



Reader's Responses of the Colonized Land in *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad

Sonya Suciati Bedihardjo

English Department, Andalas University, Indonesia

email: <http://sonya.student.sasingunand@gmail.com>

Ferdinal

English Department, Andalas University, Indonesia

email: ferdinal@hum.unand.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study discusses colonialism in Africa in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. It aims to study readers' responses regarding colonialism in the novella. The research uses a reader's response approach applying David Bleich's theory and the postcolonial theory of literary criticism of Edward Said. The methods of collecting data include spreading questionnaires to local officials and library research. The investigation also uses thematic analysis, which identifies, analyzes, and interprets patterns of the data collected from the respondents. This research reveals that everyone has their own opinion and broad view of colonialism. In the readers' responses to *Heart of Darkness*, the readers show that they are against colonialism and judge this work as a work that describes colonialism.

Keywords: reader response, colonialism, theme

INTRODUCTION

Some literary works talk about the colonialism of certain countries where some colonial governments applied their power and technology to other countries. Colonialism relates to the movement of migrants from one area to another and become permanent residents or settle in the area they visit. This population migrates to new places. However, they remained loyal to their country. Then, another government controlled the country which did not belong to them. The territory was taken over by strangers who influenced the native population. Finally, these actions gave history to the countries they colonized and referred to as occupied land.

This research is focused on colonization and its impact, as reflected in literature. Colonialism and literature mean considering the question of language. Colonial and colonized languages will experience conflicts at various levels, such as finance, control, compliance, cultural authority and prestige, and cultural linguistics (Jorissen, 2003). European colonialism began in the early premodern period, from the late fifteenth century. From the early modern period to the second half of the 20th century, European colonialism began with Portuguese colonization. The Portuguese language was part of a program to force the colonized to conform to European-Christian.

From Fichter's book entitled *British and French Colonialism in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East: Connected Empires Across the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries* (2008) two thousand eight, French colonial historians are aware of the historiography of the British empire. This book was partly due to various colonial rivalries between Britain and France. Publications on British imperial history appeared in English, now the language of European academics, attracting French colonial historians' attention. The story of Joseph Conrad tells about the experience of Charles Marlow, who had been a captain of a ship anchored in the Thames, England. Marlow is also a narrator in this story who tells his experiences. Marlow shares occurrences he experiences and what he sees while in Africa, including slavery and the sale of ivory there. Marlow feels the act of colonization when visiting people who were enslaved natives. He sees the natives as immoral, dirty, and cannibals. However, one character Kurtz is greatly admired in the region and can be said to be a God; the people there adored Kurtz.

Heart of Darkness tells what happens to the native people in Congo, Africa. The people suffers in their own country led by white people; they should resist the oppression because it is their land. However, there is no movement of resistance, and according to the book *Heart Of Darkness*, there is a part that says the tribe worships one of the white people.

Discussion about Colonialism and the Environment by Paliwal (2020) discusses the politics, limitations, and greed inherent in capitalists over a civilization that impacts the environment and human relations with nature. Since being colonized, people have become influenced by being materialists; Western countries have introduced this; this is one of the harmful effects of colonialism that brought humanity to the streets of slaughterhouses to plunder resources for profit. Colonization also occurred in Sub-Saharan Africa by Helling (2012); in his study, he said that colonialism had a considerable effect and could operate through many. The impact can slow down and slow down the development of a country, providing advantages and disadvantages.

Gilley (2017) discusses the same topic, namely colonialism. He discusses the conditions of colonizing a country. His study records several colonial cases documenting Western colonialism, usually referring to the British, French, German, Belgian, Dutch, and Portuguese colonies from the early 19th century to the mid-19th century. Where he also said that colonialism could come in this day and age. Ziltener and Daniel Kunzler (2013) also discuss colonialism. However, they discuss it differently by using a chart describing the impact on the colonized country. They found that colonialism had begun in eleven countries in the 16th century. Most countries only observed it in the 19th century, and some even in the 20th century (293). Matasci (2020) discussed in his research that colonization also affects education. He discusses education in Africa during colonial and Postcolonialism. There is debate about the usefulness of schools in metropolitan and colonized cities.

Various arguments and positions have emerged regarding education's role in African society's economic and social transformation. The impact of colonialism is discussed by Piola and Happy Anastasia Usman (2019). They think that this impact occurs on the Ibo tribe in Umuofia, Nigeria-Africa. European colonization that occurred in Africa can be seen as positive or negative. Colonialism has terrible effects such as massive exploitation of natural resources, unfair taxation system, weak industry, and dependence on the pillars of the resource economy. Ethnic conflicts in Africa that pitted each other were formed in colonialism. On the other hand, the mechanisms and systems used by the colonizer in a colony are a separate legacy for the colonized country.

Marfu'ah (qt in Rosmarin, 1989), entitled "Darkening the Reader: Reader-Response Criticism and Heart of Darkness" analyzes the novel through the lens of contemporary critical theory. In particular, she criticizes the novel's interpretation of darkness. By reversing the order of things, darkness is not the opposite, a kind of evil but a now reliable white man. On the contrary, the black men in these stories behave more morally and civilly than the white men. Every critic points out that darkness remains the setting and mode of Marlow's final confrontation with Kurtz, as in the original. As a result, it continues to be the term Marlow uses to express his most interesting (and, of course, forever unanswered) questions about Kurtz and himself.

This study focuses on studies that provide different perspectives on colonization and *Heart of Darkness*. The author concludes from the review that colonialism can change a country and impact the land and review the work; This book can show the darkness that exists in humans. The author uses one of the works of Joseph Conrad, which can describe colonialism.

Therefore, this study will examine the reader's response to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, particularly regarding colonization and colonized land. This research will include the perception of some readers from Indonesia to provide reader responses through a questionnaire made by the author. Readers are expected to express their opinions on the issue of colonization and colonized lands after reading the novella *Heart of Darkness*. This research also aims to enrich the reader's insight about the colony so that the reader can see the meaning of the topic and novella from various sides from other readers' responses.

METHOD

The author will discuss and show the opinions received from several respondents regarding matters related to colonialism in *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad. There are several assumptions regarding the questions; the readers can express their opinions and conclude what they understand about colonialism.

The author gathered information through textual analysis. The author will then use the data collected from the novel through postcolonial theory to develop the questions in the survey. The author surveyed some readers to obtain their responses about colonialism in *Heart of Darkness*. Twelve questions were entered into a web Google Form and distributed to respondents to receive their responses. The author will use them to analyze the data further.

This study's participants were English majors and readers who had finished reading Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The respondents were selected based on gender, age, and education. The respondents were asked to read and comprehend the novel. Readers can discuss and express their thoughts on the points in the questionnaire given to them.

The data obtained will be examined using a quantitative method and descriptive data analysis. For close questions, the author created a table, entered the respondents' choices in the table, and then provided a conclusion. Then, for open questions, the author will read each answer they give according to their respective perception; after that, the author will conclude from the readers' responses.

The final step is to present the results. The author includes a table with reader responses to a specific survey. First, the author introduced the subject. The author then analyzed and entered the data from the readers into the table. Data were obtained from the reader's responses to the questionnaire, then wrap up all of the explanations of the readers. The results of the web questionnaire will be presented in tabular format. Finally, the author will present the findings of his research. The analysis findings are presented in narratives and charts that

include the author's arguments and reader responses, which will be combined into a single data set.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The author has distributed the online questionnaire and received the reader's responses regarding *Heart of Darkness*. In this section, the author presents the results of analyzing respondents' responses to each of the questions in the online questionnaire. This questionnaire has two categories of questions: closed-ended and open-ended. The author describes four closed-ended questions with tables and seven open-ended questions. The author uses the responses of these respondents as a guide in understanding and completing this research. The readers shared their thoughts on the colonialism issue in the novella *Heart of Darkness*. They showed us how Conrad portrays it in the novella. Twenty-one readers agreed with the theme of this novella, colonialism in Congo, which was set in the 18th-19th century. Readers will come across the issue of colonialism, in which white people enslave native people and force them to work and control a country that is not theirs to profit from.

The issue of colonialism is also evident, with white people viewing black people as creatures beneath them, filthy and uneducated creatures. Because of this point of view, white people who colonize their country engage in racist behavior toward black people. In addition to understanding the issue of colonialism, readers will experience an enraged reaction due to the unfair treatment of natives. By opposing white people's colonialism and filling out the questionnaire, the readers express sympathy by filling out the questionnaire with their perceptions of colonialism.

Table 1: understand about colonialism

Question	Answer
What do you understand about colonialism?	Colonialism is an action taken by the state to control a region and seize the resources that exist in that region.
	Colonialism is an effort a country or group makes to develop their power in other areas to develop the economy, religion, and culture.

	According to my understanding, colonialism is an act or system in which a country tries to control the people and natural resources found in other countries.
	Colonialism is an act of creating a group by colonizing or invading another group's territory.
	Colonialism comes from the word colony, so colony, according to Latin, means settlement. Efforts made by ruling countries to control an area/region to obtain resources
	Colonialism is a condition in which a government prevents a specific country or region that is not part of its territory.
	Colonialism destroys the politics, psychology, and morals of the country
	Colonialism, in my opinion, refers to the system of developing state power over the territory and the people.

These questions can obtain various answers regarding the respondents' understanding of colonialism in *Heart of Darkness* story. Respondents defined colonialism as a situation in which one country controls another or a specific territory, not part of its territory. Furthermore, another respondent stated that colonialism holds a country and steals its rights. Moreover, colonialism took natural resources from the countries it colonized. Then one respondent noted that colonialism was a racist act.

Table 2: causes an act of colonialism in this story

Question	Answer
What causes an act of colonialism in this story?	Lack of knowledge and understanding by the people in the controlled area so that the site can be easily controlled by a state that has power
	Several factors can cause colonization. For example, the existence of something that can benefit the colonizing country, the technology owned by the colonized country

	is not yet sophisticated. A high sense of power causes nations to have to do colonialism to be respected by other nations.
	The ego of the colonizing country that considers other countries not on the same level as their country.
	Ambition to seek wealth and success. Conditions in the country are less aware of the unity and integrity that allows the invaders to come.

Readers respond to this question. They say colonization can occur because of certain conditions or opportunities that make a country occupy a specific area and a lack of public awareness of unity and integrity and the nature of humans.

Table 3: the things experienced by the natives of the novel

Question	Answer
What do you think about the black after seeing the things experienced by the natives of the novel?	It is more or less similar to the colonialism that occurred in Indonesia in the past.
	Quite surprised and saddened by the tragedy that happened to them
	Feel the sadness and sympathy
	The people's experiences are more directed toward racism
	White people robbed their natural resources
	In my opinion, the original inhabitants of the novel can undoubtedly feel how they suffered.
	It is more or less similar to the colonialism that occurred in Indonesia in the past.
	Quite surprised and saddened by the events that happened to them

People's experiences are geared toward racism than colonialism. This action is evident in the treatment of black people, who have a lower status than white people. Readers appear

depressed, worried, and unhappy with the natives' treatment. Readers also mention that the locals want to keep what they have, which includes a lack of humanity toward the people in Africa, where they suffered injustices during colonialism. As humans, blacks fought for their lives and defended what they had. According to one respondent, this experience was similar to colonialism in Indonesia in the past.

Table 4: acts of racism against Africans in the story

Question	Answer
What do you think about the white's racial acts against Africans in the story?	The racism in the story shows that Africans were born as black creatures who deserve to be enslaved because white people believe that whites are considered more sacred and their status is higher than blacks.
	In the past, it was still old-fashioned; there was still a substantial issue of racism, especially between countries. They consider people who are not from their country to be their enemies.
	This act of racism from the white community is arbitrary to African society. It's as if the African people can't do anything more than the white people.

Racism in the story shows that Africans, as divine beings, were born that way, as black beings who deserve to be enslaved because white people believe that white people are considered better and have a higher status than black people. The actions of white people discriminated against Africans based on skin color because they felt superior. Respondents also said that racism from the white community was arbitrary against African society; it's as if Africans can do nothing. Racism perpetrated by white people against African culture led to acts of oppression and slavery which had many negative impacts.

In the past, there was still a substantial issue of racism, especially between countries. They regard people who are not from their country as their enemies. The author can conclude as they do not condone racist acts; the readers feel sad and feel that this action is not commendable to the people of Africa. Black people must serve white people as enslaved people in their own country. They also say that fellow human beings have the same degree, and this action is still present in our lives today.

Table 5: acts of slavery in the story

Question	Answer
What do you think about the portrayal of slavery in the story?	The slavery carried out by the whites was very inhumane, as the life that the Africans had was worth nothing compared to the whites. African society is only considered a creation of God with no value and can be used as animals.
	This inhumane slavery occurs because white people value Africans as a lower race and do not deserve to be treated like normal human beings.
	Slavery is a matter of oppression; just because of different skin colors, why should we feel superior?
	Slavery is a bad thing. It would be even better if they cooperated rather than enslaved the people in the colonized countries.
	Slavery, in my opinion, is not very good because we have every human right.
	The act of slavery occurred when the white community forced the African community to work harder where there was no holiday, even for the white community. From here, there is no humanity.
	The slavery carried out by the whites was very inhumane, as the life that the Africans had was worth nothing compared to the whites. African society is only considered a creation of God with no value and can be used as animals.

The slavery carried out by the whites was very inhumane, as the life that the Africans had was worth nothing compared to the whites. African society is only considered a creation of God with no value and can be used as animals. This inhumane slavery occurs because white people value Africans as a lower race and do not deserve to be treated like normal human beings. Slavery is a bad thing. It would be even better if they cooperated rather than enslaved the people in the colonized countries. Slavery is a matter of oppression; just because of different skin colors, why should we feel superior? The act of slavery occurred when the white

community forced the African community to work harder where there was no holiday, even for the white community. From here, there is no humanity. The readers feel that the slavery accepted by Africans is an unjustified act; readers say that such actions should be abolished and inhumane. It was a pity that they had to be enslaved people in their own country, where they had to fight against the white people who colonized them. Slavery in this novel is also told where black people lined up, and their necks were chained while working. The reader's opinion is unfortunate because justice in this book seems dead, and there is no humanity, so black people do it. They don't get what they deserve in their own country.

Table 6: beneficial or detrimental to the colonized country

Question	Answer
Does the story represent that the act of colonization in this story beneficial or detrimental to the colonized country?	Every event has its pros and cons. Fortunately, there is acculturation. However, the losses are enormous. Such as the loss of lives and the occurrence of slavery in their own country.
	Plus: The country is developing in terms of education and development Minus: Gives a sense of trauma to the colonized
	It is perilous because, in addition to harming natural resources, it also traumatizes the people affected by colonialism
	Beneficial to the development of the country and detrimental in the humanitarian aspect.
	It is detrimental because white people confiscated the natural resources of the colonized country
	Mostly detrimental. But a small part has advantages, such as colonized people learning many new things from the colonizers.
	It is detrimental to take the resources of the colonized country to enrich their own country

They claim that no act of colonization benefits the occupied land and can cause trauma in the land. However, some respondents provided two responses that demonstrated the negative sides; respondents also saw two perspectives. Colonialist actions can be beneficial or detrimental to the colonized country, depending on the type of colonialism performed and how the governments survive colonialism. Colonization is advantageous to the country's development but detrimental to humanitarian efforts. A small portion has advantages, such as colonized people learning many new things from the colonizers. Every event has advantages and disadvantages. Fortunately, acculturation exists. However, the losses are enormous, the loss of lives and the occurrence of slavery in their own country. Although colonization is harmful, some benefits exist, such as improved education and public facilities.

Table 7: destroy the native culture of the colonized land

Question	Answer
Does the novel show that colonialism destroys the native culture of the colonized land?	Of course, it is destructive because the formed culture will be influenced by colonial factors so that culture is no longer natural.
	Yes, because the colonialists brought the 3g ideology where 'gospel' was not just spreading religion. But also change the culture of the colonized country if it is not by the teachings of that religion.
	Of course, it can destroy the original culture.
	In my opinion, colonialism can destroy the original culture of the colonized land.
	It can happen if the colonizing country prohibits the original culture of the colonized country.
	Yes. The people of the occupied country did not fight back and were enslaved so that we could lose the authentic culture.
	In my personal opinion, colonialism did not destroy the original culture of the countries it colonized, but rather like acculturation.

I don't think colonialism will completely erase it because erasing culture is not an easy thing. Maybe it's just acculturation
--

Respondents stated that colonialism has the potential to destroy culture because the culture formed will be influenced by colonial factors, resulting in a culture that is no longer natural. The colonizers brought the 3G ideology. The 'gospel' not only spread religion but also changed the culture of the colonized country if it did not follow the teachings of that religion. It can happen if the colonizing government forbids the occupied country's original culture. The colonized people do not fight and are enslaved, so Native Americans could lose their authentic culture. However, some argue that colonialism did not destroy the original culture. Colonialism did not destroy the original culture of the countries it colonized but encouraged acculturation because eradicating culture was complex.

CONCLUSION

After reading *Heart of Darkness* and receiving responses from twenty-two readers regarding colonialism from the book, we have concluded several things. First, Conrad describes colonization very well. He also shows racism and slavery committed by white people to natives. White people act arbitrarily, treat natives like slaves, and brand natives uneducated people. They want profit for them by utilizing the natural resources in Congo and using the power of the natives to make buildings useful for white people.

Second, the readers gave their responses and answered all the questions. Twenty-two respondents gave their understanding of colonialism that they find in *Heart of Darkness*, and they regretted that this action was detrimental to other countries. According to the respondents, the actions of white people who treated their colonized country badly could traumatize the people they occupied. Lastly, the sale of ivory took place in Africa; this not only harms the natives but also reduces the elephant population. Respondents responded to questions, and the author found that the readers see the issue of colonialism in the book *Heart of Darkness* where they strongly oppose it. They sympathize with what the natives have experienced in the book. It is said that colonialism can traumatize the colonized land.

From the analysis, we can conclude a few things. Conrad represents white characters in the novel as cruel and greedy people who care about their gains and consider black people enemies. White people also practice racism, where they view natives arbitrarily. In *Heart of*

Darkness, colonialism in Africa makes readers sympathize with the colonized lands. Readers respond to the actions white people give to natives.

REFERENCES

- Colonialism (Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy). (n.d.). Stanford Encyclopedia of philosophy. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/colonialism>
- Cooper, Frederick. (2005). "Story Plucking." *Colonialism in Question Theory, Knowledge, History, First*, University of California Press.
- Ferro, Marc. (2005). "Colonization: A Global History." *Colonization: A Global History*, 1st ed., Routledge.
- Ferdinal, Seswita, and Edria Sandika. (2020). *Introduction to Literary Studies*. Padang: PJ Publishing
- Fichter, James. (2018). "British and French Colonialism in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East: Connected Empires Across the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries." Britain and France, Connected Empires, Palgrave MacMillan.
- Gilley, Bruce. (2017). "The case for colonialism, *Third World Quarterly*." Heldring , Leander and James A. Robinson. (2012) "Colonialism And Economic Development In Africa." National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Marfu'ah, Itsnaini Baroroh. (2013). "Colonialism And Racism Reflected In Joseph Conrad's *Heart Of Darkness (1902): A Postcolonialism Perspective*." Univrersity of Surakarta, Indonesia.
- Matasci, Damiano et al. (2020). "Education and Development in colonial and postcolonial Africa: Policies, Paradigms, and Entanglements, the 1890s-1980s".
- Paliwal, Nisha. (2020). "Colonialism and Environment: A Postcolonial Eco-critical Approach towards Dhruv Bhatt's *Oceanside Blues*." Central University of Rajasthan, India.
- Piola, Afriliyani and Happy Anastasia Usman. (2019). "The Impact Of The 19th Century European Colonialism In Africa, In The Novel "Things Fall Apart" By Chinua Achebe." English Literature Department, University of Muhammadiyah Gorontalo.
- Sadjadi, Bakhtiar. (2017). "Reader-Response Approach: Critical Concepts and Methodology in Phenomenological Reading Theory."
- Ziltener, Patrick and Daniel Kunzler. (2013). "Impacts of Colonialism - A Research Survey." University of Fribourg, Switzerland.