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The Concept of Cultural Identity in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness

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Abstract

Cultural identity is a sense of belongingness to a group. It is an element of a person's self-conception and self-perception and is related to nationality, culture, religion, society and generation. It is a kind of social group that has its own culture. Joseph Conrad in Heart of Darkness, has discussed the identity issue. He has shown through his novella the strategies the European leaders have used during that time to control the world, especially Africa.

Keywords: culture, religion, society, generation and belongingness

1. Introduction

A state of our present day, but it goes backward to our ancestral times. In the novella the problem of race, gender, culture and religious features are reflected. It also explores the idea of western on African civilization and culture, during the practices such as: racial discrimination, integration, apartheid. Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness is the finest example of The 19th century was a phase of European predominance and racial discrimination. European writers in general and the British in particular were able to portray, colonialism and imperialism of European countries and their wish to power and raw materials. The crisis of identity is not racism and discernment.

The main parts of the conflict against colonialism and neo-colonialism in Africa have persistent mainly on the cultural liberty of the previous and the new generations. This fight still lasts till today. Therefore, to speak, cultural identity is both feature of the individual and the culturally identical group of members sharing the incessant philosophy. The concept of identity in the novella can be applied in two different ways. Firstly, it can be employed as a reference to the collective self-awareness that a particular group embodies and reflects. Identity implies idea of a social character which defines a set of traits that members of a given community share with each other above and beyond their individual disagreements. Such traits almost always comprise of a constellation of values and defiance towards life, God, and nature. Treated in its collective sense, the concept of cultural identity consists of typologies of cultural conducts. Such deeds are the appropriate and inappropriate ways of encountering people's basic needs and solving life's crucial dilemmas. The concept of cultural identity includes shared premises, morals, definitions, and beliefs and the day-to-day, instinctive pattern of activities.

Cultural identity is an effective aspect of individual personality, which is a central symbol of his existence. It is in reference to the individual that the notion is used in this work. The problem of identity is a long-standing subject that goes back to ancient times. In the course of a critical analysis of Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness is to show that Joseph Conrad is a realistic writer who portrays devoted characters whose task is to tour to Africa in order to bring vision to the uncivilized and the savage. Colonial period in Heart of Darkness, suggests that since the 14th century, African societies were organized in kingdoms. They endeavoured their best to keep their land productive and protected from others over the years. But by the arrival of the western on their coasts, the situations were changed. They came and annihilate Africans and enslaved them. Nearly centuries later, after hard struggles, slavery was abolished and Africa, regardless of all her lost had to turn her back on and has to look forward her future. But no sooner had she started her exercise to reconcile her wounds than she was once again shove in the name of Civilization.

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Therefore, a new period had begun in the history of Africa. The title suggests that Africa is the “Heart of Darkness”, the malicious place where exists no culture, no civilization, and no identity. Darkness is theoretically integral part of the book’s title. However, it is difficult to uncover what it means as everything in the book is shrouded in darkness. Africa, England, and Brussels are all defined as depressing and gloomy, even if the sun is shining strongly. Here, darkness might be the description of the human state which has thoughtful consequences. Assuredly, Conrad’s main idea is not to express the inhabitants’ condition. It must react imaginatively and assess appealing rather than sociological or conceptual conditions. Heart of Darkness has become a very mixed work by many literary critics, a fiction falls of uncertainties and illogicalities.

The book makes us see not only a simple symbol, but also the revelation of conflicting and unfathomable world they lived in. Conrad’s purpose in Heart of Darkness is to carry a vision of Europe through characters in his novella. He introduces Kurtz, as a business agent sent to Africa by the company to examine their social cultural, financial and psychological glitches. Many people around the world travelled to Africa in the nineteenth Century and had described the same situation as Stanley wrote in his book, The Dark Continent printed in 1897. It seems that Conrad had read these books and had been inspired by the images of Africa. Africans in Heart of Darkness are perceived as primitives, savages and insensitive. Savagery and primitiveness are existing in every part of the story. Conrad admires savages clapping their hands engraving their feet, and maintaining their own cultural values and ethnicities.

It is conceivable that the need to reserve that image is at the heart of the fact that some Western readers find Chinua Achebe’s attack on the novel as racist both outrageous and hard to take. When Conrad wrote Heart of Darkness; he did not expect an African readership. Although he may have written from the best generous and humanitarian purposes, he was unaware that the stereotypes and conservative defiance about Africa that he took for granted would one day, be challenged by a readership that would not instantaneously recognize itself in those. It would possibly have shocked Conrad to hear that these images that he took for granted as a usual way of talking about Africa may be “the Heart of Darkness”. They are the foundation of the unexamined naivety upon which the civilizing mission was based and the seeds from which its disloyalty among its agents in Africa inexorably grew.

Achebe was basically pointing Heart of Darkness towards a long overdue dialogue with people it foretells as Europe’s others. Though, a postcolonial interrogation of Heart of Darkness need not be constrained to pointing out the racist labels and assumptions, which reinforce its image of Africa. One could also try to convalesce the narratives that Conrad overturns. Africans had opposed the European domination of their mainland from the beginning. Whenever this opposition gained drive, the superiority of European military technology prohibited any long-term success. A European writer, in an ironic poem on the Scramble for Africa, wrote that whatever happens to chortle, Europeans had got the Rule gun, and Africans not. Colonial perception in Heart of Darkness as Europeans perception on Africa cannot be addressed without mention being made of Joseph Conrad whose name is confidentially linked with Africa, particularly in the English-speaking domain. Conrad and his

book Heart of Darkness, printed when Europe’s so-called civilizing mission in Africa was moving at peak, seems to be an essential reference for all individuals who write about Africa, and precisely about Central Africa.

The colonial rule of the Belgian King Leopold II, the Congo Free State, became one of the infamous scandals of the turn of the century. Leopold II had acquired the vast Congo region through substantial investment of his own opulence in setting up his administration there, and by persuading the great powers at the Berlin Conference of 1884-5 to award his International Congo Association title to what was to turn out to be the Congo Boundless State. By the mid-1890s the Congo Basin and its products became a cause of great wealth to Leopold who worn his riches to beautify his Belgian capital Brussels while using his agents in Africa to start a brutal exploitative regime for the taking out of rubber in the interior forest provinces of the Free State.

The notion of the strong coercing the weak- and the weak powerless to revolt surfaces in Heart of Darkness, where the White merchants promiscuously murder the Congolese in quest of riches and power. They came in Africa as military, traders, and missionary; they alienated Africa in order to rule. Another noble task they had to attain according to them is to civilize, apprise and ennoble the savages that Africans are; they determined to corrupt us with and by some features of their cultures. They placed Africans on their ways of Holiness, for them, the Christianity is truth and actual religion.

The white clerics tend to be kind to their parishioners contrarily to Kurtz who was neither satisfied with the human. He put in titles neither the atrocities he inflicted to Africans nor the restraint concepts they for them. Like Kurtz in Heart of Darkness, colonizers did not only assault Africa, they shot fires, killed his menfolk, women and kids. They also settle battles, obliteration, tear and weaken in Africa. As if not pleased by the horrors in Africa, they forced their values to Africans.

Conrad’s Africa is a place where the white man brings and meets his own darkness and inhumanity. Having no real emotional approachability of reconnoitring this continent what so ever, Conrad’s European replies to it either by manipulating what he can (as the manager, the Company, and its representatives do), destroying what he cannot for e.g., killing the locals and blowing up hills needlessly, or displaying infrequent prejudice, indifference and misperception as Marlow does in the novel. Everything the reader knows about Africa is through Marlow’s individual perception of what he perceives or does not grasp, of what he hears or does not catch, and, ultimately, of what he self-ironically understands or fails to comprehend.

Marlow was unable to tell his companions about his experience in the Congo river, he measured his journey as a nightmare, also he thought that his fellows lived in a world of modernism and civilization.

Marlow remains cloistered from any real contact with the local culture; his stuck to the river journey serves to reserve a confused and reflective attitude in him, rather than an involved state of mind. His African experience comprises of very little fact, proves mostly sensorial, vigilant and rather interested in itself as an object of study than in the environs. Describing the other’s eyes or looking into them supports just as a mirror. It is supposed that if Africans were not interested in Conrad’s compassion, what could be perfectly vindicated, maybe they would be interested in the honour

Conrad confers upon this continent by choosing Africa as a valuable background to cast truth on how imperfect and horrific the psychology of the white man is under all his civilized facade.

In spite of being securely deceased, Conrad reminds the entire world that there is an Africa that was savagely colonized. The description of an antagonistic animistic nature suggests confrontation rather than determined racism. Nature seems to have a mind of its own, observing and reacting to occupy aggression.

The disrupting message that it sends is a leitmotif often employed in world literature. Conrad uses Colonization in this novel to discover the questions about man's capacity to do evil. But the end of colonization has not abbreviated Heart of Darkness less pertinent, since Conrad was interested in making a modern world in which colonization was simply a surface. While reading the novel, one can observe that Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness prepares us for a new generation in which a new man has had to bear the psychic and physical pain of dislocation and all the attendant confusion of watching imagined certain standards become variable. Problems like discrimination, famines, war, massacre and murder attempt caused by some extremist groups in some Africans countries seem to be early signified by Conrad in some of his novels particularly in Heart of Darkness which limitations with passages that seem petrifyingly contemporary in their descriptive accurateness. Joseph Conrad deals with the concept of cultural individuality in Heart of Darkness to address issue of change and the need for it in the target society. It also shows that Africa represented in the novel is based on racial discrimination, gender and civilization. Conrad has stressed on human discrimination, either ethnical or racial acumen for selfish political outcomes. He also has discussed the identity issue and come to the end that, identity is dynamic and can change within the time. He has shown through his novel the strategies the European leaders have used at that time to control the world, especially Africa. For Conrad, people's discrimination and marginalization are the problems of life nowadays, and it couldn't endure being a problem, if we stop to ponder our countrymen differently. In terms of the results, Conrad's shorts biographies show that they have taken their inspiration from their own lives stories. This novella has pictured Conrad's views on glitches of the society and given their solutions to them. This book has mainly dealt with the matter of socio-cultural identity. Moreover, he attacked colonialism and depicted the aggressive attitudes towards the African victims of European imperialism and also slammed and indicted their system, which forced the Africans to work as a machine and deprived of their right for owning a land or getting an income. From beginning to end in the Heart of Darkness, the reader can grasp the true nature of human beings and can easily distinguish between the evil and the good.

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