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Communities Disintegration as a Result of Colonization in Heart of Darkness and Things Fall Apart

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Abstract

This paper makes an attempt to analyze the novel Things Fall Apart and Heart of Darkness in an attempt to mirror the Communities Disintegration as a Result of Colonization. The study focuses on Chinua Achebe his first novel Things Fall Apart (TFA) in 1958, and Conrad's Heart of Darkness Achebe wrote TFA in response to European novels that depicted Africans as savages who needed to be enlightened by the Europeans. He also fiercely resents the stereotype of Africa as an undifferentiated "primitive" land, the "heart of darkness," as Conrad calls it. The importance of this study lies on the novel when he shows how African cultures vary among themselves and how they change over time in the two novels. The results shown as a young boy the "African literature" he was taught consisted entirely of works by Europeans about Africa, such as Conrad's Heart of Darkness and Joyce Cary's Mister Johnson, which portrays a comic African who slavishly adores his white colonist boss, to the point of gladly being shot to death by him.

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1. Introduction

Things Fall Apart, published in 1958, is the seminal African novel in English. Although there were earlier examples, notably by Achebe's fellow Nigerian, Amos Tutuola, none has been so influential, not only on African literature, but on literature around the world. Its most striking feature is to create a complex and sympathetic portrait of a traditional village culture in Africa. Achebe is trying not only to inform the outside world about Ibo cultural traditions, but to remind his own people of their past and to assert that it had contained much of value. All too many Africans in his time were ready to accept the European judgment that Africa had no history or culture worth considering. Achebe has said that it was his indignation at this latter novel that inspired the writing of Things Fall Apart. Achebe presents to the reader his people's history with both strengths and imperfections by describing for example, Igbo festivals, the worship of their gods and the practices in their ritual ceremonies, their rich culture and other social practices, the colonial era that was both stopping Igbo culture and also brought in some benefits to their culture. TFA therefore directs the misleading of European novels that depict Africans as savages into a whole new light with its portrayal of Igbo society, and examines the effects of European colonialism on Igbo society from an African perspective. He also wrote a famous attack on the racism of Heart of Darkness which continues to be the subject of heated debate.

2. Discussion

In Achebe's criticism he also mentions that a novella which so depersonalizes a portion of the human race should not be considered a great work of art. This is wrong and even if Heart of Darkness is in fact completely racist there is no denying that it can still be a work of art. One can just look at Triumph des Willens one of the most famous propaganda films of the Nazi Party. Now everyone can see that it is thoroughly racist but that does not keep it from being an important time-document, technically ground breaking and a masterpiece in its genre. One should not completely disregard the early critics who praised the novella's writing and prose. The beautiful language is without question an important reason why it is considered such a masterpiece today and why it was so praised when it was originally published. I began to sense certain incomprehension in Achebe's analysis of the pressures of form that engaged Conrad's imagination to transform biases grounded in homogeneous premises. By form I mean the novel form as a medium of consciousness that has its deepest roots in an intuitive and much, much older self than the historical ego or the historical conditions of ego dignity that bind us to a particular decade or generation or century [1. 86]. Harris also states that it is unfair to expect someone who is living in colonial times to be fully post-colonial. Just like Said pointed out we must not forget to historicize and contextualize texts. It is however important to note that even though Achebe's critique might be erroneous, it is just like Heart of Darkness an important text and adds an important take on the novella. One can just take a look at all the responses Achebe's critique has caused. Even a misreading of a text can lead to discussions because it can create a chain-reaction of responses to responses. Conrad could be perhaps considered racist by today's standards, but considering the time when he wrote the novella, he probably was no more racist than anyone else. Conrad and his peers would not have seen the novella as being racist. It is difficult to know how much of what is said in the novella was written for dramatic effect, Marlow might have been created to be slightly racist. However, Conrad did go up the Congo river in 1890 so it is hard to think of Marlow as something completely separate from Conrad. To Achebe this effects the value of the novella in question. To Said this point is fairly

irrelevant in evaluating the novella's value. This is probably due to the fact that the feelings for Africa and racism are closer to his heart. The African identity is more important to Achebe than to Said. It also seems possible to read the text as a positive view of Africa, in that Conrad seems to imply that the origins of man are in Africa. Marlow is after all travelling into the heart of darkness and he does suggest that London just like Africa has been "one of the dark places of the earth" [2 . 5]. He does see a connection and the birth of man can be seen as something positive in that we all share a common ancestry. Marlow considers the Africans a part of the machinery just as much as the boiler is. However Marlow does show some affection for his late helmsmen, Marlow states the reader might find this as rather odd because after all he was just "a savage who was no more account than a grain of sand in a black Sahara" [2. 49] but because he had steered for him and been at his back for so long he had formed a kind bond with him "like a claim of distant kinship" . According to Achebe this is the meaning of the novella. The problem with this is that Achebe also seems to claim that Africa is the "heart of darkness" but "heart of Darkness" could just as well refer to Europeans' greed as they loot and torture the Africans in their search for ivory. That's what I say; nobody; here, you understand here, can endanger your position. This is referring to how Europeans can do whatever they want in Africa and treat it as their own playground without having to face any consequences for their actions. Here, the Europeans seem to represent the darkness, and not the African. Conrad also shows a strong disdain for colonialism calling them conquerors and claiming that they just took what they wanted like violent robbers conducting murder on a great scale. Fundamental to the Age of Imperialism was the "scramble for Africa" period of the 1880s to the 1890s. The Europeans became hungry for Africa's natural resources, resulting in their arrival into Africa as well as their hostile takeover of the land. During this period many European countries set colonies in Africa. One of the reasons that the Europeans had for colonizing Africa was their claim to civilize the primitive African minds as a humanitarian act. Soon African states were dominated by European power be it economic, political or social. The Europeans held a Eurocentric view of the world; firmly believing European culture to be superior. Euro centrism therefore perceives Europe as the core of civilization and of humanity. Euro centrism had racist tendencies which granted an inferior status to the non-whites. In order to give his people back the pride that they once had, Achebe wrote *Things Fall Apart*. Language is also a very important element to Igbo. It gives them a sense of belonging and they also use it as a means to preserve their culture and heritage. And although language is important to Igbo, it ultimately leads to the fall of their society. The waning of the negritude movement also took place in the 1960s and 70s. The aim of the negritude movement was to "unite peoples living in different nations through their shared ancestry and common ancestry and common origins" [4. 77]. It was criticized for putting focus on the skin color and blackness and upholding separatist binary oppositions. It was also criticized for not questioning the negative associations with 'blackness' (ibid. 81-82). More than ever it seemed important to create an African identity. Achebe was also part of the Pan-Africanism movement which aim was to unify native Africans and eliminate colonialism. [3. 73]

3. Conclusion

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* has invited a body of criticism of great complexity. Many of the critics of this have presented valuable and incisive analyses of the novella. As argued in this essay, however, when reading this criticism, we need to approach it just as we approach Conrad's novella, that is, we need to place it in a historical context. Exploring some of the main critics of *Heart of Darkness* from such a historicizing and

contextualizing perspective, then, this essay has shown that each critique of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is highly influenced by the time-period in which it was written. The early responses mainly focus on the aesthetic aspects of *Heart of Darkness*. They discuss how atmospheric and beautiful the language is. The 'race' aspect is completely ignored. This is not so surprising considering that racism was not even a word and 'race thinking' was seen as something so natural, that they were completely blind to it. Achebe condemns Conrad and calls him a racist. He also claims that a novella that depersonalizes a portion of the human race should not be considered a great work of art. There are a number of reasons for this. In the mid-60s most of the former European colonies gained their Independence. After this, it was seen as important to create a strong African identity from an African standpoint. the fall of Igbo culture as well as the fall of Okonkwo cannot only be attributed to their strong belief system and rooted cultural heritage. Hence this paper is an attempt to show an insight of pre and post colonialism on Igbo society. It is argued that the interaction between the whites and the Igbo people had both negative and positive consequences. It is evident in Achebe's novel that the Europeans greatly influenced the lifestyle of Igbo society. Try to see in what ways his novel answers Cary's.

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