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VS NAIPAUL'S *THE MIMIC MEN*; DEGENERATION OF VALUES

V. S. NAIPAUL'UN *TAKLİTÇİLER*'İNDE DEĞER YOZLAŞMASI

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p> Received: 05.07.2021</p> <p> Accepted: 12.10.2021</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords: <i>Colonization,</i> <i>Post-Colonization,</i> <i>Degeneration.</i></p> <hr/> <p>Research Article</p>	<p>Colonization has been an exploitative trend that has dominated some parts of the world for several centuries. It is common for the colonizer state to impose economic and political pressure on the colonized state, as well as pressure on the religion, language, and culture of the society in question. V. S. Naipaul is a Trinidadian writer whose country has been colonized for centuries. In this framework, his works frequently mirror the colonial and postcolonial periods. <i>The Mimic Men</i> is an important work in terms of witnessing both the colonial and postcolonial periods. The novel is set on the imaginary island of Isabella and it portrays Ralph Singh's semi-autobiographical life. With Singh's grandparents being indentured servants who migrated to Isabella from India and the island being in the Caribbean, it has a lot in common with Naipaul's actual life. The societies that have been colonized for a long time and detached from their traditional values have disintegrated from their religion, language, and culture and have failed to build a healthy character. This study aims to focus on the value corruption caused by the colonial process in the novel.</p>

MAKALE BİLGİSİ	ÖZET
<p> Geliş: 05.07.2021</p> <p> Kabul: 12.10.2021</p> <hr/> <p>Anahtar Kelimeler: <i>Sömürgecilik,</i> <i>Sömürgecilik Sonrası,</i> <i>Yozlaşma.</i></p> <hr/> <p>Araştırma Makalesi</p>	<p>Kolonizasyon birkaç yüzyıl boyunca dünyanın çeşitli bölgelerine hükmeden sömürüye dayalı bir hareket olmuştur. Bu sömürgecilik sürecinde egemen devlet sömürülen devleti ekonomik ve siyasal olarak baskı altına almasının yanı sıra yerine göre söz konusu toplumun din, dil ve kültürüne de baskı uygulama yoluna gitmiştir. V. S. Naipaul da yüzyıllarca sömürülen bir ada ülkesi olan Trinidad'da doğmuş bir yazardır. Bu çerçevede romanlarında sıklıkla kolonyal ve post kolonyal dönemin yansımaları görülmektedir. <i>Taklitçiler</i> hem kolonyal hem de post kolonyal döneme şahitlik etmesi açısından önemli bir yapıttır. Hikâyenin kahramanı Ralph Singh'in yarı otobiyografik hayatını aktaran roman kurgusal bir ada olan Isabella'da geçmektedir. Singh'in atalarının Hindistan'dan Isabella'ya göç eden sözleşmeli işçilerden olması ve adanın Karayipler'de olması, Naipaul'un kendi yaşantısında kesitler sunması noktasından ortak yönler taşımaktadır. Uzun bir süre sömürge altında kalan toplumların din, dil ve kültüründe yozlaşmalar olduğu gibi, geleneksel değerlerinden kopuk yaşamının sonucunda da sağlıklı bir karakter geliştirememeleri de söz konusu olmaktadır. Bu çalışma romanda sömürge sürecinin neden olduğu değer yozlaşmasına odaklanmayı amaçlamaktadır.</p>

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I. Introduction

Occupation of someone else's land for one's personal advantage is a human attitude as old as human history, and it is directly proportional to human covetousness. Today, the term "colonization" refers to the period from the 16th to the 20th century. It is a common knowledge that the majority of the world's significant colonial countries during this period were Western European countries. Among these countries, the United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Portugal might be recognized as having a wide range of colonial activity (Nowell, 2020). The core principle of colonialism is to exploit the settled country's richness in every possible way. In order to secure the hegemony in colonized territories, a variety of coercive tactics are used against the local population. There have been interventions in the indigenous peoples' language, religion, and culture during the colonization process. Such non-humanitarian approaches have had a significant impact, mostly negative, on indigenous peoples.

Colonized societies gained their independence one by one as a result of worldwide freedom movements, thus the colonization movement has come to an end. In most of the colonies, this was not done voluntarily, but rather as a result of the circumstances. Even in the post-colonial period, the duration of colonization and the intensity of the practices in the country where it was practiced left indelible effects on the exploited society. The colonizer has a superior and favourable position in this bipolar system, whereas the exploited have a contemptuous and unfavourable position. It is possible to follow these traces of the colonization process in post-colonial literature such as Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*.

V. S. Naipaul is a well-known author who is acknowledged as a member of the post-colonial literati. In terms of his birthplace, Naipaul is strongly tied with colonization. It is because Trinidad's colonization traces back to the 16th century. With the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1498, Trinidad's fortunes altered drastically. The slave trade was also carried out on the island of Trinidad, which was colonized by Spain and subsequently Britain for many years. After the abolition of slavery, indentured workers were brought in from India in order to ensure the continuity of the workforce. Naipaul's grandparents were also members of this community that were brought from India to work in Trinidad. Witnessing both the slave trade and indentured labour migration, Trinidad has dealt with many different cultures. Trinidad and Tobago was liberated in 1962. It is reasonable to assume that he witnessed the colonialism process up until Trinidad's independence. In this perspective, Naipaul is a writer who was born in the heart of an extensively colonized region. Hence, the majority of his writings are about the colonial and post-colonial realms.

II. A Semi-Autobiographical Novel

While one of the locations in the novel *The Mimic Men* is the fictional island Isabella, it shares certain similarities with Trinidad. Isabella, a fictional Caribbean island, is a place where the slave trade existed for a time, much as there were indentured labourers from India. Similar to Isabella Island, Trinidad is a Caribbean Island and has witnessed both the slave trade and indentured workers. Another feature in the story that connects to Naipaul's real life is that the protagonist of the story, Ralph Singh, has ancestors who were also indentured workers who migrated from India. Another point that Ralph and Naipaul have in common is that they both

complete their higher education in England. When these elements are considered, it is clear that Naipaul is creating a novel based on geography, social structure, and events that he is familiar with.

After abolition of slavery, the need for indentured servants arose to provide the necessary labour force. Due to the famine in India in the late 18th century, many Indians migrated to countries in the Caribbean to work as indentured servants (French 2008: 9-10). The indentured servant was, in a sense, legalized slavery. In this milieu, Naipaul's grandparents were also among the labourers who came to Trinidad to seek a future. Living in a country far from their own culture has had certain implications. The Indian-origin family gradually diverged away from Indian traditions and began to forget Hindi (French 2008: 55). Naipaul was born in 1932 in a sugar-plantation town of Trinidad. His father was a journalist and his approach to books and writers reinforced Naipaul's interest in writing. He continued his higher education in Oxford with an overseas scholarship he earned while studying in Trinidad. After completing his education at Oxford, he struggled with financial difficulties until he proved himself as a writer. Naipaul, who has produced many works as a prolific writer, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2001.

III. An Outlook to *The Mimic Men*

Naipaul's novel *The Mimic Men*, published in 1967, was written in a colonial and postcolonial framework. Naipaul's style shifts dramatically in this novel compared to his earlier works. "*The novel is written in a severe style, quite unlike the subtle comedy of voices heard in the earlier books*" (Pritchard 2008: 436). In *The Mimic Men*, there is a shift from novels with a humorous tone to more serious writing. Furthermore, it has been suggested that this novel is overly pessimistic (Hearne 1977: 31). The story takes place partly in Isabella, a fictional Caribbean island, and partly in England, the country that colonized Isabella. The story is narrated by a middle-aged person, Ralph Singh, who is in exile and writing his memoirs. The reason for his exile is the political polarization in his country. Indo-Caribbean and Afro-Caribbean people are residents of Isabella. After colonization period there is the nationalization process which works against the Indian-origin population (Phukan 2008: 137). As a result, the protagonist, an Indo-Caribbean politician, was forced into exile. The novel, which is semi-autobiographical in nature, is essentially a novel about the transition from colonialism to post-colonialism.

IV. The Erosion of Values

The colonial authority uses a variety of policies and strategies to retain its hegemony over the society it exploits. One of these policies is to instil the belief that the oppressed society requires colonial power and cannot exist without it. In order to accomplish this, the exploited society's members are instilled with a sense of inferiority and backwardness. It is necessary to inhibit the growth of feelings such as individual self-confidence and leadership in order to obtain this. Another approach used is to humiliate society in order to repress it. In order to avoid a movement against hegemony, national identity and national feelings must be annihilated. According to Angrosino being a "colonial" indicates a loss of psychological identity (1975: 2). Besides, if the colonized society is made up of various ethnic groups, creating slander among

them will weaken social unity. The hegemony's continuation is also dependent on the corruption of language, culture, religion, and morality. Sanctions such as limitation of education and restrictions on economic freedom can also be used to keep society under pressure. Almost all of the colonized peoples' values can be eroded at varying degrees as a result of all of these actions. In this context, the goal of this study is to examine the impact of the colonial process in an island country.

The Mimic Men fictionalizes Ralph Singh's life story in a semi-autobiographical way in four periods. After his childhood on the island of Isabella, he continues higher education in London. Following his return to Isabella, he plunges into politics, eventually he ends up as an exile in London. The novel consists of memoirs he wrote while in exile. With flashbacks, he presents sections from various periods of his life. The novel begins with the story of Singh, who came to London for higher education after World War II and settled in a hostel where people from different cultures live.

The colonial process had a profound impact on all layers of society, including the youth. According to common perception, young people's feelings of hopelessness and pessimism can only be overcome with time or as they get older. Singh no longer has the strength to communicate his anguish as someone who has gone through all of it. He lacks a sense of belonging and attachment. We deduce this from his statement that he enjoys the feeling of being impermanent. "*I prefer the freedom of my far-out suburban hotel, the absence of responsibility; I like the feeling of impermanence*" (Naipaul 1998: 12). Singh's social circle in London is mostly made up of exiles and immigrants like himself. It is clear that immigrants and exiles generally live in bad conditions. They are unable to obtain a respectable position in society and feel compelled to belong to somewhere since they are not accepted by society. In truth, the novel's title may be derived from the fact that the colonized people's characters were unable to flourish. As a result, the title of the novel might be interpreted as a reference to postcolonial people who try to copy the characteristics they see around them. *The Mimic Men* describes a practice that produces authorized versions of otherness (Dhareshwar 1989: 78). Singh lacks the strength of character to steer him through the chaos he encountered when he first arrived in London as a student. As a result, he decides to play a snobbish and wasteful colonial as an easy character to imitate. "*It was up to me to choose my character, and I chose the character that was easiest and most attractive. I was the dandy, the extravagant colonial, indifferent to scholarship*" (Naipaul 1998: 24). Because the colonial process prevented him from developing his character, so he resorts to such methods to prove himself. These realities are at the root of his never-ending need to prove himself. In fact, it has taken on a false persona, one that is hollow and can only affect subjugated colonial people. He lacks the perception to recognize that the arguments he uses to persuade others have no equivalent in western culture.

One of Singh's motivations for moving to London is to adapt, evolve as a person, and broaden his horizons, because the environment in which he grew up has been made inappropriate for the development of such qualities. However, he could not find what he was looking for in the first step. Singh himself is not fully aware of what he has turned into. He evolves into a figure who takes on the characteristics of the setting in which he finds himself. He left himself to the drudgery of life because he could not control his own life. In one setting,

he turns into a sensitive young guy, in another, he acts like a beast, and in public spaces he assumes the role of the actor of private plays. “*The son-lover-brother with Lien, the player of private games in public rooms, the sensitive young man with a girl like Beatrice; the brute with the girl who, undressed...*” (Naipaul 1998: 32). His inconsistent performances highlight the Indo-Caribbean man’s struggle to find his place in society (Ceraso & Connolly 2009: 114). He is terrified of not being able to recognize himself as a complete human being as a result of this process.

The time in which Singh’s political life is portrayed supports the idea of erosion in values, which is the subject of this study. In general, Singh appears to have begun his life with high expectations. It turns out that Singh has realized that he has not found what he was looking for in life. He makes a bleak start just as he begins to convey his memories to the reader.

It is noteworthy that the postcolonial process is characterized as a diseased period. What is more striking is that only people in positions of power would see that this is a sick period. The colonial powers have numbed society to the point where colonized people are unaware that the political situation is deteriorating. While the narrator touches on the political and social structure in the colonies, he emphasizes the quick development of events and the rapid overthrow of the leaders; “*The pace of colonial events is quick, the turnover of leaders rapid*” (Naipaul 1998: 9). Singh, a former politician who was deposed, emphasizes that those who deposed him will face the same fate.

It can be seen here how colonial hegemony erodes a society’s political and social values. The deep-rooted understanding based on tradition is replaced by superficial principles caused by the colonial understanding that lacks depth and ethical standards. In environments where an understanding without a certain depth prevails, events develop rapidly, and it is inevitable for politicians who lack inner depth to follow wrong paths. As a result, politicians may eventually fall into the traps they set for their opponents.

“We lack order. Above all, we lack power; and we do not understand that we lack power. We mistake words and the acclamation of words for power; as soon as our bluff is called we are lost. Politics for us are a do-or-die, once-for-all charge. Once we are committed we fight more than political battles; we often fight quite literally for our lives. Our transitional or makeshift societies do not cushion us. There are no universities or City houses to refresh us and absorb us after the heat of battle. For those who lose, and nearly everyone in the end loses, there is only once course: flight. Flight to the greater disorder, the final emptiness: London and the home counties” (Naipaul 1998: 9).

In this paragraph, the protagonist briefly summarized the process he experienced. As a result of the degeneration caused by colonization, there is no stable situation in political and social life. It is because the bonds of citizens with their roots have weakened. The Indian community is portrayed as decadent, suffocating, and obtrusive (Finch, 1986: 24). In addition to this, a feeling of insecurity in the interpersonal and social sense prevailed. On the island where the novel is set, such occurrences are dealt with more harshly. It is because the island is home to a number of groups with opposing viewpoints. The conflicts occur between the groups that consider itself to be more native and the group that arrived later on the island. Because the

Indo-Caribbeans have arrived later on the island, their attachments to it may have been less stronger than the locals. On the other hand, these bonds were largely eroded during the colonization process. As a foresighted protagonist, he notices that the happenings on the island are following a predictable pattern. As a result, it is suggested that the events that occur should not be thought of as unusual.

As it is understood, those who interact with politics after the colonial period have a brief political life. And their political careers frequently end tragically. The irony is that they are living in the future that colonialists foresaw and scared them with. In a way, they fall into the trap that has been set for them. There is no order in the system they live in, and no one has the power to lead events in the correct direction. Because there is not a well-established idea of democracy, political life is filled with hazards and perils. Singh “...learns the lesson that small, recent, multi-racial societies don’t work” (Miller 1967: 693). In the postcolonial period, politicians enter politics by risking their lives as a result of the unsafe climate created by colonial forces. The point that stands out here, on the other hand, is that the protagonist emphasizes the volatile and slippery society without delving into the reasons for it. Another factor worth mentioning is the lack of institutions, such as universities, that might operate as a buffer for societal agreement. As a result, it is clear that in the postcolonial process, there is no victorious party.

Individuals who were forced to flee their homes during the postcolonial period are also depicted in the novel. Those who are forced to evacuate their homelands because of the postcolonial turmoil must live with the immigrant tag in the countries where they have sought sanctuary. With the humiliation of being in limbo, they are far from being self-assured, healthy social persons. Asylum seekers who held high positions in their home countries but found themselves in an average circumstance while in exile are given as examples. Singh states that; “*The pacific society has its cruelties. Once a man is stripped of his dignities he is required, not to die or to run away, but to find his level*” (Naipaul 1998: 10). He expresses the situation of people in exile like himself as the confusion of an unhappy soul in chains. While Singh walks through a large department store, he notices a salesperson with a familiar face. This woman, whom he encountered at an international conference dressed in his native costume, held a respectable position in the old days. She used to be a charming woman dressed in silks, but today she wears an ordinary shop uniform and has lost all of her allure. Singh walks away, hoping that he was not recognized by the woman. The situation of this woman is used to illustrate how a once-respected person can become a victim of the postcolonial process. He avoids confronting the woman because he does not want to confront his own circumstances. Because most individuals, like Singh, are poor and far from their former glorious days. According to Singh, the majority of those in this condition were either too shy or ignorant to gain wealth (Naipaul 1998: 11). Their characters, which were moulded by the colonial period, were deprived of the ability to think, to be free, and to become wealthy.

Discrimination continues in the postcolonial period on the island of Isabella, professions such as banking are reserved for the privileged classes (188). It is observed that the atmosphere of peace and trust cannot prevail on the island. Tensions between classes are at an all-time high. Afro-Caribbeans are however disturbed by the presence of Indo-Caribbeans on the island.

Maintaining racial hostility in the postcolonial period serves the interests of some factions. Although the colonizing process is over, the economy is still being exploited through multiple methods. Because they were caught off guard during the postcolonial process they could not develop any political and economic development in the colonial process. Singh describes his island as a cursed region of the world bound to fail (68). The end of the colonial era did not provide complete independence for the people.

Conclusion

The Mimic Men is a significant work in terms of witnessing an epoch in both colonial and postcolonial contexts. Without a question, colonialism has a significant impact on colonized nations. *The Mimic Men* provides crucial information about the character formation of exploited people through the colonial process, the destruction of national and cultural values, and the emergence of a lame personality. Generally colonialist regimes use coercive methods in order to retain their authority. Colonized societies may suffer irreversible deterioration as a result of this process. The consequences of colonialism can be seen in the postcolonial period as well. Returning to their core values and regaining their former structure is a painful process for the colonized society. And sometimes they may never regain their previous identity. *The Mimic Men* depicts the people of Isabella Island that has just emerged from the colonization process. In the postcolonial period, it is clear that there is no stable order in the country. Isabella Island has been tarnished in every aspect by the colonizer nation. Political stability cannot be achieved there during the postcolonial period. Being independent does not mean that their difficulties have been overcome; on the contrary, they now face new challenges. The colonizer country is largely responsible for the situation such as corruption in culture, traditions, and politics in the postcolonial process.

Ethical Statement

According to the author's statement; scientific, ethical, and quotation rules were followed in the writing process of the study named "VS Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*; Degeneration of Values"; according to ULAKBİM TR DİZİN criteria, there was no need for data collection in the study requiring ethics committee approval.

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