

BEN OKRI'S VISION OF POST-INDEPENDENCE: A NEO-COLONIAL READING OF DANGEROUS LOVE

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Abstract

The present study aims at examining the Neo-colonial aspect in Ben Okri's Dangerous Love. It is a critique of Neo-colonialism as a form of the postcolonial theory that is concerned with perpetuating colonialism in Nigeria after independence. The main argument of the study is that, through presenting his vision of post-independence in Nigeria. Ben Okri wants to present his own vision of how to fight the different forms of colonialism after independence through portraying characters that are capable of presenting this gloomy vision. Of primary concern to this study is the way Okri sketches the Nigerian young people exemplified in the character of Omovo, the protagonist, and his friends. The study further examines the different types of the Nigerian people including the main characters and their reactions to the Neo-colonial practices and atrocities committed by the elite of the natives who represent the ex-colonial powers. Through a close textual analysis the study also investigates the different forms of disintegration resulting from Neo-colonialism as a form of perpetuating colonialism. Okri uses Omovo, as the first person narrator, to show his rejection of this disintegration as well as the degradation of life represented in the moral corruption of the ruling elite. In so doing, the author employs characterization as his tools in presenting the theme of his novel.

Keywords: Neocolonialism, corruption, post-independence, disintegration, degradation.

Introduction

Decolonialization in Africa has not been ended with the end of the European imperialism; its impact can be seen and felt in the conduct of Africans at many levels in the mainstream of the people's lives. In its broadest sense, Neo-colonialism means the perpetuation of the colonial domination of the imperial power in different forms even after achieving independence. The core of the neo-colonial tendency lies in the fact that white colonizers are replaced with upper classes of the

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natives to initiate a new phase of exploitation. Ben Okri is one of the great diasporic writers who pen down the suffering of the people of their native countries. Primarily, many European colonial powers came to Africa for the sake of exploiting the African peoples under the guise of the colonial enterprise of civilizing them. European writers have presented Africa as dark and its peoples as uncivilized and less human. Nevertheless, the second half of the twentieth century witnessed the independence of many colonized countries. However, the colonial powers have left their impact on the ex-colonized countries even after politically getting their independence. This impact has taken different forms. For example, it has resulted in cultural disintegration on account of instilling the western ideology in the natives that they have been inferior to the Europeans and that they are savage and uncivilized. As Chidi Amuta puts it "To the Western mind, the African was and has remained a product of "the heart of darkness", an incarnation of several radically-defined pathological limitations." (Amuta. 1989 3)

Many African writers have been moved by the cultural disintegration of their nations by the colonial rule and they have endeavored to revive their cultural roots through their literary outputs. As postcolonial writers, they have tried to figure out the means by which these ex-colonized nations have been kept under the control of Western neo-colonial powers. Observing the whole social, cultural and political system adopted by the forces of the ex-colonizer for perpetuating the colonial impact, such writers have also been moved to show not only this impact on the ex-colonized nations but also the impact of the hegemony of the neocolonial powers by means of inducing new ideologies in the people of the so-called independent nations.

The question of whether the ex-colonized nation have obtained their entire independence or not has been a subject of interest of many writers and critics. Such writers and critics have observed that, although colonialism is officially over, the ex-colonial powers have succeeded in maintaining colonialism of another sort through employing the native elites as their representatives to work for their favor. It is in such once-colonized countries that the native elites have got hold of the administrative ranks either by the nationalist citizen's self-sacrifice or by the ex-colonial powers' support. The natives have realized the fact that nothing in the colonial system has been altered in their miserable situation and what has changed is only the subject. That is from Colonialism to Neo-colonialism. The European ex-colonizers have been replaced with native people as representatives who are supporting the former colonial system. In other clearer words, the ex-colonized countries are still economically, ideologically,

politically and culturally facing what Williams and Laura refer to as “The continued globalizing speed of imperialism. They argue that:

The ending of the colonial rule created high hopes for the newly independent countries and for the inauguration of a properly post-colonial era, but such optimism was relatively short-lived, as the extent to which this west had not relinquished central become clear. The continuing western influence, located in flexible combination of the economic, the political, the military and the ideological was named Neo-colonialism. (Williams & Laura. 1993 2)

The ex-colonized countries are still manipulated by external forces through the support of the bourgeoisie who determine the standards of life of the native folks. That is to say the governments of post-independence have failed to fulfill the aspirations of the native masses. In this regard Frantz Fanon contends, “During the colonial period the people are called upon to fight against oppression. After national liberation, they are called upon to fight poverty, illiteracy, and underdevelopment.” (Fanon. 1967 74)

Again, though independence has been politically achieved, decolonization is still on in Africa. It has not ended with the end of the European imperialism. The former imperial powers, to maintain the perpetuation of their imperial influence on the newly independent countries, have adopted a tendency of undermining the economic growth of such lands for the sake of perpetuating their postcolonial regime. It is simply a mode of exploitation to ensure the continuation of the power of colonization. As Kohn and McBride pointed out, “Even though the nationalist attempts to achieve a revolutionary outcome seemed propitious at first, they have simplified the transmission of the political power of the colonizers to the new native rulers which preserved the financial colonization in support of the colonial countries.” (Kohn and McBride. 2011 10) Here, the term Neo-colonialism emerges to reflect the political, social, economic and cultural condition of the African nations as ex-colonies that have already got their independence.

Before embarking on discussing Neo-colonialism as the main subject of interest of this paper, the researcher wants to draw a line of distinction between two terms that might be confusing or overlapping for the reader namely: Post-colonialism and Neo-colonialism. To begin with, Post-colonialism refers to a period relating to the period of the aftermath of Western colonialism when many colonized nations got their independence from western countries especially after 1960s. Post colonialism, from the point of view of literature and criticism, is concerned with examining, responding to and analyzing the cultural impact of colonialism and imperialism on the life of the natives after colonialism is over. On the other hand, Neo-colonialism refers to the

persistence of the hegemony of a powerful country over a weaker one that was under the colonial rule by means of both cultural and ideological dominance, economic exploitation and social disintegration.

Neo-colonialism, in its simplest term, means the perpetuation of the domination of the imperial power in a different form. The term has been primarily used to refer to Africa after the start of the process of decolonization. Though colonialism was officially over, Neo-colonialism indirectly operates through controlling the newly ex-colonizing countries at different levels. In other words, the former colonies have still been governed by the former colonizers rather than by their own independent governments. As Yousef points out, "The essence of Neo-colonialism 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 its political policy are directed from the outside." (Yousef. 2010 3) Simply, Neo-colonialism means that a country can be both postcolonial and neo-colonial at the same time. Postcolonial because it is no longer governed by imperial rule and has already attained its political independence, and neo-colonial because of still being economically and culturally dependent.

Primarily, the term "Neo-colonialism" was first introduced by Kwame Nkrumah in his article "Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism (1995). He contends that "Neo-colonialism is the final and the most dangerous stage of Imperialism as the old fashioned ways of colonization no more exist. The imperialist powers direct their domination indirectly to the economic system, politics and cultural base of a decolonized nation." (Nkrumah. 1980 137) According to Nkrumah "Neo-colonialism is exercised by economic means and its body impacts the economic prosperity of the decolonized state. The post-independent states have failed to fulfill the dreams and aspirations of their once-colonized nations. The peoples of such nations have been pushed to extreme poverty and exposed to extreme oppression. Frantz Fanon, in his "Toward the African Revolutions (1970) has remarked that, "Neo-colonialism is the result of an indetermination present in the very decolonization process." (Fanon. 1970 121) Here, by indetermination wants to refer to the lack of collective nationalist consciousness of the people, who after many years of suffering, were struggling to liberate their nations from neo-colonial oppression." (Fanon 1970 121)

Ngugi Wa Thingo is an eminent African writer who has tried his best to fight Neo-colonialism and stand against cultural imperialism. In his "Writers in Politics" (1998) he states, "Cultural imperialism which during Neo-colonialism often affected the population and the country unevenly depending on the colonial policies of the marauding powers and the degree of resistance in each country and in different parts of

the country becomes the major agency of control during colonialism.” (5) According to Thiongo, cultural Neo-colonialism can be defined as the continuation of cultural imperialism in the colonies by the former imperialist power after attaining independence. It is an act of ideological brain-washing of the downtrodden native masses. He has been quite aware of the devastating impact of Neo-colonialism, and he has called for forming or shaping a national consciousness. He has shown his rejection of the political, financial and military interference of the colonial power that was welcomed and supported by the ruling class of the victimized nations, nullified the significance of freedom stained the unhappy past of anti-colonial struggles.” (Thiongo.1998 142)

Ngugi Wa Thiongo thinks that the cultural disintegration that has been widely spread in Africa has been the result of the role that Christianity has played in the conversion of the African society to this new religion. Unlike other writers and social reformers, Ngugi calls for revolution rather than reform. To Ngugi, such disintegration, that takes different forms at different levels, can be challenged by a socialist revolution. In his novels, Ngugi tries to stir the consciousness of Africans in order to oppose to the oppressive practices of the political leaders who is representing the former colonizers. In *Detained* (1981) Ngugi has expressed his contempt toward the neo-colonial felony. He states:

In a neo-colonial country, the act of detaining pathetic demands, progressive intellectuals and militant workers speaks of many things. It is first an admission by the detaining authorities that their official lies labelled as new philosophy, their presentations often hidden in three-piece suits and golden chains, their propaganda package as religious truth, their plastic smile ordered from abroad.(Thiongo. 1981 12)

Ngugi, again, believes that the native elite are just executive tools at the hands of the colonial system. He emphasizes that:

The economic goes hand in hand with the political control. Under colonialism, political control was often direct through the settler representative or through a white-controlled native administration, and of course, through the colonial army and police force. Under the neo-colonial form, control is exercised through a comprador or bourgeoisie. (68)

Though Nigeria has got its independence, it is still a land where one can see the agony of the youth, the ritual sacrifices, the nightmares, and the hopelessness of its masses. It has become a post-independent industrializing nation that has sucked peasants off the land and forced them to spread in the capital. The existence of the postcolonial system can be clearly seen in the different forms of chaotic public transportation, unhealthy drinking water, unreliable communication

system and horrible housing where people are victims of an inhuman and unjust system.

From among the many Nigerian writers who have shown a great concern about the postcolonial impact of colonialism, Ben Okri stands unique because he is a master and visionary in demonstrating about the condition of Nigeria. He is such a great artist who has penned down the suffering and the ailments of the people of his native country. Okri's description of the Nigerian ghettos in his novels implies how his country has been caught up with a hegemonic force by the clutches of the ex-colonial power after independence. In an interview with Jane Wilkinson, Okri remarked "I need to experience if I was to write truthfully. Modern literature is the product of too much false suffering, too much pain, real suffering is like the dirt that miners dig up and carry away. It is necessary if we are to find the true gold that writers seek." (Wilkinson. 1991 76)

Despite his physical absence from his native land, Okri, like many other diaspora writers, highlights the decadence of his native country through the description of the nature of his home city Lagos. He employs his writing as a tool to unveil the hidden realities. Depicting the real life of the people in his home country is a recurring theme in his novel. Okri believes that the reality of Africa can't be honestly presented by external forces. In his narratives, he wants to highlight how the post-colonial African society has been influenced by the European materialistic values that results in the disintegration of its cultural heritage and corruption in various forms.

Okri is an African writer who belongs to the second generation. He exhibits a great concern about the harsh reality of the post-colonial African world in its injustice, exploitation, suffering and oppression. As a visionary writer, Okri wants to highlight that the ex-colonized nations should question their current circumstances and work for protesting against the colonial powers and their exploitative systems and to force them out of their countries. He believes that Nigeria should have a secure basis so that the harmful legacy of colonialism cannot find a scope for persistence. In his narratives he displays a gloomy vision of the already politically independent Nigeria through depicting the different aspects of Nigerian society in its disorder and the despair represented in picturing the filth-trodden streets, violence, a general sense of distrust and the broken relationship both at the community level and the personal level.

As a Nigerian writer who is very interested in the Nigerian interior affairs, Okri's main concern has been the societal transformation. He wants to enlighten his people through showing the luminous past in comparison to the present. He urges the people to be bold enough to speak out their minds. Okri is dejected to see the suffering of his

people in terms of their helplessness, increased corruption on account of the treasury of the leaders who betray themselves beside turning a deaf ear to their glorious history.

Okri's fictional work exhibits deep insights of the African traditional practices presented in a modernized way. As an African writer who has been forced to leave his country on account of so many injustices and social inequality, he wants to create a voice for the most downtrodden Africans through his writings. Okri's vision can be simply expressed in Kehinde's words. He points out:

The vision of Okri is that since the African city is ravaged by inflation, pollution, violence and etc., it stands to lose many young and middle-aged people to the suburbs. Each of the stories reinforces and illuminates the other by critically elaborating on and exemplifying of some of the problems associated with contemporary African cities such as the corruption of the individual and the city, the problems of displaced persons, shattered dreams, ethnic diversity and the beleaguers city. (Kehinde. 2007 239)

In *Dangerous Love* (1996) Okri wants to unveil the ugly realities post-independence Nigeria. It is a rewritten and revised version of *The Landscape Within*. The setting of both novels is the same; that is Nigeria. *Dangerous Love* won the Premio Palmi prize in 2000. The novel is a multi-dimensional narrative. In this novel Okri seeks to project the realities of the Nigerian society after independence taking Omovo and Ifeywa's love as the backdrop. *Dangerous Love* is concerned with the degradation of the moral values in the Nigerian society. Nigeria has been a maze of dishonesty, bribery and corruption. It provides a vivid description of the life of the people in the ghettos. It mostly revolves around the life of people in a compound that consists of twins strips of small houses filled with scupools. The people of the compound are poverty-stricken leading a life characterized by misery at different levels.

In *Dangerous Love*, Okri depicts the struggle against the Neo-colonial forces. He delineates the pervasiveness of corruption and sadism. In Nigeria people are segregated and denigrated as a result of the political leadership of the native elite who usurp the nation's resources to perpetuate hegemony on and poverty among the people. In this novel, Ben Okri explicitly projects the malaise of corruption which has taken different forms. The narrative has a subtle connotation of political and artistic liberty. Thus, here, Okri gives a lively description of the Nigerian ghettos in a way that demonstrates how the country has been caught up with hegemonic forces above it. As Bushan Remarks, "Ben Okri builds a vivid picture of Nigerian life: a compound with its utter lack of privacy, gossip, hearsay street life and the nature of relationship at the level of the same feeling, the benevolence and

deceitfulness of friends, the native struggle to come to terms with the brutality of the civil war.” (Sharma. 2015 35)

Dangerous Love is a tragic love story with a subtle undertone of bureaucratic hollowness, corruption, infidelity and filthy politics. People have that “gloomy and pessimistic attitude in a country that has become a labyrinth of corruption.” (Bushan 2020 125) The different aspects of corruption and denigration threaten the growth of the already independent nation. This denigration culminates in the detestable image of the “scupool”. The narrative can be seen as an explicit comment on the disintegration of the society as a whole. It is a direct critique of Neo-colonialism in the Nigerian society in which Okri uncovers the severe debasement that touches all the aspects of the society.

Dangerous Love is imbued with instances that display the sordidness of the life of the Nigerian people. The ghetto where Omovo and his beloved Ifeywa live is described by the narrator in the following lines; “As he walked past the twin strips of bungalows that made up the compound, the airless trapped heat, the stuffy smells and the bustling noises crowded his senses. The cement ground was gray, dirty and full of potholes. Above, the sky could be seen through the corrugated cases”. (Okri. 1996 6) Here, the deterioration of the lives of the people after independence is a clear evidence of the indifference and of the corrupt native rulers to improve the condition of the people. The passage above indicates how chaos and lawlessness prevail in Nigeria. Added to this is the manipulation of the people by the neo-colonial forces for their own benefit. This goes hand in hand with what Kehinde points out:

The impact of the post-colonial system can be clearly seen in the deteriorating life of the people of the ghetto dwellers through the characters and the tragedy of the crumbling ghetto. The image of the life of the ghettos and slums is of great dysfunctionality which is apparent in the scenes of scarcity of portable drinkable water, chaotic public transportation, unreliable communication systems and horrible housing. (Kehinde. 2007 244)

Okri has introduced Omovo as a model of the poor young man who represents the other Nigerian young men in how they are demeaned to a degraded status and become servants at the colonial shrines. Okri reflects on the condition of the people as follows:

He (Omovo) felt the purity of helplessness, the subversion of hope – he saw caves of unmeasured corruption, felt the burden of desperate prayers uttered, unheard – the prayers of slaves – the betrayal of ancestors – the treachery of leaders – the lies and the corruption of the old generation – their destruction of future dreams – they raped

our past, we rape our future – we never learn our lessons – history screams and ghettos erupt with death and maddened youths – they scrambled for our continent and now we scramble for the oil-burst of Independence – traitors and disunity everywhere – those who are deaf to history are condemned to be enslaved by it – enslaved by ourselves, our attitudes, our tribal madness, each for himself – the smiles of the rich grow more predatory while children weep their lives away burning in infernos of hunger and disease – our history hasn't hurt us enough or the betrayals would stop, the streets would erupt, till we are overcome with the inescapable necessity of total self-transformation – we burn for vision – clear, positive vision – for vision allied with action – for want of vision my people perish – for want of action they perish – in dreams – in dreams begin responsibility – for we have become a people of dream-eaters, worshipping at the shrines of corruption – we can't escape our history – we will dwindle, become smaller, the continent will shrink, be taken over, swallowed, pulped, drained, by predators, unless we transform – in vision begins – in vision begins responsibility – and even as we die, and shrink, and are taken over, reduced, seen as animals, as invisible, even as the streets spill over with the poor, even as we dance our lives away, and celebrate the powerful, worship like servants at their vulturous shrines, we can utter psychic decisions and set forces into motion that could change our lives forever – in vision begins action – in action begins our destiny – for the things that you do change you – and the changes affect the things you do – to him that hath shall be given – seek and ye shall find – to him that hath not shall be taken from, even that which they haveth – you either become, or you die – (Okri.1996 35)

The love between Ifeywa and Omovo is dangerous not only because of its illicit nature but also because it could survive despite all the stifling circumstances of the environment in which they live. This love story is taken as a backdrop to delineate the social disturbances caused by neo-colonial forces represented in the native elite. Also, the narrative of Omovo and Ifeywa is employed by Okri to uncover such harsh realities. Skillfully, Okri weaves the story of Omovo and Ifeywa with the ugly realities of the post-independent Nigeria exemplified in the city of Lagos and its ghettos. Omovo is trapped by the shackles of neocolonialism. He can be seen as a symbolic figure who represents all the oppressed African artists in their struggle against oppressive rules.

Omovo and Ifeywa live in a society riddled with corruption of various types and they have to struggle to defy the deadly social environment of the compound in which they live. As the narrator remarks:

She thought about the atmosphere into which they had been born and in which they must survive; an atmosphere of confusion, acquisition, an age of corruption, poverty, ghetto dreams, a period of waste and loss, a generation betrayed by their parents. She felt angry at the

feeling that, in a better world, a different one, a love story would have been possible between her and Omovo. But the age had thwarted them. These she was, in the darkness with love between them and the whole world separating them. (Okri 1996 31)

Ifeywa's husband, Takpo, is a trader who is older than her. Their marriage is not at all compatible and she has to suffer a lot. Here, Ifeywa's marriage symbolizes the reality of the bad and deteriorating life she is compelled to accept. She has been married to him due to the bad conditions and the dire need of her family. She has lost both her father and her brother. The death of her father has compelled her to leave school and give up her education. Consequently, she has lost faith in all people as a whole. Ifeywa's marriage is a lawless marriage as she is not interested in Takpo and can't hide her hatred for him. In return, Takpo uses his brutal masculinity in his marital relationship with her. It turns to be more a rape than a normal mating relationship. Ifeywa always sees him as an enemy whose domination she wants to free herself from. In this regard, Bushan points out "Okri uses Takpo as a systematic representation of the imperialist's political and cultural hegemony which deters and intimidate the natives from becoming people of imperialist's standards" (Bushan.2020 13)

Omovo is a model of the young African artist whose art is not given the freedom to reflect the reality of the society in which he lives. Omovo has lost his mother and his father has got married to another woman called Blakie and his brothers have been dismissed from home as a consequence. Omovo is a painter who finds in his art of painting an outlet for his repressed self. One of his painting shows a vivid description of the neighborhood in which he lives. It's a very expressive and reflective painting of "scupool" representing the environment in which he lives. It has been painted on the scumpool background of the compound where he lodges. It is clearly an open attack against the political hegemony in post-independence Nigeria. Commenting on the painting, Keme, Omovo's friend, remarks, "It is a commentary on our damned society. Isn't it? We are all on a drift, scummy, isn't that what you are suggesting" (Okri.1996 48)

Under the neocolonial system, the government makes a ban on anything that looks adversely upon her practices. Dr. Okosho, a painter, and Omovo want to express their indignation toward the rule each in his own way. However, the government does not give them the space. Both Dr. Okosho and Omovo want to find an outlet for their repressed selves through expressing their contempt toward the regime in their artistic outputs. Yet, they are faced with a lot of protest and rejection. Consequently, they undergo a conflict between painting or not painting what really reflects the ugly realities of their society. "I know, but what can we do? If you tell the truth you are in trouble. But if you see the truth and you keep quiet your spirit begins

to die. The position of the artist is a terrible one". (Okri.1996:12) Omovo's painting is based on the scumpool background of the compound. Here, the "scumpool" symbolizes the ugly reality of the life of the natives. He uses his art of painting as a means for communicating the evils in his society. It's through Omovo's painting that Okri wants to highlight the harsh realities of the lives of the poor masses, the injustices, the corruption in the society, the struggle for human survival, the groaning and yearning of the dissatisfied, the despair and the hopelessness of their existence". (Inyarbi. 2015: 165) It is in his painting that Omovo finds an outlet for his ailment and agony and suppressed soul. He says "My mother died, my brothers thrown out of the house. I am not happy. Nothing is what it could be. I am a human being.....I had to paint it, so I did". (Okri. 1996: 15)

Dr. Okosho is considered as a Godfather to Omovo. From the outset, he shows a lot of concern for him. He always supports him, can read his mind in different situations and offers him advice and help. Like Omovo, Dr. Okosho depicts the harsh realities of the society in his paintings: the hunger-stricken mob, the depressed faces of old men and the ruthlessness of young men. Dr. Okosho informs Omovo of an exhibition: that is held at Belshazzar's Feast where he (Omovo) can exhibit his paintings. While the exhibition is on, Omovo's painting attracts the attention of many visitors. Primarily, a boy expresses his opinion on the painting as "a bloody good commentary on our society" (Okri. 1996: 36) The painting also attracts the attention of a soldier who immediately questions Omovo about the idea of his painting. The attendants can understand that this painting is not just an ordinary painting. They see it as an attack against the sovereign country:

Why did you do that painting?

I just did it.

You are reactionary. You want to ridicule us, eh?

You mock our independence. You mock our great progress. We are a great nation.... You are not allowed to mock us.....You are a rebel....We are going to seize the painting." (Okri. 1996: 39)

Eventually, the painting is seized and becomes an indirect commentary on the disintegration of the society as a whole. As Bushan remarks "Taking the dictats from the political man, the military men brand any artist who paints the Nigerian psyche realistically as reactionary and always expects the optimistic things and never take out the masque under any circumstances." (Bushan 2020: 19)

Primarily, Omovo refuses to sell out his painting to the European man through a boy from the compound. He is offered a very good price for it. Yet, he rejects the offer. The boy says, "Europeans would pay as

much as twenty Naira for some works if they were properly framed" (Okri.1996 8) Omovo refuses again saying "There is nothing to say" (Okri. 1996 8) Commenting on Omovo's stance, Sumaira Akhter remarks "In rejecting the offer, Omovo emerges as a non-conformist to the demand of the post-independent government. He emerges as a sincere African artist who, despite his dire need for money, rejects the post-independent practices of the former colonial system" (Akhter.2013 75). Here, Okri uses Omovo and his painting as a tool for rejecting Neo-colonialism. He states his critique of the neo-colonial ideological forces through stating his vision. "He decided that, in his paintings, he wanted to create a simple vision, he wanted to start with what he knew, and what had taught him all the people he identified with the most. He wanted his work to awaken the emotions and the inexpressible sates that he felt". (Okri. 1996 204)

Commenting on the painting and the significance it bears, one of Omovo's friends - Keme- remarks "It's a commentary on our damned society, isn't it? We are all on a drift, a scummy drift, isn't that what you are suggesting?" (Okri.1996 48) Again, Omovo's painting represents an indirect attack against the prevailing corruption of the political hegemony of the post-independent Nigeria. The painting is confiscated by the government officials and is never given back to the artist. He says "The work will be returned to you at the appropriate time. If at all you can go, but be warned, worse can happen to you". (Okri. 1996 51) As a result, Omovo's hope are shattered. Thus, the episode of the seized painting reveals a very important aspect of Omovo's character. Being the mouthpiece of Okri, Omovo emerges as a revolutionary against the prevailing corruption in his country. Here, it is Okri's intent to urge the young generations to stand against the neo-colonial forces. Commenting on the action of having his painting, seized, Omovo reveals, "My drawing was stolen. Today my painting was seized by the government officials. Things happen in vicious circles. The evening I walked through a landscape of nightmares. This night I moved from peace to terror." (Okri. 1996 64)

The narrative delineates the sordid realities of the city of Lagos and its ghettos, especially the neighborhood where Omovo and his beloved Ifeywa live, to uncover the hunger, ugliness, dirtiness and violence in a way that implies the hollowness that characterizes the fake independence that the country has politically attained. The society has become mired in corruption and riddled with deterioration. As the narrator tells|:

He thought about the entanglement of bureaucracy and corruption that has spread throughout the country. He thought about the older generation, how they have squandered and stolen much of the country's resources, eaten up its future, weakened its potential enriched themselves, got fat, created chaos everywhere, poisoned the

next generation, and spread rashes of hunger through the land". (Okri.1996 190)

Omovo works for a chemical company and his job is to collect the orders and get them to the administration. He has to travel every day. He is very interested in doing his job sincerely and gracefully. Unlike Omovo, the other employees of the company are concerned only about spending their time on their own private business rather than doing their official job". (Okri. 1996 198) Moreover, such employees are a source of disturbance for him and he tries his best to avoid them. As the narrator remarks, "He wants to get through each day of office routine with minimum amount of aggression and resets obeying orders" (Okri 1996 186)

Mr. Babakoko is an affluent businessman. He has a big trade in chemical material. He is in the habit of getting his orders of material without waiting in the queue like other traders. He is capable of manipulating the manager of the company and his assistant by means of bribery. One day, Omovo is alone in the company as both the manager and his assistant are away. Mr. Babakoko finds himself in a situation where he has to deal with Omovo. The man offers a bribe to Omovo but the latter rejects the deal as a whole. Here, Mr. Babkoko is a model of the rich man who can use his money as a tool for reinforcing and spreading corruption. As Tom Inyarbi points out "Corruption can be clearly seen in the land through receiving money as a bribery as a means of manipulation. Such corruption violates the rights of both the individual and his group and this helps spread insecurity in terms of lives and property and in terms of job situations". (Inyarbi.2015 161)

Omovo appears unrelenting to the deal of Mr. Babakoko. He presents a model and a representative of the subaltern community. As the narrator tells "He thought about the entanglement of bureaucracy and corruption that he had spread through society..... created chaos-everywhere, poisoned the next generation, and spread rashes of hunger through the land". (Okri 1996 249) In reacting to Omovo's rejection of the deal, Babkoko deals in a bad way with him. Babakoko says "You are young and I understand what you need. Just come out straight with me and don't waste my time. Your friends are straight with me, your manager is straight with me. They get what they want and so do I. Everyone is happy. Fall for me, I fall for you. That's the game. Don't be shy about it". (Okri.1996 189)

Thus, the episode of Mr. Babakoko is a clear example of the corrupt affairs going on in the different institutions. Unlike the other employees in the community as a whole. Omovo deviates from the norms and he has to suffer the impact of the imperial hegemony though it is officially over. Again, Babakoko is a representative of the neo-colonial elite who have the privilege to manipulate the society on

their own ways while creating a lot of fissure and breeding insecurity and corruption among its people. As Micere Githae Mugo points out:

The neo-colonial state offering privilege here and there, volunteering assured patronage, in an attempt to coerce the recipient into collaboration. Those accepting the bribes have a good life, appointments as cabinet ministers by the patronizing neo-colonial regimes or by accepting lucrative directorship where they can make a quick back, and so the alluring offers roll on. Those who reject the blackmail are severely punished for daring to prohibit the violation of their consciences. (Mugo. 2007 146)

Consequently, Omovo loses his job at the company and he is substituted by the nephew of the manager on account of his absence for three days. In coming back, Omovo enters the manager's office and being there inspires in him a sense of the old imperial power. In the conversation between him and the manager, it is evident that Omovo has to leave the job under pressure, the manager says to him:

Manager: As a matter of fact, your salary has been increased.... But you've been transferred to our mile twelve branch.

Omovo: Meanwhile you give your nephew the benefit of employment. Well, I'm not accepting the transfer. It is spiteful.

Manager: Put in your letter of resignation with immediately effect. (Okri.1996 189)

Here, the episode of Babakoko and his act of bribery is a clear indication that lawlessness and chaos are widespread. Omovo is trapped by the shackles of Neo-colonialism. As Sumeria Akhter points out. "He (Omovo) realizes that the ex-colonial powers continue to play a decisive role despite the fact that African has gained political independence. Colonialism does not end with the independence of the country." (Akhter 2013 67)

Another example of the degradation of the moral values practiced against art and artists can also be seen in the episode of the mutilated girl. Keme works as a journalist. He wants to write on the deteriorating condition of his country. He sees a mutilated girl thrown into the river. He wants to write on the accident but he is not allowed by the editor of the journal. Here, in post-independent Nigeria, Media, which is an effective sector, is also still under the control of the neocolonial government. It rejects publishing incidents that challenges the government agencies. As the story tells, "I (Omovo) went to his (Keme's) place yesterday. He was angry that the police had detained him for a day. He did not tell why because of his anger. He said something about his editor refusing to publish his story. He is threatening to resign. Commenting on this incident of the dead girl,

Inyarbi remarks "It is symbolic of the social malaise in an impoverished social space made by years of misrule and avarice." (Inyarbi.2015 165)

In post-independent Nigeria, many young men have lost interest in their own culture on account of the invasion of the Western culture. This is reflected in different incidents in the narrative. Such young men have developed a desire to leave their land for European countries either for a better life or for education. Consequently, they absorb the western standards of living as they think that such standards are superior to theirs and that they have no indigenous viewpoints nor conventions. This goes hand in hand with Messay Kebede remark. She contends "Educated Africans are unable to adopt a moral standard: the contempt-mostly unconscious- that they feel for Africans totally deprive them of ethical relations with themselves and their original society." (Kebede. 2004 162)

Dele, Omovo's friend, is not at all happy about his life in Nigeria. He wants to lead a luxurious life. He despises the wretchedness around him. His great ambition is to study in America to which he refers to as "God's country". He thinks that his life in Nigeria is like living in suspended animation. It is in America that he can lead a free life and can spend time at night clubs with women. Many young men have lost interest in their own culture on account of the cultural invasion of Nigeria by western culture. Many of Omovo's friends are preoccupied with the dream of living in America. They want to escape from the nightmare of their country and find a refuge in America. In this regard, Sedat Bay remarks:

The western powers have endeavored to set up formidable barriers between the native people and these people's civilization or indigenous culture with the help of the colonial language and education that have enabled them to make the native people forget their local values and to make them overcome by an inferiority complex as well as deviated by the desire to mimi the European models. (Bay. 2020 113)

Okoro, another friend of Omovo is looking forward to the western culture. He is so impressed by American life and he dreams of America in order to escape from his society which he sees as "a battle field where poverty, corruption and hunger are bullets. Bad governments are the bombs." (Okri.1996 109) Okoro tells Omovo "I can't speak my mother language and at all I struggle with my father. How did this happens to us?" (Okri.1996 181) Okri wants to highlight the fact that people have become aware of their lost cultural heritage. He wants to highlight the cultural devastation as a result of Neo-colonialism. Dele is also not happy about his life in Nigeria and wants to leave for America. As the narrator states, "His single greatest ambition was to go and study in America. He believed that life would begin for him out

there. In his own country he felt that he was living in a static of suspended animation". (Okri.1996 111) He decides to leave Nigeria for US and goes to cast blame on the society as the reason that compels him to leave his country. He remarks "See how Africa kills her young ones. Africa is no place from me. That's why I am going to the States". (Okri.1996 61) In another situation, Keme expresses his disillusionment with life in Nigeria. He says "We are a betrayed generation, a generation of burdens, we will be the interiors of bad faith and the cost of all the waste and corruption. We have to sort out the mess our parents made of the city, the opportunities we missed, the oil boom that they pocketed". (Okri.1996 200)

Omovo lives in a very poor neighborhood where poverty-stricken families exist and his family is not an exception. He has lost his mother and the father has married another woman called Blackie. Being the wife of a father whose children have lost their mother, Blackie gives a lot of trouble to Omovo and his two brothers. The brothers -Okur and Umeh- have grown restless to live at the same house with a step-mother like Blackie and, consequently, they have decided to leave Nigeria as a whole for another country on account of losing affection and filial love. Having left both the house and the country, the two brothers have kept in touch with Omovo through letters. In their letters, they express their suffering and agony. "I just had to write. I am working my way on a ship. It's hard. I think often of you and of home and I feel like crying, but I don't. I think of dad too and I try to forgive him. He is weak and tired. I have no home and no destination. We have all badly lost something. Take care." (Okri.1996 74) Here the reaction of Omovo's brother toward the deteriorating life they have been leading reflects their interest, like other young men, in their country, in the American ideology "They wanted to go to America where they hoped to work and attend university at the same time. It was every person's passion fed by Hollywood films and album cover of popular musician" (Okri.1996 178) Nevertheless, the hopes and the dreams of others are not fulfilled and turn to be a nightmare.

Moral degradation is widespread in post-independent Nigeria. It is one aspect of Neo-colonialism that Okri wants to highlight. It takes different forms. It is represented in the people's excessive alcoholism, prostitution, street brawls, women infidelity and etc. For instance, given the deteriorating health of Omovo's father, Blackie finds satisfaction of her physical needs in her relationship with another man from the same compound. Also, Omovo's friend, Dele, deserts his girlfriend after impregnating her. Moreover, he asks her to abort the fetus. Eventually, Dele leaves for America and he goes to cast blame on the society for compelling him to leave his native land.

Toward the end of the story, having become too restless about her life with Takpo, Ifeywa decides to return to her family to ask them to give

him back the bride price that they have taken from him to live the rest of her life as free in the company of Omovo; the man who she has adored and who becomes a source of satisfying her emotional needs and sexual satisfaction. Under very volatile circumstances of a civil war between the villages, Ifeywa is randomly shot by the brutal folk of the insurgent and she eventually dies. Ifeywa's body is found floating in the river the next day. One of the villagers comments on the incidents upon finding her body on the shore of the stream near the neighboring village. He says "We are killing ourselves over a problem which the white man caused in the first place. Let this innocent girl's death be the final sacrifice. Let us solve this problem in our way." (Okri.1996 33)

Having lost his mother, father beloved and his brothers, Omovo stands as the best paradigm for the neo-colonial regime. He attempts to express his contempt toward the prevailing social injustices are punished. He has been fired from his job and his paintings have been confiscated. Late in the novel, Omovo arrives at a town where he becomes a guest of a chief tribal sect. The chief provides him with a room to sleep. The room is so dirty and contaminating with the smell of death and rituals. Upon losing Ifeywa he loses faith in everything. He goes to wander around the country. He reminiscences through Africa's ancient history to the contemporary world and is shocked by the brutal materialism of national despondency, ingrained corruption and political hegemony. As Ayo Kehinde remarks "Battered settings produce battered individuals. Most of the people are engaged in sordid amoral activities and exude blatant irresponsibility. This is dramatized in their street brawls excessive alcoholism, prostitution, cheating, perversion of tradition and cultural artifacts." (Kehinde.2007 239)

CONCLUSION

In presenting his gloomy vision of post-independence in Africa, Okri wanted to highlight that the ex-colonized nations should seek to question their current circumstance and work for moving the people against the neocolonial regime and its exploitative system. In so doing, they should try their best to force the native elite to stop the neocolonial practices. On the other hand, the natives should adopt an anti-colonial attitude against such practices so that the harmful legacy of former colonialism cannot find a way for its persistence. One finding of this study is that Okri wants to convey that whatever the African people have internalized in terms of their culture and history is basically the outcome of the different ideologies instilled in them so that they remain in need for some external power to govern them. Omovo is presented as a model that should be followed in terms of his firm stance of rejecting any price for his painting added to his rejection

of Babakoko's bribe on account of which he lost his job. He rejects the neocolonial practices in an already independent country. In his reaction to the offers in both situations, Omovo's stance should be highly appreciated and taken as a model. He has presented Okri's gloomy vision of post-independence through revolutionary actions in standing in the face of Neocolonialism. Okri has employed Omovo as his mouthpiece to urge the upcoming generations to stand against and defy the neocolonial forces. In a word, Okri's vision is skillfully manifested through showing Neocolonialism as a threat to the contemporary African nations. It is a vision that exhibits an explicit critique of Neocolonialism and its aspects namely the different forms of disintegration of the society as a whole.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank the Deanship of Scientific Research, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, for their support in bringing out this article

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