

## Dialogic Signs of Resistance: a Case Study of Reading Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

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### Abstract

Dialogic criticism constitutes an ideal case for reading and interpreting literary texts as it does not talk *about* the text but *to* the text or more precisely *with* the text so that neither voice is excluded. It, according to Clifford, proposes a reading transaction that is precisely the space readers wish to explore as the borderland between 'self' and 'other' and a potent location to ask questions and have discussions. Both the reader and the text are opened, exposed, and the 'self' is strengthened rather than diminished. For a further investigation into these claims, a case study through the application of participant observer is conducted on four groups of graduate students in a 'post-colonial' educational setting to explore their dialogic engagement with a literary text. We contend that 'dialogic readers' go through a complex cultural exchange whose identities constructed not as an 'archaic survival' (Clifford), but as an ongoing process, politically contested and historically unfinished. Such a proposal could be taken up as providing sufficient power to guide literary criticism particularly in post-colonial educational contexts, and contributes to the field of literary theory and criticism. It also provides readers of an alternative approach to textual meanings and analysis.

**Keywords:** Dialogism, dialogic criticism, post-colonialism, literary criticism, classroom literature

**Introduction**

Although literary criticism provides keys to literary interpretation, the enterprise of literary theory has been largely accepted without reference to the voices of the indigenous and minority groups. In its colonial/Enlightenment/modern history, literary theory has been treated as unproblematic and it grants the traditionally voiceless little space within the classrooms of universities (Balzer, 2006). Before the introduction of reader-response theory in the 1980s, formalism was the dominant theory for approaching literary texts in the twentieth century. Both theories, however, deny readers the opportunity to read with 'non-Western' eyes. Likewise, New Criticism, which played a prominent role in literary theory, has worked to reinforce the power of the English literary canon (Ghandi, 1998). One result of this limited methodological approach to textual analysis has been, according to Mukherjee (1995), the creation of a putative 'universal' reader. Therefore, focusing on the universality of human experience erase "the ambiguities and the unpleasant truths that lie in the crevices" and forget that "society is not a homogenous grouping, but an assortment of groups" (p. 450). In this sense,

the editor-critic feeds readers on a vocabulary that pretends that human beings and their institutions have not changed a bit during the course of history, that they all face the same problems as human beings (p. 451).

To probe further, a consideration of classroom practices also provides an understanding of the ways 'informed' interpretations of literary meanings are achieved; Marshall (1995) examining the 'power relations' inherent in teaching literature, concludes that classroom discussions are products of the teacher's previous academic experience, very much like discussions in a science and maths classroom. Classroom discourse and discussions have their own conventional ways of talking about literature that affect students' understanding of literature and represent a type of tacit curriculum in conventional modes of literary knowledge (Eagleton, 1996). Such discussions hinder examining ideological assumptions since students develop an implicit, but informed, understanding of responding to literature (Marshall, 1995).

Such ideological assumptions on which 'doing' English is based are defined as 'cultural models' (Gee, 1996), which are simplified emblematic visions of an idealised or normal reality that varies across cultures. Cultural models, according to Gee, are ideological because they involve what is considered valuable and act as though they represent reality. If cultural knowledge is the basis of meaning-making, then these assumptions or master myths can limit ways of thinking, since culture can best be seen as the source, rather than the result, of human thought and behaviour (Crotty, 2003).

Our endeavour in this research paper is to explore further potential of Bakhtin's (1981) dialogic criticism in the context of post-colonial studies. Our assumption is that in this particular juncture of history that is often marked with a proliferation of methodology and co-construction of meaning, dialogue remains an outstanding approach when local readers are exposed to foreign texts. If the study of literature is to regain its lost favour among the new generation of readers whose prospects go beyond the positivistic approaches or those informed by literary theory whose contestation has become a feature mark in recent years, it has to acknowledge the ultimate potentials of dialogism as way of co-construction meaning. In response to this demand, we adopt Bakhtin's dialogic approach to text in an attempt to answer questions, such as how do learners read across cultures? How is their reading located in a certain history? How could learners read across cultures so that dialogue is opened rather than closed, and see more than just what things

seem to be? Based on dialogic underpinnings, we contend that dialogic eludes dualistic binaries such as civilised/primitive, self/other where a learner “acknowledges not only the primacy of the context, but the possibility of the textual resolution as a productive indeterminacy” (Moore, 1994, p. 4). Such dialogic reading, we argue, opens further possibilities through the text and ultimately to the real world from which the text comes so that readers might engage not only with the text, but also with the community it represents (Moore, 1994).

### **Dialogic Criticism**

Bakhtin (1981) contends that “the image of an idea is inseparable from the image of a person, the carrier of that idea” (p. 56), and thus the idea “begins to live, that is, to take shape, to develop, to find and renew its verbal expression, to give birth to new ideas, only when it enters into genuine dialogue relationships with other ideas” (p. 61). In such dialogic relations, ideas cannot be separated from their holders and people cannot be rhetorically manipulated in isolation from the ideas that shape their discourse. Whereas, in rhetoric criticism, for example, judging the work is mostly affected by ideological differences, dialogics “concerns the relations among persons articulating their ideas in response to one another, discovering their mutual affinities and oppositions, their provocations to reply, their desires to hear more, or their wishes to change the subject” (p. 70).

Bialostosky (1998) claims that dialogic criticism re-creates the images of specific persons who voice their ideas in specific texts and contexts. By situating an utterance historically and imaginatively in another person’s utterance, the productivity of dialogue could be maintained since it depends on discovering the mutual bearings among person-ideas that have not yet engaged one another, and in reconstructing the mutual bearings both parties have. As such, dialogics introduces a different way of talking that challenges the very language of the interlocutors. Instead of appealing to the audience, such voices could intrude on the claims of other persons excluded from that audience and who are nevertheless affected by the issue it is considering.

The dialogic reader as such would re-voice others’ discourses in pursuit of his/her own theme. He or she would not seek for an impossible coincidence of the reader’s and the others’ utterances but would reveal and answer representations of the one in the other. Talking about the value of such representation, Bakhtin asserts

one can speak of the absolute aesthetic need of one person for another, for the seeing, remembering, gathering, and unifying of the other, which alone can create his extremely completed personality; this personality will not exist if the other does not create it (1981, p. 109).

Dialogic textual engagement allows an ‘ultimately shared standard of truth’, which could be attained through a ‘regulatory principle of exchange with others’ (Todorov, quoted in Bialostosky, p. 793). In dialogic exchange, Bialostosky claims, “such a standard of truth would reduce the sense of radical otherness to an as yet unsolved problem and would direct further discussion to locating the higher principle that would synthesise the difference one had stumbled on” (p. 793). Dialogic exchange acknowledges difference between the realm of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’, where both are open to recognition.

In her dialogic approach to the literary text, Dunlop (1999) challenges the dichotomous generic and historical conventions aiming to dissolve the boundaries between public and private history and between fact and fiction. Her approach acknowledges the cultural complexity not as simply

socially constructed and defined but rather as essentially human, which ultimately leads to a genre of critical pedagogy that acknowledges multiple subjectivities and multiple forms of discursive practices. In her work with students reading texts dialogically, she finds that although the tension of difference among learners and the texts they engage with becomes evident, engagement with dialogues forces participants to question their own positioning and discover that “critical scrutiny and destabilisation of one’s own subject positioning and exploration of the many discursive positions encountered is necessary” (p. 60). She adds:

we [the students and herself] were forced to interrogate our own subjective positions, our biases, our privileges, and our assumptions about the other, within cultures and across difference and similarities. This involves a process of 'self-othering' (p. 61).

Dialogic interrelation between the reader, the text, and the wider context constantly renews itself, in which internal values of exchange extend into the dynamics of external cultural contact. Unlike dialectical binaries, such as, those of conqueror/conquered, absorption/resistance, or loser/winner, dialogics extend their perspectives so that they operate a ‘dialogics of exchange’ where identities may exchange cultural products. In response to binary structures, such as civilised vs. Savage, where colonial systems intend effect change through the school boys’ uniform, for instance, aiming to ‘civilise the savage’, the multiple and hybrid tendencies of cultural dialogics acknowledge that the uniform as a mode of exchange, does not change the boys (Giroux, 1992).

### **Dialogic approach to the text in ‘post-colonial’ literature classrooms**

Dialogism is a practical mode of engagement with knowledge in general and textual meaning making in particular. It aims to decolonise criticism and resist meanings informed by the mainstream narratives of Western literary theory. It proposes a reading tradition that goes beyond the reader and the text, aiming to posit the reader in the world both in and beyond the text. It proposes dialogic reading as the reading transaction that is precisely the space learners wish to explore as the borderland of ‘self’ and ‘other’ and a potent location to ask questions and have discussions. Both the reader and the text are opened, exposed, and the ‘self’ is strengthened rather than diminished. Dialogic readers’ identity is thus constructed “not as an archaic survival, but as an ongoing process, politically contested and historically unfinished” (McQuaid, 2009, p. 47).

While dualistic binaries that focus on pure identity miss the value of the blurring boundaries between such binaries, those whose identity is defined through dialogic interaction continue to negotiate dialectical history in ways that are invisible to dialecticians (Wegerif, 2008). Dialogic meaning making transcends a relation that occurs outside that dialectic binary by revealing a wider field of intersecting binaries, each altering the others. As such, a dialectic single binary is transcended through dialogism to a multi-dimensional field and thus transcends and infuses the text, where dialogic readers entering the reading process, go through a complex cultural exchange instead of binary absorption or resistance between the ‘self’ and ‘other’, between white and non-white, or between coloniser and colonised.

Furthermore, dialogic interrelation between the reader, the text, and the wider context constantly renews itself, in which internal values of exchange extend into the dynamics of external cultural contact. While dialectal binaries (e.g. conqueror/conquered) underscore polarised identities, dialogics extend their perspectives through the operation of ‘dialogics of exchange’ where identities may exchange cultural products. Clifford (quoted in Moore, p. 11) argues, dialogics

would respond to binary structures, such as civilised vs. Savage through exchange. He reports that while colonial systems intend effect change through the schoolboys' uniform aiming to 'civilise the savage', students adopting multiple and hybrid tendencies of cultural dialogics acknowledge, and only then, uniform as a mode of exchange, rather than a change of the boys' identities (Moore, reasons:

when your non-Native enemies do not function by such a system of exchange but instead assume either your absorption in or resistance to the enemy culture, and when the enemies are thus blind to both their own and your participation in exchange, then a different sort of war ensues, and a different sort of tragedy takes over. Yet dialogic cultural exchange occurs even in the midst of dialectic culture wars. To move beyond such a dialectical history requires precisely the recognition of inexorable and mutual, dialogical historical exchange (p. 12).

When binary and dualistic approaches miss the dialogics of cultural exchange, they enact the historical polarising violence that demonises the 'other', thence the 'self' (Howard and Gill, 2001). Dialogic cultural exchange, however, makes vital cultural negotiation by registering exchange beyond polarisation discourses. Dialogic reading though works as a resisting movement, adopts a non-oppositional 'pragmatics' of cultural exchange, which loses and yet survives historical struggle. Moore points out that dialogical cultural exchange "survives both because part of the culture operates outside the terms of that struggle and because dialogics survival, unlike dialectic synthesis, maintains difference within the dynamics of opposition", and thus eludes cultural dualism (p. 17).

A post-colonial critique, thus, should be non-oppositional and heteroglossic, since colonial hegemonies are based on dualistic oppositions. It is crucial to emphasise here that non-oppositional dialogics does not call for complicity, since what is aimed at is a 'mutual cultural exchange'. Moore summarises the dialogic reading mechanism of cultural interaction that leads to a 'genre' of resistance:

'resistance' would equal a dualistic pattern; 'absorption' would equal a dialectic pattern; and a 'nexus' of exchange would equal a dialogic. Thus resistance would be two monologisms in dualistic competition; absorption would be two monologisms in dualistic cooptation; and exchange would be a dialogism of multiple voices in collaboration, not in a utopian sense but in the sense of mutual cultural dynamics rather than hegemonic cultural domination or inertia (p. 18).

While dialectic dualism selectively locates a final meaning within the colonial subject of history as against colonised object, "a dialogic emphasises, however, the changeability of 'both' participants, the colonised and the coloniser, the text and the author, the text and the reader, by showing how they are not aligned dualistically but rather are surrounded by influences in a multiple field" (Moore, p. 18). While dualistic structure seeks a thesis or antithesis that focuses on the definition; 'the 'what' of each opposing term in order to effect their synthesis', dialogic reading seeks to 'locate 'where' each term stands in its place in the contextual web' (p. 20).

Dialogic systems of knowledge acknowledge not only the primacy of context but also the impossibility of textual resolution. Through the reader/textual dialogue, readers seek a productive indeterminacy as it accounts for a relational interplay of attractions and aversions that constitute the dynamicity of the complexity of the two parties (the reader and the text). It would

be, as Krupat (quoted in Moore, p. 22) puts it, “not to overthrow the Tower of Babel, but, as it were, to install a simultaneous translation system in it; not to homogenise human or literary differences but to make them at least mutually intelligible”. Since literary theory has a tendency toward dualistic critique, it finds itself aligned with the hierarchy of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’, which, without examining the ethics of a colonial context, projects various unfortunate forms of the ‘noble savage’ onto the colonised other. Such dualistic epistemology, Moore affirms, “can produce a politics of exoticism, an ‘orientalism’, on the economics of mercantilism and commodification, reading the text for academic lucre” (p. 19).

Additionally, a dialogic approach to the text resists hegemonic and universalistic claims as well as ethnocentric projects. ‘Aesthetic universalism’ ignores the particular, different, and other culturally specific modes and codes. In fact the multiplicity of dialogic perspectives that acknowledges the ‘other’ as an ‘other’, cannot ignore the other cultural perspective from which the text is produced. Thus, the dialogic reader is neither called to adopt that perspective nor to insist on the absolute difference from the perspective of the ‘other’. Besides rejecting ‘cultural absolute difference’, dialogics resists homogenising criticisms. Dialogic reading and criticism thus calls for learning from the cultural contextual elements surrounding the text to produce a more accurate criticism of that text. Such dialogic scepticism towards universalist assumptions, such as the imperial selfhood is indeed a prerequisite to ‘careful’ negotiation of critical and cultural exchange with texts. Hence it would not be naïve to suggest that the particular possibilities for intercultural critical participation are multiple, however sensitive. The impossibility of knowing the ‘other’ without an alternative participatory epistemology of exchange, inscribes the native ‘other’ as the vanishing sign. Moore claims that “an alternative epistemology of exchange logically opens up both perceptions of historically specific native cultural survival and of academic participation in recognition of that survival” (p. 27). Thus universalistic projects can miss the political context of dialogic cultural survival in a given text: “A dialogic critique, however, finds textual and contextual ways for critical selves to speak neither of nor for the other but with the other” (p. 27).

In conclusion, for a post-colonial world to sustain a decolonising, it becomes crucial that critical projects are framed by assumptions of multiple cultural possibilities practiced through the creation of dynamic and multiple spaces. Dialogics offers a post-colonial subject to cross from the colonised ‘self’ to an understanding of a post-colonial ‘other’. Such a process requires an engagement in a dialogue (with the text and beyond) that is not merely a cognitive, but also a participatory and contextual engagement. A post-colonial learner can perform a participatory process of knowing by dialogic and through transcending ‘the cultural constellations’ or ‘force-fields’ (Achebe, 1965) that shape colonial binaries. Recognising the complexities of cultural representations, dialogics emphasises a ‘process’ rather than ‘destination’ and the ever changing over the static stance of knowledge. It pays attention to the mediator or interpreter, rather than what it is pointing to and ostensibly avoiding the essentialising of difference, with all that this politically and culturally entails (Murray, quoted in Moore, p. 22). Such readers are able to link the text ethically to the context by acknowledging new paradigms in the cross-cultural contacts.

### **A case study: context, methods, and sampling**

The case study was conducted in an English department in a ‘post-colonial’ higher education institution. Using a case study approach (Guba and Lincoln 1985; Merriam 2001, Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Bloor and Wood, 2006), we aimed to gain a ‘thick description’ (Creswell, 2007) of the students’ dialogic engagements and interpretation of the given text. In the case study, we

also aimed to gain an emic perspective of two directions of the current study: the students' construction of meanings and their co-construction of dialogic meanings as inferred from the text. It is both the descriptive characteristic and interpretive intent that made case study research most suitable for addressing these two perspectives. Specifically, our investigation ranges between the notions of beliefs (those regarding the text) and those of pedagogical practices (the implementation of the dialogic-based intervention). Therefore, the case study provided us with a holistic approach for these two issues in terms of beliefs and sentiments regarding meaning and dialogue.

Sixteen undergraduate students were 'purposefully' (Barbour 2001; Taylor 2007; Maxwell, 2002) selected as research participants. The students were assigned into four groups to dialogue, negotiate and analyse a text, *Heart of Darkness*. The students engaged with a dialogic approach to read, analyse and discuss different aspects of the text. The classroom seminar discussions were audiotaped, transcribed and analysed according to dialogic theoretical tenets.

During the intervention, the researchers were visible research participant in the classroom. They engaged in dialogic discussions of the text at hand and surveyed the students' comments and responses. In this respect the very act of observation of participation entails self-reflexivity in research and a move away from conceptualising research as an 'objectifying methodology' to an understanding of research as 'an intersubjective methodology' (Tedlock, 2000: 471). In the final session of the seminar, the students provided personal narratives about their current experience in terms of their perceptions of different pedagogical issues handled in the previous sessions. We see personal narrative and story-telling as an emancipatory approach in which the students unfolded themselves while expressing meanings, which emerged in a context of conversation and story-telling. The context of the dialogue was carefully crafted by the students and ourselves to fulfil our emancipatory aim. In this sense, their narratives were not distorted by fear of negative consequences regarding what was said. These conversations and stories were satisfying both as ends in themselves and as means to better understanding and for providing solutions of the current situation.

The analysis of students' interaction is informed by the works of Linell (2009), Markova (2003), and Werstch (1993), which assume that human communication entails the interaction of diverse perspectives, and is embedded in a socio-historical context. Linell (2009), for example, argues that the importance of adopting dialogic analysis as an interpretative methodology lies in its close analysis of either spoken or written transactions or utterances for their embedded communicative significance. We take up the assumption that the meaning of dialogic utterance is mediated between those it responds to and those it anticipates (Wegerif 2008). Therefore, the basic unit of analysis is the transaction: the involvement of two or more parties reciprocally affecting or influencing each other's worldviews. In this respect, we adopt a post-structuralist approach to analysis and meaning-making (SØndergaard, 2002). Post-structural analysis, as SØndergaard argues, explores the ways in which subjects hold and develop. It highlights the various subject positions in their everyday exchange, within the repertoires of 'self' that the subjects have already acquired.

### **Text selection**

Although there were many challenges associated with this study, careful selection of the text was our primary consideration. We used Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as a basis for our intervention that focused on the dialogic reading and interpretation of the text. We estimated *Heart of Darkness*, in particular, has the potential to endorse our investigation of the possible

ways to challenge ready-made interpretation of texts. Conrad and his fiction have a crucial relevance to issues around colonialism, representation, cultural involvement in perceiving the 'self' and the 'other', among others. His fiction has invited immense critique, research, and debate over a plethora of cultural issues. Bhabha (1994) citing Edward Said (1994) perceives the novella as exemplary of the seminal text "that invites the most comment and interpretation" (272). Naipaul (quoted in Fincham and Hooper, 1996) remarks, "Conrad's value to me is that he is someone who sixty to seventy years ago mediated on my world, a world I recognise today. I feel this about no other writer of the century" (p. xi). Fincham and Hooper insist that Conrad's "complex representation of the relationship between Europe and her ex-colonies complicates the reductionist mapping of the centre versus the periphery, the dominant versus the marginal, and the empowered versus the unempowered" (p. xii). Fincham and Hooper (1996) contend that Conrad anticipated post-modern and post-colonial representations through undermining the dominant ways of understanding and seeing of the world. Furthermore, they see his fiction as creating "complex articulations between form and history, narrative and ideology and demands to be taken seriously nearly a century after it was written precisely because of its relevance to the analysis of post-colonial ambiguities" (p. xiv).

*Heart of Darkness* has attracted the attention of leading literary theorists and raised debate among other cultural theorists since; according to Cooper (1996), it "foregrounds issues of authority, legitimacy, and canon-formation" (p. 3). Armstrong (1996), addressing the issue of epistemology of cultural difference, argues that the text can neither be understood as racist, nor as a model of ethnographic objectivity. He points out that the novel has elicited divergent responses ranging from seeing it as a daring attack on imperialism to a reactionary purveyor of colonial stereotypes. He argues that the novel has such a contested position because "its enactment of the dilemmas is entailed in understanding cultural otherness in inherently double and strategically ambiguous" ways (p. 23):

The text dramatises the impossibility of capturing the Other in writing, [...]for the very reason that understanding otherness requires an ongoing reciprocity between the knower and the known through which each comments on, corrects, and replies to the other's representations in a never-ending shifting of positions (p. 22).

He also claims that the novel's "textual strategies aim to educate the reader about the processes which might make dialogue with the Other possible" (p. 24). This is achieved through scrutinising Marlow's failure of representing the 'other' without having dialogue with this 'other'. Moreover, Hampson (1996) argues that the novel has multi-layered meaning. It requires the reader to emphasise the 'idea' behind imperialism, which might lead the reader at one level of interpretation to assume that the story is an exploration and enunciation of that 'idea'. At another level, the reader could take up the psychological dynamics underlying Marlow's ambivalence as he is split between two worlds.

### Discussion

In our intervention with the students, we addressed two areas of investigation: a) we examined dialogic reading and its pedagogical potential for problematising essentialised textual constructions of meanings. B) We also trace changes of meanings embedded in their responses, and how they realised these meanings in the context of the dialogic intervention. The following areas of discussion emerged from the students' interaction with the text: their construction of

Africa, black/white 'divide', European-African relations, reflections on Marlow's representations, attitude of the novella, and realisation of textual colonialist meanings.

Therefore, it is crucial to highlight that our interpretation of the students' textual meaning-making is informed by the dialogic underpinnings, which is twofold: a) the recognition of the plurality and dynamicity of textual interpretations, and b) acknowledging the conundrum of whether meanings reside in the text itself or in the students' 'inner meanings' based on their assumptions. In our approach to the students' textual interpretations, we maintained a reflective and reflexive position based on the dialogic underpinnings. As such, our contention in this research is that one 'true' and 'authorised' interpretation does not exist and nothing grants such interpretations validity. Within the post-colonial critique and framework, we hold a position that the text is a driven system of meaning and there exists an assemblage of texts which embody colonial meanings that construct an ideology of colonialism, or cultural essentialism. However, what might appear to be an 'inner' interpretation of the students, which resonates with a 'reader response theory' repertoire, remains highly contestable in our reading of the students' responses, since it de-contextualises the meaning-making process from its social and academic contexts.

Congo is the setting of *Heart of Darkness*; therefore, Africa was a recurring theme of the seminars discussions. The students' textual interpretations could be divided into two categories: the first sees Africa as a *vague* and *primitive* place and the Africans are *uncivilised*, *cannibals*, *ignorant*, *tribes with no religion*, *people who refuse to be developed* and *tribes with no system*. The second category sees Africa as *poor*, *victim*, '*victim but primitive*', and '*rich weak man*', and Africans are helpless, *poor*, and *scavengers*. It is important to point out that these categories or sets of responses do not divide the students into groups, but rather delineate the variation of their responses, since similar students provided responses that fall into more than one category. Additionally, over the seven seminar sessions, the tone of the students' responses regarding the image of Africa was tempered to include words around the *victim* theme. This section details these constructions alongside our interpretation and argument.

The first set of responses that interpret Africa as a *vague and primitive place*, and the Africans as *uncivilised cannibals* is significant in its indication of the normativity and endorsement of textual representations. Generally, it could be noted that these responses are shaped by their early occurrence, assertive mode, naturalness, and spontaneity, as well as providing justification by reference to certain events in the novel.

In session 1, we introduced the novel by asking general questions regarding the title, setting, author, *etc.* One question regarded the possibility of a geographical significance of the story. Said provides the following view of Africa:

**RI:** *Is there a geographical significance of the story?*

**Said:** *I think, yes, there is, since the events took place in Africa and we know that Africa was full of cannibals, bad people, ignorance/ from this point darkness comes*

**RI:** *I heard something very interesting/ could you repeat what you have said about the Africans?*

**Said:** *yes/ the cannibals/ the primitive/ and the river is like the snake/ they all come under the umbrella of darkness (G1, S1).*

Prior to this question, the title *Heart of Darkness*, was the point we were discussing and *darkness* was the theme of that discussion. When we asked about the *geographical significance*, Said remains concerned with *darkness* in his response. Although he directly answers the *geographical significance* question by discussing *events [that] took place in Africa*; he elaborates by providing an opinion of Africa as being *full of cannibals, bad people, and ignorance*. These phrases ensued

naturally in his speech, since the last phrase, *from this point darkness comes*, indicates that his major concern is still the *darkness* issue. Moreover, his digression about *the river as a snake*, and *all come under the umbrella of darkness*, indicates that *darkness* is the idea he is thinking of. Yet, Said's opinion of Africa, and the way he articulates that opinion indicate an impulsive view of Africa when it is first mentioned. Said's 'natural' and spontaneous connotations attributed to Africa reflect a dominant worldview of Africa, which Said unconsciously reproduces.

In the following quotation, the students' views regarding their interpretation of Africa are not different from Said's. What is significant, however, is the nature of these responses and the degree of assertiveness and certainty. Unlike Said's spontaneity while providing a view of Africa, Islam and Doa seem to be more conscious of the answers they articulate. They tend to provide justification and elaboration to their answers, which they back up by interpreting certain events in the text.

**RI:** *what kind of representations/ descriptions does Marlow give us about the Africans?*

**Islam:** *he talks about them as uncivilised, savage, and primitive people/ I think he is realistic in his views/ we don't have media to say that he maybe biased*

**Isra:** *he depicts them as scavengers who are just interested in things that make them alive/ they do many other things for survival...*

**Doa:** *I remember he called them cannibals/ Marlow tries to understand those cannibals/ I think they throw the dead body from the boat in order not to eat it/ because they were hungry/ so he sympathises with them although they are cannibals*

**RI:** *you said they are cannibals/ is this yours or Marlow's opinion?*

**Doa:** *they are cannibals/ so he tried to understand them not like Kurtz or other white characters (G2, S1).*

Islam refers to Marlow's representation and expresses her agreement with his representation as *being realistic*. The value of this response, we argue, is twofold: first, she is aware of the textual representation of Africa, which indicates an interpretative ability that enables her to read these representations, since Marlow's representations might be difficult for them to interpret. Second, and more interestingly, she refers to other sources of knowledge *we don't have media to say that he maybe biased*. The significance of this reference is that for readers like Islam whose interest in literature is exceptional, textual 'realities' become sources of knowledge, and a 'reality' that shapes their understanding, position, and judgements. The occurrence of media in Islam's speech is also significant since she identifies another source of knowledge that she relies on for knowing about different cultures.

Like Islam, Doa, holds a similar view of the Africans, but she goes beyond that as she interprets *throwing the dead body in the river* as a sign of cannibalism on the part of the Africans. While the burial custom for people travelling in the sea is to heave the dead body in water, Doa's linkage of this act to African cannibalism indicates that she articulates a far-reaching certainty in her worldviews about the Africans as cannibals eating human bodies. This becomes more obvious when she confirms that this is her own opinion, not Marlow's, and through her search for *Marlow's sympathy with the Africans although they are cannibals*. Such interpretation indicates that students like Doa hold a firm image of the Africans as cannibals, which might be estimated and stereotyping all Africans as cannibals. In fact, Doa finishes Isra's uncompleted utterance *they do many other things for survival...* by Africans as *cannibals* and justifies that *because they were hungry*. Although Isra disagrees with Doa's opinion of Africans as cannibals, it is highly significant that Doa exploits Isra's utterance to articulate her own ideas. People often tribute their meanings either of right and wrong reading to others' ideas.

The following extract exemplifies the students' elaboration of other textual representations that deal with the idea of blackness:

*[A black figure stood up, strode on long black legs, waving long black arms, across the glow... the black shadows of disease... (p. 134)*

**Anas:** *I have read something about the word 'white'/ it is the sign of good not only in Victorian age but in the Christian belief/ the skin of Elisabeth the First was not so white so she always put a veil on her face*

**R2:** *Why do you think so?*

**Isra:** *it's racism/ whether to be good, innocent, or beautiful, you should be white*

**Anas:** *this reminds me of Heathcliff when the father brought him, not being a white, the rest of the family considered him an evil child*

**Isra:** *and he is humiliated by the family*

**Anas:** *they classify people as black/ white and brown to say white people are smarter than black people (G2, S2).*

This is an interesting digression regarding the concept of 'blackness'; and a 'cultural' and historical contextualisation through which Marlow's extensive use of the word 'black' is connected to 'cultural' ideology and so realised as a sign of racism. Anas's remark regarding the Victorian Age and Christian beliefs about whiteness designates the importance of contextualising cultural understanding for the purpose of understanding textual representations. Connecting *goodness, innocence, and beauty to whiteness as racism* in Isra's view suggests a dialogic moment when both Anas and Isra build on each other's ideas to critique racist representations. Interestingly, recalling historical and other examples of textual representations (*Heathcliff, Wuthering Heights; Friday, Robinson Crusoe; and Othello, Othello*) to interpret textual meanings in hand is a remarkable progress in the students' sense of criticality and in their understanding of textual representations. Additionally, this contextualisation seems to connote a genre of dialogic reading that surpasses textual 'realities' to wider cultural and historical contexts while attempting to understand whiteness/blackness.

The second set of responses focused on the position of the captain of the boat who seems to be Marlow's friend. However, through critique of Marlow's account of this character, the students demonstrate an ability to connect these images to wider issues of coloniser/native relations. Here, we focus on the students' interpretation of this particular relationship and trace its development in their critique. Marlow introduces the native captain of the boat as follows:

*[And between whiles I had to look after the savage who was fireman. He was an improved specimen; he could fire up a vertical boiler. He was there below me, and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind-legs. A few months of training had done for that really fine chap. ... instead of which he was hard at work, a thrall to strange witchcraft, full of improving knowledge. He was useful because he had been instructed... (p. 70)].*

Students in the following dialogue attempt an interpretation of this extract:

**R1:** *how do you read this...?*

**Hiba:** *...the fireman is helpful to Marlow/ I think he is Marlow's friend*

**Tariq:** *there are many other friends on the boat and in the station...*

**Hiba:** *but not all African are friends...*

**Batool:** *in 'Robinson Crouse', Friday is his friend but his family or his tribe are not*

**R1:** *how do you see this friendship?*

**Batool:** *they are slaves*

**Hiba:** *I think these people are dangerous because they make a civil war/ I will kill you by your friend by your brothers/ this is immoral...*

**Tariq:** *they are mimickers*

**Batool:** *their followers/ I mean followers of the Europeans*

**Tariq:** *they behave in the same way as colonisers (G4, S3).*

Interestingly, although our intention of providing this quotation was to help the students read Marlow's account of natives who cooperate with the European 'expedition' to Congo, a wide variety of responses emerged in our discussion. This extract is indicative of several themes a) the developmental nature of dialogic interaction through which the students arrive at a profound understanding of such relation. Whereas they start interpreting this relationship as a form of *friendship*, other views emerge indicating that this *friendship is dangerous* on the part of the natives, which becomes *immoral*. b) The students' articulations and use of words also evoke those of literary theory such as Tariq's remark about natives as *mimickers*. c) It implies an understanding of the nature of such relationships as being helpful to Europeans who gave some natives command over the other natives. d) Batool's reference to the relationship between *Friday and Robinson Crusoe* provided an opportunity to introduce the concept of mimicry (we also refer to this quote and extract in 'the students' realisation of colonialism' section below).

The following two extracts epitomise the students' critique of civilised/uncivilised binaries backed up by reasoned examples from other literary texts. Ali's evocation of two settings: Centre/margin; the British and Indian in *Passage to India*; his thought out criticism entails a conspicuous attempt to defy such binary thought.

**Ali:** *I have read in 'Passage to India' / the first two pages is just a detailed description of two scenes... in the story he compared between the two stations: one belongs to the British and the other to the Indians/ there is a sentence here, civilised/ there is a sentence there, uncivilised/ here are trains/ there are bicycles/ civilised/ uncivilised and he repeats these images until you believe that thing... (G1, S3).*

Another example is Islam's reference to *The Lord of the Rings*, both the book and the movie, she comments:

**Islam:** *This (European African relation) reminds me of the epic 'The Lord of the Rings', I have read and seen/... they are always focusing on the idea of East and West and the middle of earth/ people coming from the east are always barbarians/ they just use the arrows/ they try to kill from far away/ they are so naïve/ they kill for any simple reason/ and they always say that's the evil comes from the east (G2, S3).*

In her reference, Islam comments on the *East/West* binaries by connecting them to North/South or the European/African 'divide'. Like Ali, she demonstrates a reasoned account by reconceptualising her previous experience in reading binary knowledge. Islam however goes beyond Ali in her reference and contextualisation as binary images in the epic are not directly stated. Phrases like *East/West*, *barbarians*, *naïve*, *use of arrows*, and *kill from far away* are purposefully chosen. The significance of this is that for students to understand colonial relations, they must first understand binary discourse through its creation of images and metaphors, which enables them to defy and disrupt binary logic.

Emergent ideas classified under this theme are crucial to this study for several reasons. First, they reflect the students' critique of Marlow's accounts. Second, they demonstrate the transitional dialogic stages and positions the students take up while discussing Marlow's 'realities'. They also extend that discussion to a general critique of Conrad and the novel in general with reference to other English literary texts, particularly the classics. Third, and most

significantly, these responses reflect the students' understanding of Marlow's 'failure' in his accounts and representations of Africa; they ascribe this failure to two things: a) *Marlow establishes anticipated stereotypes about Africa inferred from his culture, his representations are implanted in him, and his consciousness makes him use concepts from his cultural 'knowledge'*; and b) *Marlow distances himself from those he represents, hence, he fails to provide evidence of dialogue or reciprocity with the Africans, the 'other', therefore his account of Africa is a one-sided discourse.* The following section traces these 'developmental' positions.

In this extract, the students attempt to interpret the anonymous narrator's reference to Buddha while describing Marlow's manner of sitting and way of speaking.

**Said:** *I think Marlow stands neutrally in this novella/ he represents the white side of this novella/ he is not like Kurtz, so he is not a coloniser*

**Muhammad:** *the writer, I think, likes to say that I will give you wisdom, knowledge that you wouldn't find anywhere/ that's is about Buddha and his followers/ he puts himself in Buddha's position and the readers are like the followers of Buddha*

**Ali:** *and what makes you sure like that (reading) [... with his legs folded before him, he has the pose of Buddha preaching in European clothes... (p.36)] (paraphrases) 'what we have said is something lazy and now there is a silence to get somebody to give the real knowledge who is Marlow'/ this is a technique/ a convincing style...*

**Muhammad:** *in the state of silence, information will be clear/ so the word 'silence' means that he is highly reliable (G1, S1).*

Contrasting Marlow with Kurtz, Said views Marlow as a neutral, outside observer of events. Unlike Kurtz, who is interpreted as *a coloniser*, Marlow is *the white side of the novel*. In his interpretation, Said discredits the value of Marlow's representations of the Africans, and the textual 'realities' that arise because Marlow is the key character and a first narrator who introduces this story from a particular 'point of view'. Muhammad's interpretation of Buddha's image seems to go alongside with the textual claim regarding Marlow's role as a seeker after truth, which suggests a possibility of a transmission of textual 'realities' to readers. This becomes evident when he refers to the *state of silence* as *highly reliable*. *Readers and Buddha followers* are thus located in the same position; followers without questioning (Fothergill, 1989). In paraphrasing the quotation, Ali's mocking tone hints that *Buddha's image* and *state of silence* are not signs of reliability, but rather a technique used by the writer to prepare readers 'to hunt for meanings', to use Fothergill words.

Discourse and language constitute another version of textual 'reality' the students seem to take up as a source of trusted knowledge about the Africans. In the following passage, Batool feels that Marlow is being objective [*they were not enemies...*].

**Batool:** *names give readers ideas about people/ he named them savages/ in the beginning of the novel, I feel he is objective/ he says [they were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly know (p.40)] (G4, S2).*

Batool juxtaposes these phrases with Marlow's reference to the Africans as *savages* feeling that the latter statement is more objective as far as they are *not enemies or criminals*. This raises the fundamental issue of textual 'realities' for the interpretations produced by students. Juxtaposing Marlow with Kurtz, and phrases of varying degrees of account (*savages* vs. *enemies...*), produces a highly textual impact regarding the ways the students construct knowledge, and promotes a sense judgment. This is to argue that 'norm reference' (evaluating vis-à-vis comparing) and 'dialectic reading' might call on Batool to accept the word 'savage' not only as a less

intimidating attribute, but also a textual ‘force’ that makes her believe in Marlow’s objectivity while referring to the Africans as such.

However, the following extract suggests that the students, Sura and Misa, take up dialogic positions in their attempt to understand Marlow’s representations of the Africans.

**Sura:** *I think in all the story, Marlow is not dehumanising the Africans/ for example, when he describes them as dry sticks, very weak, they were setting, and their backs are against each others, and they are powerless*

**Misa:** *I think he over-generalises them as inferior creatures and savages/ this means his sympathy doesn’t help (G3, S1).*

Sura is sympathetic to Marlow’s reference to some Africans as *dry sticks, very weak, and helpless*. Misa, however, does not allow this sympathy to last long and reminds Sura that Marlow’s sympathy with the Africans *doesn’t help, since he over generalises them as savages*. This example reflects the nature of the dialogue the students have while trying to arrive at textual interpretations. Misa sees savagery to be equal to dehumanisation and thus takes the former to be a stereotype that Marlow creates for the Africans, which is obviously something she does not approve of. Interestingly, Sura does not argue with Misa and the transaction is closed with Sura’s utterance, which suggests a dialogic nature of interpretation when an interlocutor gives up exchange. We understand this silence in the part of Sura as either a consent of Misa’s point of view or a preference to suspend dialogue. In both cases, we argue that a dialogic interpretation take place as both were listening attentively to each other’s views.

Again, the following dialogue unfolds two discrete points of view regarding Marlow with the direction of charging him as being responsible for providing *unpleasant image of local people*:

**Tariq:** *Marlow bears imperialistic mind and thus commits bad deeds to those people*

**Batool:** *how? Did he manipulate the others? Marlow?/ could you provide us with examples of these deeds ... he looks sympathetic with the African*

**Tariq:** *... the issue is that his image of local people grows increasingly unpleasant/ I think this is what Marlow does.*

**Batool:** *Marlow is a victim of the prejudices he brought with him to Africa*

**Tariq:** *I think Marlow plays the two roles, he was a victim then he became a victimiser (G4, S3).*

Here, Tariq burdens Marlow with the responsibility of *committing imperialistic deeds*. This is an indication of over stated interpretation of Marlow’s position in the novel. Tariq’s position, according to Batool, seems to take up a prejudicial or dogmatic account. In response to her challenge, it appears that Tariq slightly modifies his position by acknowledging the double roles of Marlow as a victim and victimiser. The moderate modification in his position through discussion with Batool, although not explicitly articulated, suggests a dialogic tradition through which the students search for an ‘in-between’ area or a ‘third space’ (Bhabha, 1994, 1996) that is distinctly different from the original views. We recognise in Tariq’s moderate change in position an implication of dialogic interaction and a shift of a dichotomous mode of discussion into a dialogic one. In fact, tracing the provisional nature of the positions Tariq’s view of Marlow, which ranges between *victim, victimiser, increasingly unpleasant* and *imperialistic mind*, implies a dynamic and constantly changing mode of dialogic textual interpretation and meaning making. More evidently, the students’ understandings of Marlow’s account of Africa are provisional and temperamental, though they echo the nature of dialogic interaction when they attempt an appraisal of Marlow’s case. These responses also reflect an indicative maturity in their critical

accounts, especially when connecting Marlow's representations to images borrowed from his culture, and a lack of communication and reciprocity with those he speaks for.

**Muhammad:** *I think when Marlow travelled he asked about the Congo, the nature of his job/ it's common sense to say that Marlow will establish a stereotype about the Congo / he judged his experience/ I think he anticipated those images before he saw them*

**Ali:** *... this is the role of the unconscious/ he wants to cover what is inside his mind/ and after that he said some words that are related to his reality because they think about Africans as things, as criminals, as beasts...*

**Muhammad:** *I think they were different from him therefore he talked about them in negative words (G1, S3).*

While Muhammad refers to Marlow's account as a stereotype established by his experience, Ali talks about the role of his unconscious and an articulation of reality that exists in his mind. Building on Ali's views (*Marlow uses some words that are related to his reality...*), Muhammad, shifting from his previous position, offers another explanation *since they are different, he talks about them negatively*, which is a clearly articulated dialogic and hybrid critique. Such a provision in Muhammad's responses, also highlights a dialogic merit; where meanings oscillate in the area between utterances. Additionally, both responses *unconscious meanings and difference leading someone to speak negatively* are highly suggestive of eighteenth-century European thought regarding stereotyping Africa as full of 'cannibals' and 'beasts'. Such a response resonates with Said's (1978) argument regarding European's polarisation of knowledge regarding the non-Western people. Said maintains that Europeans were not 'telling lies' nor dislike non-Western peoples, but their 'knowledge' was filtered by their culturally informed prejudices. Therefore, this knowledge produced

a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar [...] and the strange [...] When one uses categories like Oriental and Western as both the starting and the end points of analysis [...] the result is usually to polarise the distinction- the Oriental becomes more Oriental, the westerner more Western- and limit the human encounter between different cultures, traditions and societies (Said, 1978, p. 45-46).

Within this reading of the students' interpretation and challenge to textual accounts, we recognise a genre of resistance to those 'realities' provided by the text. The discursive nature of these interpretations suggests a dialogic multiplicity of constructing meanings beyond a static reading or interpretation of textual meanings. It is possible to argue that the dialogic relationship between the text, the students, and among the students themselves allows creative and shared 'response-abilities' through which all interlocutors become agents for the co-construction of meanings.

Shahd and Hiba's criticism/critique of Marlow's representation both ascribe his vision of Africa to the interference of his culture, though he attempts a sympathetic representation of the Africans.

**Shahd:** *when we talk about Marlow, we forget that he is European/ I think he sympathises with the Africans but he portrays their image with European eyes*

**Hiba:** *I think Conrad depicts how he was brought up/ how he thinks and this is the way he realises the world/ I think this is something implanted in himself/ he can't live outside himself/ so I think this is the reason why he couldn't give the Africans their real names/ I think he*

*introduces his nation's ideas about them without thinking or even making contact with them or conversation (G4, S3).*

This example demonstrates the students' ability to outperform the immediate textual constructs as a source of knowledge to a wider contextualisation of the text. Deeming Marlow's accounts of the Africans as being informed by a genre of 'cultural knowledge' *implanted in himself*, Hiba articulates 'knowledge' about the 'other' as culturally produced. Arguably, reading the text culturally is highly significant for realising the 'whys' behind textual constructs, and so a reasoned critique of the versions of reality, particularly when these accounts create particular stereotypes about the 'other', such as in Marlow's case with the Africans. Although both students refer to Marlow's cultural background as a 'reality' that informs his understanding of Africa, Hiba goes beyond that to enunciate a dialogic value by critiquing Marlow's *failure* to attempt *contact* or *conversation* with Africans. This implies that dialoguing with the 'other' could disrupt forms of stereotypes and culturally informed knowledge about the 'other', and promotes understanding the 'other' in his own terms.

Interestingly, this extract also registers one of the few occasions when the students alternate Marlow with Conrad, which raises a highly contestable issue regarding the students' position of the novella itself. In fact, the students demonstrate remarkable difference while identifying the positions of Conrad and the novel. While some students, Doa and Muhammad, for example, identify a position of Conrad as defending the Africans, others take the novel as a colonialist text based on the assumption of the ways Marlow introduces and represents Africa. It becomes challenging to accept or refuse either of these positions, which echoes the various and contestable positions literary critics, including post-colonial ones, attribute to *Heart of Darkness*. As for the students, this position is reflected in some of the ways they read Marlow's accounts of the Africans.

Islam, who looks sympathetically at Marlow, suggests he is internally conflicted; according to her, although, he is angry about the Europeans' deeds in Africa, he is not able to say that.

*Islam: he has a conflict inside himself/ he can't say no, that's wrong, that should not happen/ but actually inside, he is still angry/ he is conscious/ they shouldn't do that/ I mean Europe shouldn't do such things in Africa (G3, S3).*

Such an interpretation reflects an important 'split' in Marlow, since he adopts a "contradictory position as the self-aware and critical but a complicit employee of the company" (Fothergill, 1989, p. 41). This 'homo-duplex': a double view or position, as Fothergill argues, reflects a deep state of contradiction and ambivalence. Islam's interpretation provides cognitive tools and live examples, not only to challenge textual essentialism and claimed realities, but also those of the students themselves. Additionally, her interpretation of Marlow and hence Conrad in this dialogic context challenges the one particular and 'authorised' interpretation of the text, thus, a promotion of a multiplicity of textual interpretations.

In furtherance to Islam's point, Anas draws links between Marlow's case and cultural representations, in general, with reference to himself as *our cultural judgements*.

*Anas: I think culture always affects our judgement on things/ and I think Marlow is affected by the European culture and when he gave us the picture of African people he is never objective/Marlow has a dominant power/ when we talk about power, we see a clear image that the world is like a forest/ and the strong defeats the weak (G2, S3).*

This might indicate a sort of transferring Marlow's issue into a problem of representation all cultures share. Anas's reference to himself and his culture is another indication of reflexivity that is attained while discussing the text. We recognise such provisional positions the students appear

to take up in relation to the text and in transforming textual matters to wider cultural issues, such as Anas's reference to his *own* culture, underlie the power of literature in its impact on readers. In addition, Anas provides an understanding of power, which is not only a mark of the European conquer's manipulation of the Africans, but also a hint to power that enables dominant discourse, in general. By referring to Marlow's position as the one who owns the voice which is a production of power, Anas implies an understanding of how European colonial powers nurtured and 'objectified' particular 'knowledge' about the 'other' (Said, 1990), who is potentially voiceless (Spivak, 1988) by assuming the position of being weak. However, Anas's elaboration of the image of the *world as a forest where the strong defeats the weak* suggests a sense of rejecting current global relations, which are based on powerful/weak relationship.

### Tracing signs of dialogic resistance of textual meanings

The students' attempts to understand the novel's position on the issue of colonialism is a significant theme through which they adopt different accounts in terms of locating the text. The various positions they take up, as the following examples demonstrate, are suggestive of sensible reasoning regarding the way they judge the novel as a whole, which indicates a provisional and dynamic shift of their worldviews. Specifically, these responses demonstrate that a) Conrad is an *opponent to capitalism and colonialism*, hence the novel might be taken as an early 'post-colonial' text. b) Other responses, however, suggest that Conrad is a culturally biased writer through his *introduction of reversal relation of white/black, civilised/uncivilised concepts*; and c) a third group sees the novella as a hybrid text and Conrad as having *a double identity: someone living in two worlds*. These responses are detailed below.

While some responses take up the novella as a critique of the European colonialism, others challenge this view, classifying the novel as a colonial text. In fact, these two extreme positions are interesting in their indication of the idea of the plurality of textual interpretations we attempt to explore through the dialogic approach. Furthermore, it is essential to emphasise that these two different positions in the part of the students do not classify them into two groups, but rather the students' provisional positions appear to oscillate between the two positions, which suggests that dialogism promotes the dynamicity of judgments. Below, Doa perceives Conrad's position as a defender of the Africans by uncovering the European brutality towards *weak and defenceless people*:

*Doa: I think Conrad is against colonialism/ he wants to tell us how the Europeans treated the Africans in a bad and inhuman way/ we know about this by reading his novella/ Ok/ I agree that Marlow misrepresented Africans, but I think Conrad wants to tell us Marlow's story not his own (G2, S4).*

*Heart of Darkness* is a highly controversial text in terms of Conrad's position to European colonialism (Sarvan, 1980; Armstrong, 1996; Fothergill, 1989; Hampson, 1996). Interestingly, Doa's understanding of Conrad's position as a writer who is against colonialism is informed by the assumption that Conrad and Marlow are distinguished from each other. This seems to be inferred from her reading of the constructs provided by the story. In fact, there exists the possibility that Conrad introduces Marlow in a critical light, so that darkness, savagery, and other meanings attributed to the characters of the story could be used by Conrad as an early critique of European colonialism. Therefore, the values introduced in the novel might not necessarily be those of the author himself. Although such a line of reading disagrees with some post-colonial interpretations of the text, the possibility of such an engagement and understanding might locate Conrad's position in *Heart of Darkness* as a 'post-colonialist' writer. Therefore, it is possible that

Conrad attempts to represent Marlow and the colonial values from a critical perspective. Thus, Doa's interpretation of the two positions is a thought out consideration of the multiple textual possibilities, particularly the author's positions.

On another level, Islam sees *Heart of Darkness* as a result of Conrad's real experience while travelling to Congo.

**Islam:** *I think Conrad in his novel is against/ or in other words, questions the idealism of capitalism and colonialism/ Conrad wrote his novel on the basis of his own experience/ it is realistic/ in his experience he criticises the point of view: 'we must go to Africa to free man', but in fact, the Europeans go to Africa in order to make the Africans and the natives more miserable in the shackles of slavery/ I think Conrad wants to say that (G2, S3).*

According to Islam, Conrad questions the European presence in Africa, and registers the suffering of Africans caused by white colonisers. In her interpretation, Islam employs knowledge of Conrad's biography. *Heart of Darkness* is often thought to be connected to Conrad's real-life experiences. Therefore, Islam's contextualisation of Conrad's biography "seems to invite comparison of the two spheres, the literary and the real (a 'real' which, of course, we only have access to through other, usually written accounts)" (Fothergill, 1989, p. 6). Acknowledging the fact that Conrad himself gave credence to the biographical reading of literature, Islam recognises another level of interpreting textual constructs within their historic, geographical, time, and cultural settings. Additionally, it could be argued that Islam's interpretation of the text underlies a practice of colonial discourse analysis. However, instead of owing this interpretation to her own reading and discussion around the novel, she states that *Conrad wants to say that*. Islam's trust in literature is exceptional and her judgement echoes her worldview of the value of textual meanings.

Unlike Doa and Islam, Hamza deems *Conrad as biased* and the darkness Conrad speaks about *reflects the darkness of the psyche of the White*.

**Hamza:** *Conrad wrote this novel to introduce us to the darkness of Africa/ I think he is biased with western colour since he depicts Africa as dark, but my point of view after reading the novella, I think darkness was in the heart of the psyche of the White because they treated the Africans in a savage way/ you finally discover that the darkness in their souls and in their hearts not in Africa itself (G2, S4).*

In reference to the colour issue, Hamza rejects the novels' '*association of blackness to Africa*'. This opinion seems to reflect an employment of a wider cultural stand to textual interpretation. Obviously, Hamza, being sympathetic with the Africans, values the novella on the basis of the *darkness* issue, which suggests that the textual construct through which darkness is associated with Africa provokes a preoccupation that readers might rely on while valuing the work as a whole. Arguably, this might encourage readers to 'read' and sometimes 'mis-read' the work in terms of dislocating reference to *who says what*. Talking about *the White's savage way of treating African*, Hamza seems to miss a point that Conrad himself is the one who uncovers and registers this behaviour.

Hiba discusses textual discourse and language, which designates another level of dialogic critique of the text.

**Hiba:** *after reading the novella, I think it is the reversal of concept of white and black, civilised and uncivilised/ it is about a psychological and physical journey of Marlow to reach his inside reality/ the whiteness of the European (G4, S5).*

Hiba judges the novel as the *reversal concept of white/black, civilised/uncivilised* binaries. She also hints at another level of interpretation the *psychological journey of Marlow* or the white

man's search for reality, which can only be discovered through differentiating the 'self' from the 'other'. Hiba observes of the novel's discourse and attempts to deconstruct Conrad's binaries, through this, she embraces multiple dialogic perspectives in interpreting and critiquing the binary constructs of the text. Within such an approach, Hiba's combination of two levels of interpretations, cultural and linguistic, indicates a profound gain in dialogic analytical skills. Such progress in textual analysis when combined with dialogue around wider cultural issues, like the one we attempted in our discussions, gives weight to dialogic readings of textual meanings. The third category, which identifies Conrad's position as 'split' between two worlds, demonstrates exceptionally articulated dialogic responses in their moderate accounts regarding the novel. Anas's following comment exemplifies some of these responses:

*Anas: it is not a matter of extreme things, but I think the ideas in this novel reflect Conrad's conflict as someone who lives between two worlds/ the European and the African/ his own personal life and his story reflect this fact... (G2, S5).*

In addition to its indication of profound knowledge about the novel and the author, Anas's comment of rejecting extreme positions while judging the text enunciates the core intention of our dialogic approach in recognising the value of *living between two worlds*. Conrad once called himself 'Homo duplex' indicating a double position or displacement, which provides a useful key to an understanding of Conrad's life and the ambivalences of his work (Fothergill, 1989). Acknowledging the fact that Conrad had double nationality, two professional careers, mixed social/class identity, he became politically, culturally, socially, and not least, linguistically hybrid, which might call readers to read him with a critically as someone 'inside-and-yet-outside' (Fothergill, 1989). Arguably, we recognise Anas's view that the novel reflects the enunciative locations dialogic attempts to create, which appeared through tracing the shift between Anas's initial positions and the current one.

### **Tracing the students' realisations of colonialist meanings**

Colonialism is a recurring theme that intersects the whole set of data created by the students' readings and dialogue around the text. Although data provided in the previous sections could be interpreted in line with this theme, in the current section, we focus on the students' realisations, reflections, and connections of textual meaning to their wider accounts and visions of culture.

The students' recognition of the possibility of colonialist meanings in *Heart of Darkness* is mediated around three areas: a) tracing possible colonialist meanings in the novel and connecting these meanings to other canonised literary texts: the classics and particularly 18<sup>th</sup> century texts included in their syllabus; b) attempting an understanding of these meanings within a 'colonial discourse analysis', and c) recognising and resisting colonial legacies by connecting them to contemporary issues. While it remains controversial to take the novel as a colonialist text, the students' readings and discussions around the novel especially Marlow's accounts of the Africans provoked emergent thoughts regarding European colonialism, which they contextualise in critiquing current 'colonial ideologies'. In fact the students' accounts of colonialist assumptions oscillated in and out-side the text, and between the past and present.

Muhammad and Said, in the following extract, refer to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the time when the novel was written in an attempt to reach an understanding of the concept of colonialism. They also compare what the concept could mean in those times to the current understanding.

*Muhammad: colonisation at that time (time of writing Heart of Darkness) was not evil/ at that time no one says colonisation is bad*

*Said: how come?*

**Muhammad:** *it[colonisation] is bad, but who can say that in those times (G1, S2).*

The period 1899 – 1902 marks the time *Heart of Darkness* appeared in public. It also marks a heady age of the high tide of European imperialism. During those times, colonialism was the Empire's source of glory and pride; *no one would say that it was bad*, Muhammad reasons. However, from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards colonialism has been subject to fervent criticism. In his remark, Muhammad articulates the change of peoples' perceptions over time, which we recognise as an inferential ability through which he connects textual meanings to time, particularly current times. Thus, it could be argued that although textual representations of highly charged concepts might be contestable, it is possible that readers, particularly dialogic ones, could reach an understanding of the dynamic nature of textual meanings and their evolution.

Similarly, broadening the contextualisation of the concept, Sura, Nour, and Wala conceive of the concept of colonisation as a genre of ideological practice regardless of *who* adopts it.

**Sura:** *I think we have to distinguish between two terms colonisation and occupation/ I think occupation is found with army but colonisation by both arms and ideas or ideology, so what happened in Iraq is occupation and that of Jordan is colonisation/ Egypt, Syria, and Jordan all suffer from colonisation...*

**Nour:** *a nation can control another in different ways and by many things/ the Americans can control us from a remote place without coming here*

**RI:** *how?*

**Wala:** *we are culturally attacked, by media/ by net/ by many things*

**Sura:** *the books we read*

**RI:** *which books do you mean?*

**Sura:** *many books we read, for example, English literature*

**Nour:** *I think it is not only English literature/ many other literatures do the same (G3, S4).*

Sura finds *ideas and ideology* distinctive features of *colonisation*, which is different from *occupation*. The indicative remark Sura raises is an understanding of colonisation as the employment of ideas as apparatus colonial powers use to *control other countries*, which opened the space for other ideas to emerge. Both Nour and Wala, building on this view, through dialogic interaction, talk about the different ways colonisation is practiced, *media, net, many things*, and, according to Sura, *books*. A broadening of the contexts in which colonial ideology could be practiced further abstracts the concept, a conceptualisation that emerged in the course of their dialogue. We realise the students' accounts and building on each others' dialogic values through the discursive nature of dialogue create a non-dogmatic understanding of matters discussed, such as the one in hand. Therefore, an understanding of the concept of colonialism surpasses specific referents such as that of European colonialism, into an abstraction, where colonial ideology becomes the key point of discussion and the subject of criticism. Furthermore, the students' reference to time as present rather than past while discussing the concept implies that colonial ideology is not bounded by a time frame; they critiqued the concept as an 'idea' or an abstract construct, irrespective of a time frame, and it remains an ideology that is of concern. In line with this argument, we find the students' approach and realisation of the concept in this manner a remarkable one. They realise that colonialism or neo-colonialism is an ideology that was practiced in the past and still exists now, which invites them to critically reflect on their own critical cultural awareness. However, such a conceptualisation invites them to transfer and practice their criticisms and thus resist colonial ideology as well as other forms of ideological

assumptions from a diasporic and hybrid ‘third space positioning’, which brings about non-dogmatic accounts while practicing critique.

Attempting a colonial discourse analysis, the students practiced a genre of discursive dialogue in and out-side the text, which invites them to recall and discuss a plethora of relevant texts and issues, particularly contemporary ones. In so doing, dialogic practice creates further spaces in which to construct their multiple realisations and locations through which they enunciate their views. The following extract exemplifies the way the students dialogue, digress, and elaborate around this theme.

*[... He (Kurtz) began his argument that ‘we white, from the point of development we had arrived at, ‘must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings – we approach them with the might as of a deity’, and so on. ‘By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded’ etc. etc. ... (p. 117)].*

*Ali: such a text points out that they want to justify their mission in Congo, they say that this mission is a noble one and we are going to make people more civilised in this primitive area but at the end we discover that this mission is not a noble one/ they justify their mission under the umbrella of civilisation*

*Muhammad: I think this text is not to justify but to convey an opinion of colonialism/ we come to Congo to make people civilised/ that’s true, nowadays we hear something similar things but the difference is only in terminology/ now, we hear a lot about freedom the equality between men and women, the human rights*

*Ali: yes, for example Iraq*

*Muhammad: not only Iraq, look at Jordan*

*Ali: When Bush in his campaign told us that he wanted to establish democracy in Iraq, and freedom for the sake of Iraqis but what we see now is not what he claimed/ it’s quite opposite /also we have a real reason and a good reason/ the good reason we want to develop people and make them civilised and the real reason remains inside minds*

*Muhammad: we can say surface meaning and deep meaning*

*Said: it’s a kind of hypocrisy (G1, S2).*

The lines Marlow reads from Kurtz’s report triggered the students’ reactions and responses towards colonial discourse. In simple expressions with profound meanings, the students attempt to explain how colonial powers authorise their presence and domination of other people and their land. The congenial flow of the students’ dialogue implies accordance in their views, which is a notable feature of other related themes. It could be argued that, in reaction to Kurtz’s ideas, the students adopt a consistent vision and argument, which indicates that they locate themselves in one position that of the ‘other’. In their defence as well as in their reference to Iraq, they not only connect Kurtz’s discourse to contemporary issues, but also thoroughly understand the tools of colonial language, which appears, for example, in Ali’s phrases *real/good reason* or Muhammad’s *surface/deep meaning*. Said, who once approved Marlow’s representation of Africans as *uncivilised* and Africa as *full of cannibals*, also joins the group in their criticism of colonial issues, which is typical of the other students. Additionally, the argument expressed in this example suggests concern about currently circulated discourse such as *freedom, man/woman equality, human rights*. It could also be argued that bringing these issues into the discussion over colonial discourse reflects the students’ concern for their cultural image, since recently these issues are largely argued in the Arab world.

The message of enlightening the ‘other’ operates strongly in colonial discourse (Said, 1978, 1983; Ashcroft, et al. 1989). The students’ reading, analysis, and discussion of textual recalling

of some 'national' figures who assumed the responsibility and the 'burden' of spreading the 'message of enlightenment' to other people provoked an understanding of colonial discourse as embedded in textual accounts. In the following extract, the students provide a rationale and an analysis of Marlow's recalling and contextualising of some national figures in his narrative:

*[... from Sir Francis Drake to John Franklin, knights, titled and untitled – the great knights of the sea ... and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire (Marlow, p.63)...]*

**Islam:** *I think he provided these names to make us believe his ideas are more realistic / it gives his story more realistic value/ names make the text more reliable*

**R2:** *but do you know those people?*

**Islam:** *no but when you give me those names, I think they are reality and I don't have to know them/ there is something which you need me to know and believe...*

**Anas:** *(interpreting) 'these are our ancestors, we glorify and praise them as they are the source of our power/ 'the torches and the messengers', I think refer to Christianity which tried to enlighten other peoples (G2, S2).*

Conrad's allusion to these figures implies a sort of reader whose competence enables the correct decoding of historical referents as heroic figures. Even if readers do not know who those people are, "competence is something a text both assumes and can create" (Fothergill, 1989, p. 15). Therefore, the intention of stating such names is typically interpreted by Islam and Anas. While, for Islam, they give the text *realistic value*, Anas goes beyond that claiming that they are a *source of glory and power*. Both cases, however, indicate a harmonious conceptualisation of the reason for including those names. Conrad's reference to the '*messengers as bearers of a spark from the sacred fire*' in the next paragraph endorses the idea of enlightenment, where those national figures are agents of the 'civilising mission' ((Fothergill, 1989, p.15). Therefore, Anas's interpretation of *those people are as sources of glory and power*, and the *torches as indicators of Christianity that aims to enlighten other people* is indicative of his realisation of the colonial '*message*'. We recognise in Anas's connection between glory, power, and enlightenment, on the one hand, and European Christianity, on the other a reading of colonial discourse that is based on textual representations, since the phrase a '*spark from the sacred fire*' is suggestive of Christianity. In this line of argument, it could be estimated that textual realities have the potential to construct meaning. *Heart of Darkness*, in terms of its selection of the Congo setting and the European ivory 'trade' alongside the many other accounts the novel gives would enable colonial meanings to emerge out of the text itself. The reader's responsibility then becomes a 'share' of these constructs irrespective what kind of 'share' he or she provides.

In the following passage, Tariq articulates a compelling analysis of colonial discourse by connecting colonial ideology with culture and power:

**Tariq:** *any form of colonisation comes from one spot from one culture/ this culture has certain beliefs that it is the superior, the powerful, the most advanced economies/ and the other cultures are inferior, so it is our responsibility to send our sons to enlighten them/ so they try to convince their people of that/ but the real thing, they want to make easy life for their people/to find other natural resources/ in the past the ivory was a precious thing so they went Africa / but they treated Africans in totally inhuman way/and if they have the chance to return back without a disease, they tell these stories to people back home (G4, S5).*

The salient feature of Tariq's comments is the connection he makes between colonial discourse and cultural assumptions from one side and literature from the other. He reads in Kurtz's discourse in his report directed back to Europe, a genre of narratives and an epistemology

travellers and colonisers held about themselves, their culture and the 'other'. It was the custom for those travellers to report their knowledge about foreign 'races' they encounter overseas *if they had the chance to return back without a disease*. The link Tariq makes between colonisers' stories and the way they perceive their culture as powerful and superior and the 'other's' as inferior informs their 'realities' about themselves and about the 'other'. Therefore, as far as this 'other' is *inferior and uncivilised*, it becomes the *powerful and superior's responsibility to enlighten* those 'dark races': 'the white man's burden' (Young, 1995), in other words. Reading Tariq's comment this way, we recognise a thought out reading and contextualisation of textual constructs, which he embraces to analyse colonial discourses. Interestingly, the students', through such responses, are transferring textual reading and analytic skills to reflections on wider cultural issues.

The students' elaboration on the possible colonialist meanings and the connections they made to their lives and to their realisations of contemporary cultural, social, and academic matters provoke a wide range of responses. The discursive nature of these responses makes categorising them under several headings possible. However, the students' association of colonialism with the political and social scene resonates powerfully in their worldviews, which makes it a recurrent theme:

**Muhammad:** *I want to associate things with colonisation, in Syria for example the prominent language is French that is because of the French colonisation to that country, and the same in Jordan the most important language is English*

**Said:** *besides language, I would say the political effects/ we know that there are many problems in the Middle East*

**Ali:** *I think they changed our own ways of thinking/ we believe that they are an ideal society*

**Muhammad:** *we make this*

**Ali:** *even in literature and history, they affect us/ if you compare between Shakespeare and Al-Mutanabbi you are made to think that Shakespeare is more rhetorical/ there is a picture in my mind that Shakespeare is the first poet or play writer in the whole world.*

**R2:** *where do you think this picture comes from?*

**Ali:** *it is before the university, I think from my childhood (G1, S4).*

Associating *language spread, the political problems in the Middle East, and the change of their ways of thinking*, as well as *glorifying English literature, Shakespeare in particular* connote the discursive nature of the students' reflections on colonial issues discussed in the text. The recurrence of these issues at various stages of the seminar sessions attests a conviction through which they rearticulate a socially and politically circulated discourse. Ali's reference to *Al-Mutanabbi*<sup>1</sup> and juxtaposing him with *Shakespeare* and taking the latter as *more rhetorical* echoes another discourse which significantly goes beyond the academic setting to a social or cultural one. For Ali, we argue, *Shakespeare is no longer more rhetorical than Al-Mutanabbi*, since evoking this idea while discussing colonial legacies signifies Ali's realisation of the fallacy of his previous perception. Furthermore, Muhammad's illusion that *we make this* could be read as reference to themselves either as a group of students discussing the issue or to Jordanians, a 'once colonised people'. At any rate, Muhammad alludes to the colonised people's share in stereotyping the image of Europeans' ideal societies. In so doing, Muhammad adopts an intermediate position where he directs his critique not only to colonial discourse but also to the colonised in stereotyping this image of Europe and themselves.

### Conclusion

In this study, we have attempted an interpretation of the students' worldviews as presented in their responses and traced their textual meaning-making while reading and discussing *Heart of Darkness*. Data revealed wide variation among students' views while interpreting the text, which reflects the multiplicity and discursiveness in their realities that inform their interpretations. Although their analyses regarding some points reflect a reproduction of received knowledge, other responses reveal thought out inferences. The students' responses exceeded our expectations, as they have been indoctrinated with both literature and scientific facts. Paulo Freire (1985) argues that 'normalising education' manifested by 'particular informed meanings'. In their reflections, the students place their current experience of dialogic engagement against their formal education through which they recognise that the spaces created by the dialogic engagement and the shared knowledge they gained could loosen the 'righteous' and 'taken for granted' interpretations. In their remarks, the students realised that 'standardised' readings of a literary text remain open to dialogue, hence, to challenge. We argue that dialogic approach enables a 'counter education', as opposed to a 'normalising education', where learners could recognise and practice the skills and tools of deciphering the politics of institutional indoctrination.

Based on our findings, we claim that the students adopt a dialogic interaction with the text in the ways they transcend dualistic and dichotomous oppositions into assuming the right for textual meanings as an 'Other' having the right to be voiced, represented, and acknowledged. They give equal, dialogical attention to their own voice and the voice of the text; such a mode of textual interaction promotes a critical reflection on the process of 'difference' exploration. Therefore, readers' subject positions are 'double-voiced' or 'constructing the "self" in relation' instead of 'single-voiced' or expressing 'adherence of the "self" viewpoint' while realising textual ideas. Thus, dialogic readers would tend for an exchange of voices rather than holding antithesis to a given thesis or an answer to a proposed question (Bialostosky, 1986) in her search for an understanding of the writers' psychology and position.

Furthermore, the search for elements in and beyond the text registers another dialogical element in terms of discovering the experience of the cultural context behind the text that gives the words their validity and meaning, through which readers could explore the 'borderland' of the 'self' and the 'other' represented by textual meanings (Moore, 1994). Therefore, acknowledging the psychological and cultural positions of textual ideas enables 'third-space positioning' which surpasses dialectic binaries into a 'multi-dimensional' field. Dialogical mode of interaction transcends and infuses the text in such a way readers get through a complex process of cultural exchange instead of binary absorption between the 'self' and the 'other' where 'culture' operates outside the exchange since the aim turns into 'dialogic survival' rather than 'dialectic synthesis'.

Third, the primacy of context and the impossibility of textual resolution is implied in the students' dialogic approach to valuing the text. This appears not only in their search for wider contextual elements, but also in the ways they come to understand and evaluate the text in terms of these elements. We contend that the students gain deeper knowledge about textual background and practices critical reflexivity, which appears in their search for reciprocity construction of meanings. They participate in a genre of dialogic reading that shifts into not only a participatory epistemology, but also contextual exchange. As such, the reader and the text turn into dialogic interlocutors where readers and ideas could discover mutual oppositions and affinities.

<sup>1</sup> *Abu at-Tayyib Al-Mutanabbi, according to almost all Arab critics is the most renowned of all Arab poets (Badeau and Hayes, 1992).*

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