Postcolonial Hauntology of Modernity: Exploring Legacies of Enlightenment Thought in the Understanding of the 'Human' through Intertextualities in Heart of Darkness and Hunter x Hunter

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Postcolonial Hauntology of Modernity: Exploring Legacies of Enlightenment Thought in the Understanding of the ‘Human’ through Intertextualities in *Heart of Darkness* and *Hunter x Hunter*

Dartmouth College

Comparative Literature Senior Honors Thesis

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Preface

I was East Asian before I was African. Or to be more precise, I was Japanese before I was Kenyan. That is to say, even though I was born in Kenya, because we had moved as a family to Japan when I was two, Japanese became the first language that gave meaning to my world, and all things Japanese in the early 2000s shaped my perspectives —although I had no real grasp of things as I took it all unconsciously, as a child would. So, when we returned to Kenya when I was seven with my parents and two siblings, even though I knew that I was returning to the place I was born, my father’s country, I had already developed a Japanese sensibility – like bowing (ojiki) when meeting people – and I looked onto everything Kenya presented to me with a Japanese outlook. Kenya was different. I only spoke Japanese while people spoke English and Kiswahili interchangeably. And if you listened keenly enough, you could hear all these other languages: Luo, Kisii, Gujarati, Kikuyu, and even Lingala – so many languages that I had never heard before. Here, I had to shake hands to greet people, not bow—a strange thing. So, I naturally looked onto my new world with an amazed wonder at first, with all its new cultural customs, the new languages, the new sights, which then eventually turned into a calm wonder—a calm observation that I think hid beneath it a discomforting uncertainty because everything was new and different. I just took it all in, observing - not imitating but observing - with the wonder of a seven-year-old in his father’s country.

I spent my years since in Nakuru, the fourth largest urban center in Kenya, through primary and high school. After such a time, my formative experience had decidedly become ‘Kenyan’. Yet, when I turned 18 and had to apply for my Kenyan national ID card, I was suddenly struck by the burden of nationality. There I was in queue, on the way to officially becoming a full-fledged Kenyan adult on paper, but I realized I couldn’t fully identify myself as one. I had felt more Japanese for some reason. Yet it had become apparent, having already spent
most of my life in Kenya, how baseless my proclaiming being Japanese had become: with only five years of eighteen spent in Japan then, it had become a crystal of childhood memories long past. How could I proclaim myself Japanese, when most of my spatio-temporal experiences had been in Kenya? Moreover, I was, always had been, Kenyan by birth and was on my way to becoming one by registration. Hadn’t ‘Kenyan’ experiences I gathered all those years shaped me and made me arguably Kenyan, or more Kenyan than Japanese? Yet I hadn’t felt Kenyan because I often wasn’t considered Kenyan by those around me, evidenced by how *mchinku*—meaning Chinese—was a term that often found its ways to my ears from others, because the color of my skin was suspiciously light to not be considered Kenyan. *Mzungu*—which meant white man—a term heavy with colonial undertones, was another term that I was often called by my classmates. Evidently questions arose in my mind: Who is Kenyan? Or African? Or Japanese? Am I really to be considered Asian? Who decides?

It was with these pertinent questions of identity in mind that I began my undergraduate studies at Dartmouth College. New to the United States, its conceptions of race confounded me. I had read about how Africans are made to confront their blackness here through Chimamanda Adichie’s *Americanah* but reading it and experiencing it was different altogether. Since I had had a difficult time even identifying myself as African back home, which also easily conflated with blackness, it was all the more confusing, i.e., because I hadn’t felt African so I hadn’t felt black. And yet, here in the United States, the lines were drawn differently. Asian was not a category I could pass for at all. I was ‘black’. As perplexing as this was, it gave me the chance to embrace identities—African, Kenyan, black—I had had difficulty coming to terms with until then.

So, I am Japanese-Kenyan, in that order temporally, and Kenyan-Japanese in that dominant order culturally and experientially. I perceived myself as Japanese first before being
Karimi

Kenyan, and ironically only began to identify myself as primarily Kenyan, African, after beginning my studies in the United States and realizing that I was more experientially African. Displacement was pivotal in my own self-perception. I am also aware that my being in the United States has inevitably shaped part of me to become American in ways that I have and haven’t noticed. Which is why, given my lived experiences overall, I have come to take the concept of state/countryhood—this idea of belonging and coming from a country— with a grain of salt. The writer Taiye Selasi puts it succinctly in her TED talk, that “as a unit of measurement for human experience, the country does not quite work”. I couldn’t agree more. Despite the world today being more globalized and interconnected than it has ever been in history, our understanding of identity is heavily based on the language of nationality which has a tendency to be mutually exclusive. It is why I have struggled with identity given my experience and background, add the fact that I cannot claim dual citizenship as per the laws of citizenship that at least my motherland dictates. My identification as Japanese-Kenyan or Kenyan-Japanese then is itself a contradiction in the face of citizenship law due to the overall insistence of the language of nationality to resist plurality.

Now the origins of the language of nationality finds its roots in the concept of sovereignty that came to being in the 16th century. Sovereignty, manifesting in modern nation states, offers an individual citizenship and personhood based on the territory that it claims as domain. This inherently leads to what is more often a fiction of singularity, privileging a fictive homogenous collective identity that the national identity often gathers (Selasi), blanketing the plurality of the culturally and historically rich human experience. Reality of course is not as simple since persons are more than their nationalities that are proffered to them by a sovereign state. People’s identities are often, as Selasi puts it, ‘multi-local’—rich with intricate
intersections of geography, history, movement and memory. So, that ever so familiar but pertinent question, “where are you from?”, has never been as innocent as it seems, because it is often directed with the specific understanding of sovereign statehoods steeped in a dynamically complex matrix of power. The question begs to reveal the political power of the individual as recognized more so by the sovereign state than it reveals one’s own geographic origins and histories.

I find it pertinent to bring this issue of sovereignty and its logic of national identities up because it is relevant in my outlook on comparative literature, and the comparative literary thesis that I hereby seek to pursue. To be more precise, because of my interest in the plurality of human experience and the capacities of human expression through language and literature and how it is shaped by the political, along with my apprehension of the singular political national category, what I seek to study is the confluence of human experience through literature beyond geopolitical borders because my own vision and experience is inherently parallactic. I therefore seek to understand the world as it has been shaped politically by combining and forming an outlook of it through the lenses provided by the localities that deal with my cultural and historical origins—Japan and Kenya, or more broadly Asia and Africa proper—setting my comparative focus in the realms of Japanese and African and African American studies.

I set to achieve such a parallactic vision with postcolonialism (the study of the cultural, political, and economic impact of colonialism and imperialism) as the framework of my analysis. This is partly based on my African upbringing, not only having heard the experiences of my older extended paternal family during the colonial period, but also seeing and living through post-colonial Kenya in the early 2000s, and 2010s, perceiving the hauntings of the continent’s colonial past that I believe still ripples the country’s, and more broadly the African continent’s,
sociopolitical fabric. My double vision is also informed by my experience studying abroad in Japan during my time at Dartmouth, having had the chance to visit Hiroshima and witness the aftermath of the atomic bombing. This experience had me further reflect on the issue of postcoloniality in as far as the second World War was a war between imperial powers.

Preliminarily, what I realized as the common link between colonialism in Africa and the bombing of Japan in 1945, at least historically, was that both seemed to have been fueled by a core imperial ambition whose seeds seem to have begun in Europe. Questions then arose: What fueled and led to such imperial ambitions? How did it occur? Were there any commonalities then that led to, on one hand the colonization of Africa, and the use of a nuclear weapon on a people on the other? These questions were persuaded by Edward Said’s assertion that imperialism is “the residuum of a dense, interesting history that is paradoxically global and local at the same time… a sign of how the imperial past lives on” (Said, 20). And if the imperial past lives on, could a comparison of literature across time perhaps provide a window to excavate answers to these questions? If so, how does it do so, and does it in any way inform us of our present condition?

Put it differently, I am interested in what could be termed as postcolonial hauntology, which questions the condition of the present being haunted by specters of the imperial/colonial past (its social and historical effects), because haunting is, as per Avery Gordon, about “endings that are not over” (1997, 139) and because haunting is “a story about what happens when we admit the ghost—that special instance of the merging of the visible and the invisible, the dead and the living, the past and the present—into the making of worldly relations that make our accounts of the world” (ibid, 24). To be more precise, the ‘condition of the present’ invoked in hauntology overlaps with the notion of the ‘modern’. Therefore, what I seek to achieve is a
parallactic Africa-Asia literary account of the perceptions of modernity that has been shaped by a deeply imperial/colonial past, because hauntology by its very nature points to history. This is based on Hannah Arendt’s assertion that scientifically (emphasis mine), the modern age began in the seventeenth century and came to an end at the beginning of the twentieth century, but politically (emphasis mine) the modern world in which we live today was born with the first atomic explosions (Arendt, 102). Hence my comparative study situates itself similarly within Arendt’s confines, which analyses “those general huma capacities which grow out of the human condition [that]… cannot be irretrievably lost so long as the human condition itself is not changed” (ibid). The perception of modernity that I investigate therefore has a postcolonial political dimension whose relevance affects the present, but has its origins placed far back in the modern age.

Modernity in this sense, invoking Naoki Sakai, is a “[historical perspective] to explain the location of nations, cultures, traditions and races in a systematic manner”. I achieve such a comparative literary view of modernity as influenced by the imperial/colonial past by bringing together on one hand, Joseph Conrad’s classic novella Heart of Darkness whose context is set in the Congo Free Stat of King Leopold II, and on the other, Togashi Yoshihiro’s Japanese manga Hunter x Hunter whose plotline not only alludes fantastically to the atomic bombing of Japan at the end of WWII, but also has Conradian echoes, tying the atomic bombing to the colonial regime in the Congo.

This claim that the colonial regime of the Congo is intricately linked with the world’s first use of the atomic bomb on a populous, an event perceived as the birth of the contemporary modern world, may raise brows of doubt, given the seemingly disparate events the two seem. However, the world is more interconnected than one would think, as it has in fact been
discovered more recently that the uranium used to make the atomic bomb that hit Hiroshima in 1945 was indeed mined from the Congo (Williams, 2016). With such a historical linkage as the basis of understanding then, I propose that a literary analysis of overlapping motifs existent within the two literary texts will be informative in a literary postcolonial understanding of modernity, which I will be arguing finds expression in how sovereignty, also regarded as biopower in Foucauldian biopolitical terms as per Achille Mbembe (2019) has come to be defined. Simply put, this thesis seeks to dissect and analyze the concept of modernity through a postcolonial comparative literary analysis of texts that provide an African-Asian historical link to the understanding of sovereign (or biopolitical) modernity.
Chapter 1. Haunting Intertextualities: Positing the Postcolonial in *Heart of Darkness* and *Hunter x Hunter*

I had already heard unpleasant things about Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* even before I read it. I’d come across these displeasing commentaries in passing, on some online article I cannot fully remember, about how an African readership wouldn’t take well to the book. I’d just completed high school at the time and was intent on reading authentic stories on Africa, narratives that captured the plurality of African experience by Africans themselves because it had occurred to me that as much as I had lived in Kenya almost all my life, I wasn’t quite familiar with African literature save for the set books I read in school. Since it was clear that Conrad had a scathing outlook on Africa, I had never bothered to look at it since it wasn’t what I was looking for. Eventually though, I had to pick it up for a class in global literary and cultural theory much later in college.

It has been a while now, about two years, since that very first reading. What I can still gather clearly from then was frustration. Conrad, at first glance, was a convoluted read. His sentences, taken whole, were as contradictory as they were meandering. Sure, they had a pleasant rhythm, flowing like water in a river, but they piled onto each other endlessly into overly long paragraphs that meshed together too many ideas. Not only that, but his style, ever spiraling back and forth in time, with a reflection here, a foreshadow there, made it harder to follow. As its readers know, the story begins with a nameless narrator who sets the stage for a five-person crew on a cruising yawl named the Nellie, just before sunset as it floats on the River Thames (Conrad, 3). As the world plunges into the dark of night, a character by the name Marlow takes over the narrative as he begins to tell of his adventure to the African continent, told in detours and meanders, of how he traversed that ‘biggest, most blank [Continent]’, going up that ‘mighty big river… resembling an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea, its body at rest curving
afar over a vast country, and its tail lost in the depths of the land’ (8)—the River Congo. Again, it was a frustrating first reading, due to his style and of course what I took as unfiltered bias against Africans. When I flipped to the final page however, I must admit the book did leave me with quite an impression.

The impression that *Heart of Darkness* had indelibly left me can summarily be named ‘the horror’: Kurtz’ final pronouncement, so memorable, that as much speaks to his fate as it does on the imperial/colonial matrix\(^1\) he enacts whose forces seem to have driven the characters in *Heart of Darkness* to do what they do, i.e., that streak of European greed and hunger for material resources in the late 19\(^{th}\) century while preaching the language of the modern, seeking to share and spread it to the ‘heathens of the earth’ was the basis for a global enterprise, resulting in the well-known historical occurrence, the Scramble for and Partition of Africa. This was the historical context in which *Heart of Darkness* was written, where Marlow’s journey across the Congo mirrors Conrad’s on journey across the Congo under the Belgian rule of King Leopold II. Despite the hazy meaning of his work, because of this impression of horror it emphasizes, I felt Conrad had succeeded in writing a story that seemed, to paraphrase Marlow’s words, to throw a kind of light, a light which was sombre enough and pitiful—not extraordinary in any way nor clear—but throwing a kind of light all the same (6). It left me with a certain sense of wonder that any creative piece, whatever medium it is in, would leave you with when its force of narrative moves you. More specifically, it was a wonder that questioned the notion of human nature and its supposed association to be good.

\(^{1}\) Mignolo’s colonial matrix, whose interrelated domains are i) control of economy, ii) control of authority, iii) control of sexuality, iv) control of subjectivity and knowledge. Here, I infer implicitly that there are multiple colonial matrices, and that *Heart of Darkness* situates itself in the European strand. See Mignolo, 2007, 162.
Interestingly, along with this impression I had was also a sense of déjà vu. *Heart of Darkness* had elicited in me a sense of similar wonder and amazement at the horrors of human nature was eerily familiar. My impression of the novella was similar to the impression I had when I had watched the Chimera Ant arc of the anime *Hunter x Hunter* whose manga it is based on², written by Yoshihiro Togashi. As such, because I perceive heavy Conradian echoes within the manga and because my interpretation of the said arc grounds the manga series well in real historical occurrences (the atomic bombing of Japan at the end of WWII) with postcolonial significance, I propose intertextuality as another basis upon which these two works together are brought together. Intertextuality, according to Kristeva who José-Santiago Fernàndez-Vasquez quotes, is a notion that considers creative works as influenced by collective, ideological, cultural and historical factors that foreground them; that is, no text is completely original or autonomous (104). Or more precisely intertextuality is “any allusion in one text to another text”, where echoes of former texts and writers are foregrounded, either directly (deliberate citation) or indirectly (impersonal textual relations) (ibid, 105). As such, if two seemingly unrelated texts, when viewed comparatively, have elements in them that are echoes of each other, a proposal for comparison can be brought forth. I propose then that it is based on *Hunter x Hunter* echoing the motifs, imagery, and themes foregrounded within *Heart of Darkness*, that I make a comparative analysis between them. I argue for such an analysis while in consideration of Haun Saussy’s outlook on the practice of comparative literature, where he advocates for postcolonialists to not limit themselves to a single imperial matrix, given how cross-cultural comparison is more than

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²Even though the animation is what could be considered a faithful adaptation of the manga, I must emphasize here that the focus of literary analysis is the graphic texts, not the adapted animation. This is because of Yoshihiro Togashi’s attention to detail in written language found in the graphic texts, an element that is lost once rendered into the televised *anime* adaptation. This is the only time refer to the animation as I initially encountered the story-world through the televised medium.
ever needed when so many problems and possibilities extend far beyond the frame of the nation (73).

Moving forward, in order to make clear the intertextualities that exist between the two texts I will first provide an overview of the reception of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* before providing more background information on *Hunter x Hunter* along with its intertextualities with Conrad, after which I will provide a framework that situates both texts in postcolonial modernity.

1.1 Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*

*Heart of Darkness*, at least among Western academic circles needs no introduction. It is a semiautobiographical work, as Conrad himself had traveled to the Congo Free State in 1890. First published in 1899 in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* for its thousandth issue, it only received acclaim among Conrad’s own literary circle, but the story failed to secure any kind of popular success (Wasney). When published as one of three stories in *Youth: And Two Other Stories* in 1902, it again received the least attention. Surprisingly, the story began garnering academic attention posthumously (Conrad dies in 1924) in the 1940-50s for its rich universalist exploration of human interiority—of its corruptibility, inaccessibility, and darkness inherent to it—at a time when literary interpretation was dominated by a psychologically oriented approach (ibid). Then by the 1970s, it had garnered acclaim to be even considered, quoting Chinua Achebe, as permanent literature—read and taught and constantly evaluated by serious academics and numbering the half-dozen greatest short novels in the English language (Achebe, 15). The novella is no doubt considered by many as a work of art, as masterpiece.

But what makes *Heart of Darkness* a masterpiece? According to Wasney, the novella straddles the boundary between a waning Victorian sensibility (for its heroism, or antiheroism) and a waxing modernist one, given its use of multiple narrators, its asynchronous chronological unfolding, and its post-structuralist distrust in the stability of language—which gives it its
ambiguity. He further surmises that it is especially this ambiguity of language, which offers *Heart of Darkness* to multiple interpretations, that gives it its mass appeal. And I believe it is precisely how Conrad strikes a certain ambiguous balance with his words and style that has many a writer responding to him.

However, Achebe’s stance on Conrad is of particular interest, especially because it has since rendered *Heart of Darkness* as controversial not only within Western canon, but within the African context, noting its dehumanizing depiction of Africa and African people (21). Achebe, despite acknowledging Conrad as a great stylist of modern fiction and a good storyteller (15), goes as far as to advocate for the abandonment of the entire text, because, according to him, his humanity and African humanity as a whole, is something that should not be questioned whatsoever. As such, he says that “the abandonment of unwholesome thoughts [can only be] its own and only reward” (26). Certainly, I cannot blame Achebe for his hard stance on Conrad. For a person such as Achebe whose own experiences had him go through the colonial regime, it would be more surprising that his is not enraged, because any person identifying as African would be angered at the depiction of African characters within the novella. But does this warrant the abandonment of the text altogether? Ngugi wa Thiong’o would disagree.

Ngugi, in a New York Times article that reviews Maya Jasanoff’s book on Conrad’s literary career, is more forgiving of Conrad, even though he agrees with Achebe that Conrad did hold biases against Africans. In fact, Ngugi acknowledges that Achebe’s essay had actually helped explain what he had found repellent in Conrad’s work and why he had stopped reading him altogether: the depiction of native African characters that always seemed to merge with their environment, reminiscent of the Hegelian image of Africa as a land of childhood still enveloped in the dark mantle of the night. Why he finds Conrad appealing and worth reading, contradictory
to Achebe, is Conrad’s “ability to capture the hypocrisy of the “civilizing mission” and the material interests that drove capitalist empires, crushing the human spirit”. Ngugi ensures to remind us that Conrad was simply a writer inadvertently shaped by worldly circumstances that he did not have much say in, just like any of us even now – each of us born into the world unawares, making do with whatever cards we are handed. So, putting Conrad into context, born in Poland under czarist Russia to parents engrossed in the struggle of Polish independence, before becoming a traveler of the oceans and eventually ending up as an English-speaking citizen of the British empire, Ngugi reminds us that Conrad was also partly a victim of larger imperial forces at work. Hence, Ngugi asserts that Conrad from another perspective can be considered, despite his own biases, as Achebe’s literary brother, who in a similar vein with Achebe captured the contradictions of imperialism and colonialism. Therefore, in as far as Conrad captured the impact of imperialism and colonialism, his novella can be considered postcolonial, or more precisely it can be considered for postcolonial readings.

So, while I agree with Achebe that any reader in this day and age must be consciously aware of the racist sentiments that exist within Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, I am inclined to agree more with Ngugi and would not go so far as abandon the text altogether. The text is a literary work of art, not in the sense that I presume Achebe seems to uphold art—devoid of flaws—but art in the sense that it is revealing of a facet of the world through its emotional power despite its flaws. It is worth considering it a literary masterpiece, if we consider masterpieces as, paraphrasing Morrison, works whose imagination bears and invites rereadings, which motions to future readings as well as contemporary ones (xii) that bear political relevance. As such, just like Ngugi I believe that, Conrad’s works still remains relevant and applicable to our current postcolonial present. That is to say, the structures and ideologies that were held when colonial
empires were thriving in the late 19th and better half of the 20th century are also intimately tied to events that end WWII, and that these superstructures and ideologies still haunt us and our perspectives on modernity. The perspectives offered by Heart of Darkness’ narrative then lay bare how these structures persist. It is why I propose a lateral comparison with Togashi’s Hunter x Hunter, which I argue intertextually alludes to Heart of Darkness.

In order to bring out the Conradian intertextualities existent in Hunter x Hunter, I would like to note Conrad’s reception overseas. Evidently, Conrad’s style in the English language has come to be acclaimed even overseas, with a significant presence even in Japan that goes far back to the early 20th century. According to Davidson and Hayaski, Conrad was already established as a major English writer in Japan in the 1920s and 30s, when “students of English [in high school and college] would read serious works of literature in English for additional language practice” (136). As for those who wished to read Conrad in Japanese instead of English, numerous translations were available, going as far back as 1914 for the short story “One Day More” (ibid). Davidson and Hayaski state further that in Japan, Conrad’s shorter works garnered more attention because of Japan’s literary culture that prizes brevity, but also because of the ease of translating shorter works (137). For Heart of Darkness, about 4 translations of it exist, published in 1940, -59, -76-, and -86 (136). His works also received much literary criticism in Japan in the 70s, in part due to the flourishing of Japanese higher education, in another part attributed to prominent student unrest in the 70s, where faculties and institutions were called on to become more involved, to criticize society, and to change it – concerns that Conrad’s political novels touched (141).
I find noting all of this significant in the context of the intertextuality of the texts in question. That is, while it is not explicitly clear that *Hunter x Hunter*’s author Yoshihiro Togashi has read *Heart of Darkness*, his year of birth being 1966, places his enrollment in Yamagata University in the 80s, and thus puts him in a time when Conrad was being well read and engaged with even in Japan. The loosest connection I have of Togashi being even remotely aware of Conrad is that he is an avid fan of the *Alien* film series in which a spaceship is named Nostromo – a reference to one of Conrad’s novels. Some of the *Hunter x Hunter* fandom have thus speculated that the Chimera Ant design is inspired by the Xenomorph in *Alien*. This is not

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3 From an interview transcribed in *Hunter x Hunter* Volume 0
mentioning the common motifs of Enlightenment and Horror that appear in both texts that, when compared (which is the objective of this thesis), do not seem coincidental. Given such overlaps then, it is clear that *Hunter x Hunter* is a highly intertextual work that, as iterated already, echoes and foregrounds former texts and writers, either directly or indirectly. The fact that a certain text is directly or indirectly alluded however is not significant. Instead, what is significant is how the text becomes open to various modes of interpretation dependent on the reader’s repertoire of literary familiarity. My proposed reading of *Hunter x Hunter* then is one that argues for its inherent intertextual relation with Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, and how such literary relations can be generative towards a more nuanced understanding of the postcolonial past, and its implications to the understanding of contemporary modernity.

### 1.2 Manga and Intertextuality

Before delving into the narrative of Togashi’s *Hunter x Hunter*, offering an introductory explanation of manga as genre and form is apt. Manga (“漫画”) in Japanese, as Mary Knigghton states, derives from Chinese characters (*kanji*) that denote whimsical scribbles and random drawings (139). It is, then, simply a form that simultaneously utilizes the written word and graphic images simultaneously. In its contemporary form, these words and images used have intraframe and interframe relationships that produce dynamic effects of speed, movement and dramatization, and the consequent layout codifies and guides the reader’s eye to visually and dynamically relay the details of depicted character relationships, minute changes in psychological or physical landscapes, and complex time shifts (140). Such multimedial interrelations between word and image in manga is what gives it its appeal to many of its readers that span the globe, with an estimated market size valued at 10.9 billion dollars as of 2021 (Grandview Research). Given such a global reach, I believe that the consideration of manga as literary pieces *and* as pieces of visual art worthy of literary analysis, despite their easy conflation
as mere children’s entertainment, is apt. This is because just like any other form of visual art, literature or entertainment, manga does not exist in a vacuum (Ito, A History of Manga). It is immersed in a particular social environment that includes history, language, culture and politics. The plethora of narratives produced in this form then also depict social phenomena, such as social order and hierarchy, sexism, racism, ageism, classism and so on. (ibid). As such, the genre becomes in the context of this discussion, a prime site for the rememberance of the history of war, specifically the atomic bombing that left a deep mark on Japan’s national psyche.

1.3 Yoshihiro Togashi’s *Hunter x Hunter*
First, a disclaimer: I do not intend to discuss the entirety of *Hunter x Hunter*, given its expansive and intricately woven plot that spans, at the moment of writing this thesis, a total of 38 volumes. I intend to instead focus my analysis on the 6th arc, the Chimera Ant arc. I would like however to provide a preliminary breakdown of the entire plotline in this introductory chapter for those who are unfamiliar with the series before getting into the literary analysis of the text.

*Hunter x Hunter* then, as the name suggests, is a story that is primarily about ‘Hunters’. The very introduction of the series in its first volume is as follows: “Rare beasts and Monsters. Wealth and Secret Treasures. Demonic Enclaves and Unexplored Lands. The word ‘Unknown’ emits magic, and there are those who are enchanted by its power. These people are called ‘Hunters’—translation mine—”4”. This statement is coupled with four panels arranged vertically on the page, the first of which depicts fictitious creatures with monstrous characteristics, the second a display of glittering treasures, the third a scenery of a mountainous landscape and caves, and the last panel a display of numerous human hands that attempt to grasp at a centered light in the distance (Vol 1, 1). The rest of the volume, while introducing to its readers the young

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4 Quotes from the manga are primarily my own translations, although I do make sure to cross reference English translations.
protagonist Gon, contextualizes who Hunters really are. They are considered licensed elite members of humanity who not only look for these treasures and hunt beasts, but also dedicate themselves to the protection of knowledge, people, and nature they discover (ibid, 111-123). The young boy Gon, aspiring to his Hunter father, Ging, thus begins his own journey and leave his village in a quest to become a Hunter himself, while hoping to find his father who left him when he was but an infant (ibid).

The *shonen* manga series (*shonen* being a demographic category that ostensibly targets an audience of adolescent males) whose first volume got published in 1998 is considered one of the more critically acclaimed series, amounting to its thirty-seventh volume published as of November 2022. As for its sales, it has had over 84 million copies in circulation as of July 2022 and this is speaking only of the manga. Its serialization into anime, the televised form of the original graphic texts, only further speaks to its global reach beyond its intended readership to include all ages and genders.

In its thirty-eight volumes released so far, *Hunter x Hunter’s* plot can be generally divided into story arcs which are as follows: 1) the Hunter Exam arc, which has Gon take the Hunter Exam to qualify being a Hunter, which he does; 2) the Zoldyck Family arc, which has Gon rescue his newfound friend Killua from the Hunter exam from his family of assassins; 3) the Heavens Arena arc, which has Gon and Killua challenge a 251-floor colosseum-style battling ground, and as they do so, learn the basics of Nen (the power system that provides logic for each characters’ superhuman abilities in the *Hunter x Hunter* world); 4) Yorknew City arc, where Gon and his friends seek to buy a video game named Green Island that holds clues to help Gon find his father; 5) Greed Island arc, dedicated to Gon and Killua playing and completing the game Greed Island as Gon seeks the clues to find his father; 6) the Chimera Ant arc, where upon
completion of Greed Island, Gon is intentionally, by Ging but unbeknownst to Gon, led up to Kite—Gon’s mentor figure who himself was trained by Ging—before they are caught up in a saga that involves human-eating Chimera Ants; 7) the 13th Hunter Chairman Election arc, where, with the aftermath of the Chimera Ant proving disastrous, Gon is in a dire state and his friend Killua attempts to revive him while an election to appoint a new chairman of the Hunter Association is ongoing due to the previous chairman’s death in the Ant saga. It ends with Gon being revived and finally getting to meet Ging, his father, while a new Chairman of the Hunter Association is elected; 8) the Dark Continent Expedition arc, where an expedition to the forbidden Dark Continent is launched by the Kakin empire, pressuring the other world powers, including the Hunter Association, to try sabotage the Kakin empire’s efforts while also trying to get a piece of the continent’s spoils; and 9) the Succession Contest arc, where all concerned figures of the expedition are aboard a ship named the Black Whale that sets sail for the Dark Continent, and a contest to the death ensues among the princes of Kakin to determine who the next emperor will be.

Any postcolonial reader with a careful eye, when provided with such a preliminary understanding of the Hunter x Hunter’s plotline, would, I believe, already identify postcolonial themes existent within the manga. The concept of ‘Hunter’ and the Hunter Association as an institution based on the premise of the discovery and protection of knowledge, people, and nature, in addition to the hunting of treasures and rare beasts, is curious, and can be interpreted as reflective of the imperial/colonial enterprise. This is not mentioning how the term ‘Dark Continent’ (Ankoku Tairiku), heavy with postcolonial relevance, comes up and becomes a destination that the plot of the manga gravitates towards with a significant number of key characters aiming to discover, conquer and colonize it. So, while the series can be summarized as
a coming-of-age story of the young protagonist Gon as he seeks to become a Hunter like his father, the very concept of becoming Hunter itself and its implications on its wider narrative world makes Hunter x Hunter a story that is deeply immersed in postcolonial discourse. While also considering Roman Rosenbaum’s 5 claim that manga not only contextualizes the Japanese historical experience in imaginative ways, but also provides the potential to challenge new ways of thinking by enabling us to perceive history in new ways (253). Hunter x Hunter, through its fantastic depiction of the atomic bombing of Japan at the climax of the Chimera Ant arc, provides its readers the chance to situate Japan’s historical experience within postcolonial discourse. In order to demonstrate such however, a breakdown of the arc in question, the Chimera Ant arc, is in order.

1.3.1 Hunter x Hunter: Chimera Ant Arc

The arc in questions begins in the manga series’ 18th volume, when the Chimera Ant Queen, who takes the appearance of a humanoid-sized ant, drifts ashore injured—much later revealed to have drifted from the Dark Continent—and begins to devour any living being around her to rejuvenate. As she does, she eventually ends up devouring two human children who are delivered to her by her soldiers, upon which she gains a taste for humans (Vol 18). It is then revealed that the Chimera Ant Queen is known to reproduce via Phagogenesis (Sesshoku Kouhai)—reproduction through devouring—where the queen imparts genetic characteristics of ingested creatures onto the next generation. Hence the soldier ants laid by the Queen after the ingestion of humans begin to increasingly take on human characteristics (ibid). In a later instance when the more human-like soldier ants birthed interact with the Queen, she notes internally that she also must have some human blood in her (Vol 19). Meanwhile, Gon, who has just met Kite

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5 Roman Rosenbaum is an Honorary Associate in the University of Sydney, Australia, specializing in Postwar Japanese Literature and Popular Cultural Studies
and his team conducting ecological research, discover the existence of the Chimera Ant Queen that could easily devour humans when they come across the Queen’s broken arm. Recognizing the imminent threat that this poses to humanity, they dispatch to immediately exterminate the ants (ibid). What follows is about a twelve-volume long plot because the Chimera Ants abilities far surpass their expectations. The Ants’ rate of expansion of their colony is rapid, and the imminent threat that the birth of the King (named Meruem after birth) by the Chimera Ant Queen poses is too great. Before long, two countries, named NGL (Neo-Green Life) and the Republic of East Gorteau, are ravaged by the Ants (Vol 19-23). Kite sacrifices himself to let Gon and Killua escape from a near-death experience with the Ants, after which a specialized Extermination Team from the Hunter Association, which includes the association’s chairman, Netero, is dispatched to deal with the Ant menace (ibid). Gon also joins this Extermination Team in a bid to save Kite. In the end, the casualties that mount is nothing short of horrific: Kite is killed and ‘dead’, Gon consequently lets hatred and rage consume him to the point that he ‘descends into darkness’ to kill Neferpitou (Kite’s killer) while choosing to gain powers that consequently puts him in a comatose state (Vol 29), and the most threatening of Chimera Ants, despite their seemingly omnipotent King being born, are defeated by Netero detonating the Poor Man’s Rose—a compact atomic bomb implanted into him prior his fight to the death with the King—by way of suicide, killing the Ants by radiation poisoning (Vol 30).

1.4 Situating *Heart of Darkness* and *Hunter x Hunter* in Context of a Postcolonial Modernity

With a preliminary understanding of the primary texts laid out, putting them in the context of a postcolonial modernity is in order. Let me begin with *Hunter x Hunter*, given that its genre is fantasy fiction in the form of graphic novel, and as such it needs a reconstructive reading to situate it in historical reality. By ‘reconstructive’ I mean the the reassembling of the narrative
plot and meaning of the work while being conscious of historical precedents that the plot may allude to. I will then follow such a reading with situating *Heart of Darkness*, which is an easier and shorter task.

To begin then, I must reiterate that Hannah Arendt’s claim that the use of the atomic bomb, from a political perspective, marks the beginning of the modern world. Hence, by association, the narrative in the Chimera Ant arc that alludes to such a politically charged historic event can be analyzed to further nuance the concept of modernity. To do this however, I make use of Naoki Sakai’s critique of modernity that discusses Japan’s historico-geopolitical position from the 19th century to the post-war era, along with Thomas LaMarre’s idea of ‘Speciesism’ to make clear how Yoshihiro Togashi renders Japan’s historical experience fantastically.

Importantly, I take Sakai’s stance on modernity, that it is as part of the premodern-modern-postmodern series “a 19th century historical scheme that provides a perspective to comprehend the location of nations, cultures, traditions and races in a systematic manner” (93), as a given. Modernity, he states, will always be associated with the historico-geopolitical: that is, historically, modernity is primarily opposed to its historical precedent – the premodern; and geopolitically, it has been contrasted to the non-modern, or more specifically, the non-West (94). Hence, when a subject is posited through the attribution of these historico-geopolitical predicates (functioning discursively), two kinds of areas are diacritically discerned: the modern West, and premodern non-West (ibid), and this understanding excludes the possibility of a simultaneous coexistence of the premodern West and the modern non-West (ibid). Given this, he notes how Japan, despite its rapid modernization during the Meiji Restoration period to become a modern industrial society, having defeated Russia in the Russo-Japanese war of in 1904, and having begun to mimic Western imperial practice onto its Asian neighbors, had become a discursive
object that was “a heterogenous instance that could not be easily integrated into the global configuration organized according to the pairing of the modern and the premodern” (96-97). Or simply put, Japan, within the West’s predicate of modernity, could not be discerned as modern, because it is the West that is the universal point of reference that others recognize themselves as particularities, and it is only the West that has the power to recognize Japan as modern. In other words, from the outset, Japan, as part of the Orient, was a shadow of the West. For Japan then, modernity meant, above all, the state of being deprived of its own subjectivity (117).

Expounding on Sakai further, he notes that this was the case because a sizeable intellectual labor had been invested in the United States in order to render Japan as innocuous in such a discursive formation, culminating as “Modernization Theory” (97). This is to say modernization, which had been more or less equated to Europeanization until then, morphed in two ways: 1) the term ‘Western’ was reconstituted with the center moving from Europe to the US, because the West is a name always associating itself with those regions, communities and peoples that appear politically or economically superior to other regions; and 2) Any society could potentially modernize, but in doing so, that society becomes similar to America. It significant to note here that it was the United States that forced Japan’s opening from its isolationist Sakoku policy in 1853 (McCargo, 18-19), and upon Japan’s defeat in WWII, Japan had the American Occupation that dictated its trajectory of economic revival (35). In other words, modernization, or progress, always meant Americanization (ibid), a thought which, Sakai claims, was successfully implanted in the mass consciousness of postwar Japan (ibid).

It is based upon such an understanding that the Chimera Ant arc in Hunter x Hunter becomes interpretable. This is to say that an object can only be considered modern only in so far as the West recognizes the object as modern, and in this case, Japan finds herself in a peculiar
position where it is neither modern nor pre-modern, as her subjectivity is deprived. What is significant to understand here is that the understanding of modernity is very much tied to race, and given such a relation, the context of WWII, defined by John Dower as “primarily a race war” (4), becomes pertinent. In his book War Without Mercy, Dower outlines in the second part of his book a general strategy of dehumanization applied by the United States media onto the then Japanese enemy, where the Japanese were perceived as non/sub-human, depicted as animals, reptiles, or insects. Such a strategy had the effect of stripping away the humanity of the enemy, and Thomas LaMarre terms such a displacement and translation of race relations into species relations as ‘Speciesism’.

LaMarre, who takes particular interest in how Speciesism found expression in wartime animation, traces a contrast between American Speciesism and Japanese Speciesism that Dower did not see. That is, while American Speciesism tended to animalize/bestialize the enemy, Japanese Speciesism on the other hand, did not tend to bestialize the American enemy, depicting them in a mostly human form, even though this does not mean that Japanese war media was not dehumanizing (76). An example he provides is in Seo Mitsuyo’s 1945 animated film Momotaro: Umi no shinpei, where Japan’s English-speaking enemies appear in human form but with horns on their head, reflecting their degraded and demonic stature, and suggesting that Japan’s spiritual youthful purity and vigor, embodied in Momotaro, will dispel them (78). As such, LaMarre observes a humanizing streak within Japanese Speciesism that sought to provide an alternative stance to “the antipodal stereotypes of pure Self and incorrigibly evil Other” that Dower saw (255). Given such not-entirely-dehumanizing depictions of the American enemy by the Japanese, LaMarre argues that animation, and by extension manga due to their commonalities, provide a
prime site for speciesism (81). I thus argue concurrently with LaMarre, that such wartime speciesism finds itself expressed, hauntingly, in Togashi’s *Hunter x Hunter*.

With this in mind, the Chimera Ant arc can be interpreted as a historical representation of imperial Japan through Togashi’s rendering of Speciesism. That is, Togashi’s speciecism is an amalgamation of both American and Japanese Speciesism with the atomic bombing depicted in its narrative story as representative of the global modern political order in mind. Hence, Togashi chooses to outwardly humanize the characters associated with the Hunter Association as representative of the West, while the Chimera Ants with their overly insectoid appearance, from the outset depicted as non-human other, become representative of the Japanese empire that was the victim of the atomic bomb at the end of WWII. Such premise leads to a perspective where even the Chimera Ant’s rapid evolution and expansion through the devouring of humans can be interpreted as mirroring Japan’s rapid modernization through assimilation of Western ideals. The same act of devouring however is simultaneously reminiscent of barbarism or cannibalism, which is in contrast to civility that is often connotated with the human. Coupled with the fact that the Chimera Ant Queen drifted from the Dark Continent, one can begin to see how the Ants are conceived to the humans of *Hunter x Hunter*, representative of the West, as raw and savage, against which the human protagonists can pivot themselves as innocent, validating the Hunters’ freedom and heroic authority to exterminate the Ants. Said extermination then culminates in the allusion of the atomic bomb of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by way of Netero’s suicide bombing, thereby situating *Hunter x Hunter* within historical reality.

With such an understanding, while also remembering Japan’s historical link with colonialism in the Congo, we begin to see a common thread that ties the two together in terms of Sakai’s discursive geopolitical predicates: the West. It was the West, in its broadest sense of the
term that included the United States that made the atomic bomb, and Europe that colonized Africa and extracted its resources (hence uranium being mined in the Congo and traded with the US), that dehumanized Africans while simultaneously choosing to drop a nuclear weapon on an imperial power that it considered its Other. To add, the dehumanization of Africans and the perception of Japan as non-modern predates Arendt’s assertion of the political beginning of the modern world, situating the roots of such perceptions in the modern age. It is precisely why Wasney states that *Heart of Darkness* has a modernist sensibility. Again, considering what I have already expressed as an inherent intertextuality of motifs and themes in both texts, a comparative literary analysis of such would be generative to a nuanced understanding of modernity. The motifs and themes that a namely being 1) Enlightenment and 2) Its Horrors, the former which I argue suggests at the origin of modern perceptions in discussion—the Age of Enlightenment—while the latter points to the disastrous humanitarian implications that unravels by the logic of such modern perceptions in each of the historical contexts. I dedicate a chapter to each of the themes for analysis.

Chapter 2, “Understanding Enlightenment” preliminarily lays out how the concept of Enlightenment is introduced in both texts. It then provides a theoretical framework established by Richard Cohen to gain a critical exegesis of the concept of Enlightenment as displayed in the primary texts, i.e., the core of the motif of enlightenment in both texts points to modern ideas shaped in the European intellectual Age of Enlightenment. I also note an overlap of language in the established framework with Achille Mbembe’s *Necropolitics*. This overlap becomes significant in the discussion of the Horror in the following chapter. I then close the chapter by

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6 While I do not bring Horkheimer and Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* into discussion, I acknowledge that the perspective of Enlightenment I bring forth shares with the critique of Enlightenment that they assert.
provide close readings of how such a framework narratively expresses itself in both *Heart of Darkness* and *Hunter x Hunter*.

Chapter 3, “The Horrors of Enlightenment: A Parallactic Vision” follows the previous chapter by offering a multivalent interpretation of the horrors of modern Enlightenment thinking through the lens of Achille Mbembe’s *Necropolitics*. But first, the historical context of the link between the use of nuclear bomb in Japan and colonial Congo is established. Then the concept of ‘shadows’ of Enlightenment based on race is brought forth, after which how such a notion came to be in the Age of Enlightenment is illustrated, focusing on the works of Compte de Buffon and Denis Diderot. Then a description of how the self-institution and self-limitation of sovereignty (or biopower) leads to horrors manifesting in the form of, first, the negation of nature, second, the justification of the right to kill by such negation, and three, by the very act of negation, the reasoning of sovereignty is upheld in death as a living spirit, perpetuating biopower as a systemic totality is given. Close readings of how each point becomes manifest narratively in *Heart of Darkness* and *Hunter x Hunter* are then provided. I then close by providing an extension of Mbembe’s necropolitics as provided by the close readings.
Chapter 2. Understanding Enlightenment

In *Heart of Darkness* it is curious that the protagonist Marlow is compared to the Buddha twice. The first occurrence is in the novella’s opening pages: “Marlow sat cross-legged right aft. . . He had sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, resembled an idol” (4). Then: “he had the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus-flower” (7). The second occurrence is at the end of the novella, in its closing paragraph: “Marlow ceased, and sat apart, indistinct and silent, in the pose of a meditating Buddha.” And interspersed throughout the story are references to meditation and reincarnation, which I will go into further detail later, but this much is clear—that the protagonist being akin to the Buddha, that it is mentioned explicitly at the beginning of the story and at the end, makes the motif significant in understanding the plot of the novella.

This same motif of a Buddha also appears in *Hunter x Hunter* in a curious way, more specifically in the Chimera Ant arc given that the plotline offers two contrastive Buddha-like figures: Chairman Netero of the Hunter Association who can conjure a 100-armed Buddha statue (Vol 27) and Meruem, the Ant King with an ambition to conquer all of humanity (Vol 28), whose own background and character development is a dark and twisted mirror of the historical Buddha himself who was born as a royal but ends up denouncing his role upon learning of the outside world and finding enlightenment. Furthermore, the climax of the narrative arc in question culminates in a battle between these opposing characters while also alluding to the historical atomic bombing of Japan at the end of WWII and its subsequent implications. With the Buddha’s image taking central function in their battle to the death (Vol 28) makes the motif and its association to enlightenment heavy with literary meaning. What I would like to argue here then is as follows: that there is more than meets the eye to this motif of Enlightenment in both texts,
and to fully uncover the meaning of this motif, we must understand ‘enlightenment’ in its full sense of the word.

In order to provide a literary analysis of ‘Enlightenment’ within *Heart of Darkness* and *Hunter x Hunter*, I first invoke Richard Cohen’s discursive analysis of enlightenment in his work “Beyond Enlightenment,” as a framework to understand ‘enlightenment’. This is because Cohen traces a certain semiotic understanding of Buddhism in relation to ‘enlightenment’ as a sign, specifically in the Western context that most scholars easily overlook. That is, because Buddha was described as ‘enlightened’ in the Age of Enlightenment that has a Christian particularist core, Buddhist enlightenment was in the Western context interpreted as a Western Enlightenment phenomenon (Cohen, 7). Thus, Buddhism becomes a mere posture that is a mechanism of detachment just as much as it is a mechanism to uphold a noble image. I then supplement Cohen’s established framework with Achille Mbembe’s understanding of the biopolitical and its relation to modernity, identifying an overlap between Cohen’s use of the term ‘hegemony’ and Mbembe’s use of the term ‘sovereignty’ which he also refers to as ‘biopower’. I finally proceed to a literary analysis that shows how such a framework is expressed narratively within both works while also expounding on its relation to historical events that have postcolonial relevance on ideas of modernity.

2.1 Cohen’s Enlightenment: Enlightenment as Empty Signifier

![Diagram of Enlightenment and Modernity]
When the word ‘Enlightenment’ is uttered, what comes to mind? Does it bring up enlightenment concerning Buddhistic doctrine or Sanskritic valences associated with intellection, wisdom, liberation (Cohen, 15)? Or does it bring to mind European history—the Age of Enlightenment associated with modernity, rationalism, science, secular emancipation (ibid)? Or does it conjure the Holy Spirit, associated with the Protestant Reformation that concerned itself with anti-clericalism, guiding providence, divine providence, divine inspiration and salvation (ibid)? Given such broad meanings associated with Enlightenment because of the signified being indefinite not due to a lack of referents, the term is clearly a polyvalent symbol. Cohen however notes that Enlightenment is just as much an empty signifier as it is polyvalent, because it seems to burst with significance while simultaneously seeming irreducible to temporally determinate meanings (ibid). That is to say, when the sign ‘Enlightenment’ is filled with meaning, depending on the signifier (image) that it is filled with, the meaning morphs and shifts due to the signifier being indefinite due to the sign’s inherent polyvalence. With ‘Enlightenment’ as empty signifier of such disparate meanings then, Cohen’s discursive framework argues that it is imperative to understand European Enlightenment first in order to understand Buddhist enlightenment, and how these two meanings of enlightenment relate discursively to offer illusory meaning. Significantly, this would reveal how the word gains discursive power in a political context. Summarily, Cohen proposes that the Enlightenment of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe provides the political context for understanding Buddhist enlightenment as the simultaneous, coequal, perfection of rationality, religiosity, morality, and humanity, beyond politics (xiii).

European Enlightenment by and large is understood as an international (European) phenomenon, with each European country producing unique literary forms and intellectual
modalities that emphasized the human being’s emergence from self-incurred minority of the religious – minority here being the inability to make use of one’s own understanding without direction from another (Cohen, 8). In other words, European Enlightenment is a period in European intellectual history from 17th to 18th centuries when a cohesive body of philosophers and artists represented themselves as standing at the brink of history, aware of their own modernity that was based on their independence from religion. Such independence emphasized rationalism, science, and secular emancipation, while overthrowing “the sacred bounds set down by religion, breaking the fetters that faith placed on reason” (9), quoting from Diderot and d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie*. It was the genesis of an idea of modernity with a particularist string from strictly their (Western) point of view, which eventually got projected onto the wider world with an ethical imperative conscience to build a better future for all based on such self-modern understanding. With Kant as the focal point of the age of Enlightenment and its discourse—considered the inventor of modern subjectivity—Cohen argues that the threshold to modern secularism was crossed when Enlightenment thinkers disentangled political citizenship from theological dicta (10).

There is a caveat to Enlightenment’s modern secularism however, Cohen expounds. Despite the abandonment of religion, he argues that man’s religiosity remained intact, because man has a “real religiousness”, i.e., man is anthropologically inclined to religion to even become a new species—*Homo religiosus* (14). That is, Kant’s rational secular man is also necessarily a religious man, because the idea of god plays a crucial subjective role for practical moral reason (12). Or in other words, Kant’s man is a rational animal who becomes a moral animal who becomes a religious animal, and this is possibly because of the vestigial trace of Christian particularism existent within Kant’s universal schema (13). Hence, morality inevitably leads to
religion, and through religion, it extends itself to the idea of a mighty moral lawgiver outside the human being (12). Kant’s rational secular man can also then be referred to as religiously rational man, and like his pre-modern Christian brethren, still subjugates himself before divine ordinances that exist independently of himself (13). What is significant to understand here then is that Kantian Enlightenment, which is foundational in European Enlightenment, has universalization and Christian-particularism as conditions for a cosmopolitical imaginary (ibid).

Now, to be more precise, Enlightenment as an intellectual movement was by no means simple, and that despite its questioning of human nature, morality, conceptions of progress and reason against theological dicta, there emerged two internal movements within general Enlightenment: Moderate and Radica (Menashe, 1). The former believed that reason was limited in scope and wanted to preserve religion and faith, while the latter thought that everything can be transformed into reason. That is, on one hand, Radical Enlightenment took a stance against anti-colonialism and discrimination based on race and gender, while the Moderates’ beliefs ultimately upheld slavery and inequality (ibid). Alexa Menashe clearly lays out such a schism within Enlightenment and explains quite clearly that it was the Moderate sort that emerged as mainstream (ibid). It is this strand of Enlightenment, which treated reason as “immaterial and inherent in God, a divinely given gift to man, and one that raises him above the rest” that I believe Cohen is speaking about (ibid). Understanding which strand became more mainstream than the other is significant, as it provides the basis upon which I discuss Enlightenment in particular. That is, while acknowledging that Enlightenment thought did have a prominence of a genuinely universalist, culturally relativist thread (Radical), it would be adequate to critique Enlightenment more broadly for its more mainstream strand whose associations with European colonialism and modern-day racial classification, one could argue, has had overly tragic
consequences to foreign peoples in its trajectory of development in history. But I digress, if only a little to clear up on the specificity of Cohen’s Enlightenment that I illustrate.

While understanding Enlightenment as having a Christian-particularism as a condition for cosmopolitical imaginary, Cohen then proceeds to draw the confluence between Enlightenment and enlightenment (Buddhistic). This culminates through Max Müller, a German-born philologist and Orientalist known as one of the founders of western academic disciplines of Indian studies and religious studies. It was Müller’s work, Cohen notes, that was pivotal in translating “buddha” as “the enlightened” despite “awakened” being a more apt translation (3). At the same time Müller, being a Kantian, articulated man’s elemental religiosity and postulated a science of religion that expressed a general pattern for religious history: all religions are founded by superior men; all succumb to decay; yet all might be returned to their original purity through a due reformation (5). This view that he held was however biased to assay Christianity’s superiority over other religions. Müller’s science of religion was really then as much a tool for evangelism and missionizing as for reformation that would restore “to the whole history of the world in its unconscious progress toward Christianity its true and sacred character” (ibid). Such is the scientific context, Cohen argues, within which Müller translated “buddha” as “enlightened.” In his anthropology, humans search after “light and truth”: seeing the light meant apprehending truth with intellectual clarity. But if light was truth, truth had but one single source—Christianity which was to Müller the true religion (ibid). For the language of enlightenment to fulfill its discursive function in Müller’s science then, Shakyamuni had to be assimilated to Jesus as a religious founder, and Buddhism to Christianity as a religion. In other words, European Enlightenment was indispensable for the genesis of the academic field
Buddhist studies, given that for scholars, (Buddhist) enlightenment was an Enlightenment phenomenon (7).

2.2 Cohen meets Mbembe: Enlightenment as Sovereignty
Another significant point in Cohen’s discursive analysis is how Enlightenment becomes an instrument of hegemony (xiii). That is, because, for Müller, enlightenment is an empty signifier that holds the pure Christianity of Christ at its core, it becomes the place of logos and the Infinite (19). This delimits and concretizes Müller’s values, but in so doing, it also excludes, just as it provides an identity only insofar as it creates an equivalence among everything on the inside, but excludes, devalues, and makes a potential antagonist of everything that does not participate in that order (ibid). Thus, through Müller, who preached Kant who in turn is considered the inventor of modern subjectivity, one can postulate that Western Enlightenment thought in general became an instrument of hegemony insofar as it came to present itself as realizing the broader aims of either emancipating or ensuring order for wider masses of a global population. It becomes apparent how Enlightenment thought presents itself as a universal whose content is the terrain for ideological antagonisms, have their significance fixed, with acceptance of that resolution then providing a criterion for structuring society (21).

Curiously, Cohen’s language of Enlightenment being an instrument of hegemony overlaps with Mbembe’s Foucauldian language of the necropolitical in relation to modernity. For Cohen states that, “in the modern world, human beings actualize their humanity, becoming Enlightened subjects, only when they have the wisdom to accept the responsibilities of political citizenships [as per Enlightenment Thought]” (Cohen, 13), to which Mbembe would agree since he asserts that, “reason is the truth of the subject and politics is the exercise of reason in the public sphere” in as far as “reason is the most important element of both the project of modernity and literary convention of sovereignty” (Mbembe, 13). In other words, Enlightenment as
hegemony becomes metonymic with sovereignty, which to Mbembe is synonymous to biopower (12). Biopower (sovereignty) meanwhile is the power and capacity to dictate who lives and who dies (11). Thus, summarily, 1) Killing or allowing to live constitutes the limits of sovereignty; 2) Exercising sovereignty is to exercise control over mortality (12) and; 3) Exercising sovereignty is to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power (13). It is based on such an understanding of Enlightenment that I propose a reading of the politics of Enlightenment within *Hunter x Hunter* and *Heart of Darkness*. In other words, the figure of the Buddha within both texts becomes a signifier of enlightenment but said enlightenment does not point necessarily toward enlightenment in the Buddhist sense, although it does partially, but instead points more largely at Enlightenment thought because Western Enlightenment thought assimilated Buddhism into its iconography⁷. And since Enlightenment thought develops to become an instrument of hegemony, while considering the assimilation of Buddhist iconography to Enlightenment thought, hegemony/sovereignty/biopower can be analyzed through the figure of the Buddha as it appears in the literary texts considered.

### 2.3 Enlightenment in *Heart of Darkness*

One must remember that *Heart of Darkness* is a story that is largely focused on Belgian imperialism/colonialism in the Congo, nested as an ‘enlightened’ experiential narrative that is shared on a yawl floating on the Thames. The use of Buddhist imagery may stand as peculiar and perplexing at first given associations of Buddhism with Asia, but with the above framework in mind however, that Western Enlightenment assimilated Buddhism to Christianity, with Christianity as the place of the logos and the Infinite for a cosmopolitical imaginary, a systematic

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⁷ For an elaborate illustration of what ‘European Buddhism’ is, explaining how Buddhism migrated into modernism through Arthur Schopenhauer (who built on Kant) while putting it in comparative context of *Heart of Darkness*, see Avram Alpert’s “Empires of Enlightenment” (2017), and Owen Knowles’ “Who’s Afraid of Arthur Schopenhauer” (2015).
literary analysis of enlightenment within *Heart of Darkness* can be made. This is to say, there is a complex semiotic relationship of enlightenment within the work given how it is represented in the novella, and given Cohen’s framework, we can establish that the enlightenment being referred to in the story is not necessary Buddhist, but instead refers to values and thoughts associated with Enlightenment thinking. I will therefore outline elements of Enlightenment that are both explicit and implicit in the text while making sense of the meaning of these elements, and then putting it in context within history and its political implications.

As mentioned in the opening paragraph of the chapter, one of the more explicit elements of the Enlightenment within *Heart of Darkness* is the motif of the Buddha, given how Marlow is compared to the Buddha at the beginning of the story and at the end of the story. This is significant, given how the motif of the Buddha seems like a veil, a shell of sorts, that frames the story. It is worth mentioning that the comparison made between Marlow and Buddha doesn’t conflate Marlow completely with the historical Buddha. In other words, as pointed out by Avram Alpert, the narrator is careful to the point of excess (2017, 4), to separate out his Buddha from the historical Buddha: Marlow has an “ascetic aspect” and “resembled an idol” (Conrad, 4); he is in a “pose… preaching in European clothes” (ibid, 7); and importantly, he lacks the “lotus flower” (ibid, 7) which is symbolic of purity and spiritual enlightenment. This clear distinction, that Marlow is not the historical Buddha, works as a place marker that justifies European Buddhism (which I interpret as Enlightenment thought in a Buddhist veil) being at work than what would be understood as merely Eastern Buddhism. As such, I propose that what lies at the core of Marlow’s European Buddhism is Western Enlightenment ideals.

### 2.3.1. Enlightenment as Noble (Western) Ideals, Religiously Believed

As such, Marlow’s own words are especially insightful in bringing out Western Enlightenment ideals that are existent within the novella. First, how he begins his exposition of
his adventure is quite telling: “And this also has been one of the dark places on earth… Light came out of this river since… [when the Romans first came here nineteen hundred years ago]. But darkness was here yesterday” (Conrad, 5) This is only after the narrator has described the Thames as a river from which light emanates, invoking the spreading of enlightenment from Europe to the rest of the world:

“They [hunters of gold and pursuers of fame] had gone out… bearing the sword, and often the torch… bearers of a spark from the sacred fire. What greatness had not floated on the ebb of that river into that mystery of an unknown earth… The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires.” (ibid)

This language from the very onset of the novella creates a duality between light and darkness with certain values associated with each. Put it differently, an implicit relation between light/enlightenment with civility/modernity is made just as much as darkness is associated with nature, darkness and savagery. However, Marlow is careful in noting that these are not necessarily mutually exclusive, given how the depiction of the Thames, from which light emanates but was once dark, informs the reader of the relationship between light and darkness as being two sides of the same coin. What’s more, this flip-sided duality of light and darkness is further expressed in how the Romans, implicitly representative of civility, are described as ‘no colonists,’ but ‘conquerors [of] brute force… It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind – as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness’ (ibid). Ideas of nobility, civility, modernity are then in fact, Marlow suggests, ‘not a pretty thing when you look into it too much’ (ibid). These ideas are inherently noble, perceived as light, simply because they are perceived as such, i.e., there is darkness in light, or darkness is simply the flip side of light-ness: “What redeems it (the conquest) is the idea only” (ibid).

Curiously, Marlow then immediately adds that ritualism and religiosity, by virtue of “an
unselfish belief in the idea – something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a
sacrifice to” (ibid) adds to the feeling of redemption to the idea of conquest.

This exposition already seems to follow well Cohen’s discursive analysis of
Enlightenment, particularly his point on man’s inherent religiosity to even be considered a
species—Homo Religiosus—and how such religiosity eventually develops to become an
instrument of hegemony. What is described as the sacred fire that ebbs out into the mysteries of
the unknown earth is then only sacred because of its idea and the fervent belief in such an idea.
What’s more, Conrad’s evocation of the beginnings of the Roman empire also uncannily
overlaps with Foucault’s claim of sovereign power to have been derived from the ancient patria
potestas that granted the father of the Roman family the right to “dispose” of the life of his
children and his slaves (Foucault, 41). In short, Conrad’s writing already hints from the very
beginning, even before Marlow’s narration of his venture to the Congo, that Western
Enlightenment thought is merely an ideal upheld and perceived noble by its subject (the West),
providing an identity that claimed emancipation and order for the mysteries of unknown earth—
the wider global population.

2.3.2Meditative Buddhist Enlightenment as Veil/Blindfold

So, in a sense, Marlow’s story to the Congo to ultimately meet Kurtz, which he describes
as ‘the farthest point of navigation and the culminating point of [his] experience’ is a story of
experiential knowledge of European imperialism/colonialism told by a ‘European Buddha’. It is
a story of ‘enlightenment’, packed with ‘enlightened’ knowledge that throws a kind of light that
is sombre, pitiful and not clear (Conrad, 8). Despite such contradictory and abstract remarks, he
insists that such light is still revealing – a murky truth so to speak – reminiscent once again of
‘the meaning of an episode being not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which
brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze’ (5-6).
This, that the murky meaning of the tale being outside but perceived as being enveloped by a haze that is revealed by a glow, brings us to the other meaning of Enlightenment, or perhaps why Marlow is compared to the Buddha, why he is a European Buddha. To make this clear however, a pertinent question must be answered: to whom specifically is this truth murky? In the context of the novella, it is Marlow, but one must remember that this novella is not just an imaginative work—its source of inspiration is from the very lived experiences of the author, Joseph Conrad, whose travel to the Congo, according to Adam Hochschild’s introduction in the deluxe edition of the novella states, “[had] brought an angst whose source was an embarrassment and guilt about his own youthful naivety” (Conrad 2017, xviii). But this is not all. This murky truth also applies to the very audience that the novella was originally intended. The journal in which the first part of *Heart of Darkness* was first published, *Blackwood’s Magazine*, was widely read among professional Englishmen at the time who were enthusiastic about British imperial endeavors. Indeed, it had appeared on the magazine’s thousandth issue, which was specifically devoted to celebrating British imperialism (ibid, 122). To put it differently, the truth presents itself as murky to the teller and audience of the story, the teller and audience here being the wider West, given how the novella has become more than what it is, representative of, quoting Barack Obama via Maya Jasanoff, that the novella is about “the man who wrote it. The European. The American. A particular way of looking at the world” (ibid, 93).

The narrative truth offered thus presents itself murky precisely because the idea of colonial conquest is perceived to the Western subject as a noble venture, despite it being, when stripped bare and looked at keenly, not a pretty thing. And yet the West cannot help but persist in such a belief due to their religiosity to their belief in Enlightenment, so enraptured by the ‘progressive’ values it emphasizes of science, rationalism and secular emancipation. Marlow, as
did Conrad, saw the savage violence of imperialism/colonialism cloaked as truth, and in the face of such violence, develops a reactionary philosophy that stills such violence within them through meditation. Hence, Buddhist imagery becomes a cloak, for Marlow is not a Buddha in the literal sense. He is instead perceived as resembling the Buddha by the narrator, only because of the still meditating pose that Marlow maintained while telling his story. Buddhism, or the stillness that resembles Buddhism that Marlow enacts through his sombre and meditative stance and attitude, is thus simply a defense mechanism to unsee, to blindfold, to forget—to essentially detach oneself, what one could call a twisted nihilistic sense of Buddhist detachment—from the grotesque truth of imperialism/colonialism, culminating finally in the lie told to Kurtz’s Intended which only perpetuates imperialist/colonial ideals by withholding the horrors of truth.

2.3.3 Enlightenment Thought expressed as Hegemony/Sovereignty in Heart of Darkness

With what has been established so far then, it becomes clear how Enlightenment in the context of *Heart of Darkness* discursively functions as an empty signifier. That is, to reiterate Cohen’s Laclauian interpretation, Enlightenment as empty signifier comes to function as an instrument of hegemony because of its stable signifying systemic totality (Western Enlightenment Ideals as core) within which it functions and makes the basis of an exclusionary limit (Cohen, 16-17). Or to put it differently, it totalizes Western discourse and makes it the basis upon which systemic totality is created. Within such a systemic totality that assumes a Christian universal core, Enlightenment then assimilates other meanings to itself while providing an identity only insofar as it creates an equivalence among everything on the inside, but excludes, devalues, and makes a potential antagonist of everything that does not participate in that order (19). Or, in biopolitical terms, Enlightenment thinking morphs into a sovereignty (synonymous to biopower) through its self-institution and self-limitation (Mbembe, 13). Thus, reiterating my point, the Enlightenment expressed within the narrative of *Heart of Darkness* points to Western
Enlightenment ideals and its associated idealization of (hegemonic) conquest and colonialism. However, Enlightenment thought cloaked itself in Buddhist meditative practice to further conjure an enlightened imagery for itself while simultaneously detaching itself away from its own horrific imperialist/colonial consequences. With such an understanding, that Buddhist imagery is simply a veil, and with an eye focused on how Enlightenment ideals are expressed narratively, a number of significant passages in Marlow’s narrative begin to draw interest.

First, Marlow’s dear aunt who assisted him in getting an appointment with the Trading Company of ‘Continental concern’ (9) becomes significant. It is through her that Marlow is able to go to the Congo, because she believed in Marlow’s idea to venture outside. However, there seems to be a misunderstanding of motive between the two. While Marlow expresses his quest to venture into Africa as merely one born of curiosity and a spirit of adventure (8), his aunt seems to have a different opinion. Given her spirited nature, she enthusiastically endorses Marlow to administrative persons, claiming it to be a ‘glorious idea’ (9). And when Marlow goes to say his goodbyes to her before his departure, she discloses to him her pre-existent ideas on the goal of his adventure: that he is an ‘emissary of light,’; ‘a lower sort of apostle,’; that his duty is to ‘wean those ignorant millions of their horrid ways’ (13). Marlow then gets uneasy and rattled by such words from his aunt to the point that he makes an outrageous statement on his outlook on women: “it’s clear how out of touch with truth women are! They live in a world of their own, and there had never been anything like it, and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether…” (13). Marlow also expresses a similar sentiment much later in the second part in one of his sudden remarks after describing the death of the fireman native which forebodes Kurtz’s death and the moment of his lie to his Intended, saying “I laid the ghost of his gifts at last with a lie… Girl! What? Did I mention a girl? Oh, she is out of it—completely. They—the women, I mean—are
out of it—should be out of it. We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse” (55).

Here, we must understand that Marlow is an unreliable narrator, that he openly expresses his bias and outlooks as he narrates his story. One must then take his words with a grain of salt and infer that what his aunt or even the Intended say is not delusional but is instead informative on the kinds of popular discourse that were going on at the time, for Marlow says, “There had been a lot of such rot let loose in print and talk just about that time, and the excellent woman, living right in the rush of all that humbug, got carried off her feet” (13). If we understand Marlow’s aunt as such, that she is representative of the wider ideological popular discourses that were prevalent in Britain at the time, then, Marlow’s statement, with his bias on women given the benefit of the doubt, can be postulated to instead be expressive of Enlightenment discourse. In other words, the women must be helped to stay in that beautiful world of theirs because of Enlightenment’s rootedness to patriarchy which biases the association of man categorically to reason and rationale, and women to idealism. By this then, women become the expressions of idealisms in society, and their expressions need, in the biopolitical sense, to be controlled, to be in line and made to stay in ‘that beautiful world of their own’ for the sake of a stable systemic totality – that of the Roman *patria potestas*. With this in mind, Marlow’s aunt’s ideas on the goal of Marlow’s adventure becomes reflective of the politics of hegemonic Enlightenment Thought, as Marlow is an emissary of light who would wean the ignorant millions through reason and science. Or in Mbembe’s terms, because politics is the exercise of reason in the public sphere, expressed in general norms by a populace (Mbembe, 13), Marlow’s aunt’s views is evident of a systemic totality, which is Enlightenment as hegemony/sovereignty, at work.
However, there is no denying that the most apparent account of Enlightenment as hegemony/sovereignty is the figure of Kurtz. Kurtz is the quintessential embodiment of Enlightenment and Marlow’s ‘enlightenment, because “[a]ll Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz” (Conrad, 56) and to Marlow meeting Kurtz was “the culminating point of [his] experience” (8) First mentioned by name to Marlow by the accountant whom he met at the first station he arrives at, by the accountant’s description, Kurtz is a remarkable person (21). And on account of the manager’s spy, he was ‘a prodigy’, ‘an emissary of pity and science and progress’, a special being who comes with ‘higher intelligence, wide sympathies, a singleness of purpose for the guidance of the cause entrusted… by Europe’ (28). Marlow, who then is driven to ennui due to the inefficiencies at the company station, from his steamboat having been broken down and the difficulties experienced in finding rivets to repair it, remarks at the end of the chapter on how Kurtz becomes to him a curious figure that he began to obsess about because Kurtz seemed the only person who had come ‘equipped with moral ideas of some sort’ (34).

While these are preliminary, Kurtz being an embodiment of Europe so to speak, and an emissary of pity, science and progress, all of this is already telling of Enlightenment thinking’s values associated with modernity, rationalism, science and secular emancipation being associated with him. His description as being the only person with moral ideas of some sort also aligns with Cohen’s claim of rational man becoming a moral man. It is also worth mentioning that Kurtz is an idol to the Harlequin, and given Conrad’s intentionality on the use of words, since Marlow is to the narrator an idol resembling the Buddha, then by extension, Kurtz can also be interpreted as a Buddha of sorts, or at least to the Harlequin, as an enlightened figure similar to the Buddha (67). This can be further justified given that Kurtz, similar to popular Buddhist iconography, is ‘impressively bald’ (55). Even if he isn’t a Buddha in the literal sense, his character seems to
parallel the role of the renunciant that the historical Buddha met before he renounces his royal duties. That is, the renunciant the historical Buddha met had a shaven head, was dressed in ragged robes, was serene and self-possessed (Cohen, 114), much like Kurtz who Marlow—the Buddha figure in the story—meets before he encounters his ‘enlightened’ truth. Marlow’s encounter with Kurtz is therefore really the culminating point of his experience as Kurtz is to Marlow a figure indispensable for his enlightenment as was the renunciant to the historical Buddha before his own achievement of enlightenment.

A more systematic look into Marlow’s language describing Kurtz only proves further Cohen’s discursive analysis of Enlightenment, that Kantian Enlightenment man is a rational animal who becomes a moral animal who becomes a religious animal. An instance of such pronouncement is when Kurtz’ ideas are expressed through the conversation between the manager and his nephew that Marlow eavesdrop on. Kurtz’s vision of every station, which the two found ‘pestiferously absurd’ was that “each station should be like a beacon on the road towards better things, a center for trade, but also for humanizing, improving, instructing,” (Conrad, 37) acknowledging Enlightenment thought’s value for secular emancipation in colonial territories.

The most blatant expression of Enlightenment Thought ideals as hegemonic however is Kurtz’s report written for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs (56). According to Marlow, its opening paragraph is ominous, beginning with the argument of white superiority from the point of development: “[we whites] must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings – we approach them with the might as of a deity… By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded” (57). Such a claim becomes evident of Cohen’s analysis of European Enlightenment having
universalization and Christian-particularism as conditions for a cosmopolitical imaginary, upon which the claim to morality, extending to the idea of a mighty moral lawgiver outside the human being. Note that the ‘human being’ here is defined in the systemic totality of Enlightenment thought, and therefore, in biopolitical terms, is a body that is recognized as self-understanding, self-conscious, and self-representing (fully equal men and women) only in so far as the it is defined by the limits of Enlightenment reasoning/rationality (Mbembe, 13). Consequently, Enlightenment thought expressed as sovereignty self-rationalizes the conquest of lands deemed as savage on the basis that ‘savages’ not being within the boundaries of sovereign and is instead without and is part of the exclusionary limit. It is based on such rationale that the imperial/colonial horrors depicted within Heart of Darkness, reflective of the historical reality of Belgian Congo, occurs. It is clear then how Western Enlightenment thought functions biopolitically as an instrument of hegemony, an expression of sovereignty that is applied onto the global sociopolitical fabric, where territories, according to Mbembe, recognized as colonies are frontiers of sovereignty inhabited by “savages”, and its inhabitants are not recognized as an equal and fully ‘human’ (24).

2.4 Enlightenment in Hunter x Hunter

Hunter x Hunter I argue, not only also depicts Enlightenment in a similar manner as Heart of Darkness, as described in Cohen’s discursive analysis but also takes it a step further and layers it with not one expression of sovereignty but multiple. Thus, with the former having intertextual echoes of the latter in mind, I postulate that the image of the Buddha as it appears in Hunter x Hunter is also simply a veil that covers underneath it ideas associated with Western Enlightenment thought which in turn expresses itself as a systemic totality that becomes an instrument of hegemony. Unlike Heart of Darkness however which has explicit elements that tie
it to a Christian core, *Hunter x Hunter* simply depicts Buddhism as masked enlightenment beneath which a hegemonic sovereign is at work.

To gain such a discursive argument of Enlightenment in *Hunter x Hunter*, I first describe *Nen*, a feature within *Hunter x Hunter*’s narrative that provides logic to explain the supernatural abilities that characters display and its relevance to Enlightenment, followed by a breakdown of two central characters, Netero and Meruem, who are the representative figures of Enlightenment through their shared motifs relating to the Buddha.

**2.4.1. *Nen* as an ‘Enlightened’ Tool for Hegemonic Control**

Considered a Shonen manga, it isn’t surprising that *Hunter x Hunter*’s plot is primarily action and adventure focused, and so supernatural powers and abilities being a trope within the plotline is not surprising. What serves to explain how characters are capable of attaining such powers is the story world is *Nen*. The concept, which in the Japanese original uses the character ‘念’ meaning ‘thought’, ‘feeling’ or ‘desire’, is described as a technique that allows a living being to use and manipulate their own life energy to gain a variety of parapsychological abilities. It is worth noting that only a minority are capable of using it, and to add, most high-profile jobs contracted to the Hunter Association list knowledge of *Nen* as a minimum requirement (Vol 6). This is one of the reasons why Hunters are considered elite, given how most, if not all Hunters, are aware of and can use *Nen*. It is worth noting that the term used to describe people having attained *Nen* is also an ‘awakening’—覚醒 *Kakusei*—(Vol 24, 164). As such, anybody capable of using *Nen* is considered ‘awakened’ which has close associations with being ‘enlightened’. Thus, the acquisition of *Nen*, which can be viewed as an acquisition of knowledge through ‘awakening’, manifests as parapsychological abilities that provide characters who have attained it certain degrees of power with which they assert influence over their environment. Such a claim
is clear, given what Rammot, one of the Chimera Ant characters within the series says about it upon his awakening: “…yes, this is a destined talent gifted from heaven. A power belonging to the chosen. If I can master this ability… Even I can be King!!!” (Vol 19, 153)

The claim to ‘kingship’ here has more to do with Nen providing power that one can use to conquer, or rather be sovereign over others. Nen hence becomes symbolic of an enlightened individual that points towards metaphysical powers that mark characters as ‘chosen individuals’, or ‘Hunters’ more specifically, who by their powers attained become enchanted towards a hegemonic undertaking, seeking to find, discover, and conquer the unknown that is beyond them. This pits Nen into a system of biopolitical signs that become crucial in understanding how Enlightenment is expressed in the series.

With this in mind, Chairman Isaac Netero of the Hunter Association then becomes a significant figure of Enlightenment since his Nen ability summons a gigantic multi-armed Buddhist statue named Hyakushiki Kan’on—100 Type Guanyin Bodhisattva—(Vol 27, 160). This becomes reflective of Cohen’s Enlightenment described in his discursive analysis. That is, Netero clearly is a Buddha figure, akin to Marlow, in the sense that Buddhist imagery is used to depict his character. As described by Cohen’s analysis however, this Buddhist symbolism is simply a cloak, and beneath it lies Western Enlightenment values and ideals at its core which seeks to work hegemonically through its religiosity to its ideals. To perceive this clearly, one must understand how he gained his Nen ability, and how ironic Buddhism becomes a vessel through which violence and power to subjugate and conquer is expressed.

Netero’s attainment of his enlightenment is depicted in volume 25. Believing that he had reached the pinnacle of his physical potential in the martial arts at the age 46 (he is over 100 years old at the time of his death), he goes up into the mountains to reflect. He then begins,
having felt infinitely grateful to the martial arts that brought him to that point, an arduously long meditative training spanning two years to express his gratitude towards it. He accomplishes this by choosing to offer ten thousand punches a day in the following sequence: setting his mind, pressing his palms in prayer, pray, take stance, and finally thrust. In the end, he realizes that he is capable of completing his ten thousand punches of gratitude before the sun sets. By age 50, he had become capable of completing this ritual in under one hour. He then descends from the mountain, returning to the *dojo* he had originally begun training in to demonstrate his new strength. The grandmaster of the *dojo* upon seeing his strike that apparently surpassed the speed of sound, notes that he had glimpsed the Guanyin and is moved to tears, before willingly offering the title of Grand Master to him along with the dojo, begging to be trained. Such are the circumstances in which Netero gains enlightenment (82-87). Not long after this, he is considered one of the strongest *Nen* users in the world (Vol 32, 193), then survives two expeditions to the Dark Continent with a survival rate of 0.04% (Vol 33) and eventually becomes the Chairman of the Hunter Association. All these accomplishments which further depict him as an enlightened figure in as far as ‘enlightened’ denotes him being an emissary of progress just as much as an individual who commands respect. Noting his successful expedition to the Dark Continent especially, he can be considered as a ‘first class agent’ as Kurtz is described in the *Heart of Darkness*.

It is significant to note here that, in line with Cohen’s point on man’s aspect to religiosity, the method used by Netero to attain his Buddha-related powers was founded on his religiosity – to offer ten thousand punches a day painstakingly for years. Furthermore, while he sought to attain this power in gratitude for martial arts, at his core, he sought for the peak of martial arts in order to “duel with a formidable enemy against whom he could offer the whole of his soul to
defeat” (Vol 28, 18-19). His preference for power is iterated when he claims he “only needs the powerful, not cat’s paws” when speaking about the kind of help he needs for the extermination of the Chimera Ants (Vol 19, 191). It begins to become clear then that what is symbolized by Netero’s Buddhistic enlightenment has more to do with power and its associations with conquest. It becomes quite ironic then that the Guanyin, an enlightened being who is considered an embodiment of compassion, becomes a tool of violence that is used by Netero to battle his opponent – a clear portrayal of Buddhism being simply a cloak that masks the power for violence. One can even argue further on the overlap in the meaning ‘compassion’ as used here, and ‘benevolence’ in Heart of Darkness, and a parallel between Kurtz claiming that he approaches native Africans with the might of a deity and Netero’s own depiction as a deified Buddha. Hence, in a similar manner as Heart of Darkness, Buddhistic Enlightenment becomes a façade that conceals a more sinister meaning.

2.4.2. Enlightenment Thought and Institutional Sovereignty in Hunter x Hunter

Netero’s seemingly noble and respectful demeanor as emphasized by his relation to Buddhahood and his accomplishments in fact becomes more questionable when his associations with the higher powers that be is considered. This is to say that, even as Chairman of the Hunter Association, Netero had to answer to a forum named V5, (an intergovernmental political forum that consists of the world’s leaders) the sovereign entity which bespeaks of a systemic totality at work in the world of Hunter x Hunter. It is the V5 that seems to be at work in the shadows, not only sending teams to the Dark Continent for the promise of profit and fame of discovery (Vol 33, 15), but it was also at their behest that Netero was ordered to exterminate the Chimera Ants (Volume 27, 157-158). Netero is therefore a central character whose actions culminate in the events that follow Chimera Ant arc. It is precisely his death that is the trigger that: 1) causes the Kakin Empire to publicly declare an expedition to the Dark Continent, his son Beyond Netero
leading the expedition precisely because his father died, who had forbid him to set out (Vol 33, 16); 2) causes the V5 to consequently react to Kakin’s bold declaration and invite it to its ranks, becoming the V6, with the intention that the spoils of the expedition be equally shared among them (ibid, 33); 3) has Netero come clean with his intentions in a video recording that expressed his final will, which is for the Hunter Association to also partake in the Dark Continent expedition (ibid, 17-18). Netero is thus, at least in line with Cohen’s discursive analysis, at the center of and is a center piece of a hegemonic totality that seeks to conquer and colonize lands for fame and profit.

Therefore, an apparent overlap between the V5 and Cohen’s expression of a systemic totality begins to present itself. That is, the V5, when considered a systemic totality, clearly assimilates other meanings to itself while providing an identity only insofar as it creates an equivalence among everything on the inside, but excludes, devalues, and makes a potential antagonist of everything that does not participate in that order as Cohen describes, and this is seen in its treatment of Kakin, incorporating it to its ranks on one hand, and its treatment of the Chimera Ants, exterminating it, treating it as an antagonist Other on the other.

2.4.3 The Parallels of Chimera Ants and Japan in the Meiji Period, and Sovereignty’s relation to Modernity

The Chimera Ant arc’s relevance within our discursive Enlightenment framework thus begins to become relevant, given the premise established so far. This is to say that the Chimera Ants are treated as the exclusionary limit, within a larger totality at work as a hegemon. And yet, one must remember that Chimera Ant’s themselves are a totality in themselves. Reiterating from chapter 1 that the Chimera Ants are parallel to imperial Japan, they are thus just as much an expression of Enlightenment as is Netero, the Hunter Association and the V5, who are
representative of the wider West. This applies when we understand Japan’s own history of modernization during the Meiji period.

During the Meiji period, Japan’s customs and manners changed drastically from the feudalistic *shogunate* system to adopting western culture in order to catch up with the west, all with the belief in the inexorability of progress tied to western examples that committed to science, technology and utilitarian knowledge (McCargo, 21). During this period, Japan had promulgated a constitution heavily based on German political and legal ideas in 1889, the constitution being a marker for modernity, Japan being the first modern nation-state in Asia (ibid, 24). Japan had also adopted institutional models based on those of Britain, France, Germany and the United States (ibid, 21). These major sociopolitical developments were famously understood and termed as ‘*bunmei kaika*’ by Fukuzawa Yukichi in his rendering of the ideas of ‘civilization and enlightenment’ in his book *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*, establishing the relationship between modernization and linkage to Enlightenment thinking.

This is precisely why I choose to interpret the rapid evolution and progression of the Chimera Ants depicted in *Hunter x Hunter* through the devouring of humans as an act of assimilation of Western ideals through Phagogenesis – reproduction through devouring. Importantly then, Japan by the end of the Meiji period had successfully transformed into a modern secular ‘enlightened’ nation state, the nation-state being an expression of sovereignty with Enlightenment thought and its associated values as its foundation. Hence, Japan had achieved its own sovereignty, its own modernity through its adoption of Western ideals, if we take Mbembe’s stance that modernity is at the origin of multiple concepts of sovereignty (and by extension the biopolitical) (Mbembe, 13). However, this is where Naoki Sakai’s view on the relation of modernity and the Orient, that modernity in the strictest Western sense excludes the
possibility of the modern non-West (Sakai, 94) as mentioned in the previous chapter, begins to apply.

Sakai elaborates that because the West thinks itself ubiquitous with regard to its subjective modern identity, it thus represented the moment of the universal under which particulars are subsumed (95). Hence, drawing from the Japanese intellectual Yoshimi Takeuchi, Sakai makes explicit of the involuntary nature of modernity for the non-West through its spatio-temporal relationship to the West (114). Modernity for the Orient is therefore primarily its subjugation to the West’s political, military and economic control, as the modern Orient came into being only when it was invaded, defeated and exploited by the West (ibid). In other words, the West is the universal point of reference that others recognize themselves as particularities, and in Japan’s case, it is only the West that has the power to recognize Japan as modern. Japan therefore, despite its modernizing efforts which even began to replicate the West’s colonizing mission onto its Asian neighbors, could not be discerned as modern, and therefore as sovereign, sovereign here being that which can exercise its own subjectivity.

This is precisely why the two contrastive Buddhistic characters in *Hunter x Hunter* come into conflict, because the Buddha becomes the figure through which the achievement of modernity is perceived but take on contrastive appearances due to subjectivity defined by speciesism. Hence, the Hunter Association, headed by Netero and representative of the totalizing West, are represented by Togashi as human and cannot fathom another equal subjectivity coming from a non-Western counterpart. Hence, the Chimera Ants, depicted as animal due to their being believed to have come from the story world’s Dark Continent\(^8\)— due to its hegemonic nature.

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\(^8\) The Dark Continent, while a reference to Africa, in the context of *Hunter x Hunter* should not be conflated directly as such. Togashi uses the term to depict the imaginary power that it holds onto a fictive land within his story world that has overlaps with how Africa is perceived in the West’s imaginary. Given the Chimera Ants overlap with imperial Japan, one can interpret that the Dark Continent here also includes the Western perception of the Orient.
Hence, it posits what is outside of it as, borrowing Dower, the ‘antipodal stereotype of the incorrigibly evil Other’ (Dower, 255), exemplified by Togashi’s Specieicism that outwardly depicts the Chimera Ants as non-human antagonists. This is all the more applicable when considering historical contexts, that the Japanese, in the eyes of the United States and Britain during WWII were more hated than the Germans before as well as after Pearl Harbor, and were perceived not only as a race apart, but also a species apart (Dower, 8). And yet ironically, Japanese modernization itself required resistance through assimilation of Western Enlightenment values (bunmei kaika) which manifested in imperial/colonial action of the Japanese empire. It becomes apparent then how the Japanese empire, or in the context of Hunter x Hunter, the Chimera Ants, also have Enlightenment Thought at its core.

This claim that Enlightenment Thought is expressed even through the Chimera Ants is further elaborated when one considers Meruem as a character. Despite being the mirror opposite of Netero, he is depicted with elongated earlobes that is undoubtedly Buddhist iconography. The name Meruem itself, bestowed upon him by his mother, the Ant Queen, is described as ‘Light that illuminates all’ – a reference to enlightenment. And if one were to take a distant look at his overall narrative progression, he, like the historical Buddha himself, is born a royal and embarks out onto the outside world, attributing Buddhist enlightenment to his characterization. The Buddhist configuration is once again, a veil, since Meruem’s outlook from the moment he is born is that the ultimate purpose of life is dominative power to conquer others, which is in line with Enlightenment’s tendency to be a systemic totality of domination. The way he is depicted on the cover of Volume 24, with his hand clasping over the earth’s globe, speaks of his aim to conquer the world, emphasizing Enlightenment’s tendency to domination. Furthermore, Meruem’s enlightenment overlaps Kurtz’s enlightenment in that Meruem’s own words are
similarly noble and eloquent as the latter. As Netero seeks to begin a battle to the death with him, he initially refuses, seeking to discuss:

“I do not understand. Do you [Netero] fight for the human species’ sake? If so, then my own actions are in fact an offer for co-operation. For example, in human society there are national borders that are similar to territories. On the right of the border, children starve and die, and on the left, there are scums who do nothing but own everything. It is a mad state of affairs. I offer to break that. Allow me to offer a world so fair without such irrational difference! I admit I will use power and terror at first, but only to maintain an order and discipline. I have learnt why I have gained power. To protect the weak that should be let live. Not to tyrannize the defeated. And therefore I, the King, will not fight you. I willingly chose to change locations because I simply wanted to reason with you.” (Vol 27, 154-156)

It thus goes without saying, noticing the logic that justifies the use of “power and terror to maintain an order and discipline” under the pretense of “protecting the weak that should be let live,” arguing that this is reason, that all of this reflects Meruem’s as an embodiment of Enlightenment Thought.

2.5 Summary

Given all of this, I believe I have clearly laid out the strings of Enlightenment thought and how it finds expression in its various meanings in both *Heart of Darkness* and *Hunter x Hunter*. Summarily, I: 1) outlined Cohen’s discursive argument as a framework to understand Enlightenment, 2) demonstrated how such a framework is expressed cross-narratively in *Heart of Darkness* and *Hunter x Hunter*, while sustaining a biopolitical, postcolonial, and intertextual historicogeopolitical outlook.

What became clear from such an undertaking is that 1) ‘Enlightenment’ is an idea whose semiotics is polyvalent as sign. It evokes many meanings at once, of Buddhism, of the European historical phenomenon named the Age of Enlightenment, or of a particular string of Christianity. Its signifier however is empty. This is to say that no one image stands for it, and so the signified becomes indefinite. This is because its signifier is unstable, no one image fully captures its
meaning—the signified evoked in the mind. 2) When constricted to a historicogeopolitical outlook that questions modernity however, ‘Enlightenment’ is first filled with the religious, because man is religious species, *Homo Religiosus* while having Christianity at its core in the Western context because Christianity was the threshold crossed to define what was modern by Enlightenment thinkers of Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries – the Age of Enlightenment. Its associated values and ideas were rationalism, science, and secular emancipation *against religion*. 3) Those who adhered to such values then were considered ‘modern’ while those who did not were ‘primitive’ or ‘non-modern’. But because the human being is anthropologically inclined to religion, rationality becomes morality that rationalizes to others said values to the point that it becomes a religion, or a monistic hegemony. Hence, the Age of Enlightenment was the beginning of the idea of the universal that shaped the understanding of what is ‘modern’ and what is ‘non-modern’ through its repudiation of Christianity, with the center being Europe. This idea universalized in turn became a hegemonic tool to rationalize its benefits (science, rationalism and secular emancipation) onto its Others. 4) This manifests as sovereignty, which in the biopolitical sense, is synonymous to biopower that has led to the control and subjugation of the European Other in history, which is intimately tied to the imperial/colonial across time.

This is whereby I provided an account of how Enlightenment expresses itself narratively in the imperial/colonial past through a comparative literary analysis of, on one hand, Joseph Conrad’s classic novella *Heart of Darkness* whose setting is in Belgian Congo in the late 19th century, and on the other, Togashi Yoshihiro’s Japanese manga *Hunter x Hunter* that fantastically renders the atomic bombing in Japan at the end of WWII on the basis of their inherent intertextuality. The strength of such an analysis is proven further by what is a
coincidental link between the two historical phenomena: that the uranium used in the making of the atomic bomb in Japan was in fact mined from the colonial regime in the Congo.
Chapter 3. The Horrors of Enlightenment: A Parallactic Vision

In the empire of silence, the act of ‘turning away’ is a vain exorcism of a familiar daemon that breaches the citadels we ever change, ever fortify again. Dragging us back though old routes of anguish, it suggests: “Alas, human, your nature relishes fratricidal blood.”

But to be human is to be intrinsically, totally, resolutely good, is it not?

Nothing entertains the devil as much as this protestation.

Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, “Weight of Whispers”

In the previous chapter, I established that Enlightenment was by its very nature polyvalent, but with its signifier being empty. By using Cohen’s work as a literary framework however, a clearer understanding of Enlightenment was established. i.e., Western Enlightenment is the prevalent signifier when modernity is brought into question. This enabled a reading of how Enlightenment as theme expresses itself narratively in Heart of Darkness and Hunter x Hunter, where Enlightenment is introduced and symbolized by characters with Buddhist imagery, but Buddhist imagery is only a ‘cloak’ for values of Enlightenment Thought that shape modern perceptions. I would like then to move on and provide a parallactic double vision of the subsequent literary theme of Enlightenment, the Horrors of Enlightenment as affected by Enlightenment’s modernist perception existent in both texts.

Again, such a parallactic reading of the theme of Horror is provided for both texts on the premise that 1) Hunter x Hunter is an intertextual text, echoing Conradian sensibilities in its plot, and 2) there is a historical linkage of between the atomic bombing in Japan at the end of World War II alluded in Hunter x Hunter and colonial extraction of uranium in Belgian Congo, alluded in Heart of Darkness, events which are geopolitically charged in relation to modernity. I consider Toni Morrison’s thinking of literature, that “when the imagination produces work which bears
and invites rereadings, which motions to future readings as well as contemporary ones, implies a shareable world and an endlessly flexible language” (Morrison, xii) as integral to this exploration. In other words, given the context of intertextuality of the texts considered—a shareable, or rather, shared world—even if such intertextuality was coincidental, these two works, one a fantastical graphic novel, and the other an auto-fictive novella, when brought together can offer an interesting literary take on imperial/colonial phenomena that have been shaped by Enlightenment thought.

Also, as I made clear in the closing remark of chapter 1, Achille Mbembe’s necropolitics is foundational in offering this double-visioned framework to understand how Enlightenment Thought has come to express itself. I argue that it is through the biopolitical mechanics of sovereignty, given Mbembe’s assertion that modernity is at the origin of multiple concepts sovereignty (13), that the Horrors of Enlightenment can be understood. I achieve this through the following systematic manner: 1) provide the historical context of the linkage between colonial Congo and Japan’s atomic bombing, and describing how both events are central in the outlook of modernity; 2) with the historical linkage and its relation to modernity established, discuss race as a ‘shadow’ of Enlightenment, analyzing how it is used by Achille Mbembe, Naoki Sakai and Toni Morrison. 3) propose a new outlook on perceiving racial whiteness and racial blackness (non-whiteness), adopting Will Bridges; 4) elaborate on how Enlightenment ideas shaped such modern European notions of race, 5) provide a literary analysis of the ‘Horror of Enlightenment’ as expressed necropolitically in each of the works considered for analysis.

3.1 Historical Context of the Congo and its relation to Japan’s Atomic Bombing
To understand the linkage between colonial Congo and Japan’s atomic bombing, one must first understand how Congo became a colony. This began with the imperial ambitions of King Leopold II of Belgium, who was unsatisfied with his sovereign power over what he thought
was a small country and a small people (Hochschild 1999, 38). His colonial interests had begun even before ascension to the throne in 1865, where in 1862, he had traveled to Seville, Spain, with a deep primary interest in understanding colonial profits, researching Seville’s Indies archives that held all decrees, government and court records, correspondence, maps and architectural drawings that have to do with the Spanish conquest of the Americas (36-37). As such, Adam Hochschild notes that Leopold’s ambition for the acquisition of a colony was so heated, it was nothing less than obsessive. Such obsession was partly flamed by a loveless childhood (34) and a struggling marriage (35-36, 39), but also flamed by a desire for money and power during a time royal authority was gradually giving way to that of an elected parliament across western Europe (39). Belgium being quite late to the colonial game relative to her European counterparts, with no more unclaimed territories in the Americas, no blank spaces in Asia already occupied, Leopold thus attempted to acquire already colonized lands from his Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch counterparts, but was only met with their reluctance, a cause for his frustrations (41). It was then that he began to set his sights for Africa in the mid 1870s, where large swathes of territory still remained unconquered.

And so, with a cultivated brilliance and charm that he developed over the years, Leopold setup a well-thought strategy to acquire a colony of his own. That is, because he was a king of a small country whose cabinet had no public interest in colonies, he recognized that a colonial push of his own would require a strong humanitarian veneer (42). Hence, he set up an elaborate public relations scheme that cloaked his greed in the rhetoric of Christian philanthropy, advocating for the curbing of the Arab slave trade, moral uplift and the advancement of science in Africa (ibid). He consequently hosts a conference of explorers and geographers in Brussells in
1876, named the Geographical Conference (43), in which his given speech clothed his colonial aspirations in noble rhetoric that gained the stamp of approval from his hosts:

“To open to civilization the only part of our globe which it has not yet penetrated, to pierce the darkness which hangs over entire people, is I dare, say, a crusade worthy of this center of progress...” (44).

The conference successfully ends deciding on the “location of routes to be successively opened into the interior, of hospitable, scientific, and pacification bases” that would be staffed by a half-dozen or so unarmed Europeans—scientists, linguists and artisans who would teach practical skills to the natives” (45). Note that Leopold’s language is reflective of Enlightenment values as discussed in the previous chapter, and is eerily similar to Kurtz vision of what each station should be, “a beacon on the road towards better things, a center for trade, but also for humanizing, improving, instructing,” (Conrad, 37).

What followed then was Leopold’s hiring the famous explorer Henry Morton Stanley from 1878-1884 to navigate the Congo River under the auspices of the International Association of the Congo established by Leopold, having Stanley make treaties with native chiefs that “[backed] the rights of private companies to act as if they were sovereign countries” (Hochschild, 61-71). He then lobbied first the United States and then all the major nations of Europe in to recognizing the Congo as belonging to him personally. This fact is significant, as it implicates the United States in the very set up of the colonial regime in the Congo, established with Enlightenment ideals at its core. Furthermore, this was achieved through Leopold’s meticulous philanthropist façade that promised, in a letter to President Arthur, that “American citizens would be free to buy land in the Congo and that American goods would be free of customs duties there (78). This was of course a given even to Belgium’s European counterparts,
given that Leopold’s colony (finally proclaimed official in 1885 post-Berlin Conference) was a free-state, a zone that would allow freedom of navigation, arbitration of differences, Christian missionaries, and most importantly free trade (86).

Leopold’s reign of the Congo Free State did not last forever. The brutalities within the free state (with the severing of native hands for failing to harvest expected quotas of rubber being perhaps the most striking detail) (Hochschild, Chapter 8) became public in 1904 through the Casement report and raised an international outcry (ibid, Chapter 17), eventually leading to the end of Leopold’s rule and to the annexation of the Congo as a colony of Belgium, known as the "Belgian Congo", until formal acquisition of independence on 30 June 1962 (Ndahinda, 146). The annexation of Congo under Belgium rule was expected to work towards the betterment of the conditions of the native population, but in reality, as Felix Ndahinda notes, Belgian management of the colony brought only modest improvements to the status and living conditions of the natives—the coercive and brutal methods of exploitation of the natives only relatively softened (ibid).

With the Congo under Belgian colonial rule until 1960, it was directly involved in the two World Wars as a supplier of raw materials. Given the context of this thesis, I will not delve into Belgian Congo’s involvement in the first world war, but in WWII, it became a strategic supplier of rubber to the Allies after Malaya fell to the Japanese empire in January 1942 (Dummett, 396). 1942 was also the year that the United States joined the Allies, and this development led to the Belgian government negotiating a new economic agreement with the United States. One must remember the ties that the United States already had previously with the colony, offering recognition to Leopold’s Congo Free State, so such an undertaking seems hardly surprising. Evidently, as Susan William’s book Spies in the Congo illustrates, the colony became
one of the major exporters of uranium to the US during World War II, particularly from the Shinkolobwe mine, which was used for the Manhattan Project, including in the making of atomic bombs dropped on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Thus, not only do we see how the Western colonial enterprise is interlinked with how the WWII ended by providing the resources necessary for the development of nuclear technology, but also how modernity is predicated with EuroAmerica as its center as Sakai’s explanation of Modernization theory\(^9\) illustrates—an idea that is well founded on Enlightenment values of progress and rationalism. Sakai’s illustration implicitly describes how the Age of Enlightenment provided the environment that Europe, and later America, rationalized its universality because Enlightenment ‘[represented] the most dense universalistic social formation’, which proved Euroamerica as ‘the most advanced particularity, ahead of less universalistic and more particularistic societies in the historical time of rationalization’ (Sakai 98-99).

Mbembe’s language seems to further confirm this, because to him, the concept of *reason* (emphasis mine) is made one of the most important elements of both the project of modernity project and topos (literary convention) of sovereignty (Mbembe, 13). So, said sovereignty, with reason and unreason to define a certain idea of *political, community, subject, good life* and *how it is achieved*, then becomes a full moral agent by the exercise of its self-institution and self-limitation (ibid). When such an exercise of sovereignty (often expressing itself as nationalism) becomes a universal project (seeking to change and rationalize social institutions in a global level) the justification of that particular sovereign to dominate and conquer others becomes complete (Sakai, 99). And if we continue along Mbembe’s line of thought, that sovereignty is intimately linked to death insofar as politics is a work of death and thus sovereignty is biopower

\(^9\) Modernization, which had meant Europeanization was reconfigured with the United States as center of the West, making modernization equivalent to Americanization
that defines the right to kill (Necropolitics, 16) it is not hard to see manifestations of such an
exercise on one hand in the colony, as seen in the Congo, Africans considered being within the
state of exception, hence disposable, and on the other, what can be considered a kind of ‘Final
Solution’ that was the atomic bombing of Japan during the state of emergency that was WWII.
Importantly, Mbembe’s configuration of the politics of death contains within it race as an ever-
present shadow (emphasis mine) that imagines the inhumanity of, and rule over, foreign peoples
(17).

3.2 Race as Haunting Shadow of Enlightenment: Towards a Reconstructive View of
Racial Blackness

Notably, Mbembe is not the only scholar who has defined race as a ‘shadow’. Sakai
himself describes the Orient as shadow of the West (Sakai, 117), with race as an implicit fact
contributing to the distinction of the two. He also adds that “…the relationship between the West
and the non-West seems to follow the old and familiar formula of master/slave (100). And Toni
Morrison crucially describes Africanist presence as a shadow to whiteness in her work Playing in
the Dark (33). She eloquently describes how Africanist blackness became a fabricated concept
associated with non-freedom and polarity of skin color within American literature. She describes
it within the context of the history of the United States, calling it specifically as “American
Africanism”—a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire that is uniquely
American (38). She also adds that European Africanism is American Africanism’s counterpart in
colonial literature (ibid). Morrison thus provides a link between American and European views
on Africanist blackness, which I argue speaks to the glaring similarities of language describing
the Africanist black Other found American literature and European colonial literature often
connotated with savagery and animality. –I will touch on Sakai’s view of the Orient as West’s
shadow momentarily.
Given all this, what emerges is that Western sovereignty, founded on Enlightenment, is a paradox of simultaneous idealism and apparent inhumanity. The idealism expresses itself in the utopian belief in the power of human reason while spinning various narratives of mastery and emancipation underpinned by Enlightenment understandings of truth and error (Mbembe, 19). And yet, adopting Morrison, such romanticized narratives simultaneously excluded the Other while (adopting Sakai) stripping them of their subjectivity, making them mere ‘shadows’ or ‘specters that haunt’, i.e., the existence of the shadowed Other is real, but is never fully acknowledged, like a ghost. Shadows then become defined by their ‘sub-humanness’/’non-humanness’ as defined by the truth and error of Enlightenment, although the extent to which this manifests, I argue, differs dependent on the sovereign’s extent of domination on the shadow, and the extent of resistance that the shadow puts up against the sovereign. Which is why Mbembe defines in one instance the slave’s humanity as the perfect figure of a shadow, their condition being a triple loss: loss of a “home,” loss of rights over their body, and loss of political status, synonymous with, natal alienation absolute domination, and social death respectively (21). He then also implicitly states the shadow status of a colony, as colonies “…inhabited by savages...are not organized in a state form and have not created human worlds. (23)” Hence, to the sovereign conqueror, savage life is just another form of animal life that is part of nature needing subjugation, appearing like phantoms, unreal and ghostlike” (ibid). Meanwhile, Sakai defines the Orient as the West’s shadow to the extent that the Orient’s modern subjectivity is stripped from it (118) due to the Orient’s relative heterogeneity to the West. That is, in order for a modern nation state to acquire its subjectivity, the folk collectively formed and identified under the reign of the state needs to “negatively mediate other [heterogenous] folk” because of the necessity of the elimination of heterogeneity to construct a nation (118). This is cloaked under
what he terms as the Hegelian “universal homogenous sphere” that assumed a European particularism (ibid). This justified the West’s invasion, defeat and exploitation of the Orient.

So summarily, we begin to see how Enlightenment not only accommodated slavery at its inception because the concept of freedom emerged, was highlighted, in fact created by, the antithetical concept of slavery (Morrison, 38) but also became a prelude to the imperial/colonial actions of the West onto the globe, culminating in, at least in the context of the two literary texts I compare, the postcolonially charged historical contexts of colonial Congo and the WWII atomic bombing of Japan. Hence, if Enlightenment is a light that cast EuroAmerica into modernity with a specific definition of who a human is, it cast the rest of the world, understood as the non-West, into the shadows on the basis of race.

At this juncture of understanding that Enlightenment only cast a portion of the global population into the light of ‘truth’ while casting others into the shadows, it seems almost natural how semantic associations between light and racial whiteness seems to emerge. And at least in the confines of American literature and European colonial literature, reiterating Morrison, darkness then became perniciously associated with phenotypic racial blackness, and this blatantly shows in Conrad’s depiction of native Africans in the Heart of Darkness representative of European colonial literature as Morrison illustrates in Playing in the Dark. Arguing that the plot in Hunter x Hunter is also cast in the same racial logic, requires a more elaborate explanation. This is where I rely on Sakai’s view of the shadow which seem to suggest that such semantic associations are not strictly, at least more globally, in the binary confines of phenotypic whiteness/blackness as Morrison holds. I also rely on W.E.B Du Bois, Morrison’s much older African American contemporary who finds companionship with Sakai’s view just as much as he does with Morrison, to further support my argument. I then finally bring Will Bridges’
perspective on modern race and blackness in the context of Japanese literature to drive my point of home.

In *Souls of White Folk*, Du Bois refers to modernity as White Supremacy, noting its racial logic as so vast in scale and elaborate in detail such that it is an imperial project of proportions not seen in the world before (932). He notes how such logic emphasizes pernicious semantic associations of values based on color, i.e., everything good, great, efficient, fair and honorable is “white”; everything mean, bad, blundering, cheating and dishonorable is “yellow”; a bad taste is “brown”; and the devil is “black” (933). His acknowledgement of a global racial hierarchy is significant especially when he adds how Japan is a nation that dares subvert the logics of modern race when he wrote the piece in 1920. He says:

“when [w]hite supremacy was all but world-wide… [t]emporary halt in this program was made by little Japan, and the white world immediately sensed the peril of such “yellow” presumption! What sort of a world would this be if such “yellow” men must be treated “white”?” (1987, 932).

This is significant in as far as the white race is at the center, while the others are on the margins. Given this, I would like, thinking alongside ideas brought forth in Will Bridges’ *Playing in the Shadows: Fictions of Race and Blackness in Postwar Japanese Literature*¹⁰, a more nuanced understanding of ‘whiteness’ and ‘blackness’ as it is associated with ‘light’ as in Enlightenment, and ‘shadow’. That is, I propose, given Du Bois’ hierarchy of races – broadly speaking white/non-white (or in other terms West/non-West)—can the “yellow”, the “brown” and the “black”, by virtue of being tinged by darkness (or non-whiteness), be considered, metaphorically, black?

¹⁰ Note Wiill Bridges’ title of his monograph is a riff of Toni Morisson’s *Playing in the Dark*
I argue that such a proposal is logical given how the issue of race is predicated within Enlightenment, which necessitates Europe—and the United States at the moment of founding—to define themselves as racially white relative to others. Add the fact that Enlightenment was defining towards the culmination of the Rights of Man in France (and Europe more largely) and the United States that defined a certain outlook of who a human being is, the antithesis to racial whiteness becomes naturally its antonym ‘racial blackness’. Said blackness, I must reiterate, from a postcolonial global and literary standpoint, is not always necessarily phenotypic. It is instead a social fiction with biological underpinnings that finds expression narratively (Bridges, 4) and I add that creative authorial diction, often influenced by culture, influences said narration within literary texts. That is, blackness, as Will Bridges describes, instead has more to do with ontology (the nature of being). Therefore, an attempt to define blackness is an attempt to think through being (or perhaps, nonbeing) in the social world (ibid, 12-13). It is an attempt to view what a ‘black human soul’, borrowing from Bridges, as defined by the perimeters of Enlightenment thought that seeks to create a European Juridical Order – *Jus Publicum Europaem* (Mbembe, 24). Hence, “blackness” in this social and of course political world from a postcolonial standpoint holds the potential for multivalent imaginings of fictions of race, finding expression in anything considered by the sovereign subject as ‘black’. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that Hannah Arendt also criticizes the perspective of the Human upheld by the Rights of Man as follows:

“…in view of objective political conditions, it is hard to say how the concepts of man upon which human rights are based-that he is created in the image of God (in the American formula), or that he is the representative of mankind, or that he harbors within
himself the sacred demands of natural law (in the French formula) - could have helped to find a solution to the problem.” (Arendt, 93)

Now, if Sakai’s line of thinking on Modernization Theory applies here (that modernization meant Europeanization, then Americanization post-WWII), we then begin to see how even ‘blackness’ may manifest, considering *Hunter x Hunter*, in postwar Japanese literature. This is in part due to Morrison’s view where in Western literature (American and European) blackness informs its texture in compelling and inescapable ways as both a visible and an invisible mediating force (46).

If such is true, Will Bridges in *Playing in the Shadows* argues by adopting Morrison that non-Western literature, by virtue of contact with and influence of the dominating West, would also express a racial ‘blackness’ within it both visibly and invisibly. This is the reason Bridges postulates the existence of blackness in non-Western literature, more specifically postwar Japanese literature. He premises his assertion in the words of Tanaka Minoru, a Japanese literary critic who stated that the secret of the birth of the modern novel in Japan could be discovered by understanding how Japan came to terms with the arrival of Commodore Perry’s ships to open its borders for trade (Bridges, 1). Interestingly, these very black ships had African American soldiers and servants that were meant to impress and intimidate the Japanese, hoping to relay to them what would await them if they were to show resistance to American might (ibid). Hence, transposing Morrison’s belief that “as metaphor for transacting the whole process of Americanization, blackness may be something the United States cannot do without,” Bridges argues how such ideas of blackness permeated by virtue of contact within modern Japanese literature so that also “in the process of [modern] Japanization, blackness might be something postwar Japanese literature cannot do without” (2). Blackness in Japanese literature then, he
adds, has a double vision: 1) Representative blackness, insofar as Japanese literature represents blackness that can be seen with the naked eye; 2) Reconstructive readings of blackness, i.e., even in the absence of representations of black characters, there are translational, intertextual, experimental and shared historical moments of contact between Japanese literature and Morrison’s Africanist understanding of blackness. (220) Such reconstructive readings then allows postwar Japanese authors, to “reimagine the ascription of race to bodies (bodies of literature, the body politic, or the human body itself) (3), …playing with and reimagining how we think about racialized human beings, testing the epistemological limits of the relationship between race and being” (14).

I propose that the latter reconstructive reading of racial blackness finds expression in the Chimera Ants representing Japan in *Hunter x Hunter* through Speciesism as elaborated both in the interlude and Enlightenment chapter. That is, Togashi’s use of the ant motif is expressive of a critical outlook of Enlightenment. He achieves this because of the ants’ instinctive nature to form colonies, and their very organization seem to be reflective of an imperial tendency to mark and/or expand its territory, especially given how ants themselves often conduct territorial wars amongst each other. What is curious then is how Togashi complicates the use of such a motif. Or to put it differently, the ant motif ends up having a double meaning. First, when taken literally, the ant motif that is inherently associated with the imperial/colonial is pit against humanity’s tendency to also be imperial/colonial, the very justification of imperality/coloniality based on perceived superiority is brought to question. That is, how different are humans who justify imperial/colonial action, due to their perceived enlightenment, from ants? Second, when taking into consideration the symbolic historical representation of the Chimera Ants, along with Togashi’s making explicit that the Chimera Ants were never really fully non-human to begin
with, and as the plot progresses, some of the Ants begin to seem as human as the humans themselves, and some of the human characters also display “savage-like characteristics”, the very relationship between race and being as expressed through speciesism is brought into question. In other words, is the subjective perception of the Hunter Association on the Chimera Ants, that they are ‘dangerous creatures’ worth exterminating valid when the Ant characters’ anecdotal evidence makes the Ants’ humanity as evident as the savagery of characters depicted as fully human? Does Enlightenment thinking that justifies racial superiority truly hold?

It becomes clear then that ‘racial blackness’ is not necessarily skin deep, and such an understanding will be crucial in the developing literary analysis that will show Mbembe’s necropolitics in each of the works studied. But before that, I will elaborate on how Enlightenment ideas shaped such modern fictions of race that manifests in the broad binary of ‘racial whiteness’ and ‘racial blackness’.

3.3 Nature and the Shadow of Race: The Development of Modern Racial Classification through Enlightenment

It is apparent how race is a contingent issue within Enlightenment Thought, but how such became manifest has not been made clear. I take Devin Vartija’s article on Enlightenment’s racial classification as seminal to such an understanding. In “Revisiting Enlightenment racial classification”, Vartija demonstrates the context within which Enlightenment’s 18th century race concepts developed, with new understandings of nature and deep time being pivotal in new understandings of humanity’s place at the time. Simply, modern racial classification traces back to Enlightenment thought philosophes who on the one hand advocated for equality of rights, liberty and autonomy, but violated the very same principles as they expanded the transatlantic slave trade and deepened the colonial project (Vartija, 606) on the other. Undergirding such a paradox was how during this time human beings were conceived as part of the natural world as a
species that can and should be classified alongside all other living organisms. He quotes Johann Friedrich Blumenbach who pointed out how Europeans realized in the eighteenth century that “man is also a natural product, and consequently ought as any other to be handled from the point of natural history according to the difference of race, bodily and national peculiarities” (607). Hence, modern racial classification was understood as an “overextension” of biological classification (ibid). This therefore made race, despite its biological incoherence due to the human genome being 99.9 percent identical, a biological fiction that overlapped with taxonomy, making racial thinking possible.

To be clear, this does not imply that race was a newly-found concept at the beginning of the Age of Enlightenment. The concept of race undoubtedly existed prior and was instead reconfigured towards classification that was made necessary to understand humanity’s place in nature which challenged older Christian traditions that had proven inadequate or inaccurate. In other words, the Enlightenment philosophes had their own intellectual tutelage to overcome and were posing new questions, the answers to which would by no means be definitive (613). Importantly, for this reason, their conclusions were prone to, as human as they were, to bias.

Now because the discovery of the New World and Scientific Revolution occurred simultaneously in the 18th century along with Enlightenment thinking, the period was a turning point in reflections on human diversity. To Vartija, Comte de Buffon and Denis Diderot were the most prominent Enlightenment thinkers to engage in this debate, with their contributions revealing how reflections on human diversity intersected with broader religious and philosophical issues concerning the nature of matter and life (608). While the two were considered “quintessential defenders of the universalist Enlightenment values of equality and freedom” belonging to the Radical faction, they also were representative of “[Enlightenment’s]
consolidation of a Eurocentric racial classificatory system” that bordered on racism if perceived from contemporary times (ibid). Vartija’s core argument lies in accepting and appreciating this core contradiction. This is to say that underneath this Eurocentric conception of racial difference laid a newfound understanding of humanity’s place in nature which helps to explain: 1) humanity’s place in a reconfigured history of nature and 2) European “civilizational superiority” (ibid).

Buffon’s work, for one, was seminal in transforming the understanding of nature in the 18th century in what is termed the “Buffonian revolution”. He strongly re-established the concept of nature as a substantive causal agency, arguing that physical differences between human groups must be explained primarily by the force of the natural environment acting on bodies to instigate changes that could become hereditary (ibid). This was significant in that races were not fixed, with a temporal aspect where human species were placed within what was the transmission and accumulation of qualitative differences across time affected by nature (ibid). It was the strand of his thought that was Enlightenment’s engagement with humanity on a new explanatory axis that super-seded a parochial religious framework that often restricted human time to 6000 years by strict biblical chronologies (611). His line of thinking however did hold a problematic cultural streak, postulating that a non-European climate and nomadic lifestyle had a negative impact on a people’s physical features. Thus to him, white was humanity’s original and most beautiful color, while non-white peoples have degenerated from this primeval homogeneity (ibid) This streak seemed to hold prevalence also in the Scottish Enlightenment, that like Buffon, held a monogenist perspective. That is, the idea of the progress of humanity was described in stadial histories, perceiving some people as “stagnated” in time (605).
Moving on to Diderot, he adopted Buffon’s conception of nature as dynamic, refusing the fixity of anything in nature, including differences in human beings. His œuvre however emphasized the impact of culture on human behavior and the historical contingencies of societal development. He expanded Buffon’s theory of organic change, holding that the great diversity of living forms that we now see has likely resulted from a process of transformism across unimaginably long stretches of time. What is interesting with Diderot however is that despite maintaining a Eurocentric lens in his natural history of humankind, he was acutely critical of them based on the nascent concept of human rights and the hypocrisy of European injustice inflicted on non-Europeans (613).

“The insatiable thirst for gold has given birth to the most infamous and atrocious of all trades, that of slaves [ ... ] The majority of European nations are soiled by it, and a vile self-interest has stifled in human hearts all the feelings we owe to our fellow men.”

(Diderot, Political Writings, 187)

For Diderot, other ways of life were potentially as reasonable as European ways, and he warned quick judgement of customs of other peoples based on one’s own often-parochial vision (614).

Thus, through elaborating Buffon and Diderot’s thinking, Vartija notes how Enlightenment philosophers’ positioned themselves as “classifiers” – individuals with the scientific gaze that had the power to create a classificatory system (613) that affects modern day perspectives on race. He ensures to clearly define how both equality and inequality went into the making of these thinkers’ anthropology, and thus arguing for the irreducibility of Enlightenment reflection on human diversity as simply racist European supremacy or a straightforward egalitarianism. This much becomes clear then: that Enlightenment had a profound effect on the European and (white) American perspective on nature, deep time and evolution where race
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became the classifier for the progress and recognition of humanity, with the white race being argued to be the most developed while others belonged to antiquity.

Now, Vartija’s most emphasized point on Enlightenment’s realization of nature’s effect on human diversity as central in understanding humanity’s place in the natural world finds a curious interpretation in Mbembe. That is, for a human being to become a full modern subject (to be recognized as self-understanding, self-conscious, and self-representing) first he must negate nature (emphasis mine) reducing it to his or her own needs, and second, he must transform nature through work and struggle, creating a world (Mbembe, 14). It is work and struggle that separates the human from nature, or in another sense, the animal. So, a human being becomes subject by rejecting/separating from the animal or becomes subject in the struggle and work through which he or she confronts death.(ibid) Consequently, through the confrontation of death, or more elaborately, by attempting to uphold one’s work in death in order to become a living spirit, the modern human (defined by ideologies of Enlightenment) is cast into the incessant movement of history (ibid).

If we were to take Mbembe by his word then, along with the thought that Enlightenment thought fueled the European modern sense of racial superiority in that they were fully human by virtue of their work of scientific progress and rationalism, while others were not—perhaps even animal, or were “stagnated” in time of stadial histories—then we begin to see how the negation of nature itself becomes the negation of the Other, as the two are conflated. Thus, as the ‘savage’ is seen to behave like a part of nature by treating nature as their undisputed master (Mbembe, 24), something that the full human subject negates, we begin to see how “savagery” and “nature” become semantically associated with “darkness/blackness” or “shadows”. Consequently, the fear of nature being something that can perhaps overwhelm the work of Enlightenment man becomes
an overwhelming reality that, in Morrison’s words, makes it possible to for Enlightenment to *epistemically* “inscribe and erase, to escape and engage, to act out and act on, to historicize and render timeless” the racialized Other” (Morrison, 7).

Such a reaction against nature, synonymous to savagery and darkness/’blackness’ becomes most apparent in both *Heart of Darkness* and *Hunter x Hunter*. In *Heart of Darkness*, not only do African characters seem to merge with their environment an act of erasure, but also Marlow perceives of them as timeless: “I don’t think a single one of them had any clear idea of time, as we at the end of countless ages have. They still belonged to the beginnings of time—had no inherited experience to teach them as it were. (46)” In *Hunter x Hunter* on the other hand, Netero, the Chairman of the Hunter Association, not only looks down on the Chimera Ants on several occasions, referring to them derogatively as *arinko*—puny little ant— (Vol 25, 75) or declaring that “insects should not look down on humans” (Vol 28, 36-37) when Meruem praised his abilities. Furthermore, Netero, in his recorded video testifying his will to the Zodiacs, speaks of the Dark Continent as a New World where “only battles against harsh cruel nature that pays no heed to individual value exist” (Vol 33, 17). Noting that the Chimera Ants are speculated to come from the Dark Continent (Vol 32, 165), we also begin to see Togashi’s interpretation of the Dark Continent as how the West perceived the Orient, if the Chimera Ants are interpreted as representative of the Orient. Hence darkness/blackness, from the perspective of an Enlightened subject, as iterated many times already, is anything that is not within the bounds of its associated modernist values. With this as preliminary literary evidence of how nature/savagery or darkness/blackness is negated by the self-institution and self-limitation of Enlightenment, I will now move on to the Horrors of Enlightenment.
3.4 The Horror: A Necropolitical Perspective

First, to reiterate the objective of this thesis: to provide a parallactic Africa-Asia literary account of modernity through a literary analysis of Enlightenment and its Horrors as seen in *Heart of Darkness* and *Hunter x Hunter* by virtue of their intertextuality. Such intertextuality also includes historical fact, that is, colonialism in the Congo and the atomic bombing in Hiroshima are interlinked through the uranium mined in the Congo that was shipped to the United States for the Manhattan project. Given this, the ghosts of colonialism haunt the atomic bombing. So, a sense of what the horror of Enlightenment is has already been advanced, given the brutishness, cruelty, violence, predation and inhumanity that has occurred in the wake of its ideology, manifesting broadly as the Western imperial/colonial enterprise, observed in the colonial violence meted African peoples on one hand, and the imperial violence meted on another imperial power by use of nuclear weapons on another. While this may sound like a strict critique of the West/Occident, I must make clear that Japan is not excused for its own horrors. Japan itself is implicated within Enlightenment thought, along with its horrors, since its imperial inclination was a result of its adopting western sociopolitical culture in what Fukuzawa Yukichi rendered as 文明開花 ‘bunmei kaika’ (‘civilization and enlightenment’). What we begin to see then is the tendency of Enlightenment thinking to be, as already elaborated so far 1) totalizing, 2) creating a racial hierarchy, and 3) justifying what is obviously a horrific subjugation and conquering of peoples based on such racial logic from a macro-historico-geopolitical perspective. The horrors of Enlightenment then, summarily, seems to be triggered by the modern sensibility that Enlightenment thinking facilitates.

Now, what I term as the ‘Horrors of Enlightenment’ is, just as Enlightenment, multilayered and I argue that it finds its manifestations in the ways Achille Mbembe elaborates
necropolitics. At the expense of being repetitive, allow me to summarize Mbembe’s understanding of biopower and my understanding of its relation to Enlightenment. According to Mbembe, sovereignty is synonymous to biopower, which is the power and capacity to let live or die. Such sovereignty, he notes following Foucault’s thinking, is inscribed in the way all modern states function (17). Now, sovereignty, insofar as the sovereignty in relation to Enlightenment is being discussed, gets manifested and exercised through what I understand is a four-step process: first, self-institution and self-limitation (13) after which, second, nature is negated through (political) work (14), then, third, the right to kill what is negated is justified (17) and finally by the very act of negation through the work of politics—an exercise of reason/rationalism—that seeks to confront death and live beyond it (14), sovereignty is upheld and perpetuated. I argue that it is in these processes where the layers of the meaning of the horror lie. I will thus elaborate each process while provide how each of the processes gets exhibited in each of the literary texts considered to make clear the layered meaning of the horror.

3.4.1 The Horror as Self-Institution and -Limitation, Negation and Killing

First, self-institution and self-limitation. Sovereignty became manifest by self-instituting and self-limiting itself with Enlightenment that emphasized reason as its core. This is why reason is the most important element of the project of modernity and literary convention of sovereignty (13). Furthermore, racial classification, and by extension racism, was found within this process of self-institution and self-limitation. Such a process led to Jus Publicum Europaeum – a European juridical order, leading to a territorial distinction between Europe itself (the West) and parts of the globe available for colonial appropriation (23). Consequently, as Sakai elaborates, modernity became historically opposed to its historical precedent, the pre-modern, and geopolitically contrasted to the non-modern/non-West (Sakai, 94). When the pairing of the historical and geopolitical predicates function discursively, two kinds of areas are thus
diacritically discerned: the modern West, and pre-modern non-West (ibid) open for conquest, subjugation and appropriation.

In *Heart of Darkness*, the very state of the Stations and how the native population are treated in what is the Congo Free State is reflective of the characteristics of the colony that Mbembe states, where the European juridical order makes colonial territories frontiers where controls and guarantees of the juridical order can be suspended (24). Hence, the manager and his uncle go as far as to even verbally plot the hanging of either Marlow or the Harlequin or both. Marlow overhears the uncle say, “[G]et him hanged! Why not? Anything… can be done in this country… Nobody… here can endanger your position” (Conrad, 36). Mbembe also states that because of the racial characteristic that differentiates the conqueror from the native, denying any common bond, the colonies are ruled in absolute lawlessness (Mbembe, 24). It is why even Kurtz ‘had nothing on earth to prevent him from killing who he jolly well pleased’ (Conrad, 65).

Due to *Hunter x Hunter* having two imperial factions pit against one another, the self-institution and self-limitation of sovereignty in the Chimera Ant arc is double fold. The Chimera Ants self-define and limit themselves against humans and vice versa, based on perceived superiority of species. Meruem specifically has no regard for the life for any human life he comes across immediately after his birth (Vol 21) and is thus akin to Kurtz in the way he kills whomever he pleases. Furthermore, the process can be seen in how the Chimera Ants overtake the Republic East Gorteau whose political organization allegorizes North Korea\(^1\), reflective of colonial territorialization with the logic of a juridical order. (ibid) The Ant King Meruem and his three Royal then subsequently make a criteria for what is called the ‘Selection’ that seeks to massacre the republic’s entire population for food, considering equal to ‘cattle’ while those who

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\(^1\) Such allegory speaks to Togashi trying to replicate historical fact. Therefore, if the Chimera Ants are representative of Japan, it matches its overtaking East Gorteau as Japan colonized Korea during between 1910-1945.
survive would become human-ant soldier hybrids (ibid). When the Hunter Association begin to infiltrate the invaded East Gorteau, the Royal Guards also declare a state of emergency against so-called rebels to try and counter the newly-emergent threat (Vol 22), demonstrating the biopolitical ways self-institution and limitation manifests.

Second, self-institution and self-limitation implies the negation of nature, where the notion of nature consists of the shadow/Other. Or in the context of the historicogeopolitical predicate, the non-West, or in racial terms ‘black’ (non-white). This becomes demonstrated in language, and in the case of a graphic text, a combination of language and visible physical characteristics that differentiates the sovereign subject from the sovereign other. I have already given such examples just prior the beginning of this sub-section but give further examples below.

*Heart of Darkness* describes literal nature, the environment, as a ‘God-forsaken wilderness, and an enigma (14-15). It is also depicted as immense, unconquerable, “something too great and invincible, like evil or truth that waited for the passing of the fantastic [imperial/colonial] invasion” (26). Nature is also perceived as hostile, given how men of French ships died of fever at three men per day (15). And yet, the wanderers persist at invading the continent regardless, proving Mbembe’s point on laboring against nature. Indeed, a sharp contrast between the native population and European invaders from the weapons they use (spears and arrows to guns), the modes of water transport they use—boats moved with paddles (15) to steamboats ()—and modes of living (villages to cities) demark alleged civility and savagery. It becomes natural then that terms such as enemies, criminals, rebels (67), cannibals (39), and savages (by the very act of negation and killing, sovereignty’s work of reason is upheld and perpetuated in death as living spirit (17) are used to describe the natives while European characters such as the accountant are ‘elegant’ and ‘clean’.
*Hunter x Hunter* once again takes what would be a critical perspective on the negation of the Other. That is, because each side, the Humans and the Chimera Ants, due to their subjectivity, perceive themselves as superior full subjects. The Ants then, by virtue of their excessive animal self displayed graphically (which overlaps their human constituent) perceive themselves superior to humans, rationalizing their excess as an evolutionary advantage. And yet, humans perceive the Ants as threat and inferior because of their implicit understanding of superiority through evolution. In other words, the idea that animal like characteristics of characters situate the human as the epicenter of evolution while relegating the animal to stasis and unchanging ahistoricity (Chaney, 100) is questioned in Togashi’s version of speciesism. This is explicit in a conversation between an unnamed human character and a Koala Ant (Vol 19). Upon the Koala Ant ordering the human not to move, the human exclaims that a lowly beast should not instruct the superior human being. To which the Koala responds with questions: “Lowly? Superior? I don’t understand. What makes me and you any different?” This is on the basis of the Chimera Ants being inherently hybrid with the human. Adopting LaMarre, the Chimera Ant is therefore a ‘humanoid alien’ that “introduces uncertainty about the boundary between races and species” (91). The plotline presents several other occasions where such uncertainties are brought to question, but the climax of events seem to point that such negations end up being strongly rooted, leading to the point where the right to kill is justified. What is then the epitome of the negation of Other is expressed by Meruem, stating that because he was born to be the King of Ants, he has the right to rule over all organisms (Vol 28, 146). “I represent the instinctive hope long nurtured by my species, and that species continues to evolve for my sake,” he adds (ibid), proving the perceived superiority based on species. We also observe a similar perspective on the human side, in the conversation Netero has with a V5 representative that
settles on the method of extermination. The representative notes the Ants as “dangerous life forms” that need swift extermination (Vol 27, 157), betraying implicitly a perceived superiority that justifies killing based on the Logic of Survival (which gets discussed in the following point) leading to Netero implanting the atomic bomb prior his battle with the Ant King.

Third, the negation of nature justifies modern sovereignty to exercise its right to control life and to kill. Mbembe observes the various ways this becomes manifest, first in slavery, where the slave is in a status of sociopolitical death (21). The right to kill also manifests in colonial domination, where a territory defined as ‘colony’—a shadowed territory—becomes a space where the violence of the state of exception for the sovereign is justified under the pretense of “civilization” (24). Such shadowed territory and its inherent state of exception also overlaps with the state of concentration camps, where the inhabitants are divested of political status and reduced to bare life due to the camp’s political-juridical structure (12). The state-of-exception becomes a permanent spatial arrangement within such territory that remains continually outside the normal state of law (13). Finally, the right to kill manifests in the project of the “Final Solution”, where “the perception of the existence of the Other as an attempt on [the sovereign subject’s] life, as a mortal threat or absolute danger whose biophysical elimination would strengthen[sovereign subject’s] potential to life and security” (17-18).

*Heart of Darkness* has an instance of each case of the right to kill. For one, it can be argued that the concept of slavery and the concentration camp overlap in how native Africans subjugated to the point of being both chained and being emaciated due to starvation (17). Marlow describes them as “nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom” (18-19). Add the fact that Marlow also states that they were called criminals because of “outraged law, like the bursting shells, had come to them, an
insoluble mystery from the sea.” (17) and it is apparent that the native African population are stripped of their full sociopolitical status as human beings. Of course, the question of colonial domination is obvious given the context of the novella’s setting. Finally, the project of the “Final Solution” finds itself manifest in the excessive death that Marlow observes upon arriving at Kurtz’s inner station, finding half-a-dozen slim posts in a row, with upper ends ornamented with what are round curved balls that are actually native human heads (66). This goes along with a suggested method proclaimed boldly in Kurtz’s report: “Exterminate the Brutes!” (57).

*Hunter x Hunter* similarly exhibits the various cases of the right to kill in its plot. I actually argue that *Hunter x Hunter* does so thoroughly, providing every manifestation of biopower that Mbembe elaborates. Given this, this section will be lengthier compared to the examples given in *Heart of Darkness*. First, a display of slavery is found in a chapter named the “Human Dog” where certain Chimera Ants go as far as chaining and making pet dogs out of humans (Vol 19). The Ants perspective of humans as inferior is blatantly clear in their use the counter for animals in counting humans. This is also replicated in the Ant character Zazan, a humanoid Ant with scorpion characteristics who used her ability to turn humans captured into mutant slaves (Vol 22). Meruem also declaring the East Gorteau palace as the site to set up a human meat farm, humans being declared as feed for the Ants goes to show how the sociopolitical status of being is stripped from them, reducing them to bare life based on a difference perceived on the basis of species (Vol 21).

Second, the Hunter association dispatching an Extermination team (Vol 22) runs parallel to the Royal Guard declaring a state of emergency/marshal law in East Gorteau (Vol 22), both actions which display what Mbembe states as the Logic of Survival, where each man is the enemy of every other, and therefore, one’s horror at the sight of death turns into satisfaction that
it is someone else who is dead (Mbembe, 36). Hence, each enemy killed makes the survivor feel more secure. By this logic, the right to kill the Other is dispensed on a wide national scale.

Furthermore, the very organizational structure of the Hunter association on how it dispatches its human resource, Hunters, is reminiscent of Mbembe’s definition of war machines. That is, the Hunter Association seems to consist of segments of armed men that split up or merge with one another depending on circumstance or task, and display features of both a political organization and a mercantile company (Mbembe, 32). This also explains why the Hunter Association becomes indispensable in the complex power play and political moves seen in the Dark Continent expedition, where resource discover and extraction becomes the main objective (Vol 33). The association, as Mbembe states, forges direct connections with transnational networks that fuel resource extraction (Mbembe, 32-33). In this sense, nature literally is ‘killed’.

Thirdly, the concentration camp also finds itself manifest in *Hunter x Hunter*, and this is curious as Togashi seems to provide what is initially a tangential but intricate storyline from the main Chimera Ant Saga by introducing a character named Gyro in Volume 20. This storyline is significant in that it provides a dialectical (thesis, antithesis, synthesis) understanding of the term ‘Human’.

The readers are introduced to Gyro as a boy who has lived in a construction camp until he was twelve years, having been compelled to free labor the whole time. He had even learned to make bricks and concret even before he could talk. Gyro’s father, who raised him alone, was taciturn and was a drunkard. He wasn’t allowed to leave his bed from work except when heading to the toilet, and only once. He also learnt not to move at all while sleeping, since he got punished severely for any movement which made the wooden double bunk bed creek, a sound
that his father hated. To accommodate for himself when he needed to take a short call therefore, he kept an alcohol bottle just in case, to relieve himself when the need arose.

Thesis: “Do not bother people” was the only thing that he was taught by his father. He had held this teaching like a treasure since this was the only thing his father had taught him. In his small world, his father was a god. He loved his father dearly and believed he was needed by his father, despite the rough treatment he received. There were two reasons behind this: 1) He remembered once when he had a deadly fever that his father had cared for him through the night, changing towels to lower the fever; and 2) his father had never told him to leave even once all through his life. These two reasons became Gyro’s secret pride.

Antithesis: But one day, an older teen claiming that the reason his father never chased him away was because Gyro got his father money. Gyro had told the teenager about his secret pride and was overwhelmed with guilt for lightly sharing this secret, and was thus overcome with rage. With his only pride hurt, he was overcome with hatred, and tried to assail the older boy. The teenager, raged at Gyro’s sudden rebellion (as the young boy had kept his father’s teachings till then and never fought back despite being taunted) pummeled him but still didn’t feel satisfied. While stepping on Gyro’s head, he said “It was the old man next door who took care of you when you had a high fever! Your father was getting himself drunk as usual at that time too.” The old man next door and the father that night had quarreled, and the old man asked ‘What will you do if your child dies?’ Your father said ‘Nothing in particular. I won’t care if he died.’” The cruel teenager who pummeled him told him cruelly.

Synthesis. On hearing this, Gyro glimpsed on the truth. Then his father, who was incidentally passing by at the time, caught his eyes, but without showing an ounce of care, went on ahead. Truth then dawned on him: ‘The universe does not care for him. It did not matter to his
father whether he lived or died. If he lived, the father would get money. If he died, the father
would get more space in his room.’ His father’s words, ‘Do not bother people,’” had only been
told to him, he realized, because it was his father who would bear the burden of trouble if he had
been cause for any concern. Therefore, ‘people’ here instead meant his ‘father’ here. No.
Actually ‘people’ meant ‘Humans’. So, his father had meant, ‘do not trouble Humans’, ergo, he
was not Human. Gyro thus went on to kill his father with this revelation and escaped the
construction camp. He then became leader of an organization called NGL, which eventually
became a country, and he became the King leading it. And because he was not Human, he
planned to wreak havoc, spreading evil in the world of humans, and D2, a narcotic drug that had
found its way across all urban centers in the world, was only the beginning of his plans. NGL
however is decimated when the Chimera Ants invade it, and Gyro himself becomes feed for the
Ant Queen. However, some Chimera Ants born subsequently, inherit the soul of their previous
human lives, and in this way, Gyro is introduced as an antagonist who does not bend to the
Queen’s bidding and begins to plot for worldly havoc from scratch once again.

I choose to interpret such a tangential storyline as Togashi trying to offer his
understanding of what is a spectrum of the ‘Human’. This is especially because of how Togashi
chooses to gloss the term ‘Human’. He does so in two different ways: using the Chinese
characters/kanji ‘人間’ (read as hito, although its usual reading is ‘ningen’) and using katakana
‘ヒト’ (also read as hito). It is noteworthy that the latter, the use of katakana, in Japanese
orthography is the official way to refer to a species by its scientific name. The use of Chinese
characters on the other hand is connotated with giving a term meaning in its fullest sense. What’s
more, Togashi ensures to include the term ‘Ant’ glossed as 蟻/アリ for the Chimera Ant, with
their genetic makeup also including the human to further complicate his dialectical discussion. In other words, what Togashi provides is a highly systematized dialectics of the notion of the human, where it can be argued that there are those considered full Humans—人間, lesser human—ヒト, and non-humans/ant—蟻/アリ equated with the animal (or the sub-altern). Gyro becomes central in laying out this dialectical hierarchy given how he is depicted graphically as fully human but is not recognized as one, then becoming non-human upon being devoured by the Ant Queen and subsequently being reborn as a Chimera Ant.

I argue then that the perspective of the spectrum of the human may be relative to the positionality and subjectivity of the subject in question, and that the manner of dispensation of the right to kill is predicated on the positionality of such dialectics in the case where there are multiple subjectivities existent. This thus leads to the negation and the justification to kill so long as the subject in question perceives that either their own subjective humanity (or right to live) is questioned, or that the Other is reasoned to be not-human. This explains why the Chimera Ants feed on humans because they are not-Ants, why humans then choose to retaliate against the Ants because of their threat to life while also perceiving them as not-humans, and also why Gyro chooses to kill his own father and subsequently pledge vengeance on humanity.

Finally, the Final Solution finds itself manifest in Hunter x Hunter in the way the battle between Netero and Meruem end, the former detonating a radioactive bomb—dubbed the Poor Man’s Rose—implanted in him by way of suicide. This is because the Ants by their manner of reproduction—Phagogenesis (Vol 18)—and their rate of expansion presented to humanity an absolute danger whose biophysical elimination would ensure humanity’s life and security. Indeed, the narrator in the story arc describes the bomb as the most “inhumane and demonic weapon of destruction” due to the poison that it contained (Vol 30). The poison, by its highly
contagious and radioactive nature, has the victim survive long enough to spread the poison to someone else, propagating a vast number of casualties – the perfect killing chain (ibid).

Consequently, even though the Meruem, the Ant King is revived by two of his royal guards, he along with the royal guards due to their proximity to him, end up dying, ending the most significant threat of the Chimera Ant invasion on human territory (ibid).

3.4.2. The Silent Horror: Sovereignty as Living Spirit

Now, the three processes established so far are pretty clear in terms of how they are demonstrated. The fourth process however is what would be easy to overlook. That is, the negation of nature also upholds sovereignty’s (biopower’s) work in death as living spirit, because Enlightenment man’s work and struggle seeks to confront death and live beyond it. Mbembe elaborates this by referencing Georges Bataille in order to build on Hegel’s account of death and subject. To be exact, because sovereignty is an excess in the sense that it is death that lives a human life, it is essentially a proliferating self-consciousness exerting its power over life (15). It is precisely why it is withdrawn from the horizon of meaning (ibid), which is why Enlightenment is capable of cloaking in Buddhist iconography, as illustrated in the Enlightenment chapter. Therefore, death implicitly holds signification as a means to truth (ibid). It is the means by which sovereignty, along with its attached modern sensibilities, perpetuates itself.

*Heart of Darkness*

Conrad shows how such a process comes about, but how he lays it out for us within his novella is not by any means simple. In order to fully understand the ‘Horror’ in this fourth sense, we must be first aware that the ‘horror’ is the final word of Kurtz, uttered twice, at some image, at some vision that he saw before crossing the threshold of death (80). Marlow witnessed this because he was standing over him. Given Conrad’s narrative style where everything is revealed through Marlow’s first-person narration however, the readers, just as the listeners of the story on
the Nellie, can only imagine and speculate what went on in Kurtz’s mind. It is why Marlow remarks: “Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge?” (ibid). The horror brought forth is nebulous, because it can only be inferred from the perception of an observer, Marlow, not Kurtz himself.

And yet, it is these very dying words that indelibly marks Marlow’s subsequent reflection. Therefore, the horror perceived is layered, with what can be inferred being more or less the horrors that were perceived by Marlow being juxtaposed with the horror that Kurtz experienced. Or in other words, Kurtz’s pronouncement of the horror haunts Marlow’s perspective of his journey to the Congo. Curiously, Marlow compares Kurtz’s pronouncement at his death as remarkable, while denigrating himself for what is a foreshadow of his lie to Kurtz’s Intended (81). He says, “I like to think that my summing-up would not have been a word of careless contempt. Better his cry—much better” (82) referring to his failure to confess what Kurtz’s last words were, instead lying to her that he uttered her name (89). Herein lies the complexity of the meaning of the ‘horror’. That in death, Kurtz was remarkable for his judgement, but Marlow himself is unremarkable because, despite living, he ‘wrestled with death’ to only ‘have nothing to say’(81). He then follows to say that while Kurtz had “stepped over the edge”, he himself, living through Kurtz’s extremity, was “permitted to draw back [his] hesitating foot” (81-82). In finalizing his drawling reflection before meandering to his recollection of the people that sought to know of the details of Kurtz’s fate and achievements, he notes that it is for this very reason, that Kurtz’s proclamation in death was a moral victory of some sort, that he remained loyal to him to the last, and even beyond (82). At the same time, he once again references his lie to the Intended, noting how he heard the echo of Kurtz’s magnificence thrown to him from ‘a soul as translucently pure as a cliff of crystal’ – the Intended (82).
It is important to understand here that Marlow’s ‘wrestling with death’ is in fact Marlow wrestling with the memory, the ghost, or living spirit of Kurtz and how it will be upheld, given that he was entrusted with a package of Kurtz belongings. And it is also important to understand the significance of lying as it means to Marlow himself. In the first part of the novella, Marlow states that he hates, detests, cannot bear a lie because it appalls him. He then adds that there is a taint of death, a flavor of mortality in lies—which is exactly what he detests in the world—and, significantly, what he wants to forget (30). Given this then, Marlow contradicts himself, and positions himself within what I argue is the fourth process by which sovereignty, or Enlightenment Thought, manifests itself through necropolitics. In other words, by remaining loyal to Kurtz in the end (and beyond) by lying for him, Marlow masks and silences the true horrors of Enlightenment and inadvertently lets Kurtz’s ‘enlightened’ work live on in spirit.

So, Kurtz’s work as an emissary of pity, science and progress is upheld beyond his death, with his truth—steeped in the problematics of Enlightenment thinking and reasoning—being withheld from the horizon of meaning, and in turn proliferating as a self-consciousness (or hegemonic totality). We thus can understand why Marlow denigrates himself – because Kurtz declared at the moment of his death what his life work was—the horror, but he cannot declare the same and is thus hypocritical. Given the crucial moment of truth, when asked to reveal Kurtz final words to the Intended, he lies, and by the very act implicates himself in the perpetuation of an ideology that goes on, if we are to consider historical fact, in the colonial domination of Africans for decades to come. What is more, this occurs while the very colonial enterprise remains romanticized as a noble universal project. This is apparent in two ways: first by the way Kurtz’s Intended upholds an unwavering and illusory faith of Kurtz’s virtuous and reputable image:
“What a loss to me— to us!… To the world. It is impossible that all this should be lost—that such a life should be sacrificed to leave nothing—but sorrow. You know what vast plans he had. I knew of them, too—I could not perhaps understand—but others knew of them. Something must remain. His words, at least, have not died… And his example… Men looked up to him— his goodness shone in every act.” (Conrad, 88)

And second, in the way Marlow made sure to tear the postscriptum “Exterminate the brutes!” off of Kurtz’s report before handing it over to the bespectacled man from the Company who sniffed and returned it with contempt (83) after which he offered it to a journalist who was claimed himself Kurtz’s colleague for publication (84). Indeed, Kurtz’s eloquence that held the notion of an ‘exotic Immensity ruled by an august Benevolence’ (58), hollow in practice, ends up being communicated to the public sphere becoming epistemically upheld.

*Hunter x Hunter*

Similarly, sovereignty’s work (which constitutes Enlightenment rationale) is upheld as living spirit in *Hunter x Hunter* in the way that Netero, a character parallel to Kurtz, is remembered, and his will upheld after his death. What is most interesting however is how Netero’s nuclear death overlaps with Mbembe’s necropolitical illustration of the suicide bomber. This manner of death leads to the perpetuation of Enlightenment reasoning as a proliferating self-consciousness. But first, a detailed account of Netero’s death is in order.

Given our understanding of Netero as character as established in the Enlightenment chapter, we understand that strength is a core value that informs his character, and his ideal was to “duel with a formidable enemy against whom he could offer the whole of his soul to defeat,” and he finds such a formidable opponent in Meruem. Which is why he initially seeks to pull all of tricks up his sleeve that are limited to his own abilities to either defeat or be defeated. The
nature of the battle however does not allow him to let his opponent live, as the continued life of
the opponent would mean the demise of humanity. This is why, by the behest of the V5 to ensure
extermination of the Ants, he resorted to implanting the Poor Man’s Rose in himself as his
ultimate trump card.

It is also important to reiterate that Netero, as is Kurtz, is the epitome of Enlightenment
thinking, given his accomplishments. He is the chairman of the Hunter Association, and
significantly had two successful expeditions to the Dark Continent, denoting him as an emissary
of progress in as far as discovery of unknown lands and being a Hunter is concerned. His
prejudice against the Ants, as already illustrated in this chapter, is also reflective of the racial
aspect of Enlightenment. His very actions then, given Enlightenment’s nature to uphold and
romanticize its reasoning as truth, are also painted with a sense of nobility and compassion,
further emphasized by the image of the Guanyin Bodhisattva—Hyakushiki Kan’non in the
Japanese original—that his ability allows him to manifest (Vol 27, 161-162). This is why his
final and ultimate Nen move, the Zero Hand, used when his left hand and right leg were severed
by Meruem, is described as follows:

“The One-hundred-armed Boddhisattva Zero Hand is formed when the heart is formed
appropriately to become a wish, and the wish in turn bears fruit and takes form. The
Boddhisatva then appears behind the enemy gently but firmly engulfing the target with an
indiscriminate love… before transforming the entirety of Netero’s aura into a light like a
dazzling star and fired with a merciless roar.” (Vol, 28

The very description is filled with contradiction, given that the attack seeks to completely
annihilate the enemy, in this case Meruem, while being cloaked in the language of kindness and
love. This, I interpret, is the very nature of the contradiction of Enlightenment: its speech is filled
with the power of noble eloquence, misleading with notions of liberty, love, equality, and justice when in reality, it is a violent practice that seek to completely negate the other. When the negation of the Other however fails for some reason, and in the case of this battle to the death, because of the vitality and strength of the enemy, the next resort is the simultaneous dispensation of the Logic of Survival and the Logic of Martyrdom (Mbembe, 35), the latter being the novel logic added to the equation. And the Logic of Martyrdom is epitomized by the suicide bomber (36), as in Netero.

According to Mbembe, by the Logic of Martyrdom, they martyr’s body is annihilated, along with those around it. Hence, suicide and homicide are accomplished in the same act, making resistance, to a large extent, synonymous to self-destruction (36). That is, the will to die is fused with the willingness to take the enemy with you, closing the door on the possibility of life for everyone (37). The Martyr then, in that moment of death, establishes a supremacy in which he overcomes his own mortality while laboring under the sign of the future (ibid). In other words, in death, the future is collapsed into the present, and therefore in its desire for eternity, the bomber’s body becomes a piece of metal that brings eternal life into being through sacrifice (ibid).

This is what exactly applies to Netero. In his death, he completely annihilates the enemy, (even though Meruem revives, he dies again for good due to radiation poisoning), while bringing his own image, his spirit, his will, into the realms of eternity. It is by his death that he is celebrated as a hero who put to a stop the Chimera Ant, while completely negating the moment of truth because there are no witnesses to attest to his final pronouncement before the explosion, which was: “I am not alone… Do not underestimate the human race, Meruem. Meruem, King of Ants. You understand nothing… Of humanity’s endless potential for evolution (進化—shinka—
glossed as 悪意—akui, malice—)” (Vol 28, 147-150). These final words are accompanied by a description of the narrator that captures Meruem’s reaction: “As Netero spoke the King’s name, the King had no time to consider the echo of the statement, as he gazed at what was an old man who was supposed to be surrendering. It was the first time the King had felt fear (恐怖, kyoufu).

One look at the face of this old man who had wrung all of himself out who should have been waiting for death, made it clear that his seemingly vain words were no mere boast” (ibid. 151).

These words, along with the ensuing description of Meruem’s reaction, are what I interpret as Togashi’s second critical take on the true nature of Enlightenment thought. This moment is the laying bare of the horror of Enlightenment, expressed in the use of the word kyoufu—fear—which constitutes an element of ‘horror’, ‘terror’, and/or ‘dread’. The use of the word shinka (evolution) while glossing it with akui (malice) is also Togashi’s way of noting exposing the dark horrific side of Enlightenment – that a malicious intent of racial difference rationalizing negation sits side by side with its noble promise of equality, freedom and justice.

To put it differently, Enlightenment Thinking, elevated to the realms of sovereignty, tends to erase its own acts of negation while simultaneously upholding its reasoning as truth. Indeed, as elaborated in the Enlightenment chapter, it is Netero’s death that is the trigger to the events following the Chimera Ant saga. First, the Kakin Empire publicly declares an expedition to the Dark Continent, his son Beyond Netero leading the expedition precisely because his father died, who had forbidden him to set out until his death (Vol 32). Second, the V5 in reaction to Kakin’s bold declaration, invites the empire to its ranks, becoming the V6, with the intention that the spoils of the expedition be equally shared among them (ibid). Third, Netero comes clean with his intentions in a video recording that expressed his final will, which is for the Hunter Association
to also partake in the Dark Continent expedition, which it does (ibid). These events are in a sense the proliferation of Netero’s will, an enactment of sovereignty to live in death as a spirit.

If we are to compare any similarities in the expositions of the Horror as laid out in both texts in the way Enlightenment sovereignty self-perpetuates, we can thus find a way to extend Mbembe’s necropolitics. First, at least in my interpretation, Mbembe’s explanation of the Logic of Martyrdom and its application to the context of Palestine which is the weakest link to his elaboration of necropolitics finds firm ground through Togashi’s illustration of Netero’s death. And, given how there is an overlap of in how sovereignty perpetuates itself in *Heat of Darkness* and *Hunter x Hunter*, I argue that the Logic of Martyrdom also works within *Heart of Darkness*, although not in the sense of the ‘suicide bomber’. In other words, if we take ‘martyr’ as meaning ‘one who is killed because of their beliefs’ Kurtz, by virtue of his methods being declared ‘unsound’ by the manager (Conrad, 71), then becomes the necessary sacrifice to perpetuate Enlightenment thinking as a proliferating self-consciousness. Or to be more precise, sovereignty tends to find and discard a scapegoat—often an epitome representative of its negating contradiction—in order to erase its acts of negation of the Other to uphold its seemingly progressive reasoning as truth.

3.5 Summary

Summarily, then what has been deciphered is the horrific nature of sovereignty, where upon its self-institution and self-limitation, the horror finds itself manifest in three different aspects. First, the horror becomes manifest through the fear, abjection and revulsion of the shadowed Other as described in the negation of nature. Second, the horror becomes manifest as terror, leading to the death of the Other. And, last but not least, there is a horror in the very act of sovereignty’s negation of Nature/Other via its self-institution and self-limitation, where it self-perpetuates through the deliberate epistemic erasure of its negation while simultaneously
upholding its reasoning as truth. It is, simply, the silencing of its horrors, or in Yvonne Owuor’s words as quoted at the beginning of the chapter, “an empire of silence”.

Conclusion

I believe that it has become rather clear through the literary analysis over the “Understanding Enlightenment” and “Horrors of Enlightenment” chapters that the premise of modern perceptions held today is largely based on the tenets of Enlightenment Thinking. It is also clear that these tenets had in them a horrifying contradiction that manifested in negation (fear, abjection and revulsion) of Nature and Other, and the subsequent imperial/colonial terror based on racial classification. I believe then that a sense of how such modern sensibilities have proliferated over four centuries leading to brutish imperial/colonial historical developments that can only be described as horrendous has been made clear.

The transnational nature of Enlightenment thought as hegemonic/totalitarian, given the linkage between colonial Congo and the atomic bombing in WWII is also made obvious. In other words, a magnified sense of horror is perceived when considering the combined tragic losses of human life that has unfolded based on such an ideology. Importantly, because West, or the Occident—what Yvonne Owuor refers to as the “ideological space from which the originators and architects of the catastrophe that becomes colonialism” (Owuor, Derelict Shards)—was at the center of such developments, it rationalized the shadowing of all that it considered ‘non-white’ and thereby justifying the stripping of the latter’s subjectivity. Such shadowing, again based on racial classification, created a hierarchy of who is ‘fully Human’.

Japan however, as elaborated, became a curious nation state in terms of the discursive framework that Enlightenment Thinking was based on. Despite its emergence into imperial status was based on Enlightenment thinking, due to the racial logic, it could not be discerned as modern. Japan then is the typical case of becoming like that which it wished to resist, but not being recognized fully as what it became. David Morris suggests this describing the history of Japan as a “history of the parallax” (467). Put it differently, one vision of Japan is a “view [in
which], despite its development and wealth, Japan is best understood as a victim of exploitation and representation from the moment of its entry into the modern world” (ibid). But with slight shift in parallactic position, Japan’s history is also of “elite-driven modernization with resistance to external imperialism often deployed to justify various forms of dominance and exploitation” (468). In this sense, while Japan should not be excused for its own perpetuation of the horrors of Enlightenment, Japan is also a ‘victim’ in as far as subjectivity and who is considered fully human based on subjectivity is concerned. Hence, the arguing of a literary racial blackness that is not simply skin deep—'shadows of race’. Of course, we have to acknowledge that literal blackness, or Africanism as Morrison puts it, bears the brunt of much suffering and negation, having been placed at the bottom of the racial hierarchy. And this shows, given how it is black labor and suffering that contributes to the bombing of Japan at the end of WWII. Or in other words, the ghosts of African colonial labor haunt the atomic bombing with the West at the center of the double tragedy of humanitarian crisis from a political perspective.

Such an interpretation has been achieved through a lateral comparative literary analysis of shared/intertextual modernist motifs of Enlightenment and Horror between Heart of Darkness and Hunter x Hunter, positing that Enlightenment broadly created a binary of literary whiteness and literary blackness based on racial lines in its wake. Such literary interpretation is made possible because literature is a prime site where sociopolitical processes get inscribed through the writers’, or in the case of manga even illustrators’, ability to “transform aspects of their social grounding into aspects of language [and image] to tell other stories, fight secret wars, limn out all sorts of debates blanketed in their text” (Morrison, 4). Thus, literature’s value, to be that site for historical rememberance that enables us to critically investigate their contexts relative to our present condition, is made tangible. It has also come to attention how a better understanding of
the global sociopolitical order can be arrived at through a transnational comparative lens, so long as a consistent historical and literary connection between literary texts is argued. And this has been achieved through the comparison of a what is a Victorian/modernist novella according to Wasney published in the 19th century, and a Japanese graphic novel series whose publishing began in 1998 and goes on to the present, and hence could be considered pop culture/literature.

More specifically, I believe that I have critically investigated what Toni Morrison in Playing in the Dark proposed as an area worth studying: the technical ways in which what I have adopted as literary blackness (or non-whiteness) has been strategically used to define the goals and enhance the qualities of white (or fully human) characters (52). This is in addition to the way literary blackness has been manipulated as a means of mediation on one’s own humanity (53). How such narratives of literary blackness/shadow is used for discourse on ethics, social and universal codes of behavior, and assertions about and definitions of civilization and reason (ibid) becomes clear. And we see, at least in Yoshihiro Togashi’s graphic-narrative dialectic of the category of ‘Human’ in Hunter x Hunter, a criticism of such justification of difference and superiority. For we are indeed, genetically speaking as a human species, 99.9% the same. It goes without saying civilization, or modernity, cannot be claimed by any color, any race. Civilization is the totality of human history, not belonging to one singular time period lorded over by a certain race, i.e., the system of thought that privileges a people for their gift of ‘modern development’ cannot hold.

If we are to truly live up to the progressive values that Enlightenment advocates, the barest minimum to begin a step towards that ideal, if it is even an ideal worth upholding, is an acknowledgement of the horrifying contradiction (how the human becomes human only when nature is negated) runs parallel with such ‘progressive’ values, while beginning to include those
negated, erased shadows of nature and Other into conversation. This is of course not an easy feat as such Enlightenment modernist perception still echo to the present. This is a non-issue, evident in George Floyd’s utterance, “I can’t breathe” moments before his passing and the subsequent Black Lives Matter Movement protests that took the United States and the world by storm (Taylor) in the year 2020. Or in the way black Africanist labor that violate human rights at the now Democratic Republic of Congo through mining coltan still fuels much technological innovation (Nyabola, 176-175). The sustenance of such logic would predictably only lead to ever more losses of human lives not considered ‘human’ by its narrow definition. Or how, moving from a strictly human perception to considering what seems to be an ever-worsening environmental crisis on a global scale, the modernist sensibility is simultaneously anthropocentric and anti-nature. It seems to me that such a sustained stance would only lead to greater doom, where the realization to our duty to the custodianship of the earth because it sustains us and we cannot live without it, will dawn on us all too late because we, as a human species more broadly, let our thinking as the center of the earth lead to our own very doom. But I am now starting to enter the realms of speculation. If there’s anything of a takeaway in such an intellectual exercise that I have undertaken worth reiterating, it is this: there is still much room for a reimagination and redefinition of who a human being is, speaking on the basis that Enlightenment is a shared ghostly inheritance, where all parties and individuals need to be included and concerned in discussion and discourse, for by our very existence of human life, we are implicated in the trajectory of the ever-accumulating history of humanity, for better or for worse.
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