

Exploitation of African Resources and Indigenous People: A Postcolonial Study of Conrad's Heart of Darkness

Muhammad Shadab Ilyas¹

¹Anhui University, China

Email: muhammadshadabilyas@gmail.com

Received: February 15, 2025

Received in Revised: March 17, 2025

Accepted: April 24, 2025

Abstract

Colonialism, far from being a mere economic enterprise, functioned as a mechanism of moral corruption and ideological domination. The study interrogates *Heart of Darkness* as a textual space where the moral corruption and economic rapacity of colonialism are unmasked, with a particular emphasis on the novel's depiction of the ivory trade and the systemic exploitation of Africa's Indigenous communities. Based on postcolonial theory and historical context, this study uses a close-reading approach to show how Conrad reveals the psychological breakdown of its European actors in addition to the harsh material effects of imperial expansion. The findings contend that the narrative addresses the ethical and ideological inconsistencies that uphold colonial enterprises, going beyond a simple critique of economic looting. While Conrad's narrative structure and positioning complicate a rigid postcolonial interpretation, the novel nonetheless operates as a crucial site of colonial critique. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on imperialism's enduring repercussions, foregrounding Conrad's work as an essential text in postcolonial literary studies.

Keywords: Greed, Darkness, Resource Exploitation, and Dilemma

Introduction

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* with its haunting imagery and complex characters, serves not merely as a narrative of adventure, but as a profound critique of the imperialistic fervor that gripped the 19th century. Beneath the surface of an enlightened mission to bring progress to Africa, Conrad skillfully explains a tale of greed, moral disintegration, and the relentless exploitation of both, the land and people. Joseph Conrad wants us to see how Kurtz's great looting adventure, Marlow's journey up the river, and the narrative itself all share a common theme: Europeans performing acts of imperial mastery and all will (or about) Africa (Edward W Said, 1994).

The scramble for Africa led to the partition of the continent among the European powers. The Congo Free State was particularly a brutal example of colonialism, with King Leopold II ruling the region as a personal fiefdom. The "Scramble for Africa" is a striking example of the historian's attempt to recapitulate the historical process employing metaphor. Scramble suggests rapid and confused activity and a sort of treasure hunt (Betts, 1966). The Industrial Revolution created a demand for resources such as cotton, rubber, and minerals, which Africa possessed in abundance (Beck, 1993).

This led to a rapid carve-up of Africa, with European powers staking claims to vast swaths of territory without regard for existing African borders, cultures, or political systems. By the early 20th century, virtually all of Africa had been colonized, with only a few territories remaining under African control. The "Scramble for Africa" was propelled by the desire to spread Christianity, "civilize" African societies, and establish strategic military outposts (Beck, 1993).

The region was known for its rubber plantation, ivory trade, and forced labor camps. In the late 19th century, European powers were competing for colonies and resources in Africa.

This idea was often reflected in literature, with notable authors incorporating themes of colonialism and imperialism into their works. Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" published in 1899, is a novella that has sparked intense debate and controversy among scholars, literary critics, and readers, set against the backdrop of colonial frenzy in the Congo Free State during the height of European colonialization. Conrad's short novel is probably the most famous, and most widely read, of all the works of fiction on the topic of European imperialism in English literature. Short and well-structured narrative that is often realistic and satirical in tone. The story revolves around Marlow, a sailor who recounts his journey up the Congo River into the heart of Africa.

As Marlow travels deep into the jungle, he encounters the dark side of human nature and the effects of colonialism. The novella is a thought-provoking and haunting tale that explores the themes of imperialism, racism, and the exploitation of African resources and Indigenous people. *Heart of Darkness* projects the image of Africa as "the other world" a place where men's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality (Achebe, 2016). Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which better than any other work that I know displays that Western desire and need (Achebe, 2016), and it is indeed a powerful critique of the colonial project, highlighting the hypocrisy and violence that underpin European claims to moral and political superiority. In the narrative, the most damaging is the patronizing attitude towards Africa and Africans that permeates the book (Manby, 1992).

The late 19th century saw European colonization of most African territories. A pivotal event in this process was the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, convened by German Chancellor Otto Von Bismarck, where European powers gathered to formalize the partition of Africa among themselves (Crowe, 1942). The conference established the principle of "effective occupation," which allowed European powers to claim African territories based on their ability to effectively occupy and administer them (Crowe, 1942). This period, known as "Scramble for Africa", was conquered by European imperial powers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Parker & Rathbone, 2007). Marked by intense political rivalries and competition among European powers, particularly Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Portugal, and Italy.

Those European powers were in intense competition, rivalries fueled by a desire for territorial expansion, strategic dominance, and access to key trade routes. The colonial conquests of European forces had been achieved not by miraculous weaponry, but by greater aggressiveness, ruthlessness, and, above all, disciplined organization (Singer & Langdon, 2004). The first encounter between the peoples of the Congo and Europe took place in 1482 when the Portuguese explorer Diogo Cão led an expedition down the Atlantic coast of Africa (Rutz, 1970). Thomas Pakenham in his book "The Scramble for Africa: The White Man's Conquest of the Dark Continent from 1876 to 1912" reviewed by Bronwen Manby describes British "punitive expeditions" up the Niger in the 1870s, destroying the riverside towns with shellfire and indiscriminately killing all the inhabitants.

This underscores the ruthless pursuit of colonial interest regardless of the human cost. The consequences of the colonization of Africa for its inhabitants, were by no means confined to the century of direct European rule (Manby, 1992). The effects in Africa lasted for long, beyond the time when the direct rule ended. The study critically examines the dark underbelly of European colonialism in Africa, exposing the brutal treatment of African people and the exploitation of resources in the heart of darkness, exploring how Conrad's work perpetuates or challenges the dominant colonialist narrative of that time. It covers the concepts of colonialism and imperialism.

Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" serves as a profound critique of European colonial exploitation in Africa, highlighting the ruthless extraction of resources and its devastating impact on indigenous populations. The novella not only exposes the brutal methods of resource extraction but also delves into the far-reaching consequences for native societies and the broader implications for colonial power dynamics and environmental degradation. The first section examines the methods of resource extraction depicted in "Heart of Darkness." This includes a discussion of the ivory trade, which serves as a central motif in the novella, symbolizing the greed and exploitation driving European colonization.

The section further explores the techniques and tactics used by European colonizers, such as forced labor and violence, to extract resources from the African continent. The second section delves into the consequences of resource extraction for indigenous populations. It analyzes the subjugation and dehumanization of African natives, as portrayed in the novella, and discusses how European colonizers viewed and treated the indigenous people as inferior. This section also explores the disruption of societal structures, examining the displacement of communities, the loss of traditional ways of life, and the erosion of indigenous autonomy.

The third section addresses the broader implications for colonial power dynamics. It discusses how "Heart of Darkness" portrays the power imbalance between colonizers and the colonized, highlighting the monopolistic control exercised by European companies over African territories. Additionally, this section explores European colonizers' moral and ethical corruption, focusing on the psychological impact of their actions, as seen through the characters of Kurtz and Marlow. The significance of this research lies in its exploration of Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" as a critical commentary on European colonial exploitation in Africa.

Aim to contribute to the understanding of how literature reflects and comments on historical and socio-political realities, particularly the brutal methods of resource extraction and their devastating impacts on indigenous populations. Postcolonial theory deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies and those societies' responses (Ashcroft, 2017). By employing Postcolonial Theory, the thesis will offer an analysis of power dynamics and ideological constructs inherent in colonial entities. The research articulates its significance and relevance in contemporary academic contexts by articulating its significance.

As stated by scholars such as Edward Said, 'Orientalism is the founderstone of post-colonial study' (Sawant, 2011) and Homi K. Bhabha, postcolonial analysis is crucial for deconstructing the narratives of power and domination that have shaped historical and cultural interactions between the colonizers and the colonized. Therefore, this thesis deepens the literary analysis of Conrad's work and enriches the broader discourse on colonialism and its enduring impacts. The research underscores the relevance of "Heart of Darkness" in contemporary discussions about imperialism, human rights, and environmental degradation. Additionally, it inspires further scholarly inquiry, and debate, and invites new interpretations and critiques, encouraging scholars to re-examine other literary works and historical events through similar lenses.

This iterative process of analysis and reinterpretation is essential for the advancement of knowledge and the continuous re-evaluation of historical and cultural narratives. Moreover, as noted by scholar Elleke Boehmer, postcolonial literature plays a pivotal role in re-evaluating and re-telling history, colonial and postcolonial literature is the leading critical overview of and historical introduction to colonial and postcolonial literary studies (Boehmer, 2005).

Literature Review

The literature surrounding Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" is rich and varied, reflecting its enduring significance in literary and postcolonial studies. Scholars have extensively analyzed the novella's complex portrayal of European colonialism and its devastating impacts

on Africa and its people. *Heart of Darkness* analyzes the colonial enterprise and dehumanizes indigenous populations brought about by imperialism. The colonizers grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got (Hawkins, 1979). One prominent area of research examines the economic and ideological motivations behind European colonization as depicted in the novella.

Additionally, literary scholars have explored the symbolic significance of the ivory trade and its representation of colonial greed and exploitation. Critical discussions have addressed the portrayal of African natives and the themes of otherness and dehumanization. According to Mahfuza Zannat, the colonizers represent Africans as uncivilized and savage (Zannat & Longhai, 2021). In contrast, the reality of Africans is different from their appearance. Through Marlow's journey, Conrad exposes the devastating illusion of profit that blinds individuals to their ethical disintegration. Her research highlights Conrad's unique position as a European who critiques the racist ideologies of his time, inspired by his own life experiences and political insights.

Conrad's raised voice toward racism despite belonging to the European region might bluff some critics. In the view of her research thesis, Zannat's insights are crucial for understanding European colonial exploitation. Her analysis supports the arguments that Conrad's portrayal of Africa debunks the colonial justification of exploitation based on alleged savagery. Instead, Conrad uses Marlow's journey to reveal the devastating consequences of imperialism on both the colonizers and the colonized. Zannat's emphasis on Conrad's anti-racist stance aligns with the postcolonial framework, which seeks to uncover the layers of critique embedded in Conrad's narrative.

Gonçalves investigated the symbolic study of darkness in the novel. He concluded that the image of wandering pervades the tragedy of man's return to cannibalism, savagery, and, consequently, to his destructive state. We see that it is by man's walking away from the company of other individuals, often referred to as "Brutes", that man brutalizes himself to the point of no return (Gonçalves, 1981). He suggests that it is by isolating themselves from the civilized society of others, whom they often disdainfully refer to as "brutes" that individuals lose their moral bearings and become brutish themselves. This separation from society leads them to regress into a primal, savage state from which there is no return. According to Hunt Hawkins, throughout his fiction, Conrad condemned imperialism of all types, both efficient and wasteful, benevolent and malevolent, British and non-British. He further says:

"Conrad's condemnation of this highly capitalized and apparently benevolent imperialism, made on quite different grounds from his explicit judgment of Leopold, can be seen by comparing the cruelly inefficient building of the railway in Heart of Darkness with the competent yet still disruptive building of the railway in Nostromo." (Hawkins, 1979).

Hunt Hawkins's statement elucidates Conrad's universal condemnation of imperialism, regardless of its efficiency or the nationality of the colonizers. In the context of this research, Hunt's analysis supports the argument that "*Heart of Darkness*" serves as a critique of European colonial exploitation in Africa. Conrad's portrayal of the chaotic and destructive building of the railway in the Congo exemplifies the devastating impact of imperialism, reflecting a broader critique that also encompasses seemingly well-organized colonial endeavors. This duality underscores the inherent brutality and disruption caused by the imperial pursuits, irrespective of their outward efficiency or benevolence.

Research Questions

The native Congolese have been often portrayed by many of their literary writers as resilient and deeply connected to their land. However, as it has been taken from the narrative, *Heart of Darkness*, the representation of natives by European colonizers has been systematically shown as distorted and dehumanized. The narrative of characters for example Marlow and Kurtz, mostly, reflects a biased discourse that undermines the cultural identity, autonomy, and humanity of the African people, reducing the African people to mere tools for exploitation. From the perspective mentioned above, we are centralizing our main objective of study, to explore how the novel, *Heart of Darkness* shows the ruthless extraction of resources and the physical as well as verbal destruction of native African identity under European colonialism. The following research questions will guide our investigation: (1) How does the *Heart of Darkness* portray the ivory trade's exploitation of African resources, especially those in the Congo, as a major theme driving the economic reasons for European colonialism? (2) In what ways do the representations of African natives in the novel reflect the dehumanization and moral decay?

Methods

The research is purely based on a qualitative approach, centered on textual analysis, to explore mainly the postcolonial dimension of the novel. The methodology involved the following key steps: Engaging in the close reading of *Heart of Darkness*, focusing on the exploitation of the environment particularly the issues concerned with the land and under-earth minerals, and after that the exploitation of native Congolese both verbally and physically. This includes the examination of the locals who were working under the company. Besides this, the examination of language, used by the colonizers, the imagery, and the narrative techniques that were employed by Joseph Conrad to portray the dynamics.

Results and Discussion

Postcolonialism and Theory

Post-colonial literature originates from the erstwhile colonies of Britain in the Caribbean, Africa, and India. This theory came to the front with the critical literary domain in the 1970s, up to now the majority of writers and practitioners credit Edward W Said for his remarkable contribution, when he launched his book, “*Orientalism*”. This theory is based on the concepts of otherness and resistance (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013). Postcolonialism is the historical period or state of affairs representing the aftermath of Western colonialism (Hsieh, 1997). Overall, we can say that it challenges the dominant narratives of history and culture, which were either directly imposed by force or indirectly, using Christianity and the mission of civilizing the [so-called] uncivilized. It is a powerful tool for understanding the ongoing effects of colonialism in the modern world.

Exploitation Resources

Throughout the history of Africa, we have noticed that mineral wealth has been exploited for centuries by developed capitalist countries (Wright & Czelusta, 2003). Inside the novel, the ivory trade functioned as a central motif and reason for economic motivations behind European colonialism in the Congo Free State. In the novel, Joseph Conrad depicts his narrator, Marlow as a man of consciousness, the purpose of which is to illustrate the actual nature of colonizers. They were no colonists and nothing more. They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force (Conrad, 1902). Besides this, Conrad masterfully depicts the exact brutal exploitation of African resources, incredibly the central theme, with the ivory trade enlighteningly serving as a powerful motif that represents the complete economic motivation behind European colonialism that drove them from Europe to Congo Africa.

They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. (p.10). This kind of practice was not merely a commodity but acted as a symbol of the insatiable greed and moral decay that drove the colonizers. From the historical viewpoint, after the Industrial Revolution (probably 1760 to somewhere between 1820 and 1840), a sort of new corridors were opened for trade and commerce globally among Europeans and the rest of the world. They started journeys and voyages [specifically the dangerous sea travels] to faraway unexplored continents in search of power and wealth. In *Heart of Darkness*, the most prominent strategy depicted is probably the establishment of trading posts and, indeed, stations deep within the African interior.

These outposts [somewhat how] served as bases for European agents like Kurtz, his only task was to secure a large amount of ivory and some other precious minerals and metals. For the achievement of such tasks, the colonialists employed a network of African laborers. The British Empire colonized Africa to exploit their main resources, especially ivory, to use them in their manufactories (Hamad & Mkhalef, 2023). Even Conrad himself, through his narrator, believes that the whites may not be better than the natives in some respects. He subtly portrays this in the statement of Marlow, who metaphorically refers to the white imperialists as “whited sepulcher.” (p.13). This eventually means that they bring decay, violence, and injustice: the core of western modern civilization, of capitalism. Through his speaker, Conrad condemns the actions of those who capitalize on the weakness of the natives:

“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 darkness. The conquest of the earth, which mostly means 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.” (p.10)

In obvious respect, the physical exploitation of African natives by European colonizers actually was moving around the extraction of the continent's valuable natural resources and forced labor. Cedric Watts in Harold Bloom's new edition book, summing up he added that Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, figured out that Nordau, for instance claimed that civilization was being corrupted by the influence of the people who were morally degenerate; his account of the ‘highly-gifted degenerate’, the charismatic yet depraved genius, may have influenced Conrad's depiction of Kurtz. (Watts, 2008). The word ‘ivory’ rang in the air (p.35). McQuade confirms that European powers extracted vast quantities of minerals, including gold, diamonds, and copper, from African lands and much of its traumatic exploitation of natural resources traces its origins to early colonialism (McQuade, 2019).

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the central Congo, ultimately, became the site for extreme exploitation under the rule of King Leopold II of Belgium, this was because of the resources that the state of Congo had. However, in the novella, the central focus was on the extraction of ivory and some gemstones along with it, the extraction of rubber was also conducted at the same time during the realm with little regard for the well-being of the native population. Heaps of it, stacks of it. The old mud shanty was bursting with it... there was not a single tusk left either above or below the ground in the whole country (p.79). For the accomplishment of this greedy desire, they were often involved in the establishment of mining operations where the local population was forced into labor and violence under harsh and dangerous conditions, and social disruption was rampant as colonial powers sought to maximize their profits.

The character recalls it as ‘My ivory, my intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my_’ everything belonged to him (p.80). The profits from these resources were funneled directly back to Europe, with little or almost no benefit for the African populations. In the novel, ‘Mr. Kurtz, was at present in charge of a trading post, a very important one, in the true ivory country... sends in as much ivory as all the other put together.’ (p.27). The historical analysis can be somewhat how, specifically linked to the modern practices in mineral and raw material extraction. From the thoughtful analysis of Adam Hochschild, in his study on the greed, terror, and heroism in colonial Africa, the total extraction of raw materials is not merely an economic activity and it is deeply intertwined with the social and environmental justice (Wengraf, 2018).

While examining, the observation is particularly link to the atrocities that were committed in the Congo and subsequently, the quest for the resources led to widespread suffering. When Conrad visited the Congo, he saw disturbing scenes of absolute brutality, meanness, and cheating. ‘I could see every rib, the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope; and each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them, rhythmically clinking (p.23). From a humanistic viewpoint, he was disappointed with the mindset [psyche] of the white traders and the authoritative manners in which they treated the natives. Inside the novella, numerous references claim the brutality of Europeans towards African natives, such as they had been calling them words like savages and some sort of animalistic names.

During the conversation, Marlow said to Mr. Kurtz’s friend ‘Perhaps you had better go if you have any friends amongst the savages nearby.’ ‘Plenty’ (p-90). In many colonies, particularly in the Congo Free State, Leopold’s administration was characterized by systematic brutality and atrocities in the Congo Free State, including forced labor, torture, murder, kidnapping, and the amputation of the hands of men, women, and children when the quota of rubber was not met (Wikipedia, 2024). As far as the mentality of King Leopold II was concerned, he was at that time driven by the intense international rivalry’s need for territorial expansion; the ultimate aim was the colonial possessions. African people were subjected to forced labor; they were often brutally coerced into forceful hard work such as on rubber plantations, in mines, or in the construction of infrastructures like railways.

In the novella Marlow witnesses that ‘the thing looked as dead as the carcass of some animal... to the left, a clump of trees made a shady spot, where dark things seemed to stir feebly... they were building a railway... the cliff was not in the way or anything, but this objectless blasting was all the work going on. (p.22). Failure to meet quotas often resulted in severe punishment, including mutilation or death. Africans were compelled to build infrastructure such as railroads and roads that primarily served the economic interests of the colonizers. Those projects were undertaken with little regard for the well-being of the laborers, many of whom died due to the grueling work conditions and diseases. This kind of physical exploitation was justified by the colonizers through racist ideology that dehumanized Africans and portrayed them as inferior beings, who needed to be civilized. These actions had long-lasting effects on African societies, economies, and environments, the consequences of which are even clearer.

Exploitation of Indigenous People

While studying the book *Culture and Imperialism* by Edward Said, I came across a passage that, somehow, describes the attitudes of Western minds. He argued that the disturbingly familiar ideas about flogging or death or extended punishment being required when "they" misbehaved or became rebellious, because "they" mainly understood force or violence best; "they" were not like "us," and for that reason deserved to be ruled (Edward W. Said, 1994). According to his perspective, if we look closely at the idea, colonized people were seen as fundamentally different, as in the text. Said used the words, ("they" versus "us") and, as shown

in the novel, the native Africans were often dehumanized, and perceived as being closer to savagery or barbarism. As a result, colonizers just followed the belief that the only way to manage and control these populations was through force and violence, because "they" supposedly understood and responded only to such measures. Conrad has vividly portrayed this moment in such words:

“Near the same tree two or more bundles of acute angles sat with their legs drawn up... and all about others were scattered in every pose of the contorted collapse, as in some picture of a massacre or a pestilence.” (p.25)

The formally subjugation of native Congolese under that colonial rule has been clearly portrayed inside the narrative particularly in a way they were forced into submission European figures in power. Joseph Conrad, through his narrator Marlow, illustrates this form of indigenous exploitation through the depiction of Kurtz’s interactions with the chiefs, who did not engage with him as equals but instead approach him in a degrading manner. Hopefully, this is evident in the following passage: The Camps of these people surrounded the place, and the chiefs came every day to see him. They would crawl... when approaching Mr. Kurtz... after all that was only a savage sight (p.83). What it actually exemplifies is the ethnocentric view that Western civilization, the pinnacle of human achievement, and those who did not conform to Western norms were considered as backward or uncivilized.

This been analyzed over the time that the savagery of the great Empires dominated the Congo Free State. Throughout the history of the relationship between Africans and whites, the majority of them showed that Western white people formulate a sort of double revelation while observing the people, as Tyson comments that white racism is fueled by the myths that people of color are less intelligent, less civilized, less moral, and even less attractive than white people.” (Tyson, 2023). After viewing this argument, it can be believe that the exploitation of indigenous people in the novel is deeply rooted in colonial racism. Though, their blur agenda was to civilized the uncivilized. The earlier passage given is a key mechanism of exploitation, allowing Europeans to treat natives as expandable labour and subjects of control. The statement by Ahmad Sekou, Republic of Guinea, 1962, and Thomas Hobbes, further gives us the foregrounding opportunity for the actual familiarization of Africans. It follows as:

“The relation between the degree of destitution of peoples of Africa and the length and nature of the exploitation they had to endure is evident. Africa remains marked by the crimes of the slave traders: up to now, her potentialities are restricted by under _population. (Ahmad Sekou). A people, coming into possession of a land by warre, do not always exterminate the ancient inhabitants.” (Thomas Hobbes).

Since our exclusive focus here is on exploitation so we talk about the Europeans, all they did was a kind of savagery but in the shape of civilization (Hamad & Mkhalef, 2023). Exploitation and degradation of human values in every form was prevalent globally. (Cabrales, 2023). It is obvious, that the extraction of ivory has devastating effects on African societies, specifically in the region of Congo Free State. Universally, ‘domination and inequities of power and wealth are perennial facts of human society’ (Said, 2008). The European colonialists specifically relied on the myth of the Civilizing mission and their sole agenda was to justify their actions (Firchow, 2000). However, the Indigenous people were not only exploited for their forceful labor but also they have had suffered from the destruction of their social and environmental fabric. In the narrative, Conrad portrays that everything else in the station was in a muddle— heads, things, and buildings.

Strings of dusty niggers with splay feet arrived and departed. (p.27). We can say that they covered up the real economic reasons for their actions by framing their exploitation as a kind

attempt to educate and modernize the Africans, which they often referred to as "savages" in the overwhelming majority of cases. They were able to infiltrate crimes under the pretense of moral and cultural superiority. The novella, clearly, illustrates how the colonizers' greed in trade not only verbally exploits but also physically. Before going deep into the discussion its necessary to illustrate what the narrator of the novel says about the whites; 'we whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings—we approach them with the might of a deity', (p-71-72). It conveys several significant ideas related to colonial attitudes and the dynamics of power between Europeans and Africans. Firstly, this statement highlights the perceived cultural and technological superiority of the European colonizers.

The colonizers believed that their advanced technology, organization, and knowledge set them apart from the indigenous populations, whom they viewed as less developed or "savage." Secondly, the statement displays the way colonialists dehumanized the indigenous people by viewing them as fundamentally different and inferior. By referring to themselves as "supernatural beings" and "deities," the colonizers placed themselves on a higher plane of existence, which ultimately, legitimized their exploitative and oppressive actions. Therefore, this subsequent dehumanization facilitated the rationalization of brutal acts committed against the native populations.

Thirdly, we understand that the phrase underscores the ultimate psychological impact of colonialism on both the colonizers and the colonized in the Congo Free State. In a sequence seeing themselves as god-like figures reinforced their sense of entitlement and power, in an underdeveloped country. For the colonized Africans, the overwhelming force and unfamiliar technology of the Europeans could indeed seem supernatural and miraculous, this perception creating a sense of awe and fear that further cemented the colonizers' dominance. Most of the time, European colonizers have expressed their views regarding the native Africans as 'they had faces like grotesque' (p-20). We hold that European colonizers often expressed derogatory views regarding native Africans, describing them as having "grotesque" faces and other dehumanizing characteristics.

In the novel, we can observe that European colonists often portrayed African communities as barbaric and in need of European leadership to become "civilized". The narrator says that by the simple exercise of our will, we can exert a power for good practically unbounded (p. 71–72). They have been considering themselves as miracles just as the narrator has described it: I met a white man...He was amazing and had a penholder behind his ear. "*I shook hands with this miracle*" (p.25). This sort of practice perpetuates the cycle of colonization and cultural superiority. This gave rise to a paternalistic mindset among colonists who thought it was their responsibility to bring about change and teach the "uncivilized" Africans. This notion of cultural superiority was used to justify the imposition of European political institutions, educational programs, and religious traditions.

This set of thinking justified the exploitation of local labor and the appropriation of resources while simultaneously devaluing African traditions. Primarily, as we look back at the nineteenth century, we see that the drive empire in effect brought most of the earth under the domination of a handful of powers. Our analysis of dehumanizing others is the process by which colonists used the idea that Indigenous people were inferior to humans in order to rationalize their exploitation and enslavement. By characterizing the colonized as savages or beasts, this form of rhetoric robbed them of their humanity and made it simpler for colonizers to defend their ruthless tactics. This strategy served as a means of intimidation as well as a moral and ethical smokescreen, hiding the harsh facts of colonialism behind a facade of missionary language meant to appear more civilized.

Dehumanization has long been a pillar of colonial literature and policy. In the late 19th century, European powers often painted African communities as primitive, barbarous, and lacking in civilization during the Scramble for Africa. Numerous colonial literature and policies made this clear. For instance, Henry Morton Stanley frequently used disparaging language in his works to characterize Africans, which served to further the idea that these people were subhuman and in need of European rule and direction. This viewpoint was not unique; it was present in the literature and laws of the age, supporting the colonial enterprise's legitimacy and the concept of racial supremacy.

These dehumanizing beliefs served as the foundation for the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, which codified the division of Africa among European nations with little consideration for native cultures. By and by with consideration, Conrad further amplifies this dehumanization through the character of Kurtz, who epitomizes the ultimate descent into moral and ethical corruption fueled by colonial greed for trade. Kurtz's infamous report, where he states, "Exterminate all the brutes!" (p-72), succinctly captures the genocidal mindset that dehumanization fosters. Achebe, in his critical essay "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness'" argues that Conrad's portrayal of Africans as faceless, nameless entities perpetuates racist stereotypes.

The masses were either directly or indirectly controlled through the use of terror activity and intimidation by the authority, (Ilyas, 2024). The people of Congo kept in chains and forced to work hard, beyond their capacity. By depriving those Africans of their humanity, they were able to take advantage of their resources and labor without feeling responsible for what they were going to be insane. As from the historical viewpoint, we all know that one of the main forces for the colonization of Africa was the unquenchable need for raw commodities like minerals, rubber, and ivory. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which centers on the ivory trade, is obviously, a prime example of this relationship. The violent extraction techniques used by colonists highlight the degree to which dehumanization enabled economic exploitation. According to historical reports, Ivory was extremely valued in Europe at that time and had been considered as the prime motive.

If we saw Africans as nothing more than instruments or barriers, to overcome for financial benefit, Europeans could be willing to tolerate violent and enslaving methods in order to obtain these riches. The Europeans, specifically the whites, look at the inhabitants of the developing civilizations [Africa, Asia, and some historians claim South America too] with much contempt and disgust. We can conclude from all the analysis of the novel that the white man feels that it is somewhat how their responsibility to educate men [especially the inhabitants of Africa Continent] and of course it is popularly known as the White Man's Burden. Numerous other passages from the narrative, explain the phenomenon of human exploitation, many people were compelled to work, and 'each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them, rhythmically clinking' (p-22).

If we deeply analyze the iron collars and chains it shows the stark symbols of enslavement and oppression that the African natives most probably endured under European colonial rule. These kinds of physical restraints in the novel significantly represent the loss of their freedom and their autonomy. It is crucial to bring back to the forefront the central questions that have profoundly guided our entire investigation. this research primarily seeks to explore European colonial exploitation, we have examined how the novel portrays the ivory trade as an exploitation of African resources, as a central theme that reveals the economic motivations behind resource extraction in Africa and the subsequent dehumanization of native Africans.

For instance, we explore how the ivory trade serves as a central motif for understanding the economic drive that fueled European colonial ambitions. In fact, this question aims to uncover

the multi-layered narrative that Conrad constructs around the economic exploitation driving European interests in Africa, using the ivory trade as a metaphor for the larger colonial enterprise. Through an intricate analysis of the text, this work explores the methods, consequences, and symbolic significance of the resource extraction portrayed in the novel, seeking to connect these depictions with historical realities and broader colonial agendas. It examines within the broader context of how Africans were systematically portrayed and treated as savage. This reflection is not merely a literary exercise but a genuine attempt to bring to light the suffering and manipulation faced by indigenous populations, probably a history too often glossed over.

Conclusion

By concluding this research on Heart of Darkness, it can be confidently said that Joseph Conrad's novella offers a multifaceted critique of European colonialism, especially when it comes under the lens of postcolonial theory. By dissecting the portrayal of the ivory trade, it becomes clear that Conrad uses this theme to represent the relentless exploitation of both Africa's resources and its people. The novel also sheds light on the psychological and moral corruption of the colonizers, with Kurtz embodying the darkest consequences of unchecked imperial greed. Throughout this research, we found that Conrad does more than just to expose the physical brutality of colonialism; he also critiques the ideological framework that justified it. The dehumanization of African natives, represented by their objectification and voicelessness, illustrates how colonial discourse stripped them of their identity and agency. Using postcolonial theory, particularly the insights of scholars like Edward Said and Bill Ashcroft; it is now easy to see Heart of Darkness as a significant text in deconstructing the imperialist narrative that dominated the 19th century. As for my data collection, the combination of historical documents, literary criticism, and Conrad's letters helped provide a richer understanding of the colonial context. The analysis of key passages in the novel further supported the findings, offering evidence of Conrad's subtle but damning critique of European colonialism. The limitations, however, included the challenge of aligning historical facts with literary symbolism, and the often-ambiguous nature of Conrad's narrative left certain interpretations open-ended. In the end, this research has not only deepened my appreciation for Conrad's work but also reinforced the importance of literature in reviewing historical European injustices. The novel's relevance to contemporary issues of exploitation, human rights, and environmental destruction highlights its enduring significance, inviting future scholars to continue exploring its layers of meaning.

References

- Achebe, C. (2016). An image of Africa: racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness. *The Massachusetts Review*, 57(1), 14-27. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1353/mar.2016.0003>
- Ashcroft, B. (2017). Postcolonial theory. *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, 1-5. <https://doi.org/doi:10.1002/9781118430873.est0281>
- Beck, R. B. (1993). The Scramble for Africa: The White Man's Conquest of the Dark Continent from 1876 to 1912: Pakenham, Thomas: New York: Random House, 768 pp., Publication Date: November 1991. *History: Reviews of New Books*, 21(3), 128-128. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03612759.1993.9948689>
- Betts, R. F. (1966). The scramble for Africa: causes and dimensions of empire. (*No Title*).

- Boehmer, E. (2005). *Colonial and postcolonial literature: Migrant metaphors*. Oxford University Press.
- Cabrales, M. G. R. (2023). Exploitation of resources. In *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Global Security Studies* (pp. 513-515). Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-74319-6_332
- Conrad, J. (1902). *Heart of Darkness* (Vol. Penguin Popular Classics) [Novella]. Penguin Books.
- Crowe, S. E. (1942). The Berlin West African Conference, 1884-1885. (*No Title*).
- Firchow, P. E. (2000). *Envisioning Africa: Racism and Imperialism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness*. University Press of Kentucky.
- Gonçalves, R. (1981). Heart of darkness: a symbolic study. *Ilha do Desterro A Journal of English Language, Literatures in English and Cultural Studies*, 2(6), 060-073.
- Hamad, F. H., & Mkhalef, M. H. (2023). Savagery and Civilization: Joseph Conrad's "The Heart of Darkness". *Journal of Asian Multicultural Research for Educational Study*, 4(2), 1-6. <https://doi.org/http://doi.org/10.47616/jamres.v4i2.401>
- Hawkins, H. (1979). Conrad's Critique of Imperialism in Heart of Darkness. *Pmla*, 94(2), 286-299. <https://doi.org/10.2307/461892>
- Hsieh, S. P. (1997). Rethinking the problem of postcolonialism. *New Literary History*, 28(1), 7-19. <https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.1997.0009>
- Ilyas, M. S. (2024). Doublethink and Manipulation: Psychological Tyranny in Orwell's 1984. *Academic Journal of Social Sciences (AJSS)*, 8(1), 32-51. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.54692/ajss.v8i1.2157>
- Manby, B. (1992). WHITE MAN'S HISTORY.
- McQuade, J. (2019). Earth Day: colonialism's role in the overexploitation of natural resources. *The Conversation*, 18.
- Parker, J., & Rathbone, R. (2007). *African history: A very short introduction* (Vol. 160). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780192802484.003.0005>
- Rutz, M. A. (2018). *King Leopold's Congo and the "scramble for Africa": a short history with documents*. Hackett Publishing. <https://doi.org/LCCN2017034198>
- Said, E. W. (2008). Two visions in Heart of Darkness. *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: Joseph Conrad's*, 5-18.
- Sawant, D. G. (2011). Perspectives on Postcolonial Theory: Said, Spivak and Bhabha. *Literary Endeavor*, 2, 129-135.
- Singer, B., & Langdon, J. W. (2004). *Cultured force: makers and defenders of the French colonial empire*. Univ of Wisconsin Press.
- Tyson, L. (2023). *Critical theory today: A user-friendly guide*. Routledge.
- Vinthagen, S., & Johansson, A. (2013). Everyday resistance: Exploration of a concept and its theories. *Resistance studies magazine*, 1(1), 1-46.
- Watts, C. (2008). Heart of darkness. *Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness*, 19-35.
- Wengraf, L. (2018). *Extracting profit: Imperialism, neoliberalism and the new scramble for Africa*. Haymarket Books.

- Wright, G., & Czelusta, J. (2003, November). Mineral resources and economic development. In *Conference on Sector Reform in Latin America, Stanford Center for International Development Nov* (pp. 13-15).
- Zannat, M., & Longhai, Z. (2021). Imperialism & Insanity: A Study on Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness. *世界文学研究论坛*, 496.