

Review

Critical Reading of the Whites and the Blacks' Discriminatory Coexistence in J.Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

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In Joseph Conrad's novella, *Heart of Darkness*, the narrative explores the coexistence of Whites and Blacks in a discriminatory and oppressive manner. This abstract focuses on the critical reading of this aspect within the novella. *Heart of Darkness* depicts the journey of the protagonist, Marlow, into the heart of Africa, where he encounters the brutal exploitation of the African people by European colonizers. The novella raises important questions about power dynamics, racism, and the dehumanization of the African population. One key aspect of the discriminatory coexistence portrayed in the novella is the stark contrast between the white colonizers and the black natives. Conrad presents the white characters as superior and civilized, while the African natives are depicted as primitive and savage. This portrayal perpetuates harmful stereotypes and reinforces the idea of white supremacy. Furthermore, Conrad's use of language and imagery contributes to the dehumanisation of the African people. They are often referred to as "savages" or "brutes" reducing their identities to mere stereotypes. So, by critically examining the discriminatory coexistence between the Whites and the Blacks in *Heart of Darkness*, readers can gain insights into the complex dynamics of power, racism, and oppression.

Keywords : Africans, Europeans, Discrimination ; hatred ; deshumanisation,

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INTRODUCTION

Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad is a novella which presents a view of a past plunged into worldwide racism. This phenomenon has been the source of many horrors throughout the world. Through this book Conrad reveals the causes, the manifestations and some consequences of this phenomenon. *Heart of Darkness*, inspired by Conrad's journey to the Congo in 1890, written in

England in 1898-1899 and published in 1899 is made up of 130 pages. The 130 pages of the book are subdivided into three (3) chapters. The story opens on the Thames River outside London, where Marlow is telling the story that makes up *Heart of Darkness*. Events of this story take place in Brussels, at the Company's offices, and in the Congo, then a Belgian territory. Then, the present work focuses on the Critical Reading of the Whites and the Blacks' Discriminatory Coexistence in Joseph

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

The critical study of the discriminatory coexistence between black and white in the novel *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad is an in-depth analysis of the racial and colonial themes present in the literary work. In this novel, Conrad explores the horrors of colonization in Africa, using the main character, Marlow, to narrate his journey across the Congo River. As Marlow progresses in his journey, he comes face to face with the brutality of European colonization and how it oppresses and exploits African populations. One of the main criticisms of the work is the depiction of African characters, which are often dehumanized and reduced to racist stereotypes. Africans are often portrayed as savage, primitive and devoid of any form of humanity. This degrading portrayal reinforces racial prejudice and perpetuates inequalities between whites and blacks. Another criticism concerns the role of white people in the novel. Although Conrad denounces the brutality of colonization, he does not fundamentally question the colonial system itself. White people are presented as brave and intrepid explorers, but they are also complicit in the oppression and exploitation of African populations. The critical study of the discriminatory coexistence between black and white in *Heart of Darkness* sheds light on the problems of racism, discrimination and social injustice that were present in the colonial era and which have repercussions even today.

Theoretical Background of the Study

Introduction to the Study

This chapter deals with the problem statement, the research purposes and the significance of the study. It also contains the conceptual definition and limitation of the study.

Problem Statement

The problem this research work raised is to know the different reasons behind the discrimination widespread in the novella. What brings such of discrimination occurred in the novella. Why do the Whites misbehave with the Blacks?

Research Purposes

The sharpening of the inhumanity of whites with blacks in the novella is the main reason that brought us to engage in a Critical Reading of the Whites and the Blacks discriminatory coexistence. The next reason that has been taken into account for the choice of the topic is to present the negative representation that the Whites have of the Blacks as an uncultured and uncivilized society.

Significance of the Study

This research work is important because it will help us to understand the unequal power relation existing between the Whites and Blacks, the hegemony created by the West through their literary works. In addition, the present research work is significant because it can serve as a tool for scholars and maybe as an inspiration for some students while in search of writing their dissertation in the area of British literature.

Conceptual Definition and Limitation of the Study

Conceptual Definition of the main themes

'**Discriminatory Coexistence**' can be qualified in another word as 'intersectionality' which means "because you are a minority, you get special standards, special treatment in the eyes of some", according to Kimberlé Crenshaw. This expression refers to the discrimination occurring when different groups of persons with different characteristics are called to live together. The rights that some have in the eyes of others because of the difference between them. The difference can be the sex, the language, the skin color, etc

Limitation of the Study

The present research work is a personal view based on the ways Whites treat blacks for many years. They still have many other aspects of the book that can also be high-lighted. But this work is only focused on the Whites and the Blacks' discriminatory coexistence occurring in the book.

Research Methodology

I have firstly used data collection. After carrying out the data collection, I consider the novella. Then, I explore the novella and use qualitative method as research method to study the causes of discrimination as exposed by Joseph Conrad.

Literature Review

It is important to look at both colonialism and postcolonialism at the same time. In fact, during colonialism the idea of postcolonialism grew. Most written records show that colonization happened during the end of the nineteenth century. Ania Loomba in the book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* says that colonialism is the act of taking over the land and property of another people and ruling over it. How do different kinds of ideas help colonialism spread? The West thought that all Africans were barbarians because they didn't think they were smart enough to help civilize the continent. Eric

Allina in her writing "Transforming 'beasts into men': colonialism, forced labor, and racism in Africa" mentions that:

"Colonial authorities across the continent said that Africans had to work no matter what. Several rules made this possible, but they all relied on the idea that Africans had the intelligence or morality to figure out how much their work was worth. During the time that Europeans colonized Africa, slavery was illegal, but the Europeans thought that Africans would be eager to work if the area got better"¹ (Allina, 8-9).

Even though European colonizers said that European culture would "save" Africans, colonization made it more likely that Africans would be forced to work in new ways. Africa had to change into a modern culture where the level of civilization of its people was measured by how much they looked like Westerners. Young says:

"European culture was (and still is) thought to be the basis and standard for legitimate ideas about government, law, economics, science, language, music, art, and literature..." (Young, 19)

It is hard to explain what is going on without knowing how capitalists see colonialism. Loomba says in his book that: "*colonialism contributed to the rise of capitalism in Europe*" or that "*the transition to capitalism in Europe could not have happened without the development of colonialism*"² (10). The idea of colonization brought Europe a lot of wealth. In his study Neocolonialism author Afisi Oseni Taiwo looks at how money fits into the idea of colonialism. He says that:

"Europeans first tried to colonize when they started looking for trade opportunities outside of their own place and found that other different countries, especially Africa, had a lot of natural assets that could help them make money" (Afisi,17).

In this way, the European colonizers in *Heart of Darkness* went to Congo and colonized the place for getting ivory, a very valuable thing. Otherwise, there is an important point which has to be highlighted. This is to know if Conrad is actually racist or not? First of all, let me mention that Achebe and Watts help us enough to better

understand this question. a journal article titled "A Bloody Racist': About Achebe's View of Conrad," author Cedric Watts talks about Achebe's paper "An Image of Africa" and says: "*No doubt the paper had the value of arousing vigorous debate*"³(197). Besides, while talking about Achebe's claims about Conrad's racism; Watts mentions:

"The blacks are dehumanized and degraded, seen as grotesque or as a howling mob. They are denied speech, or are granted speech only to condemn themselves out of their own mouths. Furthermore, Marlow (who is Conrad's mouthpiece) is guilty of liberalism, which entails a **paternalist** form of racialism. As the tale unfolds, the author displays 'a preposterous and perverse kind of arrogance in...reducing Africa to the role of props for the breakup of one pretty European mind.' However talented Conrad may be, his tale preaches racial intolerance; it is on the side of enslavement rather than deliverance; and it is therefore to be condemned." (Watts, 197)

To finish, there is also a current work titled: "A Critical Analysis of *Heart of Darkness* and Things Fall Apart: Successful or Unsuccessful Counter-Discourse of Conrad's Novella?" written in 2022 by Nabila Tansia, student in the Department of English and Humanities of Brace University, which aims to analyze whether Conrad was actually critical against colonialism or did he inherit racist traits more despite being a writer of the modernist period.

Exploration of racial discrimination in *Heart of Darkness*

Heart of darkness is simply a piece of art very impressive and fascinating. The art lies in the depiction of imperialistic approach: unsympathetic and inhuman relationship of the natives of central Africa and European colonizers who became an embodiment of evil due to his prolonged stay in the dark continent of Congo. It contains many autobiographical elements and its narrator Marlow is regarded as the mouthpiece of Joseph Conrad: but in spite of their much resemblance they also differ a little. In fact, the first chapter of the novella is an excellent synthesis of various themes. All the themes are related to two major characters: Charles Marlow and Mr. Kurtz. The themes used in the novel are: evil, imperialism, madness because of Colonization, lack of self-restraint, isolation, Moral corruption, Human Greed, the exploration of

¹ Allina, Eric. "Transforming 'beasts into men': colonialism, forced labour and racism in Africa." *Open Democracy*, 2015.

²Loomba, Ania .*Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. 2nd ed. London & New York: Routledge, 2005. O'Reilly, Christopher. *Post-Colonial Literature*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

³ Watts, Cedric. "'A Bloody Racist': About Achebe's View of Conrad." *The Yearbook of English Studies*, vol. 13, 1983, pp. 196–209.

darkness and theme of reality and appearance.

Critics of the Novella

Critical Analysis of the Whites and the Blacks' Discriminatory Coexistence

This analysis has dealt with Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Indeed, the story of the novel is a complex exploration of the attitudes people hold on what constitutes a barbarian versus a civilized society and the attitudes on colonialism and racism that were part of European imperialism. In Conrad's text Africa's image is portrayed as a dark, primitive location containing savage uncultured people. The savages in the Congo are evil because of the primitive instincts which dominate them and the civilized men of the white cities have become corrupt because of the vices of civilization. From the beginning of the story; racism can be seen in different forms. Conrad shows his racist attitude mainly by depicting the native Africans as black, ugly, cannibals, savages, calling them "niggers" etc. such demeaning names. Always using the word "nigger" indicates how the white people considered themselves as racially superior because of having white skin. The black people in Conrad's text have been portrayed almost similar to animals:

"It was paddled by black fellows. You could see from afar the white of their eyeballs glistening. They shouted, sang; their bodies streamed with perspiration; they had faces like grotesque masks-these chaps; but they had bone, muscle, a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement..."⁴ (Conrad 20).

So, many people think Conrad showed racist traits more by wasting too many words in describing in an insulting way the behaviors, appearance and activities of Congolese instead of criticizing more about the brutal aspects of imperialism and the inhuman treatment of the whites on the blacks. Otherwise, in response to all those humiliations a great African writer named Chinua Achebe protests against these insults and dehumanizes the Africans in his criticism. Achebe's belief is that using words like savage, nigger, etc. was in the purpose of presenting Africans as less than human beings. Instead of using any name or respectful word to indicate the Africans; Conrad used such words like black shapes, nigger, etc. throughout *Heart of Darkness*. But, when describing whites he used words like: angel, intelligent, genius, miracle.... For example, when describing the

chief accountant of the Outer station Marlow says:

"I met a white man, in such an unexpected elegance of get-up that in the first moment I took him for a sort of vision. I saw a high starched collar, white cuffs, a light alpaca jacket, snowy trousers, a clean necktie, and varnished boots. No hat. Hair parted, brushed, oiled, under a green-lined parasol held in a big white hand. He was amazing, and had a penholder behind his ear. 'I shook hands with this miracle...' "⁵(Conrad 26).

This novel is an exploration of hypocrisy, ambiguity, and moral confusion. Indeed, this story reveals the real face of humanity and how people coexist according to their skin color.

Personal Stand on the Whites and the Blacks' Discriminatory Coexistence

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, helps us to understand better well the topic **of this research work. Since, many years ago till now, a kind of discrimination** has been observed between whites and blacks: racial discrimination. The Whites considered themselves superior to the Blacks because of their skin color. And through Conrad's novella we witness a lot of events that prove that. The way the whites are described is opposite to the Blacks. This novella is a perfect example of colonization: the way Europeans treated black people during colonial time. It is a pity to see human beings be mistreated, denied and threatened like animals because of their skin color. At that time, blacks were sold as articles of no value, exchanged with goods such as: mirror, sugar, clothesetc.

The whites come to Africa for our resources such: raw materials and labors. In order to cover their crime they come up with ideas like the native people cannot run their own governments and live in stagnant, unproductive societies that need help from the outside to get better. Despite this exploitation which has broken us for many years until now, they also take the control of the colonized governments by dictating rules in our political system, administration, in education, medicine, even in our own society and culture. All this happens because they underplay themselves and trust in westerner's hypocritical kindness. Those cannibals, white outside but black inside. But, through his work Achebe disproves the Western prejudiced ideas that indigenous African people are inferior, uncivilized and barbaric. A current example that Africans should imitate is the one of Ghana's

⁴ Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. London: Penguin Classics, 1899.

⁵ Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. London: Penguin Classics, 1899.

president who surprised Macron with a rejection of development aid. Indeed, in a joint press conference with Macron, the president of Ghana, Nana Akufo-Addo says:

“We can no longer pursue a policy for our countries and regions that is based on the support given by the West, France or the European Union. This has not worked and it will not work. It is not right for a country like Ghana – 60 years after its independence – to depend on the generosity of European taxpayers when it comes to financial means for health or education,”⁶

Macron was visibly surprised by the statements made by the Ghanaian president. This is a greater time and moment to speak with conviction and courage. If only other Africa's presidents can do like the president Nana Akufo-Addo, make sure that Africans get their freedom and be “self”.

Perspectives

Economical domain

Racial discrimination in the economical domain is a pervasive problem that affects many individuals and communities. It includes unequal access to job opportunities, lower wages, and limited access to credit and financial services. However, efforts to promote financial literacy and provide access to affordable credit and financial services can help reduce economic disparities.

Social domain

This can manifest in various forms such as unequal access to education, healthcare, housing, and job opportunities. Discrimination can also be seen in social interactions and attitudes towards individuals of different races. Addressing racial discrimination in the social domain includes challenging stereotypes and biases, promoting cultural awareness and understanding, and creating opportunities for marginalized communities to have their voices heard and their needs met.

⁶ Ghana's Akufo-Addo joins Macron to pitch new role for African diaspora.
<https://www.google.com/amp/s/amp.rfi.fr/en/africa/20190712-Ghana-Akufo-Addo-joins-Macron-pitch-new-role-African-diaspora>.

Professional domain

In this domain racial discrimination can manifest in various forms such as unequal access to job opportunities, pay disparities, and discriminatory practices in hiring and promotion. Racial discrimination in the professional domain can perpetuate systemic racism and limit opportunities for marginalized groups.

Addressing racial discrimination in the professional domain requires an engagement to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion

Educational domain

In this domain, racial discrimination can manifest in various forms such as unequal access to educational resources, biased disciplinary practices, and discriminatory admissions policies. Addressing racial discrimination in this domain includes executing policies and practices that promote equal opportunity and fair treatment for all students, regardless of their race or ethnicity.

Political domain

In this domain, this can manifest in various forms such as voter suppression, discriminatory policies and practices. Addressing racial discrimination in this domain requires recognizing the ‘intersectionality’ of race, gender, and other identity factors and working towards solutions that promote equity and justice for all.

Religious domain

Racial discrimination in this domain can have a significant impact on individuals and communities, leading to feelings of alienation and marginalization. However, education about diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism can help to combat discriminatory attitudes and behaviors within religious institutions.

Health domain

This can manifest in various forms such as unequal access to healthcare, differential treatment based on race or ethnicity, and implicit biases held by healthcare providers. However, addressing racial discrimination in the healthcare domain includes executing policies and practices that promote equal access to healthcare for all individuals, regardless of their race or ethnicity.

Musical domain

Historically, Black musicians were excluded from mainstream music scenes and were forced to create their own genres and styles. This exclusion continued even

after integration, as many Black artists were still marginalized and faced obstacles in gaining recognition and success. And the story of the king of hip-hop, Michael Jackson is a concrete example.

Environmental domain

Racial discrimination can manifest in various forms such as unequal access to clean air and water, exposure to environmental hazards, and disproportionate impacts of climate change. Otherwise, addressing racial discrimination in this domain requires an engagement to promote environmental justice and equity.

Cultural domain

Racial discrimination in the cultural domain is a serious issue that affects individuals and communities worldwide. Addressing and combating racial discrimination in the cultural domain requires collective efforts, including education, speech for the defense and policy changes.

CONCLUSION

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is a popular and great work of literature. It helps us to make a critical reading of the Whites and the Black's Discriminatory coexistence with evidence. However, after analysis we remark that Conrad is a racist who, despite the animosity of his brothers white tries to embellish their crimes with words. Otherwise, Achebe has wonderfully shown the authentic story of the native black Africans and their long history, traditions and culture in his article, "An image of Africa" by proving so many of the Western prejudices wrong. It can undoubtedly be regarded as successful discourse against the novella *Heart of Darkness*. Achebe depicts both pre-colonial and colonial periods to show how the existing indigenous culture and customs begin to fall apart after the arrival of the Europeans. Achebe feels it is crucial to reclaim the native history. So, Africans through the great work of Achebe have to open eyes on their wealth and remark how valuable, beautiful, strong, gorgeous, smart and most civilized there are. They have to stop thinking that the languages and customs of Europe are the best way to live. Africans demean themselves by thinking that Africa must change into a modern culture where the level of civilization of its people is measured by how much they looked like Westerners.

This is what pushes Africa down and not allows him to be free. And as Bill Gate says: "*Don't compare yourself with anyone in this world. If you do so, you are insulting yourself*". To finish, let's emphasize that a truthful success depends on the way you get it and also depends on your attitude. Attitude in fact, is what determines you. If you want to become the best version of you, you have

to work on your attitude. So, it is time for Africa to work on his attitude in order to become his best version.

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