



Analyzing the Themes of Greed and Colonization in the Novel "Heart of Darkness"

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Abstract:

This paper aimed at underscoring the callous role and ill-treatment of the colonization in Africa as it appears in the novella "Heart of Darkness" by Joseph Conrad. What happened in the Congo as it was depicted in the story was a prototype to what happened in all background countries. Ignorance of these atrocities, led some writers of dark complexion to praise the colonizers and even to lament their "early" evacuation from African countries. The researchers adopted the descriptive analytical method. The researchers started with a background and the summary of the story, then a brief introduction to the main characters to put the reader through. The researchers gave a sample to the conquest of a conqueror; that is Britain the main conqueror. Then the researchers documented some incidents which prove the downfall and refute the claim of the colonizers and their stepsons of civilizing the natives. The bad treatment also included the natives who consolidated the rule of the white man. The researchers came with results that the mere objective of the colonizers was to make money. The researchers recommended that the colonization history better be revised and novels like Things Fall A part could be taught in all ex-colonies

Key words: Colonization, Imperialism, unjust role.

المستخلص:

هدفت هذه الورقة للتأكيد على الدور القاسى وسوء معاملة المستعمر للافارقة كما يظهر ذلك في رواية "قلب الظلام" التي كتبها جوزيف كونراد. ما حدث في الكونغو كما هو مبين في القصة كان نموذجا لما حدث في جميع البلدان المستعمرة. وقد أدى الجهل بهذه الفظائع بعض الكتاب من ذوى البشرة الداكنة إلى الثناء على المستعمرين، بل والبقاء على جلائهم "المبكر" من البلدان الأفريقية. بدأ الباحثون بخلفية وملخص القصة، ثم مقدمة موجزة عن الشخصيات الرئيسية لوضع القارئ فى الاطار. وقد اعطى الباحثون مثالا بغازى الغزاة(بريطانيا).

ثم وثق الباحثون بعض الحوادث التي تثبت سقوط المستعمر اخلاقيا ودحض ادعاءاته بشأن تثقيف المواطنين.

ولم تكن هذه المعاملة السيئة موجهة ضد المواطنين العاديين فحسب، وإنما أيضا للعاملين السود الذين عملوا لصالح المستعمرين، وعززوا الدور غير العادل للرجل الابيض. من نتائج الورقة، ان المستعمر اساسا جاء لتحقيق اهدافة المادية فقط. وقد اوصى الباحث باعادة النظر فى تاخيخ الاستعمار وتدريس بعض الروايات مثل رواية "الاشياء تتداعى" للكاتب النيجرى جينوا اجيبى.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاستعمار، الإمبريالية، الدور الظالم.

Introduction

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, European countries began exploring and colonizing many different areas in the world. The last half of nineteenth century saw the

highest of European colonial power around the globe. France, Belgium, Germany, and specially Great Britain, controlled over half of the world. Along with this achievement came a notable



sense of pride and confident belief that European civilization was the best on the earth and the natives of the lands that European controlled would only benefit from colonial influence. However, not everyone saw colonization as positive for all that involved. Some of the most notable writers of the time produced works criticizing the process of colonization. Two of the most significant works in this area are Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" and Chinua Achebe's "Things fall a Part."

Heart of Darkness is considered as a novella, yet it contains a lot of themes. It may look for some readers and even some critics unaccustomed that such a short story deal with so many themes. Imperialist exploitation of backward country comes at first. Then there are the themes of hypocrisy of imperialism. The theme of self-constraint. There is the theme of the influence of barbarian and primitivism (madness in this case) on a civilized man when he is cut off from civilized society, and finally the theme of the working of the sub-conscious mind of man. There is the theme of exploration of a little-known continent. Thus Heart of Darkness is a masterpiece which, its brief compass, deals with a number of important ideas. Conrad's treatment of the theme of white imperialism was influenced by his own visit to the Congo and his exploration of that dark country; and his rendering of Marlow's conscious and sub-conscious thoughts was also based upon his own reactions to what he had himself witnessed in the course of his travels through the Congo.

Research Problem

Some resent literary works like "Things Fall A part" by the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe and "Heart of Darkness" by the British writer Joseph Conrad has drawn the attention of some critics about what exactly happened during the

colonization era. Moreover, some African writers nowadays call openly to the colonization rule due to their ignorance. In this paper the researcher would like to cast the light on what happened exactly according the novel so as to stop poisoning the thought of the present and coming African generations.

Methodology

The researchers adopted the descriptive analytical method. All extracts in italic are taken from Conrad, Joseph, Heart of Darkness, Penguin Popular Classics, 1994, Berkshire.

Research Objectives

- i. This paper aims at first to highlight the horrible treatment of African natives during the colonization of the Congo.
- ii. To refute the European claim that they were trying to civilize and humanize the natives.
- iii. To prove the natives were not brute and criminals and to what extent they practiced self-constraint.

Research Questions

- i. Did the colonizers really come to civilize the natives in the Congo?
- ii. What concrete distribution did colonization do to the Congo?
- iii. Why do some colonizing countries feel shame nowadays due to what extent their ancestors did?

Research Significance

This paper is intended to draw the attention of the natives whom their ancestors suffered from colonization what really the crimes did the colonizers commit?. What led the writer to conduct the study is the emergence of some African voices who try to glamorize the picture of the colonizers and even lament its (glorious) era.

Research limits

The paper concentrated on what exactly happened in the Congo during colonization era



according to the novel. What happened in the Congo was a prototype to what happened in all Africa.

Background of the story

Heart of Darkness (1899) is a [novella](#) by Polish-British novelist [Joseph Conrad](#), about a voyage up the [Congo River](#) into the [Congo Free State](#), in the heart of Africa, by the story's narrator [Charles Marlow](#). Marlow tells his story to friends aboard a boat anchored on the [River Thames](#), London, England. This setting provides the [frame](#) for Marlow's story of his obsession with the ivory trader [Kurtz](#), which enables Conrad to create a parallel between London and Africa as places of darkness. Central to Conrad's work is the idea that there is little difference between so-called civilized people and those described as savages; *Heart of Darkness* raises questions about [imperialism](#) and racism. Originally issued as a three-part serial story in [Blackwood's Magazine](#) to celebrate the thousandth edition of the magazine, *Heart of Darkness* has been widely re-published and translated into many languages. In 1998, the [Modern Library](#) ranked *Heart of Darkness* sixty-seventh on their list of the [hundred best novels](#) in English of the twentieth century (African Novel, p.67)

Heart of Darkness Chief Characters

- i. Charles Marlow, who travels up the Congo River in search of a man named Kurtz.
- ii. Kurtz, the manager of a trading station in the Belgian Congo, who turns savage while hunting for ivory in Africa.
- iii. The District Manager, Kurtz's enemy, who believes Kurtz's methods are destroying the district.
- iv. The Russian traveler, one of Kurtz's many admirers
- v. Kurtz's Fiancée, a woman who Marlow wishes to retain the belief that Kurtz is good and

powerful. (*Heart of Darkness Analysis*, 2009, p.170).

Summary of the story

Conrad described his tale this way: "A wild story of a journalist who becomes manager of a station in the (African) interior and makes himself worshipped by a tribe of savages. Thus described, the subject seems comic, but it isn't." The story pivots on Charles Marlow, who while onboard a moored ship on the Thames River in London recounts to the narrator (and to the reader) his extraordinary journey up the Congo, thereby establishing straightaway, via the two rivers, contrasting symbols of the "civilized" West and "dark," uncivilized Africa, respectively. As Marlow explains, he was assigned by an ivory trading company to take command of a cargo boat stranded in the interior. Making his way through treacherous jungle, he treks from the Outer Station to the Central Station and then up the river to the Inner Station, witnessing the brutalization of the natives by white traders along the way and hearing tantalizing stories of a Mr. Kurtz, the manager of the trading station and one of the company's most successful collectors of ivory. He hears that Mr. Kurtz is unwell, and so he sets off to find him. The long and slow passage through the African heartland fills Marlow with a growing sense of dread. He and his company are attacked by African natives, and some of the crew are killed. Incrementally, Marlow learns more about the mysterious Kurtz—about his civilized traits (his painting, musical abilities, and great eloquence), his charismatic, god-like power over the natives, and the severed heads that surround his hut. Upon finding him, Marlow concludes that, in this alien context, unbound by the strictures of his own culture, Kurtz had gone mad, become a bloody tyrant, and exchanged his soul and any humanitarian ideals he may have



initially had upon his arrival in Africa for abject greed and power. A mortal illness, however, is bringing his reign of terror to a close. As Kurtz dies, he whispers to Marlow, “The horror! The horror!”—seemingly acknowledging his encounter with human depravity, the heart of darkness. Marlow returns to Belgium, delivers to the trading company Kurtz’s papers, including a report he had written for “The Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs” (but with Kurtz’s handwritten postscript—“Exterminate all the brutes!”—ripped off), and then visits Kurtz’s fiancée, to whom he lies about Kurtz’s final words, saying he died proclaiming her name. Marlow is disgusted with himself, his lie, and the whole experience. (English literature .II, 2010, p.555)

Background to the Ancient Roman Conquest of Britain

The keynote of the theme of imperialism is struck at the very outset of Marlow's narration. Marlow speaks at the very beginning of the ancient Roman conquest of Britain, and says that the ancient Romans were conquerors using brute force .The ancient Romans, says Marlow, grabbed what they could get. Their conquest of Britain was "robbery with violence"; and the violence in this case means murder on a large scale. The conquest of another country, says Marlow, mostly means the taking away of things from those who have a different complexion or who have flatter nose than conquerors have. Such a conquest is unpardonable. What can, however, excuse such a conquest is the idea of the back of it: not a sentimental presence bit an idea, an unselfish belief in the idea. What Marlow here wishes to say is that conquest can only be excused if the conquerors perform constructive work in the background country which they have conquered. Marlow here does not use the phrase “the white man's burden”; but

he has evidently that concept in his mind. The white man certainly has a duty to the savages whom he dues, and whom he begins to govern. The test of white man's intentions lies only on his performance of this duty. If he fails in his duty, his government of background countries cannot be justified.

Ivory a Symbol of Imperialist Greed and Commercial Mentality

Marlow's (Conrad) experience in the Congo clearly shows that the man here has failed to perform his functions. Instead of civilizing the savages, the white men who went there became exploiters, pure and simple. The Congo at that time was being governed by the Belgian king, Leopold II; and the Belgian trading companies were sending their agents into the Congo for trading purposes. The chief commodity which these Belgians found worth their pain was ivory .Ivory was of no use to the natives themselves, while the white men collected ivory and send it to Europe there it could profitably be used for the making of numerous ornamental articles. Now as we go through the book, we find the ivory is constantly mentioned (*The word Ivory would ring in the air for a while-and on we went again into silence*). (Heart of Darkness, 2010, P.34). Ivory dominates the thought of the manager of central station, thought of the brick-maker, the thought of several agents who loiter around the central station and to whom Marlow gives the name of " faithless pilgrims" (*"Ivory" jerked the nephew; lots of it-prime sort- lots-most annoying, from him*). Subsequently, we find that ivory not only dominates the thoughts of Mr. Kurtz but has become an obsession with him. The manager of central station tells Marlow that Kurtz collects more ivory than all the other agents taken together; and the Russian tells Marlow that in one occasion Mr. Kurtz has threaten to kill him if he did not surrender to Mr.



Kurtz a small quantity of ivory which the Russian had received as a gift from a native tribal chief. Thus ivory become a symbol in the book. Ivory symbolizes the white man's greed and the commercial mentality. The white man's chief concern in the Congo is to collect ivory and send it to Europe. The greater ivory collected by the agent, the greater is his achievement in the eyes of his employers and the higher is the promotion which he can expect. Ivory becomes a source of revenue to the trading company which can therefore, afford to invest a lot of money in sending its agents into the Congo. Nowhere do we find any mention of any service being rendered by the white men to the native of the Congo. (Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia)

The White Man's Callousness towards the Natives

The sights seen by Marlow, when he has got down from the Swedish captain's steamer, are of a very depressing kind. The evilness of imperialism and colonization is expressed well in this extract: "*as Marlow travels from the outer station to the central station, and finally up the river to the inner station, he encounters scenes of torture, cruelty, and near slavery*". (Heart of Darkness, 1994. P.45). These sights depicts the wretchedness and the misery of the natives of the Congo, and the sheer futility of the white man's seemingly useful work. Marlow sees a lot of black people, mostly naked, moving about like ants. Later he sees half a dozen men chained to one another and each wearing an iron collar on his neck. These men are criminals, who have violated the laws and are being punished by hard labor under the orders of the white rulers of the country. Marlow feels deeply upset to see these sights. Going further he sees black figures crouching under the tree, leaning against the trunks and clinging to the earth. These men, says

Marlow, were dying slowly. These men were not enemies; they are not criminals; they were only black figures representing disease and starvation, and lying in the state of confusion in the gloom of the trees. Here Marlow feels as if he has entered into the gloomy circle of some inferno. Now, it is made obvious to us that the white man's indifference and his unconcern are responsible for this state of affairs. These sights have been described by Marlow in order to convey to us the callousness of white man towards the natives. (Heart of Darkness, famous product, 2007, p.144).

A Waste of Time and Effort by the White Man

Accompanying all these sights and a few others which clearly indicate the hypocrisy of the white men who are simply wasting time and effort to show that a kind of constructed work is going on. There a project to build a railway line in this region. But Marlow sees that a rock is being blasted with gunpowder even though this rock does not stand as an obstruction on the way of the railway line. Likewise, he sees a boiler lying down unused in the grass. Then he came up some pieces of decaying machinery and large heap of rusty rails. Similarly, before landing here, Marlow had seen a warship anchored close to the land and firing its gun into the forest aimlessly. Marlow had found a touch of madness in this firing of guns to no purpose at all. Outwardly, of course, the warship was fighting away the savages; but actually it was merely a waste of ammunition. This waste of effort and the unused machinery lying in the grass offer a sharp contrast to the starving natives. The whole effort of the white man is completely misdirected. It is a sad commentary on the efficiency of the white man that Marlow should not be able to find rivets to repair the wrecked ship for weeks when these are needed badly.



Meanness and Pettiness of the White Colonizers

The futility of the white man endeavors in the dark country called the Congo become even more evident when we meet certain employees of the trading company which has sent Marlow there. The manager of the central station has been described by Marlow in scathing terms. Marlow makes us despise this man who could inspire neither respect nor love nor fear, and who can inspire only uneasiness. Marlow found nothing within this man. Marlow's description for the brick-maker is equally satirical and critical. He describes the brick-maker as a "peppier-macheMephistopheles" because of the man's cunning. The brick-maker is here but makes no bricks. His function is to act as spy for the manager. The men, who are loitering around the central station are idlers having no work to do but to gossip, to speak ill of one another and to hatch intrigues. When the manager's uncle turns up as the leader of the exploring expedition, he turns out to be a seasoned schemer and plotter. The manager's mind is full of fear lest he should be supervised by Mr. Kurtz. If such are the colonizers in the dark continent of Africa, what possible benefit can they confer upon the savage there? Conrad conveyed his disapproval and disapprobation of these white men to us most effectively, so that we can begin to look upon these white men with the greatest possible of contempt. (Heart of Darkness, 2007, p144)

Bad Treatment Even for the Black Employees

Joseph Conrad describes the oppression emphasizing the horrible treatment of African natives during colonization of the Congo. The Europeans claim that they were trying to civilize the natives, and that each colonized station should be for "humanizing, improving and

instructing" as if colonization was to the advantage of the natives. In the same voice, it was said that the natives were "brute" and "savages" and they should all be "exterminated". They were also described as "criminals" and "enemies" and they were treated as such.

The evilness of colonization and imperialism is expressed very well in this extract: "*As Marlow travels from the outer station to the central station and finally up the river to the inner station, he encounters scenes of torture, cruelty and near slavery*".

Natives were forced to do intense heavy labor for the colonizers. They dig holes, tunnel through the mountains, and move soil from one place to another in baskets balanced on their heads. They were treated like working animals. In the stations, they work in chain gang where, each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected by a chain. If the blacks stop working, made a mistake, or were suspected of making a mistake, they were beaten savagely nearly to death.

It is equally disgusting to us to see the manner in which the cannibal crew of Marlow's steamer are being treated by the white owners of the steamer. The cannibal crew are most efficient, hardworking, and sturdy fellows who deserve every encouragement. But the pity is that they were not fed properly. It goes to the credit of the cannibal crew themselves that they are expressing self-constrain and are not attaching the white men and eat their flesh.

The Lamentable Failure of Mr. Kurtz to Uplift the Savages

Even Mr. Kurtz who has begun to identify himself with savages, and who had at one time held that the white man should confer huge benefit upon the backward people, has done nothing for the uplift of the natives. Instead of improving their mode of life, he has himself



become a savage in their company. He has miserably failed to exercise any self-restraint, and has begun to satisfy his various lusts without any limit. Even in his prime of life, when he has supported the view about white man's civilizing role, he had written down the following words conveying an opposite message: " *Exterminate all the brutes*". In fact, Mr. Kurtz has now become brutalized and even dehumanized. Such is the irony of achievement of Mr. Kurtz who has once upon a time believed that the white man could prove himself to the Messiah of the natives. (Heart of Darkness, 2007, p.170).

Conrad's Exposure of the Belgian Imperialist Rule

Heart of Darkness conveys to us in a nutshell the deceit, fraud, robberies, arson, and murder, slave-trading and general policy of cruelty of the Belgian rule in the Congo. There is the incident of the fire in the story, and there is the long trek during which the natives have to carry a heavy load on their heads in the service of their white masters. The portrayal of the company's chief accountant is itself a grim commentary upon the white man who can afford to dress flawlessly when the natives around are diseased-stricken and starving. (Marlow of course admired this man but to us this admiration seems to be ironical). Indeed in this novel the brutal futility of the Belgian imperialist rule is memorably captured in image after image; a natural ravine is clogged with a wanton smash-up of imported drainage-pip; and the grass grows through the ribs of trader's corpse in a village abandoned in panic upon his accidental killing, colonist and local community destroyed equally by their encounter.

The wider Implications of the Novel

We can go so far to say that Conrad is here not only exposing the hollowness and the weakness of the Belgian imperialist rule over the Congo

but also indirectly reminding us of British imperialism in various countries of the world of his time. Today the picture of the world is widely different from what it was in Conrad's time. Today white imperialism has crumbled; and all of the countries of Asia and Africa have become independent. But in Conrad's time all the African countries were still a part of the Dark Continent, and most of the Asian countries were being governed by their white rulers, chiefly the British. Therefore his picture of imperialist misrule and callousness in the background countries has in those days undeniable relevance. Conrad's denunciation of imperialistic rule in the Congo has a valuable message for those for both the exploiters and the exploited. Today, of course, this message has only a historical interest. Now all the subject countries have become independent, though independence has brought new problems for them. The evil of concrete imperialist rule has ended, but another evil have come into existence. (Heart of Darkness, 2009, P.212)

Findings

Due to all that, the researcher has come out with the following findings:

- i. The colonizers arrived Africa without any intentions to civilize the natives.
- ii. The colonizers adopted the Machiavelli principle "The End Justifies the Mean" to achieve their goals.
- iii. Scholarships and humanitarian assistance which the West give to their ex-colonies is an attempt to expiate their guilt.

Conclusion

Heart of Darkness is a record of things seen and done. But also Conrad was reacting to the humanitarian presence of some of the looters precisely as the novelist today reacts to the morals, to the cold war propaganda. Then it was



ivory that poured from the heart of darkness;
now it is uranium.

Recommendations

According to the findings of the study, the researcher recommends the following:

- i. The History of colonization should be revised and to discover the entire truth.
- ii. Literary works written by African writers such as Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe should be taught all over Africa.
- iii. Some African writers who try to amend the picture of the colonizers should not be given limitless chances to address the lay man.

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