
**WRITERS AND THEIR WORLDS: *HEART OF DARKNESS* BY JOSEPH
CONRAD AND *THINGS FALL APART* BY CHINUA ACHEBE**

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Abstract

Cultural values, customs, traditions, and points of view or approaches to certain issues change over time. Literary works, as the products of their own periods, carry valuable information that reflect social, political, and economic conditions of their times. The aim of this study is to show that both Conrad and Achebe, due to their background and the discourse they lived in, had different approaches regarding Africa and its residents when they wrote their novels *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart*, respectively. Furthermore, this study also aims at refuting Achebe's accusation that Conrad was a bloody-racist when he penned *Heart of Darkness* since discourses of different periods do not have to create subjects thinking or evaluating situations in the same manner. The approach used for the analysis of the two novels is historical-biographical approach since it is expected that this method will reveal the conditions and the ideology of each period exclusively.

Keywords: Heart of Darkness, Things Fall Apart, Imperialism, Nineteenth century, Discourse.

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YAZARLAR VE DÜNYALARI: JOSEPH CONRAD'IN *KARANLIĞIN YÜREĞİ* VE CHINUA ACHEBE'NİN *PARÇALANMA* ADLI ROMANLARI

Öz

Kültürel değerler, gelenek ve görenekler, belirli konulara bakış açıları veya yaklaşımlar zamanla değişir. Kendi dönemlerinin ürünleri olarak edebi eserler, içinde doğdukları dönemin sosyal, politik ve ekonomik koşullarını yansıtan değerli bilgiler taşırlar. Bu çalışmanın amacı hem Conrad'ın hem de Achebe'nin, geçmişleri, hayat tecrübeleri ve yaşadıkları dönemden dolayı, *Karanlığın Yüreği* ve *Parçalanma* adlı romanlarını yazarlarken Afrika'ya ve Afrika'da yaşayan insanlara karşı farklı yaklaşımlara sahip olduklarını göstermektir. Ayrıca bu çalışma, Achebe'nin Conrad'ı *Karanlığın Yüreği* adlı çalışmasını kaleme alırken kanlı bir ırkçı olduğu suçlamasını da çürütmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bahsi geçen her iki romanın incelenmesinde kullanılan yaklaşım, her dönemin kendine özgü koşullarını ve ideolojisini yansıttığı bilinen tarihsel-biyografi yaklaşımıdır.

Anahtar Kelime: *Karanlığın Yüreği*, *Parçalanma*, Emperyalizm, Ondokuzuncu Yüzyıl, Söylem.

1. INTRODUCTION

Various articles that compare both *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart* have been written. Okafor (1988), in his article titled *Joseph Conrad and Chinua Achebe: Two Antipodal Portraits of Africa*, Okafor has found that in *Heart of Darkness*, Africa is synonymous with darkness, and symbolizes chaos and unspeakably evil forces while in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe creates a more realistic portrait of the continent. In another article written by Lawtoo (2013), the writer discusses that Achebe unveiled the racist implications of Conrad's image of Africa and his postcolonial mimesis serves as an enabling device instrumental in sketching an admirably complex and illuminating representation of Africa.

This study focuses on different publication dates of *Heart of Darkness* in 1899 and *Things Fall Apart* in 1958 and aims at revealing that although Achebe considered Conrad a racist, different times changed the perceptions of readers and reception of literary works through differing discourses and Conrad, while portraying a wild Africa, was inevitably under the influence of the discourse of his period in his attempt to present the dark face of colonialism. In order to display these clearly, the historical-biographical approach has been used in the analysis of the two novels.

The historical-biographical approach can be dated to “the writings of the nineteenth-century French critic Hippolyte A. Taine, whose phrase race, milieu, et moment, elaborated in his *History of English Literature*, bespeaks a hereditary and environmental determinism” (Guerin et al., 2011, p. 44). This approach claims that a literary work is a product of its author's

biography and context in which it was written. Therefore, novels, like other literary genres, are products of their discourse. Both *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart*, two outstanding novels that reflect the conditions in Africa but from different eyes, deal with colonialism and its effect on the natives. Nineteenth century in Britain is known as the age of Queen Victoria and her reign was brilliant since this was also a period in which the British Empire gained territories in all over the world and thus made the empire the largest ever in its history.

Nineteenth century is regarded as the age of imperialism not only for Britain but also for European countries as well since this was a century in which the developed countries were in a competition with each other for gaining new territories and becoming more powerful industrially. It was during this time when the saying “The Empire on which the sun never sets” began to be used for Britain since it had gained lands as the largest empire. The British Empire and other powerful European countries wanted to enlarge their territories and thus colonized and exploited the weaker countries in different parts of the world. “[T]he explorers now directed their efforts to the interior of ‘old’ continents which were still largely unfamiliar to Europeans” (Korte, 2000, p. 87).

It was during the Victorian period (1837-1901) that the British Empire enlarged its lands in the competition of colonialism with other countries and had vast lands over the world. Queen Victoria became Empress of India in 1877 and the following years meant more expansion for Britain. *Heart of Darkness* (1899) was written during the heyday of colonialism. Its protagonist Marlow, as the mouthpiece of Joseph Conrad, narrates his experiences in Congo.

When Africa was divided up among the European countries due to the Berlin Conference in 1884, The Congo belonged to the Belgians and it was under the control of King Leopold II. The king, in a conference he called in Brussels in 1876, indicated the general intention for Africa as “to open to civilization the only part of [the] globe where Christianity has not yet penetrated and to pierce the darkness which envelops the entire population” (Hennessy, 1961, p. 13). Moreover, Murfin (1996) states that Leopold had divided the country into sixteen districts, each governed by a commissioner who rendered the local chiefs impotent (p. 6). Ivory, which is mentioned in *Heart of Darkness* as well, was among the items traded the most. Thus, the colonizers grabbed the richness of the continent they called heart of darkness. Like Belgium, the other European countries used the African countries for their own advantages under the pretext of bringing them civilization.

2. ANALYSIS OF *HEART OF DARKNESS*

Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) was christened Josef Konrad Nalecz Korzeniowski. His parents Ewa and Apollo were descendants of wealthy Polish families. When he lost his parents, his uncle began to take care of him and he asked his uncle to let him join the French merchant navy. He sailed to the West Indies and Venezuela (Murfin, 1996, pp. 3-4). It was during his career working between British ports that he learned English. Conrad sailed on British ships to different parts of the world, in 1886 he became a naturalized British subject, “and in 1890 took a steamboat up the Congo River in nightmarish circumstances...” (Greenblatt, 2005a, p.1885). Conrad, who had read many literary books like Achebe, claimed that writing English was as if it had been his own native tongue (Ray, 2007, p. 2).

In *Last Essays*, Conrad described his admiration for geography, polar explorers and books on Africa since they were still unknown places. His interest focused on Africa and mapping the continent when he was assigned as the second officer in the Merchant Service. For him, “[t]he heart of its Africa was white and big” (Conrad, 2010, p. 12). What can clearly be seen in *Heart of Darkness* is the similarity between the adventures of Marlow and Conrad. The novel serves as an autobiographical novel.

Heart of Darkness can be described as a gloomy novel for modern readers. It portrays an Africa that is dangerous and unknown. The plot of this novel can briefly be given as follows:

The novel opens with a boat that is anchored in the Thames River near London with five people on the deck, including Marlow and the narrator. Although the narrator is one of the listeners of the story that is told by Marlow, the main story is told by Marlow himself. Marlow, who is adventurous, wants to see more of the world and gets his aunt in Brussels to have him a position as a captain for a steamer whose captain has already been killed in Congo. In Congo he meets the company’s accountant who tells him about Kurtz, an agent who works very successfully by bringing lots of ivory for the company. After walking for days from the outer station to the central one he learns that the steamer that will take him to Kurtz is sunk. About three months later, Marlow and four more white people including the manager and thirty Africans begin to go up the river to find Kurtz. Just about fifty miles before they reach the station of Kurtz, they are attacked by the black. During this clash, Marlow’s African helmsman is killed with a spear. As Marlow pulls the string for the whistle of the steamboat, the black people are frightened and disappear. When they arrive at the inner

station, they are met by a Russian first, who tells them that he has been taking care of Kurtz since he is ill. The Russian tells them that Kurtz collected ivories from the villages by using force and violence. Kurtz has been accepted as a God by the black. When he is carried on a stretcher towards the steamboat, an African woman together with other black people get ready to attack the uninvited guests but with a movement of his hand, Kurtz stops the attack. The Russian secretly tells Marlow that it was Kurtz who gave the order of attack to the steamer. At the same night Kurtz escapes from the steamer but he is stopped by Marlow on the shore and carried to the boat. The next day they avoid another attack by the black people. Marlow pulls the string for the whistle and frightens them again. On their way back to the central station Kurtz dies. Before he dies, he says ‘The horror! The horror!’

At the beginning of the Chapter I, Marlow compares conquest of England by Romans in the past with the conquest of Africa and refers to this situation as “robbery with violence”. For him, this conquest is “taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than [themselves]...” (*HOD*², p. 10). His ideas regarding the life in Africa for the European changes for the negative after seeing Kurtz’s condition.

London is described as a brilliant city (*HOD*, p. 6). It is as if even the nature reflects the civilization of London. There is a group of people which consists of the Director of Companies, a lawyer, an accountant, Marlow and the narrator. Said states that this group of people were chosen by Conrad because 1890s were now replaced with “the empire of business” (Said, 1994, p. 25).

On his way to his destination in a French steamer that carries French soldiers as well to Africa, he finds the shelling of the jungle of Africa by the French inexplicable as someone on board tells him there was a camp of natives: “[H]e called them enemies! – hidden out of sight somewhere” (*HOD*, p. 20).

Heart of Darkness reflects the life of Conrad. At the beginning of the novel, Marlow mentions his childhood aspirations for maps and his intention to go to the blank heart of Africa. There are parallels between Conrad’s diary and his fictional protagonist Marlow while conveying their observations of Africa and their experiences at stations and through their journey in the Congo River.

² Conrad, J. (1994). *Heart of Darkness*. Penguin Popular Classics.

Marlow wonders about the world, discovering and seeing new places. Referring to his childhood he says he would look for hours at the continents and lose himself in all the glories of exploration (*HOD*, p. 11). He has an adventurous spirit for visiting new places. As he grows up, he sees fewer blank spaces on the map of Africa since it is partitioned by the powerful European countries. He notices the lakes and rivers with their names and the Congo River “resembling an immense snake” (*HOD*, p. 12).

Like Marlow in the novel, Conrad had attempts to obtain a position as commanding a steamer in the Congo River. His aunt Marguerite, like Marlow’s aunt living in Brussels, used her considerable influence on several important men involved in the colonization effort. When Conrad learned that that a steamer captain named Freiesleben had died in the Congo and that a command was available, he headed for a French port, from which he shipped for Barna, the main port of entry to the Congo (Murfin, 1996, pp. 9-10).

The place Marlow chooses to go is Congo when he grows up since he was affected by the snake-like shape of the Congo River. He does not know much about Congo until he goes there. He witnesses the suffering of the black people as soon as he arrives in Africa. In a way Marlow confronts with himself throughout his journey to find Kurtz.

Marlow ironically describes “a boiler” and “a railway-truck”, as symbols of European advancement. Their existence in Africa contrasts with their full function since they resemble animals, even the dead ones. He makes one of his first observations when arriving at the outer station. Then he sees six black men walking one after another along a path with small baskets full of many things on their heads: “I could see every rib...each had an iron collar on his neck...” (*HOD*, p. 22). What he finds is that the natives are cruelly treated by the Europeans.

The natives are described simply as “black shapes” which makes them indistinguishable objects around them. Marlow, as the mouthpiece of Conrad, conveys his observations to the readers. He does not humiliate the natives. Even the phrase “the black bones” stresses the reality of their being exposed to starvation with their skin and bone appearances. He later comes across some Africans who are in terrible conditions: “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” (*HOD*, p. 24).

Marlow’s description of some scenery as he travels along the river gives the reader some idea about how Africa is like. However, his personal idea even regarding the scenery contains

some negative connotations. He feels distressed and psychologically deteriorated as he keeps observing the environment: “Going up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world...There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine.” (*HOD*, p. 48).

Marlow admires Kurtz’s accomplishments in the beginning. Kurtz was like Marlow when he went to the Congo first. He went there with the intention of helping the people claiming bringing civilization but after a while he lost his spirit and became a part of the savage world. Kurtz, who is regarded as a very successful agent of the company by bringing lots of ivory to the company, is now in a very miserable condition. “This enigmatic man had been received by the natives as if he were a god... his misconduct takes him beyond the limits of his heart; thus, he is punished with madness and death” (Calleja, 2003, p. 7). After all, Marlow could have had the same experience like Kurtz had he himself stayed there for a long time.

The approach of the Western countries to the Africans is clearly seen in the novel. Kurtz is not only an agent collecting ivory for his company, but also a reporter appointed by an institution called the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs that makes long-termed plans for Africa (*HOD*, p. 71). The black are not seen as savages only by individuals but also by the state institutions. Even Marlow’s aunt, referring to the Africans, talks about “weaning the ignorant millions from their horrid ways” (*HOD*, p. 18), which shows that even her aunt is conditioned by the discourse of the period.

Kurtz represents a stereotypical colonizer in exploiting the natives for obtaining more ivory from them. He, as an authoritative, cruel, and more powerful figure compared to the black, gets the natives to kill each other when he feels the emergence of a threat by them for his own ambitions and greediness. He is implied to be a breed of countries in Europe that both symbolize the civilization and colonialism: “His mother was half-English, his father was half-French. All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz” (*HOD*, p. 71).

Before meeting Kurtz, Marlow thinks that Kurtz is a man of philosophy, of great intelligence and idealism. When he reads his letters, he sees Kurtz’s argument that the whites, from the point of development they had arrived at “must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings... with the might as of a deity” (*HOD*, pp. 71-72).

Kurtz in a way symbolizes the Eurocentric figure when Marlow reads through his papers and sees his sentence “Exterminate all the brutes!” (*HOD*, p. 72). Reading his papers, he concludes that Kurtz blames the black for his destruction. It is just a paradox that outsiders such as Kurtz and Marlow aim at bringing civilization while they encounter a land that affects

their psychology deeply and makes people such as Kurtz reveal their natural instinct of violence.

From the colonial perspective, Africa represents the darkness and an unknown place. “This, of course, is another way of deploying the evolutionary model of development so that Africa becomes the physical location for the staging of a European confrontation with its preexistence” (Slaughter, 2010, p. 83). “Marlow notes that the seeds of Kurtz's destructiveness were evident right at the beginning of his pamphlet, in the assertion of godlike white racial superiority” (Spittles, 1990, p. 38). What is crucial at this point is that it is not the superego of the Europeans that functions in Africa but it is greediness and superiority of the white that makes them exploit not only the sources of the continent but also the human beings. Had Marlow stayed longer in Africa, he could have turned into a Kurtz.

According to the news published in *The Times* in 1896, there were British missionaries in the Congo and a letter from the missionary in charge of the station mentioned that a Mr Glave, who was delirious during his fever, never regained consciousness and died. Mr Glave had requested the missionary to take care of his possessions and carry out his wishes (Spittles, 1992, p. 79). Conrad may have been inspired by this story when creating his fictional characters Kurtz and Marlow. The writers are usually affected by their environment and the experiences they live through. Conrad, who had been in the Congo, had taken a young Frenchman called Georges Antoine Klein on board and this young man had died during the journey down river. What is more striking is that this person's name was later changed to Kurtz (Ray, 1990, p. 188).

The situation in Africa is inexplicable even for Marlow. The problems and challenges Marlow experiences affect his psychology to a great extent: “I don't know why, but I assure you that never, never before, did this land, this river, this jungle, the very arch of this blazing sky, appear to me so hopeless and so dark...” (*HOD*, p. 79). Marlow sees the Africans only as ghosts that do not exist (*HOD*, p. 97). For Marlow, Kurtz's last words “The horror! The horror!” (*HOD*, p.100) summarizes how Kurtz sees Africa before he dies. When visiting Kurtz's intended more than a year later, Marlow tells her that he heard Kurtz's last words. His intended asks him to repeat the words since she wants something to live with. Marlow tells her that the last word Kurtz pronounced was her name (*HOD*, p.110). Marlow feels the need of telling a lie to Kurtz's intended since he cannot make her more grieved or disappointed by telling the reality about Kurtz's life in Africa.

Conrad based most of the events in his novel on his real experiences. In 1890, he remarks “Passed a skeleton tied up to a post,” in his diary. He meets “Camille Delcommune, the manager of the station at Kinshasa, whom he later called ‘a common ivory dealer with base instincts’”. Decommune had decided to make a trip to the Inner Station at Stanley Falls to see a desperately ill agent called Klein, who would die. Klein dies on Conrad’s ship. Similarly, Kurtz dies on Marlow’s ship. The four-week trip and the return with Klein’s corpse nearly robbed Conrad of all taste for life. He wrote to his aunt: “Everything here is repellent to me” (qtd. in Murfin, 1996, pp. 11-12).

While at the beginning of Marlow’s tale it was evening, it is very dark at the end of his tale. There is a juxtaposition between darkness and Marlow’s uncivilized Africa for which the narrator says: “The offing was barred by a black bank of clouds, and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed sombre under an overcast sky - seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness” (*HOD*, p. 111).

While reading *Heart of Darkness*, the modern readers may feel that the black in Africa are othered since we are not provided with details about their habits, customs, or tradition. Thus, the distance the novelist puts between himself and the natives turns into the distance between the readers and the natives. *Heart of Darkness*, as a novel written during the expansion of colonialism, is based on Conrad’s experiences when Africa was still a mystery for many Europeans. The title of the novel itself refers to the unknown, foreign lands, and the complex motives of humanity.

During his journey, Conrad kept a record of everything which is reflected in *Heart of Darkness*. He saw that the natives, no matter whether they were men or women, were maltreated. Conrad himself witnessed the killings of the natives during his stay in Africa. He mentions that while crossing the hills and several minutes after meeting an officer, he saw “the dead body of a Backongo” who he thinks was shot (Conrad, 2010, p. 14).

The exploitation of Africa by the colonizers to extreme degrees and violation of the natives’ rights leaves a deep effect on Marlow. “The pattern of the plot shows that the youthful idealism of Marlow meets the dark forces of the reality of greed and power (Spittles, 1990, p. 32)”. The conflict between Marlow’s idealism and reality changes his view on imperialism and its conclusions. “The idealised reality he was confident of in Europe has been seriously challenged, and Marlow has begun to substitute for it a much more battered one” (Spittles, 1990, p. 37).

The wide gap between the power of the Europeans and the natives makes the powerful dominate the weaker however the so-called ideal was to bring civilization. “Conrad is always trying to provoke us into thought, especially about the nature of ideals and of reality” (Spittles, 1990, p. 44). The end of the Victorian era, with imperial and colonial aspirations, was dominated with a discourse of discovery of the unknown lands as in Africa.

3. ANALYSIS OF *THINGS FALL APART*

Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) is an important literary figure especially in African literature in changing the prejudices established by the western world. He, along with other leading African writers, cast themselves in the role of possessing their own culture. Towards the middle of the twentieth century and thereafter many African countries gained their independence from their European colonists. Those were the times appropriate for African writers such as Achebe to write more freely.

When Achebe, who is considered to be one of the most influential writers in African literature, was born in 1930, he was christened Albert Chinualumogu, and his parents had already been converts to Christianity. His father had been an evangelist and church teacher in other parts of Eastern Nigeria (Innes, 1990, p. 4). Achebe was born at a time when colonialism was felt to the bone. However, there was a spark of freedom movements throughout the continent during his youth.

As a small child, Achebe gained the characteristics both of his culture and the British culture. Ogidi, the town where Achebe grew up, offered a life that would be an amalgam of both traditional life style and colonial life style imposed by the British. Talking about the time when he was a boy, Achebe mentions his growing period “at the crossroad of cultures” and the conflict between his parents’ Christian belief and his father’s brother’s heathenism (Achebe, 1995, pp. 190-191). In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo’s son Nowoye is also converted to Christianity, which can be seen as a similarity between different religions of his family members.

When he was a child, he attended church schools and it was when he was about eight that he began to learn English. When he was at the prestigious secondary school, Government College in Umuahia, he studied for the Cambridge School Certificate. Although he matriculated with a scholarship to study medicine at University College, Ibadan, which was affiliated to the University of London, he decided to study English Literature, Religious

Studies and History. It was during these years that he became familiar with the British literary figures and novelists such as Conrad. “The history classes he attended were taught from a British point of view, but they... stirred him to investigate further the history and theology of his own people, mainly through oral accounts but also through written records of missionaries, administrators and anthropologists” (Innes, 1990, pp. 7-8). Achebe mentions the setup of two first-class boarding schools for boys in Nigeria, one at Ibadan and the other at Umuahia following the end of the First World War (qtd. In Ochiagha, 2015, p. 19).

This was, on behalf of the colonizer, a means of convincing the locals to reach the rich gains provided by the white man. Moreover, the black people considered this a step up the social ladder and power among their own people. “At Umuahia, students were required to speak English at all times” (Ochiagha, 2015, p. 69). Learning English, the language of the colonizer, was an effective tool in being a good subject.

Towards the end of the First World War, the augmented value of African exports and increased geo-political importance of the colonies triggered the recognition of education as an important facet of colonial policy. Apart from taking more interest in missionary institutions, the colonial authorities began to amplify the number of government-owned schools and colleges. (Ochiagha, 2015, p. 20).

Achebe was culturally affected by the British and cricket, a sport played especially in Commonwealth countries, was adopted by the students at colleges. He mentions playing of cricket between the colleges as one of the most thrilling peculiarities of Umuahia (Achebe, 2012, p. 22).

Dunn (1990) states that Achebe was one of Ibadan’s first graduates of literature in 1953 and he was introduced to the complex and carefully constructed masterpieces of Joseph Conrad (p. 5). Achebe, who became familiar with both the British education system and novel writing, considered this as an opportunity for writing about his own people. In a way he appropriated the Western education and then tried to subvert it by adding some Igbo words to his novel he wrote in English. That was also a time when there was an increasing interest in the Nigerian culture and Achebe, like many students, began to think that “if Hitler was an enemy of the British, he deserved support” (Innes, 1990, pp. 8-9).

Achebe wrote novels that covered the colonisation period of Nigeria. He believed that a writer has to assume responsibilities to his society. A writer’s mission thus, becomes a voice for the representation of his society. In his book, he makes use of proverbs, idioms, and traditional tales prevalent among his people. “In the years following the publication of *Things Fall*

Apart, its paradigm shift fascinated young Nigerian graduates of Achebe's generation..." (Ochiagha, 2015, p. 2). He became one of the best African writers who aimed at writing the story of his own people. "His influence both as a creative writer and a critic has been considerable, not only on his fellow Nigerian authors but also on East African novelists such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Nuruddin Farah" (Innes, 1990, p. 19).

Furthermore, Achebe was not the first West African novelist of the century to write his novel in English. The Nigerian Amos Tutuola's novel *The Palm-Wine Drinkard and His Dead Palm-Wine Tapster in the Deads' Town* was published in 1952 and Amos Tutuola was going to influence the later African writers such as Ben Okri (Whittaker & Msiska, 2007, p. 16). Until that time, African writers did not have experience with the novel, which was accepted as a western literary genre. It was until this period that the Western literary discourse dealt with Africa as a continent that needed to be civilized.

In *Things Fall Apart* Achebe reflects the administration of the British on Igbos in 1900 and their division of dividing South-eastern Nigeria into areas ruled by District Commissioners and appointed selected Igbos to act as warrant chiefs, clerks and messengers to assist them (Innes, 1990, pp. 6-7). This system did not consider the vulnerabilities of the Igbos, who had their own specific system of government.

The novel can be summarized as follows: Okonkwo is a respected clansman who asserts his power with his courage and physical strength. He is opposite of his father Unoka, who wanders idly and seems weak compared to his son Okonkwo. He is known in neighbour villages as well as an intrepid person and a successful wrestler. As a result of a dispute with another village, Okonkwo adopts Ikemefuna only to kill him after three years when the Oracle of the village decides that he must die. Okonkwo, who wants to seem manly and strong, and the men of the village slaughter Ikemefuna in a forest but afterwards Okonkwo feels sad for a few days for what he has done. Later, when he accidentally kills a boy in a ritual, he is sent into exile with his family. During this time, missionaries arrive in villages in the region and more and more people are converted into Christianity. When Okonkwo returns to his village, he sees a changed village and feels the advance of the white as a threat for themselves. Okonkwo and some other Igbo leaders are arrested for several days due to a dispute between the natives and the missionaries and then they are released when ransom money is paid. When Okonkwo and other clansmen gather to take action against the white, a messenger who is sent

by the colonizers to give the order to stop their meeting, he is butchered by Okonkwo. He finally hangs himself when he realizes that nobody will fight against the white.

Although the characters are fictional, the story, as in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, is based on Achebe's experiences and inspired from real events that took place in West Africa. In *Things Fall Apart*, Obierika mentions the killing of a white man who was riding an "iron horse" and the massacre of Abame that followed (*TFA*³, pp.130-131) while talking to Okonkwo and the others. The massacre of Abame was based on the real "Ahiara massacre of 1905" and the violent control of the natives included "the destruction of Igbo opposition groups by the Bendeonitsha Hinterland Expedition" (Greenblatt, 2005b, p.2623).

In order to give a profound effect to the destruction of his societal values, Achebe uses some lines from the first stanza of a poem titled "The Second Coming" by William Butler Yeats as an epigraph:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.

Achebe, who wanted to use a universal language through which he could make his voice heard, used the English language in his novel. However, he did not ignore embedding Igbo words in his narrative. Watts (2010) emphasizes that Achebe, although he wrote in English, he integrated "folklore, proverbs, tribal customs, and the performance of oral storytelling" (p.65) into his story.

Writing a novel about his own people, Achebe wanted to create the story of his own people told not by an outsider like Conrad but by an insider like himself who was a native of Africa. From the beginning of the novel to the end, the readers get acquainted with the customs, daily life, religion, and traditional values of the natives and feel sympathy with them.

Heart of Darkness by Conrad takes its name from Africa implying that it is Africa itself that is evil, sinister, or ominous. However, darkness for the African people such as the Igbo means the same: "Darkness held a vague terror for these people, even the bravest among them. Children were warned not to whistle at night for fear of evil spirits" (*TFA*, p. 9).

³ Achebe, C. (2010). *Things Fall Apart*. Penguin Books. Ltd.

At the beginning of the novel, we get detailed information about Okonkwo, who lives differently from his father Unoka, who was lazy, and unreliable especially about financial issues. His father was not a man of war, "...[h]e was in fact a coward and could not bear the sight of blood" (*TFA*, p. 6). Okonkwo, on the other hand, is described as a man of war with strong muscles and beat his rivals easily in wrestling. War means being manly for Okonkwo: "On great occasions such as the funeral of a village celebrity he drank his palm-wine from his first human head" (*TFA*, p. 10).

Achebe conveys the tradition of the clans in an objective way without any hesitation since what he wants to show is that the people in Africa had their own customs and beliefs like other peoples living in Europe, America, or any other part of the world. His society is a male-dominated society and the genders have their established roles. In this polygynous society, Okonkwo has three wives and believes that a man should be able to rule his wives and children or "he was not really a man" (*TFA*, p. 50). According to him, affection to the wives is a feminine quality which means weakness.

Okonkwo himself had three wives and eight children. Women in Igbo culture are not considered as equal as men. His beating Ojiugo, his youngest wife, just because she did not cook the meal on time is an example of this (*TFA*, p.28). As he beat his wife during the Week of Peace, his society believes that crops of village may not grow since he angered Ani, the earth goddess. Therefore, he is expected to sacrifice animals and devote a hundred cowries to Ani. Ani is more important for them than other deities. "She was the ultimate judge of morality and conduct" (*TFA*, p. 35).

Family life is an important characteristic of Achebe's novels since "he had a particularly happy and warm upbringing himself" (Dunn, 1990, p. 6). Like many other European nations, the natives tell stories to their children as well. Okonkwo and Ekwefi tell stories to Nwoye, Ezinma, and Ikemefuna. The story of the tortoise, the bird, Earth and Sky are just some of them (*TFA*, p. 50). The readers of this novel are provided with all necessary information about Igbo people thanks to Achebe who opens a door to the life of his own people. Shells of sea nails are used as a means of exchange among the members of the clan or with other clans. The amount of the cowry shows the level of richness. Some locals have titles that they earned as a result of their success or special characteristics. They use musical instruments such as a kind of drum called *ekwe* to express their feelings (*TFA*, p. 6).

Looking from outside, especially from European perspective, it may be difficult to grasp how a seemingly primitive society handles its issues or problems. The meeting of nine egwugwu from nine villages to solve a problem between a married couple shows their system of removing conflicts even in marital affairs.

Religion and beliefs take an important place in this society. According to the Igbo theology, each individual living in the clan has a *chi*, considered as a personal God that determines the fate.

Manhood mingled with beliefs administer their life to such an extent that Okonkwo does not hesitate to kill Ikemefuna upon the order of the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves as a spiritual leader (*TFA*, p. 57). Okonkwo's butchering Ikemefuna is a sign of proving his manhood. However, he feels restless during the two days after Ikemefuna's murder since he cannot eat any food. In fact, he has emotional conflict between what he did and what he feels. He tries to convince himself that a man should not give up his masculine qualities as long as he is a warrior.

Although there are warriors like Okonkwo in this society, there are also men who consider issues more maturely than Okonkwo. Obierika, Okonkwo's closest friend, is a man who criticises the tradition of his own clan. Throwing away the twins and killing them, or the killing of Ikemefuna does not seem correct for Obierika or Uchendu, Okonkwo's maternal uncle. Achebe wants to show us that his society did not necessarily have written laws but had norms and beliefs that were long established and there were dissident persons as well which can be seen in all societies.

Okonkwo is sent into exile with his family for seven years by his society because of killing a sixteen-year-old boy during a ceremony. Uchendu supports Okonkwo by giving him a piece of land for cultivation during their stay in Mbanta, Okonkwo's motherland, and gives him pieces of advice as a wise man: "Your duty is to comfort your wives and children and take them back to your fatherland after seven years. But if you allow sorrow to weigh you down and kill you they will all die in exile" (*TFA*, p. 126).

Achebe provides the readers with lots of details about customs and daily life of his clan in the first part of the book. This is a convincing method in introducing his society to the outside world. The Oracle resembles the coming of locusts to their region to the arrival of the white men and warns the locals that they will bring destruction. In other words, things will fall apart. A white man, who is regarded as a threat is killed by the natives (*TFA*, p. 130). The

killing of a missionary seen as a threat to the people of Abame is based on a real event. “The incident is based on a similar one that occurred in 1905 when British forces massacred the people of Ahiara as retribution for the killing of an English missionary, J.F. Stewart” (qtd. in Lynn, 2017, p. 36).

The missionaries who settle in villages ask for some land to build their houses or facilities. The inhabitants of Mbanta give them a piece of land from the Evil Forest expecting the deities in the forest to show their power by punishing the Christian missionaries. However, they are just disappointed when they see the missionaries alive the next day (*TFA*, pp. 140-141).

The white used religion as a weapon to convert the African natives in order to achieve their goals and for this purpose they sent the missionaries even to the furthest villages they could reach. Obierika tells Okonkwo about how the colonizers achieve their goals:

The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart. (*TFA*, p. 166)

It is when Okonkwo returns to Umuofia after seven years that he sees how it has changed. Moreover, Okonkwo cannot find the respect he had in the past. Now there are many missionaries and more converts in his village. Things have changed so much that Enoch, a convert who has replaced his local religion with Christianity, takes of the mask of egwugwu during a ritual, which is believed to kill the ancestral spirit. This act, creates anger among the locals who continue their tradition and beliefs and they burn down the church they see as a threat and the house of Enoch as well (*TFA*, pp. 178,181). However, Okonkwo and his accomplices are arrested by the British District Commissioner and only released after paying a fine of cowries according to the laws put in practice by the white. Okonkwo, who expects to rebel along with the people of Umuofia against the colonizers stays alone when he kills a messenger who has come to tell them that the white man has asked them to stop their meeting (*TFA*, p. 194).

What is striking is that Achebe does not portray a whole society that resist the colonizers. Some of the characters in the novel adapt to the changes initiated by the British and they even change their religion. Those who do not accept the novelty and decide to react against the missionaries or colonial officials are destined to lose, which becomes inevitable for most of the natives. They just feel themselves helpless against the white, who are technically overpowered and insidious in their strategies. Okonkwo, the main character in the novel,

resists all these violently but in the end commits suicide because he loses a society that meant life for him.

Achebe does not describe a totally negative relation between the natives and the white. Although he mentions the trade between the natives and the white as a positive development and for the good of his society, he criticises the Reverend James Smith and the District Commissioner for their attitudes toward the natives. Officials such as the district commissioner are stereotypical colonizers. The commissioner is thinking over the title and content of a book he wants to write about his experiences such as the suicide of Okonkwo in Africa. In the end, he chooses the title “The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger” (*TFA*, p. 197), which reminds us of Kurtz’s writing a report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs.

Achebe, with the example of the district commissioner, shows that the white own the right of writing narratives that deal with the black. The district commissioner makes any changes with the real story of the local tribes while writing their story in his book titled *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*.

Okonkwo’s suicide is a refusal of the colonial order and the social and political changes in his own society. He prefers to follow and observe his traditional beliefs, which is ultimately overturned by the white. Dunn states that Achebe presents his fiction in such a natural way that “we can see for ourselves the tragedy of a human being caught up in circumstances of history over which he has no control” (Dunn, 1990, p. 11).

Things Fall Apart reveals the condition of the Igbos living in Nigeria at the end of the nineteenth century and the imperial ambitions of the European countries in dividing and exploiting Africa among themselves. While doing that, they made the colonized feel the super power of the colonizers.

Achebe’s anti-colonial writing developed during his university years. He developed a critical view against “British heroism and superior culture” (Ogbaa, 2022, p. 16). The role of *Things Fall Apart* for Achebe was to restore the identity of Africans with their own literature. “In *Things Fall Apart* Achebe creates a narrative that places the African at the historic centre of the colonial encounter, with the imperialistic European as the usurping outsider...” (Whittaker & Msiska, 2007, p. 18). In this regard, by raising consciousness of being an individual like Europeans and taking a stance against Eurocentric literature and discourse, this novel is one of the leading novels not only in African literature but also in the whole Postcolonial literature.

Achebe tried to write the narrative of his own people. He claimed that the past should have been written by the insiders not the outsiders. Achebe states that he was angry with *Mister Johnson* when he read it in his second year and thought that it could be better to try his hand at it as an insider (Nkosi & Soyinka, 1997, p. 13). Therefore, he did not appreciate stories such as *Mister Johnson* written by Joyce Cary and *Heart of Darkness* by Conrad. "...Achebe's metahistorical past issues from an alienated historical consciousness suspicious of the fundamental instability of historical narratives" (Lovesey, 2010, p. 116).

Chinua Achebe gave place to myths, folktales, idioms and Igbo vocabulary in *Things Fall Apart* as well as in other novels and stories written by him. He made a claim to reveal his people's identity and culture as an insider since he did not approve of the writing of the narratives about Africa by outsiders such as Conrad.

4. COMPARISON OF *HEART OF DARKNESS* AND *THINGS FALL APART*

In Britain, there were other writers as well who dealt with the theme of imperialism or colonialism before and after *Heart of Darkness* was published. While *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) by Daniel Defoe and *Kim* (1901) by Rudyard Kipling presented the colonial mindset as favourable, *A Passage to India* (1924) by A. M. Forster revealed the tension between the British and the Indians, which, in fact, was a result of independence movements of the colonized people that appeared in 1920s in India. Furthermore, the following years would bring the harsh criticism of the European imperial powers in all over the world including Africa.

Heart of Darkness is one of the most important novels in postcolonial studies and African literature. When analysed deeply and considering the discourse of its period, it can be said that it criticizes the effects of imperialism, which aimed at bringing the so-called civilization to the undeveloped and undiscovered lands. Conrad in fact is against the idealization of imperialism since it not only challenges the culture of the natives but also aims at exploiting their sources and turning them into the slaves. "...Conrad subverts majority imperialist sentiments and opinion from the beginning, revealing an aspect of his modernity" (Goonetilleke, 1990, p. 69).

The details given in the novel provide the readers with the real face of imperialism. "Conrad's realism controls his compassion so that there is no lapsing into sentimentality" (Goonetilleke, 1990, p.73). Returning to Achebe's accusation that Conrad was a racist and did not give place

to the individual lives of the natives, it can be said that considering the discourse of the period and expansion of the British Empire in a time when *Heart of Darkness* was written Conrad portrays the black as the victims of imperialism. While doing that, he includes people such as Kurtz in the victims of European Imperialism. Goonetilleke (1990) expresses that Conrad has been prescient and by the end of his tale (1899) has clearly caught the drift of Western civilisation which seemed to be leading to its collapse” (pp. 92-93).

Conrad denounces imperialism and colonialism in Africa. He does not approve the British imperialism as claimed by Achebe. He even considers it as “the distasteful knowledge of the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience...” (Conrad, 2010, p. 14).

There are reviews and publications as to the intention of Conrad in dealing with Africa and the natives. The setting is the late Victorian period. The end of the nineteenth century was a century of imperial expansionism since colonial Powers of Europe shared Africa among themselves in order to exploit the continent’s human and natural resources. Lynn (2017) states that during the colonial period the natives were employed as secondary or background figures in British literature (p.24). It was at such a time Conrad wrote his novel and the discourse prevalent at that time was naturally perceived by Achebe as full of racism. However, perceptions and evaluations change from period to period. Publication of *Heart of Darkness* in 1899 and that of *Things Fall Apart* in 1958, by authors of different origins with different views, reveals that they belong to different discourses.

Achebe, with the discourse of the middle of the twentieth century and as an African native, accused Conrad of being a ‘thoroughgoing racist’ (Achebe, 2016, p. 21). However, Conrad, based on his experiences, realized that the Europeans who embarked on the mission “to enlighten and civilize can corrupt and destroy” (Murfin, 1996, p. 9). Conrad’s observations of the Congo carry a bitter reality which can be disturbing. Furthermore, he takes his stance as an outsider for his comments and criticism. In a letter he wrote to William Blackwood on 31 December 1898, he expresses that the title he is thinking of for his novel is ‘Heart of Darkness’ but “the narrative is not gloomy” (Sherry, 1997, p. 96). This situation may reveal both the personal or societal point of view developed during those times since in modern criticism such a narrative is definitely more than gloomy.

In essence, Conrad’s novel criticizes the imperialism in Africa and dwells on the destructive effects of the environment on Europeans such as Kurtz. Imperialism for him seemed to be a

paradox rather than assuming a task for civilizing the natives. “Conrad was interested in the philosophical revelations inherent in the imperial experience, rather than simply the ideological aspects” (Spittles, 1992, p. 21). Furthermore, in spite of being a short novel, many readers have found it to be complex and difficult in understanding. His narration aims at getting the readers to dive into deep thoughts regarding the occurrences in Africa. Conrad expresses that when writing his novels, he let people think and the details in “Heart of Darkness” were correct (Ray, 2007, p. 151).

At a time such as to the end of the nineteenth century when colonialism was at its peak level, the sole authority for creating and spreading knowledge was the powerful European countries. “Achebe proposes that the reason that Western readers have so long accepted Conrad’s representation of Africa as factual is because this representation is consistent with a typical Westerner’s system of thought” (Wolfe, 2010, p. 171). It was towards the middle of the twentieth century that novels about Africa by African writers with an aim to increase consciousness on African identity and culture began to spread. Achebe, complaining about the attitude of the Europeans for not teaching the Africans their own literature, decided to join and intensify the spirit of forming their own history through fiction. As one of the leading African novelists, he changed the constructed prejudices and perception towards Africa. 1950s, however, were the years when the black gained more civil rights. Achebe, in an atmosphere of deconstruction of colonization both in Africa and Asia either with peaceful or revolutionary methods, wrote his famous novel *Things Fall Apart*, which was published in 1958.

At the end of the twentieth century, the Europeans on the main continent were provided with information about Africa from travel adventurers, merchants, officers, or missionaries. The language itself was an important element in being an obstacle for the Europeans in Africa, who were already prejudiced, to understand the local tribes. Conrad, as an outsider, gave place to the exploitation of the Africans from the nineteenth century point of view of the Europeans. Achebe (2012) states that when the first Europeans came to Africa, they knew very little of the history and complexity of the people and the continent and that some of that group persuaded themselves that Africa had no culture, no religion, and no history. This situation opened the door for all sorts of rationalizations for the exploitation (p. 54). It was through imperial aspirations that the western powers regarded themselves as having a high

civilization which was based on a long history and thus legitimized their colonization by claiming that the Africans did not even have a history.

CONCLUSION

Conrad actually reveals the brutality of the colonizers by portraying Africa with its savage side. However, this stems from the discourse prevalent at the time in Europe. While doing that, he presents the readers with a mysterious Africa with its wild side that lures and traps the Europeans. However, this does not make him think outside the box as a representative of the Western ideology. He tends to display the horrible side of Africa and its effect on the white rather than justifying the treatment of the colonizers. Achebe, however, wrote at a time when West African literature began to claim its position in literature. He felt that, as a black community, it was a requirement to seal their own destiny by writing about themselves. So, the middle of the twentieth century can be seen as giving birth to the voice of Africa by its own writers. Moreover, different discourses cover different approaches to social issues as well and judging Conrad as racist without considering his own period and discourse may not be a very good deduction. Considering the social, cultural, economic, and political conditions of different time periods in which the novels were written may be helpful for the readers to evaluate Achebe's accusation against Conrad and reinterpret the conditions of the two periods better.

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