

## STEREOTYPES IN NAIPAUL'S NOVELS

Cengiz KARAGÖZ<sup>1</sup>

**Öz:** Naipaul, hem teorik yazıları hem de belirsiz ve aşırı derecede bütünüleyici bakış açısını yansıttığı edebi eserleriyle en çok tartışılan edebi şahsiyetlerden biridir. Romanlarında yer alan sadece ana karakterler değil aynı zamanda ikincil karakterler de çoğu kez kendi ırksal kalıplarının göstergesi olan kişisel özellikleri üstlenirler. Sömürgecilik bazı kişilerin belirli milletleri ve ırkları aşırı derecede bütünlüme ya da genelleme hatasına düşmesine sebep olduğu için Naipaul gibi yazarlar romanlarda ırklarına ya da uluslarına göre belirlenmiş ve seçilmiş olup öne çıkan özellikleri benimseyen basmakalıp karakterlere değinirler. Bu da onları ırk ayrımına götürür. Naipaul'un bu niteliği kendi ırklarını yansıtan tipik olarak kendine özgü özelliklere sahip Afrikalı ve Hintli karakterler olmak üzere karakterlerini ikiye bölerek yansıtmalarına sebep olur. Afrikalı karakterler, Avrupalı sömürgeciler ile işbirliği yapan ve bir ülkede kaosa yol açan acımasız despotlar gibi olumsuz özellikleri kendilerinde somutlaştırırken Hintli karakterler ise çoğunlukla sömürgeciler tarafından zarara uğramış olan sömürgeleştirilmiş toplumlardan birinin tahrip edilmiş kişilik özelliklerini temsil ederler. Fakat yazara göre Afrikalılar sömürgeleştirilmiş milletlerin sosyo-politik ve psikolojik yaşamlarında sömürgeci toplumların ya da ülkelerin sebep olduğu yıkımdan çok daha derin tahribat bırakmıştır. Onun romanlarında bunun en belirgin örneği kendilerine özgü kişilikleri, kültür ve tarihini kaybetmiş ve yaşamlarını Avrupa ve yerli medeniyetleri arasındaki bir ikileme idame ettirmek zorunda olan Hintli karakterlerde görülür.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Naipaul, Afrikalılar, Hintliler, Basmakalıp Karakter, Irk.

### Introduction

Colonialism can be described as “the conquest and control of other people’s land and goods.” (Loomba, 2005, p. 8). But its effect did not remain in the economical and political terms since it has run through every aspect of the invaded societies. Colonialism not only disrupted the economical and political scene of the colonized countries but also transformed their citizens’ identities and psychology into ambiguous stereotypes. Nearly all of the colonized societies felt alienated and frustrated, which drew them trying to find solutions for the ruins inflicted upon them by the colonizers.

---

<sup>1</sup> Okt. Namık Kemal Üniversitesi, Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu. [ckaragoz@nku.edu.tr](mailto:ckaragoz@nku.edu.tr).

Post-colonialism is concerned with the “effects of colonization on the cultures and societies.” (Tiffin and his colleagues, 2001, p. 186). “The term has subsequently been widely used to signify the political, linguistic and cultural experience of societies that were former European colonies.” (Tiffin and his colleagues, 2001, p. 186). Yet it cannot be regarded simply “as coming literally after colonialism, but more flexibly as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism.” (Loomba, 2005, p.16). That is, the term “post-colonialism” cannot be restricted to a simple definition as various approaches to it have emerged since it began to be used. In the post-colonial period, colonialism has been thought to be necessary for the colonized nations, it has been justified under certain excuses while it has also been refused and argued that it can never be justified whatever the reason for this is. But the third viewpoint has been exhibited as well, and it has taken in the idea that colonialism has left behind advantages and disadvantages for the native people; thus, it cannot be rejected or accepted totally.

Regarding the effects of colonialism on the identities of the colonized people, critics' views are divided into two basic approaches; some critics (such as Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire) claimed that the effects of colonisation can be removed completely by strict and intimate efforts of the colonized while others (such as Homi Bhabha and Hanif Kureishi) argued that it is impossible for the colonized to get rid of the wounds of colonialism inscribed on their souls and bodies. The previous group believed that the only solution to be free from the destructive effects of colonialism is revolution which they thought would expel the colonizers and their cultural remnants. According to these critics, pre-colonial history and culture play an important role for the colonized to regain their spiritual values and personality which they began to be unaware after colonialism, so they must return to their roots and have self-confidence with the aim of bringing back their original values and identities. On the other hand, the latter group supported the idea that colonialism destroyed every side of the colonized societies' identities which will not be saved whatever they do. In spite of this destruction, these critics thought that colonialism did not eradicate the identities and cultures of the colonies completely, so the effects of colonialism mingled with the colonized people's own values and personalities, which caused them to try to redefine themselves in respect to who they really were. Wherever they go and whatever they do, they cannot escape from this ambiguity, being obsessed with the questions whose answers they are not able to find out.

### **1. Stereotypes in the Post-colonial Period**

Stereotypes can be defined as “representations or impressions of groups” on other people particularly at the “psychological” level (McGarty and his colleagues, 2004, p. 2). People create images in their minds concerning certain groups and attribute the characteristics of these images to all the members of these certain groups although they do not have any evidence to support their mental images. People can observe the members of a community and deduce some conclusions about the whole community through overly generalizing.

In the post-colonial period and literature, the Western scholars and writers have maintained the attempts to generate stereotypes of the Eastern nations by drawing sharp lines between themselves and those other people. They have attributed certain fixed and “timeless” features lacking the developed civilization of the West to the people of the Orient because “... the Orient exists as a timeless place, changeless and static, cut off from the progress of Western history.” (McLeod, 2000, p. 44). The Eastern people’s disgraceful characteristics have often been identified with their races and skin colours. The black race of the Orient nations reveals such despicable features as being savage, uncivilized creatures which have to be trained by the Western nations.

It is often seen that the writers of this period reach overly made generalizations in respect to certain nations and races. Their characters’ typical features generally reflect the standardized characteristics of a race and society. While some races and nations are loaded with creditable and superior characteristic, others assume dishonourable features which make them usually guilty in each situation.

### **1.1. Naipaul’s Stereotypes**

Naipaul has searched a kind of belonging since his career in literature began, but he has not been able to discover up to this moment (Dar, 2012, p. 4). His approach to colonialism is a blurred one which must have stemmed from the fact that he is originally an Indian, but has moved to and lives in the West, thus owning a hybrid character. Naipaul, criticising India harshly and shortcomings of the nations that just gained their independence, thinks that although Europeans exploited the colonies by enslaving them and bringing problems to these places, they also introduced modern ways of living and peace into these colonies which struggled against the local wars and disruptive non-Western attacks (King, 2003). Although colonial powers drew back their military forces from the colonies, the colonized began to experience through worse predicaments in which they had to deal with a chaotic order and which they were not used to living. The withdrawal of the Europeans did not bring an advantage to the colonies since new leaders also began to exploit them, collaborating with the white Europeans. The main reason for the chaotic environment was the fight between the local elites and the counter-forces that tried to initiate a revolution which was against the local elites, and which they thought would bring peace and a new order to their land, but the efforts for the revolution did not solve the problems and meet their expectations, worsening the situation.

The main characters of Naipaul’s novels generally disclose their own identity and confusion that were caused by colonialism. These characters often consist of Indians who were exposed to colonialism and its lasting effects. Although they seek to escape from the excruciating and wreckful results of colonialism, they are not able to cope with this problem since colonialism left such a deep and intense devastation on them that it is vain for them to attempt to regain their own spiritual and psychological essence. When they encountered with the

Western values and impositions, they got affected and confused and began to feel that they have an in-between position where they belong to nowhere. They often think that immigration or travelling would serve as a kind of healer for their plight, and they immigrate or travel to European countries in which they cannot do away with their identity crisis and disorder.

The Africans in Naipaul's novels are reflected as the ones who try to suppress and exploit the colonies after the Europeans put back their soldiers formally. In spite of the fact that the colonized stopped their violence and exploitation on the surface politically, the Africans took over the leadership of the colony, performing the role of local elites and cooperating with the Europeans in bringing the Western goods and products to the colonized land. The other Africans who wanted to be independent of their leader's rule attempted to gain control of the land by causing chaos and violence in the colony where they live.

In his novels, he generally divides people into categories such as the ones that were exploited mostly through colonialism and as those that led a chaotic order in which they gained their personal profits or they endeavoured to take control of the government.

## **2. Stereotypes: Fragmented Identities**

Naipaul's main characters are generally Indians who are immigrants in various European countries or in The East. As in the novels like *A Bend In The River*, *Magic Seeds* and *The Mimic Men*, they try to find serenity and relief as a means of getting rid of their fragmented and ambivalent identities which arose after colonialism; nonetheless, they are unable to reach any fruitful result for this problem in spite of constantly searching for their real identities, and they have to live with their anxiety during their lifetime.

In *A Bend In The River*, Salim, the main character, is an Indian living in Africa and also the narrator who talks about his confusion and frustration since he witnesses the conditions and tumults that have emerged after the Europeans try to go back. In the novel, Salim's knowledge of history has disappeared or has been wiped away (Naipaul, 1989). His sense of history is a means of knowing himself because it conveys the idea of whom his ancestors or what their traditions and lifestyles were. All Salim knows about his ancestors' historical realities consist of what is articulated in the books by the European people (Naipaul, 1989). This proves the idea that Europeans attempted to shape these people's identities by removing their bonds with past and history which function as a kind of awareness of oneself. While Europeans put their forces back, new and unfamiliar conditions begin to appear, thus making Salim frustrated, insecure and unprotected. Salim finds most of the people and everything he sees in this African country whose name is not mentioned clearly very strange due to the fact that Europeans have affected and changed Africa, as a result of which new ways of living that are not known by Salim very well have come into existence. Salim knows and guesses anything neither about his past nor his future. His only concern is that he struggles to live his life by earning his money and to get accustomed to these unusual experiences that he

lives for the first time in his life. According to Salim, Africa has become a land where he and others have to endure and stay safe (Naipaul, 1989). One of the basic feelings of Salim is that he supposes himself in a vacant space in which there are two Africas; an old and a new Africa. The new Africa is a place where the President tries to bring modern Europe architecture and establish bizarre buildings that strike Salim and others as alien. Therefore, it becomes very tough for Salim to stand and live between these two completely different worlds that begin to emerge after the European values have penetrated into the African land and culture. He decides to travel to Europe and stay there for a while as he thinks that he will get some relief and find a way of escaping from his anxiety. After a short time of his arrival in London, he feels lonely although he knows Nazruddin there and speaks to him, thus understanding that he belongs to nowhere. He returns to Africa as he thinks that London is not a suitable setting for him, but the conditions get worse and worse day by day because of the chaos sparked off by the hostile friction between the President and his opponents who reject the President's regime that imitate the western thought and white men and who want to set up an independent order. Throughout the novel, Salim's anxiety and fragmented identity never resolve and recover, continuing to exist within his own self although he always insists on escaping from and getting rid of it.

In *Magic Seeds*, Naipaul deals with the main character Willie's efforts throughout the novel with the aim of finding himself a proper place and satisfaction in the world. At the beginning of the novel, Willie is reflected as Indian who lives in Berlin with his sister after having lived colonisation's depressing and chaotic events in Africa. Although he is in Berlin, he cannot forget his depression and confusion which he began to feel in Africa and which always draw him into a mental state where he lost himself and feels belonging to nowhere. He is disturbed by the fact that he has more than one identity and more than one world as the author suggests "The world coexisted. It was foolish to pretend otherwise." (Naipaul, 2004, p. 13). In the past, he lived in London and spent eighteen years in Africa, which is the main reason for him to have a floating identity with which he has to live a whole life. According to Naipaul, colonialism paved the way for these ambiguous identities and worlds that the colonized have since the colonized, especially Indian people, had to immigrate to the other countries; therefore, they began to feel frustrated and alienated after having lived many years in the Eastern countries and spending the rest of their lives in the European countries or cities. Willie's sister Sarojini says to him "The ancestors of our rose sellers here in Berlin. They have travelled for a hundred years." (Naipaul, 2004, p. 23). Living in Berlin as an anxious and unhappy person, Willie is encouraged by his sister to join a revolution in India in order to find his real self and relief, and he decides to go to India. Even though he joins a movement, he realizes that he is among the fighters whose ambition is not certain and that he has joined a false movement which is a guerrilla fight. There, he meets various people who have different experiences, but he feels disappointed and frightened as he cannot trust them, feeling that he is not a real member of the. Even in India, he is not able to feel safe and relieved

as conveyed in the novel: "The most comforting thing about life is certainty of death. There is no way now for me to pick my way back to the upper air. Where was the upper air? Berlin? Africa?" (Naipaul, 2004, p. 101). He becomes aware of the fact that there are only vain attempts in the movement which is very dangerous for him, and he thinks that he has to surrender to the police, understanding that he is doomed to be caught. In jail, he is taken to a big cell where there are educated people and which is comfortable, but he wants the superintendent to bring him to the other cell which has very terrible conditions, which implies his inner uneasiness and dissatisfaction wherever he goes. After released through a special amnesty, he returns again to London, where he took education in the past. While in London, he is obsessed with his former experiences in Africa, which was ruined by the colonial Portugal government, and those in a guerrilla movement in India. His isolation and estrangement are still prevalent in his mind in London, and he thinks that he does not possess a real place in the world. After beginning to live in London, his fragmentation and double personality can be inferred when he says to Roger "I do not know whether I will be able to live with this new person. I am not sure I can get rid of him. I feel he will always be there, waiting for me." (Naipaul, 2004, p. 177). In addition, the novel refers to the fact that colonialism did away with the Indians' history the knowledge of which is imposed on them by the Europeans as Sarojini says "All the history you and other people like you know about yourselves comes from a British textbook written by a nineteenth-century English inspector of schools in India called Roper Lethbridge." (Naipaul, 2004, p. 10).

The main character of *The Mimic Men* is Ralph Singh, also the narrator, who is originally an Indian, disclosing his own life story that embraces ambiguity, loss and exile. When he is young, he studies in England, and then he returns to the Caribbean island, Isabella, where he becomes very rich by renting land, then getting into a political career. After being unsuccessful in his political life as a minister, he escapes to London, but he no longer feels at ease and contented, saying that "Flight to the disorder, the final emptiness; London and the home countries." (Naipaul, 1985, p. 8). And he also states that "I no longer dream of ideal landscapes or seek to attach myself to them." (Naipaul, 1985, p. 10). This is one of the typical examples of the characters in Naipaul's novels that emphasize the point that colonialism created floating characters that want to escape from ambivalence and disorder but that find nowhere which offers them relief and delight, which attests to the features of the postcolonial age. After his first stay in London for his education, Singh returns to his landscape with his wife, but he does not think that the landscape is his own land, keeping the thought in his mind "This tainted island is not for me. I decided ten years ago that this landscape was not mine." (Naipaul, 1985, p. 51). While referring to his and the island's past and background, he often uses the word "shipwreck" which implies the destruction of the island and its people. Since his childhood, he has thought that his father's past and background are also "secrets" that he is not able to clarify. In his political life, he at first gathers supporters and becomes

a well-known minister in Isabella, his Caribbean island; however, he cannot meet the expectations of the society and workers although he supports the socialist movement. The Europeans continue to exploit his land through the contracts and imports to his land, which he becomes aware too late. He ascribes his failure to the rapidly changing conditions in the postcolonial period and to his inconsistent, flippant, unstable psychology which is one of the indications of the destructive effects of colonialism. At last, he thinks that he has to escape to London as a solution for the unrest in the island and returns there, now living in a hotel, writing his memories and feeling lonely, disappointed in his exile. He says that “We are people who for one reason or another have withdrawn, from our respective countries, from the city where we find ourselves, from our families. We have withdrawn from unnecessary responsibility and attachment.” (Naipaul, 1985, p. 247).

### **2.1. Stereotypes: Causing Political Crises and Exploitation**

In Naipaul’s novels, the Africans often take on the same negative, abject qualities which make them cruel dictators who carry out acts of violence especially the visitors or immigrants as well as their natives, act as the local elites that continue to exploit their society in accordance with the Europeans’ commands, and they are also reflected as the ones taking part in power struggle, thus drawing the country into a chaotic atmosphere as in *A Bend In The River*, *In A Free State* and *Magic Seeds* in which the African characters externalize nearly the same qualities.

In *A Bend in the River*, the President and other Africans are revealed as the characters who worsen the conditions, terror and chaos in the African land after the Europeans leave there. The main point here is that the colonized country of Africa is inflicted on by the inner war and power struggle between the President, often mentioned as the Big Man without being given his name, and the liberation forces, creating an atmosphere in which the immigrants coming from various countries become anxious, insecure and afraid. Thus, the withdrawal of the colonizers does not solve the problems which spring up due to colonialism; rather, the Africans get into a power struggle which has emerged between the President and the counter-forces, which is the main reason for the death of the innocent people day by day although they are not involved in any side of the war. The President is a dictator whose photos are put everywhere as a sign of his power and authority and whose aim is to create an area called the Domain where he builds modern buildings, thus bringing modern Western values to the African land. As his own companions, he also has white men, which prove his cooperation with the Europeans, just as mentioned in the novel “The Domain had been created by the President; for reasons of his own he had called certain foreigners to live there. For us that was enough; it was not for us to question or look too closely.” (Naipaul, 1989, p. 71). Therefore, the President tries to establish a different and unfamiliar world that carries Western characteristics and provides personal profits for him and the local elites. When the circumstances become worse and worse because of the inner war between the liberation army that want to establish a free state without the President’s

dictatorship and the President who demands that everything and everybody in the country should be used and serve for him, he declares that the money and business of the citizens have to be given to new owners who are called state trustees serving under the decree of the President. When the main character Salim attempts to hide some of his money from the statesmen, his crime is recognized, and is taken to the prison for not sharing all his money with the state. The President captures the money of his citizens, exploiting and making them poorer. Thus, Naipaul conveys the idea that the President and his opponents are the Africans who forge violence and turbulence in the postcolonial era for the sake of political power, implying that Salim and other immigrants suffer from this blurred order.

The Africans in *In A Free State* assume the same dishonoured qualities of those just mentioned above as the ones exerting violence, being involved in power struggle and being manipulated by the Europeans. The third part of the novel presents a tumultuous environment in which an inner war has emerged although the African state has gained newly its independence. It cannot celebrate its independence owing to the rage and fight between the king and the president, which have divided the natives and the country into two groups. Despite the unity that was dominant in the early days of independence between the king and the president, the colonizers have succeeded in breeding hate and rage between them, therefore making them enemies against each other. As the president's army is more powerful than that of the king, the colonizers have decided to support the president. In the novel, it is expressed that "The new photograph showed the president without the headdress, in jacket, shirt and tie, with his hair done in the English style." which discloses the idea that the African leaders imitate the Europeans, believing in and complying with their lies, serving as the local elites in cooperation with them (Naipaul, 2001, p. 45). The president's soldiers capture the king's people as prisoners, treating them without mercy, tormenting and even killing them. When it is past four in the state, the curfew begins to be put into effect by the president's cruel soldiers. Concerning them, Linda says "Fat black savages. I cannot bear it when they grin like that." (Naipaul, 2001, p. 98). Moreover, Bobby confesses that "It must be awful for him having to run away from the wogs." (Naipaul, 2001, p. 50). Thus, the Africans in the novel are identified with the humiliating features that Naipaul attributes to them in most of his novels. For instance, they expel the Indians from The Union Club which the Indians founded and where they accepted the Africans who were not accepted anywhere in the capital. Also, Bobby is beaten by the president's soldiers, which is mentioned in the novel: "The boots probed his ribs, his belly, probed and kicked." (Naipaul, 2001, p. 107). They rarely welcome the visitors or immigrants, increase the confusion in the state and are burning with hate within their hearts against the others.

In *Magic Seeds*, the main character Salim and Roger mention Marcus, an old African diplomat, by emphasizing his dictatorship and inter-racial marriages with white people. Roger says to Salim that "He has served every kind of wretched dictatorship in his country." (Naipaul, 2004, p. 229). As in his other

African characters in other novels, Naipaul conveys the idea that the African leaders or politicians are generally tyrannisers who rule their government brutally, exploiting their people and being the Europeans' pawns. In the novel, Roger remarks that "He was only still being trained to be a diplomat, but he already had five half-white children of various nationalities." (Naipaul, 2004, p. 230). The author intimates the close relationship between the Africans and the colonizers, suggesting the idea that the Africans became accomplices by conniving at colonial crimes with their white shareholders.

### **Conclusion**

One of the main characteristics of Naipaul's novels is that his characters generally carry the same qualities that are attributed to them according to their races; therefore, Naipaul's basic criterion in creating postcolonial characters is their races that encouraged Naipaul to use stereotypes in his novels. These stereotypes are activated due to the fact that colonialism has made people believe that some races embrace certain qualities that make them innocent while other races assume some negative qualities which make them guilty in the postcolonial era. Naipaul's Indian characters are shown as those who lost their identities because of colonialism, so they are always in search of their real identities, or they try to find a suitable identity for them, but their efforts are futile. They feel lonely, alienated and confused despite the fact that they often travel to other countries, especially European ones, in order to reach relief and eradicate blurred feelings; however, they never feel that they belong to an absolute land, floating with anxiety. Naipaul's African characters usually take on the role of the local elites who exploit the colonized societies with their European collaborators and the role of dictator rulers that introduce modern architecture and thought into the colonized country; in addition, Naipaul's Africans are brutal people who never welcome immigrants and who stir up chaotic atmosphere with their blind struggle to gain control of the country and dominate. These characters indicate Naipaul's wrong totalizing habit which makes him forget that each race or ethnic society possesses both virtues and ignoble features; thus, postcolonial societies cannot be divided into stereotypes according to their races as each society takes in not only dictators, selfish people, liars but also honest, innocent, insightful citizens. Colonialism ignited the feelings of anger, hate and avarice among the countries and their ethnic groups since it caused destruction, exploitation and massacre, but it would be wrong to make generalisations about certain races and countries, which will only direct the feelings of anger and hate to other innocent people of the same group in question.

### **REFERENCES**

- Ashcroft B., Griffiths G. and Tiffin H. (2001). *Key Concept in Post-colonial Studies*. New York: Routledge.
- Dar, M. S. (2012). Revisit, Revise and Rewrite: V. S. Naipaul. *The Criterion An International Journal*, 3 (4), 1-4. Date of Access: 24<sup>th</sup> of April 2013, <http://www.the-criterion.com/V3/n4/Dar.pdf>.

- King, B. (2003). *V. S. Naipaul* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Loomba, A. (2005). *Colonialism Postcolonialism* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). New York: Routledge.
- McGarty C., Yzerbyt V. Y. and Spears, R. (2004). *Stereotypes As Explanations*. UK: Cambridge University Press.
- McLeod, J. (2000). *Beginning Postcolonialism*. Oxford: Manchester University Press.
- Naipaul, V. S. (1989). *A Bend in the River*. New York: Vintage.
- (2001). *In A Free State*. London: Pan Macmillan: London.
- (2004). *Magic Seeds*. New York: Random House.
- (1985). *The Mimic Men*. New York: Random House.

### STEREOTYPES IN NAIPAUL'S NOVELS

**Abstract:** Naipaul is one of the most controversial literary figures with his both theoretical writings and literary works in which he reflected an ambiguous and overly totalizing perspective. Not only main but also minor characters in his novels often assume the same characteristics which are the indications of their racial patterns. Since colonialism has caused some people to fall into the mistake of overly totalizing certain nations and races, writers like Naipaul touch upon stereotype characters who take on outstanding features which are determined and chosen in novels according to their races or nationalities. Naipaul's this trait makes his characters divided into Africans and Indians who possess typically distinctive characteristics which reflect their own races. While Africans externalize negative features such as cruel despots leading to disorder in a country and collaborating with European colonizers, Indians generally represent the characteristics of one of the destructed identities of the colonized nations who are damaged by colonizers. However, for him, Africans have left much more intense damage on the socio-political and psychological lives of the colonized nations than the colonizers. On the other side, in his novels Indians are the colonized people who lost their distinctive identities, culture and history and who have to uphold their lives in a dilemma between the European and native civilization.

**Keywords:** Naipaul, Africans, Indians, Stereotype Character, Race.