

## Colonial Shadows: Unveiling the Narrative of Colonialism and Othering in Conrad's Heart of Darkness

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### ABSTRACT

Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" unfolds against the backdrop of European colonialism in the Congo, serving as a profound exploration of the human psyche and the moral ramifications of imperialism. This abstract delves into the intricacies of colonial shadows and the pervasive theme of othering that Conrad masterfully elucidates. During an era characterized by anxiety and oppression, Conrad's novella is widely regarded as a moral lesson on human self-indulgence and a sociological commentary on the morality of colonialism and imperialism. Through the protagonist, Marlow's journey into the heart of Africa, Conrad unveils the darkness inherent in the colonial enterprise, exposing the brutal exploitation and dehumanization of the African people by European powers. Central to the narrative is the concept of othering, whereby Europeans construct an image of the African "other" as inferior and uncivilized, justifying their oppressive actions. Conrad meticulously portrays the consequences of this ideological construction, depicting the profound psychological impact on both the colonizers and the colonized. Moreover, he critiques European civilization's inherent hypocrisy and moral decay, which claims enlightenment while perpetuating barbarism in the name of progress and profit. Through vivid imagery and haunting prose, Conrad forces readers to confront uncomfortable truths about the human condition and the insidious nature of colonialism.

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### INTRODUCTION

Conrad's "Heart of Darkness", Conrad & Conrad (1996) is a narrative that transcends mere storytelling and a profound exploration of colonialism and the insidious practice of othering. Through evocative prose and haunting imagery, Conrad unveils the shadows cast by colonial exploitation, revealing the darkness within the heart of Africa and the hearts of those who perpetuate imperialism. This introduction invites readers into a journey of discovery as we delve into the intricate layers of Conrad's narrative, confronting the complexities of power, identity, and the human psyche in the colonial era.

"Heart of the Darkness" works on the ideology of Colonialism and imperialism. Othering, Stereotyping, Racism, and Hybridity are vital concepts in this novel and the whole post-colonial discourse. These concepts came from two renowned critics (Spivak, 2023 and Bhabha, 2012). Spivak (2023) gave the concept of othering, while Bhabha (2012) gave the concept of stereotyping and hybridity. These concepts are according to postcolonial theory. The concept of othering is related to racism. Some critics say that this book is totally about racism and that Europe is superior to Africans due to their color. They are black that's why they are inferior. This has become a stereotype that Blacks are nothing. They are considered as "others" based on creed and color. Fanon (1998), a critic, explained this concept of being other in his book "Black Skin and White Masks" that even the people of his land called him "Dirty Nagger" because it has become a stereotype in history and society that blacks are not equal to them. They do not treat them as humans. The same thing is in the novel "Heart of the Darkness," that Blacks are ignorant and not humans. They are dirty and inferior. Europeans colonized them, and they say that they taught them a lesson of being human and they taught them civilization. Europeans imposed their rule on the natives in Africa. They dominated nearly all parts of Africa to benefit from the natives. In his Culture and Imperialism, Said (2014) puts forward that:

"In Europe itself at the end of the nineteenth century, scarcely a corner of life was untouched by the facts of empire. The economies were hungry for overseas markets, raw materials, cheap labor, and profitable land. Defense and foreign policy establishments were more and more committed to the maintenance of vast tracts of distant territory and large numbers of."

Kurtz is the protagonist who claims that the people of Congo are ignorant and uncivilized. He taught them how to live. He civilized them. The colonized people of Congo were under the pressure of colonizers. Kurtz thinks he is a European and an essential brick in the construction of the civilized Congo.

In the above paragraph, Said (2014) criticized the dominance of powerful countries over African countries in exploiting them. Similarly, another character of the novel, Marlow, is against European colonialism because they were exploiting the people of Africa by giving them the title of other because this has become a stereotype that black people are free from every perspective of being a human. He falls into a moral dilemma before meeting Kurtz's Intended; he explains this dilemma in the book:

"It was a moment of triumph for the wilderness, an invading and vengeful rush which, it seemed to me, I would have to keep back alone for the salvation of another soul" (HOD95).

Marlow, as a European, feels ashamed of what Kurtz has done in Congo when he comes to know about his immoral acts, and that was the reason he could not explain all the realities of Kurtz's life in his meeting with Kurtz's Intended. Marlow says that it is impossible to reveal the truth that he experienced during his journey,

"No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence — that which makes its truth, its meaning — its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream — alone...." (32).

### Research Objectives

- Investigate the portrayal of colonialism in Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" by analyzing the narrative techniques employed to convey the oppressive dynamics between European colonizers and the African population.
- Examine the theme of othering in "Heart of Darkness," exploring how Conrad's narrative constructs and perpetuates stereotypes about African people and cultures, and analyze its implications for understanding colonial attitudes and power dynamics.
- Evaluate the impact of Conrad's narrative strategies in "Heart of Darkness" on readers' perceptions of colonialism and othering, considering how the novel's portrayal of darkness, both literal and metaphorical, shapes interpretations of European imperialism and its consequences.

### Research Questions

1. How does Joseph Conrad's narrative techniques in "Heart of Darkness" illuminate the dynamics of colonialism and othering, particularly in portraying African characters?
2. To what extent does Conrad challenge or reinforce prevailing colonial attitudes and stereotypes through the characters and events depicted in "Heart of Darkness," and what implications does this have for our understanding of colonial discourse?
3. How does Conrad's exploration of the theme of othering in "Heart of Darkness" intersect with broader discussions of race, power, and identity in the context of European imperialism during the late 19th and early 20th centuries?

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" has long been a subject of intense scholarly scrutiny, particularly regarding its portrayal of colonialism and the dynamics of othering. This literature review seeks to delve into various critical perspectives that shed light on the complex narrative of colonialism and othering within Conrad's pivotal work.

Numerous research papers have delved into the themes of colonialism and othering in "Heart of Darkness." For example, Lösing (2020) examines Conrad's use of symbolism to convey the darkness of colonialism, arguing that the Congo River represents the journey into the heart of darkness. Similarly, Jones (2019) analyzes the character of Kurtz as a symbol of the corrupting influence of imperialism, highlighting the dehumanization of both the colonizers and the colonized.

Furthermore, Coetzer (2020) explores Conrad's narrative style, particularly his use of ambiguity and unreliable narration, to underscore the moral ambiguity of colonialism. This perspective is echoed in the work of Cupples & Grosfoguel (2019), who argues that Conrad's narrative techniques critique the Eurocentric worldview and challenge the readers' perceptions of otherness.

Numerous scholars have analyzed the representation of colonialism in "Heart of Darkness." Chinua Achebe's seminal essay "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness'" (1977) criticizes Conrad for perpetuating racist stereotypes and dehumanizing portrayals of Africans. Conversely, Watts, (1983) essay "A Bloody Racist: About Achebe's View of Conrad" (2014) argues against Achebe's interpretation, suggesting that Conrad's narrative critiques colonial exploitation rather than an endorsement of racism.

Aziz et al. (2021) argue that othering is the worst way of marginalization that affects gender and their roles in a submissive way. The concept of othering, wherein one group is marginalized and portrayed as fundamentally different from the dominant group, is central to "Heart of Darkness." Edward Said's groundbreaking work "Orientalism" (1978) provides a theoretical framework for understanding how Western literature often constructs the 'other' as exotic and inferior. In "Heart of Darkness," Conrad explores the mechanisms of othering by depicting African characters as primitive and subhuman.

In "Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent" (Brantlinger, 1985), critics like Patrick Brant Linger examine the power dynamics inherent in colonial discourse. Brant Linger argues that "Heart of Darkness" reflects the ideological underpinnings of European imperialism, wherein the colonized are portrayed as passive recipients of European benevolence or savagery.

Postcolonial scholars like Bhabha (2012), in "The Location of Culture", emphasize the agency of the colonized in resisting and subverting colonial narratives. Bhabha's concept of mimicry suggests that colonized subjects adopt and mimic the cultural practices of the colonizers as a form of resistance. This lens offers a nuanced understanding of how African characters in "Heart of Darkness" negotiate their identities within the colonial framework.

Some critics, such as Spivak (2023) in "Can the Subaltern Speak?", examine the intersection of gender and colonialism. Spivak critiques Western feminist discourse for often marginalizing the voices of colonized women. In "Heart of Darkness," the absence of female African characters underscores the erasure of their experiences and voices within the colonial narrative. "Colonial Shadows: Unveiling the Narrative of Colonialism and Othering in Conrad's Heart of Darkness" encompasses a rich tapestry of critical perspectives illuminating Conrad's work's complexities. From discussions on the portrayal of colonial exploitation to analyses of othering and resistance, scholars continue to engage with "Heart of Darkness" as a potent critique of imperialism and its enduring legacies.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Firstly, the text is being examined through a postcolonial lens, which involves understanding how power dynamics, cultural hegemony, and colonial discourse manifest within the narrative. This analysis focuses on identifying instances of "othering," where individuals or groups are portrayed as inferior or exoticized, and examining how these instances contribute to the perpetuation of colonial ideologies. Furthermore, the methodology involves scrutinizing the text for instances of stereotyping, particularly in how characters from colonized regions are portrayed and how these stereotypes reinforce colonial hierarchies. This entails closely examining language, characterization, and narrative structure to uncover underlying colonialist attitudes and assumptions. The methodology also contextualizes the text within the historical and cultural milieu of Conrad's time, considering the broader colonial discourse prevalent during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Overall, this approach combines close textual analysis with insights from postcolonial theory to illuminate the ways in which Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" reflects and perpetuates colonialist ideologies, particularly through the mechanisms of othering, stereotyping, and the portrayal of colonial power dynamics.

## **ANALYSIS**

Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" stands as a poignant critique of European colonialism, unraveling the layers of darkness that shroud the colonial enterprise in Africa. Zorin (2021) illustrated that one of the central themes explored in the narrative is the concept of othering, wherein the Europeans view the African natives as fundamentally different and inferior, justifying their exploitation and subjugation. This paper aims to delve into the narrative's portrayal of colonial shadows, drawing insights from previous research to illuminate the complexities of Conrad's critique.

Conrad vividly depicts the ruthless exploitation of Africa and its people by European colonizers. The Congo becomes a symbol of darkness, both literal and metaphorical, representing the depths of human depravity. Previous research by Smith (2018) highlights the economic motivations driving colonialism, emphasizing the role of capitalism in fueling the exploitation of African resources. Through the character of Kurtz, Conrad exposes the moral decay inherent in the pursuit of wealth and power as the protagonist descends into madness amidst the jungle's oppressive atmosphere.

Moreover, Conrad's narrative underscores the psychological impact of othering, whereby the Europeans dehumanize the African natives to justify their actions. Said (1978) argues that othering serves as a mechanism of domination, allowing the colonizers to assert their superiority and maintain control over the colonized population. This perspective is evident in Conrad's portrayal of the Africans as primitive and savage, reinforcing stereotypes that perpetuate the myth of European supremacy.

The Heart of Darkness symbolizes not only the brutality of colonial exploitation but also the moral abyss that engulfs the colonizers themselves. Previous studies by Aldrich & Johnson (2018) emphasize the moral ambiguity of

imperialism, highlighting the contradictions inherent in European claims of civilizing missions while perpetrating atrocities against indigenous populations. Through Marlow's journey into the Congo, Conrad exposes the hypocrisy of colonial rhetoric, revealing the moral bankruptcy at the core of imperialist endeavors.

Furthermore, Conrad's narrative challenges the structural inequalities perpetuated by colonialism, shedding light on the power dynamics that underpin European domination. As argued by Fanon (1998), colonialism breeds a culture of oppression and resistance, perpetuating cycles of violence and subjugation. Conrad's critique of imperialist structures echoes Fanon's insights, underscoring the need for decolonization and liberation from the shackles of colonial oppression.

Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" unveils the narrative of colonialism by depicting the brutal reality of European exploitation in the Congo. Through vivid descriptions of the atrocities committed by the colonizers and the dehumanization of the indigenous population, Conrad exposes the dark underbelly of imperialism. Kurtz's character serves as a focal point for this critique, representing the epitome of colonial arrogance and moral decay.

Moreover, Conrad explores the concept of othering by portraying the Africans as "other" to the European colonizers. The pervasive racism and stereotypes perpetuated by the colonial mindset are evident throughout the novel, reinforcing the dehumanization and marginalization of the indigenous people. By portraying the Africans as primitive and uncivilized, Conrad highlights the inherent hypocrisy of colonial discourse.

A post-colonial analysis of the first chapter of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* reveals that Othering, Stereotyping, and Hybridity phenomena are persistently present in the novel. The process of Othering and Stereotyping is spread throughout the novel in general and in the first chapter in particular.

Violence is an indispensable part of colonialism for the Europeans, and it constantly occurs throughout the novel. For example, Marlow tells that a native, thought to cause fire, has been beaten harshly:

"[a] nigger was being beaten nearby. They said he had caused the fire in some way; be that as it may, he was screeching most horribly" (HOD27).

This incident is an example of European violence against the Africans. Besides, it shows the novel's subversion since Conrad introduces their cruelty to English people through an Englishman. The European chooses to beat the Africans to prevent probable "conflagrations," as stated in the novel;

"Black figures strolled about listlessly, pouring water on the glow, whence proceeded a sound of hissing; steam ascended in the moonlight, and the beaten nigger groaned somewhere. 'What a row the brute makes!' said the indefatigable man with the mustaches, appearing near us. 'Serve him right. Transgression—punishment bangs! Pitiless, pitiless. That's the only way. This will prevent all conflagrations in the future (HOD30).

Marlow feels pity for the people of the Congo, while other colonizers do not feel that pity for them. Marlow is a sympathetic and kind character who gives importance to humanity not conflicts between Europeans and Africans. He evaluates people just based on humanity, nothing more than that. At the end of the novel, the Africans are presented as "others" and as the dark side of Europe. They are exempted from all the rights, which links to the history that they are in the same criteria of being inferior in the past and still at the same edge. This explanation may seem to strengthen the concept of the Europeans "as civilized, enlightened, at a more advanced state of intelligence and ability than the Africans." However, there is certainly no difference between Europeans and Africans; if the difference is there, then that is the distinction of thoughts of the both because humans are equal and respected creatures of God, and white people categorize black people based on color and creed and gave them the status of "other". But this thing links with a history that blacks were always considered nothing by White people; even the new generations of them are also taking previous assumptions as it is. As it has become a stereotype that Niggers are not humans and they are nothing. They are dirty. Only on the basis of their color and shape, Europeans dehumanized them in some parts of the novel. Europeans called Africans cannibals, not by their names. Even these people save Marlow at the river when he is dying. He did not know that people were the people of Congo, but he became impressed by their humanity that they saved a white person without thinking of rude behavior and exploitation of them by Europeans. Marlow tells:

"Their headman, a young, broad-chest like black, severely draped in dark-blue fringed cloths, with fierce nostrils and his hair all done up artfully in oily ringlets, stood near me. 'Aha! I said, just for good fellowship's sake. 'Catch 'I'm,' he snapped, with a bloodshot widening of his eyes and a flash of sharp teeth—'catch 'I'm. Give 'I'm to us.' 'To you, eh?' I asked; 'what would you do with them?' Eat 'I'm!' he said curtly, and, leaning his elbow on the rail, looked out into the fog in a dignified and profoundly pensive attitude. I would no doubt have been properly horrified, had it not occurred to that he and his chaps must be very hungry (HOD50).

It is mentioned in the starting chapters of the novel that the white characters enjoy complete freedom and authority over the black people. In contrast, the blacks are marginalized, oppressed, humiliated, and beaten by the white people quite heartlessly.

The image of black people is stereotypical and provides a view of the African people as being 'others' in contrast with the 'self', which is the British empire. The 'others' are considered uncivilized, savage, poor, and mindless people; they are physically, emotionally, and psychologically inferior to the white people, who consider themselves too superior, civilized, and intelligent. They do not value the needs, emotions, and aspirations of the native people, 'the others'. The process of Othering has made the black community look like heaps of bones. The difference between 'the self' and 'the other' is extremely wide. Stigmas or stereotypes play a poignant role in one's life Aziz & Khadam (2021). The Stereotyping of the colonized subjects in Heart of Darkness can be understood with the help of Figure 1, which presents the whole impact of the novel.

## CONCLUSION

In Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness," the exploration of colonial shadows reveals not only the darkness of the Congo but also the deeper shadows cast by the moral ambiguities of colonialism and the insidious practice of othering. Through his narrative, Conrad skillfully unveils the layers of exploitation, oppression, and dehumanization inherent in the colonial project, shedding light on the dark heart of European imperialism. As we journey through the Congo with Marlow, we confront the stark realities of the colonial enterprise and the ways in which it distorts both the colonizer and the colonized. Through Marlow's encounters and observations, Conrad challenges us to confront our own complicity in systems of power and domination, urging us to unveil the narrative of colonialism and othering that continues to shape our world. In doing so, "Heart of Darkness" becomes a historical document and a timeless reminder of the enduring consequences of unchecked power and the imperative of confronting the shadows within ourselves and society.

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