

**THE BLACK EXPERIENCE IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA: A
WOMANIST READING OF KOPANO MATLWA'S NOVELS, *COCONUT* AND
*PERIOD PAIN***

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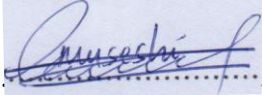
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Declaration

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented in any other University or any other Award.

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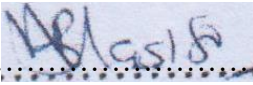
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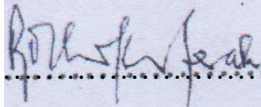
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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my mother, sisters, daughters and finally to all black women who struggle with interlocking forms of oppression.

Acknowledgement

Firstly, I would like to take this opportunity to appreciate God for giving me strength throughout the writing process. May You be glorified now and forever. Secondly, my gratitude goes to my family members for their unwavering support and parental love. Thirdly, my sincere appreciation goes to my Supervisors Dr. Beatrice Busolo and Prof. Rocha Chimerah who offered a lot of encouragement throughout the course of the study. They gave me adequate guidance and honest criticism which contributed greatly to the quality of this thesis. Lastly, I thank Dr. Nancy Ngowa, Head of Department of Languages, Linguistics and Literature who offered me great pieces of advice concerning the various requirements for the Masters of Arts Program.

Definition of Terms

Post-apartheid era -This era refers to the historical period in which South Africa attained their independence in 1994 with Nelson Mandela being the first black president. This period is marked by the abolition of the brutal apartheid system which discriminated against black people in South Africa.

Womanist – This is a woman who is committed to the liberation of both male and female from all forms of oppression.

Womanist consciousness – This is a woman’s recognition and acceptance that her male counterpart is also a victim of racism and other societal problems.

Womanist approach - This is a kind of an approach that seeks to address problems that people face, both male and female.

Feminist approach -This is a kind of an approach that advocates for full social, economic and political equality to women.

Feminism vs. Womanism- What sets apart feminism from womanism is that unlike feminism which exclude men in their struggle, womanism include them.

Madness- According to Collins (2020) madness refers to insanity, dementia, lunacy, great anger, foolishness, passion or wild excitement. This study borrows from Collins’ (2020) definition where the term madness entails insanity; a character experiences a state of mental imbalance, delusion or mania; anger, where her actions are driven by rage and fury; and lastly passion, where the character is observed to have extreme enthusiasm, zeal and craze to experience a certain way of life.

Abstract

This study entails a womanist reading of Kopano Matlwa's novels, *Coconut* (2007) and *Period Pain* (2016). It analyzes how the author projects the black experience in post-apartheid South Africa from a womanist perspective in her writing. The study aimed to explore how a black woman writer like Matlwa advocates for positive transformation where men and women work together rather than against each other. Black women writers often grapple with interlocking forms of oppression on the basis of race, class and gender. In this study, it is argued that Matlwa is part of the new generation of women writers who have written their fictional works which seek to explore their unique experiences. The study therefore, was guided by three objectives: to explore the deep meaning of the black woman experience as depicted in the two novels; to demonstrate the womanist approach in the reading and interpretation of the two novels; to analyze the author's vision for the black people in post-apartheid South Africa in the two novels. In order to meet these objectives, the study used a womanist approach to argue that Matlwa depicts the black experience from a womanist consciousness. The researcher employed close textual reading on the two novels in order to get adequate data for analysis. In this kind of a method, the study made use of scenes, characters' language and thematic concerns projected by Matlwa in the two novels which provided the main points of arguments. The analysis was then subjected to Walker's (1984) and Ogunyemi's (1985) womanist theory in order to argue that Matlwa projects the black experience from a womanist perspective in post-apartheid South Africa. This study had three major findings. Firstly, the deep meaning of the black woman experience entails multiple forms of oppressions on the basis of race, class and gender. Secondly, the major tenets of womanism includes: portrayal of the black women as courageous and daring, has a concern for humanity, intertextuality, epistolary form and the concept of madness. Thirdly, the womanist vision entails reconciliation, gender complementation and the revival of the African culture.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.0 Introduction

Kopano Matlwa Maboso was born in 1985 in the township outside Pretoria, South Africa. She has authored three novels since she began her fictional career: *Coconut* (2007), *Spilt Milk* (2010) and *Period Pain* (2016). So far, she has won literary awards in recognition of her talent and break out success -that is the European Union Literary Award as well as the Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature. This study finds her works more appropriate than her predecessors like Bessie Head, Angela Makholwa and Laretta Ngcombo. Unlike these earlier writers, Matlwa is part of the new generation of black women writers in post-apartheid South Africa whose main aim is to reinterpret the black experience from a womanist perspective through their fictional works. Such a perspective does not focus solely on black women oppression like the way many other black women writers do. Rather, she expresses her concern to address all forms of oppression that have caused suffering to all black people - men, women and children. She tackles the issues of being black, that is racism and classism along with those of being a woman which is sexism. This study appraises her two novels: *Coconut* (2007) and *Period Pain* (2016) and in the next subsection the background of the study is examined with special consideration to the black experience in post-apartheid South Africa.

1.1 Background of the Study

Boyce (1994) argues that the term people use to refer to people of color such as Blacks, African-American, Caribbean, Third World and so on carry so many internal contradictions. In general sense, the term 'black' used to refer to people who originated from Africa. In the South African context, the term began to be used in the 1960s and 1970s under the Population Registration Act. In this Act, the first step was to group people

as either blacks or whites. Next, those who found themselves in the category of blacks were further divided into Indians, Colored and Bantu. This Bantu group was further divided into different ethnic groups. For the purpose of this study therefore, the term 'black' is used to signify the racial classification according to the apartheid era which continue to manifest itself in the post-apartheid era.

Firstly, the post-apartheid environment is characterized by racial tension that exists between whites and blacks which emanates from the fact that these two racial groups which had been separated for a long time and learnt to hate each other, are expected to work together in the new environment that is supposedly free from racial attitudes and prejudices. However, there is a lot of tension in these spaces. The whites are angry because they are not in total control of the country. Blacks too are full of anger because they feel that the whites had dehumanized them so much during the apartheid era. For them, it is hard to forgive and move on.

Secondly, in the post-apartheid South Africa, identity crisis is another major problem facing the black people. According to Radithalo (2010), borrowing from Ngugi wa Thiong'o's term "white ache" argues that South Africa is a country where black people are suffering from a disease called 'white ache' where they not only wish to be white but actually consider themselves to be white. He also says that in addition to being culturally lost, these people also live in an environment that does not allow them to be black. This situation according to Distiller (2012) has resulted to an identity crisis. According to her, it was caused by the white settlers taking power and imposing their culture on the South African natives.

Thirdly, the country has witnessed a lot of xenophobic attacks since the country gained independence. Harris (2002) considers xenophobia to be consisting of negative attitudes, dislike and hate towards foreigners which results in bodily harm and damage. Xenophobic sentiments which seek to foster exclusion and intolerance involve the perpetrators of xenophobia arguing that their poverty situation is due to an influx of foreigners who came to rob South African job opportunities. Matsinhe (2011) argues that like xenophobia, racism positions its target groups creating the others onto whom they project what they exclude, disgrace and stigmatize. This means that both racism and xenophobia enables the in-groups to justify their control over the means of power, privilege and survival. As such, they are both ideological rationales for intra-group aggression, violence and mass extermination. In this study, the argument put forward is that the current xenophobia in post-apartheid era is similar to the racism during the apartheid era.

Furthermore, poverty caused by racial division is another problem crippling the South African nation in terms of economic growth. Schensul & Heller (2010) posits that during the apartheid era, there was a big economic gap between whites and blacks. Jacobs (2016) confirms that this gap still exists in the post-apartheid era and just like during the apartheid era and it favors the white population. This makes Ndlovu (2015) conclude in his research conducted in Dunban village that twenty years after democracy, the black government has still been unable to address the inequalities of the past. In fact, he adds that the commodification of basic survival services has worsened the levels of poverty and led to further division at the community level.

In addition to these experiences, gender based violence is also another problem black women face in South Africa. Snodgrass (2015) argues that according to the 2014 Gender Statistics Report, Gender-based violence in South Africa is considered to be the worst

worldwide. Women are assaulted and killed every day. They are also gang raped to correct their supposedly bad behavior. Abrahams (2001) notes that the most shocking numbers about the new South Africa is that one out two South African women will be a victim of sexual violence at least once in her life time. The situation is worse because as Snodgrass (2015) puts it, “the government has not prioritized women’s dignity and security. This is evident from the way it has inaccurate information concerning genderbased violence as these cases are under reported, with only one out of nine cases being reported. In this era therefore, Gender Based Violence is another evil that this black woman has to battle with.

The above mentioned experiences are among the many social evils that bedevils postapartheid South Africa. This environment is one that is greatly influenced by the legacies of the apartheid system of oppression. Therefore, in this study, the researcher argued that a black woman writer, who is conscious of these experiences, cannot afford to write her fiction aimed to bring gender equality alone. She envisions greater problems crippling her country; gender inequality is just one aspect of these problems. For this reason therefore, my study argued that texts written by black women coming from such environments should not be interpreted using a western feminist theoretical framework as it has always been in most studies. This is because this framework projects only one aspect of her experience gender inequality which is a shallow reflection of the multiple oppressions that she faces. I therefore proposed in this study that her works should be analyzed using a broader and more accommodative platform that will project all her problems which by extension entails the black experience in the post-apartheid era. In order to meet this end, my study proposed the womanist approach to be used in the analysis of these works. For this reason, Matlwa’s *Coconut* (2007) and *Period Pain* (2016) were subjected to the womanist lens in order see how she projects the black experience in post-apartheid South Africa.

1.1.1 Synopsis of *Coconut*

Coconut is a novel that revolves around two young black female protagonists: Ofilwe and Fikile. The novel is divided into two halves each of these serves to reveal to the reader the economic inequalities that continue to persist in the newly formed South African nation. In the first half of the novel, Ofilwe is introduced to Ofilwe and her rich family who represent the minority population of black people who grabbed the nation's resources at the expense of the majority of the black population. The novel generally addresses the major issues like poverty, identity crisis, racial tension and gender inequality. This family enjoys the privileges that were earlier dominated by the whites during the apartheid era. Ofilwe and her brother Tshiamo attend schools meant for the rich people, their family go for vacations abroad, and they live in a rich estate and drive expensive cars. In the second half of the novel, Matlwa lets the reader see the other economic class that exists in this post-apartheid era, through Fikile's life experiences. She lives in Mpe Batho, a scummy township that according to her, is full of filth, dirt, animal excrement and pest infestation. Her life is a struggle where one has to fight to survive.

1.1.2 Synopsis of *Period Pain*

Period Pain is a novel that revolves around Masechaba, a young black woman who struggles with her own menstrual related problems. Her flow is abnormal and often makes her feel embarrassed. She is admitted at the hospital and goes for transfusion after transfusion, takes pills and injections time without count. At last she uses this weakness to be her strength as she works hard and becomes a medical doctor. While practicing her career, Masechaba empathizes with patients who are dying on a high alert each day due to the incompetence of the black government. She explains how the public hospitals lack basic equipment such as gloves, thermometers, beds etc. this situation according to her, is worse for patients who are of foreign nationalities. They are discriminated against by

being mocked and being left unattended to. Masechaba also reveals to the reader how xenophobia is intense in the post-apartheid era. She clearly describes scenes of violent xenophobic attacks that destroy lives in the country.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Many studies conducted on black women writings from South Africa have been using the feminist approach to analyze texts written by black South African women writers. This kind of an approach wedges war between black men and women as their main agenda is to bring gender equality. For instance, the main idea in the radical feminist approach is to ensure total exclusion of men in all spheres of life; the Marxist feminist approach preaches revolution to displace men in order for women to take top positions hence liberation; and the eco-feminist approach which emphasizes justice for women and the environment. Such approaches are biased because they assume that the only problem that black women face is gender inequality. They fail to factor in other problems such as those brought about by racism such as racial tension and identity crisis and those brought about by classism such as poverty.

In order to correct the inadequacies of such approaches, the womanist approach was proposed by this study to be used in the analysis of texts coming from countries such as South Africa where black women face multiple forms of oppression. This is because its tenets propagates for liberation of all people; men, women and children, hence accommodative. Its broad nature is seen from the way it addresses issues like gender complementation, revival of the African culture and reconciliation which are normally marginalized in the feminist approaches. Through the analysis of Kopano Matlwa's novels, *Coconut* (2007) and *Period Pain* (2016), this study aimed to show that the womanist approach is the most suitable kind of an approach to be used in analyzing black women literary texts coming from racist environments.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The study aims:

1. To explore the deep meaning of the black woman experience as depicted in the two novels.
2. To demonstrate the womanist approach in the analysis and interpretation of the two novels.
3. To analyze the author's vision on the black people in post-apartheid South Africa as projected in the two novels.

1.4 Research Questions

The study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is the deep meaning of the black woman experience as depicted in the two novels?
2. How has the womanist approach been demonstrated in the analysis and
3. interpretation of the two novels?
4. How is the author's vision on the black people in post-apartheid South Africa advanced in the two novels?

1.5 Justification for the Study

The application of a womanist approach in the understanding and interpretation of texts written black women challenges all societies to be more human and more transformative. This is because the approach advocates for the liberation of all forms of oppressions including those of race, gender and social class. In relation to this, the whites are challenged to be more accommodating towards the blacks, to view them as brothers and sisters and not as the inferior others. This approach emphasizes that there should not be binaries like black doctors versus white doctors, black researchers versus white

researchers or black teachers versus white teachers as it calls for the unity of races. When this is achieved then humanity would not be divided along racial lines and social classes.

Moreover, the approach calls for the unity of the two genders, male and female. It calls for the black woman to realize that just like her; the black man is powerless in the white patriarchal structure. Therefore, a one sided fight of gender as propagated by the Western feminist approach will not be the ultimate solution to end her suffering since her oppression is multi-faceted. The approach therefore, is the most appropriate one in the interpretation of black women's literary texts coming from Third World countries like South Africa whose sociopolitical situations are chaotic linked to the murderous experiences of colonialism, the brutal apartheid system and slave trade. In such environments, it helps in providing solutions to all forms of oppression. In addition to this, the approach is still under development. Hence an analysis of Matlwa's *Coconut* (2007) and *Period Pain* (2016) would contribute to the existing knowledge in an attempt to widen its scope.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

This study only analyzed two of Kopano Matlwa's novels: *Coconut* (2007) and *Period Pain* (2016). These findings therefore may not necessarily be generalized to her other novels. Although there are many other novels written concerning the same subject, the study only considered the two because they both depict the black experience in post-apartheid South Africa through their thematic concerns of xenophobia, racial tension, identity crisis, poverty and sexual violence. This was used mainly to allow manageability. In addition, only the womanist theory as propagated by Alice Walker (1984) and Chikwenye Ogunyemi (1985) will be used and the analysis would be restricted to the framing of this paradigm.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.0 Introduction

Literature review was done in accordance with the three objectives of the study. First of all, the review was concerned with the deep meaning of the black woman experience. Secondly, it focused on the various works of black women scholars and critics who have been advocating for the womanist approach in the understanding and interpretation of black women literary texts. Thirdly, the review focused on analyzing the various visions projected by other authors. The study then reviewed the womanist theory as advanced by Alice Walker (1984), Chikwenye Ogunyemi (1985) and Hudson-Weems (1993). In the next subsection, the study delved into the first objective in an attempt to analyze the deep meaning of the black woman experience.

2.1 The black woman experience

Over the years, black women scholars and critics all over the world have endeavored to find out what the black woman experience entails. In their quest, they have argued that her experience comprises of interlocking forms of oppression. This is clearly articulated by Ogunyemi (1996) who mentions the ways in which black women are disadvantaged. Firstly, together with the black men they face racism because they are black. Secondly, since they belong to the 'inferior race' they are automatically considered to occupying the second class where they face poverty. Thirdly, these black women will also be victimized by black men still due to patriarchy which gives them superiority over the black women. This kind of oppression is what makes William (1990) question what form of liberation is urgent to black women. She questions whether these black women first need to be liberated from the color bar, class, ignorance of their tradition, male domination or economic domination. The argument put forward by many critics is that these forms of

oppressions are mere social constructs. According to Weber (2013), race, gender and class are social systems in which people operate from and they determine the relationship among them. Collins (2005) further argues that these social systems were imposed on people in order to justify social arrangements which exist in these societies. In this literature review, my interest was to find out how these forms of oppression as social constructs in the society operate to define the black woman experience.

Apple (1999) contends that it is the society that determines which race one belongs to. This is in line with Emibayer (2013) who adds that one does not have the power to choose which race he or she wants to belong to. This is why Graves (2001) considers race to be nothing but a social fabrication. Gilbourn (2008) believes that there is nothing like separate human races as the characteristics which are normally used to denote race include physical markers and these normally change depending on the historical and social contexts. This fluid nature of this concept of race makes Savas (2014) argue that there is no single theory of race in literature as many scholars approach it depending on how it affects people of different races. This argument was key in my study because the different meanings attached to the concept of race entails part of this black woman's experience. Her being 'black' will automatically call for her oppression from the whites as she belongs to the 'second race' which is inferior to the white race.

When it comes to gender, Crawley et al. (2013) also considers it as a social system that designs rules meant for men and women which do not have a biological but a social basis. Bell & Nkomo (2001) further this argument by explaining that gender also entails assumptions and beliefs, behaviors, references and the treatment of men and women. This set of behavior confine individuals in a prescribed action and expectations to ensure they acquire a stereotyped identity (Cerulo 1997). This makes the concept of gender to be so

pervasive in our societies in such a way that people believe it bred into their genes (Lorber 1994). This discussion about gender reveals that gender, a social construct, is fluid just like the concept of race which keeps on changing depending on the context. Therefore, gender was an important concept in my study because it helped me to explain how the patriarchal societies reconstruct and recreate gender by deciding that the males are superior to females. In such a society, patriarchy privileges the black man over the black woman by giving him power which he uses to his advantage to oppress the black woman. Gender as a social construct then becomes part and parcel of the black woman experience. As a woman, she belongs to the 'second sex' which automatically denies her voice hence she suffers in silence.

In addition, class is another social construct in the society. Piff et al. (2012) consider social class to be the ranking done in the society on the basis of wealth occupation and education level. The social class according as argued by Kraus (2013) provides the means by which people are ranked in the social ladder of a society. Kohn & Schooler (1969) further this argument by explaining that the position that one takes in this hierarchy determines their mannerisms, tastes arts and culture. Those who occupied the top position were the white middle class individuals who according to Piff et al. (2012) had abundant resources. Those belonging at the bottom were categorized as the working class and according to Finch (1993), they came into effect through the misconceptualizations of the middle class individuals who wanted to assert their power by separating themselves from the working class. An understanding of the social class was an important aspect in my study because it forms part of the black woman's experience. It sheds light on the fact that this black woman belongs to the lower class due to the social and economic exploitation she suffers, together with the black man, from the whites. They live in poverty because they lack adequate means of survival. Poverty which entails part of the black woman

experience defines her as belonging to the lower class. In the next subsection, the study reviewed works on the intersection of race, class and gender.

2.2 Previous studies on the intersection of race, social class and gender

Black women scholars and critics have argued in their works that these social constructs intersect to oppress the black woman as they operate simultaneously to deny her voice in the society. Matsuda (1991) argues that in most cases, she associates racism with classism and sexism. In this light, various black women writers especially in regions greatly affected by racism and apartheid systems like America and South Africa have been engaging their writings to expose how race, gender and social class operate simultaneously to define the black woman experience.

In her novel, *Ain't I Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, Hooks (1982) argues that the impacts of racism and sexism dictates the social class to which a black woman belongs in the American society. According to her, the black women were considered as “sexual heathens.” This sexual stereotype created the image of the black woman as an immoral individual who cannot control her sexual desires. The white women on the other hand were considered to be pure. Therefore, it was this sexual stereotype that white men used to justify their rape of black women. Thus, the black woman suffered the most in these white patriarchal structures. This is because together with the black man, they experience racism and exploitation. However, in addition to racism, these women were sexually exploited which made their experiences more demoralizing. Hooks also points out that the patriarchal social order in America promoted tension between the black man and the black woman. This is because, this kind of social order maintained that men should take the role of being breadwinners in both white and black households. In relation to this situation, as Hooks explains, the black men felt impotent because the whites refused to employ them in wage earning positions. All they offered them was menial jobs and little monetary

rewards. Meanwhile, the black women kept on pressuring the black men to relieve them of their menial jobs by assuming the full responsibility of being the sole breadwinners just like the white men. At this point, the black men felt helpless, powerless and emasculated. In their attempt to reclaim their power and assert their masculinity, these black men ended up meting out violence to their black women. At this point it was clear, as Hooks put out that the black women were the most vulnerable people in white patriarchal societies.

Thondakazi (2018) in her article, *Don't Call Me a Born Free* uncovers her experience as being a Black umXhosa woman in post-apartheid South Africa. Her argument is that, 'born free' is a term that is mostly used when referring to people who are liberated from the yoke of racial discrimination. She however argues that this is nothing but a superficial image created of people living in the post-apartheid era. The reality of these peoples, as she argues is that of racial inequalities, great poverty levels and gender inequalities. Thondakazi highlights the socio-psychological impacts of being an umXhosa woman living among different racial and ethnic groups. She clearly articulates that despite the effort made by the black government to stop discrimination, racism is still widely spread and gender inequality which is still a nightmare is far from being over. Thondakazi also comments that there is still a lot to be done as the South African nation is deeply rooted in patriarchy. Her concern for the black woman's oppression can be illustrated from the way she narrates the experiences she faced as she lived in different parts of South Africa. Living in Engcombo village, she learnt that gender ranking exists where she was identified as a 'girl.' However, upon moving to Delft South, she learnt that in addition to being a girl, she was black hence she was identified as a 'black girl.' Due to the additional problem of color, she started becoming increasingly aware of the physical differences that existed between her and her classmates. According to her, this kind of an environment consisted of a double burden of being black and female. As she argues, despite South Africa having

achieved political freedom, the blacks are still crippled by other struggles which include poverty, racism and gender inequality.

In her article, *Freedom in Bondage*, Masenya (1994) confirms this triple oppression of the black woman. She argues that in the South African context, the black woman is always the object of oppression from all sectors of society. For this reason, she argues that black women unlike their white counterparts, have a clear understanding of how the multiple forms of oppression operates simultaneously to silence her. This universal oppression according to Masenya, is deeply rooted in patriarchy as this phenomenon justifies the position of the male as the head of the family. In such a situation, the other members who include women, children, workers and property are subject to male authority. She argues that social class, race and sex as factors contributing to the oppression of the black woman are interrelated. In South Africa, blacks automatically qualified as the lower class due to the exploitation they suffered from the white minority. In this country, race becomes the criterion to qualify the class to which one belongs.

Generally, the black woman experience is characterized not by a single form of oppression like that of her white counterpart. Hers is more intense and much deeper as she is oppressed almost by everyone. Walker (1984) puts it in an interesting fashion that the black woman has been forced to carry the burdens that everyone else refused to carry. Therefore, in this study, I argued that by placing her experience inside a one dimensional framework of the western feminism, one tends to omit her experience on the basis of race and class as this one-sided framework only focuses on the issues of gender. Hence, her literary texts should be interpreted using a more accommodative framework that would incorporate her race and class concerns. For such a framework, my study proposed the womanist approach which was founded by black women to focus on the liberation of people as opposed to that of women in isolation. My argument is in line with Walker's

(1984) statement where she says that it is the black woman's words that carry meaning for her fellow black women. This is because, like them, she has experienced life as both a woman and a black woman. In this study therefore, the womanist approach was found to be the most suitable one in the reading and interpretation of Matlwa's *Coconut* (2007) and *Period Pain* (2016). In the next subsection therefore, the womanist approach was reviewed with reference to objective two of the study.

2.3 The womanist approach

The existence of multiple forms of oppressions which intersect to marginalize the black women made them to constantly question the western feminist approach which ignores the role played by racism (Collins 2015). Such a situation led these black women to seek other feminist frameworks that would address a wide range of issues of black life such as poverty, the relationship between gender, motherhood and so on (Hooks 1989). Also, Hooks (1992) adds that it was very necessary for the black women to seek a feminist movement that addresses their needs, strengthen their bond with the black men and children and liberate all black people from all yokes of oppressions. In order to explain what womanism entails the study carried out a discussion of the major proponents of womanism which included Alice Walker (1984), Chikwenye Ogunyemi (1985) and Hudson-Weems (1993). This discussion entailed the explanation of how each one of them arrived at the term womanism and what each of them contends womanism entails.

2.3.1 The major proponents of womanism

Alice Walker was the first proponent of womanism whom this study focused on. In the academic context, scholars generally agree that the term 'womanist' appeared first in Alice Walker's 1979 short story, *Coming Apart*. This story revolves around a black female who does not consider herself a feminist but a womanist. In a footnote, Walker explains

what she meant by the word womanist. According to her, a womanist is a feminist who is deeply anchored in the black women's culture and therefore her identity does not necessitate the addition of the prefix 'Black' the way Black feminism does.

Walker further builds on this concept in her collection of essays, *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden*, where she identifies four aspects that identifies a womanist. Firstly, she states that a womanist is a black feminist or a feminist of color. She further explains that womanist comes from 'womanish' which is the exact opposite of girlish. Girlish for Walker meant an identity that is frivolous, irresponsible and not serious. Moreover, according to her, the term originates from the black folk expression where mothers would always tell their female children 'You acting womanish' which meant like a woman. Secondly, Walker explains that a womanist is one who loves other women either sexually or non-sexually, appreciates and prefers women culture and women's strength. For this reason, she is committed to the liberation of all people, male and female. She uses the analogy of a flower garden to explain this traditional Universalist nature of a womanist identity. According to her, just like the way a flower garden is full of flowers of every color so is the colored race which is full of colored people in every part of the world. Thirdly, Walker explains that a womanist loves music, the spirit, the struggle, the folk (tradition) and herself. Lastly, she adds that womanist is to feminist as Purple is to Lavender.

Various scholars have come up to explain the meaning of Walker's aspects of the womanist identity. In her book, *What's in a Name: Womanism, Black feminism and Beyond*, Collins (1996) identified at least two meanings from these aspects. Firstly, she argues that womanism emanates from black women's history of racial and gender oppression. Collins interprets Walker's statement 'You are acting womanish' to be a

suggestion that the black women experience is exclusively accessible to black women. For this reason, black women's actions were always contrasted sharply with white women's actions. For black women, their actions were outrageous, courageous and willful. This can be juxtaposed with white women's actions which are 'girlish' and associated with frivolous, irresponsible and not serious. As Collins explains, womanish girls wanted to know more as they were serious and in charge. Secondly, Collins looks at this concept from a more radical perspective. She argues that Walker indirectly attached superiority to the black woman's identity and inferiority to the white woman's identity. According to Collins, the black woman's superiority results from the fact that she is connected with the black folk tradition. Collins further argues that by connecting the black woman's experience to the racial history in America, Walker constructs her experience to be more intense as it has multiple forms of oppression compared to the white woman's experience whose only oppression is gender inequality.

This line of argument is also advocated by Izgarjan and Markov (2012) in their article entitled *Alice Walker's Womanism: Perspectives Past and Present*, where they argue that Walker sharply contrasts womanism and sets it apart from the western feminism when she articulated that womanist is to feminist as Purple is to Lavender. Their argument is that Purple is a deeper shade as compared to Lavender which is paler. It is for this reason that Montelaro (1996) believes that Walker had a political intention behind this comparison which was to show that the black woman experience was more intense as represented by the rich and undiluted Purple. This, he argues, is the exact opposite of the white woman's experience which is less intense represented by the pale and diluted Lavender.

Generally, Walker's intention was to express her concerns for the black women by giving them voice regardless of their origin and ethnicity. She encourages sexual and nonsexual

relationships in the black community which will provide unity to them as children, mothers, sisters, brothers and even fathers. She advocates for women's right but not by placing the black man and woman in confrontation. For Walker, womanism is the force that brings forth unity rather than division like the way the western feminism does by placing the white woman in confrontation with the white man in the battle for gender equality. Due to her love for the black people and the black folk tradition, Walker expresses her concerns for the content of the black woman's text. According to her, the black woman's text should promote unity among the black people. She advocates for a novel where the black woman tell her real experience rather than a fabricated story that is integrated with the experiences of the white woman.

The second proponent of womanism that this study focused on is Chikwenye Ogunyemi, an African female theorist from Nigeria. In her (1985) essay, *Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English* Ogunyemi gives a detailed explanation on what womanism entails by juxtaposing womanism and feminism. She places the white woman's and the black woman's text in mutually exclusive terms in order to show the sharp contrast that exists between them. For Ogunyemi, the African and the African American women writers share the experience of subjugation under the control of the white people. Therefore, she finds it appropriate to cite black women novels from both Africa and America in her attempt to show the existence of this sharp contrast between womanism and feminism.

Firstly, Ogunyemi argues that the feminist novel is characterized by protests against sexism. This kind of a novel presents the female character as one who is subjected to patriarchy where she must struggle to break patriarchal rules and expectations and come out victorious. Ogunyemi however argues that this fight against sexism is just one aspect

of the struggle in the black woman's novel. According to Ogunyemi, this black woman has to battle with more serious forms of oppression that involves racism which has resulted to her poverty situation. Ogunyemi drives her point home by posing a realistic question: What is the essence of gender equality in a ghetto? For Ogunyemi, the black woman writer is not limited to issues of sexism like the way the white woman is. Rather, this black woman, in addition to sexism, she will also attempt to tackle the issues raised by her people. For this black woman, racism and sexism must be eradicated together.

Secondly, Ogunyemi argues that the black woman's novels do not represent the black man as the potential enemy the way the white woman's novel does. This is because, the black woman is conscious of the black man's impotence in the white patriarchal structures. Therefore, unlike in the white woman's novel which ends with the separation between the female and male characters, the black woman's novel ends in integrative images of the black male and female worlds.

Thirdly, Ogunyemi argues that unlike the white woman who is powerless in the white world, the black woman is not. She is less protected than her white counterpart and therefore has to grow independently. These factors are the ones that greatly contribute to the affirmative spirit in the black woman's novel which tends to be packed full with female achievements. Fourthly, Ogunyemi argues that both the black woman and the white woman's novel present their female characters as having gone mad. However, unlike the negatively presented white madwoman, the black madwoman is presented in a positive perspective. This black madwoman knows in her sub consciousness that she has people without resources who are depending on her. Therefore, madness in the black woman's novel becomes a temporary obstacle as this woman struggles to recover in order to save her people. This according to Ogunyemi, is not the case for the white madwoman because

her madness is presented as a permanent situation because her people are comfortable and are not in need of her rescuing.

Lastly, Ogunyemi argues that the black woman's novel is fused with the oral traditional forms of writing unlike the white woman's novel which is purely composed of the western forms of writing. Ogunyemi argues that the black woman writer does so because she finds herself in a tight spot where she is sometimes handicapped in the second language. For this reason, black women integrate their novels with the oral traditional forms like reiterated phrases, verse and even songs.

Generally Ogunyemi views womanism as an ideology that is rooted in black life. It is concerned more with addressing the white patriarchal structures that subjugates blacks. It is also concerned with uniting all the black people; male and female so that one can be a sister, a brother, a mother or a father to the other. Its general goal, as argued by Ogunyemi, is to ensure wholeness and survival for all.

The third proponent of womanism that this study focused on is Hudson-Weems. In her (1993) book, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*, Hudson Weems sets apart her form of womanism from the western feminism, Walker's (1984) and Ogunyemi's (1985) womanism and black feminism. She calls her form of womanism "Africana Womanism." This kind of womanism, she argues narrows down the broad categorization of the black woman experience to focus solely on the African woman experience. Hudson-Weems argues that Africana womanism establishes some kind of familiarity among the African women all over the world because it relies strongly on cultural roots. She argues that feminist movements like the Black feminism, African feminism, Western feminism and Walker's womanism fail to adequately project the African woman experience. According to her, these feminist movements cannot be applied to the African woman experience

because they are incapable of understanding some essential values of the African culture. Hudson-Weems sets apart her form of womanism from other feminist movements by her rejection of the gender issue as a form of oppression that the African woman faces. Africana womanists, like HudsonWeems do not consider gender inequality as a problem. The following are attributes that define the Africana womanist identity: self-definition, self-naming, familycenteredness, genuine sisterhood, male compatible, respect and appreciation of elders and tenderness to mothering and nurturing.

The discussion of the various proponents of womanism was very important in this study because it provided a justification of the form of womanism that the study used. The study found Alice Walker's (1984) and Ogunyemi's (1985) womanism to be the most appropriate form of womanism in reading and interpretation of Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* (2007) and *Period Pain* (2016) for the following reasons:

1. Unlike the feminist approach, Kopano Matlwa does not deal with gender problem in isolation, she deals with it as one of the many problems the black woman faces in post-apartheid South Africa.
2. Unlike the Africana womanism which fails to recognize gender oppression as a black woman problem, Matlwa through her two novels recognizes the impact of patriarchy which the black woman in post-apartheid South Africa has to deal with.
3. Matlwa's aim as projected in the two novels is not to focus on the African cultural aspects in the South Africa tradition like in the Africana womanism. Hers is mainly concerned with addressing problems brought about by the brutal apartheid system which are three-fold: racism, sexism and classism.

In this study, the researcher argued that South Africa is a unique country in terms of its history and therefore the black women writings in this country require an approach that

projects the reality of the black experience. Unlike the other African countries which only experienced the effects of colonialism, South African, in addition to colonialism, faced the dehumanizing effects of the apartheid system. The argument therefore is that the black woman experience in such a country which is on multiple levels of oppression cannot be projected from a feminist framework which will focus solely on gender inequality. Also, this experience cannot be projected by Africana womanist framework which completely rejects gender as a black woman's problem. My study found a great connection between the South African black experience and the black experience in America because their black women faced discrimination as both women (sexism) and black women (racism and classism).

Therefore, the major concern of black women writers in these two regions is to address these interlocking forms of oppressions simultaneously. Hence, Alice Walker's (1984) womanism which propagates for the black rights in America was considered more effective in the interpretation of the black woman experience in post-apartheid South Africa because Matlwa is also propagating for black rights in South Africa through her novels. In addition, my study found Ogunyemi's (1985) womanism also appropriate in the interpretation of these two novels as the tenets of her womanism overlaps with Walker's womanism. Ogunyemi agrees on this by stating that though she arrived at the term 'womanism' independently, she was pleasantly surprised to discover that her notion of its meaning overlaps with that of Walker's. Due to this overlap, my study found it most appropriate to use the tenets of Walker's (1984) and Ogunyemi's (1985) womanism in the interpretation of the black experience in post-apartheid South Africa as projected by Matlwa's *Coconut* (2007) and *Period Pain* (2016). The next subsection is concerned with literature review on the need for a womanist approach.

2.3.2 The need for a womanist approach

Most black women scholars and critics have been advocating for the womanist approach to be used in the reading and interpretation of black women's literary texts. They base their argument on the fact that the western theoretical framework of feminism does not give a true picture of the black woman experience. Firstly, it misinterprets and distorts these experiences. Secondly, they argue that feminism is exclusive as it is rooted in racism. Thirdly, these women argue that the fight against racism is bigger than the fight against sexism. In relation to this, the black women writers all over the world have voiced out their need to speak for 'self' using a womanist approach which they deem the most appropriate in articulating their oppression.

Firstly, misinterpretation and distortion of the black woman experience created a need for another platform for black women to address their issues. In her path breaking study *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, Hooks (1982) argues that rather than discussing the negative impacts of the black woman's oppression, the western feminists made fun of their oppression by romanticizing it. She says that on one hand these feminists talked about the black women's victimization but on the other hand they implied that these women could bear the damaging effects of the oppression as they are strong. In this case, the stereotyped image created for the black woman was no longer considered to be dehumanizing. According to Hooks, it became the new badge that this black woman had to wear every day. Hooks explains that whereas the white women had books that discussed the negative effects of sexism on their lives, the black women's books contained the message that they had nothing to gain in women's liberation. She further explains how they were informed by white women that they should find their dignity not in the liberation from sexist oppression but on how well they could adopt and cope with this oppression. Collins (2002) refers to this misinterpretation and distortion of the black woman

experience as “controlling images.” According to her, these images were constructed to make racism, sexism and all other forms of oppression to appear normal and hence inevitable in the lives of black people.

Secondly, the generalization of women’s experiences further created the need for the womanist approach. In her groundbreaking study, *Feminist Theory from Margin to center*, Hooks (2000) critiques the western feminism for generalizing women’s experience. She specifically focuses on Betty Friedan’s (1963) book, *The Female Mystique* which was considered to having paved way for the western feminist movement. Hooks argues that Friedan’s concept did not incorporate the black, colored and poor white women. She argues that Friedan generalizes the plight of all women regardless of their different experiences. Hooks further argues that Friedan only considered women who were college-educated and forced to stay at home to be the only victims of sexist oppression. These according to her, were important but not pressing concerns of all the women in general. Hooks’ point home is that the contemporary white women who dominate the western feminist discourse, just like Friedan before them, have never taken a moment to think whether or not their perspective of women’s oppression factors in all the problems that women face as a group. According to Hooks’ observation, they have very little understanding of how other forms of oppression like racism and sexism operate simultaneously to oppress the black women. Hook’s sentiments are in line with Mohanty (1988) who argues that the western feminism has reduced all women of the Third World into a single collective group. According to her, this implies ignoring the diversity of their experiences within this group. According to these western feminists, the black women and the other women of color are assumed to be constrained by their families, sex and tradition, often ignorant of their own subjugation, illiterate and thoroughly domesticated.

Mohanty argues that such representations were meant to place them in vulnerable spaces where they needed to be saved by the western feminists.

Thirdly, the exclusive nature of western feminism also created the need to embrace womanism. The white feminists looked down upon the black women and the other women of color. They asserted their power over these black women and other women of color by looking at them as the 'inferior others.' In this case, black women and other women of color felt excluded and argued that the western feminism is similar to patriarchy. Just like patriarchy that operates on binary oppositions where it excludes the women in important positions, the western feminism excluded these black women and other women of color and considered them to be the 'inferior others.'

Therefore, in most cases, the black women and the other women remained excluded in the feminist discourses. As Shawalter (1991) argues, the silenced partners on feminist discourses have always been the black women and the other women of color. Mitchie (1991) further points out that these white women did this because they wanted to maintain their positions as speaking subjects. For this reason, womanists wanted to decenter white feminists and challenge their perception of what they considered to be the norm (Bryson 2003).

Fourthly, the urgency to fight racism further created the need for black women to embrace womanism. The contemporary black women have argued that the fight against racism is bigger than the fight against sexism. This is because the liberation from racism is holistic in nature as compared to the liberation from sexism which tends to be in favor of the women as opposed to humanity. In her book, *Africana Feminism: A Worldwide Perspective, Women in Africa and African Diaspora*, Steady (1996) points out that racism has been the biggest obstacle that hinders the black women's acquisition of basic needs. Her argument is that the situation presented to black women is not just a simple case of

sexism but a situation caused by racial factors. As Steady argues, it is more important to focus on the sources of oppression that black women face at the hands of racism. This is because, she argues, the problem women face are not only because they are women. They are first and foremost victimized because they are black and further victimization will result from the fact that they are women living in male-dominated societies. This line of thought is also reinforced by Ladner (1971) who believes that in the South African context, the black women do not consider the black men as their potential enemies. What these black women consider to be their primary enemy is the oppressive force of racism that subjugates both the black man and woman.

Generally, some of the factors that have contributed to the black women and the other women of color to embrace womanism as discussed above were misinterpretations of the black woman experience, generalization of all women's experiences, the exclusive nature of the western feminism and the urgency to fight racism. Womanism therefore was developed as an answer to these disturbing situations that black women and the other women of color found themselves in.

2.3.3 Previous studies that used the womanist approach

Kohzadi et al. (2011) uses Alice Walker's womanism to examine the multiple oppressions meted out to the black woman in her article, *A Study of Black Feminism and Womanism in Toni Morrison's Bluest Eye from the Viewpoint of Alice Walker*. In this article discrimination on the basis of gender is explored deeply. Kohzadi argues that Morrison presents her protagonist Pecola Breedlove as one who is firstly oppressed by the white community due to her race and secondly by her own black community because of her darker skin. A further examination of the sources of discrimination is given where Kohzadi argues that Morrison presents her male characters as ones who are frustrated due

to the racist system in North America which does not offer employment opportunities for black men which makes them impotent. This can be observed from Cholly, Pecola's father who is an alcoholic and an abusive man who takes his past and present frustrations to his wife Pauline, Pecola's mother and beats her up. The argument on this kind of oppression is further built on the fact that Pecola is raped twice by his father and becomes pregnant by him. Here, Kohzadi argues that Cholly's rape of his daughter is linked with his childhood trauma when he encountered two white hunters who mocks him when they caught his girlfriend and him making love in the bushes. He thus takes out his frustrations on his daughter who is absolutely helpless and weaker than him.

Kohzadi then focuses the analysis on the discrimination of Pecola on the basis of race. The analysis reveals the different types of racism she faces. First of all, Pecola faces both racism and intra-racism. This means that she is victimized by both the white society (racism) and the black society (intra-racism). Intra-racism is the form of discrimination among the black individuals due to the internalization of beliefs of white superiority. Such notions make Pecola view herself as ugly and only believe that she would be beautiful when she has blue eyes. Kohzadi believes that the point Morrison was trying to put across was that self-hatred cannot come to an end not unless the African Americans start viewing themselves differently. For as long as Pecola measures her beauty through the beliefs and standards of whiteness, she would not feel beautiful and worthy. Therefore, the novel, according to Kohzadi reveals Morrison's attempt to tackle the complex reality behind the worship of blue eyes and blond hair in racist societies. By presenting Pecola's quest for blue eyes as tragic, Kohzadi argues that Morrison presents the damaging effects of white standards imposed on the black female body. This is the reason why Walker (1984) motivates black females to love themselves and their culture and not to be weighed down by these western standards.

In his article, *Womanism in Alice Walker's Temple of My Familiar*, Raja (2012) also uses Alice Walker's womanism to examine the novel. Firstly, Raja comments that Walker brings out a clear picture of how the black women's bodies were objectified: hair being chopped off, bodies being burnt by iron, physical punishment and endless beatings which lead to bleeding and in some cases, death. Raja argues that this creates a horrific mental picture of the female slave. Later on, Raja argues that despite the heavy oppression, Walker presents her characters as strong and courageous. Secondly, Raja also argues that Walker's novel is filled with the ideas of survival for all people because she employs poly vocal, cross-cultural, multi-dimensional and multi-gendered voices. It entails stories by people from various cultural backgrounds; weavers, healers, painters and artists among others. Here, Raja argues that Walker's message is transformative as it encourages connections among people from diverse cultural backgrounds. This message of survival for all people is well articulated in the womanist realm.

Kivai (2010) also uses a womanist approach in the reading and interpretation of Chiamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun and Purple Hibiscus* in his thesis entitled "The Female Voice and the Future of Gender Relationships in Nigeria." He situates his study in the womanist theory as advanced by Ogunyemi (1996) and Kolawole (1997) to project how Adichie projects the problems of humanity in the two novels. Kivai argues that the two novels when read and interpreted using a womanist lens becomes metaphors of the Nigerian political situation. Firstly, he analyzes Adichie's presentation of how patriarchy oppresses the African women by forcing women into the belief that their inferior position is natural and normal part of their everyday experience. In this thesis he argues that Adichie challenges this status quo by presenting her female characters as speaking subjects in the two novels in an effort to confront patriarchy. Secondly, he argues that Adichie presents her female characters as the ones who are the embodiment of reason as

they keep their families hopeful when the country is hit by a civil war. Moreover, these women are presented, as Kivai argues, to be opposing the oppressive cultures and traditions through the characters of Mrs. Muokelu, Olama, Amaka Kainene, Adebayo, Ifeoma and Mama Onitsha. They are modeled to deconstruct the oppressive customs and traditions which marginalize women. Kivai also argues that Adichie projects the vision on gender from a womanist perspective. Here, Adichie tries to give ways through which the society can adopt for the betterment of humanity through positive transformations. Kivai further argues that Adichie does not present her gender concerns in isolation. She ties them with the other concerns of her society and the African continent at large, just the way any womanist would do. Lastly, he adds that Adichie supports gender complementation as a way of uniting the African men and women for peace and harmony to prevail.

Al-Harbi (2017) also employs an Hudson-Weem's (1993) womanism in reading and interpreting Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. She focuses her analysis on the major tenets of Africana womanism. She analyzes these women as self-namers, self-definers and authentic. This analysis reveals that the Shona community comprised of complex hierarchal structures which are differentiated by titles. Therefore, her female characters are given names and titles to indicate respect and status in these structures.

Thirdly, Al- Harbi argues that Dangarembga presents her female characters as male compatible, family-centered, mothering and nurturing. According to Dangarembga, in addition to the husband, wife and children, the African family consists of also the members of the extended family; uncles, aunts, cousins and grandparents. She also presents her female characters as not oppressed by their male counterparts but as crucial partners. These female characters like Maiguru also functions to define the female identity as a mother and a nurturer.

A review of the previous studies that used a womanist approach was very important in my study because it acted as a foundation. Through a close examination of these researchers' analysis, my study was able to adopt the salient features of womanism in an attempt to interpret Matlwa's *Coconut* (2007) and *Period Pain* (2016). The next subsection is concerned with literature review on the author's vision for the black people in post-apartheid South Africa with reference to objective three of the study.

2.4 The author's vision for the black people in post-apartheid South Africa

In every literary work, the author will always have a message he/she wants to convey to the audience. According to Mugubi (1994) the author will mold the piece of work from the way he/she perceives reality and uses this reality to project a vision for the people.

When texts are interpreted from different approaches, they project the author's vision in varied ways. For instance, when a text is read from a Marxist feminist perspective, it would project a vision that will be different as when it is read from an eco-feminist perspective. The visions of various works of black women writers in South Africa as projected by various approaches were reviewed.

Firstly, for the radical feminists, the root cause of women's oppression is located solely in patriarchy. Their vision thus entails empowering the women to reject patriarchal structures. The aim of this empowerment of women is mainly to disempower men. Zimmerman and Rappaport (1988) consider empowerment to be an active process whose essence is to propel people's activities towards transformation; from a passive state to an active one. Through this empowerment, women become stronger before men and are able to break male dominance in the society. Since gender is a social construction, radical feminists' argument is that women's oppression will not end only through political and economic reforms. For them, the transformation of the entire gender system is their

priority. This restructuring of the gender system is intended to eliminate men totally in all social and economic contexts.

In her thesis, *Mysogynism and the Dynamics of Power* Ntambo (2018) use a radical feminist approach to the reading and interpretation of Angela Makholwa's "Black Widow Society." Ntambo assesses how Makholwa's female characters reject male domination by being sexual deviants, killing their husbands and being economically independent. Ntambo argues that the female characters' expression of sexual liberty should not be considered as deviant because it is their expression of their empowerment and rejection of male domination. She further argues that the breaking of taboos give these women some kind of self-fulfillment that is denied by the patriarchal structures.

In so doing, Ntambo justifies immoral female actions such as Tallulah's promiscuity, Janie's prostitution and Nhomle's husband-snatching behavior. These women as argued by Ntambo enjoy living according to how they please. They do not depend on gender roles prescribed by the society which normally dictates how a woman should behave. Ntambo also argues that Makholwa presents her female characters having a conscious that tells them that it is right for them to eliminate men because these men became successful through women's efforts. This justified Lyod's murder by Thami. Ntambo's argument is that though these women are considered to be the 'black sheep,' their actions are in line with the radical feminist vision of total exclusion of the men. Therefore, a text interpreted from a radical feminist perspective entails a vision of eliminating the men in all social and economic contexts which will in turn disempower them while empowering the women.

The Marxist feminist is another vision projected from the works of black South African women. Marxist feminists borrowed a leaf from the works of Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx on the theory of social production. This theory focuses on what can be considered

productive and unproductive. Marxist feminists use this concept of productive and unproductive labor to interpret the sexual division of labor in a patriarchal society. For them, men's labor normally results to a paid wage hence it has always been considered productive because it was a public affair. However, women's form of labor (motherhood, nurturing, cleaning and cooking) was considered unproductive and hence unpaid because it has always been considered a private affair. However, Marxist feminists argue that women's contribution which was considered unproductive should in fact be categorized as productive because their contribution is very essential in the maintenance of the public sectors. For Marxist feminists, the emotional component that women give is part of the reproductive labor because it entails social ideas, tradition and values that helps to sustain political systems.

In her article *The Politics of Motherhood: Reproductive Labor in Lauretta Ngcombo's 'And They Didn't Die'* Timlin (2017) argues that Ngcombo's novel can be grounded in the Marxist feminist perspective. According to Timlin, Ngcombo's novel responds directly to the punitive literature produced at the time. This kind of literature produced by men romanticized women's hardships as heroic and this reinforced patriarchal structures within the society. Timlin's assessment points to the fact that Ngcombo interrogates these kinds of sentiments on two realms which are the personal and the political. Firstly, she argues that Jezile's aspirations for motherhood are not necessarily for performance of her role as a woman but for personal fulfillment. Her inability to have a child at the beginning, her attempts to get pregnant and the challenges she faces once she has children according to Timlin, can be equated to reproductive and unproductive labor. In this line of thought, Timlin argues that Ngcombo presents marriage as a transaction where the woman is the worker, her body and her labor being the means of production. The resultant commodities which are this woman's fertility and children are all sold in this transaction. Jezile, is the

kind of woman whom according to Timlin, is molded to the form of a vessel solely for procreation; her contributions are seen to be unproductive in this marriage. Her emancipation comes when her husband is imprisoned and she has to take a job as a house help in a white home. She assumes the role of the breadwinner and reverses the roles designed by patriarchy. Hence, in the Marxist feminist vision, revolution is the key to liberation.

Thirdly, another vision projected from the works of South African black women writers is the eco-feminist vision. Eco-feminists believe that those who suffer the most in the society are women and the environment. They argue that their oppression results from the exploitative industrial practices of men in their quest to create wealth (Shiva, 1988). Men view both nature and women as property to be controlled and exploited. According to Oksala (2018) women and nature are unified by their nurturing attributes which leads to the patriarchal world to feminize nature as “Mother Earth.” Women as a result, feel interconnectedness and a “mystic alliance” with natural world and adopt the slogan of “Earth guardianship.” For this reason, Snodgrass (2015) believes that in so doing, these women are campaigning against wasteful materialism and pollution. As Gonzales (2013) puts it, historically, gender oppression was synonymous with environmental pollution. Just like women who were considered men’s property, the environment was also considered to be men’s property which were to be manipulated by men any time and were expected to be passive reservoirs.

In his thesis, *Africana Eco-feminism: Bessie Head’s When Rain Clouds Gather*, Ismael (2019) argues that Bessie Head’s intention in this novel is that of educating people about the progressive means in agriculture that could help sustaining the exhausted lands. He further says that as an educated woman, Head believes that there should be improvement

on farming means to prevent the encroaching desert caused by traditional overuse of lands as grazing areas and the long term cycle of drought. In the novel, Ismael argues that Gilbert Balfour, an English agronomist who settles in Golema Mmidi, devotes his energy to help the villagers work on a cooperative project to help promoting the place into a productive project to help in promoting the place into a productive agricultural community. This, as he believes, will change the community's economic status because of their total dependence on the deteriorating business of raising cattle. Balfour also enlists the women of the village to join this agricultural project as the men are far away with their cattle. He advises them to collaborate and work in groups in order to be able to double their profits. This will free them from the control of chiefs, who force their subjects to share their profits with them. He also confines Makhaya, a refugee, to settle in the village and educate women of the modern methods of farming. Moreover, Ismael argues that Head also comments on the marginal status of women in tribal communities, whom the dominant men can "buy at some stage, like buying a commodity to keep at home and not care much about it." Ismael also comments that Head voices the evils of patriarchy and capitalism where women are physically exploited from an early age and child prostitution being a common practice to some villages. In addition, Ismael argues that Head's criticism of overgrazing is demonstrated in the tragedies that afflict the villagers when most of their cattle perish as a result of the dry season. She presents images of mass death with vultures circling the sky above the dead cows, barren lands and loss of loved ones. Ismael concludes by stating that Head's vision is one where there would be sustainability of the land and social justice to women.

Generally, a review of the previous works of black women writers in South Africa which project various visions of these authors when interpreted using different approaches was very important in this study because it emphasizes on the need to interpret Kopano

Matlwa's *Coconut* (2007) and *Period Pain* (2016) from a different perspective: the womanist perspective. From the above discussed approaches, radical feminist vision entails disempowering the men in order to empower the women; the Marxist feminist vision entails women resisting oppression by fighting against men; and the eco feminist vision entails bringing justice to nature and women. All these were aimed at providing a message to the black people in South Africa. However, in this study, the researcher argued that the black people in the post-apartheid South Africa do not need a message that is biased like the one the western feminism preaches. It is biased in the sense that it only favors the women while working against men as it solely aims to end patriarchy. In this study, the researcher argued that these are still experiencing the aftermath of the dehumanizing apartheid system need a vision that is holistic. A vision that puts into consideration their gender, race and class concerns; a vision that recognizes that the black men just like the black women are impotent in the white patriarchal structures hence fighting each other will not end the oppression. Rather, the solution lies in working together and embracing each other's ideas. This vision is one where the black men, women and children live in peace and harmony. Such is the womanist vision.

2.5 Theoretical framework

This study used the womanist theory as advanced by Alice Walker (1984) and Chikwenye Ogunyemi (1985) to analyze the two novels. The major tenets include:

1. Portrayal of the black woman as courageous and daring
2. The black woman's concern for all people; men, women and children
3. Intertextuality in the black woman's novel
4. The epistolary form in the black woman's novel
5. The concept of madness in the black woman's novel

The above tenets were used in the study to provide a lens through which the researcher used to argue that Matlwa's *Coconut* (2007) and *period pain* (2016) projects the black experience in post-apartheid South Africa from a womanist perspective.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, the research design was based on qualitative interpretive method. Being a textual study the research data was drawn from a library research. George (2008) posits that library research is a method of collecting data where data is collected through studying and understanding data which is closely related to issues from documents, books and theories. The forms of data included primary data: *Coconut* (2007) and *Period Pain* (2016); and secondary data which included journals, articles and books on black women writings. The tenets of womanism as advanced by Alice Walker (1984) and Chikwenye Ogunyemi (1985) were also employed. This study did not involve participants because as George (2008) argues, in a library research method, the researcher is the one in charge of identification, collection and interpretation of the data. What provided data for the main arguments of the study included description of action and scenes, character and language analysis.

Sampling done involved the works of African American women writers such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou and Bell Hooks; African women writers like Chimamanda Adichie and Flora Nwapa from Nigeria, Mariama Ba from Senegal and finally the research narrowed down to works of black women writers from South Africa. These works included those of Sisonke Msimang, Mohale Mashigo, Bessie Head, Malebo Sephodi and Kopano Matlwa. Out of these, the study settled on two of Kopano Matlwa's novels; *Coconut* (2007) and *Period Pain* (2016) due to their thematic concerns that project fully the black experience in post-apartheid South Africa. The procedure used included:

1. Reading the two novels and the biography of Kopano Matlwa.
2. Tracing the development of womanism
3. Studying and investigating Walker's and Ogunyemi's womanism.

4. Reading the previous studies related to the main topics
5. Analyzing the themes and the technical aspects of the work.
6. Discussing the findings
7. Conclusion

The researcher observed research ethics where data collected was entirely meant for academic purposes and not for the researcher's personal gain or for economic growth.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF *COCONUT* AND *PERIOD PAIN*

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher focused on the three objectives of the study. The first section deals with the first objective: to explore the deep meaning of the black woman experience in the two novels. Here, investigations are done to find out how the female characters grapple with the issues of gender, class and race. The second section deals with the second objective of the study: to demonstrate the womanist approach in the analysis and interpretation of the two novels. Here, the researcher demonstrates that Matlwa writes from a womanist consciousness to project the black experience in the post-apartheid South Africa. Here, womanist tenets as advanced by Ogunyemi (1985) and Walker (1984) are used in order to meet this end. The last section deals with the third objective of the study: to analyze the author's vision for the black people in post-apartheid South Africa in the two novels. The researcher aims to find out how Matlwa advocates for womanist actions in order to seek avenues for communication rather than justifications for misunderstandings.

4.1 The black woman experience

The study operates from the understanding that the black woman is oppressed by interlocking forms of oppression on the basis of race, class and gender. Hence, this section explores how these forms of oppression operate simultaneously to oppress the black female protagonists in these two novels who represent at large the oppression which the black women experience in post-apartheid South Africa

4.1.1 The black woman and racism

In South Africa, racism was brought about by the apartheid system which forced the whites to live separately from the non-white population. The contact between these two groups was limited. This brutal system ended in 1994 when Nelson Mandela came to power in South Africa as the first black president and abolished it. However, despite the black government's efforts to put an end to racism, the post-apartheid era is still marked by racism because nothing much has changed. In *Coconut*, Matlwa explores the immediate impact of this racist system which is identity crisis. Within the postapartheid environment the various forms of identities available to the black people which make them confused on what form of identity position they want. The root of this identity crisis is that the people have internalized western values and practices. This novel focuses on how the privileged and the underprivileged communities respond to this crisis. Spencer (2009) contends that the term 'coconut' in South Africa has a negative connotation referring to a black individual but has adopted the white lifestyle. The novel therefore focuses on two protagonists, Ofilwe and Fikile who have adopted the white way of living. These two black female characters have found themselves in the newly formed South Africa where they feel that they are too black to be considered white or too white to be considered black. The result is that these black individuals are presented with problematic identity positions. In the next subsection, identity crisis as a resulting problem emanating from the racist apartheid system was analyzed with reference to *Coconut*.

4.1.1.1 Identity crisis in *Coconut*

Firstly, in *Coconut*, language is depicted as one major cause of identity crisis as characters consider the English language to be more important than their local languages. This is revealed through Ofilwe who explains that her brother was supposed to be admitted in grade two but was held back in grade one just because he did not articulate the English

words properly to match the standards of his new school (6). The language of instruction which is English makes Ofilwe hold onto it dearly as she makes great efforts to master and believes that she even speaks it better than the whites. She tells herself that black people are just jealous of her and that is the reason why they avoid her. Her reasoning is that she speaks English perfectly that's why these black people treat her with indifference.

She even goes to the extent of disdaining her local language Sepedi by saying that she knew it from the start that Sepedi would not take her anywhere near success. According to her, all those successful people from her surrounding; doctors, lawyers and accountants did not speak Sepedi. She says that she speaks the TV language that is associated with success (142). Elsewhere in the novel Ofilwe brags about how her extended family treats her differently because she speaks English perfectly. When she spends time with them, they do not allow her to work as she should save all her energy for books. She even tells her cousins she will teach them English and they will become special just like her (54).

In addition to this, there is a specific type of English which is preferred. This is the English spoken by the white South Africans. This is witnessed from the conversation between Ofilwe and her white friend Belinda. In this conversation, Belinda insists that Ofilwe has to speak 'properly' so that she won't be laughed at (49). In this scene, Belinda concentrates not so much with the game but on teaching Ofilwe the "proper accent." In so doing, Belinda keeps this activity uneven by unconsciously suggesting that English is superior to other languages. Here, the fact that Ofilwe feels pressured to speak English properly or else she gets marginalized tells us that in the post-apartheid environment, there is still the construction of the center and periphery. The blacks feel pressured by the whites and longs to belong to the center which is evident when Ofilwe finally lets Belinda teach her so that she won't be mocked.

Ofilwe generally shuns her own language at the expense of the foreign one. According to her, English is the language of advancement, one that provides opportunities for personal development. His brother Tshepo even warns her that her preference for this white language would lead her to a far place one that would not be easy to return (45). In another instance when her friend Siphokazi visits her, Ofilwe feels left out when Siphokazi and Tshepo have a conversation about how important the African languages are to the black South Africans. Her inability to understand Sepedi, her local language renders her unable to follow this conversation, something which makes her very angry (59). In this case, Ofilwe feels alienated from her own people because she is unable to communicate with them in Sepedi. It is for this reason that Tshepo considers her a ‘sell out’ and even warns her not to come close to him when his friends are around (60).

Fikile is another character who considers the English language very important. This is clearly seen when she explains how her whole life is centered on how she speaks and how the sounds she makes sound in peoples’ ears. According to her, her accent is key because it makes people classify her to belong to the ‘high and mighty’ class in South Africa. This strong desire to speak in English makes her refuse to speak Zulu which is her native language. Just like Ofilwe, she believes English is the language of development whereas Zulu is the exact opposite. This strong desire drives Ofilwe to a point where she believes she is superior to other black people. This superiority complex makes her formulate stories about her white identity. For instance, she comments that most people consider her to be foreign and coming from the UK. According to her, these people think so because of her accent which is different. She further explains how she never gets along with these poor black South Africans (146).

Her desire to speak the English language perfectly can also be seen from the way she interacts with the customers at her work place. She uses civilized words like ‘espresso, waffle’ and even calls a customer Sheilz instead of Sheila. Also she insists that people should call her Fiks instead of Fikile as the latter, according to her brings out the image of her being backward. Rudwick (2008) points out that both excessive and limited use of the English language can lead to one being banished from his or her community. She also explains how hard it is for one who lacks proficiency in the English language to secure a well-paying job in South Africa. She also adds this kind of situation causes internal turmoil to blacks because they feel uncomfortable using it.

The second factor that has resulted to identity crisis in the post-apartheid environment is the ideals and standards of whiteness. According to Frankenberg (1993) whiteness gives people a kind world view that shapes people’s thoughts to look at the white culture as superior to the black culture. This makes the white to look down upon the blacks’ culture as being inferior, backward and retrogressive. This inferiority attached to the black culture makes the blacks to despise their own culture and prefer to adopt the white one. This kind of a situation is what Ngugi calls ‘white ache.’ Radithalo (2010) explain that white ache is a kind of sickness where blacks do not wish to pass as blacks but as whites. One way in which the power of whiteness is projected is through mass media. It creates stereotypes which are associated with race, class and gender. The fashion magazines mentioned in the novel are directed to white South African women (132). These magazines according to Sanger (2008) are encoded with racist and prejudiced ideas which are meant to distort the thinking of the black people.

Both Ofilwe and Fikile are negatively influenced by these fashion magazines as they have internalized the white standards of beauty hence redirect their lives towards these

expectations. In one instance Ofilwe relates how she spent one afternoon staring at the magazines she had stuck on her bedroom wall (92). When her brother enters her bedroom, he points out that there was no single face of colored person. He orders her to take them down as she had unconsciously projected the theme of whiteness (92). He comments that Ofilwe is one person who is stuck between two worlds and each of these worlds shun her (93). Elsewhere in the novel, Ofilwe walks over to a newsstand to look at the cover of Fresh Magazine. She looks at how this magazine uses a white South African woman to market the standards and ideals of whiteness. Ofilwe's description of this actress is that she is expensively dressed and enjoys esqerian weekends with her husband (55). This is the kind of lifestyle Ofilwe aspires to have in the future.

Another instance Ofilwe remembers how Kate Jones, her white classmates had beautiful hair. According to Ofilwe, Kate's hair dazzled even her teachers (1). She is delusional over her hair to the point of comparing it with elements of nature such as burnt amber, autumn leaves and the setting of the sun (1). Ofilwe emphasizes this visual beauty to point of overlooking her terrible personality. Though Ofilwe admits that Kate was overfed, hoggish, spoilt, naughty and foul-mouthed she still insists that Kate was beautiful. The admiration of these white standards of beauty lead her to do all it takes in order to conform these standards. In one memory, she relates the pain she has to go through when straightening her hair. She admits that this pain sends quivers down her neck and teeth as the comb slides in. Despite all this pain, she admits that she is happy to be beautiful (4). According to Murray (2008) conforming to the white standards meant that one's hair should be straight.

Fikile is also obsessed with fashion magazines. She explains how she finds comfort in the life displayed in Pristine World Magazine (167). These magazines gives her a vision of a

different lifestyle as she admits that the more she read, the more she assures herself that that was the kind of life she was born to live (168). This is the reason why her grandmother scolds her by telling her to go outside and play rather than sitting all day engrossed in those magazines. Her obsession with these fashion magazines makes her internalize the white standards of beauty to the extreme point of altering her appearance. She give a detailed picture of the items she treasures the most which include contact lens, lemon light skin lightening cream, sunscreen, eyeliner, mascara, eyeshadow, eyelash straightener and the pieces of caramel blond hair extension (117). She further explains her beauty routine of polishing chips or cracks that may have developed overnight. She has come to understand how important it is to maintain a good physical appearance in her work environment. It helps her not only to maintain her employment but also to conform to the white standards of beauty. This according to her, helps in escaping her poor living conditions. Her white boss also commends her concerning her conformity to these white standards of beauty by commenting that she looks gorgeous (119). This implies that Fikile got this job because she dresses and behaves in accordance with the white expectations. Later on, when she goes against these expectations by not brushing her hair properly, Miss Becky gives her a stern warning against such behavior (122).

Thirdly, cultural rituals have further contributed to these problematic identity positions. Hlongwane (2013) points out that the black South Africans living in the post-apartheid era do not see the value of their black culture because of the permeating and overbearing culture of whiteness. In order to fit in and exist, Phiri (2013) explains that these blacks conform to this domineering white culture. For instance, the Tlous who are living in the white suburbs are unable to conduct cultural rituals. On one occasion when a chicken was spotted on their hanging line, they are issued with a warning letter (73).

Living in this white suburb, they were not allowed to be African and carry out their cultural rituals. According to the two security guards who issued the warning letter, this family was breaching the rules by going against the expected code of conduct stipulated in the Estate Handbook (73).

On another occasion, when Ofilwe's father got drunk and attempts to perform a ritual sacrifice by carrying a bag that dripped blood into the house, Ofilwe's mother reacts in an outburst. She screams saying that the ritual was a witchcraft and a reminder of their backwardness (72). As Ofilwe narrates, her mother was even mad at her grandmother Tlou for covering her Peach Persian carpet with blood and flies (74).ironically, Grandmother Tlou whom Ofilwe considers to be the custodian of the African traditions seems to have embraced the western tradition at one point. Ofilwe explains how she took a leave of two weeks for mourning the death of Princess Diana of Wales. Ofilwe explains how she dressed in black throughout this whole period.

Cultural alienation is also expressed by Ofilwe who looks down upon the traditional way of life. In one instance when Ofilwe misses going to a sleepover so as to attend a funeral of a family friend to her parents', her grandmother explains to her that such functions are of immense importance (7) Ofilwe's reaction the importance attached to funerals by her family is that of disdain. She contemptuously comments that such functions are only important to greedy people. According to her, she does not want people coming to her funeral pretending to cry yet their main goal is food (8). Ofilwe's reaction emanates from her internalization of the western culture which has alienated her from her African cultural rituals. It is this state of cultural crisis that Ofilwe admits that she is ignorant of the traditional customs. She says that she fears one day when her turn comes to conduct these sacred occasions she would not know how to conduct them. She questions her ignorance

further by stating that she does not know what mourning women wear, which way the yellow mattress face and how long people wear the black dresses (9). It is clear that Ofilwe is unable to feel comfortable in the affluent life her family is living. She realizes that they are culturally and emotionally separated from their own cultural roots. Generally, Matlwa lets us see through *Coconut* that the black woman experience in post-apartheid South Africa entails problematic identity positions. These black women seem to have a problem in seeing the value of their own traditions. This is because the white culture is so domineering that it does not allow these women the freedom to practice their own culture. This is indeed problematic because these women are torn between adopting the white culture and holding onto their own culture. Most of these women tend to adopt the white culture at the expense of their own and in the process they become alienated and rootless.

In this study, the analysis of identity crisis as a resulting effect of the racist apartheid system was only analyzed from *Coconut* because Matlwa wrote the novel when the people in post-apartheid South Africa were at the peak of the crisis in 2008. *Period Pain* was published later on in 2016 when Matlwa focused not so much on identity crisis but other problems that resulted from the brutal system. In the next subsection racial tension was analyzed in both *Coconut* and *Period Pain* as Matlwa gives it prominence in both novels.

4.1.1.2 Racial tension in *Coconut*

In addition to identity crisis, racism in South Africa resulted to racial tension in the post-apartheid era. Within this environment, much of this tension between blacks and whites emanates from the fact that these two groups are expected to coexist within the new environment that was supposedly free from racial attitudes and prejudices. However, this is not the case because the tension that was present during the apartheid era is still intense in the post-apartheid era.

In *Coconut*, instances of this tension between the whites and blacks are clearly witnessed. Ayanda, Fikile's co-worker at Silver Spoon Coffee Shop expresses his anger through an outburst at the continued inequalities caused by the racist system in the post-apartheid era. He reacts angrily when a rude white customer at work comments that blacks would not be able to read and write if it were not for the whites (150). Ayanda abuses her and goes ahead to accuse the general white South Africans by stating that they are not even remorseful for the dehumanizing experience they let the blacks go through. Ayanda lets her know that even without the whites, the blacks would still create their own means if they had given them the chance (151). This outburst generally exposes the continued injustices and marginalization that the blacks still face in the new South Africa. Matlwa also reveals that when in public, a black person is always uncomfortable because whiteness always passes judgment on him or her. Ofilwe is one character who gets really irritated by this 'white gaze' as she explains how in one instance a white store owner stared at him as if she had an 'innate proclivity for theft'(44). In this case, the 'white gaze' represents the racist and prejudiced views concerning black people. Ofilwe's comment that maybe she has an 'innate proclivity for theft' points to the fact that in this era, there are still stereotypical constructions attached to the black identity: the whites still stereotype the blacks as thieves.

This gaze of the white store owner makes Ofilwe remember another instance when she was twelve years old. While playing the game of spin-the-bottle, the axe deodorant bottle determined that she should kiss Clinton Mitchley, a white boy. Ofilwe then decides to close her eyes and prepare for the kiss. Clinton however reacts in an outburst that Ofilwe's lips are too dark (45). Embarrassed Ofilwe returns to the outside of the circle as she is painfully reminded of her racial identity. Hence she cannot be accommodated within the white circle since her racial identity dictates that she belongs to the margin. Elsewhere in

the novel, this tension is witnessed where Ofilwe has a crush on Junior P, a white boy. Ofilwe then decides to write down a love note to him which he arrogantly replies that he only dates white girls (24).

Moreover, through Fikile, Matlwa also explores the racist and sexist beliefs. These beliefs entail the assumption that white men owned black women's bodies. Paul, a white customer at Silver Spoon Coffee Shop, assumes that he owns Fikile's body. Despite his friends revealing that he is married, he tells Fikile to go with him and leave her job because he is able to pay her the money she is being paid at Silver Spoon. He also tells Fikile that she does not belong to this place (175). Here, Paul's racist remarks serves two functions. Firstly, he reveals that in the post-apartheid era, white men still believed that they owned black women's bodies. Secondly, the comment, "you don't belong here" means that despite Fikile's desires of belonging to the white society, she will never actually fit in because this society still has racist attitudes and prejudices. These racist notions are further evident when Fikile later meets Sky, a white regular customer of Silver Spoon. Here, Fikile is judged by her skin color. Sky makes an attempt to get close to Fikile by inviting her over for a drink. However, his white friends just like Paul's friends make a racist remark that Sky should not keep chasing black girls (184). These remarks tell us that Fikile's relationship with Sky will be one that is filled with challenges because of these white racist notions.

This tension is so intense that makes black individuals to be uncomfortable in their own skins thus want to escape their blackness. For instance, when Fikile is asked by her teacher what she wants to be when she grows up, she says that she wants to be white (135). Later on during a Mathematics lesson while being taught the concept of 'Infinity' she creates a project for escaping blackness. This project which she calls Project Infinity, she argues

that will enable her escape the life of blackness (171). Moreover, both Ofilwe and Fikile have created their own fantasies which reject the realities around them. At some point, Ofilwe longs to be a white princess (18) as she believes that she came from a royal lineage but later on she rebukes these thoughts by stating that she does not like the way her mind thinks sometimes. She tells herself that she is a black girl and it was not good to sell her soul for a white skin (61). Fikile also has created stories about being white and not black. Her stories are aimed to classify her among the white people (147). However, at some point she also rebukes her thoughts as she says her head is messed up with these stories hence needs cleaning (147). This is what Du Bois (1993) refers to as 'double consciousness.' According to him, double consciousness entails two souls conflicting in one black body. Both Ofilwe and Fikile seem not to be certain about what world they want to embrace and hence their thoughts end up divided in the in-between space, between the black and white worlds.

Matlwa also explores the tension existing amongst the blacks at the community level. This tension is as a result of intra-racism, where black people's internalization of white ideals lead them to start discriminating each other. This is in line with Fanon (1967) who argues that in the colonial world; the black natives not only represent the absence of values but also the negation of these values. Firstly, this kind of intra-racist attitudes can be witnessed among the poor blacks. Fikile is one such poor individual who has adopted the most racist attitudes towards her fellow poor black people, disdaining them in every way. She considers them as cable thieves (134), speaks of women as having bad breath and odor and labeling all black men as a bunch of criminals (129). On one occasion when she sits next to a black man on a train, the man tries to engage her in a friendly conversation but when she notices he carries an expensive briefcase she spitefully tells herself that she does not want to sit next to that black man because he is probably a thief, an alcoholic and a

rapist too. In another instance when she was going to work, she boards a train and then looks around her. She tells herself that she is not part of those black people who sat around her. She further convinces herself that she is rich and brown and they are poor and black (140).

This tension is also evident between the newly rich blacks and the poor blacks. When Tlou's family enters Silver Spoon for Sunday breakfast Fikile becomes suddenly conscious of her own black identity and treats this newly rich black family with the same spite that she bestows on the poor blacks on the train. This contrast sharply with the way she treats her white customers. According to her, these white customers will help her get out of poverty but the black ones are simply an "annoyance" and "waste of time" (164). She is pointedly rude to them and when they do not leave her a tip she spitefully comments that one cannot expect much from black people (176). In this case, her hatred for these wealthy black families is for two reasons: firstly, she is probably envious of their own achievement of having entered the white society which has been her dream always. Secondly, it could be because she is fearful that if she ever rises to that kind of status she would still feel the same sense of alienation due to her black skin.

Matlwa further explores this tension at the family level. Ofilwe and her mother have a relationship that is restrained as noted from Ofilwe's comment that she feels uncomfortable being alone with her mother" (50). The fact that Ofilwe has internalized the white superiority notions makes her consider her mother inferior because, according to her, her mother is uncivilized because she still embraces the African traditions which are backwards and retrogressive. Ofilwe admits that, "it has not always been like that" (55). She remembers how close she used to be with her mother when she was young. At this point, Matlwa lets us understand that the rift that is between them is caused by

Ofilwe's internalization of the white racist attitudes and prejudices. It is also for this reason that she does not tell her mother about the parents' evenings conducted in the school as her mother, according to Ofilwe, would embarrass her. Another instance is when she feels ashamed by her mother is when her friends came at her place for a sleepover. Ofilwe believes that her mother is unable to behave in accordance with the white's expectations and will embarrass her because Ofilwe associates with the rich white children when in school. Her broken English, according to Ofilwe is a big letdown (53). She goes to the extremes of her spite towards her mother by thinking to herself that she is dumb (3) and to make the matter worse she goes ahead to tell her to her face that she is dumb immediately her friends leave.

4.1.1.3 Racial tension in *Period Pain*

In this novel, instances of revenge are also witnessed in the way the black South Africans treat their white counterparts. In this era, it is witnessed that the black people take revenge on white people by raping and murdering them. In one instance, Masechaba narrates how a white lady was brought to hospital after black men broke into her home, killed her boyfriend, raped her and ransacked her house (43). Elsewhere in the novel, the tension between blacks and whites is manifested from the way Nyasha, Masechaba's Zimbabwean friend and flat mate, bitterly comments about the white girls who had gone to work in the hospital. According to her, these white girls are not capable of anything good but serving their own interests (50).

Matlwa further explores deeply the tension existing amongst the blacks at national level in this novel. The tension that exists at this level is a projection of the black South African's frustration and a state of hopelessness. In this new era, the black South Africans had high expectations of equality on the social and economic life. The black people in this

era are angry because the promises made by the black government were not fulfilled. Ironically, they direct their anger to the black people coming from other African countries instead of directing it to their own government. Matsinhe (2011) argues that the black South Africans' high expectations drastically dropped when they realized that service delivery was far-fetched. Therefore, the era has witnessed the black people being more conscious than before hence aware of the unequal distribution of resources. The existence of these inequalities promoted xenophobia. Xenophobia, in simple terms refers to the hate that black South Africans have towards foreign nationals.

They put all the blame of this unequal distribution of resources to these foreign nationals. Thus, xenophobia can be considered the 'New racism' because just like the 'Old racism,' it rejects the other. This rejection is now based on ethnic background. Ethnicity entails people sharing a common heritage. This common heritage normally comprises of a common language, faith and ethnic ancestry. They thus consider the black immigrants to be strangers because they do not share a common heritage with them. The South African natives define them as being illegal and criminal.

These foreigners are easily spotted once they speak because their accent sells them out. They are thus referred to using the derogatory term, *kwerekwere*. These foreigners found their way into South Africa when the country gained independence and abolished the apartheid system. The Africans who migrated to South Africa from neighboring countries like Mozambique, Angola and Zimbabwe were hit hard by famine, floods and civil wars. The Africans coming from these countries saw an opportunity to progress in the newly formed South Africa. It is for this reason that the black South Africans hate them. They view them as opportunistic individuals who just came to rob them of their jobs and cause

a scarcity of resources. These attacks are normally through the destruction of their businesses, looting and killing them by stabbing, stoning or burning them to death.

In this novel, at first Masechaba expresses some racist attitudes towards the immigrants. At some point when she was a student she used to laugh with her friends about the smell of the immigrants. She admits that she remembers laughing at them during her first year where her friend Zanelle called them *oorkans* and said they smell of menstrual blood (74). In addition, whenever she had an argument with Nyasha, she blamed her actions on her Zimbabwean roots. In her diary, she confesses that sometimes she would really want to tell Nyasha to go back to her own country and stop interfering with South African problems (62). Masechaba's mother also discriminates Nyasha because of her foreign nationality. In one instance, Masechaba narrates how her mother would do when she went home on weekends. According to her, her mother makes her to take off her clothes at the door as she says she does not want Masechaba to go in with Nyasha's charms and black magic (52). Her mother claims that these *kwerekweres* would steal Masechaba's intelligence and her whole future (38).

Later Masechaba is angered by the mistreatment of black immigrants who come to the hospital seeking treatment. She exposes how the hospital staff mistreats these foreign patients by calling them dirt, shouting at them and laughing at their foreign names (48).

Ironically, despite being angered by this mistreatment, Masechaba does nothing to change the situation and she admits to this (41). At this point, she understands that xenophobic attitudes towards foreign nationals are connected to racism during the apartheid era but she does not have the courage to confront the perpetrators. Although Masechaba's conscience is pricked by this mistreatment, her lack of courage to try to put an end to it

emanates from the fact that her society has been perpetrating it even before her birth and it is deeply rooted. As much as she wants to fight and outdo it, she cannot.

The xenophobic attitudes are based on discriminatory practices. Firstly, they are based on discrimination on the basis of citizenship. Nyamnjoh (2006) notes that only those who have legal citizenship are the ones considered to belong to the South African country legally. Masechaba's mother lets us see that even those who were in the front line fighting during the apartheid struggle to attain racial equality are in fact the ones who ironically perpetrate xenophobic attitudes which are similar to the racial attitudes during the apartheid era. Just like during the apartheid era where racial stereotypes existed, the immigrants are seen to be thieves, stealing what "real" South African deserves. She cautions Masechaba to stay away from Nyasha as she will steal everything she had worked hard for (38). In this sense, the fight against apartheid is seen not to be a struggle where blacks were fighting for equal rights. Rather, it is seen as a struggle to gain legality for the South African citizens and illegality for non- South African people.

In South Africa, this illegality is also based on the physical appearance. Nyamnjoh (2006) explains that individuals who are suspected to be *Makwerekwere* are those who are dark, have a different accent, hairstyle and dressing style. On one occasion, Masechaba makes a discriminatory comment that although Nyasha had a fair complexion (a physical appearance that qualifies her to be a South African citizen) her illegality was detectable from her accent (42).

Matlwa further stresses on these exclusionary practices where these foreign nationals are considered to be diseased, capable of contaminating the South African community. A good example is the unkind nurse who sees Nyasha handing over a bottle of water to

Masechaba and spitefully comments that Masechaba should not drink it lest she becomes sick (65). The other nurses also react in the same way as if these foreign patients had a contagious disease. As Masechaba explains, they scrunch up their noses while examining the foreigners. They also laugh at their names and humiliate them without considering how they would feel (48). All these comments made by these South African natives like Masechaba, her mother and the nurses enables Matlwa to expose the fact that the racist attitudes and prejudices that prevailed in the apartheid era continue to exist in the post-apartheid environment

Generally, Matlwa lets us see that the racial tension in the post-apartheid era is not different from the one that was present during the apartheid era. This era is still haunted by the racial demons of the past. The tension at the national level projected in *Period Pain* through the frequent outbursts of xenophobic attacks confirms this. As such, it can be considered to be a leftover of the apartheid system. In *Coconut*, Matlwa builds upon this argument by presenting the tension at the national, community and family levels to be one that has a dividing force on the black population. This division is especially between those who have internalized racism and those who have not. Therefore, through these two novels, Matlwa enables us to see clearly the fact that the black woman experience in post-apartheid South Africa entails her oppression on the basis of race. In the next subsection, classism as another direct result of the apartheid system was analyzed with reference to both novels.

4.1.2 The black woman and classism

Classism is a kind of discrimination where the people occupying the higher social class exclude and devalue the people occupying the lower social class. Bourdieu (1986) defines a social class as a class that comprises of economic, social and cultural capital. In his

elaboration, he argues that economic capital is simply the money that he has in his possession; social capital being the social networks available to the person; and lastly cultural capital being the knowledge on information that one has about the dominant culture. During the years of apartheid regime, classism was clearly present in South Africa. Black and white people who had the same qualifications and performed the same job had different salary scales. Knight and McGrath (1977) confirm this by stating that the salary for a black secondary teacher and a black police constable was only half of that of a white secondary teacher and a police constable. In the same vein, Seekings and Natrass (1996) explain how the pension awarded to old blacks by the state was less than that awarded to their white counterparts. Marks (1994) further explain how one's race determined his prospects for promotion. State policies worsened this situation because they promoted these inequalities between the black and white people. For instance, black people were denied the right to own property and their businesses were curtailed for the simple reason that they are black and belong to the second race hence second class citizens. In so many ways therefore, the person's income depended on his or her racial classification. In the post-apartheid era nothing much has changed since the systems of inequalities continue to persist.

4.1.2.1 Classism in *Coconut*

In this novel, Matlwa examines the two economic realities in the post-apartheid environment using the life experiences of her two female protagonists, Ofilwe and Fikile. Ofilwe comes from the economic class of the newly rich black South Africans who are seen to be trying to fit in a class which initially belonged to the whites. Fikile on the other hand, comes from a class of poor blacks who are also struggling to get out of this class where poverty is the norm. In both classes, therefore, Matlwa presents these black individuals to be uncomfortable. In the first half of the novel, the readers are introduced

to the Tlous (Ofilwe's family) who are the newly rich blacks in the newly formed South Africa. Ofilwe's family has a house full of European and North American luxuries and a Mercedes Benz in the garage. Ofilwe also uses expensive chemical hair relaxers from the United States in order to fit into the prescriptions of beauty that comes with this class. Ofilwe also mentions that every Sunday, her father used to order three "traditional English breakfast" for them at Silver Spoon. They also go to family vacations abroad: Disneyworld on Orland, Florida.

In the second half of the novel, Fikile lets us have a glimpse of the life enjoyed by this privileged upper middle class through her uncle's photo album. Her uncle grew up in a white family, the Kinsleys. These photos that Ofilwe have entail her uncle's birthday parties. She describes the images in detail and her mention of "Fizzes and Cheese Curls and Smarty's and little round colorful chewing gums and Paper Cups filled with Coke and Fanta" (123). This is indeed a kind of party that people from a privileged class would organize. Matlwa also mentions that Fikile had never had a birthday party in her entire childhood (123). These financial problems that Fikile's family is suffering are mostly due to lack of opportunity for the black people because of the racial division during the apartheid era. The kinds of opportunities available for the white South Africans were not the same as those available to the black South Africans.

Later on, through Fikile's lower class background, Matlwa critiques poverty in an attempt to address black disadvantage in the post-apartheid era. She presents the Township life as one that is filthy, full of dirt, blood, animal excrement as well as pest infestation. In this sense, blackness is associated with these unkempt neighborhoods and underdeveloped urban. Fikile lives with her uncle in a one-bedroom house that is described to be the back of another main house in Mpe Batho Township. Describing her poor living conditions,

Fikile explains how they lack a toilet or a bedroom like the one present in advanced homes. She explains that she has to collect water from taps outside, boil it then clean herself in a bucket in their kitchen (118).

This economic gap was brought about by the social classes that existed in the postapartheid environment. These social classes came up because of the policies that were put in place by the black government under the leadership of Nelson Mandela. Such included the Black Empowerment Policies whose aim was to reduce the economic gap between the white and blacks by including the black people in the economy. This is clearly illustrated by Ofilwe who explains that her father's company, IT Instantly had got the post office tender after her father was involved in bribery as she says that he had invested 'many golf balls and a thousand glasses of JC' (71). The opportunities and resources provided through these policies got into the hands of greedy minority few who grabbed them at the expense of the majority poor black South Africans. In this sense, the problem is not only the economic gap between the blacks and whites but also between the minority rich blacks and the majority poor black South Africans.

This economic gap is worsened further by the discrepancies that exist in many companies. Many companies practiced fronting as the superficial act to comply with these policies. Fronting, according to Durheim et al. (2011) is the superficial inclusion of black men and women in white business in order for them to be considered compliant with the Black Economic Empowerment policies which enables them to qualify for big contracts in both private and public sectors. This phenomenon of fronting in post-apartheid South Africa is clearly witnessed in the novel where Fikile's uncle complains of how he is treated at work. On one occasion, he narrates how his boss would always call him in meetings to represent

their company as the Black Economic Empowerment partner and after the meeting is over, he would be hurried back to his security post (106).

These policies have further caused conflict, animosity and division within the black population. This is why Fikile feels frustrated and considers the government to having failed her in terms of service delivery. She puts all this blame on the unreliable trains (129), cable thieves (134) and scummy townships (135). It is for this reason that Fikile hates blackness with so much passion and therefore aspires for whiteness. For her, being white meant having wealth, luxury, power, maturity and civility. She loathes blackness to a point that she creates fantasies of her background in order to escape her poverty stricken economic reality. In one instance, she creates in her head a story about England where his parents lecture. According to her explanation of why she is currently in Africa is the fact that the weather in England was extremely harsh. However, we get to know the actual details of her background when she unconsciously starts thinking about how her mother died by slitting her wrist. Her uncle was the only one who could take care of her since her father had run away and her grandmother had so many children she was taking care of at the time (114). Therefore her attempts to associate with whiteness can be seen as a way for her to escape her poor economic background.

Matlwa also exposes to the reader to the fact that although the newly rich black have acquired wealth but are uncomfortable in their upper middle class position. Ofilwe's family is symbolically placed at the margins of the Coffee shop. This is clearly seen when Ofilwe narrates how they were shown to sit on a table that was the only remaining one near a swinging door (19). A similar case is narrated by Fikile. At some point, she gets too comfortable at the white establishment but is quickly reminded of her place. One morning when she arrives at work, she is confronted with the chaos created by Caroline,

her boss' daughter. Despite her acquired "status" as waitress, Caroline degrades her by forcing her to work together with the other kitchen staff. Later on, Miss Becky corrects her daughter Caroline but it's too late as the message is clearly sent which is, blacks will always be servants and their place is in the kitchen- the lowly place. In this way, Matlwa shows us that the apartheid structures continue to persist in post-apartheid South Africa. In the next subsection, the study analyzed how Matlwa exposes classism existing in the post-apartheid South Africa through *Period Pain*.

4.1.2.2 Classism in *Period Pain*

In this novel, classism is evident because the structural and economic inequalities that existed in the apartheid period are still present in the post-apartheid era. Many people who attend the poorly funded public hospitals are blacks. Masechaba give details of these poor conditions of the public hospitals when she explains how the soap dispenser only worked on special occasions, especially when the minister comes to visit (29). The hospital worked fully on such events which show that there are discordances related to equality of access to services. Masechaba also describes how patients are crowded in wards (29). This state of affairs becomes worse in a way that the nursing staff goes to the extent of taking their own salaries in order to provide the care the patients need which the government has failed to provide. This scenario leads to their desperation and that of their patients to a point that they channel their anger to the foreign nationals in South Africa. This is why Sister Palesa blames the foreign nationals for the suffering of the black South Africans (81). She bluntly says that there would be enough food the black South African citizens for as long as the foreigners do not eat (82). It is ironical that the black South Africans are blaming foreign nationals for their hunger and poverty yet they are supposed to blame their own government for unequal distribution of resources.

Furthermore, the structural and economic inequality which has resulted to the country's state of hopelessness affects individuals even at personal level. At some point, Masechaba starts casting regrets on the achievement of her dream of becoming a medical doctor. She states that being a doctor has brought her nothing but pain and confusion (34). She further explains how she is psychologically tormented every day with the way the patients suffer and die in the hospitals. She adds that she is tired of watching their parents come every day asking for answers which she cannot give. She states that she is tired of working with people who are dead just like her (35). Matlwa therefore reveals to the reader the kinds of evils brought about by classism. Due to these prevailing evils, the post-apartheid society has lost hope in ever getting equal services and opportunities.

Generally, through Matlwa's depiction of classism in *Coconut* and *Period Pain*, the reader gets to know that the post-apartheid environment is one that is full of economic inequalities which is contrary to the expectations of the black people concerning the newly formed South Africa.. In the next subsection the focus is on sexism which is another form of oppression the black woman has to deal with in the current South Africa. The analysis was done on the lives of Matlwa's black female protagonists with the aim of projecting how she depicts sexism in the post-apartheid era.

4.1.3 The black woman and sexism

Sexism is another form of oppression that the black woman faces in post-apartheid South Africa. It entails discriminatory practices based on individual beliefs, attitudes and behaviors concerning gender or support the unequal status of men and women. The modern day sexism is characterized by men denying the continued existence of these discriminatory practices by assuming that women are asking too much from policy makers (Swim et al. 1995). According to Tougas et al. (1995), the present forms of sexism in the

post-apartheid era are manifested through a lack of support for social policies which are aimed at reducing gender inequality. Gender based violence which is part of these discriminatory practices has been a persistent problem in this era. In particular, the South Africans call it 'corrective rape' or 'curative rape.' Nell & Judge (2004) argue that it is supported by the patriarchal culture which allows men to rape women who go against societal expectations. These are what Basdeo (2006) calls 'rape myths.' He argues that they entail misplaced beliefs that the victim is the one who is on the wrong and that is why she is raped. Most of the time, such cases have a low rate of reporting because the victims normally face secondary victimization because the government officials offer little or no help to the victims. Through *Coconut* and *Period Pain*, Matlwa lets us see this gender based discriminatory practices and exploitation through the lives of her female characters.

4.1.3.1 Sexism in *Coconut*

In this novel, Matlwa exposes these discriminatory practices to the readers. Firstly, she shows the readers how male domination is one of these gender discriminatory practices. Through Gemina, Ofilwe's mother, Matlwa reveals that the position of women is in the domestic space while that of men is in the outside domestic space. Ofilwe narrates how her mother's voice is heard throughout the house while her father is always outside. She talks of her father spending his time in an outside garden (79). Here, male domination is symbolically represented by creating an English garden which has the statue of a boy peeing which suggests that power and authority in the home rests upon Ofilwe's father. Moreover, male domination in this society is also evident from Ofilwe's grandmother's response concerning her daughter, Gemina's complains about Ofilwe's father's infidelity. She advises her against divorces as she tells her that she would have nowhere to go. According to Ofilwe's grandmother, without Ofilwe's father, Gemina is nothing (13).

Fikile also suffered at the hands of her uncle who used to molest her when she was still young. In one instance, she narrates how her uncle would find her sitting on the kitchen floor writing her Mathematics homework and practicing English pronunciation when he would start nagging about the mistreatment he gets at work. Fikile explains how she would then lead him towards the bedroom and lie him down on the bed. Later on, when Ofilwe goes to sleep her uncle would then take her hands and gently slip them into the loose tracksuit pants that he usually wears at night (148). Here, Matlwa exposes how Fikile is sexually molested at the hands of her uncle. The next subsection is concerned with depicting how Matlwa exposes sexism in *Period Pain*.

4.1.3.2 Sexism in *Period Pain*

In this novel, these gender discriminatory practices are considered to be ‘curative’ or ‘corrective’ This can be illustrated from Masechaba’s narration of the events that led to her rape incidence. She explains that the men who accosted her accused her of helping the *Kwerekweres* instead of helping her own people in fighting these foreigners. These men claimed that foolish and spoilt women like her needed to be taught a lesson so that it would act as a deterrent measure to others who might want to follow the same path. Masechaba also explains how they told her that she was lucky they did not necklace her like they did to the likes of her during apartheid (113).

Moffet (2006) argues that this kind of rape has an ideological reasoning which is to put the victim back to the straight path. He adds that those who perpetrate this are usually targeting women as they consider them being the ones going against societal expectations in a patriarchal society. These perpetrators thus consider themselves to be the guardians of the social order in these patriarchal societies. According to them, these women need correcting as they pose a serious threat of overthrowing patriarchy in such societies. Even

Masechaba's psychiatrist, Dr. Phakama agrees to such notions by telling Masechaba that she should accept what happened to her as a form of correction for her abhorrent behavior which needed correcting (120). In this case then, sexual violence is seen to be used by men to put women down. Moffet (2006) supports this by arguing that in the South African context, sexual violence is an instrument of gender domination which in most cases is not associated with a racial agenda. In the same vein, Mackinnon (2005) further argues that women are raped for the simple reason that they are women; belonging to the inferior gender.

The experience is always so traumatic that the victims do not find the words to explain. Masechaba says that her pain lies so deep. According to her, there is no vocabulary that she can use to explain her pain. She even says that there is no language she can use to explain the turmoil inside her. According to her, the experience was worse than death (109). Masechaba further reveals the kind of trauma that women suffer due to this kind of rape when she says that although Dr. Phakama keeps on pushing her to forget the rape incident; she cannot get her head straight as she is still being raped every day in her mind (118). Through the novel, *Matlwa* lets us see how sexism oppresses the black women in post-apartheid South Africa as it allows for gender discriminatory practices. These black women lack voices in such a society because of its patriarchal nature. This then has become part of the experiences of a black woman living in post-apartheid South Africa.

4.2 Womanism in *Coconut and Period Pain*

This section demonstrates that *Matlwa*, a black South African woman, writes from a womanist consciousness to project the black experience in the post-apartheid South Africa. In this section, womanist tenets as advanced by Chikwenye Ogunyemi (1985) and

Alice Walker (1984) which include portrayal of the black female characters as courageous and daring, their concern for humanity, Intertextuality in black women's novels and how they portray madness were used to interpret the black experience in the post-apartheid South Africa. In the next subsection, the study delves into the first tenet of womanism as argued by Walker and Ogunyemi.

4.2.1 Portrayal of the black woman as courageous and daring

Courage and being daring is among the four aspects of the womanist identity according to Walker who considers 'womanish' to be the opposite of girlish. Girlish females who represent white women were irresponsible and not serious. On the contrary, womanish females acted in courageous, outrageous and willful ways. These attributes according to Collins (1996) sharply contrasted black women with white women. These womanish girls as Collins further argues, are curious, responsible and in charge. This is in line with Ogunyemi's line of thought who believes that unlike the white woman, the black woman is not powerless in the black world. Her power emanates from the fact that she has to fight to survive because she is less protected unlike the white woman who is fully protected in the white world. Therefore, this black woman has to grow independently, a factor that contributes greatly to her courageous and daring aspects. This is the reason why womanists like Walker and Ogunyemi argue that the womanist novel is fully packed with female achievement. In connection to this aspect, Matlwa constructs her female characters to be courageous and daring in both novels.

4.2.1.1 The black woman's courageous deeds in *Coconut*

In this novel, Matlwa projects Fikile as a courageous and daring female protagonist. Her daring and courageous personality is witnessed from her struggles to escape her poverty stricken background. She lives in Mpe Batho Township that is dirty, filthy, full of blood

and animal excrement and pest infestation. Her neighborhoods are unkempt and underdeveloped (118). She courageously decides to take the initiative to struggle to escape this kind of life. These struggles to dissociate herself from poor environments are presented through her loath towards blackness. She explains how she never got along with the poor black South Africans (146). One way in which she tries so hard to escape these low economic realities is by creating stories concerning her background. She creates a story of how together with her family, they lived in England but only came back to Africa because her body could not tolerate the harsh climatic conditions. She also creates an imaginary project, Project Infinity (171) that was meant to help her escape the life of blackness. Her loath for blackness goes to the extreme when she constructs stereotypes and attaches them to these black people as cable thieves (134) and a bunch of criminals (129). She thus convinces herself that she is rich and brown unlike the poor black people who are poor and black (140).

Her desperate urge to escape this life of blackness leads her to manipulate her appearance in order to look like a white woman. She applies lemon lightening cream, sunscreen, eyeliner, mascara, eye shadow, and eyelash straightener and caramel blond hair extension (117). She also speaks and dresses just like the white people. Her boss' comment that Fikile looks gorgeous also implies that she hired Fikile for the mere reason that her dress code and mannerisms conform to the white standards and expectations. This daring struggle to escape blackness can also be seen from the way she interacts with her customers at Silver Spoon. She frequently uses words like 'espresso, waffle' and even insists on being addressed as Fiks instead Fikile which is her African name. Her struggle is further witnessed from the way she is obsessed with the fashion magazines. She reads them so that she can escape her reality and oscillate in the white world. In addition, Fikile

also struggles with men who want to exploit her in her life and courageously puts them off. She confronts both Paul and Sky who think they own all black women's bodies.

Moreover, Fikile's daring deeds are also witnessed when she decides to put a stop to the molestation she undergoes in the hands of her uncle. Firstly, she decides to stop sleeping on the hard floor and abandons the bed she was sharing with her uncle. Secondly, she decides to move out and get her own home so that she can fend for herself. Therefore, Fikile's struggles to escape her prevailing poor background can be considered daring moves and courageous deeds. Given the circumstances that she found herself in, her mother committing suicide, her father abandoning her even before she was born and her sexually immoral uncle who used to molest her, Fikile courageously struggles with these circumstances in order to survive. In a world where she is victimized on the basis of race, sex and class, Matlwa's construction of Fikile is that which projects her to be a strong willed and courageous black female protagonist; an idea strongly advanced in Ogunyemi's (1985) essay.

4.2.1.2 The black woman's courageous deeds in *Period Pain*

In this novel, Masechaba is such a black female character who faces a lot of problems but acts courageously and takes daring steps. Firstly, she struggles with her own menstruation related problems. She narrates that her menstrual struggles began one day when blood poured out between her thighs and down onto her shoes. This continued for weeks and eased up for a few days then gushed out with more intensity (10). In one instance, Masechaba narrates how this abnormal flow made her feel embarrassed. Her father had bought her brother Tshiamo a car. When her brother offered her a ride, Masechaba recalls how she forgot to change her sanitary towel and messed up her dress which stuck on the seat of the new car (11). She further explains how this condition alienated her from the

rest of her classmates. She says that she would always sit at the back of the classroom so that if she messed up on her school dress, nobody would know (11). Masechaba explains further the pain that would accompany this menstrual bleeding which made her get admitted in one hospital after the other and went for transfusion after transfusion, took a lot of pills and many injections. This menstrual nightmare haunts her even during her medical practice. In one instance, she explains how she had to leave theatre because she had developed severe menstrual cramps. She explains how she could hardly keep herself from falling over and contaminating the entire operating field. She further explains that though her periods had reduced a little due to the endometrial ablation she had undergone, the severe monthly cramps persisted (45).

In addition to her menstrual woes, Masechaba also battles with her older brother's suicide. She explains how she is haunted by his death. She wakes up every morning preoccupied with it. She struggles to forget this memory but it is in vain. She keeps sending emails to him, a sign that she has not got over his death. The smiley faces and photographs add to her pain (18). This memory is very real as Masechaba gives an instance where she would wake up very early, drive recklessly as she wonders how it would feel to disappear and reunite with Tshiamo, her brother (48).

In spite of all these personal problems, Masechaba's courage, similar to Walker's (1984) and Ogunyemi's (1985) black woman's courage is seen when she decides to take a bold step and face these problems. Her first bold step was to become a medical doctor. This she does in order to find a solution to her menstrual problems and save other women who are suffering the same fate. She made this decision after she successfully got the ablation operation. She tells her mother that she was sure she wanted to become a medical doctor (13). Her strength is seen when she ends up graduating from Geneva World Medical

Association (13). Furthermore, her courage is also seen when she rises from her lonely cocoon and starts giving talks to other youths about careers (17). Father Joshua even congratulates her for being a role model who can be emulated by the youth (17). All this is in line with Ogunyemi's belief that the womanist novel is fully packed with female achievement.

Masechaba's height of courage is seen when she makes a daring move after being pushed to the breaking point by the frequent violent xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals. She decides to take a bold step, one that is aimed to bring transformation on the practice of dehumanizing foreign nationals. She declares that she would draw a petition and print it and distribute it around the morning departmental meetings. She plans on getting all the other interns to sign it and deliver it to the doctors' quarters. She also planned to stick it on the blood bank so that people going in and out can also sign it. Moreover, she planned on leaving it in the anesthetics tea room so that the doctors could sign it between cases. Also, she thought of the Emergency Department where she could ask the families of patients to sign it. After all these people have signed it, Masechaba says that she would take it to the CEO of the hospital and the senior leadership to sign it and eventually get it printed in the local newspaper (55). This is a daring move because it only requires a bold and courageous person for its execution. Her aim was to draw attention to all South Africans to stop this madness and to tell the rest of the world that those people who go about killing the foreign nationals do not represent the majority of the South Africans.

Generally, as witnessed from both novels, Matlwa creates her female characters to be courageous, bold and daring which is one of the aspects of a womanist identity as argued by both Walker (1984) and Ogunyemi (1985). In the next subsection, the study focused on the second tenet of womanism.

4.2.2 The black woman's concern for humanity

Walker argues that a womanist is one who is committed to the liberation of all people; male and female. She argues that the colored race which the black person is part of, is like a garden which has different types of colors. This is in line with Ogunyemi's assertion that womanism is meant to unite every black person where one can be a brother, a sister, a father or a mother to the other. Both Walker and Ogunyemi agree that womanist novel's main aim is to contribute to wholeness and self-healing. In a similar vein, the study explores Matlwa's womanist concern of liberating all the black people from all forms of oppressions in these two novels.

4.2.2.1 The black woman's concern for humanity in *Coconut*

In this novel, the black woman's concern for all people is seen from how Matlwa depicts black men to be the victims of the oppressive apartheid structures. Tshepo, Ofilwe's brother and Ayanda, Fikile's co-worker are such black men who are victims of these oppressive structures. Just like Ofilwe and Fikile, they experience identity crisis as they want to associate themselves with both whiteness and blackness to some extent.

Tshepo, Ofilwe's brother, comes from a black wealthy family but he still wants to be associated with the lived experiences of the lower economic bracket. Ofilwe comments that when Tshepo expressed his desire to be a waiter at Fast Food Establishment called Instant Fried Chicken, she laughed. Here, Ofilwe laughed because she says she knew that Tshepo was the kind of a person whose existence depended entirely on mental stimulation (middle class lifestyle) and not menial work. Ofilwe comments that she knew his appointment would not last a week (25).

Ayanda's identity crisis situation comes in the same way Tshepo's crisis does. Despite being rich, as stated by Fikile who says he lived in an estate called Morningside (152) he still sought to be employed in Silver Spoon Coffee Shop. From Fikile's narration, the reader gets to know that Ayanda had gone to a white school and lived in white neighborhoods throughout his life (153). Their efforts to associate themselves with people of lower economic class do not bear fruits. Firstly, Tshepo is unable to relate with his colleagues at Instant Fried Chicken. He expresses his fears in his diary where he says that he knows that he is different. He says that although he has tried so much to mask himself in white labels like All Stars Sneakers and Free Youth League, he admits that he is certain that they will catch him once he opens his mouth (26).

Their inability to blend well with the low economic social class is manifested when Tshepo greets white customers who fail to return his greetings. He angrily tells himself that he felt like slapping their faces with his private school articulation and hurting their empty heads into a dizzy spin with the diction he uses (29). At this point, the white customers consider Tshepo a poor black person because he is a worker at Instant Fried Chicken and that is why they do not return his greetings as he belongs to the low economic social class. Ayanda also experiences a similar incident at Silver Spoon identity complexes just like Ofilwe and Fikile.

Another male character who is also projected to be a victim of identity crisis is Fikile's uncle, Silas Nyoni. His language as narrated by Fikile is characterized by verbosity and Coffee Shop when a white customer disdains him by telling him that black people are nothing without the white people (150). Fikile also comments that her uncle likes it when she recites a prayer using the foreign accent (111). Nyoni is affected by white superiority and black inferiority notions and that is why he admires the white language. His

admiration and expression of this foreign language is what qualified him to be the superficial Black Economic Empowerment Partner in Lentso Communications (106) and in meetings as the black representative yet he was the company's security guard in real life. His merit for selection was thus based on the fact that he could speak English as compared to other black employees.

Therefore, by projecting her male characters as victims of the apartheid system that resulted to identity crisis, Matlwa's message to the South Africans is that both men and women should unite and fight their common enemy which is racism, instead of fighting each other. This is because the black man, just like the black woman has been victims of this brutal racist system. This clearly reveals that Matlwa's concern is for the liberation of all people rather than just women. In the next subsection, the analysis focused on how her concern for all people is witnessed in *Period Pain*.

4.2.2.2 The black woman's concern for humanity in *Period Pain*

Matlwa writes this novel with a similar conviction which encompasses her incorporation of all people including the black man in the struggle for the liberation from all forms of oppression. Through Masechaba, Matlwa expresses her womanist concern as she reveals that the black man is also a victim of the violent xenophobic attacks that are spread throughout the country. In one instance, she explains how a man of foreign nationality was brought by the Emergency Medical Service. The man was burnt alive and sustained third degree burns to eighty percent of his body (77). Masechaba also gives details of how even children were harmed in these violent outbursts. This is clearly evident when she explains how the TV was ablaze with news of burning people and shops. She explains further how the streets were full of bloody thirsty men who were screaming that foreigners should leave the country. She even gives details of how she saw a naked man being

dragged by a mob of boys. There was also a group of policemen pouring water over the body of an elderly woman. She explains how tools of destruction like hammers, sticks, bottles, rocks, axes and knives were scattered everywhere (75). At this point, Matlwa clearly reveals her womanist concern to save all people from these violent xenophobic outbursts by speaking through her female protagonist. Masechaba feels helpless not only in her inability to save women but also men and children.

This womanist concern for all people is also projected through Masechaba's empathetic nature. Throughout the novel, she empathizes with the patients and the dying and rebukes her colleagues who mistreat the patients. She is one person who seeks happiness in the happiness of others. For her, a single death is one too many and she does everything in her power to stop patients who have not fully recovered from being discharged and allowed to go and die at home. In one instance, she narrates what she plans on doing the following day. She says that she was going to make sure she is the first person to get to the laboratory and get the patients' results, check the patients' temperatures herself and stop others from discharging the patients who are not well enough to go home (45).

Moreover, her concern for humanity is also revealed when the reader gets to know how she is psychologically disturbed by the under-resourced and under staffed hospitals which contributes greatly to deaths, poverty and xenophobic sentiments. Her conscience is pricked and a deep sense of despair and desperation overwhelms her as she feels helpless in the situation. At one point, she admits that she does not know who she is anymore. She says that she feels like a failure because as much as she wants to be these people's savior, she does not know how to do it (56-57). Her inability to save patients from pain, suffering and death further pricks her conscience. When one of her patients, Mrs. Mazbuko is gang

raped and dies, she blames herself for not being able to protect her from the indifferent third years who accosted her (32).

Through the issues raised in both *Coconut* and *Period Pain*, Matlwa confirms Ogunyemi's assertion that the black woman is not limited to tackle issues related to her femaleness like the way a white woman is. For Ogunyemi, the black woman attempts rather, to question issues raised by her humanity. This is in line with Walker's belief in the wholeness and survival for all people including men and children. Matlwa, through her female characters, battles with the dehumanizing effects of the racist apartheid system which caused identity crisis for the black people and worst of all xenophobia. Through her female characters, Matlwa shows her womanist concern for all people by projecting the problems that all blacks face in the post-apartheid South Africa. In the next subsection, the study focuses on the third aspect of womanism as argued by both Walker and Ogunyemi.

4.2.3 Intertextuality in the black woman's novel

Womanists argue that African and Afro American writers always relate their experiences because they are similar in a way. For instance, Ogunyemi (1985) argues that the black women writers cannot be feminists like the way the white women are. She further contends that African and African American writers share the experience of subjugation. For this reason, Ogunyemi believes that these black women have connections. This is in line with Walker's (1984) sentiments that it is the black woman's words which are of value to other black women because of their shared experience of their subjugation under the white powers. In the same vein, Matlwa connects her novels with those of African and African American women writers.

4.2.3.1 Intertextuality in *Coconut*

In this novel, Matlwa's Fikile is a direct reference to Toni Morrison's Pecola in her novel, *Bluest Eye*. The concept of internalized racism is embodied in Fikile as much as it does in Pecola (Roye 2012). Both Fikile and Pecola are subjected to similar circumstances which are the incestuous abuse and the shame that results from it. Just like Morrison's Pecola who is sexually abused by her father and even impregnated, Matlwa's Fikile is sexually molested by her uncle. This direct reference to Morrison's novel that Matlwa uses, emphasizes the intensity of sexual violence black women face in their homes and the shame that comes along with it. These women feel ashamed because the inhuman act is carried out by the closest people around them. Matlwa depicts this sexual abuse through irony; the people who are supposed to protect these girls are in fact the ones who are devouring them.

Despite these horrible prevailing circumstances, they are both presented with a dream of conforming to the white standards of beauty which gives them the strength to overcome these circumstances. Matlwa alludes to Morrison's utilization of 'blue eyes' as a symbol of white standards of beauty when she presents Fikile to be delusional about white beauty to a point of wearing green colored contact lens (117). Matlwa, just like Morrison presents Fikile to be obsessed with white beauty and as such, it provides them with an alternative way of living free from sexual exploitation. Pecola is unable to see the messed up situation of being sexually abused and focusing on her quest for blue eyes (Morrison 1970: 167) and the same can be said about Fikile. She looks past these horrible circumstances and focuses on fulfilling her dream of Project Infinity (119), a project which will take her out of the life of blackness which is full of poverty. Pecola's quest to acquire blue eyes can also be considered as one that has a positive motivation which is self-fulfillment.

Moreover, just like Morrison who uses the concept of self-loathing in her novel *Bluest Eye*, Matlwa uses it in *Coconut*. Self-loathing is what Du Bois (1993) considers to be the situation in the American society where a black person was presented with a double consciousness; to always look at themselves through the eyes of the white people. The impact of judging themselves through these white standards according to Du leads to these blacks hating themselves as the white world would always attach inferiority to the black identity and superiority to the white identity. In this sense, Matlwa molds Fikile to hate blackness in the same fashion Morrison molds Pecola to disdain blackness. These two characters judge their black identity because they are using white people's scales to measure black standards of beauty which projects blacks to be inferior and whites superior.

Furthermore, Matlwa alludes to Morrison's Cholly when constructing the character of Silas Nyoni, Fikile's uncle. Just like Cholly who is a product of the racist apartheid structures, Silas Nyoni is presented in the same light. Hooks (1982) contends that black men meted out violence towards black women because they felt powerless, demoralized and emasculated by the white patriarchal structures which offered them no decent job opportunities. Fikile describes her uncle's look as 'pathetic' when he returns home from work. This look represented the powerlessness, demoralization, impotence and emasculation that Hooks was referring to. As Fikile explains, his uncle had failed to further his education at the university level due to the 'color bar' and hence was always disappointed by his inability to realize his potentials (117). In this sense, his sexual violence can be attributed to the oppressive apartheid structures. When Fikile comments that she hated that she was the only person that could comfort her uncle, she unconsciously alludes to the castration anxiety that Morrison employed in *Bluest Eye* where women were the recipients of black men's frustration, anger and shame that resulted from the

oppressive white patriarchal structures. In this case, the black women were taken to be the vessels to everyone's shame. As Walker (1984) puts it, the black woman has been forced to carry the burden that everyone else refused to carry. This is in line with Nfah-Abbenyi (1997) who argues that the black woman is the victim of her own blackness and femaleness. In the next subsection, Matlwa's use of Intertextuality is analyzed in *Period Pain*.

4.2.3.2 Intertextuality in *Period Pain*

In this novel, Matlwa alludes to Alice Walker's concept of female friendship in her debut novel, *The Color Purple*. Masechaba and Nyasha are very close friends in *Period Pain* just like Celie and Shug in *The Color Purple*. Matlwa, just like Walker, portrays the importance of female friendship through their depiction of these females who support each other during worst moments. Though Matlwa's Masechaba at first is skeptical about Nyasha, her Zimbabwean flat mate, she later warms up to her and they become good friends. This is similar to Walker's Shugs who becomes a close friend to Celie. At some point she tells Celie that she does not fear how people are going to view her when she interacts with the isolated Celie. According to her, she does not fear judgment and feels no shame interacting with Celie. Just like Walker's Shug who offers emotional support to Celie so that she can overcome her trauma concerning her sexual assault by her step-father, Matlwa's Masechaba takes daring steps for the sake of her friendship with Nyasha. She decides to speak out against xenophobia which has brutal effects on foreign nationals like Nyasha. She decides to take the bold step of filing a petition in order to campaign against xenophobia. Her aim was to save all foreign nationals from the violent xenophobic outbursts taking place in the country and that meant she prioritized her friend's safety.

Moreover, Matlwa's concept of madness is an allusion to Tsi Tsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. Just like in Dangarembga's novel where Nyasha, her female protagonist's madness is as a result of the patriarchal oppression in her society, Masechaba's madness is also as a result of the oppressive South African patriarchal structures that allows rape of women which they consider 'corrective' or 'curative.' As Ogunyemi argues, this madness in black women is normally a temporary aberration and both Dangarembga and Matlwa supports this because Dangarembga's Nyasha and Matlwa's Masechaba both recover from this madness. As argued by Ogunyemi, these black women have to recover because they are aware in their sub consciousness that they have people without resources who depend on them for their survival. Therefore, through alluding to Dangarembga and Walker's texts, Matlwa is able to show us how black women's writing connects. In the next subsection, the study focuses on the fourth aspect of womanism.

4.2.4 The epistolary form in the black woman's novel

Womanists argue that black women's writings feature oral traditional forms. Ogunyemi (1985) argues that the black women writing in the twentieth century used old forms of writings that were used by their male and female predecessors. Ogunyemi argues that one of the reasons why these black women infuse these traditional forms is that most of the time; they find themselves handicapped by writing in a second language. Such writings are mostly interspersed with verse, song, letters, poems, reiterated phrases. In the same vein, Matlwa uses letters in her two novels to pass her message. According to Ogunyemi (1985) though letters are literary forms that pretend to be private, they are made public and ensures people look critically at these issues that affect them. She adds that letters in the black woman's novels ensures projection of black problems in a quest for liberation. In the same line of thought, Matlwa employs letters in these two novels in order to clearly project the black people's sufferings in the post-apartheid era.

4.2.4.1 The epistolary form in *Coconut*

In this novel, Matlwa uses the medium of letters to project black suffering. In one instance, Matlwa projects the negative effects of the white gaze through a letter. In this letter, Ofilwe laments to God about how these white people laugh at her a laughter that is not heard but felt through their eyes. This white gaze as recorded by Ofilwe in her diary dictates how blacks should behave; how they should eat, walk and talk. This gaze does not give them a chance to be black as it gears them towards conforming to the white expectations. Fikile's grandmother also expresses her anger towards the white patriarchal structures in the form of a letter addressed to God (159-160). Despite the fact that the prayer is recited in the voice of the grandmother, it can be easily be read as an expression of both her and her grandmother's anger.

Moreover, Tshepo, Ofilwe's brother's diary contributes to Matlwa's epistolary form of the novel which aims to address certain realities in the post-apartheid South Africa. He writes a letter in which he talks about the experiences of him, a black person working in a restaurant where he was treated with a lot of disdain. On one occasion, he was forced to clean the floor and becomes angry when his white boss accuses the whole staff as having a crèche-school level education (27). Tshepo is angry at the inferiority attached to the black identity as a group because as a person, he had graduated as Dux scholar in his junior school (27). He wishes to tell the white customers who treat black servants with spite that it is post-apartheid and not the apartheid era (29), with the hope of changing their perception.

However, the other staff members advise him against such an action and tells him that it was good for him to learn the ways of the white man. Tshepo faces identity crisis because being a Dux scholar does nothing to improve how these white customers view him and

also does nothing to ingratiate him with his fellow employees. His comment that it is written in this letter that they cannot serve such offensive people (29) serves to reveal that Tshepo's expectations are a representative of the black people's expectations who are living in the post-apartheid era. These people's expectations were that the racist attitudes and prejudices ought to be a problem of the past. However, his colleagues comment that he should learn the ways of the white person confirms that the racial structures that were present during the apartheid era continue to persist even in the postapartheid era. Tshepo remains alienated in this restaurant because he suffers from internalized shame which Ofilwe suffers too. He finds it hard to cope with those around him due to his internal conflict towards western values.

4.2.4.2 The epistolary form in *Period Pain*

In this novels, Masechaba's traumatic experience after the sexual assault is documented in a personal journal. Immediately she is raped, she starts asking God where he was while those evil men were raping her. She directly ask him, 'Did you run or hide or were you away in a personal business? Saving lives elsewhere?' (59) At this point, she is very angry and tries to have a conversation with God in an attempt to find the answer to as to why God let evil befall her. Later on, she starts blaming herself for the incident. She starts asking God whether he was punishing her because she had not put religious practices into action. She says, "Is it because I didn't wear my rosary at work? (620 or were my prayers incorrect, repetitive and boring (630. She then starts asking God to give her a second chance and teach her on how to pray incorrectly. She says she is willing to learn as long as he took her pain away (63). From Masechaba's action of directly addressing to God, Matlwa helps the reader to see Masechaba's inner being and perpetual self.

Moreover, Matlwa documents the poor conditions of the public hospitals in her diary. She gives details of how the soap dispenser only worked on occasions where the ministers visited the hospital (29). She also explains how patients are crowded in wards (290). This kind of a situation is so bad that the nursing staff goes to the extent of taking their own salaries in order to provide care for their patients whom the state has failed to provide. She further explains how she is emotionally and psychologically affected by patients suffering and death (350). Through this narration that Matlwa does in a diary form, she makes the readers connect with the experiences of those who are in the hospital, patients and doctors, go through every day.

In addition, Masechaba narrates the harrowing xenophobic experiences in this diary form. She narrates various instances of violent xenophobic outburst. In one instance, she narrates how one man of foreign nationality was burnt alive and sustained third degree burns to eighty percent of his body (77). She explains how all people were harmed when she gives details of how a naked man was dragged by a mob of boys; a group of policemen pouring water over the body of an elderly woman; the way the streets were full of tools of destruction- hammers, sticks, bottles, rocks, axes and knives (75). This raw narration of such outbursts creates vivid pictures of how inhuman, callous and indifferent xenophobia is. These kind of narrations pricks the consciousness of the readers and makes them share the pain the South African nation is facing. The readers become deeply engrossed in the suffering; psychological, emotional, physical torture that foreign nationals are facing in the hands of the native South Africans. Matlwa tries to make her readers know that native South Africans are not bad people, it is due to the dehumanizing effects of the racist apartheid system that destroyed their humane side and thus treat foreigners with spite. Through exposing the harrowing experiences of xenophobia, Matlwa is urging all South Africans to embrace forgiveness and reconciliation and stop meting out their vengeance

to these innocent foreign nationals. The diary form then becomes a powerful tool from which Matlwa passes serious messages. She appeals directly to all the five senses of the readers, making them feel the pain and suffering the protagonist faces which in the larger sense relates to the experiences of those living in the post-apartheid era. Matlwa manages to appeal to the humanity side of her readers; both South Africans and non- South Africans to join her in the fight against xenophobia, sexual violence and poverty.

By fusing the letters in *Coconut*, Matlwa conforms to the womanist expectations on the form of womanist novel. This epistolary form helps her to pass serious messages about the impact of the apartheid system on the black people in South Africa. As argued by Ogunyemi (1985), letters in black female writings ensures illumination of black predicament that precedes black integrity. In the next subsection, the study focuses on the forth aspect of womanism which is the concept of madness.

4.2.5 The concept of madness in the black woman's novel

According to Collins (2020) madness refers to insanity, dementia, lunacy, great anger, foolishness, passion or wild excitement. This study borrows from Collins' (2020) definition where the term madness entails insanity; a character experiences a state of mental imbalance, delusion or mania; anger, where her actions are driven by rage and fury; and lastly passion, where the character is observed to have extreme enthusiasm, zeal and craze to experience a certain way of life. Womanist novels portray this insanity, anger and passion in the positive light. Ogunyemi contends that "black women writers in most cases present their female characters to having gone mad. But unlike the negatively presented white madwoman, the black madwoman fights to overcome madness because in her sub consciousness, she knows that her black people do not have resources and they depend on her. Therefore she has to fight to recover. Matlwa presents both her black

female protagonists having gone mad but later recovers from this madness in accordance with the expectation of womanism.

4.2.5.1 Black woman's madness in *Coconut*

In this novel, Matlwa projects madness in the form of obsession with the western culture. Both Fikile and Ofilwe are characters who are depicted by the writer to be people who have internalized the western culture to a point of delusion. This internalization of western culture makes them measure their worth against the white standards. As Du Bois (1993) puts it, the double consciousness made black people to look at themselves through the eyes of the white people. In the first half of the novel, Ofilwe's madness is revealed through various instances. Firstly, she is obsessed with Kate Jone's hair and this makes her delusional. She even starts comparing Kate's hair with the elements of nature such as autumn leaves, burnt amber and the setting of the sun (1). She starts measuring her beauty with the white standards and that is why when she goes to the salon she bares the pain that the hair straightener causes. She happily admits that despite all that pain she is happy to be beautiful (40). This is indeed madness as she is ready to go through extreme pain just so that she conforms to the white standards of beauty.

Secondly, Ofilwe's madness is projected through her extreme desire to speak English fluently and even believes she speaks better than the whites. She says that the black people are jealous of her and that is why they avoid her. Her madness is clearly evident when she disdains her own language at the expense of the foreign one. She says that Sepedi was a language that she knew from the start that would not take her anywhere near success (142). She even goes to the extent of describing herself as special from the way she says that her extended Family treats her with utmost respect just because she speaks perfect English

(54). His obsession of this foreign language makes her brother warn her that her obsession would lead her to a point of alienation (45).

Thirdly, Ofilwe's madness is also projected through her obsession with the fashion magazines. Her craziness about these magazines is revealed in one instance where she spends a whole afternoon sticking these magazines on her bedroom wall (92). It was her brother who notices that she had unconsciously displayed her madness on the wall by only displaying white faces (93). It is this obsession that makes Ofilwe stop at a newsstand to look at the white faces displayed on the magazine and start imagining the life these actresses enjoy as they are dressed expensively (55).

In the second half of the novel, Matlwa projects Fikile as another black madwoman. Just like Ofilwe, Fikile has internalized the white standards of beauty to a point of delusion. Just like Ofilwe, Fikile is also obsessed with the English language. She is very keen on her pronunciation as she says that accent is very key as it will make people classify her as high and mighty. Her craziness for the language makes her despise Zulu, her native tongue. Just like Ofilwe, Fikile believes that her native tongue would not take her anywhere as English is the language of advancement (146). Moreover, just like Ofilwe who is obsessed with the fashion magazine, Ofilwe is also addicted to them. According to her, these magazines envision her future (167). She even admits that the more she read, the more she assured herself that this was the kind of life she aspired to live (168). For this reason, her grandmother is very cross with her and commands her to go and play outside just like the other kids. This obsession makes her to go to the extreme extent of altering her appearance in order to conform to the white standards of beauty. She applies a skin lightening cream, sunscreen, eyeliner, mascara, eye shadow, eyelash straightener and wears a blond wig (117).

However, despite Matlwa's portrayal of her female protagonists as having internalized the crazy notions of the western culture, Matlwa's message is clear towards the end of the novel. As Ogunyemi argues, despite the black women's portrayal of her characters as having gone mad, their madness bring out positive and important message to the black society. In the case of Ofilwe who is crazy about the white culture, towards the end of the first novel, she starts having second thoughts and regrets about her preference of this culture. This is seen from the instance where she starts regretting why she preferred the alien language at the expense of Sepedi, her native tongue. During one evening when her brother, Tshepo invited Siphokazi to their home, the two hold their conversation in Sepedi and talks about the importance of African languages to the South Africans. Ofilwe is unable to follow this conversation which really angers her due to her inability to understand Sepedi (59). She regrets being ignorant of her language and feels alienated.

Moreover, Ofilwe later on starts appreciating the black women around her. For instance, she starts admiring her dark-skinned mother whom she considers beautiful (51). She also looks at Makhulu, another black woman as beautiful (17). At this point, Matlwa projects her madness as an obsession that is malleable, an obstacle that is not permanent. Therefore, Matlwa implies that the black woman's madness has a cure and can be healed as it is only a temporary aberration. In addition, Fikile's madness is also deconstructed towards the end of the novel where she starts talking to the black man in the train whom earlier on she had refused to say a word to. Her integration to the black world is one instance where Matlwa reveals to the reader that the black woman's madness is used to project a positive message to her black people; to show the destructive force the western culture has on the indigenous one. Therefore, her madness, just like Ogunyemi argues is positively portrayed.

4.2.5.2 Black woman's madness in *Period Pain*

In this novel, madness is presented as depression. Depression is considered to be an extreme state of grief. According to Kubler-Ross (2005), there are five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Matlwa's Masechaba goes through these five stages of grief. The first stage is denial where Kubler-Ross argues that one responds to it with extreme shock. To the person in this stage, the world becomes meaningless and overwhelming. The person sees life to be making sense. Denial often comes with questioning our reality where one reviews the circumstances.

Masechaba's signs of denial are projected when she accounts how the rape occurred. She narrates that she remembers walking into the Emergency Department afterwards and whispering the word 'sister' to the nurses but none of them responded. She says that none of them lifted up their heads to notice that her dress was torn her eyes blackened, her mouth split and her pants soiled and bloodied. Instead, Sister Palesa simply pointed at her box and said it was full of patients and she needed to work faster (75). She later says that when she recounted all this to Dr. Phakama, her psychiatrist, she said Masechaba must have been in the first stage of bereavement. According to Dr. Phakama, after rape one suffers a loss of the former self and it is normal and important to mourn. As Masechaba recalls, Dr. Phakama told her that her desire to sing praise to God after she had just been raped was an example of extreme denial (76).

The second stage of grief is anger where Kubler-Ross (2015) argues that the person is angry at the world. The feelings of anger always preceded those feelings of panic, sadness, hurt and loneliness. This anger appears to be intense and loved ones are normally shocked by these feelings because they appear immediately the victim begins to function at the basic level. The victim is angry, probably because he/she could not prevent the unexpected, undeserved and unwanted happening. Kubler-Ross considers anger as a very

essential stage in the healing process and hence encourages grieving people to feel the anger. Kubler-Ross further explains how this anger has no limits as it can extend to family members, friends, enemies and even to God. Masechaba moves to this stage when she vents her anger firstly to God. She blames Him for neglecting her. She asks God where he was when those evil men were raping her. This anger makes her go to the extent of mocking God by asking; “Did you run or hide? See none of it at all? Only hear about it later? Or were you out of town, away in business, saving lives somewhere else? So now you come and want to help me? Go away! Who are You anyway, and why should I care what You think? Where do You come from? How can I trust You if You have no home, no people who call You their own? I don’t even know why I am speaking to You. You never speak back. Your silence is everywhere. It’s thick and plugs out air. It’s outside and inside, making it hard to breathe, hard to believe” (59-61).

Masechaba is even angry with everybody. She does not want to be visited at the hospital. She says: “The visitors pour through the door. I feel like an animal in the zoo. Ma says they only want to show me their support; it’s better not to be alone for too long. But they irritate me, saying stupid things like, ‘everything will be okay, don’t worry, everything will be okay.’ How do they know everything will be okay? Why do they say Why do they say stupid things they have no evidence for? Things that is impossible to guarantee? Everything will be okay. ‘They say it with such confidence. Liars! Where is their evidence? Everything will be okay? No, it won’t. Nothing is okay. Absolutely nothing. If people don’t know what to say they shouldn’t say anything at all” (63).

The third stage is the bargaining phase where according to Kubler-Ross (2015) a person wants everything to return to normal. Bargaining phase as Kubler-Ross puts it, it is always accompanied by guilt. A person bargains with the pain trying to negotiate with the hurt.

At this point, the person starts to question what could have been done differently that could have led to evading of the problem. Masechaba's bargaining phase begins when she starts speaking to God and wants to know why she was raped yet she was a staunch Christian who trusted in the Lord for protection. She says: "Is it because I didn't wear my rosary at work? Are you mad with me? Is it because I didn't vote? Surely, You can't be so cruel. Or is it supposed to be the 'thorn in my flesh'? This is no thorn, Lord, this is a dagger. What did I do to deserve this? (62). Later on, she starts questioning her faith and actions when she asks herself whether or not she had said the correct prayers, whether the prayers were not soft enough, vague or too many prayers. Or rather still whether her parents were insincere, repetitive or boring (63). At this point, Masechaba's guilt is revealed in the way she blames herself concerning the incident. She starts wishing that she could have done things different. She even goes to the extent of asking God to give her a second chance and teach her how to pray correctly. She says, "Give me a second chance please. Teach me how to pray, the way You want and I'll do it. I'll do it every day, twice a day, all day. Just make this all a bad dream. Take all of this away, please, Lord. Please" (63)

The next stage is depression. Kubler-Ross (2015) argues that after the bargaining phase, the person's attention shifts to the present. Here, one is filled with empty feelings and extreme grief engulfs the person. He/she is filled with sadness and questions whether there is a point of carrying on with life. Masechaba's depression phase begins when she starts seeing the events of that night in her dreams. Her mind is in delirium: "The men came and they were laughing, taunting me. You like your *kwere-kwere pipi ne*? That's because you've never had a real South African man. Today we will make you a real South African man. Today we will make you a real South African woman. And then there was blood pouring out of me, between my thighs, gushing, spraying and splashing everywhere. It

covered their legs, then their arms, then their heads, drowning them drowning me”(69). She further describes what goes through her mind when she sits alone: “Sometimes when I’m forgetting, drifting into madness, I’m jolted by a breath on the back of my neck, a breath like the one that breathed on me before grabbing me from behind and bringing my legs to the floor. I begin to cry out. Ma says it’s just a breeze that the doors and burglar bars and gates are locked and nobody can hurt me in here. But that breath gets in somehow under the door, through the burglar bars, over the gate. I feel it warm and moist on my neck. I tell Ma she must stop bringing me all these newspapers and use them to plug the windows, the doors, the holes in the walls. But she gets angry when I say these things. She says she won’t allow me to surrender my mind to madness” (Matlwa 65).

Masechaba is unfit psychologically as she reveals: “If I feel myself beginning to get anxious, if the thoughts in my head begin to move at an ever increasing pace and there seem to be others threatening to start a conversation in my mind, I cover my head with my pillow and force sleep” (66). She keeps seeing blood everywhere and tells her mother that her legs are soaked in blood but her mother said that there is nothing and advises her to take her pills and not to give into madness. She says: “The madness Masechaba, the madness that has done all these things to you. The madness that has stolen your life. The madness that makes you sit on a bucket wiping yourself with newspapers covering the walls and the floors with blood. The madness that is killing you Masechaba. The madness that will kill me”(70).

Masechaba is also haunted by voices, images, whispers and shadows when she reveals about how she spends sleepless nights: “What is it about this time of the night that drags me from sleep, pulls my eyelids open shakes my mind awake? There were three men and they divided in two? Or was it three times two? Do they sleep Lord? Do they dream of

parties and balloons and picnics with smiling faces or they are tormented like me? Do they have to fight off whispers, images, shadows that hide in the recesses of their minds?" (66-67). She further says: "Sometimes they shout. Why must you talk so loud? I ask them, why must you be so noisy? Whisper! I can hear you. Whisper. But they don't listen and it makes me confused, are they outside or inside? So I put in my wax ear plugs to try to muffle them out... I see their faces from time to time. The one with the stripped T shirt, his belly protruding beneath it. I instinctively force my eyes to shut, hope the tears will wash the images out of my mind." (70-71).

Dr. Phakama tells Masechaba that major depression has psychotic features. She says: "It happens Masechaba, particularly with your family history. You were especially vulnerable. You are unwell but you'll get better. Nobody can blame you for the things a sick mind does"(78). Her state of depression is further witnessed when she even calls her dead brother's phone to tell him what Dr. Phakama had said. She says: "I called Tshiamo's phone today to tell him what Dr. Phakama had said. That we are a family of mad people, him, me, Papa, Ma, all of us. That I was correctively raped. That I should sit in a park behind a tree with my eyes closed to help me get better" (Matlwa 79).

The last stage is acceptance where, according to Kubler-Ross (2015) is about accepting the reality about the present situation. This is where healing and adjustment take course. This healing takes the form of recollecting and reorganizing. People in this stage are not angry anymore and start accepting that whatever happened can never be undone. As they heal, they start a new relationship and try to re intergrate the broken pieces of their lives. Towards the end of the novel, Masechaba accepts herself and the situation she is in as part and parcel of her identity as she says: "I have decided to stop all the medication. I've come to like this little trickle of blood coming out of me day after day. It colors the bath water

pretty pink. Sometimes when a tiny clot comes out the water goes dark maroon. The soft part of my belly is warm and tingly. I am so faint, I have to sit often, to keep from falling over. It's a kind of pain and a kind of pleasure, a kind of freedom that I like, that Dr. Phakama's medication tried to steal from me. But it's me, it's nice and I want it" (Matlwa 68).

She further says: "There's not much in this life one can count on to be there forever. Everything goes, everything fades. There are peaks and valleys, then more peaks then more valleys. All I know is I look forward to it coming to an end" (87). At this point, she looks at the whole idea of being raped and conceiving a child from a positive perspective. She decides to go back to work after the sick leave is over. After delivery, she looks at her baby from a positive perspective. This can be seen from the way she describe her: "She looks like nothing, a blank page, like a fresh start, my fresh start" (92). Masechaba even starts viewing the rapists from a positive light when she says: "It is possible that there is some goodness in them (because surely, there's goodness in all of us) came together to form her, (despite their evil intentions)" (98).

Her acceptance phase is also seen when she starts contemplating whether or not she will tell her daughter who her father is: "Will I tell her about her father(s)? I do not know. How do I explain the violence? That she was born out of violence, yet wanted still (97).

She says that she would tell her that she was both the worst and best thing that ever happened to her; she wanted to commit suicide but because of her she decided against the idea. She gave Masechaba strength to look past the violence. She also says that she would tell her daughter that it was not her fault and she does not deserve to have that stain in her future. Lastly, she says that she will inform her that she was 'Mpho,' her gift (98). Here,

Masechaba views her child as a blessing in disguise. She looks at her child not as a curse but as a blessing in disguise. She explains how she would sit and admire her daughter for hours. She observes her big, loving, forgiving, shiny black eyes and toothless smile (102).

4.3 The womanist vision

This section investigates Matlwa's womanist vision in her two novels. Here, the researcher argued that Matlwa calls for womanist actions like revival of the African culture in an attempt to create awareness about the rich black heritage; gender complementation where the black woman and man join hands rather than fighting against each other like in feminist visions and reconciliation vision where she urges blacks to forgive the whites for dehumanizing them during the apartheid regime so that they can heal and accept black immigrants in their country. In reading these two novels therefore, the womanist lens was employed where the aim is to seek avenues for communication rather than justifications for misunderstandings.

4.3.1 Revival of the African culture vision in *Coconut*

The concept of culture is universally acknowledged and its relevance varies from society to society. Tylor (1958) contends that culture is a complex system which encompasses knowledge, beliefs, laws, customs and other capabilities and habits which man acquires as a member of the society. Before colonialism and apartheid eras, the black South Africans had their own black culture. However, when the whites got into the country, they made the blacks to hate their own culture and prefer the white culture which was considered to be superior. The resulting effect was that these black people faced identity crisis as they were torn between adopting the white culture and retaining their African identity. In the post-apartheid era, many of the individuals face what Ngugi (2007) refers to as 'white ache.' Such individuals are obsessed with the white culture.

Therefore, the African culture remains threatened by the domineering influence of the western culture. Various efforts have been made by the black government to revive the African culture. For instance, in October 2012, the South African government officially announced some changes made to promote the African culture. For instance, it gave provision to the African Month 2015 program which was aimed at creating a platform and opportunities to African artists from the continent and diaspora to redefine the African identity. In the same vein, black women writers in South Africa like Matlwa have been advocating for the revival of their cultures in order to make them alive again. Through their writings, they praise and glorify the African culture as a way to acknowledge their roots.

In *Coconut*, Matlwa critiques the blacks who appear to embrace excessively white values at the expense of their own culture. The first indicator of this is the choice of her title, 'coconut.' In the South African contexts, this term has a negative connotation. As Rudwick (2008) puts it, it refers to a black person who is excessively obsessed with whiteness. As the coconut is dark in the outside, so is the black person's skin; as coconut is white in the inside, so is this black person who has internalized the white ideals and values and hence becomes white. Matlwa uses it to satirize those blacks who aspire to be white in an attempt to appraise blackness which in the long run aims to revive the African culture. Through various black individuals, Matlwa attempts to revive the African culture. These characters, both male and female make attempts to save their African roots which are threatened to become extinct in the presence of overbearing western culture. These characters include Ofilwe, Tshepo and the Commuter.

Firstly, Matlwa uses Ofilwe to praise the African identity, both consciously and unconsciously. She is seen to be compelled by her African intuition to consider black women beautiful. She comments that her dark-skinned mother was beautiful (51). She

also refers to Makhulu, the lady who sell chicken feet at the intersection in Pretoria as ‘vintage jet black lady.’ In this sense, Matlwa characterizes these two women as having ‘dark’ skin in her novel. In a country where whiteness had been normalized for years, this can be considered one way in which Matlwa celebrates dark beauty. Their skin therefore, becomes a site for celebration. Ofilwe’s view of the seller’s body is one of pride and self-awareness. Ofilwe describes her skin to be leathery and folded into a hundred and two deep lines which makes it difficult for one to read emotions in her face (17). From her comment that she secretly believes that this woman is of royal blood (17) suggests directly the fact that Ofilwe believes that Africans have a royal lineage. In this sense, Makhulu is not considered as an object but a subject within the story. In so doing Ofilwe and subsequently Matlwa, is able to deconstruct white feminist notions about black women’s bodies being inferior by presenting them as beautiful, commanding and deserving respect.

Secondly, Matlwa praises the African beauty through Ofilwe’s memory of Kate Jone’s hair. At first, Matlwa presents Ofilwe as a character who is mesmerized or dazzled by Kate’s hair which represented white beauty. Matlwa then deconstructs this white beauty by presenting Kate in such a way that her hair is the only aspect of her that Ofilwe is envious of. As much as Ofilwe admires her hair, she does not attempt to emulate Kate’s weight which she considers to be consisting of a ‘poggy’ face and swollen ankles (1).

Also, Ofilwe does not try to copy her mannerisms of being ‘hoggish, spoilt and haughty, rude and foul-mouthed (1). Moreover, as much as she admires Kate’s hair, Matlwa does not construct Ofilwe to be one who mimics Kate’s hair entirely. When Kate’s hair is described to be curling towards the end, the readers’ expectation is that, since Ofilwe admires it, she would do her best to emulate it. On the contrary, when Ofilwe goes to Ous Beauty salon, she requests that her hair straightener to be left for a little longer so that

every curled hair gets to be straight (4). This means that to some extent, Ofilwe represents the black individuals who do not follow white expectations blindly. Instead, they look at white constructions skeptically. Ofilwe has her own understanding of what beauty is. This understanding is not dependent on white standards but on Ofilwe's own ideas of beauty. By straightening her hair just like the way the black TV American girls do (4), Ofilwe implies that black beauty supersedes white beauty. Matlwa further deconstructs white beauty through Kate's admiration of black beauty. Ofilwe narrates how one day Kate complemented her braided hair and requested Ofilwe to also braid her hair, so that she can look as beautiful as Ofilwe (4). In so doing, Matlwa implies that the white standards of beauty are fluid, malleable and constantly shifting.

Furthermore, Matlwa advocates for the revival of the African culture by deconstructing the superiority attached to the English language. Ofilwe, who has been obsessed with the English language becomes extremely agitated when she reflects upon a memory in which Belinda, her white friend, insisted on teaching her the correct pronunciation. She comments that hate was the only word she could describe how she feels about the incident (49).

In addition, Tshepo, Ofilwe's brother, is another character who attempts to revive the almost lost African culture. There are instances where his rejection of the western culture and appraisal of the African cultures are foregrounded in the novel. For instance, he desires to study African literature. This is a kind of desire that puts him at loggerheads with his father. His father is described by Matlwa to be a person who has internalized the white standards and therefore considers Tshepo to be a disgrace to the family (80). Later on, his desire to retain his African identity leads him to start dressing in his mother's old *Kafian* clothes. Here, Tshepo not only fantasizes about their African identity but also

believes he can subvert the inferiority placed on the African culture and the superiority attached to the white culture. Through him, Matlwa urges the black people in the post-apartheid era to go back to their roots and identify with the African culture, instead of aping the alien culture.

Lastly, Fikile has an encounter with a black man whom Matlwa names, the Commuter. She meets him on her way to work and back on her way home. This Commuter is constructed by Matlwa to be one of the custodians of the African tradition. He is saddened by the way his daughter refuses to speak Xhosa, her native tongue due to the influence she gets in school (188). He laments that he feels sorry for the black children who speak in English as the only language of communication, not knowing that they have a beautiful language waiting for them at home that they would one day long for (189). The Commuter also takes note on the enthusiasm of these black children schooling in white schools have for the western language. He comments that he is not sure whether the happiness they are experiencing is worth losing their heritage. The Commuter's sentiments are similar to what Tshepo was trying to tell Ofilwe concerning her inability to speak Sepedi. The Commuter also describes the past of Africa. He nostalgically talks about what Africa has lost; the mud and glistening stone beads (190). Through him, Matlwa lets us see that Fikile is also not truly comfortable in her assumed white identity.

4.3.2 Reconciliation vision in *Period Pain*

After the apartheid regime came to an end in 1994, there has been racial tension which the black government of South Africa feared that it would lead to chaos. Therefore, the African National Congress' first priority was to ensure peaceful coexistence amongst the black and whites in the country. It took several steps in its attempt to resolve the conflict through participating in the peacemaking and peace-building process. For instance, the

government formed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the year 1995. Its primary function was to help the country get through the process of reconciliation by uncovering the truth concerning human rights that were violated during the apartheid era. However, it failed to bring reconciliation of races because the long years of the apartheid regime left big scars to the hearts of the blacks. They are still suffering these effects in the post-apartheid era. Matlwa therefore uses her novel *Period Pain* as a tool to preach forgiveness and the importance of reconciliation in order for the South African country to move ahead social, psychologically, politically and even economically.

The novel encompasses the problems of country that is still suffering from the racial demons of the past. As it was the expectation, the end of the apartheid regime was supposed to usher in an era that is free from racial oppression. However, this is not the case. Through the novel, Matlwa makes it known to the reader that there is still a long way to go before the expectations of the post-apartheid era are achieved. Some of the issues she highlights in the novel are economic inequalities, under resourced hospitals and harrowing xenophobic attacks among other problems. Matlwa's message is that people will only achieve forgiveness if the wrongs that necessitated for forgiveness have been righted. She echoes this message to those who were supposed to implement reforms for the poor black South Africans. They have not done so and this is a wrong that is still yet to be righted. The xenophobia that Masechaba witnesses is presented by Matlwa as the anger that the poor black South Africans have concerning lack of change following the abolition of the apartheid system. The anger however, is not channeled to the right direction which responsible for the unequal distribution of resource. It is directed to the foreign nationals. In the novel, poor black South Africans like Palesa blame even the poorer immigrants for their poverty situation instead of blaming the whites and the government ministers. In this novel, Matlwa urges the black South Africans to look past

the trauma of the apartheid regime. Her message is that this trauma should not always be seen as a referent point that defines their identity. In other words, the South Africans should not be defined as a violent people just because of the big scars that were left by the dehumanizing racist system. Matlwa's portrayal of xenophobia is an exploration of its roots rather than a condemnation of those who hold such views. Khair (2012) explains this by stating that xenophobia has to do more with the systems in which people are forced to exist and not the people. Masechaba's empathetic remark that she feels bad about how the country treats foreign nationals (41) is an appeal to her fellow countrymen to come to their senses in view of their past.

Matlwa also urges the South Africans to accept black immigration as a way of paying back the African countries that assisted them to gain independence and end the racist system. This is in line with Solomon (2019) who argues that the current xenophobia in South Africa defies logic. They consider it ironical for South Africans to act indifferent towards other Africans yet these African nations supported its liberation struggles through the provision of sanctuaries, education and sustenance to the fleeing comrades. Speaking through Masechaba, Matlwa urges her fellow countrymen to come to terms with the racial oppression of the past by looking ahead, though they have good reasons to get angry. In reply to Nyasha's complains about the whites being responsible for all the bad things that are happening, Masechaba tells her that what happened did happen and nothing can be changed about it (51). In this case, Masechaba advocates for a multiracial and multi-ethnic harmony in South Africa which can only come to pass through forgiveness. Matlwa's sentiments are in line with Nietzsche (1997) who posits that it is possible for one to live without memory and live happily just like the way animals do but it is there is a lot sleeplessness when one keeps on remembering the past which is very harmful to any living thing, whether the thing is a man, people or culture.

Masechaba's effort to push for forgiveness makes her side with foreigners and she is nicknamed a 'kwerekwere' lover (79). Masechaba's first step which was aimed at pushing for forgiveness comes to play when a native South African patient spats on a foreign doctor on the grounds that the patient did not want to be examined by a 'cockroach.' This action pushes Masechaba to file a petition, print it and distribute copies in all the departmental meetings (80). Her aim was to show the whole world that the few South Africans who express xenophobic sentiments do not represent the majority of the South Africans. This petition creates publicity for her in which she ends up being gang raped for betraying her people by fighting for justice of the foreigners. She gets pregnant and against our expectations, she decides to carry the pregnancy to full term. She gives birth to a baby girl and calls her Mpho. She says that it was the baby's life that forced her to live (50). Adding upon this, Masechaba says that it was not her fault that she was born out of the shameful act and says that she forbids anyone to tell her so. She considers her daughter to be a blessing in disguise. She says, she is her 'mpho,' her gift (51).

Through this, Matlwa advocates for forgiveness. In its metaphorical sense, Matlwa passes a serious message to the South African people that the past is gone and that they should look at the brighter side of life. They should look past the brutal apartheid regime. They should rise up and hope for a brighter South Africa as there is still hope, there are still better days ahead of them.

4.3.3 Gender complementation vision in *Coconut*

Gender as a social construction entails the belief that the roles of men and women are not biologically determined. These gender roles assigned to men and women are designed in such a way to promote male dominance and female sub-ordination. This lowly position of women has been a topic of debate for so many years that is propagated by the feminists.

For them, men and women ought to be equal, that is, no superiority or inferiority should be attached to any gender. However, for most of the black women, gender equality is the least of their problems. Most of them, Matlwa included, argue that the black women are faced with problems of survival and their engagement to these societal construction and confrontations is not urgent. For this reason, these black women tend to be ‘womanists’ as Walker (1984) puts it, they are committed to the survival and wholeness of all people; male and women. This is in line with Ogunyemi (1985) who believes in gender complementarity to end all forms of oppressions. In the same vein, Matlwa presents her male and female characters in a perspective in which they engage in a discussion rather than a confrontation.

In *Coconut*, Matlwa creates her male characters as being the one creating awareness to the female characters, enlightening them so that they can join hands in the fight against the oppressive structures of whiteness in post-apartheid South Africa. She comment that it was only after Tshepo had pointed out that she realized that she had unconsciously displayed her belief in whiteness by sticking magazines of white people and no single face of a black person (92). Here, Tshepo is the one who makes Ofilwe aware of what she has become. This is the reason why Radithalo (2010) comments that Tshepo uses his knowledge of black inferiority in his attempt to rescue her delusional sister. His criticism contributes greatly to Ofilwe’s growth as a person. Tshepo is very skeptical about anything associated with whiteness. He opposes Christianity because he views it as not being part and parcel of the black traditions. His being doubtful of the white man religion results in him not attending church.

Furthermore, Tshepo’s skepticism is revealed when he becomes very critical of Ofilwe’s friends. He educates Ofilwe concerning the nature of true friends. He tells her that a true

friend should know her name, her background and her people and family. He adds that true friends do not make fun of her beliefs and customs; they should appreciate her for who she really is (43). Moreover, Tshepo comments on her behavior by warning her that the people whom she strives so hard to embrace will one day reject her and it will be too late because she will not find acceptance from the black people too, since she once rejected them, they will too reject her. As Tshepo warns, Ofilwe would find herself stuck between two worlds and shunned by both (93). This is similar to Ayanda, who keeps on warning Fikile about the white people. He tells her that the effort she makes towards these people; remembering their middle names, their preferences, favorite seats, will not make them accept her as one of them.

Generally, the male characters are the ones presented to be the ones enlightening the female characters about the destructive influence of whiteness. Matlwa does this to voice a message to the South African people that the fight against racism is bigger than the fight against sexism. In order to do this, she suggests that the males and females join hands and fight the oppressive forces of racism.

4.4 Chapter summary

The first section of this chapter has explored what really is the deep meaning of the black woman experience in post-apartheid South Africa. This was done in order to achieve the first objective of this study which was: to explore the deep meaning of the black woman as depicted in the two novels. Through the analysis of the two novels, it has emerged that her experience entails interlocking forms of oppression. Firstly, since racism is still persistent in the post-apartheid environment, this woman experiences race-related problems such as identity crisis, racial tension and xenophobia. Secondly, classism is another form of oppression that this black woman still faces. Though the analysis of these

two novels, it is evident that there still exists a big economic gap between the white and blacks. This economic gap has also widened due to the few black individuals in power who grab the opportunities at the expense of the majority of black people. Therefore, poverty will form part of the experience of most black women living in such an environment. Lastly, it has also emerged that sexism is still another form of oppression that this black woman is faced with in this era. Through her female characters, Matlwa revealed that the black South African woman faces gender discrimination practices such as male domination, sexual molestation and sexual violence. Through her projection of this form of oppression, Matlwa directly implies that the war against gender discriminatory practices is far from being over.

Moreover, the second section of this chapter has explored the tenets of Ogunyemi's (1985) and Walker's (1984) womanism as depicted in *Coconut* and *Period Pain*. According to the two pioneers of womanism, they concur with the following tenets: (i) Projection of black women as courageous and daring (ii) Concern for all people (iii) Intertextuality in the black women writings (iv) Positive madness and (iv) Infusion of traditional forms of writing. These tenets enabled the researcher to prove that Matlwa projects the black experience in these two novels from a womanist perspective. For this reason, it is argued in this study that Matlwa writes her two novels from a womanist consciousness. In her womanist consciousness, Matlwa aims to address all forms of oppression that have caused suffering to all black people, not just women like the way the feminists writers do.

In addition, the third section of this chapter has explored the third objective of the study. It has been established that Matlwa's two novels reveal a womanist vision. Her vision entails the revival of the African culture that is almost becoming extinct due to the overbearing influence of the western culture. She calls for the South Africans to go back

to their culture as it is beautiful and wholesome. Secondly, in her vision, Matlwa reinforces the idea of reconciliation. She calls for the black South Africans to forgive the whites for the dehumanizing experience they put them through and forge ahead. In the same vein, Matlwa urges the black government to help the citizens in this healing process by correcting the wrongs they also did through the unequal distribution of resources which has led to a big economic disparity between the rich and the poor. By righting this wrong, the government would ensure that fairness and justice is accorded to all South Africans. This would mean that there would be less or no xenophobic sentiments and violent attacks meted out to foreign nationals. Lastly, Matlwa's womanist vision calls for gender complementation where males and females work together to end all forms of oppression.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Findings

In this section, the researcher recapitulates three major arguments advanced during the study which are in line with the three objectives and make recommendations further research. Firstly, the study has made it clear that Matlwa uses her female characters to reveal the deep meaning of the black woman experience. This experiences projected in this study entails interlocking forms of oppression on the basis of race, class and gender.

Secondly, it has also emerged through the study that the major tenets of Ogunyemi's (1985) and Walker's (1984) womanism entails the portrayal of the black woman as courageous and daring, one who has a concern for all people (men, and children inclusive), employ intertextuality, the epistolary form and the concept of madness.

Lastly, the womanist vision as expounded in this study entails reconciliation of races so the South Africans can overcome their traumatic past. In these two novels, Matlwa insists that the past is gone and the South Africans should look at the brighter side of life and treat immigrants with dignity. She also advocates for gender complementation where men and women work together for a peaceful, harmonious and progressive nation. In addition, revival of the African culture has been found out to be embedded in this vision. Matlwa envisions a world where the black people would start appreciating their own culture in an effort to go back to their African roots.

5.2 Suggestions for Further Research

Firstly, this study was limited only on the negative deep meaning of the black woman experience in the post-apartheid South Africa as projected by Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut*

(2007) and *Period Pain* (2016). Therefore, more research needs to be carried out on other novels by other black women writers from South Africa like Panashe Chigumadzi, Zukiswa Wanner, Angelina Sithebe among others in an attempt to find out whether their works project this deep meaning from a positive perspective.

Secondly, this study used the womanist approach by Chikwenye Ogunyemi (1985) and Alice Walker (1984) to analyze the two novels. Hence, more research needs to be conducted on Matlwa's works using other forms of womanism such as Kolawole's (1997) Africana womanism, Floyd-Thomas' (2006) Christian womanism and Dove's (2003) and (1998) womanism. This will contribute to the tradition of criticism of black literature.

Lastly, the current study only projected Matlwa's vision for the black people in post-apartheid South Africa from a womanist perspective. Therefore, more research is needed on Matlwa's novels to project her vision for these black people from other perspectives such as the Marxist, modern and post-modern perspectives.

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