

ROOTLESS EXPERIENCES:
THE IMPORTANCE OF SPATIAL UNDERSTANDING
IN THE WRITING OF V. S. NAIPAUL

MAKIKO NISHI

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BY

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FOR THE DEGREE OF Ph.D

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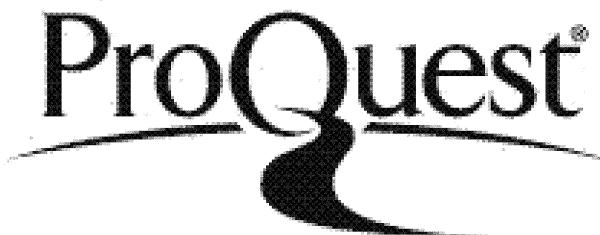


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ABSTRACT

**Rootless Experiences:
The Importance of Spatial Understanding in the Writing of V. S. Naipaul**

By Makiko Nishi

This thesis examines the works of V. S. Naipaul (1932-), a Trinidad born writer who has been settled in England since 1950. Naipaul is dislocated both from his ancestral motherland of India and from his home, Trinidad. Because of this doubly uprooted condition, the idea of rootlessness is essential to discussion of the author. This theme of rootlessness is one of the main subjects in my argument. In pursuing my argument, I will be particularly attentive to issues of space, which has inspired burgeoning interest and debate since the late 1960s in the humanities and social sciences.

The first three chapters deal with Naipaul's fictional narratives, examining his differing treatments of the settings of Trinidad, metropolitan cities, and the former colonies. The fourth chapter will discuss Naipaul's two narratives about Trinidad's history, which reveal his skilful manoeuvring of spatial concepts for the benefit of the West Indies or Trinidad Indians. The fifth chapter will discuss Naipaul's narrative in his travelogues and his accounts of his travel. Naipaul's travelogues cover locations worldwide. However, because of his particular way of looking, his travelogues show some recurrence of observation and themes. Consequently, there emerges a geographical pattern in his presentation of the world. The sixth chapter will pay attention to the autobiographical aspects of Naipaul's writing. It will discuss the relationship between Naipaul's works and his own movements as a rootless writer. Overall, the argument reveals Naipaul's ambiguity as due to being caught in the tension between the dichotomic view of the world created by the ideology of imperialism and the counter disposition of hybridity fostered by his own rootless experience.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Works by Naipaul

<i>Among</i>	<i>Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey</i>
<i>Area</i>	<i>An Area of Darkness</i>
<i>Bend</i>	<i>A Bend in the River</i>
<i>Enigma</i>	<i>The Enigma of Arrival: A Novel in Five Sections</i>
<i>Finding</i>	<i>Finding the Centre: Two Narratives</i>
<i>Free</i>	<i>In a Free State</i>
‘Free’	‘In a Free State’
‘History’	‘History: A Smell of Fish Glue’ in <i>A Way in the World: A Sequence</i>
<i>House</i>	<i>A House for Mr Biswas</i>
<i>Loss</i>	<i>The Loss of El Dorado: A History</i>
<i>Middle</i>	<i>The Middle Passage: Impressions of Five Societies — British, French and Dutch — in the West Indies and South America</i>
<i>Miguel</i>	<i>Miguel Street</i>
<i>Million</i>	<i>India: A Million Mutinies Now</i>
<i>Mimic</i>	<i>The Mimic Men</i>
<i>Mystic</i>	<i>The Mystic Masseur</i>
‘One’	‘One out of Many’
<i>Overcrowded</i>	<i>The Overcrowded Barracoon and Other Articles</i>
<i>Return</i>	<i>The Return of Eva Perón with The Killings in Trinidad</i>
<i>Stone</i>	<i>Mr Stone and the Knights Companion</i>
‘Tell Me’	‘Tell Me Who to Kill’
<i>Way</i>	<i>A Way in the World: A Sequence</i>
<i>Wounded</i>	<i>India: A Wounded Civilization</i>

Introduction

1: Naipaul as a Rootless Exile

My thesis will discuss V. S. Naipaul's works from a spatial point of view. The thesis uses the term 'space' as a concept that emphasises the idea of fluidity, motion, changeability, interactions, human imagination, and the relations between human beings, cultures and nations. To use Soja's phrase, it can be thought of as the 'actually lived and socially created spatiality, concrete and absolute at the same time, the habitus of social practices.'¹ Further discussion of the spatial viewpoint will be given in the next section 'The Concept of Space.' The particular viewpoint of mine, it is hoped, will contribute both to research on Naipaul, whose spatial sensibility has not been thoroughly studied,² and to the burgeoning interest in space in the humanities.

V. S. Naipaul (1932-) was born in an impoverished rural Hindi-speaking area of Trinidad. His grandfather, a trained Brahman,³ indentured himself from India to teach among Trinidad's Indian cane-workers.⁴ Naipaul's father, Seepersad (1906-53), was a

¹ Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989, repr. 1999), p. 18.

² I have traced only one study on Naipaul from this viewpoint. Baucom's Doctoral thesis, 'Locating Identity: Topographies of Englishness and Empire,' deals with the issue of space. The fifth chapter is on Naipaul's autobiographical novel *The Enigma of Arrival*. Ian Bernard Baucom, 'Locating Identity: Topographies of Englishness and Empire' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Yale University, 1995).

³ 'Brahman' is the name of the sacerdotal class. Though it is a priestly class, all Brahmins are not priests. 'Brahman', in John Garrett, *A Classical Dictionary of India: Illustrative of the Mythology Philosophy Literature Antiquities Arts Manners Customs etc. of the Hindus* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1973), pp. 107-8.

⁴ After emancipation, the Caribbean estate owners sought new manpower sources outside the Caribbean. Recruitment bounties supported by government induced hundreds of thousands to become indentured West Indian labourers during the century after 1840. Most of the 600,000 East Indians and Javanese who came to the West Indies on two- to five-year plantation contracts remained on the land. David Lowenthal, *West Indian Societies* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 61-62.

local journalist, and also a short story writer. Seepersad Naipaul introduced his son to serious literature and had instilled in the son the notion that he should become a writer. He sought and won a Trinidad government scholarship in 1948. In 1950 he left Trinidad to study literature at Oxford University and, since then, he has lived in England. He has written in many forms: the short story, the novella, the novel, the travelogue, the book review, the essay, the history, and the autobiographical account. He has won many literary prizes, including the Booker Prize in 1971 and the Nobel Prize in 2001.

Naipaul's life has been rootless and adrift in many ways. The young Naipaul lived within an Indian community cut off from Trinidad's Creole society.⁵ In other words, Naipaul lacked connections both to his Indian roots and to Trinidad's Creole society. In addition, the administrative centre of colonial government, or London, was far away and had an image of inaccessibility. His sense of uprootedness was intensified by the fact that his family moved from house to house. His leaving for England increased his sense of rootlessness as well. When he first came to England, he had 'a great sense of being adrift'.⁶

Such background information brings forth one of the ubiquitous themes of rootlessness in his work. Many of his characters are adrift. They are away from their own society, or lack such a community from birth. For individuals, the disconnection from societies is both the source of their freedom and the cause of their distress. Many of the characters choose to be away from their own society for their own benefit. Even the characters under a forced exile see the advantages to their free situation. However, Naipaul also shows that there is a price to pay in exchange for gaining personal freedom. Achieving personal freedom is depicted as causing a feeling of isolation, reducing any sense of responsibility, or lessening a genuine human connection.

Naipaul's writing is caught up in a tension between a quest for personal freedom and a

⁵ The term Creole originally denoted black slaves born in the New World, as distinct from African-born. It came to refer to any one, black or white, born in the West Indies. It has kept changing its definition, and it is now a euphemism for coloured or black. Yet its meaning varies locally. In Trinidad, the term excluded Amerindians and East Indians. Lowenthal, p. 32. I will use the term in Trinidad's usage henceforth.

⁶ V. S. Naipaul, 'Living a Life on Approval', Interview, *Manchester Guardian*, 4 October 1971, p. 8.

counter quest for a sense of belonging. Naipaul, as a rootless man, idealises society in which people are settled, share values, and have an organic relation with the place. Yet he also knows the joy of rootlessness, so he is sceptical about whether anyone will appreciate the individual's complete belonging to the land. Thus, Naipaul simultaneously and paradoxically longs for individual freedom and a sense of belonging.

Naipaul has multiple origins to which he only partially relates. This makes Naipaul's achieving a sense of belonging difficult. The nature of colonial education encouraged Naipaul in his identification with the values of English civilization. On the other hand, he is consciously aware of his ethnic roots as an Indian, and reveals a Hindu morality in his works. His self-recognition as a colonial subject is also strong. His colonial identification defines the destinations of his journeys. For instance, through the journeys to postcolonial nations, Naipaul reflects not only on postcolonial conditions, but also on his own circumstances. However, Naipaul belongs to none of these origins completely. Consequently, his search for his roots is caught in an unfruitful repetition.

Multiple heritages also cause inconsistency and ambiguity in Naipaul. For instance, he reveals an unresolved ambivalence in his attitude towards the history of empire: he sees colonial rule both as a system of vile plunder and as a lost ideal of order; he views the metropolitan centre both as fulfilling and betraying.

These aspects of rootlessness, multiple heritages and ambiguous belongingness are the significance of the author. Naipaul is deprived of a consistent identity, a sense of security, and a sense of belonging to a certain culture as a consequence of cultural transplantation caused by imperialism. Naipaul embodies the aftermath of imperialism and the condition of the postcolonial era.

Naipaul is determined to write truthfully to himself. Although the spontaneous and honest responses sometimes reveal inconsistencies or cause disputes against him, the value of his writing is its frankness and confidence. Naipaul's critical reception ranges from harsh condemnation to the highest critical praise. Much of the controversy over his works

stems from the way in which his incisive and honest vision is perceived. Since Naipaul's methods of searching for truth depend on autobiographical themes, the overemphasis on the ideological issue seems inappropriate. This thesis, therefore, will try to balance autobiographical accounts with the political aspects of Naipaul's writings.

Being a postcolonial exile who has a complex uprooted condition, Naipaul is interested in his and others' comfortable relationship with places and inevitably becomes sensitive to the idea of place and space. Through a colonial education, Naipaul became familiar with English literature as a boy and was accustomed to imagining the far away places depicted in a 'foreign' literature. This educational background seems to create the condition that when he imagines far away places his sense of fantasy increases. Consequently, many of his works are produced by his imagining and writing about places that are geographically far away from him.

While geographical distance thus works favourably for his imagination and creativity, it also causes a problem for Naipaul. Feeling that he lacks his own 'settled culture'⁷ and has 'no society to write about',⁸ he constantly undertook journeys to look for materials to write about. Thus, Naipaul's lack of his own society brings forth the spatial life of a traveller.

Naipaul's fictional characters reveal ranges of spatial sensibility. The majority of the characters are displaced individuals who cross cultural or national borders occasionally. Staying in foreign places or moving between different cultures, the characters feel changes in atmosphere instinctively or spatially. In 'In a Free State,' Bobby, a White expatriate in an unnamed country in East Africa, drives for two days and instinctively feels the tense atmosphere caused by political unrest.

Naipaul also depicts the mental confusion and emotional difficulty involved in various sorts of people's movement. For instance, the swiftness of travelling by air is the cause of confusion for some characters. Salim, a protagonist in *A Bend in the River*, says, 'I was in

⁷ Naipaul, 'Floating up to a Point', Interview, *Guardian*, 30 April 1984, p. 9.

⁸ Naipaul, 'Without a Place: V. S. Naipaul in Conversation with Ian Hamilton', in *Conversations with V. S. Naipaul*, ed. by Feroza Jussawalla (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), p. 16 (first publ. in , 30 July 1971, p. 897).

Africa one day; I was in Europe the next morning. It was more than travelling fast. It was like being in two places at once. . . . Both places were real; both places were unreal.⁹ Indar, another character in *A Bend in the River*, says, ‘the aeroplane is a wonderful thing. You are still in one place when you arrive at the other. The aeroplane is faster than the heart. You arrive quickly and you leave quickly. You don’t grieve too much.’¹⁰ Indar thus shows off his capability to adjust but reveals that leaving a place of attachment used to be distressing for him.

Before moving to a detailed argument about Naipaul and space, the following section will give a brief introduction of the increasing interest in the concept of space in humanities and the social sciences. Because of the scope of the ongoing debate on space in various disciplines, it is impossible to cover all the issues. However, the aim of the section is to pick up major spatial issues and to provide a general outline of the burgeoning spatial debate. By doing so, it is hoped that the significance of my spatial analysis on Naipaul will be framed within the larger context of current thinking about the concept of space.

2: The Concept of Space

Since the late 1960s, there has emerged an interest in the relationship between space and theory in the humanities and social sciences. This academic trend influenced disciplines such as geography, sociology, literature, history, gender studies, postcolonial studies, and cultural studies. Consequently, social thought appeared to be ‘increasingly smitten with a geographical idiom of margins, spaces and borders.’¹¹

⁹ Naipaul, *A Bend in the River* (London: André Deutsch, 1979; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p. 237.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

¹¹ Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift, ‘Preface’, in *Thinking Space*, ed. by Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift (London: Routledge, 2000; repr. 2001), p. xi. For the summary of the increasing spatial interest and spatial debate, see, for instance, Soja’s first chapter, ‘History: Geography: Modernity’, in *Postmodern Geographies*, pp. 10-42, Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift, ‘Introduction’, in *Thinking Space*, ed. by Crang and Thrift, pp. 1-30, and David Harvey, ‘Introduction’, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980; repr. 1990), pp. 201-210.

The way people experience and think about time and space has been changed in the past few decades. People are becoming more aware of the significance of the relationship between space and their lives. The social awakening of spatial thinking is related to the arrival of capitalism and modernisation. In *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880-1918* (1983), Stephen Kern examines the dramatic change in life style since the end of the nineteenth century and the subsequent change in the way people experience time and space:

From around 1880 to the outbreak of World War I a series of sweeping changes in technology and culture created distinctive new modes of thinking about and experiencing time and space. Technological innovations including the telephone, wireless telegraph, x-ray, cinema, bicycle, automobile, and airplane established the material foundation for this reorientation. . .¹²

While Kern's argument is centred on the time between 1880 and 1918, David Harvey calls the phenomenon 'time-space compression' and extends Kern's argument to the period of modernism and postmodernism.¹³

The geographical distribution of these changes continues to widen. In a global era, people, material and information cross national or cultural borders more often and faster. Technological and economic developments promote communications, the distribution of information and physical movement across national boundaries. Thus, place and community become no longer the clear supports of identity, and people become more aware of what lies outside their community.

While people's view of the world has been broadened, the idea of time as a linear development has been weakened. When knowledge of the world was limited, what people saw was the chronological social development within a small unitary world, because time progress is equal to social development within a small world. The expanded view of the world, however, reveals an uneven economic development.

¹² Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880 -1918* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), p. 1.

¹³ Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 284. The discussion of time-space compression is in Part III, 'The Experience of Space and Time', in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, pp. 201-323.

In theoretical terms, space has been redefined as a product of human activity. Famously, Michel Foucault's writings revealed the complex interactions between space and power. For instance, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* argues that since the 18th century Europe's space has been constructed in such a way that the masses could be mastered and that a better economy of time could be achieved. Foucault gives various examples: the boarders are supervised in the dormitory space; the workers are watched in the manufacturing space; and the pupils are disciplined in the educational space.¹⁴

The increase of interest in space and power has coincided with the emergence of voices from the margins, such as those of former colonials and feminists. In relation to marginal subjects, space is a powerful concept in revealing the imbalance of power relations. From a postcolonial perspective, space as a product of human activity is particularly relevant, for the activities of empires are involved with territorial expansions, people's emigration to the colonised world, and the confrontation of different cultures. The postcolonial debates have enthusiastically engaged in revealing that these activities are conducted under the imbalance of power and that the imperial activities produced various kinds of representations of marginal subjects.

For instance, the traditional European travel narrative can be viewed as a kind of narrative that depicted the colonised world marginally and helped imperialists to justify their occupying others' territories. Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* argues that European travel narratives manipulated the professed objectivity of reporting and factual description.¹⁵ They manifest a rhetoric of power that transforms 'seeing' into 'discovering' and then into 'claiming.' Under these circumstances,

¹⁴ Michael Foucault, 'Docile Bodies', in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Allen Lane, 1977; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), pp. 135-69. Foucault's explicit observations on space appear in two interviews: 'Questions on Geography', in *Power / Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. by Colin Gordon, trans. by Colin Gordon and others (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), pp. 63-77; 'Space, Knowledge, and Power', in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by Paul Rabinow (New York: Bantheon; Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1984; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), pp. 239-56.

¹⁵ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

postcolonial debate is keen on deconstructing the knowledge-power relationship inscribed in the space of traditional Western travel writings. The postcolonial debate has also established that the contemporary travelogue needs to be critically scrutinised as to whether it inherits the style of the traditional European travelogue.

Marginal representation of the colonial subjects is also seen in the fictional depiction of them. As Edward Said argues in *Culture and Imperialism*,

Nearly everywhere in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British and French culture we find allusions to the facts of empire, but perhaps nowhere with more regularity and frequency than in the British novel.¹⁶

Said criticises the elaboration and articulation of imperial power as presented in the novel.¹⁷ Under these circumstances, postcolonial writers have attempted to deconstruct the existing fictional representation of the Other. For instance, *Foe* (1986) by J. M. Coetzee and *Moses Ascending* (1975) by Sam Selvon rewrite Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, critically retelling the story. These works use space as a vehicle for deconstructing the existing presentation of Other:

[Coetzee and Selvon] re-enter the narrative space of *Robinson Crusoe* and, rather than contesting what was constructed within that space, they unmap the space itself, destabilising the terrain on which its particular masculinist, racist, imperialist vision was constructed.¹⁸

In this way, fictional space has been seen as the potential vehicle to dismantle the power relations constructed by earlier works.

In recent years, the focus of postcolonial debate has turned from discussing literature as a locale of dichotomous division between Europe and other parts of the world to the discussion of hybrid and heterogenous cultural identities, examining the historical

¹⁶ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993; repr. London: Vintage, 1994), p. 73. For Said, spatial thought is indispensable. His works, particularly *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*, are related to the spatial analysis of the operation and aftermath of imperialism. For an analysis of Said's spatial thinking, see Derek Gregory's 'Edward Said's Imaginative Geographies', in *Thinking Space*, ed. by Crang and Thrift, pp. 302-48.

¹⁷ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 87.

¹⁸ Richard Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire: A Geography of Adventure* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 144.

aftermath of imperialism, or ‘overlapping domains’.¹⁹ Said’s *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* exemplify this shift in the focus of postcolonial debate. In this respect, the fluidity of the concept of space is again useful in discussing the ambiguity of cultural interrelations.

The above spatial debates are highly relevant to Naipaul’s works. For instance, Naipaul depicts various responses to the contemporary phenomenon of time-space compression; his work includes literary genres of travel writing and fiction which are relevant to spatial debate; and he shows his awareness of how the rhetoric of imperial power is blamed for the figuration of the binary representation of the world.

3: Summary of Thesis

The first chapter will discuss Naipaul’s earlier fictions with a Trinidadian setting, written in the 1950s and 1960s. In these works, Naipaul depicts Trinidadian characters who have a sense of separation from power, a feeling of marginal existence, and a sense of entrapment. It is suggested that colonial domination inflicts the negative images of Trinidad and the dichotomic view of the world on Trinidadian characters. However, Naipaul also depicts the strength of Trinidadians who are capable of forgetting the negative ideas about their country and enjoying their lives. Naipaul’s depiction reveals the mixture of his detachment from and attachment towards Trinidad. While his distanced view, given by the fact that he has lived away from home, enables him to see the negative influence of colonial domination over Trinidadians, the compassion enables him to depict his home favourably.

The second chapter will discuss a novel and short stories with metropolitan settings, written in the 1960s and 1970s. Naipaul depicts the process in which the former colonial subjects migrate to metropolitan cities and become disillusioned because of the gap between what they fantasised and what they actually see. Naipaul suggests that they are

¹⁹ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 313.

misled by the colonial ideology to believe in the geographical myth that the ‘centre’ of the world exists. Despite being misled and disillusioned, the characters are strong enough to assimilate to and survive in their new environment. However, Naipaul does not optimistically celebrate their survival, but shows the problems of the lives of immigrants in cities. The incisive vision of the metropolis as a contact zone between the former colonial masters and subjects is one of the significances of Naipaul’s urban writings. Furthermore, compared to the Caribbean stories, the stories with metropolitan settings are characterised by hybridity. In this respect, Naipaul’s urban narratives are successful in deconstructing the dichotomic view of the world and reconstructing the image of the metropolis.

The third chapter will discuss the stories which are set in the former colonies, written in the 1970s. These stories evolved out of Naipaul’s journalistic articles in which he reports on his journeys to postcolonial countries and articulates issues such as political unrest and economical underachievement. Naipaul continues to depict rootless individuals. Yet he positions individuals adrift within a climate of political unrest, so the individuals’ frailness is emphasised. For instance, Naipaul depicts white characters who leave behind their security for less developed countries looking for adventure and a sense of freedom. Although Naipaul depicts the pleasure which is given by seeking freedom, he also stresses the negative effects of a rootless condition. By doing so, Naipaul addresses the price of gaining personal freedom and the importance of being responsible to one’s circumstances. Naipaul also depicts political turmoil such as dictatorship and insurrection in the newly independent colonial nations negatively. For instance, he associates the increasing lawlessness of those nations with the writings of Conrad who depicted Africa as the location of barbarism. Such a dichotomic presentation again reveals the influence of colonial education on the author. Even though the dichotomous depiction is vulnerable to criticism that Naipaul does not help to empower the former colonies, it is the product of Naipaul’s genuine concern about the future of postcolonial nations and his intention to

arouse a sense of alarm in readers. Furthermore, Naipaul's bleak vision is only temporary and is replaced by a more hopeful tone in his later career.

The fourth chapter compares Naipaul's two narratives about Trinidad's history. The existing history writing in the former colonial nations tended to emphasise the explorers' heroic deeds and neglect the experience of the indigenous. Historians in those nations found such histories irrelevant and tried to write new kinds of history. In this respect, Naipaul's practice of history writing is unexceptional. In *The Loss of El Dorado*, Naipaul depicts imperialism as an ideology associated with exploration of new lands and the occupation of others' territories. Depicting how Trinidad was touched by this expanding ideology, Naipaul frames the history of Trinidad within a global perspective. It is Naipaul's international life style that gives him a distanced view of home and enables him to set its history within an international concept. 'History: A Smell of Fish Glue,' the second chapter of *A Way in the World*, deals with the contemporary history of Trinidad, focusing on the Trinidad Asians who were politically marginalized at the time of the nationalists' empowerment. 'History: A Smell of Fish Glue' reflects Naipaul's caution with regard to Trinidadian nationalism. It also reveals his concern for establishing an ethnic-based history. *The Loss of El Dorado* and 'History: A Smell of Fish Glue' thus show Naipaul's different sense of history.

The fifth chapter deals with Naipaul's travelogues. Naipaul has visited a number of postcolonial nations, observed the conditions which the countries are in, and given incisive analysis of them. However, the visited countries often reminded him of his childhood insecurity, which Naipaul claims is created by the uncertainty of poor and uprooted living conditions. This makes him become emotional and dismissive of those countries. As a result, Naipaul's travelogues sometimes reveal a uniform presentation of the world. They are often categorical and reveal a dichotomic division between the developed world and the underdeveloped world. Such a dichotomous view mirrors Naipaul's traumatic memory and distorted vision, which suggests that Naipaul is the victim of imperialism. In terms of the

deconstruction of the dichotomic presentation of the world, many of Naipaul's travelogues are unsuccessful. However, the most significant aspect of Naipaul's travelogues is his revealing the long-lasting impact of colonial ideology on the mind of colonials including himself. In his later career, however, Naipaul explores a new style that juxtaposes many kinds of lives and rarely reveals the dichotomic view. Naipaul overcomes his psychological burden, becomes open to other cultures, and transcends the dichotomic view.

The last chapter discusses the connection between Naipaul's works and his geographical movement as a rootless writer and traveller. In his later career, Naipaul modifies the dichotomic view of the world and becomes more open to other cultures, as the previous chapters suggest. This last chapter will argue that Naipaul's geographical movement plays a significant role in changing his attitudes. The works that reflect the autobiographical aspects will be discussed in this chapter. Naipaul's particular way of travelling and writing about it has a curing effect which helps him to be free from the ideological logic of centre and margin. This process gives forth the matured author who is finally in tune with his rootless condition and has modified his distorted view of the world.

Overall, in his former career Naipaul often reveals that the author is the victim of colonial education and possesses a dichotomic view of the world in terms of the centre and the margin. Because of this, some of his works are vulnerable to the criticism that his works do not help to empower the former colonies. However, the significance is that Naipaul is frank enough to present his dichotomic view of the world and to reveal the psychological damage that the ideology of imperialism has imposed on the minds of colonials. Such incisive and honest visions are a significant value of Naipaul's writing.

Chapter One:

Fictions with a Trinidadian Setting: A Division between Centre and Margin

1: Introduction

This chapter will discuss Naipaul's fictional depiction of his birthplace of Trinidad. In his early career as a writer, Naipaul published four novels set in Trinidad: *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958), *Miguel Street* (1959), and *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961). The first three fictions represent Naipaul's vision of life in contemporary Trinidad in the mixed styles of comedy, tragedy and pathos. *A House for Mr Biswas* is a more complex and serious treatment of the author's background.

Miguel Street is Naipaul's first written, but third published, fiction. It is a collection of character sketches of the inhabitants of Port of Spain's Miguel Street during the 1930s and 1940s. Many of the characters are based upon people Naipaul knew as a boy growing up in Trinidad. *Miguel Street* represents Naipaul's comic vision of life in Trinidad, depicting the colourful inhabitants of Miguel Street. However, it also constitutes a disturbing picture of Creole society: the beating of women and children and verbal abuse are frequent, as is a longing for a Western model of success that is never achieved. Despite this, characters bounce back with eccentricity and laughter. Their separate aspirations and disappointments are carefully revealed.

The Mystic Masseur is another comic depiction, this time of the East Indian *milieu* of Trinidad's countryside. The protagonist, Ganesh Ramsumair, exhibits his dynamic personality. Ganesh starts off as a teacher and becomes a recognised healer. Later he

enters politics, getting elected as a Member of the Legislative Council, and finally becomes an MBE. It is a comic book but it contains the painful theme of the attenuation of Trinidad Indian culture in Trinidad. It depicts how the protagonist repudiates his Indian origin, which is symbolically represented in his changing name from Ganesh Ramsumair to G. Ramsay Muir.

The Suffrage of Elvira deals extensively with the politics of Trinidad. The story is set in 1950, during Trinidad's second election held under universal suffrage. Naipaul views the arrival of universal adult suffrage in 1946 as political immaturity: '[t]here were no parties, only individuals. Corruption . . . aroused only amusement and even mild approval'.¹ *The Suffrage of Elvira* reflects this view and caricatures the political confusion in the fictional district of Elvira in Trinidad. The protagonist Harbans runs for election to the Legislative Council of Elvira, and eventually wins. Naipaul ironically depicts the election business as carried out without the constituents' having a proper understanding of democracy.

A House for Mr Biswas is an imaginative reconstruction of the life of Seepersad Naipaul, V. S. Naipaul's father. It tells the story of a Trinidad-born Indian, Mohun Biswas, from birth to death. It depicts Mr. Biswas' growth from a homeless child to a journalist and father of four, established in a house of his own. Mr. Biswas' search for domestic independence is one of the themes: Mr. Biswas has to lead a nomadic life and inhabits various domestic environments from childhood onwards. Through marriage, he moves to the Tulsi household in Hanuman House, an extended family governed by Mrs. Tulsi and her son-in-law Seth. Mr. Biswas' association with the Tulsi household occupies the larger part of the book. On the whole, Mr. Biswas' life and his *milieu* convey the social history of the Indian community and, by extension, that of the West Indies.

The critics' opinions on these four works vary. West Indian critics sometimes criticise the detached view employed in Naipaul's first three works as contemptuous. On the other

¹ Naipaul, *The Middle Passage: Impressions of Five Societies – British, French and Dutch – in the West Indies and South America* (London: André Deutsch, 1962; repr. London: Picador, 1995), p. 84.

hand, Western critics tend to appreciate Naipaul's use of irony as his narrative technique. The varied reviews are partly due to Naipaul's exploitation of the ambiguity created by the exile's duality, which contains a combination of compassion and detachment. This chapter will consider the double viewpoint as a source of Naipaul's significance and uniqueness. Distance enables Naipaul to understand his home. Furthermore, it creates a sense of nostalgia that makes him recreate an imaginary home in his fiction. It also creates the unique spatial depiction of his home, which will be analysed in this section. On the whole, Naipaul's ambiguous relationship with Trinidad as an exile gives forth a uniqueness that consists of the mixed sentiments of detachment and compassion.

The first two sections will discuss the double viewpoint that dominates Naipaul's fictional depiction of Trinidad. It reveals the intricate mixture of Naipaul's compassion, detachment, anxiety and criticism that makes his depiction of home unique. The fourth section will defend Naipaul from the criticism that his distanced view is contemptuous of his birthplace. The last section will establish the significance of Naipaul's writing of home for West Indian literary history. It will argue the benefits to Caribbean literature of Naipaul's imagining and writing of home.

2: Romancers' Escapism, Tricksters' Masks of Success

This section will discuss two types of space in Naipaul's fictional depiction, which can be labelled 'romancers' escapism' and 'tricksters' pretence.' Naipaul applies the term 'romancers' to inhabitants of Miguel Street to suggest the kind of character who escapes to fantasy and ignores the poor conditions of their living place.² Naipaul shows that such escapism is always followed by a disappointing realisation that idealism is illusion. 'Tricksters' reveal another kind of double vision. Naipaul depicts various Trinidadian

² Naipaul, *Miguel Street* (London: André Deutsch, 1959; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 72.

tricksters who survive with their wit and enjoy a kind of success. However, the seemingly successful stories are revealed to be a mere cover over a fundamental failure.

Such double-faceted space is one of the prominent devices seen in Naipaul's fictional depiction of Trinidad. Pretentious behaviours imply a defence mechanism, for Naipaul's characters conceal the negative sense of place, namely that they live in an unimportant place far away from the colonial centre. Behind their escapism, Naipaul reveals the islanders' psychological damage created by colonial ideology.

Naipaul sees both positive and negative aspects in romancers' fantasy lives, yet he also sees the negative aspects in escapist's willing forgetfulness. In *The Middle Passage*, Naipaul critically analyses the West Indians' willingness 'to forget and ignore' and to live in 'the West Indian fantasy', where '[r]eality is always separate from the ideal'.³

An example of the double-faceted aspects of romancers' escapism is seen in the story of B. Wordsworth. B. Wordsworth, or Black Wordsworth, sees himself as a spiritual brother of White Wordsworth, by which he means the English poet William Wordsworth. B. Wordsworth considers himself '[t]he greatest [poet] in the world'.⁴ At the beginning, the poet enchants the boy narrator with his poetic sensibility. With the charm of beautiful words, the poet draws the boy into his poetic world and makes the narrator say '[t]he world became a most exciting place'.⁵ Even when the boy narrator is upset, the poet can quickly lift his mood. Then the boy says, 'I felt like nothing, and at the same time I had never felt so big and great in all my life'.⁶ The story is thus heart-warming and reveals the attractive aspects of the romancer's fantasy world. Even so, the poet's fantasy is doomed to disintegrate at the end of the story. The poet hides the painful fact that he hardly produces any poetry at all and cannot be taken seriously. B. Wordsworth confesses to the boy narrator that he is a failed poet, and ends their friendship abruptly, being too ashamed. The

³ Naipaul, *Middle*, pp. 77, 77, 74.

⁴ Naipaul, *Miguel*, p. 46.

⁵ Ibid., p. 49.

⁶ Ibid., p. 48.

boy narrator is heart-broken, and the fantasy world of the escapist is replaced by disillusionment.

Naipaul's presentation of escapism and disillusionment is divided clearly into an either / or division. Naipaul creates this particular pattern to firstly present the escapist's world, and then replace it with the world of disillusionment. This clear-cut division is also seen spatially. For instance, the narrator of *Miguel Street* explains his native environment as follows:

A stranger could drive through Miguel Street and just say 'Slum!' because he could see no more. But we, who lived there, saw our street as a world, where everybody was quite different from everybody else.⁷

Here are seen two types of space: 'just a slum,' and 'a world.' When the characters' uniqueness and charm are emphasised, their fantasy world looks like 'a world.' However, when the characters' uniqueness is revealed to be a pretence to conceal their failure, their world stops looking like a wonderful world. The former is the vision of insiders, and the latter is the perspective of outsiders. Naipaul reveals each view by turn. For instance, Big Foot is depicted as the strongest and most feared man on Miguel Street, but readers are informed of the concealed fact that he is also a coward who is terrified when he cuts his foot on a broken bottle. In other words, readers are given the objective view of Big Foot, which inhabitants of the Street are not informed of. Similarly, Elias is a boy who is respected for his cleverness by inhabitants of Miguel Street. However, readers are informed of his superficial understanding of subjects and do not share the insiders' admiration of the boy. Naipaul gives the two views of insiders and outsiders by turn and juxtaposes them as the two sides of the same coin. It is a spatial aesthetics controlled by the exile's distanced position.

Paradoxically, unlike the distinct spatial division, the author's sentiment is not clearly distanced from romancers. Naipaul still possesses part of the colonial sentiment, which prevents him from maintaining a mental distance from home. He particularly remembers

⁷ Ibid., p. 63.

his fear at the idea that he is trapped in his native *milieu* until death and will be completely forgotten after death. Such claustrophobic and existential fear lingers in him even after he establishes his literary career: when his ship from England touches the quay in Trinidad, ‘I began to feel all my old fear of Trinidad.’⁸ This is in 1960, when Naipaul has already published his first three fictions and established his reputation as a writer in the UK.

Because Naipaul sees Trinidad as a place that feeds such existential fear in islanders, he emphasises the characters’ tenuously rooted existence. An example is seen in Naipaul’s treatment of B. Wordsworth’s death. One year after his death, the narrator happens to see the changed residence where the poet used to live. Then he feels ‘as though B. Wordsworth had never existed.’⁹ The phrase conveys the implication that the poet fails to live up to his literary ambition and disappears from the world without leaving anything to prove his existence. Characters in *Miguel Street* are often given this kind of depiction, which makes them look tenuously rooted and illusory. Furthermore, this illusory depiction reflects Naipaul’s old negative self-image of marginal existence, which he used to feel in his formative years in Trinidad. When the boy narrator who mirrors fragments of Naipaul’s childhood leaves for England, the narrator seems to reveal Naipaul’s old fear of leading a marginal existence. The narrator finds that his flight has been delayed, so he goes back to *Miguel Street*. The narrator feels that his excitement before his adventure is neglected by his street; he is disappointed to find that ‘everything was going on just as before, with nothing to indicate my absence.’¹⁰ This response on the part of the narrator mirrors his self-esteem and his fear towards the imprisoning *milieu* that cannot satisfy his great expectations of life.

Thus, Naipaul juxtaposes two spaces: of escapism and disillusionment. In the space of escapism, islanders are witty, comical and unique. It is the space viewed through insiders’ willing forgetfulness of the outside world. It enables them to create a sense of happiness in

⁸ Naipaul, *Middle*, p. 40.

⁹ Naipaul, *Miguel*, p. 52.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

life and to cherish their lives. For instance, Hat is a content man of ‘settled habits,’ who ‘always enjoyed what he did.’¹¹ He also observes the lives of people on the Street and entertains friends with his interesting philosophical comments. Similarly, Laura, a mother of eight children of seven fathers, is ‘always gay’ and amuses people with her ‘shouts and curses’, which are rich and unique.¹² However, once the escapists’ space disintegrates, characters reveal their helplessness. Their seeming happiness turns out to be only a superficial resilience, and their fantasy world is doomed to disillusionment. Hat’s laid-back style disappears after he himself faces personal predicaments, revealing that his sorrow overcomes his ability to enjoy life. Laura also loses her gaiety when one of her daughters becomes pregnant. The fact that her daughter follows the same doomed path as she has distresses her. This reveals the hidden sadness and self-negation of Laura, which she hid with gaiety.

This double-faceted space is the product of the author’s experience of exile. Naipaul, who knows Trinidad both from inside and outside, controls the distance towards his home. There is a paradox in this double viewpoint. Although Naipaul’s leaving home to escape from a sense of entrapment gives him a detached vision, his geographical escape from this *milieu* increases his fear. As a result, when Naipaul resorts to his distanced view, he depicts the characters’ disillusionment and tenuous existence, and reveals his old fear towards the imprisoning *milieu* of Trinidad. This suggests the paradox that distancing himself physically from home feeds a sense of past anxiety and evokes psychological trauma. Naipaul’s physical escape from home does not erase his inner anxiety, but increases it.

This reveals that Naipaul is psychologically entrapped in his existential anxiety, which was fostered in the native island. Naipaul believes that the colonies’ political dependency causes psychological damage in colonials:

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 160, 157.

¹² Ibid., pp. 84, 85.

[T]o be a colonial is, in a way, to know a total kind of security. It is to have all decisions about major issues taken out of one's hands. It is to feel that one's political status has been settled so finally that there is very little one can do in the world.¹³

Thus Naipaul is critical of the colonial ideology that creates the colonials' paralysed mentality. By depicting the romancers' helplessness, Naipaul suggests that they are victims of colonial ideology. The depiction of existentially tenuous space reveals not only Naipaul's own anxiety but also his criticism towards the ideology of colonialism.

So far it has been argued that the double-faceted space of romancers is an intricate mixture of Naipaul's compassion, detachment, anxiety, and criticism. In addition to such escapism on the part of romancers, Naipaul applied his double viewpoint to his depiction of tricksters' success and failure. Naipaul depicts Trinidad as a predatory world where tricksters survive with their wit and enjoy their success. *The Suffrage of Elvira* depicts various exploiters who take advantage of the haphazard mood that accompanies universal suffrage. Harbans, the protagonist and an electoral candidate, manages to win the election by offering bribes. In *The Mystic Masseur*, Ganesh dons and doffs roles according to circumstances and climbs the steps to fame. The division between the tricksters and the tricked is not clear. Man-man appears to be a successful type of picaro. He can go his way, for he is feared by people as a half-mad man who cunningly uses the excrement of his dog for his benefit. However, one day his eccentricity leads to failure, and he becomes one of the tricked: when Man-man becomes aware of religion and starts preaching on the street, people start stoning him.

Naipaul's tricksters always reach a point where their aspiration to victory stops because the cruelty of their *milieu* does not allow them to succeed. Harbans wins the election, but bitterness remains in him. He is disillusioned with his constituents who use their votes as a lure to make Harbans spend money on them. Even Ganesh, the greatest bluffer in Naipaul's fiction, faces situations to which he must submit. At the Governor's dinner,

¹³ Naipaul, 'Without a Place', p. 14.

Ganesh, as a Member of the Legislative Council, feels uncomfortable, for he cannot eat most of the meal because of the vegetarianism he practices for religious reasons. Other guests are also embarrassed because they are not used to Western table manners. The awkwardness of the dinner scene depresses Ganesh. In this respect, the division between tricksters and romancers is not clear: just like romancers, tricksters hide a fundamental failure behind seemingly successful stories.

Naipaul depicts tricksters themselves as having a double self-image: whilst success makes a trickster feel himself to be a great figure in the world, he occasionally has moments in which he feels his existence is trivial. Such a divided vision of self is also spatially depicted. For instance, when Ganesh achieves fame, it is depicted that his presence changes the landscape of Trinidad. Fuente Grove, Ganesh's village, used to be 'a sad little village,' which appears only 'on large maps in the office of the Government Surveyor'.¹⁴ After his reputation grows, the place attracts people from all over the country, so that 'Fuente Grove prospered. The Public Works Department recognized its existence and resurfaced the road to a comparative evenness.'¹⁵ Thus, Ganesh's reputation brings his nonentity to recognisability. Even so, Ganesh has moments when he feels his existence is trivial. During the Second World War, Ganesh and his friend follow the war news 'with interest and discussed it every Sunday.'¹⁶ They get hold of a map of Europe, and talk about strategy and tactics. Ganesh is excited with the idea of publishing 'a sort of history book for later on'.¹⁷ The idea soon dies though, when he realizes that his country is not participating in the war, and says, 'we is just a tiny little dot on some maps. If you ask me, I think Hitler ain't even know it have a place called Trinidad'.¹⁸ The topographical imagery of Trinidad as 'a dot on a map' often appears in *The Mystic Masseur*, which becomes a spatial metaphor to suggest the Trinidadians' sense of alienation from metropolitan culture.

¹⁴ Naipaul, *The Mystic Masseur* (London: André Deutsch, 1957; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), pp. 12, 68.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 154.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 112.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

The spatial metaphor suggests that the geographical division of center and margin is insinuated into islanders' sense of space and intensifies their sense of inferiority. Just as romancers do, tricksters live in a double-faceted space where they feel their existence to be both important and trivial, depending on the situation. Again, Naipaul's double viewpoint controls whether his characters appear to be successful or unsuccessful.

When the effects caused by tricksters' frauds stay at the personal level, they are usually depicted comically. However, when they seem to damage the development of the country, Naipaul often depicts them critically. Naipaul's concern about his home perhaps makes him severe in depicting the fraudsters. One of the examples is the tricksters' involvement with politics. The newly arrived democracy is one of the opportunities that tricksters take advantage of. Naipaul critically depicts how fraudsters manipulate the situation for their benefit.

The topic of Trinidad's politics is one of the themes in both *The Mystic Masseur* and *The Suffrage of Elvira*. They describe the first two elections (1946, 1950) just before and following independence from British Colonial Rule. Whilst *The Mystic Masseur* sketches the first election in 1946, for which Ganesh runs, the second election in 1950 is the topic of *The Suffrage of Elvira*. According to the historian Brereton, it

was the heyday of the individualist in politics, the independent, the 'broker politician' wheeling and dealing between various interest groups, manipulating the votes and the divisions among them in his own interests, seizing every chance in the confused transition from one system of political authority to another.¹⁹

Similarly, Naipaul recognises individualism during the beginning of suffrage. Naipaul attributes this individualism to the nature of the colonial society, where every man has 'to be for himself' and owes 'no loyalty to the island and scarcely any to his group.'²⁰ Naipaul

¹⁹ Bridget Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad: 1783-1962* (Kingston, Jamaica: Heinemann, 1981), p. 227.

²⁰ Naipaul, *Middle*, p. 83.

thus recognises both the political inexperience and the history of colonialism that brings forth ‘the squalor of the politics’.²¹

Such a negative view of the beginning of universal suffrage in Trinidad makes Naipaul depict it ironically. His target is the confusion of politics and profit, the mimicking of colonial-style politics and the absurdity of democracy, which has not evolved out of the needs of the people. For instance, *The Suffrage of Elvira* shows how the constituents of Elvira carry on an absurd involvement with the election and do not learn the essence of democracy until the end of the election. Naipaul ends the story with the ironical phrase, ‘[a]nd so democracy took root in Elvira.’²²

Such irony, however, is not merely the product of Naipaul’s distanced view as an outsider. It reflects Naipaul’s genuine concern about the future of his birthplace. In fact, Naipaul reveals slight hopes for the future of the country. The characters of younger generations are depicted as learning from the beginning of democracy and growing up. For instance, Foam, who takes the role of Harbans’ campaign manager, has grown and matured as a result of the activities of election. People start to treat him respectfully because ‘the election had somehow changed Foam; he was no longer a boy.’²³

This section has argued that Naipaul’s viewpoint as an exile creates a double-faceted space in the representation of Trinidad. Naipaul presents his characters’ escapism and disillusionment by turns and juxtaposes two types of space as two sides of the same coin. The way Naipaul juxtaposes the two creates the clear-cut division between illusion and disillusionment. Perhaps the weakness of such an explicit division is that it may be vulnerable to certain criticism: some critics will emphasise Naipaul’s depiction of characters’ disillusionment and criticise Naipaul as disdainful. Although Naipaul’s aim in depicting the divided sense of space is to reveal the psychological harm that the ideology of colonialism inflicted on the colonials, there remains the fact that he represents the

²¹ Ibid.

²² Naipaul, *The Suffrage of Elvira* (London: André Deutsch, 1958; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 193.

²³ Ibid., p. 195.

dichotomic vision of centre and margin. Furthermore, the narrative reveals that Naipaul himself is caught in the dichotomic view, for he reveals his own anxiety at having led a marginal existence. Naipaul, in his later career, however, overcomes such a dichotomic view and develops a more fluid sense of space, as my sixth chapter will argue.

Naipaul's depiction of the East Indian culture and the life of Mr. Biswas reveals a more ambiguous sense of space. Irony and sentiment are intricately mixed, as the next section will establish.

3: East Indians' Space and Mr. Biswas' Search for Independence

In the mosaic society of the Caribbean, cultural attenuation is unavoidable, but Naipaul's East Indian characters are uncomfortable about losing their Indian culture. They try to maintain that culture by retaining the old lifestyle and performing traditional rituals. Such effort is seen in spaces such as the Tulsi household in *A House for Mr Biswas* and Ganesh's house in Fuente Grove, where he practices his mysticism. These are examples of the space of a Hindu past that preserves traditional Hindu culture. Similarly to romancers, the East Indian Trinidadians escape from the Creolised world and withdraw to their ethnic roots.

Mr. Biswas, however, reveals a different attitude towards this escapism. Although he occasionally takes advantage of the shelter of Hanuman House, he also has the spirit to challenge the status quo and tries to achieve an independent status. Because of Mr. Biswas' double desires for his Hindu roots and his independence, he has an ambiguous relationship with the spaces of the Hindu past. This section will firstly argue that Naipaul's depiction of the space of the Hindu past reflects its cultural attenuation, the idealised escapism to Hindu roots, and the inevitability of Creolisation. Secondly, it goes on to show that Mr. Biswas both belongs to the space of the Hindu past and searches for his independent status.

Hanuman House is a typical example of the space of the Hindu past. The narrator calls it 'an alien white fortress', because the house offers a kind of shelter for the Tulsi men who

belong neither to motherland India nor to Creolised Trinidad: ‘They continually talked of going back to India, but when the opportunity came, many refused, afraid of the unknown, afraid to leave the familiar temporariness.’²⁴ The Tulsis practice various Hindu activities to maintain the old Hindu values. For instance, Hari, one of the brothers-in-law in the House, is a pundit, a Hindu scholar.²⁵ His activity as a pundit is appreciated by his friends: daily he changes from estate clothes into ‘a dhoti’, reads some ‘huge, ungainly Hindi book’, and conducts ‘occasional ceremonies for close friends’.²⁶

While Naipaul describes the well-preserved Hindu activities in detail, he also depicts their superficiality. The empty Hindu activity is depicted as the product of cultural attenuation caused by Creolised and Westernised Trinidad society. Ganesh’s house, for instance, shows its Westernisation spatially. It has a Hindu exterior with two stone sculptures of Ganesh, the Hindu elephant god, but a modern interior is fitted with a musical toilet-paper rack and a refrigerator packed with bottles of Coca Cola. In Hanuman House, the elder Tulsi son not only goes to a Roman Catholic College but also wears a crucifix. With such Hindu attenuation, the space of the Hindu past loses its authenticity.

The attenuation of Hindu culture in Trinidad is one of Naipaul’s major themes. He sees the uprooted Hindu culture in Trinidad as ‘self-contained’ and ‘imperfect’.²⁷ Although he accepts such attenuation as inevitable, he laments this loss: ‘we knew there had been change, gain, loss. We knew that something which was once whole had been washed away. What was whole was the idea of India.’²⁸ A short story, ‘My Aunt Gold Teeth [sic]’(1954) in *A Flag on the Island*, deals with the attenuation of Hinduism as its main theme. The protagonist, the wife of a Hindu pundit, is attracted by Christianity, and secretly frequents

²⁴ Naipaul, *A House for Mr Biswas* (London: André Deutsch, 1961; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), pp. 80, 194.

²⁵ Pundit, or Pandit in Hindi, is ‘a Hindu scholar who is learned enough in the scripture to interpret and expound them.’ George Thomas Kurian, ‘Pandit’, in *Historical and Cultural Dictionary of India* (Metuchen, N. J.: Scarecrow, 1976), p. 189.

²⁶ Naipaul, *House*, pp. 114-5.

²⁷ Naipaul, *An Area of Darkness* (London: André Deutsch, 1964; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 29.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 187-88.

the nearby church. Naipaul depicts the absurdity and comicalness in her mixing of Hinduism and Christianity. However, her secret infidelity ends up in a sequence of family misfortunes. She is blamed for its cause and judged as a ‘shame’ by her family.²⁹ The narrator says, ‘[w]e didn’t know that a good Hindu, and a member of our family, could sink so low.’³⁰ Whilst the comical depiction of her behaviour reflects Naipaul’s acceptance of the inevitable attenuation of Hinduism, there is also an element of nostalgia for the purer Hindu culture of the past. Thus, the cultural attenuation of Hindu culture is described as unfortunate and unavoidable.

In this way, the world outside the space of Hindu escapism is depicted as the world of unavoidable Creolisation. Furthermore, the Caribbean Creole society is depicted as a changing new world without a long-established history. It makes for a contrast to the East Indians’ Hindu world, which has a kind of order originating in the old Indian tradition. The following section discusses Mr. Biswas, who shares both the space of Hindu escapism and the creolised society, and reveals the ambiguity of belonging.

As a modern Hindu, Mr. Biswas defies the conventions of the Hindu culture and searches for independence. In the context of an emerging colony, to achieve his independence is significant for Mr. Biswas, because it not only gives him economic independence but also creates a morally coherent environment. His search for an independent status is symbolised in his quest for a house. Mr. Biswas, as a fatherless and homeless derelict, needs a shelter when he is battered by the cruelty of society. As a result he continues to be a temporary resident living in the houses of others; ‘in none of these places had he ever been more than a visitor, an upsetter of routine.’³¹ Mr. Biswas’ quest for independence is achieved through his balancing of this ambiguous belonging to the two worlds.

²⁹ Naipaul, ‘My Aunt Gold Teeth’ (1954), in *A Flag on the Island* (London: André Deutsch, 1967; repr. 1970), p. 21.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Naipaul, *House*, p. 132.

Mr. Biswas' double belongingness is symbolised spatially: residential space plays an important role in symbolising Mr. Biswas' relationship with the collectiveness of Hindu culture in Trinidad. Mr. Biswas' living in Hanuman House suggests his dependency and belongingness to the tradition of the East Indians in Trinidad. On the other hand, his running away from the house reflects his urge to be independent. The succession of his residences, therefore, reveals the trajectory of Mr. Biswas' quest for independence. For instance, Mr. Biswas' leaving Hanuman house and moving to the house he has built at Green Vale is his first attempt at independence. The collapse of the house at Green Vale, however, is paralleled by his nervous breakdown and the subsequent return to the shelter of the Tulsis. Thus, Mr. Biswas' living places symbolise alternate periods of dependence and rebellion.

Naipaul depicts Creole society outside the protection of the Hindu family as cruel to Mr. Biswas. Having lost his father at an early age, he is doomed to have a rootless life as an orphan moving from one shelter to another. Naipaul creates powerful images of promiscuity, illness, and filth in an underdeveloped society. For instance, when Mr. Biswas works as an apprentice journalist for the *Sentinel*, he is assigned the task of reading the applications of the destitute and is exposed to the terrifying poverty in slums every day:

The *Sentinel* could not have chosen a better way of terrifying Mr Biswas, of reviving his dread of the sack, illness or sudden disaster. Day after day he visited the mutilated, the defeated, the futile and the insane living in conditions not far removed from his own: in suffocating rotting wooden kennels, in sheds of box-board, canvas and tin, in dark and sweating concrete caverns.³²

In spite of the cruel society outside the Hindu escapists' world, Mr. Biswas attempts to join the Creole society. However, his mental strength and financial capability is not enough, so he must compromise through his occasional dependency on the Tulsis. Because of his imperfect rebelliousness, Mr. Biswas is mocked as a 'paddler' by the Tulsi family.

Mr. Biswas' rebellion against the Tulsis is the rebellion of the modern Hindu against the orthodox Hindu. As a result, he retains an ambiguous relationship with Hindu culture.

³² Ibid., p. 441.

Ostensibly, Mr. Biswas seems to have little attachment to the Hindu way of life. For instance, at Jairam's place, where Mr. Biswas is sent to be trained as a pundit, he 'sat without religious fervour before the elaborate shrine.'³³ However, he occasionally reveals his Hindu inclination. In Green Vale, during the storm, he chants the names of Hindu deities, 'Rama Rama Sita Rama', telling Anand to do the same.³⁴ Mr. Biswas also criticises the loss of Hindi in the Tulsis, their empty rituals, and their acceptance of modern ways when they are advantageous. Thus, Hindu nature is inherent in Mr. Biswas in spite of his seeming rebelliousness. It parallels Mr. Biswas' model, Seepersad Naipaul, who considered himself to be a 'modern Hindu' and attacked the moral feebleness of traditional Hinduism.³⁵

After a succession of attempts and failures in search of independence, Mr. Biswas finally purchases his own house in Sikkim Street, an attempt 'to lay claim to one's portion of the earth'.³⁶ Mr. Biswas is satisfied in spite of the jerry-built mortgaged house because he values the idea of having his own space. However, the narrative also reveals Mr. Biswas' misery in dying in the jerry-built house for which he has been duped into paying far too much. Therefore, whether Mr. Biswas' last home should be considered a success or not remains ambiguous.

Whilst Mr. Biswas ends up establishing himself and his family in an independent home, the Tulsi family disintegrates gradually by losing its Hindu character and yielding to the Creolised society. As Mrs. Tulsi becomes old, her power to control the household weakens. Some of the sons-in-law start to behave selfishly, and many of the Tulsi family are settled in houses of their own. By the time of Mr. Biswas' death, all the sisters have moved to their own houses. The disintegration of the household is depicted spatially. When they move to Shorthills, the new estate in the mountains, some begin desperate money-making

³³ Ibid., p. 53.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 291.

³⁵ Seepersad Naipaul, 'Mr. Naipaul to Make Sacrifice: A Goat to Die for Kali Today', *Trinidad Guardian*, 23 June 1933, p. 1.

³⁶ Naipaul, *House*, p. 14.

schemes, selling things from their own property such as fruits, trees and soil. However, their lack of experience and know-how leads to the consequent disastrous failure of every scheme. The property is broken up and becomes a spatial metaphor to suggest the end of the Tulsi unity. Hanuman House, which the family leave behind, loses its Hindu identity as well. The House is taken over by a Port of Spain firm. Beneath the statue of Hanuman, a monkey-god in Hindu mythology, hangs '[a] large red advertisement for Bata shoes'³⁷ which symbolises the house's loss of its former Hindu identity and submission to the larger force of society and economy. Thus, Naipaul reveals spatially that Trinidad's Hindu society loses the unifying symbol, which was brought from India.

Mr. Biswas not only avoids following the same fate with the Tulsi family but also acquires his own house. From this point of view, the end of Mr. Biswas can be seen as celebratory. However, close examination will reveal that Mr. Biswas' satisfaction is achieved conditionally: Naipaul depicts Mr. Biswas' satisfaction as gained at the cost of accepting a limiting *milieu*.

In his youth, Mr. Biswas escapes into metropolitan idealism. For instance, he escapes into Samuel Smiles' books, which he finds as romantic as novels.³⁸ He sees himself in many of Samuel Smiles' heroes, but there always comes a point when the resemblance ceases. Unlike Smiles' heroes, Mr. Biswas 'had no ambition, and in this hot land, apart from opening a shop or buying a motorbus, what could he do?'.³⁹ Thus, his reading of Samuel Smiles both encourages and discourages him in his belief that some kind of idealism is possible in Trinidad.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 530. Bata Shoes is the world's largest shoe company. It is currently headquartered in Toronto, Canada.

³⁸ Samuel Smiles (1812 - 1904) was a political reformer and moralist, born in Scotland. His career as a writer of inspirational works includes *Self-Help* (1859), *Character* (1871), *Thrift* (1875) and *Duty* (1880). He also produced biographies of great men who through hard graft found success; they included *George Stephenson* (1875), *Lives of the Engineers* (1861) and *Josiah Wedgwood* (1894). 'Smiles, Samuel', in *The Concise Dictionary of National Biography: From Earliest Times to 1985*, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), III, pp. 2767-8.

³⁹ Naipaul, *House*, p. 79.

As he grows old, Mr. Biswas stops his habit of escapism. Once, he had ‘moments when he could persuade himself that he lived in a land where romance was possible.’⁴⁰ But gradually Mr. Biswas’ escapism lessens. He does not finish his attempted novel, ‘Escape,’ nor does he reply to a letter from America in which his ex-boss suggests that he should try to look for a job there. Thus, his acceptance of the native *milieu* is possible on the condition that he abandons the habit of dreaming and escapism.

This suggests that Mr. Biswas is the victim of the poor and limiting *milieu* of the colony. He lives at a time when leaving the country is beyond his reach financially. However, the younger generation of his children such as Anand and Savi finds it possible to go abroad. From the way Mr. Biswas enthusiastically educates his children in his later life, it is revealed that Mr. Biswas’ fantasy is passed over to his children. Such a relationship between a father and his children parallels that of Seepersad and V. S. Naipaul. Seepersad’s dream of publishing his novels is neglected for his daily concern for earning money. Even so, V. S. Naipaul gained a scholarship and was given the opportunity to leave home and achieve creative freedom.

Naipaul depicts that Mr. Biswas accepts the limiting *milieu* of Trinidad but still is able to get a sense of satisfaction from it. At the beginning of the story, the endless nomadic life-style has deprived him of a sense of belongingness to any place. This experience makes him wish to possess his own living space:

Mr Biswas thought in the long room, suppose that at one word I could just disappear from this room, what would remain to speak of me? . . .

He had lived in many houses. And how easy it was to think of those houses without him!⁴¹

This shows that having one’s own living space is significant for Mr. Biswas. That is why Mr. Biswas is happy with his own house, in spite of its poorly built condition:

How terrible it would have been, at this time, to be without it [Mr. Biswas’ own house]: to have died among the Tulsis, . . . to have lived without even

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 79.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 131.

attempting to lay claim to one's portion of the earth; to have lived and died as one had been born, unnecessary and unaccommodated.⁴²

Thus, the final house is seen 'as representative of the partial freedom which one can achieve, once one has learned to accept one's limitations and live within the realms of the possible.'⁴³ The house gives Mr. Biswas happiness, although it is conditional.

Thus, the house in the Sikkim Street is seen both as Mr. Biswas' achievement and his tragic outcome. Whether or not his final acquisition is significant remains ambiguous in Naipaul's narrative. This perhaps reveals that Naipaul himself has mixed feelings towards his father. The author's mixed feelings make the depiction of Mr. Biswas an intricate mixture of compassion, pathos, and detachment. Naipaul's tender feelings for his father bring forth the depiction of Mr. Biswas' house as his achievement, yet Naipaul's distanced view reveals the limited world of Mr. Biswas' life. Also, Naipaul's guilt as a son who could not devote himself to his father during his lifetime gives a sense of pathos to the narrative.

Naipaul's intricately fused emotions also appear in a spatial form. As discussed in the previous section, the distanced view of Naipaul's first three novels is simpler and creates a clear-cut effect. The narrator controls the division between the space of escapism and disillusionment. Such spatial division is not seen in *A House for Mr Biswas*. The narrator does not control the spatial presentation, so that it is up to readers to decide how to interpret it. As a result, an ambiguity remains in the spatial division: the significance of the house in Sikkim Street is ambiguous, and Mr. Biswas' belongingness to Hanuman House is uncertain.

In an interview in 2003, to the question, 'do you consider the ending to be happy or tragic?' Naipaul contemplated for a few seconds and answered 'it's both actually.'⁴⁴ As

⁴² Ibid., pp. 13-14.

⁴³ John Thieme, *The Web of Tradition: Uses of Allusion in V. S. Naipaul's Fiction* (Hertford: Dangaroo; Heartford: Hansib, 1987), p. 68.

⁴⁴ Naipaul, 'World Book Club', BBC Radio World Service, London, 25 December 2003.

this dialogue suggests, the book is rich in its ambiguity: the narrative does not attempt to control readers' interpretations.

4: Irony as the Aesthetics of Distance

The previous two sections have argued that Naipaul's double vision as a diasporic writer creates mixed sentiments and an elusive spatial form in his fictions. His distanced view, however, is sometimes judged as contempt for his birthplace. This section will defend Naipaul from this criticism. It will firstly argue that Naipaul's detached style is his means to an objective view of home and to achieving themes of universal appeal. Secondly, it will argue that Naipaul's aesthetics of distance gives him a wider perspective and enables him to connect a New Literature in English to the Western literary tradition.

When Naipaul is criticised as contemptuous of his native island, his compassion for his characters is often overlooked. As discussed already, the pathos seen in the story of B. Wordsworth is one piece of evidence for Naipaul's obvious warmth of feeling for his characters. Naipaul's detachment, therefore, does not necessarily equal a mere contempt for what he depicts. However, Naipaul's detachment sometimes brings forth a caustic vision of the harsh reality of his native environment. As discussed in my second section, the absurdity of politics in Trinidad and the romancers' helplessness due to their limiting *milieu* are cruelly revealed through Naipaul's detached vision.

Naipaul's aim in disclosing such painful truth is to be truthful and honest, for he believes that writing honestly is the writer's responsibility. He believes that a writers' direct vision will raise readers' recognition of certain problems. In 'The Documentary Heresy' (1964), he criticises the type of literature that fails to rise above mere documentary and does not seek to impose the writer's vision on the world.⁴⁵ Writers of such literature, Naipaul says, abandon half of their responsibility.

⁴⁵ Naipaul, 'The Documentary Heresy', in *Critical Perspectives on V. S. Naipaul*, ed. by Robert D. Hamner (Boulder: Three Continents, 1977), pp. 23-25 (first publ. in *Twentieth Century*, 173 (1964), pp. 107-8).

Having such a literary aesthetics, Naipaul has certain ideas about how the West Indian *milieu* should be depicted. He thinks a West Indian writer should employ a direct vision for depicting home in order ‘to diagnose the sickness of his society’.⁴⁶ However, Naipaul believes that no local writers wish ‘to let down his group.’⁴⁷

Thus, Naipaul’s aim in his direct vision is to raise the readers’ consciousness of problems. It reflects the author’s seriousness as a writer and his genuine concern towards his birthplace. His revealing the absurdity of Trinidad’s politics mirrors his wish to make readers realise the importance of gaining a real sense of democracy, for he finds it problematic that Trinidad’s democracy started involuntarily ‘after no popular agitation’.⁴⁸ Similarly, Naipaul reveals the harsh reality of romancers’ disillusionment in order to show the psychic harm inflicted upon Trinidadians as a result of the ideology of colonialism. Naipaul is concerned about the danger of the West Indians’ escaping into fantasy, as he says that the West Indians are ‘corrupted by a fantasy which is their own cross.’⁴⁹ The value of Naipaul’s ironical and detached vision, therefore, is his seriousness and concern about his native environment.

Another value in Naipaul’s detachment is that it increases the accessibility of his literary material for a wider range of readers. As I will further explore in the next section, Naipaul’s subjects in his writings about home are highly regional: calypso is one of the main motifs in *Miguel Street*; the Hindu culture of East Indians in Trinidad is depicted in detail; Trinidadian wit is used to depict both the comedy and pathos of Trinidadian lives. Naipaul distances himself from these regional materials to achieve a balanced mixture of detachment and attachment. Naipaul’s distanced view widens his vision and helps him to find similarities between his home and other regions. This enables him to succeed in connecting his regional literature to the literature of other worlds.

⁴⁶ Naipaul, *Middle*, p. 80.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

For instance, Naipaul connects the Caribbean trickster figures to Spanish picaresque literature. The genre of the Spanish picaresque novel reflects the social unrest during 16th century Spain, a period of profound social change. It was a time when the Habsburg kings were committed to empire building and fought wars on a grand scale. In the late sixteenth century, however, the Spanish military faced difficulties. The situation made many soldiers escape, begging and stealing on their way home. Reflecting such times, the Spanish picaresque novel presents a rogue and his adventures:

[The protagonist] is born of poor and dishonest parents. . . . He comes up by hook or crook as he may. . . . [I]n order to live he must serve somebody. . . . [H]e flits from one master to another, all of whom he outwits in his career, and describes to satirize [sic] in his narrative. Finally, having run through a variety of strange vicissitudes, . . . he brings his story to a close.⁵⁰

Representative picaroon heroes are seen in such works as *Don Quixote* (1605) by Cervantes and *Lazarillo de Tormes* (anonymous).

In *The Middle Passage*, Naipaul compares Trinidad to the Spanish picaroon world, in that both are predatory worlds where the tricksters rule supreme:

Trinidad has always admired the ‘sharp character’ who, like the sixteenth-century picaroon of Spanish literature, survives and triumphs by his wits. . . .

This [Trinidad] was an ugly world, a jungle. . . .⁵¹

Naipaul believes that the history of its slavery made Trinidad a disordered picaresque world: ‘[i]n the colonial society every man had to be for himself; every man had to grasp whatever dignity and power he was allowed’.⁵² As a result, ‘[s]lavery, the mixed population, the absence of national pride and the closed colonial system have to a remarkable degree re-created the attitudes of the Spanish picaroon world [in the sixteenth-century].’⁵³ Seeing the social similarity between postcolonial Trinidad and Spain in the sixteenth-century, Naipaul depicts Trinidad’s tricksters in the manner of picaresque

⁵⁰ F. W. Chandler, *Romances of Roguery; An Episode in the History of the Novel. The Picaresque Novel in Spain* (doctoral thesis, Columbia University, 1899; repr. New York: Burt Franklin, 1974), pp. 45-46.

⁵¹ Naipaul, *Middle*, pp. 84-85.

⁵² Ibid., p. 83.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 85.

literature. In doing so, Naipaul has succeeded in associating the Caribbean world of his novels with ‘a clearly defined literary type’ of picaresque literature.⁵⁴

There are some literary critics who make similar points to Naipaul. It is argued that contemporary Brazilian narrative based on the antihero is derived from Spanish picaresque literature.⁵⁵ The disordered society of contemporary Brazil is similar to the Spanish picaresque world of the sixteenth-century. So, the genre prospers in contemporary Brazil more than in Portugal because the Brazilian *milieu* is more suitable for the literary genre. In the Brazilian picaresque, or ‘neopicaresque’ to use González’s term, the protagonists are marginalised from the colonial administration.⁵⁶ On the other hand, in the Spanish picaresque novels, the church’s teachings on faith and morality make the tricksters outcasts. In both cases, social disorder enables tricksters to deviate from social rules and ascend the social ranks, which generates parody.

Thus, Naipaul’s viewpoint of Trinidad as connected with the Spanish picaresque world is supported by similar examples of other postcolonial regions. This reveals that Naipaul’s association with Spanish picaresque literature is neither idiosyncratic nor mere favouritism of European models. As Naipaul’s adaptation of Spanish picaresque novels reveals, he blends West Indian materials and European literary genres. Naipaul’s distanced view thus widens his perspective and helps him to extend the theme of his fictional world. It works favourably for Western literature as well, for it gains new materials from the colonial world.

This section argued firstly that Naipaul detachedly reveals the harsh reality of home, motivated both by his sense of responsibility as a writer and by his genuine concern towards his native *milieu*. Secondly, it has shown that the distanced view widens his vision, enables him to extend his themes, and to connect regional material to other literary

⁵⁴ Robert D. Hamner, *V. S. Naipaul* (New York: Twayne, 1973), p. 74.

⁵⁵ See Nancy Vogeley, ‘A Latin American Enlightenment Version of the Picaresque: Lizardi’s Don Catrín de la Fachenda’, and Mário M González, ‘The Brazilian Picaresque’, in *The Picaresque: A Symposium on the Rogue’s Tale*, ed. by Carmen Benito-Vessels and Michael Zappala (Newark: University of Delaware Press; London: Associated University Press, 1994), pp. 123-146 and pp. 163-75.

⁵⁶ Mário M González, p. 163.

traditions. Thus, Naipaul's distanced view is not a disdainful gesture but the product of his responsibility as a writer.

5: Imaginary Homecoming: Exile in Order to Write

This section will propose the significance of Naipaul's writing about home for West Indian literary history. I will argue that, in spite of Naipaul's absence from home, his imagining and writing home itself will contribute to Caribbean literature. It is often said that the condition of exile gives writers 'a desire to reinvent and rewrite home'.⁵⁷ This is applicable even to a writer who voluntarily and happily escapes from home. For instance, James Joyce 'spent his life obsessively rebuilding his home in his art'.⁵⁸ On the other hand, there are a number of writers who celebrate their freedom away from home and do not bother writing about it. An example is the so-called lost generation, a group of American writers in the 1920s, who enjoyed freedom in Europe without a sense of nostalgia.⁵⁹

However, even content expatriate writers have moments when they reveal hints of nostalgia. For instance, although Salman Rushdie is a writer who celebrates his cosmopolitan status and does not openly express nostalgia, he sometimes shows his yearning for a relationship to the past. As Blake argues, in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie depicts the setting of Bombay as the 'great, hot, wealthy and poverty-stricken, overdeveloped and polluted city'.⁶⁰ It is a landscape which Rushdie had been brought up with. Such landscape 'is part of Salman Rushdie's own life' but does not exist anymore.⁶¹ Rushdie thus portrays Bombay 'with a thorough and detailed nostalgia for something which has been lost for ever'.⁶²

⁵⁷ Susheila Nasta, *Home Truths: Fictions of the South Asian Diaspora in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 7.

⁵⁸ Andrew Gurr, *Writers in Exile* (Brighton: Harvester Press; Atlantic Highlands, N. J., Humanities Press, 1981), p. 15.

⁵⁹ Malcolm Cowley's *Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s* (New York: Viking, 1965) explores the relationship between the lost generation and their exile.

⁶⁰ Andrew Blake, *Salman Rushdie: A Beginner's Guide* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2001), p. 44.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

The Caribbean milieu has been especially rich in accounts of imaginary home-writing by expatriate writers. It often involves the recollection of the author's childhood or adolescence. The viewpoint of innocent children works favourably for West Indian writers because it evokes 'a world still free of the harrowing consciousness of cultural dislocation'.⁶³ Such imaginary home-writing includes *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953) by Barbadian writer George Lamming, *A Brighter Sun* (1952) by Trinidadian author Sam Selvon, *Annie John* (1983) by Antiguan writer Jamaica Kincaid, as well as *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961). As Derek Walcott argues, these works are 'regional novels', which are 'rooted in real soil'.⁶⁴

There are certain reasons why the Caribbean produces diasporic writers and their imaginary home-writing more than any other region. Being the descendants of immigrants, the West Indians have their ancestral motherlands far away and therefore lack a sense of tradition. This situation urges the writers' feeling of the necessity of creating a Caribbean tradition through imaginary writing. The lack of tradition, however, has its negative effect on writers' creativity: the transplanted society without long-established cultural identity does not act as a spur to their sense of creativity. Even the home-based writers often express a wish to get out. Edward Kamau Brathwaite, for instance, admits the existence of 'the desire . . . to migrate . . . at the heart of West Indian sensibility'.⁶⁵ Yet, paradoxically, once the West Indian writer leaves home, the distance from home spurs a sense of nostalgia. Distance also gives writers creative freedom, a detachment to observe home objectively, and a sense of commitment to writing about home.

In spite of the distance between writers and their home, both in time and space, their memory brings forth an elaborate and precise revival of home. However, their depiction of home is not the mere record of a real place, but the interpreted representation of the

⁶³ Renu Juneja, *Caribbean Transactions: West Indian Culture in Literature* (London: Macmillan Education, 1996), p. 11.

⁶⁴ Derek Walcott, 'The Action is Panicky', in *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, ed. by Susheila Nasta (Washington: Three Continents, 1988), p. 125.

⁶⁵ Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *Roots: Essay* (Habana, Cuba: Ediciones Casa de las Américas, 1986), p. 7.

imaginary home. In their writing about home, diasporic writers have assembled their memories, and ‘created a “new place” in literature.’⁶⁶ The process makes the fictional home-narrative ‘a mythical construct built on the discontinuous fragments of memory and reconceived in the imagination.’⁶⁷ Furthermore, the mythicised narrative helps to characterise Caribbean society and ‘to establish its values as significant and worthwhile.’⁶⁸

The fictional representation of home tends to be different in nature from what the author remembers about home. For instance, Joyce’s imagining and mythicising of home transforms his detestation of the corruption of Catholicism and the economic stagnation in Ireland into a general theme of imagining home. As a result, ‘Ireland in Joyce’s work is split in two, the one he remembers and the one he imagines’.⁶⁹ This kind of variation is applicable to Naipaul’s writing as well: while his commentary about the West Indies in journal articles and interviews is analytical and critical, his fictional texts present a complex mixture of his emotions, his distanced view, and nostalgia, as previous sections have shown. Naipaul’s stinging attacks on the Caribbean in *The Middle Passage*, therefore, should be remembered as a different kind of narrative from his fictional and imaginary depiction of home.

Naipaul’s fictional home-writing is significant for the West Indian literary tradition for the following reasons. Firstly, Naipaul’s home-narrative has a local character in its material, form, and sentiment. Secondly, his autobiographical writing in *A House of Mr Biswas* reveals a social history of the West Indies, and gives West Indian readers a deeper understanding of their cultural identity and history.

Firstly, Naipaul’s home-narrative reveals regional character in its fictional material, narrative form, and sentiment. The materials Naipaul picks for the depiction of home are derived from the island folk’s life and stories. According to Cudjoe, ‘[m]any of the themes

⁶⁶ Mary Condé, ‘Introduction’, in *Caribbean Women Writers: Fiction in English*, ed. by Mary Condé and Thorunn Lonsdale (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p. 3.

⁶⁷ Nasta, *Home Truths*, p. 9.

⁶⁸ Gareth Griffiths, *A Double Exile: African and West Indian Writing between Two Cultures* (London: Marion Boyars, 1978), p. 79.

⁶⁹ Michael Seidel, *James Joyce: A Short Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), p. 21.

in *Miguel Street* are found in short stories written from 1929 to 1951 by other writers'.⁷⁰

Similarly, Cudjoe points out 'the unmistakable imprint of the [Caribbean] short stories of the period from 1929 to 1949' in *The Mystic Masseur* and *The Suffrage of Elvira*.⁷¹ In addition to these materials, the narrative form of *Miguel Street* mirrors West Indian literary style. The book's lack of a coherent plot and dramatic tension is 'in the tradition of the early short stories of Trinidad and the West Indies'.⁷²

Naipaul uses Trinidadian wit as well. According to Gordon Rohlehr, Trinidadian wit is a means both to masking a sense of insecurity and to disclosing the painful truth behind pretentiousness:

Wit is often a mask behind which the individual hides the fact that he has no face at all. It can be a means of evading truth about self and milieu, . . . a wry expression of paralysis. On the other hand, it is equally a means of confronting truth, something more than simple pose. When the calypsonian sings about painful truth, he generally has to pose as posing.⁷³

Such wit, with its double effects, parallels Naipaul's use of irony to deal with Trinidadians' escapism. Wittily and pretentiously, Naipaul's characters avoid confronting the painful facts and escape into idealism. However, this wit is also used to strip away their masks of escapism and reduces them to despair. My first section showed that such a double-faceted aspect is given by Naipaul's vision as an exile who possesses both insiders' and outsiders' viewpoints. However, the similarity between Trinidadian wit and Naipaul's irony reveals that Naipaul's ironical detachment has a regional source. Thus, Naipaul's home-narrative has local characteristics in its material, narrative form, and sentiment. Such writing is significant for an emerging West Indian literature.

The second significant point in Naipaul's fictional home-writing is its autobiographical and historical aspects in *A House for Mr Biswas*. By recording his father's life, Naipaul comes to understand his own background. The autobiographical past, furthermore, reveals

⁷⁰ Selwyn R. Cudjoe, *V. S. Naipaul: A Materialist Reading* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), p. 19.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., p. 31.

⁷³ Quoted in Thieme, *The Web of Tradition*, p. 22.

a social history of Trinidad and, by extension, the West Indies. His writings, therefore, enable West Indian readers to understand their roots, cultural identity, and history.

Naipaul has a strong literary connection with his father Seepersad, who was a reporter and author of short stories. The father's ambition to become a writer was passed over to his son, and the two encouraged each other to achieve their dream. Naipaul admits that Seepersad's writing made him believe that he could be a writer in spite of his colonial background:

A great deal of my vision of Trinidad has come straight from my father. Other writers are aware that they are writing about rooted societies; his work showed me that one could write about another kind of society.⁷⁴

Thus, Seepersad makes Naipaul believe the literary potentiality of the home background and clears the way for his son to become a writer. Having such a literary debt to his father, Naipaul's writing *A House for Mr Biswas* involves a double commitment to the father's world. Firstly, the aim of the novel is 'to tell the story of a man like my father'.⁷⁵ Seepersad himself long hoped to write an autobiographical novel, so his hope is partially accomplished through his son. Secondly, in *A House for Mr Biswas*, Naipaul adopts some parts of his father's book, *The Adventures of Gurudeva and other Stories*.⁷⁶ In other words, Naipaul indirectly brings his father's writing to the public for the father who could not fulfil his literary ambition. *Letters between a Father and Son* (1999) was published under a similar motivation. When Naipaul was studying at Oxford, the father suggests: '[i]f you could write me letters about things and people — especially people — at Oxford, I could compile them in a book: *LETTERS BETWEEN A FATHER AND SON*, or *MY OXFORD*

⁷⁴ Naipaul, 'Portrait Gallery', Interview, *Sunday Times Magazine*, 26 May 1963, p. 13.

⁷⁵ Naipaul, 'Writing *A House for Mr. Biswas*', *New York Review of Books*, 24 November 1983, p. 22.

⁷⁶ Seepersad published *Gurudeva and other Indian Tales* privately in Trinidad in 1943. V. S. Naipaul edited these stories to make up *The Adventures of Gurudeva and other Stories*, which was published posthumously in 1976. In his stories, Seepersad has his characters classified as animals. They include 'The Old She-Fox' and 'The Scorpion'. Seepersad Naipaul, *The Adventures of Gurudeva and other Stories*, foreword by V. S. Naipaul (London: André Deutsch, 1976), p. 109; In a similar manner, Mr. Biswas calls Mrs. Tulsi as an 'old she-fox', and refers to Seth as a 'scorpion'. *House*, pp. 129, 163. For more examples of Naipaul's adapting his father's fictional practice, see Thieme, *The Web of Tradition*, pp. 54-65.

*LETTERS. What think you?*⁷⁷ After almost fifty years, Naipaul published the compilation of letters. Naipaul thus produces three books which relate directly to the father: *A House for Mr Biswas* immortalises Seepersad Naipaul as a fictional figure and brings back part of Seepersad Naipaul's work; *The Adventures of Gurudeva and other Stories* is republished posthumously by Naipaul to give it international recognition; *Letters between a Father and Son* fulfils the father's dream of a shared volume bearing both the son and father's names. So, *A House for Mr Biswas* is Naipaul's first step towards his literary undertaking, which reveals Naipaul's strong sense of connection to his father.

Recording his father's life is a process by which Naipaul comes to understand his own background. The autobiographical past, furthermore, reflects a social history of the Indian community in Trinidad and, by extension, in the West Indies. For instance, the organisation and functioning of the Tulsis can be seen as a paradigm for the political history of the region. At Shorthills, the Tulsi family, without the control of Seth and Mrs. Tulsi, is subject to the scramble for power in a newly independent colony. The widows' desperate money-making schemes and their disastrous failure may recall the confused attempts of emerging nations during industrialisation. Similarly, Hanuman House being taken over by a Port of Spain firm reveals the unavoidable force of economics in Port of Spain. Thus, Naipaul recreates the history of the country by writing about his ancestry, the East Indian community, and Trinidad's colonial society. This is significant for West Indians in that, 'after reading *A House for Mr Biswas* many of our people have a deeper understanding of the West Indies than they did before', as C. L. R. James remarks.⁷⁸

Furthermore, Naipaul's romantic idea about the past increases the mythic quality in his writing. Depicting his father's time is to imagine the remote past for Naipaul.

I was writing of things before my time. . . . [T]he time of wholeness had seemed to me as far away as India itself, and almost dateless. I knew little about the Trinidad Indian village way of life. I was a town boy. . . .

⁷⁷ Naipaul, *Letters between a Father and Son*, intro. and notes by Gillon Aitken (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1999; repr. London: Abacus, 2000), p. 29.

⁷⁸ Cited in Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel* (London, Faber and Faber, 1970), p. 192.

So the present novel begins . . . in a land of the imagination.⁷⁹

The idea of remote pastness is thus involved in Naipaul's writing *A House for Mr Biswas*.

Furthermore, writing about the remote past stimulates Naipaul's romantic idea about the past as the time of unitary wholeness. In the epilogue to *In a Free State*, Naipaul writes of his fascination with an ancient picture of a tomb in Luxor in Egypt. The picture is a landscape of fairyland-like images, and Naipaul thinks that '[i]t was the special vision of men who knew no other land and saw what they had as rich and complete.'⁸⁰ Here, Naipaul implies that in the past people moved less than they do now, were geographically more innocent, and therefore believed their culture to be the richest in the world. Naipaul is attracted to the picture that reflects such a vision of cultural wholeness in the past. Thus, Naipaul has a sense of nostalgia for the existential happiness given by the geographical innocence of the past. Perhaps this explains why Mr. Biswas is described as being materially poor, spatially innocent and restricted, but still existentially satisfied: Mr. Biswas is satisfied to possess a portion of land in spite of the jerry-built house. Therefore, Naipaul's romantic view of the past as the time of cultural wholeness gives a unifying sense to the novel and helps to mythicise the world of Mr. Biswas.

To sum up, *A House for Mr Biswas* reveals various aspects of Naipaul himself and his background. It is Naipaul's serious treatment of his autobiographical past, his identity as an East Indian, and Trinidad's history. These are synthesised to the level of a myth by Naipaul, who romanticises the past as the time of cultural wholeness. With varied regional aspects intricately combined, *A House for Mr Biswas* becomes Naipaul's imaginary home creation as well as one of his masterpieces.

After *A House for Mr Biswas*, the concept of a fictional depiction of home disappears from Naipaul's writings, despite the fact that Naipaul sometimes chooses the Caribbean as his literary setting. After writing four fictions with the setting of Trinidad, Naipaul turns to

⁷⁹ Naipaul, 'Writing *A House for Mr. Biswas*', p. 22.

⁸⁰ Naipaul, 'Epilogue, from a Journal: The Circus at Luxor', in *In a Free State* (London: André Deutsch, 1971; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 241.

a metropolitan setting. However, he comes back again to the Caribbean for the setting of *The Mimic Men* (1967), 'A Flag on the Island' (1967), which is the title story of *A Flag on the Island* (1967), and *Guerrillas* (1975). Unlike the first four fictions with the setting of Trinidad, these stories are set on fictional or anonymous Caribbean islands. This makes the *milieu* just an island representative of the West Indies. The individuality in the landscape recedes, and the typicalness of the Caribbean is emphasised. For instance, *The Mimic Men* announces, '[i]t has happened in twenty places, twenty countries, islands, colonies, territories'.⁸¹ Trinidad's particularity thus disappears, and the theme of home-writing is replaced by other themes of diasporic uprootedness.

The treatment of the world outside the West Indies changes as well. In the first four fictions, England is presented as the ultimate dream of fulfilment for the Trinidadians. It is also a place beyond their reach. Only a few attempt the escape, but how they fare in the dreamland is not told. The Caribbean fictions written afterwards, on the other hand, tell about what happens after such escapes. All three protagonists have seen the outside world. Singh and Jimmy, protagonists in *The Mimic Men* and *Guerrillas* respectively, have spent some time in London and come to acquire a sense of rootlessness. In 'A Flag on the Island,' the theme of the Caribbean as home disappears because it is narrated through the American character Frank. Thus, the idea of place as home is less important to the West Indian characters.

Naipaul therefore turns away from personal concern with his birthplace, and moves on to the theme of diasporic dislocation. Levy argues that Naipaul needed to kill Mr. Biswas or his father figure in his fiction in order to repudiate the 'father's heritage' and be congruent with 'English culture and language'.⁸² It seems that *A House for Mr Biswas* plays the role of an elegy for Naipaul, helping him to move away from the home setting.

⁸¹ Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* (London: André Deutsch, 1967; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 192.

⁸² Judith Levy, *V. S. Naipaul: Displacement and Autobiography* (New York: Garland, 1995), p. 7.

The abandonment of the home environment is not unique amongst West Indian writers. Each writer shows his / her own trajectory in terms of their relationship with home. George Lamming initially abandoned his birthplace and celebrated the sense of freedom, as his book title *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960) symbolises. However, in his later career, he comes back home and works locally. Sam Selvon had his literary base in London, but returned to Trinidad as his fictional setting. What matters for West Indian writers, therefore, is to establish their own unique relationships with home rather than mere loyalty to it.

These days, Caribbean scholars have become more open to the variety of home depictions by West Indian writers. When Naipaul published his novels set in Trinidad, Caribbean literary criticism was dominated by nationalistic views. Such assumptions worked against Naipaul, who practices the manner of detachment. However, West Indian critics began to consider that the literary act of ‘looking back’ is itself a kind of homecoming. They started to understand that the writers’ exile is ‘literal’ because many of them ‘continued to return home in imagination to the islands of their birth.’⁸³ This literary environment makes for the optimistic prospect that Naipaul’s imaginary home creation can contribute to the Caribbean literary world. In fact, in 1987, Walcott stated that despite Naipaul’s negative comments on Trinidad, ‘we West Indians are proud of Naipaul’.⁸⁴

6: Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Naipaul’s home-writing reflects his mixed emotions of attachment and detachment, his childhood anxiety, and his criticism of his birthplace. The mixture of these sentiments is controlled by his literary aesthetic of a distanced view. The value of Naipaul’s depiction of home is the coexistence of attachment and detachment. While his compassion generates comedy and pathos in his depiction of home, the exile’s detached view brings forth both criticism and connection to the Western literary world, but

⁸³ Juneja, p. 4.

⁸⁴ Derek Walcott, ‘The Garden Path’, Review of *The Enigma of Arrival* by V. S. Naipaul, *New Republic*, 13 April 1987, p. 30.

the criticism is derived from his responsibility to write the truth and his concern about his homeland.

The dual viewpoint and sentiment also creates a unique spatiality in Naipaul's representation of home. Naipaul's childhood fear creates an anxiety-ridden space. In such a space, the author's fearful viewpoint makes Trinidad look illusory and characters look existentially tenuous. Naipaul's characters privately possess a similarly negative sense of place, so that the image of geographical dichotomy emerges in the narrative. The dichotomic sense of space reflects Naipaul's criticism of the colonial ideology that inflicted psychological harm on colonial subjects. At the same time, the author himself is caught in such a dichotomic spatial vision and reveals his old anxiety about having led a marginal existence. Thus, Naipaul's spatial depiction reveals the paradox that he is critical of spatial power relations, yet subject to the spatial dichotomy himself.

Whilst the tenuous sense of place is thus one of the characteristics of Naipaul's depiction of home, Naipaul creates a new spatial sense in *A House for Mr Biswas*. Trinidadian space is existentially satisfying for Mr. Biswas, and he reveals a rooted sense of place. Thus, Naipaul overcomes the earlier anxiety-ridden sense of space. Furthermore, in *A House for Mr Biswas*, Naipaul creates a unitary representation of home: local materials are fully utilised for representation of the local landscape, and Trinidad's past is romanticised to the level where the work is considered a masterpiece. Overall, the exile's complex emotions and distanced view create a unique spatiality in the imagining of home.

After the four fictions with a Trinidadian setting, Naipaul stops looking backwards. It might be a source of regret for some readers that he loses interest in writing about home. On the other hand, it has a positive aspect in that it marks the starting point for the author to overcome his dichotomic sense of space: in his later career, his rigid dichotomic view of the world as the marginal Caribbean and the metropolitan centre disappears, and Naipaul starts accepting the idea of rootlessness. The process of how he disintegrates the divided sense of

space and starts to accept a more fluid sense of space will be revealed in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter Two:

Fictional Narratives with Metropolitan Settings: A Vision of Hybridity and Rootlessness

1: Introduction

This chapter will discuss Naipaul's fictions with urban settings, which were written during the 1960s and the 1970s. After the prolific years of annual publication of fiction with a Trinidadian setting, Naipaul experienced a creatively sterile period. After writing *A House for Mr Biswas*, which totally absorbed and exhausted him, he was unable to produce his next fiction for three years. During this unproductive time, he had 'been feeling unemployed'.¹ Naipaul's sense of the necessity to make a break gave forth *Mr Stone and the Knights Companion*: 'I had to write another book, to prove to myself that I could write, that it wasn't all over, that one had a talent.'² This was the first step for Naipaul in moving on to the next setting of the metropolis, and attempting to overcome his creative dilemma.

Mr Stone and the Knights Companion (1963) is his first and only book with English characters in an English setting. It is the story of Mr. Stone, an aging South London bachelor and a man of entrenched habits. It examines Mr. Stone's last two years before retirement. With the time of his retirement approaching, Mr. Stone starts to question the coming days and is disturbed by a sense of uneasiness. To distract himself from this disturbed state of mind, he marries a widow and starts a scheme called 'the Knights Companion' which helps retired employees of his company. The story deals with a period

¹ Naipaul, 'Portrait Gallery', p. 13.

² Quoted in Thieme, *The Web of Tradition*, p. 94 (originally, Naipaul, 'Desert Island Discs', Interview with Roy Plomley, BBC Radio4. London, 5 July 1980).

of elation caused by the success of the scheme and of the subsequent disillusionment that Mr. Stone feels.

Other urban fictions that come after this book are about the postcolonial diasporas in Western cosmopolitan cities. In *The Mimic Men* (1967), the protagonist Ranjit Kripalsingh, alias Ralph Singh, is a forty-year-old West Indian former politician living in exile in suburban London, where he recollects his life in the West Indies and England. Singh is writing his memoirs, which is the narrative of *The Mimic Men*, to attempt to impose order upon the chaotic events in his life. His narrative moves in nonchronological fashion between his life in the West Indies and England, between the past and the present, and between fantasy and reality. As with many of Naipaul's Trinidadian characters, Singh leaves his Caribbean home and takes refuge in an idealised English society. Singh fears the 'haphazard, disordered and mixed society' of his island, and flees to London.³ However, in London, he only finds 'the greater disorder, the final emptiness'.⁴ Singh finds that the place he idealised is irrelevant to giving him a sense of belongingness, and realises that the sense of disorientation is within himself and accepts his rootlessness. Thus, *The Mimic Men* investigates the conditions in the metropolis that attract the colonial subject who seeks there the solution to his disorientation.

In a Free State (1971), a collection of three novellas and two articles, contains two stories about Indian immigrants and expatriates in metropolitan cities. The locations that the book covers are international, the prologue and epilogue set in the Mediterranean where Naipaul had travelled, the three novellas set in Washington, London, and an unnamed African country respectively. The characters described in the works are all adrift 'in a free state.' A sense of displacement is again strong as a theme. In his later career, Naipaul was enthusiastic about attempting to mix different genres in his works: *Finding the Centre: Two Narratives* (1984) consists of two narratives of autobiography and travelogue; *A Way in the*

³ Naipaul, *Mimic*, p. 55.

⁴ Ibid., p. 8.

World (1994) is mixes of historical writing, fiction and an account of the author's travels.

In a Free State shows the beginning of such a literary shift for the author. 'One out of Many' tells the story of the uprooted life of the Indian protagonist Santosh who follows his employer who has been posted to Washington. Naipaul shows how Santosh gradually loses the Hindu perspective, adopts the ways of Washington and becomes 'one out of many.' 'Tell Me Who to Kill' depicts the isolated lives of two brothers, Trinidadian Indians, in London. The unnamed narrator, only introduced as Dayo's elder brother, works hard to support Dayo's study in London both financially and morally. Later, however, Dayo's brother loses his hard-earned fortune, is betrayed by Dayo, and is disillusioned. Dayo's brother is sensitive but inarticulate and exhibits a confused state of mind. He is filled with anger but does not know whom to blame.

Some of the familiar themes in Naipaul's fictions with a Trinidadian setting are repeated in these urban fictions. For instance, the theme of colonial mimicry seen in the Trinidadian characters reappears in his urban characters. On the other hand, Naipaul also tries to expand his familiar theme of colonial uprootedness. He depicts the urban characters, both diasporic and indigenous urbanites, as uprooted to some extent. Through such depictions, Naipaul succeeds in making his diasporic and exotic themes more accessible to readers of various backgrounds.

The urban milieu itself has been a theme for a number of writers. Their themes often reflect the society they have lived in and can be understood as representative reactions to the cities of those times. For instance, the novels of Charles Dickens focus on depicting the squalor and misery of London. His negative sentiment towards London reflects Britain's history of the abrupt development of cities starting in the early nineteenth century.⁵ On the other hand, writers in the contemporary era depict other kinds of cities. They are depicted as mechanically and systematically ordered, making communication between urbanites

⁵ Andrew Lees, *Cities Perceived: Urban Society in European and American Thought, 1820-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), discusses the cultural impact of the development of Western cities between 1820 and 1940. See pp. 10-11 for Dickens and his era.

difficult. In the novels of Saul Bellow, for instance, his New York characters lament the urbanites' private thinking and the incommunicable city condition, as Marcus argues.⁶ Urban writing thus reveals the urban experience which is partly moulded by the condition of the time.

In the contemporary era, the fictional presentation of cities is often characterised by features of postmodern spatial fluidity and postcolonial multiculturalness. Firstly, for the postmodern urban experience, the concept of space has been increasingly significant. Increasing privatisation necessitates the urbanites' imagining of the cityscapes. Consequently, it blurs the reassuring reality of physical objects and emphasises the spatial fluidity and ambiguity in the urban experience. It is now 'up to us to do our own [city] readings', as Caws argues.⁷ An example of this is Jonathan Raban's *Soft City* (1974), his reading of London's cityscapes. Raban focuses on the spatial and fluid urban experience, and divides the city into hard and soft elements. The hard elements are the material built environment, such as the streets and buildings that frame the lives of city dwellers. The soft elements, by contrast, refer to an individualised interpretation of the city created in one's mind.⁸

Secondly, multicultural contemporary cities are significantly related to the postcolonial condition. A significant number of former colonials migrated to the cities of the colonial motherlands. Consequently, the multi-ethnic, diasporic urban world becomes one of the characteristics of the contemporary metropolis. The ethnic population inflow includes significant numbers of writers as well. They depict their urban perceptions and introduce foreigners' viewpoints to Western urban fictional presentation. They reveal problems such as alienation and racial discrimination. They also describe the postcolonial mimicry performed by newly arrived former colonials and raise the issue of whether such mimicry

⁶ Steven Marcus, 'Reading the Illegible: Some Modern Representations of Urban Experience', in *Visions of the Modern City: Essays in History, Art, and Literature*, ed. by William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock (New York: Heyman Center for the Humanities, Columbia University, 1983), pp. 228-43.

⁷ Mary Ann Caws, 'Introduction', in *City Images: Perspectives from Literature, Philosophy, and Film*, ed. by Mary Ann Caws (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1991), p. 3.

⁸ Jonathan Raban, *Soft City* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1974; repr. London: Harvill, 1998), pp. 3-4.

can be subversive or damaging to their identity.

These two urban elements, postmodern spatial fluidity and postcolonial multiculturalness, are seen in Naipaul's urban fictions as well. Naipaul's urban fictions are about postcolonial experience in that the city is viewed and experienced by characters who are postcolonial immigrants. Also, Naipaul's presentation of cities contains postmodern spatial aspects, for it emphasises characters' fluid perception of urban space. In addition, Naipaul's urban fictions show the influence of the urban presentation of the modern era. For instance, the idea of London as the site of spiritual emptiness that is depicted in Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) is alluded to in Naipaul's London in *The Mimic Men* and *Mr Stone and the Knights Companion*.

These mixed elements in Naipaul's urban presentation reflect Naipaul's ambivalent presence as an exotic writer who assimilates to Britain: the postcolonial aspects of his urban writing mirror his experience itself; his allusion to English literature reflects his position as a former colonial subject who gained his knowledge of literature through a colonial education; the postmodern depiction of spatial fluidity suits Naipaul in making his exotic characters merge into the Western cities.

What is common among these overlapping manifold concepts is the theme of survival. Migrants to cities initially face problems such as isolation and culture shock, but they find ways to survive. Naipaul's English characters also show such strength. Mr. Stone overcomes his fear of death and recovers his comfortable relationship with London at the end of the story. However, Naipaul does not optimistically celebrate urbanites' survival. Instead, he reveals the complex aspects of cities as they are. Although Naipaul's interpretation and presentation of the urban experience are not particularly pleasant, it is significant that he shows the possibility of human strength and the capability to survive.

This chapter will explore the multifaceted space described in Naipaul's urban writings. A spatial concept will be introduced in this chapter. It will discuss the 'spatial selfhood'

which Naipaul's characters reveal. 'Spatial selfhood' is the imaginary self that is not restricted in one's body, but freely trespasses beyond one's body. As discussed already, in the modern era, urbanites are highly involved with imagining cityscapes, and the division between私ateness and publicness breaks down. As a result, '[t]he dichotomy between . . . self and other' is blurred and 'we can now map the psyche onto the outside'.⁹ In this context, the body is no longer a container of self. The spatial self is linked to the outside world. For instance, urban landmarks become the indeterminate objects with which urbanites identify and extend their spatial selves.¹⁰ On the other hand, these urban selves can be privatised to reach the point where they feel themselves mere perceivers. The spatial self is thus extended or reduced, depending on the psychological conditions of the urbanites. This concept of elusive spatial selves is important in Naipaul's depiction of the ambiguous sense of belongingness of his characters.

Section two will show how the spatial selves of Naipaul's characters alter their forms. The relationship of the characters' spatial selfhood to their environment shows the mental state of the characters and their sense of belongingness in cities. Section three will argue that Naipaul depicts the problematic partial urban belongingness of diasporas. Naipaul shows his incisive understanding of diasporic predicaments and depicts various difficulties that diasporic urbanites face in their new environments. The fourth section will discuss Naipaul's depiction of Western indigenous urbanites. Naipaul shows the similarities between his diasporic characters and Western indigenous urbanites, and makes a connection between the two. This reflects Naipaul's effort to reduce the exotic subjects of his writing and to widen his literary themes.

⁹ Crang and Thrift, 'Introduction', pp. 7-8.

¹⁰ Roland Barthes has emphasised the indeterminacy of urban landmarks, the empty signifiers from which the urbanites feel the necessity to derive meanings. See Roland Barthes, 'Semiology and Urbanism', in *The Semiotic Challenge*, trans. by Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), pp. 191-201.

2: Diasporas' Spatial Selves in Metropolitan Cities

This section will discuss the spatial selfhood of Naipaul's diasporic characters. This spatial selfhood reveals various relationships with the environment, depending on the characters' sense of belongingness to the metropolis where they have newly arrived. The flexibility of spatial selfhood reflects the strength of the characters who are capable of assimilating to and surviving in the new environment. However, Naipaul also depicts the disconnections between spatial selfhood and environment and suggests the difficulty of the newcomers' acquiring a sense of belonging to the new place.

All the newly arrived immigrants initially feel alienation in foreign cities. Differences of language and culture worsen their segregation and determine their limited involvement in the urban world. Dayo's brother in 'Tell Me Who to Kill,' for instance, feels a strong sense of segregation in London:

The buses come and go. The taxis come and turn, and men and women get out and get in. The whole world going on. And I feel outside it, seeing only my brother and myself in this place, among the pillars.¹¹

Such separation locks them in their small flats and brings forth the idea of imprisonment. Santosh in 'One out of Many' contemplates the fact that he spends most of the time alone in the apartment and says, 'I understood I was a prisoner. I accepted this and adjusted. I learned to live within the apartment, and I was even calm.'¹² Singh in *The Mimic Men* feels similar. He occasionally mentions his 'book-shaped room' as the only space that witnesses his true personality without his acting, and the space of the book-shaped room becomes his spatial selfhood.¹³ At times the spatial self is even reduced to a state of invisibility: Singh feels that city dwellers are 'nothing more than perceivers'¹⁴; Dayo's brother feels that 'nobody seeing me [sic]'.¹⁵

These fictional presentations of a reductive spatial selfhood reflect a sense of

¹¹ Naipaul, 'Tell Me Who to Kill', in *Free*, p. 95.

¹² Naipaul, 'One out of Many', in *Free*, p. 32.

¹³ Naipaul, *Mimic*, pp. 5, 24, 25, 28.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁵ Naipaul, 'Tell Me', p. 85.

confinement that is caused by cities in the contemporary era. This aspect of urban segregation has often been pointed out by thinkers on urban space. Wirth-Nesher argues that the economic and racial divisions in cities ‘are powerful forces of exclusion’, and that ‘the immigrant has incomplete access due to his ignorance of the native language.’¹⁶ A sense of ‘connectivity and community’ is further diluted in cities due to the development of telecommunication networks.¹⁷

Naipaul depicts these restrictive urban conditions regulating the lives of the immigrant urbanites. Santosh’s imprisoned life-style, for instance, is only indirectly connected to the outside world through the television and windows. The television and windows allow him to watch the outside world but prohibit actual human contact. This makes him interpret American culture oddly without anyone to correct him:

I watched a lot of television and my English improved. I grew to like certain commercials very much. It was in these commercials I saw the Americans whom in real life I so seldom saw and knew only by their gas-lamps. Up there in the apartment, . . . I saw them cleaning floors and dishes. I saw them buying clothes and cleaning clothes, buying motor cars and cleaning motor cars. I saw them cleaning, cleaning.¹⁸

Naipaul himself, in his early time in London, experiences the privatized London life. The city gave him the impression that ‘[i]n England everything goes on behind closed doors’, and that ‘[t]here are no communal pleasures in London.’¹⁹ Consequently, ‘[t]he privacy of the big city depresses me’ and brings forth ‘the barrenness of my life in London.’²⁰

Although diasporic characters’ reduced spatial selfhoods reflect their urban predicament of alienation, the characters are not so weak as to simply accept the condition. They reveal paradoxical reactions to urban segregation: while they passively accept urban alienation

¹⁶ Hana Wirth-Nesher, *City Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996; repr. 1998), pp. 24-25.

¹⁷ Michael Dear and Steven Flusty, ‘The Postmodern Urban Condition’, in *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*, ed. by Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash (London: Sage, 1999), p. 70.

¹⁸ Naipaul, ‘One’, p. 33.

¹⁹ Naipaul, ‘London’, in *The Overcrowded Barracoon and Other Articles* (London: André Deutsch, 1972; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp. 14-15 (first publ. as ‘The Regional Barrier’, in *TLS*, 15 August 1958, pp. 37-38).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

and withdrawal into themselves, they also have an inner stubbornness that makes them refuse to accept the situation. Naipaul himself seems to have experienced such contradictory urges to accept and deny his urban segregation. Although he has ‘achieved the Buddhist ideal of non-attachment’ in London, he never ceases ‘to feel that this lack of interest is all wrong’, for at the bottom of his heart he wants ‘to be involved’.²¹ This kind of stubbornness is seen in his characters, which leads them to bounce back and extend their spatial selves. Consequently, all Naipaul’s characters manage to get out of their imprisoning urban conditions, at least temporarily. Naipaul seems to believe both in the human capacity to survive and in the urban environment’s power to draw positive energy out of urbanites.

Naipaul depicts various ways in which spatial selfhood expands in the urban space. Observing the cityscape seems to be the crucial strategy for any character to get used to their new environment. Santosh starts watching the city on television, and successfully increases his territories to the nearby streets and parks. Accordingly, he gets out of the imprisoned state and achieves a more comfortable relationship with the space of Washington:

I remembered how magical and inexplicable that circle had seemed to me the first time I saw it. Now it seemed so ordinary and tired: . . . There was no longer a mystery. I felt I knew where everybody had come from and where those cars were going. But I also felt that everybody there felt like me, and that was soothing.²²

Here, Santosh finds it ‘soothing’ to identify himself with the unknown urbanites in the city. His identifying with the urban space implies his harmonious belongingness. Indigenous urban characters often reveal such identification with the city or other urbanites. For instance, Mrs. Dalloway projects her own withdrawn self onto an old lady in the room opposite.²³ That Santosh, the newcomer to the city, achieves this level of identification suggests that he has successfully expanded his territory. In contrast to Santosh, Dayo’s

²¹ Ibid., p. 16.

²² Naipaul, ‘One’, p. 52.

²³ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), p. 204.

brother misses the opportunity to observe and to expand his spatial self. Working days and nights, London for him ‘is the bus rides, morning, evening, night, the factory, the restaurant kitchen, the basement.’²⁴ Although he is connected to the outside world through the screen of the bus window, just as Santosh’s imprisoned life is linked to the outside by the screen of the television, the former does not have a will to watch and therefore misses the chance to achieve a sense of belongingness.

Walking in the city is described as another means to extend one’s spatial self. The act of walking is directly related to the possibility of territorial expansion in order to create human connection. Again, Santosh is good at this. One day, he

decided to act, to challenge fate. I decided I would no longer stay in my room and hide. I began to go out walking in the afternoons. I gained courage; every afternoon I walked a little farther.²⁵

As a consequence of this regular walking, Santosh experiences a succession of events. He bumps into his former lover, finds a new job in a restaurant, proposes to the girl, and becomes a U. S. citizen through marriage.

Sexual activities are often treated as the means for the urbanites to make connections to other urbanites and increase their sense of belongingness. As Caws argues in *City Images* (1991), cities accommodate sexual opportunities, which trigger the possibility of overcoming the collective impersonal urban life:

[C]ities engender many opportunities for sexual activity. They provide anonymity, pluralistic standards of behavior and plenty of potential partners densely packed into a small area. . . . Sex, after all, is still linked not only with pleasure but with love, friendship, kindness, cooperation. . . . [T]he individual may emerge triumphant over the collective.²⁶

Singh’s sexual experiences in London embody this aspect of the city. His sexuality is initially associated with racial purity, as his sexual initiation happens incestuously with his aunt Sally in his home. However, after coming to London, Singh has his sexual encounters with neighbours, prostitutes, and Sandra, his English wife. This parallels his increasing

²⁴ Naipaul, ‘Tell Me’, p. 84.

²⁵ Naipaul, ‘One’, p. 52.

²⁶ Caws, pp. 85-86.

sense of belongingness to the new environment.

Copying the cosmopolitan styles such as fashions and behaviours is also depicted as helping newcomers to assimilate to the city. For instance, Santosh had initially been careless about his appearance. But when he sees himself reflected in a mirror he discovers that his ‘face was handsome.’ Then ‘I became obsessed with my appearance, with a wish to see myself. . . . I became more careful of my appearance. . . . I bought laces for my old black shoes, socks, a belt.’²⁷ A tidy appearance gives him a better perception of himself and helps him to gain self-respect and a sense of individuality. He no longer compares himself with his employer or thinks of himself ‘as dirt.’²⁸ In this way, copying the metropolitan style helps him to blend into the population of the city and become more confident. Similarly, Singh’s friend Lieni, the Maltese housekeeper, ‘spent much time on the creation of this smart London girl’.²⁹ This concept of copying is controversial, as it relates to the concept of postcolonial mimicry (which will be discussed shortly.) However, in Naipaul’s metropolitan settings, mimicry is often used by his diasporic characters as a means to gain confidence and blend into the city. Singh, for instance, is pleased with Lieni’s help:

It was Lieni who led me through the stores and chose my clothes. . . .

It was Lieni who dressed me, approved of me, and sent me out to conquer. . . . I must confess I was pleased then that the character Lieni created had in its own small way become a legend.³⁰

I have discussed four features that are depicted in Naipaul’s writings as helping the newcomers to assimilate to their new environment. They are to observe the cityscape and learn urban rules, to walk and reduce one’s fear towards an unknown environment, to make human connections, and to copy metropolitan styles. These urban tactics, described by Naipaul, are not unique to his works. Writers of varying eras and nationalities depict

²⁷ Naipaul, ‘One’, p. 35.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 36.

²⁹ Naipaul, *Mimic*, p. 11.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 20-21.

similar aspects of urban life. Scholars in urban studies have also discussed and analysed the effects and consequences of urban phenomena. When Naipaul's city writings are compared to other fictional representations and scholarly analyses, it is revealed that Naipaul values the concepts of assimilation and survival in cities.

Firstly, Naipaul's urbanites' mimicry and role-play have the chief role of letting them create harmonious relationships with the environment and helping them to blend into cities. Naipaul's description of mimicry receives both positive and negative interpretations from literary critics. Bhabha famously offers a positive and actively insurgent model of mimicry in 'Of Mimicry and Man,' the fourth chapter of his book *The Location of Culture*. Bhabha takes *The Mimic Men* as one example and explores how the ambivalence of the colonised subject becomes a direct threat to the authority of the colonisers through the effects of mimicry. For Bhabha, mimicry is 'one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge.'³¹ Similarly, there are scholars who see strength revealed in Naipaul's description of mimicry. For instance, Lindroth interprets it as 'incessant invention' and an 'authentic creative performance.'³² However, these scholars' refusal to see defeatism in Naipaul's mimicry is not widely accepted by other scholars of Naipaul. They see Naipaul's mimicry as an endlessly repeated inauthenticity and powerlessness. In *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), for instance, it is argued that Naipaul 'views the mimicry . . . as permanently disabling, because of the disorder and inauthenticity imposed by the center on the margins of empire.'³³

The above argument, however, seems to be restricted to the political considerations. Lieni's role-play as a smart London girl 'was like a duty owed more to the city than

³¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994; repr. 2001), p. 85.

³² James R. Lindroth, 'The Figure of Performance in Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 30 (1984), p. 528.

³³ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989; repr. 1999), p. 88. Similar views are shared by Richard Kelly, *V. S. Naipaul* (New York: Continuum, 1989), p. 100; Gabrielle Watling, 'Embarrassing Origins: Colonial Mimeticism and the Metropolis in V. S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* and Sam Selvon's *Moses Ascending*', *Literature in North Queensland*, 20 (1993), p. 72; Fawzia Mustafa, *V. S. Naipaul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 106.

herself.³⁴ It also misses the point that Naipaul applies this feature of mimicry both to the colonial subjects and to indigenous urbanites in a similar manner. The English characters enjoy mimicry and role-play just as his diasporic characters do. As Joshi argues, Mr. Stone and his friends reveal that their ‘expectations in life are moulded by films.’³⁵ Mr. Stone’s niece Gwen mimics the actress’s performance as Lady Bracknell in *The Importance of Being Earnest*.³⁶ The map on the wall leads Mr. Stone to indulge in the fantasy that he was in general’s uniform in a high panelled room as he had seen in films.³⁷ He expects his typists to be as glamorous and efficient as secretaries are made to appear in films.³⁸ In addition to media-oriented mimicry, Mr. Stone’s social world is ruled by role-playing, just as Singh lives in a social circle that makes him want to play certain roles. Mr. Stone’s domestic, Miss Millington, plays the role of drudge except on Thursdays, when she becomes a pensioner at the cinema and sleeps through matinee performances.³⁹ Tony Tomlinson tries unsuccessfully to play the role of an entertainer at the Stones’ first dinner party.⁴⁰ After her husband’s death, Grace Tomlinson turns in a fine performance as a widow.⁴¹ English characters are thus depicted as enjoying mimicry and role-play.

Naipaul also depicts the idea of copying urban fashion, as my discussion of Santosh and his purchasing clothes showed. Yet, it is depicted as a positive act which makes Santosh achieve confidence. This is similar to Western females’ manipulation of fashion to achieve authority and power. It has been argued that ‘consumption always work[s] in the service of a hegemonic structure’, and therefore that the pursuit of the so-called high fashion is driven

³⁴ Naipaul, *Mimic*, p. 11.

³⁵ Chandra B. Joshi, *V. S. Naipaul: The Voice of Exile* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1994), p. 156.

³⁶ Naipaul, *Mr Stone and the Knights Companion* (London: André Deutsch, 1963), p. 51. Thieme argues that the unnamed actress must be ‘Edith Evans, who played the part of Lady Bracknell in Anthony Asquith’s 1952 film version of Wilde’s play.’ Thieme, *The Web of Tradition*, p. 101.

³⁷ Naipaul, *Stone*, p. 91.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 92.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 91.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 49.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 129-131. My argument on the role-play in *Mr Stone and the Knights Companion* is guided by Thieme, *The Web of Tradition*, pp. 100-5.

by hegemonic modes of social control.⁴² Within ‘second wave’ feminist scholarship, fashion was negatively conceived as ‘an ideological institution designed to confirm the woman in her place within patriarchy and capital.’⁴³ However, Radner argues that in the contemporary era, ‘fashion and authority are related,’ that it is possible to see fashion ‘as an amalgam of tactics and strategies,’ and that fashion can ‘function as the woman’s accomplice in her expeditions within the public area of authority and power’.⁴⁴ These manipulations of fashion by contemporary women reveal similarities with the pursuit of fashion by Santosh who manipulates his appearance and gains individuality. From this perspective, Santosh’s fashion is not mere postcolonial mimicry, but contains aspects of a general tactic of infiltrating the structures of authority.

The above examples show that Naipaul’s depiction of mimicry and role-play is not a restrictively postcolonial concept. Naipaul’s concepts of mimicry and role-play have as their chief role the representation of how urbanites blend into their environment.

Secondly, Naipaul’s idea of invisibility, or the condition of urban anonymity, has much in common with Western concepts of individuality. This is clear when Naipaul’s ‘One out of Many’ is compared to Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952). Although ‘One out of Many’ seems to be influenced by *Invisible Man*,⁴⁵ the two authors’ treatments of invisibility in the city are contrastingly opposite: whilst in ‘One out of Many’ Santosh manages to escape invisible anonymity and gain confidence, Ellison’s black protagonist in New York gains inner strength by achieving the state of invisibility which eliminates his confrontation with racial abuse. To understand the different treatments of (in)visibility, it will be important to bear in mind the different ethnic and social backgrounds of the two protagonists. *Invisible Man* reflects American society, which has evolved out of a history

⁴² Hilary Radner, ‘Roaming the City: Proper Women in Improper Places’, in *Spaces of Culture*, ed. by Featherstone and Lash, p. 86.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 92, 87, 97.

⁴⁵ Bruce King, *V. S. Naipaul*, Macmillan Modern Novelists (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 87-88, argues that ‘[b]esides the obvious parallels, echoes and similar themes, there is the comedy of using a novel about black-white relationships in America as a source of Asian Indian-black relationships in America.’

of slavery. In such an environment, '[r]acism comes to rest on the body, using the visibility of the body as a major signifier but also as a site for racial abuse and violence.'⁴⁶ On the other hand, in Naipaul's 'One out of Many,' Asian protagonist Santosh shows a different attitude to his body and visibility. Santosh learns and accepts the Western concept of individuality, which values visibility as the reflection of one's individuality and authority. Santosh starts to care about his appearance, and overcomes the initial feeling of invisibility caused by his low self-esteem. However, it does not mean that Naipaul does not recognise the concept of racism towards non-White people. For instance, Dayo's brother has a hard time when his roti-and-curry shop is targeted for abuse and vandalism by 'the young English louts'.⁴⁷ Thus, the two authors show varied reactions to urban anonymity. Santosh's acceptance of the idea of visibility and the Western concept of individuality reflects his inclination to assimilate to the host society. Here, again, it is revealed that Naipaul values the ideas of assimilation and survival in the city space.

Thirdly, Naipaul's concept of city walking can be compared to the urban theory of Michel de Certeau. The two writers offer insights into the meaning of walking in the city, yet they have different interpretations of it. While Naipaul's description of city walking suggests that its essential role is to let the walker blend into the city, de Certeau's concept of city walking is associated with the idea of resistance. In 'Spatial Practices,' the third chapter of *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1988), de Certeau discusses the spatial experiences of the masses in cities.⁴⁸ He represents the city experience as an act of reading and writing. He contrasts the panoramic view of the city from a high vantage point with the narrow view of the city from street level. Viewing from a high point transforms the complexity of the city into legibility and allows one to read the city. On the other hand, the walkers' reading of the city at the ground level is caught up in a labyrinth and has a limited

⁴⁶ Sallie Westwood and John Williams, 'Imagining Cities', in *Imagining Cities: Scripts, Signs, Memory*, ed. by Sallie Westwood and John Williams (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 9.

⁴⁷ Naipaul, 'Tell Me', p. 88.

⁴⁸ Michel de Certeau, 'Spatial Practices', in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 91-130.

perspective. This leads to an implicit assumption that views from a high point master reality. However, de Certeau challenges this assumption and proposes the concept of resistant walkers. He argues that the onlooker from a high spot misses the tangled experience of walkers and is deceived by the seemingly stable urban space. On the other hand, city walkers' criss-crossing, tentacular movements are real and active. Although walkers cannot read the complexity of the city, their walking constitutes the irreducible mark of the human subject, and therefore makes history. From this perspective, urban space is represented by two opposing literary metaphors: viewing from a high point is 'misreading,' and walking on the ground level is 'blind writing.' De Certeau celebrates the latter as the active and real urban practice.

The ordinary practitioners of the city live "down below." . . . They walk—an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, . . . whose bodies follow the thick and thins of an urban "text" they write without being able to read it. . . .⁴⁹

The central thrust of his argument is thus 'to affirm the resilience and inventiveness of "ordinary men and women" against the analyses which present them as entirely informed'.⁵⁰ Naipaul's description of diasporic characters' walking has some similarities with that of de Certeau. These include the walkers' blindness in the unreadable city and tactical walking to find their own ways. However, Naipaul is not optimistic enough to interpret it as a potential resistance to authority. A realist, Naipaul attributes to the act of city walking the chief function of familiarisation with, and blending into, the city in order to live and survive in that *milieu*.

The above comparison of Naipaul's description of cities with that of other writers' and scholars leads to the conclusion that Naipaul's essential theme in his urban writing is the urbanites' survival and assimilation rather than resistance and subversion. Sometimes, Naipaul's characters in cities are negatively interpreted by critics as being in a state of

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 93.

⁵⁰ Jeremy Ahearn, *Michel de Certeau: Interpretation and Its Other* (Cambridge: Polity; Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 185.

withdrawal and as lacking subversiveness against the empowered authority. Mustafa, for instance, sees Singh at the end of the story as being in a state of ‘reclusiveness’.⁵¹ However, such entirely negative terms seem to be inappropriate for Naipaul’s characters, who are able to find their own ways to survive. Naipaul’s assimilating characters are not so weak as to fall into a state of uselessness. But they are not optimistic enough to believe in the possibility of subversion. This vision of the complexity of the urban experiences is the chief value of Naipaul’s urban fictions. He depicts manifold and paradoxical urban experiences and avoids simplistic interpretations and straightforward presentations of urban lives. The following section will discuss further the urban paradoxes and urbanites’ predicaments that Naipaul depicts as unavoidable city experiences.

3: Naipaul’s Incisive Vision of Problematic Urban Belongingness

Naipaul seems to be sceptical about the newcomers’ perfect assimilation into cities and depicts the characters’ partial belongingness. Even the seemingly most successful assimilator, Santosh, appears irrevocably alienated from any of his multiple territories. He comes to belong to three major territories: the park, the restaurant where he works, and the African-American residential area. Still, he does not belong to any of the spaces comfortably: he feels that ‘[t]he restaurant is one world, the parks and green streets of Washington are another, and every evening some of these streets take me to a third [his living place].’⁵² His fragmentary belongingness makes him feel himself an outsider in any of the sites. For instance, he reflects on his status as an outsider in the residential area where he lives after his marriage:

Its smells are strange, everything in it is strange. But my strength in this house is that I am a stranger. I have closed my mind and heart to the English language, to newspapers and radio and television, to the pictures of *hubshi*⁵³ runners and boxers and musicians on the wall. I do not want to understand or

⁵¹ Mustafa, p. 106.

⁵² Naipaul, ‘One’, p. 57.

⁵³ Literally, ‘hubshi’ means ‘Abyssinians,’ but Santosh applies this term to any African-Americans in Washington following his Indian convention.

learn any more.⁵⁴ [Italics original, note added]

His working place is not a comfortable territory for him either. He starts to work in the Indian restaurant owned by a successful Indian, Priya, who is strong enough to be ‘able to cope with Washington.’⁵⁵ Because of his successful business life, Priya’s restaurant symbolises ‘the materialistic and socioeconomic aspect of the American dream,’ as Chua argues.⁵⁶ On the other hand, as Thieme argues, the title of the novella, ‘One out of Many,’ ‘alludes to the American national motto, “*Epluribus unum*”’, the optimistic assertion of the American melting pot’s ability to create unity from diversity.⁵⁷ Priya, then, is one of those who take advantage of the country’s ability to absorb different ethnicities. This is symbolised by his motto, ‘If you can’t beat them, join them.’⁵⁸ Santosh’s working place, then, is the symbolic space of the American dream and the American ideal of the melting pot. However, instead of appreciating it, Santosh accepts this territory only partially and becomes the living denial of the optimistic ideal of the American melting pot. Santosh’s expanding selfhood ends in paradoxical and unsatisfactorily overlapping territories, which reveals that Naipaul is not the optimistic celebrator of the diasporas’ assimilation.

Another aspect of Naipaul’s scepticism is seen in his depiction of the way that diasporic characters unavoidably increase their distances from their past. He depicts his diasporic characters as living doubly uprooted from the present and the past. Naipaul seems to understand the concept of the past as one’s essential roots, and sympathetically depicts the characters who lose their sense of the past and undergo a subsequent feeling of emptiness. The attenuating past produces paradoxically opposing urges in Naipaul’s characters. They have to forget their past in order to assimilate to a new situation. They also wish to keep a sense of the past because losing it produces crippling pain. As a result, the loss of one’s past is depicted both as the necessary practice for urban assimilation and as the fundamental

⁵⁴ Naipaul, ‘One’, p. 57.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 45.

⁵⁶ C. L. Chua, ‘Passages from India: Migrating to America in the Fiction of V. S. Naipaul and Bharati Mukherjee’, in *Reworlding: The Literature of the Indian Diaspora*, ed. by Emmanuel S. Nelson (New York: Greenwood, 1992), p. 52.

⁵⁷ Thieme, *The Web of Tradition*, p. 152.

⁵⁸ Naipaul, ‘One’, p. 42.

loss that causes the depletion of one's soul.

Santosh is one of the victims who lose their pasts and consequently their essential spirit. When Santosh is advised by Priya to marry an American to legalise himself as a U. S. citizen, initially Santosh hesitates because he has 'a wife and children in the hills at home.'⁵⁹ However, Santosh is soon persuaded by Priya and justifies forgetting the past. He thinks, '[Priya] was right. I was a free man; I could do anything I wanted.'⁶⁰ However, his decision to forget the past is followed by a disturbing sense of emptiness and loneliness: '[i]t didn't matter what I did, because I was alone. And I didn't know what I wanted to do.'⁶¹ Santosh thus manages to assimilate to Washington, at the price of losing his sense of past, and consequently his soul.

Naipaul depicts Santosh's loss of his roots sympathetically and allows him to be withdrawn. Here is seen Naipaul's ambiguousness toward the idea of withdrawal. As my fifth chapter will argue, in his Indian travelogues he often criticises the state of indifference seen in Indians he meets. He considers it a mental state derived from Hinduism and criticises it as a 'philosophy of withdrawal' that gives men 'no idea of a contact with other men'.⁶² However, Naipaul is not critical of the similar state of withdrawal seen in Santosh. Naipaul comforted himself with a Buddhist's nonattachment during the lonely time in London, as shown earlier. Naipaul understands the usefulness of being withdrawn at times to get over hardship and survive in the impersonal city. The inconsistency seen in Naipaul's treatment of the idea of withdrawal reflects his ambiguous presence in his adopted country. His sense of origins remains in him, in spite of his attempt to assimilate to the new *milieu* and his subsequently-acquired distanced view towards the culture of his origins.

Santosh's increasing distance from the past is embodied in his newly-gained

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 54.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 54-55.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 55.

⁶² Naipaul, *India: A Wounded Civilization* (London: André Deutsch, 1977; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 53.

materialistic way of thinking: looking back at his past appearance with rough and dirty clothes, he is ‘choked with shame’ about ‘how ragged I must have looked, on the aeroplane, in the airport, in that café’.⁶³ He also loses the old sense of unity and belongingness to home. Once he was ‘part of the flow, never thinking of myself as a presence’ in Bombay.⁶⁴ After living in Washington, by contrast, ‘I knew it wasn’t possible for me to return to Bombay. . . . I couldn’t easily become part of someone else’s presence again.’⁶⁵ Thus, he gains ‘Western individualism’ and loses ‘Hindu communalism’.⁶⁶ In other words, he manages to be ‘one out of many’ urbanites in Washington, at the price of losing the old comforting sense of being ‘one out of many’ in Bombay. He yields to Western materialism and individualism, increases distances from his past, and loses the Hindu perspective.

The loss of one’s past is what Naipaul himself has experienced and it has become one of his consistent themes. However, his reactions to the lost motherland India and Hindu roots are complex. As discussed above, his fictions treat Indian characters’ loss of origin in metropolitan cities sympathetically. In his Indian travelogues, on the other hand, Naipaul’s idealization of the Hindu past leads him to criticise the secularised and modernised Hindu attitude in India. At other times, he endeavours to preserve Hindu culture in the globalising world by participating in the politics of ethnic revival; the fourth chapter will argue this point. These varied reactions to Hindu culture reveal that the concept of the past as a diaspora’s root and identity is one of Naipaul’s eternal themes and sources of creation.

Naipaul’s pessimistic description of diasporic characters’ difficulty in preserving their sense of rootedness contrasts with Sam Selvon’s optimistic depictions of immigrants’ lives in London. As this chapter has argued, Naipaul’s characters often acquire a sense of individualism as a defence against the feeling of emptiness. On the other hand, Selvon’s fictional Trinidadians create a small Trinidadian community and console themselves with

⁶³ Naipaul, ‘One’, p. 35.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 57.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 41.

⁶⁶ Dennis Walder, ‘V. S. Naipaul and the Postcolonial Order: Reading *In a Free State*’, in *Recasting the World: Writing after Colonialism*, ed. by Jonathan White (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 96.

the illusion of home. Selvon depicts such immigrant communities in London in his trilogy, which deals with the central figure of Moses Aloetta: *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), *Moses Ascending* (1975), and *Moses Migrating* (1983).

Selvon's descriptions of immigrants in London parallel Naipaul's descriptions in many respects. Selvon's characters also experience the city's bleakness, which reduces their spatial selfhood.⁶⁷ They also Anglicise themselves to assimilate to the new environment.⁶⁸ On the other hand, what distinguishes Selvon from Naipaul is Selvon's celebration of the characters' 'collective colonial consciousness'.⁶⁹ Selvon's characters form a circle of immigrants, achieve emotional support for each other, and manage to live in London, which can be 'powerfully lonely when you [are] on your own'.⁷⁰

This kind of formation of groups is not seen in Naipaul's urban writings. Even when immigrant characters from the same background congregate, each person's suffering is private and individual. Dayo and his brother, for instance, live together and look for comfort in each other, but their pains are private. Their sufferings are rarely shared nor reduced by seeking the ephemeral comfort given by others. On the contrary, their sufferings often intensify their sense of isolation. For instance, as the predicaments of Dayo and his brother intensify, the secrets they keep from each other multiply and create distance between the brothers. To compare Naipaul to Selvon reveals that Naipaul has an individualistic and pessimistic understanding. Naipaul shows that the predicament of urban uprootedness is within oneself and cannot be salvaged by others' company or help.

This section has argued that Naipaul gives deep insights into what will follow when newcomers assimilate to cities. His understanding is pessimistic: newly arrived urbanites

⁶⁷ London 'divide [sic] up in little worlds, and you stay in the world you belong to and you don't know anything about what happening in the other ones except what you read in the papers.' Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (New York: Longman Caribbean Writers Series, 1985; repr. 2002), p. 74.

⁶⁸ A character called Harris anglicises himself to the point of carrying bowler, umbrella, briefcase and *The Times*, Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, p. 111. The older Moses becomes a London landlord of sorts and assimilates a great deal to English culture in *Moses Ascending* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1975; repr. Oxford: Heinemann, 1984).

⁶⁹ Harold Barratt, 'From Colony to Colony: Selvon's Expatriate West Indians', in *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, ed. by Nasta, p. 258.

⁷⁰ Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, p. 47.

end up belonging to the cities partially; assimilation necessitates the abandonment of one's sense of the past; the pain brought by uprootedness is private and not salvaged by any other means.

Scholarly debates about the recent emergence of heterogeneous or multi-cultural cities reveal two kinds of reactions to this phenomenon. While one celebrates cultural diversity and heterogeneity, the other warns that such optimism overlooks the various problems caused by cultural confrontation.⁷¹ Stuart Hall, a member of the black Caribbean diaspora in London, celebrates black immigrants' occupation of London itself:

[Y]oung black people in London today are marginalized, fragmented, unenfranchised, disadvantaged and dispersed. And yet, they look as if they own the territory. Somehow, they too, in spite of everything, are centered in place.⁷²

Naipaul, who depicts various unsolvable problems for urban diasporic characters, certainly opposes such positive representations. The value of Naipaul's urban texts, however, is that he well describes the diasporas' uprootedness and isolation in cities, that he depicts those characters' strength to assimilate to the new environment and survive in spite of hardship, and that he presents the full complexity of their problems. These facts reveal the author's sense of responsibility as a writer to be truthful to himself and to present his views.

4: Allusion to *The Waste Land*

The previous two sections dealt with Naipaul's depiction of foreigners in cities. This section will argue that Naipaul connects the immigrant urbanites with indigenous urbanites by suggesting similarities between the two. For instance, Naipaul associates diasporic characters' isolation in London in *The Mimic Men* to the urbanites whose spiritual emptiness is deplored by Eliot in *The Waste Land*. By this association, Naipaul suggests that segregated urban lives and the consequent hollow feelings are not limited to

⁷¹ Dear and Flusty, pp. 68-69, summarise the contemporary critics' reactions to the development of heterogeneous cities.

⁷² Stuart Hall, 'Minimal Selves', in *The Real Me: Postmodernism and the Question of Identity*, ed. by L. Appignanesi (London: ICA, 1987), p. 44.

immigrants, but are common to all urbanites. This reflects Naipaul's attempt to expand his theme of diasporic uprootedness.

Naipaul's adaptation of English literature is vulnerable to certain criticism: it can make him look like a literary mimic who panders to Western readers. He can be also criticised as avoiding confronting the issues of immigration by overlooking the differences between diasporas and indigenous urbanites. However, those criticisms seem to overlook the positive dimensions of Naipaul's works. It is a means to overcome the exoticism of his material and to help readers of varied backgrounds to understand his depictions of the urban diasporic world. In other words, he is not avoiding the issues around diasporas, but endeavouring to facilitate readers' understanding of topics unfamiliar to them. Furthermore, when Naipaul alludes to English literature, he does not do so in a manner of mere literary mimicry. Naipaul combines Western and Eastern themes, develops them, and achieves a rich narrative.

His attempt to achieve literary eclecticism reflects the dilemma of a cultural barrier between his colonial and Asian origins and the English culture he has adopted. In his article 'London,' Naipaul explains the problem of 'being a regional writer' in Britain.⁷³ Being a regional writer prevents his works from being judged appropriately: he often faces 'public indifference', and critics make 'political rather than literary judgements'.⁷⁴

This discomfort is perhaps one of the motivations that made Naipaul turn from a Trinidadian setting to metropolitan settings. Furthermore, Naipaul uses the metropolitan setting to combine his exotic subjects with English literary tradition. In other words, Naipaul's allusions exploit earlier literary representations of the city. For instance, in *The Mimic Men*, Naipaul alludes to *The Waste Land*, using the fact that the two works share the setting of London. The second section of *The Mimic Men* starts with a description of London in which Singh's perceptions as a newcomer are mixed with the landscape of

⁷³ Naipaul, 'London', p. 14.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

London in *The Waste Land*.

When Singh arrives in London he feels the crowd in London to be heartless and uncommunicative: ‘The trams on the Embankment sparked blue. The river was edged and pierced with reflections of light, blue and red and yellow. . . . The tram was filled with individuals, each man returning to his own cell.’⁷⁵ This cityscape is similar to London in *The Waste Land*, in which Eliot describes Londoners whose lives are filled with routine work and who are locked into a mindless life:

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.⁷⁶

As Kelly argues, Naipaul, a young man who was infatuated with London and experienced disillusionment and alienation, ‘could not have escaped the Siren lure of Eliot’s startling disclosure of his alienation and his clear dramatization of his disordered world.’⁷⁷ As a result, Eliot becomes ‘a major influence upon his work’.⁷⁸

However, Naipaul’s echoing of Eliot is not simple borrowing. Naipaul alludes to Eliot and develops his writing into intricate eclecticism. The following scene is a good example of Naipaul’s creation of layers of imagery.

How right our Aryan ancestors were to create gods. We seek sex, and are left with two private bodies on a stained bed. The larger erotic dream, the god, has eluded us. It is so whenever, moving out of ourselves, we look for extensions of ourselves. It is with cities as it is with sex. We seek the physical city and

⁷⁵ Naipaul, *Mimic*, pp. 18-19.

⁷⁶ T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, in *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961; repr. 2002), pp. 42-43.

⁷⁷ Kelly, p. 91.

⁷⁸ Ibid. Although my argument treats only the relation between *The Mimic Men* and *The Waste Land*, scholars point out many echoes of Eliot in Naipaul’s works: King, p. 71, sees in *The Mimic Men* ‘many echoes of and allusions to T. S. Eliot’s poems — especially “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, “The Waste Land”, “The Hollow Man” and “Gerontion”’; Thieme, ‘Naipaul’s English Fable: *Mr. Stone and The Knights Companion*’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 30 (1984), p. 503, points out that *Mr Stone and Knights Companion* alludes to *The Waste Land*; Angus Calder, *T. S. Eliot* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987), pp. 102-3, interprets Naipaul’s adaptation of ‘The Hollow Man’ from the postcolonial point of view.

find only a conglomeration of private cells. In the city as nowhere else we are reminded that we are individuals, units. Yet the idea of the city remains; it is the god of the city that we pursue, in vain.⁷⁹

The depiction of the couple and the sexual dissatisfaction in the above scene shows its resemblance to the scene of the lovers in *The Waste Land*. Eliot depicts two lovers, a typist and a young man:

... she is bored and tired,
Endeavours to engage her in caresses
Which still are unreproved, if undesired.

...
She turns and looks a moment in the glass,
Hardly aware of her departed lover;⁸⁰

Here can be seen lovers whose sexual intercourse is sought without ‘authentic love and communication’.⁸¹ The sexual dysfunction in *The Waste Land* symbolises urban characteristics such as the privatised selves of urbanites and a break-down of communication. *The Mimic Men* depicts a similar feeling of emptiness. Singh attempts to overcome his loneliness through sex. However, seeing and sleeping with different women does not give him comfort. As a result, Singh gives up his sexual adventure with the feeling of disillusionment: ‘we seek sex, and are left with two private bodies on a stained bed.’ This sentence alludes to a concept from Eastern thought, ‘sex mysticism.’ Hindu thought believes in the mythical and magical aspects of sex. Sex rites are advocated and practiced in numerous cults. The participants of the rite are believed to achieve a real sense of the universe through sex. However, if the participants’ minds are clouded with passion, they fail to learn the idea of love and sex.⁸² The scene of two bodies on a bed in *The Mimic Men* brings forth this concept of Hinduism. Therefore, the above scene from *The Mimic Men* alludes to both the scene of the lovers in *The Waste Land* and the idea of sex in Hindu philosophy.

⁷⁹ Naipaul, *Mimic*, p. 18.

⁸⁰ Eliot, p. 50.

⁸¹ William Chapman Sharpe, *Unreal Cities: Urban Figuration in Wordsworth, Baudelaire, Whitman, Eliot, and Williams* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 104.

⁸² Benjamin Walker, ‘Sex Mysticism’, in *Hindu World: An Encyclopedic Survey of Hinduism*, 2 vols (London: George Allan and Unwin, 1968), II, pp. 390-4.

To combine religious figures from the East and West is another aspect of *The Mimic Men* that shows similarity to *The Waste Land*. The above scene in *The Mimic Men* introduces an unnamed Hindu god, which seems to be the god of karma or the Hindu god of love.⁸³ However, *The Mimic Men* also alludes to the Christian concept of god, when it introduces ‘the god of the city,’ which reminds readers of the famous book *City of God* by St. Augustine. The fact that Singh arrives in the Western city of London and considers his arrivals a kind of pilgrimage also alludes to the Christian concept of pilgrimage. In this eclecticism, Naipaul shows the ambiguity of the identity of Singh, the former colonial subject of Hindu origin who is exiled in Britain. Eliot also creates an eclectic atmosphere in *The Waste Land*: ‘Burning burning burning burning / O Lord Thou pluckest me out’.⁸⁴ The first line alludes to the Buddha’s Fire Sermon, and the second line is quoted from St. Augustine’s *Confessions*. According to Eliot, the eclectic combination is deliberate in that the ‘collocation of these two representatives of eastern and western asceticism, as the culmination of this part of the poem, is not an accident.’⁸⁵ As Kearns argues, Eliot was open to non-Western cultures, and used them to stimulate his thought and revitalise his poetry.⁸⁶

Overall, the above scene in *The Mimic Men* is an example in which Naipaul alludes to *The Waste Land*, compares his diasporic subjects with Eliot’s subjects, and creates layers of meaning. As a result, the scene generates eclectic and rich implications such as the feelings of isolation of modern urbanites, sexual dysfunction, failure of communication, and religious inheritance of both East and West.

With these parallels, Singh’s diasporic view of London is connected to Eliot’s view of the city, which enables Naipaul to universalise his themes. The association with *The Waste Land*, however, does not mean Naipaul is erasing specific diasporic experiences from his

⁸³ B. Walker, ‘Kama’, in *Hindu World: An Encyclopedic Survey of Hinduism*, I , pp. 514-5.

⁸⁴ Eliot, p. 52.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 62.

⁸⁶ Cleo McNelly Kearns, ‘Religion, Literature, and Society in the Work of T. S. Eliot’, in *The Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. by A. David Moody (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994; repr. 2002), p. 82.

writings. As the former part of this chapter has argued, Naipaul reveals an incisive vision of the urban lives of foreign newcomers. Naipaul's allusion, therefore, is his means of facilitating readers' understanding of the unfamiliar subject of immigrants.

Cities have always attracted people because they are the hubs of economical, social, and political activity. Writers have also been attracted to, lived in, and written about cities and in doing so, have presented their understanding of the urban world. Naipaul and Eliot are amongst these writers. Such circumstance allows Naipaul to allude to Eliot's depiction of London. Through such allusion, the landscape of London in *The Mimic Men* blends with Eliot's depiction of London and becomes an eclectic space which reveals not only Naipaul's theme of postcolonial reality but also Eliot's theme of the urban world in the modern era. In this light, Naipaul's depiction of urban space and exploration of its nature is to be considered the result of the writer's skill in manoeuvring the spatial concept.

The success of the usage of the spatial concept in *The Mimic Men* will be more prominent when it is compared to *Mr Stone and the Knights Companion*. This story shows another attempt by Naipaul to overcome his exotic presence in the English literary world. In *Mr Stone and the Knights Companion*, Naipaul parodies an Arthurian romance and depicts the English characters mimicking a romantic past. The novel reflects Naipaul's critical view that '[t]he English bourgeoisie are mimicking their former roles.⁸⁷ By depicting contemporary Britain as a barren urban world that mimics the past, Naipaul attempts to depict English characters as mimics and uprooted like his immigrant characters. In other words, Naipaul presents his theme of urban uprootedness through English characters. But Naipaul was not successful in attempting fiction about native English society. For instance, Nightingale argues that Naipaul's accounts of English lives 'seem never to go beyond detailed, but still superficial, observation.'⁸⁸

Naipaul himself is aware of the damaging effect of writing this kind of novel had for

⁸⁷ Naipaul, 'The Dark Vision of V. S. Naipaul', Interview, in *Conversations with V. S. Naipaul*, ed. by Jussawalla, p. 64 (first publ. in *Newsweek*, 16 November 1981, pp. 104-115).

⁸⁸ Peggy Nightingale, *Journey through Darkness: The Writing of V. S. Naipaul* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1987), p. 73.

him. In his article ‘London,’ Naipaul lists the three subjects of sex, race and the use of English or American characters as devices with which regional writers might overcome cultural barriers to their work. However, he thinks none of these methods is possible for him. To ‘introduce an English or American character and write the story around him’ is ‘good business, but bad art.’⁸⁹ Naipaul’s adaptation of English characters and settings in spite of an awareness of its harmfulness is evidence of the author’s dilemma about the direction of his writing.

The above discussion reveals that Naipaul’s adaptation of English literary models in order to overcome regional barriers does not mean that he negates his rooted sensibility through mimicry. He experiments with literary form both to facilitate readers’ understanding and to create rich implications in his work. Naipaul maintains a balance in combining different cultures without negating his sensibility, and creates an eclectic representation of urban space in which varied themes blend intricately.

5: Conclusion

This chapter has discussed Naipaul’s fictional description of the lives of immigrants in cities. In spite of Naipaul’s dark view that the problems of their uprootedness cannot be solved easily, the strength of Naipaul’s urban depiction is his straightforwardness in showing the reality faced by urban immigrants. Furthermore, he depicts the capacity for survival of diasporic characters.

This chapter has also discussed how Naipaul relates the immigrants’ lives to those of Western indigenous urbanites, and attempts to show that every urbanite is rootless to a certain degree. Naipaul alludes to both Eastern and Western cultures, and creates an eclectic representation of urban space. The eclecticism reflects the author’s endeavour to reduce the exotic aspects of his subjects. By doing so, Naipaul tries to open his written world to a broader audience. However, his attempt to overcome cultural barriers is

⁸⁹ Naipaul, ‘London’, p. 13.

motivated by his truthfulness to his origins and sympathetic appreciation of urbanites' uprootedness.

The concept of space is important in Naipaul's presentation of the city in a number of ways. The elusiveness of space becomes a means for Naipaul to depict the ambiguous belongingness of immigrants. The allusion to *The Waste Land* in *The Mimic Men* helps to expand the urban theme. As a result, compared to the fictions with a Trinidadian setting, the novels with metropolitan settings are characterised by hybridity. In this respect, Naipaul's urban narratives are successful in deconstructing a dichotomic view of the world and reconstructing the image of the metropolis. Naipaul turned to writing fictional narratives set in former colonies in the 1970s. In these narratives, Naipaul develops and represents a different sense of space, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Three:
Fictional Narratives set in Former Colonies:
A Bleak Vision of Rootless Individuals and the Postcolonial Future

1: Introduction

This chapter will mainly discuss Naipaul's fictional presentations of former colonies published in the 1970s: 'In a Free State,' the title story of *In a Free State* (1971), *Guerrillas* (1975), and *A Bend in the River* (1979). These three narratives were based on the contemporary political history of Uganda, Trinidad and The Congo¹ respectively. The stories have a common element: the settings are newly independent and politically unstable postcolonial countries. Naipaul depicts those countries as dark, lawless and chaotic. The main characters, on the other hand, are rootless Western or Asian outsiders who come to the newly-independent former colonies looking for freedom, a sense of adventure, or new opportunities for work. However, they are depicted as powerless individuals who are adrift in foreign nations and vulnerable in circumstances of political turmoil.

These three stories have a close connection to Naipaul's work as a journalist. Since the mid-1960s, Naipaul started to develop his journalistic interest in former colonies that had met with political and economical disasters after achieving national independence. He travelled to and spent time in those countries and reported back his experiences in journal articles.

¹ The Congo was called Zaire when Naipaul was writing the story. Yet, the country reverted to the name The Congo in 1997. For convenience, I will call the country The Congo throughout my argument.

Part of his experience evolved into fictions set in former colonies that had gained their independence. ‘In a Free State’ originated in Naipaul’s sojourn to Uganda in 1966. He was in Uganda as a writer-in-residence at Makerere University, and visited the neighbouring countries of Rwanda and Kenya. In Uganda it was the time of the State of Emergency when President Milton Obote captured the palace of the Kabaka of Buganda (‘King Freddie’), forced him to flee the country and ended the possibility of Buganda’s secession. Out of this event, Naipaul produced the story of ‘In a Free State.’ The story is set in an unnamed country in East Africa, and begins at the point where the president, supported by white governments, has just sent out his powerful army against the king’s people. This dangerous political unrest has an effect upon the two main white characters, Bobby and Linda, during their two-day and four hundred mile drive from the capital to the compound where they live.

A Bend in the River was born out of Naipaul’s stay in The Congo in 1975 during the rule of Mobutu.² In 1971, Mobutu started his program of ‘national authenticity,’ which required the replacement of Christian names with African names. His charismatic leadership encouraged a sense of nationhood, but at the same time brought about political corruption and economic disaster. Mobutu appears as ‘the Big Man’ in *A Bend in the River*. The story is set in the African interior, to which a Muslim protagonist Salim travels from the east coast of Africa to take over a shop. In a town at a bend in the river, Salim experiences the shift from peace to revolution and social chaos over seven years. The main characters are all rootless, powerlessly adrift at a time of ideological turmoil, and end up in being scattered to various locations. This generates a painful sense of dislocation in the novel.

² Before *A Bend in the River*, Naipaul wrote a travelogue *A Congo Diary* (1980) and a journal article ‘A New King of the Congo’ (1975). The travelogue and the article served as the skeleton for the novel, but there are some differences in their styles. In the travelogue and the article, Naipaul is frank and reveals his fury at the socio-political condition of Congo, yet in the novel such emotion is transformed. See Elaine Campbell, ‘A Refinement of Rage: V. S. Naipaul’s *A Bend in the River*’, *World Literature Written in English*, 18 (1979), pp. 396-7; Lynda Prescott, ‘Past and Present Darkness: Sources for V. S. Naipaul’s *A Bend in the River*’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 30 (1984), p. 548; Helen Hayward, *The Enigma of V. S. Naipaul: Sources and Contexts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 175; Kelly, p. 132.

Guerrillas was born out of Naipaul's writing a journal article on the Michael X murder case.³ Michael X, alias Michael de Freitas or Abdul Malik, was a mulatto from Trinidad who turned into a successful Black Power leader in London in the 1960s. Having broken the law, he was forced to return to Trinidad, where he set up an agricultural commune with the help of Hakim Jamal, an American Black Power activist. In 1972, Michael X murdered Gale Benson, his English girlfriend, and Joseph Skerritt, a co-worker in the commune. In 1979, Michael X was sentenced and put to death. In *Guerrillas*, Malik is transformed into Jimmy Ahmed, half-Chinese, half-black. Jimmy has recently been deported from England, where he established his reputation as a black activist, to an unnamed West Indian island where he sets up his agricultural commune.⁴ The other central characters are Roche and Jane. Roche is a white liberal with experience of torture and imprisonment for his beliefs in South Africa. Jane lives with Roche, has an affair with and is killed by Jimmy, which recalls the life of Gale Benson. Like the previous two African stories, *Guerrillas* is about rootless outsiders in a former colonial nation during political unrest.

The dependence of these fictions on journalism seems to be partly due to a lapse in the author's creativity. Naipaul had experienced a creative slump between 1970 and 1973. In this period, Naipaul had to face the painful situation of being a novelist without producing novels. To explain his role in society, he turned to journalism. In the end, however, his novelist's talent was stimulated by the experience, which contributed to the construction of the fictions.

Although each novel has a different setting, postcolonial condition and political situation, Naipaul created a common pattern and similar atmosphere in these stories. Naipaul depicts

³ *Guerrillas* was developed out of a series of journal articles, 'The Killing in Trinidad: Part One', *Sunday Times Magazine*, 12 May 1974, pp. 16-35; and 'The Killing in Trinidad: Part Two', *Sunday Times Magazine*, 19 May 1974, pp. 24-41. These articles were revised and compiled as 'Michael X and the Black Power Killings in Trinidad', in *The Return of Eva Perón with the Killings in Trinidad* (London: André Deutsch, 1980), pp. 1-91.

⁴ The island shows resemblance to Trinidad and Jamaica. As King conjectures, the 'Reggae, gangs, Rastafarians, Bauxite, and racial composition of the island . . . could be Jamaica. The way the killing of a black radical leader by the police turns into a black power uprising . . . recalls Trinidad's Black Power revolt of 1970', King, p. 100.

the politically unstable former colonies as follows: the withdrawal of imperial power brings about independence and the subsequent unstable political condition in the postcolonial countries. With the agitation of independence and political inexperience, what emerges is political unrest, such as revolution, riots, radical nationalism and the Black Power movement. Revolutionary politics creates disastrous results. In contrast, the outsiders who do not share the same ideological interests have to suffer from the chaos and reveal their powerlessness as individuals.

Naipaul seems to believe that there were common factors and consequences in postcolonial countries, which perhaps generated the above fictional pattern. For instance, he seems to believe that the suppressed anger among the colonised led to the political turmoil in the newly independent former colonies. Therefore, he saw the same psychology in the lawless Argentina under Perón's governorship and in The Congo under Mobutu's dictatorship. In spite of the different continents and histories, he mixed the two situations in his fiction: as he says, 'I transferred . . . the emotion of Argentina, . . . to my Central African setting [of *A Bend in the River*].'⁵

Section two will discuss the lives of expatriate characters in the settings of the newly independent postcolonial nations. It will argue that their lives are described as powerless in the midst of political turmoil and suggest that Naipaul's stories written in the 1970s emphasise the negative aspect of the characters' rootlessness. Section three will discuss how Naipaul alludes to the imperial past to suggest a long-lasting impact of the colonial ideology on the postcolonial present. Section four will discuss Naipaul's depiction of the individual characters whose lives are touched by the ideology of imperialism. The conclusion will evaluate these stories, and argue their importance despite criticism of Naipaul's pessimism.

⁵ Naipaul, 'Argentina: Living with Cruelty', *New York Review of Books*, 30 January 1992, p. 13.

2: Lives of Expatriates: Postcolonial Rootlessness

This section will discuss Naipaul's expatriate characters: described as fragile and powerless, trapped in the political atmosphere associated with the transfer of power at the advent of decolonisation. As shown in the previous two chapters, the idea of rootlessness is one of Naipaul's common themes. In Naipaul's 1970s stories, the negative aspect of the idea of rootlessness dominates. Contrary to the characters' expectation to satisfy their desire for freedom in foreign countries, their freedom is denied because of the political condition. Their sense of imprisonment is also depicted spatially. For instance, their living space is often fortress-like, guarded from the indigenous population. Furthermore, such spatial depiction generates an atmosphere of separation with the expatriate characters removed from the indigenous population, reflecting Naipaul's pessimism about cultural interaction in the postcolonial era.

The expatriate characters in Naipaul's 1970s stories are depicted as being deprived of man's essential needs of independence and freedom and having restrictive lives because of the politically unstable situation. In *Guerrillas*, for instance, Naipaul depicts white characters such as Roche, Jane, and Harry. They live in the Ridge, a seemingly secure and exclusive section of the fictional Caribbean island, which looks down upon the capital, and where only the privileged can live. The residents of the Ridge are concerned about their safety, for the political situation is worsening with occasional riots and a state of emergency. In spite of the residents' money and their defended living space, they live a life of both spatial and mental restriction.

Here [on the Ridge], . . . everyone lived in a state of suppressed hysteria, and . . . ambitions and jealousies no longer had to do with motor-cars or houses or fine things, but with security – money shipped abroad, residence visas for Canada and Australia and the United States.⁶

The privileged space of the Ridge is prison-like and becomes a spatial metaphor to symbolise the residents' sense of restriction. The Compound in 'In a Free State' is a

⁶ Naipaul, *Guerrillas* (London: André Deutsch, 1975; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 98.

similar kind of fortress. It is temporarily more heavily guarded because of the ongoing tribal war. Although the major part of the story consists of the journey of Bobby and Linda, the Compound – their living place and the goal of their drive – stands out through occasional reminders as the only safe place that they can trust. Naipaul thus depicts the living space of expatriates as restricting their lives and failing to satisfy humanity's essential need of independence and freedom.

This kind of restriction is not what the expatriates expected to face before arriving. The homosexual Englishman Bobby, who suffered from a mental breakdown at home, came to Africa both for sexual freedom and to cure his nerves. The middle-class English woman Jane in *Guerrillas* followed her man to the Caribbean expecting to find adventure, but these fantasies turn out to be only an illusion when the characters meet restrictions and dangerous predicaments.

Naipaul depicts Bobby's fantasised Africa as differing from what Bobby actually sees and experiences in Africa. The following is the fantasised African space:

Africa was for Bobby the empty spaces, the safe adventure of long fatiguing drives on open roads, the other Africans, boys built like men. ‘You want lift? You big boy, you no go school? No, no, you no frighten. Look, I give you shilling. You hold my hand. . . . Buy books, learn read, get big job. . . . You want five shillings?’ Sweet infantilism, almost without language. . . .⁷

This is a sexualised space that allows Bobby to pick up boys along the road and to satisfy his homosexual desire. In addition to sexual satisfaction, Bobby also expected Africa to give him mental peace. Bobby confesses to Linda about the fantasy he had during his breakdown in Oxford:

‘. . . [D]uring my illness I always consoled myself with the fantasy of driving through a cold and rainy night, driving endless miles, until I came to a cottage right at the top of a hill. There would be a fire there, and it would be warm and I would be perfectly safe.’⁸

Then, later, Bobby says, ‘I suppose . . . this is the sort of drive I used to dream of. The

⁷ Naipaul, ‘In a Free State’, in *Free*, p. 109.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

mountains, the rain, the forest. . . . I used to drive day after day along this road and spend hours in that white room –'.⁹ Bobby thus had a fantasised Africa that motivated him to resettle there.

Kelly argues that Bobby's fantasy reflects 'his homosexual and selfish needs'.¹⁰ Furthermore, Kelly and Hayward argue that Bobby's attitude and sense of space are imperialistic, for he exploits Africa as the site of a fantasy.¹¹ Naipaul depicts characters with such selfish inclination unattractively. He unfavourably depicts Western characters who come to the postcolonial nations for their freedom without much consideration of the outcomes of their arrival. For instance, to describe Jane, Naipaul emphasises that she is a visitor who is rooted in England: '[s]he was from London; she had London to return to; she was not taken seriously'.¹² Because of her rootedness, she is associated with the image of a 'sea anemone, rooted and secure, waving its strands at the bottom of the ocean'.¹³ Naipaul points up the irony that Jane herself secretly takes pride in her luck in having freedom to decide her way:

Jane thought how lucky she was to be able to decide to leave. Not many people had that freedom: to decide, and then to do. It was part of her luck. . . . She was privileged. . . . She would leave; she would make use of that return air-ticket.¹⁴

However, Naipaul views Jane's sense of adventure as irrelevant to the circumstances, and unsympathetically depicts her predicament in the Caribbean as one she has brought upon herself. Her affair with Jimmy ends in her murder, which, it is suggested, is caused by her misbehaviour in having sought adventure; the evidence of the murder is destroyed by her boyfriend Roche because she 'had invested little in this relationship'.¹⁵

Naipaul is thus critical of people's lack of seriousness that makes them view postcolonial nations only as a locale for pleasure and exploitation. Naipaul made the same

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

¹⁰ Kelly, p. 114.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 117 and Hayward, p. 194.

¹² Naipaul, *Guerrillas*, p. 98.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

criticism in a 1981 interview: ‘It has very hard things to say about people who play at serious things, who think they can always escape, run back to their safe world.’¹⁶ Perhaps Naipaul is jealous of the Europeans’ sense of place and security. Dayo’s brother gives expression to this jealousy when he observes the tourists in London:

But these people come for the day; they are happy, they have buses to take them back to their hotels; they have countries to go back to, they have houses. The sadness I feel make my heart seize.¹⁷

This critical and slightly jealous reaction to the rooted characters reflects Naipaul’s homelessness without his motherland of India and his birthplace of Trinidad since the age of eighteen.

Naipaul thus distinguishes the kind of rootlessness that has a place to return to from the kind of rootlessness without a place to return to. Naipaul identifies and sympathises with the latter. However, Naipaul also sees the similarities between the two. In a 1981 interview, in response to the interviewer’s remark that ‘[people] are all uprooted. . . [T]he lostness . . . is one we all share’, Naipaul said, ‘you do have English people who go to Africa, in search of some sort of personal fulfilment, and are lost, just as you have an Indian servant who goes to America and is lost.’¹⁸ Characters such as Bobby and Linda are categorised as the former type. Santosh in ‘One out of Many’ is categorised as the latter type. Naipaul diagnoses rootlessness in both white characters and characters who are former colonial subjects. However, Naipaul is more sympathetic to the characters whose homelessness is created under forced circumstances than the Western rootless characters who have the choice of going back to their countries. In *A Bend in the River*, Salim and his friend Indar, who are from the Muslim traders’ settlement on the east coast of Africa are examples of the former. Muslim settlers had lived in the community for generations and considered it as their home. However, they also feel that the ‘[t]rue Africa’¹⁹ is the interior

¹⁶ Naipaul, ‘A Conversation with V. S. Naipaul’, in *Conversations with V. S. Naipaul*, ed. by Jussawalla, p. 86 (first publ. in *Salmagundi*, 54 (1981), pp. 4-22).

¹⁷ Naipaul, ‘Tell Me’, p. 94.

¹⁸ Naipaul, ‘Without a Place’, p. 20.

¹⁹ Naipaul, *Bend*, p. 17.

of the continent, which suggests their awareness that they live in a transplanted culture. At the high point of nationalism in the country where Salim's community is located, Africans consider the Asians to be outsiders and expel them from the country.²⁰ As a consequence, Indar experiences personal grief over his family's losses: the house built by his grandfather is expropriated and two generations of labour and achievement go to waste. Salim's family are also forced to scatter, which generates in Salim a sense of insecurity: as he says, 'the idea came to me that as a community we had fallen behind. And that was the beginning of my insecurity.'²¹

Being homeless outsiders in a politically unstable Africa, Salim and Indar are sensitive about protecting their living space but sceptical about its future. Salim looks out over his family's compound from his upstairs room:

My aunt was calling to one of her daughters: some old brass vases that had been taken out to the yard to be scoured with limes hadn't been taken back in. I looked at that devout woman, sheltered behind her wall, and saw how petty her concern with the brass vases was. The thin white-washed wall (thinner than the wall of the slave stockade on the beach) protected her so little. She was so vulnerable – her person, her religion, her customs, her way of life. . . . How could anyone stop to ask what it was that had really protected us?²²

Salim's pessimistic view makes a wall look useless to secure the territory of his family. In this is seen his helplessness and sense of insecurity caused by living in an African state as a member of a 'foreign' ethnic group.

This helplessness is partly due to a lack of national identity. Both Salim and Indar understand their misfortune as individuals without national affiliation. Indar's family house is a spatial metaphor that symbolises the insecurity of individuals without national identity. The house is introduced as the home of a rich family that is well protected.

[Indar's] family lived in a big compound in an asphalted yard. . . . Everything was surrounded by a high ochre-washed wall, and there was a main gate with a

²⁰ This plot is to be based on historical actuality. In Uganda, for instance, Idi Amin ordered Asians who were not citizens of Uganda to leave the country, and within three months all 60,000 had left, most of them for Great Britain.

²¹ Naipaul, *Bend*, p. 22.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

watchman. . . I didn't think it was possible to be more exclusive or protected.

Rich people never forget they are rich, and I looked upon Indar as a good son of his money-lending or banking family.²³

Later, it is revealed that the overprotection of the property symbolises more than their richness. When Indar confesses a sense of fragility about belonging to the uprooted ethnic group in Africa, Salim cannot help viewing the heavily guarded property as a sign of the family's helplessness.

Indar said . . . 'We're washed up here, you know. To be in Africa you have to be strong. We're not strong. We don't even have a flag.'

He had mentioned the unmentionable. And as soon as he spoke I saw the wall of his compound as useless. Two generations had built what I saw. . . . I felt I could . . . see what he saw - the mocking quality of the grandeur, the gate and the watchman that wouldn't be able to keep out the true danger.²⁴

Here is seen the contrast between 'a wall' and 'a flag,' which generates the spatial contrast between a space inside 'a wall' and a space represented by 'a flag.' In other words, it is the contrast between individual space and national ideological space. It is a spatial version of one of Naipaul's themes, for the individual's capability under social restriction is his recurring theme. Naipaul uses the metaphor of 'shipwreck' to depict Ralph's sense of restriction in his Caribbean island of Isabella.²⁵ The narrow apartments occupied by newly arrived immigrants is another metaphor, embodying the restricted lives of the urbanites who are unfamiliar with the urban *milieu*. Similar to these metaphors, which embody the negativeness of the restriction of the *milieu* for individuals, the story of Indar's ill-fated property also reveals Naipaul's pessimism towards individual capability under social restriction.

Indar's house is seized as a national property. This shows individuals as powerless against ideological forces. Indar's house also reveals Naipaul's pessimism about cultural mixing and individuals' forced migration to other places. Naipaul depicts how spatial dislocation will only lead to a predicament for individuals. The particularity of the setting –

²³ Ibid., p. 24.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Naipaul, *Mimic*, p. 27.

the politically unstable postcolonial Third World – is not the ideal host place for the outsiders. However, apart from this particularity, there are other factors that prevented Naipaul from believing in the possibility of the mixing of cultures and of individuals' ability to assimilate to other places.

Firstly, Naipaul views an individual's past as an absolute concept that shapes and is preserved in identity. Mr. Biswas, for instance, experiences this concept of the past when he runs away from Hanuman House and goes to Port of Spain. He is excited with the possibility of starting a new life. He enjoys 'the adventure of being in the city' and a sense of freedom.²⁶ However, he soon loses the excitement and gets depressed when he remembers the fact that he is not actually a free man but a man who had a troubled and dependent life in another place: 'His freedom was over, and it had been false. The past could not be ignored. . . [H]e carried it within himself.'²⁷ Similarly, urban immigrants are depicted as failing to assimilate to a new *milieu* because of their strong sense of the past, as the previous chapter has argued. Thus, the past is presented as a concept that holds one back and prevents one from adjusting to a new situation.

The second factor leading to Naipaul's pessimism towards the idea of cultural mixing is his nostalgic view of social and cultural homogeneity. As Thieme argues, many characters in his earlier fictions pursue an ideal of belonging that is both physical and psychological.²⁸ For instance, Singh in *The Mimic Men* thinks that people 'could achieve fulfilment only within the security of their own societies and the landscapes hymned by their ancestors,' and therefore people's dislocation from the motherland is 'unnatural'.²⁹ Also, *India: A Wounded Civilization* reflects Naipaul's negative view of cultural mixing. Naipaul interprets India's independence not as the beginning of a new nationality, but as the end of rule by several foreign cultures:

²⁶ Naipaul, *Biswas*, p. 311.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 316.

²⁸ John Thieme, 'Re-constructions of National Identity in the Recent Work of V. S. Naipaul', in *Nationalism vs. Internationalism: (Inter)National Dimensions of Literatures in English*, ed. by Wolfgang Zach and Ken L. Goodwin (Tübingen: Stauffenburg-Verlag, 1996), pp. 407-8.

²⁹ Naipaul, *Mimic*, p. 32.

Five hundred years after the Arab conquest of Sind, Moslem rule was established in Delhi as the rule of foreigners, people apart; and foreign rule—Moslem for the first five hundred years, British for the last 150—ended in Delhi only in 1947.³⁰

Here, Naipaul reveals his sceptical view of India's capability to form a national identity out of mixed cultures, and cannot celebrate India's independence.

In Naipaul's understanding, then, cultural dislocation makes people nostalgic for the motherland, and reluctant to adjust to new places and enjoy a new plural sense of identity. But this dislocation also reinforces cultural mixing, preventing the formation of a homogeneous national identity. Thus, in Naipaul's understanding, cultural dislocation has negative effects for both individuals and nations.

Because of this pessimism, the expatriate characters are all described as the victims of the negative effects of the mingling of cultures. Also, Naipaul presents the mixing of peoples as an inevitable aspect of life in the modern and postcolonial world. However, Naipaul offers ideas about how to survive the postcolonial predicament of dislocation. Naipaul's lessons are to accept the world as it is, to be responsible for oneself, and to abandon false dreams of security and homeland. Salim often seems to speak for the author: 'THE WORLD is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it'³¹; 'I couldn't protect anyone; no one could protect me. . . . I could be master of my fate only if I stood alone'³²; 'There could be no going back; there was nothing to go back to.'³³ Although these lessons are dark in their nature, they convey the real vision of the postcolonial predicament as befalling individual expatriates who live adrift in the politically volatile atmosphere. Compared to the works discussed in the previous chapters, the dark aspects of rootlessness come to the fore in Naipaul's 1970s stories. Naipaul sees the strong effect of ideological force over individuals and depicts characters adrift and vulnerable to social and historical forces. This reveals that Naipaul

³⁰ Naipaul, *Wounded*, pp. 7-8.

³¹ Naipaul, *Bend*, p. 9.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

recognises the enduring impact of imperialism in the post-independence phase. Naipaul's understanding of the imperial past will be argued in the next section.

3: Long-lasting Impact of Imperialism

This section will discuss Naipaul's allusion to the colonial past. Despite the fact that sovereignty was returned to the indigenous populations after the imperial powers left, Naipaul understands that the imperial past has not disappeared but continues to impact upon the postcolonial world. With this understanding, Naipaul depicts the growth of the old antipathy of the colonised towards the colonisers. Naipaul also alludes to works by Conrad, recalling the imagery of the colonial past and deepening the implications of his own narratives.

One of the examples that remind readers of the long-lasting impact of the imperial past is the depiction of the latent anger of the colonised that emerges at the advent of the decolonisation feeding the politically volatile atmosphere. For instance, Naipaul depicts the emergence of tribal rivalry in postcolonial Africa in this connection. Naipaul contends that tribal identities were temporarily suppressed by imperialism and reappeared after the empires fell. In *A Bend in the River*, he writes of 'the miraculous peace of the colonial time, when men could, if they wished, pay little attention to tribal boundaries.'³⁴ Yet, after the empire left, 'all the accumulated anger of the colonial period' reawakened tribal pride and led to conflict and chaos.³⁵ Naipaul depicts a devastating sense of menace and terror beneath the surface of seemingly ordinary experiences and suggests that the latent frustration of the former colonial subjects is about to erupt. The volatile atmosphere leads to violent incidents. 'In a Free State' depicts the killing of a king, the lorry drivers' menacing Bobby, and the soldiers' beating him. *Guerrillas* depicts rioting and vandalism

³⁴ Ibid., p. 40.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 72.

in the town, Jimmy's murdering Jane, and Stephen's being shot by policemen. In *A Bend in the River*, Naipaul depicts bloodthirsty battles and Salim's witnessing the torture inflicted on prisoners. The level of violence is so high that Linda feels that '[y]ou could disappear . . . without trace'.³⁶

The hidden emotion of the colonised is also traced in the Big Man, a new leader of a fictional African nation. The Big Man figure parallels Naipaul's presentation of Mobutu as 'the great African nihilist' who embodies the rage of the suppressed and the defiant attitude developed after national independence.³⁷ The Big Man is depicted as exhibiting his ruling power, and his sentiment is reflected in his politics and national project. The Domain, a newly established university city whose object is to produce a modern Africa, becomes a spatial symbol which reflects the Big Man's policy and power. The modernisation is explained as his temporary capriciousness to show off his power, rather than a long-term and appropriate project of development. Therefore, the Domain is described as a mere graft onto the African life of the bush:

He was creating modern Africa. . . . He was by-passing real Africa, the difficult Africa of bush and villages, and creating something that would match anything that existed in other countries.³⁸

Then, when the Big Man embarks on the nationalisation program and the Domain is left out, the space of the Domain is described as if it is quickly reverting to a natural state because of the irrelevance of its modernisation: '[t]he polytechnic was still there, but the Domain had lost its modern "show-place" character. It was scruffier; every week it was becoming more of an African housing settlement.'³⁹ Thus, the Domain – changeable and irrelevant – is presented as embodying the Big Man's ruling power and the improprieties in the process of decolonisation.

There are, of course, other interpretations of the political instability in the postcolonial

³⁶ Naipaul, 'Free', p. 165.

³⁷ Naipaul, 'A New King for the Congo: Mobutu and the Nihilism of Africa', in *Return*, p. 196 (first publ. in *New York Review of Books*, 26 June 1975, pp. 19-25).

³⁸ Naipaul, *Bend*, pp. 107-8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

world, which contest Naipaul's view that it is rooted in the suppressed frustration of the colonised. Historians understand that the emergence of tribal conflict in Africa results from the irrelevant national boundaries that 'were imposed on Africa from outside by the European powers . . . with little knowledge of, or regard to, pre-existing African political and cultural structures and distributions.'⁴⁰ This results in the situation that '[c]ulture group areas were inevitably cut by those boundaries.'⁴¹ In its 'extreme cases', such boundary confusion developed into tribal war and secession.⁴²

With regards to the interpretation of Mobutu's failed leadership, it has been argued that the 'internationalisation of Zairean politics', was the 'immediate consequence of the crisis'.⁴³ For instance, as the historian Davidson argues, the 'Belgian repression' prevented the emergence of educated Africans and brought about a situation where the politically inexperienced Africans gained independence and brought about 'unhappy outcomes'.⁴⁴ Another international interference was the Cold War. In the 1960s, America supported Mobutu, who was sympathetic to American interests. Nixon argues that 'Mobutu needs to be recognized as, to a significant extent, an interactive product of colonial and Cold War interventionism'.⁴⁵ Also, 'American and Belgian mining interests' instigated and sustained the secession of copper-rich Katanga, the country's wealthiest province.⁴⁶ Naipaul neglects these historical and social aspects of The Congo and attributes the nation's chaos to the frustration of the suppressed.

From this perspective, essentialism and simplification are evident in Naipaul's fictional presentation of the former colonies. Although these aspects of his writing might be vulnerable to criticism, what is significant in Naipaul's depiction of the former colonies is

⁴⁰ Ieuan Ll Griffiths, *The African Inheritance* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 91.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 123.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ M. Crawford Young, 'Zaire, Rwanda and Burundi', in *The Cambridge History of Africa*, ed. by Michael Crowder, 8 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), VII, p. 722.

⁴⁴ Basil Davidson, *Modern Africa: A Social and Political History* (London: Longman, 1983; repr. 1997), p. 155.

⁴⁵ Rob Nixon, *London Calling: V. S. Naipaul, Postcolonial Mandarin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 102.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 101.

that these fictional representations are an attempt to indicate that the imperial past has made a deep impact and continues to affect the postcolonial present.

Naipaul's other means of reminding readers of the enduring colonial past is his adaptation of Conrad's presentation of Africa. As Naipaul himself admits, Conrad had existed in his mind as a literary guide since an early age. In an essay 'Conrad's Darkness,' Naipaul writes about his personal relation to the senior writer. Naipaul was introduced to Conrad's writing by his father at the age of ten. Naipaul admits Conrad's great impact on him: 'I found that Conrad . . . had been everywhere before me.'⁴⁷ What interested Naipaul was not only Conrad's literary talent but also Conrad's life: Conrad — a displaced writer, an immigrant, an international wanderer who turned Englishman — gave hope to Naipaul, who believed his tragedy was that he was born in a colony and, therefore, had less opportunity to become a writer: 'Conrad the late starter, holding out hope to those [Naipaul and his father] who didn't seem to be starting at all.'⁴⁸

All the three stories discussed in this chapter are tinged with Conradian description. In 'In a Free State,' *Heart of Darkness* is the significant allusion: the immemorial life of the forest in 'In a Free State' and in *Heart of Darkness* are depicted in 'an almost identical manner.'⁴⁹ The drive of the pair in 'In a Free State' is similar to Marlow's journey upriver, as both are journeys through hostile African terrain. A direct reference to Conrad is provided by Bobby, who says to Linda, 'You've been reading too much Conrad. I hate that book, don't you? '⁵⁰ In spite of Bobby's negative comment on Conrad, the narrative takes over Conrad's descriptive manner. *A Bend in the River* reveals more parallels with *Heart of Darkness*, as both are set in The Congo. When *A Bend in the River* was published, many

⁴⁷ Naipaul, 'Conrad's Darkness', in *Return*, p. 216 (first publ. in *New York Review of Books*, 17 October 1974, pp. 16-21).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

⁴⁹ Thieme, *The Web of Tradition*, p. 160.

⁵⁰ Naipaul, 'Free', p. 161.

reviewers, such as Enright and Miller, drew attention to the Congo parallel.⁵¹ Salim's journey up-river matches that of Marlow. The descriptions of the African landscape as dark and uncanny are identical in both stories. *Guerrillas* also has Conradian imagery, although it is set in the Caribbean: *Guerrillas'* narrative of foreigners adrift in an unknown setting has a Conradian touch; Conrad's characters in his African story 'An Outpost of Progress' (1897) influenced Naipaul's view on Gale Benson, an English woman who Naipaul writes about in his article 'Michael X and the Black Power Killings in Trinidad' and later fictionalises as Jane in *Guerrillas*. In 'An Outpost of Progress,' Conrad unkindly describes his white characters as people whose lives 'are only the expression of their belief in the safety of their surroundings.'⁵² Naipaul sees similar motives in Gale Benson.⁵³

Naipaul's description of the tropical forest also reveals Conrad's influence. *Heart of Darkness* represents the forest as the embodiment of African backwardness. Firstly, it depicts the African forest as deep and empty: 'Trees, trees, millions of trees, massive, immense, running up high. . . . We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness. It was very quiet there.'⁵⁴ Also, the forest has a prehistoric atmosphere: 'We were wanderers on prehistoric earth'⁵⁵; '[g]oing up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world'.⁵⁶ Furthermore, Conrad applies this uncanny imagery to the African jungle and its inhabitants: 'a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly. . . . No, they were not inhuman. . . . They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces'.⁵⁷

Naipaul describes Africa in a very similar way. He frequently uses the term 'bush' to imply the unknown, uncivilised locale of forests. For instance, Salim, who is amused by

⁵¹ D. J. Enright, 'Naipaul's Grief', Review of *A Bend in the River* by V. S. Naipaul, *Listener*, 20 September 1979, p. 382; Karl Miller, 'Salim and Yvette', Review of *A Bend in the River* by V. S. Naipaul, *London Review of Books*, 25 October 1979, p. 5.

⁵² Conrad, 'An Outpost of Progress', in *Selected Tales from Conrad*, ed. and intro. by Nigel Stewart (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), p. 17.

⁵³ Naipaul, 'Michael X and the Black Power Killings in Trinidad', p. 71.

⁵⁴ Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, in *Youth, Heart of Darkness, The End of the Tether: Three Stories* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1902; repr. 1946), p. 95.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 92.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 96.

the unexpectedly quick arrival of the goods he has ordered, says ‘[m]oney alone had brought these magical things to us deep in the bush’.⁵⁸ Here there emerges an opposition between the place of civilization where ‘these magical things’ are produced and the uncivilised place of ‘the bush’. In a similar manner, Salim calls the past days in Africa ‘the days of bush’.⁵⁹ Here, ‘the bush’ is a synonym for the prehistoric. These examples reveal that Naipaul inherits and reproduces Conrad’s negative imagery to represent the developing world.

Naipaul added to this tradition his descriptions of the frustrations of the suppressed, emerging at the advent of decolonisation. Naipaul writes about the revolution in his version of *The Congo* by linking its destructiveness to African rage and the bush.

It [Africa’s reckless destruction] was unnerving, the depth of that African rage, the wish to destroy, regardless of the consequences.

But more unnerving than anything else was the ruined suburb near the rapids. Valuable real estate for a while, and now bush again. . . . The houses had been set alight one by one. . . . The big lawns and gardens had returned to bush; the streets had disappeared; vines and creepers had grown over broken, bleached walls of concrete or hollow clay brick. Here and there in the bush could still be seen the concrete shells of clubs.⁶⁰

Here, Naipaul connects the destructive force of revolution to the quickly growing bush. Naipaul creates his version of the bush by adding the concept of postcolonial anger to the Conradian jungle.

Naipaul’s allusions to Conrad combine Conradian imagery with his own idea of the postcolonial reality, where he believes the anger of the suppressed remains strong. Naipaul balances images of the imperial past and the postcolonial present in his fictional presentation of the former colonies, suggesting the long-lasting impact of imperialism. Consequently, Naipaul’s depiction of the postcolonial world reveals its complexity, showing a combination of the colonial and postcolonial eras.

⁵⁸ Naipaul, *Bend*, p. 96.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

The reception of *Heart of Darkness* has dramatically changed since its publication.⁶¹ Once *Heart of Darkness* was viewed as an indictment of imperialism through its description of an amoral colony. However, it is now often viewed negatively as a text of racism, or a text that creates and consolidates the inferior image of the African continent. Nixon is one of those who see the negative effect of *Heart of Darkness* on other literature. He argues that the canonisation of *Heart of Darkness* in English literature has an ideological effect because the novel's presentation of Africa is quoted and reproduces the same negative image. Nixon calls such ideological and canonical effects 'The *Heart of Darkness* tradition'.⁶² As examples of works that inherit this tradition, Nixon refers to *Journey Without Maps* (1936) by Graham Greene and *Travels in the Congo* (1929) by André Gide. Nixon argues that Naipaul conveniently took over the Conradian tradition to assimilate to an English literary tradition. From this point of view, Naipaul's allusions can be criticised as an unreflective representation of cultural backwardness.

However, it is possible to detect Naipaul's ambiguous position and his existential anxiety as a former colonial subject. Personal and cultural experience informs his inheritance of Conrad's vision of the undeveloped world.

[My perspective] came from living in the bush. It came from a fear of being swallowed up by the bush, a fear of the people of the bush, and it's a fear I haven't altogether lost. They are the enemies of the civilization which I cherish.⁶³

By saying so, Naipaul justifies his dislike of the bush. Here is traced the old fear of Naipaul towards the colonial *milieu*. As my first chapter discussed, Naipaul harbours an old existential fear, which is revealed through his Trinidadian characters. The above interview shows the similar anxiety of a former colonial subject. Naipaul's comments on the bush reflect his urge to keep the old fear away from him.

⁶¹ Joseph Conrad: *Heart of Darkness*, ed. by Nicolas Tredell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), gives an overview of how the views on *Heart of Darkness* have changed.

⁶² Nixon, p. 92.

⁶³ Naipaul, 'Naipaul Reviews His Past from Afar', Interview, *New York Times*, 1 December 1980, p. C15.

With regard to the term ‘civilization’ in the above quotation, whether Naipaul means ‘Western’ civilization or ‘universal’ civilization is debatable. Feder argues that Naipaul means universal values:

Naipaul’s conception of a universal civilization is based on his belief in individual potentiality and individual responsibility. It is not unlike the position of Isaiah Berlin, whose advocacy of cultural pluralism is well known.⁶⁴

Isaiah Berlin is a philosopher who has argued that there exist common universal values:

No culture that we know lacks the notions of good and bad: true and false. . . . There are virtually universal values. . . . There are values that a great many human beings in the vast majority of places and situations, at almost all times have in fact held in common.⁶⁵

Similarly, Patrick Glynn argues that Western values ‘transcend differences of cultures’ and that ‘they are indeed not so much “Western” as universal.’⁶⁶

Although Feder argues that Naipaul is one of those who believe in civilization in a universal sense, it should be added that at times Naipaul attributes the origin of civilization to the West. For instance, in *Among the Believers*, he writes:

The West, or the universal civilization it leads, is emotionally rejected. . . . But at the same time it is needed, for its machines, goods, medicines. . . . [P]arasitism is one of the unacknowledged fruits of fundamentalism.⁶⁷

Naipaul’s essay ‘Our Universal Civilization’ also reveals that his concept of universal civilization originates in the West. In this essay, Naipaul talks about his personal ideas about civilization. Naipaul associates the concept of civilization with an intellectual atmosphere, the vocation of a writer, and the Western world.

It is the civilization, first of all, which gave me the idea of the writing vocation. . . . To be a writer, you need to start with a certain kind of sensibility.

⁶⁴ Lillian Feder, *Naipaul’s Truth: The Making of a Writer* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), p. 16.

⁶⁵ Isaiah Berlin, ‘Philosophy and Life: An Interview’, *New York Review of Books*, 28 May 1992, p. 52.

⁶⁶ Patrick Glynn, ‘The Swelling Democratic Tide’, *TLS*, 11 April 1997, p. 11.

⁶⁷ Naipaul, *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey* (London: André Deutsch, 1981; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), p. 158.

The sensibility itself is created . . . by an intellectual atmosphere.⁶⁸

[I]f I have to describe the universal civilization I would say it is the civilization that both gave the prompting and the idea of the literary vocation; . . . the civilization that enabled me to make that journey from the periphery to the centre.⁶⁹

Thus, Naipaul suggests that the postcolonial Western countries possess the qualities of a universal civilization since they are intellectually stimulating and open to outsiders.

Naipaul is thankful for such generosity: he feels ‘a greater appreciation of the immense changes that have taken place since the end of the war, the extraordinary attempt of this civilization to accommodate the rest of the world, and all the currents of that world’s thought.’⁷⁰ This essay reveals that by ‘the universal civilization’ Naipaul has in mind a concept rooted in the West.

This essay also reveals that the concept of civilisation creates a dichotomous division between the world of civilisation and that of barbarism. Naipaul’s colonial background and upbringing is responsible for the development of this dichotomous division. Having received a colonial education, Naipaul came to perceive a gap between the foreign idea of the occupation of a writer and the cultural poverty that he encountered in the *milieu* of Trinidad. As a result, he felt threatened and fearful for his ambition to become a writer. In this respect, Naipaul’s advocating a dichotomous view of the world reflects his own trauma at having been torn between the imposed ideal and the colonial reality. Therefore, Naipaul’s negative representation of the developing world should be seen as reflecting his own ambiguous ideological position as one who was led to believe the imposed ideal through the history of colonialism and who feared the colonial reality which prevented him from achieving that ideal.

This section has discussed how Naipaul depicts the imperial past as having had a long-

⁶⁸ Naipaul, ‘Our Universal Civilization’, in *The Writer and the World: Essays*, ed. by Pankaj Mishra (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf and Alfred A. Knopf, 2002; repr. London: Picador, 2002), p. 504 (first publ. in *New York Review of Books*, 31 January 1991, pp. 22-25).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 506-7.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 516.

lasting impact on the postcolonial present. By depicting the suppressed frustration of former colonial subjects, Naipaul attempts to suggest the psychological impact of imperialism on its colonial subjects. Allusion to Conrad, on the other hand, gives Naipaul's works the additional theme of imperial history and thus his fictional representation of the postcolonial present succeeds in opening up the historical trajectory of imperialism.

4: Individual Lives Touched by the Ideology of Imperialism

This section will discuss Naipaul's depictions of how individuals' lives are influenced by the ideology of imperialism. As the previous section has argued, Naipaul refers to the imperial past to suggest its enduring impact on the postcolonial present. While Naipaul refers to the historical and political results of the imperialism, what interests him most is how individuals' lives are affected by this ideology. As a novelist, Naipaul creates characters within varied situations in the setting of former colonies and depicts each character's personal history as interrelated with the ideology of imperialism.

An example of how the imperial past is revealed on an individual level is found in the old relationship of ruler and ruled. Naipaul often describes how in moments of crisis relationships tend to fall back into the old divisions of master and slave and suggests that the shadow of slavery still hangs over the post-independence phase. For instance, in *A Bend in the River*, Salim's position in relation to Metty remains as that of master to slave. Metty, the servant of Salim's family, is sent to Salim. Salim becomes Metty's benefactor and allows Metty to settle in his flat. Salim takes Metty for granted, and pays attention to him only when he displays resistance to the duties inherent in their relationship. It is only when Salim feels betrayed by Metty at the end of the story that the master finally recognises the life of the servant.

While Salim unconsciously depends on the old relationship of master and slave, the Colonel in 'In a Free State' is more aware that the power balance is shifting. Yet the Colonel deliberately maintains his old power over those supposedly freed from colonisation.

The Colonel runs a hotel and has his African employees under control for the moment, but he knows that his employees are always waiting for the chance to attack and kill him. The Colonel's run-down hotel is a relic of colonial times and becomes the microcosm of the end of imperialism when the sovereignty shifts from Europeans to the indigenous populations.

Bobby in 'In a Free State' also resists giving up his superior position. When Bobby returns home after being badly injured in a beating at the hands of the president's army, Luke, Bobby's African servant, recognises Bobby's injuries and laughs at him. Bobby is humiliated by Luke's disobedient manner. As an initial reaction to Luke's disobedience, Bobby feels it necessary to leave Africa, but soon changes his mind and feels, 'I will have to sack Luke.'⁷¹ Naipaul thus shows his awareness that the power balance is changing gradually as the process of decolonisation progresses.

Naipaul also recognises the contradictions manifest within this shifting of power. Naipaul depicts the process of decolonisation as not simply a matter of the indigenous population's regaining sovereignty, for the relationship between the colonisers and the colonised is mutually dependent as their lives are intricately interrelated. Such complex relationships are seen, for instance, in those of Jimmy, a guerrilla leader in a fictional Caribbean island. People gather around Jimmy not because they are attracted to Jimmy's revolutionary propaganda but because they depend upon or need to use Jimmy for reasons of their own. The boys gather round Jimmy because they have nowhere else to go. The firm of Sablich, former slave traders, supports Jimmy's project as a public relations stunt, to improve the image of the company which will suit the new society which had abolished slavery. Roche has no faith in Jimmy's project, but he has to work for Jimmy as part of his employment with Sablich.

Some characters are aware of contradictions in their situation but cannot do anything because of the complex postcolonial relationship in which the former coloniser and colonised depend on each other. Roche, a white liberal who endured torture and exile on

⁷¹ Naipaul, 'Free', p. 238.

behalf of the Blacks in South Africa, comes to the Caribbean not because he is a man of action but simply because he is ‘a man who didn’t have a place to go back to’.⁷² Roche is supposed to represent the cause of the Blacks, but ironically has a job with a firm of former slave traders. Aware of self-contradiction between his reputation as a liberal and his job with the imperialist firm of Sablich, Roche feels that ‘I’ve built my whole life on sand’.⁷³

While people form relationships with Jimmy for reasons of their own, he himself also depends on them. Jimmy arms himself with the jargon he learnt during his London days, revealing his dependence on the cosmopolitan culture. He is also aware of the hypocritical attitude of Sablich and the superficial relationship between him and Sablich, as a male character in the story Jimmy writes, who is modelled after Jimmy himself, says, ‘they now pretend that black is beautiful . . . I play along, what can you do –’.⁷⁴ Jimmy’s mentality thus displays double orientations; the racially conscious and revolutionary mind, and the identification with and dependence on the West. Naipaul recognises similar kinds of dependency and self-contradiction in the Argentinean guerrillas: ‘They have split personalities; some of them really don’t know who they are.’⁷⁵ Jimmy’s split identity is reflected in his confused and distorted desire for Jane. His desire for her to accept him is revealed in the story he writes as a pastime; his book becomes a form of wish-fulfilment. In the story, Jane becomes a heroine who is romantically interested in a male character modelled after Jimmy himself. In reality, however, Jimmy’s obsession with Jane takes a form of a racial revenge through sexual violence; he sexually abuses and murders her. Thus, with bitter sarcasm, *Guerrillas* depicts Jimmy as a failed revolutionary, confused and unsure who the enemy is.

In his depiction of Jimmy’s confused state of mind, Naipaul shows a complicated postcolonial reality in which the relationship of the colonisers with the colonised is intricately interlinked. Naipaul seems to suggest that the former colonised cannot simply

⁷² Naipaul, *Guerrillas*, p. 53.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 102.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 42.

⁷⁵ Naipaul, ‘The Return of Eva Perón’, in *Return*, p. 98.

regard the former coloniser with hostility. To use the phrase in *Guerrillas*, ‘[w]hen everybody wants to fight there’s nothing to fight for’,⁷⁶ Naipaul understands that the real enemy of the former colonised is something else. As Naipaul writes in an article about the Black Power in the Caribbean, ‘there is no enemy. The enemy is the past, of slavery and colonial neglect and a society uneducated from top to bottom’.⁷⁷

Naipaul depicts the relationships between the colonisers and the colonised as mutually dependent. Furthermore, he condemns the formerly colonised’s resorting to hostility and violence as a means of regaining sovereignty from their former imperial government. Naipaul also depicts the ideology of imperialism touching every life of each individual, surely but differently. Naipaul’s interest in individualism is again evident here. To use the phrase in *Guerrillas*, ‘everybody wants to fight his own little war, everybody is a guerrilla’,⁷⁸

5: Conclusion

This chapter has revealed that Naipaul described the former colonial nations in the 1970s as dark and doomed to failure: individuals’ search for freedom is not satisfied; the newly independent postcolonial nationhood seems to be futureless; the mingling of cultures ends up in polarity between the expatriates’ space and the space of the postcolonial nations; the space of the bush does not change its essential prehistoric nature. In the 1970s, Naipaul was perhaps at his most pessimistic and produced the darkest of his fictions. The tendency is reflected in his spatial depiction, too. Naipaul in the 1960s depicts hybridity in urban space and seems to move away from the polarised view of the world that dominated his depiction of Trinidad. However, the narratives discussed in this chapter again show the dichotomic division of civilization and barbarity.

Naipaul’s pessimistic and bleak view is sometimes attacked by critics. In particular,

⁷⁶ Naipaul, *Guerrillas*, p. 87.

⁷⁷ Naipaul, ‘Power?’, in *Overcrowded*, p. 271 (first publ. as ‘Power to the Caribbean People’, in *New York Review of Books*, 3 September 1970, pp. 32-34).

⁷⁸ Naipaul, *Guerrillas*, p. 87.

they concentrate on the argument that Naipaul is prejudiced against the developing world and against blacks. Walder raises the question of Naipaul's racism in *In a Free State*, and implicitly suggests that he is racist. Maja-Pearce criticises the Naipaul brothers as contemptuous of Africa, taking examples from the African fictions 'In a Free State,' *A Bend in the River*, and *North of South: An African Journey* (1978) by Shiva Naipaul. Pyne-Timothy points out Naipaul's scornful comments on the Third World and criticises him as Euro-centric, elitist and pessimistic.⁷⁹ This conclusion will defend Naipaul from such criticisms.

Firstly, the either / or categorisations – such as whether Naipaul is a racist or not – seem to be inappropriate. Naipaul, who was once in Trinidad and later adjusted to England, understands both societies, yet relates to them only partially. The uniqueness of his standpoint is this inbetween-ness. However, this inbetween-ness also generates ambiguous aspects. For instance, the assimilator Naipaul takes the side of Western civilization, which could be seen as promoting neo-imperial ideology, but Naipaul's criticism of Bobby's exploitation of Africa reveals Naipaul's anti-imperial attitude. In this respect, it is wiser not to categorise Naipaul in terms of either / or relations. Naipaul's diasporic life shows his partial belongings to several places. Naipaul's manifold views, born out of his multiple spatial belongings, contribute to his uniqueness.

Secondly, it should be remembered that Naipaul produced the dark vision at the particular time when many of the newly independent postcolonial nations were politically unstable. It was the time when 'there were further military take-overs, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America',⁸⁰ and when the Black Power movement rose in many regions. Naipaul's frank reaction to these events is one of the values of these books. More than twenty years have passed since their publication, and the current political-economic

⁷⁹ Walder, 'V. S. Naipaul and the Postcolonial Order'; Adewale Maja-Pearce, 'The Naipauls on Africa: An African View', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 20 (1985), pp. 111-7; Helen Pyne-Timothy, 'V. S. Naipaul and Politics: His View of Third World Societies in Africa and The Caribbean', *College Language Association Journal*, 28 (1985), pp. 247-62.

⁸⁰ Jeff Haynes, *Third World Politics: A Concise Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 40.

situation of those countries shows Naipaul's prediction to be both correct and incorrect. What proves him right, for instance, is the worsening situation in The Congo, which had been led for thirty years by President Mobutu. The concentration of power in one man brought about killings, poverty, and exodus, and prevented democracy from being achieved. The result is that, even in the 1990s, the situation of the country was catastrophic, with increasing numbers of displaced people, numbering 'from 32,000 in 1990 to more than 1.2 million in 1996.'⁸¹ Mobutu clung to power until expelled from the country in 1997. On the other hand, what Naipaul's prediction misses is, for instance, the recent strong democratic trends in many parts of the Third World.⁸² However, since the politics of those countries is not yet consolidated, it would be reasonable to say that it is too soon to judge Naipaul's view. Even so, Naipaul's honest response to the situations of those countries is significant. The value of Naipaul's honesty is his trying to see and depict the world as it is. Naipaul has a genuine concern for the future of those countries, which produced his honest depiction.

Thirdly, it should be remembered that Naipaul's pessimism was only temporary. After the 1980s Naipaul moved away from writing dark visions and started to be more hopeful. For instance, he came to write about the possibility of establishing postcolonial nationhood. In 1990, Naipaul wrote of India: '[w]hat I hadn't understood in 1962, or had taken too much for granted, was the extent to which the country had been remade'.⁸³ Here we see Naipaul's new, hopeful attitude in believing in the establishment of postcolonial nationhood. Also, Naipaul started to be positive about the establishment of the hybrid selfhood that belongs nowhere and everywhere as a consequence of cross-cultural inheritances. In *The Enigma of Arrival*, for instance, Naipaul created a narrator who both assimilates to England and goes back mentally to his past. Naipaul's dark vision in the 1970s novels, then, should be seen as transitional work created just before moving on to books that accept the

⁸¹ Kisangani N. F. Emizet, *Zaire after Mobutu: A Case of a Humanitarian Emergency* (Helsinki, Finland: UNU World Institute for Development Economics Research, 1997), p. 1.

⁸² Haynes, p. 39.

⁸³ Naipaul, *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (London: William Heinemann, 1990; repr. London: Vintage, 1998), p. 517.

hybridity of space and selfhood.

When one sees how Naipaul's spatial presentation changed from the 1950s to the 1970s, a pattern emerges. Naipaul's sense of space is associated with the idea of achieving a real sense of freedom. His characters' frustration is caused by an inability to achieve freedom and is often reflected in a claustrophobic sense of space. Chapter 1 showed that the space of the Trinidadian island in the stories of the 1950s has a shipwrecked atmosphere because islanders feel everything important is beyond the island. Naipaul depicts characters who feel the insignificance of their lives but put up with the restrictive *milieu* of Trinidad. The space of the metropolitan stories of the 1960s, as revealed in Chapter 2, shows more ambiguous forms of entrapment, as newly arrived urbanites confront the possibility of freedom but are unable to satisfy their needs. Instead, they feel comfortable only in their small flats. In the fictions in the 1970, as this chapter argued, a sense of entrapment is stronger, since Naipaul depicts some characters' entrapment in houses and cars during political unrest. This depiction implies that the characters' search for freedom in the postcolonial nations is completely negated.

There are several scholars who have noticed Naipaul's changing sense of place.⁸⁴ What they generally agree is as follows: whilst in his earlier career, Naipaul described a sense of identity that is determined by one's existential space, by the time he wrote *A Bend in the River*, place ceased to give characters a sense of identity but became merely a physical locale. For example, Tiffin argues that a motif of 'successful house building' in *A House*

⁸⁴ For instance, Ronald Blaber, "This Piece of Earth": V. S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River*, in *A Sense of Place in the New Literatures in English*, ed. by Peggy Nightingale (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1986), pp. 61-67, reveals that *A Bend in the River* shows a fragmented sense of place and denies the possibility of the land offering the spiritual rootedness. John Cooke, 'A Vision of the Land: V. S. Naipaul's Later Novels', *Journal of Caribbean Studies*, 1 (1980), pp. 140-61, argues that Naipaul had gradually lost his idealisation of the landscape as linking to a sense of identity. Similarly, Violet H. Bryan, 'The Sense of Place in Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* and *Guerrillas*', *College Language Association Journal*, 33 (1989), pp. 26-35, argues that a sense of place and a sense of identity are connected in *A House for Mr. Biswas*, yet this connection disappears in *Guerrillas*. While the above three critics see a negative effect in dislocation from place, Helen Tiffin, 'New Concepts of Person and Place in *The Twyborn Affair* and *A Bend in the River*', in *A Sense of Place in the New Literatures in English*, ed. by Nightingale, pp. 22-31, gives a positive reading of the fragmented sense of place that can offer a potential for creativity.

for Mr Biswas symbolises Mr. Biswas' identification with and acceptance of his new world of Trinidad.⁸⁵ On the other hand, Cooke argues that, in *In a Free State* and in *Guerrillas*, 'the land, rather than offering a sense of place, discloses that alienation from it is inevitable.'⁸⁶

Although all the major characters in those fictions look for escape from their past and for freedom, ironically the attempt entraps them in a spatial imprisonment: it seems that the more one seeks for freedom, the smaller one's space becomes. It seems that, because of Naipaul's pessimistic ideas about the future of the postcolonial world, the development of his spatial depiction meets a cul-de-sac. Even so, it is a temporary pessimism and bleakness. As said already, in the 1980s, Naipaul seems to find his spatial future in the positive understanding of the ability to assimilate, which will be discussed in the latter part of my thesis.

⁸⁵ Tiffin, p. 23.

⁸⁶ Cooke, p. 142.

Chapter Four:

Two Historical Narratives: Attempts to Write Histories for Trinidad and Trinidad Indians

1: Introduction

Most of the West Indies' histories derived from sources written by imperialists tend to put their emphasis on European explorers and conquerors. The typical summary of the West Indian imperialists' history is as follows. In 1492 Christopher Columbus was the first European to visit the islands. These were inhabited by three indigenous tribes: the Arawaks, the Caribs, and the Ciboney. They, however, became extinct due to the Europeans' territorial expansion. By the middle 1600s European settlements had been established by the Spanish, the English, the French and the Dutch. Large numbers of Africans were imported to provide slave labour for the sugarcane plantations. After the emancipation, East Indians and Javanese were recruited as indentured labourers by the new sugar growers during the century after the 1840s. In the 18th century, there was constant warfare among the European colonial powers for control of the islands. Until the early 20th century, the islands remained in European control. Most of them gained independence in the 1960s and 70s.

Thus, the mainstream storyline is how the Europeans conquered the new territories, settled there, recruited new settlers from abroad and developed the region. The topics of the indigenous tribes, slaves and the non-European immigrants are only supplementary

subjects. This kind of history can be defined as ‘imperial history’,¹ to use the term employed by the Australian historian Paul Carter.

In contemporary West Indian society, imperial history has started to be recognised as irrelevant and unsatisfactory as a local history. For instance, the African slaves who crossed by the Middle Passage, tolerated exploitation and finally gained freedom, have totally different stories. Furthermore, such West Indians who feel the imperial history irrelevant greatly outnumber the descendants of the Europeans who participated in the imperial history.

Naturally, the re-enactment of the relevant local history has started to be considered important, particularly during the cultural nationalism movement of the 1950s and the 1960s.² However, the task met difficulty due to the historical reality that the West Indies is a *milieu* of migrants from various regions. The West Indians turned to the local only to find themselves culturally dislocated and fragmented with their origins somewhere else. Accordingly, ‘the West Indian writer has all too often been paralyzed by a vision of the Caribbean as the site of historical and cultural shipwreck.’³ Under such conditions, to establish relevant local histories for the West Indians turns out to be difficult task.

Naipaul’s works often show his interest in Caribbean history, and some of them were written with the chief aim of investigating it. The first book with Caribbean history as its theme is *The Middle Passage* (1962), in which the author recorded the contemporary society of the five Caribbean countries he visited: Trinidad, British Guiana, Surinam, Martinique and Jamaica. The book’s viewpoint is deeply historical, for Naipaul always

¹ Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), p. xvi.

² Cultural nationalism is the movement that ‘was nurtured and heralded by both West Indian and metropolitan critics of the same generation in the 1950s and the 1960s.’ They ‘focused on a region, a people, and the aspiration of a new national literature’, and began a process of analysing and championing the new literature. They considered such a movement as integral to the Caribbean’s ‘struggle for independence and identity.’ Stefano Harney, *Nationalism and Identity: Culture and the Imagination in a Caribbean Diaspora* (London: Zed; Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies, 1996), p. 4.

³ Barbara J. Webb, *Myth and History in Caribbean Fiction: Alejo Carpentier, Wilson Harris, and Edouard Glissant* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), p. 4.

returns to the essential beginning of slavery as the societies' roots. Although the details of each post-slaveholding society are different, their general historical backgrounds and current problems are presented under the same theme, namely that a rapacious colonial and slave-owning past had disastrous effects upon the Caribbean. *The Middle Passage* came after his four comic novels with a Trinidad setting, *The Mystic Masseur*, *The Suffrage of Elvira*, *Miguel Street* and *A House for Mr Biswas*. The socio-historical analysis in *The Middle Passage* validates the fictional presentation in the four novels preceding it. Whilst *The Middle Passage* tells about the West Indians' admiration for eccentricity and sharp characters and their talents in trickery, those ideas are demonstrated by the characters in the four novels: Ganesh achieves his success through trickery; Miguel Street is full of eccentric characters; the suffrage of Elvira is fought for through trickery; Mr. Biswas' odd behaviour is an expression of his wish to achieve recognition. *The Middle Passage* gives sociological and psychological explanations for those characters' behaviour. Consequently, *The Middle Passage* stands out as Naipaul's first socio-historical survey of his birthplace, which connects his earlier fictional world, contemporary Caribbean society, and its history.

Seven years after *The Middle Passage*, Naipaul published *The Loss of El Dorado: A History* (1969), which is the result of the author's serious engagement with Caribbean history. For two years, Naipaul researched the archives at the British Museum and created a continuous narrative of historical episodes. Although the sources Naipaul resorted to include imperialists' documents, the circumstances do not make his history imperialistic. His imagination transforms the significance of these sources. For instance, reading documents about Trinidad in the British Museum, Naipaul feels 'the truth of the other, aboriginal island. From that distance . . . the landscape of the aboriginal island became fabulous.'⁴ The scholarly research turned into a history book with a novelist's approach. The historical figures and events are given novelistic characterisation and narration. The

⁴ Naipaul, *A Way in the World: A Sequence* (London: William Heinemann, 1994; repr. London: Minerva, 1997), p. 209.

book examines the early history of Trinidad after its discovery by Europeans. Naipaul chose lesser-known episodes, ‘two forgotten stories’, for his history book.⁵ The first is ‘the story of the end of the search for El Dorado’ between 1595 and 1617.⁶ The second story is ‘the British-sponsored attempt, from the newly captured island of Trinidad, to set going a revolution of high principles in the Spanish Empire.’⁷

Some of his fictions also reveal his interest in history, particularly the history of imperialism and slavery. Usually, it is the characters with historians’ eyes that introduce the historical perspective. Singh, a protagonist of *The Mimic Men*, is one example. As a child, he is taken for a drive by his father. They come across old Carib areas where the present population is predominantly black. Singh understands that the Caribs used to be the blacks’ tormentors but ‘had simply ceased to be’ through assimilation.⁸ Singh shows the historian’s sensitivity by quickly noticing the changing ethnic balance in the population and understanding its historical significance: ‘here, just for a moment, the rise and fall and extinction of peoples, a concept so big and alarming, was concrete and close.’⁹ This scene also reveals something of Singh’s insecurity as he is disturbed by the idea of the extinction of peoples. He feels that the histories of ‘[s]laves and runaways, hunters and hunted, rulers and ruled’ have ‘no romance’ for him, and that their ‘message was only that nothing was secure.’¹⁰ He grows to have a ‘hope to give expression to . . . the deep disorder’ of his society in a way that ‘a great historian might pursue.’¹¹ However, he cannot write a history, for he is ‘too much a victim of’ the feeling of uprootedness caused by the colonial circumstances.¹² Also, his existential insecurity surpasses his passion for history. Therefore, instead of a history, he writes personal memoirs that help him to give a sense of

⁵ Naipaul, *The Loss of El Dorado: A History* (London: André Deutsch, 1969; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 17.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Naipaul, *Mimic*, p. 121.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 32.

¹² Ibid.

order and meaning to his life. Even so, his memoirs can be understood as a personal history, which indirectly tells a history of a West Indian struggle for independence. Just a few weeks after the completion of *The Mimic Men*, Naipaul began *The Loss of El Dorado*, as if to set about Singh's unfulfilled dream of writing a history book. On the other hand, Naipaul wrote one chapter, 'History: A Smell of Fish Glue' in *A Way in the World*, as a reaction to the empowering Creolisation and revealed his ethnic consciousness. This consciousness of Naipaul's parallels that of Singh. In a way, Singh doubly reflects Naipaul's sense of the past, a hope to write West Indian history and an ethnically conscious sense of origin, which is fostered in the racially mixed environment of the Caribbean.

Twenty-five years after *The Loss of El Dorado*, Naipaul published *A Way in the World* (1994), which again investigates Caribbean society and history. *A Way in the World* consists of nine linked and complementary narratives, some personal, some historical, some novelistic. The book explores various topics, such as the author's own childhood, adolescent / ancestral memories, the story of a black revolutionary in the Caribbean, and the history of European colonialism. These seemingly unrelated topics are connected by the common feature of the Caribbean *milieu*.

Because of its narrative juxtaposition of various topics, the book is not usually seen as a history book. However, it is highly historical in nature, depicting figures such as Columbus, Sir Walter Raleigh and Francisco Miranda, a Venezuelan revolutionist who fought for independence from Spain. Despite the fact that *A Way in the World* revisits the same topics of *The Loss of El Dorado*, it has significance as a book that accounts for Caribbean history from new perspectives.

In *A Way in the World*, Naipaul brought unrelated figures – both the coloniser and the colonised – all together in the setting of the West Indies: the author himself, Sir Walter Raleigh, Francisco Miranda, Lebrun, the Trinidadian communist of the 1930s, and Blair, the black Trinidadian with whom Naipaul was acquainted in his youth. This combination of personae stresses how their lives represent a continuum influenced by the Trinidadian

milieu. In *A Way in the World*, the Trinidadian locale itself is the historical stage. In *The Loss of El Dorado*, on the other hand, the island's history is located within international history. For instance, Sir Walter Raleigh appears in both books but is described from different points of view. Raleigh, in *The Loss of El Dorado*, is described as a figure who was involved with European imperialism, so that his main role in Caribbean history is presented as his exercising imperial power over the islands. On the other hand, *A Way in the World* focuses on Raleigh's later life when he was old, ill, but still obsessively thinking about his failed expedition to El Dorado. He is presented as a figure whose life was greatly affected by his experience in Trinidad.

There are new features to be seen in *A Way in the World*, which will be discussed in this chapter. Firstly, *A Way in the World* contains spatial concepts; a part of the book tells history spatially. This is particularly so in the second chapter, 'History: A Smell of Fish Glue.' The chapter tells of Naipaul's personal impression of how the landscape of Port of Spain had been changed from the time of his childhood to the 1970s. By presenting the social space of Port of Spain, which was affected by historical events, the chapter tells Trinidad's contemporary history spatially. Secondly, 'History: A Smell of Fish Glue' reveals Naipaul's ethnic consciousness as a Trinidad Indian: the moment of the Creoles' political victory is depicted from the viewpoint of the Trinidad Indians, who are unhappy with their status as an ethnic minority.

Thus, Naipaul's sense of history and way of writing history differ between *The Loss of El Dorado* and *A Way in the World*. Both were produced as a result of the author's serious engagement with, and a sense of responsibility for, giving an appropriate voice to the West Indian past. These two works will be the main focus of discussion in this chapter. Section two will argue that *The Loss of El Dorado* places the West Indies' history within international history. Sections three and four will analyse how 'History: A Smell of Fish Glue' tells contemporary Trinidad history from the viewpoint of Trinidadian Asians who were politically marginalised at the time of Creoles' empowerment. The conclusion will

evaluate Naipaul's multiple sense of history; the global understanding of history seen in *The Loss of El Dorado*, and the ethnically conscious history seen in 'History: A Smell of Fish Glue.' It will interpret Naipaul's multiplicity positively, as the significance of his works and as the product of his diasporic life.

2: *The Loss of El Dorado*: Tragedy Brought by Spatial Expansionism

This section will mainly argue three points. Firstly, Naipaul's sympathy uncovers the forgotten histories of minorities such as the slaves and American Indians. Secondly, Naipaul reveals the imperial history of exploitation and indicts the wrongs of imperialism. Thirdly, Naipaul's spatial sensibility enables him to see imperialism as a spatial ideology and to set the history of the West Indies within a global context. By showing these aspects, I will defend the book, which has been criticised for its dark and pessimistic view of the past.

In *The Loss of El Dorado*, Naipaul mixes two sentiments in an outwardly detached, but privately compassionate, approach to the tragedy. With these sentiments, Naipaul uncovers the tragedy brought about by imperialism and criticises the resultant injustice. Naipaul's sympathy is inconspicuous because of the detached sarcasm that runs throughout the narrative. The search for El Dorado is presented as the embodiment of the Europeans' greed for gold. Explorers who blindly believe the native guides who pretend to know the location of the gold mine look absurd rather than heroic. The colony is a chaotic, uncontrollable community with the centre of its administration too far across the Atlantic. As a result of this detached narrative hiding Naipaul's compassion, some critics have taken the impression that Naipaul looks down on Caribbean history and found fault in his attitude as a disdainful gesture. Hassan argues that it was 'not uncommon' for West Indian critics to see Naipaul's detachment in *The Loss of El Dorado* as reflecting the arrogance of a successful man.¹³

¹³ Dolly Zulakha Hassan, *V.S. Naipaul and the West Indies* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), p. 217.

However, what such criticism seems to have missed is Naipaul's hidden but certain sympathy toward people who were affected by the inhumanity and injustice brought about by imperialism. He believes that history tends to record information selectively. Raymond, a historian in *A Bend in the River*, speaks for Naipaul when he says that things in the past 'have gone unrecorded' and that it is impossible to know 'the truth about what has happened' in the past.¹⁴ Furthermore, Naipaul appears to understand that it tends to be the history of the marginalised that is forgotten. For instance, he writes, '[s]o much was written about Negroes. But the Negroes of 1800 remain as anonymous as the Indians of Las Casas three centuries before. It is the silence of all serfdom.'¹⁵ Naipaul's pity for the forgotten made him attempt to recover such voices. He seeks to uncover the inhuman acts of brutality and injustice brought by imperialism.

Naipaul's will to uncover this past in *The Loss of El Dorado* is seen in the narrative structure. The narrative is framed by a Foreword and Epilogue that state that there are some forgotten pasts in the West Indies. In the Foreword, Naipaul talks about extinct American Indians called Chaguanes. Naipaul found out that Chaguana, the name of his birthplace, originates in 'a certain nation of [American] Indians called Chaguanes'.¹⁶ Naipaul was shocked by the fact that 'the Chaguanes disappear in silence' and no one in the settlement, including himself, 'would know that there was once a people called Chaguanes'.¹⁷ He reasons that the Chaguanes were forgotten because they were deemed unimportant, and concludes that 'this was how a colony was created in the New World'.¹⁸

His Epilogue makes the same point as the Foreword:

The slave was never real. Like the extinct aboriginal, he had to be reconstructed from his daily routine. . . . In the records the slave is faceless,

¹⁴ Naipaul, *Bend*, p. 137.

¹⁵ Naipaul, *Loss*, p. 291.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 13-14.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁸ Ibid.

silent, with an identification rather than a name. He has no story.¹⁹

However, Naipaul writes: '[t]here is an exception. Jacquet, the *commandeur* or headman of the Bel-Air sugar estate, has a story.'²⁰ The story is about the murder of a baby fathered on a slave by an estate owner. The baby is loved by everyone and 'became the pet of the whole estate.'²¹ When the baby is poisoned and dead, Jacquet does not go to the funeral because he is too distressed. Later, however, Jacquet confesses that he wanted to poison his master, but somehow changed his mind and killed the baby instead. Later Jacquet is found dead, yet no one knows whether he was killed or committed suicide. The story is ambiguous in that both Jacquet's motivation for murder and the cause of his death are uncertain. Instead of killing the master, Jacquet killed the very object of his love and himself. Jacquet's episode is the story of self-ignorance and self-destruction. Ending with Jacquet's sorrowful episode, *The Loss of El Dorado* emphasises the evil of slavery that created the inhuman conditions of slaves' lives.

As the narrative structure framed by the Foreword and Epilogue shows Naipaul's will to uncover the forgotten past, Naipaul discloses this past in the text. For instance, when Naipaul tells about the Spanish exploration and conquest of the newly 'discovered' island of Trinidad, he does not forget to give the histories of injustice inflicted on the American Indians: the Indian population dropped from 40,000 to 4,000 during one century.²² Arwacas Indians became Spanish servants and the city of St Joseph de Oruña was founded in a manipulative and forceful way, as the notary who was called to bear witness to the foundation self-righteously wrote that the Indians 'rejoiced'.²³

Naipaul also revives the inhuman brutality exercised on slaves in jails. He describes the jail, especially 'the punishment cells', in a painfully detailed way: the 'heat was one of the punishments in the jail,' and the 'temperature in these dark windowless rooms was never

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 375-6.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 376.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., p. 118.

²³ Ibid., p. 34.

less than 100 degrees'.²⁴ Prisoners who were 'chained flat on boards, quickly wasted away and became demented'.²⁵ Descriptions of 'Negroes dying in convulsions' and 'rotting bodies'²⁶ enable readers to sense what it was like to be a slave locked in the jail. The jail becomes the symbol of the inhumanity that slavery and the plantation system brought to the West Indies. What lies behind such revelations of brutality is the author's compassion for the victims. Elliott argues that it was Naipaul's 'gift of compassion' that produced *The Loss of El Dorado*.²⁷ Nightingale has recognised Naipaul's 'growing compassion for victims'.²⁸

By uncovering such cruelty, Naipaul indicts the wrongs of imperialism that created a harmful society. However, Naipaul does not judge the imperialists as evil but depicts them as being contaminated by the slave society itself. This reveals that the target of his criticism is the ideology of imperialism itself, rather than the imperialists. For instance, Picton, the first English governor of Trinidad, who is strict and cruel, is spared Naipaul's criticism. Picton was depicted as a man who had 'inherited . . . a slave island, where he alone was the law' although he was 'interested neither in slaves nor revolution'.²⁹ He is described as being quickly absorbed into the amoral and exploitative atmosphere of the colonial society, and turning into the perfect colonialist who appealed to any means to defend slavery.

Although *The Loss of El Dorado* criticises the wrongs of imperialism, it is sometimes criticised as being Eurocentric because it has the history of European imperial history as its thematic centre. For instance, Mustafa argues that:

[Naipaul discovered] that the island of his birth was at least central to the imperial theme, rather than entirely peripheral. . . [T]he almost self-denigrating way in which he casts the island "at the rim of the world" is

²⁴ Ibid., p. 189.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 201.

²⁷ J. H. Elliott, 'Triste Trinidad', Review of *The Loss of El Dorado* by V. S. Naipaul, *New York Review*, 21 May 1970, p. 26.

²⁸ Nightingale, *Journey through Darkness*, p. 129.

²⁹ Naipaul, *Loss*, pp. 152, 157.

somewhat mollified by the almost Ptolemaic nostalgia that stems from Naipaul's subtle acknowledgement of the personal excitement that his researches into the history of the city of Port of Spain procured him.³⁰

I agree that Naipaul's history views Trinidad in terms of its connection to European imperialism. However, I do not think that the connection should directly lead to the hypothesis that *The Loss of El Dorado* shows the author's valuing of Europe as the centre and devaluing of the Caribbean as peripheral. The book happens to contain topics of European imperialism because he sets Trinidad history on an international scale. Colonial expansionism affected various regions of the world, including the Caribbean. Its influences were global in every respect: numerous Africans crossed the Atlantic to become slaves; plantations changed the landscape and economy of the colonies; immigration from various regions – European settlers, African slaves, and Chinese and Indian labourers – resulted in racially mixed populations in the colonies. In this way, imperialism is a spatial enterprise with global influence. It affected both the northern and the southern hemispheres, and millions of people moved to other lands. Furthermore, the effects of its ideology have survived until today. Imperialism changed the social space of many regions, and is the root of current social problems in those regions. Empire was 'short lived' but 'altered the world for ever', as Singh says in *The Mimic Men*.³¹

Naipaul's vision of the spatial impact of imperialism is the product of his experience as exile and traveller. Whichever former colonies he goes to, he quickly discovers the spatial reminders of imperialism: when Naipaul is in Karachi, he sees a pilgrim ship to Mecca seen off by a provincial governor and bagpipe band parade. Then he understands 'the inherited British military style . . . imposed on this pilgrimage to Mecca. . . . [L]ayer upon layer of history here.'³² Seeing the green land outside Buenos Aires 'full of military names,' he thinks they are 'the names of generals who took the land away from the Indians', and

³⁰ Mustafa, p. 110.

³¹ Naipaul, *Mimic*, p. 32.

³² Naipaul, *Among*, p. 105.

imagines a ‘history of Indian genocide and European takeover.’³³ By witnessing a great number of spatial reminders of imperialism in many former colonies, Naipaul developed a spatial understanding of imperial history.

Naipaul views imperialism not as limited to European history, but as ideology on an international scale. If Naipaul has a global view and tries to write Trinidadian history, naturally his history will include the history of imperialism as a central issue. However, it does not mean that Naipaul makes a priority of connecting Trinidad with European history. That is why the book’s theme is not imperial history itself. Its theme is the malady of the imperialism that harmed both the colony and the Caribbean people. *The Loss of El Dorado* locates Caribbean history in international history and reveals the exploitation and greed that the ideology of imperialism fostered.

Naipaul’s pessimistic vision of the past was often too dark to be accepted by the West Indians and provoked negative reviews. Discussing the reception of *The Loss of El Dorado* in the West Indies, Hassan summarises that the book ‘has disappointed reviewers . . . primarily because it fails to glamorize the history of the island.’³⁴ She argues that the atmosphere of West Indian nationalism was unfavourable to Naipaul.³⁵ For instance, Naipaul has often been unfavourably compared with the Guyanese writer Wilson Harris, who is one of the key figures for the cultural nationalism movement. Harris values positive attitudes as a way of finding new possibilities for the future. The ways the two writers deal with the legend of El Dorado reveal their differences. Harris offers a positive interpretation of the El Dorado legend in *Palace of the Peacock* (1960): he creatively converts the local myths into a story that functions ‘as a link between the past and the present’ and gives the West Indians a positive sense of the past.³⁶ While Harris ennobles the fable of El Dorado to a sublime legend, Naipaul demystifies the fable. Naipaul depicts El Dorado as ‘a Spanish delusion’, which brought about the absurd and failed expedition of El Dorado, motivated by

³³ Naipaul, ‘The Return of Eva Perón’, pp. 148-9.

³⁴ Hassan, p. 216.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 215.

³⁶ Webb, p. 63.

greed.³⁷ As a result, Naipaul makes the West Indian past look barren, which incited criticism among the West Indians.

This raises questions as to whether the obligation of the historian is to produce a positive West Indian history. I will object to this hypothesis by showing the significance of Naipaul's and other West Indians' history books that do no put emphasis on producing a positive past.

Firstly, Naipaul's attempt in *The Loss of El Dorado* to locate Caribbean history on an international scale is significant in that '[f]ew Caribbean historians have attempted in recent years to write the histories of particular territories or groupings in their larger imperial context'.³⁸ Higman discusses the importance of having a variety of histories with various viewpoints for the future of the West Indies in his ninth chapter, 'Alternative histories,' in *Writing West Indian Histories* (1999). He regrets the fact that few West Indians have tried to locate the Caribbean within world history, and suggests the importance of such a viewpoint.

[T]he English-speaking Caribbean needs to be located within freshly conceived histories of empire and within world history. . . . Work of this sort . . . is needed in order to understand the economic, social, ideological and political development of the region under empire. I do not mean a return to the old imperial view that colonies had no history apart from their empires or a reassertion of the primacy of metropolitan politics, but rather a recognition of the fundamental significance of imperial factors.³⁹

Naipaul's attempt fits neatly into the type of history that Higman proposes.

Secondly, Naipaul's compassionate disposition is a valuable characteristic required for the history of the post-slaveholding society. For the forgotten historical voices, what is essential is to claim 'for compensation for historic injustice'.⁴⁰ To achieve this, a sympathetic interest in the unofficial histories is necessary. Historians who research minority ethnic groups often apply such sentiments to their research. For instance, the

³⁷ Naipaul, *Loss*, p. 17.

³⁸ B. W. Higman, *Writing West Indian Histories* (London: Macmillan Education, 1999), p. 246.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 242.

emergence of black history is due to the increased endeavour of historians who ‘gave voice to a people who were thought to be silent, without historical agency’.⁴¹ With the same attitude, Naipaul pities ‘the silence of all serfdom’ and revives slaves’ voices out of ‘anonymous’ conditions.⁴²

Thirdly, the selective topics of *The Loss of El Dorado* have a particular significance. Although the book’s selectiveness was sometimes criticised as the partial presentation of history and even as historical inaccuracy, Naipaul took the novelistic approach to Caribbean history with his themes in mind.⁴³ It is not only Naipaul who writes history from consciously selective perspectives. Stefano Harney has described the various types of histories attempted by contemporary Trinidadians. In *Society and Politics in Colonial Trinidad* (1985), the historian James Millette ‘attempts an interesting union of Trinidad’s diverse peoples with its sad history of dictatorial colonial administration.’⁴⁴ Bridget Brereton’s *A History of Modern Trinidad: 1783-1962* (1981) is a scholarly history which focuses on ‘the arrival of groups and their interaction’.⁴⁵ The novelist Michael Anthony’s *Glimpses of Trinidad and Tobago* (1974) takes ‘us on a cultural tour through the history of modern Trinidad’ and gives a ‘portrait of a nation struggling to emerge and express itself culturally’.⁴⁶ Eric Williams, trained as an economic historian, presents Trinidad as ‘a place of restricted and unfair economic development’.⁴⁷ Whether political, cultural, social or economic, all these histories try to describe the land of Trinidad in their unique way. If ‘alternative history’ is required for the present and the future of the West Indies, as Higman proposes, these attempts, including Naipaul’s, are certainly valuable. As this section has

⁴¹ Clarence E. Walker, *Deromanticizing Black History: Critical Essays and Reappraisals* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), p. xi.

⁴² Naipaul, *Loss*, p. 291.

⁴³ Critics who questioned the book’s historical accuracy include Clyde Hosein and Peggy Nightingale: Hosein regrets the two-hundred-year gap in the history presented in the book; Nightingale problematises Naipaul’s lack of acknowledgement of the sources of his citations and the lack of a bibliography. See respectively, Clyde Hosein, ‘Naipaul’s Latest Called a Novel about History’, *Trinidad Guardian*, 14 December 1969, p. 20; Nightingale, *Journey through Darkness*, p. 138.

⁴⁴ Harney, p. 12.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 13.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 14.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 9.

discussed, *The Loss of El Dorado*'s uniqueness lies in its global viewpoint and critical perspective on imperialism. Because of these significances, it is reductive to reject *The Loss of El Dorado* because of the author's eschewal of West Indian nationalism.

3: The Black Power Movement in the West Indies

The previous section discussed how *The Loss of El Dorado* sets West Indian history within an international scale and indicts the malady of imperialism with an outwardly detached, but privately sympathetic, sentiment. Twenty-five years after *The Loss of El Dorado*, Naipaul wrote 'History: A Smell of Fish Glue,' the second chapter in *A Way in the World*. In this chapter, Naipaul writes the contemporary history through the viewpoints of Trinidad's Asians, who were alienated from the emerging Black Power movement. The chapter's eminent difference from *The Loss of El Dorado* is that the viewpoint has shifted from a global view to one of local ethnic consciousness.

Before Naipaul's ethnic consciousness is discussed in the next section, this section will briefly introduce the ethnic conditions in contemporary Trinidad. It will show that the Black Power movement in the West Indies between the 1960s and 1980s caused feelings of isolation and terror among the ethnic minorities in the West Indies. This social phenomenon helps us to understand Naipaul's growing ethnic consciousness as a Trinidadian Indian.

The Black Power movement was in its heyday across the world in the 1960s and the 1970s. In the West Indies, it started in Jamaica. A group initiated a 'Back to Africa' movement in 1960, which led to riots and demonstrations in various regions in the West Indies. Naipaul does not appreciate this movement. In an interview by Rowe-Evans in 1971, Naipaul said:

Take a place like Trinidad, where they talk about Black Power and appear to believe in the ridiculous idea that there is somehow a great movement in the world, for black people only. It's a kind of hysteria. . . . In about 1836 there was an ex-slave, called Daga, who thought he would walk back across the Atlantic Ocean to Africa; and he did have a little following; there was a

mutiny that was quelled. A hundred years later there was a sort of holy man who formed a movement, created a strike in the oil-fields. . . . Then, more recently, you had Dr. Eric Williams. . . . Now, fourteen years later, it's Black Power, offering salvation again. The hysteria recurs, but the situation doesn't change. Black Power is a great mirage, and I fear it will end badly.⁴⁸

Here, Naipaul expresses his negative views toward the movement as eccentric, violent, and irrational. He also connects the national leader Eric Williams to the racial movement and criticises him. However, Naipaul does not mention Eric Williams' political contribution to the nation. Naipaul talks as if the Black Power movement and Eric Williams emerged from the same racial force and the bitter past of slavery.

Naipaul's negative understanding of the Black Movement and Eric Williams' government seems to reflect the uneasiness of the non-black West Indians due to their political marginalisation. According to Maingot's argument in 'Haiti and the Terrified Consciousness of the Caribbean,' the Black Power movement in the 1960s revived fear among the whites in the West Indies, with the memory of the bloodthirsty slave revolts in Haiti (1791-1803)⁴⁹ fresh in their minds. The white minorities developed 'a terrified consciousness', which is 'the peculiar dynamics of a special form of social conflict, one which generates not just fear but indeed panic'.⁵⁰ Kenneth Ramchand's *The West Indian Novel* (1970) assumes the persistence of a terrified consciousness among white minorities and analyses the fear expressed in novels written by white West Indians.⁵¹

In Trinidad, where the blacks and the Indians have developed a mutual racial antagonism due to historical circumstances, the empowered blacks seem to have threatened the Indians as well. At the height of the Black Power movement, the blacks articulated their grudges against the Indians. For instance, Walter Rodney, a historian and politician in

⁴⁸ Naipaul, 'V. S. Naipaul: A Transition Interview', in *Conversations with V. S. Naipaul*, ed. by Jusawalla, pp. 29-30 (first publ. in *Transition*, 40 (1971), pp. 56-62).

⁴⁹ The French West Indian colony of San Domingo was France's most profitable colony in those days. Yet in 1791 slaves revolt broke out and lasted for 12 years. The revolt resulted in the establishment of the Negro state of Haiti in 1803. The revolt is the only successful slave revolt in history.

⁵⁰ Anthony P. Maingot, 'Haiti and the Terrified Consciousness of the Caribbean', in *Ethnicity in the Caribbean: Essays in Honor of Harry Hoetink*, ed. by Gert Oostindie (London: Macmillan Education, 1996), p. 54.

⁵¹ Books discussed include *Christopher* (1959) by Barbadian writer Geoffrey Drayton and *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) by Dominica-born Jean Rhys, see Ramchand, pp. 223-36.

Guyana, reveals such racially-oriented antipathy in *The Groundings with My Brothers* (1969), the written versions of his popular talks on African and contemporary West Indian politics. He openly despises the Indians as another group of slaves who are inferior to the blacks, who have already gained freedom: ‘Look where Indians fled – to the West Indies! The West Indies is a place black people want to leave not to come to [sic].’⁵²

This rather alienating spirit of the Black Power movement seems to have been used by Eric Williams for his political ends: Maingot argues that he never used racial identifications to oppress others, but used them to boost his political career.⁵³ Such a subtle alliance between a political leader and the Black Power movement seems to have been powerful enough to appear threatening to Trinidad’s Indians: Brereton acknowledges that the victory of William’s party, PNM⁵⁴, at the election in 1959 made the Indians feel ‘particularly alienated from the rise of Creole nationalism.’⁵⁵ Thus, Naipaul’s view of the emergence of Eric Williams’ government as a racial phenomenon seems to reflect the collective feelings of the Trinidadian Indians.

4: ‘History: A Smell of Fish Glue’ in *A Way in the World – Spatial History*

This section will argue that the chapter ‘History: A Smell of Fish Glue’ relates contemporary history from the viewpoint of Trinidad Indians. This ethnic-oriented history reflects Naipaul’s wish to preserve the Trinidad Indians’ sense of the past. Naipaul uses a spatial narrative as a device to deviate from the official history and reveal the lesser-known past of the Trinidad Indians.

The chapter ‘History: A Smell of Fish Glue’ tells the contemporary history of Port of Spain spatially. The earlier part of the chapter tells of Naipaul’s good memories, which are

⁵² Walter Rodney, *The Groundings with My Brothers* (London: Bogle-L’Ouverture, 1969; repr. 1975), p. 26.

⁵³ Maingot, p. 75.

⁵⁴ The PNM, The People’s National Movement, was ‘the creation of a group of middle-class professionals, mainly but not exclusively black, who rallied round the dominant personality of Eric Williams . . . in 1955-6 to establish a party that could take the Creole middle class into power.’ Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad*, p. 233.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 239.

attached to the landscape of Port of Spain where he lived in his childhood between 1938 and 1950, or between the ages of six and eighteen. The latter part portrays the same city at a later time, from 1956 onward, when he felt less familiar with a city that had changed during his absence.

The subtitle ‘a smell of fish glue’ indicates the odour of the local fish glue, which binds all the colonial records. As a teenager, Naipaul worked at the Registry Office as ‘an acting second-class clerk’ who made ‘copies of birth, marriage and death certificates.’⁵⁶ The vault, which kept all of the records of colony, smelt of fish glue.

I had been told that everything printed in the island was lodged in the vault. All the records of the colony were there, all the births, deaths, deeds, transfers of property and slaves, all the life of the island for the century and a half of the colonial time.⁵⁷

Thus, the smell of fish glue is associated with the vault, or a literal repository of the island’s history. So, by titling the chapter ‘History: A Smell of Fish Glue,’ Naipaul implies that the chapter is about Trinidad’s local history.

However, Naipaul tells the history in his unique, or spatial way. The narrative abounds with street names and detailed portraits of architecture and landscapes, so that readers are informed about the topography of Port of Spain. On the other hand, times are not specifically revealed but are hinted at indirectly. Spatiality is emphasised more than time. However, the chapter is not about a ‘history of the townscape.’ It is ‘the history of Trinidad,’ which is told through the landscape of Port of Spain. I will call the historical character of ‘History: A Smell of Fish Glue’ ‘spatial history’ henceforth.

The earlier part of the chapter depicts the time before independence. When the young Naipaul lived in Port of Spain, Trinidad was governed under a modified form of Crown Colony government, yet it was the time when Trinidadians started to yearn for national identity and self-government: it was the time of ‘cultural renaissance,’ the ‘literary and

⁵⁶ Naipaul, ‘History: A Smell of Fish Glue’, in *Way*, p. 20.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

artistic movement that tried to create an authentic West Indian cultural expression.⁵⁸ Also, the first universal suffrage was introduced in 1946. In other words, it was an era of outwardly colonial government, but under the surface the yearning for political independence and national and cultural confidence was growing among Trinidadians. The character of the time is spatially depicted by Naipaul. The colonial government is linked to the outward townscape, and the people's frustration because of political dependence is associated with the hidden parts of the city space, such as interiors.

The external cityscape is introduced as Naipaul's favourite place, because of its beauty, excitement and sophistication: he liked the colonial styles of architecture, and was particularly fond of Woodford Square, 'the most beautiful square in Port of Spain'.⁵⁹ The square, with two newspaper offices facing each other, gave Naipaul the 'excitement, of paper and ink and urgent printing'.⁶⁰

As a contrast, the hidden part of the townscape is associated with the frustration and the hidden disappointment of the Creoles, who were unhappy because of their condition inherited from the time of slavery. For instance, inside the 'splendour of the Red House', Naipaul worked part-time and felt the disappointment of the coloured civil servants there.⁶¹ The black boy who worked with Naipaul 'was not at all content' due to his destiny of 'accepting his limitations'.⁶² Another 'coloured' man, a senior clerk, was 'a disappointed man' who had to accept the fact that 'the best jobs were reserved for people from England'.⁶³

The chambers of a black lawyer also symbolise frustration. The lawyer's son who was Naipaul's friend took Naipaul to the chambers one day. The lawyer raised the topic of race and made Naipaul uncomfortable:

[H]e leaned back in his Windsor chair, thrust his big white-sleeved forearm

⁵⁸ Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad*, p. 175.

⁵⁹ Naipaul, 'History', p. 18.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 12.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 19.

⁶² Ibid., p. 23.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 23-24.

across the table, in a gesture of strength, and said, with a smile, and as a kind of pledge, ‘The race! The race, man!’

The black race, the African race, the coloured races: I suppose that was what the lawyer meant, and that was why I had been brought to his chambers.⁶⁴

With the uncovered frustration and the darkness of the room, the chambers come to be associated with the suppressed frustration brought about by racial inequality.

In the latter part of the chapter, however, the spatial division disappears and Port of Spain is described as if the blacks’ suppressed emotion had burst into the outward townscape after the PNM’s political victory. The latter part of the chapter starts in 1956, the year when Naipaul first revisited his native land after six years’ absence. The year is not specified but can be estimated by some hints in the narration.⁶⁵ Naipaul came back just after Trinidad had its third election since universal suffrage in 1956. This is the election which the PNM won, causing amongst the Trinidad Indians a sense of alienation from the rise of Creole nationalism, as discussed earlier.

The new atmosphere in Port of Spain, caused by the exaltation of the PNM victory, is spatially presented; Naipaul describes the blacks’ joy as if their suppressed frustration flowed into the public space:

[P]eople had lived with this emotion as with something private, not to be carelessly exposed. . . . Everyone you saw on the street had a bit of this emotion locked up in himself. . . . Now all those private emotions ran together into a common pool, where everyone found a blessing. Everyone, high and low, could now exchange his private emotion.⁶⁶

Naipaul spotted the unrepressed emotion everywhere, expressed openly: in Woodford Square, there were regular ‘lectures about local history and slavery.’⁶⁷ In another square, an orator was talking, and his opinion was shared by black people.⁶⁸ Visiting his old office in

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 15.

⁶⁵ The following two sentences by Naipaul provide clues: ‘After that writing [of *Miguel Street*] I went back to Trinidad for a few weeks’ (*‘History*’, p. 27); ‘I had heard on the steamer that a new kind of politics had come to Trinidad’ (*‘History*’, p. 28). In 1955 Naipaul began to work on *Miguel Street*. In 1956, PNM came to power. In the same year, Naipaul returned to Trinidad for the first time.

⁶⁶ Naipaul, ‘History’, p. 29.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 28.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 29.

the Red House, he felt the workers' 'exaltation'.⁶⁹ Everyone on the street showed 'a little new glory'.⁷⁰

As a contrast to the excitement of the blacks, non-blacks are described as feeling uncomfortable. For instance, a white family, Naipaul's old acquaintances . . . had been standing at the edge of the square, noticeable, confident, respectful of the occasion. . . . But then, like me, they might have felt excluded; they might have felt the ground move below them.⁷¹

Here he conjectures that the white family was feeling the same uneasiness as Naipaul. The imaginary alliance between Naipaul and the white family is an expression of Naipaul's instinctive alarm caused by his own ethnic group's exclusion from politics.

Naipaul portrays the consequences of the victory of the PMN negatively. The townscape of Port of Spain is described as becoming chaotic due to the inflow of blacks to the city.⁷² Naipaul also lays the blame on the blacks' occupying the city for the subsequent black revolts in the 1970s. The revolts are described as destroying the beauty of the cityscape: 'The Red House and St Vincent Street smelled of death. Some fifteen people had died in the late-afternoon assault. . . . [A] number of the bodies had begun to rot.'⁷³ Then, Naipaul expresses his sadness at losing the beauty of Port of Spain and his own childhood memory attached to the city:

It was as though, with the colonial past, all the colonial landscape was being trampled over and undone; as though, . . . the energy of revolt had become a thing on its own, eating away at the land.⁷⁴

Here, Naipaul describes events as if the destruction of the colonial townscape of Port of Spain symbolises the arrival of the new politics from which Naipaul felt alienated. Naipaul's portrayal of the new government and of Black Power is thus totally negative and critical. This negative reaction of Naipaul's echoes the previous section's discussion of the non-blacks' feeling alienated from the Creole government.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 31.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 32.

⁷² Ibid., p. 33.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 39.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 35.

Unlike interviews and journal articles where Naipaul openly gives his opinions, ‘History: A Smell of Fish Glue’ delivers his message indirectly by manipulating historical information. It is the spatial narration that enables Naipaul to be manipulative. An example is seen in the way the new government of the PNM was introduced. Eric Williams and his party had governed the country for more than 30 years by the time Naipaul wrote *A Way in the World*. They had also achieved national independence in 1961. The PNM and Eric Williams are major terms that appear in any history books if they cover the contemporary era. Even so, Naipaul does not introduce either. Instead, recognising the new atmosphere in Port of Spain, he simply says, ‘[t]here was something new. I had heard on the steamer that a new kind of politics had come to Trinidad’, and moves on to the description of how the city had changed.⁷⁵

In addition to omitting such key terms, another unique feature of ‘History: A Smell of Fish Glue’ is its spatial method of explanation: former slaves were frustrated with the unequal society, but a new black government came and the black revolts followed after ten years. As a result, the landscape of Port of Spain was ruined. This explanation sets its focus in the changing landscape of Port of Spain, for which Naipaul thinks both the new government and the revolts are responsible. Because of this spatial explanation, the achievement of the PNM is denigrated as part of a mere phenomenon of racial upheaval and vandalism. In short, the historical achievement of the PNM is downplayed in Naipaul’s spatial history.

The spatial history, then, distorts the historical perspective: it can be used subjectively to choose what to tell and what not to tell. This aspect of spatial history gives Naipaul an opportunity to challenge well-known history and to tell his own version of history. In *The Loss of El Dorado*, too, Naipaul challenges the established history with his perspective. Since one of the themes of the book is how the spatial ideology of imperialism affected the Caribbean region, the setting of *The Loss of El Dorado* is not limited to Trinidad but

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 28.

includes its surrounding regions, too. This challenges the Eurocentric history that stresses the deeds of imperialists and does not stress the interrelation of the Caribbean regions. As a result, *The Loss of El Dorado* ‘deconstructs Eurocentered myths distorting Trinidad’s and the region’s history’, as Weiss argues.⁷⁶

Comparison of Naipaul’s spatial history with other kinds of spatial history defined by Paul Carter reveals the significance of the spatial concept. What is common between Carter and Naipaul is that, in both histories, spatial history is used as a tactic to challenge the authorised history. In *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* (1987), Carter proposes ‘historical space’ as an alternative to the history Australia has now. According to Carter, Australia’s present history is made by the expansionists and imperialists through naming, and the act of naming ignored the pre-existing Aboriginal names and histories of the land. Therefore, Carter proposes going back to the records by the ‘discoverers, explorers and settlers’.⁷⁷ The landscape in those records will revive the past and create a sense of the past that will become an alternative and more relevant history for the nation. Carter calls this kind of revived past a ‘spatial event’.⁷⁸

Whilst Naipaul writes spatial history from his ethnic group’s point of view to challenge the empowering blacks’ history, Carter tries to recover the Aboriginals’ past through a spatial viewpoint and challenges the authoritative imperial history. Both manipulate and take advantage of the ambiguity and flexibility of the concept of space instead of the linear concept of time, and succeed in revealing other histories. Although the destinations of their histories vary – Carter aims to create national history and Naipaul an ethnic minority history – their usages of the concept of space as a tactic are the same.

Naipaul’s ethnic consciousness, seen in ‘History: A Smell of Fish Glue,’ reflects his

⁷⁶ Timothy F. Weiss, *On the Margins: The Art of Exile in V. S. Naipaul* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), p. 18.

⁷⁷ Carter, p. xxi.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. xiv. Similarly, to interrogate the historiography of aboriginal land is a spatial investigation of the forgotten past. For instance, see Ranger for the research from this point of view. Terence Ranger, “Great Spaces Washed with Sun”: the Matopos and Uluru Compared’, in *Text, Theory, Space: Land, Literature and History in South Africa and Australia*, ed. by Kate Darian-Smith, Liz Gunner, and Sarah Nuttall (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 157-71.

hope of restoring the Trinidad Indians' identity and sense of the past. Such hope is also revealed in his opening talk at a first conference of Indo-Caribbean studies.⁷⁹ This conference represents a milestone in Indo-Caribbean studies and has been followed by 'a good deal of study and research' on the subject.⁸⁰ Naipaul's opening talk was about the encouragement for Caribbean Indians to further their examination of Indian roots. Naipaul's talk reveals his wish to contribute to the burgeoning scholarly movement of Indo-Caribbean studies.

Naipaul's speech was a kind of 'a plea' for scholarly examination of the Caribbean East Indian community.⁸¹ He says that West Indian East Indians became 'people without a past', but he believes in the importance and possibility of understanding one's past through scholarly enquiry.⁸² Naipaul stresses the value of self-knowledge and encourages further scholarly examination in Indo-Caribbean studies:

But the self-awareness is revolutionary and I think that this first Indian attempt at self-examination – this intellectual response to a cultural loss, this break with the past – makes the community more complex and interesting than it perhaps has been.⁸³

Bearing in mind this hope of Naipaul's, the Indians' viewpoint as seen in 'History: A Smell of Fish Glue' is understood as his awareness of a necessity to recover his ethnic past. The history revealed in 'History: A Smell of Fish Glue' is a negative past that shows the

⁷⁹ In June 1975 the first conference on East Indians in the Caribbean was held on the St Augustine Campus of the University of the West Indies. The collection of the papers was published in 1982 as *East Indians in the Caribbean: Colonialism and the Struggle for Identity*, ed. by Bridget Brereton and Winston Dookeran (New York: Kraus International, 1982).

⁸⁰ David Dabydeen and Brinsley Samaroo, 'Introduction', *Across the Dark Waters: Ethnicity and Indian Identity in the Caribbean*, ed. by David Dabydeen and Brinsley Samaroo (London: Macmillan Education, 1996), p. 5. According to Dabydeen and Samaroo, conferences on Indo-Caribbean studies were held in Trinidad, New York, Toronto, and the University of Warwick. Important publications include *India in the Caribbean*, ed. by David Dabydeen and Brinsley Samaroo (London: Hansib, 1987), a collection of essays on West Indian East Indians' plantation experiences, and their active and passive resistance to exploitation; and *Across the Dark Waters: Ethnicity and Indian Identity in the Caribbean*, ed. by Dabydeen and Samaroo, a collection of essays analysing the experience of the Asian Middle Passage under the system of indenture.

⁸¹ Naipaul, 'Introduction', in *East Indians in the Caribbean: Colonialism and the Struggle for Identity*, ed. by Brereton and Dookeran, p. 9.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

moment of the political defeat of the Indians. However, it expressed their real feeling about the historical events. Indo-Caribbean studies emerged just a few decades ago, and is eager to revive and collect many kinds of Indo-Caribbean experiences. In that sense, ‘History: A Smell of Fish Glue’ will contribute to Indo-Caribbean studies. Also, eventually, it will contribute to Trinidad’s history, because multi-cultural Trinidad has started to appreciate multiple histories, as discussed in Section two.

5: Conclusion

Section two stated that *The Loss of El Dorado* is West Indian history seen from the international viewpoint. Sections three and four have argued that ‘History: A Smell of Fish Glue’ reveals the author’s ethnically-conscious viewpoint. These two contradictory conclusions of mine reveal Naipaul’s dual sensitivities: one is the detached sensibility of the cosmopolitan, and the other is the rooted sensibility that originates in the ancestral past. Given that Naipaul is also assimilating to Western culture, as my sixth chapter will discuss, it is revealed that Naipaul has multiple orientations to the West, his Asian origins, and internationalisation. Some may interpret such multiple natures as inconsistency. However, I like to see the positivity in his multiple sensibilities. It can be understood as flexibility and analogous to the nature of diasporas.

Stuart Hall is one of those who see positivity in the flexible identities of diasporas. Hall, who is himself a member of the black Caribbean diaspora in Britain, specifically deals with the transformations made by Britain’s black community. In his essay ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora,’ written in 1990, he discusses a distinctive Caribbean diasporic identity. He proposes a new notion of diasporic ethnicities as flexible, multiple and shifting:

[C]ultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture. . . . It is not a fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute Return.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Stuart Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’, in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990; repr. 1998), p. 226.

He adds that ‘Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.’⁸⁵ Thus, Hall presents a new way of thinking about fluid identity and challenges the conventional idea of identity as an already accomplished fact.

Another black Caribbean, Paul Gilroy, has theorised the transcultural identity of black migrants. His influential text *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) supplies an insightful analysis of how African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans live within a ‘double consciousness’ stemming both from Africa and Europe. He argues that black people in history have been travellers: brought from Africa to America and the Caribbean on the slave-ships across the Atlantic Ocean. For this reason, the transnational routes provide a better way of thinking about black identities in the present than notions of roots and rootedness.

Hall’s and Gilroy’s concepts are similar to Bhabha’s idea of hybridity. Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* (1994) advocates the hybrid identity or the in-between position of the migrant identity as a new way of thinking about identity. For Bhabha, identity is a discursive product, and subjectivity is open to being remade. Thus, Bhabha, Hall and Gilroy deny the conventional idea of fixed identity and propose a new concept of hybrid identity. Bhabha’s writing is situated within the realm of literary theory, and works by Hall and Gilroy within the fields of sociology and cultural studies. Hall and Gilroy specifically theorise about Caribbean diasporas, and add social and cultural examinations to Bhabha’s theoretical argument of hybridity.

These studies of hybrid selfhood are applicable to the ambiguity of Naipaul’s standpoint. Apart from the difference of ethnicity, Hall’s and Gilroy’s explanation of the identity of the Caribbean diasporas matches the situation of Naipaul. In this light, Naipaul’s multiple senses of history, which made him produce West Indians’ histories from different viewpoints, can be understood as reflecting the diasporic multiple self and as the flexibility

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 235.

and strength of the author. To sum up, Naipaul's sense of history seems to be best explained by his diasporic identity and lifestyle. His historical writings reveal his multiple diasporic identities. His spatial understanding of imperialism in *The Loss of El Dorado*, and spatial presentation of contemporary history in 'History: A Smell of Fish Glue,' reflect this.

Chapter Five:
Travelogues: From Categorical Dismissal Towards Openness

1: Introduction

Since around the 1980s, postcolonial studies has seized upon travel writing as a record of cross-cultural encounters between European and non-European people, which is directly involved with the history of colonialism. Studies taking this approach include *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) by Mary Louise Pratt, *The Savage in Literature: Representations of 'Primitive' Society in English Fiction 1858-1920* (1975) by Brian V. Street, and *Pleasurable Instruction: Form and Convention in Eighteenth-Century Travel Literature* (1978) by Charles L. Batten, Jr.¹ These authors understand Western travel writing as ideological production, which continuously re-enacts earlier journeys. It is argued that the repetitive production of the prejudiced image of the Other in Western travel writing consolidates the image and legitimises the ideology of colonisation. Therefore, postcolonial critics criticise ethnic stereotyping and cultural condescension in Western travel writing both in the past and the present. As mentioned in my Introduction, spatial concepts are significant for travel writing. The depiction of the world in travel writing represents a space viewed and described from a particular point of view and inscribed with power-knowledge relations.

As a contrast to this political approach, there is another approach that reveals the

¹ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*; Brian V. Street, *The Savage in Literature: Representations of 'Primitive' Society in English Fiction 1858-1920* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975); Charles L. Batten, Jr., *Pleasurable Instruction: Form and Convention in Eighteenth-Century Travel Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

romantic and poetic aspect of travel writing. This approach is exemplified by *Abroad: British Literary Traveling between the Wars* (1980) by Paul Fussell, *The Art of Travel* (1982) by Philip Dodd, and *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel* (1983) by Percy G Adams.² Travel is viewed as sequences of dramas: a traveller leaves home for an unknown places, meets hardships, overcomes difficulty, achieves inner growth, and comes back home with stories to tell. What can be called a poetic approach to travel writing sees the values in travellers' satisfying their curiosity, their pleasure of being in new places and meeting new people, and their acquisition of new experiences. With these viewpoints, the proponents of the poetic approach establish a theory on travel literature, but their argument is less vigorous than the political approach that decries the wrongs it identifies in travel writing.

Musgrove points out that these two approaches are mutually exclusive and criticise each other.³ The political approach is criticised for being an incompletely surveyed historical actuality and for its consistency, which reduces divergent reality to a schematic discussion of domination and subordination. On the other hand, the poetic approach is criticised for its subjectiveness, devoid of critical perspective, and for excluding political engagement.⁴ However, the recent tendency has been to attempt to combine the two, as seen in studies such as *Travel Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit* (1999), edited by Steve Clark.⁵

I would like to argue that in this globalising era it is becoming less possible to see a purely romantic concept in travel literature. With the technological advances in global media, one encounters foreign places and people much more frequently. Although the

² Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Traveling between the Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); *The Art of Travel: Essays on Travel Writing*, ed. by Philip Dodd (London: Frank Cass, 1982); Percy G. Adams, *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1983).

³ Brian Musgrove, 'Travel and Unsettlement: Freud on Vacation', in *Travel Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit*, ed. by Steve Clark (London: Zed Books, 1999), p. 33.

⁴ My argument on the mutual criticism of the two approaches owes my knowledge to Musgrove's analysis in pp. 31- 38.

⁵ *Travel Writing and Empire*, ed. by Clark.

information is in a speedy and packaged form, one has a feeling that there is no unknown world to explore. Both travellers and readers of travelogues have a less romantic view of the unknown world. Whilst the romance in travel is diminishing, the political aspect in travel writing seems to be increasing. Because the contemporary era is more globalised, travellers cannot write only for readers at home. They are exposed to readers of various nationalities. Under these circumstances, writing about other countries seems inevitably to reach readers of various backgrounds and political perspectives.

When it comes to Naipaul's attitude to travel, he seems to possess both the romantic and political attitudes, though the latter is more prominent. Having a mythic image of the motherland, Naipaul was motivated by his romantic view to go on his first trip to India, and produced *An Area of Darkness* (1964). The book can be seen as a record of Naipaul's disappointing pilgrimage toward self-discovery. However, the themes of his travel books are highly political. He tends to visit countries during periods of political turmoil, with the journalistic motivation to report on politically significant scenes: his visit to Islamic countries soon after the Iranian revolution (1978) produced *Among the Believers* (1981); *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977) depicts the time of the Emergency proclaimed by Indira Gandhi in 1975. However, his choice of themes is selective and associated with personal interests. In short, his attitude to travel reveals an intricate mixture of romantic, personal, and political aspects. Therefore, it is important not to discuss his travelogues from a single viewpoint.

Naipaul's accounts of his travel cover locations worldwide. Naipaul has produced three Indian travelogues: *An Area of Darkness* (1964), *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977), and *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1990). Whilst in the first two works Naipaul criticises the effects of religion and philosophy in Indian consciousness, in the third book he is more hopeful for the future of India. Of his other destinations, most are former colonies and developing countries, reflecting Naipaul's interests derived from his upbringing and experience. *The Middle Passage* is his observations of the Caribbean countries: Trinidad,

British Guiana, Surinam, Martinique and Jamaica. His African trips produced two books, *A Congo Diary* (1980), and *Finding the Centre* (1984). *A Turn in the South* (1989) is about his travels in the American South, a region that shares a history of slavery with the Caribbean.

Naipaul has also written two Islamic travelogues. *Among the Believers* (1981) treats Islamic fundamentalism and ideas about political revolution in four countries, Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia. As a sequel to *Among the Believers*, Naipaul published *Beyond Belief* (1998), in which he investigates the aftermath of the failure of these Islamic revolutions. He also depicts how idealised Islamic beliefs encounter global economic change. Naipaul's Islamic journey is selective, stopping in only four nations. To these nations, Islam is not native but was a result of Arab imperialism that began in the seventh century CE. The selectiveness reflects Naipaul's interest in imperialism. In short, Naipaul's destinations are chosen selectively. Because of a certain range of interests and a certain way of looking, there are some recurrences of observations and themes in his travel books.

This chapter will pay attention to both the personal and political aspects of Naipaul's travelogues. Section two will discuss the fact that Naipaul's childhood in the secluded community of Trinidad Indians shapes his subjective view of the world. In section three, I will trace the childhood experience which distorted Naipaul's viewpoint and contributed to his negative view on India. The fourth section will discuss Naipaul's view of the developing world, which reveals a uniform view despite the fact that the regions Naipaul writes about vary. Section five will discuss how Naipaul, in his later phase, is kinder and more understanding in his judgement of other countries, taking as an example *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1990). The conclusion will argue the significance of the travelogues of Naipaul, who expresses his honest vision of the world as a former colonial subject, manages to abandon distorted perspectives in his later career, and becomes more understanding of other cultures.

2: Childhood Experience: The Origin of Naipaul's Prejudice

This section will argue that Naipaul's childhood is a source of his particular view of the world. It has already been argued that colonial education is partly to be blamed for Naipaul's possessing a dichotomous view of the world. This section will reveal another aspect that influenced Naipaul's geographical sense. It is his childhood, segregated both from the Creolised Trinidadian society and from the ancestral motherland India, that played a significant role in shaping his distorted view of the world.

In order to understand Naipaul's view of the world, it is important to consider his childhood experience in a secluded Indian community in Chaguanas, about ten miles south of Port of Spain. As Lowenthal argues, East Indians in Trinidad have lived in the countryside and been segregated from the rest of the country:

Only recently have East Indians thronged into urban areas. . . . Many rural East Indians are quite remote from Creole and the Creole life of the towns, but urban Creoles and East Indians are better described as polarized than segregated.⁶

To live in a transplanted Indian community in Trinidad and to be away from the remote motherland shaped Naipaul's sense of Indian identity and his view of the ancestral motherland in a particular way. However, the life there also deprived him of the opportunity to achieve a sense of security and to possess a realistic view of India. Naipaul's writings often reveal that his earlier vision, fostered by cultural segregation, has remained in him despite the fact that he has lived in the racially mixed capital, Port of Spain, since the age of six.

Naipaul himself understands the consequences of his doubly uprooted upbringing and writes about it in his autobiographical accounts. For instance, *An Area of Darkness* has as its first chapter 'A Resting-Place for the Imagination,' which explains how and why his personal mythical image of India was formed. By using a whole chapter to explain the

⁶ Lowenthal, p. 164.

subjective image of India, and by locating it at the beginning of his Indian travelogue, Naipaul suggests the importance of personal mythical imagery of India for him.

Naipaul stresses the fact that his childhood image of India inflicted a powerful impact on his mind, and has haunted him throughout his childhood into adulthood. The haunting image is something lurking, but causes a subtle effect on him when it emerges. For instance, when he arrives in India for the first time by ship, ‘some little feeling for India as the mythical land of my childhood was awakened.’⁷ Being thirty years old at that time and knowledgeable enough about contemporary India through reading newspapers and books, he feels it is ‘foolish’ of him to be disturbed by his childhood vision but cannot control it.⁸

Naipaul’s writings often offer an explanation of why the country had such a psychologically strong effect on him. Poverty in India is one of the causes that generated a fear in him:

[F]or most of us [in Trinidad] life was poor; . . . With this poverty around us . . . the India from which my ancestors had migrated to better themselves became in my imagination a most fearful place. This India was private and personal, beyond the India I read about in newspapers and books. This India, or this anxiety about where we had come from, was like a neurosis.⁹

Here, Naipaul uses the Freudian term ‘neurosis’ and the psychoanalytic term ‘anxiety.’ Naipaul uses the psychoanalytic terms to suggest that his childhood relation to India was mentally crippling. Naipaul was often disturbed by a feeling of insecurity, which was caused by the uprootedness of his life and the poverty of his *milieu*. For instance, Naipaul recounts an episode of homeless Indians the sight of whom used to disturb him. In *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, Naipaul wrote about his childhood memory of a square in Port of Spain where the homeless, former indentured labourers, flocked. Naipaul as a child felt that they had ‘become destitute, abandoned by everyone’ and ‘live on the streets until they died out.’¹⁰ The sight of the homeless caused a sense of insecurity in him and made him

⁷ Naipaul, *Area*, p. 42.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Naipaul, *Million*, p. 7.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 159.

feel that ‘we were people with no one to appeal to.’¹¹ Here is revealed Naipaul’s sense of anxiety, or what he calls ‘Indian nerves,’¹² caused by a perception of Trinidad Indians as uprooted, poor, and separated from their ethnic origins.

In spite of the negative idea of Indian poverty, India also possesses a positive image that Naipaul in childhood wished to identify himself with. India was a symbol of ‘the great names’, ‘the great civilization’, and ‘the great classical past.’¹³ Trinidad Indians, including Naipaul, ‘felt supported’ by such a country’s greatness as the origin of their identity.¹⁴

In contrast to this grand image of India, the Trinidad Indian community was perceived as an ‘imperfect’ miniature version of India, which superficially maintained Indian tradition in the new environment.¹⁵ The caste system almost disappeared when East Indian immigrants arrived in the Caribbean.¹⁶ The festivities had to be simplified because of the lack of special materials for the events. Living in an incomplete Indian community, India with its great classical past became the object of Naipaul’s nostalgia. The episode of a science class at school shows Naipaul’s sharing his nostalgia with another Hindu boy. Despite the fact that Trinidad Indian society is casteless, the boy spotted Naipaul’s particular cleanliness, which is considered characteristic of Brahmins, the highest caste rank, which Naipaul belongs to:

In the science class at school one day we were doing an experiment with siphons. . . . At one stage a beaker and a length of tube were passed from boy to boy, so that we might suck and observe the effects. I let the beaker pass me. I thought I hadn’t been seen, but an Indian boy in the row behind . . . whispered, ‘Real brahmin’. His tone was approving. I was surprised at his knowledge, having assumed him, a Port of Spain boy, to be ignorant of these things. . . . But I was also pleased. And with this pleasure there came a new tenderness for that boy, and a sadness for our common loss.¹⁷

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., p. 516.

¹³ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Naipaul, *Area*, p. 29.

¹⁶ Caste is ‘the different classes or tribes into which the people of India are divided.’ It is a restrictive social division and an endemic feature of Hindu life. Garrett, ‘Caste’, in *A Classical Dictionary of India*, pp. 120-123.

¹⁷ Naipaul, *Area*, pp. 34-35.

Here is seen the subtleness and elusiveness of Naipaul's nostalgia for India. It is a feeling that is not recollected on a day-to-day basis, yet it is a latent feeling that, if remembered, causes a sense of loss and sadness.

Although he feels close to India in his heart, Naipaul had not been to India in actuality. This condition makes him grow up to possess the idea of India as 'the mythical land of my childhood', and 'an area of the imagination', which is 'never real'.¹⁸ This mythical image has haunted him, since it was established in his childhood with a strong impact and a feeling of connection.

Childhood experience also affected his view of other cultures. To have been brought up in ethnic isolation made other neighbouring ethnic groups look both familiar and strange to Naipaul. For instance, Naipaul explains that his partial view of Muslims is due to his background in a Hindu community:

Muslims were part of the small Indian community of Trinidad, which was the community into which I was born; and it could be said that I had known Muslims all my life. But I knew little of their religion. . . . I was never instructed in the religious details [of Islam], and perhaps no one in my family really knew. The difference between Hindus and Muslims was more a matter of group feeling, and mysterious: the animosities our Hindu and Muslim grandfathers had brought from India had softened into a kind of folk-wisdom about the unreliability and treachery of the other side.¹⁹

This comment reveals some of the conditions that made Naipaul's prejudice toward other ethnic groups stubborn. Firstly, the prejudice is supported by the group feeling of the Hindu Trinidadians and by the endurance of the ideas inherited from their ancestors. Secondly, Naipaul's youth made him accept his community's view uncritically. These conditions helped Naipaul to develop a sometimes wilful ignorance of other cultures. This stubbornness and wilfulness seem to be part of the reasons why travels to other countries did not change Naipaul's childhood views. Naipaul has given a self-justifying explanation of how his childhood experience led him to possess a biased view.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 42, 41, 27.

¹⁹ Naipaul, *Among*, p. 15.

The doctrine [of Islam], or what I thought was its doctrine, didn't attract me. It didn't seem worth inquiring into; and over the years, in spite of travel, I had added little to the knowledge gathered in my Trinidad childhood.²⁰

Naipaul gives this acknowledgement at the age of forty-nine, which suggests the stubbornness of his childhood vision.

Naipaul's prejudice is also the product of the social and political environment of the time. According to Brereton, the Indians were 'concentrated in particular areas of Trinidad' in rural settlements which were 'exclusively Indian communities'.²¹ Even in the 1950s, 'the rural Hindu in particular were still virtually untouched by the creolizing process'.²² Racial tensions, particularly between the Indians and the Creoles, had 'heightened . . . since the 1930s'.²³ Naipaul, born in 1932, had grown up in this social climate. As for the relationship of Hindus and Muslims, they shared an Indian background, but still lived in separate communities divided by politics and religion.²⁴

I have argued that Naipaul's childhood experience in a transplanted and secluded small Indian community in Trinidad played a key role in shaping his subjective views of his ancestral country and of other cultures. The next section will show that his private feeling for India – the mixture of fear and identification – often makes him overreact with regard to the real country and prevents him from being impartial.

3: Criticism of India: The Earlier Phase

This section will deal with Naipaul's description of India in his early and middle phases. It will trace Naipaul's childhood insecurity and the idealisation of India behind his emotional reaction to and strong criticism of the country. What is most prominent among Naipaul's criticisms is his attack on what he sees as the Indians' withdrawn consciousness and indifference toward their environment. Repeatedly, he attacks the fact that Indians

²⁰ Ibid., p. 16.

²¹ Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad*, pp. 113-114.

²² Ibid., p. 240.

²³ Ibid., p. 241.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 236.

'ignore . . . the most obvious' factors such as poor hygiene, inefficient work and poverty.²⁵

For instance, the first section 'Tragedy: The Missing Sense' in his journal article 'A Second Visit' (1967) argues that what is missing from Indians is a sense of tragedy.²⁶ He argues that Indians' sense of tragedy has been lost because they beautify poverty, take pride in the ancientness of their civilization, and refuse to accept poverty as a national calamity.

Naipaul connects the origin of Indians' indifference to the caste system. He argues that caste restricts people to their own caste and produces attitudes of indifference, non-interference, quietism and withdrawal. By calling their non-interference 'a caste vision', he criticises the Indians' withdrawn mentality.²⁷

In the Indian community in Trinidad, 'caste was seriously weakened,' as Brereton argues.²⁸ It seems that Naipaul is pleased with the fact that the Trinidad Indian community is almost devoid of a caste system:

In Trinidad caste had no meaning in our day-to-day life; the caste we occasionally played at was no more than an acknowledgement of latent qualities. . . . In India it implied a brutal division of labour. . . . In India caste was unpleasant; I never wished to know what a man's caste was.²⁹

Naipaul thus disapproves of the idea of caste, but in India he sees that Indian society is based on the caste system.

Naipaul believes that the idea of caste reflects the Indians' beautifying of 'an acceptance of karma'.³⁰ Karma is part of the Hindu and Buddhist belief in reincarnation, that 'at the death of any being' the life 'is transferred to some other being'.³¹ Naipaul disapproves of the idea and argues that accepting one's karma makes every man know 'his caste, his place', but also makes him lose interest in the world outside his caste.³²

²⁵ Naipaul, *Area*, p. 46.

²⁶ Naipaul, 'A Second Visit', in *Overcrowded*, pp. 83-106 (the former part 'Tragedy: The Missing Sense' was first published in *Daily Telegraph Magazine*, 11 August 1967; the latter part 'Magic and Dependence' in *Daily Telegraph Magazine*, 18 August 1967, pp. 6-7).

²⁷ Naipaul, *Wounded*, p. 131.

²⁸ Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad*, p. 113.

²⁹ Naipaul, *Area*, p. 34.

³⁰ Naipaul, *Wounded*, p. 25.

³¹ Garrett, 'Karma', in *A Classical Dictionary of India*, pp. 319-320.

³² Naipaul, *Wounded*, p. 28.

Naipaul is not criticising Indian philosophy itself. It is the distorted and selfish interpretation of the philosophy that he criticises. He thinks that caste might have worked in ‘classical India’ in the old days, for caste offers a ‘useful division of labour in a rural society’.³³ However, in modern times when, politically and economically, India can be exploited and invaded, Naipaul feels that the caste system does not work. A caste makes people callous to the world outside one’s caste, and the labour divisions of the caste system cause inefficient productivity. This makes Indian society vulnerable to foreign rule:

[A] changing society requires something else. . . . Cities grow; people travel out of their ancestral districts; the ties of clan and family are loosened. The need for sharper perception increases.³⁴

Here is seen Naipaul’s genuine concern for the future of India. He is worried that Indians’ particular way of seeing the world will bring harm to their country. He makes the same points through various examples. Criticising the cleaners’ inefficient work, for instance, he writes:

Study these four men washing down the steps of this unpalatable Bombay hotel. The first pours water from a bucket, the second scratches the tiles with a twig broom, the third uses a rag to slop the dirty water down the steps into another bucket, which is held by the fourth. After they have passed, the steps are as dirty as before. . . .³⁵

Similarly, the second chapter ‘Degree’ in *An Area of Darkness* criticises the social ‘degree’ of ranks, or the caste system. The fifth chapter ‘A Defect of Vision’ in *India: A Wounded Civilization* criticises the ‘defect’ of a caste system.

What is often seen behind the criticism is Naipaul’s feeling of disturbance, which seems to be associated with his childhood anxiety. For instance, during his travels in India, Naipaul occasionally expresses ‘fear’ when he confronts the scene of poverty. For example, the second chapter, ‘Degree,’ in *An Area of Darkness*, begins with various episodes of poverty that Naipaul sees or hears in India. One of the scenes that shocked him was ‘the

³³ Naipaul, *Area*, p. 78.

³⁴ Naipaul, *Wounded*, pp. 111-2.

³⁵ Naipaul, *Area*, pp. 74-75.

starved child defecating at the roadside while the mangy dog waited to eat the excrement.³⁶ After talking of Indian poverty for one and a half pages, he writes, '[c]ompassion and pity did not answer; they were refinements of hope. Fear was what I felt.'³⁷ Naipaul has to deal with this sense of disturbance during his travels in India. He was 'a fearful traveller', as he admits.³⁸

It seems that his 'neurosis' and 'Indian nerve' are awakened whenever he sees reminders of poverty. As Porter argues, Naipaul's exposure to the poverty in India provokes 'déjà vu' with regard to his childhood insecurity and fear.³⁹ Perhaps this explains why Naipaul reveals emotional reactions to certain sights. For instance, Naipaul mentions that India's poverty 'appals' him and takes him 'beyond anger and despair'.⁴⁰

In addition to his childhood insecurity, his old idealisation of India also makes his view subjective. This is seen, for example, in his criticism of Indians' mimicry of and dependence on foreign ideas. In 'Synthesis and Mimicry,' the sixth chapter of *India: A Wounded Civilization*, Naipaul argues that Indians are dependent 'on others for the ideas and institutions that make a country work'.⁴¹ Naipaul argues that the situation makes them lose 'the ability to incorporate and adapt'.⁴² Similarly, the article 'A Second Visit' (1967) urges Indians who 'are proud of their ancient, surviving civilization' to abandon ancient pride and stop being dependent on 'the other man's ideas'.⁴³ Another essay 'Jamshed into Jimmy' (1963) ridicules the newly born elite 'box-wallahs,' the young Indian business executives who Westernise their names for the sake of their Western companies.⁴⁴ Naipaul sees their changing names as a symbol of their cultural mimicry and economic dependence

³⁶ Ibid., p. 45.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Naipaul, *Million*, p. 491.

³⁹ Dennis Porter, *Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 323.

⁴⁰ Naipaul, 'A Second Visit', pp. 93, 88.

⁴¹ Naipaul, *Wounded*, p. 134.

⁴² Ibid., p. 126.

⁴³ Naipaul, 'A Second Visit', pp. 101, 103.

⁴⁴ Naipaul, 'Jamshed into Jimmy', in *Overcrowded*, pp. 52-59 (first publ. in *New Statesman*, 25 January 1963, pp. 129-30).

on the West.

Behind his criticism, there emerges Naipaul's idealisation and high expectancy of the motherland: the idealised image is so perfect that it does not compromise with the reality. As the previous section argued, Naipaul has a particular ideal of India. The beautified India in his mind was something whole and 'rooted',⁴⁵ which can be 'opposed'⁴⁶ to the West. However, he is against a simple retreat to the idealised past, for he believes that boasting about one's 'ancient, surviving civilization' is not appropriate in this modern era.⁴⁷ However, he also disapproves of adopting the ideas and technology of the First World. Although he recognises that India used to be successful in cultural synthesis and 'open to every kind of influence, even European' he believes this tradition of synthesis died after the coming of the British.⁴⁸

In this way, Naipaul considers that neither returning to the past nor adopting foreign advanced techniques will be good for India. Naipaul negates any directions that the country may take for a better future and disapproves of everything he finds in India. Here is seen Naipaul's dilemma with regard to his relationship with his motherland. Having an idealised view of the country makes him eager to find flaws in the actual country, but idealisation also prevents him from coming up with realistic ideas that will help the country to develop. Naipaul reveals his own helplessness as a rootless man caught between idealisation and reality, and between a haunting image of India and the reality of India. As Dissanayake argues, he 'may be a victim of cultural confusion', inheriting 'a triple cultural heritage—Indian, Trinidadian, and Western'.⁴⁹

Naipaul's negative view of India is reflected in his spatial depiction as well. Space in his Indian travelogues reveals his criticism of caste, mimicry and dependency on the West.

⁴⁵ Naipaul, 'In the Middle of the Journey', in *Overcrowded*, p. 50 (first publ. in *Illustrated Weekly of India*, 28 October 1962, p. 35).

⁴⁶ Naipaul, 'Indian Autobiographies', in *Overcrowded*, p. 63 (first publ. in *New Statesman*, 29 January 1965, pp. 156-158).

⁴⁷ Naipaul, 'Second Visit', p. 101.

⁴⁸ Naipaul, *Wounded*, p. 125.

⁴⁹ Wimal Dissanayake, *Self and Colonial Desire: Travel Writings of V. S. Naipaul* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), p. 72.

The space of Bombay, for instance, is divided by caste ranks:

A special type of hat or turban, a way of cutting the beard or a way of not cutting the beard, the Western-style suit or the unreliable politicians' khadi, the caste mark of the Kashmiri Hindu or Madras brahmin: this gives proof of one's community, one's worth as a man, one's function. . . .⁵⁰

Naipaul feels that such a view of the city is 'a frightening glimpse of India's ever receding degrees of degradation'.⁵¹ Having a critical understanding of caste, Naipaul cannot describe the space that reflects people's caste attractively.

The third chapter, 'The Skyscrapers and the Chawls' in *India: A Wounded Civilization*, describes the degradation of wealth spatially. The skyscrapers represent the top ranks of the wealthy. The skyscrapers are for the rich who are allured by such advertisements as '[y]our dream of having servants is about to come true' in a Bombay Handbook published in America.⁵² On the other hand, the chawls and the textile mills workers' accommodation represent the accommodation for the poor. However, as the lowest of the low, there are also many homeless squatters. The division of wealth is spatially described. The 'nightmare of the mill area' is surrounded by 'the metropolitan glamour of its skyscrapers'.⁵³ There is another 'lower human level,' or the squatters' settlement, 'in the nooks and crannies of' the mill area.⁵⁴

Naipaul gives readers a closer view of the squatters' settlement. The illegal settlement is organised by the group who declared themselves affiliated to Shiv Sena, an army of Shiva. It is named after a historical figure Shiva, alias Shivaji, the Seventeenth Century Maratha guerrilla leader. Naipaul recognises that the group has gradually gained social and political power.

Naipaul acknowledges positivity in the Shiv Sena movement, because it 'gives the unaccommodated some idea of human possibility'.⁵⁵ Naipaul believes that their movement

⁵⁰ Naipaul, *Area*, p. 47.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Naipaul, *Wounded*, p. 60.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 61.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

embodies '[t]he assertion of pride'.⁵⁶ Naipaul welcomes their movement, hoping that it will bring a radical improvement of Indian society: 'a Hindu system, . . . in the conditions of industrial Bombay, has at last been felt to be inadequate. It is in part a reworking of the Hindu system.'⁵⁷ Naipaul thus shows approval of the Shiv Sena movement, which promotes basic human rights and the idea of human dignity. In spite of the initial approval, however, Naipaul changes his opinion when he comes to know that Shiv Sena's settlement keeps the concept of caste. The community, which by principle appeals to the equality of human beings, lets sweepers do cleaning, which is despised as an unclean job.

Much [of the hygiene of the settlement] depended . . . on the 'zeal' of the municipal sweeper. Caste here! The pariahs of the pariahs: yet another, lower human level, hidden away somewhere!⁵⁸

After this disappointment, Naipaul starts to notice what he initially did not. He now sees 'a hellish vision'⁵⁹ of dirt that everyone expects sweepers to clean:

It was unclean to clean; it was unclean even to notice. It was the business of the sweepers to remove excrement, and until the sweepers came, people were content to live in the midst of their own excrement.⁶⁰

In this way, the space of the Shiv Sena's settlement is described negatively as a space that shows a caste division in spite of the principle of the movement. Bombay, in 'the Skyscrapers and the Chawls,' is thus imprinted with the division of wealth and caste. It also reveals foreign economic domination, responsible for the increasing gap between rich and poor.

Overall, negativism and criticism dominate Naipaul's depiction of India. His childhood insecurity and idealisation of the unseen motherland are part of the causes of his consistent criticism and uniform view of India. A similar kind of classification is seen in Naipaul's travelogues of other countries, too. This will be discussed in the next section.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 62.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 63.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 65.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 68.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

4: Limitation: Uniform Views on the Third World

This section will propound Naipaul's uniform representation of the developing countries in his travelogues. As already discussed, Naipaul repeatedly criticises India's dependency on other countries' technology. The same criticism is given to various developing countries in the Caribbean, Africa, Latin America and South Asia. The following criticisms of Naipaul are extracted from books and essays on those countries, and the similarities are evident:

The administration, now the court, is something imposed, something unconnected with the true life of the country. The ideas of responsibility, the state and creativity are ideas brought by the visitor.

The expectation – of others continuing to create, of the alien, necessary civilization going on – is implicit in the act of renunciation, and is its great flaw.

Living in a borrowed culture, the West Indian . . . needs writers to tell him who he is . . .

The criticisms quoted above respectively target The Congo, Iran, and Trinidad.⁶¹ Despite the fact that his books cover regions with different histories, cultures and geographies, his concluding view tends to come to the same point. This is partly because he emphasises what is common in those countries and neglects other features.

As a result of selectiveness and a unitary view, the space of different regions is reduced into the same landscape. For instance, the capitals of the developing countries are perceived as a similar kind of space where imported technology is mimicked. Therefore, Buenos Aires is:

new and has been imported almost whole; . . . its metropolitan life is an illusion, a colonial mimicry; . . . it feeds on other countries and is itself sterile.⁶²

Tehran is also a space that shows the city's dependence on imported technology.

Technology was evil. . . . But technology surrounded us in Tehran, and some

⁶¹ Quotations are from 'A New King for the Congo', p. 204; *Among*, p. 19; *Middle*, p. 78.

⁶² Naipaul, 'The Return of Eva Perón', p. 153.

of it had been so Islamized . . . that its foreign origin seemed of no account.⁶³

The spatial categorisation is such that Naipaul seems to have a global design in mind. The space in Naipaul's narrative is categorically divided between the West and the rest of the world, which depends on Western technology and ideas.

It seems that the gap between what he believes central and marginal is widening because of Naipaul's idealisation of the West and a sense of insecurity. As already discussed in the argument about the article 'Our Universal Civilization,' Naipaul associates the concept of civilization with the West and with the occupation of a writer. In this respect, Naipaul, since his childhood, longs for Western civilization. On the other hand, the scene of the developing country makes him uncomfortable and feels that 'I do not want to be like them'.⁶⁴ Naipaul often presents the developing world as a threatening opposition to civilization. He 'feels that his civilization is in danger before the joint forces of "the people of the bush"', which made him keen on creating a rhetoric which 'counterpoints "barbarous" and "civilized"', as Nixon argues.⁶⁵

His 'emotional' dichotomy becomes clear here. For Naipaul, 'the world civilization' is associated with Western culture, an intellectual atmosphere, and the vocation of a writer. However, he feels that it is threatened by the less developed world. The sensitivity seen here is that of an insecure person who was brought up in a poor country and idealised the West as the embodiment of the ideal occupation and a sense of security.

It can be summarised, then, that overall Naipaul's travelogues combine 'classificatory and emotional' appeals.⁶⁶ Classification and emotion are intricately connected and play roles in generating the dichotomy between the developing world and the developed world. Naipaul's travelogues show that it is not only a colonial education but also a sense of insecurity that created an enduring dichotomous view of the world in his mind. In this

⁶³ Naipaul, *Among*, p. 35.

⁶⁴ Naipaul, 'What's Wrong with Being a Snob?', in *Critical Perspectives on V. S. Naipaul*, ed. by Hamner, p. 37 (first publ. in *Saturday Evening Post*, 3 June 1967, pp. 12, 18).

⁶⁵ Nixon, pp. 118, 112.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

respect, Naipaul's unkind depiction of the former colonies reflects his own insecurity and distorted vision, and suggests that Naipaul himself is the casualty of imperialism. Therefore, in spite of the categorical representation of the world, Naipaul's travelogues are significant in that they reflect the impact of the ideology of imperialism on the minds of colonial subjects. Another matter of significance is that Naipaul exposes his frank responses to the world, so that his travelogues 'powerfully record cultural shocks and collisions'.⁶⁷

5: Hopeful Description in *India: A Million Mutinies Now*

Naipaul's travelogues from his later career include *A Turn in the South* (1989), *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1990) and *Beyond Belief* (1998). These travelogues reveal a more understanding and less categorical depiction of the developing world. This will be discussed, taking as an example *India: A Million Mutinies Now*. Thirteen years after the previous trip to India that produced *India: A Wounded Civilization*, Naipaul made another visit in 1990 at the age of fifty-eight. *India: A Million Mutinies Now* is Naipaul's largest book, with more than five hundred pages. The agenda of the book is to see the nation's contemporary experience and its fruition. Compared to the negative view and repetitive themes seen in the previous Indian writings, this book involves a change in both his attitude and narrative style. The book shows an understanding attitude and is packed with a succession of interviews, which reflects Naipaul's willingness to listen to people he meets.

On this visit, Naipaul believes that he is seeing a new mood in Indians, who are now awokened with national pride and identity. Naipaul identifies such Indians with the Mutiny, the 1857 revolt against the British control, which the British struggled to pacify. Although the Mutiny in 1857 did not develop into revolution, the revolt was fierce enough to be considered 'a first war of independence'.⁶⁸ By calling his third Indian travelogue, *India: A*

⁶⁷ Weiss, p. 219.

⁶⁸ Stanley Wolpert, *A New History of India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977; repr. 2000), p. 238.

Million Mutinies Now, Naipaul shows his new understanding of Indians as seditious.

Naipaul represents the Indians as mutineers hopefully:

In the 130 years or so since the Mutiny . . . the idea of freedom has gone everywhere in India. . . . The liberation of spirit that has come to India could not come as release alone. . . . It had to come as rage and revolt. India was now a country of a million little mutinies.⁶⁹

Naipaul interviews those twentieth-century mutineers and records what they say. The narrative style has changed from that of the authoritative narrator seen in the previous books to the withdrawn narrator who concentrates on recording the speech of others.

In addition to the changed style, Naipaul shows ‘a new maturity of attitude’.⁷⁰ He is more compassionate, understanding and hopeful than in previous works. An example is Naipaul’s effort to understand what the interviewee, a Sikh leader called Bhindranwale, says:

In that interview Bhindranwale also said . . . that Sikhs were subject to such persecution in India they had to ‘give a cup of blood’ to get a cup of water. This kind of exaggeration from a religious leader had puzzled me; but at that time I hadn’t yet began to enter the Sikh ideas of the torment and grief of their Gurus.⁷¹

Here, we see Naipaul’s effort to understand his interviewee. This understanding attitude dominates his narrative, and Naipaul’s voice is withdrawn behind that of his interviewees.

In addition, Naipaul is more sympathetic to people he meets. One example is his changed attitude to Aziz, one of the employees in the Liward Hotel in Kashmir district. Naipaul has a long stay at the hotel in his first trip in 1962. He revisits the hotel after 27 years, which is recorded in the last chapter, ‘The House on the Lake: A Return to India,’ in *India: A Million Mutinies Now*.

In his first visit in 1962, he spent four and a half months in the hotel. Since he was the only one who can speak English, Aziz acquired the role of assistant to and carer for Naipaul. However, the relationship between the two did not develop into friendship, as Naipaul was

⁶⁹ Naipaul, *Million*, p. 517.

⁷⁰ Dissanayake, p. 120.

⁷¹ Naipaul, *Million*, p. 473.

too cautious about being involved with people.

Service was his [Aziz's] world. . . . [A]nd it was the source of his power. . . . I became as alert to Aziz's moods as he had been to mine. He had the power to infuriate me; his glumness could spoil a morning for me. I was quick to see disloyalty and diminishing attentions.⁷²

A distrustful attitude limits Naipaul's relationship with Aziz. As Naipaul admits, he was a guest who was afraid of getting 'involved with' the human drama among the hotel staff.⁷³

After twenty-seven years, however, Naipaul shows openness to interaction with people and reveals a new personality. For instance, he is willing to show a gesture of 'friendship for' the old acquaintance.⁷⁴

Then I thought to ask him [Aziz] what I had never asked in all the months we had been together. Where had he been born? He said here, on the lake. . . .

I wondered why in 1962 I had asked Aziz so little about himself. Shyness, perhaps; a wish not to intrude. . . .⁷⁵

Naipaul is also willing to compare others' situations with his own background, which results in helping him to understand unfamiliar cultures and issues. For instance, when a scientist whom Naipaul interviewed said that his childhood was surrounded by an intellectually and culturally stimulating atmosphere in spite of the economically poor background, Naipaul said:

I understood what he meant. It was what I felt – in a lesser or different way – about my own Indian family background in far-off Trinidad. I felt that the physical conditions of our life, often poor conditions, told only half the story: that the remnants of the old civilization we possessed gave the in-between colonial generations a second scheme of reverences and ambitions, and that this equipped us for the outside world better than might have seemed likely.⁷⁶

Although Naipaul's opinionated voice thus disappears, he still seems to keep similar critical viewpoints to those that used to be articulated loudly in his previous travelogues. However, in *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, his opinion does not come to the fore. An example is seen in an interview with Pravas, an Indian scientist, who speaks about the

⁷² Naipaul, *Area*, pp. 114-5.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 114.

⁷⁴ Naipaul, *Million*, p. 516.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 511.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 157.

progress of science in India. When Pravas talks about his frustrations with India's technological and industrial lag, Naipaul's familiar criticism of Indians' accepting karma appears:

I began to wonder whether many of the frustrations Pravas spoke about . . . hadn't been created by the smallness of Indian expectations, the almost pious idea . . . that a country so poor needed very little. I wondered whether there wasn't . . . an extension of the idea of holy poverty, the old religious-political feeling that it was wrong, wasteful, and provoking to the gods (and the ruler) to get above oneself.⁷⁷

Here, we see Naipaul's familiar criticism of Indians' submitting to destiny as a state of withdrawal. In *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, however, Naipaul is not a loud critic. He only makes his point and lets his interviewees speak. Whether or not Naipaul agrees with the interviewees, he does not give a judgement and instead keeps quiet and listens to people.

These manifoldly changed dispositions of Naipaul's could be summarised in Dissanayake's words as 'his newfound attitude of perspectivism'.⁷⁸ This perspectivism allows various viewpoints and opinions to be juxtaposed in his narrative. With this new perspectivism, Naipaul represents the parade of mutineers, each of whom has his or her own idea of nationhood and future expectancy.

[T]here was in India now what didn't exist 200 years before: a central will, a central intellect, a national idea. . . .

. . . What the mutinies were also helping to define was the strength of the general intellectual life, and the wholeness and humanism of the values to which all Indians now felt they could appeal. . . . They were part of the beginning of a new way for many millions, part of India's growth, part of its restoration.⁷⁹

Some critics argue that Naipaul's withdrawal behind the interviewees shows his reluctance to analyse. Dissanayake, for instance, traces '[a]mbiguity and contradiction' in the seemingly understanding attitude and argues that it shows Naipaul's lack of interest and reluctance to discuss.⁸⁰ I will point out that such an interpretation is reductive and negates

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 171.

⁷⁸ Dissanayake, p. 126.

⁷⁹ Naipaul, *Million*, p. 518.

⁸⁰ Dissanayake, p. 145.

the writer's good intentions. As already discussed, the book reveals Naipaul's sympathy and friendship, which seem genuine enough. Therefore, I will interpret the withdrawal of the narrator as his intention to be a professional listener and to give the book a form of oral history.

As a consequence of the newly acquired understanding attitude, the space described in the book also reveals a different character. For example, the depiction of Bombay in *India: A Million Mutinies Now* reflects the author's hopes for the future of India. *India: A Million Mutinies Now* describes the chaotic space of Bombay, just as the former travelogues did. However, *India: A Million Mutinies Now* also recognises the achievements of Shiv Sena, its growth, and its winning of control of the Bombay Municipal Corporation. For instance, Naipaul notices the saffron colour and swords, the victorious emblem of the Shiv Sena.

The visitor . . . might see only small dark men in an undifferentiated crowd, and dust and fumes; might see . . . a mess of makeshift huts and the parasitic shelters those huts spawned. . . . But here in the corporation chamber, in the saffron and crossed swords of the Sena, were the emblems of war and conquest.⁸¹

Here, Bombay is depicted as a space that has the potential to develop. It makes a contrast to *India: A Wounded Civilization* in which the Sena's community is depicted as a caste-divided hopeless space.

I showed that *India: A Million Mutinies Now* is changed in many ways from the former Indian travelogues and essays. The change can be interpreted as the author's inner growth in two ways. Firstly, Naipaul is finally able to get rid of his haunting childhood vision of India and to understand the country from a less personal point of view. Secondly, he becomes capable of being more understanding and sympathetic to people and cultures he does not associate with.

Naipaul himself seems to be aware of this change. Apologetically and defensively, he admits that he did not see the real India because he was blinded by '[t]he India of my

⁸¹ Naipaul, *Million*, p. 6.

fantasy and heart'.⁸² By the time he wrote *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, he learnt that India existed as a 'physical country' that he 'could travel to'.⁸³ In other words, the haunting fantasy yields to the physical country, the real country that he can travel to and have communication with.

His inner growth is completed by his revisiting the Hotel Liward as a ritualistic and symbolic act. Travelogues tend to end in a kind of ritual by the travellers, giving them a 'sense of an ending', as Fussell argues.⁸⁴ Naipaul's travelogues are not exceptional in this respect. After the visit, he finally feels that he has 'succeeded in making a kind of return journey, shedding my Indian nerves' twenty-seven years after the first trip.⁸⁵

6: Conclusion

This chapter has approached Naipaul's travelogues and articles on his journeys from two different viewpoints. My first viewpoint, the psychological and traditional, indicates the value of Naipaul's travelogues. They reveal Naipaul's particular perspective, fostered in the uprooted and secluded community of the Trinidad Indians. They also reveal the author's personal drama in overcoming his haunting childhood image of the ancestral world. However, my second viewpoint, the political and postcolonial, reveals some negative aspects. His books present unitary and classificatory images, in spite of covering various regions of the world. The classifying view creates the dichotomy that divides the view of the world between the developing world and the civilised world. This consolidates the negative stereotypical image of the developing and postcolonial world. In terms of the deconstruction of the knowledge-power relations in the space of travelogue, many of Naipaul's travelogues are unsuccessful. Naipaul, as a former colonial, reveals that he has inherited the Western view and recreates it in his travelogue. In his later career, however, Naipaul explores a new style that juxtaposes many kinds of lives and rarely reveals the

⁸² Ibid., p. 491.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Fussell, *Abroad*, p. 208.

⁸⁵ Naipaul, *Million*, p. 516.

dichotomic view.

Thus, the two viewpoints support different interpretations of Naipaul's travelogues. However, the two often explain the same aspect of Naipaul's writings. For instance, Naipaul's creating a dichotomic view of the world is criticised in the postcolonial debate as not helping to empower the marginal regions. However, to see it from the autobiographical viewpoint, Naipaul is a casualty of imperialism, cultural dislocation, and the colonial education. Postcolonial critics criticise Naipaul's reproduction of the unitary view as consolidating the stereotypical view of the world, yet it also means that the impact of colonial education and the colonial *milieu* on the mind of Naipaul was strong and longlasting. Naipaul's travelogues thus reflect various truths about the impact of colonialism and the aftermath of imperialism, which allows various interpretations. This richness of implication and the honesty of Naipaul, who tries to be true to his vision, are the most significant aspects of Naipaul's travelogues.

This chapter has argued that the colonial education and Naipaul's sense of insecurity are some of the factors that made his subjective view unchanging and stubborn. There seems to be another factor: the act of writing also plays its role in reinforcing his beliefs. This will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Six: Positive Depiction of People's Movements

1: Introduction

This chapter will discuss the concept of geographical movement, which Naipaul has experienced and has often described as the essence of his works. As my previous chapters have shown, Naipaul's works deal with the migration and movement of people from a variety of countries and cultures into societies that they often find alien. In the fictions set in metropolitan cities, Naipaul depicts characters emigrating from the former colonies. These characters move from countries that they believe to be marginal, to places that they feel represent the centre of the world. However, they are estranged from the new environment, and suffer the sensation of rootlessness. In the fictions set in the former colonies, Naipaul depicts a number of Western characters who leave behind the security of their countries and culture and emigrate to less developed countries, searching for freedom, adventure or urged on by liberal thoughts. Naipaul has himself travelled widely, searching for material to write about, in addition to satisfying his quest for self-discovery. Naipaul thus depicts human movement and explores the implications of these journeys.

Naipaul explains that the act of movement has a number of negative effects, such as a sense of isolation and rootlessness, which entails a sense of detachment and a longing for the country that one has left. Naipaul's understanding of the postcolonial and contemporary era seems to be of people who are constantly uprooted and on the move and less connected to one place. Naipaul seems to suggest that one cannot completely avoid a

degree of rootlessness and that one has to learn to deal with the consequences. However, Naipaul also recognises the positive aspects of movement, particularly in his later phase. This will be discussed in this chapter through an analysis of works that reflect the autobiographical aspects of Naipaul's writing: *The Mimic Men* (1967), *Finding the Centre: Two Narratives* (1984) and *The Enigma of Arrival: A Novel in Five Sections* (1987).

In the discussion of *The Mimic Men*, this chapter will in particular focus on the protagonist's movement between his Caribbean home and London. Colonial education instils in Singh a dichotomous vision of the world and makes him idealise the administrative centre of the colonial motherland. However, when Singh moves to and sees the city itself, he is disillusioned and abandons his idealised vision of London. The act of seeing makes him realise that the images of places are often different from the actual places. This realisation helps him to abandon his dichotomous view of the world. As Singh abandons the fixed images of places, he also loses the concept of 'centre,' which is associated with imperial geography. Instead, Singh comes to consider 'centre' as a concept associated with one's inner self. In this way, Singh practices a movement that is constructive for the empowerment of the colonial subjects.

The other two works to be discussed were written in the 1980s: *Finding the Centre* and *The Enigma of Arrival*. Both are highly self-conscious and autobiographical narratives. These works reveal the consequences of Naipaul's geographical movement.

Finding the Centre reveals that Naipaul has developed a unique practice of repetition in travelling and writing to find the centre of his selfhood. The book consists of two narratives. The former narrative is an autobiographical account, which describes the writer's struggle to find the centre of his narrative. The latter narrative is the account of travelling to the Ivory Coast. The book's title suggests that the acts of writing and travelling are significant for Naipaul in terms of finding the centre of his selfhood.

The narrative of *The Enigma of Arrival* reflects Naipaul's finally coming to accept a rootless life. The focus of the book is the ten years during which the narrator, who mirrors

the author, lived in a cottage in a Wiltshire valley. The narrator observes the beauty of the landscape, the passing of the seasons, and the coming and going of people. *The Enigma of Arrival* depicts various people on the move, and movement is accepted as a matter of course by the narrator. On the other hand, in spite of the seeming acceptance of rootlessness, the narrator also seems to seek the idea of rootedness by assimilating to the life in Wiltshire. The narrator is thus comfortable with the kind of life that contains contradictory aspects of movement and rootedness.

2: The Disintegration of Geographical Myth

This section will first discuss how, in *The Mimic Men*, colonial education is depicted as contributing to creating dichotomous images of centre and periphery in the minds of colonial subjects. Secondly, it is argued that Singh's moving from his Caribbean home to London helps him to realise the fictionality of the images of places. Thirdly, the experience of Singh will be compared to the movement undertaken by Naipaul.

Singh's childhood and the environment of his school reveal how colonial educational institutions play a significant role in instilling in the mind of colonial subjects ideas such as cultural mimicry, political dependency, and the binary vision of the world. Naipaul often writes about the irrelevance of the educational system in the West Indies. Looking back on the education he received, he says '[t]here was, for instance, Wordsworth's notorious poem about the daffodil. A pretty little flower, no doubt; but we had never seen it. Could the poem have any meaning for us?'¹ Similarly, Singh remembers a feeling of absurdity during his first lesson, in which he learns about 'the coronation of the English king and the weight of his crown, so heavy he can wear it only a few seconds.'² In *Miguel Street*, a character called Elias studies Spanish, French, Latin and 'litritcher and poultry [sic]', but does not

¹ Naipaul, 'Jasmine', in *Overcrowded*, p. 24 (first published as 'Words on Their Own', in *TLS*, 4 June 1964, pp. 472-3).

² Naipaul, *Mimic*, p. 90.

understand the relevance of these subjects to his own circumstances.³

Naipaul suggests that the colonial education produces a sequence of negative effects on the West Indians. The instilling of alien subjects and ideas makes children deny their own environment: in Singh's school, '[a]nything that touched on everyday life excited laughter when it was mentioned in a classroom. . . . We denied the landscape and the people we could see out of open doors and windows'.⁴ Furthermore, the forced acquisition of irrelevant knowledge accustoms colonial subjects to living with ideas without fully understanding them. This reduces the colonial subjects' ability to grasp reality and creates a sense of paralysis in them. For instance, in his school lessons, Singh learns about an apple, a fruit he has never seen. Later he grows to realise that '[m]y first memory of school is of taking an apple to the teacher. This puzzles me. We had no apples on Isabella. It must have been an orange; yet my memory insists on the apple'.⁵ Such confusion of reality and ideas makes Singh feel that he lives a suspended life: 'I was consciously holding myself back for the reality which lay elsewhere'.⁶ Thus, Naipaul represents the colonial education system as responsible for the colonial subjects' dependency on foreign ideas, their denial of their own environment, and a confusion in grasping the reality.

These shortcomings also affect the colonial subjects' geographical sense. The denial of their environment and idealisation of the colonial motherland lead them to have a vision of the world that is divided between centre and margin. For instance, Singh tends to explain his circumstances with the two simplified landscapes of snow and sea. The landscape of snow is a metaphor for Singh's desires for the administrative centre of the colonial motherland. On the other hand, the landscape of the sea is a metaphor for Isabella, which he detests. So he says, 'Escape! . . . Good-bye to this encircling, tainted sea!'⁷ These two landscapes exist as a geographical opposition in Singh's fantasy. Therefore, commenting

³ Naipaul, *Miguel*, p. 34.

⁴ Naipaul *Mimic*, p. 95.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

on his travels between Isabella and London, he says, ‘already I had made the double journey between my two landscapes of sea and snow.’⁸

This kind of geographical dichotomy is problematic for colonial subjects. Firstly, the dichotomic idea will stress the either / or division which underpins the representation of the colonial subject as marginal. As Said argues in *Orientalism*,

[T]he Orient is not an inert fact of nature. . . . [S]uch locales, regions, geographical sectors as “Orient” and “Occident” are man-made. Therefore . . . the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West.

. . . The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony. . . .⁹

The dichotomous vision thus sustains the power relations which suppress marginal subjects.

Secondly, the fictionality of the images of place is also problematic. Since colonial subjects are given fragments of information about the colonial motherland, they have partial insider’s knowledge of the country. This gives the colonial subjects a strange familiarity with the place. However, the fragments of knowledge are not the source of the genuine understanding of the place. It creates wrong images of the places in their mind. For instance, for the narrator in *The Enigma of Arrival*, ‘the design on the condensed-milk label’, with which he familiarised himself in his childhood, becomes the symbol of the English pastoral scene.¹⁰ When the narrator, who is in his forties, walks in the countryside in Wiltshire and sees the ‘pretty country views’ with ‘[c]ows and grass and trees’, he feels, ‘[t]hough I hadn’t truly seen those views before or been in their midst, I felt I had always known them. . . . This was like the design on the condensed-milk label I knew as a child in Trinidad’.¹¹ This suggests that the fictional image of a place can stay in the mind for a long time. Furthermore, such two-dimensional and fictional images cause absurd perceptions, as seen in the narrator, who sees a landscape and thinks about the design on a milk label.

⁸ Ibid., p. 31.

⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), pp. 4-5.

¹⁰ Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival: A Novel in Five Sections* (New York: Viking, 1987; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p. 38.

¹¹ Ibid.

The perceptual confusion caused by the fictionality of images of place is also experienced by Singh in *The Mimic Men*. When Singh arrives in London, he is confused with the gap between what he expected to see and what he actually sees:

So quickly had London gone sour on me. The great city, centre of the world, in which, fleeing disorder, I had hoped to find the beginning of order. . . .

Here was the city, the world. . . . Its heart must have lain somewhere. But the god of the city was elusive. . . . I would play with famous names as I walked empty streets and stood on bridges. But the magic of names soon faded. Here was the river, here the bridge, there that famous building. But the god was veiled. My incantation of names remained unanswered.¹²

This shows that Singh possessed geographical information about London before his arrival there. However, instead of benefiting from this knowledge, Singh is confused by his partial understanding of the city. As a result, he is disillusioned because he cannot find what he wants to see, nor can he satisfy his belief that the centre of the world exists.

Although the fictionality of images of place causes confusion in Singh, he later manages to get rid of the geographical myth:

I no longer think of it [snow] as my element. I no longer dream of ideal landscapes or seek to attach myself to them. All landscapes eventually turn to land, the gold of the imagination to the lead of the reality.¹³

Here, Singh himself understands the fictionality of the landscape of snow and realises the senselessness of having the idealised landscape. This leads to his eventual abandonment of the dichotomous view of the world.

Paralleling the disappearance of the idealised landscape, the initial definition of the term ‘centre’ also disappears. Initially, for Singh, ‘centre’ is a geographical term and implies the colonial motherland. After disillusionment, ‘centre’ comes to be associated with ideas such as the inner self and home. For instance, when Singh decides to leave London for home, he says, ‘I thought of escape, and it was escape to what I had so recently sought to escape from.’¹⁴ Here, the destination to escape to, or the centre, is not London but the Caribbean

¹² Naipaul, *Mimic*, pp. 18-19.

¹³ Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 31.

home.

The above argument reveals that Singh loses both the geographical myth and a dichotomous view of the world. Naipaul's account of his travels reveals a similar kind of experience to that of Singh. For instance, Naipaul recalled the time when he arrived in London and said: 'I came to London. . . And I was lost. London was not the centre of my world. I had been misled. . . All mythical lands faded, and in the big city I was confined to a smaller world than I had ever known.'¹⁵ Here it is revealed that, similarly to Singh, Naipaul was also subject to the geographical myth and the idea of London as the centre of the world. Naipaul's experience and ideas about movement as a rootless man are thus reflected in Singh.¹⁶

Twenty years after writing *The Mimic Men*, Naipaul wrote *The Enigma of Arrival* and depicted a confused perception similar to the one seen in *The Mimic Men*. This time, the setting is in Wiltshire, the countryside of England. As discussed earlier, in the argument regarding the design of a milk label, the narrator initially has particular images of the landscape of the English countryside and is subject to the geographical myth, just as is Singh. Therefore, the narrator sees the shearing of sheep as 'something out of an old novel, perhaps by Hardy, or out of a Victorian country diary.'¹⁷ Jack at first appears to be a figure 'in a version of a Book of Hours,' and Jack's father-in-law 'seemed a Wordsworthian figure . . . going gravely about his peasant tasks, as if in an immense Lake District solitude.'¹⁸

However, the narrator gradually learns that his initial perception is wrong. Jack, who appeared to be completely in tune with the conventions of the region, turns out to be 'a newcomer to the valley' like the narrator.¹⁹ The landscape of Salisbury Plain, with

¹⁵ Naipaul, *Area*, p. 42.

¹⁶ Singh is representative of his author in the essential features of personality and character. Joshi gives various examples of correspondences between Singh and Naipaul. The similarities are, for instance, their way of understanding lives through writing, their interest in Roman history, their racial consciousness, and their views on the Caribbean. Joshi, pp. 171-6.

¹⁷ Naipaul, *Enigma*, p. 18.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 19-20.

Stonehenge, loses its image of antiquity when he starts to see the elements—such as ‘highways’, ‘brightly coloured trucks and cars’—that do not correspond to traditional images of Englishness.²⁰ The narrator thus alters his perception gradually, and abandons the geographical myth he used to have.

As a result of this altered perception, the narrative presents a new landscape of hybridity in which different cultures meet harmoniously without the disturbance of stereotypical images:

So in tune with the landscape had I become, in that solitude, for the first time in England.

Of literature and antiquity and the landscape Jack and his garden and his geese and cottage and his father-in-law seemed emanations.²¹

Here is seen a new landscape free from the dichotomy of centre and margin. Similarly, the following landscape embraces both the narrator and landlord, and creates a harmonious coexistence between the two: ‘I wondered at the historical chain that had brought us together—he in his house, I in his cottage, the wild garden his taste (as I was told) and also mine.’²² As Boehmer argues, it is a landscape that shows ‘an eventual blending on both sides’, ‘[r]ather than a confrontation of extremes’.²³ As does Singh in *The Mimic Men*, the narrator succeeds in abandoning the initial image of the English countryside, and disintegrating the geographical myth and the dichotomous view of the world.

In *The Mimic Men*, although the geographical myth is disintegrated, it is not replaced with a hybrid element, as seen in *The Enigma of Arrival*. The difference between the two works reflects the gap of twenty years during which the author developed a new geographical sense that is not subject to the dichotomous view. As the narrator in *The Enigma of Arrival* analyses, in respect of himself, ‘[l]iterary allusions came naturally to him, but he had grown to see with his own eyes.’²⁴

²⁰ Ibid., p. 15.

²¹ Ibid., p. 25.

²² Ibid., p. 53.

²³ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.

²⁴ Naipaul, *Enigma*, p. 157.

Ralph and the narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival* practice the movement from the former colonies to the colonial motherland. They are confused initially by the gap between what they expected to see and what they actually saw in the new place, yet they managed to alter their confused perception. Thus, they have strength and a positive attitude towards the practice of movement. Naipaul's autobiographical account reveals that Naipaul also undertakes his journey in a positive and constructive way. In *Finding the Centre*, Naipaul reveals the particular method of travelling that enables him to find the centre of his inner self. This will be discussed in the next section.

3: Travel for the Creation of Selfhood

This section will argue that Naipaul has developed the centre of his inner self through travelling and writing about travel. The notion of centre has varied meanings in *Finding the Centre*. According to the 'Author's Foreword,' *Finding the Centre* is about finding 'the centre of the narrative', which he realised was missing from his writings.²⁵ In addition, finding the centre means the discovery of his true self, because in the narrative Naipaul returns to his own experience and reflects on his life. The concept of the centre of self is applied not only to Naipaul but also to rootless people in general. Naipaul projects his own lost self on to the expatriates he meets on the Ivory Coast and identifies himself with them: 'the people I was attracted to . . . were not unlike myself. They too were trying to find order in their world, looking for the centre'.²⁶ Overall, in *Finding the Centre*, the concept of centre is not the external geographical concept, but a mental state.

In *Finding the Centre*, Naipaul discusses his motivations for travelling. Firstly, travel produces material to write about: travel 'broadened my world view; it showed me a changing world and took me out of my own colonial shell; it became the substitute for the

²⁵ Naipaul, *Finding the Centre: Two Narratives* (London: André Deutsch, 1984; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 10.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

mature social experience — the deepening knowledge of a society'.²⁷ Travels are also for the quest of self-understanding: he aims to find 'equivalent connections with my past and myself wherever I had gone'.²⁸ Therefore, he goes 'to places which, however alien, connect in some way with what I already know'.²⁹ Consequently, his destinations are places that relate to his background, such as the postcolonial nations and the ancestral motherland.

It can be argued that it is Naipaul's psychological predicament that he has to keep travelling to achieve self-discovery. As Weiss argues, Naipaul's split identity – between his Hindu heritage and Western colonial values – adds hardship to Naipaul's life.³⁰ Naipaul himself recognises his split self. He describes it as the split between 'a man' and 'a writer'.³¹ Naipaul, as a writer, identifies himself with Western culture, for he was given the idea of being a writer by Western culture. On the other hand, Naipaul as 'a man' has his ethnic and cultural roots in Hindu culture.

The split self also affects the directions of Naipaul's movement:

To become a writer . . . I had thought it necessary to leave [Trinidad].
Actually to write, it was necessary to go back. It was the beginning of self-knowledge.³²

Thus, Naipaul's spatial movement mirrors his personal predicament of having a split identity. Naipaul as 'a writer' identifies himself with Western culture, but as 'a man' he feels that his roots are not there. Consequently, he constantly goes travelling for self-knowledge, but comes back to England, his commercial base.

This repetition of travelling and writing has a role in curing Naipaul's split self. As Levy argues, 'a fundamental impetus of Naipaul's writing is to create a self'.³³ As a result of this, his selfhood shifts 'from the enactment of the split and severance from the colonial

²⁷ Ibid., p. 11.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 10.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 87.

³⁰ Weiss, p. 161.

³¹ Naipaul, *Finding*, p. 11.

³² Ibid., p. 40.

³³ Levy, p. xi.

past . . . to resolution'.³⁴

Here emerges the cycle of travelling and writing, which has a healing effect for Naipaul in curing his split self. Naipaul has developed a repetitive pattern of travelling, knowing and writing. As the narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival* puts it, 'I travelled; I wrote. I ventured out, brought back experiences to my cottage; and wrote. The years passed. I healed. The life around me changed. I changed.'³⁵

The cycle of travelling, knowing and writing is not mere repetition. Each time, after a cycle is completed, it gives Naipaul new knowledge and leads him in certain directions. The orientation is two-way, to his roots and to the West. The journeys of self-discovery give him new knowledge about himself and lead him closer to his roots. However, at the end of the journey he tends to find reasons to justify his returning to the West. For instance, this tendency is seen in Naipaul's travelling to Venezuela and meeting a model of one of his fictional characters. In 1972, he visited the man on whom Bogart, one of the memorable characters in *Miguel Street*, was based. Bogart in the story is a glamorous and rebellious bigamist, and represents the implicit rejection of Hindu convention. However, in 1972 Naipaul finds out that Bogart was not a bigamist, nor as rebellious as he remembers. Naipaul seems to be disappointed with the finding. It is perhaps because the defiant attitude of Bogart in his memory 'had lessened the guilt of his own "escape" from Trinidad, as Dissanayake argues.³⁶ However, instead of blaming himself for the mistake, Naipaul celebrates his luck that the glamorous image of Bogart enabled him to create an interesting character and led to the success of *Miguel Street*: '[Bogart] had been part of my luck as a writer. My ignorance of his true story had been part of that luck.'³⁷ Naipaul's trip to Venezuela thus ends with his justification of keeping the wrong memory of Bogart.

Here the pattern of travelling, knowing and writing with double orientations becomes clear. For self-knowledge, Naipaul travels to the places that relate to his origin. He learns

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Naipaul, *Enigma*, p. 96.

³⁶ Dissanayake, p. 102.

³⁷ Naipaul, *Finding*, p. 41.

something about himself and comes closer to his roots. However, he also learns something to justify his moving away from these origins again. Writing about it, furthermore, consolidates its meaning. As a result, the cycle of Naipaul's movement contains two orientations, to his roots and to the West.

This movement helped him to abandon the sense of geographical dichotomy and to develop a new idea of a centre, or the internal centre of selfhood. The next section will reveal the consequences of this life as a writer and a traveller, which is reflected in *The Enigma of Arrival*.

4: The Coexistence of Sojourn and Journey

This section will discuss the effect that Naipaul's movement has had on his life. Some of these effects are seen in the autobiographical novel *The Enigma of Arrival*. The narrative reveals the coexistence of both mobile and stable elements: while the narrator accepts and practices a kind of life on the move as a matter of course, he also seeks the idea of assimilation, sojourn and stability in his cottage in Wiltshire. In addition, the narrator's confrontation with the English countryside generates a harmonious atmosphere: the narrative does not create a division between the two figures, the narrator as the embodiment of former colonial subjects and the traditional English countryside as a symbol of the former colonial masters. The representation of the harmonious coexistence of different cultures suggests that Naipaul overcomes the binary view of the world that he used to possess.

The idea of 'change' is one of the themes in *The Enigma of Arrival*. The narrative describes changes of various sorts: changes in landscape, seasonal change, and change in the lives of the narrator's neighbours and acquaintances. The narrator as a newcomer in Wiltshire observes and records these changes. He recognises both the positive and negative effects of experiencing change. He used to see negative aspects in change, but comes to see a positivity in lives with many changes: 'I lived not with the idea of decay — that idea I

quickly shed — so much as with the idea of change. I lived with the idea of change, of flux, and learned, profoundly, not to grieve for it.³⁸

One of the changes that the narrative focuses on is the disappearing traditions around the manor, which the narrator sees as a sign of the decline of imperial power. In the narrative, the space of the manor symbolises imperial wealth, for it ‘had been created at the zenith of imperial power and wealth’.³⁹ Therefore, the narrator feels that the vast and beautiful manor in its grandeur ‘explained my birth in the New World, the language I used, the vocation and ambition I had . . . [which] in the end explained my presence there in the valley, in that cottage, in the grounds of the manor’.⁴⁰ It is suggested that the manor used to employ a number of labourers such as gardeners, cleaners and servants. However, by the time the narrator arrived in the village, the number of employees had decreased, which the narrator sees as the receding wealth of the manor and the declining power of the empire.

On the other hand, he depicts the increasing newcomers to the village as a counter-movement to the disappearance of the old workers from the manor. Although the workers at the manor initially seem to be old workers, it is gradually revealed that many of them are newcomers like the narrator himself: the staff in the manor are itinerant workers; the sheep shearing scene, which seems typically English, turns out to involve an Australian; the Phillipses, ‘servants living in the staff quarters of a biggish house’, who appear to belong to the tradition of the manor, turn out to have arrived recently.⁴¹ Observing these facts, the narrator stresses that the conventional scene of the manor is only a superficial appearance: ‘[t]hough they looked settled in the quiet of the manor, . . . they were not “country” people, but people of the town. . . . [T]hey were in fact rootless people’.⁴² The inflow and outflow of Wiltshire inhabitants is thus framed within the history of the receding imperial power and the growing post-war global system.

³⁸ Naipaul, *Enigma*, p. 190.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 234-5.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 174.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 200.

⁴² Ibid.

The narrator's own movement to England is also framed within the historical circumstances of the postcolonial era. He recognises that he was part of the inflow of former colonial subjects to Britain in the 1950s.

Because in 1950 in London I was at the beginning of that great movement of people that was to take place in the second half of the twentieth century — a movement and a cultural mixing greater than the peopling of the United States, which was essentially a movement of Europeans to the New World. . . . Cities like London were to change. They were to cease being more or less national cities; they were to become cities of the world. . . .⁴³

The narrator stresses the historical significance of immigration to England. Furthermore, the narrator appreciates the fact that he was part of the great movement of people. He recognises that such events were 'a great subject' for his writing, and regrets that at that time he did not realise their significance and did not try to observe and write about it.⁴⁴

Here, the ideas of postcolonial rootlessness and the subsequent movement of people are given a positive interpretation. Throughout his career, Naipaul has depicted this subject. However, most of the time, the negative aspects of rootlessness have been emphasised. In *The Enigma of Arrival*, however, it seems that Naipaul finally reaches the point where he can accept the circumstances of rootlessness and be comfortable with the condition.

Overall, *The Enigma of Arrival* suggests that everyone is on the move, frames the phenomenon within an historical context, and represents it as an unavoidable historical circumstance. In addition, the narrator indicates that he has accepted such conditions as a matter of course. As Walder argues, what Naipaul

is trying to tell us . . . is that the history of the present is a history of disruption and discontinuity on a global scale. All of us, in some sense, belong to the Diaspora; every nation is hybrid, becoming more so as migration increases.⁴⁵

Since his early career, Naipaul has suggested that everyone is rootless in some sense: as my second chapter argued, *Mr Stone and the Knights Companion* depicted the indigenous

⁴³ Ibid., p. 130.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Dennis Walder, 'V. S. Naipaul: Citizen of the World or Arrivant?', in *Nationalism vs. Internationalism: (Inter)National Dimensions of Literatures in English*, ed. by Zach and Goodwin, p. 419.

metropolitan urbanites as lost and rootless as his immigrant characters; his stories with the setting of former colonies depict English characters who are ready to abandon their security at home and become expatriates in newly independent colonial nations. In *The Enigma of Arrival*, Naipaul extends the theme and claims that even the countryside of Wiltshire, the seeming stronghold of English tradition, is subject to change, and people there are also becoming rootless.

Although the narrator claims that he accepts the arrival of the new era of mobility and rootlessness, paradoxically he also gives the impression that he ‘locks firmly into place’⁴⁶ in Wiltshire and assimilates to the country of the former imperial motherland. The narrator occasionally and self-consciously reminds readers about his domiciling in Wiltshire. For instance, he cites the episode in which he changed his cottage to the extent that the old tenants who came to look at it could not recognise it. Then he says, ‘[n]ow I, an outsider, was altering the appearance of the land a little’.⁴⁷ Here, the narrator seems to emphasise his domiciling in the cottage self-consciously. The narrator also tries to justify his presence by interpreting it as a historical consequence. In the following scene, the two figures of the narrator and the landlord are contrasted within the context of imperial history.

I was his [landlord’s] opposite in every way, social, artistic, sexual. And considering that his family’s fortune had grown, but enormously, with the spread of the empire in the nineteenth century, it might be said that an empire lay between us. This empire at the same time linked us. . . . But we were . . . at opposite ends of wealth, privilege, and in the hearts of different cultures.⁴⁸

Suleri discusses this polarised characterisation of the two figures. She argues that the narrator tries to address the new social order in which power balances are transferred.

Suleri interprets *The Enigma of Arrival* as the narrative in which the narrator claims his triumph:

Each time the narrative focuses on the physical helplessness of the landlord as a synecdoche for imperial devolution, the narrator is somehow enabled to situate his own body as a racial presence in the text. This presence becomes

⁴⁶ Mustafa, p. 172.

⁴⁷ Naipaul, *Enigma*, p. 84.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

increasingly strong in a directly oppositional relation to the landlord's disablement, and the postimperial narrator learns to acknowledge that his imperial counterpart is a secret sharer in his own progress toward bodily stability.⁴⁹

Similarly to Suleri, King also sees the novel as involving a transfer of power:

The Enigma of Arrival is less a story of Naipaul's becoming English and assimilating to English literary traditions than a claim to have come, eventually taken root, and in his own way, conquered. It is not really a story of acculturation and assimilation.⁵⁰

What is missing in the above discussions on the reversal of power relations is the anxiety and uncertainty that the narrator possesses in terms of his presence in England. He is consciously aware of his alien presence, which transforms the landscape: he is afraid of 'trespassing on . . . [his] landlord's privacy' during his walk.⁵¹ He is conscious of his 'out-of-placeness,' and feeling 'unanchored and strange.'⁵² He 'felt ashamed' about the fact that he altered the cottage so much as to bewilder the old tenants.⁵³ These facts reflect a narrator who tries to assimilate to and achieve a harmonious relationship with his new environment. Taking this into account, it seems to be inappropriate to interpret the narrator's presence in Wiltshire only as inverting power relationships. It seems more apt to say that the narrator acknowledges that his alien presence changes the aspect of the landscape, although he seeks to adapt to it. Introducing the figure of the landlord as a symbol of receding empire reflects the narrator's effort to frame the circumstances within a historical context and to justify his existence in Wiltshire.

Although the narrator reveals his conscious and self-justifying attempt to assimilate to the life in Wiltshire, he also shows the tendency to use his cottage to find solace, contemplate on his past, and withdraw into himself. He 'had looked only for remoteness and a place to hide' in Wiltshire, and enjoyed 'the solitude of the walk' in the fields.⁵⁴ As a

⁴⁹ Sara Suleri, 'Naipaul's Arrival', *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 2 (1988), p. 46.

⁵⁰ King, p. 148.

⁵¹ Naipaul, *Enigma*, p. 180.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 96, 23.

consequence of withdrawal, the narrative is full of fragmented recollections of the narrator's past, such as his childhood memories, accounts of his travels and remarks about his family members.

This kind of life enables the narrator to reflect on and achieve deeper understanding of his origins. For instance, in one scene, the narrator contemplates the circumstances of his family after the funeral of his sister. This thought about the family members makes him understand the circumstances in which his family has been put, and makes him realise the new lives of Trinidad Indians separated from Indian ancestors. He shows his realisation that '[w]e had made ourselves anew' in Trinidad.⁵⁵ Then he cherishes the new lives of Trinidad Indians, and calls Trinidad 'the sacred places of our childhood'.⁵⁶ Thus, the memory of his sister's funeral recalls successions of past memories triggering thoughts about his origin.

Here emerge seemingly contradicting aspects. Firstly, there is the coexistence of rootlessness, assimilation and withdrawal. The narrator announces that he accepts the conditions of the time, when everyone is on the move. However, he is also keen to establish a sense of rootedness, and willing to assimilate to the new life in Wiltshire. However, occasionally, he withdraws into solitude and the past. The ambiguity seen in *The Enigma of Arrival* reflects the condition of the diasporic narrator, who has multiple origins and orientations. The narrator, as a doubly uprooted former colonial subject, comes to accept his rootless condition. However, the writer's occupation necessitates that he assimilate to England, which is his commercial base. On the other hand, the narrator occasionally needs to seek quiet time to look back to his home, past and origin. As the previous section argued, Naipaul practices a repetitive cycle of travelling, knowing and writing, which leads him both to his roots and to the West. This ambiguity, caused by Naipaul's life of travelling and writing, parallels the ambiguity seen in the narrator of *The*

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 317.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 318.

Enigma of Arrival.

Secondly, the ideas of journey and dwelling are contradictory concepts that coexist in *The Enigma of Arrival*. There are many mobile elements in the narrative: the second chapter, called ‘The Journey,’ gives the itinerary of the narrator’s life as a traveller; ‘The Enigma of Arrival,’ a story-within-a-story, is the story of a traveller; many people with whom the narrator becomes acquainted in Wiltshire come and go. *The Enigma of Arrival* is, thus, a novel about ‘arrival,’ or movement. On the other hand, in spite of various mobile elements depicted in the narrative, *The Enigma of Arrival* conjures an atmosphere of settling / being settled, because the narrator is in tune with the land of Wiltshire and the cottage he lives in. As Porter argues, *The Enigma of Arrival* supports Clifford’s notion that ‘the opposition between “travelling” and “dwelling”’ is less and less distinct.⁵⁷

The Enigma of Arrival shows that it is possible to be content with and enriched by a life of mobility. *The Enigma of Arrival* thus reveals a new sentiment and disposition of Naipaul’s. The contradictory aspects that used to create conflict in Naipaul’s writings show harmonious coexistence for the first time in *The Enigma of Arrival*. Multiplicity and ambiguity are not an inconsistency, nor a weakness, on the part of the author. As discussed in my previous argument on the diasporic multiple self proposed by Bhabha and Hall, multiplicity is a characteristic and strength of diasporas. In fact, the narrator in *The Enigma of Arrival* is content and positive about his circumstances. The narrator calls his new life ‘a second life in the valley’,⁵⁸ recognises that this life is satisfactory, and celebrates it: ‘that I was to have something like a second life here . . . [was] like a rebirth for me. . . . I was to find myself in tune with a landscape in a way that I had never been in Trinidad or India. . . . I was to be cleansed in heart and mind’.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Porter, p. 306; James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988; repr. 1994), p. 9.

⁵⁸ Naipaul, *Enigma*, p. 91.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

5: Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the mobile elements depicted in Naipaul's works and seen in his own geographical movement. Naipaul depicts the positive effects of people's movement: Singh practises a kind of movement that enables him to abandon geographical myth; *Finding the Centre* shows that travelling has the effect of increasing experiences, knowing other worlds and deepening the understanding of oneself; *The Enigma of Arrival* shows that it is possible to achieve a sense of rootedness, even if one's life is on the move and rootless.

The idea of mobility has its appeal in terms of current thought. The mobile elements are used to explain the circumstances of the contemporary world. Clifford points out the popularity of the 'post-modern primitivist figure of the "nomad"' among current thinkers and writers. Clifford takes, as examples of works containing nomadic figures, texts such as *Mille Plateaux* (volume 2 of the *Anti-Oedipe*) by Deleuze and Guattari and Bruce Chatwin's *The Songlines* (1987). *Mille Plateaux* contains the metaphor of nomadic wanderers to signify methods of thinking not domiciled by regional thoughts. *The Songlines* has a nomad figure that reflects the author's inclination to abandon a sense of rootedness and seek freedom.⁶⁰ Edward Said also proposes the concept of mobility. As a strategy for writers in exile, Said proposes an 'émigré's consciousness' or 'émigré's eccentricity', 'whose opacity, obscurity, and deviousness . . . move away from the dominant system'.⁶¹ These thinkers recognise that it is a time when more people are on the move and when the frequency and distance of geographical movement has increased. Furthermore, they see the importance of concepts of mobility for the analysis of the contemporary or postcolonial world.

Naipaul's positive depiction of geographical movement parallels these thinkers in that they all recognise the social condition of postcolonial rootlessness. The difference in

⁶⁰ James Clifford, 'Notes on Travel and Theory', *Inscriptions*, 5 (1989), p. 183.

⁶¹ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, pp. 403-4.

Naipaul is that his geographical movement has a link with the idea of assimilation to the West, as this chapter discussed. In this respect, Naipaul's relationship to geographical movement might meet certain critical disagreement. For the postcolonial debate, the arrival of cosmopolitanism is a moot point in terms of its potential to empower the postcolonial nations. For instance, Friedman discusses the emerging new postcolonial cosmopolitan elites, or 'the periphery-now-in-the-centre,' who possess money and professional status.⁶² Friedman does not believe that the success of these elites leads to empowerment at the margins. They assimilate to the West and are benefited by it, which is a separate activity from the development of the developing world. Similarly, Timothy Brennan detects a neo-imperial force under the guise of globalism. Brennan is cautious of the new trend of academia that celebrates the arrival of cosmopolitanism.⁶³

It seems to me that such scepticism about cosmopolitanism will do harm rather than benefit former colonial nations and subjects. The former colonial subjects' addressing of postcolonial issues will raise people's awareness and lead to the empowerment of the postcolonial nations. Furthermore, Naipaul's assimilating to the West does not damage the development of his inner self, as this chapter showed. In spite of assimilation, he has kept his fundamental themes unchanged and continues his intellectual quest.

⁶² Jonathan Friedman, 'The Hybridization of Roots and the Abhorrence of the Bush', in *Spaces of Culture*, ed. by Featherstone and Lash, p. 243.

⁶³ Timothy Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

Conclusion

This thesis has discussed various spatial representations in Naipaul's writings. Spatial metaphors appear frequently, reflecting Naipaul's prominent literary themes. The spatial metaphors in Naipaul's writings are often associated with the fictional characters' quest for freedom and for a counter-force to social restrictions. As we have seen, Naipaul depicts a claustrophobic atmosphere to symbolise his characters' frustration when their sense of freedom remains unsatisfied; urban characters' box-rooms embody their sense of restriction; the Caribbean island is described as a shipwreck to suggest a restrictive milieu.

Another spatial representation which is prominent in Naipaul's writing is the dichotomic division between centre and margin. As I have suggested in my argument, there is a chronological shift in Naipaul's representation of this dichotomic concept. His earlier phase shows the dichotomous division between centre and margin. While 'centre' embodies the location of freedom, security, and civilization, 'margin' symbolises the location of cultural and material poverty. Yet in his later phase, Naipaul barely represents a categorically dichotomic view. Instead, he becomes more understanding towards the mixing of cultures and cultural hybridity.

To evaluate Naipaul's relationship with the dichotomic division is a complex matter. From a postcolonial perspective, the binary view of the world is problematic and should be deconstructed. In this light, Naipaul's works which occasionally reproduce a dichotomous view of the world are not entirely successful. However, the value of Naipaul's spatial representation lies in its complexity. He exposes his own view in showing that he has

inherited the dichotomous view through the ideology of imperialism, and that it has stubbornly remained with him. In other words, Naipaul reveals that imperialism is responsible for influencing his ideas and that the wrongs of a colonial education produced a persistent impact on the minds of colonial subjects.

In addition to Naipaul's spatial depictions in his works, this thesis has also discussed Naipaul's own relationship with space. It analysed his journey, between Trinidad, England, and other countries that he has visited, and discussed Naipaul's life as a traveller and his view of the world. Here is revealed the essence of his rootlessness. Naipaul's relationship with rootlessness exposes the ambiguity in his work: while pursuing his quest to achieve greater freedom, he is, at times, nostalgic for a sense of belonging. Generally speaking, in the earlier phase of his time in England, Naipaul seemed to be uncomfortable with his sense of rootlessness. However, in his later career, Naipaul has become more comfortable with the idea of rootlessness.

Naipaul's relationship with space, place, and movement can largely be explained within the context of the following terms: paradox, ambiguity, and complexity. For instance, in spite of his openly expressed unwillingness to return, in his fictional works with a Trinidadian setting, Naipaul ambiguously expresses his mixed sentiment of compassion and detachment. Another ambiguity is seen in Naipaul's sense of belongingness: while he learns to accept and feels more comfortable with his rootless condition, paradoxically, he develops a greater sense of belonging to England. Naipaul's treatment of a dichotomous view of the world is also complex: he reproduces their perspective but at other times opposes its logic.

These paradoxes and ambiguities are significant factors in Naipaul's works. The paradoxes reflect the complexity of Naipaul as a former colonial subject whose origins were multi-cultural, and who acquired a multiple self. Naipaul says, '[a]ll my work is

really one. I'm really writing one big book.'¹ To see his 'one big book' as a spatial representation of the world is to appreciate the complexity and richness that is revealed. Naipaul's spatial depiction is unique in its complexity, and significant in today's multi-cultural society.

¹ Naipaul, 'The Novelist V. S. Naipaul Talks about his Work To Ronald Bryden', *Listener*, 22 March 1973, p. 367.

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