experience, of the colonized people. In the novel, Cruso's response to Susan's inquiry about why Friday's tongue was cut off elucidates how slave traders of Africa, one of the agents of colonialism, condemned the colonized people: "Perhaps they wanted to prevent him from ever telling his story: who he was, where his home lay, how it came about that he was taken" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 23). From this perspective, Friday's silence serves as a poignant reminder of the cultural and linguistic domination exerted by the colonizers, who sought to control and reshape the identities of those they ruled. The colonialists' absolute dominance over the societies and individuals they exploited, along with their drive to shape the lives of the colonized as they see fit, is one of the standard practices of colonialism. In *Foe*, such an attempt comes into the scene again when the ship John Hobart and its crew arrive at the island at the end of the novel's first section. While the shipboat represents salvation for Susan, it is a source of fear for Friday, who "came scampering into the hut and snatched up his fishing spears and dashed off towards the crags" as soon as he sees the ship (Coetzee, 2010, p. 39). As Friday has become adapted to life on the island and can sleep "like a baby" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 28), even during violent storms, the ship is more of a symbol of fear, reminding him of his uprooting and slavery, rather than a hope for salvation. However, since it is claimed that "speech and sight are the major implements of reason" (Wojtas, 2024, p. 119), mute characters are considered unable to express or even make their own decisions. As a result of this, Friday's opinions and desires are ignored, and the decisions about his life are made by a white westerner, Susan. Moreover, she uses his disability to persuade the ship's captain to bring Friday on board at all costs by saying, "nothing you can

say will persuade him to yield himself up, for he has no understanding of words or power of speech," for Susan thinks that "Friday is a slave and a child, it is our duty to care for him in all things" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 39). In this respect, it is clear that Friday is a metaphorical symbol of the local populations, who are not able to or are not allowed to express themselves but must be looked after by the civilised Westerners. In Karl Marx's terms, they "cannot represent themselves; they must be represented. Their representative must appear simultaneously as their master, as an authority over them, as unrestricted governmental power that protects them from the other classes and sends them rain and sunshine from above" (1972, p. 106). As a validation of Marx's statement, Susan describes Friday as a "dog that heeds but one master" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 21). Therefore, when the crew disembarks on the island and forcibly brings Friday to the ship, he makes it evident through his body language that he is displeased with his relocation, which can be underpinned by the fact that Friday avoids eye contact with everyone, including Susan. Aware of Friday's unease and apprehension, Susan attempts to calm him by touching his arm and smiling as she speaks. Nevertheless, Friday is likened to "a frightened horse" mainly because "the ship and the sailors must be awakening the darkest of memories in him of the time when he was torn from his homeland and transported into captivity in the New World" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 42). Despite Friday's visible discomfort and unwillingness, the decision regarding his fate has already been made by Susan, who believes that "life in England is better than life ever was on the island" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 41). In this process, Friday's feelings and thoughts are entirely disregarded and he is ultimately taken to England. Therefore, through Friday's muteness, which makes him unable to convey his own decisions, Coetzee underscores that Friday or, more inclusively, the colonized societies have no autonomy in making their own choices but condemned to abide by the ideas and choices of the colonizers.

Foe, as a novel, also carries major thematic significance when examined from the perspective of colonialism as it reveals the workings of power dynamics. From Friday's perspective, it particularly investigates "the ways in which this power dynamic is inflicted by the disablement of the mute body" (Wojtas, 2024, p. 111). The relationship between Susan and Friday, particularly during their arrival and stay in England, serves as a significant example of the progression of these power dynamics. Friday also lives completely dependent on Susan once in England. Stripped of human qualities due to his inability to express himself, Friday is transformed into a colonial subject shaped according to Susan's will. In this context, Susan defines Friday as follows:

> Friday has no command of words and therefore no defence against being re-shaped day by day in conformity with the desires of others. I say he is a cannibal and he becomes a cannibal; I say he is a laundryman and becomes a laundryman. (Coetzee, 2010, p. 121).

Thus, arguably, colonizers find an unwarranted audacity in themselves to disregard the identities, ways of life, or cultures of the colonized societies. In Friday's case, this transgression becomes multifold due to his muteness as well as blackness. Based on the repercussion of master-slave binary opposition, Susan has a complete control on Friday. Discussing the power dynamics between the colonizer and the colonized, Albert Memmi provides strikingly the case of the colonizer:

> A foreigner, having come to a land by the accidents of history, he has succeeded not merely in creating a place for himself but also in taking away that of the inhabitant, granting himself astounding privileges, to the detriment of those rightfully entitled to them. (Memmi, 2003, p. 53).

Thus, Susan, despite arriving later on the island where Friday lived, disregards Friday's way of life and finds in herself the right to uproot him from his beloved and accustomed habitat on the island and bring him to the entirely new and foreign environment of England. In other words, taking Friday from primitive conditions of nature into the heart of culture and civilization adds to Friday's existing trauma as a colonized and mutilated subject. Moreover, to legitimize all these actions, she uses Friday's muteness or his inability to form and use words as an excuse, which presents a "paternalistic" (Memmi, 2003, p. 120) situation from the perspective of Susan or Western powers. In Memmi's terms, "a paternalist is one who wants to stretch racism and inequality farther—once admitted" (2003, p. 120). Paternalism is a result of "charitable racism," which claims that the deeds carried out by the coloniser are "gifts and never duties" as the coloniser have "no duties and the colonized have no rights" (Memmi, 2003, p. 120), Susan's actions and deeds about shaping Friday's life may appear innocent and beneficial, even presenting themselves as gifts bestowed upon Friday by a civilised, white and western British.

In the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, the dominant power is the colonizer. Consequently, the colonizer imposes their ideas, culture, and way of life on the colonized, subjecting them to absolute dehumanization. In doing so, they not only promote their values but also aim to eradicate the values of the colonized, deeming them as primitive. In the novel, Friday's muteness is the main barrier hindering Susan's attempts to teach Friday a language he can voice himself. However, Friday endeavours to express himself through his unique methods. One of these is the flute he plays. Particularly on the island, Friday expresses himself or possibly his emotions during his master Cruso's illness by playing a melody composed of the same notes on his flute. After returning to England, he continues to play the

same melody on a flute he finds in the house. Although Susan recognizes that this makes Friday happy and explicitly states that conversation is also a form of music by saying "Is conversation not simply a species of music in which first the one takes up the refrain and then the other?" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 96), she cannot bear the melody Friday plays on the island and takes the flute away from him and in England by attempting to "remonstrate" his tune (Coetzee, 2010, p. 95), Susan restrains Friday's attempt to express himself. Also again in England, though she does not take the flute from him, she tries to teach him the tune she has created, attempting to alter his way of self-expression by dictating her own way. However, because Friday refuses to play Susan's new tune and insists on playing the same single tune, Susan accuses him by stating "It is a form of incuriosity, is it not, a form of sloth" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 95), echoing a common colonial stereotype of laziness. Discussing this in his preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth,* Jean-Paul Sartre argues that "when you domesticate a member of our own species, you reduce his output," which becomes an explanation for one of the stereotypical characteristics of colonized individuals as "lazybones" (Sartre, 1963, p. 16). Additionally, Susan interprets Friday's insistence on playing the same melody as evidence of his being savage or uncivilized because "civilized people cannot forever play the same tune and be content" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 97). Therefore, Susan's attempts to stop Friday from playing his tune or making him play her tune can be seen as symptoms of colonizers' oppression of a mute colonized in order to have absolute dominance over the latter.

Besides playing the flute, Friday expresses himself is through dancing, which is more than just rhythmic movement in African culture; it is a profound expression of culture, identity and history. Rooted deeply in African tradition and spirituality, dance serves as a means of communication, storytelling, and community cohesion. However, its significance extends far beyond mere performance since it embodies resistance and resilience, particularly in the context of colonial history. Besides, dancing functions as a profound form of self expression by which individuals may express their identities, emotions, and spiritual connections through dance movements that are learned and passed down through generations. Thus, each dance step tells a story, invoking memories of ancestors, cultural values, and personal journeys. For this reason, as an African, Friday tries to express himself through dancing, especially during his stay at Foe's house. Susan says, "In the mornings he dances in the kitchen, holding out his arms and spinning in a circle, his eyes shut, hour after hour, never growing fatigued or dizzy" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 92). Friday's dancing, which Wojtas describes as "trance-like" (Wojtas, 2024, p. 117), also provides a space for emotional release and healing. Particularly in colonial societies where

verbal expression may be limited or constrained by the social norms dictated by the colonizers, dance offers a non-verbal channel for the oppressed to express complex emotions and experiences. As mutilated, muted, and marginalised, Friday attempts to foster his way of self-expression by dancing, during which "he is not himself. He is beyond human reach" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 92). However, once again, the main obstacle preventing Friday from freely expressing himself in his way is Susan, who tries to shape every moment of Friday's life. While he sleeps, she initially decides to take his robe from Friday, which perhaps reminds him of African traditional clothing and motivates him to dance. Susan believes this will "bring him to his senses" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 92), and thus, she attempts to domesticate and keep Friday under her control. Nonetheless, as Friday holds on tightly to the robe, preventing her from doing so, she tries to establish control over Friday and his means of expression, which is dance, by playing the flute herself and expecting Friday to dance harmoniously with her tune. However, when Susan realizes that Friday is "insensible of" her (Coetzee, 2010, p. 98) and thus not dependent on her, she becomes angry and tries to "halt the infernal spinning." Still, she fails as Friday "seemed to feel my touch no more than if it had been a fly's" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 98). As a consequence of Friday's indifference, Susan concludes that through dancing, "his soul" was "more in Africa than in Newington" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 98). In addition to this, despite realizing that the only ways by which Friday, as a tongueless character, to express himself are "in music and dance" (Coetzee, 2010, 142), Susan still attempts to shape Friday's identity by dictating him her ways, which can be seen as a repercussion of colonialists' trying to "substitute our language for theirs" (Sartre, p. 15).

Colonial discourse argues that one of the fundamental goals of colonialism is to domesticate wild lands and civilize the primitive societies. Colonizers, seeking to justify themselves and their actions, claim that their sole purpose is to "bring light to the colonized's ignominious darkness" (Memmi, 2003, p. 120). Thus, colonization is legitimated in every sense and with all its consequences. From this perspective, by teaching Friday how to write, the colonizer is helping him have a voice (Wojtas, 2024, p. 10), which may bring "him out of darkness" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 60). In a similar vein, Achille Mbembe explicitly expresses the mission of colonization and the importance of education for so-called primitive Africans by saying the Europeans believe that they "can even, through a process of domestication and training, bring the African to where he or she can enjoy a fully human life" (2001, p. 2). Therefore, Mr. Foe, arguing that "writing is not doomed to be the shadow of speech" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 142), suggests to Susan that she should teach Friday to write and give him a voice. However, this is

also a colonial act, as "writing is one of the most significant features of colonial control. It lies at the heart of imperial power" (Ashcroft, 2011, p.7). Thus, though Susan's attempt to teach Friday writing seems to be an innocent or paternalistic deed, Friday as a metaphor for Africa becomes "essentially an object of experimentation" (Mbembe, 2001, p. 2) to be shaped by the Westerners. During his education process, what Friday can write is only "rows and rows of the letter 'o'" (Coetzee, 2010, p. 152), which stands for Friday's "tongueless mouth, of zero" (Ashcroft, 2011, p.13). Consequently, Friday's muteness symbolically creates a void that needs to be filled by Westerners. As such, although Friday's situation seems hopeless, Mr. Foe insists that Friday's education process should continue. While this belief seems to stem from Mr. Foe's notion that "if you have planted a seed, that is progress enough," and from a colonial perspective, silence, which can be seen as a metaphor of primitiveness, is a condition that must be overcome because it "threatens the civilizing mission" of colonialism (Ashcroft, 2011, p. 11). In short, it can be claimed that the success of Friday's education is not only important but also a necessary step for the success of the colonial ideology, which mainly attempts to domesticate and civilize the other.

CONCLUSION

In J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*, disability serves as a powerful allegory for the impacts of colonialism, encapsulating the physical and psychological traumas inflicted upon colonized populations. Through the character of Friday, Coetzee vividly illustrates the systemic silencing and marginalization experienced by the colonized, mirroring the broader suppression of indigenous voices, cultures, and identities. Friday's muteness, a direct result of colonial violence, symbolizes the erasure of the colonized's ability to narrate their own stories and assert their autonomy.

The novel intricately explores the dynamics of power and control, revealing how colonial discourse dehumanizes and infantilizes the colonized, reducing them to passive subjects who must be civilized by their colonizers. Susan Barton's interactions with Friday highlight the paternalistic attitudes of the colonizers, who impose their values and ways of life upon the colonized, often under the guise of benevolence. Despite Friday's attempts to express himself through music and dance, his self-expression is continually undermined and reshaped by Susan's interventions, reflecting the broader colonial effort to dominate and redefine colonized identities.

Coetzee's portrayal of Friday underscores the deep-seated inequalities and injustices inherent in colonial and postcolonial societies. By presenting Friday's disability as a metaphor for the

destructive consequences of colonialism, Coetzee calls attention to the enduring legacies of colonial domination and the ongoing struggles for autonomy and self-expression faced by formerly colonized peoples. In doing so, *Foe* not only critiques the historical realities of colonialism but also invites readers to reflect on contemporary issues of power, oppression, and resistance in a postcolonial world.

REFERENCES

Ashcroft, B. (2011). Silence as heterotopia in Coetzee's fiction. In Chris Dante, Sue Kossew & Julian Murphet (Eds.). *Strong opinions: J.M. Coetzee and the authority of contemporary fiction,* (141-157). Continuum.

Barker, C. (2015). *The Cambridge companion to the postcolonial novel*. Cambridge University Press.

Coetzee, J. M. (2010). *Foe*. Penguin Books.

Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth.* Grove Press, New York.

Head, D. (1997). *J. M. Coetzee.* Cambridge University Press.

Jin, M. (2022). Cathleen ni houlihan: A dual perspective of disability studies and postcolonial studies. *Theory and practice in language studies,* 12 (9), pp. 1939-1944.

Kirmayer, Laurence. (1992). From the witches' hammer to the Oedipus complex: Castration anxiety in western society 1. *Transcultural Psychiatry* (29). pp. 133-158. 10.1177/136346159202900205.

Loomba, A. (2005). *Colonialism/postcolonialism*. Routledge.

Marx, K. (1972). *The eighteenth brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Progress Publishers, Moscow.

Mbembe, A. (2001). *On the postcolony.* University of California Press.

Memmi, A. (2003). *The colonizer and the colonized.* Earthscan Publications

Oliver, M. (1995). *Understanding disability from theory to practise*. Macmillan Publishers.

Sartre, J.P. (1963). Preface. In F. Fanon, *The wretched of the earth* (R. Philcox, Trans.) (pp. 7-31). Grove Press New York.

Sherry, M. (2007). (Post)colonising disability. *Wagadu,* 4, pp. 10-22.

Tremain, S. (2001). On the government of disability. *Social theory and practice*, 27 (4), pp. 617-636.

Vijayan, G. (2021). Disability studies: A path breaking approach in literature. *The creative launcher,* 5 (6), pp. 15-19.

Wojtas, P. (2024). *Narratives of disability and illness in the fiction of J. M. Coetzee*. Edinburgh University Press.