

Neoliberal Subaltern Voices in Aravind Adiga's *Amnesty* Through the Paradigm of Alter-Globalization

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Abstract

In a world shaped by powerful dominant narratives, many voices remain unheard. This research paper explores the concept of Alter-Globalization as a paradigm to reimagine the struggles of marginalized communities. Through a critical analysis of Aravind Adiga's recently published novel *Amnesty*, (2020), I inquire about conventional subaltern narratives and propose a new perspective that centers on the experiences of those silenced by dominant discourses. By examining the novel's portrayal of Undocumented immigrants in "Core" developed Countries, I argue that the idea of Alter-Globalization offers a framework for understanding their unique challenges and advocating for transformative change. This study not only sheds light on Adiga's powerful literary contribution but also contributes to ongoing dialogues about social justice and the alternative subaltern voices in our contemporary neoliberal globalized world.

Keywords: Subaltern, Globalization, Neoliberalism, Postmodernism, Illegal immigrants, Exploitation, Criminalization, Alter-Globalization, Marxism, Xenophobia, Undocumented.

Introduction

In the giant umbrella of postmodern discourse, the concept and term 'Subaltern' have been conspicuous for their Deep and penetrating approach at the very micro level of society especially in the third world. With the advent of various socio-economic policies and changing socio-political structure over a century, the definition of subaltern and attributes associated with it has been altering, and "This controversial concept of the subaltern caused a great deal of confusion all over the academia and left students of colonial discourse and post-colonial theory perplexed while wallowing in labyrinthine postulations of specialized scholars." (Louai 2012, p.4) It was Antonio Gramsci who coined the term subaltern to denote those sections of society who were oppressed and exploited but could not raise their voices and associate themselves with the mainstream of social movements and revolutionary voices, he states "It is the conception of a subaltern social group, deprived of historical initiative, in continuous but disorganic expansion, unable to go beyond a certain qualitative level" (Gramsci 1971/1999, p. 734) especially farm laborers and peasants.

In the post-colonial era, after the 1960s, when postmodernism was emerging in the intellectual ecosystem of the West and neoliberal values were being established, these new ideas and Paradigms cast their deep influence on subaltern conceptuality as El Habib Louai concluded in his research paper entitled *Retracing the Concept of the Subaltern from Gramsci to Spivak: Historical Developments and New Applications*, “It became quite difficult for all the changes taking place in a globalized postmodern world to define the subaltern as a distinct category.” (Louai 2012, p.7) Since it is evident that postmodernism is the philosophy of relativity and cultural subjectivism, it fuses with subaltern discourse and engenders a micro phenomenon that leads to identity politics. Consequently, multiple identities come to be known with their masses and strive to gain their rights and social justice. Thus, it can be a great advantage of Neoliberalism that those sections of society who are marginalized but have their numbers to become a mass can organize themselves to raise their voices and make them heard to achieve their rights. But there can also be a part of society those are exploited and marginalized but have no enough mass and potential to make themselves observable in social mobility, “that the subaltern as a distinctly conscious subjectivity only possessed a dominant language or a dominant voice to be heard.” (p.7)

A movement known as Alter-Globalization or Alternative-Globalization emerged in reaction to the perceived shortcomings of globalization, especially its focus on neoliberal economic principles and its adverse impacts on underprivileged populations and the environment as Peter Evans remarks “A counter-hegemonic globalization perspective looks at the effects of globalization on the vitality of national movements for social protection from precisely the opposite perspective as structural pessimism.” (Evans 2008, p. 275). It promotes counter-globalization strategies that put social justice, equity, sustainability, and democracy first. The goal of Alter-Globalization is to subvert established hierarchies of power and encourage a range of viewpoints and voices during global decision-making. It includes a variety of civil society organizations, grassroots movements, and projects to establish a more just and inclusive global order.

This article connects with Alter-Globalization through its exploration of marginalized perspectives in Adiga’s *Amnesty* within the context of neoliberal globalization. It critically analyzes the subaltern experiences of characters like Dhananjay Rajaratnam, depicting their struggles as undocumented immigrants and minorities facing discrimination and exploitation since “The labor movement is the most interesting test case for structural arguments against the possibility of transcending national and regional borders” (p.289) By scrutinizing these narratives, the article reveals the limitations and drawbacks of neoliberal policies, particularly in addressing issues of social justice and equity.

Aravind Adiga, the Booker Prize winner of 2008, has been writing on the subaltern subject since the very beginning of his career. Adiga's novels are vocal on the subjects and issues of marginalized sections, “Social justice is a signature theme across Aravind Adiga's fiction, from the subaltern position of servants and domestic workers” (Mendez and Lau 2022, p.2). His *White Tiger* has been acclaimed for its excellent depiction of the exploited class and ruthless

intentions and motifs of the corporate class. He is a keen observer of the neoliberal contemporary world. so, his pen is found very sharp at highlighting the predicament resulting from the socio-political policies.

Amnesty is the voyage of a man standing at the lowest level of society in a neoliberal timeframe who is marginalized from multiple points of view: As a South Asian struggling in abroad, in a minority community in his own country, an undocumented immigrant, and the very important as an economically marginalized person so that “he is perched perpetually on the edge of banishment” (p.7). Depicting socio-political draconian reality, *Amnesty* is a story of escaping from the dilemma of whether a man without rights has any responsibility. Along with answering this riddle, *Amnesty* presents a vivid picture of neoliberal phenomena which have many terrible faces.

Criminalization of Victim: A Minority Hurdles

No doubt it is well known that the history of the past century has been one of exploitation and oppression of minorities all over the world. Jews were massacred in Hitler's Nazi Germany, then Muslims in Bosnia, a minority community in Uganda by the majority, and minority Hindus and other minorities were oppressed in newly formed countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh, and this type of incident goes on all over the world. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, the era of neoliberalism began all over the world. The international community resolves that the interests and rights of minorities worldwide will be protected and each identity will be respected equally. Today we have stepped into the third decade of the 21st century and the questions and challenges of oppression and persecution of minorities persist. Every day we keep getting news that some or the other persecution of minorities is going on somewhere in the world and it is quite connected structurally in top-down order “Oppressive local elites may sometimes operate mostly on their own behalf, intimate connections between local struggles and global power structures are more the rule” (Evans 2008, p.292). Uygar Muslims are being oppressed in China, Hindu minorities are being oppressed in Pakistan, and Sunni Muslims are persecuting Shia Muslims in countries like Iraq and Syria. Even in a country with democratic values like India, this discussion continues.

Aravind Adiga's novel *Amnesty* is a successful and meaningful attempt to depict the oppression and problems of a minority. Dhananjay Rajaratnam (Danny) is a common man who works hard to make ends meet and runs with his own hands, his family also has some expectations from him, and he also hopes to live a respectable middle-class life like everyone else, the narrator states “I came to Australia on a student visa, but I realized that my college is a “ripoff.” They will not help me find a job, so I dropped out.” (Adiga 2020, p.39) it seems very clear that the burden of being a minority does not even allow Danny to move in that direction, let alone aim for a normal life as Costanza Mondo writes “the novel goes one step further and implies that illegals are inferior to animals. When Danny decides to remain in Sydney after his student visa expiration date, which immediately turns him into an illegal” (Mondo 2023, p.47) Danny belongs to the Tamil minority community in Sri Lanka, whose compensation he has to pay at every step. In the novel, we see

how Danny, being a Tamil, is falsely accused of being involved in terrorist activities and has to suffer in various ways, this is reflected here “by coming to Australia legally and then sliding under, appearing to be one thing then becoming another, because that made you an illegal s illegal, with no one to scream for you and no one to represent you in court. And this custom-made cell within the global prison was Danny’s own: a personal hot coal he had forged for himself to stand on.” (Adiga 2020, p.182-183) The consciousness of being a minority had left a deep impression on his psychology in such a way that he resorted to illegal options and concealment of his identity at various places. From the legal point of view, Danny is a criminal in many places, but it would not be fair to ignore the circumstances that have criminalized him.

Now, let's do a theoretical and legal comparative study and see, what is the position of Dhananjay Rajaratnam in his journey of illegal immigration and his mishaps. By law, a person who conceals a crime is himself an accomplice in the crime. After Radha's murder, Danny hides his crime under the pressure of Prakash's blackmail, “I wonder, Danny thought, which brown man she takes me this time. [“Sorry”] he yelled back, just to keep her quiet. If Prakash is innocent, why didn't he threaten you, why is he saying he knows you're illegal?” (p.88) By the appropriate criteria, Danny was also a criminal by then and was living his life in Australia and would continue to do so, and hence it is evident that a victim is criminalized. Soon after Prakash would probably have killed Radha's husband Mark as well and gone to South Africa, Danny would have remained unknown to all of them and would have somehow survived in Australia. But when Danny learns that Prakash is about to kill Mark, he takes the moral step of informing the police, acting ideally like a moral citizen, but as a result, Danny's illegal immigrant status comes to the fore and he is deported and treated as a criminal.

In the 18th century, Rousseau declared that man is a ‘noble savage’ and he is not bad by birth, it is the situation around him or the inherent evils in the society that make him bad. This is the reason why even the worst person if he does a good deed, gets supernatural satisfaction. This tragedy of Dhananjay Rajaratnam justifies the concept of Rousseau. Throughout the story of *Amnesty*, Danny remains a criminal hiding a crime. Still, when he realizes that Prakash is about to kill Mark, he overcomes his dilemma and informs the police about Prakash, without worrying that he may also be given compensation and can be deported to Sri Lanka.

Prevailing Xenophobia in the Global Community

Globalization is one of the most inevitable tenets of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism advocates for making the whole world an open market, for which there is a great need for mutual international cooperation and brotherhood. We have also seen from experience with research and study that when unbridled foreign investment enters the economy of a country, there comes technology and development, but at the same time, there is an economic marginalization, as a result of which the gap between the rich and the poor is widened. The difference grows exponentially. It was once seen in Europe during the 18th century. Globalization may be a requirement of everyone but is undoubtedly more beneficial to the corporate class than the common people.

Depriving any person of any right based on religion, race, and color was neither right yesterday nor today nor will it ever be. After the collapse of the colonial era, it was very important for the developed capitalist powers to create a principle that resulted in the opening of the borders of the developing countries for their trade, and Globalization was the key to this mission. To make the principle of globalization universal, discrimination based on race needed to be rejected since, “The global impact of xenophobic rhetoric and acts, in particular in the context of forced migration, is troubling” (Miller 2018, p.4) thus, it should stop happening. But whether discrimination based on color and race has been negated or exists only in theories and books, the reality on the ground is something else. Let us find the answer to this question in the story of Dhananjay Rajaratnam. Xenophobia does not only mean hating a person based on color and race but also exploiting him, this implies that “Xenophobia can also be highly localized. It has been found that while one municipality may welcome migrants, a neighboring municipality may violently oppose the arrival and integration of migrants.” (p.3) Danny had been living in Australia illegally and undocumented for the last four years. Danny used to be in trouble in a dark closet outside a grocery store. Due to a lack of legal status, he had to lead such a miserable life. The biggest irony of the time is seen here that even for living such a miserable life, Danny had to pay half of his daily wage earnings.

For the corporate world to flourish in the neo-liberal environment, many types of customer-friendly and labor welfare organizations were established, but do advocates of neoliberalism have any answer for this? That is why a person standing at the lowest rung of society is suffering and being exploited horribly because he does not have some papers. Danny is just one example; *Amnesty* tells the story of many characters like him. Australia is a developed country, that has been considered a ‘Core’ as rightly stated “Australia, a liberal democracy and a participant in the international human rights system, hosts irregular migrants unable to exercise many fundamental human rights” (Mendez and Lau 2022, p.9). Don't the governments there know that lakhs of people like Danny are living on their land as illegal immigrants? The trace of such negligence is evident when Danny encounters an Aussie woman, who is working for refugees she utters “Pay attention to me, [...], pity the illegal immigrant, but pay attention to me.” (Adiga 2020, p.132) Or is all this ignored so that by exploiting these people, a section of society can get some benefit? Therefore, rightly quoted, “The discourse of legality and citizenship becomes a tool to marginalize and exploit individuals like Danny, highlighting the harsh realities faced by undocumented immigrants” (Medhavi 2023, p.37) in the neoliberal economy. We get the answer to this very clearly inside the novel when we see that while working in the restaurant, Danny is given lower wages along with racial discrimination as Venky states “The legal quota is just twenty hours of employment for a foreign student (or forty hours in two weeks), but we can work around that, at ten dollars an hour, [“a bit”] less than the legal minimum wage, okay?” (Adiga 2020, p.172). Getting unfair wages to work was not a new experience for Danny, we see that even while working in Dubai, Danny had such unjust step-motherly treatment, where he was given less wages even after doing more work because he was an illegal migrant and He had to bear all this for fear of being deported.

Dhananjay Rajaratnam may be a fictional character, but Danny's hardships and predicament depict the harsh reality of the contemporary cruel socio-political structure. The world is grappling with the problem of non-migrant laborers today. On one hand, it is said that illegal migrants are a threat to the country's borders, on the other hand, the same migrants are also exploited. Danny's tragedy thus tells the story of the failure of neoliberalism and shows that xenophobia is flourishing even in the age of advanced globalization.

Illegal and Undocumented Immigrants: A New Face of Subalterns

When neoliberalism flourished under the shadow of postmodernity, it was asserted that it was an ideological policy to give rights to every identity. The way postmodernism talks about different identities at the micro level of society, similarly neoliberalism Claims to fulfill the socio-economic interests of every section of society by reaching the micro level through its policies as Evans points out “Neo-liberalism’s rhetorical enthronement of democracy as the only legitimate form of political decision-making creates an unparalleled ideological opportunity for global social movements” (Evans 2008, p.296). Neoliberalism has completed its more or less 50 years on the world stage. Sitting in the lap of technology and industrialization, the world is growing in a different dimension in the development field. But some questions remain the same even today, is this development everyone's? Is this progress reaching different sections of the society? And is this new policy not based on exploiting any section of mankind for development and progress? And most importantly, does neoliberalism not ignore any part of the society with its micro policy?

Amnesty's Danny is a character of literature, portraying the reality that deeply challenges this notion of neoliberalism. Danny was living undocumented and illegally in Australia but he was not involved in any immoral and evil act. He was living his life in the same way as common people do, yet he was being exploited and harassed in different places. Danny has repeatedly applied for legal status but has not found a solution, “Danny had come to Australia by plane and then applied for refugee status and had been told to fuck off.” (Adiga 2020, p.56) This happened on the conscious and educated global stage of the 21st century because Dhananjay Rajaratnam alias Danny comes from that section of the society that could not organize and unite to make them heard, but even they are criminalized as “Danny understood. There must be illegals in Bangladesh and Pakistan who forced them out” (p.133). It is depicted in the novel that there are many other illegal immigrants like Danny living in different countries around the world but “illegal immigrants are utterly isolated and prevented from bonding by their very status of illegals” (Mondo 2023, p.49) and they all face the same harassment and exploitation, a harsh portrayal we find “Once again an illegal immigrant awaiting deportation inside Sydney’s Villawood detention centre has killed himself even while he was on ‘suicide watch’.” (Adiga 2020, p.58) furthermore, illegal immigrants are treated brutally by these rich ‘Core’ economies as an example can be seen in the novel with a pathetic picture of illegal Filipino men depicted in the novel where we see two Filipino men handcuffed to each other, due to deportation, when one of them wanted to drink water from a faucet another handcuffed Filipino had to twist his body contrapuntally to allow this to happen. Like two chained monkeys.” (p.176) Whatever happened

to Danny and other immigrants cannot be said to be his fate. What they saw and experienced exposes the shortcomings and failures of established neoliberalism or it failed to overcome these contemporary social vices.

Conclusion: Poor is an Alien Everywhere

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels declared in the 19th century, "Working men have no country." (Marx and Engels 1847/2000, p.18) Danny, the main character of *Amnesty*, written in the 21st century, is a living example of this quotation. Danny was certainly Sri Lanka's minority, A Tamil, but at the same time, he was also economically backward. Aravind Adiga's novel *Amnesty* speaks vocally on racial discrimination and undocumented illegal immigrant issues but with this, the economic class struggle is silently present in the novel which makes it very special from the Marxist point of view, "Danny's experience as an undocumented worker highlights the inherent exploitation within the capitalist system. He labors long hours in precarious conditions, receives meager wages, and is denied basic rights." (Medhavi and Sahay 2023, p.2099) After an analytical study of the book, it is concluded that the main character Danny represents the subaltern point of view from multiple angles. The first is that he is a minority Tamil of Sri Lanka, which is why he has to face many persecutions in his own country and consequently, "Danny's need to escape his home country of Sri Lanka has its roots in the twenty-six-year civil war (1983–2009), which, even after it ended, left many Tamils feeling vulnerable and unreconciled to the majority race." (Mendez and Lau 2022, p.8) Thus, he escapes from there. He sometimes reaches Dubai and sometimes Australia in search of solace. The second perception is that Danny is an undocumented immigrant in "Sydney is described as imbued with light" (Mondo 2023, p.52) which appears to be the cause of all his difficulties since, "light annihilates shadows where illegals seek shelter at the margins of society, carving themselves a niche to survive" (52) throughout the novel. However, the study concludes that he was associated with all these difficulties because he was economically marginalized.

We see other migrant characters in the novel like Radha, Prakash, Venkatesh, etc. are also migrants and they too have their struggles. The troubles in his life are very different from those of Danny. The basic reason for this is that they come from the rich class they have money to live a luxurious life by fulfilling their basic needs well. Yes, it is visible that being an expatriate, they too have to face many racial discriminations or there are many such issues in the novel to which they also connect. But the theory of globalization is the whole world family seems to be fulfilled with some less and more than those characters. On the other hand, Danny who is poor is a stranger in his own country as well and remains a stranger wherever he took refuge.

From this study and observation, we can see and understand that "*Amnesty* is about this experience of irregular migrants being in perpetual limbo" (Mendez and Lau 2022, p.7) that reflects how in the current neoliberal era, with the criminalization of the victim, the voice of the oppressed and exploited undocumented immigrants remains deprived of the mainstream. Neoliberalism has failed to deal with the challenges significantly, "Organizing global-local alliances that do not replicate the power asymmetries of the current world order" (Evans 2008,

p.297) Ultimately, the study concludes that characters and their destiny in Aravind Adiga's *Amnesty* represents a distinct subalternity whose voice neoliberalism has failed to see and address. Thus, "forging collective agendas among a multiplicity of diverse constituencies, and generating a collective imaginary that will be viewed by the world's ordinary citizens as ["something radically better that is worth fighting for"]" (p.97) an alternative to the prevailing model of neoliberal globalization.

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