

Many Concepts In One and One In Many Texts: Colonialism Represented In *Heart of Darkness* and *To the Lighthouse*

Raghad S. Alsaeed

(English Department, Shaqra University, Saudi Arabia)

Abstract:

The focus of this research is in the area of modernist literature. Such a study is important in order to show the different forms of how colonialism overtly and covertly be performed among those who appear to superiors as inferiors. The research adopted in this paper includes critical reading, and analysis of main characters' attitudes and behavior from a modern notion. The findings from this research provide evidence that *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf and *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad showcase a shared central idea, colonizing and oppressing the other. Where the former suggests colonialism as an act motivated by patriarchy within a domestic domain, the latter depicts colonialism as an act motivated by imperialism. The main conclusion drawn from this research is that colonialism, of its many shapes and forms, can be conducted in the actions of superior characters towards those inferior subjects.

Keywords: Modernist literature, colonialism, superiors, inferiors, patriarchy, imperialism.

Date of Submission: 20-05-2021

Date of Acceptance: 05-06-2021

I. INTRODUCTION

Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad and *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf are modern¹ novels that discuss the theme of colonialism. The focus of this research is in the area of modern literature. Such reading and analysis is important in order to show the implication of how the act of colonialism can take place and happen in different shapes and be performed in different ways. Modernism is an era that began in the late 19th century and ended around the middle of the 20th century. It is difficult to set a clear definition for modernism, however, it is considered as a rebellious movement by the modern mind against the Victorian conventional ideas and beliefs². Modern artists and authors are concerned with making everything new, they wanted to break from all the predictable ideas the pre-modern era had. Moreover, many studies suggest that the age of modernism is influenced by social, scientific, philosophical, and many other factors that helped to shape that era. With all these factors that influence the modern period, new features and characteristics appear in the modernists' style of showing their art³.

The two modern novels proposed for this research showcase different plots. *To the Lighthouse* discusses the daily events of the Ramsay family who came to their summer house in the Hebrides. The main anticipated event that the Ramsay family awaits is visiting the lighthouse across the bay, of which this visit depends solely on suitable travelling weather conditions⁴. It is important to state that in this novel Virginia Woolf uses a modern narration technique called stream of consciousness, which according to Macey can be defined as "A mode of narration ... in which a character's thought and sense-impressions are presented directly, without conventional dialogue or description, and in many cases, without punctuation" (364). This technique is vital in exploring and understanding this paper's analysis of the idea of colonialism in Woolf's novel, *To the Lighthouse*. It, also, may emphasize how patriarchy can be seen as a form of colonialism, which it can suggest that from understanding the stream of thought of the inferior characters how oppressive treatment is made. Further, *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad explores the trip of a group of sailors to the Congo, a country in the continent of Africa that is rich with ivory. The novel centers on Marlow who has seen the brutality of the 'Company's agents' in treating the Congo's native inhabitants. The story ends with loss more than gain, those who have lost their lives, and those who have lost their entity, like Marlow who barely survives his return to Europe⁵. *Heart of Darkness* portrays the actual and geographical colonization, and suggests the infamous idea of superiors and superiority in relation to inferiors and inferiority.

¹ A reference to the age of Modernism.

² Macey, David. *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory*. Pinguin Books. 2000.

³ For further reading on Modernism: Butler, Christopher. *Modernism. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford. 2010.

⁴ Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse*. York. 2003.

⁵ Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. York. 2003.

Heart of Darkness and *To the Lighthouse* are novels that represented the same concept, which is colonialism, and how colonialism is about superior characters oppressing the inferior. In *Post-Colonial Studies: Key Concepts*, Ashcroft *et al* present an analysis of the word *colonialism*, suggesting that it is “a form of cultural exploitation” (40) Hence, it is a system that creates “[a]n other (the colonized) existed as a primary means of defining the colonizer and of creating a sense of unity beneath such differences as class and wealth...” (Ashcroft *et al*, 42). Additionally, depicting and pointing out that colonialism also means “that the relation between the colonizer and colonized was locked into a rigid hierarchy of difference deeply resistant to fair and equitable exchanges, whether economic, cultural or social.” (40-41) Taking this in consideration, one disputes that colonialism exists if there is a relation between two levels of power, superiors controlling inferiors. In this research, the inferior differs in *To the Lighthouse* and in *Heart of Darkness*, where the former presents the inferior in some cases as women, and the latter as poor Africans. Also, *Heart of Darkness* reveals this oppression through imperialism, and *To the Lighthouse* through patriarchy. However, subjugated women are very much like colonized subjects; therefore, both patriarchy and imperialism suppress and control the Other. Though colonialism, in *Heart of Darkness*, is more overtly manifested through geographical domination, in *To the Lighthouse* this exploitation and control is hidden beneath the facade of the domestic domain.

II. INVADING THE OTHER'S TERRITORY

With the approval of a higher institution, both novels portray colonialism as invading the 'Other's' territory. To illustrate, with their government's approval, the colonizers in *Heart of Darkness* physically go to the Congo and dominate its inhabitants, the Africans, in their territory. Conrad in the novel exposes Marlow's passion, the main character, in exploring Africa. His fascination on going to Africa proves that he is one of the Europeans that inhabited Africa for reasons the colonizers desire. Marlow appears to be against colonialism, in which it brings darkness to the invaded countries, as it did to Africa. However, in many moments in the novel, Marlow appears to have the same western instinct and desire of colonizing. For instance, Marlow's description of a map "marked with all the colours of a rainbow" (Conrad, 13) reveals that these colors indicate the inhabited countries, and Marlow "was going into the yellow. Dead in the center" (Conrad, 13-14). All this indicate Europe's geographical domination of the other's countries.

On the other hand, the way of colonizing is showcased differently in *To the Lighthouse*. Within the accepted traditions of marriage, the patriarchal colonization in *To the Lighthouse* happens in the woman's home, when a husband is given the right to control his wife and family. The idea of a colony is presented in the house of the Ramsay's. Their rooms are the places where they can express their free opinion, in which these opinions get rejected outside their rooms. Also, one can see the division in characters, in which one character acts as the colonizer through the use of power and force presented in strong reasonable opinions. While the other is primitive, who allows this force and accepts it. A prime example of a man colonizing a woman's territory- their home- is when Mrs. Ramsay, the wife of Mr. Ramsay, tries to preserve the beautiful image of her fruit dish that is set on the table. Where she had arranged the colors and shapes of the fruits "putting a yellow against a purple, a curved shape against a round shape," (Woolf, 118) allowing no one to touch it. However, this dish is ruined by the touch of a man, "a hand reached out, took a pear, and spoilt the whole thing" (Woolf, 118). Mrs. Ramsay's beautiful fruit dish may represent her own property, and this property is invaded by an unwanted and unpermitted touch of a man. It is invaded by Paul, Minta's future husband.

Carroll Berenice in her essay "The Political Thought of Virginia Woolf" believes that Virginia Woolf is a political person, but her political views are unnoticed. Berenice suggests that Woolf herself is responsible for her views being unnoticed because she re-jects conventional party politics (99). In addition, the critic proves her point by stating that Woolf's fiction offered "rare flashes" (100) of her political views that are found in Woolf's letters and diaries. However, what is revealed from Woolf's writings is that Woolf's political views did not reflect boredom, but rejection. The reason for Woolf rejecting politics is that politics belonged to a man's world, therefore, women need to stop reflecting this world. According to Berenice, Woolf's succeeds in achieving her purpose, which is that she is fully informed with politics and history but chose to create this illusion of her not being political or have an opinion on politics. So, it is Woolf's "deliberate policy"(102) to make her political views be unnoticed. Thus, building from this perspective, colonialism in *To the Lighthouse* happen as hidden implied theme presented in the domestic sphere.

III. COLONIALISM AS ROBBING THE OTHER

Both novels present the theme of colonialism as pillaging something from the 'Other'. The concept of 'the other' can be described as “to one pole of the relationship between a subject and a person or thing defined or constituted as a non-self that is different or other.” (Macey, 285) In *Heart of Darkness*, Congo's natives represent the inferior other, and the colonizers are pillaging the Congo's natural resources like "Ivory" and robbing the natives of their free will. The sailor Marlow remarks Europe's greed and obsession with ivory, and this exposes Europe's purpose of colonizing. The colonizers worshipped ivory, and one might think that they

"were praying to it." (Conrad, 36) As Marlow states it, whenever "the word 'ivory' rang in the air," the word was "whispered, [and] was sighed." (Conrad, 35-36) Thus, the mission to get ivory is more important to Europe than the mission to civilize the natives, as they claimed. Conrad gives a clear view to the readers about the colonizers' main purpose towards colonizing, and how Europe is deceiving the world by making everyone believe that they do a 'noble' work in Africa, and for a noble cause, which is to civilize Africa. However, *Heart of Darkness* uncovers the hidden intentions of colonizing Africa, one of which is Europe's conquering Africa to satisfy their materialistic desires. As Marlow refers to the invaders "Hunters for gold or pursuers of fame." (Conrad, 2)

In history, much debate that Europe claims that they care so much about other countries; therefore, they colonize to civilize, also, "the West has always been convinced that the presence overseas greatly affected the 'natives'..." (Bertens, 181). Instead, Europe's aim towards colonizing is never about the duty of civilizing the natives, bringing light, or even caring about hu-mans in the first place. Moreover, as long as the colonizers get what they seek for and fulfill their selfish desires, they will continue on misleading the world by claiming to enlighten the unfortunates, in this case, the African natives. Harold Bloom in his book Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* states that "civilization can be barbaric." Also, "Imperialism may be redeemed by 'an idea at the back of it', but imperialism, irredeemably, is 'robbery with violence.'" (21)

Achebe argues in his essay "An Image of Africa" that *Heart of Darkness* is one of the greatest novels. Although Conrad's novel is unpleasant and terrible book to read, the novel still touches and influence the way people think. Achebe states "Conrad actually went to Congo and experienced what he has written. That means what Conrad has writ-ten is real!" Furthermore, the most important thing is the rich information that Conrad provides about the savages, and that changes our idea about the savages. Yet, Conrad's picture of the Africans is not enough or satisfying on reflecting the real. Achebe utters that Marlow is the eyes or "[the] witness of truth"(13) to us, the Europeans, but Conrad chose to make Marlow state all these inhuman descriptions about the natives, like "they were all dying slowly... they were nothing earthly now." (Conrad, 25)

Similarly, in *To the Lighthouse*, the patriarch of the family pillages his family's sense of autonomy and free will, without any materialistic gain, unlike the colonizers in *Heart of Dark-ness*, to inflate his own sense of importance and self-worth. Mr. Ramsay, the husband of Mrs. Ramsay, most of the time looks down on Lily Briscoe and her paintings. He does not appreciate her art. Mr. Ramsay's arrogant way of looking down on Lily Briscoe, put her in a very hard position. Lily Briscoe is challenged every time she paints. She describes her suffering from Mr. Ramsay's point of view of her as chaos approaching towards her; "ruin approached, chaos approached. She could not paint... he would be on her, saying, as he had said last night, "You find us much changed" (Woolf, 162). One might question whether patriarchy can be really considered as colonization! Well, patriarchy can sometimes be one of the methods of colonizing, if one looks at colonization as an act performed to conquer and dominate the Other, where the Other is exploited and oppressed. Then, patriarchy can be looked at as colonizing women. In a Male dominant society, men are considered as superior 'colonizers', where women are the inferior 'Other'. If the other's sense of autonomy is deflated and became more reliant on the existence of the superior and the one in control, "... a third mode of existence, described as 'being-for-others'" (Macey, 285) is created. Subsequently, the other "reduces for the its-self existence" suggesting that the one in control "takes away its autonomy and denies it its freedom." (285).

Further, the act of colonialism, indeed, is done, whether implicitly or explicitly, for rea-sons such as to benefit from the inferior's natural resources. In Virginia Woolf's novel, *To the Lighthouse*, Mr. Ramsay, defined as rational, civilized, and man of science, exploits his wife's 'natural resources'. In this case, the resources are what God has given all women, their love, compassion, and support towards everyone but mainly men. Mr. Ramsay characterizes and la-bels women as irrational, emotional, and all what they care for is art, which is not important or superior like science! In so doing, a patriarch society colonizes women, by forcing certain ideologies of what is civilized, rational, superior and what is opposite according to their beliefs, and accordingly women must obey and function by their rules. Therefore, patriarchy can at some instances, enforced by certain attitudes, be considered as colonization.

IV. EFFECTS OF COLONIALISM ON BOTH SUPERIORS AND INFERIORS

Each novel shows the destructive effects of colonialism on both the ruling power and their sub-jects. In *Heart of Darkness*, the harsh effects of colonialism are presented and vividly illustrated through the psychological deterioration of the "Swede" who committed suicide. From the view of the colonizers, the different climate in Africa may serve as a reason of a clear negative out-come about colonialism. The Swede man, who is one of the colonizers, hangs himself maybe because of "the sun [was] too much for him, or the country perhaps," (Conrad, 21-22) at least that is what Marlow thought of as a reason of such an act. Another harsh effect of colonialism was Kurtz's downfall. Kurtz is a trader of ivory in Africa, he got affected by the wilderness "that seemed to draw him to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts." (Conrad, 116) Similarly, colonialism demoralized the Africans and destroys their desire to live. A prime

example of this is when two of the African natives were worn out and tired of work, and as if Marlow looks at "some picture of a massacre or a pestilence." (Conrad, 26) Marlow's description of the native's view indicates that they were worn out, dead, and have no desire to live any more.

On the other hand, in *To the Lighthouse*, the destructive effects of patriarchal colonialism are presented in Mr. Ramsay's and Mr. Tansley's constant need for affirmation and praise from Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe. Virginia Woolf in her novel represents her characters as two opposites, one lives by science, reason, and logic. While the other lives by art, feelings, and emotions. Though Mr. Ramsay and Mr. Tansley want to appear to be logical and reasonable throughout the novel, which is the act of a colonizer to proclaim to be logical and reasonable. Mr. Ramsay and Mr. Tansley reach a point where they need emotions and emotional support, a characterization that is only labeled to women by the men in this novel. Thus, in this case, emotions are received from women; the inferior. Mr. Ramsay seems most of the time as the one in control and in the position of power. However, after Mrs. Ramsay's death, Lily becomes the one who provides Mr. Ramsay with the emotional support that he sometimes implicitly needed and subtly showed and asked for from Mrs. Ramsay. Now, his need for sympathy shows that he cannot pretend to maintain the self-image of what he considers civilized. Since sometimes civilization was presented in him, and primitivism in the other inferior gender. Mr. Ramsay asks Lily Briscoe, the one he had always looked down upon, and "without being conscious what it was, to approach any woman, to force them, he did not care how, his need was so great, to give him what he wanted: sympathy" (Woolf, 165). Henceforth, these examples show and illustrate the harsh effects of colonialism the superiors and the inferiors had to live through and embrace.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, modernism as a literary era and its authors gifts the readers the possibility of reading a literary text and analyzing it to many different texts. This contributes to the idea that one may not see one notion and concept, but sees and reads many in one. This research poses one concept on two stories, *Heart of Darkness* and *To the Lighthouse*. This idea explores one of the wretches and misfortunes of the world of which one human can do to another is to compel him/her to do something against his/her will. *Heart of Darkness* and *To the Lighthouse* are novels that share the same theme; however, it is handled and portrayed differently. The way colonialism presented in *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad is concerned with geographic domination, whereas, in *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf is concerned with domestic domination. *Heart of Darkness* brilliantly reveals to the readers how this group of agents that came from Europe with the sole reason of establishing a civilization, misleads the world and the African natives, by making the natives suppose and believe that the Europeans are here to enlighten their dark oblivious country. While in fact, what is done by those colonizers is invading, robbing, and causing destruction to the people and country. On the hand, using modern technique, *To the Lighthouse* is a novel that presents the theme of colonialism through several actions done by those who appear to be superior characters invading and oppressing the inferior. In sum, both novels show that when someone is a victim, their victimizer also turns into a victim.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Achebe, Chinua. "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness'" *Massachusetts Review*. 18. 1977. 3rd ed. Ed. Robert Kimbrough, London: W. W Norton and Co., 1988, pp.251-261.
- [2]. Ashcroft, Bill, *et al. Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2000.
- [3]. Bertens, Hans. *Literary Theory: The Basics*. 3rd ed., Routledge, 2014.
- [4]. Bloom, Harold. "Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness: Bloom's modern critical interpretation." *Infobase P*. 2008.
- [5]. Carroll, Berenice A. "'To Crush Him in Our Own Country': The Political Thought of Virginia Woolf." *Feminist Studies*. 4.1 (1978): 99–132. JSTORE.
- [6]. Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*: York, 2003.
- [7]. Dettmer, Kevin J. H. "Modernism." *The Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature*. : Oxford UP, 2006.
- [8]. Dougherty, Jane Elizabeth. "Overview of 'To the Lighthouse.'" *Novels for Students*. Ed. Marie Rose, Napierkowski and Deborah A. Stanley. Detroit: Gale. 2000.
- [9]. Emery, Mary Lou. "Robbed of Meaning": The Work at the Center of "To the Lighthouse," in *Modern Fiction*, Vol. 38, No. 1, Spring, 1992, pp.217-34.
- [10]. Hardy, John Edward. "Vision Without Promise," in *Man in the Modern Novel*, University of Washington Press, 1964, pp. 96-122.
- [11]. Macey, David. *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory*. Penguin Books. 2000.
- [12]. Moss, Joyce. George Wilson. Overview: Heart of Darkness." *Literature and Its Times: Profiles of 300 Notable Literary Works and the Historical Events that Influenced Them*. Vol. 2: Detroit: Gale, 1997.
- [13]. Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse*: York, 2003.