Divided Hearts

How an image of Africa is created by two different authors in Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness & Buchi Emecheta’s Destination Biafra

Lena Andersson

Luleå tekniska universitet
C-uppsats
Engelska
Institutionen för Språk och kultur
Table of contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................... 2

Buchi Emechta ........................................................................................................ 3

Joseph Conrad ......................................................................................................... 4

1. Historical Background ......................................................................................... 5

2. Journeys of Discovery ......................................................................................... 9

3. Debbie vs. Marlow ............................................................................................. 15

4. Still Born Children and the Sepulchre City - The Symbolism of the Novels ...17

5. Kurtz, Alan Grey and Abosi - The nice guy goes wild .................................. 20

6. Poor vs. Powerful, Can They Ever Be Reconciled? ......................................... 25

Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 29

Bibliography .......................................................................................................... 31
Introduction

The relationship between Europe and Africa has been a relationship of conflict and oppression since the days of the slave trade and colonialism. This division has been a recurring subject in literary works from the Victorian era onwards and up to today, when the relationship is often examined within a post-colonial context by authors from the former colonies.

This essay examines two novels dealing with this problem to find out how one African and one European author deal with it. What are the similarites and differences in describing Africa and its inhabitants? What images of Africa do they give and why? What do they recognise as the main conflict between Africa and Europe and do they suggest any solution to the problem?

The works, which are to be examined, are: Destination Biafra¹ by one of the most important post-colonial authors, Buchi Emecheta, and Heart of Darkness², by Joseph Conrad. These two novels were chosen because they both deal with periods of violent change in African history and the relationship between Europe and Africa. Furthermore they are written by authors who have a lot in common; they were both orphaned in early age, they share an exile-experience and colonial oppression in their home-countries and they both write in English although it is not their mother-tongue.

There are, of course, important and interesting differences between them. Conrad is a male author of the early twentieth century, the historical peak of imperialism, and a descendant of an aristocratic family, while Emecheta is an African woman of working-class parents, living in a post-colonial context.

To support this investigation, Olof Lagerkrantz’s A Journey with Heart of Darkness has been an indispensable guide to Heart of Darkness.³ Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta edited by Marie Umeh⁴ is the main secondary source used when examining Destination Biafra. Basil Davidson’s History of Africa⁵ is the main source for the historical background.

¹ Buchi Emecheta. Destination Biafra. (Oxford, Heinemann , 1982)
³ Olof Lagerkrantz. Färd med mörkrets hjärta / A Journey with Heart of Darkness. (Helsingborg, Wahlström & Widstrand, 1987)
Buchi Emecheta

Buchi Emecheta was born on the 21 of July 1944 of Ibuza parentage in Lagos, Nigeria. Her father was a railroad worker and died when she was nine. Emecheta lived separated from her mother and brother with relatives in Lagos, where she was treated more like a servant than a niece. She had managed to force her parents to let her go to school with her brother in 1951, and she used this skill of persuasion to get her relatives in Lagos to sponsor her application for a scholarship with 2 shillings. She won the scholarship for the Methodist Girl’s High School in 1954, one of the best schools in the country. 6

During those High School years she started to dream about becoming an author – and was duly punished for entertaining such unnatural hopes. She was sent to the chapel to ask God for forgiveness for speaking out about her bold future plans: “But dear God, I so wish to be a writer, a story teller like our old mothers at home in Ibuza. But unlike them, I would not have to sit by the moonlight (…) because now I have learnt to use a new tool for the same art (…) So where is the sin in that?” 7 In 1962 she moved to London where she wrote her first novel *The Bride Price*. Her husband burned the manuscript so she left him, pregnant with her fifth child in 1966. As a single mother she started to study sociology at London University 8 and wrote a new novel, *In the Ditch*. This was highly autobiographical, dealing with her Ife as a single mother living at the bottom of English society.

When she took her Masters degree in 1976 she had already published three novels and two plays. 9 She is now considered as one of Nigeria’s foremost authors, internationally well known and popular. “It reads like a story, even to me, so if it reads like that to you, I won’t blame you at all. Because sometimes I don’t believe some of the things that happened to me. It is very true that some facts can be stranger than fiction.” 10

---

6 Marie Umeh. (Ed.) *Emerging perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*. Introduction, XXV
7 Buchi Emecheta. “Head Above Water” contained in Shirley Chew and Anna Rutherford (Ed.) *Unbecoming daughters of the Empire*. (Sydney: Dangaroo, 1993), 40
8 Marie Umeh. (Ed.) *Emerging perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*. Introduction, XXVI
9 Ibid.
10 Buchi Emecheta. “Head Above Water”, 42
Joseph Conrad

Joseph Conrad was born in 1857 as Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniewski in the Ukraine, at that time dominated by Russia. His parents were Polish aristocrats. When he was four years old, his parents were exiled to the Siberian province of Vologda in the far north, because of their struggle for an independent Poland. His mother died when he was seven and in May 1869 his father also passed away. By this time, the little family of father and son had been allowed to move to Krakow, then a city in the vast Austro-Hungarian Empire.

His uncle raised the eleven-year-old, orphaned Conrad. At the age of sixteen Conrad left Poland for France to fulfil his dream of being at sea. During his first four years at sea he travelled to and from the West Indies on French ships. In 1878, at the age of 21, he entered the British Merchant Navy, knowing only a few words of English.

For sixteen years he worked for Britain, at a period when it was an “empire where the sun never sets”, so he travelled widely: Singapore, Australia, Bombay, the East Indies and the Congo. In 1886 he became a naturalised Briton. He said that he had always had a special feeling for the English language, and that he was “adopted by the genius of the language”, although he could not explain how it happened: “The task would be as impossible as trying to explain the love at first sight.”

On the 24th of March 1896 he married Jessie George who was an indispensable help to him. She typed his manuscripts and seemed to bring the calm and inspiration that his work required. From his settlement in Britain 1894 to his death he devoted himself to writing. His most appreciated works were written between 1897 and 1907; nevertheless his first really popular novel was Chance, published in 1913. By that time he had already passed his creative peak, mainly because of his precarious health.

Writing had never been an easy job for him - he worked slowly to find the exact words and rhythm in his musical prose: “Believe me” he once wrote in a letter “no man paid more for his lines than I have.” He was working with the unfinished novel Suspense when he died in 1924.

11 Olof Lagerkrantz. Journey With Heart of Darkness, 32
13 Joseph Conrad. An Outpost of Progress. (Göteborg, Esselte Studium AB, 1989), Foreword
1. Historical Background

1.1. The Congo Free State 1884-1908

The Congo kingdom ranged over Angola and both republics of Congo, until the seventeenth century when it was eroded by the European slave trade. Portugal seized Angola and the remains of the Congo was divided between France and, later, Belgium.\textsuperscript{14}

The period dealt with in J. Conrad’s novel \textit{Heart of Darkness} is the era when colonialism was regarded as an exciting and profitable adventure in which all European states of any importance wanted to participate. In the beginning of the 1880’s the Belgian king, Leopold II, bought the Congo, a country the size of Britain, Spain, Germany and France put together, for the reasonable price of some cloth, brilliantly coloured uniforms and a few bottles of gin.\textsuperscript{15}

Since the days of the Congo kingdom the currency in the area was copper, so strings of copper were used to pay the wages of the African employees.\textsuperscript{16}

To get international recognition for his supremacy over the Congo, Leopold II founded the Congo Free State, which was supposed to be a free confederation of states with a president, seated in Europe, who had abolition of slave trade on his agenda. In 1884 the USA recognised the Free State, soon followed by the European colonial powers.\textsuperscript{17}

Only a few years later Leopold’s celebrated philanthropic experiment proved to be something completely different; the colony was treated as a treasure-chamber, designed to add to the king’s private fortune. Travellers, like Conrad, returned from this heart of Africa with horrible tales of slave-workers submitted to cruel treatment who, when they died, were hardly even buried. European agents had no restrictions as long as they shipped ivory to Belgium.\textsuperscript{18}

Eventually Leopold’s reign became so overtly disastrous that even his fellow colonial powers had to react. He was forced to leave the control of the Congo to the Belgian parliament. When he died in 1909 he willed what was left of his African properties to Belgium.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{14} The Swedish National Encyclopedia. http://www.ne.se
\textsuperscript{15} “King Leopold - the Mysterious Person”, Article in Norrländska Socialdemokraten (Luleå 2002-01-26)
\textsuperscript{17} “King Leopold - the Mysterious Person”, ( 2002-01-26)
\textsuperscript{18} Norman Sherry. \textit{Conrad’s Western World}, 38
\textsuperscript{19} Basil Davidson. \textit{The Story of Africa}, 182
1.2. Conrad in the Congo

Joseph Conrad arrived at this “model”-society on June 12, 1890 with the purpose of working for the “Société Anonyme pour le Commerce du Haut-Congo” as a river-boat captain. During his stay, which lasted until December 4 the same year, he kept a diary and wrote letters, of which there are a few left. Thus we know that he came to the Congo with great expectations of participating in a “civilising mission” together with other European adventurers enlightened with the same ideal. He had signed on for three years but left after six months, highly disillusioned and seriously ill. His diary was a source of inspiration when he wrote the short story An Outpost of Progress which was his first attempt to give words to his African experience. Later it supported him in writing the novel Heart of Darkness.

1.2.1 Congo revisited in Heart of Darkness

In 1898 Conrad had left his life at sea and was settled as an author in England. Leopold still ruled the Congo Free State, but his methods were increasingly questioned. Heart of Darkness first appeared as instalments in “Blackwood’s Magazine”, a most revered, and conservative British literary magazine. Conrad’s life seems to have been calm and rather happy. This friendly and peaceful atmosphere created the distance that made Heart of Darkness possible to write. The peaceful atmosphere is reflected in the tranquil, yet ominous, opening lines of the novel: “The Nellie, a cruising yawl, swung to her anchor without a flutter of the sails, and was at rest.”

1.3. Nigeria - an African Microcosm

Nigeria is one of the largest countries in Africa, and a place where it is possible to observe most of Africa’s features on a concentrated scale. It was in this region the African Iron Age started. Powerful kingdoms prospered on this metal merchandise, kingdoms made contact with mediaeval Europe which bought gold from the west coast. The European merchants carried stories with them of the splendid courts that surrounded kings with a glory so impressive that no one either could, nor would, look the king straight in his face or even dared

---

21 Olof Lagerkrantz. Journey with Heart of Darkness, 12
22 Ibid, 167-168
23 Joseph Conrad. Heart of Darkness, 2
24 Basil Davidson. The Story of Africa, 224
to approach him openly. The major ethnic groups were Yoruba and Igbo in the south and Fulani and Hausas in the north. The latter groups became Moslems around year 1000.\(^{25}\)

The prosperity of the west coast attracted European attention when the New World was discovered and colonised. It was one of the first parts of Africa to be exploited by the slave-trade on gigantic scale, which caused the once-mighty kingdoms to erode. During the seventeenth century the Nigerian coast was called the Slave-coast and European states increased their control over it.\(^{26}\)

In 1861 a British colony was founded on the island Lagos off the Nigerian coast,\(^{27}\) after the Berlin-conference Britain formed a protectorate in the north of Nigeria. The Hausas and Yorubas got on rather well with the British authorities as the British supported the Yoruba king’s authority in order to control the north through local kings.\(^{28}\) The British consul of Lagos dealt rather differently with the neighbouring king Ja-Ja of Opopo. When king Ja-Ja did what Britain tried to do, that is, create a trading monopoly on palm-oil, King Ja-Ja was deported and this cleared the way for British troops. Britain occupied the Nigerian mainland. In 1914 British Nigeria was established by uniting the protectorates in the north and the south with the colony of Lagos.\(^{29}\)

1.3.1 Independence and Civil-war

In 1960 Nigeria became an independent member of the British Commonwealth.\(^{30}\) Ethnic tension was securely built into the political system from the very beginning.\(^{31}\) The first elections led to conflicts when the industrious Igbo-communities in the east formed the Ibo-union. They soon gained followers in other ethnic groups of Nigeria and eventually there were numerous parties built on ethnicity participating in the election campaign.

The breakdown of this fragile democracy came in 1966 when the elected president Azikiwa was overthrown in a military coup which eventually led to civil war. Massacres were performed on the Igbos of the north, which led Igbo-societies in the East, where the Igbos were the majority population, to break loose and proclaim the Republic of Biafra.\(^{32}\) The

---

\(^{25}\) Ibid.95
\(^{26}\) Swedish National Encyclopedia. http://www.ne.se
\(^{27}\) Ibid.
\(^{28}\) Basil Davidson. *The Story of Africa*, 186
\(^{29}\) Ibid, 187
\(^{30}\) Swedish National Encyclopedia. http://www.ne.se
\(^{31}\) Basil Davidson. *The Story of Africa*, 224
\(^{32}\) Ibid. 266
The following war lasted from 1967 to 1970 and caused a severe famine, the first great “Media-famine”, covered by TV and newspapers all over the world.\textsuperscript{33}

The war could have been over in December 1968 if it was not for brigadier Ojukwu\textsuperscript{34} who fought for his own position as a leader of a province that would become rich because of the newly discovered oil-fields in the east. Although it was said that the war was fought for the benefit of the Igbos, it proved to be disastrous for them. The peace-treaty was unusually generous towards the defeated side, aiming at a greater sense of unity and a democratic development of the re-united Nigeria.\textsuperscript{35}

\subsection*{1.3.2 Destination Biafra}

Buchi Emecheta did not revisit her home country until after the civil war. She followed the crisis closely from Britain while many of her relatives were still in Nigeria. Some were massacred together with other Igbos and some died of starvation, but those who survived have contributed to \textit{Destination Biafra} as eye-witnesses.\textsuperscript{36}

Emecheta took part in demonstrations for the victims of the war and the starvation caused by it and eventually such activity made her start to think about writing a book concerning the war. She says herself that “it simply had to be written”\textsuperscript{37} Her compulsion is explained in the dedication: “I dedicate this work to the memory of many relatives and friends who died in this war, especially my eight-year-old niece Buchi Emecheta, who died of starvation (…)\textsuperscript{38}

The first paragraph of the novel has a strong resemblance to the opening lines of \textit{Heart of Darkness}, as both the sea and the cool British atmosphere are present:

\begin{quote}

The governor’s resident stood majestic in its Georgian elegance. Its front pillars gave it the air of a small palace, the marble shine, the result of decades of careful polishing and pampering. The floor leading to the main entrance had a blue and cream marbled effect that gave one the illusion of walking on a man-made ocean. The windows of the building faced the nearby Lagos marina where at night the music made by the lapping of the waves along the artificial shore and the swish of the palm fronds in the breeze seemed as any man’s birthright.\textsuperscript{39}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[33]\textit{Swedish National Encyclopedia}. http://www.ne.se
\item[34]Basil Davidson. \textit{The Story of Africa}, 266
\item[35]\textit{Swedish National Encyclopedia}. http://www.ne.se
\item[36]Buchi Emecheta. \textit{Destination Biafra}, Foreword
\item[37]Ibid. Foreword
\item[38]Ibid. Foreword
\item[39]Ibid. 3
\end{footnotes}
2. Journeys of Discovery

The two novels, *Heart of Darkness* and *Destination Biafra*, both deal with travelling to a long dreamt of destination, yet the titles are warnings to the reader of the quality of these journeys; the very name Biafra suggests the essence of war-caused famine, the reader cannot be mistaken; this is hardly a pleasure trip.\(^{40}\)

Although *Heart of Darkness* sounds very ominous to readers of the 21st century, to Conrad’s contemporaries it also had a luring ring of exciting adventures in the midst of a not yet fully explored continent. The title *Heart of Darkness* with its tempting ambiguity must have been a perfect headline for a magazine-serial, the form in which the novel first appeared in “Blackwood’s Magazine”.\(^{41}\)

2.1. Exile Experience

The exile experience has influenced both authors, although in different ways. Emecheta means that it would be impossible for her to write the way she does, if she was not an expatriate. She states in one interview: “It is when you are out of your own country that you can see the faults in your own society.”\(^{42}\) In *Destination Biafra* she strongly criticises parts of the Nigerian culture, the oppression of women in particular and the omission of the sufferings of civilians in the traditional war-literature.\(^{43}\)

The critical view upon her native society does not prevent her from criticising her new homeland; on the contrary, Britain as a colonial power is the major “Bad guy” in the novel. Neo-colonialism is personified in the portrait of Alan Grey, the son of one retired governor-general, in the same way as neo-colonialism is the organic continuation of colonialism.\(^{44}\) The harsh tone of anti colonial criticism is firmly struck in the first chapter of *Destination Biafra*: “Well, why don’t we drink to the past empire and the beginning of a workable Commonwealth? “Alan put in, raising his glass”.\(^{45}\)

\(^{40}\) Abioseh M. Porter. “They Were There Too” contained in Marie Umeh (Ed.) *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*, 324
\(^{41}\) Olof Lagerkrantz. *Journey with Heart of Darkness*, 87
\(^{43}\) Abioseh M. Porter. “They Were There Too” contained in Marie Umeh (Ed.) *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*, 319
\(^{45}\) Buchi Emecheta. *Destination Biafra*, 6
For Joseph Conrad the exile experience worked differently, he gets extremely cautious and uses a highly refined style to criticise colonialism, so that it cannot be understood as criticism of his new country, Britain. Many readers do not recognise this criticism at all, this must have been the case with William Blackwood who ordered the novel for his “Blackwood’s Magazine”, the most prominent magazine for politics and literature at that time. Mr Blackwood was securely established and conservative, so Conrad was anxious to convince him of his innocence concerning English colonialism: “The title I am thinking of is *Heart of Darkness* but the narrative is not gloomy (...) The criminality of inefficiency and pure selfishness when tackling the civilising work in Africa is a justifiable idea”.\(^{46}\) Although Conrad believed in “efficient” colonialism this seems to have been more a professional than a personal opinion. The very same year his friend Edward Garnett wrote in a letter to Conrad that Kipling, the most well-known and ardent advocate of European imperialism, is an enemy to everything that Garnett and Conrad stand for.\(^{47}\)

Another sign of Conrad’s dislike of all colonialism is the novel itself where there are a lot of ironic passages such as the following: “I was loafing about, hindering you fellows in your work and invading your homes, just as though I had got a heavenly mission to civilise you.”\(^{48}\) Furthermore he often turns the things he sees in the Congo into something familiar to his British readers to try to reveal what colonialism means to those who have to endure it:

> …A solitude, nobody, not a hut. The population had cleared out a long time ago. Well if a lot of mysterious niggers armed with all kinds of fearful weapons suddenly took to travelling on the road between Deal and Gravesend, catching the yokels right and left to carry heavy loads for them, I fancy every farm and cottage thereabouts would get empty very soon.\(^{49}\)

The technique of reversing the view to reveal the prejudices of the reader is also used by Emecheta when she makes her hero a heroine, a heroine who joins the army and there she gets treated as a woman by the men she meets throughout the war. Katherine Fishburn argues: “(...) that Emecheta has subverted the so-called masculine subject of war from within by the very act of writing about it herself from a woman’s perspective. In fact, she might be said to

\(^{46}\) Olof Lagerkrantz. *Journey with Heart of Darkness*, 87 & 187  
\(^{47}\) Ibid.85  
\(^{48}\) Joseph Conrad. *Heart of Darkness*, 5
be signifying on those novels that glorify the heroics of soldiers and ignore the pain of the civilians.”

2.2. Different Linguistic Vehicles

Emecheta’s prose is uneven, sometimes as witty, funny and brilliant as her readers are used to, but too often awkward and talkative; her prose resembles the bumpy roads that Debbie travels from cool, polished Lagos to war-struck Biafra. Conrad’s flowing language, on the other hand, has no flaws. It flows as smoothly as the sea and the other waterways that Marlow cruises.

The most interesting stylistic features both novels reveal is the use of narrative techniques connected to traditional African story-telling. The story-teller, Marlow, who Conrad uses, sits in the centre of a group of listeners when twilight turns to the dark of the night. He tells his story with a lot of features from oral story-telling tradition, such as repetition: “The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires” and digressions: “Now when I was a little lad I had a passion for maps”. Rhetorical devices that also reveal Conrad’s classical education.

Emecheta uses an omniscient author who can peep into secret conferences and private bedrooms, something which is not common in African oral tradition. However she uses one African device; the characters represent whole groups of people. Debbie represents Nigeria as it can become in the future, Alan Grey represents Britain’s post-colonial relations with Africa and the little baby Biafra who soon dies of starvation is an obvious symbol for the unsuccessful Biafran experiment. Practically all the characters in the novel are supposed to represent ideas and political positions of the time, tribes and classes.

Conrad also uses his characters to represent more than themselves; the manager is the evil, greedy, inefficient colonialism, the Harlequin represents the noble, innocent savage and so

49 Ibid, 16
51 Marie Umeh (Ed.) *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*. Introduction, xxxviii
52 Joseph Conrad. *Heart of Darkness*, 5
53 Ibid.
54 John C.Hawley. “Coming to Terms; Buchi Emecheta’s Kehinde and Birth of a Nation” contained in Marie Umeh (Ed.) *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*, 337
56 Abioseh M Porter. “They Were There Too” contained in Marie Umeh (Ed.) *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*, 332
forth. Thus both authors create an image of Africa with a mixture of African and European stylistic tools.57

2.2.1 Journeys through Time and Space

2.2.1.1 An Ancient Paradise

The heroine and hero, Debbie and Marlow travel through African landscapes separated both in time and space. In time they are separated by 70 years although the reader often gets the impression that Marlow travels through a much more ancient world than he actually does. Marlow’s journey is repeatedly referred to as a journey “on prehistoric earth”58 to indicate an Africa totally new-born, where civilisation has not changed anything. He depicts an undestroyed wild world in which he does not belong. In real life, when Conrad travelled the Congo, the river was trafficked by many steamboats and numerous canoes, the shores of the river were rather densely populated59, yet Conrad insists on describing a totally desolate area.

Raoul Granqvist suggests in his essay “Stereotypes in Western Fiction on Africa”60 that Conrad’s description of this primeval world was an adaptation to the readers of “Blackwood’s Magazine”; they were used to these pictures of the inner Africa. The scenery should trigger the English gentleman explorer in the reader; his confidence in his superiority was evoked by this silent wilderness: “Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest.”61

There is, however, a streak of sadness, which must have been rather unfamiliar to the sporty English gentleman and this sorrowful ring seems to have been over-looked by Granqvist. Conrad continues:

The broadening waters flowed through a mob of wooded islands; you lost your way on that river as you would in a desert, and butted all day long against shoals, trying to find the channel, till you thought yourself bewitched and cut off from everything you had known once somewhere-far away- in another existence perhaps.62

57 Marie Umeh (Ed.) Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta. Introduction, xxix
58 Joseph Conrad. Heart of Darkness, 31
59 Norman Sherry. Conrad’s Western World, 39
60 Raoul Granqvist. Stereotypes in Western Fiction on Africa
61 Joseph Conrad. Heart of Darkness, 30
62 Ibid.
Furthermore, Marlow uses this passage to transfer focus to the vanity of existence and the artificial lives his listeners on the Nellie were leading: “I felt often its mysterious stillness watching me at my monkey tricks, just as it watches you fellows performing on your respective tightropes for-what is it? A half a crown a tumble.”

Nevertheless Conrad does not show Africa as he must have encountered it. However, this was not as Granqvist says, to idealise the European gentleman, but rather to idealise Africa, its noble wilderness, undestroyed timelessness and ability to realise what is really worth something. He idealises Africa in contrast to civilised, unhappy Europe. This is not an uncommon stereotype to be found in European culture since the time of Tacitus, Rousseau and Fennimore-Cooper, yet it is not the same stereotype that Granqvist perceives in the text.

2.2.1.2 A Contemporary Hell

Emecheta’s heroine, on the other hand, travels through very different scenery, she goes by car and bus on bumpy roads, she wades through stinking swamps and passes villages and towns filled with Dickensian madding crowds. In fact the only silent place in the novel is the colonial palace in Lagos: “In contrast to the peaceful atmosphere inside the governor-general’s compound, outside the gate Nigeria was in a fever of excitement.”

Emecheta never gives us long descriptions of the scenery, her emphasis lies on actions and dialogue; Emecheta’s Africa is never silent. Trees and forests are trees and forests, they never “brood” or threaten people. Debbie encounters all the horrors of war and she is surrounded by flesh and blood, friends and enemies, and all of them wear faces. She is clearly at home in a place where people remember her, love her and hate her.

Katherine Fishburn points out that this is a means for Emecheta to argue for her concept of decolonisation which, Emecheta claims, has to start with rejection of the European – originally Graeco-Roman – notion of individualism. The African way is a constant interaction between members of a group; from the family to the village, the country and then the whole of Africa across and beyond ethnical frontiers. In Debbie’s mouth this hope for African unity is pronounced:

---

63 Ibid.
64 Buchi Emecheta. *Destination Biafra*, 3
“Do you think Nkrumah really wants to rule the whole of Africa?”

“Why do you ask? It’s true that he wants to unite the continent, and somebody would have to be at the head.” (Alan Grey)

“Well, I don’t mind if it is Nkrumah. At least we would have someone who is really doing something unlike all these corrupt politicians”66

---

66 Buchi Emecheta. *Destination Biafra*, 40
3. Debbie vs. Marlow

3.1. A doubly rooted black Modesty Blaise

Debbie is the favourite character of Emecheta’s: “If there is any character that I like in all my books, it is Debbie Ogedemgbe in Destination Biafra. I think that she is still my best character and the one that I would like to identify with. Unfortunately I can never be like her (…) I admire women like Debbie who also have a western education.”

Apart from having a western education Debbie is beautiful, trimmed, brave, and rich and has a good knowledge of languages. She is, on the whole, a rather incredible person; an African Modesty Blaise. The novel has often been criticised for Debbie’s “cartoon-like” character. Katherine Frank in “Women Without Men: The Feminist Novel in Africa” calls her “flat and unchanging.”

Emecheta chose a non-Igbo female serving in the Nigerian army since she realised that, after reading Wole Soyinka’s “The Man Died”, her tribe, the Igbos, was not the only tribe to suffer during the war. So to cross both tribal and class barriers, Debbie comes from a small tribe and she is the daughter of a very rich man. In his sympathetic essay: “Coming to Terms” John C. Hawley notes that most female characters in Emecheta’s work can be described as “doubly rooted”. They are women who critically assess their past and present to improve their situations; they do not live between countries but in both countries. Debbie is one of these doubly-rooted women for whom the exile experience has meant enrichment instead of deprivation.

So even if it is easy to agree with the critical view on Debbie as an incredible character, it is equally easy to see why she is Emecheta’s favourite. Feminists all over the world often ask for more good examples to follow, and argue that there are too few of these for girls and women to identify with. So for young women Debbie might serve as a positive role model in the same way as the incredible Pippi Longstocking, who indeed is firmly rooted wherever she is.
3.2.  **Marlow - the lone ranger, living between worlds**

We are not spoiled with female heroines like Debbie but Conrad’s hero, Marlow, is a type abundant in western fiction; the lone ranger. Marlow is Conrad’s recurring alter ego, a character created both to show him as he wanted to be regarded, and disguise him when the vulnerable immigrant expressed “uncivil” things. Marlow is English as Conrad’s admiration for his new country never fails. In the case of this novel, it is also wise to use a British sailor to convey criticism against colonialism and modern civilisation. In *Heart of Darkness* Marlow’s ability to stay an outsider and never really get involved is his most prominent feature. As a true lone ranger, and in great contrast with Debbie Ogedemgbe, Marlow lives between worlds and not fully in any of them. In his case the exile-experience does not create a doubly rooted identity. The only identity he creates for himself is that of the alien, thus guarding his integrity and innocence, or is it his irresponsibility?

In the very same year that this novel was written, Conrad wrote a literary essay on Marryatt and Fennimore-Cooper. Traces of his interest in their works are revealed in Marlow’s critical view upon the “civilising” efforts he saw in the Congo. Ever since Tacitus, who saw the Germanic tribes as free, brave and manly in contrast with the effeminate and over-civilised Romans, this has been a recurring stereotype in European literature; the noble, dancing savage who ought to be left alone by the civilisation and its sad subjects.

Conrad uses Marlow to represent the conflict within the civilised man when encountering this happy and un-tamed world. Marlow, and Conrad feel drawn to this wild state of independence, but they always manage to repress this attraction, knowing that for the civilised man it is already too late: “suddenly (...) 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? (...) You wonder I didn’t go ashore for a howl and a dance? Well, no I didn’t. Fine sentiments, you say? Fine sentiments, be hanged! I had no time.” By using the common excuse:” lack of time” he implicates that the “savages” live happily without time-schedules, a rather worn stereotype when it comes to exotic people. In spite of all his civilised behaviour that prevents him from going wild, Marlow does not feel a part of civilisation either: “(...) the bearing of commonplace individuals going about their business in the assurance of perfect safety, was offensive to me” he says when returning to the “Sepulchre City”.

---

73 Olof Lagerkrantz. *Journey with Heart of Darkness*, 84
74 Ibid, 85
75 Joseph Conrad. *Heart of Darkness*, 32
76 Ibid, 66
4. Still Born Children and the Sepulchre City - The Symbolism of the Novels

Both novels frequently use symbols which mostly allude to death, and create a lot of the “super-realistic” feeling in the novels. The symbols are also used to concentrate the text and create an ominous sensation. For different reasons the authors also use symbols to make political statements. Emecheta uses the African story-telling technique already mentioned to make the truth more acceptable to the reader, according to the old truth that hundreds of victims never provoke the same tender feelings as one that you really get to know.

4.1 Still Born Children

Emecheta uses child-birth and deaths to symbolise conflicts. Since she is telling women’s and children’s war-history these are natural symbols to use: the pregnant refugee-woman on the run for safety in Biafra, gets her child cut out of her stomach by Nigerian soldiers as a strong symbol of what the federal government has done to Biafra. At the same time Debbie is raped by these soldiers although she is enlisted in the same army, indicating that women are never regarded as equal to men. At the same time the rape symbolises the division the civil war causes in Nigeria.

Abosi, the Biafran leader, and his wife suffer from being unable to have children and finally the desired pregnancy ends in a miscarriage, at the same time as the hope for a Biafran nation dies before the nation is born. Saka Momoh, the president of Nigeria has a wife who is expecting a baby. The period of labour becomes dangerous for his wife and he has difficulties deciding whether he shall permit the doctors to carry out a caesarean and when he finally gives his permission, the child is dead. In addition the baby proves to be an awful frog-like monster. However his wife, though in very bad shape, survives. With this incident Emecheta depicts how the indecisiveness of Momoh was disastrous for Nigeria.

The little baby-boy Biafra who travels on Debbie’s back and finally dies from starvation is a clear symbol of the Republic of Biafra and Debbie’s own feelings of responsibility towards it. As little Biafra dies of starvation, the Republic of Biafra had no possibility to survive and was literally destroyed by starvation.

---

77 J.O.J Nwachukwu-Agbada. “Buchi Emecheta: Politics, War and Feminism in Destination Biafra” contained in Marie Umeh (Ed.) Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta, 394
78 Tuzyline Jita Allan. “Trajectories of Rape in Buchi Emecheta’s Novels” contained in Marie Umeh (Ed.) Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta, 217
4.2 Sepulchre City

While Emecheta uses symbols to make facts clearer and more obvious to the reader, the ever-cautious Conrad uses them to both hide and reveal facts. When he uses the name “Sepulchre City” for Brussels he makes a strong declaration of the condition of Belgian colonial policies, while at the same time it is a strong proclamation against civilisation and the efforts to spread it through colonialism, in general. The metaphor of the grave suggests that civilisation as we know it is dead and death-bringing. The metaphor comes from one parable of Jesus’ where he compares the law-abiding Pharisees with “Whited sepulchres” clean on the outside but actually filled with all sorts of uncleanness inside. Just like the Pharisees, the colonialists look nice on the outside but are filled with greed and murder.

To emphasise the death-symbols, Marlow encounters two women outside his employer’s office who seem to be knitting “a warm pall”. Olof Lagercrantz points out that Conrad once had encountered women in black waiting for his father to die, when he was a child, so to him these women were a powerful, ominous sign. It is also possible that Conrad had really encountered knitting women outside the office, as many women knitted things for “poor, naked savages” during the period. Conrad maybe uses the knitting women to show the “civilised” absurdity of doing this. At the beginning of the novel it is easy to believe that these death symbols only predict the destruction of the ignorant idealists who leave Europe for the great quest in black Africa, but when the reader arrives in the Congo, and when Marlow returns to rotten Europe, the reader realises that he is referring to a dying civilisation.

Another recurring symbol is “the brute”, that is wild animals and people made brutal by circumstances. The first time we meet this monster it is in the shape of a crazy hippo: “That animal has a charmed life ‘he said; ‘but you can say this only of brutes in this country. No man-you apprehend me? No man here bears a charmed life.” As this is made clear, Conrad has nothing more to say about the evil manager except for: “he was never ill”. Another thing is also clear; the natives are certainly no brutes, for they constantly die from starvation, slavework, diseases and torture.

Conrad never points out any specific brute except for the hippo and the manager, but from the context the reader understands that the brutes are the colonialists coming to Africa who lose all their human dignity in their greedy quest for ivory. These “civilisers”, who Conrad calls “the pilgrims”, are compared with the native crew of the boat, a crew that consists of

---

79 Cloth spread over a coffin or, figuratively, dark or heavy covering.
80 Olof Lagercrantz. Journey with Heart of Darkness, 33-34
81 Joseph Conrad. Heart of Darkness, 25
men from the cannibal tribe of the Bangalas. Marlow contemplates the fact regarding why they did not eat the pilgrims although they were starving: “Restraint! I would just as soon have expected restraint from a hyena prowling amongst the corpses of a battlefield. But there was the fact facing me.”

Conrad might have been really puzzled by encountering so called cannibals who did not eat the colonialists that oppressed them. In his day the common thought among Europeans was that there was such a thing as cannibalism; savages using human flesh as many Europeans use pork. Nevertheless this passage seems to symbolise something much bigger: the uncivil and not at all gentleman-like, blood-thirsty, pilgrims contrasted with the much more reliable Bangalas, from which no one expected any gentleman-like behaviour. Conrad shows their dignity which becomes even more remarkable when contrasted with the rude pilgrims.

---

82 Norman Sherry. Conrad’s Western World, 60
83 Joseph Conrad. Heart of Darkness, 38
5  Kurtz, Alan Grey and Abosi - The nice guy goes wild

The main character in *Heart of Darkness* is an English gentleman, Kurtz, who, according to Marlow, is one of the nice guys going to Africa with the firm intention to civilise it, or rather; tame it. The equivalent character in *Destination Biafra* is the British diplomat Alan Grey, who is on a colonial mission too. His work is to see to British interests in the former colony of Nigeria. Alan Grey remains grey and uninteresting, while Kurtz is at the very centre of *Heart of Darkness*, and remains interesting and enigmatic, lost in the infinite dark.

5.1 Alan Grey

Alan Grey is not only rather dull, as his name indicates, he is also difficult to grasp. He is Debbie’s “Male concubine” as she calls him, and the son of Sir Fergus Grey, a colonial diplomat. Although he acts in favour of British interests he seems to be honest when regarding himself as a true friend of Africa. Throughout the novel he shows up here and there, buying wood-carvings for his collection, making diplomatic moves on behalf of Britain, and selling weapons to federal forces and food to Biafra: “Alan was a friend of both leaders. To his way of thinking, he had not betrayed Momoh, neither had he betrayed Abosi.”

Katherine Fishburn gives a good characterisation of Alan Grey when she summarises him as “complicated, self-serving” but “no monster” Alan experiences the same temptation as Marlow when meeting Africa; the wish to be a part of it, but unlike Marlow he does not fight those temptations: “(...) he was not going to do his tying down with a girl like Debbie, for all her Oxford know-how. She was slim and pretty but arrogant. She was intelligent, nice to be with, but independent. She was too English for his liking. If he was going to go native, he might as well do it properly”. Nevertheless he ends up proposing to Debbie to save her from the final destructive blow upon already defeated Biafra. The proposal is turned down by Debbie who makes her, and Africa’s, declaration of independence: “Africa will never again stoop to being your wife; to meet you on equal basis, like companions, yes, but never again to be your slave.”

---

84 Marie Umeh (Ed.) *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*. “Interview with Buchi Emecheta”, 449
85 Abioseh M. Porter. “They Were There Too” contained in Marie Umeh (Ed.) *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*, 315
86 Buchi Emecheta. *Destination Biafra*, 189
88 Buchi Emecheta. *Destination Biafra*, 36
90 Buchi Emecheta. *Destination Biafra*, 245
5.2 Kurtz

Kurtz is not in the least dull; he is so charismatic that he is on the verge of mental illness. He is a British gentleman with relatives on the continent. It could be argued therefore that he represents all Europe. Kurtz went to Africa to civilise it, he was said to be one of the good guys: “Something like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle”\textsuperscript{91}, Marlow puts it ironically. Kurtz rules his own station further up the river, isolated from European influence. As soon as Marlow’s “rescue-expedition” reaches him, the truth about this “emissary of light” is revealed; Kurtz has gone native, although not in any positive way. He never abdicates his “white supremacy”; he uses his position to become the native’s leader and even god. Kurtz himself experiences “no hell below him, above him only sky”, to use the words of John Lennon.

At the beginning Marlow is an admirer of Kurtz, since Marlow’s enemy, the manager, is Kurtz’s enemy too. However, when he meets Kurtz he realises that he is even worse than the manager; everything about Kurtz is fake and Marlow experiences emotional division. Still, when he has to take sides, he chooses Kurtz’s side. The novel gives no certain clue as to why he makes that choice; maybe it is because Kurtz is ill and thus does not have a charmed life. Marlow explains reluctantly: “but it was something to have at least a choice of nightmares Ï had turned to wilderness really, not to Mr. Kurtz.”\textsuperscript{92} Marlow knows he never can become one of Fennimore-Cooper’s noble savages; nevertheless the vast wilderness becomes his refuge.

Until the very last pages of the novel the reader gets the impression that it was Kurtz’s isolation and greed for ivory that changed him, but back in the Sepulchre city Marlow finds out that the seeds of Kurtz’s brutalisation were in him already in Europe.\textsuperscript{93} A visit from a former colleague of Kurtz exposes the truth that not only “innocent savages”, but also Europeans, could be deceived by Kurtz’ charisma, and that Kurtz was a victim of it himself:

This visitor informed me Kurtz’ proper sphere ought to have been politics on the popular side (...) ‘heavens how that man could talk. He electrified large meetings. He had faith - don’t you see? – He had the faith. He could believe anything - anything. He would have been a splendid leader of an extreme party.’ ‘What party?’ ‘I asked. ‘Any party,’ answered the other. ‘He was an – an - extremist,’ \textsuperscript{94}

\textsuperscript{91} Joseph Conrad. \textit{Heart of Darkness}, 10
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid. 57
\textsuperscript{93} Olof Lagerkrantz. \textit{Journey with Heart of Darkness}, 149-150
5.3 Abosi

The mirror-image of Kurtz in Destination Biafra is the Biafran leader Abosi, who begins as an idealistic leader but finally becomes one of many corrupt African leaders. Katherine Fishburn says in her book Cross Cultural Conversations that she cannot understand him and by that she seems to mean that she cannot find excuses for his behaviour; like many non-Africans, she cannot cope with Africans being the bad guys. By refusing to discuss with them and only “converse” the other, Fishburn reveals her own unintentional disrespect for “the other”.

Emecheta, with the advantage of being African, does not have to avoid criticising Africans so she willingly exposes the hypocrisy of African leaders: “I see now that Abosi and his like are still colonized. They need to be decolonized. I am not like him, a black white man; I am a woman and a woman of Africa.” She puts willingly the blame on Abosi: “Abosi simply would not give in. He felt he was already winning. If millions of people had to die, that was war. He wanted a separate nation, even with his last breath.”

Debbie experiences the same division of heart as Marlow did when facing the true Kurtz. She had believed in Biafra and Abosi, and when she understands how he really is she has to decide what to do with her knowledge; stick to her old submissive female role and be loyal to her childhood friend, or do everything in her power to prevent him from getting away with his immense crime:

Had Abosi suspected that he was going to be forced to surrender? Would she have been able to harm him personally if he had refused? Was her love for Nigeria greater than her admiration and suppressed love for this man?

Her feelings were mixed (…) He owed her—he owed all of those who had believed in him, in his burning zeal, in his ideal—an explanation.

94 Joseph Conrad. Heart of Darkness, 67
95 Abioseh M. Porter. “They Were There Too” contained in Marie Umeh (Ed.) Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta, 330
96 Katherine Fishburn. Reading Buchi Emecheta. A Cross-cultural Conversation, 140
97 Marie Umeh (Ed.) Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta. “Interview with Buchi Emecheta”, 452
98 Buchi Emecheta. Destination Biafra, 245
99 Ibid. 242
100 Ibid, 243
Finally Debbie decides to prevent him from leaving; unlike Marlow she does not hesitate unduly and has no second thoughts. The division in her is not permanent, as safely rooted in many worlds she just gets stronger by not hesitating, or regretting her choice to stop Abosi from running away from the consequences of his destructive leadership.  

5.4 The Manager vs. the Harlequin

Conrad’s “the manager” shows us the ugliest face of colonialism. His only reason to be in the Congo is ivory and he never pretends to have any philanthropic motives for being there, as he despises the Europeans who come to Africa with “civilising” intentions. The manager is a person deprived of all positive qualities, except for never being ill. This quality, however, shows that he is a brute with a charmed life. The manager is pure, ice-cold brutality. He never feels tempted to “go wild” like Kurtz, who really does so, or Marlow, who fights the temptation to do so. Yet the very opposite of the manager is the true-hearted Harlequin.

The Harlequin is a young Russian who admires Kurtz immensely, but in his innocence he never gets contaminated by Kurtz’s evil charisma. This young man acts the part of the noble savage and, like all of his kind; he is deeply innocent and immaculate. He is the equivalent of Hawkeye in Fennimore-Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*, the European trapper who “goes native” in America without becoming brutalised. To protect this true-hearted young man, Marlow sends him away to where he belongs: “Perhaps you had better go if you have any friends amongst the savages nearby. `Plenty’, he said. `They are simple people-and I want nothing, you know.”

Olof Lagerkrantz sees something of Conrad himself in the young Russian. It is easy to understand that he is what Conrad wished to be, a person belonging in Africa. Conrad wrote in an essay shortly before he died, that he remembered how he was smoking on the steamboat anchored off the Stanley Falls-station, and twice he calls his smoking in the warm, black African night a “pipe of peace”. Peace over the broken dreams of his youth, peace over a sunken continent of innocence. Africa was not what he had thought it would be, and his

---

101 Pauline Ada Uwakweh. “To Ground the Wandering Muse” contained in Marie Umeh (Ed.) *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*, 396
102 Joseph Conrad. *Heart of Darkness*, 18&25
103 James Fennimore-Cooper. *Last of the Mohicans* (New York N.Y. Pocket Books 1957)
104 Joseph Conrad. *Heart of Darkness*, 58
remedy for the greed and cruelty he witnessed, is to leave Africa, or become like the Harlequin, one of those who do not need an excuse for being there.  

Conrad’s portrait of these two important minor characters seems to represent his view of European intervention in Africa, they represent the worst and the best way of doing it and his advice is: as we cannot help being more like the manager than the Harlequin, Europe should leave Africa alone.

---

105 Olof Lagerkrantz. *Journey with Heart of Darkness*, 115
106 Joseph Conrad. *Heart of Darkness*, 11
6 Poor vs. Powerful, Can They Ever Be Reconciled?

One of the main conflicts throughout history has been between those who have power and wealth and those who have not. This conflict has been obvious in the relationship between Africa and Europe. In these novels the conflict between the poor and powerful is moulded in different ways. Conrad’s world is the simpler one, it is easy to detect who is powerful and who is poor; white Europeans have all the power and the best weapons, the Africans have nothing. The picture becomes more complex in Destination Biafra.

6.1 “Don’t you people fear God?”

The above sentence is pronounced by Debbie’s mother while scolding the Nigerian soldiers who abuse the refugees, kill the unborn baby and rape Debbie. Emecheta glorifies God-fearing, simple people who want to live in peace and realise that there is someone above everyone; no one has the right to act God and decide over life and death. In the key-chapters of the novel, those which deal with the “Refugees of the Darkening Night”, we meet people like this. In these chapters Debbie experiences a new fellowship with women from a quite different social context than her own. This part shows Emecheta at her best, with allusions to the Bible and African oral tradition, written in the enjoyable language that the reader recognises from her earlier novels. During the women’s long flight through the darkening night she fully develops her thesis that war affected civilians most and that peace and order would have been restored in Africa if women had led it. Furthermore she presents her solution to the problem of how to live together across social and ethnical barriers.

It is a sombre, terrifying tale but spotted with streaks of sunlight, exactly like the rainforest the refugees crosses. One of these streaks of sunlight is the mother who breastfeeds both little new-born Biafra and her own baby. Another is the story about the old woman who hides the refugees and thus gets miraculous protection throughout the war. Yet another one is the boy Ngbechi who becomes a mother for his younger brothers when they get separated from their real mother.

107 Buchi Emecheta. Destination Biafra, 127
108 Margareth Busby. Foreword. Marie Umeh (Ed.) Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta
109 Abioseh M. Porter. “They Were There Too” contained in Marie Umeh (Ed.) Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta, 323
110 Ibid. 321
111 Buchi Emecheta. Destination Biafra., 180
112 Ibid. 187
113 Ibid. 198 & 205
Here Emecheta answers the question: “is there any reconciliation possible between Europe and Africa?”, by introducing the reader to “the stubborn Irish priests and their nuns” who “Stayed in their mission stations, keeping the dispensary going and helping babies who were determined to be born, war or no war, to come safely into the world.” These faithful members of the Celtic church are contrasted with all whites who had left the war-zone, especially the Anglicans who “feared God less than the state”.

Emecheta claims that there is a kinship between individuals who fear God and realise that they are all human beings sharing the same world. Mutual respect makes human co-existence possible. Africans that lose contact with their roots turn out as bad as any white coloniser, such as the brutal soldiers who massacre the Irish convent with all the people seeking “Asylum Divinum” in it:

‘Even that old mother superior did not escape. They did it to her and killed her. ’

‘No, they did not kill her, she just bled to death. They killed the young nuns and many others, but they did not kill Mother Franceska’, Dorothy insisted, in a vain effort to wash away the sins of the men of her race who wore borrowed army uniforms, promoting an equally borrowed culture. A culture that did not respect the old. ‘(…) They would never rape an old woman, never…‘ Accepting the death of her child, but not able to understand the abuse of the helpless old.

Debbie becomes one of the other women by sharing their fate, despite a social position that could easily buy her a ticket to safety. In the same way the Irish nuns prove to be trustworthy by sharing the war with the other Africans. As Debbie puts it, when she bids farewell to the other surviving refugee when they arrive in safety: “We’ve been through many ordeals together (…) I’m trying to prove that beliefs can go beyond tribes.” By turning her war-diary into a manuscript called *Destination Biafra*, later brought to Britain for publication, Debbie decides to answer her own question in the darkening night: “When the history of the civil war was written, would the part played by her and women like Babs, Uzoma and the nuns (…) be mentioned at all?” Thus Emecheta states that no man can be trusted with the war-history of civilians, women have to tell it themselves.

---

114 Buchi Emecheta. *Destination Biafra*, 206
115 Marie Umeh (Ed.) Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta. Introduction, xxxi
116 Buchi Emecheta. *Destination Biafra*, 213
117 Ibid. 224
118 Ibid. 185
6.2 “An insoluble problem”\textsuperscript{120}

Conrad depicts the African scenery as a primeval wilderness although he on his own visit to the Congo had passed several marketplaces, towns and villages along the shores of the, rather densely trafficked, river.\textsuperscript{121} He describes the Africans as unfamiliar with European technical inventions while, in real life, there were a lot of skilled pilots, stewards and firemen among the native African staff on the Congo.\textsuperscript{122} Sherry states in Conrad’s \textit{Western World} that there were no violent threats from the people living in the region during the described period.\textsuperscript{123} Yet Conrad creates a hostile attack from the natives when the steam-boat approaches Kurtz station. His description of Africa often fits more to Fennimore-Cooper’s description of America a century earlier, than the Africa that he actually had visited.\textsuperscript{124}

That is perhaps why Chinua Achebe attacks \textit{Heart of Darkness} in the following words: it “is not brilliant but foolishly sensational and pretentious (...) it is set in Africa and teems with Africans whose humanity is admitted in theory but totally undermined by the mindlessness of its context and the pretty explicit animal imagery”\textsuperscript{125} He groups Conrad together with other European and American “monologists” who never let Africa speak.

In many ways Achebe is right, as when Conrad gives his solution to the problem of living together, Africa and Europe, he never gives any opportunity for the Africans to speak for themselves. \textit{Heart of Darkness} suggests the following solution: since Africans are noble savages and Europe is an evil civilisation which is strictly for Europeans only, Africa’s only rescue is to be left alone by powerful Europe. The only sign of another solution to the matter is the young Harlequin.

Conrad wrote this novel for a Britain swarming with people who gave colonisers many excuses for being in Africa; stealing and murdering in the name of progress. “The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves”\textsuperscript{126} Therefore in another way Achebe is wrong, as Conrad is rather brave in writing a critical novel against colonialism and he certainly does not imply that the Europeans are superior to the Africans in anything, with the exception of greed and cruelty, in which Europeans take a leading position.

\textsuperscript{119} Abioseh M. Porter. “They Were There Too” contained in Marie Umeh (Ed.) \textit{Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta}, 314
\textsuperscript{120} Buchi Emecheta. \textit{Destination Biafra}, 50
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid. 39
\textsuperscript{122} Norman Sherry \textit{Conrad’s Western World}, 59-60
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid. 53
\textsuperscript{124} James Fennimore-Cooper. \textit{Last of the Mohicans}
\textsuperscript{125} Chinua Achebe. “Times Literary Supplement” (1982-02-01)
6.3 Endings

Destination Biafra’s solution to the conflict is that Debbie steps into the shoes of the Irish nuns and becomes a mother to children orphaned by the war.\textsuperscript{127} The novel ends in deafening bomb-shells and a stubborn provocative hope. Emecheta gives Alan Grey the last line: “Nigeria will learn one day. See how long it has taken us.”\textsuperscript{128}

Heart of Darkness ends with no hope at all. Marlow sees Kurtz’s intended, one of the very few women in the novel. Conrad seems to make the intended partly responsible for the darkness Marlow had witnessed in Africa: ‘(...) but I believed in him more than anyone on earth - more than his mother, more than - himself. He needed me!’\textsuperscript{129}

Like all the other women in Conrad’s literary production she is very flat and utterly stereotypical.\textsuperscript{130} Both as Conrad’s literary tool and in her life, she is nothing but Kurtz’s mourning widow. Her mirror-woman in Africa was killed by the pilgrims, while being Kurtz’s African woman; she lived and died solely for him. Her death also saves Conrad from the problem faced by an, for readers of the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, unacceptable inter-racial marriage. This is another parallel with Last of the Mohicans where a superfluous woman dies at the end of the novel to save the author from the problem of getting her safely and properly married to a suitable, that is, a European, husband. In Heart of Darkness the improper wife dies while the intended wife is widowed, but while the European woman at least has the right to speak, her African counterpart only has the right to remain silent.

This is how the novel ends, in silence, and darkness, on the Nellie: “(...) the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed somber under an overcast sky - seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness.”\textsuperscript{131}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{126} Joseph Conrad. Heart of Darkness, 4
\bibitem{127} Marie Umeh (Ed.) Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta. Introduction. xxxix
\bibitem{128} Buchi Emecheta. Destination Biafra, last page
\bibitem{129} Joseph Conrad. Heart of Darkness, 71
\bibitem{130} Olof Lagerkrantz. Journey with Heart of Darkness, 24
\bibitem{131} Joseph Conrad. Heart of Darkness, 72
\end{thebibliography}
Conclusion

This investigation has proved to be very instructive. The journey that started with the presupposition that Conrad would give a realistic view of Africa, from his perspective, ended in the conclusion that his novel is a romantic masterpiece in the tradition of Fennimore-Cooper. Marlow travels through “brooding” forests and animated sceneries, inhabited by enigmatic aliens, exotic noble savages and charmed, but not at all charming, brutes.

Emecheta, on the other hand, has a heroine so incredibly perfect that you hardly believe that her picture of Africa will be very realistic. She has, on the contrary, formed an image of Africa that seems to be totally true. People are people and the forest neither “broods” nor resembles an ancient world; it is simply a damp, rain-forest with trees, mosquitoes and stinking swamps.

Another interesting finding is that both authors seem to regard colonialism as something evil. Chinua Achebe’s and Raoul Granqvist’s view that Conrad was nothing but a light version of Rudyard Kipling proved to be a misunderstanding. Conrad is certainly very European but the stereotypes of Africa seem to be different ones than those Achebe and Granqvist found. In fact, Conrad seems to mistrust European civilisation and admire the wild and untamed land and people that he found in Africa. It is true that he did not describe Africa as he really encountered it, or Africans as they really were, but the Africa of his dreams.

It is impossible not to think of Fennimore-Cooper’s romantic novels about the American forests, natives and white colonialists, when reading Conrad’s novel, as they indicate a strong influence on *Heart of Darkness*. And as Conrad had recently examined Fennimore-Coopers work when he wrote *Heart of Darkness* it is impossible to deny such an influence. This influence explains a lot of the discrepancies between the novel and the true reality that Conrad had encountered in the Congo. Rather than a conscious attempt to depict Africans as inferior to Europeans, Conrad wanted to write a novel that resembled Fennimore-Cooper’s texts by describing the wild land and noble savages of Africa in the same manner that Fennimore-Cooper had romanticised America and its natives.
Emecheta writes less skilfully and less cautiously so there is no mistaking that she also has an idealised Africa, which is personified in Debbie, her heroine together with Debbie’s dream of Biafra. Yet Emecheta seems to be more aware of her weaknesses than Conrad is aware of his romantic view of Africa. She is conscious of the fact that this is merely a dream. She lets Debbie’s mother Stella say: “Go to the Biafra of your dreams, and when you get there you’ll find ordinary people. Not angels, just people (…)” 132

Even if both authors recognise colonialism as the main conflict which has had an evil impact on Africa, they present totally different solutions to the problem. Emecheta believes in co-existence and mutual support on equal terms, which is clearly stated both in the passage about the Irish nuns and in her answer to Alan Grey’s proposal. However, most of all she believes in women, especially the African women who, according to her, are the hope of Africa.

Conrad believes that the only way to protect Africa from the evil impact of Europe is to leave Africa alone. If Europeans are not as innocent as the Russian Harlequin so they, like him, can return to the wild, thereby leaving Africa alone to avoid contaminating the continent with the evils of civilisation. In this opinion he resembles many modern Europeans who are not aware of the hidden racism in the idealisation of other “exotic” cultures. So it is difficult to agree with Olof Lagerkrantz who cannot trace any racism at all in Heart of Darkness. Although it seems to be unintentional it is obvious that Conrad does not care about the thoughts and wishes of the exotic “savages” he encounters but never really meets.

It is easier to feel sympathy with the views of Buchi Emecheta. Europe can never solve the conflict with its former colonies by “splendid isolation”. International co-operation on equal terms is the only way to reconciliation. And, like Emecheta, I believe that women hold one of the keys to a peaceful and democratic development in Africa, as well as in the co-existence with Europe and the rest of the world.

132 Buchi Emecheta Destination Biafra, 152
Bibliography

Primary sources:


Secondary sources


Hawley, John C. “Coming to Terms: Buchi Emecheta’s *Kehinde* and *Birth of a Nation*” contained in Umeh M (Ed.) *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*. Trenton New Jersey & Asmara, Eritrea Africa World Press Inc. 1996.


Porter, Abioseh M “They Were There, Too: Women and the Civil War(s) in Destination Biafra” contained in Umeh M (Ed.) *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*. Trenton, New Jersey & Asmara, Eritrea Africa World Press Inc. 1996.


**Electronic Documents:**


*Swedish National Encyclopedia*, [http://www.ne.se](http://www.ne.se).