

# The Eurocentric “I” and the White Mask of Colonialism: The African “Other” in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*

Professor Salah BOUREGBI  
Department of English,  
Badji Mokhtar University  
Annaba, Algeria  
bouregbi.salah@univ-annaba.org

## Abstract

*Eurocentrism is a philosophy which makes of the European “I” the only reference for any judgement and evaluation. Europeans consider themselves as the embodiment of good culture while the other, the colonized, the non-European, is the incarnation of brutishness and savagery. In other words, Otherness is an image built up by a referent, who is superior, and who decides about the nature of the other. Subsequently, the image-making of otherness is the representation of the person, who projects his mind into it. Eurocentrism legalizes power and legitimizes domination and makes them central for the sake of effectiveness. Moreover, hegemony gives to the colonizer the right and responsibility to civilize the colonized. Colonialist discourse tries to impress and to make the other think of himself as inferior; thus, he needs to be civilized, colonized and guided. To be an “Other” is, then, to be silenced and dependent because there is no open possibility for him to change or to reach the European, the referent. The self-justification of imperialism was an idea of conquest of other people to usurp their riches and lands. Conrad’s background of *Heart of Darkness* stems from the Euro-centric documents that acknowledge the subjective illegal right to dominate Africa and to make its natives an “Other.”*

**Keywords:** Eurocentrism, White Mask, Otherness, Colonialism, Domination.

## *Introduction*

Otherness is a perceived image built up on a priori assumption that any human, whose culture and race and image do not conform to Europe as the only referent, is bound to be an “other.” The European is the superior; he, thus, possesses the right to decide about the nature of the other. The image-making of

otherness, then, is the representation of the person who projects his mind into it. Though ideas seem to be related to facts, they are, nonetheless, primarily a mental construct. Every other, therefore, is a project of apprehension of the outside world through the inside. In other words, the apprehension of truth during the construction of the other is a construction without correspondence to the external reality. It is a reality of language that crystallizes the subject as an object without real correspondence.<sup>1</sup>

The other is the product of the Euro-centred philosophy, which judges the non-white, the non-European, as an “Other” who does not merit to be equal to them and who is in need of civilization, education and civility. The critic Bart Moore-Gilbert, discussing the clash between West and East, North and South maintains that: “West’s hegemony over the East is primarily by producing the East discursively as the West’s inferior «Other», a manoeuvre which strengthens, indeed, even partially constructs, the West’s self-image as a superior civilization.”<sup>2</sup> To be an “Other” is, then, to be silenced and dependent because there is no open possibility for him to change or to reach the European, the reference. The European becomes the masculine, the progressive, the moral, the rational; the other remains the passive, the regressive, the irrational, the sensual, and the despotic.<sup>3</sup>

So, the conception of otherness other is an excuse for the European to have the right to take in charge everything the other possesses. That is, the latter’s right is only dependence, obedience and service. Colonial authority functions as an instrument of power, a power that enables the colonizers to shape the world in their image. Elleke Bolhmer points out that: “European colonizers held the conviction not merely that the rest of the world also could be understood in its terms, but that the rest of the world also could-and indeed should-be encouraged to interpret reality in a European way, according to a European language of reason.”<sup>4</sup> Within the same context, the critic Shelley Walia in her article, “Postmodernism, Discourse and The Colonial Perspective,” states that:

*The imperial epistemology exclusively works through the centrality of Western consciousness; the incestuousness of orientalist testimony results in ambiguous colonial perspectives and disillusionments replete with desires and projections, dogmatism and*

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 22.

<sup>2</sup> Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (London and New York: Verso, 2000), 39.

<sup>3</sup> Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory*, 39.

<sup>4</sup> Elleke Bolhmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 50.

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*racism. Such is the consciousness with which the European confronts the idea of colonization.*<sup>5</sup>

It is, then, the logocentric Western discourse that makes, voluntarily, ignore the voice and the culture of the non-European. The latter is seen as disorganized, distorted with a non-self – or a self that exists and shaped by Euro-imperatives: rationalism, civility, organisation, and the like. Edward Said, conscious of such disparity and fixity in the identification of the non-European, says that: “Every writer on the Orient assumes some Oriental precedent”<sup>6</sup> and “Colonial rule, [that] was justified in advance by Orientalism, had been years, even centuries in making.”<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the critic Malachi McIntosh denounces such fixed Euro-centred mind, which makes of the Orient the regressive opposite other. He writes: “Orientalism discourse is predicted on the notion of European superiority, a notion that cannot exist without a concept of Europe as a cohesive unit.”<sup>8</sup>

So, the colonial discourse is an ideology constructed on euro-background: “who are they?, and who is the other?” The colonialist “thingifies” the other and becomes the only Subject. The dichotomy of Subject/Object – Colonizer/Colonize is very crucial to the creation of the imperialist hegemony. It legalizes power, legitimizes domination and makes the colonizer at the centre of decision and effectiveness. Moreover, hegemony gives to the colonizer the right and responsibility to civilize the colonized.

Colonialist discourse tries to impress and to make the other think of himself as inferior; thus, he needs to be civilized, colonized and guided. This logocentric philosophy makes the colonizer treat the colonized as “not fully human.” The colonizer considers himself as the embodiment of good culture while the colonized is label as the root of evil and savagery. The critics S. N. Balagangadhara and Esther Bloch state that: “Colonialism generated a particular way of looking at the world in both the Metropolis and the colonies.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Shelley Walia, “Postmodernism, Discourse and the Colonial Perspective,” in *Postcolonial Theory and Literature*, eds. P. Mallikayuna Rao, Rajeshwar Mittapalli and K Damodar Rao (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributers, 2003), 23.

<sup>6</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), 20.

<sup>7</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 39.

<sup>8</sup> Malachi McIntosh, “The Moor in the Text: Modern Colonialism in Medieval Christian Spain,” *Journal of Romance Studies* 6, 3 (2006): 65.

<sup>9</sup> S. N. Balagangadhara and Esther Bloch, “Colonialism, Colonial Consciousness, and Political Theory,” in *Research Centre Vergelijkende Cultuurwetensch* (Gent Belgium, 2003), 3.

*Colonialism and the Contextual Construction of the World*

The emergence of world construction from a text is, undoubtedly, biased. It starts from a Euro-perspective of how to look at it: how to read it and the tools you are supposed to use in order to find out what you are expecting from the text. Thus, as a background, a colonial discourse theory will guide the reader to colonial expectations: the “thingification” of the colonized. Speaking about the Orient construction from a Euro-gaze, both the critics Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia write:

*The worldliness which emerges out of the text of his own identity is crucial in his analysis of those Orientalist texts, which constructed the Orient and thereby constructed Europe’s dominance over it. In a nutshell, Orientalism demonstrates how power operates in knowledge: the processes by which the West ‘knows’ the Orient have been a way of exerting power over it.*<sup>10</sup>

The fundamental drive behind such label, thus, is the superiority of the colonizer. His cultural elitism discloses the non-European and makes him inferior. Difference becomes an evil good, instead of richness and diversity. This power of dominance and imposition is an arbitrary recognition of the non-European as an “Other.” So, power begets desire, and desire allows practices and exercises that ensure the superiority of the white over the non-white. The latter has to endure the orchestrated domination: his already private, social systems are thus destroyed and a new system stabled by the European is built up. The critic Abdul R. Janmohamed points out that:

*By thus subjugating the native, the European settler is able to compel the Other’s recognition of him and, in the process, allow his own identity to become deeply dependent on his position as a master. This enforced recognition from the Other in fact amounts to the European’s narcissistic self-recognition since the native, who is considered too degraded and inhuman to be credited with any specific subjectivity, is cast as no more than a recipient of the negative elements of the self that the European projects onto him.*<sup>11</sup>

Becoming the masters in a land which is not theirs, these Europeans accumulate a “surplus morality,” which becomes a means and an end to invest in the denigration of the native.<sup>12</sup> In the same vein, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak claims that:

*Some of the most radical criticism coming out of the West today is the result of an interested desire to conserve the subject of the West, or the West as Subject. It is also*

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<sup>10</sup> Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia, *Edward Said* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 8.

<sup>11</sup> Abdul R. Janmohamed, “The Economy of Manichean Allegory,” in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (1995), eds. Bill Ashcroft, et al. (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 20.

<sup>12</sup> Janmohamed, “The Economy of Manichean Allegory,” 23.

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*that, in the constitution of that Other of Europe, great care was taken to obliterate the textual ingredients with which such a subject could cachet, could occupy (invest?) its itinerary — not only by ideological and scientific production, but also by the institution of the law.*<sup>13</sup>

By transcending the white and by making him the Subject, the non-European turns gradually into “thingification.” A Thing produced by a Subject according to his own shape, model and doctrine. The critic George Yancy states that:

*Through the process of ideological structuring, the colonizer and the colonized are deemed opposites in an ontologically hierarchical structural relationship. The former are deemed naturally superior and the latter are said to be naturally inferior and fit for domination. The reality, however, is that the construction of the inferior / monstrous colonized is contingent upon the construction of the European as superior and non-monstrous. The colonized is fixed, because the colonizer does the fixing, and the “thingification” of the colonized is dialectically linked to the transcendent / master consciousness of the colonizer.*<sup>14</sup>

This colonialist position is a violent usurpation that destroys at the very root a whole life system of a human community, which diverges, but, nonetheless, contributes to the social good of humanity. In the words of Frantz Fanon: “This Manicheism goes to its logical conclusion and dehumanizes the native, or to speak plainly, it turns him into an animal. When the settler seeks to describe the native fully in exact terms he consistently refers to the bestiary.”<sup>15</sup> Fanon extends further claiming that the natives are “declared insensible to ethics: he represents not only the absence of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values, and in this sense he is the absolute evil.”<sup>16</sup>

European philosophy of imperialism proclaims that there is no self that exists beyond the European. Any other self that comes to be known is an Other – it is not theirs: it is foreign, and different from them in race, language, and culture. A body and a flesh of a stranger different from theirs.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 24.

<sup>14</sup> George Yancy, “Colonial Gazing: The Product of the Body as «Other»,” *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 32 (2008): 1-2.

<sup>15</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched on the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 42.

<sup>16</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched on the Earth*, 41.

<sup>17</sup> Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (London and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 2.

*African – the Other: An Object of the Subject/European*

Otherness could be seen at two levels, which are, nonetheless, interdependent and biased: the literal that exists in history and the literary that resides in artistic representations.

OUTSIDE THE TEXT: THE LITERAL

*Heart of Darkness* is an artistic record of historical events that took place in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. Though reality is modelled, entwined and enveloped into artistic canons, it, nonetheless, holds undeniable facts of colonialism and its philosophy of defamiliarising the colonized as an “other”. The overt acts of the Belgians in the Congo River Basin are the emergent clues of the covert ends. The critic Henryk Zins maintains that “The colonial exploitation was an old story of evil, greed and lust perpetrated upon a weaker people.”<sup>18</sup> The writer Joseph Conrad, however, does not look at it in physical context because physical power does not gauge/ measure civility and civilisation. He says: “They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force – nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others.”<sup>19</sup>

So, any act of domination is a transgression against other people, who are supposed to live within their own territories and with their own culture: they belong to the land and the land belongs to them. Whatever is the mode of existence, no one has the right to judge, underestimate and submit anyone else to his own culture against his own will. Thus, colonising people is imposing a new culture and disrupting the already existing one. Tony C. Brown points out that:

*In the discourse of colonialism particularly in the late nineteenth century context where the noble savage had all but disappeared-when it was space of terror being spoken of, it was so typically the “daemonic” environments of the far-off colonies which were perceived as the terror’s source. It was, of course, such an abhorrent condition which the civilizing force of European colonization was supposed to set right. In the case of Leopold’s Congo Free State, though, la mission civilisatrice appeared to perform the hideous barbarism it was supposed to eradicate, effecting a degree of confusion as to the cause of those horrors reported as occurring in the colony.*<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Henryk Zins, “Joseph Conrad and British Critics of Colonialism,” *Pula: Botswana Journal of African Studies* 1/2 (1998): 62.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, introduction by Paul O’Prey (Harmondsworth and Middlesex: Penguin, 1983), 31.

<sup>20</sup> Tony C. Brown, “Cultural Psychosis on the Frontier: The Work of the Darkness in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*,” *Studies in the Novel* 32, 1 (Spring 2000): 17.

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The logic in Eurocentrism is that all what not European is savage and, thus, replies domination. Savagery is lawless and threatening. Its presence should not block the imposition of the civilized order.

“Who judges whom?” has become paradoxical. All what is international and universal has become only European. Samuel P. Huntington points out that: “The West in effect is using international institutions, military power and economic resources to run the world in the ways that will maintain Western predominance protect Western interests and promote Western political and economic values.”<sup>21</sup> European rules and laws have become universal and, therefore, legitimated as prerequisite parameters with which we judge the other as uncivilized, and, thus, must be dissociated from his savagery and primitiveness. In the words of Emmanuelle Jouannet, “This paradox stems from the fact that international law, past and present, is the reflection of a particular – Western – culture, whilst at the same time claiming not only to internationalize but also to almost universalize the values that it conveys.”<sup>22</sup>

European imperialism has made of Africa a pure absolute otherness. The white has become the absolute Subject, who further makes the African an absolute Object. Achille Mbembe points out: “It is now widely acknowledged that Africa as an idea, a concept, has historically served, and continues to serve, as a polemical argument for the West’s desperate desire to assert its difference from the rest of the world.”<sup>23</sup> In the same vein, the critic Abdul R. Jan Mohamed maintains that: “The colonial mentality is dominated by a Manichean allegory of white and black, good and evil, salvation and damnation, civilization and savagery, superiority and inferiority, intelligence and emotion, self and other, subject and object.”<sup>24</sup>

In the European mind, it is the nature of savagery and darkness of Africa that was the source of reply and impulse for imperialism to colonize and civilize. Marlow, the witness eye, reports:

*They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind — as is very proper for those who tackle darkness. The conquest of the earth, which mostly*

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<sup>21</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations,” *Foreign Affairs* 72, 3 (Summer, 1993): 40.

<sup>22</sup> Emmanuelle Jouannet, “Universalism and Imperialism: The True False Paradox of International Law,” *The European Journal of International Law* 18, 3 (2007): 379.

<sup>23</sup> Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 2.

<sup>24</sup> Abdul R. Jan Mohamed, *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in colonial Africa* (Ambers: Massachusetts UP, 1983), 4.

*means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much.*<sup>25</sup>

This sinister primitiveness of Africans justifies the mission of imperialism.<sup>26</sup> The self-justification of imperialism was an idea of conquest of other people to usurp their riches and lands. Conrad's background of *Heart of Darkness* stems from the Euro-centric documents that acknowledge the subjective illegal right to dominate Africa and makes it an "Other." In his book *Roger Casement*, B. Inglis reports for us what John B. Murphy, an American missionary, witnessed in 1890. He writes:

*Each town and district is forced to bring in a certain quantity [of rubber] to the headquarters of the Commissionaire every Sunday. It is collected by force; the soldiers drive the people into the bush. If they will not go, they are shot down, and their hands cut off and taken as trophies to the Commissaire. [...] These hands, the hands of men, women and children are placed in rows before the Commissaire who counts them to see that the soldiers have not wasted cartridges.*<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, the journalist E. D. Morel reported that from 1890 and on, The Congo had been the scene of atrocities and massacre. The Belgian soldiers used the "civilising" power to kill the inhabitants of the Congo Basin.<sup>28</sup> He further laid bare Leopold's practices of enslaving and subjecting the Congo natives to his power and "dehumanized" them. He says:

*Systematic hand cutting and worse forms of mutilation had been practised all over the Congo territories for more than a decade. The mutilation of the dead and of the living must be assigned to the direct instigation of State officials and agents of the Trusts appointed to terrorise the rubber districts. The soldiers let loose through the country have been required to bring back tangible proof that proper punishment was inflicted, and the hands of slain, or partly slain, people were the readiest and most acceptable form of proof.*<sup>29</sup>

Such colonial exploitation, persecution have degraded the natives and shown that these whites did not feel any sympathy or sensitivity for human beings, who are different in colour and culture from them.

The African land had revealed for the traveller, Conrad, the true nature of the whites, who are hypocrites: their civilisation is laid bare in the African land. It shows barbarism and primitiveness. A civilisation lies unveiled before our eyes and goes naked in the colonies.<sup>30</sup> Both explorers Henry Morton Stanley and

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<sup>25</sup> Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 31-32.

<sup>26</sup> Ashcroft, *Edward Said*, 86.

<sup>27</sup> B. Inglis, *Roger Casement* (London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1973), 46.

<sup>28</sup> Edmund D. Morel, *King Leopold's Rule in Africa* (London: Heinemann, 1904), 103.

<sup>29</sup> Morel, *King Leopold's Rule*, 119.

<sup>30</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *On Colonialism* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968), 88.



Kitchener were honoured because of their discoveries of the other and his land. T. Brook reported for us what happened when Stanley and Kitchener came back home from Africa. He writes:

*[In April 1890] Brussels was dominated by festivities to his honour. The connection between Stanley and ivory was made more than evident: at his welcoming banquet, King Leopold had the room decorated with the tusks of 400 elephants. An important event in 1898. Kitchener, too, was welcomed by Queen Victoria; just like Stanley he was awarded a honorary doctorate at Cambridge, and he was celebrated for having opened up the Nile Valley "to the civilizing influences of commercial enterprise." The battle of Omdurman, where 11,000 Sudanese soldiers were killed and few of the 16,000 wounded survived (whereas the British lost only 48), [...] showed the humiliating procedures of capitulation, for instance, the king of Ashante and his mother crawling on all fours to kiss the boots of British officers.<sup>31</sup>*

But besides such inhumane capitulation, the African is made to believe that he is a human flesh eater. The historian critic Frederic D. Ellenberger gives the following notes: "Missionaries seem to delight in depicting the cannibals as ogres."<sup>32</sup> Between the years 1890-1905, John H. Weeks stationed in the Congo in the Bangala tribes as a missionary for the Baptist Missionary Society made many observations. It was custom for the Bangala tribe to eat people that had been killed in battle: "That night there was a cannibal feast in town."<sup>33</sup>

Cannibalism is not only one of the most spread myths about other people, but also one of the most widespread metaphors for describing the relationship of the colonialist with the colonized subaltern. African, being considered as inferior, needs a superior to conduct him. Such idea is crystallized into the Belgian King Leopold, who established himself as an absolute sovereign of the Congo. Cannon Schmitt points out:

*In 1885, King Leopold established the Congo Free State and made himself its absolute sovereign. This move granted Belgium a virtual monopoly on the exploitation of the Congo. Rather than cry foul, many other imperialist nations followed suit and established similar charter companies to develop other parts of Africa, granting their countries monopoly rights to the areas. Because Africa was so far away and there had been a general re-emergence of imperialist fervor across Europe, it took a long time*

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<sup>31</sup> Thomas Brook, "Preserving and Keeping Order by Killing Time in *Heart of Darkness*," *Heart of Darkness: A Case Study in Contemporary Criticism*, ed. Ross C. Murfin (New York: St. Martin's, 1989), 240.

<sup>32</sup> Frederic D. Ellenberger, *History of the Basutos, Ancient and Modern (1912)* (London and Morijia: Morijia Archives, 1992), 223.

<sup>33</sup> John H. Weeks, "Anthropological Notes on the Bangala of the Upper Congo River," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 39 (1909): 121.

*before there was any public outcry at the atrocities committed by imperialist agents in Africa in general, and Leopold's agents in the Congo in particular.*<sup>34</sup>

INSIDE THE TEXT: THE LITERARY

But in the text, how is this 'Other' seen? Marlow, the ascetic and Buddha-like character, is sick of these white colonialists, who legitimate their domination with conversion and civilisation:

*This devoted band called itself the Eldorado Exploring Expedition and I believe they were sworn to secrecy. Their talk, however, was the talk of sordid buccaneers: it was reckless without hardihood, greedy without audacity, and cruel without courage [....] To tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no more moral purpose at the back of it.*<sup>35</sup>

The notion of imperialism is set up right at the beginning of the novel. Conrad's narration starts by extolling the glorious imperial past and present for which the Thames figuratively stands as the source. Meanwhile, his discourse is overshadowed with the idea of hunting and consuming: "Hunters for gold or pursuer of fame, they all had gone out on that stream, bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire."<sup>36</sup> Such idea of glorification of the Knights of the empire, the ambassadors of Light, associates the Templar of colonialism to the glory of the Europe: "The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires."<sup>37</sup> The discourse used notifies that the whites are a reference-other, which supports civilization: myth of power, race, classifications and imagery of subordination.<sup>38</sup>

*Heart of Darkness* is a multileveled post-colonial parable. The notion of cannibalism is used by colonial discourse in order to define the nature as savage and hence to justify the idea of European civilization, enlightenment and progress. But where does cannibalism lie? Is it in the Blacks? Is it in the Whites? Who eats whom? What does really define this cannibalistic act? According to the literary critic C. Rawson:

*The discourse of cannibalism tends to work in two opposite directions: on the one hand the literal imputation of cannibalism serves to identify non-western people as bestial and savage; on the other, the metaphorical insinuation of the cannibalism of the*

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<sup>34</sup> Cannon Schmitt, "Tidal Conrad (Literally)," *Victorian Studies* 55, 1 (2012): 32.

<sup>35</sup> Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 61.

<sup>36</sup> Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 29.

<sup>37</sup> Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 29.

<sup>38</sup> T. F. Nogueira Diniz, "Colonial Discourse Revisited: *Heart of Darkness*," *Fragmentos* 23 (2002): 126.

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*tyrant has long served a critical function by suggesting that it is the conquerors who are more savage than the savages, more cannibalistic than the cannibals.*<sup>39</sup>

The Black cannibals do not literally eat the invaders of their lands. But, nonetheless, their cannibalism is established as real by their very own words: "Aha!" I said, just for good fellowship's sake. "Catch'im" he snapped, with a bloodshot widening of his eyes and a flash of sharp teeth – "catch'im. Give'im to us." To you.eh?" I asked; "what would you do with them?" "Eat'im!" he said, curtly, and, leaning his elbow on the rail, looked out into the fog in a dignified and profoundly pensive attitude."<sup>40</sup> But they did not eat any! P. Hulme admits that though there is no literal act of consuming human flesh in the novel, there is, however, a confirmation by explorers and adventurers about the existence of this act.<sup>41</sup>

Marlow describes the Whites as pilgrims: "The pilgrims imagined it crawled to I don't know. To some place where they expected to do something. I bet! For me it crawled towards Kurtz – exclusively."<sup>42</sup> Kurtz is the Saint of Saints; the Inner station, his compound, is the Holy place for pilgrimage. Blacks and Whites come and go to such place like the temple visitors. Marlow, thus, draws a kind of analogy between the Congo pilgrims and the Middle Ages Templar. But, all the essential humanistic values lying at the core of the pilgrimage in Christian terms are questioned and invalidated by the greed, rapacity and violence that characterize the group of people in search for ivory. Money is the only faith. Ivory is the only deity at which the pilgrims pray. The sacrament service of bread and wine is analogically similar to these pilgrims' performances in Africa. The critic Cora Kaplan maintains that:

*The cannibalism Marlow imputes to the natives may be merely a guilty projection of the rapacity of the white colonizers, who have already devoured the native population in less literal ways. Since the European intruders have invaded territorial boundaries, have violated property rights, and have in fact confiscated the natives' most personal property – their bodies – for their own uses, the Europeans are but one step from literally devouring the inhabitants.*<sup>43</sup>

Marlow's approval of the apparent restraint of the natives on board the ship is a proof of their endurance and sustainability. He feels that Europeans in the Congo listen to their incestuous inner voices. He presents Blacks as admirable

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<sup>39</sup> Claude Rawson, "Eating People," *London Review of Books* (24 January 2004): 20.

<sup>40</sup> Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 74.

<sup>41</sup> Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean: 1492-1797* (London: Methuen, 1986), 59.

<sup>42</sup> Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 68.

<sup>43</sup> Cora Kaplan, "Language and Gender" (Unpublished Paper, University of Sussex, 1977), 30.

figures. Marlow wonders why he and his companions have not been eaten by these men. They possess what Europeans do not: restraint:

*I looked at them with a swift quickening of interest how unwholesome the pilgrims looked, and I hoped, yes, I positively hoped, that my aspect was not so – what shall I say? [...] Yes: I looked at them as you would on any human being, with a curiosity of their impulses, motives, capacities, weaknesses, when brought to the test of an inexorable physical necessity. Restraint! What possible restraint? Was it superstition, disgust, patience, fear – or some kind of primitive honour?<sup>44</sup>*

Marlow's ethic, embodying his commitment to the value of restraint, stands in stark contrast to the conduct of Kurtz: "I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear."<sup>45</sup> Kurtz degenerated into a savage. But these Blacks, though they are cannibals, they did not eat any White.

Kurtz emerges as the more cannibalistic. Marlow metaphorically represents Kurtz's eloquence as a cannibalistic impulse: "I saw him open his mouth wide – it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him."<sup>46</sup> More emphatically, in front of Kurtz's fiancé, he reports how darkness did overwhelm Kurtz and made him a part of the jungle and its cannibalism: "I had a vision of him on the stretcher, opening his mouth voraciously, as if to devour all the earth with all its mankind."<sup>47</sup> His lack of moral equipment and his devotion to his inner voice and to moneytheistic culture of his race are features that show his predisposition to be in league with darkness and the law of its jungle: "But his soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself, and, by heavens I tell you, it had gone mad."<sup>48</sup>

Kurtz's desire to "cannibalize" the world around made him swallowed up by wilderness itself. Even nature in the novel connotes such idea of consumption – cannibalism: Captain Fresleven was swallowed by the soil of the jungle and only his skeleton remains. Marlow found Kurtz lying on the grass, which covers his body. "In the afternoon, I saw him. I saw him lying on his back with closed eyes."<sup>49</sup> The V-shaped river is compared to a snake opening its mouth and trying to catch up birds while flying. Kurtz was buried in a muddy hole. He was transformed to "something" buried in and absorbed by the earth: "The voice was gone. What also had been there? But I am of course aware that the next day the

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<sup>44</sup> Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 76.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, 108.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, 99.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, 116.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, 108.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, 111.

pilgrims buried something in a muddy hole.”<sup>50</sup> Nature had made the “only one”, the chief of the chiefs, Kurtz, become something, and later nothing.

Kurtz was supposed to bring light to the Blacks, but such idea redeems nothing at all. His duty to bring civilization to the natives turns into chaos. Besides his criminal acts, the tattered postscript of his report to the “International Society of the Suppression of Savage Customs,” Kurtz had scribbled: “Exterminate all the brutes!”<sup>51</sup> So, Kurtz goes native and becomes a cannibal in the jungle. He performs with the natives the ritual of cannibalism. He has symbolically become a flesh-eater and united with who he devours, the savages in the Congo:

*On the hill a big fire burned [...] The monotonous beating of a big drum filled the air with muffled shocks and a lingering vibration. A steady droning sound of many men chanting each to himself some weird incantation came out from the black, flat wall of the woods as the humming of bees comes out of a hive, and had a strange narcotic effect upon my half-awake senses.*<sup>52</sup>

Dialogically speaking, those literal cannibals are not cannibalizing any of the individuals, whether black or white, that is around them. On the contrary, the whites hold all the qualities of a cannibal: they hunt, kill and devour the African land and its riches. Kurtz, the painter, the musician, the poet, the idealistic, the man who has “the gift of expression”, turns into a primitive savage.

Approaching the Inner Station, the compound of Kurtz, the temple of the Saint of pilgrims, Marlow was smitten by a horrible scene. Through a telescope, Marlow views “round knobs” that turn out to be shrunken heads. These heads, in any case, symbolize Kurtz’s lack of restraint and offer evidence that his hunting for ivory was a headhunting ceremony: a ritual performance, which is closely associated to cannibalism. The literary critic Juliet Mclauchan takes these heads as suggestions of a ceremony of the eaten and defeated enemy: “[It] seems most probable that, in the course of Kurtz’s ivory raids, the victory might [have] seal[ed] and celebrate[d] success by not only killing but eating their defeated enemies.”<sup>53</sup> Besides his association with the jungle, Marlow describes how the wilderness swallows up Kurtz within the unknown Congo: “His was an impenetrable darkness. I looked at him as you peer down at a man who is lying at the bottom of a precipice where the sun never shines.”<sup>54</sup> Furthermore: “The wilderness had patted him on the head...; it had caressed him...; it had taken him,

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<sup>50</sup> Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 112.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, 87.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, 104-105.

<sup>53</sup> Juliet Mclauchan, “The «Value» and «Significance» of *Heart of Darkness*,” *Heart of Darkness: A Norton Critical Edition*, ed. Robert Kinbrough (New York: Norton, 1988), 386.

<sup>54</sup> Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 111.

loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation.”<sup>55</sup>

The world of the other – the African – is a world that these Europeans have fled because they fail to explain it: it is different in nature, and culture, and tradition; thus, the only escape for them is to impose their own solutions and definitions to what they ignore. They are strangers in a strange world of a strange mode of life. Such strangeness makes them estranged. Subsequently, all the means are good and permissible to survive. “Rejection of the world is combined with an urge to dominate, and urge which is infantile in origin, and which social adaptation has failed to discipline.”<sup>56</sup> A culture that discovers another culture: a European/white that encounters an African/black. Diversity in colour and culture pushes the powerful to make a choice: “which is what, and who is who?” *Heart of Darkness*, thus, comes to represent such crux. In the words of A. Serdar Ozturk:

*Imperialistic expansion’s ideology is the belief that progress and enlightenment emerges from the West. Recognition of non-European cultures does not mean the abandonment of a Eurocentric perspective. The imperialist historicism was adept at absorbing all cultures into a Eurocentric history. The historicism of “the Others” is decentred. The decentring historicism of “the Other” made possible the success of the West’s imperialism. In Heart of Darkness, Conrad dramatizes the loss of confidence in the Eurocentric view of history.*<sup>57</sup>

Reinhart Kosellek emphasises the notion of logocentrism and the imperial domination of Europeans, who investigate the origin of humanity – their origins through the other (the savage), who seems to be the primitive man of the beginning of humanity. He writes:

*Europeans possessed not only a progressive, Eurocentric vision of world history, but also the temporal sense of the synchronicity of the non synchronic. It seemed to them, in other words, that by studying other, primitive-seeming cultures existing simultaneously (or synchronically) with their own, they could study something chronologically disparate, namely their own deep, prehistoric past.*<sup>58</sup>

To label the culture of the other as prehistoric is a hasty output based on European measurements and parameters, which make of non-European an underdeveloped and even a savage. Such regressive primitive culture gives right to the superiority of the white civilisation – the European. In other words, they judge

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<sup>55</sup> Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 84.

<sup>56</sup> Octave Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, trans. Pamela Powesland (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1956), 108.

<sup>57</sup> A. Serdar Ozturk, “A New Historicist Approach to *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad,” *Kastamonu Education Journal* 11, 1 (2003): 2.

<sup>58</sup> Reinhart Kosellek, *Futures Past*, trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge: MIT P, 1985), 47.

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by themselves and for themselves. In his *Notes on Life and Letters*, Joseph Conrad writes:

*Fiction is history, human history, or it is nothing. But it is also more than that; it stands on firmer ground, being based on the reality of forms and the observation of social phenomena, whereas history is based on documents, and the reading of print and handwriting – on second-hand impression. Thus, fiction is nearer truth.*<sup>59</sup>

Kurtz is the product of the whole Europe: “All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz.”<sup>60</sup> Through him, Conrad denounces, but at the same time describes, how the so-called civilized European behaves. Hunt Hawkins points out that:

*The particular “idea” of civilizing mission not only fails to restrain exploitation but actually prompts it. Kurtz provides a striking illustration. He had gone to Africa as an apostle of civilization, a member of “gang of virtue”, but his morality disappeared when, his trade goods exhausted, he began to use a local tribe to raid the country for ivory.*<sup>61</sup>

Hawkins maintains that the ideology of imperialism is blindly followed by the “pilgrims” in Africa. He writes:

*“Imperialism has displaced both of them from their restraining native societies and forced them to rely on their own uncertain impulses. The European conquerors sundered the tribes to make Africans serve alien material aims. In doing so, Conrad indicates, imperialism destroyed the cultural integrity not only of Africa but of Europe as well.”*<sup>62</sup>

There are some passages in *Heart of Darkness* that are indices of racist and hegemonic behaviour. The English captain compares the black fireman to a dog: “To look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind legs.”<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, Marlow’s visit to the Congo River made him discover another world and the people he knows are other people: they have become what they were not. He witnesses the ill-treatment of the Blacks by the Whites: Africans chained together and sweating. These conquerors are the cause of decline and decay in Africa: “They were called criminals, and the outraged law, like the bursting shells, had come to them, an insoluble mystery from the sea.”<sup>64</sup> Even Kurtz the civilized, the scientific, the idealistic is sent by

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<sup>59</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters* (London: J. M. Dent, 1949), 17.

<sup>60</sup> Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 86.

<sup>61</sup> Hunt Hawkins, “Conrad’s Critique of Imperialism in *Heart of Darkness*,” *PMLA* 94, 2 (March 1979): 295.

<sup>62</sup> Hawkins, “Conrad’s Critique of Imperialism,” 296.

<sup>63</sup> Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 70.

<sup>64</sup> Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 43.

International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs to write a report in order to enable the Administration convert and civilize them.

But how can a cannibal save a civilized? The helmsman lost his life in trying to save that of Kurtz! Cannon Schmitt points out that:

*Although there has been much appropriate debate by critics about whether Conrad was participating in a larger imperialist enterprise with his implicit acceptance of the superiority of the Europeans over the countries they colonized, it is certain that one of the central themes of Heart of Darkness is the evil and hypocrisy at the heart of the Belgian imperial enterprise in the Congo.*<sup>65</sup>

He expends further explaining and defending the paradoxical behaviour of Marlow stating that: “Marlow’s racist sense of superiority does not blur his vision of the evil wrought at the imperialist hands of the Belgians in the Congo. Although we modern readers might take him to task for this racism, most critics have defended his larger purpose of challenging Belgian imperialist practices.”<sup>66</sup> In the words of David Galef: “One common critical assumption is that Marlow would like to tell the truth but cannot for fear of destroying an illusion; attendant to this theory is the notion that Marlow supports civilization with his lie, smoothing over the unbearable.”<sup>67</sup>

The African writer Chinua Achebe blames Joseph Conrad of being impartial and in favour of imperialism. Africa, it seems to Achebe, is made to be an “Other” – an opposite world to Europe. He writes: “*Heart of Darkness* 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.”<sup>68</sup> His critical position is essentially based on the portrayal of Conrad, who is so partial – or biased in his description, as this extract shows:

*The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us-who could tell? [...] 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. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible*

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<sup>65</sup> Schmitt, “Tidal Conrad (Literally),” 24.

<sup>66</sup> Schmitt, “Tidal Conrad (Literally),” 25.

<sup>67</sup> David Galef, “On the Margin: The Peripheral Characters in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*,” *Journal of Modern Literature* XVII, 1 (Spring 1990): 134.

<sup>68</sup> Chinua Achebe, “An Image of Africa,” *Research in African Literatures* 9, 1 (Spring 1978): 3.



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*frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you-you so remote from the night of first ages-could comprehend.*<sup>69</sup>

Even the grand black lady is described as primitive compared to the Intended, the beloved of Kurtz, who lives in Brussels. In the words of Achebe:

*This Amazon is drawn in considerable detail, albeit of a predictable nature, for two reasons. First, she is in her place and so can win Conrad's special brand of approval, and, second, she fulfils a structural requirement of the story: a savage counterpart to the refined, European woman with whom the story will end. 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.*<sup>70</sup>

### *Conclusion*

In *Heart of Darkness* two civilisations are in clash with one another: one makes sense only out-there (in Europe), the other makes sense only in-here (in Africa). The trinity "The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit" has become "the Company, the Central and the Inner Stations". The former is Monotheistic, the latter is Moneytheistic. The former Forgives, but the latter Punishes. Europeans are in the quest of the other – their other – in Africa. The voyage out-lands turns to be a voyage into the self, into the discovery of their other. Europeans have become more inward. The more they penetrate in the inner land, the more they sever from the external reality of facts, and the more they discover evil dormant within them.

*Heart of darkness* has shown that idealism of imperialism is no more than refreshment on parched sand. The idealistic civilizing mission of 'the civilized men' is revealed to be a comforting illusion of modern empire. It is no more than an organized mission of barbarism.

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<sup>69</sup> Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 68-69.

<sup>70</sup> Achebe, "An Image of Africa," 6.

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