IMPERIALISM IN CENTRAL AFRICA AS REVEALED IN JOSEPH CONRAD’S HEART OF DARKNESS
(A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH)

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Abstrak


Kata Kunci: imperialisme, kolonialisme, ekonomi, politik, konflik

Abstract

*Imperialism in Central Africa Revealed in Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness*. This research aims to observe the idea of imperialism felt by the characters revealed in the novel, reveal the impacts of imperial traits affecting the character’s performances throughout the story, and find out the impacts of imperialism in Belgian Congo. The data were collected by using library research and it analyzed by applying sociological approach proposed by Swingewood (1972) who revealed three classifications of sociology of literature. In this case, the researcher focused on the classification of sociology as the mirror of age and Orientalism theory by Edward Said (1977) used to reveal colonialism text. The results of this research show that there are some ideas of racism and the influences of the Belgian colonial power causes imperialism in Congo. Imperialism phenomena described in the novel of *Heart of Darkness* affects on the different treatment to ‘black’ skin people, the greediness and the desire to dominate Congo territories performed by the characters in the novel.

KeyWords: imperialism, colonialism, economy, politics, conflict
INTRODUCTION

One of the most important points to study novels is to understand the existence of the work itself and the interrelationship between the author and his work, as well as the social situation or condition that occurs when a work is written. To support the researcher’s opinion, Wellek and Warren emphasize that “Literature represents “life”, and “life” is, in large measure, a social reality, even though the natural world and the inner of subjective world of the individual have also been objects of literature “imitation” (Wellek and Warren, 1993). The imitation of life means that we may find out many problems that seems happened in real human life are transferred into the novel; and one of the most interesting happening in real life is the problem of humanity.

A study of social reality in the society, how they interact each other is study about sociology. Comte in Narwoko (2006), states that sociology is a study of the fundamental laws and positive symptoms of social life. While Plato in Damono (1984), defines sociology as everything in this world is actually just an imitation of reality life which comes up with the ideas.

There are a big number of novels, poems and short stories that has been written and inspired by history. One of the histories which have given a lot of inspiration and contribution into literary work is imperialism tragedy. Imperialism as “the extension of national power, authority, or influence to other countries or regions through policies of direct or indirect control. Imperialism usually suggests the impact of one society, thinking itself superior, upon another in a way that may transform both” (Encyclopedia Americana, 2004). Heart of Darkness illustrates imperialism in Central Africa. This novel not only shows the physical ‘wilderness’ of Africa, but also ‘wilderness’ in the metaphysical sense related to the practice of imperialist and colonial politics by European countries in Africa.

Sociology implies the science of human relationship that is occurring in the society. Therefore, it is close with sociology of literature, which comprehends the society as the main factor that influences such literary work, and society is a representation of the author through words as its medium and human is experience as its materials, means that there is interrelationship between sociology and literature. Thus, sociology of literature as the documentary aspect of literature arguing that it provides the mirror of age”. This view assumes that it is a direct reflection of various aspects of social structure, family relationship, class conflict and social problems (Swingewood et al., 1972). Meanwhile, the content and form of literary works are closely related to the social phenomena than those of other arts,
except cinema. Novels often bound up with particular moments in the history of society. It assumes that literature is closely related to the society which literary work appears.

The sociology of literature is used to understand the social history that is conveyed and delivered by the author through his literary work. Some important issues in the society are interesting to be analyzed. The researcher will take the examples which have happened in the 19th and 20th century found in literary works, particularly *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad. As Gekoski said that Heart of Darkness is one of Conrad’s most ambiguous and difficult story, a tale which has captivated critics with its generous imagery, philosophical, and psychological suggestiveness (Gekoski, 1978). This novel illustrates colonialism, imperialism, violence and racism. The references related to the issues at the time will be supported by data of the research. Thus, the relationship between sociology and literature are so close; it can be regarded as a social document, like the portrait of social reality.

This thesis is not the first research about *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad; there are some previous researches, which have the same object, topics or the methodology of the research. Ridley (1963), vol 18 entitled *The Ultimate Meaning of "Heart of Darkness"*. This article describes the meaning of *Heart of Darkness* and subjected a moral test by the characters in the story, and what are represented in every character. Next, Beyer (1997), entitled “*The Sepulchral City Revisited Joseph Conrad: Heart of Darkness*”. This article aims to describe the symbolic level of implication found in the story. The sepulchral city itself is symbol of repressive social mechanism of civilized world that has developed, in order to contain the behavior forces in human being and to ensure a level and peaceful coexistence. Then, Herlina (2007), entitled “*Physical Exploitation in the Novel Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad*”, tried to explain apparently, the exploration through the characters and the study aims to reveal the aspects of exploitation experienced by the African, and how this exploitation had impact on the image of Europeans to Africans.

The differences between this research and the previous researches mentioned above can be seen from the aims of the research. In this research, the researcher aims to find out and to reveal the ideas of imperialism expressed by the characters, and the impacts of imperialism in Belgian Congo and also toward indigenous people as revealed in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Finally, the study will correlate the various different concepts in analyzing the literary work with the previous researches by using sociological approach by swingewood and orientalism theory by Edward Said. This research will contribute new ideas of literature for further analysis.
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Source of Data

The data used by the researcher in this research were taken from Joseph Conrad’s novel *Heart of Darkness* published in 2008 as the primary data and the secondary data were taken from various books, articles, sparknotes video, encyclopedia, Britannica and website on internet. Through this secondary data, the researcher collects and used them as they are relevant to the topic.

Method of Collecting Data

The researcher read the text of the novel by close reading and tries to catch the ideas related to the problem investigated. Such data are in the form of texts, sentences, phrase, word, description, which show the imperialism tragedy and social situation in Africa when the novel was written. By collecting the data, the researcher does not only use library research, but also noting after reading, finds out the data through internet, watches the video spark notes.

Method of Analyzing Data

In this research, the researcher uses method of data analysis to support the analysis. In analyzing this novel, the researcher uses descriptive method, the sociology of literature, and orientalism theory which focus on the imperialism in Africa through the characters depicted in the novel. The researcher does close reading of the novel, determines the main focus on the research and highlights some important quotations from the novel to support the analysis.

Procedure of Collecting Data

In this research, the researcher does some procedures, such as read the novel carefully, intensively and writes the important note on the left side of the important quotation. Next, identifying some cases containing imperialism and colonialism. Then, Classify and clarify the imperialism through the dialogue among characters that will be analyzed by reading the novel and correlated with the supporting data from other sources and use sociological approach. Finally, conclude the result of the research.
FINDINGS

In findings, the researcher classifies the main point of the research based on the novel into three categories, as follows:

*The Imperialistic traits do the characters, perform in their respective positions*

Since the first part of the story, we can see Marlow as a keen observer who reflects upon everything that he sees in Belgian Congo. In the text, we can find out the examples of Marlow’s inner reactions of how was the European attitude toward African. Everything in the station was taken over by European. Commonly, the blacks indicate have no power while the whites have power to do everything to the powerless. Mr. Kurtz who represents the imperialist, mad to get the ivory seems not to be afraid of the natives. His intense desire, cruelty, persecute, the uncontrolled of his soul are the reasons for Marlow to think over about Kurtz awful aim to dominate everything along the stations. He can do anything what he wants and it happens to all traders, workers, criminals, enemies who have the ivory. It indicates in quotation, as follow;

> *Hadn’t I been told in all the tones of jealousy and admiration that he had collected, bartered, swindled, or stolen more Ivory that all the other agents together... It a sense of real presence was his ability to talk, his words- the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness.* (Conrad, 2008:78)

The atrocity by superior toward inferior illustrates as “dusty nigger” and” splay feet”, which the researcher assumes as a racist term and indicates the workers when they are carrying a heavy load. Marlow as the narrator in the story uses “nigger” not only to differentiate the skin colour, but also the term itself shows the feeling of racism and the idea of downgrading to the natives. In addition, the ‘white skin’ traders consider ‘white people’ are clean and reasonably as superior, while ‘black people’ are dirty and reasonably as inferior races. The main point of the way Europeans employ the natives as their labor, due to the fact that Central Africa has an interesting natural resources that encourage the western country to explore and to do competition for country’s necessity.

Imperialism causes a number affect of post-colonized country, which has the impact through the natives’ situation and the region as well. It has the impacts on characters’ performance through *Heart of Darkness*, which consists of racism, conflict and atrocities found in Central Africa. European treatment toward the ‘weakness’ country can be seen in this story, especially discrimination between ‘white’ people and ‘black’ people. Kurtz as the main character who dominates every tragedy in the station, he is also shows his racialist
argument, it is about the idea of superior to inferior that can be seen in the quotation, as follows

_He began with the argument that we are whites, from the point of development we had arrived at. By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded_” (Conrad, 2008: 82).

From this quotation, we can see that Kurtz presents his argument in reporting his existence in Belgian Congo to the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs which is part of European company, and he argues that the Europeans have the right to suppress them because the Africans differ from them in the appearances aspect and the behaviors.

The situation in Belgian Congo gives some consequences to the characters’ performance. In this case, the researcher focuses on internal conflict, which influence and has the impact toward characters’ performance, particularly for their behavior and attitude. It actually affects every characters in the story, whether the trader or the natives. In addition, Many Africans were forced to be the "carriers" as hard labor into the deepest jungle of expeditions, to move the number of ivory from one place to another.

**The impacts of imperialism on character’s performance in Belgian Congo**

In this story, Joseph Conrad presents the brutal imperialism by European nation in the Central Africa, particularly Belgian Congo. The researcher analyzes deeper through the dialogues among these main and major characters, which mainly shows the importance of prejudice, monopoly, propaganda and exploitation. Ambition, wealthy, and position become the main point of the storyline from the beginning until the end of story, the same as politic and economy. Actually, there are some impacts of imperialism in Belgian Congo correlated with any reasons to control over the land and place, such as the power of motivation, economy, politic, chauvinism and avarice. Imperialism itself closely connected to European nationalism, which in the beginning often shows their reputation and their power in terms of possession. It shows in the quotation, as follows;

“They were dying slowly - it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now- nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom… fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest. These moribund shapes were free as air- and nearly as thin” (Conrad, 2008: 25)

The dramatically colonialist by European has caused some impacts to the natives of the particular country for long time. The ‘white’ man begin the process of gaining to all possible wealth of the territories with no consideration for the people who lived there, because of the natives do not have any powers against the Europeans. The imperialists and
colonialists are not ruined by the natives, but by the colonial situation itself, through the contacts with the other merchants, engineers, overseers. It shows that the detail about ‘evil’ man happens to the imperialists when they contravene the superior’s rules in exploiting the true nature of Central Africa.

DISCUSSION

In this part, the researcher shows some findings of the research based on the research question; first, the imperialistic traits do the characters, perform in their respective positions; second, the impacts imperialism on character’s performance in Belgian Congo. The researcher elaborates the imperialistic traits do the characters, perform in their respective positions, and the impacts of imperialism in Belgian Congo. The imperialistic traits do the characters, perform by the characters in Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness include of Charlie Marlow, Mr. Kurtz, the manager, and the Harlequin. Charlie Marlow symbolizes the positive side of imperialism. He shares about his fellow Europeans’ prejudices and observes widely exposed all along the story by the character’s performance. Second is Mr. Kurtz, he is the chief of the Inner Station and symbolizes imperialist as the ‘white’ man trader in Central Africa. He is charismatic and has the ability to be a leader man. He becomes wildly successful but he has also treated his own evil desires and alienated himself from his fellow ‘white’ men. The third is the general manager; he is the chief agent of the Company’s African territory and manager of the first station. He is primary concern in perceiving his position within the company and possesses a strange capacity to produce uneasiness in those around him, which allows him to exert his control. The last the harlequin or the Russian trader, he is a sailor who has gone into the African interior as trader. His life is partly devoted to Mr. Kurtz and watched over Kurtz activities in trading competition.

The researcher also found out Imperialism which has some impacts that affected the characters’ performances throughout the story, such as racism, conflict and atrocities. The impact of imperialism is not only affect the characters’ performance but also it has the impact on the country of Belgian Congo as well for the reason of Europeans to explore more the territories, because of the motivation to spread out European power, economy, politics, chauvinism and avarice.
CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

After analyzing whole content of the novel based on the topic of the research, the researcher found out there are some ideas of racism expressed by the characters, the impacts of imperialism that affected the characters’ performances throughout the story, such as racism, motivation, economy, politics, atrocities and avarice. The impact of imperialism is not only affect the characters’ performance but also it has the impact on the country of Belgian Congo as well for the reason of Europeans to explore more the territories. This study expected to encourage further researchers on literary works. Even though in this case, the researcher chooses imperialism as the main part of Joseph Conrad’s work, but there are many other interesting topics which can be discussed and analyzed intensely. Therefore, this work hopefully could become a reference for other students as a comparison data for the further research who are interested in doing research and want to explore more aspects in Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


