

THE PORTRAYAL OF NEOCOLONIALISM IN SELECTED NOVELS OF
V.S. NAIPAUL AND AYI KWEI ARMAH

M.A. (Literature) Thesis

By

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Submitted to the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities,
University of Malawi, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (Literature)

University of Malawi
Chancellor College

April 2013

DECLARATION

I the undersigned hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work which has not been submitted to any other institution for similar purposes. Where other people's work has been used acknowledgements have been made.

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DEDICATION

To my late brother William who selflessly supported me financially in the initial stages of my MA programme. May his soul rest in peace.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to sincerely appreciate all the supervisory efforts by Prof. B.J. Uledi Kamanga. He patiently read the drafts to this thesis and gave me very pertinent guidance, which has helped me shape this thesis into a refined paper.

I would also like to acknowledge the guidance from Dr. Bright Molande. He made enlightening comments on my thesis and I express my gratitude for that.

ABSTRACT

A lot of views have been expressed on how Naipaul and Armah portray neocolonialism. On the one hand the dominant view is that the two writers negate the image of Africa through the portrayal of neocolonialism, while on the other hand the dominant view is that the writers are simply addressing the reality on the ground. However, the main argument in this study is that the two writers' portrayal of neocolonialism shows that they are optimistic that Africa can progress if the governing elite of its countries shakes off the influence of colonial masters. This is observed through a close analysis of the portrayal of neocolonialism in Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Osiris Rising* as well as Naipaul's *In A Free State* and *A Bend in the River*. In *A Bend in the River*, for instance, Naipaul attacks the African leaders' actions of entrenching neocolonialism instead of making sure that their countries are free from neocolonial influence. In the other novel, *In a Free State*, Naipaul satirizes the claim for freedom by new African nations, when in reality the perpetration of neocolonial tendencies by the African leaders, is compromising the prospects of meaningful freedom. Similarly, in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* Armah criticizes the black leaders who took over from the colonial regimes for letting neocolonialism to flourish, instead of fulfilling the aspirations that their people had before attaining independence. In *Osiris Rising* Armah is critical of the black leaders' entrenchment of neocolonialism which is evident in their dependence on Europe and America politically, culturally and economically.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTERPRETATIONS OF NEOCOLONIALISM

The term ‘neocolonialism’ has been central to the debate on whether colonialism ended or not. Yew asserts that “the use of the term ‘neocolonialism’ is one such manifestation of the on going nature of imperialism” (1). However, Yew hastens to add that the use of the term ‘neocolonialism’ is also highly contentious. This is because “the term is multifaceted and loosely used” (1). It is often used “as a synonym for contemporary forms of imperialism, and in a polemical way is used in reaction to any unjust and oppressive expression of Western political power” (Yew 1).

In addition, Yew suggests that underlying the different meanings of ‘neocolonialism’ “is a tacit understanding that colonialism should be seen as something more than the formal occupation and control of territories by a Western metropole” (1). In other words, colonialism should suggest “an indirect form of control through economic and cultural dependence” (1). In this case, argues Yew, “neocolonialism describes the continued control of former colonies through ruling native elites compliant with neocolonial powers, populations that are exploited for their labour and resources in order to feed an insatiable appetite for finished physical cultural commodities made by the metropole” (1).

Similarly, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in *Decolonising the Mind* suggests that the elite in governments in the former colonies promote neocolonialism. However, Ngugi goes further to highlight the fact that neocolonialism is not only promoted by the elites in government but also by those in the academic field, the judiciary, the media and in business as well. He observes that "the economic and political dependence of this neo-bourgeoisie is reflected in the culture of apemanship and parrotry enforced on a restive population through police boots, barbed wire, gowned clergy and judiciary ; their ideas are spread by a corpus of state intellectuals, the academic and journalistic laureates of the neocolonial establishment"(2).

Underlying Ngugi's observation is the view that the perpetual dependence on the former colonial master, both politically and economically, leads to the continued control of people's lives in the former colonies by this former colonial master. Therefore, like Yew, Ngugi subscribes to the view that neocolonialism is a new form of colonialism which entails the indirect control of former colonies through cultural and economic dependence.

Thus, neocolonialism thrives on the control of the elite. Political, cultural and economic dependence of the elite on the former colonial powers becomes the means of this control. Politically, the control is exercised through literature. The former colonial powers have inscribed themselves in their literature as being superior and in control. The end result is that the elite internalise this subterfuge, and govern their people in ways that actually uphold the view that the West is in control and Africa has to follow its lead.

Culturally, the colonial masters achieve control through language. Languages spoken in the former colonies enforce the colonialists' cultural control of Africans. When the colonialists left Africa, they left behind their languages and, therefore, their cultures in the countries which they formerly colonized. Thus, these languages entrench cultural hegemony which in turn fosters a new kind of colonialism. Fanon stresses that: "To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture" ("Black Skin, White Masks" 38). This means that African people, by speaking European languages, have abandoned their culture and adopted the European culture.

By adopting this European culture, Africans have accepted neocolonialism since “...the biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism...is the cultural bomb”(Ngugi Wa Thiong'o 3). Language is the main tool that the imperialists use to unleash this biggest weapon. It has the power to control a people's culture and therefore a people's collective mind since their perspective of themselves and of the world around them is the one that they acquire through the language they use to communicate.

By abandoning their culture and adopting foreign cultures through acquisition of the language of former colonial masters, African people are recolonized and once again become inferior to the imperialists who control their everyday lives. This is the situation African countries face. Therefore, it is not surprising that Western powers still cling to and wield power in the former colonies.

In economic terms, the presentation of western products as valuable becomes a means of control because the modern way of living is highly economic. As a result, the former colonial powers compel the elite to adopt these imperial economic values and accept them as their own, thereby enhancing neocolonialism. This situation makes the elite compliant with the neocolonial powers. As such, the neocolonial powers find the elite as readily available agents whom they use to maintain a hold and control over people's lives in the former colonies.

The conception of neocolonialism expressed in the preceding paragraphs is similar to that of Kwame Nkrumah. In contrast with colonialism, Nkrumah argues that neocolonialism is a manifestation of a system of dependency and exploitation which was created by the formal granting of independence:

Neo-colonialism is...the worst form of imperialism. For those who practice it, it means power without responsibility and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress. In the days of old-fashioned colonialism, the imperial power had at least to explain and justify home the actions it was taking abroad. In the colony those who served the ruling imperial power could at least look to its protection against violent move [sic] by their opponents. With neocolonialism neither is the case (qtd. in Yew, 1).

Thus, Nkrumah realizes that the attainment of independence did not bring any freedom. If anything it only acted as a platform for the commencement of a new form of colonialism. Critics such as Eldred Jones, Chinua Achebe, S.A. Gakwandi and Emmanuel N. Obiechina have said that this realization inspired most writers from previously colonized countries, especially those from Africa, to view neocolonialism as a new danger which required immediate attention if their societies were to experience real change.

In this connection, Jones asserts:

Political independence enjoyed only a brief period of celebration, if any at all (Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of Forests* did not linger over romantic celebration) before writers and thinkers were alerted to new dangers. Exploitation had not after all disappeared with political independence, only the exploiters have changed (1).

What this means is that “the target of protest changed from the colonial invader to the inheritors of their power” (Jones 1). Similarly, Gakwandi argues that “the attainment of independence by many African countries ... and the resultant change in the socio-political atmosphere of these countries has [sic] had discernible influence on fictional themes. It has removed, or at least distanced, the common enemy, colonialism, which has been the object of frequent attack, and has made clearer the limited validity of eulogies of the past” (66). He further adds that this situation has led to the emergence of a new type of novel in which the interpretation of the present considers that “the present has brought new problems which cannot simply be explained in terms of an external enemy and from which it is impossible to escape by the creation of a romantic or heroic past” (Gakwandi 66).

Achebe also agrees with Gakwandi's point of view. He argues that:

Most of Africa is today politically free; there are thirty-six independent African states managing their own affairs-sometimes very badly. A new situation has thus arisen. One of the writer's main functions has always been to expose and attack injustice. Should we keep at the old theme of racial injustice (sore as it is still) when new injustices have sprouted around us? I think not. (38)

Some of 'new injustices' that Achebe is referring to are the neocolonial injustices perpetrated by the ruling elite. It is also these new injustices that Obiechina refers to as 'new realities' when he asserts that: "Faced with the new realities of power and the politics of power, writers have had to reappraise their role in society. The preoccupation with the past had to give way to concern with the problems of the present" (122). In this regard, writers now tend to expose and attack the injustices that come with neocolonialism. They have moved away from taking colonialism as an object of attack.

Against this background, this study examines how neocolonialism is portrayed in V.S Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* and *In a Free State* as well as Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Osiris Rising*. V.S Naipaul is a novelist of the English speaking Caribbean. He has several works ranging from novels to a collection of essays. Ayi Kwei Armah is a novelist who has six novels to his credit.

The portrayal of neocolonialism and its impact on the image of Africa by V.S Naipaul and Ayi Kwei Armah has received overwhelming critical responses. In the case of Naipaul some critics have said that his portrayal of neocolonialism puts up a defence for colonialism, thereby depicting a pessimistic image of Africa as a place without possibilities; a place which will only progress under European influence. For example, in his reaction to *A Bend in The River*, Samantrai argues that Naipaul is an apologist of European colonialism. He says Naipaul's portrayal of neocolonialism shows that Africa has to continue to be under European rule "for its own good;" otherwise it may end up being destroyed by its "well meaning but incompetent women and children – those who can never be agents driving the machine of progress – can wreck if left un regulated[sic]" (59). In this case, Samantrai attacks Naipaul for depicting Africa as a female body upon which the West as a male proves its masculine prowess through political and economic influence. Thus, Africa has been placed in a vulnerable position in relation to the West.

This vulnerability is further emphasised by the fact that Naipaul also shows Africa as a child who requires guidance from the West as a father if she has to progress politically and economically. Samantrai, therefore, concludes that *A Bend in the River* is "a local enactment of the process of constructing a logic that enables an expression of imperialism to appear reasonable, even inevitable, despite the loss of the context of European empires" (50).

Also in reaction to *A Bend in the River* Eid accuses Naipaul of endorsing neocolonialism by only looking at the bad qualities in the life and culture of newly decolonized countries. He says Naipaul's Africa is "a condemned, fragmented society that lacks creative potential; a black society that cannot govern itself; a society that should be governed by an external power" (9). As such his overall assessment is that:

As a postcolonial text, *A Bend in the River* never opens up new possibilities for the future. It is a kind of complicit post colonialism that justifies colonialism by seeing only the civilizing values of modernity, which Naipaul sees as imperialism's positive, reconstructive and basically human face. Such artists, in denying the existence of other cultures, can never create new ways of seeing or experiencing reality except the colonial Western way. It is a way of rewriting imperialism that does not look, like oppositional post-colonial and resistance writings, towards an alternative future. Narrating European imperialism from a European perspective is not in any way different from Naipaul's narration of the modernisation of developing countries. (Eid 11)

Berger also sees Naipaul's portrayal of Africa as a pessimistic, depressing overview of the apparent destiny of all Third World countries. Naipaul's Africa is without possibilities. He pronounces *A Bend in the River* a seductive novel in the eyes of Western readers, accustomed to a longstanding tradition about Africa as the heart of darkness.

In this regard, Berger feels that Naipaul is indebted to Joseph Conrad and remarks on his "obeisance to a racist and ironically self-hating view of the native 'Other'" (148).

In the same vein, Nazareth declares that Naipaul's problem in *A Bend in the River* is that it is a case of a "writer as colonial remaining determinedly colonial" (178). Singh has argued that "such an attitude becomes the thrust of Naipaul's neocolonialism" (71-85). Much as all these critics argue that Naipaul's portrayal of neocolonialism shows his defence for neocolonialism and hence his wish for the perpetuation of colonialism, there are others who argue that this is not the case. Irving Howe, for example, argues that Naipaul does not show "a trace of Western condescension or nostalgia for colonialism" (1). John Lukacs has also argued that Naipaul is "a disinterested 'truth seeker' who impartially criticizes nearly every one he writes about" (qtd. in Wise 1). Wise also upholds the view that Naipaul is a disinterested truth seeker. He says:

Naipaul does not so much offer us the unmediated observations of an irresponsible free agent as he presents us with 'objectively' determined insights or even 'truths' of a deeply disenfranchised subject of the Third world in the era of multinational capitalism-which is to say, neocolonialism.(1)

However, Edward Said dismisses the notion of impartiality in Naipaul's portrayal of neocolonialism. He argues that "Naipaul does not impartially 'tell the truth', rather he flatters the prejudices of 'ignorant' Western audiences that have of late grown weary of the problems of the Third World and of the decolonizing process itself"(qtd in Wise 1). Thus, generally Naipaul's portrayal of Africa as a neocolony is taken as uncompromisingly Western-oriented. To the critics it is this Western thinking that makes him create an uncompromising pessimistic image of Africa.

Ayi Kwei Armah has also been accused of being uncompromisingly pessimistic in his portrayal of neocolonialism in relation to Africa. Nnolim, commenting on the *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, views Armah as a ‘cosmic pessimist’ who perceives the world as inherently evil and a ‘pejorist’ who sees corruption and degeneration as inevitable natural processes. Therefore, Nnolim declares Armah as “a writer whose philosophic pessimism is undisguised” (207). He also pronounces Armah’s novel as a book that “refers to no real Africa but to some abstract human condition” (Nnolim 209). Similarly, Amuta notes that in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* “the power of decay and despair rise [sic] to the level of being deified” (“Ayi Kwei Armah and the Mythopoesis of Mental Decolonization” 54) and suggests that the creation of characters who “do nothing about their decadent societies [...] makes Armah a pessimistic African novelist” (“Contemporary African Artist in Armah’s Novels” 473).

Kibera’s assessment of the same novel is that it is overwhelmingly pessimistic. He writes:

The Beautiful Ones is, therefore, not part of that literature which probes below the obvious critical moments in history [...] but rather the unyielding statement that the world remain static, unfeeling, and that hopes of the early sixties have given way to pessimism- and death.(64)

However, according to Lazarus, this perspective of *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* as pessimistic only shows that “[c]ritics of the novel have not found it easy to describe [the] relationship between affirmative vision and degraded reality”(138) expressed throughout the novel. He, therefore, argues that it is wrong for some critics to “interpret Armah's exposé and repudiation of the Eurocentricism of Ghana's elite as the expression of a misanthrope's disapproval of people in general.”(Lazarus 147). Lazarus observes that critics like Gakwandi have “misunderstood the basic thrust of Armah's anger. Where the novelist condemns the elite's active participation in the neocolonial complex, Gakwandi sees only arrogance and self-righteousness” (147).

Lazarus further attacks Gakwandi for wrongly charging Armah with exhibiting a profound disgust towards African humanity. He contends that this is very inaccurate because “A close reading of *The Beautiful Ones* reveals that the author's contempt is reserved exclusively for the Koomsons or would- be-Koomsons of his novel's world: the wealthy, the powerful, those engaged in corrupt practices, and those who look at the world through Western-tinted eyes”(147)

Accordingly, the literature review above reveals that many critics presume that Naipaul and Armah portray neocolonialism in a way that paints a negative image of Africa in order to show that Africa cannot progress without the influence of former colonial masters. The critics argue that Naipaul portray neocolonialism in this way because he is influenced by the Western condescending thinking that nothing good can come out of Africa. On the other hand, Armah is influenced by his apparent loathing of African humanity.

However, in this study I intend to show that the assumption that Naipaul is an outright apologist for the West is a superficial analysis. I will show that while it may appear that Naipaul adopts a tone of an apologist as he portrays neocolonialism, he is actually critical of the apologists of the West. I also intend to argue that Armah is not an outright pessimist. I will show that his portrayal of neocolonialism is not simply a general critique of those Africans that are advancing neocolonial thinking but also an indirect critique of the former colonial powers for continuing to control the former colonies indirectly. The major aim is to show that V.S. Naipaul and Ayi Kwei Armah present a presumed undesirable image of Africa as way of creating a desire for a better African Society.

The chapters that follow develop the central argument as follows: Chapter two is an analysis of *A Bend in the River* and *In A Free State* that shows Naipaul's criticism of the African leaders who promote neocolonialism. Chapter three is an analysis of *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Osiris Rising* that illustrates Armah's criticism of the African leaders who support neocolonialism by collaborating with the former colonialists.

Chapter four is a comparison of the two authors' portrayal of neocolonialism which establishes the fact that though they come from different backgrounds, they are not apologists of neocolonialism. Rather they have a common social goal of trying to indirectly impress upon the neocolonial African leaders to change and reorganise African society and make it free of neocolonial influence.

Then the concluding section summarises all the arguments that express the fact that the portrayal of neocolonialism in the selected novels is modelled on the appearance versus reality dichotomy. This is to say, on the surface the two writers' portrayal of neocolonialism looks like is aimed at painting a gloomy picture of Africa while the deeper meaning of what is presented reflects the contrary.

CHAPTER TWO

NAIPAUL ON NEOCOLONIALISM: AN APOLOGIST?

Naipaul's portrayal of neocolonialism expresses implicit criticism of the leaders of African countries for allowing neocolonialism to get established at the expense of genuine freedom. By portraying neocolonialism in this manner, does Naipaul show that he is not an apologist of the West? Why does he portray neocolonialism in this manner?

In *A Bend in the River*, the nameless African country where this novel is set has failed to attain true liberation from colonialism because its leadership has been neocolonised. The leaders are operating under colonial influence although the country has attained independence formally. This influence is sanctioned by the leaders themselves, who, after noticing their inadequacy with regard to the governing of the new nation, tend to look up to the West for support. This image of the leaders reflects Fanon's position on the behaviour of the leadership that takes over from the colonial regime. In an article titled 'Pitfalls of National Consciousness' Fanon observes that the middle class which assumes power at the end of the colonial regime is inadequately prepared to replace the colonial system because of lack of training and resources and resorts to sending "frenzied appeals for help from the mother country" ("The Wretched of the Earth" 120).

Fanon also attacks the national middle class for creating this dependency by imitating goals, objectives and methodologies of the middle class of the mother country. Thus, instead of independence, the 'decolonised' nation states remain fiscally as well as politically dependent and indebted to the colonial power ("The Wretched of the Earth" 121-22).

In *A Bend in the River*, the president, popularly known as the Big Man, is a typical example of Fanon's observation. The Big Man forges his political career by imitating the display of power that he sees in the West : "He needs a model in everything, and I believe he heard that de Gaulle used to send personal regards to the wives of his political enemies" (204). Typical of the middle class, the Big Man models his political career on Western politicians with the belief that his political career will be as superior as that of his Western counterparts. This belief disregards the fact that Western politics is practiced in a context which is different from the African context. Therefore, the Big Man imposes on his country external gestures such as the sending of regards to wives of political enemies, a political life which is alien to African experience. Consequently, he allows himself to be an agent for the promotion of neocolonialism, thereby undermining the independence of the new nation.

However, Naipaul disapproves this promotion of neocolonial tendencies as evidenced in Zabeth's displeasure with the Big Man's wish to always present his superiority as equal to that of foreigners. According to the narrator, Zabeth dislikes the fact that:

In pictures in the newspapers only visiting foreigners were given equal space with the President. With local people the President was always presented as a towering figure. Even if pictures were of the same size, the President's picture would be of his face alone, while the other man would be shown full length. (241)

As evident above, giving foreigners equal space with the President and presenting the President as a towering figure among local people in pictures strengthens the view that the President takes pleasure in promoting neocolonialism. Therefore Zabeth's dislike of this behaviour demonstrates the disapproval of the neocolonial tendency of thinking that if you are putting yourself at par with Europeans then you are more superior to your fellow Africans.

The Big Man's decision to build the New Domain also suggests that he is eager to glorify Western values and hence promote neocolonialism:

He was creating modern Africa. He was creating a miracle that would astound the rest of the world. He was by-passing the real Africa, the difficult bush and villages and creating something that would match anything that existed in other countries. (110)

The Big Man, in deciding to build the New Domain, a place for educating the African youth by European teachers, imitates Europe and tries to bring it to Africa. Therefore the Domain with its modern luxurious buildings becomes a European model with western values. The Big Man thinks that building an educational institution with a European background will make it 'modern' and 'astound the rest of the world'. However the Domain is not successful as the Big Man had expected:

The Domain, with its shoddy grandeur, was a hoax. Neither the president who had called it into being nor the foreigners who had made a fortune building it had faith in what they were creating. (113)

The passage above reveals a number of things. First, the Domain was not what it was touted to be. The use of the words ‘shoddy grandeur’ betrays that there was nothing at the Domain to make it the ‘miracle that would astound the rest of the world’. But even more importantly, by calling the Domain a ‘hoax’, Naipaul illustrates that the creation of the Domain was a waste of resources because it had no clear purpose. Hence its failure to materialise. This failure is what demonstrates Naipaul’s disapproval of the leaders’ tendency to think that if they copy what people in the West do then they will also be superior like them.

The Big Man’s mind-set of thinking that Europe offers the best model of leadership is also evident in his dependence on European mercenaries to sustain his power. At the helm of his fight with the rebels who wanted to wrestle power from him were “white men, the promise of order and continuity” (86). The presence of the European mercenaries guarantees the Big Man’s survival. It is an assurance of the complete suppression of the rebellion since “all that was threatening, [...], [is] being held in check” (86). The reliance on European mercenaries to restore order in the country is ironical. It is ironical because the Big Man, as a leader of an independent country, is entrusting his political survival on former colonial powers (represented here by the European mercenaries), the very same people that they defeated in order to gain independence. Therefore, Naipaul uses this irony to demonstrate his disapproval of African leaders for perpetrating neocolonialism at the expense of their country’s sovereignty.

The disapproval of the leaders' support for neocolonialism is also observed in *In a Free State*. The narrator, in a satirical tone, attacks and ridicules the claim for freedom by the new nation when the situation on the ground reflects that the proliferation of neocolonialism is hindering the prospects of any meaningful freedom. The fact that neocolonialism is rampant in the new nation is clear when it is noted that:

The territory of the king's people lay to the south and was still known by its colonial name of the Southern Collectorate. It was there that Bobby worked, as an administrative officer in one of the departments of Central government. But during this week of crisis he had been in the capital, [...], attending a seminar on community development; [...]. The seminar had more English participants than African; the Africans were well-dressed and dignified, with little to say; and the seminar ended on Sunday with a buffet lunch in half-acre garden in what was still an English suburb. (103)

The fact that the king's territory is still known by its colonial name symbolises the continued indirect colonial influence on the supposedly independent nation. Therefore, the presence of Bobby, an English man, in the central government as an expatriate is not surprising. It is typical of a neocolonial establishment to have expatriates within its workforce.

In addition, this neocolonial influence is also manifested in the fact that the seminar on community development has more English participants than Africans, Africans who also have little to say. At this point one can sense the satirical element alluded to earlier, especially when one considers why a seminar on community development in Africa should register more English participants than Africans, and also why Africans should make little contribution to the deliberations during the seminar. This only shows that the Africans are not in control in this newly independent state and hence it is paradoxical to claim that their country is independent. Thus, it is not surprising to note that after independence there is still an English suburb in the country and that the capital city “was still a colonial city, with a colonial glamour. Everyone in it was far from home” (104). By presenting the situation like this Naipaul wants to quiz the leaders as to why they are letting the city to still look like a colonial city when the country had already attained independence. In so doing, Naipaul is indirectly expressing his displeasure at the promotion of neocolonialism by the new leaders.

The adoption of a European identity by those Africans in leadership positions also shows the entrenchment of neocolonialism in the free state and, therefore, it becomes questionable for the free state to claim to have political independence. The narrator states that the Africans into whose hands the free state has been entrusted wear European suits which they have not paid for ; their hair style is known among city Africans as “the English style”(104); they frequent the night clubs from which they had been barred before independence.

Obviously, with their adopted European identity, the leaders have become incongruous with the state of affairs in the presupposed free state. Their incongruity is emphasized by the fact that Bobby, the Englishman in the story, wears a ‘native shirt’ made of phoney native fabric, designed and woven in Holland (104). As it were, it is paradoxical for a shirt to be called native when it is made in Europe. The narrator, therefore, implies that the free state is not really free since Europe still controls every aspect of life within it. The leaders have to shake off this European influence and be themselves if the free state is to be really free. This is the message that Naipaul tries to convey in the novel.

Thus through the use of the narrator, Naipaul shows that neocolonialism impedes the realisation of true independence in newly independent African countries. The narrators in both *A Bend in the River* and *In a Free State* show that the leadership in the newly independent African countries facilitate this neocolonialism and undermine the independence of their countries. Thus, by portraying the leaders in this way, Naipaul implicitly criticises them for denying their countries genuine independence due to their unwavering support for neocolonialism. In essence, Naipaul's message in both *A Bend in the River* and *In A Free State* regarding neocolonialism is that the leaders in newly independent African countries should stop facilitating neocolonialism if their countries are to be really independent.

Therefore, the view that Naipaul advocates the continuation of colonial influence in the former colonies is rendered invalid. Basing on what has been discussed above my argument is that Naipaul's critical stance shows that he actually wishes to see that leaders in independent African countries have stopped viewing everything not Western as inferior. In so doing, the leaders will avoid entrenching neocolonialism in their new nations.

In both novels discussed in this study, the author disapproves this condescending Eurocentric attitude. In *A Bend in the River*, for example, the disapproval is expressed in Indar's reaction to the American who "spoke of Africa as though Africa was a sick child and he was a parent"(165). Indar, one of the central characters in the novel, says he was irritated by the condescending attitude expressed in this speech. The fact that Indar is irritated by what the American said epitomises Naipaul's disapproval of the condescending attitude towards Africa and its people.

In the other novel, *In A Free State*, the disapproval is shown through the juxtaposition of antithetical mind-sets of two central characters in the novel, namely Bobby and Linda. Linda is shown to be the embodiment of the Western condescending attitude towards Africans. She regards Africans as primitive people as demonstrated in this speech:

It's foolish really, but I never thought they would have fields. I somehow imagined they would all be living in the jungle. When Martin said we were being posted to the Southern Collectorate I imagined that the compound would be in a little clearing in the forest. I never thought there would be roads and houses and shops. (114)

The references to jungle and forest in the passage connote the presupposed primitiveness of Africa and Africans. Bobby's immediate reaction to this prejudiced perception of Africans exposes the ignorance of the supposedly civilised whites:

Bobby said, " Do you remember that American from the foundation who came out to encourage us to keep statistics or something? I took him out for a drive one day, and as soon as we were out of the town he was terrified. He kept on asking, Where's the Congo? Is that the Congo? He was absolutely terrified all the time." (115)

The fact that the American kept asking about where the Congo was reveals his ignorant assumptions about Africa. Like all prejudiced Whites, he thinks Africa is equal to forest, and therefore primitive. However, the reality on the ground contradicts him. He does not see the Congo, here symbolising a forested (primitive) Africa. It is not surprising therefore that he is "absolutely terrified all the time". In this regard, Bobby's response serves to show that Linda is wrong to think that Africans belong to a primitive society while at the same time indicating disapproval of this condescending attitude. The response is also an indication that Linda's Eurocentric condescending attitude is only based on imagination and not what is on the ground. The fact that reality contradicts imagination is symbolic of the disapproval of this attitude.

Therefore, through the opposing mind-sets of Linda and Bobby, Naipaul paints a picture of how prejudiced Europeans are against Africans while at the same time condemning the prejudiced attitude.

In conclusion, I contend in this chapter that Naipaul is not an apologist of European influence in the post-independence era in Africa. His portrayal of neocolonialism does not advocate the continued influence of the Europeans in Africa. Rather, it is aimed at ensuring that this influence completely comes to an end. This is why he criticises the African leadership for perpetrating this influence. It is also for the same reason that he disputes the supposed inferiority of Africans and presumed superiority of Europeans. As observed already in this chapter, the attitude of considering Europeans as superior is the main reason why neocolonialism proliferates in Africa. In view of all this, I argue that Naipaul's portrayal of neocolonialism exposes and at the same time disapproves the ills of neocolonialism so that they can be rectified. The aim is not to paint a negative image of Africa but to create in the leaders the desire to have a society free from neocolonial influence. This chapter having examined how Naipaul portrays neocolonialism the next chapter focuses Armah's portrayal of the same. Does he do it the same way as Naipaul?

CHAPTER THREE

ARMAH ON NEOCOLONIALISM: A PESSIMIST?

The portrayal of neocolonialism in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Osiris Rising* is also an implicit criticism of the leaders of independent African countries who have allowed neocolonialism to get established at the expense of freedom. The criticism is a way of telling the leaders that unless they stop collaborating with neocolonialists their countries cannot achieve sovereignty. Against this background, I argue in this chapter that Armah's portrayal of neocolonialism does not show he is a pessimist who believes that African leaders are incapable of leading without the influence of the former colonial masters.

In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* Armah shows that African leaders who take over power from the colonial rulers disappoint people because they do not live up to the expectations of the people. As the narrator in the novel says: "We were ready here for big and beautiful things, but what we had was our own black men hugging new paunches scrambling to ask the white man to welcome them onto our backs" (81).

It is obvious from the narrator's statement that what people aspired for before independence has been betrayed. Instead of fulfilling the aspirations that people had before independence, the black leaders who have taken over from the colonial regime have let neocolonialism flourish through their association with Whites. The last part of the statement strongly brings up this question of enhancing neocolonialism. The narrator's use of the word 'scrambling' expresses the eagerness with which the black leaders embrace influence from the former Western colonial masters. In the process the leaders let the former colonial masters still have a hold over people's lives in the former colony.

The idea that the new black leaders are promoting neocolonialism by associating with the former colonial masters is strongly suggested when the narrator says:

Our masters were the white men and we were coming to know this, and the knowledge was filling us with fear first then anger. And they who would be our leaders, they also had the white men for their masters, and they also feared the masters, but after the fear what was at the bottom of their being was not the hate and the anger we knew in our despair. What they felt was love. What they felt for their white masters and our white masters was gratitude and faith. (81)

The fact that white men have become masters of the narrator and his people suggests the idea of black leaders' acceptance of the continued indirect control of the country by the former colonial masters. This view is further supported by the fact that the leaders of the narrator's country also have the white men for their masters. As such the idea of enhancement of neocolonialism by the black leaders is evoked.

Moreover, the fact that the black leaders accept the white men as masters with 'gratitude and faith' suggests their belief in the superiority of Europeans and everything European. This belief in European superiority is manifest in the black leaders' struggle to do or say everything with a European mental outlook. Armah disapproves this inferiority complex because it perpetrates neocolonialism in the officially independent African countries. The disapproval is actually expressed by the narrator when he says:

There is something so terrible in watching a black man trying at all points to be the dark ghost of a European, and that was what we were seeing in those days. Men who had risen to lead the hungry came in clothes they might have been hoping to use at Governors Balls on the birthday of the white people's queen, carrying cuff links that shone insultingly in the faces of men who had stolen pennies from their friends. (81)

The colonial mentality of the black leaders is evoked by their struggle to become white through the special clothes that they hope to use at “Governor’s Balls on the birthday of the white people’s queen” [...] and also through their attempt to speak ‘legal English’ among other examples. However, this mentality alienates them from the people who are supposed to give them power, consequently they rely on the white man as the source of their power, thereby becoming imitators who have “no power if the white master gives [them] none” (81). In this way, therefore, the black leaders become victims of the ‘colonialist ideology’, which “is designed to confine the native in a confused and subservient position” (JahMohamed 21).

It is this confused and subservient position that makes the black leaders readily available agents for the perpetration of neocolonialism. This is where they draw criticism from Armah because without their collaboration the whites would not have been able to use the leaders as agents of neocolonialism. Instead of resisting the whites’ influence, the black leaders are only very glad to be conduits for the perpetration of neocolonialism.

In *Osiris Rising*, through the dialogue between Ast and the DD, Armah shows how the new leaders of the independent country have paradoxically become defenders of Europe and America. To the leaders, the formal granting of independence to the country has occasioned the consolidation of European and American influence in the country.

Ast argues against the view that independence brought change: “There is plenty of evidence that the independence game only stabilized European and American control” (36). This stabilisation of European and American control within the independence era suggests the consolidation of neocolonialism by the new Black leaders who have allowed Europe and America to indirectly control the country politically, culturally and economically. In my view, political control is evident in the fact that the new leaders cannot govern their country properly unless they draw their power from these foreign powers. The foreign based power is symbolised by the state of the art military hardware that these leaders receive as aid from the colonial masters, as noted in this speech made by the DD and addressed to Ast as they tour the security headquarters:

“They create and maintain stability. Nothing is possible without that. The subversives know that, so they are always trying to create instability. We have to be ready for them. And we are. We are,” he repeated the phrase as if he hadn’t put sufficient conviction behind it first time. “We are.” (44)

Thus to the leaders proper governance implies wielding the foreign based power to deal with all subversives who may try to bring instability into the country. The leaders believe in this power to the extent of declaring that “Nothing is possible without [it]”. It is this deep-seated belief in military might that allows foreign powers to politically control the independent country to the extent that any attempt to fight the new leaders becomes a fight against these neocolonial powers. It is a question of “cut[ting] through the accumulated power of America, Britain, France, Germany, Italy. The Mafia, the Vatican and The CIA together” (78-79).

Culturally, the foreign powers have sustained control over the independent country through education. This is evident in the fact that “syllabuses and teaching approaches [are] modelled on European practices...” (103). As a result of these Eurocentric orientations in the educational system, some Africans who take a leading role in the academic field assimilate the colonial ideology that propagates the superiority of European culture.

The Africans now look down upon their culture and uphold European culture, as it is implied in the dialogue that follows:

“The Africans [...] especially keep talking about something they call high cultural standards. They mean European culture. Europe has been made central to us in some very practical ways. There’s something called home leave for faculty members every two years. Home is defined to mean Europe. We have been trying to change it, but there’s enormous faculty support for it.”

“Even from Africans?”

“A lot of African intellectuals dream of going home to Europe every other year.”

(106)

As evident above, culture is of high standard if it is European. Therefore, attempts are made to be always in contact with Europe so that these high cultural standards are maintained. This is why the African academics in the independent country “dream of going home to Europe every other year”.

By cherishing the dream of going to the source of this presumed culture of high standards, the academics downgrade African culture and gladly embrace European culture. This cultural shift by the academics reminds us what has already been observed in chapter one that neocolonialism is not only enhanced by the elite in government but also those in the academic field, the judiciary, the media and in business as well.

While they facilitate the entrenchment of neocolonialism through cultural imitation, the African leaders and other elites believe that colonialism itself had nothing wrong except its denial “of responsible Africans participation in managing the system”. This view is expressed in the following dialogue between Ast and the DD in *Osiris Rising*.

“It’s a layman’s misunderstanding to consider independence a revolt against white power. We-the authorities in Africa-we accept the framework established by the Western powers. There was only one thing wrong with colonialism. It denied responsible Africans participation in managing the system. At the elite level. Independence solved that”.

“The system itself, then, remains the same?” Ast asked.

“Of course it’s been modernized. What do you achieve by overthrowing a working system?” (36-37)

The DD, representing the new leaders, actually confirms the eagerness with which these new leaders embrace the colonial system and manage it in the independence era. This eagerness is evident in the rhetorical question that the DD poses: “What do you achieve by overthrowing a working system?” To the leaders, therefore, colonialism is a ‘working system’ which needs to be maintained. There is no need for abandoning it. This is why the leaders decide to modernize it. By modernisation of the system the leaders implicitly suggest the participation of Africans in managing the system in the independence era as opposed to the colonial era when only whites managed the system. Therefore, it is through the modernisation process that neocolonialism is born.

However, it is ironical to call colonialism a working system considering that the leaders themselves led the struggle to end it. Through this irony, Armah saliently condemns the leaders of newly independent African countries for promoting neocolonialism, at the expense of true political, cultural and economic independence of their countries.

I therefore contend that Armah’s portrayal of neocolonialism in both *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Osiris Rising* exposes the fact that the leaders of newly independent African countries willingly promote neocolonialism in their countries. Because of neocolonialism, these countries do not experience real independence even though they became independent officially. This handling of the theme of neocolonialism serves to indirectly criticise the leaders for letting neocolonialism get established in their countries at the expense of attaining true independence.

Essentially, Armah wants to indicate where things have gone wrong so that they can be rectified. Therefore to claim that Armah is pessimistic in his portrayal of neocolonialism regarding post-independent Africa is invalid. This is because by criticising the neocolonial tendencies of the African leaders, Armah is actually trying to show them that there is hope for a politically, culturally and economically independent Africa only if the leaders shake off neocolonial influence. Having examined how Armah portrays neocolonialism in the novels under study, the next chapter will examine what motivates Armah and Naipaul to portray neocolonialism the way it has been discussed in the preceding chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR

A VISION FOR A REORGANISED SOCIETY

The discussion in chapters two and three on Naipaul's and Armah's portrayal of neocolonialism presents some similarity between the two authors' visions. Both writers portray neocolonialism as an impediment to genuine independence in African countries. As observed, the aim of this kind of portrayal is to implicitly criticise the new leaders who take over from the colonial regime for colluding with the former colonialists to recolonize their countries. So is it a coincidence that these writers, from different backgrounds, could portray neocolonialism in a similar manner? Could there be a particular common motivating factor that results into this situation? These are some questions that this chapter intends to put under microscopic examination and find answers.

Going by the discussions in chapters two and three I posit that Naipaul and Armah authors intend to use the emotive power of their works to encourage those Africans who formally replaced the colonial regimes to initiate a political, cultural and economic reorganization of society with the aim of establishing neocolonialism free countries with respect to every sphere of life. Both writers are wary of the African dependence on Europe. For instance, the leaders' dependence on foreign military aid, as portrayed in Armah's *Osiris Rising*, shows how misguided the leaders are to think that the foreign power is all conquering. This is only pseudo-power as it is only temporary in the sense that if aid is cut off they will remain powerless.

Again, we are also reminded of a similar observation that Armah makes in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not yet Born* with reference to the leaders that take over from the colonial regime. He says that , “a black man who has spent his life fleeing himself into whiteness has no power if the white man gives him none”(82). It is such kind of irony that Naipaul also underscores in his criticism of the new leaders’ dependence on foreign military personnel in order to sustain control of their countries. The leaders find a “promise of order and continuity” (“A Bend in the River” 86) in the white military personnel that help in the war against subversives. Yet it is the very same whites whom they defeated in order to gain freedom. In this connection, the seemingly all conquering power of whites becomes a farce.

Thus, politically, this is the sort of situation which needs to be reorganised. The criticism is meant to bring awareness among the leaders that drawing political power from the West leads to retrogression. Political freedom will truly be realised only if the leaders work with their own people since they are the ones who can truly empower them to govern properly. In this respect, this study reiterates the view expressed by Armah in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* that “the only real power a black man can have will come from black people”(82).

Both writers are also against the leaders' tendency of cherishing European culture which is manifest in the leaders' huge appetite for European styles of dressing, in their dream of going home to Europe, the presupposed source of a culture of high standards, and in their struggle to speak European languages such as English correctly. In *In A Free State*, for instance, Naipaul satirises the imitation of European dressing by describing those Africans in leadership positions as wearing "cast-off European clothes" (121). Critics such as Ranu Samantrai, Haidar Eid and Richard A Berger think that this is nothing but a ploy to portray Africans negatively. However, in the context of the novel, these images suggest disapproval of the enslaved mentality that is rampant in a country that wants to think of itself as free.

The leadership's dressing, as described by Armah in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, also reflects this enslaved mentality. It is a kind of dressing that they might hope to use at "Governors Balls on the birthday of the white people's queen" (81). The enslaved mentality is evident here in the fact that the leaders are compelled to dress according to dress codes for a particular occasion just as Europeans do.

Armah also criticises the manner in which the leaders strive to speak European languages such as English correctly. This is evident in the following subtle interrogation from *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, “The voice of the suited man had something unexpected about it, ...[it] forc[ed] itself into unaccustomed English rhythms. Why was this necessary? A very Ghanaian voice” (37). The question heightens the absurdity of the leaders’ attempt to speak like the English when they could very well communicate with one another if they could just be themselves. In other words, there is no need for the leaders to try to be like Europeans by imitating their use of language. This is why, in order to run away from this enslaved mentality, the Big Man in *A Bend in the River* uses an African language instead of French to deliver his speeches (221). However, he cannot completely be free from this enslaved mentality because some few French words such as ‘citoyens’ and ‘citoyenne’ were still incorporated in the speech.

This cultural enslavement is also evident in the tendency of the leaders to glorify all things Western, a legacy of colonialism and a symptom of the neocolonialist ideology which pervades African society. Both writers are against this tendency. In particular, they denounce the ideology which is at the root of the problem of emigration in Africa which posits Europe (the West) as an ideal place to which all Africans should aspire.

In *A Bend in the River* it is observed that Europe is not as rosy as it is assumed to be:

But the Europe I had come to-and knew from the outset I was coming to-was neither the old Europe nor the new. It was something shrunken and mean and forbidding. It was the Europe where Indar, after his time at a famous university, had suffered and tried to come to some resolution about his place in the world.
(247)

This is actually a debunking of the myth about Europe as the land of opportunity and prosperity. Instead, further subjugation and degradation continue for Africans who seek their fortunes abroad.

Armah and Naipaul also bemoan the African economic dependency on European countries, which results from the leadership's lack of interest in developing home industry. In *Osiris Rising*, for example, Armah criticises the African governments' reluctance to ensure that the manufacturing industry is developed to cater for the needs of the country mainly because the leaders misuse the money on insignificant issues:

"Foreign exchange problems?"

"That's what the government says. Greed is more like it. The country earns foreign exchange. But they embezzle it. Besides, it's time we manufactured the things we need right here. Instead of solving real problems, the government specializes in hunting and jailing opponents..." (54)

Furthermore, in *A Bend in the River*, we are told “everything was imported; everything was expensive” (181), an indication of the leadership’s lack of interest in developing home industry. In effect, this criticism is not aimed at presenting a negative image of Africa and its people. Rather it is aimed at showing that African leaders entrench neocolonialism through their Eurocentric tendencies. Therefore, they need to drop these tendencies if neocolonialism is to be curbed. In essence, Armah and Naipaul merely want to enlighten African leaders on the mistakes they are making so that they transform the post-independence era into an era in which their countries can claim sovereignty politically, culturally and economically.

This is the common vision that links the two writers, and even links them with other African writers who write on the aftermath of independence. Ngugi Wa Thiong’o also pursues this vision as exemplified by his criticism against the entrenchment of neocolonialism which is manifest in the governing elite’s support of the exploitation of workers by a foreign company¹. Ama Ata Aidoo also does the same in her critical stance against the entrenchment of neocolonialism which puts at a disadvantage the interests of the masses as portrayed in her novel *Our Sister Killjoy* ².

¹ to appreciate this criticism see Ngugi Wa Thiong’o (“Matigari” 108)

² to appreciate this criticism see Aidoo Ama Ata (“Our Sister Killjoy” 6)

Therefore, by criticizing the promotion of neocolonialism in post-independence Africa, V.S Naipaul and Ayi Kwei Armah are fulfilling the vision that is shared by many African writers who have written on the same problem. This is a vision which puts the interests of Africa at heart, a vision that celebrates the fact that Africa is capable of progressing without depending on Europe.

Thus the vision does not subscribe to the view that Africa is “a condemned, fragmented society that lacks creative potential ; a black society that cannot govern itself ; a society that should be governed by an external power” (Eid 9). Africa, therefore, just needs to reorganise itself politically, culturally and economically, and there will be no doubts as to whether it has the capability to progress on its own without external help.

CONCLUSION

APPEARANCE VERSUS REALITY

This thesis intends has shown that the portrayal of neocolonialism by Armah and Naipaul is not aimed at painting a negative the image of Africa through the portrayal of the reality on the ground. The preceding chapters have proved that the two writers' portrayal of neocolonialism in a manner that shows criticism of its perpetration by African leaders in post-independent African countries is double-edged. The presentation takes the appearance versus reality dichotomy approach. While on the surface the criticism may appear to portray a negative picture of the leaders and Africa; in reality the criticism shows that the writers have the best interest of Africa at heart. The writers intend to expose the mistakes of the leaders who take over from the colonial regime so that they realise that the path they have taken only leads to recolonisation of their countries. Through this exposure Naipaul and Armah wants the African leaders to reorganize their countries politically, culturally and economically so that they become free of neocolonialism.

In this regard, therefore, the two authors' depiction of neocolonialism is in total agreement with Achebe's thinking. Achebe considers it wrong for Africans to only blame foreigners for all their problems. In his view, both the "colonial aggressor and the African are implicated in the desolation of Africa" (qtd. in Ogunbiyi 32).

Achebe also expects African writers to be involved in the “reshaping of their people’s history”(qtd. in Ogunbiyi 32) instead of thinking that all they need is to observe and describe. In the same vein when Naipaul and Armah criticise the African leaders for enhancing neocolonialism they are actually sending the message that the leaders themselves are to blame because they allow themselves to be used to perpetrate this neocolonialism. At the same time the criticism shows that both writers are not only preoccupied with observing and describing but also with reshaping of the African society at large through exposing and attacking the ills emanating from the entrenchment of neocolonialism. At this point, however, one may ask: how does Naipaul fit in with Achebe’s position considering that he is non-African? Perhaps this could be an area for future research as some critics such as (Chinweizu et al. 10 – 16) completely rule out the possibility of a non-African to be called an African writer because he or she is deemed not well conversant with African experience.

However, from the presentations of neocolonialism by Naipaul and Armah, it is evident that the issue of experience does not matter because though Naipaul could be presumed to lack the capacity to handle an African experience on account of not being part of the experience, he ably exposes and attacks the ills of neocolonialism just like Armah and other writers writing on the same subject have done.

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