

**Otherring of Africans In European Literature: A Postcolonial Analysis of Conrad's
"Heart of Darkness"**

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ABSTRACT: *This paper aims to analyze the construct of "Orientals" and "Others" as represented in Western colonial discourse through Conrad's Heart OF Darkness (1899). The main purpose of this paper is to unveil the biased and misrepresented image of Africans in Western texts. Said's concept of "Otherring" has been applied and will be discussed with special reference to Conrad's Heart OF Darkness (1899). It reflects how Europeans have represented themselves as superior as "Occident" while on the other hand they have represented Africans as inferior and "Orientals". "Otherring" is a Western construct which is a concept related to civilizing East.*

KEYWORDS: Conrad, Heart of Darkness, Occident, Orient, Otherring, Postcolonial.

INTRODUCTION

Post colonialism analyzes the modes of cultural perception and ways of viewing and being viewed. It describes the way the subaltern peoples are exploited by colonial rule and are represented in literary cannon. The Europeans conquered and controlled the cultures and economies of Third World. Post colonialism is the study of the changes of cultures and politics and it has these three stages:

- i. Social, political, cultural and psychological inferiority on colonized people by Westerner's.
- ii. Desire for power in ethnic, political and cultural areas.
- iii. Awareness of hybridity and double identity.

Europeans and colonized Africans regard one another. The Europeans think colonized peoples as inferior as well as "Others". The colonizers think that their native culture is rich so they represent colonized people as savages. The colonizers have divided the world into two parts. They have created binaries between them and the colonized people.

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* has been considered as one of his most famous and valuable works with reference to the specific phenomenon of "othering". The superiority of white races as powerful and colonizers over blacks as powerless and colonized has been traced out through

the in-depth and detailed study of the novel. In *Heart of Darkness* Conrad has presented the African natives as exotic others, barbaric, slave, made for labour, powerless and blacks. Conrad has presented Africa as heart of darkness. Conrad has presented African natives as cannibals. Africa is described as pre-historic limbo. The men in the novel are represented as blacks and crazed people. Marlow, the narrator of the story describes African natives as they were not inhuman and nothing earthly but as diseased shadows of death and misery. He does not call them inhuman, He calls them human but he still calls them barbaric, instinctive and savages.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Western writers such as Conrad and Kipling have presented Orientals through the lens of western writers. In “Heart of Darkness”, Conrad has presented the binary opposition of self and other and he has presented Europeans as whites, intelligent, civilized and superiors while on the other hand Africans are presented as blacks, unintelligent, uncivilized and as inferior.

Noori Berzenji, S and Abdi, M. (2013), have presented the opposing images of African culture presented in “Heart of Darkness” and “Things Fall Apart”. In “Heart of Darkness” Africans are presented as “Others”, primitive, barbaric, voiceless and marginalized while Achebe’s “Things Fall Apart” describes cultural assumptions presented by Conrad and presents a totally different image of African society which is aware of its past history and gives a true representation of Africans. Conrad’s “Heart of Darkness” is considered a hypocritical civilizing mission of Europeans. They describe that “Heart of Darkness” is set in dark and mysterious jungles. This refers to the darkness of the African past and African history. As Africans are thought by Europeans devoid of any history and culture. Europeans have misrepresented Africans as others in their literary cannon that is why Achebe tries to depict the true identity of Africans in “Things Fall Apart”. This research brings to light that Europeans have presented themselves as superior or self and Africans as inferior or others.

Murfin (1998) describes when Europeans find or get freedom from European restraints, their morality destroys and deteriorates to make trade gains of the subject races. He describes that Africans in “Heart of Darkness” are so primitive, barbaric, uncivilized and uncultured that when Europeans come to Africa for trade purposes they also become uncultured and uncivilized. So he describes that Africans are presented as uncultured and as others while on the other hand Europeans are presented as cultured and civilized in “Heart of Darkness”.

Mushtaq, H. (2010) conducted research on Conrad’s “Heart of Darkness” and on Coetzee’s “Waiting for the Barbarians”. The stories of both the novels are inter-related. In this study he has focused on three significant postcolonial concepts, Othering, Stereotyping and hybridity. The study has been delimited to the first two chapters of the novels. A detailed analysis of the first chapters of the novels were conducted on issues such as othering, hybridity and stereotyping. He finds that black natives seem to have no quality, no life, no value and no personality. They have no names. They are niggers. He says that the Othering makes the innocent people seem horrified, humiliated and depressed. He finds that both the texts demonstrate very vivid binaries of the colonizers and colonized, and the self and the other.

Sidi-Said, F (2012) conducted research on the representation of the “Other” in the works of Conrad and Melville. He describes the psychoanalytic and postcolonial concept of “Otherness”. Although both the texts are different yet they provide the lens that allows us to examine the

dynamics of race and critique authorial responses to race. The work was divided into two parts. Each part is comprised of three chapters. The first part describes the ideologies of otherness. It describes Melville's and Conrad's perception of the "Other". The second part discussed the place the "Other" holds, in their selected works with an emphasis on the Africa. He criticizes in his study that the ideology of the "Other" is not as controllable and rational as Westerner's think.

METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Postcolonialism addresses the postcolonial identity of the colonized people. The purpose of postcolonial theories is account for the social, cultural and political effects of colonialism on colonized people. Postcolonial theory analyzes literary texts from the perspective of culture of colonized countries (Said, 1978). In his *Orientalism* Said describes that third world is created as an exotic other by the Europeans and exploitation of the European's is justified by them.

Europeans have presented east as oriental world and they have presented themselves as Occidents. Moore-Gilbert,(1997) says that Said's Orientalism is the pioneer of postcolonial theory, Bhabha describes that postcolonial work started with Orientalism and Spivak describes it as the basis of postcolonial theory. Orientalism is a Western discourse about the Orients, convincing natives of their inferiority. Said in his book "Orientalism" describes how West has misrepresented the East and called them "Orients" and they have in their literary cannon has presented them as "Others". Ashcroft (1995) says that it is the matter of power which determines identity of East and West. So Europeans have created "Oriental world". Westerners' presentation of 'Others' is a feature of cultural dominance. Orientalism describes the various disciplines which is a way for Europeans to know the Orients or Others (57). Westerners divided the world between "us" and "them", "black and white", "light and dark", "superior and inferior" and "first world and third world".

Europeans present Orientals as barbaric, instinctive, savages, brute, exotic others and uncivilized. Tyson, (2006) says that Africans are considered savages and exotic others. They are considered as devilish, diabolic and infernal and in this way they are related to inferiority and in context of exotic other they are related to primitivism. Westerner's define a self-image of Europe and Africa. They describe that European culture and identity is superior and African culture and identity is inferior.

Analysis

In "Heart of Darkness" the themes of justification, power and individual responsibility have been discussed by Conrad. Despite Conrad's great story telling, he has also been viewed as a racist by some of his critics. He is considered the one who has created binary oppositions between West and East in his novel "Heart of Darkness". Achebe, Singh, and Sarwan are the critics who criticized Conrad for being racist and depicting East as the other world.

The Nigerian writer Achebe describes the "Heart of Darkness" as a "resentful and lamentable book" that "set[s] Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest." Achebe says that Conrad has not written it as a book of imperialism.

Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" is a counter discourse against Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness". In the novel "Heart of Darkness" the Europeans traded with the African natives for their own gains. It is a story of Marlow through African Jungle and Kurtz who exploits African natives. Marlow is in search of Kurtz. The book is thought to be dealing with issues such as race, gender, colonialism and capitalism. The book deals with the cruelty that was imposed upon the Africans by Europeans in 19th century. Heart of Darkness has still an important place in the curriculum of the western world. Conrad's representation of African culture and his emotions and aesthetic aims have presented the Africans as "Others". In this novel Conrad has depicted Africans as savages, barbarians, uncivilized and prehistoric limbo who destroy the white travelers.

In an Image of African "Achebe says that" in "Heart of Darkness" Conrad has presented the Africans as the "other world, third world, uncivilized, barbarians, instinctive, pre-historic limbo, Orientals and impulsive". They are mocked by triumphant bestiality. Although it is thought that "Heart of Darkness" is an anti-colonial and anti-imperial text by some scholars but some critics and scholars including Achebe think that "Heart of Darkness" presents dehumanizing images of Africans. Fanon, (2001), says that Africa is represented as the place of savages, barbarians and uncivilized people. He calls it a country of cannibals, a Negro country and a country where there is fanaticism. Said (2001), says in his Orientalism that Europeans call the colonized nation as "orient" and they think them as uncivilized, rational, barbaric, romantic haunting landscape People. So Achebe claims that Africans have been misrepresented by the Europeans. They have misrepresented the culture and history of Africans.

"Heart of Darkness" describes the experience of narrator Marlow in Africa. Marlow came to Africa. He under takes the journey through the country to meet Mr. Kurtz, but sees the brutality of Kurtz. This novel has social, Political, metaphysical and individual implications. In this novel the lives of the natives are misrepresented to European world considered themselves as ideal and Africans as "Others" as they are different from them in culture language and history. In the novel the narrator, Marlow describes Africa as an uncivilized lands and he feels isolated and deteriorated as other Europeans feel it there. Conrad has represented Africans as blacks and inferior in his house. Marlow describes the group of black natives as a burst of yells and whirl of black limbs. Conrad has represented and portrayed Africans in this way that Achebe calls Conrad being a racist. Achebe describes in "An Image of Africa" that Conrad has represented Africans as barbarians and as others.

Conrad uses Marlow, the main character in the novel, as a narrator so through Marlow, Conrad himself enters the story. Conrad used "double speak" throughout this novel. Upon arriving at the first station, Marlow described the natives of Africa, as blacks, savages and barbaric. He described the natives by saying, "They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now, nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation" (Conrad, 1902, p.18). In contrast to black Africans Conrad presents the white and civilized Europeans who must be respected because they are superior. Their whiteness represents civilization as contrasted to blackness of African blacks. "Moreover I respected the fellow. Yes. I respected his collars, his vast cuffs, his brushed hair" (Conrad, 1902, p.19). Conrad dehumanized the Africans in his "Heart of Darkness". Europeans not only misrepresented the African natives but also the jungle. He describes natives as devils, red eyed devils full of greed. In this novel Conrad has an obsession with skin colour, he describes natives as being black and everything

being black related to Africa. In the scene of Kurtz's death, Africans are described as savages with wild eyes and using not a good language.

The book opens on the River Thames, serene, calm, resting peacefully, "at the decline of the day after ages of good service done to the race that peopled its bank" (Conrad, 1902, p.2). But its actual story takes place on the River Congo, the very antithesis of the Thames. It is not used for any kind of service and enjoys no old age service credit. We are told that, "Going up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world" (Conrad, 1902, p.39).

The two rivers are shown totally opposite to each other, contrasted to each other, one is symbol of civilization while on the other hand other is the symbol of uncivilized forces and primitivism. Early in his journey, Marlow sees a group of black men driving boats. He praises their naturalness, strength, and energy, life likeness and senses. This notion leads him to believe that he still belongs to a world of reason. The feeling is for the time being, however, for it is not long before Marlow, too, comes to see the Africans as some subhuman form of life and to use the language of his day in referring to them as "barbarians," "niggers," "blacks", "cannibals" and "savages". In the novel "Heart of Darkness" natives are represented as exotic others as none of the natives have proper names, they are described as black shapes and shadows to represent them as others and as an antithesis to the whiteness of the European world. African natives are no more than cannibals for Europeans. They are represented as inferior to Europeans as they are represented as cannibals. The prospect of cannibalism appear when a group of men save Marlow on the river.

In order to justify the act of colonialism, the Europeans regard the natives as cannibals. Booker says that the representation of Africans as cannibals make the Europeans seem civilizing and also shows the superiority of Europeans over African natives. Marlow does not protest or try to interfere when he sees six Africans forced to work with chains about their necks. He calls what he sees in their eyes the "deathlike indifference of unhappy savages." He describes them as barbaric, uncivilized and savages. He says about black African that he was "a savage who was no more account than a grain of sand in a black Sahara." (Conrad, 1902). So in this way Conrad has shown native Africans as slaves, savages, brutes, barbaric and uncivilized and in contrast he has presented Europeans as masters, civilized and intelligent. Marlow refers to the "savage who was fireman" as "an improved specimen". He compares him to "a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind legs" (Conrad, 1902, p.43).

Conrad was a racist who depicted the Western imagination of their superiority and inferiority of Africans. He would often mix ignorance with racism when he described the natives by saying that, "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" (Conrad, 1902, p.42)

It may be said that in Heart of Darkness, the narrator is talking about a story in which the very humanity of black people is called into question. They are represented as exotic others, inferiors and uncivilized. Though he did not originate the image of Africa which we find in his book, it was and is the dominant image of Africa in the Western imagination and Conrad merely brought the peculiar gifts of his own mind to bear on it. It is the categorization which is made by Westerner's, through which they represent themselves as superiors and Africans as inferiors. Conrad has socially categorized people in his novel which led to his conformity to racism. His ignorance of not completely "giving the natives human status" leads him to social categorization.

CONCLUSION

In “Heart of Darkness”, binary oppositions between the colonizers and colonized are created. West is represented as the “Self” and as the “Other”. The process of “Othering” is at the very core of the novel “Heart of Darkness”. Achebe calls Conrad a racist. He says that a novella which so dehumanizes a portion of the human race should not be considered a great work of art. The concept of “Othering” is used by Europeans to create a strong African identity from an African standpoint. The creation of an African identity is the most important roles of European writers. The differences between civilization and barbarism in the novel are represented as blacks, barbarians, lazy, cruel, illiterate, secretive and uncivilized. The white people and white things are presented as images of civilization. The barbarians are then seen as the “Others”.

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