POSTCOLONIAL SOCIAL REALITY AND THE DUALITY OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN V. S. NAIPAUL'S *THE MIMIC MEN*: A STUDY IN THE CONTEXT OF POSTCOLONIAL THEORY	Dr.Redwan Gabr Elsobky English Department Faculty of Arts Al Menoufiya University

"In The Mimic Men, Naipaul discusses what he calls "colonial schizophrenia", where the colonial man mimics his captors as ideal models of manhood and power."(Orisanmi 1)

Abstract

Postcolonial theory is concerned with the historical , political, philosophical , social, cultural and aesthetic structures of colonial domination and resistance. This theory discusses how colonial education and language influence the culture and identity of the colonized and the emergent forms of postcolonial identity after the departure of the colonizers. Naipaul presents a consistent image of social reality in the non-Western world, where dispossessed people search for order in their lives.

In *The Mimic Men*, Naipaul explains how mimicry becomes 'naturalized' for the colonized. It is like camouflage , a form of resemblance. It conceals no presence or identity behind its mask. Ralph, his wife, and the social set they associate with share common features of puzzlement, instability and confusion. They are afflicted with *"colonial schizophrenia"* , that is to say duality of identity. Ralph 's political activity is a personal search to attain some degree of glory and also a place and national identity . He accepts the Western European view of the

world as the only correct one rather than one possibility among many. This acceptance means that he wants to feel the stability of his identity after long quest . His failure to achieve his national identity is a direct result of his being always conscious of role-playing since none of his roles ever 'fit.' Naipaul's message is that true national identity for the colonized is difficult to achieve even after independence .

Postcolonial Theory and Naipaul's Writings :

One significant aspect of the modern world has been the impact and legacy of imperialism, colonial territorial acquisition and control – particularly of European imperialism. This is because more than three quarters of the world was controlled by Europeans . So appeared the postcolonial theory within its lights it can be possible to study the cultures and thoughts of the colonized nations :

> Postcolonial theory has emerged from an interdisciplinary area of study which is concerned with the historical , political , philosophical , social, cultural and aesthetic structures of colonial domination and resistance; it refers to a way of reading, theorizing, interpreting and investigating colonial oppression and its legacy that is informed by an oppositional ethical agenda. (Low 463)

Postcolonialism can be defined as an approach to literary analysis that concerns itself particularly with literature written in English in formerly colonized countries :

It usually ... concentrates on writings from colonized cultures ... in places and societies that were once dominated by European cultural, political , and philosophical tradition. (Bressler 265)

The terms postcolonial and postcolonialism first appeared in the late 1980s in many scholarly journal articles. By the mid-1990s , the terms had become firmly established in scholarly writing, and now postcolonialism usually refers to literature of cultures colonized by the British Empire. (Bressler 265-6) The term "postcolonial literature" seems to label literature written by people living in countries formerly colonized by other nations. It is related to the culture of the colonized acquired from the colonizer. Postcolonial literature and theory investigate "what happens when two cultures clash and when one of them with its accompanying ideology empowers and deems itself superior to the other. " (Ibid. 265)

In a very general sense, "postcolonial ," means ",the study of the interactions between European nations and the societies they colonized in the modern period." (Bahri 38) In practice, however, the term is used much more loosely: "it is not only the period after the departure of the imperial powers that concerns those in the field, but that before independence as well. (Bahri 40) So the term 'post-colonial' is used to cover "all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day." (Ashcroft 45)

'Postcolonial' seems to describe the second half of the twentieth-century in general as a period in the aftermath of the heyday of colonialism. Even more generically, "the "postcolonial" is used to signify a

position against imperialism and Euro-centrism. " (Bahri
40-1) As a literary theory or critical approach
'postcolonial' deals with literature produced in countries
that were once, or are now, colonies of other countries.
("Post-colonialism."Online 1) All postcolonialist theorists
admit that colonialism continues to affect the former
colonies after political independence. (Ibid. 2) The affect is
on the identity of the colonized during colonization and
after independence:

> Post-colonial theory deals with ... literature
> written in previously or currently colonized
> countries, ... It focuses particularly on
> literature by colonized peoples which
> attempts to articulate their identity and
> reclaim their past in the face of that past's
> inevitable otherness. (Lye 10)

A major feature of post-colonial literatures is the
concern with place and displacement. It is here that the
special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being:
"the concern with the development or recovery of an
effective identifying relationship between self and place."
(Ashcroft 46) The dialectic of place and displacement is
always a feature of post-colonial societies whether these
have been created by a process of settlement, intervention,
or a mixture of the two :

> Beyond their historical and cultural
> differences, place, displacement, and a
> pervasive concern with the myths of identity
> and authenticity are a feature common to all
> post-colonial literatures in English. (Ibid.
> 46)

The colonized peoples are highly diverse in their nature and in their traditions, and as beings in cultures they are both constructed and changing, so that

> while they may be 'other' from the colonizers, they are also different one from another and from their own pasts, and should not be totalized or essentialized. (Lye 11)

Consequently the identity of the colonized people is characterized by duality and confusion .

Post-colonialism deals with many issues for societies that have undergone colonialism. These issues include the dilemmas of developing a national identity during and after colonization. So it is argued that postcolonialism answers these questions :

> How did colonial education and language influence the culture and identity of the colonized? What are the emergent forms of postcolonial identity after the departure of the colonizers? (Bahri 42-3)

All postcolonialist theorists admit that colonialism continues to affect the former colonies after political independence. Consequently: "The very concepts of nationality and identity may be difficult to conceive or convey in the cultural traditions of colonized people. " (Lye 13) Postcolonial theory is also built around the concept of "resistance which takes various forms : "resistance as subversion, or opposition, or mimicry." (Ibid. 12)

Indeed, most "postcolonial" writers, like Naipaul, often move to England or north America or other European countries because they have been exiled, or

because they find a more receptive audience there, or simply in search of a more comfortable mode of living. (Brians 50) Some of them oppose the struggle of the colonized nations for independence and Naipaul is one of them : "V.S. Naipaul is ... more often cited as an opponent than as an ally in the postcolonial struggle." (Ibid. 49)

Naipaul's Fiction Shows Unenthusiastic View of Postcolonial Nationalism :

Having grown up under the colonial system, V.S. Naipaul began to ask questions and formulate opinions about culture and imperialism. His fiction and nonfiction since the 1960s have reflected "an unenthusiastic view of postcolonial nationalism and nation building." (Naipaul, *Overcrowded Barracoon* 250-54) He has had difficulty believing in the ability of new nations in Africa and the Caribbean to raise themselves to a condition of economic autonomy and cultural authenticity. He has also been against any political agenda that calls for breaking cultural ties with European nations. And these views are out of his personal experience :

> His experience of colonialism, mimicry and post-imperial destitution in Trinidad and the stubborn desire to become a writer in an arid place are the base and foundation of everything he has written. (Ramchand 165)

Naipaul explores the tensions between his East Indian, West Indian, and British identities; three categories to which he belongs but in which he has never felt at ease. In his novels

Naipaul inwardly works through his conflicted ideas of what it means to be a colonial. Juxtaposed to Naipaul's subtle self-consciousness were drastically more radical works concerning the colonial situation. (Orisanmi 2)

As a writer he has been compared to Joseph Conrad because of similar pessimistic portrayal of human nature and the themes of exile and alienation. He once stated that "Barbarism in India is very powerful because it has a religious side." (Ramchand 168) In his essay 'Conrad's Darkness' Naipaul sees his own background as "one of the Conradian dark places of the earth."(Naipaul , 'Conrad's Darkness' 2)

Naipaul's writings reflect his experience. He has written about slavery, revolution, guerrillas, corrupt politicians, the poor and the oppressed, interpreting the rages so deeply rooted in the imperial societies. His writings include themes of alienation, mistrust, rootlessness, mockery, and self-deception . His central themes in his works are the damaging effects of imperialism upon the people of the Third World. He is concerned with issues of freedom for the individual and the decolonized world. In his Nobel lecture Naipaul made a characteristic observation when he said:

> Everything of value about me is in my books ... I am the sum of my books — I feel that at any stage of my literary career it could have been said that the last book contained all the others. (Mishra 2)

So it is argued that Naipaul represents the third-world people "not with sugary magic realism but with their demons, their misdeeds and horrors - which made them less victims and more human." (Jaggi 15) In most of his novels Naipaul takes his readers into the farthest reaches of the Third World — Africa, the Caribbean, Asia and the Central Asia all the way to South Asia . (Rothfork 185)

Naipaul presents a consistent image of social reality in the non-Western world, where dispossessed people search for order in their lives: "His own search for rootedness bespeaks the search of many colonial peoples ... a colonial seeking to depict larger reality." (Sachs 1167) As long as Naipaul is seeking truth , he is interested in the political situations of the colonized countries : "Almost all of V.S. Naipaul's writings have to do with politics, race and personality — the real world — rather than exclusively with 'literary fictions'." (Vyas 3)

It is said that reality for Naipaul is romantic and subjective as he : "presents not objective reality but subjective perceptions." But he is such a brilliant and persuasive writer that he can overwhelm the reader into feeling he is telling the whole truth. (Sachs 1167) and Didion's view is that

> This world of Naipaul's is in fact charged with what can only be described as a romantic view of reality, an almost unbearable tension between the idea and the physical fact. (Didion 5)

Naipaul himself confessed "I try to make my fiction as close to life as possible." (Jaggi 15) This is clear in his depicting the Third World countries.

In an extensive interview Naipaul illustrated his view concerning postcolonial reality :

> I wanted to deliver the truth, to deliver a form of reality based on what I have observed, seen, experienced. Western writers come from the imperial period without knowing it, without considering themselves imperial writers. They inhabit a world where they do not see the other half or three-quarters. For that reason they think reality's all been chartered. I carry many cultures in my head, and these people are much more restricted. (Hussein 155)

If Naipaul tends to say the truth of his surroundings , he also tends to express his feelings of alienation, his disdain for both England and Trinidad, and his sense of responsibility as a post-colonial writer weighed heavily on him :

> Naipaul's writings express the ambivalence of the exile and the problem of an outsider, a feature of his own experience as an Indian in the West Indies, a West Indian in England, and a nomadic intellectual in a postcolonial world. (Ramchand 165)

His life is a journey in which it becomes clear, as one of his characters points out , "home was hardly a place I

could return to. Home was something in my head. It was something I had lost." (Naipaul, *A Bend in the River*) Naipaul's voice remains like that of the outsider: "the *voyeur* looking on at a world which he has not entered fully and does not wish to embrace." (Naipaul , *In a Free State* 23) So the hero in most of his novels is alienated and outsider, two attributes of the national identity in the postcolonial world. Being an outsider and alienated, Naipaul's protagonist realizes that his way of life is almost at its end and eventually he must give up everything, " But there is no place to go." (Naipaul, *A Bend*) Being an outsider himself and depicting his characters to be alienated means that national identity after colonization is difficult to achieve.

The Postcolonial World of *The Mimic Men* :

V.S. Naipaul's novel *The Mimic Men* is the fictional memoir of protagonist Ralph Singh. Written in a boarding house in London, it is a retrospective, first-person account of Ralph's life, ranging over his childhood in the fictional West Indian island of Isabella, (Trinidad-like island) his university days in London where he meets and marries his wife, and his somewhat successful business and political careers back in Isabella. The novel begins with Ralph's college years in London during World War II, then follows his return to the Trinidad-like island of Isabella with an English wife at war's end .Yet ,

> Ralph Singh is also a prototypical colonial character, an intelligent and sensitive person confused by the plural but unequal society he's raised in and for whom identity is a primary issue. (Galloway 5)

Naipaul tries to represent a societal transition from a colonial to postcolonial situation and, on the other hand, he acknowledges, in _The Mimic Men_ , that he describes a world that lacks cultural models, including artistic precedents. (Greenberg 33) Typical of postcolonial critical discourse in this regard is Sara Suleri's view that Naipaul seeks the reality of a Third World place and time lacking continuity with England in the colonial period. (Suleri 127)

Naipaul's protagonist is typical postcolonial located in the period before full independence and Black Power came to various Caribbean nations. (Trinidad and Tobago achieved full independence together in 1962.)

> 'My career is by no means unusual,' he consoles himself. 'It falls into the pattern. The career of the colonial politician is short and ends brutally'. (Naipaul , _The Mimic Men_ 8)

Ralph can acknowledge that his view of his political career as "arbitrary" and "whimsical" may have been inaccurate: "I find I have indeed been describing the youth and early manhood of a leader of some sort, a politician, or at least a disturber. " (Naipaul , _The Mimic Men_ 184), he eventually admits. Ralph's sense of alienation, his experiences as a colonial politician, his struggle with a sense of personal identity, and his inability to connect with others are linked as various expressions of his sense of loss and disconnectedness.

Ralph Singh's colonial education causes him to become a homeless (placeless) man with no self, no

subjectivity; he realizes that he is doomed to be a mimic man as he is "a specific product of a particular socioeconomic formation called colonialism." (Cudjoe 100) Thus Naipaul stresses that *The Mimic Men* is about "colonial shame and fantasy, " about "colonial men mimicking the condition of manhood, men who had grown to distrust everything about themselves" but not about "mimics." ("Colonial Predicament." Online 4)

Naipaul's protagonist -- a survivor of the colonial era -- faces the problem of being utterly unable to create an original identity caught between helplessly imitating the colonizer in an attempt at originality, or returning to the roles that colonization has imposed on the likes of him. So he finds himself between two worlds colonial era and postcolonial one. And from here the duality of his identity appears . It is in London where he gains an awareness of himself as someone trapped in a position of dependence on the imperial country for his identity :

> an awareness of myself not as an individual but as a performer, in that child's game where every action of the victim is deemed to have been done at the command of his tormentor, and where even refusal is useless, for that too can be deemed to have been commanded... (Naipaul , *The Mimic Men* 85)

Every action of Ralph's originates with the colonizer, as in a theatrical setting where every action of the player originates with a playwright. Ralph comes to London, hoping to achieve a spontaneous originality -- the "flowering" and the "extension of [him]self" (Naipaul , *The Mimic Men* 26) -- only to find that all has already been

scripted by his colonizer. His position as a "mimic man" is not something that he willingly chooses, as if he wished to become like his somewhat absurd colonial "masters". He is a "mimic man" because he has no alternative. He comes to London only to find himself reduced to an unreal, insubstantial character.

In *The Mimic Men*, Naipaul explains how mimicry becomes "naturalized" for the colonized. They are brainwashed ideologically, with respect to the colonizer's culture and history. The protagonist, Ralph Singh, remembers how the boys at school learned all about British history , culture and language without any Trinidadian history , culture or language. Actually, Ralph Singh is probably unable to say anything about Trinidadian culture because he has not learned about it at school. His first memory of school really confuses him . He becomes a 'mimic man,' the person people expect him to be. Since his Indian identity is denied, he would rather be anonymous. Moreover, he endows himself with a Western name which is unimportant but useful . As a matter of fact, the Western name is hollow because he cannot possess a Western identity simply by possessing a western name. However, identifying with the Western name and dismantling his Indian name symbolizes the loss of his original culture. He intends to separate from his original culture in order to appropriate the Western one, yet even so he is still excluded in and from 'Western space':

> Indians have been reduced to mimicry of
> themselves in the name of resisting pollution
> by alien cultures. Naipaul argues that
> Indians must realize that they can never go
> forward until they cease trying to go back to

the past. (Sachs 1168)

In England, Ralph is still a stranger, a foreigner, an outsider; but he is very much in the 'center' back on the small island of Isabella because of his British education and culture. All over the novel Ralph is seen so puzzled between his Trinidadian identity and that of the colonizer's that he is about to be inflicted with schizophrenia :

> Mimicry is , thus , a sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform , regulation and discipline , which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power . Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate." (Bhabha 86)

Still, Ralph cannot be an authentic English person through his bleaching and mimicry; indeed, these only serve to bring him greater anxiety and restlessness. This seems to reflect Naipaul's assertion that the colonial cannot easily transform himself into an English person through mimicry, even though the impact and effect of colonization on him are very great. Being a mimic man , Ralph cannot achieve a true identity because "Mimicry is like camouflage ... a form of resemblance," and because "Mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask." (Ibid. 88-9) The "aftermath of empire" also causes the colonized to suffer from a special kind of loss and restlessness, as Ralph explains:

> it was my hope to give partial expression to the restlessness which this great upheaval has brought about. The empires of our time were short-lived, but they have altered the

> world forever; their passing away is their
> least significant feature. (Naipaul, *The Mimic
> Men* 38)

Ralph feels the full extent of his insignificance to the
British Empire in his walks around its capital :

> In the great city, so three-dimensional, so
> rooted in its soil, drawing colour from such
> depth, only the city was real. Those of us who
> came to it lost some of our solidity; we were
> trapped into fixed, flat postures .... in this
> growing dissociation between ourselves and
> the city in which we walked . (Naipaul, *The
> Mimic Men* 27)

Apparently, Ralph is not satisfied with his
situation as a mimic man. It is asserted that his " lack of
wholeness, of identity and authenticity, leads to his
posturing, dandyism and flights into exile." (King 78) At
first Ralph was eager to get a place in the great city of
London, but then he is frustrated and disappointed that
his feelings of isolation and alienation have been extended
from his homeland of Isabella to the imaginary centre,
London. It seems that "No place is home. Everywhere he
is shipwrecked, washed up." (Ibid. 78) Ralph employs the
word "shipwreck·" frequently to describe his situation on
Isabella :

> Shipwreck : I have used this word before.
> With my island background, it was the word
> that always came to me. And this was what I
> felt I had encountered again in the great city:
> this feeling of being adrift, a cell of
> perception, little more, that might be altered,

> if only fleetingly, by an encounter. (Naipaul,
> *The Mimic Men* 32)

To be shipwrecked means to be abandoned on the fringes
of the Empire. Ralph who is the son of a poor
schoolteacher asks himself about his earlier existence on
this small island :

> And what was an unmarked boy doing here,
> shipwrecked chieftain on an unknown shore,
> awaiting rescue, awaiting the arrival of ships
> of curious shape to take him back to the
> mountains ? (Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* 134)

Ralph tries to establish a sense of belonging ; he struggles
and fails, first in England and later in his homeland,
Isabella. He even feels isolated in the house where he lives
in Isabella. He cannot acquire a sense of security. He
originally thinks that he will feel no more isolation once he
leaves Isabella :

> I thought that this absurd disorder, of
> placelessness, was part of youth and my
> general unease and that it would go away as
> soon as I left Isabella. (Naipaul, *The Mimic
> Men* 184)

It seems that Ralph is not the only one to be a
mimic man but the people of Isabella are all mimics as
they do not have true identity because of their colonial
Mimicry: "The effect of mimicry is camouflage ... it is not
a question of harmonizing with the background , but
against a mottled background ." (Wolfreys 474) Those
people cannot live in harmony and stability. The boys of
Isabella imagine themselves to be living, to be true citizens
of the "true, pure world," looking forward to the future
even though they are frozen in "fixed, flat postures" as
passive objects to be observed and described :

> We, here on our island, handling books
> printed in this world, and using its goods,
> had been abandoned and forgotten. We
> pretended to be real, to be learning, to be
> preparing ourselves for life, we mimic men
> of the New World, one unknown corner of it,
> with all its reminders of the corruption that
> came so quickly to the new. (Naipaul, *The
> Mimic Men* 157)

They are not real because they lack the resources to be
real. It is observed that mimicry in Naipaul's nonfiction is
attributed by Naipaul to

> partly Westernized societies of the Third
> World [that] have learned the security of
> living off the creativeness of others. By
> languishing in the idleness of that
> dependency, they dehumanize themselves.
> (Nixon 131)

The reason they "pretend" to be "real" and to be
"learning", the novel seems to say, is that they are on a
far-flung island, borrowers not producers, (Ibid. 130) and
aspirants without resources, ideals, or models of high
achievement. They cannot create an authentic culture
without a greater past, and their past is one of slavery,
indentured servitude, colonial brutality, and colonial
neglect.

Ralph, his wife, and the social set they associate
with share common features of puzzlement , instability
and confusion. They are afflicted with *"colonial
schizophrenia"* , that is to say duality of identity. They

have "all studied abroad and married abroad;" they were "a group to whom the island was a setting" and for whom "the past had been cut away." (Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* 55). They represent what Frantz Fanon calls

> an 'underdeveloped middle class,' the result of an anemic colonial economy that cannot support a vital middle class engaged in production as financiers or captains of industry but rather engaged in intermediary activities like small-scale business, agriculture, and the professions. (Fanon 149-50)

Hesitation in making decisions and duality of identity caused Ralph to be alienated and confused. He is not close to his parents, siblings or other relatives and develops no close or lasting friendships in adulthood. Even his friendship with Browne is not real. Because this friendship involves learning about slave history and seeing the world as Browne sees it. Entrance into the perspective of poor blacks like Browne's father and the thought of the "thousands who, from their fields, could look forward to nothing but servitude and days in the sun" becomes too painful for Ralph to bear : "I grew to fear Browne's fellowship. I grew to hate the very hills." (Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* 145-46) Browne made him feel, he says, that "we walked in a garden of hell." (Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* 147)

In a visit to Browne's house Ralph is greeted by Browne's father--a "genuine old-time Negro, grey-headed and pipe-smoking" who is thrilled to meet one of his son's schoolmates. But Ralph (revealing perhaps Naipaul's

attitudes as well) is embarrassed to see Mr. Browne in his "flannel vest, which was grimy with little rolls of dirt," to see "the narrow room" and on the wall, "framed pictures of Joe Louis, Jesse Owens, Haile Selassie and Jesus." (Naipaul, *The* Mimic Men 148-49) When Browne's father calls to his son elsewhere in the house, Ralph hears the son mutter something about "that black jackass." (Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* 149) In this scene, we slowly discover not only Ralph's sense of superiority but also how it serves to protect Ralph from the fear of suffocating and of hopelessness, that threatens him with extinction :

> We never forgive those who catch us in postures of indignity. That Saturday, with its two gestures, its two visits, its two failures, marked the end of the special intensity of our relationship. I cannot deny that I was relieved. I had been choked in that interior, and not by its smallness. Joe Louis and Haile Selassie on the wall, the flannel vest, the family photograph, that black jackass: it was more than an interior I had entered. I felt I had had a glimpse of the prison of the spirit in which Browne lived. (Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* 150)

But the prison of the spirit Ralph reveals is also his own, despite his telling himself it belongs only to blacks: "Was it only for Browne that I was concerned?" (Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* 151), Ralph asks later on. "There is perhaps more than a trace of racism in Naipaul's use of Browne's father as a typical rural worker," (Greenberg 36) since the basic pattern in the Caribbean was that "East Indians made up more of the oppressed agricultural population

and blacks tended to be found in the cities. " (Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* 145-49) The People in Isabella live under the distress of being recently independent and the distress of poverty. 'Distress' is Naipaul's shorthand word throughout the novel for the historical, social, cultural, and psychological problems of working-class Isabellans.

The postcolonial social reality drawn by Naipaul is that Ralph failed in his national and political activities and this failure means a failure for postcolonial society as a whole and consequently a failure to achieve national identity for himself and for the society as a whole. When Ralph is asked to handle the nationalization of industries like sugar, he is given an impossible task. The party is on record favouring nationalization, but "nationalization was as impossible as getting rid of the expatriate civil servants: so much London had made clear." (Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* 220) When his efforts in London fail, he is repudiated by his party. He is condemned at a meeting for selling out on the nationalization issue. So the instability and confusion of his identity cause him to be unable to take a decision or to do something right .

Ralph's political activity is a personal search to attain some degree of glory and also a place and national identity . After some meaningless political activities in Ralph's political career, his political "stage" is over. His feelings about his home island of Isabella are similar to Naipaul's own feelings about Trinidad. Ralph knows Isabella to be "horribly man-made; to be exhausted, fraudulent, cruel and above all, not mine." (Naipaul, *Mimic Men* 60) After his unhappy career as an island politician in Isabella, Ralph goes back to the disorderly city of London and gets lost.

Ralph's political experience raised the interrelated issues of nationalism, independence, and democracy and served to introduce the possibility of creating a better society only to discount it. So he had a hope in achieving something good out of the nationalist movement :

> His own involvement in Isabella's nationalist movement and new transitional government is also ultimately disillusioning, confirming that promised independence does not easily offer chances to create a new uncorrupted society but rather is tainted from the outset by the history that has gone before. (Galloway 5)

Ralph's failure in his national and political activities is because of the weakness of the government members whose lack of real power also makes Ralph's and Browne's efforts at governance futile since they are stopped at every meaningful turn by those who truly hold power. They realize the government cannot run without the help of colonial officials and government aid from London . This futility of Ralph and the members of the government leads to the rational result that independence brings neither change nor improvement. Ralph realizes that his efforts and his companions' have been pointless and becomes aware that "success changes nothing;" (Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* 203) that the island is still under the colonial yoke and they are "compelled to cater to the interests of those powerful actors that they cannot control." (Hintzen 9) This outcome conjoins with Fanon's contention that "in the majority of cases, for 95 per cent of the population of underdeveloped countries, independence brings no immediate change." (Fanon 75) Consequently Ralph is accused of attempting to create racial divisions and dismissed from his political party and his government post

amid a period of communal tension and racial violence. It is surely no comfort that "decolonization is always a violent phenomenon." (Ibid., 35)

After Ralph's dismissal , he realizes that he cannot construct any positive meaning out of his political experiences; his slogans are `borrowed phrases' and the impetus of the nationalist effort ran the same course as `twenty' others. He was one of the faceless politicians "made by distress and part of [distress]." (Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* 240) But the ultimate hollowness and futility Ralph discovers in business and politics are mere echoes of a much more personal and profound emotional emptiness. Indeed, his entry into politics was prompted by "some little hurt, some little incompleteness." (Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* 37)

Ralph and the reader come to realize that the postcolonial society of Isabella is chaotic : "chaos lies all within." (Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* 192) Reflecting on his adult years in Isabella as a businessman and politician, Ralph writes,

> I see that all the activity of these years existing as I have said in my own mind in parenthesis, represented a type of withdrawal, and was part of the injury inflicted on me by the too solid three-dimensional city in which I could never feel myself as anything but spectral, disintegrating, pointless, fluid. (Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* 51-2).

The restlessness he experiences in London each of the three times that he visits, constantly walking its streets, moving "from room to room ... from district to district, going ever farther out of the heart of the city" (Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* 30) draws upon the image of the restless conqueror or restless writer hungry to see the world and claim it as his ground. At first glance, this new identity that Ralph takes upon himself -- that of an observer and traveller in foreign climes -- promises to provide him with a way of sidestepping the footprints of European writers who came, who saw, and who wrote.

Ralph accepts the Western European view of the world as the only correct one rather than one possibility among many. This acceptance means that he wants to feel the stability of his identity after long quest . Yet this only serves to disorient Ralph, dislocating his sense of place and history from Isabella to London, creating what Albert Memmi calls "a permanent duality" within him. (Memmi 106) Ralph's conscious and imaginative identification with Britain and the West affects him psychologically in a number of interrelated ways. When he considers his origins, he is descended from a line of "the unimaginative, unenterprising, and oppressed" which is "a cause for deep, silent shame." (Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* 83) This fits with Memmi's contention that "love of the colonizer is subtended by a complex of feelings ranging from shame to self-hate." (Ibid. 121) Ralph's sense of shame leads him as a child to withdraw more and more from the people and activities around him and he looks forward to escaping to London and the European landscapes that are his proper backdrop. He conceives of himself as protected by the West, since he thinks he is one of their own, and imagines

a "celestial eye" that watches over him. (Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* 94)

When Ralph turns to the colonizer's home , he finds that London does not welcome him, he is not in his rightful place after all and he fails to integrate into the ideal culture presented to him through books. From childhood Ralph had disowned Isabellan history and culture, yet he doesn't find a place in British society either. His position between home and homelessness reflects that his identity is unfixed, unstable and changing. Ultimately Naipaul, through his protagonist, the narrator, has gained an identity as a permanently exiled writer without a fixed home." His identity is open, not limited."("Colonial Predicament." Online 5)

Ralph's failure to achieve his national identity is a direct result of his being always conscious of role-playing since none of his roles ever `fit.' In retrospect, he asks the reader to "understand my unsuitability for the role I had created for myself , as politician, as dandy, as celebrant." (Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* 40) Therefore one should not be surprised at his "inevitable failure." (Naipaul, *The* Mimic Men 184) His failure is certain because of the fact that he feels he must pretend. The colonized, as one critic notes, "can never succeed in becoming identified with the colonizer, nor even in copying his role correctly." (Memmi 124) But Ralph continues to try and play his roles because he feels he has no authentic alternative identity, his real self has been too damaged by his youthful experience in London. (Ibid. 57) Ralph truly does not belong anywhere, either in Isabella or in England and this ensures the duality of his identity . It is pointed out that

only by striving to create a unique identity can Naipaul's characters hope to transcend mimicry and role-playing and become responsible individuals with a clear sense of who they are and where they belong. (" Colonial Predicament." Online 6)

Ralph ultimately narrates that he finds peace and contentment in the "in-between" space which doesn't belong to any place, community, or group :

> I could not pretend even to myself to be part of a community or to be putting down roots. I prefer the freedom of my far-out suburban hotel, the absence of responsibility; I like the feeling of impermanence. (Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* 13-14)

The protagonist is attracted to Sandra, an English woman, because of her confidence and her `rapaciousness' (an imperial trait) and he writes,

> it seemed to me that to attach myself to her was to acquire that protection which she offered, to share some of her quality of being marked, a quality which once was mine but which I had lost." (Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* 47)

Obviously part of Sandra's attraction is that she is English; she belongs to British culture in a way Ralph never can, and his marriage is simply another strategy to attach himself to this culture. For him

A product manufactured by the colonizer is accepted with confidence. His habits, clothing, food, architecture are closely copied, even if inappropriate. (Memmi 121)

Once again, Ralph becomes the passive spectator, the confused childlike man. His desire to break away from his position as mimic man to actual manhood is humiliatingly thwarted by the childlike Stella and her childish tales. With Stella , another English woman , he feels confident. This confidence is for the colonizer . Ralph's helpless struggle for an original identity only makes him realize the extent to which his identity depends on the colonizer, for even his desire to become his own person always leads him to a London which only affirms there can be no originality; that he can only choose between the act of mimicry available to him in the city, or the "fixed, flat postures" available to him in Isabella: both roles forged by the colonizer: "The city and snow, the island and the sea: one could only be exchanged for the other," (Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* 254) he thinks to himself on a plane carrying him back to Isabella after his affair with Lady Stella has ended. The choice depends on what form of identity proves more urgent: the need to possess the power of the colonizer , or the need to differentiate oneself from the colonizer.

Ralph's ultimate reaction to both public and personal events is emotional and physical withdrawal. Though his confused sense of identity contributes to an emotional distance between himself and others, further difficulties and a culmination of events intensify this tendency. At one point Ralph writes that he throws himself into various activities because they link him with the 'real' world and distract him from his internal reality.

But fear controls his thought and actions . Even he fears "the people and their destructive potential." (Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* 197)

Ralph concludes that the corruption and the wrongness of the world can never be put right. His only chance for survival is to retreat into the emptiness. This retreat is a kind of surrender . He reflects on what he hopes to achieve by writing of his life: "[I]t was my hope to give partial expression to the restlessness which this great upheaval has brought about " But he realizes he cannot do this because he is " too much a victim of that restlessness which was to have been [his] subject." (Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* 32)

It seems that the reason for Ralph's retreat and surrender is that the colonized society "is a diseased society in which internal dynamics no longer succeed in creating new structures." (Memmi 98-9) But Ralph never entertains a suggestion that "underdeveloped countries ought to do their utmost to find their own particular values and methods and a style which shall be peculiar to them." (Ibid. 99)

Naipaul's message is that true national identity for the colonized is difficult to achieve . As Simon During points out, "the postcolonial desire is the desire of decolonized communities for an identity" (During 125) which has been forcibly withheld, and which has now been dismissed as a mere myth:

> the notion of true identity is passé, and the concept postmodernity has been constructed in terms which more or less intentionally

wipe out the possibility of post-colonial identity." (Ibid. 125)

Conclusion :

In conclusion , the difficulty of achieving a true national identity for the colonized people causes them to suffer . These sufferings come as a result of the colonized being standing between two worlds: the colonized (national) world which they long for and the colonizer's which they want to get rid of . Being unable to do that they still suffer from the duality of identity . Ralph reaches a similar pessimistic conclusion regarding his own fate. Every personal endeavour or relationship is tainted from the outset. And he discovers nothing in his experiences or in himself that suggests any possibilities for overcoming his initial failures or disappointments. He has not become a whole man because he has not ceased to define himself through the categories of the colonizers. Though he seems unable to construct a whole identity from the fragments of his life, he is forever caught in the empty space between two cultures and two identities . And this indicates a probable and continuing effort on the author's part to make a sense of the world and of his situation, the situation of the formerly colonized. Finally it might be said that to imagine the postcolonial world being a place where people can transform and reinvent themselves in original ways is to dream a fool's dream .

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