

## Marlowe's Voyage Of Liberation: A Post-Colonial Perspective On Heart Of Darkness

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### Abstract

This research paper delves into the novel "The Heart of Darkness" by Joseph Conrad, examining it through a post-colonial lens to explore the themes of liberation and the impact of colonialism on various aspects of life. The analysis chapter investigates crucial subtopics such as the dream-like existence and passivity of the colonial settlers, the exploitation of power and the weaknesses of the colonized, the lives of subalterns, the imposition of new systems, and the loss of freedom. Additionally, it examines the darkness of life and the insignificance of native culture, along with the legitimization of invasion and occupation and the voice of resistance. The study adopts a qualitative research methodology, drawing on post-colonial theories presented by scholars such as Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, and Frantz Fanon (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1993; Bhabha, 2008; Fanon, 2008). These theories serve as a theoretical framework, guiding the textual analysis to uncover and interpret post-colonial structures and themes present in the novel. By employing these perspectives, the study seeks to understand the complexities of colonial relationships, encompassing traditions, norms, identity, culture, and experiences depicted in the portrayal of both colonizers and the colonized. The main analytical tool used in this research is Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, supplemented by insights from other post-colonial theorists (Edward, 1978). The data collection process involves a comprehensive study of the novel and the selected theories, and relevant text materials from the novel are carefully chosen based on the elements of the adopted theories. The primary sources of data include Joseph Conrad's "The Heart of Darkness," as well as the works of Spivak, Said, Bhabha, and Fanon (Conrad, 1902; Said, 1978; Spivak, 1993; Bhabha, 2008; Fanon, 2008). The research paper presents a qualitative data analysis technique, focusing on themes such as orientalism, racism, identity, subalternity, and hybridity. After thorough examination and interpretation of the novel's text in light of the selected theories, the paper offers critical insights into the post-colonial elements present in "The Heart of Darkness." This study contributes to the broader understanding of post-colonial literature and highlights the lasting impacts of colonialism on both the colonized and the colonizers.

Key Words: post-colonialism, identity, racism, notion of hybridity.

### Introduction

Most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the decolonization of the formerly colonized Western world, a time now known as post-colonialism, and the

man who is considered the founding father of post-colonialism is Edward Said (1978), who is also famous for his orientalist views. As a theory, post-colonialism includes a vast range of elements, among which the marginalization, terror, fear, suppression and control by power of indigenous peoples represent the main concepts regarding public affairs. Both colonizers and colonials manifested many kinds of relations that emerged within the same system, connections which are further elaborated in the extended literature developed by the post-colonial thinkers in their theories.

The novel "Heart of Darkness" (1902) is a haunting exploration of the complex dynamics between colonizers and colonial subjects. The story begins on the British ship *Nellie*, anchored off the Thames, where the narrator, the manager, the accountant and Charles Marlow converse. Marlow recounts his voyage aboard a steamer on the Congo River, which becomes the central narrative of the book. Marlow's youthful goal was to go to Africa and pilot a steamer on the Congo. He got a job at Business, an ivory trading company operating in Congo, and left Europe on board a French steamer. Arriving at the company's outpost in Congo, Marlow is confronted with scenes of violence, disorder and destruction. There he meets the accountant Kurtz, whose impeccable appearance contrasts with his arrogant attitude. Marlow draws important insights from this fascinating character.

Marlow embarks on a 200-mile voyage across Africa from the outstation to company headquarters, only to find that the steamer he was assigned to pilot has sunk. Frustrated by the delay caused by the repair, Marlow learns Kurtz's story from a business manager. The manager claims Kurtz is unwell, but Marlow becomes suspicious and suspects the manager of sabotaging the steamer to disrupt Kurtz's deliveries. The story continues when Marlow meets a mason whose useless work loses vital resources. After that, the Eldorado exploration expedition led by the manager's uncle arrives at the main station. Marlow overhears a conversation between the manager and his uncle about Kurtz's job, and the manager expresses concern that Kurtz is trying to undermine him.

Finally, while the steamer is being repaired, Marlow leaves the main station for Kurtz with the manager, agents and a small crew. As they approach Kurtz's inner station, they are attacked with arrows, leading to a violent confrontation between the white men in the boat and the natives. Unfortunately, the local captain is killed in the conflict. Marlow regrets never having had the opportunity to speak to Kurtz, as he suspects the inner station has already been attacked by the natives themselves. Dealing with the complexities of colonial relationships, exploring the themes of power, human nature and cultural conflict, the novel makes *Heart of Darkness* a fascinating exploration of the human psyche against the backdrop of colonial Africa.

The Heart of Darkness is a renowned narrative with multiple significant storylines, converging in its metaphorical representation of Africa as the most primitive, remote, and darkest continent. Scholars argue that the novel not only portrays Africa's darkness but also delves into its history as a continent ruled by colonizers and influenced by enigmatic external forces.

The post-colonial era holds immense significance for those of lower status, as it signifies liberation from oppressive colonial rule. Authors during this period challenged the colonial perspective that once deemed them inferior. Edward Said's "Orientalism" highlights the dominance of Western portrayal of the Orient, while Bhabha explores post-colonial identities. This study aims to shed light on themes of cultural, racial, and inferior identities in Heart of Darkness, showcasing the portrayal of oppression endured by indigenous peoples across Africa.

A heightened awareness among European thinkers has led to an exploration of issues related to colonization and colonialization, which in turn have led to discussions about perception, identity, culture and race in the former colonies. However, these representations were often distorted and presented unbalanced. Postcolonial literature, on the other hand, offers a more authentic picture of life in Africa and offers a deeper understanding of culture, identity, race and subjugation in the colonial era. This literature illuminates the hardships of culture and illuminates the emergence of voices advocating balance, equality and deploy an exposure of Western oppression of indigenous Africans.

#### **Objectives:**

- i. To assess the impact of post-colonialist theories on enriching the interpretation of the novel.
- ii. To explore the profound aspects of colonialism through the characterization of Marlow.

This research delves into the domain of post-colonial studies, centering on Joseph Conrad's novel, Heart of Darkness. By shedding light on previously overlooked facets of Charles Marlow, a central character in the novel, this study provides a comprehensive comprehension of the text's pertinent implications. The significance of Marlow's portrayal extends beyond this research, as it holds relevance for scholars, students, and educators in numerous additional contexts.

#### **Literature Review**

Marutfah (2013) directed a careful assessment of Joseph Conrad's Heart of Obscurity, uncovering the original's depiction of the colonized despite prejudice. The creator presumes that Africans are portrayed adversely by Americans, which shows the constraint of their emphaticness because of prejudice of their lifestyle. All through the novel, Africans are alluded

to as "Negroes," an overly critical term that adversely portrays the native people groups (Marutfah, 2013).

In a concentrate by Fatima et al. (2013), the clever's plot was painstakingly examined, prompting the distinguishing proof of two kinds of resistance: one zeroed in on strength and the other on accommodation. Heart of Haziness strikingly portrays scenes of brutality, displaying how the colonizers consumed development to the detriment of the native people groups. Native populaces are depicted as savage, languid, horrible, and graceless, totally disengaged from the upsides of advancement and development. This sharp differentiation among Africans and colonizers builds up the view of Africans as basically "others" (Fatima et al., 2013).

Guyen (2013) led a review zeroing in on the vicious relations between the two countries portrayed in the novel, which outlines the conflict of various moral codes. The pioneer populaces are portrayed as the "miscreants," while European colonizers are depicted as agents of the "heroes." The novel really shows the awful and constrained inconvenience of European thoughts and culture on native Africans (Guyen, 2013).

In a concentrate by Michael (2020), the detestations of western imperialism as portrayed in Heart of Dimness were examined. The novel gives proof of serious abuse and minimization of native people groups. It clearly depicts their day to day environments, which are far more terrible than on some other mainland, revealing insight into the unforgiving truth of post-pioneer presence for underestimated individuals in Africa. Moreover, the novel should be visible as both an excursion and a collection of memoirs, offering experiences into the profoundly disturbing circumstances in which colonized people groups live (Michael, 2020).

### **Research Methodology**

The present study presents limited qualitative analysis of the novel The Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad. This study is conducted for the purpose of discovering in the novel the elements of post-colonialism, as presented by post-colonial theorists such as Edward Said, Bhabha, Spivak, and others.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

As this study is based on a qualitative approach with an emphasis on postcolonial structures, the method of analysis used is textual and based on descriptions in the text itself. Postcolonial theory is used to highlight aspects such as traditions, norms, values, identity, culture, life experiences and perspectives presented in the novel in relation to both colonized peoples and colonizers. The implications of these central relationships are explored, drawing on famous postcolonial philosophers and theorists such as Edward Said, Spivak, Bhabha and Frantz Fanon. These concepts serve to illustrate and explain the major trends and circumstances that characterize the colonial era. Therefore, this study uses the theories of these postcolonial authors to provide a comprehensive interpretation of the novel's text.

### **Tools of Data Analysis:**

Qualitative research is the type of research which utilizes textual interpretation to denote the central issues and the varying aspects of those issues through application to the text of different theories. The adopted text is *The Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad (1902); the main analysis tool is the theory of Edward Said, with additional assistance from commentaries and analysis provided by other post-colonial theorists and their theories, such as Subaltern Theory by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1993), *Orientalism* by Edward Said (1978), *Notion of Hybridity* by Homi K. Bhabha (2008), and *Racism* by Frantz Fanon (2008).

The text of the novel is studied thoroughly, and elements of post-colonialism are determined for the purpose of analysis. The proposed theories of writers Said, Spivak, Bhabha and Fanon are also thoroughly examined, compared, and applied to the novel to provide a foundation for subsequent analysis, and for fulfillment of the purpose of the study. Selection of text materials in the novel is made according to relevant elements of the theories adopted.

Primary sources of data collection:

- i. *The Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad (1902)
- ii. *Subaltern Theory* by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1993)
- iii. *Orientalism* by Edward Said (1978)
- iv. *Notion of Hybridity* by Homi K. Bhabha (2008)
- v. *Racism* by Frantz Fanon (2008)

Secondary sources for the present study are libraries, articles and journals, internet sources, books, libraries.

The data is analyzed qualitatively, according to the selected elements of orientalism, racism, identity, subalternity, and hybridity. This analysis occurs after careful selection of the text of novel and interpretation of that text in terms of the proposed theories.

### **Data Analysis**

#### **Life of Colonials as Dream and Passivity:**

We live as we dream—alone. While the dream disappears, the life continues painfully. (Heart of Darkness, 1902)

These lines analyze character actions in Heart of Darkness, applying Said's (1978) postcolonial theory to comprehend the marginalized and oppressed living conditions depicted. Said's concept of Orientalism pertains to those under imposed rules and theologies, particularly inhabitants of colonies known as "Orient," where liberty and civilization are controlled. This study further examines interpretations revealing residents' lack of freedom. Similarly, Spivak's postcolonial theory focuses on subordinates, their limited voice, and mental state. The lines stress characters' confined existence to dreams, highlighting the African's limited life as an "Oriental" even in his own country. Their authentic voice is absent, dictated solely by work, disregarding lifestyle.

I don't like work--no man does--but I like what is in the work—the chance to find yourself. Your own reality—for yourself not for others—what no other man can ever know. They can only see the mere show, and never can tell what it really means. (Heart of Darkness, 1902)

Colonialism's central elements are passivity and marginalization, describing cultures seen as strange and lacking a voice in shaping their own systems, freedom, and ways of living. Said's discussions (1978) on power dynamics between colonizers and natives reveal the notion of resistance, with colonials denied prosperity and forced to adopt a Western worldview. They live under an imposed subaltern perspective, constantly focused on the colonizers, leading to overlord cruelty and the loss of self-recognition. The quoted lines highlight the tragic beauty and concern arising from colonists snatching basic rights from subjugated people, who can only observe their longings unfulfilled.

#### **Power Exploitation and Weakness of Colonials:**

Your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others. (Heart of Darkness, 1902)

Post-colonialism emphasizes resistance, but in Heart of Darkness, reciprocity between colonizers and colonized is evident. The characters' life experiences reveal the core issue of colonization, where the colonizer controls the minds, behavior, and circumstances of the subject people, leading to natural resistance. Foucault discusses this resistance, where the colonizer's power stems from the weakness of others, symbolized in the Africans' living experiences. Spivak argues that marginalized voices aren't given equal weight in positive portrayals, while their weakness is used to deny them any power.

Like a running blaze on a plain, like a flash of lightning in the clouds. We live in the flicker. (Heart of Darkness, 1902)

The lines quoted illustrate the painful and difficult situation for the peoples of Africa as well as for the governed. Conrad's Heart of Darkness depicts a pluralistic society with marginalized elements and shows that the colonized must adapt to the systems imposed by the colonizers. Such a life means that the colonized no longer have their own identity and only focus on their daily physical needs. Conrad dramatically emphasizes these key aspects of her life. Spivak's theory is consistent, stating that subordinates have no purpose in life and are told their experiences and culture have no value. The theory of Orientalism is also concerned with how people perceive the world through their own way of seeing and looking at things. The novel vividly describes life experiences in which ownership of land is beyond the residents' control.

#### **Life of Subalterns, New-System Imposition, Lost Freedom:**

I have a voice, too, and for good or evil mine is the speech that cannot be silenced. (Heart of Darkness, 1902)

From a Foucaultian perspective, post-colonists discuss sin, which includes resistance to authority, either explicit or implicit, as well as creation of circumstances antithetical to the prevailing social systems. The line quoted here illustrates the moral tendencies and implications of power, and that power is challenged by the voice of the colonized asking—no, insisting—on legitimation. Elements of high concurrence arise in these lines, especially those of good/evil, and these compel hearing: the natives cannot remain subaltern when they speak out for valid tendencies and rights. The social norms and values indirectly referred to compel attention to the fact that the congested, restricted, and restrained life is not acceptable to colonials, and that the life of development and search for prosperity is considered the ultimate reality by the colonial rulers.

...for there is nothing mysterious to a seaman unless it be the sea itself, which is the mistress of his existence... (Heart of Darkness, 1902)

This line contains and reflects, symbolically, the marginalization and uncontrolled aspects of the colonized who must live under some specific imposed system. The symbolic description represents a life in which the major marginalized players must suffer just to exist under the system that governs them. This existence filled with pain and suffering emerges from one central image with two distinct but related meanings: the sea as the symbol of the land which sustains life, and the sea whose referent is the inhabitants of that land and that country. Just as the seamen have little or no control over the dramatic movements of the sea which tosses and turns beneath their boat, so the people without legitimate control

of the land lack a firm grip on the land, because the systems that make it run successfully are not in their hands. Those systems lie in the power of the colonizers, which strangely do not allow, nor bring, a corresponding sense of control/manipulation to them. For Edward Said (1978), the land, the country, is among those manipulated things that related to the crucial aspects of life. His perspective, presented via his theory, involves the orientalism against which the natives of any country are presented, usually as the sage and savage who are necessary for studying the lessons taught by civilization. In this context, land occupation is a core issue for the colonial people who occupy the land, as well as for the governing systems of the country.

#### **Darkness of Life and Insignificance of Native Culture:**

He has to live in the midst of the incomprehensible, which is detestable. And it has a fascination, too, which goes to work upon him. The fascination of the abomination—you know. (Heart of Darkness, 1902)

Conrad presented himself as the protagonist in the novel, a man who has to encounter everything and who has to combat certain kinds of tendencies that arouse almost constant concern. At the same time, he must convince himself that these tendencies are legitimate rather than characteristic of the suppressed. The quoted lines imply major issues experienced by the suppressed people, because they are denied their rightful place in society. This society reveals two dimensions, one of which illustrates their living standards as well as the approaches to life that they confess. Said (1978) discusses the subaltern view of the world, which incorporates these denied tendencies. It clearly shows that many desired actions they are asked to perform take place in difficult circumstance where the desired action would be feeling-less, or feeling-free, and would not reflect tendencies of their own culture and cultural norms.

“It made you feel very small, very lost, and yet it was not altogether depressing, that feeling. After all, if you were small, the grimy beetle crawled on—which was just what you wanted it to do”. (Heart of Darkness, 1902)

According to Said (1978), colonial people are asked to think from the same perspective as their overlords, and this means ultimately that they do not live authentic, genuinely true lives but in performing actions not natural to them, they are simply ‘going through the motions’ without embracing the values that lie behind what they do. Actions of great significance are implied in the lines quoted, but the comparison of the country’s inhabitants to insects that crawl on the ground clearly communicate that the colonizers consider them the lowest of the low, and that their feelings and their reason for living has no significance independent of their manipulation. As the narrator says: “...the grimy



beetle crawled on—which was just what you wanted it to do.” Marginalization of the native people and disregard of their feelings lies at the heart of the discussion promoting the development of post-colonial theory, and these lines speak directly to these things: the subjugated people have to perform certain types of action irrespective of their needs and feelings, yet those completely disregarded feelings would later assume great importance. Such considerations move beyond the system that narrows its focus to various aspects of natural tendencies and aspects of colonial marginalization that are not acceptable in order to deal with things of greater significance. The issue raised in the beetle illustration in the lines quoted is ways to legitimize greater attention to, and concern for, the feelings of the colonized. The fact that their feelings are given no significance at all makes it necessary for the narrator to present the issue in a spectacular way, and this he does with his graphic metaphor.

**Legitimization of Invasion and Occupation, Voice of Resistance:**

Power sharing and violation of power is revealed in the quoted lines, which reflect the life of the indigenous people when they are coerced to live under an imposed colonial system. Said (1978) asserts that cruelty and suppression are part of an imposed society. Such impositions of foreign political, economic, and moral systems have occurred in many of the African countries. Native peoples are not allowed to live within their own systems, have to survive within the spectrum of their overlord, and continually experiences a sense of manipulation. Imagery in the quoted lines show the colonizers as wilder than they believe themselves to be, people who believe in the expansion of their empire at any cost. The actions of the colonials implied here indicate that they will enjoy their control and the power of creating social, political, and economic structures endlessly and at any cost to themselves. Other groups within the system, as well as the lives of people generally, remain at risk. This means that the people in control must be obeyed by acceptance of various norms of the set rules, and that the priorities and style of the native people lose their meaning. Similar assertions occur in the theory of subaltern perspectives, claims made there that marginalized people are not allowed to think freely and would not willingly adopt the imposed standards. The quoted lines indicate that the orientals are not given the permission to live as they want but must follow the set norms of the colonizers.

The edge of a colossal jungle, so dark-green as to be almost black, fringed with white surf, ran straight, like a ruled line, far, far, away along blue sea whose glitter was blurred by a creeping mist. (Heart of Darkness, 1902)

The life span of the continent of Africa is implied in these quoted lines, because the state emerges within the dark jungle where the natural biologic systems that comprise the eco-system are ruptured and largely disappear while the colonial system rises out of the ashes. That emergence from dark things symbolizes a system that is similarly dark, dark in the sense of something hidden and unknown and mysterious and, even, evil. All these meanings represent the ways the indigenous people experience the system that they are compelled to follow, a system that marginalizes them and strips away their freedom. It symbolizes as well as their recognition of their servitude and their abandonment of participation in their own system. The imposed system is crucial for the rest of the people, too, because they lack natural tendencies or have suppressed them. Said (1978) focuses as well on the overlords' sense of power-violation and the emerging plurality of the nation, a process during which the self-rule and self-governance system is abandoned while the orientals rediscover a different perspective from which the tendencies and norms of life have to be assessed under the rule of white people. These people do not fit the system, would bend easily into manipulation, and would develop a sense of life similar to the sense of life of their white overlords.

“Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings”.

Post-colonialism characteristically focuses the innocence of the indigenous people who have survived and then must live a marginalized life. As the quoted lines imply, they bring with them certain characteristics of every human population to the imposed political, economic, and moral systems of the colonizers. The imposed governing system occasionally pulls back, as in this novel, and reassesses their circumstances, momentarily gives in to a recognition of significant differences, but then tells them that they are unable to survive in the civilized world. Having to surrender their survival behaviors, and to accept ways to make such behaviors and rituals conform to more acceptable and organized systems, clearly indicates that the African people must live under British rule. They are told that they must adapt to the prevailing power system. Their pre-colonial life, which was carried on within a vast spectrum of natural tendencies, is implied by the country, or the indigenous people, existing in a vegetative state lorded over by the long trees, or white people, who are the true rulers. The quoted lines imply that the beliefs the orientals would have and the eyes through which would see their world deferred to the choice of white people. That image reflects the image of white people as power-holders and of themselves as a native people foundational to the civilization.

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. They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was 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 a darkness. The conquest of the earth, which mostly 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.

Post-colonialism, which means the extension of an occupied land to enhance the economy and governing system of the occupiers, usually refers to the British who during an important time in their history extended their territories and their power. The term also applies usually to the Asian and the African countries who lived under the rule of the British. The living experiences and the marginalized status of these peoples and their overlords comes into clear focus in the quoted lines. They indicate that the African people must live in difficult circumstances where the systems and traditions that they must embrace arise out of their subjugation. The words "conqueror, arisen from weakness, murdering of larger scale, tackling of the darkness" reveal the cruelty and oppression of the colonials who had expanded their governance and imposed their rules upon the people they had conquered. Their commitment to extension of their power will accomplish this objective, even if they have to assassinate the resisting people. The quoted lines focus these issues of British governance and system of control where the indigenous people are coerced to become civilized, according to the British understanding of that term, while in reality they remained savage.

### **Conclusion**

This study performs a qualitative analysis of Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* to examine the elements of postcolonialism as presented by postcolonial theorists Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The analytical method used in this study is a textual analysis that focuses on the novel's established postcolonial structures and descriptions. Postcolonial theory deals with the traditions, norms, values, identity, culture, life experiences and perspectives of colonized peoples and their colonizers. Prominent postcolonial thinkers and writers such as Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, and Frantz Fanon have discussed at length the nature and complexity of the relationships between these groups during the colonial period. Her work sheds light on the cultural trends and circumstances that have led to such relationships. This study uses the postcolonial theories of these authors to interpret the text of the novel and to explore how these theories enrich its meaning. In particular, it examines the negative aspects of colonialism reflected in the character and observations of the novel's

protagonist, Charles Marlow. The study focused on the postcolonial aspects related to the subaltern experiences observed by Marlow.

The results of this study indicate that Joseph Conrad effectively presents elements of postcolonialism in the novel, particularly in the description of the characters' life experiences. Marlow's comment supports the idea that settlers are expected to view life through the settler's prism and that power is used and derived in different ways in Africa. Throughout the novel, indigenous culture is viewed as savage and indigenous peoples are denied a voice from their point of view. The dominant colonial system undermines the intrinsic value of native Africans and places them in a position of subordination without leadership. The term "Third World" is used to classify Asian and African countries, labeling their indigenous peoples as "Oriental" and maintaining the impression that they lend themselves only to manipulation.

The colonial system is described as seductive, glamorous and promising, despite constant violence and exploitation. Marlow finds that while most of the settlers' suffering has subsided, the killings and oppression continue. The natives are forced to see the world through the eyes of their rulers, which reinforces the perception of their uncivilized nature and their association with dark and primitive impulses. Settlers and natives live in darkness and the symbols of trees, rivers, water and mountains represent the power dynamic between them. Settlers adopt the identities of the colonizers, leading to a gradual erosion of their unique indigenous identities through land grabbing and cultural imposition. Consequently, hybrid cultures arise from the merging of the native culture with the culture of the invaders.

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