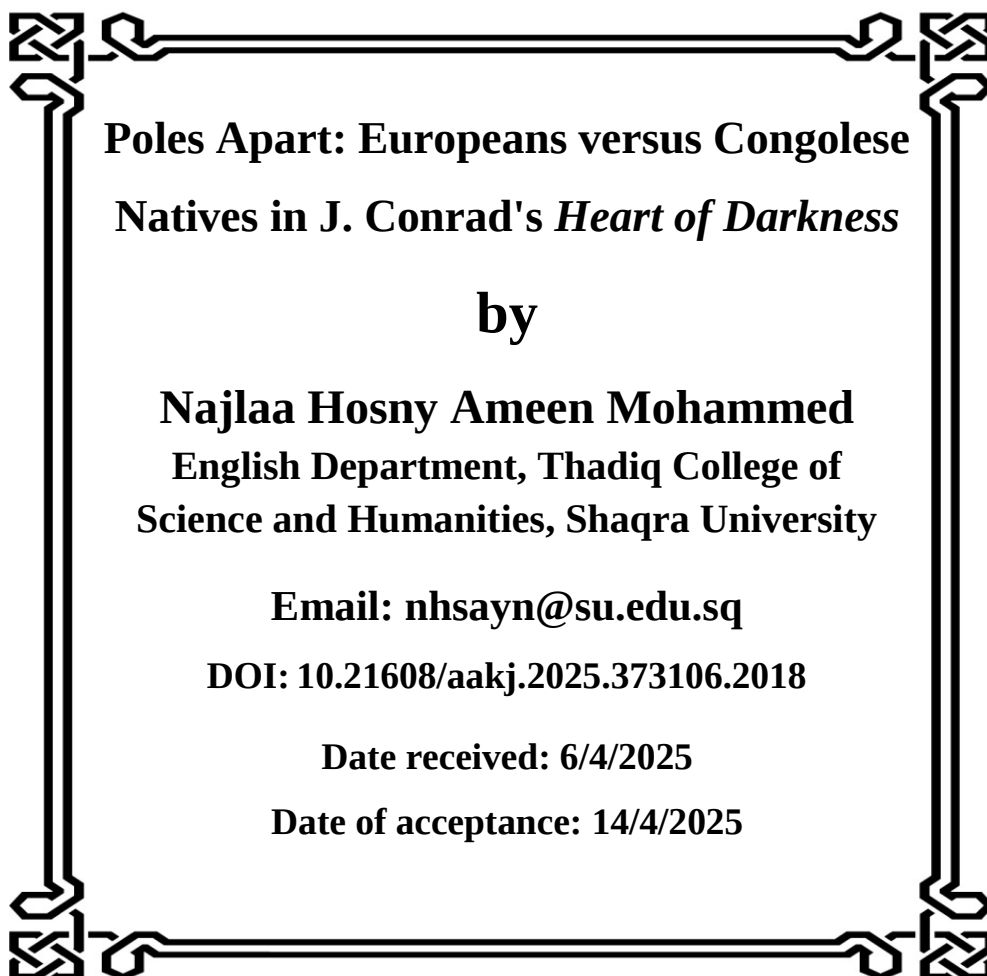




**Poles Apart: Europeans versus Congolese
Natives in J. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness***

by

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Abstract:

This article, titled Poles Apart: Europeans versus Congolese Natives in J. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, is divided into four sections. The introduction puts forth the topic and the dimensions that will be investigated. The next section: Europeans in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* concerns itself with representations of Europeans in Conrad's novella. The third section of the novella: Congolese Natives as Represented in J. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, explores the stereotypical representations of the (African) Congolese natives in Conrad's work. In addition, the narrator's honesty is questioned and refuted. The Conclusion section brings the article to a close by stressing the point that the gaps between Europeans and the Congolese are unbridgeable.

Keywords: Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, Europeans, Congolese Natives – Postcolonialism

**أقطاب متنافرة: الأوروبيون والكونغوليون في رواية قلب الظلام
للروائي جوزيف كونرد**

الملخص:

يدرس هذا البحث الهوية الكبيرة التي تفصل بين المستعمر الأوروبي والمستعمر الكونغولي في رواية قلب الظلام للروائي جوزيف كونرد. ينقسم البحث الى أربعة أجزاء. المقدمة تقدم للبحث وأهميته والأسئلة التي سيتم الإجابة عنها. يناقش الجزء الثاني فكرة الأوروبي كإله أو على أقل تقدير ككائن أسمى وأعلى من البشر. يتم ذلك من خلال مناقشة صور كيرتس ومارلو و"الخجاج" في الرواية. يوضح الجزء الثالث صورة الكونغوليين كمخلوقات ليست بشرية. فالكونغوليون في عيون الأوروبيين هم مخلوقات وحشية وهمجية وهم اكلي لحوم البشر يسكنون الأشجار ولغتهم الإشارات والصيحات وهم يزحفون أو يخبون وبذلك فهم أقرب لأن يكونوا حيوانات وحشية من أن يكونوا بشرا. يخلص البحث الى ان الهوية التي تفصل بين الأوروبيين والكونغوليين لا يمكن تخطيها وما من نقاط التقاء بين هذين القطبين المتنافرين.

كلمات مفتاحية: جوزيف كونرد، رواية قلب الظلام، الأوروبيون، الكونغوليون، ما بعد الاستعمار.

Introduction:

To start with, this article aims at exploring the gaps that distance Europeans from Congolese natives as shown in Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness*. The article asserts that, through his continual dehumanizing of Congolese natives and, on the other extreme, exalting the images of Europeans, Conrad's novella creates an ever-distancing, unbridgeable gap that keeps Europeans and the Congolese poles apart.

Even though this study goes within the framework of postcolonial scholarship, it promises of a new reading of the novella. *Heart of Darkness* was not previously investigated through such a contrastive standpoint; one that is strikingly exposing of the narrator's (European) over-inflated sense of egoistic conceit accompanied by a shockingly dehumanizing attitude towards the nonwhite races, especially black Africans. Essential theoretical concepts of postcolonialism, including othering and stereotyping, will be utilized and applied to the text. It is worth noting that most of the studies conducted on this canonically touchstone novella focused almost entirely on (post)colonial aspects as proffered in the work. This articles, however, promises of a different reading of the work that, even though it goes within the same trope of postcolonialism, promises of presenting a new reading that will focus primarily on the unbridgeable gaps that separate Europeans from the Congolese.

The article will respond the following questions: how are Europeans and Congolese native represented as essentially different in J. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*? To what extent can Marlow/Conrad (the narrator/the author) be looked at as a snobbish and racist?

As they are represented in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Europeans and Congolese natives are poles apart. Europeans are everything the Congolese are not, and vice versa. So unbridgeable is the gap that separates one party from the other. As Marlow, the narrator, simply states:

we whites...‘must necessarily appear to [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings—we approach them with the might as of a deity,’ and so on, and so on. ‘By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded,’ etc., etc. From that point [Kurtz] soared and took me with him. (74)

Poles apart are Europeans and the Congolese natives as depicted all along the text. It is true; no point of convergence can be made out in the horizons where both poles may ever come to a meeting point. It is the disparity Kipling stated bluntly in the opening lines of “The Ballad of the East and the West”, published in 1889: “Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,/Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God’s great Judgment Seat” (kiplingsociety.co.uk). Such lines have stood out for so long a time as signposting divergence rather than convergence at whatever point. This has proved to be a long-standing maxim that has stood out like a waving flag of (post)colonial studies.

As the novella asserts it, there seems nothing in common that may even bring two such poles together at any point. What really matters is that differences are essentially species-determining in the sense that they implant in readers’ minds that while Europeans are human beings the Congolese natives are not. Divergence rather than convergence, difference rather than accordance feature

prominently all through the novella. Though they sometimes walk on their feet human-like, Congolese natives also creep (57) and “crawl” (88) at other times.

Europeans in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* Marlow's (Conrad's): Snobbishness and Racism

As a matter of fact, Marlow never misses a chance to degenerate and dehumanize Congolese citizens in ways that leave readers really skeptic about the very nature of the species such creatures are. He, thus, repeatedly reminds his readers that such beings are closer to animals than humans. He tells readers that such creatures, animals-like, “walk...on all-fours” (38). Elsewhere, speaking of one of such creatures, Marlow asserts that “he can't walk—he is crawling on all-fours” (98). He recurrently reminds readers that such “creatures”, the word he repeatedly uses to refer to natives, are not human-like. “One of these creatures rose to his hands and knees, and went off on all-fours towards the river to drink” (23). Such sentences, phrases and the like of them instill in readers' minds the idea that such are not human beings; at best they can be nothing more than a sub-human species or else, they are animals that probably only skeletally bear some resemblance to human beings. The words “crawl”, “crawled” and “crawling” are mentioned many times in the text to describe how such creatures move. The author keeps reminding readers that such creatures are crawlers or creepers, thence, through such countless repetitions of images and through the cunning use of such words, those “creatures” are stereotyped into animal-like beings and this cements into the readers' minds the idea that such creatures can by no means be human beings. In his book *Key Concepts in Contemporary Literature*, Steve Padley asserts Conrad's “racial stereotyping of African natives” in *Heart of Darkness* (176).

The Congolese characters in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* are, more often than not, no more than "ants" (19, 86), "phantoms" (52, 89, 103), and "apparition[s]" (90, 91). Speaking of one of the natives, Marlow asserts that, like other natives, such one is no more than a ghost, and asserts that "it seemed to me that if I tried I could poke my forefinger through him" (37). Elsewhere, he dubs natives "brutes" (36, 40, 74), and insists on seeing them as no more than animal-like beings that walk on all-fours (98).

Marlow's (Conrad's) is, undoubtedly, a persistently racist outlook that discriminates, degrades and excludes, such "creatures" from being humans basically on the grounds of their "black" (17, 19, 20, 22) and "bronze" (66, 90, 91) skin color. All through the novella, the narrator keeps reminding his readers that such creatures are "black" ones, as if he were wondering whether tar-black creatures can ever be considered human beings. Contextually, the answers, as implied sometimes and directly stated at others, are in the negative! He, thus, keeps reminding his readers that such natives are "black" ones; "A black figure stood up, strode on long black legs, waving long black arms, across the glow" (99). "Black" is such a word that is repeated numerous times as this sentence indicates.

After nurturing his readers' minds with such countless exclusive ideas that dehumanize such exotic beings, Marlow finds that he has reached a point at which he can refer to them as nonhumans, more specifically as animals. He uses the pronoun "it" to refer to a native creature that belonged to such a species, "It had horns—antelope horns, I think—on its head" (99). The narrator's honesty and trustability should, therefore, be questioned rather than being blindly accepted. John Mullan may have had this same idea in mind when, discussing Conrad and few other novelists, he

asserts, “[t]he novelist undoes the repressed...For omniscience brings its own problems” (67).

Kurtz: A Deity-Like Figure

The gap that separates Europeans from Congolese natives in terms of the very being of each, as shown in the novella, can be as vast as the one that may exist between humans and God. The Kurtz instance is even more difficult to conceptualize. Swollen pride, hubris indeed, drove Kurtz into creating a God-like image of himself. As the Harlequin asserts, “[y]ou can’t judge Mr. Kurtz as you would an ordinary man. No, no, no!” (83-4). It is true; to the Congolese citizens, he took up the role of a deity. “Kurtz wanted an audience” (83) of worshippers, readers are told. He succeeded in getting many followers who worshipped him and performed rituals in tribute, “unspeakable rites”, to him (74). This represents European boundless egocentrism. Natives spoke of him with all such awe and respect that astonished Marlow greatly, “the tone of these words was so extraordinary that I looked at him searchingly. It was curious to see how a citizen mingled eagerness and reluctance to speak of Kurtz. The man filled his life, occupied his thoughts, swayed his emotions” (84).

Striking as it may sound, this is what Kurtz managed to formulate the relationship between himself and the Congolese natives into. To them, he stood out God-like. He remarkably used certain means of technology to dazzle such creatures into believing him to be a god, “he came to them with thunder and lightning, you know— and they had never seen anything like it—and very terrible” (84). In such ways, he misled them; and “they adored him” (84). As a matter of fact, Kurtz is one of the worst examples of how the colonizer permeates and spoils all the aspects of life as well as

the consciousness of the colonized, “Britain’s imperial destiny was a pervasive one” (Watson 346). Kurtz, thus, seeped into and colonized the consciousness of the Congolese natives. Like Kurtz, Europeans, deliberately enough formulated the relationship between them and the Congolese on this very basis: God-creatures relationship. It is this very sense of over-inflated egoism and of negligence of the other that encouraged god-like Kurtz to claim possession of land and its creatures, “‘My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my—’ everything belonged to him” (71).

In R. L. Stevenson’s *The Beach of Falesa* (1892), set in the South Seas, Case, a Kurtz-like figure, tricks the natives and makes them believe that he is a supernatural, god-like figure, through employing and synchronizing some technological paraphernalia, “Case beguiles the natives [with] an Aeolian harp, a luminous painted idol, and such items” (literariness.org/ 2022/05).

Kurtz is exemplary of how European powers only misguided and exploited the nations/lands they colonized, and never thought of civilizing such nations; the mission is far away from being a civilizing one. Such were only the announced missions, the pretexts, and the veils under which European colonizers intruded such poor countries. Such were the masks that hid the ugly faces of colonization. Like Kurtz, Europeans, built their glory on the ruins of other weaker nations; they looted the treasures, resources and wealth of other weaker countries, “[t]he conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from [others] is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much” (7).

Even when they built churches for the colonized in the lands they invaded, European colonizers aimed primarily to subdue natives of the colonized countries, and to guarantee their loyalties to

the white man. In his book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), F. Fanon asserts, “[t]he Church in the colonies is the white people’s Church, the foreigner’s Church. She does not call the native to God’s ways but to the ways of the white man, of the master, of the oppressor” (openanthropology.org). As Shafquat Towheed asserts:

The empire was a mirror in which the British saw themselves as they wanted to be seen: powerful, resourceful, enterprising, hardworking, virtuous, Christians, bringers of progress, civilization and emancipation. This vision of the British mission abroad was often at odds with reality... (Watson 346)

The Congolese landscape exposed European mindscape: European greed, lust for power, gratification, egocentrism and geographic expansion as well as robbing the lands of the weaker nations of their treasures. In one of her poems, Uju Asika expressed this idea that such European colonizers, “Chew[ed] on the meat of our culture, / and pick[ed] their teeth with our backbones (Kadija66)”. The poem dismantles the European cunning and greed. It is noteworthy that it was Belgium that, under the reign of Leopold II, colonized the Congo, from 1908 to 1960. Other European powers, however, got their shares of the Belgian Congo, as predators would on hunting a prey. Marlow asserts that “the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human consciousness” (peterharrington.co.uk). European greed, aggression, violence, pretense proved to be limitless. Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) once said, “Earth provides enough to satisfy every man’s needs, but not every man’s greed” (upscfactory.in/earth).

British (European) insatiable greed and geographic expansions cannot be understood without a reference to such maps that Europeans kept for all the wealth and treasures of the different nations. Significantly, Ralph, in W. Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, says to the other boys, "My father's in the navy. He said there aren't any unknown islands left. He says the Queen has a big room full of maps and all the islands in the world are drawn there" (38-9). Maps are of great importance to colonial orientations. They are importantly dealt with in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*:

when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, 'When I grow up I will go there.' (8)

This can further be developed into dwelling on the idea of maps that identify the different treasures of the world, of which the Catalan map is one. These are, of course, different from political maps that show the borders between one country and another/others. In Mali, King Mansa Musa was the richest king on earth at his time. He was the only one represented on the Catalan map (caravans.library). Gold has been stolen and, up until today, the citizens in Mali are still striving for fresh water!

Colonizing Europe, it is true, robbed and sacked African nations. They built their glories on the back of the weak conquered nations. They stood "on the back of other [nations]/ to get a good view of ourselves (66)". What is even more is that such European

colonizing powers convinced the natives of such nations that they are torchbearers of lightening, harbingers of light and missionaries of civilization. They, however, abused the populations of African lands, stole their treasures, robbed their natural resources, enslaved the populace and defaced natives' cultures. In short, they left such countries in such grossly deplorable states that no country could have its, so to speak, colonial wounds healed.

Such are crimes committed against humanity. Almost all African countries had the wealth of their countries stolen, and they were ultimately denied the very basic right of being considered human beings. Thus, in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, natives are seen one time "like ants" (19) and another "ants" (86). The difference between simile and metaphor implies the great degree of demotion, humiliation and dehumanizing. Such were practices adopted by European powers.

The Pilgrims

The Pilgrims, a European group "sixteen or twenty" in number (34), are an important phenomenon introduced in the work. They are, the narrator tells readers, "the Eldorado Exploring Expedition" (43). Throughout the novella, the narrator always calls them pilgrims; a word mentioned thirty four times in the text. According to the *Cambridge Dictionary*, a pilgrim is, "a person who travels to a holy place as a religious act", "a person who makes a journey, often a long and difficult one, to a special place for religious reasons" (dictionary.cambridge.org/). The word, thus, has its religious bearings, the question to be posed here is what sacred shrine is their destination. As a matter of fact, the word can be taken to unveil Conrad's own belief that the world is "godless" (Cawelti 173). The word indicates that the new European belief will be in capitalism rather than in traditional

religions, but it will be in materialism. Capitalism will be the new god of Europe! Elaborating on this point of European overwhelming creed of capitalism, Caitlin Vandertop quotes, “Capital is the only real and omnipotent God” (1). Describing the group as “pilgrims” is, thus, of great significance. Such are worshippers of gold. Europeans are described by Marlow as “hunters for gold” (3).

European Women

For disparity between the two poles of the title to be perfected, representations of European women and Congolese female “beings” (89) can be brought into questions. Even European women are part and parcel different from Congolese women. European women, as represented in the novella, are human beings in their own right. They are well represented even though the narrator asserts that, “[i]t’s queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there has never been anything like it, and never can be” (15). Marlow is, however, fully aware of their influential roles in European manipulation of the world. His aunt, who helped him get his job through the help of, “the wife of a very high personage in the Administration” (9) provides one example in this respect.

Throughout the novella, Marlow refers to the importance of women and their influential relationships. The image of the two women, mostly symbolizing Europe, knitting black wool is importantly utilized to foreshadow something of great importance being planned and a plot being concocted, “two women, one fat and the other slim, sat on straw-bottomed chairs, knitting black wool” (11). The image of such two women knitting black wool recurs many times in the novella to assert that something serious is being

engineered. The following quotation can speak volumes of the gist such an image can imply:

Often far away there I thought of these two, guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool as for a warm pall, one introducing, introducing continuously to the unknown, the other scrutinizing the cheery and foolish faces with unconcerned old eyes. Ave! Old knitter of black wool. (13)

This is seconded by Marlow's own assertion that Europeans who travel to the Congo are "sworn to secrecy" (43). He was so cautious that he asserted more than once, "I am not disclosing any trade secrets" (87). So grave was the issue and so dangerous was the plot that Marlow, on discovering what was taking place, confessed, "it seemed to me as if I also were buried in a vast grave full of unspeakable secrets" (94).

Congolese Natives as Represented in J. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

The Congolese through Marlow's (European) Eyes

As we see the world in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* through Marlow's own eyes, it will be through Marlow's own words that we can know how Europeans saw and thought about the Congolese. Marlow is the omniscient narrator of the novella. Through his words, we know what the characters said, did, were about to do, thought of, etc. The narrator's European bent of conceit manifests itself all through the work. The novella shows how Europeans looked at the Congolese, and the Africans in general. To Europeans,

the Congolese are like insects, hardly ever heeded or taken any notice of.

Throughout the novella, we saw the Congolese natives through the eyes of Marlow the narrator who, as many critics assert, represent Joseph Conrad, himself. The similarities between the author and the narrator are countless. The author-narrator interconnectedness is a weighty idea that helps readers understand Marlowe's European pride and prejudice as shown in the novella; it is the curse of Eurocentrism that plagues Europeans into believing that they are the loftiest of all races.

In spite of his almost prominent craftsmanship and eminent connoisseurship, Marlow can be found biased as he did not really try in one way or another to provide an balanced representation of the Congolese tradition. He did not even try, in one way or another, to delve into the Congolese culture. Indeed, he never wanted to believe those people had a culture of their own. His deliberate overlooking and slighting of such a nation, its people and culture are noticeable features of the work. This should, indeed, be taken against Conrad who did not mention anything about the culture of such a people. He did not even give such people the chance to introduce or represent themselves. In the introduction to his book *Orientalism*(1978), E. Said quotes, "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented" (xiii). Conrad's European self-centredness inevitably counts as a shortcoming. His insistence on belittling "those creatures" (113), undervaluing and obliterating everything that belonged to them can be taken against him. The Congolese natives in *Heart of Darkness* are objects; they are such silent things. The novella is exposing in the way it probes the author's integrity and credibility as a novelist. Even though his expertise and prowess outstandingly tower head and shoulders

beyond any doubts, he can be said to have failed the test of honesty as he deliberately and starkly denies the Congolese natives their own humanity on the grounds of their color of skin.

It should be acknowledged that though he is a great canonical writer, Conrad made a grave mistake by his utter ignoring of the rich literary human heritage Congolese natives (and Africans in general) have; such is a literary heritage is rich in mythologies, legends, folktales, fables and cults (academia.edu/103933240).

This work of Conrad's triggered Achebe's zeal to respond to such deliberate ignoring of important African human values and traditions. This is one of the main reasons why, in defense of African ancient literary tradition, Chinua Achebe wrote his *African Trilogy* *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960), and *The Arrow of God* (1964). In his trilogy, Achebe presented a proper representation of the great African literary heritage to defend it against the denial of European conceited outlook on other nations' traditions.

Europeans looked down upon the Congolese natives. To them, such natives are "like flies" (5) or "like ants" (19), but they can by no means be human beings. There are so many exclusive barriers that make it impossible for such Congolese natives to be looked at as humans. Europeans have always insisted that humanity and the color black are poles apart; they have associated black with dirt. "[I]t seemed to me that if I tried I could poke my forefinger through him, and would find nothing inside but a little loose dirt," said Marlow (37). Their black skin is one of the biggest barriers in this respect. In the poem, "Blots on the Landscape – To Whom It May Concern", anthologized in Kadija Sesay's *Burning Words, Flaming Images: Poems and Short Stories of African Descent*,

UjuAsika sends important messages to her natives who lost confidence in themselves and their humanity because of European humiliation, enslavement and subjugation of such nations. One such message is directed:

**To the mother who taught her son
who taught my cousin aged three
that she must wash more often
because her brownness was her dirtiness
That she must scrub her skin away... (65)**

Europeans plagued Africans with the thought that black skin is a barrier to humanity. Such is an idea that inculcated the inferiority complex (researchgate.net/publication) in the psyche of African nations. The problem lies in the skin. Black Africans are not human beings. This is one of the reasons why Jim, in Eugene O'Neill's drama *All God's Chillun Got Wings*(1924), tried to change his skin color by drinking a lot of "chalk", even though his stomach ached:

**Jim—[Suddenly.]; You know what, Ella? Since I
been tuckin' yo' books to school and back, I been
drinkin' lots o' chalk 'n' water tree times a day.
Dat Tom, de barber, he tole me dat make me white,
if I drink whiter? enough. [Pleadingly.]Does I look
whiter?**

Ella—[Comfortingly.] Yes—maybe—a little bit!

**Jim—[Trying a careless tone.] Reckon dat Tom's a
liar, an' de joke's on me! Dat chalk only makes me
feel kinder sick inside.**

Ella—[Wonderingly.] Why do you want to be white?

Jim—Because—just because—I lakdat better.

Ella—I wouldn't. I like black. Let's you and me swap. hands. I'd like to be black. [Clapping her Gee, that'd be fun, if we only could!

Jim—[Hesitatingly.] Yes—maybe——

Ella—Then they'd call me Crow, and you'd be Painty Face!

Jim—They wouldn't never dast call you nigger, you bet! I'd kill 'em! [A long pause. Finally she takes his hand shyly. They both keep looking as far away from each other as possible.]

Ella—I like you.

Jim—I like 'you.(coldreads.wordpress)

A snake can slough off its skin, but how can “Jim” remove or change his black skin? Africans have to undergo a life of servitude, and lead their lives as prisoners of their own skin. To be at odds with yourself is a curse; a curse it is to hate your complexion, to be reminded of your dehumanization and degeneration whenever you see your reflection in a mirror. With the natives' skin being such an invincible barrier that separates them from humanity: they are seen, through European eyes, as belonging to any species other than humans'. They can be animals, beasts, brutes or cannibals as the following quotation suggests:

**When we came abreast again, they faced the river,
stamped their feet, nodded their horned heads,**

swayed their scarlet bodies; they shook towards the fierce river-demon a bunch of black feathers, a mangy skin with a pendent tail—something that looked like a dried gourd; they shouted periodically together strings of amazing words that resembled no sounds of human language; and the deep murmurs of the crowd, interrupted suddenly, were like the responses of some satanic litany. (101-2)

To this very thought that Europeans proliferated about such innocent African citizens, UjuAsika replies:

**To those who call us cannibals
while chewing on the meat of our culture,
and picking their teeth with our backbones
(Kadija66)**

The Congolese: Such Submissive Creatures

As depicted in the novella, the Congolese natives were sossmissively pacified and tamed: they were helpers (22) and carriers (25, 27); they obediently carried the resources of their lands, especially ivory, to the ships of the colonizers. Even when they died, they did that quiet silently, they died, “like flies” (5). The countless deaths of the natives recounted throughout the text are a clear testimony to the merciless servitude of such a nation. One time after another, readers come across sentences like, “[t]hey die so quick” (47), “he died without uttering a sound, without moving a limb, without twitching a muscle” (68) and “[t]hey must have been dying like flies here” (5).

The Congolese: Forest (Trees) Dwellers

One of the most important images drawn of the Congolese in this novella is that of portraying such beings as forest/tree dwellers so that they will look more like animals than human beings to readers of the work:

I saw a face amongst the leaves on the level with my own, looking at me very fierce and steady; and then suddenly, as though a veil had been removed from my eyes, I made out, deep in the tangled gloom, naked breasts, arms, legs, glaring eyes—the bush was swarming with human limbs in movement, glistening, of bronze colour. The twigs shook, swayed, and rustled, the arrows flew out of them, and then the shutter came to. (66)

This image of the Congolese as tree dwellers and “savages in the bush” (69) occurs repeatedly to keep reminding readers that such beings are closer to animals, “the bush began to howl” as natives were within the bush (67). These creatures are not humans; they do not build or live in houses.

The Congolese as Mindless Beasts

Despite their submissiveness, the Congolese were looked at as “enemies” (18, 20) and “rebels” (88) by Europeans. The only considerable action taken by the natives, however, was that, when in defense of Kurtz, they attacked Marlow and the other Europeans on the French steamer. Indeed, natives were ready to sacrifice themselves to defend Kurtz, their idol. This takes place later in the novella, on pages (66-8). One other action, that Marlow told readers about, but was not an eyewitness of, was that of the quarrel that happened between Fresleven and the natives, one that ended with the killing of Fresleven.

Early in the work, we are told about such mindless natives that killed the “gentlest” man on earth in a problem that aroused over two hens: h

the original quarrel arose from a misunderstanding about some hens. Yes, two black hens. Fresleven—that was the fellow’s name, a Dane—thought himself wronged somehow in the bargain, so he went ashore and started to hammer the chief of the village with a stick. Oh, it didn’t surprise me in the least to hear this, and at the same time to be told that Fresleven was the gentlest, quietest creature that ever walked on two legs. (10)

The quotation pinpoints the idea that such are bestially mindless creatures who can easily kill for no logical reason. Equally stressed is the idea that the man such creatures killed was “the gentlest, quietest” human being that ever existed. This inevitably means that such are irrational creatures, beside their minds, ones that must, in one way or another be tamed, civilized, and taught to act in human-like manners.

This is the task of civilized Europe: Europe should, therefore, take up its responsibility dutifully towards such beings even though they (Europeans) will suffer to accomplish such a task, especially when it comes to civilizing such primordial African species. It is a European obligation to bring such creatures from the darkness of ignorance to the light of civilization. Under such mottos, masks and fallacies. Europeans justified their invasions of the weaker African countries. Early enough in the novella, Marlow announces that his task is to civilize them. “I had got a heavenly mission to civilize you” (8)!

Civilizing and enlightening other nations are groundless claims that can easily be refuted and falsified. Shafquat asserts that the “vision of the British mission abroad was often at odds with reality” (Watson 346). Later on in the novella, Marlow confesses, “I had no particular desire to enlighten them, but I had some difficulty in restraining myself from laughing in their faces, so full of stupid importance” (108).

Halfway through the novella, Marlow presents the natives’ defense of Kurtz to assert that such are mindless, naïve natives. Readers are told about native Congolese citizens who readily defend Kurtz, who subdued them and exploited their lands. They are ready to die for him. Such are utterly naïve, ignorant people; they defend the biggest looter of their country, one who “[has] stolen more ivory than all the other agents together” (68). Memorably, in Achebe’s novel, when the Nigerian Mr. Omo says to his British employer “I thought...”, the employer’s immediate reply is that he has to do what he is ordered to do without thinking, “I thought ...” ‘You are not paid to think, Mr Omo, but to do what you are told. Is that clear?’ (52). Thus, even though Obi is a London graduate, he is denied the very right of thinking, not because of anything other than because of being an African. To be an African means to be mindless!

The Congolese as Naïve

It is the letter “t” that differentiates “native” from “naïve”. Natives as (mindless) naïve citizens is a parallel that Conrad kept persistently drawing from the beginning to the end of the novella. At the end of the novella, such a native-naïve dichotomy is, undoubtedly, fulfilled through the Intended’s question about the last word Kurtz uttered before he died. She expected one answer: her name. Marlow told her that, “[t]he last word he pronounced was—

your name” (117). She was quite satisfied with the reply. Simple as this situation maybe, it can be interpreted as summing up the entire relationship between Europe and the Congo: Europeans lie, and the Congolese natives naïvely, or rather innocently, believe them.

Conclusion

So wide is the gap that distances Europeans from the Congolese natives. So engulfing is the distancing abyss that it can engulf whatever thoughts of proximity that may ever suggest any similarity or affinity between such two poles. No convergence point can be detected or figured out: one party is all the other is not and vice versa. Marlow's (Conrad's) integrity and credibility are questionably refuted. Connoisseurship is one thing, honesty is another. An author's craftsmanship necessarily requires responsible, honest and well-balanced narrating as this contributes to the author's credibility and integrity. With his European egoism and self-centrism, Marlow/Conrad easily excluded the Congolese citizens from humanity, represented, stereotyped and framed them the way he wanted and confiscated even their very basic right of saying who they are. Last but not least, it is blinding European pride and prejudice that prevented Marlow, and other Europeans, from seeing Congolese natives as fellow human beings.

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