

Disorientation, Mimicry, and Progression: The Identity Evolution in *Miguel Street**

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Abstract: The intricacies of identity within *Miguel Street* have consistently captivated scholarly attention, with a predominant focus on identity loss. Remarkably scarce are analyses delving into the characters' mimicry and development. Employing Homi Bhabha's theories of mimicry, hybridity, and "unhomeliness", this paper articulates a dynamic evolutionary framework for the identity of the colonized in *Miguel Street*. It argues that the characters progress through and interact with three stages: spiritual unhomeliness, mechanical mimicry, and hybrid progression, thereby demonstrating how the postcolonial individuals evolve their strategies of identity construction. The analysis reveals Naipaul's emphasis on the colonial subjects' ongoing and active agency. They are not passive victims of fate; instead, they actively shape their dignity through cultural synthesis, along a non-linear but discernible trajectory of development.

Keywords: V.S Naipaul; *Miguel Street*; Homi Bhabha; Post-colonialism

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迷失、模仿與演進——《米格爾街》中被殖民身份的演變

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摘要：《米格爾街》中錯綜複雜的身份議題一直備受學界關注，但現有研究多聚焦於身份迷失現象，而對人物模仿行為與發展路徑的探討則顯不足。本文運用霍米·巴巴的模擬、混雜性及「非家幻覺」理論，構建了殖民語境下身份動態演進的分析框架，提出小說中的人物身份經歷並交織著三個核心階段：精神層面的無家可歸感、機械性模仿、混雜性演進。這一框架清晰呈現了後殖民個體在身份建構中策略的演變過程。研究表明，奈保爾著重刻畫了殖民者在身份發展中所展現的持續能動性。這些殖民者並未被動接受命運，而是沿著一條雖非線性卻可辨識的發展路徑，通過文化融合的方式主動塑造自身尊嚴。

關鍵詞： V.S.奈保爾、《米格爾街》、霍米·巴巴、後殖民主義

1. Introduction

Miguel Street, Naipaul's debut, comprises 17 ostensibly independent stories that collectively form a polyphonic portrait of colonial subjectivity. While each narrative centers on distinct characters, they converge thematically on the collective journey of Trinidad's lower class from cultural disorientation to hybrid resilience. This paper argues that these episodic stories collectively trace a dynamic evolutionary arc: spiritual unhomeliness, mechanical mimicry, and hybrid progression. In this arc, characters are not confined to rigid stages but intersect and influence one another. Even as distinct figures embody dominant traits of each phase, their trajectories overlap: early characters' spiritual disorientation lays ground for later mimicry, while failed mimicry paves the way for hybrid resilience. The first-person narrator, in particular, embodies all the three stages, his coming-of-age mirroring the collective shift from fragmentation to synthesis. Rather than imposing a linear narrative, this framework treats the novel's fragmented structure as a spectrum of colonial experiences, where each story contributes to a holistic understanding of identity evolution under imperialism. Grounded in Homi Bhabha's postcolonialism, encompassing theories such as mimicry, hybridity, and the third space, this paper tracks the loss, adaptation, and growth of the characters in *Miguel Street* from three stages, thus delving into Naipaul's contemplations on the "identity crisis and cultural belonging confusion" inherent in his multicultural experience.

The scholarly landscape surrounding V.S. Naipaul's literary corpus has long been dominated by inquiries into the complexities of postcolonial identity, with particular emphasis on themes of displacement and cultural fragmentation. While Naipaul's broader body of work, such as *A Bend in the River* and *The Mimic Men*, has been dissected through postcolonial, postmodern, and post-independence lenses, critical engagement with *Miguel Street* remains disproportionately skewed. In Western academia, the text is often treated as a mere precursor to Naipaul's later works, with Harish Trivedi¹ reducing it to a

¹ Trivedi, Harish, "Locating Naipaul: 'Not English, Not Indian, Not Trinidadian'," *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* 5.2 (2008): 19-32.

“fragmented mirror” of the author’s marginal identity and Louis Simpson² dismissing its characters as “caricatures of colonial disorientation.” This marginalization stands in stark contrast to Chinese scholarship, where *Miguel Street* is recognized as a microcosm of postcolonial trauma: Liu Shuang and Zhuang Jing³ situate its narrative within Fanon’s framework of “decolonization as psychological warfare,” while Chen Jianqi⁴ employs Marxist postcolonialism to link existential anxiety to colonial capital’s exploitation of labor. Yet across both hemispheres, scholarship shares a critical blind spot: the refusal to treat mimicry and character development as interconnected stages within a dynamic process of adaptation, instead confining them to footnotes of “cultural mimicry” or “colonial mimicry”.

A significant portion of scholarship on *Miguel Street* employs postcolonial theories to examine the novel’s exploration of identity crisis, yet remains trapped in a tripartite rut of static analysis. Postcolonial critiques have coalesced around three restrictive axes: identity disintegration, existential anxiety, and structural violence. Liu and Zhuang,⁵ for instance, frame the characters’ failed attempts at self-reinvention—B. Wordsworth’s poetic delusions, Hat’s performative masculinity—as evidence of “the tragedy of postcolonial identity reconstruction”, a narrative of irredeemable loss anchored in Fanon’s theory of cultural schizophrenia. Chen Jianqi⁶ deepens this pessimism by tracing material precarity to colonial economic hierarchies, arguing that poverty reduces identity formation to a “survivalist mimicry” devoid of agency. Even Yu Xiaoxi’s Bhabha-inspired analysis stumbles here: while she identifies mimicry in Bobby’s adoption of English literary tropes,⁷

² Simpson, Louis, “Disorder and Escape in the Fiction of V. S. Naipaul,” *The Hudson Review* 37.4 (1984): 571-77.

³ Liu Shuang, and Zhuang Jing, “Memory and Identity in Miguel Street,” *Journal of Ocean University of China* (Social Sciences Edition) 4 (2019): 124-128.

⁴ Chen Jianqi, “Miguel Street and the Survival Anxiety in Colonies,” *Journal of Southeast University* (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition) 14.05 (2012): 118-121+128.

⁵ Liu Shuang, and Zhuang Jing, “Memory and Identity in Miguel Street,” 124-128.

⁶ Chen Jianqi, “Miguel Street and the Survival Anxiety in Colonies,” 118-121+128.

⁷ Yu Xiaoxi, “An Interpretation of the Theme of Lost Identity in Miguel Street from a Postcolonial Perspective,” (MA thesis, Northeast Forestry University, 2016).

she treats it as a symptom of “cultural homelessness” rather than a strategic tool. Xu Weiwei⁸ introduces gendered violence as a colonial microcosm, but her focus on patriarchal domination as a static “colonial residue” overlooks how characters like Mrs. Bhago subvert power through ironic mimicry of colonial etiquette. Collectively, these studies portray colonial individuals as passive victims, echoing Zhang Deming’s critique of postcolonial discourse as overly invested in “trauma porn” at the expense of agency.⁹

This paper disrupts this stagnant narrative by introducing a developmental and evolutionary framework that reframes postcolonial identity as a three-stage dialectic: spiritual unhomeliness, mechanic mimicry, and advancement amid hybridity. Grounded in Bhabha’s theory of “performative mimicry” and “third-space hybridity”, this model challenges the field’s obsession with stasis by revealing mimicry’s evolutionary potential. While Liu and Chen treat characters’ spiritual rootlessness as a final state, the first stage of spiritual unhomeliness redefines this alienation as a prerequisite for mimicry rather than its ultimate conclusion. The second stage, mechanic mimicry, transcends Xu’s reduction of mimicry to “colonial aping” by demonstrating how superficial imitation (e.g., Eddie’s mimicry of British mannerisms) paradoxically creates gaps in colonial dominance, as seen in Man-man’s absurd reenactment of Christian martyrdom. The final stage, advancement amid hybridity, confronts Zhang Deming’s claim that hybridity equals “cultural chaos” by showcasing Bobby’s synthesis of Trinidadian oral traditions and Dickensian realism as a form of subaltern creativity.¹⁰ By tracing mimicry’s evolution from mechanical imitation to strategic subversion and its potential culmination in hybridity, the model repositions hybridity as a site of resilience rather than ruin, thus extending Bhabha’s theory to encompass the temporal dynamics of colonial resistance.

In synthesizing these threads, this review highlights a paradox at the heart of *Miguel*

⁸ Xu Weiwei, “On the Postcolonial Domestic Violence Depicted in Naipaul’s *Miguel Street*,” *Journal of Yangtze Normal University* 26.06 (2010): 166-170.

⁹ Zhang Deming, “A Post-modern and Post-colonial Interpretation of *Miguel Street*,” *Foreign Literature Studies* 01 (2002): 66-71+172.

¹⁰ Zhang Deming, “A Post-modern and Post-colonial Interpretation of *Miguel Street*,” 66-71+172.

Street scholarship: although the text teems with characters engaged in dynamic processes of emigration, performance, and reinvention, scholars consistently confine them within static narratives. This paper advances twofold contributions to postcolonial literary criticism while anchoring its core argument in the colonized subjects' quest for dignity through developmental stages. First, through its three-stage framework of spiritual unhomeliness, mechanic mimicry, and advancement amid hybridity, this study attempts to complement existing scholarship on identity loss by mapping a dynamic, albeit non-linear, trajectory of adaptation. Unlike studies that frame postcolonial existence as static tragedy, this model operationalizes Homi Bhabha's concepts of mimicry and hybridity as dynamic mechanisms of survival: spiritual unhomeliness represents the initial rupture under colonialism, mechanic mimicry serves as a tactical response to systemic domination, and advancement amid hybridity denotes the active negotiation of dignity through cultural synthesis.

The core argument posits that *Miguel Street* articulates the colonized's persistent pursuit of hope through these phases: Characters progress by learning from the dead ends of one stage to develop more complex tactics in the next. For example, Bobby's hybrid narrative voice—blending Trinidadian oral traditions with British literary forms—evolves from his earlier observations of mimicry's pitfalls and potentials, embodying Bhabha's "third space" not as a static outcome but as the result of a developmental process. By historicizing this evolution, the paper challenges the scholarly emphasis on postcolonial despair, demonstrating that dignity emerges gradually through the courageous, adaptive process of navigating hybridity's chaos. Ultimately, this study reframes Naipaul's text as a testament to the resilience of the subaltern spirit: through the lens of Bhabha's framework, the characters' struggles illustrate how mimicry and hybridity, though born of oppression, become tools for navigating colonial violence while preserving the aspiration for dignity.

2. Disorientation: The Spiritual Unhomeliness

Postcolonial theorists often describe the colonial subject as having a double

consciousness or double vision, which tends to produce an unstable sense of self that is exacerbated by the forced migration of colonialism. Homi Bhabha and others refer to this feeling of being caught between two cultures and belonging to neither one nor both as unhomeliness.¹¹ Homi Bhabha coins the term “unhomely” in *The Location of Culture* to describe the colonial subject’s experience of being “displaced from the myths of cultural authenticity” and thrust into a “permanent state of cultural liminality”.¹² This “unhomeliness” is not merely a spiritual condition but a cultural-political fracture induced by colonialism, as seen in *Miguel Street*’s residents, who are torn between indigenous traditions and imperial dominance. Morgan’s pyrotechnic delusions exemplify this: his futile quest for colonial recognition stems from a structural denial of cultural belonging, making Bhabha’s framework indispensable for decoding the novel’s critique of imperial authority.

The denizens in *Miguel Street* find themselves in a state of unhomeliness. The narrative unfolds within a neighborhood nestled in the heart of Port of Spain, the capital of Trinidad, where the inhabitants, predominantly comprised of individuals of African-black and Indian descent, inhabit the peripheries of Trinidadian society. Positioned at the nadir of the social hierarchy in relation to the upper echelons and residing culturally on the margins compared to imperialist dominance, they grapple with a profound sense of dislocation. The ostensible domiciles fail to instill any sense of belonging, as the severity of their cultural identity crisis has metamorphosed them into refugees of the psyche.

The theme of spiritual unhomeliness permeates early stories like “The Pyrotechnicist” (Morgan) and “Hat”, where characters embody the fracture of colonial displacement. Though appearing in separate narratives, their shared existential void creates a cumulative portrait of cultural rootlessness, laying the groundwork for the mimicry that follows. Take Morgan, the character in the story “The Pyrotechnicist”, for example. Perpetually engaged in experimental forays with diverse fireworks, he harbored aspirations to vend his creations to the esteemed King of England and the U.S. Congress. Regrettably, the destitution of

¹¹ Tyson, Lois, *Critical Theory Today*, (London: Routledge, 2006), 421.

¹² Bhabha, Homi, *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1995), 13.

Trinidad rendered his endeavors futile, as the denizens of *Miguel Street* remained fixated solely on rum, music, and aesthetically pleasing women. Witnessing the lamentable lack of interest in his pyrotechnic wonders, Morgan adopted a self-deprecating stance, amusing himself by unleashing the fireworks in the street, eliciting laughter from the passersby.

As the mockery towards Morgan gradually ceased, his eccentricity intensified, leading to a heightened frequency of domestic strife, marked by an increased severity in disciplining his own offspring. Morgan's buffoonery, at its core, reflected an innate yearning for love and recognition. Feeling estranged and unacknowledged by the world, he resorted to outlandish antics to evoke a semblance of concern from others. Trapped within a vacuous and solitary spiritual realm, Morgan resorted to arson upon being exposed for infidelity. Morgan's buffoonery is deeply intertwined with his spiritual unhomeliness, as evident in his repeated declarations: "My fireworks will make the King of England weep with joy".¹³ This delusion of colonial recognition underscores his profound alienation—he perceives his native Trinidad as a barren stage unworthy of his "genius", while simultaneously craving validation from imperial powers. When he ignites his fireworks in the street, laughing manically as onlookers jeer, the text notes: "His eyes glittered with a hope that was more like desperation".¹⁴ This paradoxical blend of grandiosity and despair embodies Bhabha's "unhomeliness"—a psyche fractured by colonial displacement, where even self-deprecation becomes a futile attempt to bridge the chasm between his fantasized identity and marginalized reality.

However, the local populace met his transgressions with apathy, failing to comprehend the wretched and desolate existence of Morgan. This poignant narrative underscores the existential emptiness and bewilderment pervasive among those under the yoke of colonial rule. Adrift in a sea of confusion regarding the true purpose of their existence, they manifest their internal disarray through comical behavior and indifferent expressions, perpetuating an enduring cycle of uncertainty and detachment. Morgan's cycle of destruction, however, is not merely repetitive; it prefigures the community's later strategies. His desperate pursuit

¹³ Naipaul, V.S., *Miguel Street*, (London: Penguin Books, 1971), 73.

¹⁴ Naipaul, V.S., *Miguel Street*, 105.

of colonial validation, for instance, plants seeds for Bogart's more performative mimicry: both seek recognition, but Morgan's chaos unwittingly exposes the futility of unidirectional emulation, prompting others to adapt. This transition reveals how spiritual unhomeliness, rather than a static state, catalyzes the need for new survival tactics. Yet Bhabha's theory of ambivalence reveals these actions as strategic repetitions: each pyrotechnic display, though futile, stages a symbolic challenge to colonial neglect, transforming personal chaos into a muted critique of imperial indifference.

Homi Bhabha's theory of ambivalence posits that individuals and cultures grapple with a state of ambiguity and paradox, negotiating through conflicting forces and ideas. Bhabha's concept of ambivalence is deployed here to underscore the colonized's dual position: simultaneously dominated by and resisting colonial discourse. This contradiction is not a flaw in the theory but a reflection of the colonial condition itself, as seen in Morgan's futile yet defiant pursuit of imperial recognition. Homi Bhabha tried to disclose the contradictions inherent in colonial discourse to highlight the colonizer's ambivalence concerning his position toward the colonized Other. The simple presence of the colonized Other within the textual structure serves as sufficient proof of the colonial text's ambivalence. This ambivalence undermines its assertion of absolute authority or indisputable authenticity.

Morgan's pyrotechnic experiments serve as a performative enactment of Bhabha's ambivalence, where his longing for colonial validation and the absurdity of his endeavor coalesce into a tragicomic critique of imperial authority. The fireworks, intended to dazzle Western powers, instead illuminate the vacuity of colonial dreams—a "bright chaos" that mirrors the fractured identities of Miguel Street's residents. When he resorts to arson, the act transcends mere desperation; it becomes a subversive "flame of refusal," inadvertently challenging the colonizer's narrative of civilizational superiority by exposing its inability to fulfill its promises. Morgan's paradox lies in the stark disparity between his yearning for recognition from colonial powers such as Britain and the United States and the harsh realities he faces. Plunged into profound disillusionment, he grapples with a sense of emptiness and isolation, further obscuring his cultural identity. Beyond Morgan, a myriad

of characters in the novel undergoes the intricate interplay and obscurity of cultural identities. Female characters like Laura embody a gendered form of unhomeliness, where maternal responsibilities intersect with cultural displacement. Struggling to raise children amidst poverty, Laura's "homelessness" is not merely spiritual but material and social, as she navigates the dual burdens of colonial neglect and patriarchal oppression. Her attempts to maintain domestic order amid chaos reflect a silent resilience, distinct from male characters' performative antics, yet equally rooted in the fracture of colonial belonging. Homi Bhabha's theories vividly manifest in the residents of *Miguel Street*, where they find themselves situated within the context of colonization while simultaneously navigating a multicultural milieu. As a result, the cultural identities of these individuals are complex, ambiguous, and ambivalent. This profound ambivalence creates the psychic void that the mimicry stage attempts, however imperfectly, to fill. Their collective experience of unhomeliness establishes the foundational condition from which the subsequent evolutionary stages, namely mimicry and hybridity, emerge as attempted resolutions.

3. Mimicry: The Mechanic Replication

Once losing their sense of identity, the colonized will be alienated from the edge of culture. Consequently, due to their sense of inferiority, a great number of these people endeavored to emulate their colonizers to the fullest extent in aspects such as clothing, language, conduct, and way of life. Postcolonial scholars term this phenomenon as mimicry. It reflects both the desire of colonized individuals to be accepted by the colonizing culture and the shame experienced by colonized individuals concerning their own culture, which they were programmed to see as inferior.¹⁵

Mimicry, a concept that has gained growing significance, was put forward by Homi Bhabha. As Bhabha argues, mimicry is "a strategy of subversion in compliance", where the colonized's "almost the same but not quite" imitation becomes a "menace to colonial

¹⁵ Tyson, Lois, *Critical Theory Today*, (Routledge: 2006), 422.

authority”.¹⁶ It depicts the ambiguous relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. In the context of colonization, the colonial discourse prompts the colonized individuals to “mimic” the colonizers. This imitation involves adopting the cultural customs, beliefs, social systems, and values of the colonizers. *Miguel Street* artfully captures the predicament of the colonized, who, in their endeavor to cloak an innate absence of identity, engage in a pursuit of “mimicry”. This futile undertaking leads them down a path where self-worth gradually dissipates amidst a succession of setbacks, thwarting their potential for personal growth.

Stories such as “Bogart” and “Until the Soldiers Come” (Edward) exemplify the mimicry phase, representing the community’s collective attempt to respond to the alienation diagnosed in the disorientation stage. Their parallel struggles, though narratively distinct, collectively critique the futility of mechanical mimicry, while simultaneously revealing its crucial, if unintended, role in the larger evolutionary process: it exposes colonial norms and creates discursive gaps that enable hybridity. In the story “Bogart”, Bogart spoke with a somewhat crooked mouth after his first return, and he used his crooked mouth to deliberately imitate the decadent youth of the West in the 1950s and 1960s. Beyond the mimicry of a crooked mouth, Bogart immerses himself in the replication of other deleterious habits characteristic of Western decadent youths. Bogart’s contorted mouth transcends mere physical peculiarity to become a “site of resistance” where colonial mimicry transforms into exaggerated parody. Through his exaggerated embodiment of Western decadence, manifested in his slouched posture and perpetual cigarette, he converts colonial ideals of “coolness” into a grotesque spectacle. This strategic exaggeration exploits mimicry’s inherent incompleteness to subvert authoritative norms. He drank and swore and gambled with the best, and he shouted rude remarks at girls walking by themselves in the street. As Homi Bhabha defines, mimicry is the colonized’s “desire to be almost the same, but not quite”,¹⁷ a paradox that Bogart embodies in his exaggerated Western affectations. Naipaul captures this portrayal with eloquence: “He bought a hat, and

¹⁶ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 86.

¹⁷ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 86.

pulled down the brim over his eyes. He became a regular sight, standing against the high concrete fence of his yard, hands in his pockets, one foot jammed against the wall, and an eternal cigarette in his mouth.”¹⁸ This description of Bogart’s posture—slouched, obscured, perpetually performative—materializes Bhabha’s claim that mimicry “caricatures the authority of the colonizer”,¹⁹ transforming colonial coolness into a grotesque, subversive spectacle. Bogart’s parody, moreover, contains the seeds of hybridity. His “almost the same but not quite” mimicry, being exaggerated and incomplete, unwittingly creates cracks in colonial authority. When later characters like Elias move beyond simple mimicry to repurpose colonial knowledge, they build on this foundation: mimicry’s failure teaches that survival requires a more complex strategy than emulation, paving the way for selective synthesis. Mimicry thus functions as a necessary, experimental phase in the progression towards hybrid agency. By caricaturing colonial ideals of “coolness” through his slouched posture and eternal cigarette, he unwittingly reveals their absurdity—a “menace” that Bhabha identifies as inherent in mimicry. This “mechanical” behavior, though rooted in insecurity, paradoxically undermines the colonizer’s claim to cultural superiority. Bogart’s mimicry, while cyclical in its decadence, resists closure through its exaggeration. His perpetual cigarette and slouched posture, though mimetic, become a stylized performance that parodies rather than replicates colonial coolness, creating a loop of subversion that undermines the colonizer’s authoritative aura.

In “Until the Soldiers Come”, Edward adopts an Americanized guise, both in attire and speech, as a means of shaping his own identity. “Edward surrendered completely to the Americans. He began wearing clothes in the American style, he began chewing gum, and he tried to talk with an American accent.”²⁰ When hosting American acquaintances at his residence, Edward feigned ignorance of anyone on *Miguel Street*, exhibiting a comical mimicry by folding his arms in the American manner. Edward’s American mimicry, conversely, reveals the classed limits of emulation: his ill-fitting suits and forced accent

¹⁸ Naipaul, *Miguel Street*, 42.

¹⁹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 87.

²⁰ Naipaul, V.S. *Miguel Street*, 142.

betray a desperate climb up the colonial hierarchy, only to remain trapped in a ambiguous space of “almost-whiteness”, a paradox Bhabha identifies as mimicry’s “menace”. In his matrimonial pursuits, Edward deliberately chose a spouse with white skin. When discussing his romantic partner with friends, he would hitch up his snug American-style trousers and adopt a visage reminiscent of an American film actor. Evidently, his sense of self is intricately woven with a fervor for American cultural elements. However, the acquisition of this pride does not ensure the establishment of a robust self-identity. Edward’s tragedy unfolds as his endeavor to forge a definitive identity within the grandeur of the colonizer’s empire. Nevertheless, it becomes evident that imitators remain just perpetual. Barred from integration into mainstream society, they persist as perennial followers, destined to occupy the periphery of societal dynamics. Characters like Edward become stuck in this phase, unable to progress, underscoring that mimicry alone is insufficient for sustained dignity.

There are many more such examples in *Miguel Street*. For instance, In “The Engineer”, Bako’s obsession with constructing miniature trains from sugarcane stems parodies colonial modernity. His “toys” mimic British railway technology while reducing it to a fragile plaything, embodying Bhabha’s assertion that mimicry “caricatures the authority of the colonizer,” exposing its hollow core. Man-man’s mimicry of Christian martyrdom in “The Preacher”—parading through the street with a cross—echoes Bogart’s Western affectations, both exposing the performative nature of colonial power. While Man-man’s parody critiques religious imperialism, Bogart’s mimicry mocks secular colonial codes, together revealing mimicry as a universal language of subversion. Similarly, Man-man’s mimicry of Christian martyrdom in “The Preacher”, parading with a makeshift cross, mocks religious imperialism. His mechanical reenactment, while comical, exposes the performative nature of colonial power, aligning with Bhabha’s assertion that mimicry “caricatures the authority of the colonizer”.²¹ Besides, Mrs. Hereira’s adoption of British tea rituals exemplifies gendered mimicry: by hosting “colonial-style” tea parties in her

²¹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 87.

modest home, she performs an exaggerated version of imperial gentility, a strategy absent in male characters' mimicry of Western decadence. This feminine mimicry, while aimed at social mobility, inadvertently exposes the absurdity of colonial class aspirations, as her limited resources betray the hollow pretensions of imperial culture—a “menace” that aligns with Bhabha's theory but manifests through gendered performativity. Bhabha's concept of mimicry, while not explicitly gendered, gains nuance through female characters like Mrs. Hereira. Her performance of colonial etiquette operates within the gendered expectations of “respectable womanhood”, transforming mimicry into a double-edged strategy: a bid for acceptance and a subversive parody of imperial femininity, as her imperfect imitation highlights the unattainability of colonial norms for marginalized women.

Nevertheless, for Homi Bhabha, mimicry is the process by which the colonized subject is reproduced as something nearly identical to the colonizer, yet always slightly different. When colonizers mimic the culture, behavior, manners, and values of the colonizers, this behavior involves both mockery and a particular kind of “menace”. As a result, Bhabha's dialectic of “resemblance and menace” illuminates the tension within mechanic mimicry. Characters like Edward, while initially trapped in passive emulation, inadvertently create “gaps” in colonial discourse through the incompleteness of their mimicry. Edward's forced American accent and ill-fitting suits, rather than achieving assimilation, highlight the unbridgeable divide between colonial ideals and native reality. This “failure to mimic perfectly” becomes a form of resistance, as it lays bare the colonizer's claim to universal validity as a myth. Mimicry exposes the constraints on the authority of colonial discourse, almost as though colonial authority inevitably embodies the seeds of its own destruction. In this process, the critical awareness that enables the subsequent stage of creative hybridity was born. Mimicry, therefore, is not an end point, but a crucial developmental phase that generates the conditions for progression.

4. Progression: Advancement Amidst Hybridity

The loss of identity compels the colonized to embark on a collective emulation, yet

this mimicry is not a mere replication; it unfolds as a nuanced process rife with intercultural collisions. Within this intricate process, there emerges a confluence of indigenous awakening and personal growth, propelling the hybrid of native and colonial cultures into a dynamic, ever-evolving synthesis, termed hybridity.

It does not consist of a stalemate between two warring cultures but is rather a productive, exciting, positive force in a shrinking world that is itself becoming more and more culturally hybrid. This view encourages ex-colonials to embrace the multiple and often conflicting aspects of the blended culture that is theirs and that is an indelible fact of history. Within this hybridity, the colonized have discerned their progression, ceaselessly endeavoring towards its realization. While hybridity in *Miguel Street* embodies growth, it is crucial to acknowledge Bhabha's emphasis on its inherently ambivalent nature. In *The Location of Culture*, he defines hybridity as a "third space" where cultural differences collide and coexist in a state of productive tension, never resolving into seamless unity. This framework rejects linear notions of "advancement", instead framing hybridity as a site of perpetual negotiation—both a source of creativity and a reminder of colonial violence.

The final phase of hybrid progression emerges in later stories like "His Chosen Calling" (Elias) and the first-person narrator's coming-of-age arc, which span multiple chapters. This stage represents an evolved response, born from the critical lessons learned during both the despair of unhomeliness and the fraught experiments of mimicry. Here, the novel's fragmentary structure reflects the synthetic, adaptive nature of hybrid identity achieved through this developmental process. In *Miguel Street*, Characters' journeys suffer confusion, and traverse the disoriented realm of mimicry, marked by repeated failures. Despite this, they persistently forge ahead, ultimately realizing their existential worth. A compelling illustration is found in the character, Elias, in "His Chosen Calling". Nurtured amidst the tumultuous echoes of paternal violence, Elias's aspirations diverge from the conventional allure of a blue-carriage driver, a vocation esteemed on Miguel Street since those people only worked in the early morning.

Disregarding the allure of the cleaning carriage driver's role, Elias harbors loftier ambitions, envisioning himself as a physician—a manifestation of his innate understanding

of self-worth. Diligently toiling towards this goal, he undergoes six years of arduous examinations, yet fate conspires against his aspirations, resulting in ultimate failure. Despite this relentless struggle and the inherent setbacks, Elias perseveres, unraveling a narrative that transcends the mere pursuit of personal value to encapsulate a profound journey of spiritual growth. Instead of succumbing to the despair of unhomeliness or the futility of pure mimicry, Elias adapts. Elias' failed medical pursuit evolves into a hybrid form of agency: repurposing colonial textbooks to invent rudimentary medical tools from scrap metal, he transforms "failure" into a subaltern science, blending Western knowledge with Trinidadian resourcefulness—an embodiment of Bhabha's third space. Elias' hybrid science is not an isolated innovation but a strategic response to prior failures. Unlike Edward, who abandons mimicry in despair, Elias learns from Bogart's parodic mimicry: he retains colonial knowledge (textbooks) but refashions it through Trinidadian resourcefulness (scrap metal). This progression—from mindless emulation (Edward) to critical adaptation (Elias)—demonstrates how hybridity emerges from mimicry, not despite it. Elias' hybrid science, while innovative, remains marked by colonial hierarchies. His reliance on discarded colonial textbooks underscores the unequal power dynamics underpinning hybridity: he must repurpose the colonizer's knowledge, never fully escaping its shadow. This tension reflects Bhabha's insight that hybridity is both "a strategy of resistance and a compromise with domination".²²

The most pronounced and sustained illustration of the three-stage evolution unfolds within the first-person narrator "I". His chronological maturation provides the structural backbone for tracing the developmental trajectory. His journey explicitly navigates the sequence: experiencing disorientation, observing mimicry, and ultimately synthesizing hybrid identity. The deliberate organization of the 17 short stories exhibits a discernible progression aligned with the chronological maturation of the first-person narrator. As the narrative complexity deepens, the first-person narrator matures from an unlettered child to an adolescent poised at the threshold of collegiate pursuits. This metamorphosis extends

²² Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 10.

beyond mere temporal advancement, permeating the facets of character and values. Possessing an inherent naivety, sensitivity, and intellectual acumen surpassing peers, the first-person narrator, akin to many protagonists in coming-of-age tales, grapples with the void left by the early departure of his father. The narrative underscores the necessity for other characters to assume the role of guiding mentors and fulfill the paternal void for the first-person narrator's growth. For the narrator, the mentorship of B. Wordsworth (oral traditions) and Hoyt (colonial rationality) fosters a "hybrid epistemology": his diary entries juxtapose poetic verses with arithmetic problems, culminating in the insight that "rhythm exists in both algebra and calypso", a synthesis that transcends colonial binaries. The first-person narrator's "hybrid epistemology" of poetry and algebra reflects the inherent tension of this evolved stage, a productive ambivalence marking the distance traveled from initial disorientation or mechanical copying. His diary entries, while symbolizing synthesis, also betray anxiety: the juxtaposition of calypso rhythms and colonial arithmetic reveals a subconscious struggle to reconcile indigenous intuition with colonial rationality. Bhabha's concept of "ambivalence" here illuminates the first-person narrator's dual allegiance, a hybridity that fosters growth yet perpetuates fragmentation.

Two pivotal characters exert a profound influence on the first-person narrator's transformative journey within the text. Foremost among them is the poet B. Wordsworth, whose lyrical prowess sparks the first-person narrator's poetic inclinations. B. Wordsworth leads the first-person narrator to perceive the mundane with a poetic lens, catalyzing a rediscovery of life's beauty and fostering an appreciation for the sublime in poetry. The second influential figure is the headmaster, Hoyt, whose pedagogical shortcomings prompt the first-person narrator to engage in a more rational contemplation of altering his destiny. Hoyt, grappling with educational challenges, unveils to the narrator the veracity of the Trinidadian educational landscape. Concurrently, Hoyt's emphasis on science and rationality serves as a guiding beacon, enlightening the first-person narrator's reasoning faculties. For instance, Hoyt advocates scientific methodologies for healing injuries, a revelation that resonates profoundly with the narrator, inspiring him to transcend the monotonous and pallid existence on *Miguel Street*.

These two figures epitomize the intrinsic growing force within the hybridity of the colonized and colonial culture. Their contrasting influences on the first-person narrator are integral to his developmental progression, providing the disparate materials he later synthesizes. Amidst this discordant cultural milieu, indigenous cultures undergo a gradual maturation, while colonized individuals tenaciously strive to move beyond simple emulation or despair towards actively forging new configurations of value and identity. Despite the arduous struggle for survival on *Miguel Street*, certain individuals manage to unearth their dignity, assert their unique personalities, and ascertain their inherent worth. Within the pursuit of their aspirations, a profound realization of selfhood and life emerges, fostering both material and spiritual growth.

5. Conclusion

This paper traces how the colonized characters in *Miguel Street* evolve and navigate a developmental trajectory from confusion to self-discovery through three key and interconnected stages. First, their spiritual disorientation—exemplified by Morgan’s desperate fireworks displays—creates the foundational crisis. Second, their mimicry of colonizers, like Bogart’s exaggerated Western swagger or Edward’s forced American accent, emerges as a widespread, though often flawed, tactical response to this crisis, serving a critical evolutionary function by exposing colonial norms and creating discursive space. Finally, hybridity represents an evolved strategy of active synthesis, learned from the limitations of the previous stages, through which dignity is tentatively reclaimed. Elias, despite failing colonial exams, invents his own medical tools, while the first-person narrator explicitly journeys through all the three stages, combining poetic vision with rational thought, creating a unique identity.

While Naipaul’s portrayal of colonial society is undeniably tinged with pessimism, evident in Morgan’s tragic end or Edward’s futile mimicry, this study argues that resilience lies in the process of resistance rather than its outcome. Elias’ failed medical exams and the first-person narrator’s tentative departure from Miguel Street embody Bhabha’s notion of

hybridity as a “perpetual negotiation”, where dignity emerges not from overcoming oppression, but from the courage to construct meaning amid its fragments. Naipaul’s realism acknowledges limited opportunities, yet his characters’ stubborn persistence, like B. Wordsworth’s poetic defiance, testifies to a subaltern agency that transcends despair.

The core argument is clear: colonial oppression compels a gradual evolution in resistance: from Morgan’s desperate unhomeliness (a cry for recognition), to Bogart’s mimicry (a subversive parody), to Elias’ hybridity (a creative synthesis). This trajectory reveals that dignity lies not in static “success” but in adaptive resilience, where each stage informs the next and turns fragmentation into a catalyst for reinvention. Their mimicry mocks colonial authority, and their hybridity transforms cultural conflict into growth. This study challenges the idea of postcolonial identity as static tragedy, proving that dignity emerges not from rejecting or fully embracing colonialism, but from rewriting one’s story within its contradictions. *Miguel Street* ultimately celebrates resilience: the colonized, though wounded, never stop seeking meaning and pride in a fractured world.

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