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Colonialism as a Profession: A Precursor of Moral Degradation in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

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Abstract: This paper examines the negative effects of colonialism as a profession on the European colonizers, particularly Mr Kurtz in the novella *Heart of Darkness*. The present study intends to analyze the idea that not only the African wilderness is responsible for the moral corruption of Mr Kurtz and his companions, but his profession is also a reasonable cause. The paper also explores how the narrator of the story, Marlow, who is also a part of the colonial system, distorts reality and blames only the African environment for the mental degradation of Mr Kurtz. In this regard, Frantz Fanon's concept of violence is used to illustrate these problems in the given novella. The study concludes that although Marlow only reprehends the African wilderness for the moral collapse of Mr Kurtz, colonialism as a violent profession is also a substantial factor responsible for his extreme behaviour.

Introduction

Background of the Study

By the end of the nineteenth century, most of the land outside the premises of Europe and its inhabitant people were under the occupation of European powers. Military advancement of the European powers gave them an edge over the native people, and their cannons and guns helped them to subject many nations to their service. The dominant powers exploited the colonies severely, and the people of the colonies were always considered inferior, uncivilized, lacking history and language, barbaric, and alien. The occupation of the colonies and its people was carried out under the guise of civilizing the world or what Rudyard Kipling calls the "White Man's Burden." But what happened under the veil of imparting civilization was looting the resources

of the colonies, genocides, racism, indiscriminate enslavement of the native people, and treating them like animals. A massive amount of literature—in the form of dramas, novels, poems, and short stories—has been produced to underline the atrocities committed in the name of civilization by the colonizing powers. The famous novella of Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, is one such example in the long list of such works.

Heart of Darkness is the story of a European shipman, Marlow, who is appointed by a private organization as a captain of a steamboat. He goes to Africa, the Belgium-occupied Congo (also known as The Belgium Congo at that time), on a mission to bring back a disease-stricken agent of the company named Mr Kurtz. The company is run under the illusion of the mission of civilizing

the barbaric Africans—as the people of Belgium thought so. But after visiting Africa, Marlow comes to see the hypocrisy of the company. He comes across the inhumane condition of the natives in the name of humanization. He and all the other Europeans are well aware of the fact that what is done is done for profit only. All the Europeans know that the very profit has perverted them into cruel controllers of the land, but still, they blame the African wilderness for their cruel inclinations. Mr Kurtz is an excellent embodiment of such brutality. Before coming to Africa, Mr Kurtz was a good person with a variety of talents—as described by his fiancé—but after entering the vicious program of colonization, he becomes a demigod and crosses every limit which distinguishes a sane person from an insane.

Statement of the Problem:

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* characterizes the African wilderness as the root cause of all the moral perversions that the European colonizers experienced in Africa (Belgium-Congo). This study aims to highlight that it is not only the effect of African wilderness but rather the very profession of the colonizer that demands to put such savagery into practice. Frantz Fanon's book *The Wretched of the Earth* provides useful insight into this whole phenomenon and practically explains how the colonizers are pushed into such brutal practices by their profession. The present study is an attempt to know the negative effects of colonialism as a profession on the European colonizers, particularly Mr Kurtz in the novella *Heart of Darkness*.

Objectives of the Study

This study focuses on:

- To show that colonialism as a profession is equally responsible for the moral degradation of the colonizers, especially Mr Kurtz.
- To find out that the African wilderness is not responsible for the mental and moral deterioration of Mr Kurtz and the rest of the

Europeans in Africa, as described by Marlow and his other companions.

Questions of the Study

This study answers the following questions:

- How are the colonizers (particularly Mr Kurtz) corrupted by colonialism as a profession?
- How do Marlow and the other colonizers blame the African wilderness for their moral corruption?

Significance of the Study

This paper pens out some key problems in the given novella. It helps the reader(s) to know that it was not Africa that was dark during its forceful occupation by King Leopold II of Belgium, but it was the profession and the way in which it was looted mercilessly. It also helps the reader to understand how reality is obscured by certain narrative techniques, as in the case of Marlow, and something else is presented instead of what really happens.

Literature Review

In order to expose the crimes and barbarities committed by the colonizers in the name of spreading the light of civilization, a large sum of works has been classified under the banner of Postcolonial Theory. Despite the complications of the term, Elam defines Postcolonial Theory quite simply and states that it is an epistemological body of thought that chiefly deals with accounting for the political, aesthetic, economic, historical, and social impact of the colonial domination of the West over the rest of the world in the eighteenth century through the twentieth century (Elam, 2019). The literary works produced in the wake of European imperialism unveil the exploitation of the native people, which was masked behind the notion of civilizing the world. The criminal policies and looting behaviour of the colonial enterprise have given way to a great amount of criticism.

Osman (2020) defines colonialism in these words: "Control by one authority over a dependent territory or people." Colonization refers to the act of one nation sending its settlers to another to live there after violently invading that nation and claiming its territory as its own. She separates the two waves of colonialism. She claims that the first wave started in the 15th century, at the apex of "Europe's Age of Discovery." During this era, North and South American areas were colonized by European colonizing powers like Britain, Spain, France, and Portugal. God, Gold, and Glory are the three motivating factors for the initial wave of colonial encroachment. God, because Christian missionaries considered it to be their moral obligation to propagate their own religion and believed that, in return, a higher reward from God was waiting for them for rescuing the souls of colonial people; Gold, because the Western masters would use the resources of other nations to jack up their own economies; and Glory, because European nations frequently competed over the glory of acquiring the most number of colonies. Nineteenth-century colonialism is regarded as the second wave: "During the 19th century, a second wave of colonial occupation was underway, focusing on the continent of Africa. The so-called "Scramble for Africa" saw European countries like Britain, France, Portugal, and Spain divide the continent up like a pie, drawing arbitrary dividing lines and capturing huge tracts of land for themselves. King Leopold II of Belgium, also referred to as "the Butcher of Congo," oversaw one of the most ruthless colonial governments ever. An estimated ten million Congolese people died as a result of his violent activities, which are extensively recorded (Osman, 2020).

Similarly, Price (2018) classifies the colonial enterprise as a process entirely based on the deliberate use of violence against indigenous subjects. He notes: "There is no doubt that violence had a role in the history of empires. Nonetheless, I believe it is accurate to state that

the majority of the time, the problem of imperial violence has been safely contained to the categories of war or the rare "scandal" of the empire started by an overzealous use of force (Price, 2018, p. 1). What Price wants to say is that colonial violence is not denied but is manipulated and represented as an occasional mishap. Furthermore, Price also highlights the key features of colonial violence: "First of all, it was intimate and ordinary in nature, virtually every day in character... It was the type of violence Elizabeth Kolsky has recorded for India as being "an inherent characteristic of imperial power," but also being "one of the empire's most jealously held secrets... Even though it was committed by large groups of people, this violence was primarily motivated by the settler community and had a personal feel to it. Second, it may have a significant influence on indigenous groups in terms of demographics... Third, the connection between this form of violence and the State and State violence was complicated. It was a form of violence that wasn't necessarily brought on by state institutions or official policy. This type of violence was racial, social, and imperial, although it frequently occurred outside the purview of the State. The last aspect of this violence that I want to call attention to is its blatant brutality, which Aimé Césaire described as the de-civilization and brutalization of the colonizer" (Price, 2018, pp. 5-8).

According to Roes (2010), violence and terror were used as strategic tools for looting natural resources like rubber in the African colonies, particularly Congo. Along with ivory, the rubber trade was also monopolized by King Leopold II of Belgium, as Roes notes: "During a period that far beyond the existence of Leopold's African empire, Congolese society was subject to a much larger wave of violence and upheaval than the terror of the rubber dictatorship. The first several years of the colonial encounter significantly widened the political, social, economic, and cultural disturbances experienced by the Africans. These first decades were preceded by

years of increased warfare, looting, and slave raiding that saw the dissolution and reconfiguration of the region's most vital political systems..." (Roes, 2010, p. 10). As a result of the European intervention, the pre-established African culture and tradition underwent profound changes. There was nothing as bringing civilization or technology to the colonies; all that mattered and stood first for European domination was revenue collection—by hook or by crook. Roes writes: "Revenue collection and labour mobilization were the parts of colonial administration that were most obvious, widespread, and disruptive. The severity of rubber exploitation and the dominance of the "rubber regime" in narratives explaining the widespread violence reigning the area can both be attributed to the rubber industry's vital role in the state's financial stability. King Leopold took full advantage of the chances that the demand for rubber in the world gave him to strengthen the shaky finances of Belgium and fulfil his personal imperial ambitions. A violent and fatal race for money was sparked by his constant personal pressure on his employees to enhance productivity, as well as a perverse bonus scheme that rewarded state and concession business agents for their excesses (Roes, 2010). Hence, the indiscriminate and brutal force was used for the exploitation of the colonial lands; every sort of corruption was a common practice of the colonial regimes, which left prolonged effects, both on the colonizers and the colonized.

Theoretical Framework

Among Postcolonial writers and theorists, Frantz Fanon is one of the most appreciated critics. He was also an active member of the resistance movement in Algeria and worked alongside the movement for the liberation of Algeria, famously known as the "National Liberation Front (Front de Libération Nationale; FLN)" (Peterson, 2023). Fanon, in his monumental book, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), perceives colonization as an unjustifiable project based on violence and

looting. He asserts that "their [colonizers and the colonized] first encounter was marked by violence and their existence together—that is to say the exploitation of the natives by the settler—was carried on by dint of a great array of bayonets and cannons" (Fanon, 1961, p. 36). Fanon puts forward his arguments in a clear sense that the very beginning of colonization is violent. He criticizes the colonizers for the perpetuation of violence as he writes that "it is obvious here that the agents of government speak the language of pure force" (p. 38). The process of domination was carried out by the Europeans in the name of spreading civilization, but Fanon points out that this was never the case. He regards the Europeans as perpetrators and asserts that "yet he [the colonizer] is the bringer of violence into the home and into the mind of natives" (p. 38). Moreover, Fanon, as a psychiatrist, also examines some important cases in the last section of the book, which further sheds light on the experiences of colonization (both by the colonizers and the colonized) as a system of force, and its deteriorating effects on the psyche of the experiencers. One of these cases will be examined in the discussion part of this paper.

Sartre, in the preface to *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), launches his criticism against colonization far more severely than Fanon does. He, in the preface, notes that "elsewhere she [mother country, that is, the colonizers' country] has played a double game: the colony is planted with settlers and exploited at the same time" (Sartre, pp. 10–1). He, by admitting the violent crimes of the settlers, says that the settler settles every matter by only one thing, that is, the "brute force when he can command it." Sartre also rejects any excuse for colonial violence as was presented by the settlers. He asserts that the striking power of Europe serves the task of turning this hypothetical certainty into a fact; it is ordered to degrade the citizens of the annexing nation to the status of superior monkeys in order to defend the settlers' use of them as beasts of

burden. In the occupied lands, violence aims to degrade these enslaved men in addition to keeping them at a distance (p. 15). He removes the mask of delusion and deception and declares that first, the West must face that shocking truth, the strip tease of its humanism. It is quite naked there, and it is not a nice sight. With its honeyed phrases and pretence of sensibility, it was nothing more than a lie-based ideology that provided the best basis for pillage (p. 24). Therefore, colonization is a process, the foundations of which were led by the use of brute force, as pointed out by Fanon. Its crimes and abuses cannot be justified under any notion of humanity, as mentioned by Sartre.

Discussion

Heart of Darkness, a remarkable work of Joseph Conrad, is open to many different and contradictory interpretations. It not only explores the crimes committed by the colonial regime in Belgium-Congo (Present day Democratic Republic of the Congo) but also provides an insight into the mind and soul of an individual. The story revolves around the journey of Marlow to Congo to bring back an agent of a company involved in the ivory trade. The agent, named Mr Kurtz, is believed to be “a very remarkable person” (Conrad, 1899, p. 27) by his companions; he is a multitasking man and is “of greatest importance to the Company” (p. 32), which is, indeed, the case. But Kurtz’s remarkability is only limited to his existence in Europe, as described by his fiancé in the last few pages of the novella. It implies that Kurtz is remarkable in a dual sense: remarkable before going to Africa and remarkable after he sets foot in Africa. Before going to Africa and entering the vicious colonial enterprise, Mr Kurtz is a magnetic personality, as described by his fiancé. He is a person who attracts people by his mere eloquence, as she reveals to Marlow that Kurtz was able to attract others “towards him by what was best in them” (p. 108). Kurtz is an admirable European, as she further says that knowing Kurtz

and not admiring him for his many gifts was impossible (p. 107).

She does not stop at mere admiration but wants to give Kurtz the status of a monument, something to be remembered forever as she adds on, mournfully, that “of all his greatness, of his generous mind, of his noble heart, nothing remains—nothing but a memory. She wants his life to be a guiding principle for others because a life like his cannot be immolated for the sake of mere sorrow (p. 109). Moreover, Mr Kurtz is an exemplary person before his visit to Africa. His *Intended* affirms that his charismatic persona would compel anyone to love and admire him and that people were much inspired by him because every act he did would reflect goodness and well-being (p. 109). Not only she but Kurtz’s cousin also admits his gentleness to Marlow, who was quite curious to know about all that happened to his cousin, Kurtz, during his stay in Africa, particularly the final moments of his life. Accidentally, he also reveals to Marlow yet another talent of Kurtz and adds that he was “essentially a great musician” (p. 103). Kurtz’s cousin also admits the success of Kurtz to Marlow and says that “there was the making of an immense success” (p. 103).

It is evident from the above discussion that Mr Kurtz, in Europe, is not what he is in Africa. His sheer European genius is maintained in Africa as well; the difference lies in the shift that occurs in his psyche and his moral degradation after visiting Africa. His moral corruption is attributed to the absence of a check-and-balance system upon him, the previous criticism. Psychoanalytical interpretation of the text also affirms the idea that the lack of civilization, as a necessary controlling system upon individuals, eventually leads to the deprivation of moral values. It is civilization or social norms which keep the integrity of morality of an individual uncompromised, as Freud notes that civilization gains control over a person's potentially deadly urge toward aggressiveness by weakening and disarming it and by establishing a body within

him to keep an eye on it, much like a garrison might in a city it has conquered" (Freud, 1930, p. 38). Marlow also refers to the same phenomenon in the following words:

"with solid pavement under your feet, surrounded by kind neighbours ready to cheer you or to fall on you, stepping delicately between the butcher and the policeman...how can you imagine what particular region of the first ages a man's untrammelled feet may take him into by way of solitude—utter solitude without a policeman—by way of silence—utter silence, where no warning voice of a kind neighbour can be heard whispering of public opinion? These little things make all the great differences. When they are gone, you must fall back upon your own innate strength, upon your own capacity for faithfulness."

(Conrad, 1899, p. 30)

The idea discussed above is acceptable that Mr Kurtz is corrupted by drifting away from civilization. But what this criticism, and even Marlow, lacks is that what drives Kurtz to craziness and brutality is the very nature of his profession as a colonizer. Colonization (as discussed in the preceding portions of this paper) is a mechanism based on the well-planned use of violence and force. The occupation of a foreign land can neither be achieved nor maintained without the brute use of force. Fanon calls colonization a process of "violence in its natural state" (p. 61). For Sartre, the colonies were the centres of massacres, and the Europeans pretended to forget the fact that they had conquered foreign lands, made them colonies by force and that the native people were butchered in the name of Europe (Sartre, p. 14). Therefore, it requires people with cruel and brutal tendencies. It does not accept people having sympathies towards the natives. Mr Kurtz is a good person in Europe but becomes violent and insane in Africa not only because of his disconnection with European civilization—as pointed out by the previous criticism—but also

because of his task to hold and exploit the foreign land and its resources by force.

Mr Kurtz, being an oppressor, is forced to use force, for he has no other option other than that. Fanon discusses this mandatory use of force in quite simple words and states that "between the oppressor and the oppressed, everything is solved by force" (p. 72). Whether he likes it or not, Kurtz needs violence not only to maintain his position as a demigod but to extract what he wants the most, that is, ivory. Deep down, Kurtz perhaps does not prefer violence, for the Russian admits that Mr Kurtz suffered a lot. He did not like all this at all, but "somehow he couldn't get away" (p. 81). It is because, one way or the other, he is compelled by the system of colonialism. As Fanon writes, "The colonial regime owes its legitimacy to force and at no time tries to hide this aspect of things" (p. 84). It is a well-known fact that a profession has a profound impact on the development of the personality of a person. Colonies are like what Travers (2022) calls "Bottom-line Workplaces," which he defines as:

Workplaces with a bottom-line mentality are those that pay little attention to anything else, such as employee well-being and interpersonal relationships, and instead place a strong emphasis on performance, production, and financial success. Those who tend to be "obsessively passionate" about their work should avoid working in environments that have a bottom-line mentality because they might be problematic for almost everyone. This is important that they don't neglect their interpersonal relationships and psychological health. Passionate people have a tendency to become completely focused on their work. (Travers, 2022)

The same is the case with Mr Kurtz. He works in a place where he has no control over the system, and rather the system controls him to the extent that he plunges into an endless abyss of immorality. Kurtz's violence and insanity are not only limited to the African natives but even his

own friends and well-wishers are not safe from him, which again can be attributed to his thirst for ivory and profit because of the demand of his profession. The Russian confesses to Marlow the threat he himself faced one day. He tells Marlow that once, the chief of a village gave him a small amount of ivory. Kurtz demanded ivory and was not ready to listen to any argument about it. He finally announced that he would kill the Russian if he was not handed over the ivory, for there was no obstacle in his way to abstain him from executing anyone he wished to kill. The Russian tells Marlow that in this way, he was forced to surrender his ivory to Kurtz in order to not to be killed by him (p. 81). The only thing they all wanted was profit for themselves, opposite to the claim of civilizing the backward nations. Marlow explains their greed for ivory and says that the only thing which mattered to them was ivory; the only thing they wished for and starved for was to get an appointment to a spot where a large sum of ivory was expected so that they may “earn percentages” (p. 35).

Mr Kurtz is driven by his profession to the extremes of his personality, and he becomes a person with a barbaric mentality. Violence affects not only its victims but the perpetrators as well, and Kurtz is one such example. Fanon asserts that the colonies are full of such cases as that of Kurtz because of the brutal and oppressive environment created by the colonizers. Describing Algeria, Fanon notes that Algeria has turned into a suitable “breeding ground for mental disorders” (p. 251). He also describes some case studies (which he examined himself as a psychiatrist) which are helpful to understand this phenomenon and its aftermaths on people—such as Kurtz—who are directly involved in such repressive practices. Among these, the most relatable one to the case of Mr Kurtz is that of “a European police inspector” who used to beat his wife and children (p. 267). The police inspector suffers mental perplexities, which he calls “fits of madness” (p. 267). The police inspector further confesses his extreme behaviour: “Can

you give me an explanation for this, doctor: as soon as someone goes against me, I want to hit him. Even outside my job, I feel I want to settle the fellows who get in my way, even for nothing at all” (p. 267). All his aggression is because of his job, which is torturing the subjects in order to get the necessary information out of them. When Fanon asks him: “What happens to you when you are torturing?” He describes his experience in these words: You might not know it, but it's quite exhausting. We do take turns. That much is true, but the trick is knowing when to give the next guy a turn. Each person believes that he will receive the knowledge at any moment and takes great care not to give the bird to the agent waiting for his turn once he has nicely moulded him since the other person would obviously have the honour and glory of it (p. 268). What happens to the inspector is the internalization of violence from the dark cells, which he, later on, wants to exert on everyone standing in his way. Fanon draws the same conclusion that this man [the police inspector], even though he tried to place all the blame for his disorders squarely on his current problems, he was completely aware that they were directly related to the type of activities that took on within the chambers where interrogations were conducted (p. 269).

Mr Kurtz's furious nature also resembles that of the famous British explorer and colonial expert Henry Morton Stanley, who worked for King Leopold II in Belgium-Congo. Stanley, like Kurtz, never hesitated by the terrifying application of force to fulfil his ambitions. Getz (2023) gives the details of Stanley's criminal plans for forced Labour and writes that Stanley was frequently provided with African Labour for his European explorations. This group of Labourers was frequently subjected to abuse. Stanley's treatment of his employees, even so, was not particularly rare. Gaining financial gain was one of colonialism's goals. In other words, colonized people had to be forcibly forced to Labour for little to no pay. Bodily harm and other forms of violence were frequently used by

businesses and colonial governments as well. Large-scale projects like the building of railroads have seen some instances of this violence. A single project can sometimes result in the deaths of tens of thousands of workers. (Getz, 2023) In the same way, Meyers (2016) highlights the parallels between Conrad's and Stanley's writings: Stanley's "In Darkest Africa" was published to widespread acclaim in 1890, the same year as Conrad's own treacherous trip to the Congo. Conrad's *Eldorado Exploring Expedition* and Stanley's *Emin Pasha Relief Expedition* both make reference to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), which also makes reference to Stanley's title. Further on the parallels between Stanley and Kurtz, Meyers claims that Stanley served as a good template and foundation for the creation of Kurtz's identity. "Stanley burnt towns, killed defenceless Africans, administered brutal lashings, beat some subjects to death, executed those who abandoned him, chained the Africans, bargained them as slaves, and served them as human sacrifices to the famished cannibals," the author adds. Stanley exhibits the same aggressive behaviour as Kurtz, whose barbarism is displayed by the "heads [of the natives] on the stakes" (p. 82), and Stanley also had left behind a severed head tied to a tree to give the Africans a message not to resist his ravages upon his next return (Meyers, 2016). Thus, it can be argued that Stanley was a good inspiration for Conrad's Mr Kurtz because of their shared brutal and criminal traits. It should be noted that both of the characters (i.e., the fictional Kurtz and the actual Stanley) were experienced colonialists, and it was the very need of their plans and missions to capture and plunder the foreign lands and their people by violence.

Not only Mr Kurtz but his other colonial partners are also manipulated by their inhumane and frivolous actions. Marlow's predecessor, named Fresleven, whose death opens up the opportunity for Marlow to be appointed by the company, is another example of such insanity.

Fresleven is killed by natives in a scuffle which results "from a misunderstanding about some hens" (p. 13). Fresleven, before coming to Africa, was what Marlow refers to be "the gentlest, quietest creature that ever walked on two legs" (p. 13). But what turns him into a monster is his occupation. In fact, he wanted to force himself upon the natives as a master and superior to them, and thus he "felt the need at last of asserting his self-respect in some way." And that "some way" which he is compelled to choose is the use of pure violence and force. That is, he considers it necessary to beat the chief of the people "with a stick" (p. 13). Fresleven, like Kurtz, represents a typical colonial master mindset. To achieve his goals as a master of the land and people, he follows the policy prescribed by Kurtz, which is that the colonizers "must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings—we approach them with the might as of a deity...By the simple exercise of our will, we can exert a power for good practically unbound" (p. 71-2). This approach which the colonizers claim to be for the "good practically unbound", is used as a shield to cover the crimes committed during the forceful occupation of the other nations; this is the validation the occupiers offer for their monstrosity in the colonies.

It is evident now that it is Kurtz's profession—along with the other factors—which makes him an animal. But, in the story, Marlow and the other European colonizers blame the African wilderness for the moral downfall of Kurtz and the other white masters. Throughout the story, the Europeans never acknowledge the fact that Kurtz was, first, driven out by the class-based nature of European society. Marlow comes to know about this fact when he visits Kurtz's fiancé. She tells him that her family was not in favour of her engagement to him because he was not rich enough as compared to other people to marry her. This idea of comparatively low financial status of Kurtz in society gives Marlow the thought that "it was impatience of

comparative poverty that drove him out there [to Africa]" (p. 108). And then Kurtz was swallowed up by the rapacity of the "bottom-line" task given to him—not to spread civilization but to plunder the African lands and its people—for Marlow admits that speaking honestly, Kurtz "raided the country" (p. 80). Even the manager of the Company admits that the methods that Kurtz implemented for extracting ivory "had ruined the district" (p. 83).

What Marlow tells about Kurtz, his madness, and the impacts of the wilderness on the European outsiders cannot be trusted wholeheartedly, for his own shipmates do not take any particular interest in "Marlow's inconclusive experiences" (p. 10). He does not even acknowledge the reality of the other places and people outside Europe. He calls them "blank spaces on the earth" (p. 11). Marlow's problem lies in the language he uses for the rest of the world and the people outside the geographical boundaries of Europe. Language, according to Guven (2018), creates illusions, distorts reality, and divides people into masters and slaves or foes and allies (Guyen, 2018, p. 265). Guven goes on to say that Marlow is a bold, smart, and honest European hero. He acts like a colonialist there, unable to overcome his cultural preconceptions despite being the hero of European culture. As an agent of imperialism, Marlow shares the same constrained thinking. Such a reality is difficult to fully comprehend. [as that of Africa] for a European (Guyen, 2018, p. 262).

Marlow, no matter how much honest his opinions are about the brute colonial enterprise, like Conrad himself, is still a European and, more importantly, part of the same colonial project. Edward Said, in the *Introduction to Culture and Imperialism* (1994), describes "Conrad as a creature of his own time" and elucidates that most of the works based on Western imperialism argue that the West is the centre of important action and life in the world. According to this perspective, without the West, the remote parts of the world have no existence, history, or culture

to speak of, as well as no independence or integrity worth defending. And when anything needs to be defined, Conrad says, it is "utterly corrupt, degraded, and irredeemable." (Said, 1994). Marlow adopts the same attitude towards the reality, history, and language of Africa and gives the details of the environment. He considers himself to be a complete stranger, wandering somewhere "on a prehistoric earth," on land that appears to him and his other fellows as "an unknown planet." He assumes that they were about to proclaim themselves as the "first of men" who have arrived upon the land and have taken control of the "accursed inheritance" (p. 51). Marlow uses his typical Eurocentric lens to see the native Africans as people not having "any clear idea of time," as the Europeans had because of their progress over the "countless ages." The Africans, according to Marlow's account, "still belong to the beginnings of time—had no inherited experience to teach them as it were" (p. 58). Following this attitude, he and his fellow colonialists hold the inexplicability of the wild surroundings responsible for all the evils. Moreover, the contradictory statements of Marlow further add to the "inconclusiveness" of his story.

Marlow hates lies, yet he tells one to the fiancé of Mr Kurtz. Despite being aware of what sort of monster Kurtz has become in Africa, Marlow tells her that Mr Kurtz is "a remarkable man" (p. 107). When he is asked about Kurtz's last words, he, instead of telling the truth, distorts the reality—the original words of Kurtz were "The horror! The horror!"—and tells Kurtz's "Intended" that the final thing he uttered was her name (p. 110). The justification which is provided in favour of these lies is that Marlow wants her to remain in her illusion because he considers women to be "out of touch with the truth" (p. 18). Marlow considers it a sort of his moral obligation to help her remain in her ignorance about Kurtz. "Marlow thinks that this falsehood will cement her notion that Kurtz spent out his time in obedience to a magnificent ideal

that was intimately related to the love which they had for each other," Arneson (1984) writes. He tells the Intended what she hopes to hear, that Kurtz's last pronouncement was her name (Arneson, 1984). But Arneson refutes the given justification by stating that Marlow's quaint defence of his deception to the Intended by claiming that women "are out of it should be out of it" (p. 49) falls flat given the context of the narrative he is telling. The failure of this one defence does not prove that the falsehood is unreasonable in and of itself. The problem with these readings is that they do not help to explain how Marlow perceives his deception to the fiancé to be a manifestation of his loyalty to Kurtz or how the deception may be justified as such (Arneson, 1984, pp. 432-3). It is thus clear that Marlow's story is full of contradiction which also erodes the credibility of his narration. As a consequence, the assertion of Marlow that only the African wilderness is responsible for the savagery of the Europeans—particularly Mr Kurtz—cannot be sustained firmly.

Not only Marlow but the other European colonizers—whether directly or indirectly involved in the colonial machinery—all put the blame for their savage behaviour on the hostility of the African wilderness. The doctor, which Marlow visits for his medical checkup, has probably never seen Africa, and yet he blames the African reality for the psychological disturbances of the Europeans going there. He advises Marlow to "avoid irritation more than exposure to the sun" (p. 17). The colonialists assume that the African natural environment is something deadly for them; it, they think, drags them into such confusion that they even commit suicide. But they all neglect the fact that besides other factors, the barbarism and rapacity they inflict upon the natives is also one of the main reasons for their moral collapse. They attribute their every "fit of madness" to the wilderness as the Swede captain refers to a suicide incident and tells Marlow that one day he encountered "a man who hanged himself on the road." When Marlow

asks the reason, he is told that "the sun is too much for him, or the country perhaps" (p. 21). It is not only the African environment which leads them to such monstrous tendencies but also the environment in which they create themselves through their cruel behaviour towards the natives.

Conclusion

Thus, it is observed that Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* provides important details about European imperialism in Africa and also gives an insight into the mind of a human. Conrad's personal experience in Africa and his observation of the moral deterioration of Europeans in the wilderness convinced him that evil resides in the heart of every man. As soon as it finds an outcome, it takes no time to pervert the individual into a brutal animal. Despite its brilliance of language, sheer criticism of the colonial occupation, and the pillage and plunder done in the name of spreading civilization and morality, Conrad's story misses some important points, such as the aftermaths of being a colonizer. Conrad and Marlow both forget that there were two environments: one that of the wilderness; second, the one created by the monstrous behaviour and violent policies of the occupiers. The effects of both environments are grave, but Conrad and Marlow discuss only the former to be harmful. In this scenario, Frantz Fanon's practical observations as a psychiatrist are much helpful in looking into the latter phenomenon, that is, the effects of professional colonialism on the perpetrators (not only the victims) of violence. It is also clear from the above discussion that Marlow's narration, in a strict sense, is not reliable. He presents his experience from a Eurocentric point of view which is one-dimensional. He not only distorts the truth and facts but also negates the very existence of African reality. This paper, therefore, brings forth these problems in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and solves them according to the available framework.

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