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Naipaul's A Bend in the River and Neo-colonialism as a Comparative Context

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**CLCWeb Volume 2 Issue 3 (September 2000) Article 6**  
**Haidar Eid,**

**"Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* and Neo-colonialism as a Comparative Context"**

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**Contents of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 2.3 (2000)**

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**Abstract:** In his article, "Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* and Neo-colonialism as a Comparative Context," Haidar Eid discusses the dialectical interplay between the political import and aesthetic qualities in Naipaul's novel. It contests Naipaul's conclusion that "Third World" peoples are not genuine and authentic human beings, like Westerners. Further, Naipaul's implication that political and social disorder is the unavoidable product of contemporary liberation movements, and that Africans are nothing and with no place in the world, are challenged and deconstructed. The independence of Third World countries, according to Naipaul, eliminates the last hope of resistance to ignorance, as well as the last civilizing traces of Western influence. What remains in Naipaul's Africa is only greedy, consumptive desire, and backward cultural identities. Eid argues that what Naipaul offers us is a condemned and fragmented society that lacks creative potential, a black society that cannot govern itself: a society that should be governed by an external power. Naipaul's conclusion, therefore, is not different from the racist ideology of colonialism that justifies the occupation of other lands, and then defends the so-called human face of Western colonialism.

**Haidar EID**

### **Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* and Neo-colonialism as a Comparative Context**

In this paper, I investigate the ways in which Naipaul's novel *A Bend in the River* (1979) can be considered a neo-colonial response to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in that it re-draws the map of the journey taken by Conrad's protagonists. *A Bend in the River* will be dealt with as a neo-colonialist novel that aspires to respond to El-Tayib Salih's (Sudan) *Season of Migration to the North* (1969). The article therefore will focus on Naipaul and what he represents in terms of ideology and literature in a postcolonial context, and will also explore the historical and social dimensions of *A Bend in the River*, and then attempt to relate to the novel in terms of its relationship to the author's world-views and ideological orientations. I will also explore the dialectical interplay between the political import and the aesthetic qualities in *A Bend in the River*. Since Naipaul's defence of neo-colonialism is the basis of this novel, I will define the term in relation to it. Moreover, I contest Naipaul's conclusion that Third World peoples are not genuine and authentic human beings -- as Westerners are -- because they do not produce what they consume. Naipaul's implication that political and social disorder is the unavoidable product of contemporary liberation movements, and that Africans, and by implication the whole "Third World," are nothing with no place in the world, are challenged in this article.

Novels like these necessarily refer to the debate between modernity and traditionalism. However, this conflict, in Naipaul's work, leads to the conclusion that the Third World cannot preserve its traditional values in the modern world, and that colonized individuals and cultures tend to repudiate their traditional past and mimic the lives and cultures of their colonial masters. This is, arguably, a misconception of the nature and history of such societies, which the article will seek to work on. This debate brings the comparison between Europe and Africa to the surface, and it becomes one of the major themes of the text. Naipaul insists that the best intentions of the recently decolonized countries in the Third World amount in the end to nothing, and whatever it has is brought about by the powers of illusion and European aid. The independence of "Third World" countries, according to Naipaul, eliminates the last hope of resistance to ignorance, as well as the last civilizing traces of Western influence.

What remains in Naipaul's Africa is only greedy, consumptive desire, and backward cultural identities. What Naipaul offers us is a condemned, fragmented society that lacks creative potential, a black society that cannot govern itself: a society that should be governed by an external power. I will argue that this conclusion is not different from the racist ideology of colonialism that justifies the occupation of other lands, and then defends the so-called human face of Western colonialism. One cannot avoid discussions of politics -- including slavery, nationalism and colonialism -- in any serious reading of Naipaul's *A Bend in the River*. Nor can one avoid the historical circumstances that still play a vital role in shaping modern post-colonial literature. It would be a mistake to argue that *A Bend*, with its implicit and explicit concerns with power, can be interpreted as a high, autonomous aesthetic literary work. Indeed, politics has played such a major role in Naipaul's life that its pervasive presence in *A Bend* should come as no surprise. In this regard, he is not unique among post-colonial fiction writers. And given the encompassing role politics has played in the developing countries during the struggle for national independence and the post-colonial era, ignoring it would be an ideological distortion or luxurious entertainment on the part of the reader. However, this is not to say that one should ignore the dialectical interplay between political content and aesthetic qualities in literature, generally speaking, or in Naipaul's *A Bend* in particular.

The ending of colonial order created hopes and ambitions for the newly independent countries, but optimism was relatively short-lived. According to Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman the extent to which the Western colonial powers had not relinquished control became clear: "This continuing Western influence, located in flexible combinations of the economic, the political, the military, and the ideological is called neocolonialism" (3), which is another manifestation of imperialism. This is an important definition for understanding Naipaul's defence of neo-colonialism

in terms of technology, business and industrialization, a defence that concludes that Third World peoples are not genuine and authentic human beings, like Europeans and Americans, because they do not produce bombs and machines, but rather only consume them. In fact, it is undoubtedly difficult to understand *A Bend* without having a kind of historical perspective through which the critic-reader can comprehend, not to say analyze, the sociology of the novel. Some critics consider Naipaul to be a spokesman for a new form of colonialism, i.e., neo-colonialism, such as the Marxist Indian critic H.B. Singh. In "V.S. Naipaul: A Spokesman for Neo-colonialism" (1969), Singh defines neocolonialism as "the continuing Western influence, located in flexible combinations of the economic, the political, the military and the ideological (but with an over-riding economic purpose" (71) and Edward Said observes in his *Culture and Imperialism* that the common factor of both colonialism and neo-colonialism, as constituents of imperialism, is the presumption of the superiority of the white/Western colonialist over the Black/Native colonized -- and the right of the former to oppress the latter, whose role is only reaffirming the superiority of the former (322). Thus, in *A Bend*, Black Africans cannot govern themselves and will never be able to.

*A Bend* is set in an unnamed newly independent African state governed by a dictator, the "Big Man," who claims to have brought peace and social justice by combining nationalist feelings with the nationalization of property belonging to foreigners. Bruce King, for example, suggests that *A Bend* is undoubtedly intended to be both metaphorical and realistic: The namelessness of the country makes it stand for most of the Third World countries which are faced with the dilemma of choosing between their present and their traditional past (3). However, the fact that the country is Francophonic, and the similarities between the Big Man and president Mobutu, makes it easy to associate the country with Zaire. It is, then, Zaire to which we are taken, and which becomes a representative of the contemporary post-colonial Africa after the disintegration of colonial order. Political and social disorder, frequently turning to chaos, is for Naipaul the unavoidable product of contemporary liberation movements. From the very beginning we are told that "the country, like others in Africa, had its troubles after independence," and that "too many of the places ... are full of blood" (3). It is a chaotic, ambiguous world; hence we do not know, in the beginning, to whom the narrator is speaking. The world we are confronted with is both fictitious and realistic, a world that is not responsible for the destruction of order in Africa. Rather, according to Naipaul, the individual Africans are responsible for the tragedy in their lives. Although the colonial system is the major reason for the backwardness in the old colonial countries, this responsibility is rejected from the beginning of the novel. The opening, with its anti-evolutionary dimension, summarizes the whole existential philosophy controlling the novel: "The world is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it" (3). From its inception, Naipaul's novel suggests that Africans are nothing, and allow themselves to become nothing; they have no place in the world.

Naipaul's Africans are either obsessed with modernity and its technology, which they do not produce, or they totally reject whatever is new and unfamiliar to them. The contradiction between traditional culture, rooted in village life, and the seemingly modern Westernized city is appalling. Hence one can comprehend the recurrent thematic implications and images of mimicry and destruction: "the rage of the rebels [against the Belgians] was like a rage against metal, machinery, wires, everything that was not of the forest and Africa" (86). Africa, and the Third World, cannot, and will not, preserve their traditional values in the modern world. Instead, individuals and cultures tend to repudiate their traditional past and mimic the lives and cultures of their colonial masters. The novel centres on the conflict between traditionalism and Westernism; this is the same dynamic that has generated many of the contradictions now characteristic of other post-colonial societies that manifest themselves in the clash between such categories as the "modern" and the "traditional," the new and the old ways of life, and hence between Western and Native cultures and values. In response to the alienation from the colonial past and neo-colonial present, there are widespread efforts throughout the Third World at returning to and coming to terms with the past by revising it and renarrating it, since -- as Naipaul's narrator says -- "our history ... [we] have got from books written by Europeans" (11).

Breaking with the past, the Big Man mimics a political career, imitating the display of power he sees in the West: "He needs a model in everything, and I believe he heard that de Gaule used to send personal regards to the wives of his political enemies" (188). Of course, the Big Man never understands the theoretical nature of French politics. It is not something that has been produced in his own culture: He can only mimic the external gestures of political life which are alien to the African experience. Naipaul's narrator says: "He was creating modern Africa. He was creating a miracle that would astound the rest of the world. He was by-passing real Africa, the difficult Africa of bush and villages, and creating something that would match anything that existed in other countries" (100). By mimicking Europe and trying to bring it to Africa, the Big Man decides to build the New Domain; a place for educating the African youth by European teachers. The Domain becomes, with its modern luxurious buildings, a European model with Western values. We are told that "what the [Big Man] was building was meant to be grander" (100). But this "miracle" falls into ruin. The reason is explained by the narrator: "You took a boy out of the bush and you taught him to read and write; you levelled the bush and built a polytechnic and you sent him there. It seemed as easy as that, if you came late to the world and found ready-made those things that other countries and peoples had taken so long to arrive at -- writing, printing, universities, books, knowledge" (102-03).

The Domain, however, is a hoax. Moreover, the president maintains his power by means of European airplanes, and by posting gigantic photographs of himself, printed in Europe. European experts rebuild the destroyed town and even European mercenaries suppress the rebellion (Boxil 74). That is to say, without Europe, the Big Man -- and Africa -- would not be able to survive. Even his maxims are not original, i. e., they are modelled on the sayings of Mao Tse Tung. In a post-colonial state like Zaire, the president's speeches are usually superficial; that is, the rhetoric is perfect, but the words are not intended to mean anything practical (Boxil 75). His maxims are simply necessary because the time is one of revolution: "Above it on the blue wall, high up, where the uneven surface was dusty rather than grimy, was painted *discipline avant tout*" (209). His radio speech as described by Salim, the narrator, conveys all the contradictions and hypocrisy of the Big Man's principles: "The speech, so far, was like many others the President had made. The themes were not new: sacrifice and the bright future; the dignity of the woman of Africa; the need to strengthen the revolution, unpopular though it was with those black men in the towns who dreamed of waking up one day as white men; the need for Africans to be African, to go back without shame to their democratic and socialist ways, to rediscover the virtues of the diet and medicines of their grandfathers and not to go running like children after things in imported tins and bottles; the need for vigilance, work and, above all, discipline" (206).

Although he claims to have an independent state, he is dependent upon European advisers and experts. When the Big Man nationalises the businesses of foreigners, he delivers them to his supporters, not to the people. What TheoTime, to whom Salim's store is delivered, says is both pathetic and particularly significant: "The revolution had become ... [a] little rotten. Our young people were becoming impatient. It was necessary ... to radicalize. We had absolutely to radicalize. We were expecting too much of the President. No one was willing to take responsibility. Now responsibility has been forced on the people" (256). This is very pathetic because he does not know the meaning of what he says; and significant because it indicates the position of Naipaul's post-colonial states, in the sense that the so-called revolutions in the Third World are "rotten." The relationship between Citizen TheoTime and his manager, the old owner of the store, is a metaphor for the relationship between Africa/Third World and Europe, as described by Boxhil in his *V.S. Naipaul's Fiction: In Quest of the Enemy*. That is to say, Africa will always be dependent on Europe without confessing this dependency (75). TheoTime, representing Africans, is described as a greedy, foolish man: "He would have liked to live out his role in fact -- to take over the running of the shop, or to feel (while enjoying his storeroom life) that he was running the shop. He knew, though, that he knew nothing; and he was like a man enraged by his own helplessness. He made constant scenes. He was drunken, aggrieved and threatening, and as deliberately irrational as an official who had decided to be malin" (262).

Of course, the political equation that runs the foreign policy of the state is reflected on the internal affairs of the state itself. All the people should be dependent on the Big Man and remember that he is always present; hence his photographs appear everywhere since it is "a picture of all Africans." The hidden solution that one tends to think about is a new revolution against the Big Man: A revolution that is expected to compromise by preserving certain social, cultural traditions and by adopting certain modern principles. A Liberation Army opposed to the Big Man declares, in a badly written leaflet, that "we have decided to face the ENEMY with armed confrontation ... The ancestors are shrinking ... By ENEMY we mean the powers of imperialism, the multi-nationals and the puppet powers that be, the false gods, the capitalists, the priests and teachers who give false interpretations ... The schools teach ignorance and people practise ignorance in preference to their true culture ... We LIBERATION ARMY have no education. We do not print books and make speeches" (211-21). In order to achieve this liberation, the Liberation Army members are going to resort to killing. The narrator's slave says: "They are going to kill everybody who can read and write, everybody who ever put on a jacket and tie, everybody who put on a jacket de boy. They're going to kill all the masters and all the servants. When they're finished nobody will know there was a place like this here. They're going to kill and kill. They say it is the only way, to go back to the beginning before it's too late" (275). Again, like the revolution against the colonialists, there will be destruction and bloodshed, i. e., a revolution that will destroy the old regime and bring a worse one.

It is significant, then, that the relationship between the Big Man and the people is unrealistic: A relationship that can never lead to prosperity. Hence the economic boom the country witnesses as a result of the selling of copper easily collapses. It is a relationship that does not take into account the level of the people who never produce what they consume, according to the narrator. The new Africa the President is trying to construct is only an ideal place that has nothing to do with the "Africa of bush and villages." Raymond, the president's Belgian adviser, is the character who represents the ideal European intellectual "Africanist" and thus affects the President's views: "His subject was an event in Africa, but he might have been writing about Europe or a place he had never been ... He had made Africa his subject. He had devoted his years to those boxes of documents in his study ... Perhaps he had made Africa his subject because he had come to Africa and because he was a scholar, used to working with papers, and had found this place full of newspapers" (181). That is why Raymond's, and the Big Man's, Africa is different from the real one the narrator is familiar with, i.e., Africa of the bush, poverty and ignorance. So it seems, then, that the narrator, Salim, is the only "realistic" character who has the ability to observe things objectively: "So from an early age I developed the habit of looking, detaching myself from a familiar scene and trying to consider it as from a distance" (15). He is the only one who survives the onslaught, and realizes what is happening and decides that the situation is hopeless. We are given all the description and detail of the place by this astute observer who is introduced to us as an immigrant from an East African Muslim Indian family. He moves into the interior, to Zaire, where the newly independent state is ruled by the Big Man, and where there is a site of severe conflict between the past and the present. The detailed description we are given exemplifies his existential world-view. He introduces himself from the beginning: "My own pessimism, my insecurity, was a more terrestrial affair. I was without the religious sense of my family. The insecurity I felt was due to my lack of true religion" (16) and by rejecting his fate, like Camus' outsider, Salim is confronted with the same existential questions to which he -- as an individual -- tries to find answers; he is left alone with "no family, no flag, no fetish." It is his own choice: "I could be master of my fate only if I stood alone." That is, he does not accept his fate: "I could no longer submit to fate. My wish was not to be good in the way of our tradition, but to make good" (20).

Salim's existentialist thoughts and comments concerning his own experience and that of others leads us through this pessimistic journey from one cycle of destruction to another (King134). The political order falls apart around him and the only solution is emigration. All the characters Salim encounters confirm his observations and his hopeless conclusion. His physical relationship with Yvette, Raymond's wife, is one of these relationships which leaves important traces in his life. Sex,



which he has only experienced with prostitutes, becomes different with Yvette in that it leads him to discover new dimensions of himself: "But I felt now as if I was experiencing anew, and seeing a woman for the first time" (175). Significantly, Yvette is European, not African; she is married to a man, Raymond, who loses his glamour, an event that leads her to move from one affair to another. She comes with her husband to Africa expecting to find a new, exciting life, but she ends up beaten violently by Salim. She activates in him what he himself condemns as "African rage." Their relationship is a metaphor for the relationship between Africa and Europe. By rejecting Yvette as an external factor that helps him to discover himself, Salim realizes that he should depend on himself in order to find his own way. In fact, his relationship with Yvette, and his evaluation of Raymond, the superficial historian, and Father Huisman, the Lover of Africa, are ambiguous. From time to time he becomes innocent, and at other times capable, and at other times adrift. He easily shifts his ground and changes what seems to be a stable conviction. Raymond is, for example, introduced to us as the "Big Man's white man" who knows history very well (130-31), but we find out, through Salim's evaluation, that he has no genuine knowledge of Africa: "He knew so much, had researched so much ... But he had less true knowledge of Africa, less feel for it, than Indar or Nazruddin or even Mahesh" (182).

Shifting to the lives of others, Salim's narration bewilders us in the sense that when he determines to look at a friend, or an enemy, in one way, he suddenly encounters something that changes his -- and our -- mind. We are always reminded, through detailed description of his environment, that he is an excellent observer, an observer who reads human motives and draws sophisticated conclusions from them. But some questions about the sincerity and legitimacy of his narration arise. Do Salim's intelligent reflections occur to a man with no formal education? Reflections on political issues, social life in London, Raymond's writings, and Father Huisman's idealism are the reflections of an experienced intellectual. This is the mixture of political ideas with literature that Salim's creator wants him to convey. The rich historical and political background that Salim has makes him too knowledgeable for a person who only reads encyclopedias and science magazines. However, in order to jump over the political mines and be indirect and state a reactionary position, Naipaul gives Salim contradictory qualities. Indeed, Third World, colonialism and history are the three categories which govern Salim's Western-oriented narration: "Of that whole period of upheaval in Africa -- the expulsion of the Arabs, the expansion of Europe, the parceling out of the continent -- that is the only family story I have. That was the sort of people we were. All that I know of our history and the history of the Indian Ocean I have got from books written by Europeans ... If I say these things it is because I have got them from European books. They formed no part of our knowledge or pride. Without Europeans, I feel, all our past would have been washed away, like the scuff marks of fishermen on the beach outside our town" (11-12).

This shows a clear appreciation of the European basis of colonial education and the inability of the non-Westerner to write their own "objective" history. What Salim, and all Third World peoples, learn about themselves comes only through the European vision. This raises the question as to whether Salim's consciousness is European or Indian. Is not his conscious narration directed only to European readers? How does he come to have powers of political analysis? There is a replacement of literary questions by political and ideological issues: "[He has] heard it said on the coast -- and foreigners he met here said it as well -- that Africans didn't know how to 'live'" (29). And, when Salim is asked about the inventors of the new telephone, he associates "scientists" with "white men" and with Europeans and Americans who are "impartial up in the clouds, like good gods. We [Africans] waited for their blessings, and showed off those blessings ... as though we had been responsible for them" (45). *A Bend* is a political comparison, then, between the Third World and Europe, and between the New Domain and Africa; it is a political evaluation of newly independent states and their possibilities, and of the technology and culture that Naipaul uses to represent both civilizations: "But it [Salim's merchandise] was antiquated junk, specially made for shops like mine; and I doubt whether the workmen who made the stuff -- in Europe and the United States and perhaps nowadays Japan -- had any idea of what their products were used for. The smaller basins, for instance, were in demand because they were good for keeping grubs alive in, packed in damp fibre and marsh earth. The larger basins -- a big purchase: a villager expected



to buy no more than two or three in a lifetime-were used for soaking cassava in, to get rid of the poison" (40).

One cannot even call what Africans have a civilization. Naipaul's Africans are only consumers: "It didn't matter that we were far away from our civilization, far away from the doers and makers. It didn't matter that we couldn't make the things we liked to use, and as individuals were even without the technical skills of primitive people. In fact, the less educated we were, the more at peace we were, the more easily we were carried along by our civilization" (54). And the conclusion is that "here there was nothing" (58). That is, in the Third World the best intentions, if there are any, amount in the end to nothing; what has seemed intact -- the economic boom -- has seemed so because of the power of illusion and European aid; nothing useful can ever be done for the masses who betray whatever favours they receive. Although there is an economic boom, Naipaul's Africans never take it as a chance to produce. His narrator comments on the boom era: "We couldn't make the things we dealt in; we hardly understand their principles. Money alone had brought these magical things [European goods] to us deep in the bush, and we dealt in them so casually" (88). The Independence of Third World nations eliminates the last hope of resistance against ignorance, as well as the last civilizing traces of Western influence. Does not Father Huisman die after all that he has done for the Africans? Is not "the rage of rebels ... against metal, machinery, wires, [and] everything that was not of the forest of Africa?" (81).

In his article "V.S. Naipaul and the Third World" (1981), J. Rothork, observes that the question of social identity derives from competitiveness and de/valuations. The contest in the Third World is to choose the well-consumed imported goods and services; because of this greedy consumptive desire, traditional cultures disappear: Identities and values arising from those cultures are backward (189). Hence Third World individuals try to identify with the technological world, but because they are not the actual producers of this technology, which is alien to their culture, they end up without identity or rules. Salim says: "Africa, going back to its old ways with modern tools, was going to be a difficult place for some time. It was better to read the signs right than to hope that things would work out" (201). And "copies [are] copies; there [is] no magical feeling or power in them" (51). Hence, Africa is a hopeless case because "we have no means of understanding a fraction of the thought and science and philosophy and law that have gone to make that outside world. We simply accept it" (142). The failure or absolute destruction of culture in Zaire/Africa/Third World is not the product of the colonial system; rather, it is -- according to Salim, who himself has no culture, no identity, no family, no flag, and no religious sense -- nationalism, which tries to bring the past of the people to the present, i.e, cultural authenticity together with local socialism or "radicalization." Salim's existential philosophical reflections with the epigram of the novel are comprehended in terms of content and form. That is to say, since "the world is what it is" and since Third World people are nothing and allow themselves to become nothing, they have no place in it. That is Salim's understanding of the post-colonial world whose people never attempt to meet the challenge. If they try to meet the challenge, they become filled with rage; absolute destruction is the result. One should not wonder why Salim decides to emigrate again.

The conclusion that Salim comes to, which is that Africans are not only exiled from their past and tradition, but are also excluded from scientific, technological culture, is a totally nihilistic one (Rothfork 191). Neither African nationalism, represented as ridiculous by the Big Man, nor traditionalism -- represented by The Liberation Army -- succeeds. Third World people with few cultural values, and without technological abilities, have no way out except mimicry. Naipaul's Africans like gold, and they like to show off that they drink whisky. The reason for this backwardness is not external, but internal, i.e., the Third World resists technological developments; what Metty says about the coming revolution of the Liberation Army, and how they will kill African corruption is, then, a part of the general political and social disorder; the idea that post-colonial states have a "everybody who can read and write," sums up the whole dilemma. The promising future is unrealistic because life is regarded, throughout the text, as survival of the fittest. Mahesh, Salim's friend who runs a restaurant, says "you carry on." Salim cannot, as a businessman with a limited education, convey the whole idea about the existential world that has

no purpose, so Naipaul introduces a new character representing Third World intellectuals who exchanges roles and views with Salim. Indar, the promising young Indian -- like Salim -- decides to study in London and returns to the nameless African state in order to teach in the New Domain -- the small Europe. Indar's ideas concerning the past are radical: "We have to learn to trample on the past ... the world is in movement, and the past can only cause pain" (141). Third World peoples, according to Indar, "have no means of understanding a fraction of the thought and science and philosophy and law that have gone to make that outside world ... It never occurs to us that we might make some contribution to it ourselves" (143); thus what we have is "a little half-skill ... half-knowledge of other men's books" (143).

Indar's attempts to become a self-made man, not to allow himself to become nothing, to have a place in the world by becoming an international advisor on Third World problems, are blocked when confronted with wealthier American foundations: "Indar went to America, to New York. Being Indar, he stayed in an expensive hotel. He saw his American people. They were all very nice. But he didn't like the direction in which they were pushing him. He felt they were pushing him towards smaller things and he pretended not to notice ... He was hoping to be made one of them, to keep on that level. He thought that was his due ... In New York you drop fast, he said" (242). Discovering his dependency, he becomes a totally hopeless person with no place and no past to refer to, to help secure a sense of identity: "From time to time that is all he knows, that it is time for him to go home. There is some some dream village in his head. In between he does the lowest kind of job. He knows he is equipped for better things, but he doesn't want to do them. I believe he enjoys being told he can do better. We've given up now. He doesn't want to risk anything again" (249).

According to Said, such a response would be typical of a Third World bourgeois "intellectual who springs to undeserved prominence when fickle enthusiasts in the 'First World' are in the mood to support insurgent nationalist movement, but loses out when they become less enthusiastic" (322). But is this what Third World culture ends up with? Nostalgia and hopelessness? Do all intellectuals in the Third World feel that they are castrated by relating to the Ghandis and Nehrus? Indar despises Ghandi, who led millions to independence, and Nehru, who gave the Indian nation the concept of the state. The state is the primordial condition of the individual's self discovery that Indar cannot find. His condemnation of Nehru and Ghandi expresses a reactionary view concerning the relationship between those popular leaders and their people. Nehru, Nasser, Sukarnu, to mention but a few of the leaders of National Liberation Movements, are implicitly condemned as corrupt. Indar says: "I studied the large formed photographs of Ghandi and Nehru and wondered how, out of squalor like this, those men had managed to get themselves considered as men" (148). The large photographs are analogous to the Big Man's big photographs. The alternative to Indar's unhappy, restless fate is suggested by Salim, the protagonist, whose quest for independence and individuality leads him to London where the contrast between the Third World and the First World becomes clearer. The London Indar encounters was not simply there, "but ... it had been made by men"; this is a civilization made by people's desire, intention and ability, whereas in Third World Africa there is no enlightened civilization because people want ready-made things. Indar's London, that Salim comes to know, is full of Arabs and East Europeans, aliens in the streets seeking jobs. The rich ones just want to "run from the dreadful places where they've made their money and find some nice safe country" (234). Arabs in London will destroy Europe as they did Africa, Persia, and India (234): "They want the goods and the properties and at the same time they need a safe place for their money. Their own countries are dreadful" (244). Again, the question is, "what place is there in the world for people like that?" Salim's avoidance of Indar's fate comes through what he learns from Indar himself: "There could be no going back; there was nothing to go back to. We had become what the world had made us; he had to live in the world as it existed. The younger Indar was wiser. Use the airplane; trample on the past ... Get rid of that idea of the past; make the dream-like scenes of loss ordinary" (244).

Equipped with "pain and experience" Salim decides to "rejoin the world, to break out of the narrow geography of the town, to do [his] duty to those who depend on [him]" (230). He escapes from the town where the story is set when another rebellion is about to take place against the Big

Man and when destruction approaches. His fate that he controls is different from Africa's bad fate where "nobody's going anywhere," where "everybody is going to hell" and "nothing has any meaning" because "there is no place to go to" (272). One is, then, led to the conclusion that Naipaul's Africa is left stranded between a heritage to which it cannot return and a world it is not permitted to enter. The competing nationalist movements -- those of the Big Man and the Liberation Army -- create traps that prevent economic and cultural growth. The aim of national liberation movements is to destroy the old order and build a new one; however, since there are few materials available, only chaos can follow. Poverty and isolation lead the Third World to fantasy and mimicry -- as in the Big Man's case. What replaces colonialism is something worse -- if we consider colonialism an evil system in the text, something that reflects a cultural breakdown.

What we have in Zaire/Africa/the post-colonial world is a chaotic society. The older traditions as constitutive of a national identity collapse, and what is left of them recedes into the bush/the unconscious, and villages where Zabeth, the merchant and the sorceress, returns after buying European goods to satisfy the consumptive desire of the villagers. The withdrawal of colonialist power has no positive meaning. Fundamentally, it brought destruction and chaos; "the wish had only been to get rid of the old, to wipe out the memory of the intruder. It was unnerving, the depth of that African rage, the wish to destroy, regardless of the consequence" (26). We are left with a condemned, fragmented society that lacks creative potential; a black society that cannot govern itself; a society that should be governed by an external power. This seems to be Naipaul's endorsement of neo-colonialism. All African characters in the novel lack the courage to say "no"; they can easily be bought; there are no free Africans with the exception of Zabeth, a shadowy character who occasionally emerges from the bush/unconscious. What we are left with by the end of the novel amounts to a nihilistic ideology with insoluble problems. Salim -- the astute observer - has nothing positive or optimistic to offer to us.

No discussion of Naipaul's *A Bend* can ignore the historical factors that are inseparable from the ideological and artistic dimensions; history in the text is made by active individuals, and man is the product of himself: "The world is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it." Europeans and Americans do not allow themselves to become nothing; "London is made by men," whereas Kinshasa, the capital, is an echo of London. To be non-European is to be a follower, a lazy consumer who can use, but could never have invented, the telephone. Metty, Salim's slave, is a good example of the African who is in love with machines, but never knows how they are manufactured. I argue that Naipaul's novel justifies neo-colonialism by seeing only bad qualities in the life and culture of newly decolonized countries. There is nothing in the town by the bend in the river except disease, filth, disgust, corruption, and ignorance. The people are either slaves, like Ali, magicians, like Zabeth, or corrupt soldiers, like those in the airport. The intellectuals and businessmen are not Africans but either Europeans, like Raymond and Father Huisman, or members of the Indian minority who leave their community and join the West, like Indar and Salim. It is a comforting and entertaining novel for a Western reader; what takes place here in the town at the bend in the river cannot take place in the First World. Why should one worry about such filthy, far countries? What Salim sees is only filth, heaps of garbage that grow day by day, and a general lack of any sense of responsibility. Mahesh, Salim's friend, says: "What do you do? You live here, and you ask that? You do what we all do. You carry on" (34).

The novel includes many racist statements not only about Africans but also about many Third World peoples. Zabeth stinks; Africans "do not know how to live" (34) and "the Arabs had only prepared the way for the mighty civilization of Europe" (64). Human beings in Africa have a different mentality, inferior to that of the Europeans: "We couldn't make the things we dealt in; we hardly understood their principles. Money alone had brought these magical things to us deep in the bush, and we dealt in them so casually!" (88). Moreover, in London, Nazruddin describes an Algerian Arab who is in the habit of pissing in the lift (238). For all these primitive, uncivilized attitudes, the white man should be generous enough to carry the burden of bringing civilization to Third World peoples, since not all the enlightened intellectuals there can emigrate, like Salim and Indar. The source of order could come from the civilized outside, the West. And the message

becomes clearer: Since you cannot trust the Third World's peoples in the development of the newly independent countries because they merely consume what they do not produce, they should welcome more European expatriates. As Singh observes, such an attitude becomes the thrust of Naipaul's neo-colonialism (71-85).

The country of *A Bend* has two kinds of politicians: The Big Man and the Liberation Army members. Both are worse than the colonial rulers; during the colonial era there was "miraculous peace ... when men could, if they wished, pay little attention to tribal boundaries" (34). Now, under the Big Man, the country is unfit for self-rule. This is a strong racist condemnation of native politics, with an implicit endorsement of the colonial ideology that justified the occupation and exploitation of other lands and peoples. By regarding and reinterpreting the epigraph of the novel in relation to the whole story, one concludes that most social and economic problems would disappear if the natives really wanted to solve them. But they do not want to change, and so they allow themselves to become nothing. If there is anyone to blame, it is the Africans themselves; they are responsible for their poverty and ignorance, and they do not have the will to change them: "What place is there in the world for people like that?" (238). Of course, the solution, if there is any, depends on the country's technical and industrial progress which can only be achieved through foreign aid; this is the advice, not to say order, that Naipaul gives to countries like Zaire.

Similar to most of the colonialist European writings on Africa and the East, *A Bend* is full of descriptions and stereotypes about the Africans and Arabs, and the notion of handing over civilization to primitive peoples. The world Salim sees is ugliness and backwardness; he never understands that African nations have culture with integrities different from those of the technological Western cultures. Despite Father Huisman's attempts to educate the Africans, they kill him. This is a mind-deadened Third World nation with no culture, no history and if there is anything to describe, it is corrupt, degenerate and irredeemable. Nothing is mentioned about the crimes and violence committed by the Belgian colonialism; that is simply called "time of peace." Nothing is mentioned about the fact that European modernity and progress brought with it the blood and dead bodies of the oppressed colonized masses.

According to Frantz Fanon, "Europe is literally the creation of the Third World" (qtd. in Said 237). The question which arises is whether the Europeans could create such a technological civilization without creating slaves? The Africans' resistance against colonialism in *A Bend* is described simply as rage against machines, not as their struggle for liberation from foreign domination in their land. It is, of course, hard to say whether Belgium would ever have given Zaire its independence out of good will, without various kinds of resistance, among which is military struggle, or what Salim often describes as African rage. The technological borrowing throughout the novel is taken as a kind of inability to create and invent. Said writes that "like the history of all cultures is the history of cultural borrowings. Cultures are not impermeable; just as Western science borrowed from Arabs, they had borrowed from India and Greece. Culture is never just a matter of ownership, of borrowing and lending with absolute debtors and creditors, but rather of appropriations, common experience, and interdependencies of all kinds among different cultures. This is a universal norm. Who has yet determined how much the domination of others contributed to the enormous wealth of the English and French states?" (261-62).

Naipaul's attack on the post-colonial world for its nationalist fundamentalism and degenerate politics in *A Bend* can only be understood as a part of a Western disenchantment with the Third World that overtook many Oriental intellectuals. What Salim could not understand is the nature of nationalist revolution, which is the first phase of liberation, a phase that is characterized by the competence of different nationalist powers to reclaim the state from the colonizer. The solution that Salim and Indar could not find is the subsequent stage of national victory, i.e., social revolution. Fanon's ideas, which are ridiculed by Naipaul in the leaflet of the Liberation Army that shows a kind of misconception of Fanon's ideas concerning revolution, offer the missing solution that Salim never finds. What is needed is "a rapid step ... taken from national consciousness to political and social consciousness" (qtd. in Said 203). That is to say, the sectarianism and tribalism encouraged by colonialism should be eliminated, and wider nationalist ideas, like Pan-Arabism and

Pan Africanism, should be encouraged; moreover, the social structure left by the colonizer should be rearranged. Since such ideas support the anti-Western attitude, they are never mentioned in the text which, indeed, misrepresents what Said calls the first phase of independence movements, and the second phase that produces liberation struggle. Of course, the Big Man/Aydi Amin/Mobutu is a tyrant; however, no struggle for democracy and human rights or even secularism in countries ruled by such tyrants has ever been supported by the West.

Naipaul's denial of the culture and the historical development of the colonized Africans in *A Bend* is a reflection of a broader negation of their existence as a whole people. This can be understood as the product of the colonizer's attempts to repress the cultural life of the Africans, by either negating it, or alienating some intellectuals by assimilating them, like Indar, and even Naipaul himself. Naipaul's assimilation of the Western mentality makes him look down upon the African/Third World cultural values; indeed, he denies that such values exist at all. According to Fanon's theory, Naipaul is "a native intellectual [who] gives proof that he has assimilated the culture of the occupying power. His writings correspond point by point with those of his opposite numbers in the mother country. His inspiration is European" (qtd. in Williams and Chrisman 40). Salim, Naipaul's mouthpiece, says about Ferdinand, the African young man who wants to study: "He is only an African." What Naipaul tends to forget is what Amilcar Cabral insists on reminding us about culture: "culture -- the creation of society and the synthesis of balances and the solutions which society engenders to resolve the conflicts which characterize each phase of its history -- is a social reality, independent of the will of men, the color of their skins or the shape of their eyes" (Williams and Chrisman 61).

As a post-colonial text, *A Bend in the River* never opens up new possibilities for the future. It is a kind of complicit postcolonialism that justifies colonialism by seeing only the civilizing values of modernity, which Naipaul sees as imperialism's positive, reconstructive and basically human face. Such artists, in denying the existence of other cultures, can never create new ways of seeing and experiencing reality except the colonial Western way. It is a way of rewriting imperialism that does not look, like oppositional post-colonial and resistance writings, towards an alternative future. Narrating European imperialism from a European perspective is not in any way different from Naipaul's narration of the modernization of the developing countries. *A Bend* seems to be mainly dedicated to a White/Western reader who reads in English, and sees things only in white, but never black. Naipaul's anti-evolutionary solution -- if we can call it a solution -- is the product of his pessimistic outlook. In other words, it is a reflection of his ideological orientation that cannot cope with the qualitative historical change the whole colonized world passed through. The colonial Western dimension in *A Bend*, which never sees a positive quality in Africans, is the product of the accumulation of a racist colonial mentality that has shaped the Western mind since 1492, i.e., the beginning of colonialism. Nowadays, determining to prevent regional Third World consensus from emerging, after the success of many national liberation movements, the colonial West has replaced the old form of colonialism with a kind of imperial colonialism. That is, going back to the old days that Naipaul describes as "the time of miraculous peace." The people of the town at the bend in the river are thus invited to accept the fact that they are hopeless cases, and if they rebel, their situation will get worse; they themselves are responsible for their misery since "the world is what it is."

In fact, the challenge presented by the victories of a series of national liberation movements as a whole, regardless of the political orientation of their various contingents, and the failure of the attempts at capitalist development in a series of Third World countries, leave many questions unanswered concerning the validity of Naipaul's program, i.e., neo-colonialism. The primacy of industrial production and the omnipresence and universality of class struggle are the ideological labels of Naipaul's neo-colonialist mission. In this sense, the underside of colonial and neo-colonial culture is blood, torture and death. This is Naipaul's model which has invented all means to keep what it has unjustly gathered, and which legitimizes these unjust gains through post-colonial complicit intelligentsia like Naipaul himself. Naipaul's Salim and Indar forget, or tend to forget, that the establishment of their ideal society -- London -- was actualized on the corpses of millions of people through inhuman exploitation and hundreds of millions of human beings in the colonies.



Following Naipaul's advice -- adopting free market policy and bringing in European expatriates - has led the developing countries to corruption, fundamentalism, low living standards, huge class gaps, national debts, and -- most importantly -- dictatorial regimes supported by Naipaul's model, i.e., the West. Assassinating two elected leaders, Salvador Allende in Chile and Patrice Lumumba in Zaire, where the events of *A Bend* take place, leaves Naipaul's project with many question marks. Instead of inviting Africans to depend on their power in a relentless struggle against the existing order with all its injustice and hegemony, and instead of motivating them to seek an alternative by proceeding on the basis of their own concrete reality, cultural heritage and history without losing the straightforward movement, Naipaul offers no solutions. As Singh observes in 1969, however, to see an oppressed African and condemn her or him for being oppressed and hungry and saying that s/he allows her/himself to become nothing in the world, is not worth commenting upon. It is the essence of racism to say that Third World individuals are responsible for their misery. There is misery, oppression, and corruption in the Third World. But neo-colonialism plays an extremely important role in creating an ideological justification for its irresponsibility for such diseases. This is a fact that Naipaul's Salim cannot cope with, and, therefore, ignores it. There will always be peoples who will not trample on the past; rather they will do what Benjamin's angel does, and walk straight ahead and turn their faces sometimes to the past. Although the world is what it is, still these peoples can change it in order to create a better or other one.

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