

A New Historical Reading of Joseph Conrad's *An Outpost of Progress*

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Abstract

This article situates Joseph Conrad's *An Outpost of Progress* in its socio-historical context to unveil the various subtexts embedded in it. Colonization and surveillance are the subtexts being signified in the story. The panoptical model Michel Foucault (1977) proposed is utilized to understand how knowledge as well as capital leads to omnipotent surveillance and observation. The article questions the aesthetic principle that art is produced for its own sake; it argues that art is entrenched deeply in its historical context. It further questions the extent of Kayerts and Carlier's liberty and sovereignty as colonial agents. The significance of this study stems from its new historical presumption that events of history should be examined as critically as those of fiction. This entails that Conrad's story should be appreciated for its historical and artistic value. New historicism, which repudiates the autonomy of text and history, is the methodology through which the research topic and Conrad's story are approached. The article finds that Kayerts and Carlier are devoid of individuality and agency, considering their exposition to and internalization of the colonial ideology. The enlistment of incompetent agents such as Kayerts and Carlier, it also finds, never undermines the perseverance of the empire to conquer and civilize Africa. In addition to the introduction, the article consists of four sections, the first of which reviews the plot, the second reviews the history of trading posts in Africa, the third reviews literature on Conrad's story, and the fourth discusses the assumptions made in the introduction. The findings and inferences are presented in the conclusion. A list of references is given at the end of the article.

Keywords: colonization, Joseph Conrad, new historicism, outpost of progress, surveillance

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Introduction

The article elucidates the significant role European trading posts or fortresses played in the colonization of Africa, heterogenization of cultures, and formation of ambivalent identities. It engages itself with the mercantile, missionary and cultural activities of the posts in Western Africa. The fictional characters of Kayertes, a chief, and Carlier, an assistant chief, and Henry Price, a clerk from Sierra Leone, and their governance of the post are critically analyzed to identify the nature of the work the post conducts. Kayertes and Carlier, the article argues, are devoid of any individuality or agency due to their manipulation by the surveillance system the empire set up. As an antithesis of freedom and individuality, the panopticon (Foucault 1977) coerces omnipotent control and domination over nations and individuals through such manipulative apparatuses as capital and discourse. The acts and behaviors of Kayertes and Carlier can be better understood in light of the panoptic surveillance through which they are molded into mere puppets of the empire.

The article contributes to the existing literature on Conrad's *An Outpost of Progress* through its new historical interpretation of the event of establishing trading posts in Africa, the event of bereaving Kayertes and Carlier of their liberty and agency, the event of contriving with the empire in pursuit of power, influence and affluence, and the event of realizing a more heterogeneous and ambivalent identity in Congo. These events, the article assumes, are significant moments in the history of colonization and surveillance.

Plot Overview

A trading post is run by two white men, Kayertes and Carlier, in Congo. The post trades goods for ivory, and later slaves for ivory with the assistance of their clerk and bookkeeper Makola. The steamer, which brings them to Congo, will not return for another six months. The managing director, who leaves on board of the steamer, has low expectations of the post as well as of its ludicrous chiefs. Kayertes and Carlier feel alone, helpless and desperate amid the wilderness and savagery of Africa. They realize survival in such conditions hinges on their unity and solidarity. The sense of fraternity they maintain for a while turns into discord and hatred towards the end of the story. The dispute arising over a spoonful of sugar ends with Kayertes shooting Carlier dead. Kayertes later commits suicide right before the managing director arrives on board of the steamer.

History of Trading Posts in Africa

The European existence in Africa dates back to the 16th century when the Portuguese established trading posts in Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Mozambique, Angola and Benin. The Portuguese model was followed by other European countries, which sought to create their trading stations throughout Africa. The Dutch were the primary competitor to the Portuguese mercantile presence in Africa through the Dutch East India Company and the Dutch West India Company that had trading posts in Saint Helena, South Africa, Mozambique, Madagascar and Mauritius. The third-largest trading posts were owned by the British, who established Guinea Company in 1618 and the Company of Royal Adventurers into Africa in 1660. The French mercantile interests in Africa were less significant than those of their European counterparts; France barely had a trade port at St. Louis, present-day Senegal, in 1659 (Blakemore 2015).

In almost all instances, trade has become a milestone of the European-African relationships since the fifteenth century. The earliest contacts the Europeans had with Africa were primarily related to ivory and gold trade, which significantly prepared for the colonial expansion. European traders also sought to open new markets for their products in the interior regions of Africa. Inter-regional trade between Europe and Africa flourished during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which witnessed a high rise in the number of slaves being shipped to and toiled in plantation colonies in the New World and elsewhere (DeCorse, 2010). Reaching bilateral mercantile agreements was necessary for both parties; while they yielded power and affluence to tribal leaders and traders, the empire ensured safe trade routes, protection for posts and smooth movement of goods and troops. Yet, the agreements burdened Africa with social, economic and ecological problems as they legitimized slavery, wildlife decimation, habitat destruction, and the ravaging of natural resources. Most importantly, the agreements prepared for the European colonial presence in Africa, which would last until the twentieth century (Blake, 1977).

Subsidiary to trade was missionary work, which European posts in Africa committed to facilitate and promote. Missionary efforts were necessary to maintain the preeminence and dominion of the Europeans, so churches, schools and hospitals were set up to disseminate Christianity, civilize the natives and prepare for long-term presence through either settlement or colonization. Traders and bishops generally viewed Africans as pagan savages threatening to thwart the expansion of the civilized Christian west; thus, they devoted themselves to help the natives adopt civilized behaviors and convert to Christianity. Since then, Christianity has become the state religion in many African countries such as Benin, Congo, Ghana and Nigeria. Most people in these nations abandoned their indigenous customs and appropriated the western cultural worldview (Blake, 1977).

Literature Review

Ariesta and Emanuella (2018) discuss Conrad's voice and emphasis on the significance of efficiency, a characteristic of being human, to white men in his short story *An Outpost of Progress*. The study finds that the breakthrough of capitalism and social Darwinism during the eighteenth century nurtured colonialism in Asia and Africa to meet market demands for raw materials and actualize Darwin's evolutionary theory of survival for the fittest. It was believed that white people should rule over other nations and societies for their exceptionally superior abilities and qualities. Conrad, in the story, seems to relate the colonial project of Britain to the burdens of civilization and mercantilism. The realization of such goals relies on efficiency, which Conrad believes is the "characteristic for being English" (Ariesta and Emanuell, 2018, p. 53). The two English characters, Kayerts and Carlier, fail to efficiently run the British trading station in Africa, considering their being careless, messy, fledgling and useless. Kayerts and Carlier are "just unfit in the world that is full of struggle" (Ariesta and Emanuell, 2018, p. 53) due to their incompetence. The incompetence of Kayerts and Carlier needs to be tackled to help the empire fulfill its burdens towards the natives as well as its subjects, "for Conrad, the sense of duty is quality that every white man should know and hold, while efficiency is the complementary quality to fulfill the duty" (Ariesta and Emanuell, 2018, p. 55).

Bensemmane (2011) interrogates the postulations that Conrad was anti-imperialist. Conrad's perspective of the imperial project is examined in light of the critical discourse impregnated in *An Outpost of Progress*. The contrast between stated ideals and actual motives is one exemplar of that discourse as Europe never attends to the self-appointed duty of enlightening Africa despite the recurrent use of the term progress. The study maintains that Conrad never wholly condemns the imperial project in Africa, "Conrad does not cross the line of ideological condemnation, and does not make colonialism a catalyst for the two men's failure and madness" (Bensemmane, 2011, p. 6). Still, Conrad defensively reasons that Kayerts and Carlier are overpowered by the wilderness of Africa, which he blames for activating their basest instincts and leading to their moral and physical annihilation. Another exemplar of Conrad's critical discourse is the social multi-acculturality of ivory that signifies progress as well as violence and damage done to elephants and the dark continent, respectively. The steamer, which is metaphorically dubbed civilization, is represented as an impetus of invasion and settlement rather than of civilization and progress. Conrad's diction and imagery, the study finds, "never place Africans in this third space of enunciation, as imagined by Homi Bhabha, to establish a genuine dialogue between Europe and Africa" (Bensemmane, 2011, p. 6).

Sewlall (2006) investigates the questions of identity and alterity in Conrad's *An Outpost of Progress*, where the blackness of Makola is juxtaposed with the whiteness of Kayerts and Carlier. Contrary to the popular claims denouncing Conrad as a colonial writer, the study contends Conrad's story condemns colonization and presents a different image of Africa and Africans that defies the stereotypes of Europe's other, who possesses "both agency and authority" (Sewlall, 2006, p. 13). The story criticizes the empire for its pretensions concerning the civilizing mission, not to mention the construction of its others.

Makola's competence and brilliance contribute to deconstructing the old image of Africans as people with feeble intellect, animal propensities, and latent moral manifestations, which rationalized their subordination and dependence on the white man. Makola, in the story, is given a voice as a prototype of a civilized enlightened African. He is multilingual and has theosophy of his own. He adopts the western ideals of monogamy and the nuclear family, and efficiently runs the ivory business of the trading station. His exceptional trading, language, and personal skills enable him to outwit his two British chiefs, Kayerts and Carlier, at their own game,

Makola's range of skills, including his linguistic competence, is hardly surprising. This... enables him to negotiate between African and European cultures through switching of languages but also through a performance of identity that draws on the resources of both cultures (Sewlall, 2006, p. 11).

Sewlall builds on the progressive, powerful, and self-confident character Makola attains to discredit the alleged pro-colonial stance attributed to Conrad and prove the productivity of the empire's civilizing project in Africa.

Alam and Uddin (2015) analytically compares the variable subjective responses to colonial experiences by individual protagonists in three literary texts: *An Outpost of Progress* by Joseph Conrad, *Shooting an Elephant* by George Orwell, and *A Passage to India* by E. M. Forester. Capitalism, individualism, rationalism, expansionism, and orientalism were the ideologies under which the colonized people often lived and worked. Such doctrines have laid the "grounds and justifications to support and legitimize the hegemonic rule of colonialism and to carry the white man's burden" (Alam and Uddin, 2015, p. 38). The study finds that Eurocentrism constructs the subjectivity of both Kayerts and Carlier in *An Outpost of Progress* as they dream "of a progress in Africa and imagine it to be solely European one" (Alam, p. 40). Their inability to get free from their selfish subjective interests along with their uncritical internalization of the myths of civilization and progress, however, leads to their tragic ends. Numerous operative and dynamic forces in the society entrap colonial subjects such as Kayerts and Carlier, who are denied the right to choose, recognize and resist. The means through which a colonial subject can retain liberty and sovereignty, the study concludes, is to make "a conscious effort to recapture and scrutinize self" (Alam and Uddin, 2015, p. 41).

Discussion

The literary text, for new historicists, is embedded in a network of relations and connections with social and cultural contexts. Interrelations between text and context are mapped to establish "historicity of texts and the textuality of histories" (Montrose, 1992, pp. 392 – 418). The historicity of texts denotes that texts as well as modes of reading are historically embedded. However, textuality of history destabilizes and desacralizes history as a truthful and authentic discourse; it assumes that neither history nor any other discourse "gives access to unchanging truths" (Veese, 1989, p. xi). Readers accordingly should examine events of history as critically as those of fiction. For Foucault, a historical event "is not a stable phenomenon that can be captured by documentary evidence; nor is it the result of purposeful human action. It is instead a sign of domination, of the shifting of power relations" (Castle 2007, p. 130). As a new historicist, Nietzsche (1994) views the historical event as

the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it, a feeble domination that poisons itself as it grows lax, the entry of a masked other (p. 154).

Surveillance, slavery and colonization can be accordingly conceived as immediate repercussions of the establishment of trading posts in Africa. Situating *An Outpost of Progress*, which was written in 1897, in its broader historical, social and cultural context, and reading the story from the perspective of a new historicist unveil that the story embeds two foreshadowing projects, namely colonization and surveillance.

The Project of Colonization

As civilization follows trade, European trading posts in Africa are established to advance expansive and colonial ambitions and dreams through the exchange of goods and ideas between Europe and Africa. They enter into negotiations to reach bilateral agreements with tribal leaders

such as Father Gobila to ensure the safety and security of trading routes, and build schools and churches to teach the natives about Christianity and western civilization.

The post in Congo is located at a long distance from other posts; it is about three hundred miles away from the nearest post. This long distance gives the chief an exceptional opportunity to achieve success, demonstrate ability and aptitude, and gain fame. Nonetheless, its former chief, who died of fever, achieves no success, and Kayerts, the current chief, does not either due to their poor or bad governance. Both Kayerts and Carlier, the narrator sets forth, "understood nothing, cared for nothing but for the passage of days that separated them from the steamer's return" (Conrad, 1898, p. 66). Ruled by the feelings of impatience and eagerness as they wait for the steamer to take them back home, they lose any motivation to work, and their life gets idle and meaningless. They live "like blind men in a large room, aware only of what came in contact with them (and of that only imperfectly), but unable to see the general aspect of things" (Conrad, 1898, p. 65). They dare not set out into the river, forest and land which seems to them "like a great emptiness" (Conrad, 1898, p. 65).

Under such conditions, Kayerts and Carlier relegate their duties and responsibilities to Makola in order not to get themselves actively involved in the business transactions made. While Makola, in an instance, bargains with some traders over elephant tusks, Kayerts and Carlier idly sit on their chairs and look down "on the proceedings, understanding nothing" (Conrad, 1898, p. 65). The peak of their negligence and idleness is reached when the post becomes a hub for the slave. Realizing that his white masters care not about human rights, environment or development but ivory, Makola sells off the black men entrusted to guard the post to slavery in exchange for elephant tusks. Though Kayerts and Carlier grumble about the immorality and atrocity of that deal, they confess, "it's deplorable, but, the men being Company's men the ivory is Company's ivory. We must look after it" (Conrad, 1898, p. 74). Their confession and resolution to hoard the fangs substantiate the truthfulness of Makola's earlier presumption.

As for the civilizing project commended to the posts, the chiefs of the post in Congo barely achieve any success. The books, novels and papers the former chief brings to Congo are doomed to decay as they are not made available to the public. They are locked in a one-room-library in the storehouse, where no native but Makola can read. The efforts exerted to enlighten Africa would be futile if not accompanied by efforts to circulate texts and disseminate knowledge along with new cultural and religious values and beliefs among the natives. Though years have passed since the construction of the post, superstition, paganism and indigenous languages and cultural practices still prevail. Kayerts and Carlier do not act as typical enlighteners; they never seek to break walls of fear or build bridges of communication and dialogue that would foster understanding, love and respect. They confine themselves to the storehouse, and get detached from the surrounding society and environment, which they view as hostile and threatening. The incompetence of Kayerts and Carlier as chiefs, traders and enlighteners can consequently be attributed to their alienation and fear of otherness and difference.

The Project of Surveillance

Kayerts and Carlier's individuality and agency have become at stake since their nomination to the post in Congo. The posts in Africa were associated with companies in Britain, France, Spain and Netherlands; headquarters in those countries determined their activities and missions. European agents were appointed to run the posts and administer missionary, civilizing and colonial projects. The omnipotent panoptic surveillance companies set up and distantly run proves to be effective in light of Kayerts and Carlier's lack of critical powers. They accept the nomination for different reasons. Kayerts, for instance, quits his seventeen-year post in the Administration of the Telegraphs for his daughter Melie, whom he has to earn a dowry for. However, Carlier leaves the army and his impudent life for money as he badly needs a means of livelihood. Kayerts and Carlier's personal motivation soon gives way to a nationalist one as they determine to selflessly live and work for the cause of the empire. This perceptible change from a personal to an impersonal motivation proves the effectivity of the scrutiny the empire conducts upon its agents.

The manner through which the empire operates its panopticon is twofold. First, the ideological apparatus of family, school, church, media, and other civil society institutions at home country are manipulated to produce puppets or machines but not free independent individuals, "society ... had taken care of those two men, forbidding them all independent thought, all initiative, all departure from routine; and forbidding it under pain of death. They could only live on condition of being machines" (Conrad, 1898, p. 64). Kayerts and Carlier neither know what freedom means nor seek to retain agency for their fear of the empire. Though their voyage to Congo represents a temporary relief or escape from manipulation and prison-like life, they are still incapable of free independent thought,

released from the fostering care of men with pens behind the ears, or of men with gold lace on the sleeves, they were like those lifelong prisoners who, liberated after many years, do not know what use to make of their freedom (Conrad, 1898, p. 64).

As the panopticon relies more on persuasion and consent through knowledge and reward than on coercion through the military force, Conrad criticizes the role writers and barons play in the projects of colonization and surveillance. It is writers' pens and barons' gold to blame for instilling certain beliefs, values and attitudes into colonial subjects.

Second, the empire extends its panoptic surveillance that is based on suasion rather than coercion to its colonies. The sense of freedom and independence Kayerts and Carlier temporarily feel when moving from home to Congo does not last long for two reasons: their inability to live as individuals and their constant exposition to the imperial discourse of civilization and progress. The story, on the one hand, clarifies that the values of courage, composure and confidence belong "not to the individual but to the crowd" (Conrad, 1898, p. 63) and its institutions whose responsibility is to meet the safety and needs of individuals. As soon as the steamer, which brings Kayerts and Carlier to Congo, sails back home and they make their first steps towards the trading post, they suddenly feel alone, unsafe and unassisted "to face the wilderness" (Conrad, 1898, p. 63) in that vast and dark country. The narrator discloses that their exposure to "pure unmitigated savagery,

with primitive nature and primitive men, brings sudden and profound trouble into the heart" (Conrad, 1898, p. 64). Fear is a deep trouble brought into their hearts as it later results in their complete loss of control over the post, which Makola turns into a slavery hub. The only possible way for Kayerts and Carlier to survive the wilderness and darkness of Africa, the narrator believes, is to exist "through the high organization of civilized crowds" (Conrad, 1898, p. 63), a need and responsibility that cannot be quickly attended to in colonies. Realizing that no other white man than themselves is living in the neighborhood, Kayerts and Carlier "walked arm in arm, drawing close to one another as children do in the dark" (Conrad, 1898, p. 64). In such a crucial situation, the hierarchy of job titles matters less than solidarity and fellowship. On this wise, Kayerts suddenly feels "that this Carlier was more precious to him here, in the center of Africa, than a brother could be anywhere else" (Conrad, 1898, p. 64). Towards the end of the story, their solidarity and fellowship come to an end, as it will be shown later.

On the other hand, Kayerts and Carlier are first exposed to the imperial discourse of civilization and progress in the trading post, which is considered an organic extension of the empire and its partners. Nowhere in the story does the narrator indicate that Kayerts and Carlier have sought or received formal education and training on the civilizing and enlightening work of the empire before dropping an anchor in Congo. Following their advent, they find a small abandoned library with a bulk of books and newspapers piled on top of each other. The good-for-nothing lifestyle they lead in the post evokes their curiosity to look into that bulk, which includes a wreck of novels and old copies of a home paper. While the stories entertained and acquaint them with plots and imaginary personages around which they engage in "interminable silly discussions" (Conrad, 1898, p. 66), the paper informed them about "the rights and duties of civilization, of the sacredness of the civilizing work" (Conrad, 1898, p. 67). The article continues to praise "the merits of those who went about bringing light, and faith and commerce to the dark places of the earth" (Conrad, 1898, p. 67). Only after they finish reading the paper do they begin to think better of themselves and to understand the nature of the civilizing work the post is supposed to conduct.

The omnipotent panoptic surveillance the empire sets up through the powers of knowledge and reward generates a consciousness of constant self-surveillance. The prison-like environment of the trading post instills in Kayerts and Carlier a feeling that they are always observed. The restrictions it imposes on their freedoms of thinking and acting arouses their incorporation of the imperial discourse of civilization and progress, which the old copies of the home paper robustly promote. One manifestation of the surveillance they exercise over themselves is Carlier's initiative to replant the cross, which is leaning over the house yard. Though Carlier is not charged or policed to replant it, he does it with adeptness and precision, "I suspended myself with both hands to the cross-piece. Not a move. Oh, I did that properly" (Conrad, 1898, p. 67).

Another manifestation is their projection of the western model of civilization on people of other cultures. Fascinated and enthralled by the significance and sacredness of the new responsibilities and roles their positions in the trading post entail, Carlier imagines how Africa will be like in a hundred years, "there will be perhaps a town here. Quays, and warehouses, and barracks, and billiard-rooms" (Conrad, 1898, p. 67). Carlier recognizes the superiority of the

western civilizations, cultures and languages, which he believes should be imitated and adopted universally. He imagines the urban architectural model of Africa in the coming decades and centuries to be more akin to that in any western city where there will be buildings, sidewalks, shops, restaurants and clubs. As a healthier alternative to African diets, rice is served out to the natives, who could not get used to it for its "being a food unknown to their land" (Conrad, 1898, p. 70). Carlier remarkably begins to think and speak negatively about the black race. He frequently refers to black people as herds of "fine animals" (Conrad, 1898, p. 66) who lack the spirit of civilization. Black men, for him, have vigorous arms with strong muscles, but their legs are not healthy and developed enough to "make Cavalrymen of them" (Conrad, 1898, p. 66). That is to say, the white man is considered physically more superior and capable than his black counterpart; therefore, knights or good cavalrymen usually belong to the white race.

The other manifestation of the self-surveillance system Kayerts and Carlier observe themselves observing finds expression in their prospect of civilization effort in Africa. The story indicates that the effect of the civilizing, Christianizing and enlightening efforts on African communities was limited but promising because indigenous languages, religions and tribal traditions and beliefs were still dominant. The people of Gobila's village speak indigenous languages that are not less cultured and cadenced than English or French. While listening to the talk of a villager, Carlier gets startled with the sounds of the long sentences, beautiful intonation, expressive language and elocution, which he used. Carlier admits, "it was like a reminiscence of something not exactly familiar, and yet resembling the speech of civilized men ... I fancied the fellow was going to speak French" (Conrad, 1898, p. 68). The indigenes put faith in magic as they blame the witchcraft of the white men for bringing wicked people into their country. Gobila offers human sacrifices to the evil spirits he blames for the disappearance of his white friends. He presupposes that white people purposefully disappear, but they do not die like when the former chief of the post "had pretended to die and got himself buried for some mysterious purposes of his own" (Conrad, 1898, p. 62). He suspects that the spiritual and physical beings of that chief might have been incarnated in Kayerts and Carlier.

Gobila's non-Christian belief in evil spirits, immortality and incarnation betoken fear, respect and love to the white, which he expresses through generous provisions to and protection of the post. Aside from the fowls, goats, sweet potatoes and wine Gobila regularly provides the trading post with, he dissuades native warriors from burning the post or killing its white chiefs in retribution for the murder of a fellow villager. His forewarning, "who could foresee the woe those mysterious creatures, if irritated, might bring?" (Conrad, 1898, p. 74), reveals his suppressed fear of them. Fear in his conception is indestructible as "man may destroy everything within himself, love and hate and belief, and even doubt; but as long as he clings to life he cannot destroy fear" (Conrad, 1898, p. 74).

What makes the civilizing project promising is its capacity to hybridize cultures and identities. Makola is represented as a culturally hybrid subject; his duality is underpinned by his possession of two names, the original name, Makola, and the western name, Henry Price. While Makola maintains his indigenous language, religion and culture, he learns new languages and

assimilates new cultural values. Unlike most of his people, he speaks English and French "with a warbling accent" (Conrad, 1898, p. 62). The informal education available to him in the post enables him to read and write proficiently. His knowledge leads not to convert to Christianity to which he bears no disrespect. Still, he believes the Evil Spirit he worships "rules the lands under the equator. He got on very well with his god" (Conrad, 1898, p. 62). Kayerts and Carlier observe that his family values are more like those of the western nuclear family than those of the indigenous extended family. Unlike most men in Congo, Makola has a small family of a wife and three children. He lives away from his extended family in a hut he neatly built next to the storehouse. Makola takes good care of the cleanliness of his household by using soap for bathing and washing. He devotes his time during holidays to his children, whom he passionately loved. The heterogeneity of his identity, along with his sense of commitment and discipline as a storekeeper, husband and father, substantiates Kayerts and Carlier's view of him as a "civilized nigger" (Conrad, 1898, p. 71).

Enfeebled by hunger, disease and loneliness, Kayerts and Carlier lose faith in their fellowship as well as in the imperial project of progress and civilization. As soon as Gobila's people boycott the post for its responsibility for the shooting of a fellow villager, and the ten men, who were in charge of guarding and protecting the post, disappear, Kayerts and Carlier no longer feel safe, valued or respected. They run short of food, and fail to provide for themselves through fishing and hunting. They are left with nothing to have but rice, little sugar and coffee. They feel solitude and grow homesick for the people resembling them and the places holding their childhood memories. These unbearable conditions, together with their suffering from fever, lead to their denunciation of the company, empire and Africa. The project of civilization and progress becomes meaningless and worthless to their survival. In the end, the bond of fellowship they managed to maintain for months deteriorates to the point of murder.

Conclusion

The resolution of the story in which the steamer returns and heavy white mist descends upon the land foreshadows the persistence of colonization and surveillance in Africa. The steamer, which carried Kayerts, Carlier and the earliest chief, is going to staff the post with new agents and assistants, probably with better skills and more exceptional abilities. It would also ship more products of western civilization such as works of art, literature, philosophy and culture to expedite cultural and religious assimilation. Civilizing and enlightening efforts are probably going to be more promising and productive than at any time in the past as the white mist coating and enveloping the land suggests. The white mist, along with the unceasing ringing of the steamer's bell, permeating African towns, villages and mountains alike portends the omnipotence of the empire through its projects of colonization and surveillance. The death of Kayerts and Carlier, together with the decay of the books locked in the storehouse, does not proclaim the demise of the empire as some scholars believe. Contrarily, these events betoken the worthlessness and insignificance of the individual in the matrix of power relations, social dynamics and discourse formation, which the state usually determines through the apparatuses of knowledge, reward and coercion.

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