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Joseph conrad's heart of darkness discourse and counter discourse

Rwamo, Michel; Supervisor: Mr Divine Che Neba

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UNIVERSITY OF BURUNDI
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

JOSEPH CONRAD'S *HEART OF DARKNESS* : DISCOURSE AND COUNTER DISCOURSE

By Michel RWAMO

Supervisor :
Mr DIVINE CHE NEBA
Lecturer, University of Burundi

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of the Degree " Licence en Langue et Littérature Anglaises''.

BUJUMBURA , JUNE 2004

DEDICATION

To my late mother and father

To my beloved wife

To my dear son

To my brothers and sisters

I dedicate this work.



CONTENTS

DEDICATION ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv

ABSTRACT v

GENERAL INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER ONE : CONRAD AND THE GOSPEL
OF EURO CENTRICITY 12

CHAPTER TWO : AN AFRO CENTRIC VIEW OF
HEART OF DARKNESS 35

CHAPTER THREE : THE QUESTION OF DARKNESS :
MYTH OR REALITY ? 54

GENERAL CONCLUSION 73

WORKS CITED 77

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims at examining European and African criticisms of Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness. It is predicated on the hypothesis that modern criticism is more subjective than objective. The analysis will be conducted within the reader-response theoretical framework.

The novel raised a hot debate between Western and African critics about Conrad's treatment of the issue of imperialism and the colonized in the late 19th century. While European critics view the novel as a great work of literature celebrating the great aesthetics of the time, African critics view it as a racist propaganda validating the superiority of the West.

Finally, it is evident that both criticisms are subjective. In an attempt, therefore, to approach Heart of Darkness objectively, racial and emotional boundaries should be toed.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Africa has been made the subject of negative discourse in the Western mind. This negative orientation results from the varied prejudices and distortions of the African image in world annals. Because of these prejudices, the West has succeeded in implementing the colonial scheme in which Africa remains the "other". These distortions equally justify the basis for ill-treatment of Africans during the period of colonization. In the eyes of the West, Africa is a wild, *terra incognita* continent incarnating evil; Africans are savages, cannibals, ready for " unspeakable acts", that need to be civilized. This attitude is evident in Western literature and criticisms.

One of the literary works that has raised controversy between the West and Africa is Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, a tale about Conrad's own adventure in the Congo in 1890 when Belgians were exploiting that part of Africa. It is his description in the novel of what he saw and the way he saw it that has become a topic of debate among world's scholars. While the Euro centric critics view the novel as describing the suffering of Africans under colonial leadership, Afro centric critics see in Heart of Darkness an expression of racist hatred from the heart of its author. The questions that are raised include : are European critics not influenced by an already acquired distorted view of Africa in their criticism? Or, are Afro

centric critics not affected by years of sufferings that Africans endured due to colonialism, in such a way that their criticism is not objective? In the mist of this, whose criticism can be considered as realistic? These questions will be answered in the course of this debate.

The terms " Euro centricity" and "Afro centricity" need some clarifications. According to the Collins Cobuild Advanced Learner's English Dictionary, by describing something as Euro centric, " you disapprove of it because it focuses on Europe and the needs of European people with the result that people in other parts of the world suffer in some way". By extension, describing something as Afro centric is disapproving of it because it focuses on Africa and its needs, with the result of forgetting about the needs of people in other parts of the world.

Kariamu Welsh, in his foreword to Molefi Kete Asante's Afro centricity, defines Afro centricity as a philosophy that is

> pro-African and consistent in its beliefs that technology belongs to the world; Afro centricity is African genius and African values created, reconstructed and derived from our history and experiences in our best interests. It is an uncovering of one's true

> self, it is the pinpointing of one's centre and it is the clarity and focus through which black people must see the world in order to escalate. (viii)

The same definition can be extended to Euro centricity. The two definitions provided by the dictionary and Kariamu Welsh, though carrying different overtones, converge towards a common definition, the belief in the centrality of Africa and Africans for Afro centricity, or of Europe and Europeans for Euro centricity. In the same view, Molefi Kete Asante bases Afro centricity on the cultural values and a common history as binding Africans together and creating a common identity for them. He contends that Afro centricity " gives a true sense of destiny based upon the facts of history and experience"(1). This view can also be extended to Euro centricity as founded on cultural values and history common to Europe and define the identity of Europeans. In this work, " Afro centricity" and "Euro centricity" will be used to mean a vision centred on Africa's interests and concerns in the first case, and on Europe's interest and concerns in the second case.

The concern of objectivity in modern criticism is the primary justification which gives importance to this study. On the one hand, Africans suffered a great deal from a period during which they were dehumanised.

They are very sensitive to anyone, any word that may remind them of that period, and so, that may revive their wounds. The reaction may be uncontrolled. On the other hand, Europeans have so much believed in an Africa "so hopeless and so dark, so pitiless to human weaknesses" (Heart of Darkness, 94) as though the continent could neither breed nor support any true human life. A European, with all the good intention for Africa and Africans, can easily offend them without realizing it because of the distorted image already present in the European mind.

The aim of this thesis is an attempt to converge the euro centric and afro centric criticisms of Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness in order to determine whether or not the above influences may have altered their objectivity. It is hoped that such an investigation will result in an attempt toward an objective criticism of the novel. Though an African by birth, I will attempt to be as neutral as I can, in order to unravel the hidden truth in the novel. The conglomeration of the varied debates will permit to debunk all in Conrad's Heart of Darkness.

The thesis will use a selection of Europe-centred and Africa-centred critics whose position about Heart of Darkness is clear cut. The need to restrict the scope of the study and to highlight opposed views about the

novel are key factors that led the researcher to be limited to critics defending the novel, and others opposing it in terms of its alleged racist overtones.

The reader-response theory will be used as the theoretical framework within which the present study will be constructed. This theory emerged during the early 1970s. Briefly, the reader-response criticism can be defined as the analysis of the variety of readers' responses to a text, to determine whether the responses are the same as its meanings, or whether a work can have as many meanings as we have responses to it. But, this is too simple a definition. A survey of explanations provided by a number of proponents of the theory will make it clearer.

Adena Rosmarin in her essay, "Darkening the Reader : Reader-Response Criticism and *Heart of Darkness*" suggests that a literary work can be likened to an incomplete work of sculpture : to see it fully, we must complete it imaginatively, taking care to do so in a way that responsibly takes into account what is there. In other words, reading a text is like looking at a broken torso or a work of sculpture with pieces missing, "that we must figure out , that is, finish in our imagination by supplying poetic devices of our own." (Qtd, Ross C. Murfin, 158).

Wolfgang Iser in The Implied Reader, supports the above view by contending that texts are full of gaps and these gaps or blanks have a

powerful effect on readers. "They force the reader to explain them, to connect what the gaps separate, to create in the mind a poem or novel or play that is not there in the text, but that the text incites." (Qtd, Ross C. Murfin, 141). Again here, personal imagination plays a great role in the making out of a meaning from a text. In Self-Consuming Artefacts : The Experience of Seventeenth Century Literature, Stanley E. Fish reveals his preference for literature that makes readers work at making meaning. He contrasts two kinds of literary presentations : rhetorical and dialectical presentations. Rhetorical presentation is literature that reflects and reinforces opinions that readers already hold, while dialectical presentation refers to works that challenge readers to discover truth on their own.

For Louise M. Rosenblatt, reader-response criticism focuses on what texts do to – or in – the mind of the reader rather than looking at a text as something with properties exclusively its own. She wrote in her " Towards a Transactional Theory of Reading" that a " poem is what the reader lives through under the guidance of the text and experience relevant to the text".(Qtd, Ross C. Murfin, 140). For her, a poem presupposes a reader actively involved with a text.

Therefore, the reader having to work out a meaning from a text, different readers will respond differently to the same work, each according

to his/her own experience. The work at hand will best fit within reader-response theory framework since it is concerned with analysing different reactions of critics to the same work of literature, Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness. Also, through this approach, one will help to fill the gap left by the author and other critics.

Several critics analysed the hot raging debate over the merits versus the racial shortcomings of the novel. They mainly confronted Chinua Achebe' s virulent attack against the novel as racist in his article , " An Image of Africa : Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" on one side, and some European critics who seek to defend it and parade its humanist and artistic quality on the other.

Evan Mix in an article, " Racism in *Heart of Darkness*", confronts Achebe's opinion to David Denby's in his article ," Jungle Fever" that was written in response to Achebe's speech. After explaining Achebe's condemnation of the novel and his dismissing it as a great work of art, he explains Denby's position which disputes Achebe's assertion that Heart of Darkness is without literary value because of its racist background. Denby's opinion is that the book is a scathing attack on imperialism and cannot be condemned as evil and worthless. Finally, Evan Mix comes to the conclusion that " I tend to come down closer to Denby's opinion on Heart of

Darkness than of Achebe's"(1). He contends that the novel, while racist in its views, is nonetheless a valuable and commendable work of art.

In "Two Readings of *Heart of Darkness*", Conor Wyer juxtaposes Achebe's claims with Cedric Watts' in his essay, " 'A bloody Racist': About Achebe's View of Conrad" in which he vehemently rejects Achebe's opinions of the novel. Wyer outlines some of the arguments Achebe raises to support his claim and confronts them with Watts 'reading of the same passages. Watts' main argument is that, far from being a " purveyor of comforting myth" as Achebe qualifies Conrad, the latter more deliberately and incisively debunks such myths, the myth of white superiority, the myth of inevitable progress, the myth of civilizing the natives. In his analysis, Conor Wyer finds that Achebe resents the kinship Conrad expresses between Africans and Londoners, and this, he concludes, is a resentment of anyone from beyond the pale attempting any kind of portrayal. Besides, he agrees with Watts who presumes that there seems to be an insinuation , as Achebe proceeds, that Whites are disqualified on racial grounds from judging the text, and so, argues that " in a way, he (Watts) uncovered in Achebe's criticism the very racism Achebe accuses Conrad of" (3), but accuses Watts of being patronizing when he counters Achebe's alleged resentment by the argument that the Blacks are depicted as being the

happiest in the novel. He concludes that Watts is exercising similar manicheanism that Achebe uses to attack Conrad and finally, he finds in the establishment of the binary opposite the laying of the foundations of an argument.

In " Out of Africa" published in Guardian Unlimited, Caryl Philips admires both writers, but as many other Euro centric critics, disagrees with Achebe's argument about Heart of Darkness. He has always believed that Conrad's only programme is doubt about the supremacy of European humanity, and the ability of his supposed humanity to maintain its imagined status beyond the high streets of Europe. He does not agree with Achebe that " all racists should be thrown out of the canon" or that " we are to ignore the period in which novels are written and demand that the artist rise above the prejudices of his time"(6). Philips meets Achebe to defend the creator of Heart of Darkness but Achebe convinces him by the argument that

> towards the end of the 19th century, there was a very short-lived period of ambivalence about the certainty of this colonizing mission, and Heart of Darkness falls into this period. But you cannot compromise my

> humanity in order that you explore your own ambiguity. My humanity is not to be debated, nor is it to be used simply to illustrate European problems" (Qtd, Guardian Unlimited, 7).

Their discussion provokes an unexpected epiphany. The realization hits him with force and he recognizes that Achebe is right : to the African reader, the price of Conrad's eloquent denunciation of colonization is the recycling of racist notions of the "dark" continent and its people. He realizes that Conrad compromised African humanity in order to examine the European psyche.

The above analyses sought to evaluate with objectivity the two extreme arguments, but they failed to answer the question why Africans represented by Chinua Achebe sought to charge Conrad with racism, while Europeans did what they could to defend him. This is what distances the work at hand from the criticisms above. In addition to objectivity, the present study will strive to highlight the reason why the two sides have always argued divergently about Heart of Darkness. The work at hand will be predicated on the hypothesis that modern criticism is more subjective than objective. It seeks to prove that modern criticism is subjected to various influences that may hinder objectivity.

The present epoch is a period of globalisation when all the countries of the world have to cooperate for a global development. Collaboration between the West and Africa should be the most effective. The West needs Africa for its development, and so does Africa. Besides, the West owes a debt to the continent and its people. Therefore, this is not the time for the two parts of the world to raise controversy and to keep quarrelling on what have long separated them. They have to look back to the past, question History, face the truth and restore appropriate relations, each part acknowledging its role and acting accordingly. The present work finds its importance in its striving for objectivity . This can ease the tension that originated from the difficult relations that prevailed between the West and Africa, causing a feeling of hatred towards each other. An objective scrutiny in Africa's and Europe's past can contribute to the betterment of relations between both continents.

In the following analysis, the first chapter will present euro centric positions about Heart of Darkness, and the Afro centric views will be presented in the second chapter. The third chapter will analyse the two arguments in the light of the novel, and will be followed by a general conclusion which will sum up the main arguments and findings of the study.

CHAPTER ONE

CONRAD AND THE GOSPEL OF EURO CENTRICITY

From time immemorial, Africa has been a land of mysteries and dangers of all sorts in the mind of Europeans. This vision has been shaped by mystifying and distorted information that came from various sources. Among other reasons, this vision justified the invasion of Africa by Europeans with the aim to conquer the savage continent and its inhabitants. The same distorted vision of Africa was conveyed by Western literature of the pre-colonial and colonial period. The aim of the present chapter is to show that modern Western critics are still under strong influence of this distorted vision of Africa, and so, fail to be objective in their analysis of the literature produced by their fellow Europeans about Africa.

It appears evident today that colonialism was not an accident. It has been the result of myths and distortions of a continent rendered blank, and so, ready for occupation. From antiquity, Africa has always been given a distorted image in Europe. These distortions resulted from information about Africa that became increasingly available to the European reading public between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries.

In addition to legend, hearsay and literary allusions, there are more empirical sources of information available to the educated Europeans

in the early fifteenth century. The great tradition of geographical scholarship in Egypt and Maghrib which flourished between the tenth and early sixteenth century, had resulted in numerous written accounts. These were also second hand reports which came via centuries of contact between Arab traders and the interior of Africa. From the mid-fifteenth century, a flood of information about Africa poured into Europe as a result of hundreds of voyages around the West African coast. On the quality and reliability of this information, Philip Curtin in The Image of Africa : British Ideas and Action, posits that

> the European travellers wrote to please their audience as well as to inform. Religious beliefs were of no interest : they were mere pagan error. But spectacular festivals, human sacrifice, judicial ordeals, and polygamy were "curiosities" and were therefore recounted at length. Thus, the reporting often stressed precisely those aspects of African life that were most repellent to the West and tended to submerge the indications of common humanity. (32)

The dramatic increase in the sea-faring activities of European nations during the fifteenth century led to extensive knowledge of the West African coastal area. As a result, travel accounts began to circulate in Europe during the sixteenth century. These accounts added to the repertoire of information which was already extant. The next centuries saw an ever increasing availability of information on Africa. This information of all kind and of various sources whose reliability is questionable as Curtin seems to point it out in the above quotation, resulted into myths and assumptions of all sorts that got solidly entrenched in the European imagination : that the African is primitive, mentally retarded, they would say. His brain is too small to retain a civilized culture. He is a cannibal, lustful, ignorant, cruel, and evil. This characterization of Africa and the African is best expressed in the great German philosopher, Hegel's introduction to The Philosophy of History. He says that

> Africa proper, as far as History goes back, has remained – for all purposes of connection with the rest of the world – shut up; it is the Gold-land compressed with itself – the land of childhood which, lying beyond days of self- conscious history, is enveloped

> in the dark mantle of Night..... The Negro, as already observed, exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and unstained state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality- all that we call feeling – if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character.... At this point, we leave Africa never to mention it again. For, it is no historical part of the world; it has no movement of development exhibit. What we properly understand as Africa, is the unhistorical, undeveloped spirit, still involved in the condition of mere nature and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's History.... (Qtd, George Lamming,15)

The introduction asserts the main points with which colonialist discourse justified its right to invade the sovereign territories of non-European nations, usurp the rights of non-Europeans, and exploit both specifically Black

territories and Black bodies for its own political, material and social gain. In the above view, Hegel draws a neat dichotomy between the African and the European: whereas the former is driven by inhuman desires and irrational thought process, the latter is driven by only the fully human desire for improvement and progress, rational thought processes that prove themselves as rational through their material embodiment in organized forms of government, sophisticated social systems, as well as scientific and technological prowess. Standing outside History, he contends, Africa remains mired in a primitive past, one lacking an understanding of freedom – that we should ultimately distinguish humans from animals.

These theories and racist rhetoric served as a pretext for the West to launch its so-called "civilizing mission" in Africa. The European gave himself a new image of courageous, adventurous conqueror, who could tame wild men and continent, and spread civilization, commerce and Christianity, synonym of "enlightenment to the ignorant and heathen" savages. Imperial discourse converged towards the same aim : to bring civilization to barbarians. At the Brussels conference of 1890, the powers promised to fight the slave trade, to build roads, railways and telegraphs, to prevent the unrestricted traffic in fire-arms and to diminish inland wars between the tribes, to initiate them into agricultural works and in the

industrial arts so as to increase their welfare, to raise them to civilization and to bring about the extinction of barbarous customs such as cannibalism and human sacrifice. Frederic Lugard, the British arch-colonialist was so convinced that the African black population was inferior, docile and savage that he affirmed in his article " The White Man's Task in Tropical Africa", that " Africans were children requiring generations of guidance" (6).

The discourse was good at a certain point. Unfortunately, it was not followed by the acts it preached. The European ideal of civilization became synonym of domination, exploitation and dehumanisation of the African populations, whom they viewed as monsters, and not an ancient race to be respected for their own customs. These "emissaries of light" acted crudely, sordidly and violently towards the colonized peoples. Actually, Western venturing into Africa and in other parts of the World for the so-called civilizing mission, proved not to bring a better, more civilized lifestyle to the poor underprivileged Africans; but to satisfy their lust for power, and to take possession of the land and its riches. Whatever the noble sentiments colonialism may have pretended to were quickly forgotten under the pressure of competition for the material wealth of Africa and men surrendered themselves to the greed and brutish violence.

The explorer, Henry Morton Stanley, in Darkest Africa, recorded the exploits of the ivory hunters of Ipoto of the then Congo Free State ruled by the Belgian king, Leopold II. These ivory hunters, who, having arrived from their base on the Lualaba River, "sent on about two hundred guns and two hundred slave carriers to strike further in a north-easterly direction to discover some prosperous settlement whence they could sally out in bands, to destroy, burn and enslave natives in exchange for ivory" (236). Unspeakable atrocities were committed against the colonized for the sake of fortune, the colonized who were the free labour in the plundering of their own land. In an article " The Crime of the Congo-First Fruits of the System", a Congo Free State agent, Mister Glave, who worked for the State for six years, talking of the general unrest in the area, says that

> it is the natural outcome of the harsh, cruel policy of the State in wringing rubber from these people without paying for it. The revolution will extend. The post (Isangi) is close to the large settlement of an important coast man, Kayamba, who now is devoted to the interests of the State, catching slaves for them, and stealing ivory from the natives of

> the interior. Does the philanthropic king of the Belgians know about this? If not, he ought to. (3)

It is less likely that King Leopold II did not know what was going on in his colony, since atrocities were widespread. In the article cited above, the author cites the testimony of an English traveller, Mister Murphy, who worked in another part of the country. He gives an example of these horrid treatments inflicted to the subjected people :

> I have seen these things done, and have remonstrated with the State in the years 1888, 1889 and 1894, but never got satisfied. I have been in the interior and have seen the ravages made by the State in pursuit of this iniquitous trade. Let me give an incident to show how this unrighteous trade affects the people. One day, a State corporal who was in charge of the post of Solifa, was going around the town collecting rubber. Meeting a poor woman whose husband was away fishing, he asked " Where is your husband?"

> She answered by pointing to the river. He then asked, "Where is the rubber?" She answered, "It is ready for you", whereupon he said, "You lie", and lifting up his gun, shot her dead. Shortly afterwards, the husband returned and was told of the murder of his wife. He went straight to the corporal, taking with him his rubber, and asked why he had shot his wife. The wretched man then raised his gun and killed the corporal. The commissary sent a large force to support the authority of the soldiers. The town was looted, burnt, and many people were killed and wounded (4).

This inhumanity against the Congolese people was denounced mainly by the missionaries, in an open letter addressed on December29, 1906. Shortly after, a report of the commissioners chosen by the chief executive and virtual owner of the Congo to investigate living conditions in that State, was published, and reported the existence of measures and practices of flagrant inhumanity. However, no steps were taken to remedy these evils.

This period of subjection of Africa and other parts of the World to the West produced an abundant literature, historical as well as fictional. One of the writers of the period whose work is still read worldwide is Joseph Conrad, an adventurer who made a trip to the Congo in 1890. He recounted what he saw in the Congo Free State, in a half-historical, half-fictional novel, Heart of Darkness. This work attracted many critics, European as well as those of the rest of the World, including Africans. Let us first consider the Western vision of Heart of Darkness through its critical appraisal.

Peter Edgerly Firchow in Envisioning Africa : Racism and Imperialism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, holds that the novel is not "really about the deepest psychic fears in Conrad's and his readers' psyches" , that " with the obvious exception of Kurtz, not a single one of the Congo Belgians in Conrad's novel, is anything more than a stereotype", and that if Conrad is a racist, it is the case only in the most superficial sense, in that Heart of Darkness affirms the " common humanity" of Europeans and Africans, however much " their languages may be different, and even mutually incomprehensible" (23, 61,109). The fears in question originate from the Western desire to appear civilized. They are bound together by a number of values that repress anything that may liken them with the

assumed inferior races to which they have to teach civilization. So, the Western society imposes norms and values that prevent human urges to appear on the surface. Europeans had to fight with their inner selves so that they do not let out certain human behaviours that they share with their African counterparts, for whom they had set up a good number of denigrating stereotypes centuries before. Therefore, they became stereotypes themselves.

Maybe that is why some other Western critics saw in the novel an idea of psychological treatment. They view Heart of Darkness as a spiritual voyage in the heart of man. Edward Garnett in this vein, in " Academy and Literature", insists that the novel is a " psychological masterpiece relating the subconscious life within us, to our conscious actions, feelings and outlook" (132-133). For Garnett, the idea behind Heart of Darkness is that the human strives for noble ideals but is overcome by his unconscious desires. This view is illustrated in the novel where the so-called apostles of progress pretend to be working for the good of the Africans whom they scorn and denigrate in reality deep in their heart. The result is devastation, violence and death. They display all the greed their heart is capable of. There is the road builder who builds no roads but who shoots Negroes at the site where the road is supposed to pass, there is the bricklayer

who has not made a single brick; and there are other company officials who seem to do nothing except plotting against and backbiting each other. The regular firing of guns, the blasting of rocks and the bursting of shells that characterize the atmosphere around the station yield little evidence of constructive work going on . They only serve to demonstrate a fondness for violence. Above all, Kurtz, a great idealist at first, is overwhelmed by the true human nature once in Africa, and lets out the worst of it. For Garnett, Conrad in the novel, sets out to explore and uncover this human nature.

Albert G. Guerard, sustaining the psychological idea in Heart of Darkness in his work, Conrad the Novelist, has it that Marlow is not a mere narrator, the character whose primary purpose in the narrative is to provide those details and circumstances of the voyage that make palpable the fantastic atmosphere in which Kurtz inhabits. " He is recounting a voyage of self-discovery"(18). According to him, it is that voyage and that discovery that should interest readers of Heart of Darkness. For Guerard, the story is like a powerful dream in which Marlow meets up with his own dark nature. Marlow feels the excitement of what he calls the " wild and passionate uproar" (Heart of Darkness, 36), finds himself fascinated by abominations and, most important, " meets a strange double" in the person of Kurtz. The most important stage in Marlow's journey, Guerard continues, is the one in

which " he comes to recognize his kinship with Kurtz, a white man and sometimes idealist who had fully responded to the wilderness : a potential and fallen self..." (38-39). At the climax, Marlow follows Kurtz ashore, confounds the beat of the drum with the beating of his heart, and brings him back to the ship. He returns to Europe a changed and more knowing man. By seeing the novel as a dream of self-discovery, Guerard expands upon what Edward Garnett said when he called Heart of Darkness a psychological masterpiece.

Thomas Moser on his part, in Joseph Conrad :Achievement and Decline, also observes the Heart of Darkness as a voyage of self-discovery. Sounding like Guerard, he posits that " We must recognize our potential weaknesses, our plague spots in order to achieve a perceptive, moral life" (24). For this critic, the human being is made of two conflicting personalities : an evil personality, and a good, idealistic one. A good life will depend on a good balance of both. Of course, one has to recognize and acknowledge this dark pole of man's existence first, and then sets out to control it afterwards. Wisdom and enlightenment come to the one who effectively understands and harmonizes both sides of this human nature.

Brook Thomas, within the same framework in " Preserving and Keeping Order by Killing Time in *Heart of Darkness*", adds more to this

idea of self-discovery in Heart of Darkness by arguing that it is imperialism that uncovered the beast in Western colonizers. He contends that " the horror of the story is not that Africans are a deviant form of humanity, but that the monster is also within the Europeans who consider themselves superior" (2). He goes on saying that the European conquerors are themselves conquered as their ruthless and violent imperialism unleashes their latent savagery, making them more monstrous than those they profess to civilize. Released from the constraints of civilization, Europeans can feel a kinship with those people who, on the surface, seem so different. For Thomas, one of the most obvious reasons why Westerners do not immediately recognize the 'African' within themselves is the physical difference between races. But for Marlow, he contends, physical differences such as skin colour, are a surface deception.

For Edward Garnett, this displaying of the monster in Europeans is consequent to their exposure to the subjected peoples. He says that

> it (Heart of Darkness) offers an analysis of the deterioration of the white man's morale when he is let loose from European restraint and

> planted down in the tropics as an emissary of light armed to teeth, to make trade profits out the subject races".(164)

Some other Western critics viewed the novel as the development of literary ideas and traditions. As such, David Thorburn, in Conrad's Romanticism, analyses Heart of Darkness as an adventure tale. He shows how

> the young hero dragged unready into a world of moral and physical menace , is both a cliché of the adventure mode and a figure of seminal importance in Conrad's finest books.(42)

Even Conrad's first person narrative style is said to be common in the adventure mode. For Thorburn, Conrad shows awareness of the tradition of British Romantic poetry and the romance adventure, what has been identified as the greater Romantic lyric, a poetry form whose defining features are the play of memory across time and the juxtaposition of an older poet with his younger self. The author recounts his own journey into regions where his character, Marlow, confronts an aspect of himself. That self

confrontation, Thorburn points out, owes much to the traditions of the adventure tale and a Romantic poetry, which showed Conrad how a narrator may confront himself, both in another character and in telling the story of his own past. For Thorburn, the famous adjectival insistence is for the most part an essential aspect of the novel's meaning. Here, Thorburn touches the aspect of style study that attracts some Western critics. Some reproach Conrad for his obscure and vaporous style, while others praise it as an evidence of Conrad's craftsmanship.

E.M. Forster in Abinger Harvest, is first in this category. He talks of the foggishness of the novel in the following terms, " Sentence after sentence, in Conrad discharges its smoke into our abashed eyes"(238). This foggishness is created , in F.R. Leavis' words in The great Tradition : George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, by Conrad's overburdening the novel with "philosophical passages with adjectives that obscure rather than describe". There are places in Heart of Darkness, he points out, " where Conrad has already 'overworked' words like 'inscrutable', 'inconceivable', 'unspeakable', yet still, they recur"(49). He exemplifies his argument with the following sentence, " It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention"(Heart of Darkness, 66). Nevertheless, though he concedes to E.M. Forster his faulting Conrad for obscurity and a

vaporous style, he insists that other critics were correct in praising Conrad's ability to describe things and actions precisely, thereby , creating an overwhelming sinister and fantastic atmosphere. He has it that Conrad "pictures places – such as the grove 'greenish' with 'gloom' in which Marlow 'stumbles' upon diseased, starving Africans-with description that can be terribly vivid"(53). A reviewer for the Athenaeum commented on Conrad's atmosphere, praising him,

> He presents the atmosphere in which his characters move and act with singular fidelity, by means of watchful and careful building in which the craftsman's methods are never obtrusive, and after turning to the last page of one of his books, we rise saturated by the very air they breathe .(Qtd, Joseph Conrad : Heart of Darkness, A Case Study in Contemporary Criticism, 198)

Wilson Harris, in his article, " The Frontier on which *Heart of Darkness* Stands", explains " the distortions of imagery" in the novel as

Conrad's attempt " to create a form that best can cleave the prison house of natural bias..." . He proceeds by saying that this distortion of images is intended

> to offset or transform the hubris of apparently sacred order and to create, by painful and yet ecstatic degrees, a profound, complex and searching dialogue between confessing and confessional heterogeneous cultures..." (336)

The example of distortion of imagery he gives bears upon Kurtz's liberal manifesto of imperial good and moral light, that ends by " Exterminate the brutes" (Heart of Darkness, 87). Thus, Conrad parodies the notion of moral light as professed by Western established order, Wilson Harris states.

From the above argument, Harris pleads for Heart of Darkness as a novel seeking to shatter the enormous stone of Western biases against subjected races, a novel that takes the defence of the colonized. He is not the only one to view the novel this way.

Joseph Militello, in his article, " Conrad and the N-word : Responding to the Sensitivities and Politics of the Contemporary

Classroom", talking about the "nigger" word encountered by the reader throughout the novel, states that

> the racial epithets can be viewed as mere statements of fact concerning the debased condition of the Congolese people at the time, meant to evoke sympathy or pity at the wretchedness of their oppressed state. (114)

He however acknowledges Marlow's descriptions of the natives as " blatantly, undeniably racist" (114), but affirms Marlow's evolution throughout the novel in his perceptions of the natives, that he justifies by the context of Conrad's own intellectual and political journey.

Militello explains the good intentions of Heart of Darkness towards the colonized by highlighting Marlow's

> childhood innocence in his admiration of explorers like Cook in the Pacific, and Franklin in the Arctic, whose missions theoretically were motivated by scientific curiosity rather than

> greed; his youthful sense of wonder, lust for adventure and desire for the exotic contrasted with the mercenary and hypocritical outlooks of other Europeans in Africa during the period of colonization.(115)

Through Marlow, these good intentions are credited to the author, Joseph Conrad, who went to Congo in 1890. Like those adventurers, Marlow is a sea-man with self- assured innocence and complacency who first became interested in Africa, when, as a child, saw a vast blank space on a map. It was typical of the age that the young boy should dream of exploring that blank space when he became a man. The commonly accepted way of referring to this blank space was a place of darkness. From this darkness issues a river with its head in the sea. Marlow gets fascinated by the picture of the river " as a snake would a bird – a silly little bird" (Heart of Darkness, 33).

Marlow, Militello contends, was a good man in search of purpose and adventure, believing he would find his aspirations by sailing the waters of a mighty river.

John A. Mc Clure, in his article, "Colonial and Post-colonial Context", argues that Conrad' Heart of Darkness is essentially anti-colonial. He argues that

> Conrad's argument against colonialism is based on both anti-colonial and colonial premises. Sometimes the argument asserts European's inadequacy for rule, sometimes the rights of non-Europeans to their space and culture. (46)

Mark A. Eaton supports the above view in " After New Historicism", by stating that Conrad casts doubt on the integrity of the project of imperialism from the start of the novel, by employing what he calls " a subtle critical irony" against his own narrators. He exemplifies his argument with a passage by one unnamed narrator, about England's great explorers, "all the men of whom the nation is proud; with sword and torch in hand, they carried a spark of the sacred fire of civilization" to every corner of the earth, planting " the seed of common wealth, the germ of empires"(Heart of Darkness, 8). He goes on saying that Marlow deflates that rhetoric by challenging the concept of civilization itself, " and this also", he

says, " has been one of the dark places of the world", explaining that " when the Romans came to England, it must have seemed to them the very end of the world" (Heart of Darkness, 9). This critical irony, Eaton says, reappears later in another passage, where Marlow says,

> We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but these – there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly and the men were.... No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know that was the worst of it – this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one (Heart of Darkness, 37).

He explains the irony saying that Marlow is about to say that they are inhuman when it suddenly occurs to him that they are in fact human. But he does not express this recognition in positive terms; Eaton goes on, instead, he uses a double negative that implies a positive. Marlow means that they are human, he concludes.

From the above analysis, it is evident that Euro centric critics did not pay attention to certain aspects of the novel from which it can be attacked as racist from an Afro centric perspective.

CHAPTER TWO

AN AFRO CENTRIC VIEW OF *HEART OF DARKNESS*

Some critics have argued that, despite evident atrocities and dehumanisation of the colonized, Western critics did not dare to overtly attack these evils and to restore the once subjected races to their dignity as humans, hence, taking a euro-centric position in their criticisms of Western literature about colonization. In the present chapter, we will survey the different criticisms of Conrad's Heart of Darkness by Afro centric critics.

The issue of racism dominates the critical appraisal of the novel from an afro centric perspective. As Mark Ross attempted to explain it in his essay " The Roots of Racism", racism originates from the interests, geographical or cultural isolation or physical characteristics. The idea of group is characterized by a feeling of comfort when with those within your group, and discomfort when associating with those not in the group. This, according to Ross, can lead to associating negative characteristics to anyone who is not part of your group; hence, excluding others from your midst. This exclusion is engendered by the fear of the "other" that is justified by invoking certain attributes to others by assuming that they may be inferior, evil, or harmful. The group will reinforce those feelings, since all members of the group will respond to the same fear, and finally, this will become

institutionalised and accepted as a norm for group thought. This will lead a group to believe that the members of the other group are different and, by extension, some how inferior. Therefore, one group will want to subjugate the other, believing that only it holds the truth, God is on its side.(3)

The above view gives details of the idea behind Western invasion of Africa and other parts of the World, and the subjection of their inhabitants. One vehement attack against the novel, Heart of Darkness and its author was made by Chinua Achebe in his article " An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*". Achebe asserts that

> the novel displays the desire and need in Western psychology to set Africa up as a foil to Europe; as a place of negations in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest, a carrier onto whom the master unloads his physical and moral deformities so that he may go forward erect and immaculate (6).

Heart of Darkness, Achebe goes on, projects the image of Africa as "the other world", the antithesis of Europe, and therefore, of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by

triumphant bestiality. He illustrates his assertion by showing Conrad's prejudice against Africa from the start of his novel when he talks of the European River Thames and the African one, Congo. While the first is tranquil, resting peacefully " at the decline of day after ages of good service done to the race that peopled its bank" (Heart of Darkness, 66), River Congo is described as the very antithesis of the Thames. It was still virgin, it has rendered no service. Heart of Darkness mentions, " going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world" (66). While River Thames is described with a great fantasy, great feelings of serenity and a lot of liveliness, as a place where many people seek to follow their dreams, " the long stretches of the waterway (of the Congo) ran on, deserted into the gloom of overshadowed distances", and sailing on the Congo, " the air was warm, thick, heavy, and sluggish. There was no joy and brilliance of sunshine" (66). Here, Achebe says that Conrad is full of prejudice towards Africa from the beginning.

But it is in Marlow's description of people that, according to Achebe, most reveals Conrad's racism in Heart of Darkness. To illustrate his words, he quotes passages from the novel :

> We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown

planet. We could have fancied ourselves the first men taking possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cast of profound anguish and of excessive toil. But, suddenly, as we struggled round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy. The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us – who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings. We glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a mad house. We could not

understand because we were too far and could not remember, because we were travelling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign – and no memories (68-69).

The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster but there – there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly and the men were… No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know that was the worst of it – this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped and spun and made horrid faces, but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity-like yours- the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly (69).

The above quotations appear to be examples of Conrad's racist attitude. In the second, Marlow asserts that it is ugly for a white man to realize he has a kinship -even remote – with a black person. This gives the impression that he views the natives as being of lesser humanity and does not quite want to face the reality of this kinship.

Emily Wiggins in her article, " Colonialism and its Discontents: Imagining Africa", adds details to this presumed racist characterization by asserting that Conrad's description of Africans shows them as crazed, frenzied, out-of-control savages, not an image any turn-of-the century Westerner could warm up to; nor could his English speaking readers understand these people to be anything more than beasts, as they are only the written word to go on. She illustrates her argument saying that Conrad describes Marlow's first encounter with an African ceremony as " a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of body swaying, of eyes rolling...(Heart of Darkness, 68). She goes on to portray Marlow's reaction to this frenzy of natives " as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a mad house" (Heart of Darkness, 69). She further demonstrates Conrad's racism by his frequent use of the word 'nigger' which she finds offensive, throughout the novel. She says that

> Heart of Darkness was first published in 1902, well past a time when 'nigger' was considered an acceptable word to use when addressing, or referring to Africans or African-Americans. Despite this fact, Conrad repeatedly uses the offensive slang term in reference to the Africans Marlow encounters (3).

She illustrates her statement by giving some of the passages where this word is used: at his first stop on the Congo, Marlow lists the things he sees :

> strings of dusty niggers with splay feet arrived and departed; a stream of manufactured goods, rubbishy cottons, peas, and brass wire sent into the depths of darkness, and in return, came a precious trickle of ivory (Heart of Darkness, 46).

Conrad groups the Africans coming through the station with inanimate objects, as though they all carried the same value, she remarks. These

"niggers" live in a place that resembles them, the African jungle which is depicted as the darkness itself. Darkness in the novel is everything that is unknown, primitive, evil, and impenetrable. To Conrad, Wiggins argues, Africa is the very representation of darkness, a land where the prehistoric has been preserved. In this setting, Africans are not actors in the drama, but mere objects.

According to Peter Mwikisa in his "Conrad's Image of Africa: Recovering African Voices in *Heart of Darkness*", the depiction of Africa in the novel "evokes not a real place, but a phantasmagoria of an unexplored innermost regions of the European soul"(1), which explains why there is such scant regard for the African characters in the novel.

Achebe does not view the image of Africa as an imaginary place. He argues that Heart of Darkness treats Africa as

> a setting and a backdrop, which eliminate the African as human factor. Africa as a metaphysical battlefield devoid at all recognizable humanity into which the wondering European enters at his peril. Can nobody see the preposterous and perverse arrogance in

> thus reducing Africa to the role of props for the break-up of one petty European mind? (4).

It is a real place where Africans are seen as mere objects which have to stay in there place, the wild and evil jungle where they " ought to have been clapping" their "hands and stamping" their "feet on the bank", instead of " squinting at the steam-gauge and the water-gauge with an evident effort of intrepidity" (Heart of Darkness, 70).

The point here is that the natives make one entity with nature and things can go wrong once this harmony is destroyed. In the line of the above argument, Isak Dinesen in his Out of Africa, defines this unity with nature in the following passage as follows :

> the natives were Africa in flesh, and...(the various cultures of Africa, the mountains, the trees, the animals) were different expressions of one idea, variations upon the same one theme. It was not a congenial up heaping of heterogeneous atoms, but a heterogeneous up heaping of congenial

> atoms, as in the case of the oak-leaf and the acorn and the object made from oak (21).

This melting of the natives in nature is called by Abdul R. Jan Mohamed in his article, " The Economy of Manichean Allegory", "fetishization" of the other whereby "all the evil characteristics and habit with which the colonialist endows the native are thereby not presented as the products of social and cultural difference, but as characteristics inherent in the race of the native" (22). In its extreme form, Mohamed says, " this kind of 'fetishization' transmutes all specificity and difference into a magical essence" (18). He further argues that if African natives can be collapsed into African animals and mystified still further as some magical essence of the continent, then clearly there can be no meeting ground, no identity between the social historical creatures of Europe and the metaphysical Africans. The ideological function of this mechanism, he asserts, is that " in addition to prolonging colonialism, is to 'dehistorize' and 'desocialize' the conquered world"(22). This explains the reason why Conrad does not confer language to natives, according to Chinua Achebe. In place of speech, they made " a violent babble of uncouth sounds". They " exchanged grunting phrases" even among themselves.(Heart of Darkness, 70)

There are two occasions in the novel, however, when Conrad departs somewhat from his practice and confers speech on "the savages". The first occurs when "cannibalism gets the best of them"

> Catch'im", he snapped with a bloodshot, widening his eyes and a flash of sharp teeth..." Catch'im. Give'im to us". To you, eh? What would you do with, then? " Eat'im!" he said curtly...(Heart of Darkness, 31).

The other occasion is the famous announcement, " Mistah Kurtz, ...he dead" (Heart of Darkness, 112). Achebe argues that at first, these instances might be mistaken for unexpected acts of generosity; in reality they " constitute some of his best assaults"("An Image of Africa", 3). In the case of the cannibals, the incomprehensible grunts that had thus far served them for speech suddenly proved inadequate for Conrad's purpose of letting the glimpse of the unspeakable craving in their hearts. Weighing the necessity for consistency in the portrayal of the dumb brutes against the sensational advantages of securing their conviction by clear, unambiguous evidence issuing out their own mouth, Conrad chooses the latter. As for the

announcement of Mister Kurtz 's death, "there is no better or appropriate finis that can be written to the horror story of that wayward child of civilization who wilfully had given his soul to the powers of darkness and taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land than the proclamation of his physical death by the forces he had joined" (" An Image of Africa", 3).

Basing his argument on this refusing and granting speech to the natives at the same time, Abdul R. Jan Mohamed contends that

> it is not the stereotypes, the denigrating images of the native that are "fetishized". Careful scrutiny of colonialist texts reveals that such images are used at random. The point is that then, the imperialist is not fixated on specific images or stereotypes of the other, but rather, on the affective benefits proffered by the Manichean allegory" (22).

He explains that the "fetishizing" strategy and the allegorical mechanism not only permit a rapid exchange of denigrating images which can be used to maintain a sense of moral difference, they also allow the writer to transform

social and historical dissimilarities into universal metaphysical differences. Achebe also brings up a comparison of two women in Heart of Darkness, an African and a European, to highlight Conrad's racism against black people. The African woman, who has obviously been some kind of mistress to Kurtz, is described as " savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent.... She stood looking at us without a stir, and like the wilderness itself, with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose" (Heart of Darkness, 101). The emphasis is always on her silence and her gaze, which seem to pose questions that neither Marlow nor any of his fellow Whites are prepared to acknowledge, let alone try to answer. The White intended, Kurtz's European lover, is depicted as follows

> She came forward, all in black, with a pale head, floating toward me in the dusk. She was in mourning.... She took both my hands in hers and murmured, "I heard you were coming..." She had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering .(Heart of Darkness, 117)

Achebe states that the inclusion of these two women serves two purposes, one being that the African Amazon " is in her place and so, can win Conrad's special brand of approval" (" An Image of Africa", 3), and the second purpose is that, in Achebe's words, " she fulfils a structural requirement of the story: a savage counterpart to the refined, European woman" (3). Achebe proceeds to state that the difference in the attitude of the novelist to these two women is conveyed in too many direct and subtle ways to need elaboration. Achebe adds that the most significant difference is the one implied by Conrad's " bestowal of human expression to the one and the withholding of it from the other" (3), which implies that Conrad only gave humanistic expression to the European and not to the African. Achebe further shows " a residue of antipathy to black people" (4) in Conrad's attitude by bringing up another comparison between Conrad's black man and white man's descriptions. The black man is encountered for the first time in Haiti and Conrad depicts him as

> a certain enormous buck nigger encountered in Haiti fixed my conception of blind, furious, unreasoning rage, as manifested in the human animal to the end of my days.

> Of the nigger I used to dream for years afterwards (Quoted, "An Image of Africa", 5).

Then, from A Personal Record, Achebe gives Conrad's description of an Englishman he encountered in Europe. He calls him " my unforgettable Englishman" and describes him in the following manner

> (his) calves exposed to the public gaze ...dazzled the beholder by the splendour of their marble-like condition and their rich tone of young ivory.... The light of a head log, exalted satisfaction with the world of men...illuminated his face...and triumphant eyes. In passing, he cast a glance of kindly curiosity and a friendly gleam of big, sound, shiny teeth... his white calves twinkled sturdily. (Qtd, " An Image of Africa", 5)

These two descriptions, one with a sense of disgust, the other with amazement, evidence, in Achebe's words, " irrational love and irrational hate jostling together in the heart of that talented, tormented man" (5).

Achebe then launches in to his argument against the previous criticism that Heart of Darkness had received in the past. He states that this racism is grossly ignored " due to the fact that white racism against Africa is such a normal way of thinking that its manifestations go completely unnoticed" (4). This is Achebe's argument as to why Conrad's supposed racism in the novel is overlooked and the novel itself is instead called a great piece of literature, because it is so ingrained in the Western psyche that Africa is inferior. For Achebe, Heart of Darkness is not a great novel because it " celebrates the dehumanisation which depersonalises a portion of the human race".(4)

Peter Mwikisa, in "Conrad's Image of Africa: Recovering African Voices in *Heart of Darkness*", supports Achebe's criticism by contending that, when the novel was written, it relied upon "the silence of the African people for its moral and artistic integrity" (1). Conrad assumed none of these people would bring it under interrogation. In the novel, Mwikisa says, Africans are not called in even as witnesses. Therefore, Heart of Darkness enacts a trial in which the white man is the criminal, the prosecutor and the judge. Mwikisa's contention is that the humanitarian and liberal claims with which Euro centric critics showered the novel and the stereotypes that "dehumanise and insult" Africans cannot be separated. So,

> to endorse the book on grounds of its humanitarian pretensions is at the same time to recycle stereotypes that reinforce racist reinventions of Africa .(3)

He expands this view to the modern world saying that although the novel is still widely read as a critique of imperialist barbarism evident even in today's expansion of finance capital in search of global markets, it is on account of its image of Africa that it stakes its claim to more or less permanent tenure in the Western literary canon, an image of a continent peopled by archetypal figures: savages, faithful servants, sinister half-breeds who need to be civilized; or even a fantasy of a continent and a people from which Europeans are anxious to dissociate themselves.

Mwikisa agrees with Achebe upon the function of this negative image : that Europe needs it to set Africa up as a foil against which its own civilized virtues manifest themselves, that Africa is a place of inevitable physical and moral corruption that must be avoided by all means. He adds another function of this image which, in his words :

> serves as a setting upon which to demonstrate an apocalyptic warning against

> the danger Europe faces of loosing its empires if its agents do not uphold the virtues upon which empire building depends. (4)

Actually, according to him, Africans in deplorable conditions like the pointless tasks, the broken pieces of equipment and other parodies of progress that Marlow sees around him, are products of inefficiency as one of the qualities that detracts from white men's fitness to carry out the civilizing mission. The Africans are simply neglected pieces of equipment like the scrap iron and items originally imported for the " great work of progress" in Africa. Therefore, Mwikisa concludes, Conrad does not urge his countrymen to abandon imperialism; rather, he urges them towards higher standards of moral virtue namely, efficiency and restraint, which alone fit emissaries of light. An example of this betrayal of the ideals of the civilizing mission is the despicable methods used by Kurtz to acquire ivory. In fact, Kurtz's lack of restraint would have been impossible to enact convincingly without the myth of a mysterious land among whose simple inhabitants Kurtz is taken for a god, and is therefore free to exercise restraint and choose to be a mere mortal, or opt to throw restraint to the wind and choose to be a god. The horror is that he chooses the latter.

Heart of Darkness, Mwikisa finally concludes, supports the European view that other cultures have nothing to contribute to human development and with which it is not worthwhile engaging in dialogue. Peter Mwikisa begins his " Conrad's image of Africa", stating that when Conrad's novel first appeared, it was unlikely that the author envisaged an African readership. So, today's afro centric criticism seeks to recuperate the African voices that had been denied to Africans in the novel.

CHAPTER THREE

THE QUESTION OF DARKNESS : MYTH OR REALITY ?

Chinua Achebe's condemnation of Heart of Darkness as being racist bases its argument on the descriptions and imagery used by the author to picture the environment, events and ideas throughout the novel. If a European reader may not be upset by the portrayal, an African one is likely to feel even shocked by such a strong, vivid and perhaps prejudiced picture of Africa and its people at first sight. However, an objective and careful reflection will reveal that certain realities of some African societies at the period when the novel was written could not be rendered in a different way. Of course, some other realities were exaggerated, altered or arbitrary denigrated to conform to the author's fellow Europeans' myth about Africa already entrenched in their minds. The above reflection will be the concern of the present chapter. We will also attempt an explanation of the meaning of the sinister darkness Conrad depicts, contrasting it with light.

Joseph Conrad depicts the Congo where the story takes place as a sinister place where the jungle is almost impenetrable, inhabited by black cannibals, a frightening and dangerous place. Heart of Darkness invokes emotions from a particular set of imagery borrowed from Africa, which is, for Achebe, offending. Nevertheless, some of these images, however

offending they may be, were driven from realities that not only could be observed in Africa towards the end of 19th century when Joseph Conrad visited the Congo, but also still characterize Africa in the 21st century.

One of the elements Conrad used to portray darkness is the tropical jungle that Marlow describes as " the edge of a colossal jungle, so dark green as to be almost black..." (Heart of Darkness, 39), or " beginning of the world when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, and impenetrable forest" (Heart of Darkness, 66). It happens that the area Conrad visited is part of the region of tropical rain forest in Africa; and the tropical rain forests of the Congo provided very important images in Heart of Darkness. This rain forest region encompasses the Democratic Republic of Congo then Congo Free State ruled by Belgian king Leopold II; neighbouring Cameroon, Gabon, and a piece of the coast of West Africa. The rest of Africa is mostly grasslands and deserts. Conrad would not have encountered these images of black/green, had he visited anywhere else on the continent.

Another element Conrad used to highlight the darkness of the Congo and which cannot be questioned, as showing the author's racism, is the colour of the inhabitants. Conrad fills Heart of Darkness with descriptions of slithering, shining blackness with reference to the colour of

the people : " black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees"(44); "A lot of people, mostly black and naked, moved about like ants"(42); strings of dusty niggers with splay feet arrived and departed"(46); " a whirl of black limbs"(68); " the bush was swarming with strolled about human limbs in movement, glistening, of bronze colour"(108); "Black figures listlessly"(55);..... Of course, apart from the colour referred to, some terms used like "nigger" and this metonymy may be felt disturbing. I shall return to the point in due course.

Some practices that could lead Europeans to qualify Africans as barbaric and savage could be seen in 19th African societies, and even, can be noticed in contemporary Africa. These are human sacrifices and, at a lesser extent, cannibalism. Let us first consider the Voodoo religion in West Africa. The Voodoo rituals included offerings to the gods in the form of animal sacrifices. Human sacrifice in West Africa ended less than a century ago, but before, they were part of their rites. Reasons for human sacrifice in Voodoo religion as well as in most African societies included among others: sacrifice to accompany the dedication of a building like a new temple or bridge; sacrifice upon the death of a king, high priest or a great leader : the sacrifices were to serve or accompany the deceased leader in the next life; sacrifice for divination : a priest would try to divine the future from the body

parts of a slain prisoner or slave; sacrifice in time of natural disaster : drought, earthquake, volcanic eruptions, etc, were seen as a sign of anger or displeasure of the gods, and sacrifices were made to appease the divine ire; ritual combat : the victim was killed in nominally fair fight against a warrior. Another dark side of Voodoo religion is that sorcerers can be summoned to put a hex on an adversary, using a malevolent power of a Voodoo spirit. This is still a widespread belief in African societies.

African literature, which serves as a tool of mirroring its society provides examples of abhorrent, practices in traditional African societies, among which are human sacrifices. A frightening example is described in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart, in which a man kills a child he considered his own son. Ikemefuna is a young boy given to the village of Umuofia by a neighbouring village as a tribute to prevent war between the two villages. Because of his great esteem in the village, Okonkwo is selected by the elders of the village to be the guardian of the boy. Ikemefuna lives in Umuofia for three years, under Okonkwo's roof. Okonkwo looks at him as a son, and to Ñwoye, Okonkwo's son, he becomes a friend and a brother. Everything goes right until the Oracle instructs the elders on what to do with the boy. Then, the elders decide that the boy must be killed. The oldest man of the village warns Okonkwo to have nothing to do with the murder

because it would be like killing his own child. " That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death", advises Ezeudu, the oldest most respected man in the village (Things Fall Apart, 57). Although he treats the boy as a son, Okonkwo's great fear is to be thought effeminate. He ignores Ezeudu's advice and accompanies the party that takes Ikemefuna to his death. Ikemefuna feels safe, not believing that harm will come to him while his foster father is with him. As a member of the party moves to kill the boy, he cries out, " father", and runs to Okonkwo who ruthlessly kills him. Okonkwo justifies this killing of his adopted son as a show of his own strength and manliness.

Such acts of disrespect of human life make Westerners to style Africans as barbaric. An ancient example that was brought to the public through media happened in London in 2001: the slaying of a little boy for ritual practices. A boy aged 5 to 7 years of Afro Caribbean decent, was slain as a human sacrifice in the capital of England. His body was found in the Thames, with a missing head, arms and legs on September 21, 2001. A South African expert in ritualistic killings pronounced what many people had feared: the discovery of the body, the nature of the wounds, and the way the boy was killed, " are consistent with those of a ritual homicide as practised in Africa", Dr Hendrick Scholtz said (ABC News, Feb4,2002).

Two weeks after the corpse was found, police found 7 half-burned candles wrapped in a white sheet washed up on the southern shore of the Thames. The name Adekoye Jo Fola Adeoye was written on the sheet and the name Fola Adeoye was inscribed on the candles. According to investigations, the names are Nigerian, common to Yoruba people, police experts said. The South African expert said that the killers of Adamo- name of the slain boy- probably drank the boy's blood from his skull. Police in the United Kingdom considered the possibility that they may be facing the first "muti" murder ever committed there. "Muti" is a South African word that means traditional medicine in general. Muti is a medicine used "to bring about result", but that result can be bettering one's health, or fortune, or prospects. It is always based on the idea of taking energy from another living thing for your own. At times, the energies provided by herbs or animals are enough. But human beings are believed to have the most energy; and children, it is believed, have the most powerful energy. They have not been contaminated; they have not grown up and used it for adult purposes, so they have not been used up yet. Authorities in England said the body found in the Thames had its head and limbs severed with a sharp knife, and were not found. The body's first vertebra, valued by practitioners of "muti" was also reportedly removed. If the boy was the victim of a "muti" murder, those parts would

have likely been ground up, and his blood would have been drained for medicine, the South African expert said. Most of the parts of the body taken for medicine correspond directly with the powers desired. For example, using eye-balls in a potion would be expected to increase foresight, brains would be expect to increase wisdom, and a heart courage or sympathy. According to ABC News article (2002), in one case of "muti" murder in South Africa in the 1940s, a man who had difficulty fathering children tried to solve his problem by killing another man who had many children, and using his genitals in a medicine. But the most gruesome part of "muti" is that the body parts are usually taken while the victim is alive because death is believed to reduce the potency of the medicine. The same number of ABC News writes about an alleged "muti" murder case that took place in South Africa October 2000, where a gang was accused of removing the facial skin, genitals, breasts, hands and feet of a young mother while she was still alive. The victim lived for an hour or more after the attack before dying from her wounds. Investigators said the parts were to be smeared over a person or eaten as a part of a get-rich-quick spell.

More recent examples of occult atrocities were committed in Zimbabwe and Democratic Republic of Congo, and tend to foster the belief that human sacrifice was by no means a part of African tradition.

In Zimbabwe, a reporter of " The Telegraph", an English newspaper, recounts how four men charged with the murder of the first farmer to die in president Robert Mugabe's violent land seizures, took blood from his corpse, mixed it with alcohol and drank it. So-called veterans of Zimbabwe's independence war attacked David Stevens, the white farmer, in April 2000. A witness recounted the bizarre ritual to a Zimbabwean court. According to the witness, " one of them knelt over Stevens's body and brought a container filled with blood which they mixed with alcohol and shared among themselves"(Telegraph: 2002).

In Democratic Republic of Congo war, such bizarre rituals on human beings were observed. In a report, " Cannibalism as a Crime of War" issued by Eliza Griswold who travelled twice to the Congo to investigate claims of cannibalism as a crime of war, we are given two terrifying testimonies: one is of a victim, another by a killer. Eliza Griswold writes :

> Draping a green batik cloth over her left shoulder, Chantal says that at 5:00 in the morning on August 27,2002; she woke to gunfire in the gold-mining town of Mbabanga-Gélé. She was alone with her 6-year old son , Claude,

> as men armed with machetes entered her house, " Today we are going to cut off your arm so you can't prepare mandro (traditional beer)", they said to her. She tells me, " They cut off my arm and took it outside where they had made a fire. They cooked it while they were drinking our mandro, and ate it with the rest of the beans and rice". Then she says flatly, " They told me they were going to find my husband and eat his heart"(6).

Eliza Griswold goes on,

> The 15-year-old boy bites into a packet of jelly as he tells me how he killed. First there were the mothers, after he'd raped them. Then their babies. Four of them. The eldest aged three.... Then he wanders off, having thanked me for the sweets, to play

marbles with the other killers.... He says he trained as a nurse. But no ordinary nurse. He was taught magic remedies.... He tells me, " One day, we captured two women, the wives of the Interahamwe, and the commander told me to kill them. Then we stabbed them to death with machetes. It was cheaper than bullets. They begged us to spare them but we laughed. We had orders. We cut out their hearts to take to the commander. Their babies were aged three months, a boy; a one-year-old girl, another boy, two; and the last aged three. We killed them and used their bodies to make medicine. I boiled their feet and arms to grind and put in bottles. The potion has the power to stop bullets. I burned the meat into ash, which you sprinkle on your body

> to give extra strength. The heads of the children and their mothers we gave to the commander. We ate the hearts, kidneys and livers. (8)

Less horrible but also reflecting some of the realities x-rayed by Conrad is the life style of the Twas in Burundi, Pygmies in central African countries, Bushmen in Southern Africa. At one moment, we should not hold him hostage. These are some examples that could lead a 19th century writer as well as a contemporary one to call Africa a heart of darkness.

Of course, if Europeans could deem certain aspects of African culture barbaric, they were not from an African point of view and in 19th century. When Europeans came to Africa, they were already convinced that everything on the continent was evil. So, they could not objectively judge African culture – which they even denied – and try to understand what the various rituals and other African cultural practices meant. In 19th century, if Europeans had sought to understand the subjected peoples' culture, they would have been less horrified by some African cultural practices. For one thing, human sacrifice for instance existed in Europe. Romans practised various forms of human sacrifice in their first centuries; they adopted the original form of gladiatorial combat where the victim was slain in a ritual

combat. Prisoners of war and vestal virgins were buried alive as offerings to the gods. Archaeologists have found sacrificial victims buried in building foundations. Second, in the Akan religion, in Nigeria, there is a story told of a priest who, when the gods required a human sacrifice to end the suffering of the people, offered himself. The Christian crucifixion story can be paralleled with the above story and can be seen as a story of the sacrifice of the same noble sort. Why should Christians, who think nothing of gaining spiritual strength by symbolically eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ would stare in horror and astonishment at an African who believes he is gaining strength from the blood of his fellow human? Without condoning the practice, its meaning is at least comprehensible and not less civilized as European's meaning of eating body and drinking Christ's blood. The bellicosity of the West (World War I, World War II, Vietnam, etc; not to mention the Jewish and the African holocaust) may be considered to represent a very special kind of human sacrifice to appease the insatiable appetite of the "gods" that the West really worships.

The already entrenched idea in European mind that everything in Africa was evil and savage seems to have blinded them, and in their descriptions, everything had to conform to the prejudiced view the West had of Africa. For instance, before they came to Africa, Europeans knew that

people of a black complexion, human beings who differed from them only in terms of culture, inhabited the continent. Nonetheless, they called them " nigger" or "Negro", a word that is perhaps the most offensive and inflammatory racial slur in English, a word expressive of racial hatred and bigotry. The reader of Heart of Darkness must face this word every five or ten pages with reference to " dusty niggers", " an overfed young Negro", " quarrelsome band of footsore sulky niggers", "the fool nigger"(21,25,32,46); and other reference to that word and "savage", each presented in an apparently matter-of-fact tone without editorial comment or footnotes.

Some people would object saying that the word "nigger", like Negro, Niger and the archaic slang word "Neger" come from the Latin root for "black" and just means "black". Definitions provided by the " Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary" both have in common that " Nigger" means " a member of any dark-skinned race". All right. But in addition, they all say it is "offensive". Webster's goes one further and says, " a member of a socially disadvantaged class of persons". So, if the word is actually derived from the Latin word "Niger" that means "black", it is all the same insulting.

It is unlikely that when Conrad, in 1890 when he did his trip up the Congo River and began writing his novel ignored this pejorative meaning of the word he used so much. Stuart Flexner holds that,

> "...At any rate, 'nigger' was a common word in both England and America by the 17th century; it was just considered a pronunciation of 'Negro' until around 1825, when both abolitionists and Blacks began to object to it as disparaging. Then after the Civil War, ' nigger' became the most common contemptuous word for a Black." (Qtd, Candice Bradley, 2).

So, Conrad lived his life at a time when the reputation of the black man was at a particular low level. He did not create the image of Africa that we find in his book. It was the dominant image in Western imagination, and Conrad merely brought the peculiar gifts of his own mind to bear on it. On the other hand, Chinua Achebe did not consider the above fact and let himself get overwhelmed by anger, as an African who suffered from the colonial system. In the " Guardian Unlimited", he says, " I am an African. What I learn in Conrad is about myself. To use me as a symbol may be bright or clever but, if it reduces my humanity by the smallest fraction, I don't like it."(7)

At any rate, Conrad needed appropriate imagery to create darkness. So, he drew from physical entities that he had observed in the Congo, as well as from the repertoire of stereotypes that were in the European mind. He used darkness as a dual motif: first as a setting for his story, synonymous with uncivilized, chaos, and a summation of dark natives that roam the " invisible wilderness" (Heart of Darkness, 152). Second, darkness means evil and horror. Throughout the story, Conrad builds an unhealthy darkness. At every turn, he sees evil lurking within the land. Every image is dreary and dark. In fact, Heart of Darkness describes an outward journey to the heart of Africa that parallels an inward journey to the heart and depth of man's being. The setting of these adventurous and moral quests is the great jungle in which most of the story takes place. As a symbol, the forest encloses all, and in the heart of the African jungle, Marlow enters the dark cavern of his own heart. It even becomes an image of a vast catacomb of evil in which Kurtz dies, but from which Marlow emerges spiritually reborn.

Marlow's first glimpse of the Congo horror is " the gloomy circle of some inferno" where "clumps of dark things were dying very slowly" (Heart of Darkness, 44). The white eyes reflected in the dark mound situated throughout the groves. The grove is the dark heart of the station and

represents the true evils of colonization, dehumanisation and death. The " uncivilized" black natives are representative of the darkness. Throughout the novel, Conrad does not refer to Africa by name, but describes the place as reflecting darkness and evil.

Ivory has significant meaning in the Heart of Darkness. It serves as a contrast as being a natural white element in a heap of darkness, yet is the reason for darkness that comes to the people of Africa. Ivory is the darkness that motivates people to become dark and evil. " Strings of dusty niggers were sent into the depths of darkness and in return, came a precious trickle of ivory". (Heart of Darkness, 46)

Marlow's task to travel up the Congo River to relieve Kurtz at his station is symbolic in his travelling deeper into " a lurking death, a hidden evil to the profound darkness of its heart"(Heart of Darkness, 69). The more one penetrates deeper and deeper into " the heart of darkness", the greater the chance one will be overtaken by the darkness. Kurtz allowed the evil and the horror he supported to encompass his world and create shadows inside himself. "The mind of a man is capable of anything – because everything is in it, all the past as well as the future". Kurtz was a white man who had fully responded to the dark forces of evil. The darkness had "got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the

inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation"(Heart of Darkness, 84). He was haunted by shadowy images, " My Intended, my station, my carrier, my ideas"; all were once "subjects for the occasional utterances of elevated sentiments."(Heart of Darkness, 85) Later on, " The horror, The horror" replaces these sentiments. (111)

The explanation of what happened to Kurtz is that in Europe, behaviour is structured by policing mechanisms of civilization and abhorrent darkness that may exist. Europeans want to restrain these thoughts. However, once a civilized soul is displaced in colonial "darkness", structures and mechanisms ultimately are distorted into "shadows" of their original form when policing practices are absent. As a result, the darkness will destroy any and all that are foolish enough to venture in the darkness.

Kurtz was a great man, a poetic visionary and promoter of progressive causes. In Africa, repressed urges arose, which he could not control. Lost in the darkness of his own being, he defines this newfound reality as " the horror". His was a spiritual voyage, which failed.

Marlow's journey to the heart of the Congo is also, metaphorically, a journey to the heart of man's darkness, an exploration to his unconsciousness and the experience in the realisation of one's persistent unconscious desires. Marlow notes that he feels like he is about " to set off

for the centre of the earth, not a concrete destination"(Heart of Darkness, 39). He does reach his destination, one in which he was " permitted to draw back his hesitating foot", when he "peeped over the edge of himself and understood the meaning of his stare"(Heart of Darkness, 113). Marlow had a self-realization through his interaction with Kurtz, gaining knowledge of himself. Kurtz happened to be the light at the end of the dark tunnel.

On returning to Brussels, Marlow's reaction to the European sophisticates he finds there is revulsion. He sees the tall houses lining the streets as the posts with human heads outside Kurtz's Inner Station. Never having been tested, he sees people's confidence and self-control as worthless (just as Kurt's was). They live with the illusion that life is all sweetness and light, the policeman (neighbours, priests, parents, etc) is a force of repression and as such, promotes the illusion that mankind is essentially gentle and loving. Marlow calls Brussels " the sepulchral city" because its citizens are in a tomb (sepulchre). They have not yet begun to live in the sense that they have not taken the first step toward self-awareness, a process requiring knowledge of both light and dark. Marlow comes out of that adventure a changed man. He has lost the superficial empty happiness of life before Africa, and has gained a fuller but more troubling wisdom with his return to Europe.

In brief, the theme of the story is that within every man, there is a heart of darkness that can overtake him, once socio-cultural mechanisms, which repress the "dark" urges in man's soul, are absent. The unspeakable acts observed in situations of war in Africa and elsewhere on the globe are the results of the absence of these repressing mechanisms.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This work sets out to prove the subjectivity of modern criticism. To do this, we founded our argument on the analysis of the debate around Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness. The debate was raised over its artistic and humanist quality. We realised that most European critics defend the novel against charges of racism brought against it by their African counterparts. In an attempt to understand this, it was important first of all to trace the image of Africa in Western mind as it developed through time. In fact, it appeared that the West had a distorted image of the continent and its people, acquired from false information that came from various sources. In order for us to be efficient in our analysis, the work was set at the backdrop of the reader-response theoretical framework.

The discussion was conducted by pitting Euro centric views against afro centric ones as far as Heart of Darkness is concerned. Euro centric critics have often pointed to both the methodology of narration and Conrad's anti colonial purpose. The narrator of the novel retells the story that was told to him by a shadowy second figure, in an attempt to examine what happens when Europeans come into contact with the particular form of economic and social exploitation which is colonization; and so, questioning both European ambivalence towards the colonizing mission and her own

system of civilization. To do this, Conrad used two remarkable journeys in his novel. First, the journey that Marlow takes us on from civilized Europe back to the beginning of creation when nature reigned, and then back to civilized Europe. Second, the journey that Kurtz undergoes as he sinks down through the many levels of the self to a place where he discovers unlawful and repressed ambiguities of civilization. For these critics, the novel explores what happens when a group of people , supposedly more humane and civilized than another group attempt to impose themselves upon their "inferiors", and what happens to the members of the former group who imagine themselves to be released from the moral order of society and therefore, free to behave as "savagely" or as "decently" as they deem fit, how they respond to chaos. For afro centric critics, Conrad is racist precisely because he deliberately presents Africa as "the other", so as to justify Europe's claim of the subject.

After examining the terms in which Conrad rendered what he had seen in Africa and the critical appraisal of the novel by European and African critics, it appeared evident that Conrad is not totally the progenitor of the disturbing image of Africa and Africans. Set against the glittering " humanity" of Europe, Conrad presents us with a late 19th century view of a primitive African world that has produced very little, and is clearly doomed

to irredeemable savagery. This world picture would have troubled few of Conrad's original readers, for, he was merely providing them with the descriptive "evidence" of the bestial people and the fetid world that they "knew" lay beyond Europe. Despite the end of colonialism, this image is still held by contemporary Europeans.

The reaction to the novel by African critics has been virulent because of their own proximity to the issue. As Africans, they feel more offended than ever. They feel that Conrad's presentation of Africa and Africans is their problem, and so, they have a responsibility to react against the distorted image. They express their revolt at Conrad's compromising their humanity, in order to boost the European's ego. However, Africans should equally acknowledge that some of the descriptions made by Conrad are very realistic even today in the mist of globalisation.

In brief, according to our findings, European critics have been influenced by the distorted image they already had of Africa, and African critics reacted angrily towards this constant denigration. With these findings, we were able to answer the question whether the criticisms on Heart of Darkness were influenced by external factors and at the same time, we proved that due to this influence, criticism on Conrad has remained subjective from both angles.

As for a contribution to scholarship, this work should teach the readers to get out of the ghettos in which history enclosed us, and learn to cold-bloodedly analyse those facts of this history that could separate us.

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