

Race and Racial Thinking: Africa and Its Others in *Heart of Darkness* and Other Stories

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Abstract: *It is my contention that colonial racism was at its most dangerous not merely in the stigma attached to skin pigmentation but in its calculated plan to exclude other races, to destroy cultures that are considered potentially dangerous to colonial interests. Colonial racism translated itself into tribalism which not only introduced a new hierarchy but also became for the Africans a way by which ascend to power. The paper argues that while colonial political logic was deemed administrative in most countries, this was not the case for the Democratic Republic of Congo where it was militaristic. This partially explains why, in less than two decades, Congo saw the blood, of at least eight million natives, flowing silently. To revisit the country's popular history, absent in most history books, this paper considers the colonial library that wrote about the popular history of Congo 'Free State' between 1885 and 1908 focusing on two main figures: Joseph Conrad and William Sheppard, who, despite representing Congo from two contrasting viewpoints, offer a space from which reading racism and rethinking history in the view that 'history can also be unmade and re-written for a better future.*

Keywords: *Colonialism, Democratic Republic of Congo, Popular history, Race, Racism.*

I. Introduction

It is a significant though not wholly unintentional coincidence that the country, which attention is paid to in these lines, should be the most spoken of in terms of its crises, but criticisms of these have been felt to go in a wrong direction, or, to make appeal for, for their interpretative contents, to spheres outside the historical context. The Democratic Republic of Congo, has become that place to analyse the social injustices in history by Western capitalism in search of resources and new markets, denounced by Marx and Engels in their Manifesto of the Communist Party, which had compelled all nations "to introduce what it calls civilisation into their midst...crea[ting] a world after its own image"[1]. From the pages of this paper it will be abundantly evident that the history of Congo and the history of racism are associated in the closest possible ways. Congo is, in Chinua Achebe's words 'the ancient tree by the much-used farm road, [which] bears on its bark countless scars of the machete' [2].

Imagining racism as a form of war, one may ask: Why did the colonial project use differences in phenotype and cultures to rule? What is the link between racism and capitalism? Where is the place of Africa in the so-called global we? How can newness enter the world for a better postmodern space? What role is expected of the postcolonial critic in the fight against racism?

With the world attention turned to Congo for its natural resources, the natives became instruments in the hands of the capitalists they needed as labour-power. Many Congolese people were worked to death. In his *King Leopold's Ghost*, Adam Hochschild argues that the Congo crisis "had taken five to eight million lives" and that "The Congo would have been one of the major killing grounds of modern times" [3]. For that reason alone Congo is perhaps the place to address head-on the notion of racism and capitalism which our scholarship has neglected in its discussions.

African history is narrated from the Western view point. The whole point of this colonial study of Africa was not to learn from others than it was to undermine the other: Africa. As O. Onoge puts it: "The history of Africa as presented to us has very few redeeming features" [4]. In the main, "it is", he says, "perverse and counter-revolutionary from African stand point" [4]. The critic further shows that "there is a need of a new generation of Africanists to achieve a radical departure from the past orientation" without which there could be "no justification of the incorporation of this discipline in African universities" [4]. This conception arose not from lack of history in Africa as such but from the racist biases underlying the perception of Africa by its others.

The present paper attempts to show how race served to justify the prejudices that Africans were less human and that civilisation came to Africa only from Europe. Says Mahmood Mamdani, in his *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity*: "all talk of tradition simply ossifies systems as fixed and unchanging" [5]. The colonial project by the late 19th century did not recognise a single positive trait in African culture and history which were regarded as absent. In this sense, the colonial history represented the other history -that of Africa as nothingness, more real than the 'Heart of Darkness'. Africa was but an antithesis of Europe and only known for

its savagery, nothing more. Yet, the reality of this place is well alive natives' memories which need only to be dug into and to be reflected upon: kingdoms, exploits of wars and defeats, famines and survivals, which occurred well before the walls of cultures that rose up between 'us and them', 'white and black' stood firm. How well one understands the Achebe's complaint:

I don't come from a 'half-made' society... We're not 'half-made' people, we're a very old people. We've seen lots of problems in the past. We've dealt with these problems in Africa, and we're older than the problems. Drought, famine, disease, this is not the first time that we are dealing with these things in Africa [6].

My reflection on Congo follows this line of postcolonial thinking. It begins with the critique of the late 19th century Victorian writings of its scholars: travellers, explorers, missionaries, soldiers, companies and their agents in Africa/Congo. My discussion aims at presenting Africa and its Others and the racial thinking that characterise their relationships. I shall not call this reconstruction of history 'because as Yusuf Bala Usman, a historian at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) in Zaria, Nigeria whose study [5] analysed by Mamdani and from which I drew some inspiration, argues "establishing what happened at a particular place or time, no matter how much detail is known about it does not constitute the reconstruction of history." This is because Usman argues, "historical reconstruction requires a framework of explanation within which series of events can be perceived and understood as a process" [5], this is a task well beyond the present paper's frame. What interests me, however, is simply to -recognise that one has no option but to look at the past from the vantage point of the present|| [5]. And what this suggests is that to understand the social injustices of the present time one needs to give them their historical context. Such a view of the past not only helps one understand the now but it also prepares them for a better future. Congo, in my view, deserves such a view from the past, from its colonial history that has affected the nation's destiny.

The elaboration of the themes of race/racism/capitalism find their framework from two books on Congo's colonial history, namely: Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* [7] and William Sheppard's *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo* [8] written in the 1890s.

As already argued, to study the racialized narratives one needs to historicise them. I have argued in another paper that most problems in Africa from wars, gender imbalances to severe poverty on the continent must be first and foremost interpreted as resulting from the racist capitalism developed since the early centuries. I will even make a very bold assertion that racism is a working theoretical framework of colonialism. It is clear that the biggest problem lies in the psychology of categorising. Racialized theories are articulated within hierarchical frame which prolongs its operation in terms of high/low, better/ugly/ civilised/ primitive, etc. No neat definition of racism will be complete. V. Y. Mudimbe, writes Palmer, defines it as -the apprehension of oneself as norm, more exactly looking at oneself as particular and incarnating an otherness|| [9]. Racism is more than the mere interpretation of signs, the phenotypes (skin colour, kinky hair, broad lips and nose), Jean Paul Sartre put it even better in his *Black Orpheus*:

[...] the superiority of white over black does not express only the superiority that the colonist claims to have over the native: more profoundly, it expresses a universal adoration of day as well as our night terrors, which also are universal" [10].

In other words, Africa is forced to inherit the good and the bad of the colonial history on the ground that it has no history of its own. It is this conception I argue against.

II. Zones of forgetting and their negative ontologies

A study aptly titled *The Africa That Never Was* by D. Hammond and A. Jablo "documents the role imaginative literature played in disseminating farfetched racist ideas to English readers|| [11]; [12]. Surely, there are plenty Western classics that deal with records colonial violence in Congo and "the colonial abuses in Congo nor Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* [13] that satirises West Africans, Henry Morton Stanley's *In Darkest Africa* [14] and his other stories of his traveling in Congo, nor even the reports of missionaries (except for William Sheppard's *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo* [8], none of them has attempted to represent Congolese as a people sharing the same humanity with other. Instead, they praise brutality towards the natives.

-The first scientific image of Africa was in every way congruent with the '*Darkest Africa*' || [4]. And if racism continues to be a dominant factor in society, it is to my mind, that it is the Western literature about Africa (of that period) which largely contributed to this attitude. It therefore essential that Western classics call for the African scholars' attention in order to examine the system whose mechanism is still strives to show that black man's existence is emptiness.

Starting from the beginning of 19th century, new interests in exploration in the science of nature, stimulated curiosity about other places and the rise of industrialisation and Christianity, helped the West to perceive others as inferior and ready-made to be slaves. The representation of Africa as an exotic, unknowable, place was embraced by many European scholars of that century, the most notorious of them being the German

philosopher, Friererich Hegel, the British explorers Samuel Baker and Richard Burton, the Captain John Lock without forgetting [7], [13] and [14].-Race|| for that matter, Achille Mbembe notes,-has been the ever present shadow in Western political [scientific] thought and practice, especially it comes to imagining the inhumanity of, or rule over, foreign peoples|| [15]. In his documentary, 'Distinct but Equal', Basil Davidson identifies Friererich Hegel as an Africa who, though he had never been to Africa or knew anything about it, wrote sordidly racist things against this place and its people [16]. In 1831, Hegel wrote:

Africa proper, as far as history goes back, has remained for all purposes of connection with the rest of the world- shut up; it is the Gold- Land compressed within itself- the land of childhood, which laying beyond the days of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of night.

The Negro as already observed exhibits the natural man in his complete wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thoughts of reverence and morality- all that we call feeling- if we would comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character.

At this point we leave Africa never to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the world; it has no movement to exhibit. Historical movement in it- that is in its northern part- belongs to the Asiatic or European world...

What we understand by Africa, is the unhistorical under-developed spirit, still involved in the condition of nature.... [4].

The above allows the perception of the world that distinguish people in terms of their historical achievements, a representation which became the premise for seeing Africans as having contributed nothing to human history. Baker while in search of the source of Nile, gives an account of Africans as beasts:

"Human nature viewed in its crudest state as seen amongst African savages is quite on the level of that of the brute and not to be compared with the noble character of the dog. There is neither a great pity, love nor self-denial. No idea of duty, no religion, nothing but covetousness, ingratitude, selfishness and cruelty"[16].

To Burton, "The study of the Negro is a study of man's rudimentary mind. He would appear rather degeneracy from the civilized man than a salvage rising to the first step were it not for his total incapacity for improvement... He seems to belong to one of those childish races never rising to man's estate who fall like worn out links from the great chain of animated nature" [16].

The inner drama of this passage is scarcely a matter of stylistics alone; its true meaning lies in the scientific and religious racial equally shared by Lock's description of West Africans quoted by Mudimbe below, has only added greatly to the world's difficulty to believe in the humanity of African people:

[...] a people of bestiality living, without a God, a religion...whose women are common for they contract no matrimonie, neither have respect to chastity...whose inhabitants dwell in caves and dennes; for these are their houses, and flesh of serpents their meatThey have no speech, but rather a griming and chattering. There are also people without heads, having their eyes and mouths in their breasts" [17]; [18]; [19].

In asmuch as the travellers'reports wished to persuade the West of how different, barbaric and inferior Africans were, this negative ontologies became deeply embedded for centuries in the practice of writing; though it is difficult to exaggerate the impact of this new writing on the development of western literature, it remains a fact that these reports had dictated a new form of literature, the 'travelogue'. According to Dorian Haarhoff "through the Europeans' enthusiasm for the travel genre, [the writers] made it a respectable form, so much so that a review in 1756 felt that travels for the most part, afford us a much more rational entertainment than the fashionable study of idle novels"[20].

From Hegel to the French Romanticists to Victorian writers, the goal of literature written about Africa, seems to me, to have been the destruction of the image of Africa. It is not only the white man's disrespect for the black man's self that seems disturbing; it is also his ruse which he utilised as a means to convince himself of his actions. This is nowhere more manifest than in the Welshman, John Rowlands, and his friend Leopold II, king of the Belgians.

III. Congo, the big slice of the African cake to King of Belgium

In 1976, Rowlands', who would be known worldwide as Henry Morton Stanley, returns to Africa after his first trip from *Ujiji*, on the shores of Lake *Tanganika*, where he met Dr David Livingstone in 1871, himself being one among the first white men to open the eyes of Europe to the riches of Congo. *How I Found Livingstone* [21] which rocketed Stanley into fame thus becoming one of the greatest stories of exploration in the world. Most of his books reigned over the minds of his readers getting Africa to be perceived as the Dark 'Continent'. It is from this trip's report that the King of the Belgians, interested in the scientific exploration of the Congo, hires Stanley, under the guise of explorer, to continue the work Livingstone had begun. Livingstone is one among the first travellers to open the eyes of Europe to riches of Congo. Congo, this sleeping giant is not a 'dark hell' at all: it is a land full of riches and opportunities. Stanley is sent by the King to explore it first before he can mount a strategy to occupy it. This serves as a motif for Stanley second journey to Congo following the Congo River, from its source (*Lualaba*) to the ocean given account to in his tales. The story of Congo, however,

is also a story of Western industrialisation of Africa through the project of railway construction by slave-made villagers, alluded to by [3], "the laborers starting work on Leopold's rail way" and by [7] who says: "A heavy and dull detonation shook the ground...No change appeared on the face of the rock. They were building a railway".¹ This slave-like work, under its ruthlessness project director, took countless lives. As said earlier on, more a way of raping a land and destroying lives, the project of colonisation was also about justifying the present ideology which was believed to be: *la mission civilatrice*. It was, "To open to civilisation the only part of our globe which it has not yet penetrated", it was, "to pierce the darkness which hangs over entire peoples, is, I dare say, a crusade worthy of this century of progress" said the old Belgian fox, as reported by [3]. These sweetest words which had no claim to the integrity of his heart won the trickster a territory bigger than India and 80 times bigger than his own Belgium at the Berlin Conference in 1885.

Leopold's great adventure is fully recognised in Patricia Lauber's *The Congo River into Central Africa*: "The whole Congo was given to Leopold". And it -was|| says the author, "not given to Leopold, King of the Belgians. It was given to Leopold as a private citizen" [22]. It is this Congo Free State (1885-1908) which the Belgian will take over later labelling it the Belgian Congo till its independence in 1960. During those so-called free years of the state, the country had witnessed the Europeans traders fighting over ivory and rubber while the natives were used as slave labour and brutally abused the native populace including children; "children of seven to nine year-old were put to work"[3] as porters, beaten up, or used as conscripts.

Joseph T. Bayly's view in Congo Crisis [23] strikes us even more: "Leopold and the companies to which he granted concessions in the Congo had only one interest: money. In the words of Jermaine O. MacCalpin, "Leopold's state developed the monopoly on trade" [24]. "The exclusion of the natives cannot be ignored, as it re-emerges in the colonial era||, for the -native economic elite was neither encouraged nor even allowed to develop on its own" [24].

Strikingly, "access to the state once more became a fierce competition that pitted ethnic groups in a hostile interaction for scarce resources" [24]. Echoing Mamdani's words, "race was said to be about a hierarchy of civilisations, whereas tribe was said to reflect cultural (ethnic) diversity within a race" [5]. The difference between the two is that "If the central state justified discrimination against the native race on civilisation grounds, the local state justified discrimination in favour of the native tribe on grounds of origin and difference" [5]

To reflect further on this period (1887 and 1905), is also to think of the "epidemic famine, and state-sanctioned violence" through which -the population of Congo Free State plummeted to half of what had been in precolonial times" [21].

The history of political ideas seems to suggest that difference in culture becomes the ground for exclusion or relations of power. From the passage below, one cannot help but be struck by their concern of many about Leopold's inhuman approach:

To see Africa as a continent of coherent societies, each with its own culture and history, took a leap of empathy, a leap that few, if any, of the early Europeans or American visitors to the Congo were able to make. To do so would have meant seeing Leopold's regime not as progress, not as civilisation, but as a theft of land and freedom [3].

IV. Before they were snatched from their homeland

The "its own culture" and "its own history" of the above quote: we recognize in the ideas that consist of throwing a bridge between cultures or acknowledging humanity in the other without hoping that Western civilisation is beneficial to all or is the solution to all human problems. However, the word "empathy" does not convince me that, the visitors who witnessed the plight of the Congolese might have questioned the atrocious acts by Leopold's men, they did question the racial thinking behind them. Not much from the literature of this period shows that there is a move in that direction. Yet acknowledging Africa as a place with its own culture and history implies to rediscover beyond race and materialism, a concrete form of humanity not divided by race but where human agency is valued. With this in mind, I will briefly speak here of Kongo Kingdom, not because it was a super organisation but just to bring out this agency which is denied people of Congo by *Heart of Darkness* [7], which will be my focus in the next section.

When Diego Cão and his men had accidentally stumbled on the mouth of an enormous river bigger which will be known later on as the 'Congo' (or Kongo)² in 1482. Its monarch, the ManiKongo was chosen by an assembly of clan leaders. -Like his European counterparts, he sat on a throne, in his case made of wood inlaid with ivory|| [3]. But this is not correct. A few miles from the river's mouth Diego Cão saw a thriving Kingdom, the Kongo Kingdom. The Kongo Kingdom, whose capital city was Mbanza Kongo, which had been

¹The building a road to bypass the cataracts that prevented a smooth navigation on the Congo in 1879, a work which won him a nick name of *Bula Matari* (the breaker of rocks') or simply referred to day 'state administration' in popular parlance.

²The name Kongo Stoney heard it from one local chief 'Ikutu ya Kongo' when he asked how the River was called.

there for several centuries of which portion the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola fall. The Portuguese planted the churches. Although we have heard stories of Africans starving and walking naked, people “wove clothing out of fibres stripped from the leaves of the raffia palm tree||, they “cultivated yams, bananas, vegetables and raised pigs, cattle, and goats” [3]. In 1491, one of its kings, Zinga Mbemba, was converted to Christianity and took the name of Dom Alfonso. It is said that “when he examined the legal code of Portugal, he was surprised by its excessive harshness that he asked the Portuguese envoy what the penalty was in his country for a citizen who dared to put his feet on the ground” [2]. “This criticism was reported back to the king of Portugal, who in a letter in 1511 to his _royal brother‘, Dom Alfonso, made a defensive reference to differing notions of severity between the two nations” [2]. And “When his fellow king in Lisbon sends an envoy to urge the adoption of Portugal legal code and court protocol, Alfonso was not interested” [3]. As the early Africans had deepened the mind sufficiently to speak for itself, –can we today imagine a situation in which an African ruler is giving, rather than receiving, admonition on law and civilisation? [2] asks. From his letters of 1526 to King João III of Portugal in which he resists slave-trade we learn of indissoluble union of Western Christianity with racist capitalism as being at the very basis of the depopulation of Africa:

Each day the traders are kidnapping our people – children of this country, sons of our nobles and vassals, even people of our own familythis corruption and depravity are so widespread that our land is entirely depopulated....We need in this kingdom only priests and schoolteachers, and no merchandise, unless it is wine and flour for Mass...It is our wish that this kingdom not be a place for the trade or transport of slaves.

King João III’s reply to the African king’s letter is straightforward:

You tell me that you want no slave-trading in your domains, because this trade is depopulating your country. The Portuguese there, on the contrary, tell me how vast the Congo is, and how it is so thickly populated that it seems as if no slave has ever left.

The problem of slave trade as Martin Bernal saw it, was that “large numbers of African slaves led to the belief that they were _natural slaves in the Aristotelian sense” [25], and so, was the Christian European attacks on the heathen Africans and native Americans had to be justified on the ground that “they were not defending their property” or they “wasted land not able to cultivate it, –the only entitlement to land came from cultivation” [25].

In *The Destruction of Black Civilisation*, Chancellor Williams wrote of Queen Zinga Bande, a 17th century ruler of the *Ndongo* and *Matamba* (Modern-day Angola) who remained undefeated by the Portuguese for four decades till her death in 1663 when thousands stood in tears. “Zinga’s chief claim to fame was that she was the greatest abolished of slavery, that she herself had no slaves and, indeed, had slightest need for any|| [26]. “Zinga’s greatest act, however, probably the one that makes her one of the greatest woman in history, was in 624 when she declared all territory in Angola over which she had control as free country, all slaves reaching it from whatever quarter were for ever free”[26]. “The Queen herself had dropped –Ann|| from her name when she discovered that baptising a black into Christianity meant surrendering his soul and body not to any Christ, but to the white man”[26]. “Between the years 1680 and 1700”, as Duplessis, in *A History of Christian Missions in South Africa*, observes, “England exported no less than 3000,000 slaves from Africa” [27]³. Although all nations experienced some sort of servitude which is confused with slavery but this is not the case. I believe it is true to refer to Atlantic slave trade as devilish.

The number of people taken as slaves from Congo is unknown, 30 million will probably be near the truth, which will be followed by the 8 million dead at the hands of Leopold’s *force publique* during the Congo Free State. It is therefore not surprising that the history of Congo should be “one of unsurpassed tyranny and cruelty in the modern world” [23] to which [7] I now turn to in the next section.

Though I have briefly spoken of Congo’s past in the context of slave trade that invaded the territory, the big difference between Africa and Europe was that the white man’s leadership was exclusive whereas the black leadership, to a large extent, opened its doors to Western religion, language, and cultures thus becoming multicultural. Despite being regarded as a conservative society, this is not the case; Africa was becoming less and less African. Africa debarred nobody from enjoying the space but left everybody to carry equal rights. But if asked what happened to the black man, in return, the answer would be very simple:

If Europeans were treating Blacks as badly as they did throughout the 19th century,
Blacks had to be turned into animals or, at best, sub-humans, the noble Caucasian

³On the ideological level, the three – racism, capitalism and Christianity, became one; they did their destruction of Africa quite well. “War parties often set fire to villages at night capturing the villagers as they sought to escape the flames” [23]. The Liverpool historian, Ramsey Muir, records that –in “1807 some 17 million pounds changed hands in the slave trade in Liverpool in just one year”. It is said by the same source that “A great deal of Britain’s wealth depended upon slavery: in present day terms the slave trade earned the equivalent of the housing market or the IT industry”. John Locke “was involved with slave-owning American colonies|| and –the great 18th-century philosopher David Hume” [25]. –Locke refused to justify the enslavement of people of the same nationality“because for him –slavery was justified philosophically or morally, especially if it was through –captured” [25].

was incapable of treating other full humans in such ways [25].

V. Congo in heart of darkness

I come to the third point of contention. The focus of this particular section is the representation of the black race in literature. It will not end the controversy on the book, *Heart of Darkness*, which has lasted decades since the publication of a critical essay by Chinua Achebe in 1978, 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*' [28]. This book has awakened its postcolonial readers to its racial consciousness.

To start with, the book refers to the real local history, may be easily seen from its graphic representations of which the writer offers the dramatic realisation so close to the truth: characters are famished, unburied bones and village ruins making a pure visual impression on the reader. Conrad describes the events central to Belgian history of exploitation such as the gathering of rubber and ivory, the mass killing of people for simply failing to transport or provide food for the white man, etc. Perhaps no book of fiction so far gives us an account of the horrors that occurred in Congo of the late 1800s as Joseph Conrad does. Surprisingly, however, "European and American readers, not comfortable acknowledging the genocidal scale of the killing in Africa at the turn of the century, have cast *Heart of Darkness* loose from its historical moorings" [3]. One wonders why Western readers should seek the interpretation of the text elsewhere. In a passage from his 1917

Author's Notes, the author himself maintains that "in *Heart of Darkness* is experience too, but it is experience pushed a little (and only very little) beyond the actual facts..." [2]⁴. The a-historical reading of the genocide of such a great scale in a book is like belittling the pain of a black soul. It is unimaginable that this book should be reduced to mere fiction. This is as if saying the life of black folks does not matter.

This is one of the passages where Conrad tells us about imperialism:

A slight clinching behind me made turn my head. 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 the clink kept time with their footsteps...I could see every rib, the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope, each had an iron collar on his neck and all were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them, rhythmically clinking" [7].

This brief glimpse of the above quotes gives interpretative suppositions that the book is about imperial abuses of the locals and that the locals fell as prey victims to rapacious system which had "turned them into animals or, at best, sub-humans" as pointed out by [25]. According to [23], "the system was slavery, and exceedingly brutal slavery. Armed guards were mounted on the workers, who were treated as prisoners". However, one must note that the above scene is more as an act than as a frame of mind of the perpetrators. The inner determination of where the author stands comes with his main character, Marlow. For all his comments, Marlow reaches his readers only through the filter of his racial overtones. Achebe's critical essay, above mentioned, exposes the writer's hidden intention: Conrad creates a protagonist designed more than anything to live the experience of prejudices as it was endured by the boastful European, and especially as it was practiced in Congo, a reality for the insensitive capitalist exploiters of Congolese people in the 1890s... Besides, the book creates a framework for intelligent discussion of the subject of cultural differences. However, the book seems misleading in the sense that it encourages, by its language, racial prejudices it should be concerned to denounce. Perhaps, Jameson notes, "the ambiguity at the very heart of [Conrad's] There indeed much to say in defense of Conrad's style. However, I am interested less in defending stylistics, which Fredric Jameson believes makes "a complex and interesting historical act||" [29] than in tracking what I consider certain: the use of language in representing Africa, the writer's proactive comments on the humanity, agency, and cultures of Africa.

The book recalls this main fact: The representation of Africa.

Now and then a boat from the shore gave one a momentary contact with reality. It was paddled by black fellows. You could see from afar the white of their eyeballs glistening. They shouted, sang; their bodies

⁴-Conrad remained true to life and even so when creating the murderous character at the centre of his book|| which -perhaps is the twentieth century's most famous literary villain" [3] and that when drafting this book he took from his memory and dairy details of so many horrible things he had seen and many others he was told during his short stay in the country. Reports of mass killing that took place in Leopold's Congo, which the whites had become used to, are repeatedly recorded, what others denied or ignored. One thing which is certain is that, through his character(s) Conrad was directly or indirectly referring to people like Edmmund Bartellot, Arthur Hodister, and so on. Bartellot, wrote Hochschild, "went mad, began biting, whipping, and killing people||" before he was finally "murdered". Arthur Hodister -famed for his harem of African women and for gathering huge amounts of ivory|| before he was also killed by Arab warlords, and Captain Léon Rom of the *Force Publique*, station chief at Stanley Falls (now Kisangani) in 1895 whose military expedition took as captives -many women and children ...and twenty -one heads were brought to the falls , and ...used by Captain Rom as a decoration round a flower-bed in front of his house||, a fact which can be likened to the posts of Kurtz's own station in the book [3]. It is said that their wives were often taken as hostages when production quotas were not met....brutal floggings were frequent, and the Congolese were sometimes maimed-their hands cut-off- as an object lesson, to cause others to meet their production schedule||" [23].

streamed with perspiration; they had faces like grotesque masks-these chaps, but they had bone, muscle, a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement ... [7].

But one must go still further:

We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there-there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly, and the men were-No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it-this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity-like yours-the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar [7].

Upon reading statements such as this –A lot of people, mostly black and naked, moved about like ants|| [7] and the above, one can hardly help thinking of the author’s obsession with race.

But there is something very disturbing in this: it is as if the being of the natives reminds him of an incomplete work of creation in the black person to which he invites his readership to confirm:

“Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough” [7]. And I agree: “Heart of Darkness projects the image of Africa as –the other world|| the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilisation, a place where man’s vaunted intelligence and refinement are fully mocked by triumphant bestiality” [28].

What is more damaging, from the reader, is that even his *An Outpost of Progress* [30], a sequel of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* [7], the Congolese man is represented again as the one who seduced the white man into slave trade even though history presents the opposite. The overriding problem of Conrad’s writing is the writer’s unjustified anger towards the people he claims to defend and whom he describes the same way as any imperialists did. One wonders if racism does mix with colonialism. In fact, we feel the rationalization of colonialism from the first few pages of this book. The idea of colonising Africa does not annoy Conrad at all.

By arguing that “the Romans were not colonialists” [7] while pretending to reject their imperialism, does not make for him a strong case. Ideally, the author is a strong supporter of colonialism, especially when practised by the British. The words ‘torch’, ‘light’, ‘enlightened’, he refers to on every page are enough indication that colonialism was good for people still sitting in darkness. “Colonialism and colonization” Mudimbe explains, mean “orgainsation, arrangement” [19]. “The two words” the distinguished scholar argues, “derive from the latin word *colère*, meaning to cultivate or to design” (1). Although the colonial experience did not reflect the progressive ideals of these concepts, however, the imperialists believed they were doing black men a favour by colonising them.⁵ Did not Dalzell says that “whatever evils the slave trade may be attended with ...it is mercy ...to poor wretches, who ...would otherwise suffer from the butcher’s knife”? [18]. With admiration being conferred to his story super villain, Kurtz, while the victims are being transformed into animal kingdom, there is no way the book could possibly be read without upsetting an honest reader! The underlying ideological racial thinking here is expressed in the form of the praise of ‘Englishness’: “Kurtz”, we are told by the narrator, “had been educated partly in England.... His mother was half-English, his father was half-French” [7]. “A Conrad student told me in Scotland”, said Achebe, “that Africa is merely a setting for the disintegration of the mind of Mr. Kurtz” [28]. It becomes clearer when one recalls that the aim of Marlow’s journey to Congo was but to bring Kurtz back to civilisation. A careful reading of the book therefore will show that Conrad’s book concerns itself with the *placing* (Congo under imperial rule) and the *timing* (Victorian era and its racist ideologies) which suggests that the story swung its author between being anti-imperialist and imperialist at the same time.

It is perhaps the summary, I quote at length below, that best describes the ambivalence of colonial discourse:

Heart of Darkness is one of the most scathing indictments of imperialism in all literature, but its author, curiously, thought himself an ardent imperialism where England was concerned. Conrad fully recognised Leopold’s rape of the Congo for what it was: ‘the horror! The horror!’ his character Kurtz says on his death bed. And Conrad’s stand-in, Marlow, muses on how ‘the conquest of the earth which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much.’ Yet in almost the same breath, Marlow talks about how the British territories colored red on a world map where ‘good to see at any time because one knows that some real work is done in there’; British colonialists were ‘bearers of a spark from the sacred fire.’ Marlow was speaking for Conrad, whose love of his adoptive country knew no bounds: Conrad felt that –liberty...can only be found under the English flag all over the world.’ And at the very time he was denouncing the European lust for African riches in his novel, he was an investor in a gold mine near Johannesburg. Conrad was a man of his time and place in other ways as well. He was partly a prisoner of what Mark Twain, in a different context, called ‘the white man’s notion that he is less savage than the other savages’ [3].

⁵However, patriotically he might have felt that he has the duty of civilising the savages, the truth appears to be less certain: Africa was already civilised. The statement by the German scholar Leo-Frobenius who spent from 1890 to 1910 studying culture in West and Equatorial Africa (spent time in Congo) provides the key to this strange declaration at the heart of this paper’s conception. Frobenius, writes Dorothy Blair, “was one of the first Europeans to admit that the peoples of those regions, the so-called ‘primitive savages’, had a medieval culture equal to that of the West, that they were civilised to the marrow of their bones” [39].

The book gives the reader the impression that its author's personal racial hatred did not allow him enough distance from its subject matter; his belief in his superiority overshadowed his imaginative creativity at that point in time and he failed, as already indicated, to defend the weak, he took his seat next to his oppressor thus making the wretched of the earth to suffer double tragedy both at their persecutors hands (physically) and the artist's hands (ideologically).

Let me conclude this section with a passage by Orel:

There is a radical difference between a text considered as evidence of what a writer witnessed or thought – and used for the purposes of getting at things he witnessed or thought – and a text considered as influencing its readers and used for purposes of determining the ideas and conduct of those individuals. When the text is considered from the biographical stand point it is very important to know what the author intended to say. When a text is considered from the social standpoint such an inquiry is virtually irrelevant. The important thing is to know how the text was taken, even if it was taken upside down [31].

Renan's and Sorel's, cited by the same source, remarks are quite to the point here; "the significance of the text lies not in what the author meant but in what the requirements of the time made him mean". Having said that, however, a racial comment on one or two pages of a book would be possible for any writer to a writer perhaps to convey the attitude of people of his own time but to be contemptuous throughout the whole book is an indication that the writer shares his time's views. Unlike Conrad's book which took the Congolese out of shared humanity, John Wesley, William Wilberforce, E. Morel, Mary Kingsley, and so on, whose writings still show to this day their resistance against racism, slavery and imperialism as well as the respect for other peoples' cultures, are an indication that Conrad did not raise above racial prejudices of his period, he was not bigger than his time as great men often are. Taking into account Renan's and Sorel's above mentioned quote, *Heart of Darkness* [7] is, interestingly a mixture of all three types of texts: a testimony, a text influencing the readers and an autobiographical text. Thus, considering that it is still widely read and ranking among the top 100 books in English Literature, this has led many to wonder if *Heart of Darkness* [7] is really a great book? If one takes seriously Pareto's textual criticism in the passage below the opposite could also be true:

Beyond question, an author's views have some relation to the sentiments prevailing in the group in which he lives, and it is therefore possible, within certain limits, to gain from his views some light as to those sentiments, which, meantime, are elements in the social equilibrium. But it is curious that that is more specially the case with common place writers of mediocre talents than with eminent authors, those of great genius. The latter in virtue of their very qualities rise above the commonality and stand apart from the mass of people. They therefore reflect less reliably the ideas, beliefs, and sentiments actually prevailing [31].

It does not seem to me that, either in this book [7] or in the other [see 30] Conrad demands the freedom of the black man: at the very most he lays claim to whiteness and the superiority of Western civilisation on black people's customs regarded as primitive.

VI. Enlightened without the Enlightenment: Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo

A recognition of the limitations of Conrad's book in representing Africa brings me to an examination of another possible perspective: writers writing across cultures must show that they are able to go beyond their own cultural prejudices. What need be emphasised here is that a good analysis depends on the distance that the writer is able to create between his subject and himself without necessarily losing sight of the subject itself. What this also implies is that the writer's perspective is created when he is able to go beneath the surface of issues thus allowing his readers, not only to see what he saw but also his insight. William Sheppard's *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo* [8]. This book brings forth this message: Life in Africa would have been better if there were no colonisation.

Unlike Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* [7], which failed to place distance between the author and his subject matter, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo* [8] written the same period about the same country has the merit of penetrating beneath the surface of its subject matter moving its readers from sight to insight.

Two Presbyterian pioneer missionaries in Congo, namely: Samuel Norvell Lapsley and William Henry Sheppard, a Black American, sailed for Congo in 1890. Out of records of their missionary trips and experiences in the country grew an equally important book, already alluded to, which William Sheppard drafted from his diaries after the death of his colleague Lapsley, who died on the mission field, in Leopold Ville (now known as Kinshasa). Written a decade or so after *Heart of Darkness* [7], the book demonstrates the black American increasing ability to explore the wealth of African cultures making the world aware of their civilisation. Whereas *Heart of Darkness* denies the African person humanity depicting him or her as a helpless creature in need of improvement, *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo* [8] opens up a space to read an already enlightened and civilised world even though it was not touched by western civilisation. Like any scholar of that Victorian era, Sheppard describes nature as Conrad does, but unlike Conrad's negative vision of landscape, here the writer has deep admiration for it:

The forest everywhere was ever green. Trees blossomed and bloomed, sending out upon the gentle breeze their fragrance so acceptable to the traveller, Festoons of moss and running vines made the forest look like a beautiful painted theatre or an enormous swinging garden” [8].

While the Congo described in *Heart of Darkness* is a *terra incognita* with its writer explaining the unfamiliar, under the older tradition and exotic order, in order to give his readers the faint picture of a primeval forest and the haunt of savages who live in it, Sheppard presents a thought-provoking view of difference between cultures. He is well able to separate the content of a particular social behaviour from the same pattern in another context or place by studying each in isolation and claim for each a proper meaning of a kind that we do not see in *Heart of Darkness* [7]. Sheppard faithfully captures the ways of life of different ethnic groups: the *Bakete*, *Bakuba*, *Bena Lulua*, *Baluba*, *Bachua*, and so on, their art and picturesque cultures. “His writings” for this matter, as Hochschild also acknowledges “show an empathetic, respectful curiosity about African customs radically different from the harsh, quick judgements of someone like Stanley” [3]. The picture becomes even more clear when he speaks of the Kuba Kingdom in Kasai: “one of the last greatest African kingdoms unchanged by European influence” [3], with its outbreak of creativity which led him to argue that he was particularly impressed with the Kuba, who “make one feel that he has again entered a land of civilisation...” and that “Perhaps they got their civilisation from the Egyptians – or the Egyptians got theirs from the Bakuba” [3]. If for Marlow “going up the Congo river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world” or that “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—[which] seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness.” Or that “As if the “flicker” of civilization, the light that “came out of this river” has already begun to dim...”[7]; it is precisely this language which finds its contradiction in Sheppard’s book. Unlike Conrad’s language which is depersonalising and has nothing positive to say about Africa, Sheppard has something convincingly new to tell on each page of his diary:

Highly civilised. I grew very fond of the Bakuba and it was reciprocated. They were the finest looking race I had seen in Africa, dignified, graceful, courageous, honest, with an open, smiling countenance and really hospitable. Their knowledge of weaving, embroidering, wood carving and smelting was the highest in equatorial Africa [8].

The Kuba state was in Williams’ opinion, trustworthy and transparent and probably the best in central Africa by its social institutions that modern states can learn from. What I am here concerned to stress is the kingship, the decentralisation of power which rotated from one clan to another, with a strong and bustling parliamentary, sound city life, diffusion art and mass culture in an increasingly organised civilisation. The Kuba kingdom was enlightened although the glory it had for Sheppard in the 1890s will progressively fade away with the arrival of the colonial administration in the area. A descendant of slaves himself, Sheppard’s experience in the Congo provided him with a gate through which he could glimpse a sense of wholeness, the humanity of his own people before they were captured as slaves, to which one can nostalgically return as to some source of strength. That, however, is a topic deserving another study.

However, Sheppard never said Congolese were angels without blemish; but sums up his feelings about the Kasai people among whom he lived for many years and built the church in these few words:

–An honest People. – All the natives we have met in the Kasai are, on the whole, honest. Our private dwellings have never been locked day or night. Your pocketbook is a sack of cowries or salt tied at the mouth with a string. But now and then something happens that the rule may not become monotonous. N’susa, one of the boys of my caravan, misappropriated some cowries. I called him (in the presence of two witnesses) in question about the matter. He acknowledged removing the shells and innocently remarked, ‘You are the same as my father, and what is his is mine’ [8].

In short, the nineteenth century we read in this book is not reflexive of a grouping of the poor and underprivileged which one remembers with pain in *Heart of Darkness* [7], but a man triply happier to his condition in religion, marriage life, creativity in *Presbyterian Pioneers in Congo* [8]. If such a happy life disappeared from *Heart of Darkness* [7], it is not only because of the writer’s line of thought, it is mainly due to the expression of the great disease of the nineteenth-century: racism. The images of failure: struggle of survival, poverty, and senseless killings and the radical depersonalisation that comes with, in what Barthes calls *écriture blanche* i.e. white or bleached writing” [29], is inevitable wherever the possibility arose to write about people whose lives were affected by colonial racism. To that extent, Conrad may be justified to have depicted the life of people already altered by colonialism and standing in contradiction with the areas not yet affected such as those Sheppard visited. It is not surprising that Sheppard himself complained about life in these areas immediately after they entered into contact with the coloniser. Sheppard was effective in discussing the rise of imperialism taking over and leaving the democratic and good manners of people in the background. The pages of Sheppard’s book open up a space beyond the world touched by western civilisation and its own limits. In the light of Sheppard’s representation above, the question remains: should we refer to Africa as ‘Heart of Darkness’ or ‘Treasures of Darkness’?

VII. Conclusion: history can be unmade and re-written

Placing races of people, languages and cultures in hierarchy is an ultimate outrage and to it only one result is possible: the belief that one race, one language or one nation is better than the other. I have therefore argued here that racism is detestable and should be, as a practice, eliminated from our world. Racism is an attitude deprived of objective logic and capable of irreversible losses. Racism led to Congo genocide which took 8 million, a population seven times the size of Gabon while the world was watching. If the resentment toward Leopold II by the British and Americans, as shown in Twain's King Leopold's *Soliloquy* [32], and Lindsay's *The Congo* [33], was genuine then it is a critique of Victorian moralism. This, however, does not look to be the case. The following conclusion is unavoidable: they hated not what Leopold II was doing in Congo, but the exclusion of them from participating in the plunder of Congo by the latter. It is precisely this ambivalence in literature which claims to defend the cause of the Congolese just because nothing was awarded them to satisfy their bottomless appetite for capital I contradict. If the United States wanted to defend Congo did they delay to defend Congo, one may ask: why was America slow to react when George Washington wrote an *Open Letter to the king and A Report upon the Congo State and Country* to the President of the Republic of the United States of America exposing the abuses of the Congolese by the king before 1890 and the Reverend William Henry Sheppard whose story against the same regime which appeared in 1908, without forgetting, of course, William Morrison [see 3] who led a group of Presbyterians to see President Theodor Roosevelt about the Congo? "Leopold's ghost follows the Belgians as old [slave] ships follow the Americans" [23]. Vachel Lindsay's poem, *The Congo*, on the death of Leopold, from which we read:

Hoo, Hoo, Hoo.

Listen to the yell of Leopold's ghost

Burning in Hell for his hand-maimed host.

Hear how the demons chuckle and yell

Cutting his hands off, down in Hell [3] and see [33].

cannot appeal to a Congolese reader any longer because the work of Leopold in Congo had only begun at his death and he was not the only rapist. This is, by no means, to say that the place of Britain and USA in the abolitionist literature and politics is negligible.

When Sartre says that "whiteness expresses universal adoration" [10] he refers to the mind of people of his time for whom blackness represented the night or deprivation of light, the void in one's history thereof. The 19th century has seen people infused with the morals of killing in the name of the purity of race. Says Hochschild, "Conrad was not making much up when he had Mr. Kurtz scrawl the infamous line -'Exterminate all the brutes!'" [7]; [3] towards the end of his book. In this sense, the district commissioner's, Jules Jacques, ultimatum, "I will exterminate them to the last man" [3], Charles Dickens' hateful words against the Bushmen, "I think it would have been justifiable homicide to slay him..." [34] and the District Commissioner in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* [35] who promises to cut off unnecessary details from his book and insert one paragraph about the life of a man who killed himself, Okonkwo; demonstrate such a racist thinking: Africa's past is, if anything, "one long night of savagery" [36]. For the post-colonial scholars, however, "night is no longer absence, it is refusal" and "lack is not color, it is the destruction of this borrowed clarity which falls from the white sun" [10]. Likewise, "a void", as Homi Bhabha puts it "may be empty but it is not a vacuum" [37]. "History", argues Jameson, can be rewritten in terms of "some deeper, underlying, and more 'fundamental' narrative, of a hidden master narrative which is the figural content of the first sequence of empirical materials" [29]. Perhaps Jameson intends to show that behind any misrepresentation there is another version of history which remains hidden and perhaps if rewritten may lead to the social formation of a better future. To which, Edward Said adds: "history is made by men and women, just as it can also be unmade and re-written, always with various silences and elisions, always with shapes imposed and disfigurements tolerated, so that "our" [Africa]... becomes "ours" to possess and direct" (my extrapolation) [38]. This brings to the conclusion that Africa has a story to tell the world: a story of when the world was young, of colonial disruption, and, of course, of an inclusive future humanistic world. But revisiting the past and envisaging the future requires a method, which is not a set of rules to direct one's mind but rather of "both discovering and becoming what [one] is" [10].

The big question remains: if it could be shown that we live in global world, what would be the reason to hold on to the racial prejudice that skin colour or one's origin should be the only way to understand one's place in society? If the Victorian literature hoped to find its "greatness reflected in the domesticated eyes of the Africans", to borrow [10]'s words, the truth is that "there are no more domesticated eyes: there are only free looks that judge our world" [10]. And here is a black man speaking:

I am an African. What interests me is what I learn in Conrad about myself. To use me as a symbol may be bright or clever, but if it reduces my humanity by the smallest fraction, I don't like it [2]

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