



IDEALISM VS. PRACTICE OF THE EUROPEAN VALUES: STUDY ON JOSEPH CONRAD'S HEART OF DARKNESS

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ABSTRACT

Heart of Darkness as post colonial literature is inspired by Conrad's journey to Congo. The time in which most of the African countries were under European colonialism and slave trade was prosperous business. During this journey he condemned the colonialism and their exploitation of African people and wealth, but his portrayal of the native Africans as savages and giving them non-human traits, and how most of the white characters throughout the novel degraded black people, are regarded by many as overstated or even racism. In this paper it is attempted to explore the idealism and practice of the European regarding their motives of invading Africa such as salvation of the natives from their savageness to the equality of the civilized Europeans and how they practiced these ideals in Africa in comparison to Europe. The aim of this study is to picture out whether these claimed values and ideals were practically implemented on the ground or they are mere illusions which European imperialism used to exploit Africans and treat them differently during their colonialism as reflected in "Heart of Darkness". Through the analysis of Heart of Darkness it's found out that there is a moral dilemma. There is a conflict of ideals of western influence with the moral and physical ruins experienced by the main character Marlow. So there is a conflict between the ideals of civilization and savagery. Although there is no intentional desire by the imperialism to destroy Africa but there is apparent evidence that the European values were not practiced by the imperialism in Africa.

Keywords: idealism, practice, values, colonialism, imperialism, racism

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1. INTRODUCTION

Heart of Darkness, is a novella by Joseph Conrad, stating the story of ivory trade and slavery. His attempt to reflect this view is through the character of Marlow a white character whose childhood obsession was maps and exploration. Marlow tells the story as an eye witness participating in the most of actions of the story giving us dark image of

Africa and Africans and a horrible picture of colonialism. This darkness increases as we go into the depth of Congo. As well he reflects the role of the imperialism of the colonials in the exploitation of Africans for their own interests rather than to enlighten the natives' that they claimed for.

It is worth noting to reveal the story of Heart of Darkness before proceeding to the responses of

the critics of the novella. Heart of Darkness is a story of a white man travelled to Africa depth of Congo. He narrates what he has seen throughout his journey to the company station where Kurtz is working. Marlow accidentally with the help of his aunt finds an opportunity to replace a captain killed as a result of fighting with the local tribes in Congo. The company is for Seafaring and ivory gathering. Marlow embarks one-month journey to Congo where he described the African shores as welcoming but also they are dark and desolate in spite of the active work of the people.

As soon as he arrived, Marlow has been informed the death of the company employee who has committed suicide; and the sad story of gangs and misery of the natives. Marlow then meets a well-dressed man who looks so elegant and respectful. He is the chief accountant; Marlow befriends him and used to spend time with him in his hut while the accountant performing his accounting duties. On his way to Kurtz, Marlow travels two hundred miles journey to the depth interior of Congo. The journey is very tough and grueling, he saw many isolated and deserted habitats and dwellings and he crossed different paths up to his destination the company's station. Marlow also encounters working black men in the jungle.

Throughout the novel, Marlow never call black people as humans. Not only Marlow who describes the local black people as non-humans but also the other white characters in the novella give the natives animalistic terms. Eventually, Marlow meets Kurtz, but Kurtz was very sick in death bed. Kurtz trusts in Marlow and gives him all his possessions including papers and files among which a photo of his sweetheart. Kurtz passed away on the board of the steam ship on their way back to England. Marlow promises to meet Kurtz's sweetheart using her photo and he did so.

2. Literature Review:

The concept of idealism is about viewing human beings and different situations in our lives ideally. As defined by Marian Webster: idealism is defined as "the attitude of a person who believes that it is possible to live according to very high standards of behavior and honesty". Therefore, it's

appropriate to say that idealism is the mentality of viewing and envision a better world for all. Idealism believes firmly in things which are good but probably these hopes are impossible to be achieved on the ground.

On the other hand, practice is what can be attained as a concrete that is to be seen as the practical side of the large theory of ideals. The colonial ideals are to save the savage Africans from their darkness by enlightening them through their heavenly religion as opposing to local tribal religions, by introducing their civilization through education and infrastructure.

In the following it will be attempted to evaluate whether the colonials acted on practice as their announced idealism or wealth and power deviated them away from their norms and ideals in Africa as general and Congo in particular. Through this journey it will be tested whether the European ideals that all people are equal regardless of their color ethnicity or place of residence is implemented in the Heart of Darkness or not.

In the Heart of Darkness, the white as exemplified by Marlow treat the natives like non-humans and termed them traits that are similar to animals. On the other hand, Europeans in Africa were well respected as humans similar to their inherited values in Europe. They treated the natives as slaves exploited them for gathering ivory and other white man's interests.

Achebe (1977) stated that "Heart of Darkness" is a racist novella. He built his assumption on the theory that Marlow the main character and Joseph Conrad are the same voice. And this is attributed to the intentions of Marlow from his formative years had the desire to visit Africa. Maps were his obsession for exploring new places. Conrad also travelled to Congo once in his life and during his voyage to Africa he has seen the ivory companies and slave trade. Conrad portrayed the images of suffering and bad treatment of the imperialist colonials to the natives in Congo he reflected what he had seen there in his novella "Heart of Darkness. Achebe described this novella as a racist because in the novella African were revealed as non-human given animal terms considered as uncivilized human

eaters (cannibals), gangs and practicing superstitions without heavenly religion.

On the other hand, Saravan (1980) argued against Achebe's assumptions considering the fact that Conrad was not totally away from the prevalent racism, but he is trying to change public opinion on the issue of racism. He states that Marlow and Conrad are different. Because Marlow is a contradictory and ironic in many situations and statements as a result he became unreliable news source. Marlow also condemns Roman imperialism in England in one hand and praises their imperialism in Africa.

Murfin (1996) stated that the moral of white man is worsening when they became away from European restrictions: "analysis of the deterioration of the white man's morale, when he is let loose from European restraint, and to make trade profits out of the subject races" (Murfin: 99). Murfin justifies the deterioration of the moral of the white man as a result of being away from Europe because there are no restrictions similar to that of Europe in Africa. Here appears the dualism of the colonialism they behave civilized in Europe but their behavior tends to be barbaric. As a result their actions and treatment of black people in Africa more barbaric and full of savagery, and they tend to withdraw from morals of the civilization.

Said, Edward (1994) opens his critical essay "Two Visions in *Heart of Darkness*" by Pointing out that Europeans must not be blamed for the misfortunes of the present time. It should be instead looked at the events of imperialism "as a network of interdependent histories that would be inaccurate and senseless to repress, useful and interesting to understand." (Said, p: 19). As pointed out by Said it is not appropriate to blame Conrad for this reflection of factual events. His intentions are considered as an attempt to reveal what was taking place in the colonies to the civilized world of Europe.

3. Objectives of the Study

Joseph Conrad presented his novella "Heart of Darkness" to the world as one of the most controversial masterpiece of the world classics. It is effect touches the whole world and Europe and Africa in Particular. It has exemplified the colonialism as a destructive exploitation of the

African wealth and the natives. Despite the colonialism claim they are coming to Africa to provide civilization, through heavenly religion as opposing to superstitious paganism and education to eradicate ignorance and illiteracy. Therefore, the objective of this study is an attempt to explore the extent to which the colonialism practiced their ideals and values in their colonies or they failed to implement their values that they come with. And if they fail what have hindered them to obtain their goal as exemplified in the Heart of Darkness.

3. Materials and Methods

The researcher adopts the descriptive analytical research method. Content analysis in particular is used to collect data from literature textbook; namely "Heart of Darkness" by Joseph Conrad. This novella is analyzed to picture out the extent to which the idealism of the colonialism is parallel to their practices in Africa.

4. Analysis and Discussions

Imperialism and colonialism are rooted in the depth of the human history. Empires such as Athens and Rome in Europe, for instance established colonies and extended their empires often for economic reasons. New markets appeared as a result of the industrial expansion. The factories were turning out so fast, which necessitates importing more food for the increasing population in Europe. In the middle of this rivalry of imperials for the overseas possessions, there were strong religious and humanitarian forces underlying the spread of colonialism.

Christian missionaries for instance believed that they were offering the pagan natives of Africa a religion that is truer, more civilized, more humane, and less superstitious. This was ideal message that most of colonials justified their colony on African nation. But did they do their ideals they come with from Europe? Does their practices is similar to their ideals or even some of their ideals? The reality is different. The situation of the native Africans deteriorated and grew worse than ever and the local people became unpleasant. This is because ivory and rubber as the main product of the Congolese people and the source of livelihood of the natives was declared as the property of the state.

To examine whether these values and ideals they come up with are applied practically on the ground. It will be appropriate to go to the depth of Congo through Heart of Darkness to answer these questions.

From the very beginning of the novella, Marlow's aunt was very excited of sending Marlow to Africa terming him as an "emissary of light". This is what Marlow should be when he travels to Africa that is to enlighten the "Dark Continent" full of primitive and savages. The surface message of Marlow's aunt looks as if she is motivating him to travel to Africa to "civilize" the native African who is termed as primitive people. Probably it was the ideal trend and motives of the colonialism. "Wearing those ignorant millions from their horrid ways" (Conrad, p: 30). But the logical question here, did they really civilized the savages and primitive black Africans? This is the dilemma behind the announced motives and ideals and the irrational practice of the colonialism on the ground.

Marlow the main character when he met the black men working for the first time described them as:

"They were dying slowly-it was very clear, they were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now, - nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. Brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest"(Conrad, p:44)

This is an initial response of Marlow about the native Africans. This description is really frustrating in contrast to their ideals. The white man pretends that they seek enlighten Africa from the darkness. This may include ignorance, savageness, starvation and diseases.

Marlow stands for civilized European from Britain, therefore his thoughts and philosophy stands or similar to some extent that of imperials in general or at least the colonials and this dualism in their relationship with black people in Africa. The colonials treat the natives unlike the citizens of

Europe as animals or sometimes some animals are more useful than the inhabitants of Congo jungles. Congo here stands for all Africa.

Marlow described Kurtz as standing on behalf of all Europeans telling us about his background:"All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz, and by ...I learned that most appropriately the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs had entrusted him with the making of a report for its future guidance." (Conrad, p: 49)

The character of Kurtz is the kind of the imperials who are hungry, greedy and mad of ivory and collecting wealth. Since all Europe participated in making the greedy selfish character of Kurtz, then they might also have participated in suppression of the natives which Marlow terms them as savages and non-human throughout the novel. This negates the announced objectives of the colonials that they claim coming to Africa to provide education, a religion from heaven and to civilize these creatures and build hospitals. Consequently, they came to destroy Africa, its land escape, killing elephants for the ivory, destroying African traditions and natural habitats for both the natives and their natural resources.

MR. Kurtz stands for the "civilized" Europeans and has to implement the ideal values of colonialism, the bonds of civilization; but unfortunately he himself fall in the ocean of corrupted world. When his appetite has grown fiercely for wealth and power erected up that let him to sell his soul for ivory and business. In this juncture the colonialism put aside their values and ideals they come for and practiced barbarically even more savage than the black people of Africa was described for. Eventually, their mission ideals, civilization are blocked by the barbaric practice of the colonialism. They overthrow their values replacing it with wealth and power by robbing Africans own properties and exploitation of the natives versus degradation of the imperial traders morals.

The exploitation here is the worst type, because the native Africans are weak in comparison to the imperialism. So the black people were exploited and used as slaves to fulfill white man's interests. Hence, the colonialism goes back to

Europe full of wealth: ivory, rubber and slaves and degrading the black Africans. In contrary, they leave behind the natives even with more savage and primitive than ever before. Consequently, their mission is failed because they did not practice like civilized people themselves and their ideals of civilization are not practically implemented. Hence, they fail to accomplish their mission except in terms of wealth and power.

Another instance of colonialism failure of practice of ideal values is as the role of the "Brick maker". When initially we hear the name Brick maker we immediately come with buildings, such as hospitals, schools and other infrastructure. As claimed colonialism values, but the fact they did not make any bricks. Therefore, there are no any constructed buildings. The Brick Maker was idle person who did not work at all in the Central Station. Marlow pointed out:

"There wasn't a fragment of a brick anywhere in the station, and he had been there more than a year....waiting. It seems he could not make bricks without something ----Anyway, it could not be found there and as it was not likely to be sent from Europe, it did not appear clear to me what he was waiting for" (*Conrad*,p:56).

Even characters like the Brick maker who is intended to participate in building Africa by constructing even small buildings such as schools and health care centers he did not construct any building or made a fraction of bricks. As stated by Marlow, there was not even a fragment of brick in the station in a time estimated more than a year. As Marlow wondered "it did not appear clear to me what he was waiting for" we as the audiences ask the same question what was the Brick maker waiting for to start producing bricks. As a matter of fact the brick maker did not come to Africa to make bricks to build Africa, but he was there for other reasons. He was there to collect wealth and driven by ambition full of greediness and a sycophant. He uses all means necessary to climb the ladder of the company. As a result he used to flatter and suck up people he thinks they can help him to obtain his goals. Thus the role of the brick maker was artificial one he was

not there to build Africa but for his own concern that is to pursue after wealth.

5. Conclusion

Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" is one of the most outstanding literary works in modern history of English literature. Although it is a fictional work, it provides us some of the colonial and imperialism practices in Africa. As stated earlier the objective of this paper, is to explore how far the colonialism implemented their ideals and values of civilization on the ground. Through analysis and discussion it can be stated that the general manifestation of the colonialism which justifying their colony is a good idea. Colonialism claimed to perform many things during their occupation of Congo such as to enlighten the people of Africa from their darkness through introducing their heavenly religion and salvage them from the ignorance and civilize them by changing the local natives away from their savage way of living. But what has been explored none of these values accomplished, unlike the opposite is true they robbed the African wealth treated the local black people non-humanely. They failed to complete their mission because they sold their soul for wealth therefore they become greedy, hungry for ivory and rubber. Consequently, the natives were the victims they were treated badly and were exploited as slaves used as tools to help the imperialism to robe their wealth and their freedom. It can be concluded that in the Heart of Darkness, Europeans did not practice their ideals and values of their civilization. In contrary they opposed their values and practiced more savagery even more than the native Africans who they claimed their wilderness and barbarism as a result of the Europeans' colonial greediness and lust for power and wealth.

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