



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**The Neocolonial Paraphernalia and the Socio-Cultural Crisis of the Local in Rizwan Akhtar's *Lahore, I am Coming***

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper attempts to explore the effects of neocolonialism caused by the economic, and military oppression of the local population of Pakistan with reference to the selected poetry from *Lahore, I am Coming* (2017) by Rizwan Akhtar. Furthermore, we aim to dig deep into the psychological crisis/confusion and physical trauma of the local Pakistanis that consequently follows this oppression. The neocolonial modes of power practice, as explored in this article, include economic exploitation, linguistic imperialism, psychological domination and militaristic oppression of the Pakistani local population by Western imperialist practices. Akhtar's poetry critically takes into account the dominating role of neocolonialism which on one hand promotes cultural sameness, linguistic expansion and the military oppressions in the name of *Global War on Terror* whereas on the contrary, it unravels the unsound position of the postcolonial local who suffers the most under the prevailing phase of modern day neocolonialism. The analysis of Akhtar's selected poetry, reveals that the aforementioned techniques used by western powers continue to dislocate the Pakistani local and intensely affect the very roots of the traditional Pakistani society. Akhtar's poetry, above all, is the poetry of general rights of humanity which unmasks the obscure as well as overt challenges fostered under the popular tag of development in the guise of neocolonialism

**Introduction**

When Huggan (1997) announces, in his introductory line of *The Neocolonialism of Post-colonialism: A Cautionary Note*, that we live in neocolonial, not postcolonial, times followed by the list of neocolonial practices of the West, one can see the caution sign as an alarm not only for academia but for the changing

geo-political status of the so called post-colonial nations. We believe that this caution has now been transformed into the post-independence neocolonial syndrome for the nations which apparently have achieved their freedom from the tyranny of the colonial oppressors, yet are gripped by the many hidden forces of imperialism still practiced by their colonial masters. This post-independence neocolonial syndrome, as we see it, is the prevailing psychological crisis of the locals in the independent post-colonial countries for whom the idea of independence has shifted to the status of a mere illusion. Although the colonial masters are not physically present with us to dictate the ideals of civilization to us, still their power practices to control our lives and our lands is ruining our peace and progress. The issue at hand for the Pakistani local population is not just the deteriorating economic conditions of the country but the growing social stratification which the globalized economic expansion and draining of resources is creating, the west's racial and religious discrimination which is further aggravated by the *comprador* class's distribution of power regime, and worst of all the double militarization of the Pakistani populace by the West in the name of *War on Terror* which is creating the worst possible physical and psychological outcomes for the common public.

This study attempts to explore the effects of neocolonialism caused by the economic and military oppression of the local population of Pakistan with reference to the selected poetry by Rizwan Akhtar. Furthermore, we aim to dig deep into the psychological crisis/confusion and physical trauma of the local Pakistani that consequently follows this oppression. Although all genres of literature have enjoyed an ample status, yet poetry is marked with great potential for socio-political change/resistance and protest (Back 2014). From political slogans to revolutionary manifestos Pakistani poets, like Allama Iqbal, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Habbib Jalib etc., have channeled essential resistance to political power abuse and have advocated the rights of common people in all major historical phases. Akhtar in his poems does not conform to the increasingly expanding role of neocolonial hierarchy. The essay aims to explore the role of different means of neocolonialism with reference to contemporary Pakistani society and how these aggravate the psychological crisis of the native's understanding of the local's position, space and role in their own land while being dictated by foreign global agendas.

### **Making of the *Post-independence Neocolonial Syndrome***

Imperialism, which today is waging war against a genuine struggle for human liberation, sows seeds of decay here and there that must be mercilessly rooted out from our land and from *our minds* (Fanon1, 963, 181).

Neocolonialism, according to Halperin (2013), is a term that came to be used after the end of the Second World War. The term basically referred to the reliance of the then decolonized nations on foreign masters, but soon with the passage of time it was applied to the regions where developed countries continued

to exercise their indirect power in a more passive way. Neocolonialism is an attempt just like colonialism which promotes social conflicts of the dominant capitalist countries to the world. Neocolonialism, in other words, is colonial imperialism reinvented through the illusion of development and civilization by the imperialist powers of the day (Jiménez Peña 2015).

In *Neocolonialism, The Last Stage of Imperialism* Nkrumah (1965, 1) asserts that the essence of neocolonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside. Despite the process of geopolitical decolonization the Western powers continue to manipulate economic, political, social and educational policies of the recently decolonized nations. The locals making up the decolonized nations are although independent *in theory*, yet colonized by the power states and their agendas. Words like *independence, freedom, liberation* thus become critical to the understanding of the so called non-colonization of the people once enslaved not just physically but psychologically too. Fanon (1963,233) thus asserts Independence is not a magic ritual but an indispensable condition for men and women to exist in true liberation, in other words to master all the material resources necessary for a radical transformation of society. Ukaegbu (2017) asserts that most postcolonial societies still suffer from ideological manipulation of the local community which leads to economic, linguistic, cultural, pedagogical and psychological control of its members by western imperialists. Though the once colonized nations have territorially been decolonized in the twentieth century, still the supremacy of the dominating global political powers and their agendas passively penetrate the social existence of the local communities (Wiener 2013). The neocolonial policies of the economically powerful countries, which mostly are none other than the former colonial powers, still get implemented in the underdeveloped as well as the developing countries in a passive way through global means of power and control that do not require the physical geographical imperialism anymore. Shaikh (2017, 1) asserts that neocolonialism is the worst form of imperialism that effects not only the political and religious structures of the target nation but its cultural realm too. As a major consequence the locals, belonging to the so called geopolitical independent countries, have now developed what we call as the *post-independence neocolonial syndrome*. It is resultant psychological ambivalence of the local that seeks the balance point between freedom and slavery, friend and foe, global progress and war mania.

Ogohi (2014) opines that western advancement/progress is regarded as something civilized despite the fact that Western domination has hegemonized the world by imposing their own set of values while advocating for a more globalized community, leaving the local's identity and cultural values in a confused flux of uncertainty. Hence, a particular society following their style of living without being much influenced by the western culture is now seen as 'uncivilized' which was a very cunningly designed propaganda of the west to inculcate their culture

into the rest of the world and thereby dominating the globe (32). This reminds one of Fanon's (1963, 181) prophetic claims, the war goes on, and for many years to come we shall be bandaging the countless and sometimes indelible wounds inflicted on our people by the colonial onslaught. Saleem and Rizvi (2011) claim that psychological supremacy is the worst legacy of colonization, based on the British's racist ideology, in the subcontinent which affected the local population in the most horrid way. Contemporary racial prejudice is one of the key factors in keeping the native communities mentally colonized even after being politically decolonized (Licata 2012, 3).

In *Postmodernism and the Other: The New Imperialism of Western Culture*, Sardar (1998) explores different forms of Western neocolonial practices, which include most importantly economic, cultural and power practice in all its overt and covert forms. He exposes the hypocritical stance of the West towards the Rest, where in the name of aid, liberty, welfare and development the West actually transforms the Third World populace into commodities. Pop music, television and style products come together in postmodern times to entrap the young of the Third World, to transform their identity into a commodity. (144). He further elaborates on the fact that this cynical treatment of non-western consumers is based on the assumption that people from Other cultures are not only ignorant and foolish, but their life is not worth much either (56) and thus the military operations in the Third World countries get justified too. Jackson (2009, 162) asserts that justification for intervention and domination stem from a belief that the colonizers are superior to the colonized, and that the colonizers are altruistically bringing civilization--or in the neo-colonial model, capitalism, and democracy--to the colonized. Ironically, in the name of peace, war and all crimes related to it have been justified by U.S and other western imperials of the day (Khan 2018). Zaman (2017, 23) asserts that the main aim of the US war in Pakistan today is to control the state apparatus, and through control of media and psychological and information operations, the public narrative.

Mirrlees (2006, 199) explores how American cultural imperialism is practiced through economic exploitation of the postcolonial countries. Further he elaborates that American cultural and consumer institutions and products such as Coca Cola, McDonald's, Disneyland, Hollywood etc. typically acted as cultural instruments of U.S. foreign policy. (218) these not only brought economic dependence but also ideological manipulation of cultural values of the local postcolonial populace. Therefore, although technical revolution, transnational corporations and global restructuring of capitalism have made the world increasingly interdependent and interconnected....this has in no way changed the fundamental fact that the West still poses or imposes itself as the center of the world. (Xie, 2006).

Henderson (2002) claims that by understanding the local people, there can be generated an alternative perspective containing capably enhancing cores such as freedom, parity, justice and human rights. Daes (1997) highlights the critical

standing of the local individual. She elucidates that the present-day individual is at the crucial crossroads of global culture. According to her, an indigenous does not acknowledge the postulation that humanity is likely to get advantage from the structure of a world culture that is purely based on consumerism. The locals belonging to many neocolonial nations now see the irony of the independent nations being still controlled by external powers by all means they can use to exploit their resources. As described by Said (1978) in his *Orientalism* that the concept of equality, justice and world-peace cannot by any means prevail until the occident changes his psychological attire towards the orient.

### **Consumer Expansion and Economic Exploitation**

Just as in colonial history, the major neocolonial agenda remains to be economic expansion based on the exploitation of the third world's resources and labor under the umbrella term of 'globalization' (Veltmeyer and Petras 2001; Xie 2006). As Sardar (1998) suggests the illusion of plurality created by the market serves only to hide the reality that the west continues to despise non-western cultures while it continues to consume them. (139).The dependence of Pakistani locals on the neocolonial modes of governance and capitalism has actually increased insecurity and poverty in the country (Ahmed and Khan 2009).

Akhtar takes into account the notions of expanding capitalist economy. He consciously uncovers the current scenarios of the contemporary Pakistani society where poor locals are used as mere labor commodities in the bigger capitalist farce of foreign market. It is the same technique that perpetuates in a new-colonial way across the globe where the poor locals are used as market tools and are considered as non-entity. In his poem *Local Donald Duck outside McDonald's*, he unveils a vivid picture of the neo-imperialism largely expanding not only in Pakistan but also leaves traces across the world.

Huffing inside his armor of livelihood  
A shaggy local mascot of Donald Duck primps  
Outside McDonald's where children of the rich  
Giggle over his puck nose absurdity  
with a master stroke of luck he haggles hilarity  
with expensive cars and quivering babies

*(Local Donald Duck outside McDonald's, p.22)*

In this poem, the poet presents the image of a local mascot child who is supposed to entertain the elite children. The children of the rich mock him and make fun of his puck nose absurdity but he does not respond since his life depends

on the mocked situation of being an entertainer. The situation of the local mascot is highly symbolic of the position and role of a Pakistani local placed in neocolonial setting. While s/he tries to fit into the imperial consciousness via subconscious mimicry (Stanecka 2007, 143), the imperialist mocks him/her in addition to snaring him/her into a social paradigm of economic and political exploitation. *McDonalds*, here is used as a symbol of the status quo which the neocolonial powers have established in the different domains of the world. While technology has brought development to the world including the post-colonial countries, it has played massive role in demarcating the lines between the ones owing it and the others who have faced a constant decline. In the colonial ages, the living standards that colonizer adopted, the same conventions have been adopted by the contemporary rich in third world countries such as Pakistan. Air-conditioned vehicles symbolize the lavish style of present day's upper and elites around the globe. The poet in the face of an ordinary local allegorically embodies the entire situation of the postcolonial world where the neo-colonial empire takes advantage.

The situation of the local is as good as an amusement clown when compared to western multinational companies to which all capital goes. Akhtar is critical of such system where a certain consumerist class excludes a local commoner from the structure of the society, and brings him/her to a humiliating position of a mascot. The local is more of a joke being stuck in between the traditional norms of culture and the globalized traditional modes of so called civilization. The poet conforms to Nkrumah's (1965) take on neo-imperialism that this primarily is a type of expanding capitalist expansion that alienates a local labor from his societal fellows, creates hypocrisy in the nature of upper class and paves way for unending competition. The symbol of the local Donald duck also points to the hyper real commoditization of western ideals as Sardar (1998, 56) claims that most of the Western products sold in the non-western countries are simulacra: while they look like real things....they are in fact shoddy replicas.

### **Military Oppression: Trauma and Terror**

The neocolonial agenda of military expansion has destroyed the less developed nations instead of reviving or developing them and has created the monopolistic power play of survival of the fittest in present day political scenario (Ojo 2004). Zaman (2017, 19-20) asserts that Over the last decade or more, foreign military forces have been conducting clandestine, covert, special, information, and psychological operations in Pakistan. It is high time that we stop being passive recipients of this aggression and assume a more proactive, more sovereign posture in putting a stop to them and defending the nation.

Akhtar reflects in his poetics the trauma of terrorism which has affected a number of innocent Pakistani inhabitants under the populist slogan of *Global War on Terror* declared by the United States after the 9/11 incident. The U.S drone attacks violated the state sovereignty of Pakistan. American drones targeted the tribal areas of Pakistan bordering with Afghanistan as if Pakistan was America's

colony. Akhtar, like his literary counterparts dwelling inside and outside the country, evidentially embodies the picture of his society being massacred by foreign interventionism. In the poem, *Gulnaz of Waziristan*, he pictures the unbearable amount of agonies and miseries faced by the common locals of the tribal society of Pakistan.

Behind barbed wires her home  
drowns in a river of smoke  
shifting through a Drone's carcass  
she finds an extra flesh on her cheeks.

Her tree is burnt alive under which  
she read her first holy verse  
its time to wind up doll's wedding  
her mother yells from

*(Gulnaz of Waziristan, p. 83)*

Being a visionary humanist the poet strongly resists the inhuman drone attacks that result in killing of the innocent children and women in Waziristan, a tribal territory in the North West province of Pakistan. *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism* (2017), a London based organization has brought forth the estimation that from 2004 to 2017, United States has attacked around 429 drone strikes in Pakistan. According to that report, in that drone -strike history nearly 2514 to 4023 people have been killed. As a result, 424 to 969 civilians lost their lives including roundabout 200 children as well. The poet, therefore, highlights not only the dehumanizing impacts of neo-colonialism but also gives a live picture where a family suffers due to the then Drone attack. He uncovers the acrimonious reality of life that a tribal girl named Gulnaz from Waziristan, Pakistan faces. Her tree is burnt; the beauty and peace of the rustic life is at stake. Before her are the corpses of her innocent loved ones killed after the Drone strike. The locals in Pakistani society are doubly imperialized by military tactics; on top of being tagged as Muslims and falsely claimed as enemies of the west, they are terrorized by military imperialistic tactics like drone attacks. The locals are already the victims of trauma and terror caused by bombings and is further militarily oppressed by the western powers, ironically, all in the name of peace keeping. It is here important to note that the imperialist proxy wars fail to identify the victimization of the locals by

terror attacks within the country while at the same time being further terrorized by foreign terrorizing modes of ethnic cleansing. The West launches small wars (Mooers 2006, 112) declared and undeclared but fails to calculate the weightage of the damage done in the regions. Such military oppressions give rise to terror in such areas and they intensify the social and political issues in the regions like Waziristan as depicted by Akhtar in his poem. This marks a very pathetic face of the civilized welfare and advanced countries as inaugurators of warzones and buffer-zones in the third world countries. The poem is an utmost reflection of the dilemma of the common citizens whose psychological trauma is worst then the

physical loss of their loved ones.

The student union at university's square

Talks about my country while I sit in a warm room

outside gale force winds bang every living thing.

Our western borders are raided by drones

And I am reading about Shakespeare's England

with a subtle English wit over cappuccino

and French fries,

seasoned with a layman's vocabulary.

(*Betrayal*, p. 163)

The title of the poem *Betrayal* reveals that Akhtar's depiction in the poem reveals a serious kind of duplicity and disloyalty. The poem expresses the pain which the poet feels for his fellow countrymen when the western borders of Pakistan are bombarded by Drones. Ironically, he is studying about Shakespeare's England and enjoying cappuccino while surviving the English wit and wisdom that justifies genocide in his homeland. The poet has symbolized himself as man from war-trodden colony who despite the bombs, brutalities and crashes survives and justifies his existence. The ironic state of the local, when s/he witnesses friends turned foes, is a psychological challenge. As the title suggests, it feels like betraying your own land and people when you adhere to foreign traditions and believe in them as milestones for your betterment. The idea of our western borders placed side by side to English and French (the occident/West) highlights the political confusion of taking sides.

The poem *Burnt Brides of Lahore* presents the horrific picture of Lahore where the suicide bomb attack of December, 2009 destroyed the lives of many

innocents including the seven brides who were to be married in the December that year.

All came to have the night of their life not knowing bombs

Celebrated city's brazen season of banquets and bridals

*(Burnt Brides of Lahore, p. 53)*

The poet presents the paradoxical image of the mutilated dead bodies at the venue of ceremonial wedding festivity. The poet symbolizes the heinously murderous attack with the night of life where banquets to bridals, all were killed inhumanly. A happy event within a few jiffies turns out to be a fossil picture where then remains but the blood-stained pieces of the human bodies. This is the height of insensitive urban warfare where the general masses get to be targeted mercilessly. The ironic picture of murder at marriage brings out the traumatic suffering faced by the locals all in the name of foreign wars. This is a kind of modern day war where the starter of war remains safe from the physical loss and psychological trauma (Chomsky, George, Curtis and Lucas 2005). In another poem, *Children Bombed in a Park in Lahore*, Akhtar brings forth another human atrocity where again the innocent Pakistani citizens particularly the children are brutally bombed to death. This is the trauma that leaves long lasting posttraumatic effects on the minds of general populace of Pakistan.

In a park children's bodies spread

like nascent metaphors

*(Children Bombed in a Park in Lahore, p. 62)*

Though, there is no obvious sin of innocent children who have become subject to death in a bomb attack nonetheless they are clearly surrounded by an atmosphere backed by utmost uncertainties. Akhtar compares the dead bodies of children with nascent metaphors. Nascent metaphors are the metaphors that do not fit in the definition of metaphor and do not substantially draw a comparison. The killing of innocent children cannot be justified in any way neither in the name of 'terrorism' nor in 'anti-terrorism'. The dead bodies of children in a park reflect the true nonsensical farce which the imperials imposed on the globe. Hence, according to poet, the gone souls of innocent children might never be able to know the actual issue behind the increasing wave of terrorism. In another poem, titled *Pakistan Meets a Terrorist*, Akhtar exclaims that while the rest of the world might have gone through one 9/11, Pakistan lives a 9/11 every single day since then.

The world had one 9/11 and one 7/7

We live through them each moment

Every day rehearse a dumb-show  
of ridiculous stares silently

*(Pakistan Meets a Terrorist, p. 139)*

The poet beautifully highlights the double militarization of the Pakistani citizens, while suffering from terror attacks and bombings, losing their loved ones, seeing their homes destroyed; they are further tagged by foreign media and news as the dangerous ones. On the one hand the foreign Drones operated by the US kill them whereas as on the other hand they continuously get to be murdered by terrorist attacks. Without knowing the suffering that people face here the international agencies fail to pay attention to the local and marginalize it as a locale for their proxy wars.

### **Conclusion**

Akhtar's poetry reveals that present day neocolonialism essentializes a number of threatening disturbances generally in struggling countries like Pakistan. Akhtar's poetry reflects the physical as well as psychological crisis of the locals in Pakistan exploited in different circumstances. It also recognizes the important issue of linguistic imperialism with respect to decolonized context in the prevailing era of neocolonialism. With reference to the selected text, it is also demystified that national consciousness, be it then in the case of the general standing of a local or as collective code culture and literary heritage, is directly linked with the concept of language. If the regional language is shackled under the influence of the English wave then foreign interventionism gets to be easily penetrated because language happens to be the most piercing tool to encapsulate ideas of the proponents of the language. The militaristic impacts of neocolonialism have also been explored where the factors of trauma and terror have critically been scrutinized. The local people face double militarization and marginalization by both the foreign as well as the native comprador imperialists. The psychological confusion of the local between independence and dependence, between tradition and modernization, between local and global and worst of all between the global war of terror and the local loss of peace is highlighted in the selected work. It can be summed up that inculcating the questionable impacts of neocolonialism, Akhtar's poetry functions as a strong voice to form the humanistic version of the contemporary society of Pakistan by elucidating the linguistic, cultural, militaristic and psychological domination of the western world.

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