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Post-Colonial Humour, Displacement, and the Illusion of Self in V.S. Naipaul's *Miguel Street*

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Abstract

Postcolonial literature frequently explores themes of displacement, fractured identities, and cultural alienation, often using humour as a means of critique and survival. V.S. Naipaul's *Miguel Street* exemplifies this narrative approach, depicting the lives of marginalized individuals in a post-colonial society grappling with the residual effects of colonialism. This study examines the intersection of humour, displacement, and the illusion of self in *Miguel Street*, highlighting how Naipaul employs satire, irony, and caricature to interrogate post-colonial identity formation. The study addresses a critical gap in post-colonial literary studies by exploring the complex relationship between humour and the psychological effects of displacement. While existing scholarship has primarily focused on the socio-political dimensions of *Miguel Street*, this study shifts the focus to the novel's portrayal of self-perception and existential alienation within a post-colonial framework. The theoretical foundation for this research is drawn from post-colonial theory, particularly the works of Homi Bhabha on hybridity and mimicry, Frantz Fanon's insights on colonial

subjectivity. Methodologically, this study employs a close textual analysis of *Miguel Street*, focusing on narrative structure, character development, and thematic representations of humour and identity. Comparative literary analysis is also employed to position Naipaul's work within broader post-colonial discourses. The findings reveal that humour in *Miguel Street* serves as both a coping mechanism and a subversive tool that challenges colonial and post-colonial power structures. The study further demonstrates that displacement in Naipaul's narrative extends beyond physical dislocation, encompassing psychological and existential estrangement. By bridging the gap between post-colonial identity studies, this study contributes to the growing discourse on the role of narrative techniques in post-colonial literature. It further reveals the necessity of re-examining humour as a fundamental narrative device that not only reflects but actively constructs post-colonial subjectivities. The study ultimately enriches scholarly understandings of identity, displacement, and the performative aspects of selfhood in post-colonial contexts.

Keywords: Post-colonial literature, humour, displacement, identity, V.S. Naipaul, *Miguel Street*, post-colonial theory

Introduction

Colonialism has long been a subject of intense debate among scholars and historians, each offering unique perspectives on its origins, scope, and impact. Many trace its roots to what is often called "the time of the Great Discoveries," when European powers expanded their reach across the globe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Ferro, 1). This era saw the establishment of colonies by European nations, but the idea of colonization itself is much older. The English word "colony" comes from the Latin verb colere, meaning "to cultivate or till the land" (Benjamin, xv), a telling reflection of how colonial endeavors often centered on exploiting land and resources. By the fourteenth century, the term "colony" was in use in English, signaling a growing awareness of territories beyond Europe's borders.

Although the word "colony" existed earlier, the concept of "colonialism" as an organized system of domination and control did not fully take shape until modern Western history. Barbara Bush explains that the Latin word colonia, meaning "a farm or settlement," was an early predecessor to the English "colony," but the structured system of colonial rule did not emerge until after 1850 (Bush, 46). By this time, colonialism had become an entrenched system, justified through racial and economic ideologies that persisted well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Colonialism, as we understand it today, is deeply intertwined with the rise of European powers that sought to expand their influence through conquest, settlement, and economic control. The Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism played a significant role, as European economies relied on the extraction of resources from colonies to sustain their industries. Understanding this historical shift is key to recognizing how colonialism has left lasting marks on global power structures, cultures, and identities. Today, scholars continue to examine its complex legacies, particularly in post-colonial studies, where debates over its definitions and continuing influence remain central.

One common point of discussion is the relationship between colonialism and imperialism, terms that are sometimes used interchangeably but have distinct meanings. Ania Loomba describes colonialism as the "conquest and control of other people's land and goods" (Loomba, 2-3) and argues that it has ancient roots. She distinguishes between pre-capitalist, pre-European colonialism and modern European colonialism, which developed alongside capitalism. Loomba further notes that while imperialism can exist without direct territorial control, colonialism typically involves immediate economic and political domination. Similarly, Levy and Young differentiate between the two, suggesting that colonialism is a practical means of asserting power over people and resources, whereas imperialism is driven by

ideology. Both concepts are closely tied to modernity, spanning from 1500 to 1950, a period when much of the world fell under European or settler-state control (Levy and Young, xi).

Marxist perspectives link colonialism and imperialism directly to capitalism. Karl Marx saw colonial expansion as a crucial step in the growth of capitalism, made possible by the discovery of new lands and resources (quoted in Young, 102). Horvath describes colonialism as a form of "intergroup domination" (50) where settlers from a colonial power establish permanent control over indigenous populations. For Marx, colonialism was essential for wealth accumulation, setting the stage for capitalism's rise, which Lenin later described as its “highest stage” (Lenin, 1). Scholar, such as Ferro argues that colonialism predates European expansion, citing the Crusades as an early example of territorial conquest driven by religious and economic motives.

Different European nations adopted varying models of colonialism, reflecting diverse motivations. Young points out that the Spanish and Portuguese, influenced by Islamic jihad tactics, emphasized conversion to Christianity alongside resource extraction. The British, in contrast, followed a less structured and more adaptable approach compared to the French. These differences underscore the various motivations behind colonial expansion, from economic gain and territorial control to religious fervor and even personal adventure. Notably, Spain’s expansionist drive was largely fueled by conquest and revenge, whereas Britain's colonization efforts, as reflected in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), were often portrayed as driven by exploration and economic opportunity.

Historian Muir identifies four main motives behind colonialism from the sixteenth to the twentieth century: nationalism, commerce, missionary work, and surplus population management. He argues that European nations saw colonization as a means of

gaining national prestige while also securing resources for their growing industries. The spread of Christianity served both as a justification and a tool for colonial rule, while colonies provided new opportunities for European settlers seeking economic and social advancement.

Colonialism took different forms throughout history, with settlement colonies and exploitation colonies being the most significant. By the late nineteenth century, the French referred to their colonies as "colonization" and "domination," while the English used terms like "dominion" and "dependencies" (Young, 17). Settlement colonies, such as those in the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, were established for long-term habitation and eventually gained independence. Exploitation colonies, like those in Africa and the West Indies, were primarily used for resource extraction to benefit the colonizing power.

The race for colonies saw fierce competition among European nations, with Spain and Portugal leading the way. France was also ahead of England in early colonial expansion, though Britain later caught up despite initial delays due to internal religious and political concerns (Egerton, 14). England's first major navigator, John Cabot, was financially backed by English merchants and King Henry VII in his attempt to find a westward route to India. Christianity played a central role in justifying these colonial efforts, reinforcing the idea that colonization was part of a divine mission. The spread of European culture, religion, laws, and institutions transformed not only European societies but also the entire global landscape (Levy and Young, xiii; Benjamin, xiii).

Historian Abernethy (xiv-xvi) categorizes Western colonization into five phases, from the "age of expansion" (1415-1775) to the period of decolonization (1940-1980). Each phase reflected different patterns of conquest, resistance, and adaptation. The two

World Wars played a crucial role in reshaping colonial territories, as European powers struggled to maintain control over their vast empires.

One of the most devastating impacts of colonialism was the erosion of indigenous cultures, particularly in Africa. Traditional governance structures were dismantled, and new systems of rule, often authoritarian, were imposed. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o argues that colonialism replaced Africa's democratic potentials with violent rule, leading to social and political instability. Kasongo notes that Westernization, often framed as modernization, was in reality a tool for economic and cultural domination. Language loss was another major consequence. David Crystal explains how colonialism led to the gradual extinction of indigenous languages, as colonized people increasingly adopted the language of their rulers. In many post-colonial societies, speaking the colonizer's language became a means of accessing power and opportunities. Over time, native languages faded, leaving lasting cultural voids.

Even after colonial rule ended, its effects lingered. Many post-colonial states continued to function within the structures left behind by their colonizers, from political institutions to economic dependencies. The displacement of millions, the forced adoption of foreign languages, and the struggle to reclaim cultural identities remain ongoing challenges. As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin point out, colonialism itself was a diasporic movement, spreading European influence far beyond its original borders, shaping the modern world in ways that continue to unfold today. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin assert that post-colonial literature reflects a crucial phase in the history of colonized societies, portraying striking and often unsettling depictions of their social, economic, and political conditions. Many of the writers of the third world countries were creative and successful in focusing on the individuals of these communities. Fictional characters are built on real characters that were influenced directly and deeply by the impacts of colonialism. They adopted ideologies and hybrid

cultures which were alien to their social and moral backgrounds. Their attitudes to the alien culture and practices of the colonizers are marked either by full identification of the new culture or rejecting it altogether. The stereotyped perfect images presented by the colonizers remain the prevailing and dominant images on whole ways of thinking of these communities.

The term postcolonialism was popularized by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in their influential work *The Empire Writes Back* (1989). They used it to describe the impact of colonial rule on literature, culture, and identity in formerly colonized societies. However, the concept itself has its roots in earlier discussions by scholars such as Edward Said, whose book *Orientalism* (1978) laid the foundation for postcolonial studies, and Frantz Fanon, who explored colonial oppression and decolonization in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961).

The challenges of national and ethnic identity, along with the struggle for continuity between the past and present, were shaped and reshaped following the collapse of colonial empires. This shifts between the margins and the center whether spatial, social, or metaphorical led to the reinterpretation of shared histories (Cristina-Georgiana, 90). Colonialism was not merely a system of political domination but also a means of cultural control, in which the colonised remained, tied to the structures imposed by the colonizer. The struggle of formerly colonized peoples to reclaim their cultural identity and redefine their social structures was a key aspect of post-independence transformation, often leading to conflicts with the dominant colonial culture. Many newly independent nations faced economic and cultural crises, with the postcolonial period marked by resistance to colonial legacies and the pursuit of identity as a confirmation of sovereignty. The migration of people from former colonies to the colonizer's countries led to the formation of hybrid societies, often resulting in cultural conflicts between migrants and native citizens, as well as

among different ethnic groups. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin explain that "all post-colonial societies are still subject in one way or another to overt or subtle forms of neo-colonial domination, and independence has not solved this problem" (1). A key consequence of colonial rule is ethnic conflict, particularly in Africa and Asia, where colonial policies created divisions among ethnic groups. Mamdani argues that colonial administrations deliberately fostered ethnic divisions, making post-independence struggles for political and social recognition inevitable.

In former British colonies, ethnic rivalries were intensified by colonial rule, which maintained traditional structures of mobilization rather than dismantling them. Horowitz observes that this allowed ethnic competition to persist long after independence. Similarly, in the Caribbean, the legacy of plantation economies continued to shape social structures. Hall notes that forced labor migration brought together people from diverse backgrounds, leading to a crisis of identity as many Caribbean communities found themselves disconnected from both their ancestral roots and the colonial powers that once governed them. Newly independent states struggled to define their cultural, political, and psychological identities outside the colonial framework. Bhabha discusses how former colonies attempted to reclaim their uniqueness while resisting the lingering influence of colonial rule. Many nations sought self-determination in ways that reflected their histories and experiences rather than the imposed structures of their former colonizers.

Robert Young describes post colonialism as a body of writing that challenges dominant perspectives on the relationship between Western and non-western societies. He explains that shifting these dominant views involves reinterpreting the world from the perspective of the marginalized, offering an alternative yet significant experience. Post colonialism, therefore, contests Western centric narratives and amplifies the voices of those on the

periphery. Young argues that postcolonialism asserts the equal rights of all people across the globe. However, the legacy of European colonization and the continued dominance of Western power, often termed Eurocentrism, have divided the world into two unequal parts: the West and the rest. He further asserts that postcolonialism "seeks to intervene, to force its alternative knowledge into the power structures of the West as well as the non-west. It seeks to change the way people think, the way they behave.... It threatens privilege and power. It refuses to acknowledge the superiority of Western cultures" (7). Following Young's perspective, postcolonial literature is inherently subversive, as it challenges established knowledge and power structures in both Western and non-western contexts. It not only critiques the dominance of European perspectives in knowledge production but also questions the complicity of non-western societies in accepting Western hegemony.

The colonial experience has left an enduring impact on post-colonial societies, shaping national identity, cultural consciousness, and socio-political structures. Literature from post-colonial writers often reflects these lingering effects, portraying the struggles of individuals as they navigate the remnants of colonial rule and forge new identities in changing societies. V.S. Naipaul's *Miguel Street* engages with these themes by presenting characters that grapple with displacement, cultural hybridity, and socio-economic inequalities that stem from colonial legacies. The novel explores the effects of colonial history and character's experiences emphasizing issues of cultural dislocation and identity crisis. The novel further presents the everyday lives of people in Trinidad under British colonial rule, depicting how colonial influence shapes their aspirations and interactions. This study aims to explore how colonialism and its aftermath influence identity formation and societal structures in post-colonial societies in the text.

Existing studies have examined post-colonial identity in literature, particularly in relation to displacement, migration, and the lasting

impact of colonial rule. Scholars such as Homi Bhabha (1994) have explored the concept of hybridity in post-colonial discourse, while Edward Said's (1978) *Orientalism* highlights how colonial narratives construct identities for the colonized. Research on *Miguel Street* has primarily focused on themes of colonial subjectivity and social satire. However, there is limited scholarly engagement with the ways in which humour functions as both a coping mechanism and a critique of post-colonial displacement and fractured identity in *Miguel Street*. Additionally, few studies have analyzed how Naipaul portrays the illusion of self-improvement within a post-colonial context, where characters struggle to escape their socio-economic conditions. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining how *Miguel Street* employs humour to navigate displacement and identity crises, ultimately revealing the persistent influence of colonial legacies on post-colonial self-perception.

The study aims to explore Post-Colonial Humor, Displacement, and the Illusion of Self in *Miguel Street* with the view to underscore how colonial and post-colonial legacies influence the characters' identities in the novels, and the role of displacement in shaping post-colonial identity in the novel. This study is valuable to academics and researchers as it enhances the existing body of knowledge on postcolonial literature. This study also provides a foundation for further studies on how literature reflects historical and socio-political realities in postcolonial societies. The study will employ a qualitative approach, analyzing the novel through close reading and thematic analysis. It will also draw on post-colonial theory to provide a theoretical framework for the analysis.

Post-Colonial Theory emerged after World War II and was largely shaped by the works of key scholars like Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Frantz Fanon. The theory explores the lasting impacts of colonization on the societies and cultures of colonized peoples, focusing on how colonial powers influenced the identity and social

structures of these communities. It also investigates how colonized people have responded to colonial rule and how they have tried to rebuild their identities after gaining independence. Edward Said, in his influential work *Orientalism* (1978), introduced the concept of how Western powers created biased and stereotypical portrayals of Eastern societies to justify their control over these regions. Said argued that Western literature and culture depicted the East as exotic, backward, and inferior, which served as a way to maintain colonial dominance. This concept is particularly important for this study as it helps to underscore how the colonial gaze shaped the identities of the colonized, which can be explored in the way V.S. Naipaul's *Miguel Street* presents the tension between colonizers and colonized people and how the characters navigate their complex identities.

Homi Bhabha, another key figure, developed the idea of hybridity, which refers to the blending of cultures that occurs when colonizers and colonized interact. Bhabha argued that post-colonial identities are not fixed but are constantly changing and evolving in response to these cultural encounters. He also introduced the concept of the Third Space, where new cultural identities emerge through the interaction of colonized and colonizer. This theory is essential for this study as it helps explain how the characters in both novels create hybrid identities, influenced by both their traditional cultures and the colonial forces that have shaped them. Bhabha's work allows us to analyze how these characters are caught between two worlds and how their identities are shaped by the collision of these different cultural forces.

Frantz Fanon's work, especially *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), focuses on the psychological effects of colonization. Fanon examined how colonized people often internalized the negative stereotypes imposed upon them by the colonizers, which led to feelings of inferiority and alienation. His work emphasizes the mental and emotional struggles of post-colonial subjects as they try

to reclaim their identity and assert their worth outside the framework imposed by colonial powers. This aspect of Post-Colonial Theory is particularly useful in understanding the psychological conflicts faced by the characters in *Miguel Street*, as they struggle to define themselves amidst the lingering effects of colonialism.

Post-Colonial Theory thus provides a critical lens for understanding how the characters in these novels wrestle with their identities in the aftermath of colonization. By applying Said's critique of Western representations, Bhabha's ideas of hybridity and the Third Space, and Fanon's exploration of the psychological trauma of colonization, this study will examine how the characters in *Miguel Street* negotiate their post-colonial identities. These theories help shed light on the ways in which colonialism continues to shape personal and national identities, and how individuals from post-colonial societies strive to reclaim and redefine themselves outside the shadow of their colonial pasts.

Review of *Miguel Street* by V.S. Naipaul

Miguel Street is a novel that has gained scholarly attention. Scholars have contemplated colonial and postcolonial discourse in relation to individual experiences and how these experiences shape the characters perceptions. Burnett examines *Miguel Street* as a semi-autobiographical work that reflects V.S. Naipaul's own experiences growing up in Trinidad. She argues that the novel's episodic structure mirrors the fragmented nature of colonial identity, as each chapter introduces a distinct character grappling with personal failures, societal limitations, and postcolonial disillusionment. Burnett underscores Naipaul's integration of humor and tragedy, portraying the residents of *Miguel Street* as simultaneously comical and deeply flawed. Furthermore, she explores the novel's critique of colonial masculinity, emphasizing how many male characters adopt exaggerated bravado to obscure their vulnerabilities.

Mustafa offers an analysis of colonial subjectivity in *Miguel Street*, contending that the novel functions as a microcosm of postcolonial Trinidad, where individuals struggle with poverty, shattered aspirations, and restricted opportunities. She examines Naipaul's use of a child narrator, arguing that this perspective reveals the contradictions of colonial society, where ambitions are frequently undermined by systemic oppression. Mustafa also highlights the significance of storytelling within the novel, noting that many characters fabricate idealized pasts to construct heroic self-narratives, only to have these illusions ultimately dismantled by reality. She concludes that Naipaul's strategic use of irony underscores the precariousness of identity under colonial rule.

Ray conducts a thematic analysis of *Miguel Street*, focusing on its critique of colonial mimicry and the construction of masculinity. He asserts that characters such as Bogart and B. Wordsworth embody distinct responses to colonial rule—one through performative machismo and the other through artistic escapism. Ray argues that Naipaul portrays masculinity as inherently performative, with many male figures assuming exaggerated personas to assert dominance within a society that grants them little substantive power. Moreover, he acknowledges that while female characters are less prominent, they frequently challenge patriarchal norms through their resilience and defiance of social expectations.

King examines Naipaul's use of humor and satire, suggesting that the novel's comedic elements function as coping mechanisms for its characters. He contends that humor allows the narrative to engage with serious issues such as poverty, familial instability, and unfulfilled aspirations without descending into overt bleakness. King also highlights Naipaul's linguistic dexterity, particularly in capturing the speech patterns and rhythms of Trinidadian English, which enhances the novel's authenticity. He argues that *Miguel Street* operates simultaneously as a celebration and a critique of its

setting, depicting a community bound together by shared struggles and resilience.

Cudjoe presents a more critical perspective on *Miguel Street*, asserting that Naipaul often reinforces rather than subverts colonial stereotypes of Trinidadian society. He argues that while the novel captures the humor and vibrancy of its characters, it ultimately portrays them as trapped in a cycle of failure, thereby perpetuating negative perceptions of the Caribbean. Cudjoe questions Naipaul's narrative positioning as an observer rather than a participant, suggesting that this external perspective creates a sense of detachment from the lived realities of the characters. Nonetheless, he acknowledges that the novel provides valuable insights into postcolonial identity and the psychological repercussions of colonial rule.

This study adopts a distinct approach by examining the role of language and narrative voice in shaping identity within *Miguel Street*. While existing scholarship has predominantly focused on themes of colonial mimicry, masculinity, and socioeconomic constraints, this analysis will explore how Naipaul's use of dialect, storytelling techniques, and the perspective of a young narrator influence the reader's perception of postcolonial identity. In particular, it will investigate how language functions both as a tool of resistance and a mechanism of confinement for the characters, offering a more nuanced understanding of their struggles for self-definition within a postcolonial framework

Post-Colonial Humour, Displacement, and the Illusion of Self in *Miguel Street*

V.S. Naipaul's *Miguel Street* explores the lingering effects of colonialism on identity, social structures, and aspirations in post-colonial Trinidad. The novel presents a collection of interconnected stories about the residents of Miguel Street, showing how British colonial rule shaped their self-perception,

economic struggles, and gender roles. Despite Trinidad's independence, the characters remain trapped in poverty, limited opportunities, and a yearning for escape, often believing that migration offers a better future. Through themes of displacement, masculinity, and social hierarchy, Naipaul examines how colonial legacies continue to define identity and aspirations in a changing society. However, Naipaul's use of humour in portraying these struggles contemplates the absurdity of colonial influence, providing a satirical lens through which post-colonial displacement and identity crises are examined.

Colonial Influence on Identity Formation

The colonial past of Trinidad created a rigid class system, limited opportunities, and unrealistic expectations of masculinity, leaving the characters struggling to define themselves in a post-colonial society. Through their experiences, Naipaul highlights the lasting impact of colonial legacies on identity formation. Colonial rule established a social hierarchy in Trinidad, where people were categorized based on race, wealth, and education. This structure is evident in *Miguel Street*, where characters like Mr. Hereira and Titus Hoyt see themselves as superior because of their perceived knowledge or wealth, while others like Bolo and Eddoes are trapped in lower social positions. The narrator observes this divide, saying, "In Miguel Street, you could always tell who had a little education and who did not. Those who did walked with their heads high, as though they were better than the rest of us" (27). This hierarchy, inherited from colonial rule, creates divisions within the community, where people are judged by their background rather than their abilities. The ironic portrayal of these characters highlights the illusion of self-worth derived from colonial values, exposing the humour in their exaggerated self-importance.

Masculinity in *Miguel Street* is also shaped by colonial expectations, where men are expected to be dominant, strong, and successful. Characters like Bogart, Popo, and Hat struggle with

these pressures. Bogart, for example, tries to present himself as a tough and mysterious figure, disappearing for long periods and returning with dramatic stories. The narrator describes him as "a man of few words, but everything about him made us think of adventure and danger" (12). This performance of masculinity is a reaction to colonial ideals that valued toughness in men. Popo, on the other hand, is ridiculed for being a carpenter who lets his wife support him. The narrator recalls, "Popo was a man-woman. He made the things around him look nice, but he was not a real man" (45). This shows how colonial notions of masculinity continue to influence how men in Trinidad define their roles in society. However, the humour in these portrayals, particularly in Popo's situation, undermines the seriousness of these colonial ideals, showing their fragility and absurdity.

Education, Economic Limitations, and the Illusion of Progress

Education and economic limitations also shape identity in *Miguel Street*. The colonial system left behind an education system that favoured the elite, making it difficult for working-class individuals to succeed. Characters like Titus Hoyt see education as a way to rise above their circumstances, though their knowledge is often shallow. He proudly claims, "I have a degree in letters. I know about Shakespeare and the Greek" (53), yet his understanding is superficial. Others, like the narrator, dream of leaving Trinidad for better opportunities abroad, believing that education is their only escape. The lack of proper schooling leaves many characters stuck in a cycle of poverty, unable to break free from their colonial past. Naipaul uses humour to highlight the futility of these pursuits, as many characters delude themselves into believing that European knowledge will elevate them, when in reality, it distances them from their own cultural identity.

Most obviously, the language in *Miguel Street* reflects the cultural hybridity caused by colonialism. The characters speak a mix of Trinidadian Creole and English, a legacy of British rule. While English is associated with education and status, Creole represents

their local identity. The narrator observes, "We speak English, but not the way the English do. Our words jump and dance, mixing with the sounds of the street" (67). This linguistic blend shows how colonial influence shaped communication, leaving the people of Miguel Street caught between two worlds. The playful and exaggerated use of language in the novel further emphasizes the irony of characters who attempt to sound educated but often fail to grasp the deeper meanings behind their words.

Migration and Displacement in Post-Colonial Identity

Many characters believe that leaving Trinidad will provide better opportunities, but few actually succeed in migrating. Those who managed to leave often realize that life abroad is not as fulfilling as they had imagined. Meanwhile, those who remained feel trapped in poverty and disillusionment, unable to break free from colonial legacies. The younger generation, in particular, struggles with defining their identity in a society that offers limited opportunities for growth. Bogart is one of the few who manage to leave, frequently disappearing from Miguel Street and returning after long periods. His travels give him an air of mystery, making him seem more significant than those who have never left.

The narrator remarks, "Bogart was the only man in Miguel Street who was not satisfied with being only himself" (23). This suggests that Bogart sees migration as a way to reinvent himself and escape the constraints of his environment. However, despite his travels, he always returns, indicating that migration does not necessarily provide the freedom he seeks. The humour in Bogart's exaggerated mystique exposes the illusion of self-reinvention, showing how the fantasy of escape often leads to disappointment.

This perhaps explains why characters like Edward leave for England, expecting a life of success, only to return disappointed. The narrator reflects on Edward's failed dreams: "He had gone to England to study, but he came back and found that things were just the same" (76). This highlights how migration does not always

lead to a better life. The reality of living abroad is often harsh, as migrants face racism, economic struggles, and the difficulty of adapting to a new culture. Yet, the way Naipaul presents these failures—through ironic, almost comical portrayals—exposes the contradiction between aspiration and reality, reinforcing the disillusionment of post-colonial displacement.

The Aftermath of Colonialism and the Satirical Lens

In *Miguel Street*, Naipaul captures the economic and social struggles faced by the Trinidadian people, remnants of the colonial era. The poverty and unemployment that persist in post-colonial Trinidad reflect the ongoing legacy of exploitation. Popo, the carpenter, is one of the characters who feel the weight of these struggles. Despite being skilled at his craft, he laments, "You work hard all your life, and what you get? Nothing" (101). His frustration illustrates how the structures built during colonialism continue to limit upward mobility, trapping individuals in a cycle of poverty that seems almost impossible to break.

However, Naipaul's use of humour turns these struggles into ironic commentaries. The characters' exaggerated aspirations, failed attempts at self-improvement, and misplaced confidence in colonial ideals create a satirical portrait of post-colonial Trinidad. The novel presents the illusion of self-determination, where the characters believe they can escape their circumstances but remain bound by colonial legacies. Through this lens, *Miguel Street* not only critiques the enduring effects of colonialism but also exposes the absurdity of the post-colonial condition, where humour becomes both a coping mechanism and a means of resistance.

Conclusion

This study on post-colonial humour, displacement, and the illusion of self in V.S. Naipaul's *Miguel Street* reveals the deep entanglement of colonial legacies with identity formation, cultural alienation, and the human condition. Through the lens of humour,

Naipaul dismantles the colonial and post-colonial subject's psychological and existential dilemmas, highlighting the absurdity, tragedy, and resilience embedded within displaced identities. The novel functions as both a satirical commentary and an exploration of the fractured self, wherein humour serves not merely as a coping mechanism but as a means of subversion and survival. Displacement, both physical and psychological, emerges as a defining feature of post-colonial identity. The characters in *Miguel Street* grapple with dislocation, negotiating their place within a society that bears the weight of colonial history and the uncertainty of post-independence realities. This study has demonstrated that Naipaul's depiction of displacement transcends geographical relocation; it encapsulates the internal exile experienced by individuals whose cultural and linguistic frameworks have been shaped by colonial subjugation.

Furthermore, the illusion of self in Naipaul's work emphasizes the instability of post-colonial identity, where the colonial subject exists in a liminal space, suspended between the inherited colonial past and an uncertain national future. Through irony, self-deception, and caricature, *Miguel Street* unveils the dissonance between aspiration and reality, exposing the constructed nature of identity within post-colonial societies. Naipaul's work challenges essentialist notions of selfhood, instead portraying identity as fragmented, performative, and constantly in flux. This research therefore contributes to post-colonial literary studies in its role of highlighting how humour functions as an instrument of critique, resistance, and introspection in *Miguel Street*. It accentuates the necessity of examining post-colonial literature not only through historical and sociopolitical lenses but also through the narrative techniques that reveal the complexities of identity formation. Future studies may further explore the role of humour in post-colonial literature across different linguistic and cultural contexts, offering an analysis of how displaced identities navigate the paradoxes of post-colonial existence. Naipaul's *Miguel Street*

serves as a microcosm of the post-colonial predicament, where laughter masks despair, displacement begets reinvention, and the illusion of self remains both a source of suffering and a tool for survival.

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