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"The Self-Destructive Nature of Empire: The Boomerang Impact of Imperialism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness"

"طبيعة التدمير الذاتي للإمبراطورية: تأثير الكيد المرتد للامبريالية في رواية قلب الظلام لجوزيف كونراد"

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Abstract

Imperialism has deep roots in the history of mankind. As a malady, it has afflicted many developing countries. Definitely, it has resulted in various severe side effects not just on the colonised people but on the colonizers as well. Thus, foregrounding the pain of the colonised people and its impact on the colonizers is considered the most important issue. This work attempts to highlight the causes that give rise to such problems. Under the title "The Self-Destructive Nature of Empire: The Boomerang Impact of Imperialism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness" the work examines the reasons behind the reversal of the colonized peoples' afflictions onto the colonizers. The main cause of the exploitation and enrichment of empowered countries is the suppression of weaker countries, and this weakness is largely due to a lack of science and knowledge. Life is a competition; thus, countries compete against each other. Whoever reaches the facilities of life sooner can overthrow its rivals. This assertion can be confirmed by various historical incidents. The colonialism and imperialism of the British in the last century is an example of how this came to be. Therefore, imperialism is regarded as one of the consequences of competition among countries, a fact that has brought about misery, massacred world wars, and the erasure of nationalism.

There is no doubt that imperialism has many negative impacts on the colonized country and its people. This fact is certain; however, imperialism also affects the colonizers themselves. Therefore, what concerns is foregrounding the boomerang impact of colonization. This idea is clearly observed in Conrad's Heart of Darkness. Hence, to establish this fact, it is necessary to examine the condition of the agents of imperialism in the colonized country as depicted in the novella. Modern writers convey such a fact to their readers through their fictitious writings. In Heart of Darkness, Conrad elucidates the calamity of imperialism, the causes behind it and its impact upon the colonizers.

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الملخص

للإمبريالية جذور عميقة في تاريخ البشرية. وكمرض أصاب العديد من البلدان النامية. بالتأكيد، أدى ذلك إلى آثار جانبية خطيرة مختلفة ليس فقط على الشعب المستعمر ولكن على المستعمرين انفسهم أيضًا. وبالتالي، فإن إبراز آلام الشعب المستعمر وتأثير ها على المستعمرين يعتبر أهم قضية. ويحاول هذا العمل إبراز الأسباب التي تثير هذه المشاكل. تحت عنوان «طبيعة التدمير الذاتي للامبراطورية: تأثير الكيد المرتد للامبريالية في رواية قلب الظلام لجوزيف كونراد» يبحث في الأسباب الكامنة وراء انعكاس الكيد المرتد للامبريالية وي رواية قلب الظلام لجوزيف كونراد» يبحث في الأسباب الكامنة وإثرائها هو قمع اللهما الشعوب المستعمرة على المستعمرين. والسبب الرئيسي لاستغلال البلدان المتمكنة وإثرائها هو قمع البلدان الأضعف، ويعزى هذا الضعف إلى حد كبير إلى الافتقار إلى العلم والمعرفة. الحياة منافسة وبالتالي، تتنافس البلدان ضد بعضها البعض. من يصل إلى الاعلى عاجلاً يمكنه الإطاحة بمنافسيه. يمكن تأكيد هذا الحقيقة من خلال حوادث تاريخية مختلفة. إن الاستعمار البريطاني في القرن الماضي مثال على كيفية حدوث ذلك، لذلك، تعتبر الإمبريالية إحدى عواقب المنافسة بين البلدان، وهي حقيقة تسببت في كيفية حدوث ذلك العالمية ومحو الهويات القومية.

ولا شك أن للإمبريالية آثارا سلبية كثيرة على البلد المستعمر وشعبه. وهذه حقيقة مؤكدة ؛ ومع ذلك، فإن الإمبريالية تؤثر أيضًا على المستعمرين أنفسهم. لذلك، فإن من الضروري ابراز الكيد المرتد للاستعمار. ولقد لوحظت هذه الفكرة بوضوح في قلب الظلام لكونراد. لذلك، ولإثبات هذه الحقيقة، من الضروري فحص حالة عملاء الإمبريالية في البلد المستعمر كما هو موضح في الرواية. ينقل الكتاب المعاصرون مثل هذه الحقيقة إلى قرائهم من خلال كتاباتهم الادبية. في قلب الظلام، يوضح كونراد كارثة الإمبريالية والأسباب الكامنة وراءها وتأثيرها على المستعمرين

1. Introduction

Imperialism has a profound presence in literature, especially in modern literature, as it is one of the most prominent aspects of the modern life. One of the twentieth-century writers who realistically depicted the atrocities of imperialism was Joseph Conrad. In his Heart of Darkness, he portrays the evils of imperialism in Africa. He depicts the brutality exercised by totalitarian regimes, with the British shown as inhumane creatures eradicating the indigenous people of Africa. This paper demonstrates that Conrad, in his novella, suggests that British imperialism has a dual impact: one direct, afflicting the colonized people, and the other indirect, affecting the colonizers themselves.

Conrad shows his readers the predicaments and the sufferings of the colonizers—the agents of imperialistic power—in two dimensions. One, because the colonizers transfer from their own environment and their own social context to a different environment and social context, thus, it is difficult for them to cope and adapt. Secondly, is the alienation of the colonizers from their homeland. So, the group of the colonizers, whom they represent their colonizer country, can be depicted as victimizers whom they accept suffering, death and alienation for the sake of enriching their own country illegally.

The retrieval process which the work referred to as a backfired plan is pretty obvious in almost all colonies, colonizers get gradually dehumanised because of



the atrocity which they practice. The boomerang returns quickly after it is thrown: the harsh dehumanization experienced by the colonized is immediately reflected back upon the colonizer. Césaire, concerning colonisers, come to the conclusion that 'colonization ... dehumanizes even the most civilized man: that the colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an animal ... tends objectively to transform himself into an animal'(Chrisman21). Therefore, colonizers deteriorate colonized people, a subject them to follow their culture. The subjugators are the ones being dehumanized, and it is reciprocally and inexorably imposed on them, creating a pernicious cycle of moral and psychological degradation that transcends the initial act of colonization. This phenomenon underscores the dialectical relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed, wherein the former's humanity is concomitantly eroded through the very mechanisms of domination and subjugation they employ.

2. Imperialism: Its Implications and repercussions

Imperialism is the extension of a certain nation's influence through territorial conquests, economic, political dominance and culture over others. Hence, the effects of imperialism are profound and multifaceted. Economically, imperial powers exploit resources from colonized nations, resulting in significant wealth for themselves while crippling local economies. Politically, imperialism imposes foreign governance, eroding indigenous authority and disregarding local customs. Culturally, it facilitates the spread of dominant ideologies that can overshadow and diminish local traditions and identities. The repercussions of imperialism are not confined to the past; they continue to shape contemporary issues such as international conflicts, economic inequalities, and social tensions. As such, literature depicted the issue and looked at it as a sensitive and serious fact which threatening perpetually almost all weak nations.

Consequently, it is a fundamental theme in the Novella. The causes behind its dominance are myriad. The foremost one is the atmosphere of life under which Conrad passes. The atrocities of imperialism cause Conrad to endure a bitter childhood. A Patriotist Polish landowner who rebelled against Russia was his ancestor. His mind is imbued with the struggle of his parents against imperialism. Even so, it affluent his life with calamities. His involvement in rebellion against the Russians resulted in him being exiled from his own motherland. His anti-imperialist writing was shaped by the natural surroundings and atmosphere around him, leading him to be filled with adoration and enthusiasm for free speech. During his stay as a refugee in England, Conrad became a convenient ground for practising his ideology about imperialism,



moreover, it gave him entire freedom(Eagleton 232, 233). Imperialism has an apparent effect on the Britons. Fear and dislike of foreigners in Britain existed before the Empire(Johnson 213). Therefore, Imperialism's impact on both colonizers and colonized people is equally important.

Conrad possessed a European view towards the world, his view centres around the notion that European white people are eminent to other people. So, he can be regarded as a Eurocentric writer. Who demonstrates the concept 'The White Man's Burden'. Such perspective is another factor which plays an important role in foregrounding the reflection of imperialism in his text. Moreover, he as a polish- British writer influenced by British and European imperialism and the implication of Eurocentrism throughout his lifetime and more specifically within the writing of *Heart of Darkness*(Collits 10).

The context in which *Heart of Darkness* is written can be regarded as another major factor which abundant the text with the notion of imperialism. Conradian textually has an immense influence on Conrad and what he presents. So, the presentation of imperialism in the text should be analysed and studied concerning the events of the context. Such events draw the text and they have a great presentation in the text in a fictional shape. Besides, the turn of the century which is parallel with the emergence of *Heard of Darkness* witnessed enormous changes in regard to various serious issues. Such changes mostly include political and literary effects upon Conrad. Conrad wrote his novel during the moment of high imperialism, so there is no wonder has the reflection of imperialism in it(ibid 1, 2).

Conrad focuses on a very modern theme to be highlighted in his novel. He elevates in it the concept of policy which was a vivid issue for that time and he presented a global novel that embodied fresh issues of their days. There is no doubt that Conrad's Heart of Darkness upholds modern novel characteristics. Thus, in relying upon such assertion Conrad wants to establish the reality of imperialism because scepticism at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century was widespread. Most individuals were sceptical about things which were happening. So, Conrad wants to establish imperialism's reality. Conrad travels in his novel and he does not rely on the notion of locality in writing, he labels generality and globalization. He reports to his readers about the evil deeds of imperialism in remote of their own dwellings, in various parts of the world like Africa, Malaysia and South America. He renders the calamity under which those countries live and the darkness which occupies them due to imperialism. He foregrounds the visible injustices which practices by the soldiers and agents of imperialism in those countries. Moreover, Imperialism is regarded to be one of the most prominent realities of the modern novel, besides it was not an ambiguous topic for the



readers at that period of time because readers were facing it their real lives. Such reality provokes Conrad to write about it. Conrad presents imperialism in *Heart of Darkness* as reality through the art of fiction. He wants to reveal for his readers the reality of imperialism because in the late of the nineteenth century in Britain, imperialism equalized to glorious and victory. So, Conrad shows its reality and defines imperialism as corruption of the western ideals(Matz 19, 20).

There is another strong evident which indicates the novel to be an anti-imperialist one. R. B. Cunninghame Graham, read it as anti-imperialist, his assertions about the novel regards to be very reliable because Graham regards to be fervid socialist, disciple Marxist and anti-imperialist practice(Collits 105).

Heart of Darkness shows imperialism as exactly as it is. It reveals the mask on it. Moreover, it foregrounds its calamities and aims. Conrad through Heart of Darkness informs his readers that imperialism is old, universe and perpetual. It is a disease which afflicts almost all nations. He believes that it has a chain. A country which is imperialized by another imperial country or force in a certain period of time, the fade of such an episode of imperialism could be the start of a new episode with a new version of it by the same nation that has been imperialized. Such a notion can be derived from Marlow's speech at the start of his narration as he says: "And this also," said Marlow suddenly, "has been one of the dark places of the earth." In another assertion, Marlow states "But darkness was here yesterday" (Conrad 7). Such assertions by him indicate the ageing of the process of imperialism, Roman's brutal and dark imperialism practised upon Britain and the struggle of Britain's in overwhelming imperialism.

Conrad strives to make his readers aware of the history of imperialism. He claims that imperialism is rooted in history. He clearly declares that imperialism existed in the past, and well-developed nations of today, such as Britain, also manipulated it. Moreover, he makes a comparison between the imperialism which practised by Romans and that of the Britain of his days. He believes that the imperialism which practiced by Romans was an intensified brutality and selfishness, and possesses no positive point. Even he does not mention them as a human being. But, that of the Britain of nowadays is competent and serves some eminent ideas.

Marlow appears not to be absolutely against modern British imperialism, he models justifications for British imperialism. The comparison that he makes between Roman imperialism and British imperialism, becomes a backbone for his justification. Moreover, he encapsulates in his novel two kinds of imperialism: first, imperialism which possesses no idea and efficiency. Such a version is practiced by the Romans when they colonize the British. They are



described by Conrad as a selfish and brutal force, destroying the territory which they occupy. Conrad describes Roman's imperialism as a "running blaze on a plain" (ibid.7) such assertion indicates Roman's intensified savagery and their total destructiveness of the land like fire. But the imperialism of the British is described by Conrad problematically. He condemns British imperialism but at the same time he justifies that model of imperialism which clutches "idea" and "efficiency".

Conrad differentiates between colonialism and imperialism in order to purely show the concept of imperialism. He states:

They were no colonialists; their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you only want brutal force—nothing to boast of, when you have it, science your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others. They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind—as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness(Conrad 8).

The assertion above exhibits Conrad's attitude towards imperialism, furthermore, it distinguishes between colonialism and imperialism. According to him, Romans were not colonialists they were an imperialistic power without no ideology whereas British imperialism of his contemporary life are imperialism but with ideology. He identifies Romans as conquerors and all imperialistic power are conquerors rather than colonialists.

Terror, exploitation and animalizing are the most important actions which practiced by imperialistic power. In *Heart of Darkness* such non-human actions practiced by Britons to subjugate the Africans. They could be considered the most brutal actions in the novel. Conrad asserts that terror and imperialism are parallel because by fear an imperialistic power could control the invaders. For instance, Conrad asserts "Mad terror had scattered them," (*Conrad*12). Such assertion indicates that conquerors faces the extreme fear which makes them lost their logic and behaves madly. In a pitiless image which Conrad shows us, the animalizing of conquerors can be easily deduce from it. Conrad states "A lot of people, mostly black and naked, moving about like ants."(*Conrad*21). This image shows that the conquerors never ever treats the conquers as human beings. Moreover, Conrad declares:

Six black men advanced in a file, toiling up the path. They walked erect and slow, balancing small baskets full of earth on their heads, and clink kept time with their footsteps. Black rags were wound round their loins, and the short ends behind waggled to and fro like tails(Conrad22).



The assertion above transfers Marlow's vision when he sees the atmosphere of the individuals of the Africans suffering and animalized under the atrocity of imperialism. Exploitation also is another factor which catalyzes imperialism and at the same time, it can be regarded as the most influential aim of imperialism. It is practised by Kurtz and he presents by Conrad to be too much thirsty for ivory, "but mostly his expedition had been for ivory" (*Conrad84*). Such assertion indicates that he chases ivory more than anything else. Moreover, he wants to kill the Russian for the sake of a small amount of ivory.

Conrad endeavor to picturize for his reads the big world of imperialism, showing the non-European territories at his life time. He uses Marlow as an eye for his descriptions, moreover, to convey the concept of imperialism which was prominent at that time. The image of the imperialistic world-view which Marlow shows is a tattered world, borders by European imperialistic powers. Each divided area is subject to be ruled by its dominion. For instance Africa subjects to be rules by British power. Conrad uses Marlow to accurately visualize imperialism. The implementation of imperialism by Europeans in Africa and the predicament of imperialism upon Africans are highlights by Conrad through Marlow. The calamities, unfair and destruction of the imperialism, the aftermath which leaves behind itself are peculiarly detects by Marlow. To recap Conrad's message can be depicted as; Africans or black people are lesser to the whites and Europeans, thus, Africans are subject to be ruled and civilized by Europeans and their science, civilization, culture and history should be taken by Africans(Said, Culture 24, 25). Such fact can be deduces in the novel, For instance Conrad asserts "I got a heavenly mission to civilize you."(Conrad9), -The White Man's Burden-. Such assertion indicates that imperialism implants a fake ideology which is Europeans are naturally or congenitally more developed than Africans. Thus, there is no way that they should manage Africans and guide them.

Conrad draws two sphere of imperialism, each sphere has its own characteristics and context. The Roman imperialism and that of the British which is contemporary with Conrad's life time. Edward Said believes that Conrad informs his readers in his *Heart of Darkness* that Africa as a native cannot acquire the ability to live as an independent nation, so they sentence to imperialism. The version of imperialism which Conrad wants to be processed by his readers is morally, intellectually, ideology and economically(Said, *Culture* 27). Such version can be noticed as Kurtz pays attention to nothing other than Ivory, and he shows by Conrad as an Ivory hunter, for him imperialism is exploitation of money and programing the dwellers mind whom they are imperialized according to the ideology which is acceptable by him. He



makes himself among them a godlike and ruin the district. Indigenous of Africa whom are under the control of Kurtz become Kurtz's disciple. Imperialism which can be notice through Kurtz's behavior is destructive, exploitation of Ivory, immorality and it is everything but civilization. The quotation below affirming what precedes.

But mostly his expedition had been for ivory. 'But he had no goods to trade with by that time,' I objected 'there's a good lot of cartridges left even yet,' he answered, looking away. 'To speak plainly, he raided the country,' I said. He nodded. 'Not alone, surely!' (*Conrad84*).

In the quotation above Conrad shows imperialism's notorious duty through the deeds of Kurtz, which are revealed by the Russian trader who meets Kurtz many times, the Russian trader informs Marlow that Kurtz robes the ivory which is the implementation of the imperialistic notion. Therefore, imperialism is a hypocritic process -white appearance, dark intention- claims mottos like civilization and torch of Christianity whilst what is practised on the ground is the strong prey on the weak.

Racism is an atrocity which becomes eminent within the application of imperialism. It subjugates the aboriginal inhabitants and implants the seed of inferiority and superiority, it's a descendant of imperialism, such an aggressive notion is apparent in the novella, as a matter of course Hannah Arendt in her *The Origin of Totalitarianism*, regards racism as a need and necessity for imperialism, and no imperial power could prolong and strengthen its hegemony upon its colony without racism, that's why Conrad elevates racism as a factor which serves imperialism. Another bitter affliction which can be noticed apparently within imperialism is genocide, Conrad foregrounds Genocide, the term 'exterminate' which is used by Conrad can be regarded as evidence for geocoding the Africans by Europeans(Lindqvist ix,x).

3. A Backfired Plan: Colonizers as victims

Imperialism as Conrad shows possesses a dual effect. It affects the dwellers of the imperialized country which can be regarded as an active impact and also it affects the imperialists. Such reverse impact is elucidated by Aime Cesaire, he believes that civilization which is exalted by Europeans and they want to implant it in Eastern countries is already a handicapped civilization. Such civilization possesses an imperialistic essence. More importantly, it is that imperialism which destroys various societies(Cesaire and Kelley 44). So, it gets no success vice versa it becomes a disaster even for the conquerors. His notion is reflected in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, for instance, Kurtz is regarded as the epitome of civilization, a white man who holds the torch of civilization and hope at the beginning but finally, he turns out to be the stigma of barbarity and



evilness. Conrad defines Kurtz as "He is a prodigy,"(37). So, Kurtz is a gifted and artistic person but the boomerang effect of imperialism makes him a savage person. For instance, Marlow describes him as the following "I saw on that ivory face the expression of sombre pride, of ruthless power, of carved terror—of an intense and hopeless despair"(ibid.105). Such assertion shows how imperialism reverses even the conquerors, from a civilized person to a totalitarian one. Kurtz in the beginning is a person who embodies devotion to pity, science and progress as in "He is an emissary of pity and science and progress,"(ibid. 37). Vice versa such characteristics in the inner station no longer exist in him. They substitute it with pride, greed, dehumanization and superstition.

Two-way process, a term which is used by Dobie, examines how the culture of the imperialists transfers to the imperialized countries from the same line through which the imperialists transfer their culture. The Europeans, as well, were affected by their contract with the other cultures(121).

To summarize, imperialism inflicts a corrosive decay upon both the imperialist and the subjugated nations, ultimately resulting in the dehumanization of even the most ostensibly enlightened individuals. Kurtz was ostensibly tasked with the civilization, assistance, and education of the African populace; however, he tragically deviated from this mission, descending into a state of savagery. Thus, Conrad elucidates the concept of the "boomerang effect" of imperialism, illustrating how its repercussions extend back to afflict the conquerors themselves.

Conrad's elucidatory shows the impact of imperialism and its reverse impact. The imperial power dehumanizes the Colony's individuals and the individuals of the metropolitan as well, for instance in his work Conrad presents two kinds of labourers, the employers on Marlow's boat come from the metropolitan and the Africans' forced labour, the condition of their labour is similar, the failure of the boat to stop at food station is the best evident for that(Chrisman 22, 28). So, imperialism as an ideology enslaves both the colony and metropolitan individuals but in different ways. The metropolitan workers in the novel endure a harsh atmosphere, hard work, alienation, and low wages, for instance, Conrad asserts "is funny what some people will do for a few francs a month"(21). Such assertion exhibits imperialism's effect upon the ideology of even its metropolitan proletariats, it devalues and animalizes them.

Imperialism as a eradicate force became common in the nineteenth century, and its reflection in literary works like *Heart of Darkness* was the manifestation of that. No doubt the concept of Social Darwinism is regarded to be the foremost factor which aids its emergency. Europeans used the ideology which is mostly centred around the catchphrase "natural selection", to



legitimatize militarism and imperialism. The imperialism under which the Africans are subjugated, massacred and torchers by British forces as Conrad draws for his readers in his *Heart of Darkness*, might point to *The Origin of Species*. Accordingly, imperialists manipulate *The Preservation of favored Races in the Struggle for Life*. So, Darwinism could be regarded as an ancestor of imperialism(Hofstadter 171,172,173).

4. Conclusion

Imperialism has a profound effect on both the colonizers and the colonized. While the impact on the colonized is evident and easy to observe, the effects on the colonizers are often vague and indirect. Thus, colonization exerts a dual influence on both groups. In Joseph Conrad's "*Heart of Darkness*," this idea is illustrated, as the agents of imperialistic power struggle to thrive in regions that do not belong to them. The alienation and horrors of imperialism significantly impact the mentality of these agents. This deterioration of identity is clearly seen in the character of Kurtz, who ultimately loses himself and descends into madness throughout the narrative.

In his novella, Conrad articulates that imperialism engenders detrimental consequences. He contends that humanity ought to coexist in a state of harmony and tranquillity. According to his perspective, the avarice inherent in imperialist endeavours precipitates the disintegration of human society. Conrad underscores the imperative for individuals to pursue a collective existence characterized by joy rather than one marked by suffering and discord.

The work reflects an ethnocentric view that suggests that white races are the sole producers of civilization, while other races are viewed as fundamentally different and inferior. Hence, white races are the base and all the other races should follow them. Such an assertion escalates the concept which is referred to as Eurocentrism. It critiques the notion of racial equality, subjugation and massacre, implying that the advancement of civilisation is threatened by the inclusion of non-white races, which is framed as a regression to a "new period of darkness." Therefore, the white discourse is always of a derogatory language, they refer to Black as individuals, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and asserting that they have not contributed significantly to cultural or scientific advancements and it's their duty to educate the -The White Man's Burden-.

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