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Trabajo Fin de Grado: Joseph Conrad revisited: race and identity in the XXIst century

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Summary

This work deals with two ideas which dwell and have dwelt inside mankind's very existence: race and identity. The analysis of these terms will be put in connection with Joseph Conrad's work *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Our aim is to focus on the analysis of these terms, which have significant importance for us humans, and to link them to how they are regarded nowadays through a set of ideas and thoughts which will gather Joseph Conrad's view on the terms. These two terms can be interrelated and are a mirror for insightful perspective; we've thus decided to analyze Joseph Conrad's vision of race and identity in *Heart of Darkness.*

Resumen

Este trabajo analiza dos ideas que habitan y siempre han habitado en el seno de la propia existencia de la humanidad: raza e identidad. El análisis de estos términos se conectará con la obra de Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Nuestra intención es la de analizar estos conceptos, tan importantes para nosotros, y ligarlos a su consideración hoy en día a través de la consideración de críticas y del aporte de ideas que avalen y/o contrasten el pensamiento y la ideología de Joseph Conrad. Estos dos términos se pueden relacionar y aportan una interesante perspectiva. Es por ello por lo que hemos decidido analizar la visión de Joseph Conrad sobre los conceptos de raza e identidad en *Heart of Darkness.*

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JOSEPH CONRAD REVISITED

RACE AND DENTITY IN THE XXIst CENTURY

Omar Bousfanj Muñoz

1. Introduction

During the upcoming pages, we deal with a masterpiece that has amazed experts and critics alike, but with a twist, since our focus will be finding out what is beneath two terms that have walked the path of existence alongside people for the longest time, being both present in the novella. Nevertheless, before jumping into the 'how', let's talk about the 'why'.

1.1. Why Identity?

Identity is a concept that can be of the utmost interest for many people, even if they don't get to fully grasp its meaning. Reaching one's true and only identity is something people have longed for every single day since World History can recall. The urge to find what we are meant to do, our role in the world and who we truly are as we are growing up (or even growing old), that is indeed an interesting subject. But identity goes further than just that. It reaches out to culture, globalization, society and life itself and affects how people communicate, it has a strong influence on people's performance under different sets of circumstances, it affects their beliefs and their thoughts and, in short, it affects how people live. Identity applies to anything existent in the universe. However, we put a stress on personal identity, the identity of individuals: people alluding to concepts of any sort in order to identify themselves and achieve the idea of uniqueness, of individuality, of being something no one else can be. The idea of working with such a deep concept brought me some excitement, but we felt like I needed something else. Identity can be added to our names, to our job, social class, culture, or even to our race, hence the relationship between the two terms.

1.2. Why Race?

The concept of race is again quite an interesting one for me, and one we have been acquainted with since I was a child. My father was born in Morocco and my mother was born in Spain, which makes them belong to technically different races. Growing up in such an environment made me get used to people being physically different, so I never asked myself why my father's skin had a different tone, or why he spoke Spanish with a bit of an accent. This interest in the concept of race has its roots in my family itself, but was fully developed by how the world deals with race. Someone could define race as a group of people who share a set of both physical and biologically inherited characteristics, common to all the members of the group. Thus, race could be used to somehow pinpoint who we are and to place us within a community of people in which we can identify ourselves. Race can be seen nowadays as a layer of mankind's 'cultural identity', and can even be pointed out as the most troublesome. Race and racism are entwined, as the latter is a result of people's prejudice about the former. In upcoming chapters of this project we analyze both race and identity in a deeper way.

1.3. Why *Heart of Darkness*?

After all this deliberating, I found myself with two topics which are quite prone to thoughtful analysis. I only needed a link, something to feel like everything I have studied, everything I have worked through during my degree went into a full circle. The quest for that link took about 8 seconds; I guess I have to thank Joseph Conrad for that. He actually made it quite easy for me; he wrote a tale with a huge deal of race and identity, and such topics called for just that. Those concepts lie within people's souls, they get well deep inside, and Conrad was really good at creating journeys with mankind's soul as a final destination.

In this work, *Heart of Darkness* proves to be the perfect scenario for the analysis of race and identity. Our main purpose is to go deep into the novella, just as Marlow goes deeper and deeper inside the African jungle, to find how and by which means race and identity are presented. Looking into Europe's context in Conrad's time may also provide some insight on the presence of both concepts in the novella, which was written at a time marked by imperialism in all of Europe. With all that has been said, we will

create an analysis of both race and identity as seen in Joseph Conrad's '*Heart of Darkness'* and we will then compare how both terms are looked at in the novella with how they are regarded in the twenty-first century. But before heading into straight analysis, let us take a look at Joseph Conrad as an individual, at his major work and at his context.

2. The Author: Joseph Conrad

2.1. Early Life

Joseph Conrad was born in Podolia (a part of Ukraine that had been Polish before) on December 3rd 1857. His father was a writer who also participated in politics and worked on translation. He provided Conrad with home education, making him get in touch with literature at a very short age. Conrad became passionate about Shakespeare, which made him get in the world of English literature that would later drag him in. He lost his mother to tuberculosis when he was seven years old. After several changes in location, Conrad and his father settled in Krakow, where his father died due to tuberculosis again. Conrad was thus an orphan at the early age of eleven.

Conrad himself was ill at that time, and his results at school were lacking in any subject other than Geography. Despite not being good at school, he is described as an astonishingly intelligent person. His uncle took care of him, but his poor school results and his apparent need for open environments made his uncle try to get him to be a sailor, and Conrad moved to Marseilles to start a sailing career that would last nearly twenty years. Sailing clearly and dramatically influenced his writing, with several of his novels showing a nautical background and sailing environments. There is no need to dig deep inside Conrad's work to see this is a fact. '*Heart of Darkness'* presents several moments of sailing through both sea and river, always accompanied by abstract thinking; always conveying more than what meets the eye. As previously mentioned, Conrad loved reading; especially Polish romantic literature. However, he was deeply interested in British literature and in Britain itself. This passion led him towards working for the British merchant marine for fifteen years. His writing got characters, situations and thoughts out of those years at sea, so we can take his writing as some sort of reflection of his sailing adventures.

2.2. From Sailor to Writer.

Conrad got to work as a steamer on the Congo River, which gets us to the part of his life this project is interested in. The experiences and memories he gathered during that period of time, what he saw, what he heard and what he felt, it all would shape years later into '*Heart of Darkness'.* Many critics and experts say Conrad was a racist. We deal with that matter more deeply later, but looking at his writing, we would say that there is no way to know for sure whether if he was a racist or not (and it probably will never be known with full certainty) but he was for sure good at describing what he had seen, no matter how harsh, cruel and despicable that may have been, including how people felt towards others. Unfortunately, Conrad was a really reserved man, and that affected his writing as well. This fact creates some sort of abstract ambiguity in some of his works, making the reader not fully point out what Conrad was trying to make clear. Working in the Congo River made him witness the dark side of the colonialism and imperialism. During his time there he got ill and had to return to England for recovery.

In 1894, Conrad left his place at the merchant marine and decided to become a writer. Joseph Conrad's first novel is called '*Almayer's Folly*,' written right after giving up his sailing career, and it showcases William Charles Olmeijer, one of Conrad's many acquaintances overseas. Despite Polish being his native language, he decided to write in English. This decision brought some issues, given mainly by the language. Conrad did not get to fully apprehend English until he was in his twenties, so it seems quite a bold choice that he decided to write in English and not in Polish. His English was somewhat stiff, with compositional and structural elements resembling those of Polish at certain moments. He managed to avoid setting his literature in England, because that was the native English writers' comfort zone, and he had the odds against him. Instead, he talked about England in novels set in Congo or overseas.

Lam 1: Joseph Conrad at the age of 66

Most of Conrad's work was first published in magazines and then edited as novels after the positive reviews. Despite his writing being praised by critics during several years, he only became popular after publishing *Chance* in 1913, a novel ironically regarded as 'average'. After World War I, Conrad is said to have become more anxious, and that anxiety accompanied him until his demise in 1924, at the age of 66.

2.3. Impressions on Joseph Conrad

Several writers, poets and experts in general who met Conrad decided later to put their impressions of him in paper. Here I include the thoughts of both Henry Newbolt, a historian; and Bertrand Russell, philosopher:

"One thing struck me at once—the extraordinary difference between his expression in profile and when looked at full face. While the profile was aquiline and commanding, in the front view the broad brow, wide-apart eyes and full lips produced the effect of an intellectual calm and even at times of a dreaming philosophy. Then as we sat in our little half-circle round the fire, and talked on anything and everything, I saw a third Conrad emerge—an artistic self, sensitive and restless to the last degree. The more he talked the more quickly he consumed his cigarettes... And presently, when I asked him why he was leaving London after... only two days, he replied that... the crowd in the streets... terrified him. "Terrified? By that dull stream of obliterated faces?" He leaned forward with both hands raised and clenched. "Yes, terrified: I see their personalities all leaping out at me like tigers!" He acted the tiger well enough almost to terrify his hearers: but the moment after he was talking again wisely and soberly as if he were an average Englishman with not an irritable nerve in his body." (Najder 2007)

From this fragment we can take how Henry Newbolt saw the different layers in Conrad's self: the artist, the sailor, the English gentleman and any other his conversation with Conrad may have made apparent.

"My first impression was one of surprise. He spoke English with a very strong foreign accent, and nothing in his demeanour in any way suggested the sea. He was an aristocratic Polish gentleman to his fingertips.... At our very first meeting, we talked with continually increasing intimacy. We seemed to sink through layer after layer of what was superficial, till gradually both reached the central fire. It was an experience unlike any other... I have known. We looked into each other's eyes, half appalled and half intoxicated to find ourselves together in such a region. The emotion was as intense as passionate love, and at the same time all-embracing. I came away bewildered, and hardly able to find my way among ordinary affairs." (Najder 2007)

Russell highlights the fact that he still felt Polish, despite everything around him being English, including his very own writing. Russell shows his excitement over their

first meeting and describes his self as not hinting a sea relation. This suggests the coexistence of both the real Joseph Conrad and his writing alter ego, who uses his sea experiences as a source for inspiration.

Once the man has been discussed, it is time to zero in on the novella to be analyzed. Let us talk about *Heart of Darkness.*

3. The Novella: *Heart of Darkness*

As previously mentioned, Conrad worked during some time as a steamer at Congo River, and he later used his experience there to write *Heart of Darkness.* The novella was first published in 1899 as a three-part story in Blackwood's Magazine.
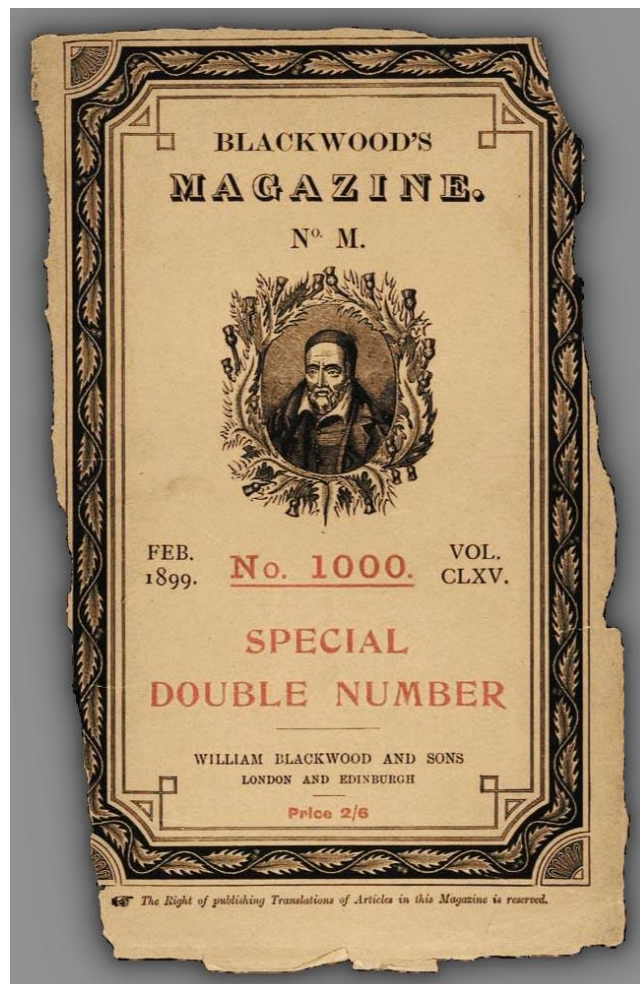
Lam 2. Blackwood's Magazine's 1000th publication, including *Heart of Darkness.*

Source: upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4a/Blackwood's_Magazine_-_1899_cover.jpg

Despite it being technically released in 1899, it is widely regarded as a twentieth century novella. It can be referred to as either a novel or a novella, but the focus on Marlow's journey thus neglecting any possible sub-plots and the decent yet not remarkable length make me swing towards calling it a novella. At the time it was published, Conrad's now regarded as magnificent work was really controversial. This was to be expected, as *Heart of Darkness* deals with the roughness and cruelty of an empire taking over a country. *Heart of Darkness* portrays imperialism and colonization and the result is raw and harsh to imagine, yet vivid and filled with rich description.

3.1. The plot

Conrad narrates the journey of Charles Marlow, a man who starts working for an ivory trading company and who finds himself travelling to Africa, through the figure of a narrator who witnesses everything. From the moment he sets his foot on that land, he starts describing what he sees. Those initial descriptions are tainted with chaos, with a feeling of disorder. They cover not only the scenery, filled with machine parts and conveying a feeling of noise, of anxiety and even fear; but they also deal with people. The narrator describes the natives as if they were not human, chained and being severely exploited, but he goes further than just that. They make unpredictable moves with their body, their eyes have wilderness all over them. The picture transmitted to the reader by this description is that of a creature more than a person. On his way to the Central Station, Marlow learns that the steamboat he was going to command sank during an accident, and reparations take three months. In that time, he hears things about Kurtz. The figure of Kurtz is a major one in *Heart of Darkness*. He embodies Marlow's drive, since it is his desire to meet Kurtz in person what keeps him going deeper and deeper into the jungle; it can be argued that he becomes obsessed with him.

Once the ship is repaired, he starts his journey upriver, which proves to be hazardous. The river is filled with fog and the natives beat drums fiercely, providing a feeling of jeopardy, danger in the wild. When they are close to their destination, the steamboat is attacked by natives and the helmsman on board is killed.

After reaching the inner station, Marlow finds out that Kurtz's health is critical. Marlow is constantly keeping Kurtz in his head, and he gets to talk to him and try to make him realize that he will get killed if he leads the natives in an attack. Kurtz's already poor health condition worsens and he dies right in front of Marlow on their way back aboard the steamboat.

3.2. Kurtz's corruption and destruction

Kurtz's last words have been a focus of analysis for many years: *"The horror! The horror!"* He is probably referring to his own actions and the actions of those who were with him in Africa, he witnessed all that horror and that eventually drove him insane and wild. Corrupted power little by little devours a man's soul until he is destroyed. Kurtz's countless talents and abilities have granted him good promotions in his job. He is strong-willed and filled with determination. His inner strength and command abilities, combined with the freedom given by the African wilderness, make Kurtz's power become corrupted, and he goes insane. He becomes more savage than the ones everyone calls savages all through the novella. Even Marlow witnesses physical proof of his degrading transformation.

> *He began with the argument that we whites, from the point of development we've arrived at, "must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings – we approach them with the might as of a deity," (...) There were no practical hints to interrupt the magic current of phrases, unless a kind of note at the foot of the last page, scrawled evidently much later, in an unsteady hand (...) It was very simple (...) "Exterminate all the brutes!"* (Conrad 1994: 72-73)

Kurtz's notes show how he undergoes a degrading process that leads him to destruction. Corruption is a recurrent topic in *Heart of Darkness.* Corruption of the soul, corruption of individuals and corruption of colonialism and imperialism are present in the novella. Ambition is what leads people to Africa, with a particular word repeatedly standing for 'money or 'profit'.

The word "ivory" rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they were praying to it. A taint of imbecile rapacity blew through it all, like a whiff from some corpse. By Jove! I've never seen anything so unreal in my life. (Conrad 1994: 33)

Ivory was their target all along, that is, economical profit. That is what hid behind the colonization façade. Conrad even states that it looks as if they were praying to it, thus putting money at the level of a deity.

Kurtz's downfall has been previously mentioned. As the avid reader progresses through the novella, he gets to notice how Marlow starts walking down Kurtz's road. The chaos he finds when he arrives, the harshness of the environment, the people being exploited to severe exhaustion or death, and his journey upriver are all signs of the darkening of his heart. The deeper he goes into the jungle, the less present his civilized self appears to be, his actions are blunter and he seems bewildered at some points. The turning point, what makes Kurtz's outcome and Marlow's different happens to be determination, which drives Kurtz to take one more step that leads to fatal consequences, while Marlow's hesitant mind decides to stop.

True, he had made that last stride, he had stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot. (Conrad 1994: 101)

Kurtz's determination eventually becomes his undoing, and Marlow's lack of it saves him in the end.

3.3. Main Symbols

Heart of Darkness is filled with rich description and sharp storytelling, elements that contribute to its current standing as one of the best novels in the twentieth century. The complexity of the characters of Kurtz and Marlow builds up as the story goes on. There are, however, some elements spread through the novella that convey meaning to a certain extent and enhance the quality of the description at times. Let us look at the most important ones.

The most relevant and obvious one is darkness, as it taints and surrounds everything in the novella. From the dusted pieces of machinery, to the darkness of the skin of the Africans, everything in the book keeps the reader within a dark atmosphere, and constantly reminds him that Marlow is in a dark place with dark people, either in the inside or in the outside. Darkness is also used to create a feeling of danger and uncertainty, of mystery and deception. When Marlow is heading upriver, fog covers everything and hinders vision for those on board. The sound of drums coming from the dark creates a sense of chaos, Marlow feels lost amidst the fog, moving towards an unknown destination and at the same time knowing that he is getting deeper into the wild. Fog is the materialization of darkness in Conrad's work; it creates desperation which makes people act blindfolded, without measuring the consequences of their deeds. Aside from this outer darkness, there is also an inner darkness, living inside the colonizers, whose greed and thirst for power lead them towards being ruthless. That inner darkness is present in Kurtz and every character plundering ivory from Africa. Both inner and outer darkness fill the novella with the 'thick-air' atmosphere intended by Conrad.

Another important symbol in *Heart of Darkness* is women, and the way they are portrayed. The first relevant female character to appear in Conrad's novella is Marlow's aunt. When he meets her to say goodbye to her, right before starting his journey, she congratulates him on going in such a noble trip to civilize the natives and Marlow - aware of his aunt's total unawareness – states the following lines about women:

> *It's queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there had never been anything like it, and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset. Some confounded fact we men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation would start up and knock the whole thing over.* (Conrad 1994: 18)

Conrad utters that women live unaware of the atrocities done by men in Africa, they fall for the colonization façade. They are at some points represented as the embodiment of human values, those human values men in Africa lost long ago. She is also used to represent naivety and innocence. The interesting thing about women in *Heart of Darkness* is that, even though there are not many of them, they are used to represent a wide range of values. The three main female characters are Marlow's aunt, Kurtz's mistress and Kurtz's intended, we've already talked about Marlow's aunt, let us now focus on the mistress. She is a native and she represents both love and faithfulness. She loves Kurtz and she is the only native who does not run away when Marlow reaches Kurtz; she stays to protect him:

> *I pulled the string time after time. They broke and ran, they leaped, they crouched, they swerved, they dodged the flying terror of the sound.(…) Only the barbarous and superb woman did not so much as flinch and stretched tragically her bare arms after us over the somber and glittering river.* (Conrad 1994: 97)

While the rest of the natives flee when they hear the steamboat's whistle, she remains where she was, willingly protecting Kurtz. Let us now talk about Kurtz's intended. She is his fiancée and while he is exploiting Africa's people and resources, she is sitting at Belgium living a normal life, and pretty much like Marlow's aunt, unaware of what is happening in Africa. Like Kurtz's mistress, she professes a strong love for him, but she is also used to embody civilization. She is out of the chaos taking place in Africa, and she represents faithfulness just as the mistress does. Conrad actually created a parallelism between the two women, alluding the protective instinct of the mistress when Marlow pays the intended a visit, after Kurtz's demise:

> *She put out her arms as if after a retreating figure, stretching them black and with clasped pale hands across the fading and narrow sheen of the window. Never see him! I saw him clearly enough then, I shall see this eloquent phantom as long as I live, and I shall see her, too, a tragic and familiar shade, resembling in this gesture another one, tragic also, and bedecked with powerless charms, stretching bare brown arms over the glitter of the infernal stream, the stream of darkness.* (Conrad 1994: 109-110)

This powerful fragment creates a relationship between the two characters; they are bonded to Kurtz by the same links: unconditional love and loyalty. Conrad uses the arm-stretching move as a matching point to put both women, the native and the civilized, at the same level. The world women live in according by Conrad remains untouched at the end of the novella, since Marlow decides to spare the intended from *'the horror'* Kurtz went through and tells her that she was present in his last breath.

One last symbol worth mentioning is River Congo itself. It is the way in for Europe; it allows the Europeans to get to the core of Africa without having to put one foot on it to reach it. The river can be seen as the flow that brings darkness – the Europeans' intentions - inside the darkness – the African's mysterious and uncharted jungle. The river is also the location for one of the most hazardous moments on Marlow's journey. His travel upriver proves to be challenging and even ends up in death. The steamboat has to fight the strong currents, the fog and the natives, all at the same time, to reach the inner station. It can be argued that the river is actually against the fact that the Europeans can get and plunder Africa and enslave its people. Congo River can embody the figure of the hopeless hero, constantly trying to protect Africa but unable to fully do so. This can be seen in the two points in which Marlow goes through the river, one upriver and the other downriver. The journey upriver to reach Kurtz is chaotic and extremely dangerous, yet the journey downriver at the end of the novella is calm and fast-paced. Also, fog covers the journey upriver representing Marlow's step into the unknown, while the journey downriver takes place after Kurtz's destruction after the corruption of his soul.

After this presentation of some of the main topics and symbols present in the novella, it is time to see what was going on in Europe at the time *Heart of Darkness* was written. Let us talk about imperialism and colonialism.

4. The Context in *Heart of Darkness:* It is all about the Empire.

Heart of Darkness was written and published during the final years of the nineteenth century, a moment in time in which all of Europe was in a wild race to see 'who conquered what' in Africa. This period had both imperialism and colonialism going on in full swing. European countries started working towards expanding their

territory by colonizing African countries. By doing that, they allegedly provided means and education to the inhabitants of those countries. Following this procedure, Africa was colonized little by little by different European countries getting different shares of the whole territory and struggling to expand their land the most.

4.1. Colonialism: a charade.

Going by the book, the colonized African countries would get an improved life quality, better education, new economical investments and the possibility for their people to work. This, of course, was nothing but sugar to sweeten the bitter reality. Most of the time, European countries got to colonize African countries by using military force, and applied their political regime to the colonized country. Colonization was presented as a way to civilize the people in African countries, but the practice and measures taken did not point out that way. Colonization thus proved to be a way to plunder African countries for the enrichment of Europe. This took place during the last two decades of the nineteenth century and is commonly known as the 'Scramble for Africa'. The timing matched Conrad's time at the Belgian Congo, which made him witness the process in all its harsh glory. Belgium was even considered as one of the most ruthless countries during this period, so what Conrad saw in Congo – and what he later depicted in *Heart of Darkness* – fully helps the reader to see to what extent European countries went for the sake of becoming wealthier and wealthier while being moved by greed and competitiveness.

The way the Africans are described to be treated in the novella is nothing but cruel and abusive; let us talk now about some of the facts this colonization process implied for African countries.

4.2. The Scramble for Africa

As previously mentioned this event took place over the course of around 30 years, after which most of Africa had been occupied by European countries. What started as a way to civilize people became a fight for both political and economic influence and hegemony, with most European countries rolling themselves in a race to obtain as much as possible out of Africa. Up until these years, colonization had supposed an influence made by the colonizer on the colonized, in terms of economy and politics. At this point,

however, things became more intense, with European countries directly ruling over their colonies.
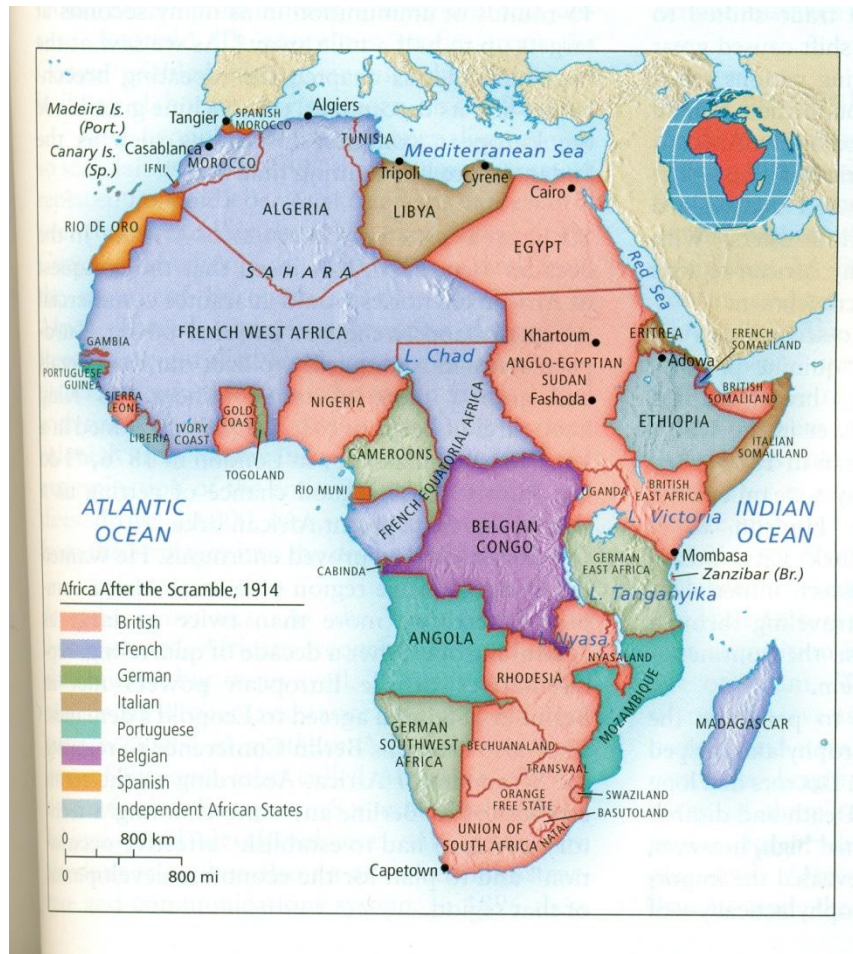

Fig 1: How Africa stood after the Scramble, in 1914. The Belgian Congo, *Heart of Darkness'* setting, in purple.

By using the colonialism charade, European countries found quite a resourceful approach to become both politically and economically relevant. Europe travelled to those countries and plundered them, exploiting their natural resources. In *Heart of Darkness,* Congo proves to be a fruitful source for ivory, which would later be used to obtain wealth. Although all of this brought some profit, they did not stop there. They enslaved the citizens of African countries, making them work to death and treating them cruelly and without any sort of respect – an extremely opposite outcome to the one spread by European countries. They also took people from those countries and sold

them as slaves to get even more money. Conrad is really explicit in his description of the people being enslaved by the Europeans; his descriptions match historical reports of the ruthlessness shown in the Belgium Congo during those years.

There are several reasons behind why Europe did what they did. First, they wanted to obtain political influence and make it big enough to outperform other countries. Second, there was an obvious chance at major economical profit, even if it meant betraying human rights and values. Third, the feeling of competitiveness itself aggravated the process, making it more violent and desperate, with countries racing against each other and wiping out the Africans in the midst of their colonizing chaos. *Heart of Darkness* excels in describing the atrocities done in Congo, with all that had been recounted dramatically influencing Conrad's experience, which was later put into paper.

Once the context has been clarified, it is time to go back to the main terms of this work: race and identity. Before scrutinizing how these terms work in *Heart of Darkness,* let us take a general look at each one of them.

5. An Insight on the Terms of Race and Identity

As the focus of this work, a spot-on view on race and identity – already applied to Joseph Conrad's novella – is not enough. We're thus including some general points on both terms before heading into the crux of the matter. As previously mentioned, both terms have an extreme depth and can be analyzed in great detail. Both terms can raise debates and are open for fruitful discussion. Without further ado, let us start this insight on the aforementioned terms, starting with the concept of race.

5.1. What is race supposed to be?

Over the course of history, people from different parts of the world have coexisted in this planet. They have interacted with each other, they have treasured memories, they have got married and they have had children. There was a time where people did not need the term race. Of course, people have always been divided, but at those times things like status, religion or social class where the ones creating the groups. It was on the seventeenth century when the term was first used to denote people sharing a

particular set of physical traits. At that point, the term did not seem to have any negative connotations. But as time went on, this use of the term got to a point in which it was used to draw a line between two sets of people, being one of them inevitably considered to be superior to the other. On the nineteenth century, the term evolved and started to be used to classify entire populations according to obvious physical characteristics, being skin color the most used one. This meaning conveyance brought the issues that would later escalate into what we call racism. But thinking with a technical mind, it is impossible not to wonder if races actually exist. This is a topic of discussion that has been open for a long time now, and today's society – as we will later state – does not make it easy to reach an full-scale solution. Human diversity is so high and rich that there is no actual proof that genetics and race are related. This leads to believing that race has no genetic basis whatsoever. For instance, not every human being labeled under the 'Asian' race is going to have scratched eyes, the same way a person labeled under a different race can happen to have that characteristic. Taking this into account, people defining race as a way to classify people sharing similar physical traits are basing their definition in something that is not entirely accurate, that is, the definition has gaps. Some experts on the field and philosophers have stated their disagreement with the existence of the term and provided other choices granted with more accuracy, such as the term ethnicity, denoting a group of people classified by having some sort of common ancestor from a cultural point of view. There are issues, however, when trying to put one concept instead of the other, since individuals cannot choose their race – physical traits choose it for them – while they can choose whether or not to practice the beliefs and customs attached to their ethnicity. The concept of race has some issues attached to it when looking at it now, but back when it all started, the term happened to be quite convenient for those who learnt how to use it; it became the excuse for the ruthless.

5.2. How race became mankind's excuse

Right after the creation of race with its current meaning, which took place in the nineteenth century, people started to use the term to justify their actions, even if they were not at all justifiable. Racial differences have been used as an excuse in several historical events, such as the slaughter of the Native Americans, the discrimination towards Asian people and the African exploitation described in *Heart of Darkness.* The point is that society used the term race to justify social discrimination and inequality

giving it a natural and inevitable order. This labeling of people socially, politically and economically weaker in the nineteenth century is what evolved into racism.

Race thus became a dark term, a term used to cover up guilt and unfairness, and a term which clearly created a dominant group – those who actually used the term – and a subjugated one. Race is at the core of slavery, of the slaughtering of entire populations for the sake of political acknowledgement and economic prosperity and exploitation. This usage of the term as a justification reached out to even laws and constitutions, which later made skin-colored people have to fight for their rights – a fight that is still happening. Over time, race became bigger and bigger, up to the point in which parents told their children to stay away from people who looked 'different'. After a period of social alienation and a later justification of evil deeds, racism was born.

5.3. Human versus human. The problem of racism.

Racism is a human issue created by humans. There is no running around about it. We are the ones to blame for everything such a term has caused. It has affected how we see the world as a whole and how we regard people. Racism added a layer of complexity to social interaction. What started as a way to classify people for how they look became a beast that has killed millions and destroyed some more millions' lives.

Technically speaking, racism is a form of discrimination based on social prejudice and physical differences. It is a form of despise, and millions of people have been somewhat racists at some point of their lives. As a concept it has gained worldwide recognition and it is considered as a mental condition by some experts. It is generally associated with a violent conduct but that does not have to be necessarily the case. The simple belief that some races are superior to others is an instance of racism. Taken to the extreme, racism is a powerful and dangerous weapon, which makes people believe that what they are doing is right when it goes straight against human rights.

In the nineteenth century, with the creation of the current meaning of race, racism appeared as well and created a world of discrimination between equals. At that time, the term was used by intellectuals to refer to those who knew what European countries had done in Africa and to refer to the attitude some countries had during historical events in the past. The term had a smaller social expansion than it has now. A wide amount of

people was not acquainted with the term racism. We further deal with the term later in the work, a twenty-first century projection on the term is quite insightful. This has explained and created a somewhat solid idea on what race is, as well as what comes with it. Let us now dive into identity.

5.4. The notion of identity

Who am I? What am I? Where do I come from? Where am I headed? These are questions every single human being has asked himself at least once in his lifetime. Humans are curious creatures; we are constantly analyzing, and constantly checking what surrounds us. We are thirsty for answers about who we are, what we want to do and who we want to be. All these inquiries have to do with our identity.

When looking at identity as a term, many and really varied layers come to our mind: from major levels such as biological identity, cultural identity and national identity, to some more accurate levels like individual identity or working identity. Identity as a whole has up to a certain degree a social basis. When we see another human being, our immediate instinct is finding out what we have that make us different from other individuals. We can share a common biological identity by the mere fact of being humans, Muslims can share a common cultural identity, and being Russian gives you a national identity. There is, however, a point in which, after adding more and more layers of identity to our own self, the level of accuracy increases, up to reaching a point in which you become a unique individual, a person with a set of characteristics no one else has. Following this idea, an Italian Catholic man called Pietro Salvatore, who is 1,87 meters tall, who works as a teacher and speaks 5 languages, can consider himself a unique individual, even if there is another Italian Catholic Pietro Salvatore who is 1,87 meters tall and works as a teacher, yet speaks 2 languages. People always find a way to become unique. As we grow up, we work towards defining who we are, and in the process we might get to have a unique identity. This can be useful as a general definition for identity. For the sake of this work, though, we are going to focus on the ideas of social, cultural and racial identity, with a glance at economical and political identity as well.

5.5. How identity shaped the partition for Africa

The well-known scramble for Africa has already been discussed, but when looking at the reasons why it happened, it all came down to having the strongest political and economical identity as a nation. Even if the colonizers did not get to dive that deep into their own intentions, what they did was meant to be projected to others, that is, they wanted others to identify them as the strongest in terms of wealth and politics. Another role of identity in this event had to do with social status, that is, people's social identity. The colonizers came from powerful countries and had a strong social identity compared to that of the colonized. The Africans had not had an education and lived in precarious conditions. This was the perfect setting for the Europeans to get the most they could under that set of circumstances.

One third level has to do with their moral or ethical identity. The Europeans were twisted enough to unleash a living torture over the Africans without thinking about any of the values they had been taught within their society. There is a strong contrast between what European societies taught as values at that time and the procedures followed by the same people in Africa. On this concern, there is yet another thing we can say about identity: it constantly changes. As our life goes on, our identity gets more and more complex, thus there is a point when people tend to get lost and suddenly do not know who they are. This triggers the quest for identity, a journey we all go through.

5.6. Identity's twists and turns

Life is complicated, and a concept of the likes of identity has enough depth to be the sole topic of a work of this magnitude. Since this is not the case, the focus is creating a base to start building up how both race and identity are presented in *Heart of Darkness.*

A feature of identity that will surely be useful later in this work is its ability to transform. Individuals are constantly exposed to change, either because of other people's influence on them or because of any possible external factor. Humans are in motion at all times, which causes us to get lost amidst a sense of chaos sometimes. Identity works at those moments as a lighthouse: when we forget why we are doing what we are doing, looking back at what we have achieved and taking a glimpse at who

we are trying to be works when doubt surrounds us in life. This does not always work, and some people feel the need to start over on a clean slate, but another feature of identity might prevent them from doing so: identity ties you, in most cases, to a place, a person or group of people or a previous event. The most clear examples deal with famous people and with those who are misunderstood by others in a major scale, but these instances of identity chains have become relevant during the twenty-first century, so they will be dealt with later.

The main terms have been defined and analyzed, the novella where they are applied has been presented as well, and all the required information has been stated. It is time now to see how race and identity get to the core of *Heart of Darkness.*

6. Race and identity in *Heart of Darkness*

At the beginning of this work, it was uttered that *Heart of Darkness* had a great deal of race and identity in it, and that it was the perfect scenario for the analysis of both terms. Now it is time to prove these words right. Everything in Conrad's novella, from the setting to the characters and the noticeable contrasts between them, has a touch of race and identity attached to it, let us try to unfold what is beneath Conrad's words when richly describing the Belgian Congo and Marlow's journey.

6.1. The setting: a dark and hollow Africa

Joseph Conrad is known for including an accurate level of description, whether talking about locations or people, even events. *Heart of Darkness* takes place in the Belgian Congo, as we already know. There is though a touch of blackness in every word Conrad pours about Africa. It is described as a dark, hollow place, filled with a feeling of uneasiness and uncertainty. Descriptions of the landscape include both the natural parts of Africa and those that have been filled with machinery and all sorts of supplies by the Europeans.

I came upon a boiler wallowing in the grass, then found a path leading up the hill. It turned aside for the boulders, and also for an undersized railway-truck lying there on its back with its wheels in the air. One was off. The thing looked as dead as the carcass of some animal. I came upon more pieces of decaying machinery, a stack of rusty nails. (Conrad 1994: 22)

This fragment shows how chaotic the environment is taken to be, how machinery is decaying under the sun and how no one bothers to put that railway-truck back on its wheels. Environmental description is as dark as the feeling of blackness Conrad wants to provide. The identity given to the Belgian Congo is that of a dark, twisted place in which people show the darkest side they have, and their heart of darkness glows darker than ever. Conrad wanted to create an image of immense lack of proportion between Europeans and Africans, and the setting contributes in the establishment of those racial differences. Both the description of the setting and its people – the natives – are parallel and interrelated. Africa identifies the natives and vice versa in *Heart of Darkness.*

Other elements of the African landscape in the novella have already been discussed (the fog, the river and the deep jungle, among others), yet they all contribute to create the image of a dark setting.

6.2. The characters: black and white, yet always dark

Side by side with the setting, we have Conrad's description of the different characters in the novella, whether relevant to the story or not. There are a massive amount of descriptions in *Heart of Darkness,* but some of them are particularly interesting for the purpose of this work, let us look at them.

Firstly, our focus goes straight to the description of the natives Marlow comes across during his journey.

Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees leaning against the trucks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half efface within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment and despair. (…) They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now, - nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. (Conrad 1994: 24)

This is one of the first descriptions of the natives present in the novella. It is worth mentioning how they are described as shapes and as not earthly – they are taken to be inhuman creatures. This description, along with some others, creates a racial contrast between the natives and the Europeans on a physical level. While the natives are black shadows, the Europeans are different. There is one description that clearly shows how different the natives and the Europeans are treated in *Heart of Darkness*. This description immediately follows the previously quoted one:

When near the buildings I met a white man, in such an unexpected elegance of get-up that in the first moment I took him for a sort of vision. I saw a high starched collar, white cuffs, a light alpaca jacket, snowy trousers, a clear necktie, and varnished boots. No hat. Hair parted, brushed, oiled, under a green-lined parasol held in a big white hand. He was awesome, and had a penholder behind his ear. I shook hands with this miracle, and I learned he was the Company's chief accountant, and that all the book-keeping was done at this station. (Conrad 1994: 25-26)

The contrast between both descriptions is blatant, to say the least. When Conrad describes the natives, he talks about limbs and scary eyes, and gives the color of their skin top priority. However, he rejoices in every little detail when talking about the chief accountant: clothes, hair style, even complements. He is referred to as a miracle and is even taken for a vision. It is easy to imagine the chief accountant surrounded by a beam of light amidst all the darkness. A racial descriptive base is easily spotted in these examples. Conrad is setting both the Europeans and the natives' identities apart: the former look decent and are worthy of Marlow's respect, while the latter do not even get a human-like description. There are several descriptions of the natives in the novella, all pointing out their unpredictable moves, their rolling eyes and their unearthly appearance. However, as we go deeper within the characters, we realize that white men are dark in the inside, and that shows what imperialism and colonization were all about. When you let go of the superficial, the real identity arises. The way the natives are treated helps the reader understand the true nature of the Europeans and their dark purpose. The descriptions of both the natives and the Europeans are the main reason why Conrad is considered a racist by some literary critics, philosophers and psychologists. That matter will be dealt with soon, let us first look at Marlow journey as a quest for identity, but one different from the usual kind.

6.3. Marlow's identity quest extraposed: who is Kurtz?

When talking about identity as an abstract idea, the well-known question 'Who am I?' was mentioned. Every human being goes on a journey to find their true identity. In *Heart of Darkness,* though, we get a different kind of journey. Marlow's main reason for his deepening into the jungle is to figure out who Kurtz really is; he wants to meet him. Conrad stresses Kurtz's identity by making it Marlow's goal. Ever since Marlow knows about Kurtz, a feeling of desperate curiosity grows within him. With each and every detail he gets to learn about Kurtz his desperation becomes more and more intense, as he has more layers of Kurtz's identity to deal with. His processing of Kurtz's identity is the same as each person's processing of their own identity.

We can see Marlow's genuine interest in talking to Kurtz in this passage, right after he is told that Kurtz might have died due to his poor health.

> *There was a sense of extreme disappointment, as though I had found out I had been striving after something altogether without a substance. I couldn't have been more disgusted if I had travelled all this way for the sole purpose of talking with Mr Kurtz. Talking with... I flung one shoe overboard, and became aware that that was exactly what I had been looking forward to – a talk with Kurtz.* (Conrad 1994: 67)

This is the point in which Marlow realizes what the reader already knew: that Kurtz was his main interest when going deep into the jungle. It is interesting how Marlow only questions his own identity when reflecting it with Kurtz's. Despite his determination to meet him, Marlow narrows Kurtz's identity until that of a speaker:

> *I made the strange discovery that I had never imagined him as doing, you know, but as discoursing. I didn't say to myself, "Now I will never see him," or "Now I will never shake him by the hand," but, "now I will never hear him." The man presented himself as a voice.* (Conrad 1994: 67)

Marlow's main interest is what Kurtz had to say, no matter the topic of conversation, he was curious about that layer of his identity.

Another important factor in the Marlow-Kurtz mechanics is Marlow's progression through *Heart of Darkness.* His transformation consists of a series of identity shifts,

following Kurtz's soul corruption. Kurtz changed dramatically while in Africa, until reaching his own demise because of it. Marlow's identity is different from Kurtz's, and that is why he lacks the ambition Kurtz had, and that allows him to stop at the last minute, avoiding the total corruption of his soul.

A lot has been said about descriptions, identity and race in *Heart of Darkness*. Now it is time to consider if the way Conrad deals with race can lead us to call him a racist.

6.4. Burning question: was Joseph Conrad a racist?

This question has had thousands of experts wondering what would be the right stand to take in this yes/no situation. Here is an attempt at bringing some light into the topic. The first thing to take into account is that *Heart of Darkness* was forged after Conrad's experience in the Belgian Congo, where he worked as a steamboat steamer. From this point on, we take that what he lived, in whichever degree he lived it, is what he poured into *Heart of Darkness*. The extenuating amount of adjectives present in the novella suggests a great deal of description in it. We can thus state that Conrad is depicting, portraying his vision of Africa. Some experts say that Conrad bashes the natives, placing them in a lower place compared to the Europeans; that, though, might not be the case. As we have seen in these pages, *Heart of Darkness* contains a strong attack towards imperialism and colonialism, Europe's trademarks at that time. The fact that Conrad states how women are "out of it", clearly confirms the existence of that terrible truth women are out of, one that is strongly criticized in the novella. So, whether he was a racist or not, we can affirm that Europe is not precisely taken to be a superhero here. Let us continue deeper into the topic.

The huge contrast between the descriptions of the natives and those of the Europeans is another point of interest when analyzing racism in *Heart of Darkness*. *"Limbs and unpredictable moves versus respectful and detailed description"* seems to be a pattern in the novella. It is worth noting, though, that Conrad's level of description deepens, reaching out to more abstract fields, in which the Europeans are pure darkness. This, of course, does not repair the damage done by Conrad stating lines like these:

Then, glancing down, I saw a face near my hand. The black bones reclined at full length with one shoulder against the tree, and slowly the eyelids rose and the sunken eyes looked up at me, enormous and vacant, a kind of blind, white flicker in the depths of the orbs, which died out slowly. The man seemed young – almost a boy – but you know with them it's hard to tell. (Conrad 1994: 24-25)

With them it is hard to tell. That line alone happens to be enough for some experts to say out loud that Joseph Conrad was indeed a racist. While the evidence is somewhat solid, there is another outcome that could be taken to be more appropriate.

Let us get inside a writer's mind trying to write about the cruelty and ruthlessness of the Europeans towards native Africans. Conrad wrote *Heart of Darkness* talking about both Europeans and Africans, but only one of those two was going to read the novella at that time. A novella which attacks Europe made to be read by Europe. Conrad was himself a European citizen and, while it is not clear whether he was a racist or not, he sure knew how Europe felt towards Africa. Putting description on top of everything, if you want to criticize how the natives were treated due to racism, you may need to be a racist – for the novella's sake. The picture depicted by Conrad would not have been half as vivid had he had some reservations with description, and probably, *Heart of Darkness* would not have managed to become the 67th best novel in the twentieth century. The raw, harsh feeling the reader gets with descriptions of the African landscape, of the natives and of how the Europeans operated in Africa, is conveyed through the raw, harsh treatment both the natives (physically) and the Europeans (morally) get in *Heart of Darkness.*

Of course, a feeling of racism is present in *Heart of Darkness;* we can even say that Marlow is indeed a racist, with his mind tainted by the European values which highlighted the physical differences between people from both continents. But there is always going to be a line between author and novel, in which you cannot know how much of the author is in the novel and vice versa. The author can help experts connect the dots if he or she wants, but in Conrad's case, that is not an option. It is thus safe to say that, no matter how much evidence is found pointing towards Conrad being or not a racist, we will never know for sure how he truly felt, and how much of him he poured into *Heart of Darkness*.

With all that has been discussed, it is time to jump forward in time, to the time of the so-called globalization, to see how race and identity have evolved since Conrad's time.

7. Race and identity in the XXIst century

Over the course of time, people's attitude towards life and their mentality have dramatically changed. In the now era of communication, people from all over the world are more connected than ever: computers, mobile phones and all sorts of devices which make contacting others fast and easy. The possibility of being in touch with people from different cultures and different races has broadened people's minds, up to a certain degree. Let us look at how race and identity stand in the present day.

7.1. Identity's newest layer: social media

We are in the middle of a technological revolution, with electronic devices making our lives easier – sometimes harder – and allowing worldwide communication. Social media is one of the biggest flagships of this time, and they are strongly related with the concept of identity. Nowadays, people from all ages – with a stress in the 15-25 demographic – use at least a social media variety. Whether we use Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, our life is constantly up on the net, for everyone to see. Artists, politicians, sportspeople and even writers expose their lives on social media and even use it as a tool to engage contact with others, to reach out and be talked about. As people shape their own identity, they have now the chance to share their progress with everyone and to show who they really are. However, this brings some issues.

Social media allows people to communicate with others in a non-physical way. This opens the door for people to lie about themselves, giving them the chance to shape a false identity, one that differs from who they really are. They might do this out of shame, fear or to show off, but this clearly is a problem that provides an easy way out of the challenge that is fighting to forge your own self. Moreover, people can deceive others by making them believe they are who they are not. A third issue arises when people realize they can attack and insult others while being protected behind their computer or smartphone screen, making them behave in a way they would not if they had the person they are insulting right in front of them.

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Social media is a powerful tool to expand our identity and spread it all across the globe, a way to send our own message. Famous people use it to become more famous, writers use it to advertise their work, sportspeople use it to advertise what they do, and politicians use it as well, to relate to others and gain followers. On November 7th 2012, Barack Obama, president of the United States of America, was re-elected as the head of the country for the following four years. The president, adding up to the classic speech, posted a picture on Twitter, a well-known social network, along with a simple message.

Lam 3. Barack Obama tweets re-election reaction on November 7th 2012

Source: https://twitter.com/BarackObama/status/266031293945503744/photo/1

Nearly eight hundred thousand people decided to share the tweet with their friends, with this message reaching an extension of over 500 million people. This proves how social media is now a layer of mankind's identity, and a powerful one. It can be used to speak up and be heard by others, and it opens the door to a much bigger world than the one people used to have while growing up. This broadens identity as a journey, and allows to experience things with more people, which translates into more perspective, more points of view, and a more understanding view of life. Of course, the classic quest for identity goes on, and will probably go on forever, as mankind's curiosity is seemingly endless. We will keep on fighting and enduring to realize our role in the world.

There are thousands of concepts to deal with when it comes to social media, but that would take another complete work, so let us get to see how race and racism stand today.

7.2. Race and racism today: an ongoing issue

If there is one good thing to point out about race today, is the dramatic increase in people's awareness on the situation compared to Conrad's time. People now know racism is an existing concept, it is happening and everyone knows it, whether they want to or not. Again, the internet has a lot to do with this, since people are in touch with the whole world. In Conrad's time, Europe was not fully aware of what happened in Africa and in other incidents involving racism. Now this is not the case, and everyone knows racism exists.

Unfortunately, that does not seem to make it go away. Mankind still has a lot to do in their way towards a total understanding of the equality of every human being. In terms of legislation and human rights, people have made giant steps, providing freedom to African American people and creating a much fairer environment in the developed world. However, there is a root, within people's minds, that cannot go away that easily. Pretentions and prejudice are still in order and, while there are people who have achieved that mental state of total equality awareness, some are still caught in racism's web of discrimination.

People can be a racist without being violent or cruel altogether. Some people associate people with different skin color to being delinquents and criminals, which is a racist thought. Others will tell their children to stay away from people with different skin color. There are thousands of possible scenarios for racism to arise. Shamefully, mankind is still stuck in that prejudice. Economically speaking, some countries have poor situations and despite the existence of organizations willing to help them, they are still undeveloped and stuck in poverty. Race is still a heavy term in most people's minds, and sometimes they can even be ashamed to admit it because they want to respect others, but racist thoughts come inevitably to their heads, showing how deeply the shackles of racism hit mankind back when it all started.

What is worse, some people still gather brutal hate towards people from different races, and murder out of racism keeps happening, and rape, and slaughter. Racism is still an ongoing issue and it will probably live among us for as long as the term race does. When coming to think of it, race might be considered as a no-longer-needed term to some extent. Technology connects us all; we are in touch with people from all over the world since we are children, social media shows us all as we are, why focusing on keeping drawing lines between humans if everything is working toward erasing them?

Fortunately, some people have started to see things as they should be and fight every single day for equality. There are associations, organizations and people willing to help others no matter the color of their skin or their physical traits and that is a sign of evolution. The fight against racism can thus be taken as a work in progress; a lot has been made, but there is still a lot to do.

8. Conclusions

At the beginning of this work, a set of goals was stated: the definition and identification of the concepts of race and identity, their presence in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and in the author's time, and a contrastive look at how both terms stand in the present day. With everything that has been said, the goals can be taken as accomplished.

Race has been delimitated as a way to sub-divide human beings according to physical traits and cultural and geographical factors, while identity is the always questioned '*Who am I?*' every human being goes through at least once in their life. The relation between both terms has been presented, as race is one of identity's layers, which qualifies people under a particular group. Joseph Conrad's time gave us insight on imperialism and how Europe, through colonialism self-proclaimed the upper race, while the natives started to be considered as inferior. What Conrad gathered from his Congo experience – and which later became *Heart of Darkness* – has indeed proven to be a wonderful scenario for the analysis of race and identity. The significant contrast between how the natives and the Europeans are describes, plus how Africa is dealt with gives as a big deal on race in Conrad's novella. Marlow's journey and his motives have also provided insightful information. Chasing Kurtz's identity through the novella, he opened the door for us to analyze how identity is dealt with in *Heart of Darkness*. Despite the blatant differences between descriptions of natives and Europeans, the latter's identity is still regarded as dark and hollow, cruel and ruthless.

Looking at the present also provided some fruitful information. Identity is more projected towards others than ever, with technology and social media leading people's quest for their place in the world. It is still an unpolished tool, which can be misused and lead to some serious consequences, but if used properly, it is mankind's key to the whole world, to a privileged place in which they can be heard by plenty. Race and racism still need some working through; both concepts' roots have dug too deep within civilization and people's values, but the path towards equality is slowly being walked forward, with more and more people taking a stand against racism and fighting for human equality.

On the whole, revisiting Joseph Conrad, his work and his time, has been a journey almost as intense as Marlow's wandering inside the African Congo. The information and contrastive analysis gathered in these pages shows how both race and identity work in the three intended frameworks: Conrad's time, *Heart of Darkness* and our time, and the differences are clear.

Conrad's depicting of race and identity comes from what he lived during his time as a steamer at the Belgian Congo, hence the similarities in the way both terms are treated in his time and in his work. The most fruitful part of it all comes when looking at the present through Conrad's work. It helps in realizing that despite all the years that have gone by, at the core, things have not changed dramatically, and there is still hatred towards people from a different race hidden inside people, regardless of them letting it show or not. Some people still consider themselves superior to others, just like the late nineteenth century Europeans thought of themselves compared to the natives.

The bright side on this analysis is seeing how a new kind of people has arisen, people willing to achieve equality for everyone, fighting for people's rights and making them happen. That a ray of hope in the run towards the end of racism.

As I final and personal note, I would like to highlight how productive this work has been, and how it affected my own identity in a way I had not seen coming. The information has been presented, the contrast has been made and race and identity have been deeply analyzed. Hopefully one day someone in my very same position will revisit Joseph Conrad and contrast his view on race and identity with however both concepts stand in his time, hopefully he will get to describe how racial prejudice disappeared and human equality took its place in a time without racism.

9. Conclusiones

Al principio de este trabajo, se enunciaron una serie de objetivos: definir e identificar los conceptos de raza e identidad, su presencia en *Heart of Darkness* de Joseph Conrad, y echar un vistazo contrastivo a ambos términos tal y como se conocen hoy en día. Con todo lo dicho previamente, podemos considerar que los objetivos han sido cumplidos.

La idea de raza ha sido definida como un método para subdividir a la humanidad en función de rasgos físicos y de factores culturales y geográficos, mientras que la idea de identidad arraiga en la eterna pregunta '*¿Quién soy?*' que todo humano se ha preguntado al menos una vez a lo largo de su vida. La relación entre ambos términos ha sido analizada y presentada, de modo que el concepto de raza se puede calificar como una capa de la identidad de una persona, que la sitúa dentro de un grupo en concreto. El análisis del tiempo de Conrad nos ha dado perspectiva en lo referente al imperialismo y a cómo Europa se autoproclamó la raza superior a través del colonialismo, colocando a los nativos en un estadio inferior. Las experiencias vividas por Conrad en el Congo – que luego forjaron *Heart of Darkness* – efectivamente han demostrado ser el escenario perfecto para analizar los conceptos de raza e identidad. El llamativo contraste entre las descripciones de nativos y europeos, junto con cómo se habla de África nos da información sobre cómo el concepto de raza es presentado en la novela de Conrad. El viaje de Marlow y sus aspiraciones también aportan interesante información. Su búsqueda de la identidad de Kurtz a lo largo de la novela nos abre la puerta al análisis de la identidad en *Heart of Darkness.* A pesar de la descarada desigualdad entre las descripciones de africanos y europeos, estos últimos poseen una identidad oscura, cruel y despiadada.

Mirar al presente también ha aportado jugosa información. La identidad está más proyectada al exterior que nunca, de la mano de la tecnología y de las redes sociales, que ayudan a las personas a encontrar su lugar en el mundo. Aún es una herramienta sin pulir, que propicia un mal uso y puede tener consecuencias desagradables, pero si se usa de forma apropiada, es la llave al mundo para las personas, la llave a un lugar privilegiado en el que muchos les pueden escuchar. En cuanto a los conceptos de raza e identidad, aún hay trabajo pendiente; ambos conceptos han arraigado con demasiada profundidad en la civilización en sí y en los valores de las personas, pero poco a poco se

avanza hacia la igualdad, con un número cada vez mayor de personas posicionándose contra el racismo y luchando por la igualdad humana.

En general, revisitar Joseph Conrad, su obra y su tiempo ha resultado ser un viaje casi tan intenso como el deambular de Marlow en el Congo africano. La información y los contrastes reunidos en estas páginas muestran cómo funcionan los conceptos de raza e identidad en los tres marcos espaciotemporales deseados: el tiempo de Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* y nuestro tiempo, y las diferencias son claras.

El tratamiento que hace Conrad de los conceptos de raza e identidad viene dado por lo que vivió en el Congo belga, he ahí las similitudes entre su tiempo y su obra. La parte más fructífera viene cuando miramos al presente a través de la obra de Conrad. Ayuda a darse cuenta de que, a pesar de todos los años que han pasado, en el fondo, las cosas no han cambiado de forma drástica, y aún hay odio hacia gente de otras razas oculto en las personas, lo muestren o no. Algunas personas aún se consideran superiores a otras, de igual modo que los europeos de finales del diecinueve se consideraban superiores a los nativos.

El lado bueno de este análisis es ver cómo un nuevo tipo de gente se ha alzado, gente dispuesta a conseguir una igualdad total, luchando por los derechos de las personas y encargándose de que los haya. Ese es un rayo de esperanza en la lucha contra el racismo.

Como nota final y personal, me gustaría resaltar lo productiva que este trabajo ha sido, y como ha afectado a mi propia identidad de un modo que no había previsto. La información ha sido presentada, el contraste se ha hecho y raza e identidad han sido analizados. Con suerte algún día alguien en mi tesitura revisitará a Joseph Conrad y contrastará su visión de los conceptos de raza e identidad con la existente en su tiempo. Con suerte podrá describir como el prejuicio racial desapareció y la igualdad humana ocupó su lugar en un mundo sin racismo.

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