

## Whiteman's morality, colonialism and heart of darkness

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### Abstract

Heart of Darkness, a post-colonial piece of literature is recognized as the analysis of the deterioration of the Whiteman's morality when he is set loose from European restraint and planted down in the tropics as an emissary of light, armed to the teeth, to make trade profits out of the races. Exploitation of black people, mentally and physically and its condemnation is at the centre of Heart of Darkness. His treatment of the Africans as non-human entities is considered by many as racism. This paper is an attempt to explore the morality of white people with reference to their invasion of African countries so that they may help them come out of their uncivilized manners and how they practice their morality. This also aims to know whether white man's morality was actually practiced or not or its ground reality was different from European intentions. A deep study of "Heart of Darkness" reveals that the morality of Whiteman was at stake in Africa. Their moral ethics remained problematic for them. Conrad's goal using morality is moral confusion. Charlie Marlow, the main character and narrator goes on a journey with the European Ivory Trade to Africa. This journey dawns upon him the black face of morality of the Whiteman overtaken by greed and imperialism. Marlowe thinks how easy it is to become inhuman without a structured civilization. He discovers that European values were not practiced in Africa.

**Keywords:** colonization, whiteman, post-colonialism, morality, heart of darkness, european values, practice

### Introduction

Colonial morality is about saving the savage Africans from their darkness. Lois Tyson states that "Colonialist ideology was based on the colonizer's assumption of their own superiority, which they contrasted with the alleged inferiority of native people, the original inhabitants of the land they invaded" (419). Heart of Darkness reflects Conrad's idea through Marlowe, who would like to hide immoral activities of the white people in Africa: colonizers think that they set examples for black people, so the colonized were considered 'other', different, and therefore inferior to the point of being less than fully human" (Tyson 420). This is the reason why the world is divided into two different parts – "us" (the civilized), and "them" (savages). The end of the novel presents the dark side of Europe. This explanation strengthens the concept of Europeans "as civilized, enlightened, at a more advance state of intelligence and ability than the African" (Brannigan 146).

"Heart of Darkness" is the story of Marlow who travelled to Congo. He tells whatever he sees throughout his journey to reach Kurtz. The company for which Marlow works, deals in gathering and transacting ivory. Muffin stated that the morality of Europeans becomes worst when they are away from European restrictions: "analysis of the deterioration of the Whiteman's morale, when he is set loose from European restraint, and to make trade profits out of the subject races" (Muffin 99). On reaching Africa, Marlow feels that Africa shores are dark and desolate: up to the company's station, in order to reach Kurtz, he saw several isolated and deserted habitats. He comes across black people working in jungle. He never calls black people as humans. In this novel, Europe meets with Africa where Marlow talks about the futility of the morality of colonialism. Said points out that "the whole point of what Kurtz and Marlow talk about is in fact imperial mastery, white European over black Africans, and their ivory, civilization over primitive Dark Continent" (29). Not only

Marlow but also all the other characters in the novel describe the natives in animalistic terms. Marlow meets Kurtz. He gives Marlow all his possessions including official documents among which there is a photo of his sweetheart. Marlow comes back England and meets Kurtz's sweetheart as promised.

"Africa is merely the fictional projection of a European fantasy in which Europe is the only truth" (Brannigan 144). Conrad wrote this novel to show the reality behind this truth. Evil of colonial exploitation is condemned here. Being a different novel from all other Victorian novels, Heart of Darkness elaborated the truth of colonialism and colonial morality imposed by England on Africa. Morality of European exploration is the issue discussed in the novel. Through a fictional character, Conrad explores the brutal activities of white people. Booker states that "Conrad's Charlie Marlow is openly critical of much of the European activity that he observes in Africa, especially of the brutal treatment of many of the Africans by their European masters" (Booker, 219) Chinua Achebe, in his an "Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness" comments that Heart of Darkness projects the image of Africa as "the other world; the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization" (338). He says this by using the assumption that both Conrad and Marlow are one and the same. Conrad, himself also travelled to Congo and observed the slave trade and ivory trade. Heart of Darkness states the story of ivory trade and slavery. Marlow presents a horrible picture of Congo. He reflects the morality of Imperialists in the exploitation of natives rather than enlightening them. The objective of this study is an attempt to discuss the extent to which the colonialists practiced their morality in colonized countries or they failed to implement their morality that they come with.

### Analysis and Discussion

In the start of Heart of Darkness, the first and the second narrator talk of darkness, gloom and despondency, literally as

well as symbolically. Both pose to be torch bearers of light. Marlow, the English seaman is aware of the fact that the light of England's achievements and civilization was struck by men long dead; that he and his contemporaries bask in the reflection of their glory. The dark English coast recalls for Marlow the darkness of moral vacancy. For Marlow, the morality of the Whiteman in Africa is not the simple darkness of the natives' ignorance but of European colonizers who have blinded themselves and corrupted the natives by their claim to be torch bearers. Marlow compares the exploitation of the black by the white man with the exploitation of the English people by Romans. The English exploiters, once upon a time were also exploited: in spite of all this European exploiters justified their exploitation and colonization by considering themselves the civilizers of the black. Did they do justice with their morality? Did they really civilized Africans and changed their social structure according to their own European standards? Reality is quite different.

Marlow's aunt managed to send him to Africa. He was termed as an "emissary of light". Dark continent of Africa was thought to be uncivilized, primitive, savage, uneducated, barbaric and ignorant. Purpose of Marlow's visit was to enlighten the black, this is what Marlow's purpose was to be. Perhaps it was an ideal trend behind the justification of colonialism. "Wearing those ignorant millions from their horrid ways" (Conrad, p: 30). Kurtz, long before Marlow, goes to Africa with all the intentions of civilizing the natives, but when he reaches there, he forgets his original mission, and behaves like another European exploiter. He advises the International Society for Suppression of Savage Customs to "Exterminate all the brutes". This is the real face of the morality of Whiteman: Marlow describes the black men 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 what Marlow initially thinks about the black. European pretend to end the darkness of ignorance, savageness, starvation and diseases. Marlow and Kurtz stand for Imperialism and Colonization. Their thoughts and philosophies pose to be civilized in content. For them the colonized are animals or perhaps some animals are more useful than the people of Congo. Congo here metaphorically stands for all Africa.

"All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz" (Conrad, p: 49). Kurtz's mother was half-English; his father was half-French. He was educated partly in England and partly in other countries. Marlow became his friend and admirer. Conrad has presented him as an efficient agent, a painter, a journalist, a musician, a great conversationalist, and a great man who could win over the hearts of the natives. All Europe also contributed in making Kurtz a selfish character. When Marlow and Kurtz call them non-human, it also reveals that the whole Europe is terming them so: Kurtz is the figure of evil whose morality is flawed, he is worshipped by the natives as a man-god. "Heart of Darkness" is nearly a story of diabolical possession, for Marlow is compelled to face the fact that in some mysterious way there is bond between himself and Kurtz. He is the company's most successful agent, had at first hoped to bring the light of civilization into the great darkness of Africa.

Consequently, Kurtz and perhaps the whole Europe looted and exploited Africa. The natural resources, along with the traditions of Congo people were destroyed just for the sake of getting as much ivory as possible. Kurtz stands for implementation of the ideal values of white people's imperialism; so he establishes the rituals which would allay the anxieties of the natives and therefore maintain his own position. The ritual –the sacrifice of a young and vigorous man would make the man-god strong and vigorous. When Kurtz's illness becomes more frequent and pronounced, this ritual was performed to see the infirm Kurtz becoming strong and vigorous. The heads on the poles facing Kurtz's hut were those of the victims. This is the barbarism, practiced by colonizers and prove to be more savage than the black people. The exploitation is of worst type because the black are weak in comparison to imperialists. Europeans fail in their mission because they did not behave like civic people themselves. They fail to accomplish their mission except in terms of wealth and power.

Whatever Marlow sees in his journey to Congo is instance of the failure of the morality of the white people. He comes across the forsaken railway truck, looking as dead as the carcass of some animal; the brick maker is idle for a year with no bricks and no hope of materials for making them; the wanton smash up of drainage pipes abandoned in a ravine; burst, piled up cases of rivets at the outer station, and no way of getting them to the damaged steamboat at the central station; the vast artificial hole somebody had been digging on the slope –all these and many more are the instances of the criminality of efficiency and bareness of morality. This proves that the Whiteman over there, are inefficient and selfish. They themselves do nothing, whereas on the other hand they exploit natives to the maximum. They extract the maximum workout of them pay them three nine –inch long brass-wire pieces a week, which are insufficient to buy them anything. This novel is a very faithful record of the cruelties and atrocities perpetrated on the natives of Africa by their European masters.

Role of the "brick maker" is also an example of the negative morality of the white. Brick making brings in our mind the making of buildings like schools, hospitals, educational and health institutes. In actual practice there were no buildings constructed as the "Brick maker" was an idle person. Marlow says, "There wasn't a fragment of brick anywhere in the station, and he had been there for more than a year waiting. It seems he could not make bricks without something found there" (Conrad, p: 56). Brick maker was not there in Africa to make bricks, his purpose was other than this. He was a greedy person whose only endeavor was to collect money. He did not intend to build Africa rather his concern was to pursue after wealth.

### Conclusion

"Heart of Darkness" is the most distinguished piece of literature in the history of English novel. It portrays the activities of the imperialists and the colonialists in the dark continent of Africa. Europeans tried to claim that they did their utmost to enlighten the people of Africa so that they may become civilized. To bring changes in the savage ways of living of the black people was endeavor of the white people. The attempt to bring ignorant black people out of their ignorance by using the civic manners of the white was what is called the morality of the colonialists. But the fact is that none of these values was accomplished. European exploiters are called by Marlow as looters, burglars,

inefficient and selfish. The story brings before us the nature of western superiority in primitive islands. Reading this story repeatedly, we know that the dark English coast before him recalls for Marlow the darkness of modern Africa, which is the natural darkness of the jungle, but more than that the darkness of moral vacancy, leading to the atrocities he has beheld in Africa. This moral darkness of Africa, we learn later is not the darkness of the ignorance of the natives, but of white men who blinded themselves and corrupted the natives by their claim to be light bearers. The European white men in Africa are parasites: They are hollow, they have no morality. They are also collapsible, because their society's institutions are incapable to hold them up. Ivory has become the idol of the foolish run of European pilgrims; and Kurtz is no exception, "all Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz". It can be concluded that Europeans failed to practice their morality in Africa. On the other hand they crossed all limits of brutalities in order to fulfill their lust for power and wealth.

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