



The Aftermath of Colonial Atrocities in Conrad's Heart of Darkness

Lect. Dr. AMMAR ALI KAREEM

Ministry of Education- Babil Education Directorate

bmwmotors1976@gmail.com

Abstract:-

Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness occupies an outstanding place in the field of colonial discourse since it has the superiority in unmasking the colonialist ideology and its impact on the colonizers and the colonized alike. The present article aims to unveil the dark side of colonialism and the usage of double- standard policy in non-Western countries. To get to the heart of the colonial project, the researcher adapts Edward Said's concept of "Binary Opposition" within a postcolonial text. Said believes that adopting a second character is not the panacea for the struggle waged between the East and the West. Thus, the research contributes in motivating scholars and researchers to dig deeply into the field of the colonial and postcolonial periods to enrich the area of study with fruitful knowledge. Moreover, the present research intends to elaborate on the colonizer's animosity towards the colonized at all levels.

Keywords: *Binary Opposition, Colonialism, Edward Said, Heart of Darkness.*

آثار الفظائع الاستعمارية في رواية "قلب الظلام" لجوزيف كونراد

م. د. عمار علي كريم
وزارة التربية - المديريّة العامّة للتربية بابل

الملخص:-

تحتل رواية "قلب الظلام" لجوزيف كونراد مكانةً بارزةً في مجال الخطاب الاستعماري، لما تتميز به من تفوق في كشف الأيديولوجية الاستعمارية وأثرها على المستعمر والمستعمَر على حد سواء. تهدف هذه المقالة إلى كشف الوجه المظلم للاستعمار، ومارسة سياسة الكيل بمكيالين في الدول غير الغربية. وللوصول إلى جوهر المشروع الاستعماري، يتبنى الباحث مفهوم إدوارد سعيد "للتضاد الشائي" ضمن نص ما بعد الاستعمار. يرى سعيد أن تبني شخصية ثانية ليس الحل الأمثل للصراع الدائر بين الشرق والغرب. لذا، يُسهم البحث في تحفيز الباحثين والدارسين على التعمق في مجال الفترتين الاستعمارية وما بعد الاستعمارية لإثراء هذا المجال بمعرفة ثرية. علاوة على ذلك، يهدف البحث الحالي إلى توضيح أسباب عداء المستعمر للمستعمَر على جميع المستويات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التضاد الشائي، الاستعمار، إدوارد سعيد، قلب الظلام.

Introduction:

The colonial character can be seen as a multi-shape since it can be accustomed to various conditions to serve its privileges. In other words, the colonizer adopts a certain strategy conceiving that the colonial project is mainly devoted to digging poor, uneducated and less cultured people out of culture, moral and technological lag. In a similar vein, in *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe argues, "[t]he white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan has fallen apart" (152). Colonial powers strive to etch out their ideology and beliefs in the consciousness of the colonized to control their actions and thinking. This colonial philosophy gains currency at first because the colonized areas were prevented from enjoying the blessing of technological and cultural privileges to compel them to be totally dependent on outsiders. Furthermore, Aimé Césaire has a point of view saying, "I am talking about societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary possibilities wiped out" (55). The colonial persona disguises under the mask of a savior intending to earn the trust of the colonized people. The colonizer adopts a strategy that aims at winning the colonized mind, imposing Western values and culture, and dominating the scenery. Consequently, the colonized object experiences cultural alienation due to the mixture of his inherited culture and the culture brought to him by the colonizer. To be precise, the colonial powers deform the history and cultural heritage of the colonized population and empty the mind of the indigenous communities of confidence to achieve the colonial objectives.

Postcolonialism seeks to heal the negative consequences of the colonial period and to expose the pseudo-project of colonialism. In other words, Postcolonialism pivoted on liberating the colonized periphery from the outdated colonial ideology. Postcolonial theorists, writers, critics and scholars struggle to alter the colonized subjects' mode of thinking to break out the alleged theories of colonialism. In her book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, Ania Loomba argues, "Postcolonialism is not just about the past. It is also about the present and the future" (1). She is aware of the imperative need to extricate the colonized subjects from their cultural



chasms, ever since, theorists, scholars, writers and critics devoted their pens to renovate the internal rifts caused by the colonizers. In the same vein, in his *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said argues, "[n]either the term postcolonial nor the idea of overcoming the past is satisfactory; the past is still very much with us" (45), showing that the impact of colonial period cannot be wiped out easily. He believes that the legacies of colonialism including cultural, economic and psychological, can be seen as challenges facing the colonized peoples and overcoming those difficulties require a shift in the mode of thinking. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak highlights the critical position of thinkers who are trapped between two contradictory period. They have to bear the burdens of the sudden change of general system. Spivak believes that "the space of the postcolonial intellectual is dangerously and invitingly inscribed" (275) because there are great challenges need wise thinking. In the same respect, Robert Young, in his book *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, supports Said's notion of the negative consequences of colonial period and its impact that continues throughout postcolonial period. Young argues that "[t]he postcolonial era in its name pays tribute to the great historical achievements of resistance against colonial powers" (60). Postcolonial period is not just a mere name of an era but it represents a system of complete ideologies and concepts that aim to lump together the different concepts, notions and thoughts to free the colonized minds from the aftermath of the colonial period.

Heart of Darkness is based on Joseph Conrad's experiences in the Congo. In 1890, Conrad was designated in the Congo to serve the interests of a Belgian trading company. Arguably, he brings to light the real suffering of Indigenous people and sheds light on their unspeakable ordeal under the authority of the white colonizer. In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad exposes the darkness that lies in the heart of colonial powers and the way they create fragmented identities. The novella attempts to trace out the broad contours of the greediness of the white colonizers and their innate desire to loot the colonized peoples' fortune. Tracking postcolonial studies, one can undoubtedly notice that Conrad's work has occupied a noticeable area in the field of critical commentary. Some critics like, Chinua Achebe, considers the novella a plain racist fiction because it sheds light on issues of discrimination. In other words, he believes that Conrad has depicted Africans as black, uneducated and less cultured monsters but the white colonizer as smart and is stuffed with cultural heritage. In his outstanding

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essay "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness", Achebe says:

Heart of Darkness projects the image of Africa as 'the other world,' the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place¹ where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality. (308)

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said states that Conrad highlights the concept of us and them which is a part of the imperial project. This project is devoted to implant the idea of inferiority and superiority in the mind of the colonized peoples. Accordingly, Said says:

Conrad's restricted vision prevented him from seeing that what he criticized was a vicious system at work. His impressionistic, heavily reliant techniques were a refusal to particularize, to give instances, to name names. (67)

Countless theorists and scholars devoted their efforts to examining the consequences of colonialism and its direct impact on the colonized objects. Consequently, many theorists agree that colonialism has paralyzed the development of the colonized peoples and inculcated their pseudo-project in the consciousness of those poor creatures. Thus, different concepts and beliefs have appeared to analyze the derogatory behavior of the colonizer towards the colonized people. Therefore, postcolonial theorists like Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Edward Said save no efforts to engross the attention of readers to the atrocities committed by the colonizer towards native people and to burnish the character of the colonized.

Theoretical Framework

There are unremitting efforts by several postcolonial theorists to reduce the negative repercussions of colonialism contributed and to retrieve the persona of the hyphenated peoples. Most postcolonial theorists take on their shoulders the responsibility for liberating the stifled voices of the colonized objects. In other words, the theorists, writers, scholars, and critics strive to give those oppressed human objects voices to express themselves. Simultaneously, they bravely mirror the ugly face of colonialism and expose their wicked project that entails muting the indigenous people. In this respect, Chinua Achebe believes that "[t]he colonial encounter was not just a political or economic event, but also a

cultural one" (251). He confirms the significance of sustaining cultural coherence and historical roots to prevent colonial attempts to distort the fundamental basis of the national identity. Additionally, Frantz Fanon argues that "[d]ecolonization is quite simply the replacing of a certain species of men by another species of men" (33). The essential focus of Fanon was to inculcate humanity in colonized people since the colonizers dehumanized them. For Fanon, the process includes the renewal of the entire system and structure of the community.

Edward Said shows animosity towards the colonizer when he compares the West and the East. Said asserts that the "Occident", the West, defined themselves as modern, civilized, and superior. While the "Orient", the East, are irrational, traditional and inferior. He called this comparison the "binary opposition", where the colonizers are dominant and the colonized are under domination. Said utilized the concept of binary opposition to illustrate how the West created its interpretation of the East through what he calls the "Other". This binary opposition is to explain Western hegemony over the East. By examining the discourse of Orientalism, Said demonstrated how these representations were constructed and perpetuated, challenging essentialist opinions of both the West and the East. In his outstanding book *Orientalism*, he argues, "[t]here is in addition the hegemony of European ideas about the Orient, themselves reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness" (14). That is to say, colonialism managed to impose its ideas and beliefs on the colonized through cultural and ideological means rather than using obligatory ways. The cultural hegemony and brainwashing achieved credible results in the countries that were under dominance. The "Orient" is portrayed as the opposite of the "Occident". In other words, the "Orient" is shown as backward, uneducated and savage to keep him in need of the "Occident" all the time.

Said posits that "Orientalism" does not mean a set of ideas or concepts. He argues that "Orientalism" is a discourse that involves the strategies that qualify individuals to think, read and write. In this framework, the "Orient" has been viewed as a pariah to its counterpart "Occident". It is this concept of "us" and "them" that is used as the sole criterion by which the "Orient" is deemed to be the "Other" and the "Occident" is the "Self". The binary can be seen as a constructed strategy to create a distinction between the West and the East. Consequently, this



binary opposition uncovers the Western viewpoint of the East and it is a way to keep the latter in need for the Western aid. According to Said, the white master saves not effort to portray the "Orient" as irrational, backward and decadence. The dichotomy of them and us is not spur of the moment; rather it is wisely woven to fit the Eastern periphery. It is the cultural production of the Western mind to construct the "Occident" and the "Orient" principle.

Edward Said argues that "Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident" (10). Said believes that this differentiation between the East and the West is built upon the colonizer's interest because it portrays Eastern people inferior to the Western ones. Furthermore, Said shows how Western scholars and thinkers adopt a stereotypical image of the East. They depict the "Orient" in a dehumanizing way to preserve the dichotomy of "us" and "them" and to oblige the "Orient" to be subservient. In other words, "[t]he Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action" (Ibid 11), but he is enslaved by the Western ideology to keep him under control. Apparently, the relationship between the colonized and the colonized is not built on humanitarian basis but is designed in accordance with the colonizer's desires. Ever since the "Orient" is a victim of the Western ideologies that demean the "Orient"

Discussion

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is not only an expedition tale; it includes a deep exploration of the negative psychological consequences of colonialism. The narrative, based on Marlow's journey into the heart of the Congo, uncovers the barbarous intentions of imperial powers and their direct impact, not only on the natives but also on the colonizers. The atrocities perpetrated under a flimsy pretext to impose authority have uncovered the real face of colonialism. The invaders deepen the cultural nuances to boost the persons of colonialism and to humiliate all the achievements of indigenous people. In other words, the brutal treatment of the colonizer for the colonized unveils the filthy intentions of colonialism.

In *Heart of Darkness*, one cannot overlook the physical cruelty of the white dominator against black people. The novella explores the savage victimization of the Congolese people by forcing them to work, starvation, and the excessive use of violence. The atrocities Marlow witnesses, along



with the skeleton-like people and the stifled voices, clarify the derogatory dehumanization adopted by the colonial system in the colonized periphery. Arguably, the major impulse behind those atrocities is the trade of ivory in Congo and the colonizers' desire to monopolize this trade. This barbarous desire pushed the white dominator to use various styles of savagery to fulfill his greediness. It is a commodity purchased at the cost of human lives and human dignity. To be more specific, the "grove of death," of those simple black people who surrendered to death due to lack of food and an unhealthy environment is grim evidence of the barbarous deeds. It is the true face of the imperial project in the Congo. These physical atrocities engraved ineffable scars on the Congo landscape and on the emaciated bodies of the colonized. Those colonial scars serve as a reminder of the dark period that the colonized peoples have undergone through the domination of the whites.

Notwithstanding, the atrocities in *Heart of Darkness* extend to psychological and moral repercussions of colonialism. In this respect, Conrad effectively unveils how these consequences negatively influence the colonizer and the colonized. The colonizers were hungry for wealth and domination and did not show any ethical considerations and moral standards in treating indigenous populations. In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad illustrates the binary opposition of self and other and demonstrates Westerners as intelligent, educated, superior and white. On the other side, Africans are backward, black, inferior and primitive. A critical reading of *Heart of Darkness* reveals the colonialist ideology the colonizers follow in the occupied territories. To be more specific, Conrad's title refers to the darkness of life in the Congo and how people there are submerged in backwardness. Chinua Achebe's essay "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness,'" is a compelling critique. Achebe declares that the portrayal of Africa in Conrad's novella as "the other world" (1785), and the description of Africans as "rudimentary souls" (ibid1787) is inequitable. Moreover, he argues that the language and the images that Conrad used to characterize Africa and the Africans are a paragon for dehumanization. The core of Achebe's argument is that Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* strengthens racism and stereotyping.

The impact on the colonized is equally profound. While their experiences are often filtered through Marlow's perspective, we glimpse the psychological trauma inflicted upon them. They are stripped of their



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agency, their culture, and their very humanity. They are reduced to beasts of burden, their lives deemed expendable in the pursuit of ivory. The fear and resentment that simmer beneath the surface are palpable. Even those who appear to cooperate with the colonizers are often driven by desperation and a desire for survival. The psychological scars of this dehumanization, the loss of identity and cultural disruption, are a legacy of colonialism that can last for generations.

The aftermath of these atrocities extends beyond the immediate context of the Congo. Conrad suggests that the darkness at the heart of colonialism infects the colonizers' homeland as well. The "sepulchral city" of Brussels, the headquarters of the Company, is depicted as a place of moral decay, where greed and hypocrisy reign. The seemingly civilized world is complicit in the atrocities committed in the Congo, benefiting from the exploitation of its resources and its people. This complicity creates a moral vacuum at the heart of Western civilization, a darkness that mirrors the darkness of the Congo.

Heart of Darkness is a powerful indictment of the brutal realities of colonialism and its lasting consequences. The physical atrocities, the psychological damage inflicted on both the colonizer and the colonized, and the moral corruption that permeates the colonial system all contribute to a devastating portrait of imperial violence. The lingering stain of these atrocities, the "horror" that Kurtz confronts in his final moments, serves as a chilling reminder of the enduring legacy of colonialism and its profound impact on the human psyche and the global landscape. Conrad's masterpiece forces us to confront this dark history and to consider the ongoing struggle for justice and reconciliation. Conrad's work portrays the immoral manners that permeate the behavior of the invaders,

In Imperialism in Africa, the novella presents a stark examination of the moral ambiguity that pervaded the actions of colonizers, especially in the way that they dehumanize the black African subjects and intentionally treated them as the "others. Charles Marlow, a sailor, sets out on his journey to the Congo, uncovers the hidden scandals of the white colonizer against the non-white human beings. He is the one who unmasked the true face of imperialism and revealed the colonial intentions of the occupier. Throughout *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad uses various imagery to show the oppression imposed upon the native population. In other words, the white colonizer's sense of greediness and his feeling of superiority have driven

him to consider African inhabitants as an attainable opportunity to gain wealth and fame. This harebrained behavior is indeed portrayed in the character of Kurtz, who fought to exploit the poor black individuals. His dirty project represents the entire plan of imperialism. Conrad employs Kurtz to show the colonizer's hidden face and to reveal the real intention of colonialism on the black continent. His disgraceful statement, "[t]he horror! The horror!" represents the declaration of the ethical bankruptcy intrinsic in the colonial project in the colonized countries.

Conrad concentrates on cultural barriers that come along with the imperial project, alongside the disgraceful atrocities of the colonizer in the colonized areas. The inhumanity and devastation imposed upon black people resemble the hidden animus of the white colonizer towards the poor inhabitants. In this respect, Marlow declares his viewpoint the moment of his arrival to Congo after witnessing the ghastly scenery saying, "I've seen the devil of violence, and the devil of greed, and the devil of hot desire; but by all the stars these were strong, lusty, red-eyed devils that swayed and drove me- men, I tell you" (16). Witnessing a black man having a rifle forcing other black chained men to a detention, Marlow realize the extent of the moral and cultural deterioration that has befallen the region. *Heart of Darkness* motivates the educated reader to encounter the depth of grief that every colonized individual succumbed. The Eurocentric views on the black object as a savage, inferior and animal-like cast a shadow over those marginalized human beings and force them to fight to attain the acceptance of their master.

Marlow is the eyewitness to the atrocities of the colonial tools in the colonized territories. He is shocked upon seeing the horrific sights and the inhuman treatment of the white colonizer. In this respect, Marlow expresses his feelings, saying, "They were dying slowly—it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now,—nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom" (21). Marlow portrays the state of African inhabitants as if they are shadows walking here and there, referring to the miserable conditions that those poor creatures face every single day. The feeling of dominance that was deeply implanted inside Kurtz and his views on Africa led him to form a blurry picture of black people. Kurtz's total mastery over African individuals and his thirst for ivory express his desire to dominate the secrecy.



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In other words, he considers the local inhabitants as mere tools to fulfill his evil endeavors. Marlow's depiction of the horror that black locals show and Kurtz's king-like status makes it easy for the reader to measure the amount of dominance of the colonizer over the colonized. Marlow expresses the situation saying "He had come to them with thunder and lightning, you know—and they had bowed down to him... Altogether he was a curious figure" (55). Over time, Kurtz uncovers his ugly face and expresses his desire to eliminate black locals since he considers them as barriers that must vanish "[e]xterminate all the brutes!" (72).

Conrad's work resembles a journey into the real suffering of a human being who is deceived by brutal forces. Through the character of Marlow, Conrad shows the depth of the black natives' struggle against their undeclared destiny. They were stripped of humanity and were seen as "bundles of acute angles", who could not determine their fate. They were dehumanized and had been treated savagely by the white colonizer. The novella shows a subtle examination of the black object's psyche against evil powers.

In a nutshell, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is a story that revolves around the greediness of certain human beings. Conrad uses a certain colonial atmosphere to depict human nature under pressure. His style and the multiple images employed in the story add a brilliant touch of craftsmanship to the work. The psychological and physical suffering of the natives serves as evidence of the dark side of colonialism. The colonizers claim that their essential goal is to develop the cultural, educational and economic aspects and to help the inhabitants keep pace with intellectual, cultural and economic development alike. At the moment they impose their control on the colonized territories, they begin enslaving the local inhabitants. Conrad's major goal is to uncover the ugly face of colonialism and to seek justice for the marginalized populations.

Conclusion:

In *Heart of Darkness*, the quest for worldly materials and authority over defenseless natives is considered the true intention of the colonial enterprise. In a neat and professional style, Conrad portrays the psychological and physical suffering of the black inhabitants of the Congo. Conrad creatively conveyed the multi-colonial images and methods used to achieve their aims. Through Kurtz and Marlow, Conrad reveals whites' bumptious character about blacks' humble souls.

The relentless pursuit of ivory and self-realization through the appropriation of the resources of local citizens is considered the ultimate goal of the colonial machine. In other words, the white colonizer used everything available to achieve his desires, even at the expense of lives. That is to say, the colonial project is disguised under the so-called education and training of backwards peoples. In reality, the colonizer uses all means, both declared and undeclared, to achieve his destination, even if it requires crushing the skulls of the colonized populations.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad skillfully and expertly conveys to the reader what Edward Said called "us and them" to refer to the class perspective that roams the mind of the white colonizer. In this regard, it is significant to shed light on the role of Kurtz, who represents the hidden face of colonialism. Driven by greed for ivory, Kurtz practiced the most heinous forms of abuse against the colonized to achieve his personal goals and implement the dirty colonial project. He represents the brutal face of colonialism, and his main concern is to gain power and achieve his plans. On the other hand, Conrad exposed the colonial enterprise in the Congo through the character of Marlow. Marlow's journey to the Congo encapsulates the true message that reveals the atrocities committed by the colonizers to impose their dominance and humiliate the colonized peoples. Marlow, in his turn, scattered the papers and revealed the secret that was hidden behind the grim reality of colonialism.

To conclude, Conrad's outstanding work can be seen as a story that exposes the passive consequences of colonialism. Metaphorically, it is obvious that Conrad used the word darkness in his title to refer to the dark side of human reality. The novella portrays the negative side of the colonial enterprise, and it shows how the imperial powers plan to occupy and exploit the powerless populations.



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