

AN AMBIVALENT CONRAD IN AN OUTPOST OF PROGRESS

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Abstract

The present paper aims to portray the racist and anti-racist dimensions of Joseph Conrad in his short story "An Outpost of Progress" (1897). Conrad's alleged racist status espoused by thinkers such as Chinua Achebe and Edward Said, particularly in *Heart of Darkness*, has constantly been the subject of heated debates in literature. A myriad of analogous traces in the short story "An Outpost of Progress" lend Conrad's voice to a highly racist position while many other anti-racist traces observed in the story could lower the resonance of the same voice, hence an inconclusive ambivalence or a liminal position in Conrad's tone. This paper is thus divided into two sections. The first section has the racist traces of Conrad in the short story on top of its agenda whereas the second section ventures into the anti-racist footprints of Conrad's voice in the story. In so doing, this paper sets out to turn to Achebe and Said in arguing for the racist position of Conrad; however, the anti-racist facets of the story will be substantiated via relying on the arguments developed by thinkers such as D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke and Benita Parry. An ironic ambivalence swaying from a racist tone to an anti-racist tone in Conrad's voice in "An Outpost of Progress" is the conclusive maxim.

Keywords: Joseph Conrad, "An Outpost of Progress", racism, anti-racism, ambivalence.

İKİRCİKLİ BİR YAZAR PORTRESİ: AN OUTPOST OF PROGRESS ÖYKÜSÜNDE CONRAD

Öz

Bu çalışma, "An Outpost of Progress" (1897, Gelişmenin İleri Karakolu) adlı kısa hikâyesinde Joseph Conrad'ın ırkçı ve ırkçılık karşıtı yönlerini tanımlamayı hedeflemektedir. Conrad'ın Chinua Achebe ve Edward Said gibi düşünürler tarafından ileri sürülen, özellikle *Karanlığın Yüreği* romanındaki, sözde ırkçı tutumu edebiyat çevrelerinde hararetli tartışmaların daimi konusu olmuştur. "An Outpost of Progress" adlı öyküsündeki çok sayıda benzer örnek, Conrad'ın oldukça ırkçı tutumuna ses vermekteyken öyküde gözlemlenebilecek pek çok başka ırkçılık karşıtı örnek de bu sesin tınısını azaltıp Conrad'ın yazar tonunda kesinlikten uzak bir ikirciklilik yahut arada kalmışlık bırakır. Bu sebeple, bu yazı iki kısma ayrılmıştır. İlk kısım, öykünün konusu itibarıyla Conrad'ın ırkçı izlerini tararken, ikinci kısım Conrad'ın hikâye içindeki sesinin ırkçılık karşıtı izlerini inceler. Dolayısıyla bu çalışma, önce Conrad'ın ırkçı tutumu olduğunu savunan Achebe ve Said'e bakıp, sonra D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke ve Benita Parry gibi düşünürlerce geliştirilen savlara dayanarak desteklenen ırkçılık karşıtı yönlere dönecektir. ırkçı bir tondan ırkçılık karşıtı bir tona savrulan "An Outpost of Progress"teki Conrad'ın sesinin ironik ikirciklilik içinde bulunma hali, çalışmanın nihai prensibidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Joseph Conrad, "An Outpost of Progress", ırkçılık, ırkçılık karşıtlığı, ikirciklilik.

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INTRODUCTION

It takes a great deal of courage to give Joseph Conrad a due title in the light of the imperial concepts. Some opt for the title of an imperial writer, enraging the other camp whose followers fervently insist on Conrad's anti-imperial essence. Some firmly hold that he was a racist, while a great many find this outrageous. As a prolific writer, Conrad wrote abundantly among which *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and *Lord Jim* (1900) stand out as his most glorious novels. Should one name one lesser-known or rather unnoticed short story by Joseph Conrad, which moved beyond its normative literary borders, "An Outpost of Progress" will, without a doubt, cross the mind. The present paper employs the aforementioned short story to examine how Conrad, as a writer of the British Empire, could operate within the so-called imperial framework, leaving imperial and racist or contrarily anti-imperial and anti-racist traces, hence an ambivalent position. This paper sets out to rely on the views of thinkers and critics such as Chinua Achebe, Edward Said, D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke and Benita Parry as its commonly used references.

"An Outpost of Progress", as ironically denominated as possible, is a story of the failed attempt of humankind in building a civilized utopia. Set in 1898, the story unfolds in a trade outpost in Congo. Conrad, being meticulously consumed by details, sets a descriptive stage upon which the readers' familiarity with the main characters Kayerts, Carlier and a third person on the staff called Makola is shaped. The arrival of the new director of the outpost, who was a ruthless yet an efficient man, marks the officially renewed initiation of the outpost and the inception of the story. The death of the previous director also fills the lines of the story with an eerie fear. The aforementioned death, coupled with the depictions of the vast uncivilized stretch of the land, makes for such a gloomy atmosphere that readers might feel alienated right at the outset. Both characters, albeit portrayed as inane beings by Conrad, fill the plotline by their regrets, past deeds, and not least the very reasons through which their being there turned to be the only choice. A dour turn in the story occurs when a group of strangers, displayed as armed savages by Conrad, approach the outpost. As of this juncture, the story is faced with regression, decadence, and immorality. This very regression is further aggravated when a slave trade is arranged by Makola, unauthorized by Kayerts. Enraged and infuriated by the loss of his staff in exchange for some unworthy tusk, he threatens to dismiss Makola who believes he has done them a favor.

Left with very little food to survive on and having lost the previously peaceful and good terms with a tribe, whose people were led by a mild altruistic man called Gobia, Kayerts and Carlier are seething with despair, hopelessness, and idiocy. On such grounds rose an episode of an absurd argument between the two characters over sugar. Kayerts, so arrogantly feeling superior to Carlier, orders him to pass him the sugar as to be only defied by Carlier. Such a senseless defiance marked the rise of a quite feverish argument that led to a chaotic chase and escape scene. In the process, Kayerts, feeling defensive and in an attempt to only save his life, shoots Carlier. Lost and buried in the depth of an unforgivable sin, he finds his redemption only coming at the hand of hanging himself by the neck, and this he does with no qualm and reservation.

As of this juncture, the words to be written will have, on top of their agenda, the very conflicting and ambivalent position which Conrad manifests in terms of his racist or anti-racist and imperial or anti-imperial voices felt in "An Outpost of Progress." A clearance on the racial and imperial position of Conrad necessitates a great body of investigation and contemplation. One should be a linguist, a literary theorist, and an ethnologist to finally come up with a notion, albeit easily shaken later after all, towards his position in this regard. No claiming voice has, to date, been resonant enough to give him an absolute title. "An Outpost of Progress", viewed from this angle, is another nebulous case, which resembles the tact, stylistics, linguistics and descriptions of *Heart of Darkness*, on a tangible scale. In all fairness, one could deem "An Outpost of Progress" a brief version of *Heart of Darkness*. The intention here is, through the forthcoming arguments, to observe

and examine certain claims made apropos Conrad's being a racist or anti-racist in "An Outpost of Progress". Before moving into a comprehensive and comparative unfolding of Conrad's ambivalence in this short story by means of giving two-folded – racist and anti-racist – discussions, a historical background with regard to the British Empire's conditions and attitudes both in homeland and in her colonies necessitates itself for a better understanding of the era and the analysis of this paper.

Historical Context (1890s)

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Empire was going through many ups and downs. "Economically Britain," Porter states, "was falling back in the world in the 1890s, as she had in the 1880s" (1975: 122). Britain fell behind her competitors like Germany, Russia, and the United States in her imperialistic and colonial rivalry and "the balance of her trade was beginning to look distinctly unhealthy" (Porter 1975: 123). Apart from economic terms, Britain was exposed to a certain political instability due to the colonial problems such as the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and the Morant Bay Rebellion in 1865, the Fenian Rising of 1867 in Ireland. Porter aptly puts that "new colonies were little help to Britain either, and in fact in many ways they could be said to be making matters worse" (Porter 1975: 126). With the decline of 'imperial masculinity' employed throughout the Empire to create active, progressive and stoic men (Horzum 2016: 74-75), army presented itself to be inadequate in the face of above-mentioned issues.

On the Eastern territories, Britain seemed to have developed and achieved far less than Russia. Most of the gains herein belonged to Russia and "Britain's achievement was confined mainly to defining more exactly the limits of her advance" (Porter 1975: 160). By and large, this was due to the Empire's preoccupation with Asia and its gains. "The first reason was that Africa was not really so valueless by contrast with Asia; South Africa especially was rapidly becoming a treasure-house itself with its diamonds and gold and the prospect of much more to come" (Porter 1975: 162). Then, to Britain, Africa turned out to be worth losing the battle to Russia.

In the West Africa, however, Britain fared differently. West Africa did not put up a good fight and most of it surrendered. By the beginning of the 1890s, many vague matters in terms of the Western African borders were disturbing the Empire. Yet, by the end of the very same decade, Britain reached a clear and firm resolution of all these matters. "At the beginning of the 1890s Africa had been full of open sores – boundaries undelimited or in dispute. ... By the end of 1898 most of these sores had been healed, the frontiers of the rival powers' influence defined right across tropical Africa" (Porter 1975: 167). Nigeria was gained thoroughly and the Nile was secured. Britain seemed to have done well here compared to Asian matters. In South, albeit faced with deeper problems, Britain won the second Boer wars and dissolved the Orange Free State and the South African Republic.

In another reading of the political events of this decade through the eyes of Trevor Lloyd in his *Empire: A History of British Empire*, relatively equal descriptions are given with an emphasis on Egypt:

In the last years of the century, events in Africa helped open the road to an attempt to give closer union a definite form. . . . In Egypt the debt had been handled so frugally and payments had been made so regularly that the rate of interest had been brought down to less onerous levels, forced labour and the lash had been abolished and some modest prosperity was visible. (2001: 122)

Furthermore, by the end of the decade and the victory of the second Boer Wars, the Afrikaners had already surrendered: "In 1902 the last Afrikaner commandos accepted inevitable annexation by Britain of the Dutch republics" (Lloyd 2001: 125).

Taking into account the chaotic circumstances of Africa and all the tensions and wars over its territorial gains, one would, with no hesitation, find out why and how Conrad, as an Empire writer who was appointed to serve on a steamer on the Congo river, devoted the majority of his writings,

particularly *Heart of Darkness* and “An Outpost of Progress,” solely to address his sea ordeals and experiences. Thematically, “An Outpost of Progress” has a lot to offer. At the very core of its themes, come the abject failures of civilization. Not only did the civilizing mission of the white and the Empire failed, but also it proved to be insufficient and inefficient, as all they achieved in the outpost was nothing but misery both for themselves and for the surrounding indigenous people. This can symbolically be suggestive of the defeat of the British Empire in its sublime duties of bringing democracy and civilization to the untapped territories of the world. Racial differences and racist thoughts cannot be overlooked. The two whites are shown to be inordinately superior to Makola and the others, as all they do is to have the meals cooked by the locals, order them around, abuse them like slaves and think of them as oddly low creatures. However, a closer look reveals that this does not apply to Makola. On a critical note, Makola is thought to be the wit of the story, in that he astutely arranged the slave deal without the knowledge of the whites. This might be regarded an act with a potential of provocation in the realm of racial superiority of the whites over the coloured community since ignoring the colonizer in such a mercantile occasion could disturb the authority of the ‘superior’ whites. Nihilism, too, is central to the thematics of “An Outpost of Progress.” The leading characters of the story are completely obsessed with the past wrongdoings, absurdity of their existence and regret in their decisions and weakened spirits; that is why the word ‘nihilism’ could be brought in here. This theme shall be thought to be the underlying ground for the shooting of Carlier and the consequent suicide of Kayerts, as the whole crux started, in a nihilistic or insignificant fashion, over an idiotic argument over sugar.

Racist Traces

Perhaps, no voice has surpassed Chinua Achebe’s sonorous voice in accusing Conrad of blatant and explicit racism. If one is to do justice to Achebe’s essay apropos *Heart of Darkness*, the words judgmental, disapproving and censuring will sound inappropriate. By the sight of the things, he found Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* an outrageously racist abomination whose words, each and every sole one, slapped him on the face with vengeance. With this claim comes a long line of evidence extracted by him from *Heart of Darkness* which solidifies his grounds. One important piece of textual evidence taken by Achebe is his most oft-repeated citation of Conrad: “*the thought of their humanity —like yours— the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly*” (Conrad 1990: 58). If this is the true voice of Conrad in depicting the Africans and if again all the other analyses indicating obfuscating reasons to stay away from this deduction are wrong, then, in all honesty, one has to relatively agree with what Achebe stated. Elsewhere in his novel, he allows another horrid description to recur stating: “*A quarrelsome band of footsore sulky niggers trod on the heels of the donkey*” (Conrad 1990: 48). The implications of the word ‘nigger’ given here will come to light later.

“An Outpost of Progress” and its dialectics run in tandem with *Heart of Darkness*, in that Conrad, in a fashion of similitude, brings down the Africans to nothing but a pile of bones and limbs. Perhaps, the reason why Achebe did not wave out a strong disapproval of “An Outpost of Progress” lies in the fact that he did not think it necessary, given the fact that a more radical and a lengthier version of it had already stormed into his psyche, shattering it to pieces. Perhaps the following lines would justify the racist position of the Conrad, through the angle of Achebe in “An Outpost of Progress,” calling for an analogy between these lines and those pertaining to *Heart of Darkness*:

Out of that void, at times, came canoes, and men with spears in their hands would suddenly crowd the yard of the station. They were naked, glossy black, ornamented with snowy shells and glistening brass wire, perfect of limb. They made an uncouth babbling noise when they spoke, moved in a stately manner, and sent quick, wild glances out of their startled, never-resting eyes. Those warriors would squat

in long rows, four or more deep, before the verandah, while their chiefs bargained for hours with Makola over an elephant tusk. (Conrad 1988: 253; emphasis added)

In the light of the above from the position of Achebe, Conrad would have obtained the same racist face in "An Outpost of Progress." Conrad seems to put forward very little of good in his portrayals of these so-called uncivilized human beings in "An Outpost of Progress." Albeit brief, the short story is in possession of countless potentials in divulging the author's view towards the supposed dark savagery of the Africans. The racist position of Conrad is further substantiated when his portrayals of the African race are deftly juxtaposed to the white people; something that could be regarded the most racist facet of the author. For instance, when Conrad addresses the contact between the two main characters and the opposing race, one could indubitably sense this racially discriminating authorial voice in these words; "*But the contact with pure unmitigated savagery, with primitive nature and primitive man, brings sudden and profound trouble into the heart. To the sentiment of being alone of one's kind, to the clear perception of the loneliness of one's thoughts, of one's sensations...*" (Conrad 1988: 250). This racist authorial voice of Conrad becomes more revolting, once the knowledge of him faring in all those lands—in an autobiographical sense—crosses the mind. Then, Achebe's solid and extreme conclusion saying "*Conrad was a thoroughgoing racist*" (Achebe 1988: 11) seems but the only way out of this crux.

Conrad's obsession with the word 'nigger' cannot be unmeaning. In "An Outpost of Progress," one cannot help but notice many cases of this linguistically offensive word, or taboo to some other linguists. Conrad, as a monumental writer, knew no fear in making immeasurable use of this word to trim his line of literary efforts, unaware of the generations to come, whose Achebe-like thinkers and critics would consider it nothing but a pure humanitarian fault and bring it under drastic scrutiny. From the position of Achebe and his likes, sentences like "*The third man on the staff was a Sierra Leone nigger, who maintained that his name was Henry Price*" (Conrad 1988: 248) and "*Kayerts and Carlier agreed that the nigger had had too much palm wine*" (Conrad 1988: 257) are not only unwelcome, but also provocative of despise and pity. Conrad's overuse of this offensive term is omnipresent in his *Heart of Darkness* as well; and this, in conjunction with all the descriptions given by him throughout the novel with regard to the Africans, renders his work intolerable by Achebe. "*Certainly Conrad had a problem with niggers. His inordinate love of that word itself should be of interest to psychoanalysts*" (Achebe 1988: 13). An argument which brings reasons for the consistency or acceptability of this term within the discourse of Conrad, would, particularly from Achebe's viewpoint, be untenable.

Another distinctly raucous voice against Conrad is Edward Said's voice. Said's notion, in regard to racism and post-colonialism, is built majorly upon the view that the West has always made efforts in making the East look more like the old-age savages, the primitive and the never-transcending race living in a dystopian context. Albeit harsh and radical in nature, these very words were what to which he attempted to cling. Not only does he assert that this image of the East offered and indeed raised by the West is a total delusion and folly, but also he goes on with a further limp, stating that the colonizing effects of the colonists have never stopped even after their departure from the said lands. The following piece might be an apt report of his position in what concerns the concept of the post-colonialism in his book *Orientalism*:

I doubt if it is controversial, for example, to say that an Englishman in India, or Egypt, in the later nineteenth century, took an interest in those countries, which was never far from their status, in his mind, as British colonies. To say this may seem quite different from saying that all academic knowledge about India and Egypt is somehow tinged and impressed with, violated by, the gross political fact — and yet that is what I am saying in this study of Orientalism. (Said 1978: 12; emphasis in the original)

Albeit much heard in the domain of post-colonialism, the resonance of Said's voice echoes all over any work which has to do with race, imperialism, and colonialism. Thus, in "An Outpost of

Progress" too, Said could be proportionately heard. The most fitting instance for Said's argument here is when Conrad displays Congo as a land which was subject to the first civilization only in the event of the British colonialism and with the advent of its imperial agents;

They also found some old copies of a home paper. That print discussed what it was pleased to call 'Our Colonial Expansion' in high-flown language. It spoke much of the rights and duties of civilization, of the sacredness of the civilizing work, and extolled the merits of those who went about bringing light, and faith and commerce to the dark places of the earth. (Conrad 1988: 254)

Analytically viewed, bringing light to a dark corner of the world is what Said wrote a great deal in accusing the West of the false thought of being the only messianic and civilizing force in the world. In short, Said is as disgusted by the false notion of the civilizing duty of the West as Conrad is by the savagery of the East (of course Africa in "An Outpost of Progress").

Said, however, happens to be severely critical of Conrad, even a notch above Achebe in particular dimensions. In point of fact, Said believes Achebe did not go to a sufficient length in Conrad's case. He contends that

Chinua Achebe does not go far enough in emphasizing what in Conrad's early fiction becomes more pronounced and explicit in the late works. . . . Conrad treats [the local Indians and the ruling-class Spaniards in Nostromo] with something of the same pitying contempt and exoticism he reserves for African Blacks and South East Asian peasants. (Said 1993: 165-166)

Said, of course, raves at Conrad not as one author, but as one of a huge number of biased and racist writers of fiction and non-fiction. Said would have asserted the same in regard to "An Outpost of Progress" as well, for the white in this story do not but pity, patronize and look down on the othered race. The way the locals including the slaves are portrayed substantiate the matter beyond need "Pah! Don't they stink! You, Makola! Take that herd over to the fetish" (Conrad 1988: 253).

Anti-Racist Traces

Not only do many thinkers, unlike Conrad's detractors, give the benefit of the doubt to Conrad's racial descriptions, but also they move beyond the doubt claiming that he was utterly just in his portrayals of Africa as well as the natives who inhabited the African territories. As the first priority of this paper, a certain body of evidence and statements belonging to "An Outpost of Progress," which favour the anti-racist dimension of the story as well as Conrad's anti-racist position, will be highlighted. Later, the essay will turn to certain thinkers and critics who fall into the defensive camp and claim his work is fair, if not anti-racist.

"An Outpost of Progress" harbours many mysteriously anti-racist facets. Conrad does not, even in the lowest likelihood, put the white on a pedestal in terms of ideology and morality. He might put the whites first and superior to the locals for the sake of giving a body and organization to his story, but what he certainly does not intend is to idealize and extol their thoughts, ethics, and ideology. All throughout the story, the leading characters Kayerts and Carlier are described as ideologically and ethically weak beings whose lives are but meaningless. Perhaps the following description does the best in displaying what Conrad thinks of these two types: "They were two perfectly insignificant and incapable individuals, whose existence is only rendered possible through the high organization of civilized crowds. Few men realize that their life, the very essence of their character, their capabilities and their audacities, are only the expression of their belief in the safety of their surroundings" (Conrad 1988: 250). Thus, Conrad cannot be said to be all-for-whites; or he cannot be the racist or the colonialist of whom Said spoke, for, in Said's eyes, superiority of the West is in their civilization as well as their sublime ideology which has invariably made the East be eclipsed beneath them and be pictured as the savages who do not stand any chance of being civilized whatsoever.

Elsewhere in "An Outpost of Progress," Conrad brings the wisdom of his white characters under scrutiny saying "but the two men got on well together in the fellowship of their stupidity and

laziness. Together they did nothing, absolutely nothing, and enjoyed the sense of the idleness for which they were paid. And in time they came to feel something resembling affection for one another" (Conrad 1988: 252). How are two extremely idiotic beings, whose whole lives were nothing but a waste of time, bringing democracy and civilization to a land untouched by it so far? This could be thought-provoking for those who have a compellingly rigid attitude towards Conrad's racist and imperial position. Imperialism can neither stand for nor rely on such absurd minds.

This description of the idiocy centering on the white characters of the story is felt even more tangibly when another white (the director) is expressing his standpoint towards the whites. These remarks are from the director on the leave from the outpost: "Look at those two imbeciles. They must be mad at home to send me such specimens. I told those fellows to plant a vegetable garden, build new storehouse... I bet nothing will be done! They won't know how to begin. I always thought the station on this river useless, and they just fit the station!" (Conrad 1988: 250). That a white is being gravely and blatantly censured in terms of intellectuality and wisdom in one of Conrad's short stories is but thought-provoking.

Makola is another character whose nature can help substantiate the ambivalence of the Conrad in "An Outpost of Progress." Albeit black, he is described with a sophisticated air and certain qualities associated with the state of being civilized: "He spoke English and French with a warbling accent, wrote a beautiful hand, understood bookkeeping, and cherished in his innermost heart the worship of evil spirits" (Conrad 1988: 248). Unlike the common misconception, normally followed by Conrad himself in most of his canon regarding the coloured as illiterate and unintelligent, Makola owns some certain skills that prove otherwise. He is said to know two widely spoken languages as well as bookkeeping, which requires mathematics and calculations. This is the same Conrad whose so-called racist descriptions of the blacks, as mentioned earlier, provoked nothing but disgust and repulsion for just thinkers, hence an air of swaying inconclusiveness.

In the anti-racist or ambivalent spectrum of the elements expounded so far, one piece is left unspoken-of; this piece alone espouses the mild or just, if not anti-racist, face of Conrad in "An Outpost of Progress." Conrad, with respect to Achebe, does but undercut and undermine the image of Africa and regards them as barbarous savages who know nothing about the civilization. Said, likewise, does not fall away from the very same page upon which Achebe had fallen and he believes the Westerns (here the British imperialists) render the image of Africa dark and uncivilized, assuming they were the only ones bringing the so-called light to the East (Africa here). Conrad, unlike what Achebe and Said contend, creates a character called Gobila and eschews, despite what is ordinarily expected, depriving him of a good image. He is characterized as a sane man who never sought war against the whites: "In his fear, the mild old Gobila offered extra human sacrifices to all the Evil Spirits that had taken possession of his white friends. His heart was heavy. Some warriors spoke about burning and killing, but the cautious old savage dissuaded them" (Conrad 1988: 263). Gobila's peaceful and sane image, despite being called a savage here again, runs counter to all the previously represented stereotypes. He is a man who cared for the whites and called them his brothers. "The two whites had a liking for that old and incomprehensible creature, and called him Father Gobila. Gobila's manner was paternal, and he seemed really to love all white men" (Conrad 1988: 255). This is another provocation for those heavily positioned against Conrad's racism.

Apart from the textual evidence proving the anti-racist or mild voice of Conrad in "An Outpost of Progress," Abdullatif Al-Khaiat happens to yield a detailed line of defenders and condemner of Conrad in his article. Although his focus was on *Heart of Darkness*, his conjectures are in a very consonant voice to this essay's argument, since one has to admit that, in terms of intellectual and philosophical thoughts, there lie minor differences between the two works. In fact, as mentioned earlier, "An Outpost of Progress" seems to be like the minimalist version of *Heart of Darkness*. One particular defender of Conrad, a professor from Sri Lanka called D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke, believes:

Writing in the heyday of Empire, the age of Joseph Chamberlain and Cecil Rhodes, Conrad subverts majority [of] the imperialist sentiments and opinion from the beginning, revealing an aspect of his modernity. Suggestions of darkness in Britain's past and present history are confirmed by Marlow's opening words, 'And this has also been one of the dark places of the earth.' (1991: 69)

One might think this refers to the darkness of the Africa, yet Goonetilleke thinks differently and attributes this to the imperialism and sees that as a suggestion of the darkness of the empire. This darkness is not without pertinence to the same darkness with which "An Outpost of Progress" is seething. When Conrad says "*faith and commerce to the dark places of the earth*" (1988: 254), the same imperialism must come under scrutiny, since the dark stayed dark and perhaps got more aggravated with the advent of the imperialism.

Benita Parry, too, is defensive of Conrad. She tends to put most of her words in line with the anti-imperial facets of Conrad's writing rather than the anti-racist ones: "*by revealing the disjunction between high-sounding rhetoric and sordid ambitions and indicating the purposes and goals of a civilization dedicated to global ... hegemony, Conrad's writings [are] more destructive of imperialism's ideological premises than [are] the polemics of his contemporary opponents of empire*" (as cited in Khaiat 2009: 47). Applying this to "An Outpost of Progress," one has to refer to the ironic use of the "*Our Colonial Expansion in high-flown language*" (Conrad 1988: 254); when Conrad uses it, the tone is not but ironic and he implies the failure of the imperialism in bringing light to the so-called uncivilized territories of Africa. Even on a symbolic note, that the two agents face an intellectual ideological fall and meet their demise—bearing in mind that they are the representations of an imperial voice—is a solid reason to agree with the words of Parry when she holds that Conrad was aiming at a destructive angle of imperialism.

Conrad's words in "An Outpost of Progress" heralded a brighter future; a future with no imperialism and racism. This is at least what thinkers such as McClure and Knapp, mentioned by Khaiat, converge on:

To both McClure and Eloise Knapp, Conrad is anti-racist and anti-imperialist, but to Henthorne, Third-World nations deserve more: Natives are not only capable of independence, but their revolution is inevitable. He challenges Achebe's great misreading of Conrad, because the overturn is definitely coming in those regions. Henthorne foresees an alternative frame of reference, a time when imperialism ends. (2010: 48)

That the title "An Outpost of Progress" is ironically implying no progress is reason enough to agree with the eradication of this progress. 'Progress' and 'Civilization' die at the end of the story, for the imperialism failed to be rightly tasked with bringing it about. Conrad is deftly aiming at the inefficiency of this undertaking or burden when he titles his work ironically "An Outpost of Progress," and progress was calling to Kayerts from the river: "*Progress and civilization and all the virtues. Society was calling to its accomplished child to come, to be taken care of, to be instructed, to be judged, to be condemned*" (Conrad 1988: 269). Obviously, these parts should be the most ethical parts of the story and one ought not to say these lines are for the spice of the literariness. Then, if this is believed to the ethical voice of Conrad, in an intellectual and ethical note and at the end of the story, it has to be deduced that he uses the word "condemn" to denounce the unsuccessful burden of the children of empire, hence the death of the child as well as the empire.

CONCLUSION

The essay composed made efforts to investigate the in-between voice of Conrad by scrutinizing the racist and anti-racist element employed in "An Outpost of Progress." To this end, the essay was divided into two distinct sections subtitled Racist Traces and Anti-Racist Traces. Each section utilized a certain body of textual evidence as well as theoretical grounds upon which the arguments hinged. The first portion majorly made use of Achebe's and Said's views in accusing Conrad of racism and his alleged support for the colonial discourse of the British Empire and related them to the case of this study. The second part, in similar vein, employed textual evidence as well as the words of thinkers such as Goonetilleke and Parry as its supporting framework with an attempt to portray an anti-racist and humanitarian Conrad depicting the white and the coloured with all their possible flaws and skills regardless of skin colour. According to these two viewpoints, both the accusers of Conrad as a racist, imperial author and the defenders of him as an anti-racist critic of colonialism could be regarded rightful in their own argumentation. Nonetheless, this ambivalent situation Conrad holds in this story is the strategy he used in *Heart of Darkness* in order to oppose the long-assumed primitivity of the indigenous, African communities and to criticize the intimidating discourse of the Western colonizers. As Kalua also asserts, "the idea of ambivalence is a political counter-hegemonic strategy that addresses the problem of identity as predicated on patently fixed categories of gender, race and class" (2014: 14). It is therefore held as a final deduction that Conrad, apart from his personal stance, holds an ambivalent authorial position in "An Outpost of Progress" as a method of challenge and critique of imperialist discourse of the period.

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