

Intersectionality and Reproductive Justice in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*: The Confluence of Race, Gender, and Power in Post-Apartheid South Africa

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Abstract

This article critically examines the intricate interplay of gender, race and power in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* from the perspective of intersectionality and reproductive justice. The novel deftly crafts a story that reveals the nuances of reproductive rights, human autonomy, and the influence of power relations on personal decisions. The study aims to shed light on Coetzee's handling of reproductive justice through a nuanced analysis of characters and plot, advancing a more comprehensive understanding of the intersectionality between individual agency and social restrictions and intersectionality of identity categories like race, class, gender, and sexuality. The prominent themes in the works of Coetzee are colonialism and post-colonialism, disgrace and shame, morality and ethics, animal rights and ethics, human rights, isolation and alienation, violence against women, trauma and suffering, etc. He tries to uphold human values in society irrespective of sex, religion, race, and place.

Keywords: Gender; Intersectionality; Power; Race; Reproductive justice.

Introduction

Reproductive justice is a concept that incorporates reproductive rights with social justice, highlighting broader socioeconomic conditions and individual choices. The term was first used in 1994 by Black women activists and it highlights the right to have children and the right not to have, as well as the creation of safe and secure environments to raise them. The movement recognises that access to reproductive healthcare is contingent upon economic and social factors, with organisations like SisterSong advocating for the necessity of accessible abortion services. Besides abortion, reproductive justice encompasses matters such as comprehensive sexual

education, the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted illnesses, safeguarding against domestic violence, and alternative contraceptive options. It also underscores fair access to prenatal and antenatal care, maternal healthcare, financial assistance for families, and secure housing. Reproductive justice is founded on international human rights, positing that reproductive rights constitute human rights intertwined with power dynamics and injustice. The movement advocates for a comprehensive approach to reproductive healthcare, contesting repressive systems and establishing it as a legal obligation and a moral and ethical imperative in the continuous pursuit of justice.

Objectives

The present study has the following objectives

- To define what is reproductive justice
- To highlight the predicament of women and children in South Africa
- To explain the key features of reproductive justice
- To list out the main issues of reproductive justice
- To analyse the novel, *Disgrace*, from the perspective of reproductive justice

Methodology

The present study employs a qualitative research approach by close reading and critically analysing the novel, *Disgrace*, to identify and analyse the passages which illustrate the themes taken for the study such as reproductive justice, power dynamics, gender, race and intersectionality. It pays attention to elements like the narrative structure of the novel, symbolic elements and interaction of characters, especially women, which illustrate the themes selected for the study. The socio-political context in which the text is situated is also taken for the study as it deals with post-apartheid South Africa.

Key Features of Reproductive Justice

The key features of reproductive justice discussed are:

- Reproductive justice aims to address the limitations of individual reproductive rights, focusing on structural factors like race, class, economic rights, and immigration. It uses women's narratives to mobilise consensus and consider socio-economic status in decision-making. Reproductive justice replaces the Roe-era civil

rights foundation with a Human Rights Foundation that guarantees rights for everyone, regardless of race, class, and socioeconomic status.

- Reproductive justice deals with the intersections of identity categories such as sexuality, class, gender, and race, encountering systemic injustice in reproductive health and rights. It aims to ensure self-determined reproductive lives for women of all categories, addressing issues like abortion, contraception, birth control, immigration, HIV/AIDS, environmental justice, and LGBTQ rights.
- The reproductive justice movement addresses issues of exploitation and control of women, children and individuals, focusing on regulating rights implemented by families, communities, and societies. It argues that women of colour, queer women, immigrants, and transgenders struggle to access reproductive justice, highlighting the role of government in the safety of different communities and violence against women.

Key Issues of Reproductive Justice

The key issues of reproductive justice are: sex education, birth control, access to abortion, maternity care, sexual coercion, pregnancy, birth and postpartum during incarceration, LGBTQ+ rights, economic justice, environmental justice and reproductive justice, immigration and reproductive justice, ability and reproductive justice, racial justice and reproductive justice, alternative perspectives on contraception and sterilisation, socio-economic issues and reproductive oppression etc.

Condition of Women and Girls in South Africa

J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* presents a harrowing exploration of gender-based violence, mirroring the unsettling realities faced by women in post-apartheid South Africa. The country has been infamously labelled as "the rape capital of the world," a stark indication of its exceedingly high rates of sexual violence. A study by the World Health Organisation (2000–2018) for the United Nations Interagency Working Group on Violence against Women indicates that nearly one in three women in the African region—approximately thirty per cent—experience physical and/or sexual violence from intimate partners or non-partners. Such staggering statistics underscore the systemic nature of gendered violence and the failure of social and legal structures to safeguard women's rights.

The crisis is exacerbated by the deeply rooted belief in virgin cleansing, resulting in a shocking rising incidence of children and infant rapes. The belief in the virgin cleansing myth that sexual intercourse with a virgin will cure sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS has incited a culture of profound violence, with particularly terrible instances of rape cases involving children and infants. Another insidious manifestation of gender-based violence in South Africa is corrective rape, a practice rooted in the belief that the sexual assault of a lesbian woman can “cure” her of her sexual orientation. Moreover, educational institutions – spaces that should serve as sanctuaries for young women – have become sites of sexual harassment and assault. Reports of abuse in classrooms, dormitories, and restrooms remain widespread, yet many of these cases are suppressed to protect institutional reputations. Rather than seeking justice through legal channels, school administrations often handle cases internally, silencing victims and discouraging legal recourse. This systemic failure to address sexual violence in educational settings has profound implications, with many young girls forced to abandon their education altogether.

Beyond physical and sexual violence, reproductive injustice continues to undermine the autonomy and well-being of women in South Africa and the broader Sub-Saharan region. The prevalence of unsafe abortions – estimated at 6.2 million annually – results in approximately 15,000 preventable deaths. Religious and cultural stigmas further restrict access to reproductive healthcare, compelling women to seek clandestine and life-threatening procedures. Even in cases where abortion is legally permitted under specific conditions, restrictive policies and social taboos often force women into dangerous circumstances, increasing health risks and mortality rates.

Compounding these issues is the persistence of female genital mutilation (FGM), a practice affecting women across twenty-seven African nations. The partial or complete removal of external female genitalia for non-medical reasons inflicts severe long-term health consequences, including chronic pain, infections, and reproductive complications. Beyond its physical ramifications, FGM represents a deeply ingrained mechanism of patriarchal control, stripping women of bodily autonomy and reinforcing their subjugation within society. The persistence of gender-based violence in South Africa – from rape and corrective violence to unsafe reproductive practices and FGM – underscores the urgent need for systemic reform. While legislative measures and international human rights frameworks have sought to address these issues, true change necessitates a radical shift in societal attitudes and power structures. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* is a power-

ful literary lens to interrogate these pressing concerns, compelling readers to confront the brutal realities of gendered oppression and the imperative for justice. The novel's portrayal of women's precarity reflects the failures of post-apartheid South Africa and calls for an unflinching examination of the intersections of gender, violence, and power in contemporary society.

Intersectionality and Reproductive Justice in *Disgrace*

Intersectionality, a term introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, denotes how many social categorizations—such as race, gender, class, and sexuality—converge to form interconnected systems of discrimination and oppression. It attacks singular paradigms of oppression that neglect the compounded realities of marginalised individuals. Reproductive justice, a framework established by Black feminists, notably the SisterSong Women of Colour Reproductive Justice Collective, transcends the limited pro-choice/pro-life discourse to encompass the rights to have children, to refrain from having children, and to raise children in secure and nurturing environments. It highlights how systemic inequalities—such as racial violence, economic disenfranchisement, and patriarchal systems—affect reproductive autonomy.

In *Disgrace*, Coetzee explores the convergence of race, gender, and power in post-apartheid South Africa, particularly via the character of Lucy Lurie. Lucy's rape by Black men in a postcolonial context represents a battleground of conflicting power dynamics, wherein gender-based violence is inextricably linked to the legacies of racial subjugation and the involvement of white settlers. Her ensuing pregnancy and choice to retain the child provoke essential enquiries of autonomy, coercion, and survival under a profoundly hierarchical societal structure. In contrast to a solely individualist feminist interpretation, an intersectional and reproductive justice perspective examines the intricate interplay of Lucy's whiteness, queerness, and gendered vulnerability with the evolving power dynamics of post-apartheid South Africa.

David Lurie perceives his daughter Lucy's rape as a profound loss of dignity and authority; nevertheless, Lucy's decision to remain on the farm and confront the repercussions of her assault indicates a complex negotiation of autonomy that challenges conventional interpretations of victimhood. She lives in a sociohistorical framework where her reproductive decisions are influenced by gender-based violence, colonial legacies, racial conflicts, and economic instability. Consequently, an intersectional and reproductive justice perspective facilitates a more nuanced comprehen-

sion of Lucy's situation—not simply as a passive victim, but as an individual manoeuvring through various oppressive systems that govern her bodily autonomy. This viewpoint opposes prevailing feminist and human rights narratives that presuppose universal access to choice and agency, emphasising that reproductive decisions are invariably situated within larger socio-historical contexts.

The novel, *Disgrace*, delineates a real picture of reproductive issues irrespective of gender, race, religion, sexual orientation and power dynamics in post-apartheid South Africa. One of the significant issues to be discussed in reproductive justice is the sexual exploitation of women who need money to take care of their families as they are not well educated to get jobs or due to religious restrictions abstain from working outside. As they do not like to reveal their identities, the escort agencies try to exploit them by paying very less for their services and behave as if they own the work for them. Soraya, a Muslim woman, is exploited by Discreet Escorts services. It charges the clients R400 for a session of ninety minutes but only half of the money that is R200 is given to Soraya. It also puts them at risk of being infected with sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDS as most of the clients do not wish to use protective measures as it reduces sexual satisfaction. These women have to be educated to take precautionary measures to protect them from unwanted pregnancy, abortion, and AIDS/STDs. She has the right to control her body and how she has to bring up her children and the sacrifices she has to make for that. Nobody has the right to question her on her autonomy and decision-making ability, "For a ninety-minute session he pays her R400, of which half goes to Discreet Escorts. It seems a pity that Discreet Escorts should get so much. But they own No. 113 and other flats in Windsor Mansions; in a sense, they own Soraya too, this is part of her, this function" (*Disgrace* 2).

Lurie one Saturday sees Soraya and her two children walking down St. George Street and follows her to an inn. Through the glass of the windows eyes of the both meet but they do speak about it in their next meetings. Lurie has had a very promiscuous life since his early years. He had sex with many people like wives of colleagues, tourists picked from bars or clubs, and also slept with sex workers. He treated women like a commodity and had no respect for their feelings and emotions and ditched them when he had had enough of them. He had no care that he might have infected them with sexually transmitted diseases which is very common in South Africa and ruined many of their lives with HIV/AIDS. When she stops visiting him after the Inn incident, he asks for her number to contact her privately which she refuses to share. He sets a private detective and comes to know

her real name, address, and phone number. He calls Soraya to speak to her but she does not entertain his wishes and shuts the phone telling him not to harass her. It causes her psychological suffering of being caught by her husband and the trauma of losing her family because of sex work and also fear of being stoned to death by the public for adultery as it happens in many Muslim societies in Africa, "You are harassing me in my own house. I demand you will never phone me here again, never" (Disgrace 10). Lurie also sexually exploits one of his colleagues, Dawn, and ditches her when he no longer wants her.

The concept of reproductive justice comprises protecting coercive sexual intercourse. This undesired sexual activity takes place when a person is put pressure on, threatened, tricked, or forced upon by the partners. Sexual coercion can take many different forms, such as persistently requesting sexual favours until the desired outcome is obtained, tricking a partner into believing it is too late to change their mind, manipulating, and threatening to endanger one's safety because of one's sexual orientation or preference. Lurie seduces Melanie Isaacs, one of his students in a romantic course offered by him. Lurie does not think of women as independent individuals but as mere objects to be enjoyed by men as a typical male in the patriarchal society, "Because a woman's beauty does not belong to her alone. It is part of the bounty she brings into the world. She has a duty to share it... What if she already share it? ... Then you should share it more widely" (Disgrace 16). Lurie extracts stealthily, the personal details of Melanie from the department office and calls her. He takes her to lunch and then to his house, indulges in sex with her without her consent taking advantage of his position which comes under reproductive injustice against women, "The girl is lying beneath him, her eyes closed, her hands slack above her head, a slight frown on her face" (Disgrace 19).

Lurie goes to Melanie's apartment without intimating her. She feels too surprised to resist the intruder who forces himself on her, and feels uncomfortable when he takes her in his arms. The words he spoke are not welcome, "Words heavy as clubs thud into the delicate whorl of her ear. 'No, not now!' She says struggling" (Disgrace 25). He takes her to the bedroom and indulges in sex with her forcefully without her consent but she does not resist, "Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core. As though she had decided to go slack, die within herself for the duration" (Disgrace 25). It is a clear-cut violation of human rights. If a woman once slept with somebody does not mean that he can come and have sex at any time he desires. That is the reason the government of South Africa passed a legislation to prevent marital rape,

non-consensual sex by a domestic partner. A comprehensive sexual education for women and girls enables them to understand and fight the sexual crime taking place against them. If not, there will be more dropouts among female students from school and colleges, and violence and crime against women and children will continue and increase in future as well.

Reproductive justice is nothing but human rights that profess the overall well-being of women in terms of their physical, emotional, physiological, and psychological well-being but in actuality, women are exploited in all possible manners. For the crime and violence against women, justice remains a mirage in the contemporary world as it has been since time immemorial. An inquiry committee was set up to investigate Melanie's complaint of predatory behaviour and harassment against Lurie. But the members of the committee were more interested in saving the name and job of the perpetrator than the interests of the victim from the beginning to the end even though she tried to commit suicide, "David, I want to tell you, you have all my sympathy. Really... We on this committee see ourselves as trying to work out a compromise which will allow you to keep your job" (Disgrace 42, 54). Moreover, the committee can only send recommendations to the university and it can be challenged by perpetrators to delay the justice being done at the earliest. When Lurie meets the lawyer to get his opinion on the case, he tells him how to get rid of the matter without being punished or removed from the job and nobody comes in support of the victim:

Well, my advice would be, as a matter of strategy, get a woman to represent you.' He mentions two names. 'Aim for a private settlement. You give certain undertakings, perhaps take a spell of leave, in return for which the university persuades the girl, or her family, to drop the charges. Your best hope. Take a yellow card. Minimize the damage, and wait for the scandal to blow over. (Disgrace 42)

The trials before the courts/committees look like a farce in the name of justice. There is no wonder that crime and violence against women, the violations of human rights of women, and reproductive injustice are increasing with each passing day and it results in the perpetuation of suffering of women across the world. The courts, special courts, and FastTrack courts, whatever may be nomenclature, fail to deliver justice to women. For example, in Afghanistan, women's right to university education was denied after the Taliban came to power after US forces left the country. Despite WHO and the UN's repeated appeals to the Taliban, nothing positive happened in this regard. It is no wonder that women cannot lead a

happy, independent, and fulfilling life.

Prejudice against LGBTQ individuals is a reproductive justice problem that affects their capacity to have and maintain healthy families, the autonomy of their bodies, and their safety. Reproductive justice holds that everyone has the human right to self-determined family creation. In addition to sharing all of these reproductive justice concerns, access to hormones that promote gender identity is regarded as a reproductive issue essential to the individual bodily autonomy of transgender persons. Lucy, the daughter of David Lurie is a lesbian and there are prejudiced opinions about her sexuality and her choice in society including her father. Lurie wonders what two women lovers-Lucy and Helen- do inside the room and he does not want his daughter to be in the arms of another woman. This shows the societal attitude towards lesbians in the traditional patriarchal society:

Is she calling Johannesburg, speaking to Helen? Is his presence here keeping the two of them apart? Would they dare to share a bed while he was in the house? If the bed creaked in the night, would they be embarrassed? Embarrassed enough to stop? But what does he know about what women do together? Maybe women do not need to make beds creak. And what does he know about these two, in particular, Lucy and Helen? (Disgrace 86)

The issue of corrective rape of lesbians to turn them straight, which is common in South Africa, is another problem that comes under the concept of reproductive justice. Lucy was raped twice once before the arrival of Lurie and again after Lurie comes to stay with her after the disaster in the university. That is the reason for Helen to leave for Johannesburg leaving alone Lucy in the Eastern Cape. But Lucy does not leave despite the repeated attacks on her. Another reason for Lucy's rape is across the world, patriarchal forces want women to rely on them for their needs – political, economic, sexual, and physical. The patriarchy sees every attempt by anyone to overthrow this system as a challenge to its dominance. Therefore, from their perspective, it punishes all women who attempt to cross the line to establish an independent social order of their own. In the novel, a lesbian Lucy overthrows the patriarchal power structure by choosing a female sexual partner and living a self-sufficient life without relying on or needing the help of males. Hence, the patriarchal forces hatch a plot to make Lucy fall in line by raping her, slaughtering dogs, which are symbols of authority, and denying her access to the property, "As a child Lucy had been quiet and self-effacing... Now in the middle of her twenties,

she has begun to separate. The dogs, the gardening, the astrology books, the asexual clothes; in each, he recognises a statement of independence, considered and purposeful" (Disgrace 89). Rape is the most heinous crime committed against women of sexual orientation whether she is straight, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. It is worse than murder, a blatant violation of human rights, and an unacceptable reproductive injustice as later it will affect her perspective on sex life, motherhood, and child raising, "Like a stain the story is spreading across the district. Not her to spread but theirs: they are its owners. How they put her in her place, how they showed her what a woman was for" (Disgrace 115).

Lucy does not report to the police about the gang rape due to social stigma and sociopolitical conditions in the country. This is where comprehensive sex education comes into use for the victims to know what to do after these unfortunate events. The consequence may be unwanted pregnancy, risky abortion, sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDS, alternative contraceptive methods available, and trauma. Timely counselling will prevent the victims from taking steps like suicide, trauma, and depression. Reproductive justice includes all these matters and helps in the protection of human rights. The absence of a proper justice system to punish the perpetrators at the earliest for violence against women is a significant issue. As it is said justice delayed is justice denied. This discourages the victims from going to the police for justice. As Ettinger says, "The best is to save yourself, because the police are not going to save you, not anymore, you can be sure" (Disgrace 100). The trauma of the gang rape was so intense that Lucy has to take a sedative to sleep.

The safety of women in South Africa is a great concern and crime and violence against women is a common phenomenon as around six lakh women and children are being raped every year. No wonder that South Africa is called the rape capital of the world. (White)Africans, Asians, and other minorities are victims of violations of human rights and reproductive justice in South Africa. If Lucy had comprehensive sex education and awareness of legal provisions available for rape victims, she should not have been raped for the second time. The quietness of the victims encourages perpetrators to repeat the crime time and again and go unpunished for the violations of human rights. The knowledge of issues discussed in reproductive justice helps the victims to come to terms with practical life. Lucy explains to the policemen what happened to them covering up about rape. Lurie recalls an incident when a young girl was raped while her family members were locked in the lavatory, just as he was locked in when Lucy was raped by three men. Human rights violations are a common

thing in South Africa. So common that nobody thinks about it seriously. He does not contradict anything, "Two old ladies locked in the lavatory/ They were there from Monday to Saturday/ Nobody knew they were there. Locked in the lavatory while the daughter was used' (Disgrace 109).

The three fundamental principles of reproductive justice are women's right to have children, the right not to have children, and bringing up the children in an environment that they think is good for their future. But in actuality, it is the male member of the family who decides whether a woman must have children or not, if she has to have children, what should be the gender of the children. The right to abortion is not decided by women but by male members who decide not only the pregnancy of women but also the gender of the baby to be born. Women could not save their species for the future. Women are thought to be a burden and nuisance by the family. That is the reason female foeticide is widely prevalent across the world. More so in third-world countries like Asian, South American, and African countries, "'We are praying for a boy' says Petrus...He pauses. 'A girl is expensive.' He rubs thumb and forefinger together. 'Always money, money, money'" (Disgrace 130). If women do not become proactive and independent about their bodies, their decisions, about their choices they will have to pay a heavy price in the future. Even when Lucy refuses to report the rape incident to the police despite repeated appeals by Lurie, "Lucy, Lucy, I plead with you! You want to make up for the wrongs of the past, but this is not the way to do it. If you fail to stand up for yourself at this moment, you will never be able to hold your head up again...Stop it, David! I don't to defend myself before you. You don't know what happened" (Disgrace 134).

One of the fundamental issues of reproductive justice is the right to have children and the right not to have children or the right to go for the abortion or not to go for abortion. Lucy becomes pregnant as a consequence of her rape by three men. Lurie, her father, repeatedly tells her aftermath to meet a doctor/gynaecologist to take care of eventualities like sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy. Lucy assures that everything is taken care of. But later it is revealed that Lucy is pregnant as a consequence of sexual assault on her. Now the question is, should she become pregnant of her own will or due to the unavailability of a contraceptive method of her choice? The state must provide comprehensive sex education to women to face issues related to their bodies. The information about birth control, access to abortion, maternity care, sexual coercion, pregnancy, forced sterilisation, and contraception, LGBTQ's rights, economic justice, environmental justice, immigration, ability, racial justice, socioeconomic issues, alternative perspectives on contraception, and reproductive justice

all these issues are closely about the reproductive justice of women. If we read the novel closely, we come to know that she was raped earlier, had undergone an abortion as well, "But I am not having an abortion. That is something I am not prepared to go through again... She is not prepared, she says, to go through with it again. Therefore, she has had an abortion before. He would never have guessed it" (Disgrace 198, 199).

Lucy's decision to keep the baby after gang rape should come out of her desire to have a baby. She cannot have a baby just because she cannot undergo the terrible experience of abortion she earlier had. She does not hate children does not mean she should have a baby. Motherhood is projected as an obligation to deny autonomy to women, reinforce gender roles that prioritise caregiving and self-sacrifice and regulate women's bodies through patriarchal laws, customs and norms. Hence, access to contraception, abortion, and reproductive healthcare is often restricted in patriarchal settings, increasing control over the reproductive rights of women. It is all because of the lack of comprehensive sex education and information about alternative contraceptive methods available for women who are victims of sexual assault or coercive sex. Whatever may be the cause for Lucy becoming pregnant, she has the right to keep the baby and she cannot be forced to undergo an abortion without the will to do so. It is a clear-cut violation of reproductive justice and human rights, "David, I can't run my life according to whether or not you like what I do...I have a life of my own, just as important to me as yours is to you, and in my life, I am the one who makes the decisions" (Disgrace 198). Lurie, her father, even though objects to her decision to have the baby, accepts her decision and extends all his support to her at any time she needs, "Very well. This has come as a shock to me, I confess, but I will stand by you, whatever you decide" (Disgrace 198, 199).

Lucy's decision to have the baby as a result of rape in post-apartheid South Africa where the power dynamics have changed after the end of apartheid rule and white people have become the minority and the target of black people for what they have done during the colonial period. Lucy's decision is a well-thought-out rational decision or an emotional decision taken when she is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder after her rape by three black men. She has to make the decision when she comes out of PTSD. The question is, does she know the consequences of it? Moreover, she is not in the normal state of her mind. We can see the symptoms of PTSD in her. They are sleeplessness, inability to concentrate on anything, not meeting people, social isolation, blaming herself for everything that happened to her, being startled easily, lack of hunger, painful thoughts, angry outbursts for simple issues, feeling neglected, loss

of interest in mundane activities, physical stress, recurring memories of past events, fear of being attacked again. In this condition, Lucy cannot make any rational judgement. The first thing she needs is not the baby but proper counselling from a psychiatrist and gynaecologist to take care of her physical and mental well-being. She cannot look after the baby in such a mental condition. Reproductive justice demands physical, mental, emotional, economic, and psychological independence. Lucy is not in a normal state of mind to make such a big decision. She succumbs to pressure and anxiety after the rape. She decides to surrender her property to Petrus, ready to be called his third wife or concubine. Her child also will become part of his family. It does not matter to her. We can imagine what would be the fate of the child in such an environment. Reproductive justice is the right to have a baby and raise it in a safe and secure environment but not the way Lucy is planning in a biased society. She cannot have a baby to bring it up in a family of rapists who support and defend rapists and have no respect and consideration for women's wishes, needs, and opinions. If she had lived an independent life away from these people it would have been a different thing. Lucy sums up the condition of women in South Africa towards the end of the novel, "No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity. 'Like a dog.' Yes, like a dog.'" (Disgrace 205).

As the states/governments have the right to rule their people based on a philosophy and ideology, they also have certain duties towards their people who are the taxpayers to run the states. As modern states are welfare states, they are bound to provide basic amenities to people like food, shelter, clothes, education, the welfare of women, children, and old people, and protection of the people from various crimes and suffering due to man-made and natural disasters. Maternity care is one such responsibility of the state to build a better future for the people and country. However, most third-world countries do not provide proper maternity care for mothers before and after the delivery of the children. Despite that, a few steps could be taken towards providing reproductive justice to women and girls. More power should be given to chemists to offer contraceptive services as women and girls will be affected in the areas where there is less access to healthcare practitioners to provide a wide range of contraceptive options to choose from. New legislations and regulations should be adopted to provide access to timely, safe abortions in response to tougher restrictions that deny people the resources and knowledge they need to make important decisions about their reproductive health. The extension of Medicaid coverage for postpartum mothers from marginalised sections to a minimum of one year should be a priority. There should be increased access to doulas and midwives as healthcare providers who assist preg-

nant people from pre- to postpartum. One of the social factors influencing reproductive justice is the socioeconomic condition of the people. Hence, there should be an increase in public funding to provide high-quality maternity and child care.

Conclusion

The examination of reproductive justice in John Maxwell Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* has shed light on the complex interactions that exist between societal norms, individual autonomy, and the changing political climate in South Africa after the apartheid regime. This study aimed to clarify the nuances surrounding women's rights to procreate, not procreate, and parent in secure and encouraging surroundings by carefully examining important characters and their reproductive decisions. Essentially, the novel's examination of reproductive justice is a call to action as much as an academic one, asking readers to consider how societal norms and power structures affect their fundamental freedom to choose their reproductive path in the real world. The novel asks us to consider the continuous fight for reproductive justice in societies going through radical change as Coetzee's characters struggle with their decisions and the fallout.

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