
Reflections of Neocolonialism in Aravind Adiga's *Amnesty*

Prakhar Medhavi, (Research Scholar), PG Department of English & Research Centre, Magadh University, Bodh Gaya, Prakharmedhavi94@gmail.com

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Abstract

Aravind Adiga's work, *Amnesty*, originally published in 2020, goes beyond the parameters of an individual narrative to become a stupendous critique of neocolonialism's creeping grasp on the contemporary world. Set in a developed society of "Core" nations, the narrative follows the struggles of an undocumented immigrant who is forced to handle the difficulties of existence inside a system meant to make them invisible yet vital. This article looks into Adiga's dense web of power relations, using a detailed examination of the characters and their interactions to shed light on neocolonial control mechanisms. Through this analysis, the article exposes colonialism's persistent legacy, revealing how it continues to impact the contemporary global socioeconomic environment. By exploring the characters' conflicts and the systems they deal with, the research reveals the widespread impact of neocolonial practices, notably in immigration and labor exploitation. Finally, this study emphasizes the importance of literature in reflecting on and addressing global power systems, showing neocolonialism's enduring relevance and massive impact on the world we live in.

Keywords: - Neocolonialism, Immigrants, Globalization, Power Structure, Neoliberal Economy, Colonialism.

Introduction

The novel *Amnesty* by Aravind Adiga is a vivid example of how literature may be used as a tool for introspection and criticism. Using its fascinating narrative and sharp analysis, the book not only questions neocolonialism but also forces readers to face unsettling realities about worldwide power dynamics. We will examine how *Amnesty* depicts neocolonialism, examines immigration laws and labor practices, and advocates for compassion and understanding as we dive deeply into the Novel's relevance in this article, "Amnesty, Adiga offers a potent Marxist critique of the neoliberal macrocosm through the protagonist Danny's experience as an undocumented worker" (Medhavi & Sahay 2023, p.2100). We will show how *Amnesty* stimulates critical thought and gets readers involved in today's most important sociopolitical concerns through a close reading of Adiga's text.

The sneaky successor to conventional colonialism, neocolonialism, thrives on the ability to sustain power without resorting to overt force, As Spivak remarks "Neocolonialism is what happened after the beginning of the dismantling of colonialism proper, that is to say, old territorial imperialisms which began with the rise of monopoly industrial capitalism" (Spivak 1991, p.220) It makes use of social and economic structures to help industrialized countries at the expense of emerging ones, unlike the direct domination of the past. Unfair commercial strategies, reliance on cheap labor, and the manipulation of political institutions are examples of how this might appear. As a result, emerging countries and former colonies struggle to escape the economic chains imposed by neocolonial forces, creating a perpetual cycle of dependency, since, "It was because the nature of neo-colonialism was economic rather than territorial or cultural" (p.221) This system highlights the need to demolish these institutions and establish a more just global order by maintaining a world in which a small number of people profit off the labor and resources of the majority of underdeveloped "periphery" nations.

Amnesty is fundamentally a biting criticism of neocolonialism, revealing the subtle ways in which colonial legacies still influence modern power structures. The book eloquently depicts

the human cost of neocolonial activities via the experiences of its protagonist and other characters. Adiga deftly captures the hardships that illegal immigrants endure in industrialized nations, as "Neocolonialism is a way of describing these disparities" (p.223) emphasizing the structural obstacles they run across while trying to improve their lot in life. The story exposes the terrible reality experienced by individuals marginalized and made invisible by neocolonial mechanisms, from discriminating immigration regulations to exploitative labor conditions. Adiga's portrayal of people and institutions' culpability in neocolonialism's perpetuation is among its most stunning criticisms. The story shows how even well-meaning people may unintentionally support repressive institutions through complex characterizations and subtle narrative complexities. *Amnesty* presents a devastating image of the pervasive effect of neocolonialism in contemporary society, whether it is the immigration authorities enforcing harsh regulations or the protagonist's employer turning a blind eye to his dire circumstances.

Alongside challenging neocolonialism, *Amnesty* provides a forum for discussing the ethical implications of immigration laws and labor practices. The story invites readers to question the underlying assumptions and biases that shape immigration policy in Western countries through the eyes of its characters. Adiga questions the distinction between "deserving" and "undeserving" immigrants, emphasizing the arbitrary nature of boundaries and citizenship rights, evidently said, "Adiga's novels collectively emphasize how knowledge, when controlled and manipulated, can perpetuate existing power structures and oppress marginalized communities." (Medhavi 2023, p.37). The novel exposes the exploitative labor practices that frequently accompany unauthorized immigrants. From low-wage occupations with no benefits to hazardous working conditions, *Amnesty* highlights the dangers that illegal workers endure in the informal sector. Adiga conveys the dehumanizing consequences of exploitative labor practices with vivid imagery and moving tales, compelling readers to confront their involvement in perpetuating such atrocities.

Central to the message of *Amnesty* is a call for empathy and

understanding towards those marginalized and oppressed by neocolonial structures. Adiga gives readers a greater feeling of empathy by portraying characters with a range of experiences and backgrounds. The story encourages readers to face their prejudices and preconceptions by humanizing his characters and sensitively and compassionately telling their lives. *Amnesty* also exhorts readers to acknowledge the humanity that all people possess, irrespective of their financial level or immigration status. The book emphasizes the value of community and supporting one another using times of connection and solidarity amongst characters when facing hardship. Adiga's message is very clear: we cannot start to undermine the repressive structures that uphold injustice and inequality unless we have empathy and understanding.

Individual Narrative in Neocolonial Machinery

"Amnesty" could seem at first to be a simple examination of a single person's experience. The protagonist, an illegal immigrant facing the challenges of life in a developed country, is presented to us. But there is a deeper meaning hidden behind the surface. Adiga skillfully uses this particular story as a jumping-off point to reveal the more extensive neocolonial control systems. To fully comprehend the notion of neocolonialism, more research is required. It represents the resurgence of colonial-era exploitative tactics but done so more covertly and deceptively, Danny's struggles, anxieties, and fight for survival become representative of the larger group facing similar hardships under neocolonial structures, "The legal and political systems upholding this structure contribute to Danny's alienation and loss of identity in postmodern society" (Medhavi & Sahay 2023, p.2099). These frequently entail hidden political impact and economic dependence, weaving a web of power structures that keeps some communities marginalized.

Adiga dispels a common misconception by establishing a narrative in a developed country, which is sometimes referred to as the "Core" in neocolonial discourse. He invalidates the myth that colonialism is only found in history books and is a thing of the past. Rather, he shows how these exploitative systems have evolved and adapted to survive subtly in cultures that on the surface appear to be

affluent, as Spivak asserts “neocolonialism in general, I’m speaking very broadly, has as its alibi a fully-fledged cultural relativism” (Spivak 1991, p.224). One crucial aspect of unveiling neocolonial structures lies in deconstructing the facade of the developed nation. The "Core" countries frequently present themselves as bulwarks of equality and progress, thus, Danny’s presence in a "Core" developed nation shatters the misconception that neocolonialism is confined to past colonial territories. This broadens the understanding of neocolonial practices beyond geographical limitations and exposes their persistence within seemingly progressive societies. But the story of *Amnesty* reveals the gaps in this front. It exposes how wealthy countries while pretending compassion, frequently profit from the labor and resources of less developed areas. This creates a system of dependence and exploitation, a hallmark of neocolonial practices

The tale is not hesitant to depict the brutal reality that illegal immigrants experience. The continual dread of discovery, the struggle to get basic requirements, and the frustration of navigating a system meant to exclude are all painful examples of the human cost of neocolonial systems. By immersing the reader in the protagonist's life, Adiga elicits empathy and forces them to confront the harsh facts of neocolonialism, “Australia, a liberal democracy and a participant in the international human rights system, hosts irregular migrants unable to exercise many fundamental human rights” (Mendes & Lau 2022, p.9). The South Asian Tamil protagonist, Dhananjay Rajaratnam’s story, *Amnesty* challenges the idealized image of developed nations as bastions of equality and progress. The narrative exposes how these nations, while projecting an air of compassion, often benefit economically from the labor and resources of less developed regions. Through using an individual story as a basis, Adiga accomplishes a complex analysis of neocolonial frameworks. He highlights the human cost of these exploitative behaviors, reveals the colonial legacy, and reveals the control mechanisms. In the end, *Amnesty* forces readers to evaluate the ostensibly developed globe critically and acknowledge the pernicious influence of neocolonialism that still shapes the modern world.

Power Dynamics of Neocolonial Structure

Adiga's criticism revolves around the character of the illegal immigrant, who must make their way through the shadows. This person represents the many oppressed and taken advantage of throughout the neo-colonial era. Their whole life is unstable, always at the mercy of a system that exists to deprive them of fundamental rights and privileges. Their perpetual state of vulnerability and anxiety is highlighted by the fact that every encounter and decision they make carries the weight of possible discovery and expulsion as reflected "There is also something called the citizen arrest option. I am betting you have an accent, which in other words means: Hey law enforcement officers, come check out my legal status not to be here." (Adiga 2020, p.40). However, the critique goes beyond a single portrayal. Adiga skillfully crafts a larger fabric of people, each with a distinct role in revealing the complexity of neocolonial power dynamics. Unlike the overt tyranny of conventional colonialism, *Amnesty* reveals a more subtle and insidious kind of control. Characters in positions of authority within the system, such as employers, bureaucrats, or even seemingly well-meaning people, may not be presented as blatantly repressive colonizers. They may express worry, offer aid, or simply maintain an air of impartiality.

Beneath this surface, the power disparity still exists, "where host countries with neoliberal capitalist economies exploit the needs of the desperate from sending countries" (Mendes & Lau 2022, p.4) These seemingly harmless persons continue to stay invisible while profiting from the labor of the undocumented immigrants. This illustrates a key neocolonialist tactic: retaining power without using physical force, "filling their labor gaps cheaply and without needing to socially provide for these migrant labourers, threatening them with the power of the state while profiting from their ["irregular"] presences." (p.4) The network of those who actively or accidentally contribute to the continued marginalization of those without documentation is essential to the system's survival. The phenomenon is exemplified by the employer class of characters. They may give the illegal immigrant a job, a source of money, and, ostensibly, a path to a better future. However, this work typically comes at a high cost. The

illegal immigrant is compelled to accept lesser earnings, labor in hazardous circumstances, and work long hours without any legal protections or benefits. They are continuously at risk of exploitation, knowing that any complaint or demand for fair treatment may result in their rapid dismissal and even deportation.

Bureaucrats: another group of people that support the "invisible chain" These people could come across as impartial if they only enforce the law and adhere to established protocols. On the other hand, their lack of action makes the undocumented more marginalized so that "The legal liminality of the irregular migrant also extends to the paradoxical hope in a state of un hoped" (p.7). For the undocumented immigrant, the complex and sometimes unapproachable application procedures, "Understand that every police officer, Taxation man, and immigration or customs officer has the power to arrest you immediately and hold you indefinitely," (Adiga 2020, p.40) strict laws and dearth of legal options converge to form an impenetrable barrier that keeps them from accessing opportunities and fundamental rights.

The portrayal of the characters in Adiga's novel who at first sight could seem well-meaning is perhaps its most fascinating feature. These people may show empathy, do sporadic deeds of kindness, or even support reform. But frequently, their acts don't reflect a deeper comprehension of the structural problems that support the undocumented community's marginalization. Without addressing the underlying roots of the issue, their well-intentioned acts may unintentionally strengthen the current power relations, "the undocumented immigrant Danny in Amnesty, navigate the complex webs of power, knowledge, and societal expectations" (Medhavi 2023, p.37). They may unintentionally add to the undocumented population's prominence and propagate the idea that they are undeserving of opportunity and basic rights. This demonstrates the complexity and subtle neocolonialism exist, and how even people with the best of intentions may end up becoming just cogs in the mechanism of exclusion.

Existing Legacy of Colonial Oppression

Beyond only demonstrating the existence of neocolonial

practices, the novel investigates their long-term impact, emphasizing how the struggles of undocumented immigrants are connected to broader issues of economic disparity, exploitation, and the continued marginalization of people from former colonies or developing countries, since, "relationships between the Global North and Global South have been based on domination rather than cooperation" (Zuchowski 2017, p.80). Their struggle to get even the most essentials, along with their reliance on exploitative labor conditions, reveals a terrible truth: the ongoing legacy of economic imbalance established by colonialism. Developed countries, sometimes known as the "Core" in neocolonial discourse, continue to benefit from the resources and cheap labor of less developed regions, as "Colonization, which was largely extended through military or political means, was mostly terminated by the end of the 20th century and has been followed by an era dominated by newer forms of colonization, referred to as neo-colonialism, that are far more subtle and based on the imposition of language and culture rather than through brute force"(80). This fosters a cycle of dependence in which people from former colonies or developing countries are caught in a system that exploits their vulnerabilities for the economic benefit of the "Core."

The illegal immigrant in *Amnesty* serves as a powerful symbol of exploitation, "Danny, a Sri Lankan Tamil refugee living illegally in Sydney, exemplifies the plight of the subaltern under the cold gaze of unfettered capitalism" (Medhavi & Sahay 2023, p.2099) Their trip highlights the frantic pursuit of opportunity and a better life, which frequently leads people to travel risky routes and labor in tough conditions in industrialized countries, since, "In Australia, internationalization has been actively promoted by both government and universities to support student learning and engagement in order to develop global citizens."(Zuchowski 2017, p.77) This corresponds to the historical narrative of colonial exploitation, in which resources were taken and labor was compelled from colonized regions for the advantage of the colonizers. "In Australia, foreign student migrants' statuses changed in the 1990s due to policies that enabled a quick transition to permanent residency," (Mendes & Lau 2022, p.7) it is evident as the narrator points out "The college gave each foreign

student a job, to train for a new life in Australia.” (Adiga 2020, p.172) but along that it is too perceptible that western model of charity is too fragile and it comes to nude when Venky says “The legal quota is just twenty hour a week for a foreign student..., a bit less than the legal minimum wage” (p.172) While the techniques may have changed, the fundamental power relations remain, making people from the Global South vulnerable to economic exploitation within the neocolonial paradigm.

Amnesty addresses the long-lasting effects of colonialism that go beyond simple economic exploitation. The book looks at how deeply rooted biases and colonial hierarchy still shape social views and immigration laws in the "Core" countries. Deeply ingrained ideas of superiority and difference serve as a fertile basis for neocolonial behaviors, “Each time a door opened or slammed, he wanted to shout, I am sorry, sir. I am sorry sir. But what was the point of saying that now?” (p.41) which further marginalize people from underdeveloped countries or former colonies. The story may reveal the subtle ways in which these colonial legacies influence immigration laws, which are frequently portrayed as impartial and objective. Restrictive quotas, difficult and frequently unreachable application procedures, and biased enforcement pose major obstacles for people from particular areas. This perpetuates the story of the "undesirable" immigrant, which has its roots in colonial ideology that classified people according to their origins, culture, and ethnicity. Likewise, the novel might examine how residual impacts of colonial bias sometimes unintentionally shape societal views in the "Core" countries. This may show itself as a variety of things, from moderate forms of discrimination and microaggressions to more explicit distaste directed at someone because of their perceived "otherness." People without documentation, as well as those from former colonies or underdeveloped countries, often feel even more excluded and marginalized as a result of these partial views.

Neocolonialism and Global Community

Aravind Adiga's *Amnesty* is a poignant commentary on the adverse impacts of neocolonialism on global cooperation. Adiga, through the protagonist, Danny, and other characters, reveals multiple

layers of migration that we discussed, labor exploitation, and the disintegration of communal empathy in a society dominated by colonial legacies. Adiga paints a vivid picture of the migration experience, illustrating how it is strategically linked to neocolonialism in a multicultural neoliberal empire as Spivak remarks "It is necessary to assert even this rather pathetic kind of multiculturalism in order to put some sort of platform against the white majority resist argument that humanities education" (Spivak 1991, p.227). Danny's journey from his homeland, an underdeveloped country in South Asia, to Sydney, Australia, epitomizes the global movement of individuals seeking refuge and opportunity. The disparity in economic prosperity between the Global North and South, a legacy of colonial exploitation, is a driving force behind Danny's decision to migrate. This mirrors broader patterns of migration driven by economic necessity, geopolitical instability, and environmental degradation, all perpetuated by historical colonial injustices. But to achieve the global goal of the international community "it would be essential to ensure that the internationalization of social work education is congruent with the ethical standards and mission of the profession" (Zuchowski 2017, p.85).

Amnesty portrays the deterioration of international solidarity due to neocolonialism's insidious motifs, evidently portrayed in the novel, "On the first day of classes, there was banging and yelling just outside the classroom because the middle Eastern students found out that they had been charged twice what the Asian students had been" (Adiga 2020, p.172) even despite the common experiences of marginalization and exploitation. Adiga depicts the complexity of interpersonal interactions, as people frequently put their interests ahead of the good of the group. This conflict is best illustrated by the character of Radha, Danny's ex-lover, who battles with her own goals and eventually puts her success ahead of her solidarity with Danny and other disadvantaged migrants.

While the novel largely focuses on illegal immigrants, especially its protagonist Danny, it also provides insights into the difficulties experienced by those who move for educational reasons, as well as the complicated dynamics of power and privilege that

underpin their experiences. International students, many of whom come from countries in the Global South, traverse an environment created by neocolonial power relations. They may encounter challenges such as language competency requirements, visa limitations, and financial restraints, all of which mirror greater disparities in educational and career prospects, “we received your request for change of visa status from student (subclass 500) to protection (subclass 866). Please be aware... of the fraudulent protection claim. Upon reviewing your petition, we find that although you claim to be the victim of torture” (p.171). Adiga hints at these issues through secondary characters or incidental remarks, giving readers a look into the novel's overlapping migration histories.

Likewise, concerns about economic reliance and labor exploitation connect with the experiences of overseas students, “You'll need to a one-semester deposit and a \$320 OSHC charge for six months. Overseas Student Health Cover” (p.169). To maintain their financial stability, many students are forced to engage in low-paying occupations where they risk being exploited and subjected to unsafe working circumstances that are akin to those faced by illegal immigrants. How Adiga depicts these interactions highlights how neocolonialism pervades all aspects of society and shapes people's lived experiences irrespective of their immigrant status.

Conclusion

Adiga's narrative extends beyond the experiences of a single person to highlight more widespread injustice and exploitation patterns seen in neoliberal regimes and alludes to a Neocolonial empire. The novel makes readers reevaluate their positions in a globalized society by forcing them to critically consider the morality of labor laws, immigration regulations, and social attitudes. Adiga humanizes the hardships of undocumented migrants via complex characterizations and compelling writing, encouraging readers to empathize with and comprehend these problems. *Amnesty* reveals the literature's continued value as a vehicle for societal criticism and introspection. Through revealing the complexity of neocolonialism and promoting compassion and unity, the book encourages readers to discuss current social concerns and imagine different scenarios.

Adiga's writings are a call to action, encouraging readers to face the systemic inequalities ingrained in the current global power structures and combat towards a more fair and just society.

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