Colonialism: *Presenting the same universal ethic in two diametrically opposite ways.*

Sehten Porshe Hills

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Preface

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Abstract

This research paper will examine the representation of colonialism in the narratives Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe and Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad. The aim of this Analysis is to demonstrate that both Achebe and Conrad expressed the same universal ethic in two diametrically opposite ways. The term “universal ethic” refers to the evil that is associated with colonialism, and “evil” represents the psychological, physical and emotional trauma that was suffered by both the colonizers and the colonized people. Therefore, as the basis for analysis, this research uses the psychological, emotional and physical criticisms to expose the evil of colonialism. As a postcolonial, Achebe’s opposition to the concept of colonialism is represented by the psychological and emotional collapse of the Igbo natives in Things Fall Apart. As for Joseph Conrad, a colonizer who was sent to the Congo, the physical abuse of the natives represents the evil of colonialism in Heart of Darkness. Achebe criticizes the evil of colonialism as a postcolonial, while Conrad criticizes the evil of colonialism as a colonial.

This research was conducted exclusively with the support of textbooks and internet articles as well as Webb publications that address the concepts of postcolonialism and colonialism. A total of six (6) recognized books, as well as twelve (12) Webb publications, were used as references to support the postcolonial theory in this analysis. In addition, this research features twelve pages of close reading that examines the psychological, emotional and physical criticism of colonialism that are used to defend the thesis. Correspondingly, the conclusion is established based on the suitability of the findings. It is then concluded that the evil of colonialism is expressed by Chinua Achebe and Joseph Conrad in two diametrically opposite ways in Things Fall Apart and Heart of Darkness respectively.

Key words: universal ethic, postcolonialism, colonialism, postcolonial, colonial, resistance, evil, psychological evil, physical evil.
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Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to demonstrate that Chinua Achebe and Joseph Conrad presented the same universal ethic in two diametrically opposite ways. For the purpose of this analysis, the term “universal ethic” refers to the exposure of the evil that characterized the colonial era. There are different ways to depict the evil of colonialism as Chinua Achebe and Joseph Conrad did in *Things Fall Apart* and *Heart of Darkness* respectively. Achebe expresses the evil that embodies the concept of colonialism from a postcolonial perspective, while Conrad’s brutal representation of colonialism is from a colonial perspective. Achebe uses the psychological and emotional to criticize the evil of colonialism. Achebe’s exposé illustrates the level at which colonialism destroyed the traditions of the Igbo natives. As a postcolonial himself (i.e. originated from a country that was once colonized), Achebe is presumably reclaiming otherness while at the same time condemning colonialism for its role in the destruction of the Igbo’s traditions. In this regard, the representation of the psychological and emotional damage caused by colonialism is principal to the postcolonial analysis of the narrative.

Conrad’s criticism of the evil of colonialism is represented by the physical devastation of the Congo natives and their lands. Conrad himself was a colonizer who worked in the Congo during the colonial era. Therefore, Conrad’s exposé of the evil under colonial rule is an indictment on the concept of colonialism. Conrad’s narrative highlights the physical abuse that the natives endured during the colonial era. *Heart of Darkness* is an eye-witnessed account that is uncensored and unedited in its delivery. Narrated from a colonial perspective, *Heart of darkness* is assumed to narrate the actuality of the colonial era.

The essay consists of three (3) sections; the first section is the theory section. In this section, the postcolonial theory will be examined because it serves as the basis for the analysis of *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe. In addition, the theory of colonialism will also be examined as it relates to the narrative *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad. The second section is the analysis section. In this section, the thesis will be analyzed. In this regard, the representation of the evil of colonialism from a postcolonial (Achebe’s) perspective will be investigated in *Things Fall Apart*. Moreover, the representation of the evil of colonialism from a colonial (Conrad’s)
perspective in *Heart of Darkness* will also be investigated in this section. The third section is the conclusion section. In this section, the conclusion will be determined by the analyses of both authors’ representation of the evil of colonialism. It will be determined that both Achebe and Conrad presented the same universal ethic in two diametrically opposite ways.

**Method**

This is an investigative research of two major literary works. The two major literatures that are investigated in this research are *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe and *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad. The two narratives were examined separately with the goal of criticizing the idea of colonialism. Both narratives approach the idea of colonialism differently as it relates to the role colonialism played in the destruction of the African natives. This essay critiques colonialism from a psychological and emotional perspective in *Things Fall Apart*, but critiques colonialism in *Heart of Darkness* from a more physical perspective. Because this is an analytical study, Peter Barry’s book *Beginning Theory* (4th edition) and as well as other key scholars of the concepts of postcolonialism and colonialism such as Robert J.C. Young and Annie Loomba (just to name a few) are used as references to support this investigation. In this critical analysis, comparisons are made between Achebe’s representation of colonialism as a postcolonial in *Things Fall Apart* and Conrad’s representation of colonialism as a colonial in *Heart of Darkness*. The goal is to demonstrate that both authors presented the same universal ethic in two diametrically opposite ways.

**Theory**

Postcolonialism seeks to investigate how the natives in previously colonized areas experienced colonialism. The prefix *post* means after but does not necessarily suggests that the effects of colonialism are a forgotten history. Alternatively, it singles out the impact that colonialism continues to have on previously colonized regions and how the West is still dominating its non-Western counterparts. In the article ‘Introducing Postcolonialism in International Relations Theory’, Sheila Nair (2017) suggests that “postcolonialism examines how societies, governments and peoples in the formerly colonized regions of the world experience international relations.” Nair added that postcolonialism “highlights the impact that colonial and imperial histories still have
in shaping a colonial way of thinking about the world and how Western forms of knowledge and power marginalized the non-Western world.”

According to Peter Barry (195), “the ancestry of postcolonial criticism can be traced to Frantz Fanon’s book *The Wretched of the Earth*, published in French in 1961, and voicing what might be called ‘cultural resistance’ to France’s African empire.” Fanon advocated for a violent resistance to western government. This resistance is seen by many scholars as the foundation of postcolonialism. The theory is centered on reclaiming one’s own past. Fanon also claimed that the ‘black man’ is psychologically brainwashed into accepting the idea that he is indeed inferior to the ‘white man.’ To further solidify his claim, Fanon points to the implementation of the Western’s language, culture, religion, laws and education systems as examples. With such strategic executions by the colonizers, the natives eventually bring themselves to believe that they are indeed inferior to the West. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* is another book that subsequently established the concept of postcolonialism suitably. “*Orientalism* is a specific exposé of the Eurocentric universalism which takes for granted both the superiority of what is European or Western, and the inferiority of what is not” (Barry 195).

Postcolonialism is defined by many literary scholars as a way of rejecting the western culture and reclaiming otherness. In the article “What is The Postcolonial?” Robert J.C. Young (13) suggests that “some writers have tried to redefine the postcolonial anachronistically to mean resistance to the colonial at any time—literally in the case of decolonized societies, and ideologically for still colonized societies.” Rukundwa and Aarde (19) give a rather refined definition of postcolonialism. The pair stress that “postcolonial theory is built from the colonial experiences of people who engaged in liberation struggles around the world and particularly in the tricontinental countries in Africa, south and south east Asia and Latin America.” Rukundwa and Aarde insist that “postcolonial critique can be defined as a dialectical discourse which broadly marks the historical facts of decolonization. It allows people emerging from socio-political and economic domination to reclaim their sovereignty; it gives them a negotiating space for equity” (4). Young (14) adds that “Postcolonialism has been created from the political insights and experience that were developed in the course of colonial resistance to western rule and cultural dominance, primarily during the course of the anti-colonial struggles of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.” The struggle for
individuality is significant to the concept of postcolonialism. In this regard, the idea of ‘resisting and reclaiming’ cannot be ignored as it relates to the concept of postcolonial.

Postcolonial writers examine the physical and psychological aspects of postcolonialism as well as the ideological aspect of the concept. In this regard, the need to associate the natives’ psychological, emotional, and physical damage that were caused by colonialism is significant to postcolonial writers. Furthermore, postcolonial writers seek to combat the claims made on behalf of the West (colonizers) that the East (colonized) is barbaric and primitive. Postcolonial writers want to revisit history by narrating the actuality of the colonial era. Postcolonial writers are exposing the faulty representation of non-Western cultures in literary works and attempting to reeducate the masses from grassroots. According to Barry, “they reject the claims to universalism made on behalf of canonical Western literature and seek to show its limitations of outlook, especially its general inability to empathize across boundaries of cultural and ethnic difference” (Barry 201). In other words, the postcolonial investigates how other cultures that are different from that of the West are represented in literatures.

Postcolonialism is the result of what the natives experienced during the colonial era. According to Young (13-14), the postcolonial “is the result of different cultural and national origins, the ways in which the color of your skin or your place and circumstance of birth define the kind of life, privileged and pleasurable, or oppressed and exploited, that you will have in this world.” Postcolonialism is the recognition of those whose traditions and cultures are victimized. The postcolonial is the colonized people, the oppressed, the orients, the subaltern classes, the minorities, the ones who are considered incapable of independence by the West. Young (15) suggests that “Western knowledge was organized philosophically through binary oppositions which had the effect of demonizing or denigrating what western people often term the other: instead of master/slave, man/woman, civilized/uncivilized, culture/barbarian, modern/primitive, colonizer/colonized, the postcolonial seeks to develop a different paradigm.” Young is essentially saying that postcolonialism pursues to neutralize identities so that they are only defined by their elaborate and reciprocated associations with others. It is the need to change the course of Western assumptions of the East that is significant to postcolonialism. The postcolonial spectrum seeks to encourage the West to familiarize themselves with non-western cultures instead of simply labelling them as primitive or barbaric. Barry writes “the Orient, he says, features in the Western mind as a sort of
surrogate and even underground self” (Barry 195). Young (16) suggests, by
summarizing Edward Said (1978), that it means “realizing, when western people look at
the non-western world what they see is often more a mirror image of themselves and
their own assumptions rather than the reality of what is there.” Postcolonialism seeks to
promote cultural differences so that individuals can be proud of Otherness. It advocates
for the honest representation of the East by literary scholars so that true knowledge can
be passed on from one generation to the next. The West is viewed or portrayed as
civilized while non-Western cultures are considered or represented as primitive and
barbaric in most literary works. The postcolonial seeks to shift such views or
representations to a more respectful and knowledgeable assumptions of the non-Western
cultures so that the traditions of the colonized people becomes equally significant to the
society.

Postcolonialism begins with the experiences of the colonized during the
colonial era. It is the story of the natives who endured abuse and dehumanization in the
hands of their Western counterparts that are being told. As Young (18) suggests, “it
listens to them articulating their stories—of exploitation and dispossession from the
land, of the hopes and hardships of desperate journeys of migration, of cruelly
ambivalent cultural experiences in the metropolitan cities of the world.” Postcolonialism
pursues to get the West to listen to the voices of the colonized to take appropriate
actions that will lead to reeducation. By reeducation, the postcolonial wants history to
be rewritten so that children (both black and white) can realize that the West’s
assumption of the non-Western culture is in fact incorrect.

Peter Barry (201) suggests that the postcolonial “develop a perspective,
not just applicable to postcolonial literatures, whereby states of marginality, plurality
and perceived “Otherness” are seen as sources of energy and potential change.” The
postcolonial movement uses the atrocities of the colonial era as the foundation for the
advocacy of change. The evil of the colonial era is well represented in postcolonial
literatures to evoke a sense of remorse, and to hold the West accountable for such
ugliness. The postcolonial is now pointing fingers at the West and demanding a new
approach that takes into consideration the equal opportunity of every individual as it
relates to cultures, traditions, and the distribution of resources throughout the world.

Postcolonialism pursues to present and insert a different kind of
perspective into the structural norm of the West as well as the non-West. The idea is to
change individuals’ assumptions about cultures that are different from the West. Postcolonialism seeks to change attitudes towards non-Western cultures. Above all, the postcolonial seeks to narrow the gap of disparities between countries as well as individuals all over the world. Rukundwa and Aarde (2007, p.4) suggest that “Postcolonial theory formulates its critique around the social histories, cultural differences and political discrimination that are practiced and normalized by colonial and imperial machineries.” It is rather unfortunate that the world today is marked by injustice, and the disparities amongst individuals is especially visible between the West and the non-West respectively.

Ania Loomba (29) claims that “it has been suggested that it is more helpful to think of postcolonialism not just as coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise, but more flexibly as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism.” What Loomba is suggesting is that if such a position is taken, people who are in the diaspora, scattered by the evil of colonialism, would be included. For example, individuals who are African-Americans and as well as people who have their roots or origins in the Caribbean but live in the United Kingdom would be included as postcolonial even if they dwell in a metropolitan society.

According to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (2) postcolonial literature can be considered a writing that is “affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day.” Because colonialism largely and forcefully claimed and exploited foreign lands while at the same time imposing foreign cultures and traditions on the natives, postcolonial literature attempts to make a connection between the natives and their places where they once considered ‘home.’ Postcolonial literatures often describe the hardship and subjugation that was experienced by the indigenous people during the colonial era, attempting to reclaim the past or otherness. According to Peter Barry (95), “for centuries the European colonizing power will have devalued the nation’s past, seeing its precolonial era as a pre-civilized limbo, or even historical void.” During the colonial era, the aboriginal cultures and traditions of those countries that were affected by colonial rule were considered primitive and overtaken by the social and cultural preferences of the colonizers. As a response, postcolonial literature pursues to emphasize the importance and fullness as well as the legitimacy and strength of the natives’ cultures, attempting to reestablish a sense of pride in the rituals that were once performed by the indigenous people prior to
the arrival of the colonizers because those rituals and traditions were thoroughly sullied
during the colonial era.

The colonizers understood the indigenous people as savages who are
incapable of self-governance and basically existing outside of civilization in static and
unproductive cultures that need foreign intervention and assistance to progress. With
such mindset, the colonizers can vindicate themselves from any wrongdoings, including
murder and abuse that were placed upon the natives. Postcolonial literatures attempt to
revisit that history to tell the story from the perspective of the indigenous people so that
their voices can be heard. According to Sarah Harrison (2012), “Postcolonial writers use
detailed descriptions of indigenous people, places, and practices to counteract or “resist”
the stereotypes, inaccuracies, and generalizations which the colonizers circulated in
educational, legal, political, and social texts and settings.” Postcolonial writing attempts
to challenge the universalist claims about literatures. “if we claim that great literature
has a timeless and universal significance we thereby demote or disregard cultural,
social, regional, and national differences in experience and outlook, preferring instead to
judge all literature by a single, supposedly universal, standard” (Barry 194).

The concept of postcolonialism is the direct result of the colonial era.
Therefore, it is significant to discuss colonialism in relation to postcolonialism. Most
literary works place colonialism at the tail-end of the 19th century. The article “The
Colonization of Africa” by Ehiedu E. G. Iweriebor suggests that “Between the 1870s
and 1900, Africa faced European imperialist aggression, diplomatic pressures, military
invasions, and eventual conquest and colonization.” The term “colonialism can be
defined as the conquest and control of other people’s land and goods” Loomba (2005,
p.8). What is the ideology of colonialism? It can be assumed that the West believed that
Africans were all savages and lack intellectual capacity to move the continent forward
as it relates to civilization. According to the article ‘Transforming ‘beasts into men’: colonialism, forced labour and racism in Africa’, Eric Allina (2012) suggests that
“colonial rulers across the continent concluded that Africans would be forced to work
anyway. The specific laws authorizing this varied, but they were all undergirded by a
general agreement that Africans lacked the intellectual and moral capacity to appreciate
the value of labour.” Even though slavery was abolished during the European
colonization of Africa, the West supposed that the African natives would be grateful to
work because the region was going to experience civilization under the colonial rule.
Eric Allina (2012) added that “according to this self-serving, racist ‘paternalism’, European colonizers were obliged to force Africans to work for their own good. Yet even as colonizers claimed Africans would be ‘saved’ by European civilization, colonizers made them vulnerable to new forms of servitude.” To the West, colonization would bring modernization to Africa. Africa needed to be transformed into a modern society where civilization would be measured in relations to Western culture and traditions. Young (2009, p.19) suggests that “European culture was regarded (and remains) the basis and the norm for ideas of legitimate government, law, economics, science, language, music, art, literature. In a word, civilization.”

The capitalist’s approach to colonialism cannot be ignored when identifying the ideology of the concept of colonialism. Loomba (2005, p.10) suggests that “colonialism was the midwife that assisted at the birth of European capitalism, or that without colonial expansion the transition to capitalism could not have taken place in Europe.” The concept of colonialism brought about considerable wealth to the Europeans. In the article ‘Neocolonialism’, Afisi highlights the economic gain that propels the concept of colonialism by suggesting that the Europeans’ “first attempts at colonization occurred when the Europeans began to seek trade pursuits outside their own continent, and thus discovered that many other nations, particularly in Africa, had wealth in natural resources which had potentials for their own economic gain.”

Analysis

The narratives *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe and *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad present the evil of colonialism in two diametrically opposite ways. *Things Fall Apart* presents the evil of colonialism as a psychological and emotional ruin. In other words, the evil of colonialism was primarily a mental, spiritual and emotional attack on the natives though some physical attacks cannot be ignored. In *Heart of Darkness*, the evil of colonialism is largely physical, which of course had some psychological effects on the natives or the indigenous people. *Things Fall Apart* is set during the precolonial era in present day Nigeria. Achebe strategically uses the precolonial setting as a tool to present the blossoming and rich culture and traditions of the natives before the arrival of the colonizers. The narrative is told from a postcolonial perspective as Achebe himself is a postcolonial. Therefore, the need to expose the damage caused by colonialism and to reclaim otherness through the voice of the native
is significant to Achebe. But first, Achebe understands that he must demonstrate that the Igbos were content with their traditions and that the tribe thrived before the introduction of Christianity. In this regard, the colorful representation of the traditional marriage ceremonies, the Igbos’ well-respected traditional laws, the funny but purposeful native parables, and the defined role of women and men in the Igbo society become pivotal to the narrative.

The Igbos were psychologically attached to their culture and traditions prior to the arrival of the colonizers; they found guidance in their traditions. They did not need the Holy Bible to tell them to honor their fathers and mother so that they can live longer or prosper in this world. Neither did they need the church as their holy place for spiritual guidance. The Igbos relied on their gods and ancestors for such guidance. Achebe is telling readers that every aspect of the Igbos’ lives was somewhat connected to their culture and traditions. Hence, labelling the Igbo’s traditions as primitive or uncivilized, and pursuing to eliminate them, is wrong and inadequate. Young (15) alluded to the demonizing of non-Western cultures by the West because it did not resemble the Europeans’ standard.

In Things Fall Apart, Achebe’s colonizers were Christian missionaries. By all implications, Christian missionaries’ goal is to rescue the natives from their evil traditional practices by somehow brainwashing them into abandoning their traditions and convert to Christianity. In so doing, the natives would have a chance to enter heaven where they would enjoy eternal life with God who is their father. Achebe is using the missionaries as a representation of colonialism so that the psychological effect of colonialism can be exposed. In other words, Achebe wants to expose the role that Christianity played in destroying the culture and traditions of the Igbos. Achebe is aware that during the precolonial era, Christian missionaries began to explore the shores of Africa to spread the Christian doctrines. “The Origin and Growth of Christianity in Africa” by Joseph Kiprop suggests that “The Evangelical Revival, in the late 18th century, started sending missionaries to Africa.” The arrival of the Europeans was used by Achebe to symbolize the beginning of the fall of the traditions of the Igbos.

The psychological and emotional attack on the Igbos by the colonizers is exposed throughout Achebe’s Things Fall Apart. The first instance of psychological abuse is presented when the missionaries built a church in the evil forest in Umuofia. The evil forest is one of the strongholds to the Igbos. The evil forest houses the bodies
and souls of all the people who died from what was considered evil diseases. The evil forest was also the place where the bodies of the most powerful medicine men were dumped. Achebe writes that the evil forest was “alive with sinister forces and powers of darkness. It was such a forest the rulers of Mbanta gave to the missionaries” (Achebe 140). In other words, it represents death, and no one dares to venture into the forest without the guidance of the Gods or ancestors. The elders of Umuofia were confident that the church would not survive the test of the evil forest. In fact, it was expected that the missionaries would all die within four days. This of course did not happen, and the church began to erode the traditions of the Igbos. This is significant because the Igbos suddenly began to have second thoughts about their traditions which they never previously questioned and began to listen more to the church. Could the church be right about the Igbos as it relates to their evil traditional practices?

According to Ozeh Cornelius “Europeans saw Africans as barbaric and uncivilized.” This notion allowed the colonizers to continue their quest to modernize the natives and proved that the Igbo’s tradition is barbaric. The colonizers challenged the Igbos’ traditional practices, and nothing seemed to happen in form of retaliation or retribution by the gods. In this light, the rescuing of twins from the evil forest and the welcoming of ‘the outcasts’ by the missionaries had a psychological effect on the Igbos. According to tradition, twins were considered evil and the outcasts were considered taboo. The narrative suggests that the outcast was “dedicated to a god, a thing set apart- a taboo forever, and his children after him. He could neither marry nor be married by the free-born (Achebe 148). If one pays attention to these passages, one might understand that those were beliefs that were embedded into the minds and hearts of the Igbos prior to the arrival of the colonizers, and no one dared to question the convictions of the Igbos’ Gods prior to the arrival of the colonizers (even if one does not agree with those convictions). However, there was a sudden change in attitudes, most notably Okonkwo’s son Nwoye’s, when the colonizers arrived. Nwoye began to doubt some of the practices of his tradition, especially the killing of his friend Ikemefuna as well as the twins and decided to join the colonizers. According to the narrative, “he went back to the church and told Mr. Kiaga That he had decided to go to Umuofia, where the white missionary had set up a school to teach young Christians to read and write” (Achebe 144).
From a postcolonial perspective, Achebe uses a colorful description of the Igbos’ customs and traditions. The aim is to combat the savage representation of the natives that is ever present in postcolonial literatures. According to Sarah Harrison (2012), “Postcolonial writers use detailed descriptions of indigenous people, places, and practices to counteract or “resist” the stereotypes, inaccuracies, and generalizations which the colonizers circulated in educational, legal, political, and social texts and settings.” In Things Fall Apart, Achebe demonstrates that he is from the Igbo tribe or he has at least spent a lot of time researching the tribe. One of the practices that is well documented by Achebe are wedding ceremonies. Achebe details the measures by which a woman becomes a wife according to the Igbo tradition. The detailed description by Achebe is an attempt to portray the Igbos in their actuality. Achebe is respectfully saying that even though the Igbos do things differently according to their traditions, that does not necessarily mean that they are savages. One must be reminded that Achebe is a postcolonial himself. Hence, it can be assumed that Achebe is writing to reject the savage and uncivilized representation of the natives. Achebe is effectively challenging writers to take a new approach in the representation of non-Western cultures in their narratives. It is important to note that during the colonial era, the indigenous people and their cultures were suppressed and labelled primitive, while the cultures of the colonizers were celebrated as the civilized standard. Sarah Harrison (2012) suggests “in response, much postcolonial literature seeks to assert the richness and validity of indigenous cultures in an effort to restore pride in practices and traditions that were systematically degraded under colonialism.”

According to Peter Barry (196), “characteristically, postcolonial writers evoke or create a precolonial version of their own nation, rejecting the modern and the contemporary, which is tainted with the colonial status of their countries.” In this instance, Achebe narrates a precolonial version of the Igbo tribe in his masterpiece. The author is presenting the richness of the Igbo’s traditions in all forms prior to the arrival of the strangers from the sea (colonizers). Achebe is putting the world on notice that colonialism destroyed a great tradition as it relates to the Igbos. The natives did not ask to be ‘modernized’. Moreover, Achebe is insisting that the European traditions and language should not be the standard of civilization. Instead, the idea of ‘otherness’ must be embraced instead of destroyed and replaced.
Resistance is another attribute of the postcolonial that is represented by Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* to allow the narrative to fully demonstrate the idea of postcolonialism. The concept of resistance allows Achebe to demonstrate that the Igbo natives did not want the colonizers disrupting the order or norm of Umuofia. Because the colonizers came with the attitude that Africa is primitive, they tried to replace the natives’ traditions to that of the colonizers and as well as any existing precolonial laws in favor of the colonial laws. The approach by the colonizers is met with resistance. Achebe demonstrates different forms of resistance to the colonizers. Example of the resistance illustrated by Achebe in the narrative can be found in the passage when the natives gathered together and burned down the church. The type of resistance used by the natives is significant. The act of intentionally burning something represents rage or hate. Achebe is effectively telling his readers that the Igbo natives despised the colonial doctrine that was replacing the natives’ traditions. Hence, the natives fought to reclaim their identity. The narrative suggests that “Mr. Smith stood his ground. But he could not save his church. When the egwugwu went away the red-earth church which Mr. Brown had built was a pile of earth and ashes” (Achebe 181).

Resistance is also illustrated in Okonkwo’s decision to cut off the head of one of the colonial messengers. The act of beheading someone is very expressive. Achebe’s expressive representation of the concept of resistance further strengthens the postcolonial perspective on the evil of colonialism. It can be assumed that Achebe is presenting such telling events to depict a group of people who are psychologically damaged as the result of colonialism. Achebe writes, “in a flash Okonkwo drew his matchet. The messenger crouched to avoid the blow. It was useless. Okonkwo’s matchet descended twice and the man’s head lay beside his uniformed body” (Achebe 194). The Igbo natives could no longer comprehend that their once superior and respected traditions and beliefs were falling apart as the result of the colonizers’ implementations of their religion, law, language, and norms. The colonial takeover left the natives psychologically distraught. In the article “A Quick Reminder of Why Colonialism Was Bad”, Robinson gives a powerfully significant reference of colonialism. Robinson writes: “imagine it happening in your own country now. It is invaded, conquered, and occupied by a foreign power. Existing governing institutions are dismantled and replaced by absolute rule of the colonizers.”
Okonkwo’s suicide fosters another debate by postcolonial as it relates to the psychological and emotional damage caused by colonialism. Okonkwo chooses to commit suicide rather than to allow himself to be prosecuted by the colonial law. Okonkwo’s miserable method of resistance is significant. There must be a serious psychological breakdown for one to resolve to take one’s own life, and Achebe is alluding to that in his exposé of the evil of colonialism. To Achebe, Okonkwo is the representation of the postcolonial. In this regard, the unswerving resistance and anger felt by the Igbo natives toward the colonizers are depicted in Okonkwo’s character.

The uniqueness of the Igbo natives is put on display throughout Achebe’s masterpiece as he highlights the customs and traditions of the natives in details. Why did Chinua Achebe reveal so much details of the Igbos’ tradition in his narrative? It can be assumed that Achebe is reclaiming otherness and giving the natives a voice. Keep in mind that the idea of reclaiming identity is also significant to the concept of postcolonialism. According to Peter Barry, “Fanon argued that the first step for ‘colonized’ people in finding a voice and an identity is to reclaim their past” (Barry 195). Achebe highlights the customs of the Igbos as it relates to marriage in a way that embraces the entire occasion. The author’s detail description of the event is a way of telling the West that the natives are honored by their traditions. For example, Achebe accounts for the tradition of asking for a woman’s hand in marriage in the Igbo tradition by detailing the price of the bride. In this respect, the bridal price is in the form of cowries that are paid out to the bride’s family by her suitor. Achebe writes, “in this way Akueke’s bride-price was finally settled at twenty bags of cowries” (Achebe 2001, p.68).

Chinua Achebe’s masterpiece (*Things Fall Apart*) has played a significant role in advancing the postcolonial theory and the natives’ systems of reasoning. According to Irele (33) “perhaps Achebe’s most important influence given his goal as a writer, is his contribution to the advancement of a new postcolonial consciousness, particularly as his fictions date from the eve of African independence, thus giving emphatic voice to the pan-African impulse that found political expression in African independence.” Achebe’s novel demands a reevaluation of the African past. The narrative pursues to insert fundamental aspects of the Igbo’s history is an attempt to combat the dominant perception of the West that Africa is prehistoric, and its inhabitants are savages. As an Igbo and a postcolonial himself, Achebe is aware of the
greatness of the Igbo’s tradition and the psychological and emotional challenges that the Igbos endured during the colonial era. Achebe is a postcolonial voice who understands the psychological and emotional repercussions of colonialism and seeks to expose it (the evil of colonialism regarding the psychological and emotional damage) with his narrative. Achebe is conscious about the decline of the Igbos past as it relates to the numerous influences of colonialism. The narrative demonstrates a stern resistance by the Igbo natives to save their individuality from falling apart. The resistance that is put on display by the Igbos shows that the Igbos have an emotional and psychological connection to their traditions, and it was taken for granted by the colonizers.

*Things Fall Apart* also exhibits Achebe’s effort to reclaim the history of the African natives and narrate the actuality of the natives’ past that had been consistently criticized by European writers. Achebe attempts to prove beyond reasonable doubt that Africa has its own history and traditions that must be respected by Western writers. It has been a common feature of European writers to portray Africa as prehistoric until colonialism. However, attempting to reclaim the past, Achebe combats the European representation of Africa in his exposé. According to Peter Barry, “for century the European colonizing power will have devalued the nation’s past, seeing its precolonial era as a pre-civilized limbo, or even as a historical void” (Barry p.195). Achebe proves with his detailed description of the Igbo tradition that the view of Africa’s past as a ‘historical void’ by the West is categorically wrong, and that any justification of colonialism that is based on that theory must be rejected. Achebe is presenting an alternative view of Africa that is indeed the reality. Achebe is essentially putting the world on notice; he is telling the world that Africa is rich with their own history and that cultural differences must be accepted and embraced rather than prosecuted because it is different from the “European standard”.

The attempt by colonialism to replace the traditions of the Igbo natives caused significant emotional and psychological stress. One example can be found in the passage of the evil forest. According to the narrative, the evil forest was previously feared and uninhabitable. However, the colonizers pursue to build a religious institution (that differs significantly from the Igbos’ customs) on the forbidden land, destroying the importance of the forest and what it symbolizes. Achebe writes “their church stood on a circular clearing that looked like the open mouth of the evil forest. Was it waiting to snap its teeth together?” (Achebe 142). Similarly, the colonizers destroy much of the
taboos and symbols of the Igbo natives. For example, the unmasking of the egwugwe was a taboo that all Igbo feared. However, one of the egwugwe was unmasked by a convert. Achebe writes “One of the greatest crimes a man could commit was to unmask an egwugwu in public, or to say or do anything which might reduce its immoral prestige in the eyes of the uninitiated. And this was what Enoch did” (Achebe 176). These were only a handful of the abomination that was introduced by the colonizers which shook the Igbos psychologically and emotionally. The colonizers and their religion fractured the basics of the beliefs of the Igbos, leaving them in psychological and emotional disarray.

Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* takes a different approach to present the evil of colonialism. Conrad’s narrative records the physical evil of colonialism. The inhumane treatment of the African natives in the Congo during the colonial era is demonstrated throughout Conrad’s narrative. Conrad himself witnessed the murders, abuses and slave-like circumstances that physically affected the natives of Congo. Therefore, Conrad gives a first-hand account of the atrocities that accompany colonialism in his narrative. Based on Conrad’s eye-witnessed account of events in the Congo, the physical abuse suffered by the Congo natives is an actuality of colonialism.

Aspects of colonialism, especially physical abuse, are narrated uncensored in Conrad’s narrative. For example, Conrad alludes to the slave-like circumstances under which the natives worked to highlight the kind of physical abuse that the Congo natives suffered in the hands of the colonizers. “I could see every rip, the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope; each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected with a chain whose bights swung between them, rhythmically clinking” (Conrad 17). Conrad’s recollection of the evil that was physically placed upon the Congo natives by the colonizers highlights Margaret Kohn and Kavita Reddy’s suggestions of colonialism. Margaret Kohn and Kavita Reddy’s realization of the concept of colonialism is very expressive in the article “Colonialism”. “Colonialism is a practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another” (Kohn 2017).

In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad also highlights the psychological changes underwent by the colonizers in the Congo. For example, Conrad writes “it would be interesting for science to watch the mental changes of individuals, on the spot” (Conrad 12). The author is alluding to the mental changes of the colonizers that is exhibited by
the colonizers upon return from their conquests. The psychological impact of colonialism on the colonizers is also represented by Conrad during Kurtz’s mental breakdown. The narrative suggests that “he cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision-he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath: ‘The horror! The horror’!” (Conrad 90). This passage is significant because of its connotations. The passage connotes that the natives were not the only victims of colonialism. It suggests that the colonizers were also psychological victims of colonialism. In this respect, the images of the evil of colonialism that accompany the colonizers even after they have returned from the ‘heart of darkness’ (Africa) is significant.

Kurtz’s illness manifests the Europeans’ view that Africa is primitive, and it is a difficult place to live especially if one is used to the luxury that Europe provides. Moreover, because of Kurtz’s isolation from the European society, it can be argued that Kurtz is forced to evaluate himself, and this self-examination had transformed Kurtz mentally. Kurtz’s illness reflects his European body’s inability to cope with circumstances that are different from the standard of the European society. Kurtz’s madness in the Congo also reflects the mental difficulties he struggled with because of his isolation from the standard European environment. Kurtz is used to a certain norm or standard of living before he is sent to the Congo. The standard means that Kurtz can function within a certain framework and expectations. With no expectations or punishment that is required by Kurtz in the Congo, it provides limitless possibilities which led to Kurtz’s madness. The jungle had transformed Kurtz into a murderer, and he proudly exhibits the murders by displaying the heads of the natives on a stick in from of his house. Kurtz’s action is of course criminal and would be punishable in Western cultures. However, the jungle of Africa provides Kurtz with the opportunity of committing crimes with impunity because of his dominance as a colonizer. With such freedom available, Kurtz neglects his own norms as a European and arrogantly begins to commit murders as he conquers villages in the Congo. Conrad writes “they would have been even more impressive, those heads on the stakes, if their faces had not been turned to the house” (Conrad 74).

The story of Fresleven is another example of the psychological changes that the colonizers went through in Africa. By all indications, Fresleven epitomizes the European standard of civilization. However, because Fresleven had spent so much time in Africa, his mentality began to change, and he became violent, which led to his
demise. According to the narrative, “Fresleven was the gentlest, quietest creature that ever walked on two legs” (Conrad p.8). What Conrad is alluding to in that passage is that colonialism affects both the colonizers and the colonized people negatively. The narrative highlights the event when Fresleven brutalized the chief of the town while the crowd watched on. It was a show of superiority that was displayed by Fresleven. Little did Fresleven know that the beating of the chief would eventually lead to his death. The narrative proposes that Fresleven died by the sword of the chief’s son (Conrad p.9). The assumption here is that Conrad is pinpointing the psychological breakdown of the colonizers. The hidden assumption is that the colonizers become frustrated by their own situations in the wild which subsequently leads to them being violent and suicidal as Conrad demonstrates with the character of the Swedish colonizer who hung himself. Conrad recalls Marlow’s conversation with the Swedish captain who explains that “the other day I took up a man who hung himself on the road. He was a Swede, too. Hanged himself! Why in God’s name? I cried. He kept on looking out watchfully” (Conrad 16).

Conrad also highlights the meaningless activities that the colonizers engaged themselves while in the wilderness of Africa in his exposé. Conrad is alluding to the lack of preparation and ineffectiveness of the colonizers that was visible at the company’s station. The colonizers spend most of their time engaging in trivial activities like blowing up a cliff for reasons best known to them. Moreover, equipment and machines are said to be shattered, and supplies finding it difficult to reach the colonizers. Conrad writes, “I came upon more pieces of decaying machinery, a stack of rusty rails.to……run. A heavy and dull detonation shook the ground, a puff of smoke came out of the cliff, and that was all” (Conrad 17). Conrad’s description of the meaningless activities by the colonizers is compelling. One might question the ideology of colonialism by pointing to the months of useless endeavors as part of his/her criticism of colonialism. It can be assumed that the extra time available to the colonizers were used to further abuse the natives.

The subjugation of the Congo natives during the colonial era is recorded throughout Conrad’s narrative. Marlow offered a native man a Swedish biscuit because of the man’s obvious malnourishment, while his compatriots showed no mercy. Conrad writes, “The man seemed young- almost a boy- but you know with them it’s hard to tell. I found nothing else to do but to offer him one of my good Swede’s ship’s biscuits I had in my pocket” (Conrad 19). The physical abuse suffered by the natives demonstrates the
evil of the concept of colonialism are the subjugation and murder. Conrad writes, “they were dying slowly- it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now, nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom” (Conrad 19).

As a colonizer himself, Conrad sees Africa as an uncivilized region which he considers “one of the dark places of the earth” (Conrad 3). Conrad’s view of Africa is aligned with his fellow Europeans conviction of Africa as being primitive. However, Conrad is somewhat doubtful about the Europeans’ view of Africa as he compares it with England’s own history when it was first attacked by the Romans. Conrad writes “......yes; but it is like a running blaze on a plain, like a flash of lightning in the clouds. We live in the flicker- may it last as long as the old earth keeps rolling! But darkness was here yesterday” (Conrad 4). Moreover, Marlow’s sudden realization that the natives are actually humans is significant to the criticism of colonialism. One might assume, and rightly so, that the cruel treatment of the natives by the colonizers stems from the fact that the colonizers viewed the natives as “other” or a lesser being. Conrad writes “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” (Conrad 44).

Even though Conrad is a colonial, his approach to colonialism anticipates an important postcolonial critique. Conrad is highly critical of the colonizers and questions their approach to colonialism. For example, Conrad writes “…. their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force-nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is an accident arising from the weakness of others” (Conrad 6). Conrad is suggesting that the colonizers were not in Africa to modernize the region. They were there to exploit the region. In so doing, violence against the natives became inevitable. Conrad writes “it was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind-as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness” (Conrad 6). Conrad is once again exposing the physical evil that colonialism brought upon the natives in those passages. Conrad is telling the world that colonialism did not bring civilization to Africa. Instead, it brought subjugation and deaths to the natives.

The exploitation of the Congo natives during the colonial era is well represented in Conrad’s narrative. *Heart of Darkness* demonstrates the brutality by which the colonizers controlled the Congo natives. The narrative shows no meaningful
interaction between the natives and the colonizers. Instead, the narrative illustrates the hierarchal gap that separates the Congo natives from their colonial masters. According to the article “A Quick Reminder of Why Colonialism Was Bad”, Nathan J. Robinson claims that “a strict hierarchy separates the colonized and the colonizer; you are treated as an inconvenient subhuman who can be abused at will. The colonists commit crimes with impunity against your people.” Robinson’s perspective of colonialism fits well with Conrad’s narrative. In this regard, the subhuman treatment of the Congo natives cannot be ignored.

The symbol of Kurtz’s mistress and, on a larger scale, Kurtz’s superior control over the natives are significant. Conrad is essentially saying that the level of self-destructiveness that Kurtz demonstrates does not in any way display civilization. Kurtz’s awareness of his limitless possibility for evil does not prevent him from demonstrating it. More importantly, Conrad demonstrates that Kurtz’s mistress validates the idea that both Europeans and Africans are similar in many respects. If one pays attention to the relationship between Kurtz and his mistress, one might realize that despite the Godlike appearance of the woman, her relationship with Kurtz reflects a normal romance of a traditional Western male-female relationship. In addition, Kurtz’s mistress epitomizes value and wealth, something that is comparable to the European woman. According to the narrative, “she had brass leggings to her knee, brass wire gauntlets to the elbow, a crimson spot on her tawny cheek, innumerable necklaces of glass beads on her neck; bizarre things, charms, gifts of witch men, that hung about her” (Conrad 78).

According to Conrad, Marlow considers Kurtz to be the ideal colonizer before meeting Kurtz. For Marlow, prior to meeting Kurtz, Kurtz epitomizes the idea of civilization that the Europeans used to rationalize colonialism; he simply brought civilization to the Congo natives. Marlow regards Kurtz as an honest and rational man while the other colonizers are regarded as greedy individuals who seek advance position with the company or in the society upon arrival. However, the reality of Kurtz’s existence becomes shocking when Marlow sees him. Kurtz has become just like the other pilgrims; he has become so barbaric and greedy in a way that surprises even the other pilgrims. Kurtz considers the stolen ivory as his own and assumes the position of an aboriginal god who was worshipped by the natives. For example, Conrad writes “the camps of these people surrounded the place, and the chiefs came every day to see him.
They would crawl…I don’t want to know anything about the ceremonies used when approaching Mr. Kurtz, I shouted” (Conrad 75). Furthermore, Kurtz also documents the ‘Suppression of the Savage Custom’ which he hands to Marlow to be distributed to the West. “One morning he gave me a packet of papers and a photograph—the lot tied together with a shoestring” (Conrad 89). Here, Conrad is fundamentally denying that the colonizers were noble men who were trying to modernize the region. Therefore, any such attempt to justify the concept of colonialism in such regard is wrong. To Conrad, colonialism is characterized by the murders and exploitations of the natives rather than civilization.

**Conclusion**

As an accomplishment, this essay demonstrates that the evil of colonialism is represented in two diametrically opposite ways by Chinua Achebe and Joseph Conrad. Achebe demonstrates the psychological and emotional evil of colonialism in his exposé, while Conrad opts for the physical evil that is caused by colonialism in his masterpiece. As a postcolonial writer, Achebe condemns colonialism in his narrative by connecting primarily the psychological and emotional abuse of the Igbo natives to the concept of colonialism. Achebe begins by narrating the precolonial lives of the Igbo natives to first establish the significance of traditions to the Igbos and to show how intimate the Igbos were devoted to their customs and traditions prior to the arrival of the colonizers. In so doing, Achebe creates a strong psychological and emotional connection between the Igbo natives and their traditions. When a strong awareness of individuality is established and a more influential and authoritative stranger (colonizer) arrives and denounces such individuality and labels it ‘uncivilized’ and ‘barbaric’, it creates confusion, anger, and other emotions that can destroy one’s psyche. The ruin of the psyche caused by colonialism is the evil Achebe alludes to in his exposé.

While Achebe focuses on the psychological and emotional ruins of colonialism, Conrad instead focuses primarily on the physical evil of colonialism. Conrad criticizes the concept of colonialism through his eye-witnessed account of the evil that were committed by the colonizers as it relates to the beatings, murders, torture and as well as the slave-like circumstances in which the natives worked under their European counterparts. As a colonizer himself, Conrad’s masterpiece is a brutal indictment on the concept of colonialism as it chronicles an uncensored eye-witnessed
account of the physical abuse that was initiated by the colonizers. Conrad is portraying
the actuality of colonialism, one that expresses the evil of the concept which is different
from the so-called “civilization” purpose. In this light, it can be concluded that both
Chinua Achebe and Joseph Conrad presented the same universal ethic in two
diametrically opposite ways.
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