

Disruptions of Hybrid Culture in V.S. Naipaul's *Miguel Street*

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Abstract

Miguel Street is a novel by V.S. Naipaul, focusing on the struggle for identity in post-colonial Trinidad. The novel follows seventeen characters from diverse cultural backgrounds, grappling with colonialism's legacy and cultural displacement. The novel highlights the impact of education, which was a key tool for colonial power, and the blending of identities in colonised territories. The novel also explores the challenges of societal discord and the complexities of hybrid cultures, with female characters like Mrs. Morgan challenging patriarchal structures and demonstrating agency and resistance.

Keywords: Postcolonial, hybridity, identity, Struggle, culture.

Miguel Street stands as one of V.S. Naipaul's earliest literary works. It says the struggle for identity in a post-colonial context and comprising seventeen distinct stories centered around the lives of various characters residing on a single street in the Port of Spain, Trinidad. The characters in the novel come from diverse cultural backgrounds, including Afro-Trinidadian, Indo-Trinidadian, and mixed-race heritage. They grapple with the legacy of colonialism, which has left them with a sense of cultural displacement and uncertainty about their place in society. This predicament is exemplified in the character of Bogart, who seeks to assert his masculinity and authority in a society that marginalises black men.

Every character sets out on a journey to discover their true selves, which have been distorted,

impeded, or combined by the effects of prevailing colonising civilizations. This situation is especially common indigenous people of third world countries. While Naipaul subverts the roles and circumstances of male characters within society, the entire street works to promote the ideals of a patriarchal-dominated family life. Naipaul's goal in fostering value on *Miguel Street* is to present a perspective of family life affected by Western societies. The narrator of Naipaul's *Port of Spain Street*, is keeping the people together until the end of the novel. As explained by King, a lot of events centre on topics namely "the effects of poor, hopeless lives and the turbulent merging of cultures, lead to fantasy, brutality, violence, and corruption". Every chapter has a strong undertone of this theme. Despite having a strong likeness to Naipaul, the novel's narrator admits that the main character is "more in tune with the life of the street than I had been"(MS 9). This suggests that the novel's narrator lives in harmony with Miguel Street's complexities and obstacles, which result from the collision of multiple identities, imposed cultural norms, and countless outside interventions.

The colonial powers disrupted cultural values and accelerated the process of acculturation by translating the education system into the West's. This strategic approach established a knowledge-power relationship, which became pivotal in managing the colonial enterprise. Education, often equated with knowledge, wielded a suppressive function, as power aligned with those who possessed knowledge. Education emerged as an ideological mechanism imposed by colonial powers on third world countries. Education is providing a pretext for the displacement of indigenous peoples. It remained a powerful instrument for subjugation in social and cultural dimensions within colonized societies. "The year before his mother died, Elias sat for the Cambridge Senior School CertificateErrol said, Everything Elias write not remaining here, you know. Every word that boy write going to England"(13). Educational institutions form an integral part of imperial dissemination, as colonisers

recognised the significance of knowledge in accomplishing their objectives in colonised regions. The provision of suitable educational institutions is crucial in facilitating cultural transformation and the dissemination of Western ideals.

‘Hybridity’ as Ashcroft points out was “one of the most widely employed and most disputed terms in postcolonial theory, commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural form within the contact zone produced by colonization” (108) . The creation of a hybrid culture emerged as a seemingly secure pathway for the adaptation, integration, and eventual assimilation of the subjugated nation into the dominant metropolitan culture. “The boy (Elias) has passed the Cambridge Senior School Certificate. Hat whistled. The Cambridge Senior School Certificate? Titus Hoyt smiled. That’s right. He achieved a third-grade pass. His name will be published in tomorrow's papers” (MS 13). Elias seeks to improve his exam score in order to define himself in a culture that is undergoing cultural change. Mr. Cambridge represents a cultural identity that is colonising and works as a barrier for the colonised, preventing them from finding employment in third world nations.

This meditation by the great Guyanese writer Wilson Harris on the void of misgiving I in the textuality of colonial history reveals the cultural and historical dimension of that Third Space of enunciation which I have made the precondition for the articulation of cultural difference. He sees it as accompanying the ‘assimilation of contraries’ and creating that occult instability which presages powerful cultural changes. It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance. For a willingness to descent into that alien territory may reveal that the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity. (Bhabha 38)

In *Miguel Street*, the characters' embodiments of a hybrid cultural identity is resulting in the amalgamation of diverse cultures. In the chapter 'Man-Man', author imitates Man-man's English accent, saying, "I said automatically, 'Yes, I goes to school.' And I found that without intending it I had imitated Man-man's correct and very English accent..His accent. If you shut your eyes while he spoke, you would believe an Englishman—good-class Englishman who wasn't particular about who was talking to you" (MS 16). Language is crucial to culture. Naipaul's portrayal of colonised subjects' hybrid cultures is a reflection of the migration of individuals from third world countries. This blending of identities creates social tensions and disrupts harmonious relationships within families and communities. The author illustrates the challenges and complexities of this unbalanced amalgamation of cultural identities in colonised territories.

Naipaul portrays the disruptions caused by hybrid cultures in multicultural societies. The colonisers imposition of cultural elements leads to domestic violence and societal discord. The character Big Foot, a confrontational and aggressive character, is defeated and emotionally vulnerable. This portrayal highlights the reactions of individuals grappling with the imposed culture and its complexities. The characters, lacking societal heroes, resort to creating fantasies inspired by the film world, constructing makeshift cultural identities to maintain their place in the world.

Naipaul challenges the patriarchal structure in Third World societies by portraying female characters, particularly Mrs. Morgan, who takes a stand against her husband's infidelity. Mrs. Morgan's refusal to forgive her husband, Teresa Blake, defies traditional social expectations and cultural doctrines. "Then the front door flung open, we saw. Mrs Morgan was holding up Morgan by his waist. He was practically naked, and he looked so

thin, he was like a boy with an old man's face. He wasn't looking at us, but at Mrs. Morgan's face, and he was squirming in her grasp, trying to get away. But Mrs. Morgan was a strong woman." (32). Her actions demonstrate the agency and resistance displayed by female Characters, challenging the traditional norms of women's submission to patriarchal dominance. This portrayal highlights the power dynamics within the narrative.

The role of women in a contrasting mentality, challenging the patriarchal framework of colonized nations is developed in this novel. The author introduces Laura, a complex female character who defies societal gender stereotypes. Laura's story, "The Maternal Instinct", challenges the restrictions and taboos imposed by patriarchal understanding, contributing to a hybrid understanding of gender balance within society. Story serves as a means of deconstructing and questioning existing patriarchal norms. "I suppose Laura holds a world record. Laura had eight children. There is nothing surprising in that. The eight children had seven fathers" (40).

Thus, *Miguel Street* by Naipaul effectively portrays post-colonial Trinidad's challenges, focusing on the characters' identities shaped by British colonial rule and independence struggles. The book explores cultural hybridity and the evolving lifestyles of Trinidadians, despite criticism and a lack of certainty in capturing the larger underlying aspects.

Reference

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