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## The Neocolonial Gaze : Globalization, Identity and Resistance in The Reluctant Fundamentalist and Americanah.

**Abstract** : Neocolonialism refers to how developed countries use economic, political, and cultural influence to control or shape developing nations, similar to what happened during colonial times. The present paper seeks to examine the impact of neocolonialism on globalization, identity, and resistance in Mohsin Hamid's The Reluctant Fundamentalist and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah. In these novels, the major characters like Changez and Ifemelu experience the pressure of Western power, culture and dominance as immigrants. The protagonist, Changez in the novel The Reluctant Fundamentalist who is a Pakistani man living in post-9/11 America, shows the difficulties he faced while living in the West under contemporary colonial power. In Americanah, the protagonist Ifemelu who is a Nigerian woman who lives in the U.S. faces different kinds of neocolonialism related to race and identity, and she speaks against the racial issues with the help of her blog. In these novels, Hamid and Adichie use various themes for instance, power, race, identity crisis, and migration to show how personal and national identities have been affected by

capitalism and cultural dominance. This paper examines how both the characters resist the neo-colonial gaze that tried to shape them even after living with the identity crisis in Western nations. Thus, after looking at their stories, this study examines the effort of the characters to resist the continuing influence of neocolonialism.

**Keywords:** Identity, Resistance, Hegemony, Race, Migration, Neocolonialism, Globalization.

**Introduction :** Neocolonialism is a modern type of colonialism which means controlling postwar countries not through direct government but through economic dependence, cultural imperialism and international politics. It has since continued to influence the identities of citizens of countries that were conquered in the past. Citizens in those regions are anticipated to take on the stature of people in the West due to globalization, which spreads Western values and the worldwide movement of power. According to Kwame Nkrumah, "Neocolonialism is that foreign capital is used for the exploitation rather than for the development of the less developed parts of the world. Investment under neocolonialism increases rather than decreases the gap between the rich and the poor countries of the world". Thus, both novels presented in this discussion, *Americanah* (2013) and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), are relevant because the character must navigate their world under the umbrella of

influences of neocolonialism, global capital and Western culture. To a great degree, *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid deal with how neocolonialism shapes identity and how protagonists resist these shaping forces. In a world shaped by Western influence, both books show how hard it is for people to hold onto that sense of self.

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez once believed in the American Dream but later realized how the world systems he used to admire were after all taking advantage of people. In trying to reject the above ideals, it is a way of him fighting back the effects of neocolonialism that are yet felt in life. The experiences of Ifemelu, a Nigerian immigrant in America are well depicted in *Americanah* as Western society tries to impose its ideas about race and identity without really forcing them upon her. She rebuts these forces by criticizing the racial structures she sees while speaking for herself through her blog "The Non-American Black". Her journey depicts how hard it is to fight against Western cultural dominance in general.

This paper explores the influence of neocolonialism on identity, resistance and globalization in *Americanah* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. It will discuss how Ifemelu and Changez struggle to find their identities and avoid neocolonial gazes, which form the part of Western culture as well as economic pressures and

face cultural and personal problems while fighting against neocolonialism. This paper will make it evident how both books lament the current after-effect ramifications of colonial authority in the new world order. The struggle between Ifemelu and Changez shows how challenging it is to seek an identity in a world that appears still bound up by colonial history.

### **Literature Review**

Many researchers are interested in how neocolonialism affects identity development, resistance, and globalization. Adichie's *Americanah* and Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* have been very important in these talks because they both deal with issues of cultural dominance, racial identity, and resistance to Western structures of power. This literature review explores how ideas about neocolonialism, identity, resistance, and globalization, based on what there is in the studies, can help a reader decipher these two books.

In works like Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, characters fight against neocolonial forces that have ravaged postcolonial Africa since its inception. Relevant themes are Neocolonialism and Globalization, Identity, Resistance and Agency. For instance, the novelist tries to demonstrate the damage linked to hegemonic globalization when he argues: "No, the English have, for all practical purposes, ceased to menace the world. The real danger today is from that fat,

adolescent and delinquent millionaire, America, and from all those virulent, misshapen freaks like Amin and Bokassa sired on Africa by Europe"<sup>2</sup>. With these words, the novelist reveals how the governments in postcolonial Africa have been greatly influenced by the Westerners. As a result, the masses face the consequences and only those in power enjoy the benefits. In case of the film *The White Tiger*, Balram Halwai says "I was trapped in the rooster coop and don't believe for a second there's a million-rupee game show you can win to get out of it"<sup>3</sup>. This shows his ascension through the ranks is an example of how Western economic constructs plunder the underclass. The Global South remains under the economic and political control of the West, which corresponds to the ideas of Kwame Nkrumah's 1965 concept of neocolonialism, which says that formal independence never guarantees a country ceases to be under Western control.

Besides, *My Name is Khan* (film) illustrates people in America post 9/11 attack how they struggle with racial as well as religious stereotypes. For example when Rizwan Khan says "My name is Khan, and I am not a terrorist"<sup>4</sup> this shows that he fights for his rights too although he lives in a bad environment. All these works show how people resist neocolonial structures whether it be the denial of Western ideas or speaking out against racism to political exploitation. Through such acts of resistance, these

acts make them stand up for who they are and make it even more visible that the world still faces the effects of colonialism. The same happens in Americanah and The Reluctant Fundamentalist major characters: In the case of Ifemelu and Changez, their battles with identity and acts of resistance when faced with Westernness show how hard it is to take control over life in a globalized world where Western culture takes up such preeminence. To further illustrate how neocolonialism shapes both identity and freedom, a few references include Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, The Reluctant Fundamentalist by Mohsin Hamid, Anthills of the Savannah by Chinua Achebe, My Name is Khan (film), and The White Tiger (film). Those acts of rebellion by the characters depict that they are free in a world, which is still bound by its colonial history. This literature review would lay the foundation for this deeper look into books that criticize neocolonialism and contextualize the complicated themes of identity, resistance, and globalization together.

### Research Questions

- I. How do the protagonists in The Reluctant Fundamentalist and Americanah work through who they are in an increasingly international or neocolonial world?
- II. How do the protagonists react to neocolonialism?

III. What does "home" mean for Changez and Ifemelu? How does the idea of home define who they are as they work to counter neocolonial ideologies?

IV. In what ways does globalization deconstruct and reconstruct ethnic identity and choice freedom in The Reluctant Fundamentalist and Americanah?

V. How do the narratives of The Reluctant Fundamentalist and Americanah confirm or negate theories most people have about neocolonialism and globalization?

VI. Through which ways do these two novels critique the manner in which globalization reconstitutes the identities and choice freedom of immigrants and foreign-origin people?

### Methodology

This research uses a qualitative, textual and comparative analysis through the concept of neocolonialism by Kwame Nkrumah, it explains how protagonists in both The Reluctant Fundamentalist and Americanah argue a significant fight against neocolonial pressure as they confront issues of race, migration, and Western hegemony. Textual Analysis: The primary method to explore how the characters in these novels resist the neocolonial gaze and struggle against the lasting effects of neocolonialism.

### Neocolonial analysis in The Reluctant Fundamentalist

In The Reluctant Fundamentalist, Mohsin Hamid explores the subtle yet powerful forces of neocolonialism through the experiences of Changez, a Pakistani man

who navigates the complexities of identity, resistance, and globalization in post-9/11 America. The novel presents a critique of how globalization serves as a new form of colonial control, where cultural and economic dominance by the West continues to shape the identities and lives of people from formerly colonized nations.

- **Identity and Resistance**

Changez's transformation from a high-achieving immigrant pursuing the American Dream to someone disillusioned with the West illustrates the novel's critique of neocolonialism. Early in the novel, Changez is drawn to the opportunities that globalization provides, seeking success in corporate America. He adopts Western ideals, aspiring to succeed in the very structures that serve global capitalism. He admits, "I was, in four and a half years, never an American; I was immediately a New Yorker"<sup>5</sup>. This quote underscores how Changez aligns himself with Western identity markers, attempting to blend into American society. As the novel progresses, Changez increasingly resists these identities imposed on him by the West, especially after 9/11. He becomes acutely aware of how his race and nationality are viewed through a neocolonial lens. His transformation is complete when he returns to Pakistan, rejecting the Western ideals that once defined him. He reflects on this internal conflict, by saying, "I had changed; I was looking about me with the eyes of a foreigner"<sup>6</sup>. This moment

highlights Changez's growing resistance to both Western hegemony and the pressures to conform to a globalized identity.

However, post-9/11, the neocolonial racial gaze intensifies, and Changez becomes increasingly aware of his position as an outsider. He faces suspicion and marginalization due to his ethnicity, and the American Dream he once pursued now alienates him. His growing disillusionment with the West marks the beginning of his resistance. As he confesses, "I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine"<sup>7</sup>. Here, Changez draws a parallel between his role in the corporate world and historical colonial exploitation, revealing his awareness of how neocolonialism operates through economic domination and cultural control. His realization leads to a rejection of Western hegemony and the reclaiming of his Pakistani identity.

- **Impact of Globalization**

The novel also critiques globalization as a modern form of colonialism that continues to exploit developing nations while promoting Western ideals. Changez's career in valuation consulting epitomizes this exploitation, as he profits from assessing companies in economically weaker nations. His growing discomfort with the ethics of his work reflects his realization that globalization serves Western economic interests at the expense of others. As he explains, "I was

struck by how traditional such companies appeared when compared to their American counterparts... I wondered how it was that their style, as manifest in their offices, could so clash with my own"<sup>8</sup>. This moment signals Changez's awareness of the deep cultural divides that globalization attempts to flatten under a Western capitalist model, further contributing to his resistance. Changez's eventual rejection of corporate America and his return to Pakistan symbolize a resistance not only to cultural assimilation but also to the economic dominance perpetuated by globalization. His decision to leave the U.S. and reclaim his own identity illustrates the novel's critique of how neocolonialism, through globalization, continues to assert control over postcolonial subjects. His resistance to the neocolonial gaze is evident when he says, "I had returned to Pakistan, but my inhabitation of your country had not entirely ceased"<sup>9</sup>. Even after his physical departure, the impact of neocolonialism lingers, underscoring how globalization maintains a lasting hold on identity.

### **Neocolonialism in Americanah**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* offers a profound exploration of neocolonialism, particularly focusing on its impact on identity formation, resistance, and the effects of globalization. Through the experiences of Ifemelu, the novel's central protagonist, Adichie illustrates how neocolonial structures continue to influence race, migration, and identity, while also

highlighting how individuals resist and navigate these global forces.

### **• Identity and the Neocolonial Gaze**

One of the central themes in *Americanah* is identity, particularly how the neocolonial gaze shapes the self-perception of individuals from formerly colonized nations. Ifemelu's migration to the United States forces her to confront how race and identity are constructed in a globalized Western context. In Nigeria, Ifemelu is aware of class differences but never truly contends with race as an identity marker. However, upon arriving in the U.S., she realizes that her identity as a Black African is viewed through racialized and neocolonial lens. As she notes, "I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as Black and I only became Black when I came to America"<sup>10</sup>. This quote highlights how the West continues to define identity for those from the Global South, imposing its own racial categories and stereotypes. Ifemelu's struggle with her hair, her accent, and her relationships with Americans reflect her resistance to this racialized identity imposed by Western society. Her decision to start a blog, where she openly discusses race and identity, becomes an act of resistance against the neocolonial structures that seek to define her. Through her writing, Ifemelu resists the neocolonial gaze, asserting her own voice and narrative outside the dominant Western discourse.

- **Globalization and Cultural Domination**

Globalization in Americanah is portrayed as a continuation of cultural imperialism, where Western ideals and practices dominate the global landscape. The novel highlights how migration and globalization force individuals to adopt Western cultural standards, from language to beauty norms. For Ifemelu, the pressure to assimilate into the U.S. is pervasive as she finds herself altering her speech and appearance to fit into American society. At one point she remarks, "You're black in America in a way you're not anywhere else, not in England, not in France, not in Nigeria"<sup>11</sup>. This quote underscores how the global spread of Western ideals, especially in the U.S., influences how race and identity are constructed for migrants.

Ifemelu's relationship with her hair serves as a metaphor for the broader theme of cultural domination. She initially straightens her natural hair to conform to Western beauty standards but later decides to wear her hair in its natural state as a form of resistance. This shift symbolizes her rejection of Western ideals and the reclaiming of her own identity. In her blog she writes, "Relaxing your hair is like being in prison. You're caged in"<sup>12</sup>, emphasizing how Western standards confine individuals from postcolonial societies. The embrace of her natural hair is an act of resistance against the neocolonial forces that seek to suppress her cultural identity.

- **Resistance and Reclaiming Identity**

Ifemelu navigates her experiences in the U.S., she becomes increasingly resistant to the neocolonial forces that attempt to shape her identity. Her decision to return to Nigeria represents a rejection of the idea that the West is superior or more desirable. In Nigeria, she reconnects with her roots and finds a sense of belonging that was absent in the U.S. Even in Nigeria, the impact of neocolonialism remains evident as Western culture continues to influence Nigerian society. Ifemelu remarks on how her peers in Lagos are obsessed with Western brands and lifestyles reflecting the lingering cultural dominance of the West.

Adichie critiques the idea that globalization has created a more connected and equal world instead showing how Western hegemony continues to dominate both in the West and in postcolonial societies like Nigeria. Despite these pressures, Ifemelu's return to Nigeria and her decision to stop altering herself to fit Western ideals are powerful acts of resistance. She reclaims her identity on her own terms refusing to be defined by the neocolonial gaze that once sought to shape her.

- **Comparative Analysis of The Reluctant Fundamentalist and Americanah**

In both novels, identity is shaped by the neocolonial gaze, which imposes Western views on individuals from the Global South. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez's Pakistani identity is scrutinized

in the United States post-9/11, and he becomes a target of racial profiling and suspicion. He describes the shift in perception: "I was instantly a suspect. I was an outsider, an immigrant, a potential threat"<sup>13</sup>. His experience mirrors how neocolonial powers continue to control how racial and ethnic identities are viewed. Similarly, in *Americanah*, Ifemelu's Nigerian identity is reframed by American racial constructs. She notes, "I only became Black when I came to America"<sup>14</sup>. This line highlighting how the Western world categorizes immigrants in a racialized hierarchy. Both characters confront how Western societies define them based on colonial legacies, but they also push back against these definitions. Globalization plays a significant role in shaping the experiences of the characters in both novels. Changez initially thrives in the capitalist world of New York but becomes disillusioned with the exploitative nature of global capitalism and how it mirrors colonial control over the Global South. In contrast, Ifemelu migration to the U.S. expose her to both opportunities and systemic racism, as well as economic exploitation. The novels critique the inequalities created by globalization and the way it perpetuates neocolonial power structures.

Resistance to the neocolonial gaze is a central theme in both novels. Changez rejects American capitalist ideals and returns to Pakistan, symbolizing his defiance against Western hegemony. Ifemelu, through her blog on race in

America, challenges racial stereotypes and reclaims her identity eventually returning to Nigeria to embrace her roots. Both characters' actions reflect their refusal to be defined by Western narratives asserting their agency and rejecting the persistent influence of neocolonialism on their lives. Thus, both novels show how characters from postcolonial societies resist the neocolonial gaze by reclaiming their identity and critiquing the unequal power dynamics of globalization.

**Conclusion** : Both *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Americanah* offer incisive critiques of neocolonialism, illustrating how globalization reinforces colonial hierarchies rather than dismantling them. Through the experiences of Changez and Ifemelu, Mohsin Hamid and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie expose the ways in which Western cultural and economic dominance continues to shape the identities of individuals from postcolonial societies. The neocolonial gaze remains a powerful force, compelling assimilation while simultaneously marginalizing those who resist. Changez's transformation from an eager participant in Western capitalism to a vocal critic of its exploitative structures epitomizes the struggle of postcolonial subjects seeking to reclaim their agency. His ultimate rejection of Western ideals underscores Hamid's critique of globalization as a tool of neocolonial control, highlighting the tensions between economic ambition



and cultural authenticity. Similarly, Ifemelu's journey is marked by a constant negotiation of identity in the face of racial and cultural hierarchies. Her refusal to conform to Western beauty standards and her decision to return to Nigeria serve as acts of defiance against neocolonial pressures, reinforcing Adichie's exploration of identity and resistance.

Both novels illustrate that globalization, far from fostering inclusivity, often perpetuates systemic inequalities that force individuals to navigate complex intersections of race, class, and culture. However, *Changez* and *Ifemelu*'s journeys demonstrate that resistance remains possible. By asserting their identities in defiance of neocolonial constraints, they challenge the forces that seek to define them, ultimately reclaiming agency over their own narratives. Their resistance underscores the broader struggle of postcolonial subjects in a world where Western dominance continues to shape perceptions of identity and success. In bridging the personal and the political, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Americanah* emphasize the importance of reclaiming identity and resisting assimilation in an era of persistent neocolonial influence. Their protagonists' journeys serve as powerful testimonies to the resilience of postcolonial voices, advocating for a world where identity is not dictated by Western hegemony but

shaped by self-determination and cultural authenticity.

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