

**The Process of Othering in *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart*: A Contrapuntal
Reading**

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requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis I submitted is my original work, which I completed while completing a degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through complete and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material obtained or submitted for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all primary sources of help.

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Approval

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes how the process of "othering" is shown in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and focuses on a contrapuntal reading of these two texts. The analysis focuses on three key areas of othering: language, culture, and gender. Language othering explores how English is used as a tool of control in colonial settings, while cultural othering compares how European and African societies are portrayed in the two texts. Gender othering, in *Heart of Darkness*, looks into the roles and representations of Kurtz's fiancée and mistress, exploring their identities and symbolic functions within the colonial narrative. In *Things Fall Apart*, gender othering happens through how society treats men and women differently. Men are seen as strong, dominant, and essential, while women are often considered weak and less valuable. By placing Conrad's and Achebe's works together, the thesis demonstrates how Said's contrapuntalism allows for a refined understanding of colonial and postcolonial literature. To support my arguments more strongly, I have engaged with a range of scholarly references like Edward Said's book *Culture and Imperialism*, *Orientalism*, Achebe's notable work "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," "English and the African Writer," Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern speak?" and so on.

Keywords: Othering, Contrapuntal Reading, Gender Roles, Cultural Identity, Postcolonial Literature.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Colonial powers have been using the process of “othering” to categorize people into superior and inferior groups. This thesis uses the contrapuntal reading technique developed by Edward Said to explore how “othering” is portrayed in two significant texts, *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart*. We can understand how writers of colonial and postcolonial eras present power, identity, and difference by reading these two texts side by side. The crucial areas of focus in this thesis are language, culture, and gender. These three components are significant because they help to portray how colonizers tried to control individuals and ideas through beliefs, traditions, and religion. In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad idealizes European women and dehumanizes African women. Conrad uses language to control African characters and portrays African culture as less civilized than European culture. On the other hand, Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* responds to the negative things Conrad showed about African people by giving the Igbo people a voice of their own. However, Achebe also indicates the imposition of language on the natives by the white missionaries, despite the portrayal of Africa's rich traditions, culture, and religion, the colonizers dismissed and belittled them. Achebe also reflects gender hierarchies by showing the differences between men and women. This thesis aims to compare how “the other” is portrayed in both texts. Its purpose is also to show how contrapuntal reading by Said reveals a more profound understanding of postcolonial resistance and colonial narratives. Through this contrast, this thesis aims to demonstrate the ways literature has been utilized to support and challenge colonial identity and power.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Within the pages of *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart* are conflicts among cultures, races, and identities. While *Heart of Darkness* speaks from the heart of the British Empire, *Things Fall Apart* speaks from the borders of Africa. Joseph Conrad portrayed Africa in *Heart of Darkness* as dark and unknown. It is also presented as a silent space where people exist like shadowy figures without identity or language. In contrast, Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* gives voice to the Igbo community and provides a nuanced view of the Igbo culture that colonial powers rejected. In *Heart of Darkness*, Africans are dehumanized, voiceless, and shown as symbols of “darkness”, and both European and African women are given no priority. On the other hand, Achebe, in *Things Fall Apart*, shows the rich language, customs, and internal conflicts of Igbo society in his writing back to the British Empire. However, Achebe’s novel also demonstrates how even in a colonized community, power imbalances and gender roles still exist. This thesis argues that the process of “othering” in both texts is exposed through three main domains: language, culture, and gender. By using Edward Said's idea of contrapuntal reading, a more profound understanding is gained of how *Heart of Darkness* silences while *Things Fall Apart* resists. This idea of Said involves reading colonial and postcolonial texts together for a clearer understanding. This thesis explores how identity, power, and resistance are all interconnected with the stories we tell about other people.

1.2 Rationale

This research aims to bring a new point of view by critically examining how the novella *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart* othered non-Western individuals through language, gender, and culture. A comparative contrapuntal reading has been provided in this research that

analyzes both texts together. This comparison highlights and exposes how each text reflects and challenges the other. The novella *Heart of Darkness* has long been criticized. For example, Achebe criticized it because of its Eurocentric viewpoint. On the other hand, *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe offers a counter discourse that reclaims African voices and identity by providing the narrative from the perspective of the colonized. By utilizing Edward Said's concept of contrapuntal reading, this thesis attempts to draw attention to the voices omitted by colonial biases in *Heart of Darkness*. This reading also highlights how Achebe challenges and redefines the representations of African people in Conrad's novella, such as describing their language meaningless. While several studies examine culture and race, fewer have compared how texts demonstrate gender, particularly female gender, of different races, languages and cultural identities altogether. Examining these areas of othering together, this research highlights how the power of colonial debate functions through gender roles and words. Moreover, this study has extended Said's contrapuntal reading to incorporate the othering of women, which has not generally been investigated in contrapuntal comparisons of *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart*. By connecting ideology, literary form, and gender in one framework, this study therefore adds up to existing studies. It offers a more balanced understanding of how the image of the other is constructed by *Heart of Darkness* and resisted in *Things Fall Apart*. This research is significant to readers because it exposes how colonial literature fostered distorted perceptions of African cultures through biased representations of their language, culture, and gender.

1.3 Background

The concept of "othering" in postcolonial theory is crucial because it helps to understand how colonial powers created the perception of the colonized as different and inferior. Colonizers frequently used othering as a common strategy to defend their control over native people. As a

result, the colonized were portrayed as uncivilized, savage, and in need of European rule. The same concept appears in literature, when authors like Joseph Conrad portrayed native people as primitive, dangerous, and voiceless. In these types of texts, like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the focus and concentration are only on the European characters. Postcolonialism serves as one of the significant foundations for this research. The concept of contrapuntal reading by Edward Said, in his book *Culture and Imperialism*, is a valuable framework to examine colonial and postcolonial literature together. Contrapuntal reading is not only a method for extending this study but also works as an instrument that encourages readers to simultaneously understand both the dominant and the countering voices in a text. This way of reading brings attention to finding out the hidden and unheard expressions of the colonized people. Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness*, written in 1899, is mainly viewed as a critique of imperialism. However, the novella has been criticized by many scholars, including Chinua Achebe, for its racist depiction of Africa and its people. The African continent in *Heart of Darkness* serves as a backdrop for European characters who search for a purpose of dominating them. Conrad portrays Africans mostly as shadows, unnamed figures, and silent entities. They are not given any identities or names, and their culture is viewed as worthless.

Heart of Darkness even though depicts the harsh reality of imperialism, it still prioritizes the European characters over African people because their voices are mostly ignored. Because of how this novella dehumanizes Africans, Achebe called it "a bloody racist novella" (Watts 196). There is room for both imperialist and anti-imperialist interpretations because of the text's ambiguous stance. Hence, this ambiguity of the texts makes it appropriate for contrapuntal reading. On the other hand, *Things Fall Apart* written in 1958 by Chinua Achebe directly responds to colonial narratives like *Heart of Darkness* by keeping Africans in the center. Achebe

provides voices to the Africans in his novel and shows Igbo culture's richness before and after the British colonizer's arrival. Achebe, in his novel, does not portray Africa as a dark continent just like Conrad did in his novella; instead, he gives African people a detailed account of their language, religion, social structure, and beliefs. Achebe does not idealize pre-colonial society. He criticizes cultural flaws and gender hierarchies present within the Igbo society. Apart from it, Achebe highlights how the white missionaries brought destruction and contributed to the falling apart of the Igbo community's social structure. Readers, when they initially read the texts *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart*, mostly perceive the colonial point of view without digging deep into how the African people are portrayed. Even though Achebe gives meaning, identity, and voice to the Africans in *Things Fall Apart*, he still portrays women in traditional roles. This is the reason behind reading *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart* side by side to comprehend better how literature has been employed to support and resist colonial power. I want to detect how othering occurs through language, culture, and gender by doing a contrapuntal reading.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

Postcolonial theory serves as the foundation for this thesis, focusing on the concept of contrapuntal reading by Edward Said. Postcolonial theory looks at how colonialism's historical impacts have shaped literature, culture, and identity. Said developed postcolonial theory in his book *Orientalism* (1978) to demonstrate how the West used history, literature, and media to portray the East as uncivilized, weak, and different. Concepts such as the creation of "Other," identity, resistance, subalternity, and so on are central to postcolonial theory. In this book, he described how writers, politicians, and scholars had generated a false image about the East, including Asia, Africa, and the Middle East as primitive, uncivilized, shadows, and so on, which

Said addresses as “the Orient.” He explains that this false image was a part of a broader system of political, and cultural domination and that it was not accidental. The reason behind postcolonial theory’s development was to challenge colonial notions that persist even after many countries, such as those in Africa, gained independence. Before Said introduced postcolonial theory in his work *Orientalism*, most academic studies emphasized and focused solely on Western viewpoints. Said mentions two types of formation in *Orientalism*, “strategic location, which means the Western writers wrote about the East from a Western point of view which did not create neutral image about the Orient (East), and strategic formation, means Western writers repeat the same ideas about the East, and their created image about the Orient (East) becomes strong, and is accepted as the truth” (*Orientalism* 20). Due to Said, this focus has now shifted. The narratives told by powerful Western countries before postcolonial theory were mostly “dominant,” as these narratives were biased and only centered on Western logic, way of thinking, and language. After *Orientalism* emerged, scholars focused more on how non-Western individuals (the other) were portrayed. Shehla Burney outlines,

Orientalism has been considered by yet another critic to be the first academic book to introduce the concept of Post-colonial studies in the West, above all, Edward Said's monumental work has changed the focus of academic attention from the dominant, logocentric, and mainstream Western narrative to the emerging intercultural discourse of the Other (Burney 41).

Burney is pointing out that Said's work greatly changed academic thoughts. She means that due to *Orientalism*, the focus has been shifted from Eurocentric viewpoints. Now, instead of spotlighting only European ideas and views, people are motivated to look more closely and

examine the representation of non-Western cultures. Said believed that the mindset of “othering” and dominance continued in culture and education even after the colonial rule ended.

As Said mentioned, “The Orient was Orientalized...because it could be-submitted to being made Oriental” (*Orientalism* 5- 6). This reflects that colonized people were not treated based on who they truly were, they were treated based on how the colonizers imagined them to be. Later, Said expanded his analysis to literary texts in his 1993 book *Culture and Imperialism*. In this work, Said introduced the method of contrapuntal reading. Contrapuntal reading is a way to read colonial and postcolonial literature simultaneously to see how they react to one another. This method of contrapuntal reading helps us to expose the things excluded and ignored in literature. Contrapuntal reading acknowledges that texts are never isolated or neutral. Instead, they are influenced by and reflect the power dynamics of their time. Said explains, “Contrapuntal reading must take account of both processes, that of imperialism and that of resistance to it...by extending our reading to include what was once forcibly excluded” (*Culture and Imperialism* 66). This method enables readers to hear both the story of the colonizers and the colonized and gain a better understanding. We can listen to both the voice of the British Empire and the voice that resists it through this method. In this thesis, Said’s method contrapuntal reading is applied to Joseph Conrad’s novella *Heart of Darkness* and Chinua Achebe’s novel *Things Fall Apart*. These texts represent the opposing sides of the colonial experience.

By reading them together, we can understand how each text either participates in or challenges the process of othering. Also, through this, we can uncover the disparities in how they depict Africa. This othering occurs in *Heart of Darkness* by portraying Africa as a land of savagery and “darkness”. In this novella, Africans are often referred to as shapes, shadows, and sounds; they are not given their own identities or voices. Even language is used as a tool of

exclusion. In contrast, *Things Fall Apart* gives the Igbo people with voices, names, and cultural meaning. Achebe presents them as whole human beings by describing their inner conflicts, customs, beliefs, language, and culture. Nonetheless, specific gender roles and hierarchies are upheld even in Achebe's novel. "...Postcolonial theory has been used increasingly as a methodology to research issues dealing with the nature of cultural identity, gender, race, social class, ethnicity, and nationality in postcolonial societies" (Burney 42). When we do contrapuntal reading of these texts, it helps us to see how they comment and contradict with one another. Conrad, writing during a time when colonialism was a supreme ideology, offers a view of Africa that mirrors the fears and fantasies of Europe. Marlow, *Heart of Darkness's* narrator, criticizes the imperial enterprise while also being a participant in it. Said observed, "Conrad's tragic limitation is that even though he could see clearly that imperialism was essentially pure dominance and land-grabbing, he could not then conclude that imperialism had to end so that 'natives' could lead lives free from European domination" (*Culture and Imperialism* 69).

This reading is required to reveal both what is left unsaid and what is said. On the other hand, *Things Fall Apart* is Achebe's direct response to such colonial narratives. Achebe is well-known for criticizing *Heart of Darkness* for presenting Africa as a place without culture, language, and humanity. Achebe shows us a community in depth before, during, and after colonial interaction. He uses English to write, which is the language of the colonizers. However, he incorporates Igbo proverbs and expressions in his writing and resists the erasure of the African language. Using the tools of the colonizers against it, such as using their language, is itself a strategy of postcolonialism. In this thesis, three types of othering: language, culture, and gender are examined through using postcolonial theory and contrapuntal reading. Each of these categorizations offers a lens to see how colonial discourse functions and how it was challenged.

The study of language othering in colonial discourse explores who is permitted to speak and whose speech and opinions are dismissed. Cultural othering examines how ways of life, beliefs, and traditions are either idealized or mocked. Gendered othering examines how women are portrayed, particularly colonized women as exotic, submissive, and voiceless. In history, “Postcolonial theory has also been used to decode the tropes, traces and textuality by which art, literature, and the media marginalize, distort, manufacture, and represent the Other” (Burney 42). Thus, postcolonial theory helps us understand how the colonial project, besides being about resources and land, was also about voice, identity, and knowledge. Contrapuntal reading serves as a reminder to pay attention to the things pushed to the margins. These tensions are evident in *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart*. In *Heart of Darkness*, the voices of others are silenced because they speak from the center of the British Empire. While in *Things Fall Apart* the silenced voices are reclaimed by answering back from the margins.

1.5 Objectives

1.5.1 General Objectives

This research aims to conduct a detailed examination of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, to explore how one group creates an “us versus them” mentality by framing the “other” as inferior through using Edward Said’s concept of contrapuntalism. This study explores how *Heart of Darkness* represents the process of othering and how it shows the people of Africa as dark, uncivilized “others.” It will also explore the dehumanization of African languages and the Eurocentric viewpoints on them, emphasizing savagery and chaos. Moreover, this study is going to explore how Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* portrays the process of othering through showing how the colonial administrations and

missionaries treat the Igbo culture as backward and inferior, justifying their attempts to force their Western norms. By examining how othering in both texts is portrayed through language, culture, and gender this thesis aims to make a profound and valuable offering to the ongoing debate about the process of othering in postcolonialism.

1.5.2 Specific Objectives

The main objective of this thesis is to examine how both texts contrast colonial and colonized cultures. Its purpose is also to understand the power dynamics in these contrasts. Then it examines whether culture hierarchies substantially define and redefine cultures. Lastly, it will explore how language, culture, and gender function in the two texts.

1.6 Research Questions

1. How do the novella *Heart of Darkness* and the novel *Things Fall Apart* represent the process of othering?
2. What are the significant factors that function as a medium of othering in these texts?

1.7 Literature Review

These are some of the notable scholars whose ideas helped to shape this research's analysis and arguments. There is an elaborated chapter on them in this research. In his noteworthy work *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said has examined through contrapuntalism how colonial powers have created a perspective about the colonized people to justify their domination over them. Said also portrays the narrow mindset of the colonial period, even though Conrad criticizes colonialism's cruelty.

Chinua Achebe, in his essay “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*,” argues that the novella’s humiliation of Africans is because of how they were presented as a part of the harmful African wilderness. Achebe points out that *Heart of Darkness* portrays Africa as a world different from Europe. Africa is seen as an uncivilized world where culture and human knowledge are replaced by brutal behavior.

Ania Loomba’s book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* notes that even though reasons for colonialism varied, they all served to maintain cultural inequality and control. Loomba reflects the attitude of the white missionaries in *Things Fall Apart*, who called Igbo traditions primitive. She mirrors how the white missionaries viewed their imposing of values, norms, European governance, and religion as a tool to justify domination and as a mission to civilize the Igbo people.

In his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon demonstrates the marginalized African people in *Heart of Darkness*. Fanon gives us an illustration of marginalized African people in *Heart of Darkness* compared to *Things Fall Apart*, where Achebe, through his narrative, brought back the Igbo people’s cultural norms, which were erased by colonial discourse.

Gayatri Spivak’s essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak,” contemplates the racial and gendered hierarchies of colonialism. Spivak mentions double marginalization of women and reflects the portrayal of women in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, where European and African women are described differently. The expressions and thoughts of Kurtz’s European fiancée compared to African mistress were shown to be more approachable and human-like. In contrast, Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* gives us a complicated view of gender dynamics in Igbo society. Spivak also mirrors the African people in *Heart of Darkness*, whose language was depicted as worthless.

Similarly, in *Things Fall Apart*, the Igbo people's native linguistic identity was replaced by English as the dominant language.

1.8 Research Methodology

This research uses qualitative methodology by examining the texts *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart*. It concentrates on the use of language, literary techniques, and character portrayals. A comparative literary design has been used to conduct this study. This thesis does a comparison between one colonial *Heart of Darkness* and one postcolonial *Things Fall Apart* text to illustrate how the portrayal of "the other" varies based on the historical context and background of the writers. The primary data of this thesis is used from these two texts. In addition, the secondary data includes books, scholarly articles, journal articles, and essays by authors like Chinua Achebe, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Ania Loomba, Frantz Fanon, and others. All the data used in this study were gathered from primary texts, *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart*. In this research, themes like identity, silence, gender inequality, suppression, and cultural erasure are analyzed. *Heart of Darkness* paints Africans as dark and less civilized. On the other hand, *Things Fall Apart* shows the strength of Igbo culture while also highlighting the harm caused by colonizers. This thesis does an in-depth analysis of characters such as Marlow, Kurtz, and Kurtz's European fiancée and African mistress in *Heart of Darkness*. In *Things Fall Apart*, characters such as Okonkwo, Nwoye, Ezinma, and many other Igbo women are analyzed. It shows how these characters reflect the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.

1.9 Scopes and Limitations

The processes of “othering” in *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart* are explored in this thesis using the concept of contrapuntal reading coined by Edward Said. With a particular focus on language, culture, and gender, the scope of this thesis includes examining how both texts represent the colonizer and the colonized. Examining the roles and portrayals of women in *Heart of Darkness*, especially the figures of Kurtz’s African mistress and European fiancée, as symbols in colonial discourse is the central part of the scope. This research has been constructed by drawing upon some key works of renowned scholars such as Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, *Culture and Imperialism*, “ Gayatri Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak,” Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, Chinua Achebe’s “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*,” and others. This research explores how a Contrapuntal reading of texts can unveil the hidden perspectives that are often unheard or neglected by colonial literature. Through close engagement with major theoretical frameworks and analysis of primary texts, this research has examined how establishment of the “other” operates in *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart*.

This thesis does, however, have some limitations. As I analyzed my thesis using a particular theoretical lens, my thesis is dominantly dependent on that framework. My initial plan was to explore more theocratic concepts of renowned scholars. Apart from what I have used throughout my thesis, I also wanted to include one or two more postcolonial theorists, such as Homi K. Bhabha. Unfortunately, I was not able to manage the time to incorporate and use their ideas in my thesis. Even though I have put in my best efforts, I mostly have to rely on my primary and secondary sources. Even though these limitations have somewhat narrowed the depth and scope of my research, I still believe this thesis provides a reasonable basis for understanding “othering” in colonial and postcolonial literature.

1.10 Conclusion

Therefore, the base of the research, which examines the process of “othering” by doing a contrapuntal reading of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, has been presented in this chapter. The major problem of how the colonizer and the colonized are differentiated by language, culture, and gender has been highlighted. Also, why *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart* are crucial in understanding the colonial and postcolonial viewpoints are underlined in the rationale and background of this research. This research aims to unveil the isolated voices and question Eurocentric perspectives based on Edward Said’s postcolonial theory and contrapuntal reading. The objectives and questions of this research help us to comprehend how identity, power, and resistance are constructed in both texts. Some critical perceptions from well-known scholars like Achebe, Said, Fanon, Loomba, Spivak, and others are provided in the literature review. This research focuses on how the portrayal of “the other” is presented in both texts using a qualitative, comparative approach.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This literature review highlights the interwoven themes of language, culture, and gender as essential to understanding the process of othering in the novella *Heart of Darkness* and in the novel *Things Fall Apart*. This review places the existing research on *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart* through the components of othering and shows how these components function to uphold and challenge cultural hierarchies. In postcolonial studies, the idea of “othering” has been a central focus. Edward Said, in his noteworthy work *Culture and*

Imperialism, has examined through contrapuntalism how colonial powers establish an image of the colonized as the “other” to justify their inhuman treatment towards them. Said asserted,

Conrad’s genius allowed him to realize that the ever-present darkness could be colonized or illuminated...But Marlow and Kurtz are also creatures of their time and cannot take the next step, which would be to recognize that what they saw...was in fact a non-European world resisting imperialism so as one day to regain sovereignty and independence (*Culture and Imperialism* 69).

Said here draws attention to how Conrad depicts imperialism’s failure to subdue the “darkness” it aims to illuminate completely, which is a complete failure of the civilizing project of the white races. Characters in the novella that represent European imperialism, like Marlow and Kurtz, are unaware that the people they are trying to control are fighting back to protect their way of life and freedom. They only view this resistance through their imperialist perspective, instead of seeing it as a fight for freedom. Therefore, even though the novella criticizes the cruelty of colonialism, it still reflects the narrow mindset of that time period. Chinua Achebe, who is renowned for calling the novella "a bloody racist book," is one of the critics who has drawn attention to Conrad's involvement in the maintenance of dehumanizing stereotypes in his novel *Heart of Darkness*. Achebe labelled the novel “a bloody racist book” as mentioned by author Watts in his journal titled, “A Bloody Racist: About Achebe's View of Conrad”, “Chinua Achebe declared: 'Conrad was a bloody racist'. *Heart of Darkness*, he claimed, is an offensive and totally deplorable book” (Watts 196). According to Achebe, the novella's dehumanization of Africans is a result of their being portrayed as "other" and as a part of the dangerous African wilderness. He argues in his essay “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*,” “*Heart of Darkness* projects the image of Africa as ‘the other world,’ the antithesis of Europe and therefore

of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality” (“An Image of Africa” 3). Here, Achebe is pointing out that Conrad’s *Novella* presents Africa as entirely a different and opposite world compared to Europe. Africa is portrayed as a wild and savage area where human knowledge and refinement are subjugated to the dominance of cruel behavior. Said states, “The Orient was Orientalized not only because it was discovered to be ‘Oriental’ in all those ways considered common-sense by an average nineteenth-century European, but also because it could be—that is, submitted to being made Oriental” (*Orientalism* 5-6). In other words, colonized individuals were characterized and treated based on how the colonizers imagined them to be instead of who they truly were. Said mentions, “strategic location, which is a way of describing the author's position in a text with regard to the Oriental material he writes about, and strategic formation, which is a way of analyzing the relationship between texts and the way in which groups of texts, types of texts, even textual genres, acquire mass, density, and referential power among themselves” (*Orientalism* 20). This shows how the Western writers described the East as inferior and biased because they wrote from a superior Western perspective. Western writers also described the same things about the East which created a fixed idea, and image about the Orient. In her book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, Ania Loomba notes that although colonial justifications differed, they all served to reinforce cultural domination and inequality:

Colonial discourses about ‘the other’ are accordingly variable. But because they produced comparable (and sometimes uncannily similar) relations of inequity and domination the world over, it is sometimes overlooked that colonial methods and images varied hugely over time and place (Loomba 19).

This mirrors the colonial attitude towards the Igbo people in *Things Fall Apart*, where the white missionaries and the administrators reject Igbo traditions and call them inferior. The missionaries do this as justification to impose their rules, norms, religion, and European governance. Loomba also explains how indigenous cultures were marked as primitive and superstitious to justify colonialism as a mission of civilization. "Many nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers equated the advance of European colonisation with the triumph of science and reason over the forces of superstition, and indeed many colonised peoples took the same view" (Loomba 24). This aligns directly to *Heart of Darkness*, where Europeans said that they are there to bring enlightenment to the African land, which is depicted as dark and chaotic. In both texts, language is an important medium for "othering". In the novella *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad marginalizes African people and reinforces their perceived inferiority by portraying African speech as savage and incomprehensible. Patrick Brantlinger has argued in his journal article titled "*Heart of Darkness*: Anti-Imperialism, Racism, or Impressionism?"

The voices which come from the *Heart of Darkness* are almost exclusively white and male. As a nearly disembodied, pure 'voice' emanating from the very center of the story, Kurtz is a figure for the novelist, as is his double Marlow. True, the 'voice which speaks out of the 'heart of darkness' is a hollow one, the voice of the abyss; but Marlow still talks of Kurtz's 'unextinguishable gift of noble and lofty expression (Brantlinger 380).

Brantlinger criticizes Conrad for providing the central voices to European characters, particularly Kurtz and Marlow, while silencing the African characters. The African voices in this novella are shown as either unintelligible or nonexistent. On the other hand, *Things Fall Apart* highlights how colonial language strategies can have destructive impacts on indigenous linguistic identities as colonizers imposed English on them.

The missionaries' material incentives in *Things Fall Apart* were a strategy to attract the people of Igbo to pursue English education. By doing this, they undermined the cultural identity and the Igbo language. This reduced the importance of indigenous languages and education. However, Achebe showed that language domination by the colonizers can also be resisted by writing back to them using their tool (the English language). As Ashcroft and his co-authors argued, in their book *The Empire Writes Back*, “The crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that post-colonial writing defines itself by seizing the language of the centre and replacing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place” (Ashcroft et al. 37). This reveals how colonizers used language to maintain superiority, while postcolonial writers like Achebe later transformed and reclaimed the language as a way of resisting the domination. The way both texts represented culture further casts light on the process of othering. The novella *Heart of Darkness* symbolizes Africa as a backdrop for Europeans' moral decay by contrasting the “civilized” European culture with the “savage” African wilderness. In *Things Fall Apart*, the white missionaries established schools, where the means of instruction was only English. This establishment slowly weakened the native language and detached the Igbo people from their native values and tongue. This portrayal of cultural shift by Achebe demonstrates the process Ashcroft and his co-authors explain, “language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated” (Ashcroft et al. 7). This reflects the Igbo language, which was once the center of Igbo identity, is now being marginalized because of the colonizer's language.

In his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon describes how violently native society, culture, and traditions were destroyed. Fanon mentions “the violence which governed the ordering of the colonial world, which tirelessly punctuated the destruction of the indigenous

social fabric, and demolished unchecked the systems of reference of the country's economy, lifestyles..." (Fanon 5-6). This reflects the African people in *Heart of Darkness* who were deprived of meaning and identity, and *Things Fall Apart*, where under British rule the Igbo traditions fell apart. Fanon also explains, "colonized society is not merely portrayed as a society without values...The 'native' is declared impervious to ethics...representing not only the absence of values but also the negation of values. He is...the enemy of values" (Fanon 6). This is a perfect demonstration of the dehumanized Africans in Conrad's novella, and a contrast to Achebe's novel, where Achebe brings humanity and cultural value back to the Igbo people, which was removed by colonial discourse.

In both texts, the process of othering is remarkably influenced by gender as well. In Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, African women are hypersexualized and presented as exotic, whereas European women are idealized and portrayed as symbols of purity. This reflects the gendered and racialized hierarchies of colonialism. Gayatri Spivak states in her essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak*,

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization (Spivak 102).

So, this clears out that Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* has shown African and European women through very different lenses. He made European women's emotions, feelings, and thoughts seem more "human" and approachable. However, he did not treat African women the same way as he would treat European women. He portrayed African women as a more mysterious and silent entity with no personal thoughts or voice. In contrast, in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe presents a

more complex view of gender dynamics in Igbo society. Even though this novel illustrates women as largely subservient in a patriarchal system, it also appreciates their vital roles in religious and social life. “The structure of exploitation is compounded by patriarchal social relations...The woman is doubly in shadow” (Spivak 84). This reflects two types of marginalization mentioned by Spivak, one is female being marginalized by colonial powers, “*Heart of Darkness*,” and by patriarchy in their own society, “*Things Fall Apart*.” Author Monir Choudhury asserted in his journal titled “‘The Otherness’ in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*”,

The personal tragedy of Okonkwo, the protagonist of the novel, took place because he had accepted a limited number of civilized values—what he thought masculine values of power and domination. He should have discovered the flaws within himself rather than finding the shortcomings in others within or outside his society (Choudhury 9).

This underlines the patriarchal values of Okonkwo that reflect greater gender inequalities in Igbo society. This also shows Achebe’s nuanced criticism of conventional gender norms, especially how rigid masculine values contribute to societal and personal disintegration. Spivak also argues in her essay that by controlling language and knowledge, the colonial authorities silenced the voices of the colonized, “The clearest available example of such epistemic violence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other. This project is also the asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious Subjectivity” (Spivak 76). This aligns with *Heart of Darkness*, where African people were either silent or their speech was portrayed as unintelligent. Similarly, the indigenous linguistic identity of the Igbo people in *Things Fall Apart* was replaced by English as the

dominant language. Spivak talks about how colonialism diminishes native knowledge, calling it primitive or small,

Perhaps it is no more than to ask that the subtext of the palimpsestic narrative of imperialism be recognized as subjugated knowledge, a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity (Spivak 76).

This is connected to *Heart of Darkness*, where the cultures of Africa are shown to be barbaric. It is also connected to *Things Fall Apart*, where the arrival of the British calls into question the value of Igbo traditions. Spivak points out that colonial repression pushes women further into silence compared to men,

Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effected. The question is not of female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules of the sexual division of labor, for both of which there is 'evidence.' It is, rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow (Spivak 82-83).

In *Heart of Darkness*, the women of Europe are held up as ideal, while the women of Africa are presented as incapable of anything but sexual depravity. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe gives Igbo women more recognition than Conrad gives to African women. Despite criticizing gender relations, Achebe portrays them as essentially passive. Spivak emphasizes that even Western

critics who think of themselves as being on the side of the marginalized continue to reinforce Western power by keeping the West at the center of discussions, “Some of the most radical criticism coming out of the West today is the result of an interested desire to conserve the subject of the West, or the West as Subject” (Spivak 66). This is certainly relevant to *Heart of Darkness*, in which Marlow, a European, is telling the story, a story that is, at best, filtered through a European perspective and that denies the African people their own narrative voice. Likewise, in the last part of *Things Fall Apart*, the transition to English represents how colonial powers overwrite the voices of the indigenous. Spivak criticizes the way in which colonial history is frequently composed from an elite point of view, one that overlooks the experiences of the many living on the margins in the colonized world. She argues, “The first part of my proposition—that the phased development of the subaltern is complicated by the imperialist project—is confronted by a collective of intellectuals who may be called the ‘Subaltern Studies’ group. They must ask, Can the subaltern speak?” (Spivak 78).

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* presents the African landscape as a mysterious, almost mythical space for European adventure, rather than a home for real people with rich traditions. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe resists this tendency by elaborating upon the customs of the Igbo people, challenging the notion that African societies before colonialism were culturally underdeveloped or lacked their own voices. The text argues that the most marginalized, particularly subaltern women, are not allowed to speak for themselves, but instead are spoken “For the ‘true’ subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself; the intellectual’s solution is not to abstain from representation” (Spivak 80). This is reflected in *Heart of Darkness*, where Kurtz's African mistress is rendered voiceless and exotic, while his European fiancée is portrayed as sheltered

and naive. In *Things Fall Apart*, much of the Igbo men's success and failure can be attributed to the crucial roles women play in their familial and social structures. Achebe criticizes this marginalization, yet many females are left unheard. Loomba emphasizes that not just the colonized but also the colonizers were reshaped by the experience of colonialism, and especially by the languages they used. She argues, "Postcolonial studies have shown that both the 'metropolis' and the 'colony' were deeply altered by the colonial process. Both of them are, accordingly, also restructured by decolonisation" (Loomba 22). This aligns with *Heart of Darkness*, where European discourse constructs Africa as an unknown place. This way of portraying Africa represents a sense of Western superiority that was already undergirding so many colonial policies. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe refutes this Western dominance by including Igbo folktales and proverbs, showing the depth of a language the colonizers tried to diminish. Loomba contends that the forces of colonialism not only shaped economic and cultural structures but also profoundly affected gender relations, "The impact of colonialism on culture is intimately tied up with its economic processes but the relationship between them cannot be understood unless cultural processes are theorised as fully and deeply as the economic ones" (Loomba 26). In *Heart of Darkness*, for instance, Marlow suggests that European women represent an ideal of purity. In contrast, the women of Africa are hypersexualized. In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, gender roles are connected with economic activities. In which men are the head of agriculture, while women work with "lesser" crops. This shows us how colonial disruption also affected the gendered divisions of labor.

2.1 Research Gap

While research on *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart* is extensive, there are certain areas that are not explored enough. Scholars have studied the way both texts deal with the process of othering, particularly regarding the issues of race and power identities that are constructed or reconstructed in that process. But comparatively few studies have taken a close look at the interactions between the two texts in this regard, and even fewer have done so using Edward Said's concept of contrapuntal reading. Most studies on *Heart of Darkness* emphasize its racist depictions of Africa and the imperial mindset of the novella. Chinua Achebe has criticized the text for dehumanizing Africans, and for that reason, it has often been taught or read in a very negative light. There has been debate about whether Conrad was depicting the racist artificials of his time or if he was actually critiquing imperialism. This debate often focuses on race; however, language and gender as tools and reasons for othering are discussed less frequently. Although some recent research has explored how women are represented in *Heart of Darkness*, very few studies have examined whether European and African women are shown differently in the novella. Also, few studies have compared this with gender roles in *Things Fall Apart*. In the same way, *Things Fall Apart* is studied widely for its descriptive work of the Igbo society before and after the incursion of colonizers. Many literary experts shed light on how Achebe challenges Western stereotypes about Africa. However, scholarly research on *Things Fall Apart* generally focuses more on linguistic and cultural othering than on gender. While many scholars have talked about how the colonizers undermined the Igbo language, fewer researchers have examined how gender was used as a tool for othering. Achebe gives more importance to female characters than Conrad does. However, Igbo women are still often shown in traditional roles. Even though

Achebe gives space to women, still it raises significant questions. Apart from it, an area in the research that needs to be explored is the role of language in the process of othering.

In *Heart of Darkness*, the African characters are often mute or speak in a way that the Europeans consider them unintelligible. This is not a direct reflection of the actual languages spoken by the African characters, but more of what the Europeans view as the languages of barbaric peoples. Many scholars have criticized this aspect of the novella; however, very few studies have compared it to how Achebe presents language in *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe portrays the language of Igbo as meaningful and rich, but uses English, the colonizer's language to write the novel. Said's concept of contrapuntal reading have been widely used in several postcolonial studies, they have hardly been applied in a direct contrast of *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart*. This is a gap because the simultaneous reading of these two texts can reveal deeper understanding about the process of othering. For instance, Achebe carefully creates a detailed Igbo society in *Things Fall Apart*. While in *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad portrays Africa as a chaotic and unknown place. How the novel *Things Fall Apart* directly challenges the depiction of Africa in *Heart of Darkness* can be highlighted by doing a contrapuntal reading of these two texts. Finally, many studies focus on either race or gender, but not enough research has been conducted on how race and gender together shape the process of othering. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* negatively shows African women, while presenting European women in an idealized form. Meanwhile, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* depicts a role for women in Igbo society. However, it also portrays women who are, in some ways, expected to be as submissive to men.

Chapter 3

Reflection of British Empire: Unheard Voices, Linguistic Control, Gender Control, and

The Construction of The Other

3.1 Uncovering the unheard voices in *Heart of Darkness*

According to Edward Said, readers must look into the viewpoints of colonial and postcolonial texts through a contrapuntal reading. Even though Conrad, to some extent, criticizes the harsh reality of colonialism in *Heart of Darkness* through the characters Kurtz and Marlow, he also uses racist and dehumanizing imagery to undermine the Africans. In his book, *Culture and Imperialism*, Said states, “Contrapuntal reading must take account of both processes, that of imperialism and that of resistance to it...” (*Culture and Imperialism*, 66). In his book, he also talks about “Two Visions in the *Heart of Darkness*.” Said discusses how Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* can be interpreted through two different perspectives or dual readings. Contrapuntal reading draws attention to the divergent interpretations of colonialism in Joseph Conrad's novella. One reading supports the old colonial perspective by depicting the colonized people as “the other” and enhancing racial divisions and stereotypes. The other interpretation, anticolonial reading, challenges these stereotypes and reveals the negative aspects of imperialism. Through the characters Marlow and Kurtz, Conrad recognizes the autonomy of the colonized world. However, he does not entirely support envisioning its liberation or resistance by asserting that, “Conrad’s genius allowed him to realize that the ever-present darkness...had to be acknowledged as independent...But Marlow and Kurtz...cannot take the next step, which would be to recognize that what they saw...was in fact a non-European world resisting imperialism”

(*Culture and Imperialism* 69). This underlines the damaging effects of European dominance on African societies as well as the moral and ethical issues brought up by the colonial enterprise.

Moreover, the complexity of colonial experiences and their influence on literature is made clear by looking at it from two opposing viewpoints, one that upholds the conventional colonial narrative and the other that challenges it. However, Chinua Achebe has described the opposing sides of the novella and made us understand that the voices of the marginalized people were not heard in *Heart of Darkness*. Even Achebe criticizes Conrad's novella as a racist and dehumanizing work, which also serves as a reason for it to be an imperialist reading. African characters in *Heart of Darkness* are mostly portrayed negatively, making them seem less human, superstitious, and primitive than European characters. Conrad also portrays Africa in *Heart of Darkness* as enigmatic, barbaric, and mysterious, giving readers the incorrect impression that the continent is dark and appears to be "a blank space of delightful mystery or a place of darkness" (Conrad 43). The novella showcases how Europeans mostly saw Africa as a region of darkness and savagery in contrast to their own supposed superiority and civilization. Even though Africans have their own traditions, culture, and society, Marlow, the protagonist, portrays them as savages who are unaware of the notions of European civilization. Africans are displayed with all unpleasant, harmful, and darker aspects of life. This shows how Marlow symbolizes the region of the African "savage" people as a "heart" which is full of "darkness," and people like Marlow are the ones who aim to bring "light" to that "dark" place. Also, the novella lacks African voices and viewpoints, because the African characters in the narrative are seen through the eyes of Marlow, the story's European protagonist. This perpetuates a Eurocentric perception of Africa and the notion that Africans are objects rather than subjects. On the other hand, the second reading can also be said as a more complex and ambivalent aspect of *Heart of Darkness*.

Although the novella critiques some aspects of imperialism, it also includes elements that unintentionally support Eurocentric viewpoints and Orientalist preconceptions. This second reading helps readers acknowledge that, despite appearing to critique European colonialist biases and attitudes, Conrad's writings can also be seen as supporting them. Individuals such as Marlow and the European settlers in Africa see it as their duty to introduce "civilization" to the continent of "uncivilized" Africa.

Instead of sticking to one narrow interpretation, Said's critique challenges us to consider the variety of voices and viewpoints that colonial literature can represent. Marlow intentionally ignores or silences the voices of African indigenous people and other Europeans to shape the story based on his own perspective and experiences. So, we can interpret that Marlow is selectively choosing what to listen to and what to tell, which might not accurately represent the complete reality of the situation. Contrapuntal reading of Conrad's novella demonstrates how he both criticized and defended colonialism. Even though he has shown the dark sides of imperialism, their greed and cruelty, it still showed Africa as a land that has no history, voice or culture. "...Rendered fearlessly and pessimistically the self-confirming, self-deluding corruption of overseas domination, but also was deeply reactionary when it came to conceding that Africa or South America could ever have had an independent history or culture..." (*Culture and Imperialism* 31). This highlights the contradiction in *Heart of Darkness*; despite Conrad exposing the dishonest and corrupt nature of colonialism, he was still unable to imagine colonized lands like Africa or South America having their own liberated culture and histories beyond the European power's influence. In *Heart of Darkness* Africa is not portrayed as a real, inhabited place with its history, culture and people. Conrad's Africa, instead, is a symbolic continent shaped by imperialist ideologies. The novella becomes an organic piece of the imperial

system because it mirrors and reinforces Europe's perception of Africa, not as a place full of independent societies, but as a dark and enigmatic space. By erasing the complexity of colonized cultures and reducing them to mere backdrops for European stories, literature can perpetuate imperial views even when it seems to criticize the British Empires. Conrad does expose the greed and violence of imperialism and understands its brutality to some extent. However, he is unable to imagine a world beyond it. He believes that Africans, apart from European control, are not capable of having full humanity or self-rule. We must read both what is stated and what is not stated. Even though Conrad criticizes the British Empire, he is unable to escape from the colonial mindset that regards Africans as peripheral and Europeans as central.

3.2 Use of language as a weapon to control non-Western voices

In *Heart of Darkness*, language is used as a powerful tool to demonstrate the differences between the Europeans and the Africans. The language English is used by Joseph Conrad not only to tell the story but to use it as a powerful tool to suppress African voices. Conrad uses several methods to achieve this, and one of the primary methods Conrad uses to dominate the language is by rendering native African speech. He silences or distorts it so that it is either incomprehensible or voiceless to the European people. This denial of the African voice serves as a potent metaphor for colonial control. The novella's narrator, Marlow, rarely allows African characters to speak. When they speak, their speech is described as strange or as language that has no meaning. For example, Marlow says, "They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours..." (Conrad 42). When Marlow acknowledges the Africans as human, he distinguishes them from Europeans by saying "like yours," as if it is shocking to him that they are also human. Marlow admits that he is

unable to comprehend the ways of the Africans and he calls their speech, “A violent babble of uncouth sounds burst out on the other side of the planks” (Conrad 23). Marlow refers to the African language as “babble,” making it seem meaningless and almost animalistic. When Marlow notices several sick Africans resting in the forest, he asserts that, “Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees leaning against the trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light....nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation” (Conrad 20). This illustrates a deep kind of language-based othering, in which African characters are reduced to racialized separation and stripped of their individuality through their linguistic choices. In this novella, Africans are also portrayed as ghostly, weak entities, figures that lack voice and interiority by being referred to as mere “shapes” and “shadows”.

Language is used by Conrad not only to dominate but also to depict and dehumanize. The Africans in *Heart of Darkness* are constructed as the racialized, silent background against which European identity is defined, and they are not permitted entry into the realm of humanity or subjectivity through their own language. The African characters in the novella are mostly described in vague and animalistic terms. For example, Marlow describes his relationship with the native man saying, “to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind legs” (Conrad 43). The comparison here to an animal is a clear and explicit act of “othering” through dehumanization. Rather than articulating their thoughts, perspectives, or emotions, the Africans are often presented by Conrad through dehumanizing or indistinct sound imagery. Conrad's language makes the Africans seem different and wild, framing them as difficult to understand. For instance “They shouted periodically together strings of amazing words that resembled no sounds of human language; and the deep murmurs of the crowd, interrupted suddenly, were like the responses of some satanic litany”

(Conrad 78). African speech is marked as both sinister and alien when it is compared to “satanic chants”. Conrad rejects their language instead of trying to understand or translate them. He separates their speech from the domain of humanity or reason. This representation linguistically detaches and “others” the Africans by denying them any claim to rational discourse. There are scenes where Africans are silenced by the narrative, even when they are physically present. For example, one dying African was trying to talk and Marlow imagine that he would speak something “in an understandable language, but the man passes away without uttering a sound, I declare it looked as though he would presently put to us some questions in an understandable language; but he died without uttering a sound, without moving a limb, without twitching a muscle” (Conrad 54). African speech in this scene is symbolically denied. The colonial idea that Africans have nothing to say or that what they could say has no worth in the colonial narrative is reinforced when the man dies as he was about to speak.

In contrast, despite their horrific actions, European characters like Kurtz are praised for their language. Marlow says of Kurtz, “The man presented himself as a voice” (Conrad 54). In Marlow’s eyes, Kurtz is admirable because of his ability to speak, despite his brutality and madness. Marlow even defends Kurtz by saying, “There was something wanting in me—I don’t know what. But I had not the strength to stand the awful frankness of that noise” (Conrad 67). Kurtz is referred to as a “voice,” that represents the colonial monopoly on narrative power and language: “The point was in his being a gifted creature, and that of all his gifts the one that stood out preeminently...was his ability to talk, his words—the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible” (Conrad 55). Conrad perpetuates a linguistic hierarchy by giving Kurtz such a commanding voice while rejecting speech to the Africans surrounding him. In this hierarchy, Europeans define and speak reality while Africans

are just silent objects within it. “Kurtz’s final words, “The horror! The horror!” (Conrad 81) are seen as profound and meaningful, whereas African expressions are disregarded. This portrays how language is used as a tool of colonial power to strengthen the ideological division between “us,” who are the civilized, speaking Europeans, and “them,” who are the silent, uncivilized, and barbaric others. Colonizers muted the colonized, giving them the impression that they have no capability of thinking or speaking for themselves. Thus, the reflection of Africans in *Heart of Darkness* supports the colonial notion that Africans must be controlled to make them “civilized,” just like the “Europeans” who are well-mannered and civilized. In addition to their physical suppression, Conrad creates a world in which Europeans are only able to speak meaningfully. Edward Said notes that Conrad’s narrative “does not grant the natives their freedom, despite his severe critique of the imperialism that enslaved them” (*Culture and Imperialism* 69-70). Colonial domination uses language both as a wound and as a weapon.

3.3 Cultural representation and colonial gaze in *Heart of Darkness*

African culture is portrayed in Conrad’s novella as dangerous, primitive, and mysterious. The title of the novella itself, “*Heart of Darkness*,” implies that Africa is a land full of terror and chaos. Throughout the novella, there are a lot of things that are strongly engaged in cultural othering. Marlow states, “We live in the flicker, may it last as long as the old earth keeps rolling! But darkness was here yesterday” (Conrad 8). This creates a binary where Africa is viewed as dark, backward, and ancient compared to Europe, and Europe is considered progressive and a symbol of light. Europeans presented Africa as a dark land where Europeans deal with madness, rather than as a continent full of people and beautiful traditions. The novella portrays Africa as a place of chaos rather than culture. It symbolizes Africa as a backdrop for the moral decay of Europeans. Marlow describes it as “the heart of an immense darkness” (Conrad 91). This

references both the jungle and how Europeans viewed African life as dangerous, and wild. “A haze rested on the low shores...a brooding gloom...the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth” (Conrad 6) referring to London, which is the center of imperial power “and this also,” said Marlow suddenly, “has been one of the dark places of the earth” (Conrad 7). Ironically, Marlow calls London the center of civilization, a “dark place”. This suggests that “darkness” is not only exclusive to Africa but also exists in the civilized world. Later, the narrative saves “true darkness” for Africa and links it with moral decline and primitiveness. Africa is presented as a savage and dark land in need of European “light”. “They shouted, sang; their bodies streamed with perspiration; they had faces like grotesque masks—these chaps...” (Conrad 17). Africans here are characterised as energetic, but in dehumanizing words such as “grotesque masks”. This reduces Africans to strange objects of exotic curiosity. This also denies them rationality or individuality, which are key elements of Western identity.

The African land and its people are portrayed as a part of an untamed and wild place throughout the novella. Marlow describes the Congo river “...resembling an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea, its body at rest curving afar over a vast country, and its tail lost in the depths of the land” (Conrad 10), giving the landscape a threatening and evil feel. “A burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping... The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us—who could tell?” (Conrad 42). Conrad suggests they are a less developed part of nature rather than civilization by referring to them as “prehistoric men.” In this way, they are framed as fundamentally “other”. In the novella, Africans are frequently shown as part of the landscape, mostly like the animals and the trees. For instance, Marlow sees a group of African people and says, “Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees... bundles of acute angles...deathlike indifference of unhappy savages” (Conrad 20-21). Africans are constantly

described as savages rather than as individuals; they are dehumanized in the entire novella and referred to as “black shapes” and “bundles.” Due to this, they are considered less than human and are shown as a part of the environment, just like animals, plants, etc. Addressing them as “savages” suggests that their civilization and culture are inferior to European standards in terms of civility, structure, and value. A European accountant becomes resentful toward Africans because they obstruct his bureaucratic activities. Deep racist and dehumanizing words are used to consistently describe and address Africans.

They are also referred to as “Strings of dusty niggers with splay feet arrived and departed...” (Conrad 22). They are described as laboring animals and defined by physical stereotypes, which further serves their perceived inferiority and usefulness only as laborers. On the other hand, European culture is described as superior and advanced. The Europeans arrived in Africa intending to bring light and civilization to the dark landscape. However, the novella shows that this mission was unsuccessful. The character Kurtz, who came to “civilize” the Africans, became mad and aggressive. He writes, “Exterminate all the brutes!” (Conrad 58), showing how dangerous and hypocritical the mission of the Europeans really is. According to Edward Said’s theory of contrapuntal reading, we should examine how both colonizers and the colonized are portrayed in colonial literature. Although in *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad criticizes imperialism to a certain level; he still views African culture through a colonial lens. In the novella, Africa is never portrayed as a place with its own values, systems, or beliefs. Even though Conrad exposes how foolish and greedy European imperialism is, he still views the world through a European lens. He is therefore unable to imagine that the people in colonized nations, like in Latin America or Africa, have their own rich culture, histories, and dreams. Despite Conrad’s criticism of imperialism, he still lacks understanding and respect for the lives of the

colonized people. Said points out the fact that Conrad shows the West as having complete authority over the world, he asserts, "All Conrad can see is a world totally dominated by the Atlantic West, in which every opposition to the West only confirms the West's wicked power...What Conrad cannot see is an alternative to this cruel tautology" (*Culture and Imperialism* 21), even when individuals oppose the West, that opposition still proves how influential the West is. It is like a trap where no matter what happens, the Westerners are the ones who always win. Conrad cannot imagine a world where colonized people liberate themselves and build their own future.

3.4 The negative representation of race and women

In *Heart of Darkness*, African women are presented as voiceless and exotic, while European women are depicted as ideal and innocent. Marlow's attitude towards women exposes reductive and paternalistic perspectives that support gender othering. Marlow, early in the novella, asserts, "It's queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there has never been anything like it, and never can be" (Conrad 15). This statement not only relegates women to a distinct, illusory realm but also dismisses their understanding of reality. Marlow justifies excluding women from action and knowledge by suggesting that their grasp on truth would break under reality. Marlow's comment reflects the colonial notion that both women and "natives" must be shielded from the truth. In this novella, there are two significant female characters. One is Kurtz's fiancée, a European woman who waits for him in Europe. The other woman, who is mysterious and powerful, appears in the jungle near his station is Kurtz's African mistress. "She came forward, all in black with a pale head, floating toward me in the dusk...She had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering" (Conrad 86). Unlike African women, Kurtz's European fiancée is presented as pure, loyal, and is treated as a real

person with deep emotions. This distinction reveals how African women are objectified and silenced, while European women are idealized. To protect her illusion, Marlow tells her a lie about Kurtz's last words. Kurtz's African mistress, however, is a powerful and silent presence. When Marlow sees the African mistress, he states, "She stood looking at us without a stir and like the wilderness itself, with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose" (Conrad 71). This is an instance where the woman is compared to the silent, mysterious, and wild jungle.

Additionally, Marlow describes the African mistress as: "savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress" (Conrad 71). The African woman does not have a voice in the novella. Even though her beauty is appreciated, she is portrayed as a symbol of the wilderness rather than a human being. This difference between the representation of European and African women is both racial and gender "othering". African women are seen as exotic and less human. In contrast, Europeans are viewed as delicate human beings needing protection. The differences made between these two female characters are directly pointed out by Chinua Achebe. He criticized *Heart of Darkness* for this difference. African women are reduced to symbols and denied speech, whereas European women are allowed to speak and express feelings. Achebe stated, "The difference in the attitude of the novelist to these two women is conveyed in too many direct and subtle ways to need elaboration. But perhaps the most significant difference is the one implied in the author's bestowal of human expression to the one and the withholding of it from the other" ("An Image of Africa" 19). This is a powerful criticism of how Conrad uses language to belittle and dehumanize African women. The African mistress is presented as a symbolic and visual figure representing danger and desire, but is never granted interiority or voice.

Colonialism frequently silenced women, particularly women of color. “On the other side of the international division of labor, the subject of exploitation cannot know and speak the text of female exploitation, even if the absurdity of the non-representative intellectual making space for her to speak is achieved. The woman is doubly in shadow” (Spivak 84). This emphasizes the “subaltern” idea of Gayatri Spivak, which denotes the colonized, particularly women who are unable to speak and express themselves within the colonial system. For example, African women, we see their existence not as humans, but as symbols who do not have the ability to tell their own story. Another example of reinforcing gender othering is revealed through Marlow’s description of two women knitting black wool in the company's office. He notes, “She seemed uncanny and fateful. Often far away there I thought of these two, guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool as for a warm pall” (Conrad 13). These women are presented as passive representations of doom rather than individuals, despite being silent and unnamed. Marlow defends keeping women ignorant from understanding the colonial realities by stating, “We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse” (Conrad 56). This displays gendered othering by assigning women a distinct, idealized mental space that is not connected to truth or action. Instead of confronting women with reality, men want to “protect” them. This perpetuates women’s marginal position in moral or political decision-making. The way women are treated in this novella shows how colonial thinking impacted not just gender, but also race.

Chapter 4

The Multiple Layers of Othering in Colonial and Postcolonial Narratives

4.1 Unveiling the dynamics of othering through a contrapuntal perspective

If we bring *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart* into direct conversation, using the method of contrapuntal reading, we will understand how one novella speaks from the center of imperial power and the other novel responds to it from the margins. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* itself is a resistance to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Achebe responds to Conrad's novella by presenting a counter-narrative to the misinterpretations of colonialism. Edward Said mentions, "reading a text not univocally but contrapuntally, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts" (*Culture and Imperialism* 96) by using this method *Things Fall Apart* becomes a response to Conrad's novella that stereotyped and silenced Africans. Achebe has been praised for his novel *Things Fall Apart* for being a great example of resistance towards imperial narratives. Conrad has presented Africans in *Heart of Darkness* as backward and uncivilized, Achebe challenges this representation by telling the story from the Igbo people's perspective. To reverse the colonial othering, Achebe's key strategy used in *Things Fall Apart* is language. Achebe provides Igbo characters with a complex and deep voice, in contrast to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which dehumanizes Africans by making them voiceless and portrays them as mere shadows. The culture of the Igbo people is not portrayed as savage, same as the way Conrad showed, but is shown as full of tradition and wisdom.

For instance, the use of Igbo proverbs to convey themselves: “Proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten” (*Things Fall Apart* 7). This line highlights the rich communication and oral wisdom traditions of the Igbo society. Through showing the richness of the Igbo culture, Achebe challenges Conrad’s view on African society as uncivilized or uncultured. Moreover, Achebe has given African characters a depth which mainly was denied to African characters in colonial literature like Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. For example, Okonkwo, the protagonist of *Things Fall Apart*, is not a native or flat figure, but he is a man who is driven by fear, pride, and a desire to gain success within his society. His father’s failure to act like a man and cultural expectations have shaped Okonkwo; he “was ruled by one passion—to hate everything that his father Unoka had loved” (*Things Fall Apart* 13). Furthermore, Achebe presents the religion of African people as powerful and sacred, but not superstitious, as labelled by the white missionaries. The narrator clearly shows that the people deeply feel intruded when the missionaries mock and make fun of the Igbo Gods. In chapter twenty-two of *Things Fall Apart*, one of the European missionaries, Mr. Smith is described as viewing “things as black and white...He saw the world as a battlefield in which the children of light were locked in mortal conflict with the sons of darkness” (*Things Fall Apart* 155). Here, Achebe reveals how colonial ideology devalued African belief systems and used binary oppositions like civilized vs. savage, light vs. dark, to legitimize dominance. As we know, contrapuntal reading tells us to consider both the process of imperialism and its resistance. This is done by expanding our reading of the colonial literatures and including the things that were once forcefully excluded and ignored.

The complexity and humanity of African life were excluded and ignored in European novellas like *Heart of Darkness*. In response, Achebe includes what Conrad excluded by portraying how the Igbo worship deals with conflict. Their customs and gods are part of a

deep-held worldview, hence they are not irrational. For example, when Nwoye, Okonkwo's son, questions the traditional customs, such as the killing of twins, this portrays not savagery but moral reflection. "It was not the mad logic of the trinity that captivated him. He did not understand it. It was the poetry of the new religion" (*Things Fall Apart* 127). This reflects how people are capable of qualities like growth, self-awareness, and change that were often denied to them by colonial writers. The European characters in *Heart of Darkness* view themselves as the heroes for the African people who bring light to them on a dark continent. Achebe flips this narrative around by portraying how the arrival of the colonizers led to cultural confusion, destruction and suicide rather than salvation. *Things Fall Apart* has a tragic ending when Okonkwo hangs himself after realizing that his people will not fight the white man. This ending foreshadows the fall of not only one man but an entire way of life. If we look into it from a contrapuntal perspective, we can see that *Things Fall Apart* speaks directly to the imperial canon instead of existing in isolation. Chinua Achebe's novel can be seen as a direct response to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Achebe in his essay "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" criticized Conrad's novella, calling it "a book which parades in the most vulgar fashion prejudices and insults about Africa" ("An Image of Africa" 23). Therefore, *Things Fall Apart* reclaims the power to narrate while challenging the way the West depicted Africa.

4.2 Colonial voices and counter voices: language as a site of power and resistance

Chinua Achebe, in *Things Fall Apart* shows how colonialism not only imposed linguistic othering as a path to marginalize the culture and identity of African but also dominated their lands and bodies. The suppression of the Igbo language in Achebe's novel is not only a side-effect of colonialism but a strategy used intentionally to render the native people voiceless

and inferior. Similarly, Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* denied African people the right to speak. There are many instances in *Things Fall Apart* that reflect the oppression done in the native African by the British missionaries. Achebe exposes in his novel how indigenous knowledge systems were underestimated by the colonial authorities' language imposition. For example, the British missionaries, when they first arrived, refused to learn Igbo or translate the complexity of Igbo customs fully. Instead, they presented English as the only and best way of communicating. The more tolerant missionary, Mr. Brown, "made friends with some of the great men of the clan... He said that the leaders of the land in the future would be men and women who had learned to read and write...He went from family to family begging people to send their children to his school" (*Things Fall Apart* 152-153). Mr Brown's action of encouraging people to learn English and go to his school suggests he believes the key to success is to get an education in English. Although Mr Brown seems tolerant, his emphasis on learning English mirrors an underlying sense of linguistic superiority. The narrator notes: "Mr Smith was greatly distressed by the ignorance which many of his flock showed...He saw things as black and white. And black was evil" (*Things Fall Apart* 155). Through this, Mr Smith highlights the rigid colonial worldview, in which the colonizers consider themselves as virtuous and the Igbo people as evil because their skin color is dark.

Moreover, the Igbo language and its speakers, apart from being misunderstood, are consciously redefined in colonial terms. Similarly, in *Heart of Darkness*, the reflection of Africans supports the colonial notion that Africans must be controlled to make them "civilized," just like the "Europeans" who think that they are the only well-mannered and civilized beings on earth. Additionally, Conrad uses language as a tool for silencing African people. African

characters in *Heart of Darkness* mostly have no voice of their own. They are described by using dehumanizing and vague terms like “uncouth sounds”, “black shape”, or “shadows”. The voices of the African people are pushed into the background as the European narrator of this novella, Marlow, controls the narrative. When speaking their language, African people are shown as incomprehensible and a “violent babble.” In contrast, Achebe, through *Things Fall Apart*, represents African people in their own voice by aiming to reclaim the ability to speak. *Things Fall Apart* is a counter-narrative that challenges how Africa was traditionally portrayed as backward, silent, and passive in the novella *Heart of Darkness*. Achebe does use English to write the novel but he incorporates it with Igbo idiom, proverbs and oral traditions to demonstrate that the African language is not inferior rather it contains great meaning. Through this process, Achebe reclaims the space of the narrative and defies the British Empire's linguistic domination. Achebe once stated in his essay “English and the African Writer,” “I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings” (“English and the African Writer” 349).

Also, he added, “I have been given this language and I intend to use it” (“English and the African Writer” 348). For Achebe, the English language can be used as a tool for creativity, communication, and resistance. The silencing of the African people is depicted by Achebe when the perspective of the native was refused by the white men when they built their court system. Also, the Igbo worldview is seen as incomprehensible and not worth documenting fully by the District Commissioner. He declares towards the end of the narrative that he may include only a paragraph about Okonkwo in his own book, *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower*

Niger, “one could almost write a whole chapter on him. Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph at any rate” (*Things Fall Apart* 172). This encapsulates the notion that marginalized voices, especially those of colonized targets, are structurally denied the chance to be heard on their own way within patriarchal and colonial power systems. This shows how the District Commissioner denied Okonkwo’s linguistic agency and his story by reducing his entire life only into a “reasonable paragraph.” This is similar to how Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* denied the African people’s linguistic agency. Conrad was unable to view that Africa and its people also had a culture and life with integrity, which was not completely under the imperialists’ control. They had their own voice and could speak, but imperialism denied their voice and did not allow it to be heard. Achebe directly challenges this in *Things Fall Apart* by including the existence of African people and their lives. The novel shows that long before colonization, African nations did have complex legal, spiritual, and linguistic systems. However, these systems were suppressed through violence and a calculated rejection of meaning and language. Achebe breaks the colonial monopoly on representation by forcing the English language to carry African meaning.

4.3 Cultural encounter and the colonial rewriting of Igbo identity in *Things Fall Apart*

Things Fall Apart and *Heart of Darkness* both texts expose the cultural division between the colonizer and the colonized, but in different ways. Africa in *Heart of Darkness* is portrayed as a backdrop of darkness and is depicted as a land without civilization, rationality and structure. In this novella beliefs, cultural practices of African people are not present, deliberately ignored and misunderstood. Achebe, on the other hand, reveals an organized and vivid Igbo society in his novel *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe shows Igbo community’s law, justice, religion, family

structures, storytelling, and rituals. Whereas, Conrad did not give any priority to African culture. He talked about and mentioned all the norms and customs of Europe, making African culture inferior. Whatever Conrad mentioned about African people was from the perspective of colonial lenses, which was not criticized. Achebe critiqued the colonial gaze that belittled and dismissed the cultures of indigenous people as “primitive.” For example, Mr. Smith’s unyielding worldview of seeing things as black and white exposes Igbo traditions as inherently evil. The dominant imperial narrative that marked African societies as inferior, backward and irrational, Achebe writes against it. Achebe exposes how culture becomes a crucial battleground in colonial conquest through the Igbo peoples story and the entry of British colonizers. The way cultural othering is done in *Heart of Darkness*, Achebe also shows othering of Igbo culture in *Things Fall Apart* by showing how Igbo customs were ridiculed and misinterpreted by the colonial administrators and missionaries.

These missionaries view the Igbo culture through the lens of European superiority rather than trying to understand it on its own terms. The District Commissioner, for instance, arrogantly states while symbolizing colonial authority, “We have brought a peaceful administration to you and your people so that you may be happy” (*Things Fall Apart* 162). This statement disregards the fact that the Igbo society already has sophisticated religion, governance and justice systems of their own. In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad showed how the West established itself through disparaging of the East, echoing this erasure of culture. Likewise, in *Things Fall Apart*, the Igbo civilization has been “made African” and portrayed as irrational, exotic and in need of Western correction according to the colonizers. The way the missionaries dismissed Igbo religion is a clear example of cultural othering. The villagers tried to explain their beliefs, practices and gods when the missionaries first arrived, but they laughed at them and called them stupid. For

example, a white man said, “Your gods are not alive and cannot do you any harm, they are pieces of wood and stone” (*Things Fall Apart* 126) and through this he directly mocked Igbo peoples beliefs that guided them on the right path for generations. “Evil men and all the heathens who in their blindness bowed to wood and stone were thrown into a fire that burned like palm-oil” (*Things Fall Apart* 125). This reflects that the white missionary condemned the traditional religion as “blind” and “evil”. This also compares indigenous worship to idols by disregarding its significance in the local culture. Moreover, when the white missionary criticized spiritual practices of Igbo, particularly about the treatment of ogbanje children is another reflection of cultural othering. This indicates a refusal to acknowledge the validity of spiritual systems of African people. By addressing the Igbo people as “primitive” or “pagans,” the colonizers pretend to understand them truly.

Additionally, the arrival of Western and Christian education acts to replace Igbo culture. For instance, Mr. Brown, nevertheless a more respected person than others, exhorts the people to abandon their own customs. He says, “The leaders of the land in the future will be men and women who have learned to read and write” (*Things Fall Apart* 154). Here, rituals, communal knowledge, and oral traditions are considered useless, while literacy in English is considered a symbol of development and growth. This also mirrors the colonial attitude towards the Igbo people in *Things Fall Apart*, where the white missionaries and the administrators reject Igbo traditions and call it inferior. The missionaries do this as justification to impose their rules, norms, religion and European governance. Through this process Indigenous cultures were marked as primitive and superstitious, to justify colonialism as a mission of civilization. The internal cultural crisis caused by colonialism is also shown in Achebe's novel. Okonkwo's son, Nwoye, for example is drawn towards Christianity because he felt an emotional disconnection

with the violent and harsh rituals of his own culture. “Something had given way inside him. It descended on him again, this feeling, when his father beat him, and again when Ikemefuna was killed” (*Things Fall Apart* 52). This conversion of Nwoye reveals how colonialism broke apart identities and families. Achebe, however portrays this not as a simple liberation but as a complex process. This questions the idea of colonialism that European culture and religion were more moral or superior. The victim of cultural othering is even the protagonist Okonkwo himself. In a world that is continuously changing due to colonial rule, Okonkwo’s inflexible dedication to conventional values becomes the reason for his downfall. The ultimate insult emerges when the District Commissioner reduces Okonkwo’s complicated life and death to a basic footnote in a colonial book. Said addresses this silencing: “They were capable of speaking, but imperialism did not allow them to be heard” (*Culture and Imperialism* 17). Achebe’s whole novel is an effort to recover African people from the borders of history and an attempt to make the excluded or ignored voices heard.

4.4 Marginalization of women in *Things Fall Apart* and *Heart of Darkness*

Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart*, through a deeply patriarchal Igbo culture shows that women are connected with weakness and excluded from decision-making tasks. In *Heart of Darkness*, European women like Kurtz’s fiancée are idealized, but the African mistress is exoticized. Both of these women are denied agency and their own voice. The European woman is protected from reality and kept in ignorance. This binary, where white women are seen as innocent beings who embody purity, while black women are oversexualized and viewed as mysterious beings, reinforcing gender and racial hierarchies. All around the novella, the attitude of the protagonist Marlow towards women reveals reductive and paternalistic perspectives that

support gender othering. In contrast, we realize from the start of the *Things Fall Apart*, anything that is associated with femininity is seen as weak, but masculinity is praised. Conrad gives some attention to European women while keeping the African women totally ignorant. While comparing women in both texts, Spivak's concept of double marginalization helps to show how both race and the British Empire silenced women in *Heart of Darkness*, and how women in *Things Fall Apart* went through both colonial oppression and cultural patriarchy. This demonstrates how women's voices are ignored from multiple directions. Nevertheless, Achebe apart from showing the patriarchal system undermining femininity, he also gives attention to his Igbo society's African women. He portrays their strength, such as the talent of Ezinma and the resilience of Ekwefi. Unlike Conrad who sometimes idealized European women and gave symbolic importance and special recognition, Achebe does not praise or give significance to any European women. Achebe, in fact, rarely mentions any white women or gives them any admiration the way Conrad did. Achebe primarily focuses on the African characters and setting and European women are not present in his political and cultural center of the narrative. Achebe notes that, even as a child, Ezinma is intelligent and wise. She behaves and demonstrates maturity like an adult. She helps Okonkwo's older wife by building a fire herself. "Ezinma went outside and brought some sticks from a huge bundle of firewood. She broke them into little pieces across the sole of her foot and began to build a fire" (*Things Fall Apart* 36). This reflects Ezinma's independence and a skill uncommon in children. Also, Ezinma understands Okonkwo's mood better than anyone else: "among Okonkwo's all children, Ezinma alone understood his every mood" (*Things Fall Apart* 148). This understanding of emotions is emotional intelligence, another form of talent that Ezinma has. Achebe speaks about the resilience of Ekwefi as a mother by showing us how she "had suffered a good deal in her life. She had borne ten children and nine

of them had died in infancy, usually before the age of three. Of all her children only Ezinma, the tenth, had lived,” (*Things Fall Apart* 66) through this Achebe shows her determination to stay strong despite facing repeated loss. Achebe also highlights her tolerance through pain, and her fearlessness to challenge tradition and fear for the sake of her child Ezinma. Ekwefi’s resilience is also evident when the priestess Chielo told her that Agbala wanted to see Ezinma immediately. Ekwefi, hearing this, became frightened of losing her only child and followed Chielo all night through the forest even after being advised not to follow her. Ekwefi “swore within her that if she heard Ezinma cry she would rush into the cave to defend her against all the gods in the world. She would die with her” (*Things Fall Apart* 93). This shows how much Ekwefi loved Ezinma that she was even ready to die for her. She feared for Ezinma’s safety in the dark forest, and faced many obstacles throughout her way, but did not give up, because Ezinma was everything to her and she could not lose her and needed to protect her at any cost.

The main character, Okonkwo views fear as weak like his father and is obsessed with strength. Achebe states

Even as a little boy he had resented his father's failure and weakness, and even now he still remembered how he had suffered when a playmate had told him that his father was Agbala. That was how Okonkwo first came to know that Agbala was not only another name for a woman, it could also mean a man who had taken no title (*Things Fall Apart* 12-13).

This linguistic use of the word Agbala is an insult which is equated with womanhood and weakness. According to Okonkwo, being associated with women or femininity is something that should be avoided and feared. Achebe also shows how men punish and physically control

women. For example, even in a sacred week of peace, Okonkwo beats his youngest wife for being late to prepare his meal. "His first two wives ran out in great alarm pleading with him that it was the sacred week. But Okonkwo was not the man to stop beating somebody half-way through, not even for fear of a goddess" (*Things Fall Apart* 26) this act of violence reflects not only the normalized domination of women but also a personal failure of character. The fact that there is lack of severe punishment for this offence demonstrates how women's pain and struggles are dismissed and minimized. Even though Okonkwo is fond of Ezinma's intelligence, her potential is still limited by Okonkwo only because she is a girl. It is reflected when Ezinma offers to carry Okonkwo's chair: "Can I bring your chair for you? Okonkwo replies: No, that is a boy's job" (*Things Fall Apart* 38). Ezinma is not treated equally like a son despite her knowledge, strength and love to her father. In fact, Okonkwo wishes that Ezinma were a boy. This wish is devastating regardless of her capabilities, because it suggests that Ezinma's value is lessened simply because of her gender. The exchange of women like property is another visible example of gender othering. When a neighbouring clan killed a woman from Umofia, the conflict was settled by handing over another woman instead of diplomacy or justice as compensation: "It was decided...that the girl should go to Ogbuefi Udo to replace his murdered wife" (*Things Fall Apart* 12). The neglect for women's autonomy is reflected by this replacement of one woman with another, as if she were just an object. In *Heart of Darkness* Conrad does not provide any voice to African women. They are given only a certain level of praise or importance. It is visible when only the beauty of them is appreciated, but are portrayed as a mere symbol of the wilderness rather than a human being. This difference between the representation of European and African Women denotes gender "othering". African women are seen as exotic beings and less human. In contrast, European Women are seen as delicate human

beings who need to be protected. In *Things Fall Apart*, a significant part of Igbo culture is also gendered.

Nyowe is told stories of “land and masculine stories of violence and bloodshed” (*Things Fall Apart* 45) by Okonkwo. However, Nyowe “still preferred the stories that his mother used to tell...stories of the tortoise and his wily ways, and of the bird Eneke-nti-oba who challenged the whole world to a wrestling contest and was finally thrown by the cat..but now he knew they were for foolish women and children” (*Things Fall Apart* 45). The stories told by Okonkwo reflect bravery and masculine values, but the stories told by Nyowe’s mother are viewed by Igbo culture as childish and feminine. This also reflects how female voices are given less importance is reflected by this internalized rejection of women’s narratives. Okonkwo says, “This meeting is for men, to the man who had contradicted him had no titles,” (*Things Fall Apart* 24) through this Okonkwo equates not occupying or having a title with being a woman, suggesting that respect and authority are only male domains. Okonkwo’s sister and mother did enough hard work to grow women’s crops “like coco-yams, beans and cassava. Yam, the king of crops, was a man’s crop,” (*Things Fall Apart* 21). This reflects how labor is also gendered. Agricultural work done by women is viewed as secondary, whereas male doing it particularly yam cultivation is a symbol of masculinity, power and status. “Do what you are told, woman; Okonkwo thundered. When did you become one of the ndichie of Umuofia?” (*Things Fall Apart* 13) this aggressive command by Okonkwo reflects how women are excluded from decision-making and are expected to be obedient and silent. Okonkwo even shouts at Ezinma and tells her to “sit like a woman” (*Things Fall Apart* 38). Through this he demands that Ezinma his daughter conform to submissive, and physical behaviours related to femininity. Also, women are largely left out from political decision-making. The elders, who have the highest authority, are all men and village

meetings are only attended by men. Women are neither consulted nor welcomed to any type of meeting, regardless of their experience. So, Conrad in his novella *Heart of Darkness* portrays gender othering through racial and imperial binaries. Whereas, Achebe portrays marginalization of female gender in his novel through internal patriarchy, enabling readers to see the profound inequalities ingrained in the culture. Achebe, even in a system that aims to silence women, provides voice to the characters like Ezinma and Ekwefi, alludes to the significance and resilience of women by. Both texts depict women as marginalized. Though, *Things Fall Apart* offers glimpses of female critique and agency, *Heart of Darkness* does not.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This thesis through implementing Edward Said's method contrapuntal reading has examined how *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart* demonstrate the process of othering. It looked at the ways in which language, culture and gender are employed as tools of representation and power. In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad presents Europeans as the one who occupies the position of rationality and superiority. In contrast, Conrad portrayed Africa as inferior, and as an empty place covered in darkness. Achebe, on the other hand, breaks this perception by providing a nuanced and detailed vision of Igbo society, bringing its human struggles, conflicts and traditions alive. Achebe by placing African voices, struggles and culture at the center of his novel, regains narrative authority. Through doing a contrapuntal reading of these two texts exposes how colonial writing both silences and generates resistance, creating a space where competing histories collide. Language is another tool that plays a vital role in the process of disrupting. Conrad's narrative, by making African characters seem fearful or strange, hides their voices. Achebe through mixing Igbo proverbs and idioms with English challenges the presumed authority of European expression. Achebe's use of language this way works as a medium of reclaiming colonial power. Culture also plays a role in othering, Africa is presented by Conrad as uncivilized in *Heart of Darkness*, but in *Things Fall Apart* Achebe proclaims the richness of Igbo community life, religion and festivals. Another difference is highlighted by gender. In *Heart of Darkness* Conrad rather than presenting women like Kurtz's fiancée and mistress as agents of history, he makes them appear as symbolic figures. Achebe, in contrast, though still within the patriarchal system, presents a more intricate picture, with female characters like Ezinma and

Ekwefi showing resilience within traditional norms. By reading these two texts simultaneously, we can see that narratives are not fixed and that they can be questioned and re-read. Achebe's work challenges the silence present in Conrad's work and offers a counterpoint to it rather than erasing it. Conrad silencing the African people in his novella exposes the power of representation, whereas Achebe's novel proves the significance of regaining African voices. In the end, this thesis demonstrates that contrapuntal reading supports the strength of cultural identity apart from only exposing the mechanisms of colonial othering. Achebe's work corrects the shadows left by Conrad and it brings Africa back into the history of literature. The process of othering, though prevalent, is not permanent, it can be fought, challenged and rewritten. Therefore, literature is both a site of hope and struggle, where voices that are silenced find expression and where history itself can be reimagined.

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