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**Tear off the Masks They Taught You to Wear:  
Post-colonialism and Rebuilding the Self in *The  
Mimic Men*  
by V. S. Naipaul**

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**Abstract**

This paper aims to present Naipaul's depreciating outlook on decolonization and post-coloniality giving voice to the process of identification with the colonizer through mimicry. The paper focuses on his exposure of the consequences of colonialism from the perspective of how the West has turned Caribbean people into mere mimic men dragging them into believing that they are always in need of the Western men of power and cannot do without. In *The Mimic Men*, the East Indian protagonist realizes that he cannot help being attached to the Empire. Naipaul conveys his view with its passivity, fear of action, and false freedom away from the Caribbean to assert his being a product of colonialism. He sees that mimicry is a shameful truth of the ex-colonized that must be abolished and discarded to recreate their identities. The starting point in the process of real decolonization and homecoming is available through self-knowledge and through an awareness of the truth about colonial history with its ruins. Naipaul's strategy is to help them see home through the lens of literature. The findings have indicated that the consequences of colonialism should be documented. They have also asserted that as long as peoples' lives are affected by imperialistic policies, they should not withdraw or submit. Rather, they should declare the war over. Finally, positive mimicry that aims at promoting the self is advocated, not mimicry that generates

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ridiculed persons. The paper adopts an analytic approach supported by the opinions of critics and post-colonial theorists.

**Keywords:** *colonial education, imperial policy, mimicry, resistance, self-awareness*

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**Introduction**

V.S. Naipaul was born in the Caribbean Trinidad. He belongs to the West Indian minority of Indians, whose ancestors immigrated to the Caribbean as indentured laborers. For him, Trinidad is a society torn between the natives' necessity to assert themselves and the conflict between the negroes and this ethnic minority of East-Indians. His complex relation with his country of origin has often been reduced to this idea of a writer dismissing his birthplace for its smallness, racism, and lack of culture. Naipaul (1987) condemns the colonial society as a site of profound lack of order, civility, progress... a sense of ethics, and a stabilizing sense of history (152). At the same time, he accepts Trinidad as one of the main influences on his life. Naipaul (1987) states that Trinidad is "the starting point... the center"(153). He says, "I think I was really made by my childhood and by my background and naturally therefore by Trinidad"(qtd in Hassan,1989,68). Naipaul (1987) underlines the importance of Trinidad in the following passage: "But the island-with the curiosity it had awakened in me for the larger world, the idea of civilization, and the idea of antiquity; and all the anxieties it had quickened in me- the island had given me the world as a writer; had given me the themes that in the second half of the twentieth century had become important; had made me metropolitan"(153). However, the fact remains that the island could no longer hold him.

Naipaul left the West Indies for England on a scholarship in 1950 with the hope of starting a literary career and devoting his life to writing. Naipaul (1987) insists he is not at home in England and not at home anywhere (25). The second World War has brought about widespread alienation among people all over Europe. Thus, Naipaul comes to the hard-earned understanding that this alienation is a universal phenomenon, though the root cause may differ.

Naipaul persists in describing himself as an exile, a refugee, a nomadic intellectual and a traveling writer, that is why some critics call him a "cosmopolitan writer" namely, some one free from national limitations. He dislikes being labeled a West Indian writer and is much more at ease when described as a homeless citizen of the world. Hence, Naipaul adopts a particular strategy which is a sort of detachment from the original country and an adjustment between his literature and his surroundings. He deals with his homes through literature and seems nowhere at home but in literature, as Derek Walcott (1992) once said, "No nation now but the imagination"(3). Naipaul's detachment, indeed, enables him to expose the depressing reality of the marginal societies and awaken the Caribbeans to the urgent need for improving their conditions.

Naipaul is one of the first-generation Anglo-Caribbean writers who belong to an early diasporic formation called by Mishra (1996) "diaspora of exclusion"(190). Exiled in Britain, he felt a need and a duty to represent his colonial society and to reveal the humanity of its people to a British society ignorant of that humanity. He provides an objective view of the Caribbean and the Western worlds seeking reconciliation. Naipaul shows great passion for understanding the world as his numerous travels demonstrate. In the 1975 speech, Naipaul provides the foundation where the dispossessed colonial finds a firm ground in his desperate search for home. He says, "the whole business of looking at one's past...I begin with myself ...I try to investigate it...to understand it...to arrive to some degree of self-knowledge" (qtd in Greenberg, 2000, 124). The displaced colonials should know the historical facts that

have shaped their past. Subsequently, Naipaul's words suggest that the beginning resides in the individual.

In Naipaul's view, following independence, imperialism keeps inventing its own methods under the mask of civilizing Caribbean peoples to legitimize its hold on power; the societies are pushed further into disorder, underdevelopment and degradation; they have no resources left for self-regeneration. Imperial leadership still regards the ex-colonials as subalterns, marginalized and discarded, when handling serious problems. Hence, an awareness of the imperial policy is important to put an end to these ongoing violations. Naipaul chooses for his novel the time of the Caribbean Trinidad's independence in 1963 to stress the ex-colonials' impossible search in this period for home or for a fully independent identity.

In *The Mimic Men*, as a fictional autobiography, V.S. Naipaul conveys his message through the personal experience of an East Indian politician, Ralph Singh, an embodiment of the dark picture of the emerging post-colonial life. Naipaul adopts the Crusoe archetype and lets his narrator-protagonist tell his own story of "shipwreck", a term repeatedly used along with "disorder" and "chaos" as motifs referring to personal tragedies, internal confusions, and Caribbean diaspora. Throughout his life, Singh accepts the Western view of the world as the only correct one rather than a possibility among many. As a student and later as a politician, Singh shows a deep pessimism towards post-colonial Isabella, his Caribbean present home which stands for Trinidad, a pessimism that speaks to his admiration of England and its varied achievements. He does not see the nationalistic struggle as an opportunity to construct a new identity or to unite the oppressed people around a goal. This results from his belief in Isabella's inability and dependence. Singh says that the country, just as in colonial times, had "no internal source of power, and no power was real that did not come from outside" (MM 246).

Dascalu (2007) claims that Singh's attitude is seen as the "natural response to a purposeful colonial technique of assimilation"

(96). Singh is a victim of the imperial enterprise that aims at keeping the colonized people, all along, dependent and inferior. Lawson (1995) emphasizes the idea saying that the colonizers have kept them far away from their original homes. Homeless and at a loss, a new sense of self has been imposed on them and Western ideas have been implanted through Western education. The colonized people have found themselves using the language of the Empire and adopting its cultures and beliefs (169). Also, Fanon (1963) shows how colonialism splits the colonized into two parts, obliging him to assume a double identity while taking him away from the authentic unity of self. This is really the psychological burden which the displaced colonial experiences. Nixon (1988), as well, indicates that the subjectivity of the colonial is brought into question because of the "distance from any clear-cut national identity or notion of home"(3). In fact, home and identity are the twin poles of subjectivity. So, the displaced colonial is unable to consider himself whole because both are lost.

In his quest for order in England, Singh meets a greater chaotic life and a deeper feeling of alienation and homelessness. Back on his island, he shares in politics becoming a minister of a new political party. Then comes the shock of being disgraced and expelled by his party before a second-term election due to factionalism, racial conflicts and lack of unity. Feder (2001) contends that V.S. Naipaul, in *The Mimic Men*, illustrates the consequences of post-colonial freedom and "its function in causing new and violent segregation in the nationalizing process". Far from producing "unification" and "creation", freedom has led to the "exclusion of individuality and dissent"(79). Falling in disgrace, homeless and isolated, Singh leaves his political life and withdraws into an anonymous boarding house in a faceless London suburb.

Naipaul portrays Singh's effort to control the chaos of his life by submitting it to the discipline of writing. He begins to write hoping to attain his calmness and impose order on his own times and on the multiracial nature of his own society. He says "a vision

of a disorder...which, I felt, if I could pin down, might bring me calm" (MM 97). Singh calls his memoirs, "the exposition of the malaise of our times pointed and illuminated by personal experience" (MM 8). Dascalu (2007) indicates that opening *The Mimic Men* with Singh's decision to write his memoirs implies that Naipaul is foregrounding the act of writing, giving it special prominence, and demanding we pay attention to it (104). According to Cudjoe (1988), it is only in writing that one can reach any idea of "what it means to be a colonial subject in a post-colonial society" (99). Furthermore, Gottfried (1984) claims that home in *The Mimic Men* can never be more than the books Singh writes or more precisely, the action of writing them (443). Similarly, White (1975) clarifies saying that Singh longs for a sense of control over his life and therefore, he turns to writing which becomes "a means of releasing from the barren cycle of events" (180). Indeed, those critics stress Naipaul's view that the world of books - where to attain and document the truth about one's self, the colonists and the Caribbean dilemma- is the only home that opens its gates or rather its pages before the homeless to think anew of what is possible for them in the world. Nevertheless, Singh sees that the island's vision of disorder is "beyond any one man to control"(MM 97). He confesses that he is unable to pin down this disorder being a victim of that restlessness resulting from one's loss of certainty in himself and in where to belong. Failing then to write colonial history, all what the narrator can hope to write about is his life.

Nightingale (1980) underlines Naipaul's view saying that self-knowledge "offers a means of analyzing past errors and possibly avoiding future occurrence"(249). Hence, writing the memoirs opens Singh's eyes to the truth he was blind to. He discovers that he and his fellow islanders were mere mimic men wearing white masks, imitating the Western ideas, beliefs and manners in an outward show of thoughts and feelings. They have assumed the roles of British politicians; they have been playing imaginary roles in the drama of decolonization. Colonial mimicry has remained just mimicry and nothing more, nothing has been

achieved. Singh thinks that he could establish his own identity wholly convinced that England opens its arms to him as a surrogate motherland. To the contrary, he realizes that he has been attached to the Empire but unwelcomed, marginalized, and mocked at. He discovers nothing in himself or in his experience that suggests any possibilities for overcoming his disappointments. Thus, the memoirs not only confirm Singh's quest for home and identity but also document his failure, homelessness, and marginality. Thieme (1987) says that the novel considers the relationship between the socio, political, and psychological consequences of imperialism (113). King (2003) highlights the point saying that to read the novel just for its politics is to destroy its emphasis on the psychological problems of colonial people (72).

### **Research Method**

The paper is a text-based study applying an analytic method in dealing with *The Mimic Men*. It is supported by specific references which serve as a backcloth for analysis. The first part of the paper is an introduction: it provides some background information about the author in addition to an overall view of the novel. The second part is a detailed analysis of the text highlighting Naipaul's strategy in tackling the post-colonial problem of mimicry and his criticism of the imperial colonizing policy. The third part is dedicated to the findings followed by a conclusion and suggestions for further research.

### **An Analytic Approach to the Text**

Singh indicates through his memoirs that many of his struggles with a sense of identity began during his childhood. When a boy of about ten, Ranjit Kripalsingh "suppresses the connection with his father's family"(MM 83). His feeling that he descends from "generations of...failures, an unbroken line of the unimaginative...and oppressed, had always seemed...to be a cause for deep, silent shame"(MM 83). The words indicate Singh's

resentment for the history of East Indians who have been exploited, oppressed and then cast away by the colonizers. Walsh (1973) indicates that Singh is marked by an "icy remoteness" since childhood and that a distance persists between him and any other person (56). A psychoanalytic interpretation of the unconscious world of Singh helps reveal the painful struggle he undergoes. According to Jacques Lacan's concept of the mirror phase, Cudjoe (1988) states that Singh's remoteness being unwilling to establish any relationship with the other boys, implies that he fails to break with the "ideal I" recognized in childhood when looking at one's image in a mirror and never allows himself to acquire the "social I" (244). Moreover, he indicates how Singh believes that the obscurity of his location in the world makes him a nonentity- that he lacks identity and that he cannot achieve one on this shipwrecked island (104).

Isabella as a British colony is obliged to model its educational system on English educational patterns. Influenced thus by his reading, both at school and at home, Singh adopts a Western view, believing firmly in the superiority of the Europeans and desiring to be like them. Fanon (1963) claims that the colonized person never ceases to dream of "putting himself in the place of the settler" (52). He dreams of being the warrior and the leader who will change the island.

Memmi (1974) contends that love of the colonizer reveals itself through a complex of feelings ranging "from shame to self-hate"(121). Singh unfolds these feelings when he disdains his given Indian name and adopts a Western one. In order to overcome his sense of shame towards his family's history, he changes his name and signs his compositions "Ralph Singh". In this way, a piece of him gets lost while surviving an ancient part of his name that is "Singh" which means an "Indian Warrior"(61). He insists, "I am a Singh"(MM 88). Dasalu (2007) states that the structure of colonialism, with its forced banishment of peoples from their original homelands to the Caribbean, is more likely to create subjects who have contradictory attitudes towards their roots (99).

In fact, Singh is a case in point: though he is ashamed of the history of East Indian indentured laborers, he idealizes India and is proud of his Indian roots. He reads books on Asiatic and Persian Aryans and dreams of horsemen who look for their leader.

Singh sees that racial diversity, merging, and integration debase and bastardize ideals. What strengthens his alienation is that East Indians are a racial minority desperately striving for the availability of place at the expense of their rituals and ideals. Later in the novel, Singh is given a "contact zone" through a political collaboration with the Afro-Caribbean character, Browne but he fails to creolize due to his adherence to his fantasies about Indian chieftainship. In addition to his mimicry of the Empire, Singh believes that to regain Indian chieftaincy, he must follow the Western example. It is this mimicry which Bhabha (1994) refers to as an "ironic compromise that produces the mockery, the rupturing and the displacement of ex- colonials"(86). Singh's admiration of the West makes him unable to envision a new hybrid identity or any sort of creolization. To the contrary, he later sees that his complete withdrawal is the outcome of his participation, through politics, in the creation of what he calls "our own little bastard world" (MM 131).

Accordingly, Isabella, for Singh, is an island of temporary habitation from which he impatiently waits to be saved when inspired by his imaginary Himalayan ancestors. In fact, Singh's sense of being "marked for chieftaincy" serves to magnify his incompatibility with Isabella; the island is not such a place that suits his heroic destiny and his desire to realize the Aryan ideals. Mishra (1996) indicates that this complete adherence to Indian fantasies produces a sort of false racism that fossilizes the colonial Indianness which the indentured communities brought with them from their original homes. This "fossilization [separates] Indians from any real relationship with the other...natives of the places they landed in"(443). In fact, Singh deadens his Indianness and strips it of any effectiveness.

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Singh sees that the variously mixed families of his friends never brings them but humiliation and shame. Singh's school life presents another picture of Isabella's racial tensions and cultural fragmentation which stresses his inability to find home on the island. Greenberg (2000) claims that "in dramatizing racial attitudes between the boys, Naipaul unpacks cultural stigmas and wounds exposing the colonial burden of self-division"(122). Greenberg wants to stress the colonial responsibility for the racial and the ethnic fragmentation in Isabella to which Singh refers as a "society not held together by a common interest" (MM 206). Each boy of Singh's friends is in fact obsessed with his own racial origin and the ethnic group to which he belongs. Hence, the homelessness and the pain of the child and the young man inevitably lead to the suffering and the isolation of the adult.

When Singh one day watches his uncle while quarrelling with a lorry driver, the uncle's savage desire for revenge after the near collision of his truck, carries to him indirect suggestions of power. He learns that "a man was only what he saw of himself in others"(MM 53). Accordingly, at school, he impersonates his uncle and plays his role as a powerful unfearing man. Singh keeps developing this talent of mimicry that finally generates in him the mimicry of Imperial power taking England as the standard. Singh says, "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" (MM 146). Singh and his friends are held together by the mimicry of the Empire. They feel insecure, unstable and homeless and thus mimicry supports them. Nixon (1988) claims that the reason they "pretend to be real or to be learning" is that they are on a "far-flung island, borrowers not producers"(130). Those ex-colonials are aspirants but without West Indian resources, ideals or models of high achievement. They cannot create a culture of their own without a supposed great West Indian past but unfortunately,

their past is one of slavery, indentured servitude, colonial brutality and neglect.

Consequently, Singh looks forward to escaping to London believing that he is protected by the West. He sees that in the heart of London, the great city, he will attain the power once inspired by his uncle's quarrel. Fortunately, this adolescent boy from such a tiny outpost of the British Empire gets the opportunity to study in London. Contrary to the wonderful vision of the city's magic, Singh finds that London does not welcome him. He feels that those who come to such a "temperate zone eventually lose solidity and become trapped into fixed, flat postures...first experience, and then the personality divided into...compartments"(MM 27). They are unable to establish relationships with English people. They cannot identify themselves with the city, its busying back and forth, and its alienation. Immigrants feel at a loss, unbalanced with personalities disintegrated, hardened, incapable of acting and interacting fluently. Singh looks on the city of London and comments, "in a city as nowhere else we are reminded that we are individuals, units"(MM 22). In a city, everyone is preoccupied with his own affairs; the sense of being together in a connected community is lost and thus, home is absent. Singh discovers that the city shelters uprooted people from every corner of the world. He is reduced to caricature, an immigrant living with other immigrants in rooms, at a London boarding house, rented by an exiled Jew.

However, Singh tries to give himself a personality and take refuge in playing a number of social roles. Unsupported by a coherent identity, he relies on the lesson he has learnt from his uncle's quarrel: "a man was only what he saw of himself in others"(MM 100). Singh says, "coming to London, the great city, seeking order... I have tried to hasten a process which had seemed elusive. I had tried more than once before, and waited for the response in the eyes of others" (MM 32). Singh asserts his coming failure saying, "from playacting to disorder: it is the pattern" (MM 184). Memmi (1974) says that the colonized can never succeed in

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becoming identified with the colonizer, nor even in copying his role correctly (124). Nevertheless, Singh continues to try and play his roles because he feels he has no alternative identity.

In his journey to London, Singh has merely exchanged one form of confusion for another. Through an irregular promiscuous life, Singh becomes the dandy and the extravagant colonial; he exaggerates dress and speech to erase his past and "become what [he] see[s] in the eyes of others"(MM 20). He becomes a mimic man in the sense that he becomes the sort of person people expect him to be, with no one to link his present with his past (MM 19). Memmi (1974) says, "a product manufactured by the colonizer is accepted with confidence: his habits, clothing, food, architecture are closely copied, even if inappropriate"(121). Memmi indeed refers to a common experience among colonized persons who imitate the colonizer. This is what Singh has to do; he has to mime the manners and public gestures of English people in an attempt to regain his coherence in the great city. But Singh has simply made himself ridiculous. His trials are to no effect. English people respond with disdain and indifference; they make clear to him that his efforts are in vain. Moreover, when Singh plays the role of the celebrant, the christening ceremony and the celebration he performs express Singh's and all the immigrants' sense of being neglected, forsaken and left alone.

Bhabha (1994) states that through colonial education and imperial culture, the colonizer creates out of the colonized people, mimetic representations, native in blood and color but English in taste, in opinions, in morals. They are people referred to by Fanon as black skin/white masks. Bhabha adds that this mimetic representation emerges as an effective imperial strategy affirming and verifying Western knowledge and mastery: the colonizer is the Other, the ideal that should be mimicked and followed. However, Bhabha confutes this view asserting that those mimic men end up emerging as inappropriate colonial subjects who threaten the imperial subjectivity, unsettle its centrality, and destroy its authority. Their mimicry repeats rather than re-presents and in that

act of blind imitation, originality is lost and purity is corrupted by their repeated "slippages"(p.88). Harles (1997) supports Bhabha's vision indicating that the negative side of assimilation appears when the outsiders [try] to 'adapt, adept and adopt" to the foreign culture which can lead to mimicry...the complete disappearance of identity"(p.711). Hence, this mimicry that never elevates, is by no means an entry to acceptance. Parroting never draws on people but absurdity and foolishness. Actually, the novel presents a disturbing picture of the colonized as a mimic, a poor copy of the master, a caricature of the real thing: to be, is to pretend to become the other which implies a second hand and degraded state of life. Accordingly, Singh's escape to London leads to "a greater shipwreck" to "the final emptiness". In this context, one is urged to say that the novel's title "The Mimic Men" strengthens Naipaul's vision: it implicitly brings together the essentially hollow and passive Caribbean society and its mimic men along with the alienating but nevertheless active, coherent and self-possessed England that is mimicked and followed.

During his days of hopeless wandering in London, he accidentally meets and befriends Sandra, an English woman who provides him a certain status. Unfortunately, Sandra turns out to be as lost as he is; Singh says, "She had no community, no group and had rejected her family [but] 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"(MM 55). In this state of mental suffering, he begins the romance of interracial marriage, a new attempt to keep his relationship with England and to rise above the wide difference between a West Indian and an English. He is captivated by her self-confidence and her ability to seize what she wants by all means which are all imperial properties. It will be found later that Singh is also attracted to Stella, daughter of Lord Stockwell, a representative of the colonial power, for similar

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reasons. The Englishness of the two ladies is to him a unique quality or a gift.

Singh returns to the island exploring two other routes towards establishing his identity and seeking home: wealth and politics. Wealth came to Singh almost accidentally as the result of exploiting a property he had been left. Thus, he enters a real estate business and gathers a good fortune. With his help, schools, shoe shops, filling stations and other buildings have been established on the island and he lends his name to these establishments. Actually, his obsession with naming shows his psychological need for power and ownership. He says, "So I went on, naming, naming; and, later, I required everything...to be labeled. It suggested drama, activity...It reinforced that sense of ownership which overcome me whenever I returned to the island after a trip abroad" (MM 215). It can be said that after his return from London, Singh wants to suppress his otherness or rather his West Indianness and to be one again with the world. Morris (1975) claims that this imperfectly Westernized Hindu is dominated by the driving illusion of the Western man's idea of a goal: one has to change himself constantly and seek a goal"(57). Encouraged then by Sandra, the Western woman, he takes power as a goal and change as a manifestation of energy. Singh and his wife are dazzled by their being among the rich. Nonetheless, Singh does not feel responsible for the fortune that has come to him. He says, "I always felt separate from what I did"(MM 53). This means that the luxurious life he leads ...cannot rid him of the sense of homelessness and isolation that dominates him. Furthermore, his wife, Sandra, begins to get bored of the island and develop the sense of "having been flung off the world [ along with] ... a fear of place, of the absent world" (MM 69). She says about Isabella, "I suppose this must be the most inferior place in the world, inferior natives...Frightfully inferior"(MM 69). Her boredom makes Singh no longer see in her the confidence, the ambition and the rightness which he has once admired. He no longer sees the resolution to "fight her way up despite her sense of

loneliness" (MM 44). After a series of marital disputes, the dark romance of mixed marriage dissolves.

Once again, there is an alternative to take him out of this despair: he begins a business in investment. He plays the capitalist transforming an inherited piece of wasteland into a housing condominium development modeled "on the house of Vetii in Pompeii" (MM 39). It is called, in honor of his father, Kripalville speedily corrupted by the locals to Krippleville. In fact, this word prefigures the crippleness and disability that surround him at the end of his story. Later on, this house provides the setting for his rise as a politician and becomes the center of the campaign for independence.

The achievement of order through the pursuit of political power is the theme of the middle and active part of Singh's life, the stage which he is later to call "in parenthesis". This part of the novel communicates Singh's sense of outward participation and inward absence. It is the stage where he achieves his complete mimic status. As an adult, Singh is able to gain political advantage from his father's reputation as a political figure before retiring as a sanyasi. But what is more significant for his political life is his friendship with the Afro-Caribbean Browne and the desire for change motivated by people's sense of oppression. This association gets more positive when the opportunity comes to them, after independence, to question the colonial system itself, an opportunity to achieve order and success as political figures. Browne is aware of Singh's attractiveness as a rich man with a certain name which is useful to him in his movement. In fact, the tormented black Browne with his slave history sees in Singh the person that will help him to prove his reality. Browne persuades Singh to put money into a socialist newspaper that he has founded. In this way, the radical Browne and the young millionaire Singh make a marvelous combination with the newspaper as their instrument and a political movement that is officially left wing.

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The marks of success increase, the public meetings, the tours of dusty country roads and the reports of speeches. Campaigning for their new party, Singh speaks of his commitment to the goals of blacks and their world and that his public image is that of the rich man who had put himself on the side of the poor and who appeared to have turned his back on the making of money (MM 193). For a short time, Singh deludes himself that "the smell of sweat of the masses" is a more real source of power than the money of foreign investors. Singh and Browne deliver their empty speeches like actors in a play. Writing his memoirs, Singh comments saying, "whatever was said, the end was always the same: applause, the path made through the crowd, the hands tapping, rubbing, caressing my shoulder, the willing hands of slaves now serving a cause they thought to be their own" (MM 198). Then comes election night; Singh becomes a cabinet minister of a new political party. Of course, power needs a more solid base than applause, a legal position to generate power. But, upon becoming such a famous politician, he soon realizes the hollowness of his island's independence. Singh is frustrated by his fellow ministers' inability to go beyond rhetoric. Singh repeatedly asserts that it is the same rhetoric that was "emerging in twenty European colonial possessions" (MM 190).

Walsh (1973) indicates that Singh's vision of Caribbean politics is a vision that emphasizes its emptiness and invalidity, presenting nothing but tumult and confusion (60). Also, Theroux (1972) asserts that their politics represented in "a set of clichés- a few hackneyed images from B-grade films and pulp fiction is the only effective political means which rouses Isabella"(31).

Singh recalls how he has become separated from his people and has to play a role to preserve his position. He has been asked to handle certain crucial projects and problems (MM 194). But when Singh has to handle the nationalization of industries like sugar, he is given an impossible task. The government in Isabella decides that the nationalization of the sugar estate, owned by an upper-class Englishman called Lord Stockwell, is the only way of solving the

economic problems and uniting people. Accordingly, Singh is sent to England as a man of politics, to carry out the negotiations since his electors press him to pursue such nationalization schemes. Actually, Singh knows that the plantation states covering the island are owned by absentee landlords living in London but these landlords are supported by a powerful post imperial management system against which the post colony in its new starts cannot do much except pleading for a change in its favor. Singh is thus caught between a newly liberated people with their impatience for self-empowerment and a colonial economy that cannot allow the free islanders full access to their valuable resources. Unfortunately, Singh fails to persuade the English masters to help his government and is also humiliated by one of the English ministers in the meeting. He recollects saying, "His manner indicated clearly that our game had gone on long enough and he had other things to do than to assist the public relations of colonial politicians...I said, "How can I take this message back to my people?". He said, "You can take back to your people any message you like. And that was the end" (MM 224). This situation stresses the idea that the ex-colonials are displaced subalterns in bondage to their English puppet masters, before and after independence.

Moreover, Lord Stockwell refuses to talk seriously about labor problems and sugar estate; instead, he treats Singh like a child and says that he has got nice hair. The English minister and lord Stockwell impose their superiority on Singh who is reduced to a child. They do not consider Singh a political figure or admit the importance of his task. The tragedy of Singh and his fellowmen lies in not recognizing their own powerlessness. Following decolonization, they behave as if they could act with the assurance of authority which they do not really possess. Thus, independence does not declare a new era or mark home rule and political freedom. Rather, it marks the beginning of corruption and violence that are the expected products of imperialism.

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It is notable that Singh focuses mostly on the weaknesses of the colonized people rather than on the British responsibilities for constructing and maintaining such a depressing colonial situation. When he fails in his negotiations, he is unable to break with the colonizer and this demonstrates his deep attachment to the Empire. Singh cannot utter any word of protest because he himself does not want this break or this rupture. His images of "desolate beaches and "rotting vegetation" signify the bareness and desolation of his life in the absence of the mother country and suggest his nostalgia for the Empire (MM 224). In fact, he has struggled to keep mimicry and drama alive for "its replacement was despair...[He] "had to pretend, to be other than [he] was, other than what a man of [his] background could be" (MM 57-134). Singh keeps identifying with England but this identification will give him only the colonizer's wish for his removal.

Singh is invited to Lord Stockwell's home. There, Lady Stella gives him a copy of the Oxford Nursery Rhyme Book, "a link with the past" where some lines convey a message to Singh implying that the world of England is not and will not be his. The following lines, indeed, carry a warning:

But when they are clean,  
and fit to be seen,  
she'd dress like a lady.

And dance on the green (MM 159)

The lines suggest that if the colonial subjects act properly and remain obedient to the empire, they can receive the masters' blessings. Lady Stella wants Singh to yield to her people's mastery, even after independence. After reading these lines, he, like a child, is caressed and made calm in the arms of Stella who stands for the mother country. Singh surrenders to Stella and receives the blessing. Singh's meeting with Lord Stockwell and Stella opens his eyes to the truth: no place for him in England, no home; he is not a real politician but a mere colonial subject.

Now, Singh is unsecured in a sea of chaos. Rather than dealing with the problems of his island, he sees that the corruption

and the wrongness of the world "can never be put right"(MM 207). Nonetheless, Singh tries to keep moving, he returns to Isabella and there his failure in the nationalization process provokes a racial war. Singh speaks of his false success on the island as a gift that is tainted that "sets us apart, distorts us" (MM 61). He means that all what remains of politics is the racial disturbance that will lead to his banishment. His failure echoes a profound emotional emptiness which he summarizes in his words, "chaos lies all within" (MM 192).

Towards the end of his career, Singh sees the final breakdown of their movement prophesized in an anonymous short story published in the local newspaper about miscegenation. The narrative focuses on blackness and whiteness excluding an in-between race or color denoting the non-presence of East Indian solidarity in Isabella. To him, this exteriorization implies his withdrawal from the social order of Isabella. Singh says "Of course, it was the intruders, those who stood between the mutual comprehension of master and slave, who were to suffer...Asiatics are the natural outsiders [among Isabella's other ethnic groups]"(MM 233). This alienation forces him to seek the available means of escape. Singh's reaction to public and personal events is emotional and physical withdrawal. In his memoirs, he emphasizes this tendency and explains to the reader saying, "understand that stillness, that withdrawal...It was the fear of the man who feels the veils coming down one by one, muffling his deepest responses...I prefer the freedom of my suburban hotel, the absence of responsibility. I like the feeling of impermanence"(MM 11-72). He withdraws since he is deprived of the rootedness and permanence "home" offers.

Singh simplifies his life saying, "the simple and the ordinary" away from the complex disturbing colonial life (MM 207). He detached himself from the Caribbean Isabella and England, the two landscapes of "sea and snow" where the mimic and mimicked are brought together. He gets satisfied with his life at the

suburb in his room "with its stationary objects...which aid the final aim of his life that is the continuous, quiet enjoyment of the passing of time"(MM 267). The order he has been after is now reduced to the order of his room. He says, "Order, sequence, regularity: it is there every time the electric metre clicks" (MM 244). The revealed pattern of the room is only a shadow of the real pattern he has vainly yearned for.

Singh has retreated into imaginative simplicity, leading a mechanical life, thinking himself free. Morris (1975) refers to D.H. Lawrence's idea in *Women in Love* that this sort of freedom that is the substitution of the mechanical principle for the organic unity of man is the first state of chaos. Morris explains that detaching from the conflicts of the island forcing himself into a mechanical order, implies Singh's inevitable drift into chaos (67).

Singh's political miscalculations have led to his complete estrangement from society. His political career is only an extension of the roles he has been playing. He detaches himself in London as a perpetual exile. He turns to an imaginary home of writing to release himself from the cycle of events in the Caribbean society. It is an attempt to compensate for his lack of wholeness and a "substitute for what it then pleased [him] to call life"(MM 244).

Yet, his memoirs repeat, confirm, and document post-colonial mimicry. Singh is the witness who merely describes rather than prescribes or finds solutions. Instead of trying to seek any possibility for transformation, Singh convinces himself that he becomes free from the pressures of life. This makes Mustafa (1995) claim that Caribbean post-colonial fiction originates in "self-deception not self-invention"(106). In a Nobel lecture (2001), Naipaul comments on *The Mimic Men* as a novel of "shame and fantasy" and about " how the powerless lie about themselves"(193). England, where he seeks his self and his subjectivity, denies him and accepts him as a subaltern. In this process of self-knowledge, he has never been concerned with the Caribbean dilemma or the search for solutions to their problems. Moreover, he is incapable of finding his way out of his own dilemma.

Dascalu (2007) indicates that Singh's act of writing is the act of a person who can never return "home" and who accepts that the self can never be fully achieved (151). In addition, Mustafa (1995) indicates that the novel begins with Singh's first stay in London and ends with his later exile there; this goes well with Singh's vision of his "active political life as though in parenthesis, bracketed by the moods of pessimism that dominate these two stages"(103). Singh says, "The period between my preparation for life and my withdrawal from it, that period in parenthesis"(MM 32). Mustafa sees that this idea of parenthesis indicates how he focuses on the psychological aspects of his social formation throwing aside his public life as ultimately subordinate. He is only concerned with his own sufferings and besieged by his sense of homelessness. Also, Bhabha (1994) comments that Singh's detachment in an unknown suburb in London implies that he accepts to remain marginalized with his sense of self horribly reduced (87). It is London that implants in him the seeds of dependence and subjection. It is London also which, in the end, witnesses his withdrawal and failure. London seals marginality and loss of home.

Singh is now aware of how and why he finds himself in the condition of the homeless and the displaced. Detached in London, he says,

I prepared myself for fresh action. It will be the action of a free man. What this action will be I cannot say. I used to think of journalism...a job with the UN...business again. Or I might spend the next ten years working on a history of the British Empire, I cannot say. Yet some fear of action remains. I do not wish to be re-engaged in that cycle from which I have freed myself. I fear to be continually washed up on this city (MM 250)

Though Naipaul focuses on the disastrous effects of colonialism and the homelessness that burden the Caribbeans, the possibility of personal or political transformations is implicitly raised through Singh's words "yet some fear of action remains"(MM 300). Dascalu (2007) claims that his words carry within themselves a question: is there the possibility of action in the world- as opposed to writing which is presented here as an absence of action- action that does not rely on a return to the restlessness or role- playing from which writing has freed the narrator?. In fact, the novel seems to suggest that there is such a possibility (150).

### **Findings**

In *The Mimic Men*, Naipaul refuses to follow a traditionally Western mode of writing. The novel is fragmented, fractured and disordered in its construction and in its connection with chronology or language. This implies the island's social and psychological disturbances and communicates the sense of despair and incompleteness that dominate his mood. Greenberg (2000) states that Naipaul succeeds in using a retrospective narrative as a way of marrying his "recollections, which represent the modernist aspect of the work, with a social, psychological and political anatomy of Isabellan life and politics that is rooted in realism, [Naipaul's artistic motive]"(123). White (1975) indicates that the island of Isabella in *The Mimic Men* is a representative country standing not just for Trinidad, Naipaul's Caribbean island, but a typical ex-colony whose history, as Singh says, the "history of our times". Singh generalizes about "territories like ours" where the "pattern of dependence to disorder has been repeated with no significant variation"(167).

In fact, Singh's colonial education and the hybridism that colonialism has created in the Caribbean have led to his final emptiness. His destructive mimicry emphasizes the imperial denial of colonial peoples' psychology making it a condition for affirming Western greatness. In the Nobel lecture (2001), Naipaul says that the novel is about "colonial men mimicking the conditions of manhood"(193). This word "manhood" leads us to mention that Said

(1979) refers to the imperial idea that the colonial subject is effeminate, thus deserving the guiding hand of a masculine Empire (126). Said adds that people in whom the ideas of Western superiority are inserted, are forced to copy the colonizer and thus dissolve their subjectivity (128). Singh is created by the West in a way that makes him wholly attached to the Empire. He says, "Yet how can we see, when we ourselves were part of the pattern" (MM 256).

Dascalu (2007) claims that Naipaul, through the act of writing, gives us space within imperial oppression to put up a resistance and to allow the suspension of this oppression because in her view, it will never truly cease (151). Hence, Mustafa (1995) wants a positive step, breakthrough, a new cultural life that ex-colonials can affirm and hope to see extended (106). Besides, Bhabha (1994) says that positive mimicry "does not nullify or prevent invention". In this sense, he sees that colonial mimicry should be motivated by "the desire for a reformed recognizable other"(86). Here, mimicry is powerful and productive; it aims at reshaping and promoting the self, not that mimicry which generates ridiculed subjects.

Gurr (1981) mentions Naipaul's words when he says, "You might go on endlessly writing creative novels, if you believed that the framework of an ordered society exists...But that no longer exists for most people...They live in a disordered and fast-changing world, and they need help in grasping it...controlling it. And that is how the writers will serve them"(86). Naipaul's attempt at truth is his approach in finding an outlet for the homeless colonials. West Indians, in turn, should be keen about reading and discovering these truths about themselves and the ex-colonizers so as to think seriously and properly of reassembling their cultural fragments and be one whole. They should adapt themselves to the places they have been obliged to live in independently of their place of origin and begin rebuilding the self and establishing a Caribbean identity.

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

As a horrible impact of colonialism, Naipaul depicts the loss of Caribbean identity epitomized in his protagonist who sees that they are doomed forever to be mimic men, pale reflectors of the dominant power stripped of their ability to bring about any significant change. Particularity and real selfhood are abolished and the Carribeans assert themselves only through mimicry. Without the master, they get paralyzed and at a loss.

Naipaul presents a multiracial society lacking homogeneity. Lack of political awareness makes West-Indians absurd insignificant characters; independence becomes a word but not real action. Post-colonial society fails to offer a sense of national unity and identity. In fact, the emergence, after independence, of the members of the local elite to the position of power, adds to a general sense of malaise and disturbance on the part of East Indians, like Singh, who were preparing to carve out a place for themselves within the colonial order but are faced with their exclusion and displacement.

Accordingly, Bhabha (1994) indicates that the Caribbeans, as victims of colonialism, do not bring about any positive step or present any model of resistance. Rather, they have no way but mimicry and subordination (87). In brief, Naipaul depicts the Caribbeans in this passive way to emphasize the dark picture colonialism has left behind.

At last, Naipaul wants to say that men should not withdraw, like Singh, into their rooms; nations should not withdraw into their corners of the world and discover in an isolation - similar to Singh's - the "order, sequence and regularity" they have lost on their hopeless voyages towards home and identity. Withdrawal means leading a goalless mechanical life. If one doesn't fight against this chaos, he will be a shadowy man, deadened, and static. Through his novel, Naipaul paves the way to his people's positivity, resistance and to their breakthroughs. He calls all the marginalized societies to wake-up and tear off the masks they have been forced to wear. The Caribbean's awareness of the shameful truth about themselves as

mimic men is the first step towards change. By understanding and coming to terms with the self, can they be able to deal with the outer chaos in the Caribbean and become responsible individuals with a clear sense of who they are and where to belong: "I'm a West Indian belonging to the Caribbean".

For further research, handling works of second-generation Caribbean writers like Joan Riley, Jamaica Kincaid, Caryl Phillips, Michelle Cliff, David Dabydeen, and Earl Lovelace is recommended. It helps tracing to what extent the younger generation has shifted and changed in thought. They are the leaders of a movement that carries a new wave of creativity in the 1980's doing without the idea of exile and detachment.

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