Analyse the politics of displacement and/or marginalisation.

Hierarchies stand at the centre of human interaction and it is often literature that allows the stories of those displaced and marginalised by these processes to be told. Academic Mark Hearn argues that "people construct identities (however multiple and changing) by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories" (2004, p.67). Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* presents a late nineteenth century narrative, set within the displacement resulting from imperialist contexts. The novel explores the politics of the creation of a constructed 'other' out of subaltern groups based upon ethnicity, in nuanced ways. Christos Tsiolkas' post-modern *Loaded* however, investigates the politics of contemporary marginalisation through a blunt, confrontational literary style. These texts' forms may reflect their respective historical contexts, but both explore the construction of social order and present a challenge to these understandings, particularly reflecting on the superficiality of belonging and the idea of a dominant-hegemonic order as a 'masquerade'.

Conrad deals primarily with one of the strongest social constructions of his time-marginalisation due to race. Firchow discusses how people of Western nations were forced to confront for the first time a much wider world than they had previously comprehended, during a period of uncertainty and social upheaval instigated by processes of imperialism (1999, p.237). Europeans reinforced their volatile sense of identity by "marking boundaries of difference" based upon race (Hearn, p.80). Conrad directly addresses this in the introductory framing of his imperialist narrative; he explains the process of "the conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion" (p.7).

We are reminded of this theme throughout the novel by the constant use of racial labels, such as 'pre-historic man', 'black', 'cannibal' and 'savage', that define native people of Africa in opposition to 'superior' European humanity, (eg. p.34-35).

Although the racial discourses employed in *Loaded* vary from their nineteenth century counterpart, the employment of race is similarly used as a marker of marginalisation. Tsiolkas repetitively categorises race through the constant 'listing' of nationalities within distinct separate spheres; "old Greek men are playing cards in the coffee shops", whilst "three Polynesian boys sit around listening to rap", (p.19). This is also highlighted in the use of chapter titles such as "A Vietnamese woman" (p.15). Callan discusses post-war "Australian identity, which historically was xenophobic and dominated by imagined threats to safety" (1983, p.123). Tsiolkas presents a direct challenge to Australians' idealistic self-perception that we have moved beyond this racism into a mindset of 'multiculturalism'. Ari explains that when Anglo-Australians look at Greek men "all they see is a hairy back, they see a wife beater" (p.34). Yet *Loaded* contains an illuminating sense of irony in that even Ari expresses the same forms of racist thinking that are deployed against him; "I don't trust Arab boys" (p.32), "I know Muslim boys treat Christian girls like shit" (p.51).

It is within this created context of Melbourne as categorised into hierarchies of race that displace and marginalise, that Tsiolkas presents a challenge to the superficiality of what it means to 'belong'. Authers discusses the politics of multiculturalism within contemporary Australia which attempts to recognise ethnic difference in a "contained fashion, in order to manage" the situation (2005, p.126), he concludes that this represents a sense of "fictional

ethnicity" (p.137). *Loaded* reflects upon this idea that "ethnicity is a scam" (p.43) particularly evidently in the sub-narrative of Ari's parents' displaced identities. Both Ari's father and his mother represent deracinated figures that possess a strong sense of uprootedness. For his father this is due to his alienation from his origins; "he was born in Greece. A different world." (p.12). Ari's father "can't really breathe" in Australia (p.12), but attempts to "hold onto old ways, old cultures, old rituals which no longer can or should mean anything" are ultimately presented as futile and meaningless (p.82). Ari's mother was born in Australia, but she presents a no more reconciled figure in her environment, as she too is alienated from her cultural origins; for her particularly "there is no home" (p.82). Yet this idea of meaningless identity is not simply represented as a struggle of ethnic peoples; Tsiolkas delves deeper into understandings of belonging to present a challenge that includes Anglo-Australians. This is particularly evident in his repeated idea of Melbourne as a "wannabe-America" where Anglo-Australians are not physically deracinated but mentally displaced through ideology that belongs in another world (p.82).

Heart of Darkness is often critiqued with the argument that it is characterised by "its adherence to a Western, male world hegemony" (Cole, 1998, p.251), but upon close analysis of the text it can be seen that Conrad presents a direct challenge to the creation of a constructed 'other'. The framing of the inner-narrative in the introduction, in which a separate narrator expresses that "this also [London] has been one of the dark places of the Earth" (p.5) is highly significant. This statement implies that Africa is a reflection of Europe's historical past, which has the same capacity for 'savagery' that they perceive to constitute the Congo. Conrad employs the extended metaphor of water as a pathway into a physical and metaphoric 'heart of darkness'; flowing from the Thames right into the centre of Africa. There

is a strong sense of textual integrity in that this idea forms both the introduction and conclusion of the novel. The phrase also featured in the introduction that the Thames "leading to the uttermost ends of the earth" (p.4/77), is concluded with the last lines of the novel that it "seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness"; inextricably linking Europe and Africa (p.77). Pronounced emphasis is given to the concept through the use of the initial narrator for just the single last paragraph.

Further proof of Conrad challenging the metanarrative of Europeans as a 'civilising' force and critiquing the 'ugly truth' of the false validations of imperial ambition particularly based upon race, is seen in the extensive symbolism of the two opposing 'nightmares', representing 'masquerade' and truth. Throughout the narrative Marlow struggles to fix upon "the nightmare of my choice" (p.64). The station manager represents the veneer of "the cause entrusted to us by Europe" (p.25), in which the Western presence is "humanising, improving, instructing" (p.32). This is articulated in a setting that highlights the utter falseness of this premise with representatives of this ideal, ironically labelled as 'pilgrims', being men who had come solely "to make money, of course" (p.20) and were seen to be "strolling aimlessly" (p.23), with "their faces so full of stupid importance" (p.71). In juxtaposition to this façade, Kurtz represents the dark 'truth' of the crossable divide between 'civilisation' and 'savagery'. Kurtz is built up throughout the first half of the novel as a figure of Western perfection with a focus on his art with the English language which acts as a symbolic means of dividing the 'savage' from the articulate European. Yet, when Marlow finally meets Kurtz he finds a man who hides "in the magnificent folds of eloquence the barren darkness of his heart" (p.68). Ironically Kurtz is sponsored by the 'International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs" (p.49) yet he himself is a 'savage' creature as we can see for instance in his staking

of his enemies' heads (p.57) and his reluctance to leave the 'wild' Africa. Marlow directly addresses the fear that Kurtz as a character represents; "that was the worst of it- this suspicion of their [native Africans] not being inhuman" of "your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar" (p.36). When Marlow visited Kurtz's 'intended' he found that she did not want the truth but rather "something- to- to live with" (p.76), so Marlow was forced to perpetrate the façade. Yet we see in his internal struggle that he had grasped the 'truth' that in a "supreme moment of complete knowledge" (p.69), Kurtz upon his death had summed up the 'real' imperial narrative; "The horror! The Horror!" (p.76).

This same sense of masquerade is also developed in *Loaded,* particularly in the figure of Joe. Harter argues that the construction of an identity based upon fitting into external ideals means the "crafting of a false self that does not reflect one's authentic experience" (1982, p.682). Joe is determined to lead an 'acceptable' life; he tells Ari to "grow up" and "get a job" (p.66). Ari looks upon Joe and sees "an ordinary man walk out with an ordinary woman into an ordinary life" (p.67). The meaning of this is then directly challenged however in the next chapter significantly entitled "Joe's mother" in which we are faced with the 'ugly truth' of a woman who went mad despite the fact that she "was so normal, a standard Greek wife" which evidently reflects upon Joe's endeavour for a confined 'normality' (p.67). *Loaded* as such presents a narrative that denies explicitly the clear-cut division of the included and excluded within the construction of social hierarchies; Ari sums it up as "white, black, yellow, pink, they're all fucked" (p.5) and that he would do "anything to stop the charade" (p.83).

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Christos Tsiolkas' *Loaded* represent very different time periods with opposing literary approaches. Despite this, both texts illustrate the development of social hierarchies through processes of displacement and marginalisation that create a constructed 'other'. These two narratives however, go beyond simply representing a social setting, but rather they present a challenge to these processes as superficial and reflect upon them as essentially a masquerade that hides ultimate 'truths' of the human condition.

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