

CHAPTER FIVE

IN CONTESTED SPACES: *A BEND IN THE RIVER,*
THE MIMIC MEN, AND GUERRILLAS

I was in 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. I woke up in London with little bits of Africa on me—like the airport tax ticket, given me by an official I knew, in the middle of another kind of crowd, in another kind of building, in another climate. Both places were real; both places were unreal. You could play off one against the other; and you had no feeling of having made a final decision, a great last journey. (Naipaul, *A Bend in the River* 268)

There are many aspects of this fate which Naipaul has explored in autobiographical as well as fictional terms. His novels, for example, have developed the meanings lying coiled up in his own past, meanings which, like the verbal ambiguities in the word “Indian,” don’t easily go back to some unquestioned origin or source. Fiction has therefore been that “play” of “adjustments” made when a remembered India fell away for East Indians after World War II.... (Said, *Reflections on Exile* 98-99)

It was so hard to get away from England here. And there were so many Englands.... (Naipaul, *Guerillas* 108)

The global mongrelization or métissage of cultural forms creates complex identities and interrelated, if not overlapping, spaces. (Lionnet, *Postcolonial Representations* 7)

New cultural negotiation resulting from multicultural mixing of migrants in changed geographical and cultural spaces have been extensively explored in VS Naipaul’s fiction. In the novels *A Bend in the River*, *The Mimic Men*, and *Guerrillas*, the displaced individuals inhabit *in-between* spaces where the real and the imagined elements contest and negotiate, resulting in the fluidity of their existence. These spaces are characterized by fluidity and ambivalence. Characters in the novels under analysis approach their ethnically diverse origins and they live, narrate and make sense of their multicultural ways of life in the spaces they inhabit. They are located in contested spaces which is the result of a continuous process of interaction, transformation, and negotiation. The dispossessed postcolonial subjects’ cultural interactions do not facilitate a comfortable cultural exchange. This chapter aims to examine contested *in-between* spaces of cultural ambivalence in Naipaul’s texts as mentioned above.

It would not be out of place here to refer to Blunt and McEwan's comment on the contentions of postcolonial discourse and geography. They write that it "traces the critical interfaces between postcolonial and geographical thought, exploring the diverse geographies of colonial power and discourse by interrogating the colonial production of space, destabilizing imaginative geographies of empire, and disrupting the hierarchy of colonial centres and margins" (*Postcolonial Geographies* 5). It follows that space, geography and postcolonial thought and power politics are intertwined in a manner which ensures that none can be seen as an exclusive category in the postcolonial context. As Jane M Jacobs, in *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City* (1996) observes: "Because of the primacy of the spatial in imperial projects, postcolonial politics is also often explicitly spatial (Said 1993:271) (*Edge* 4). She goes on to contend that

The politics of identity and difference established under colonialism and negotiated through a range of postcolonial formations is not only 'practiced' in particular settings, as if they are simply 'staging grounds' (Appadurai 1990:15), but also activated through 'real' space. This is not to suggest an abstracted space with determining force, nor a material space which is outside of social relations. Rather, it is to propose, as Doreen Massey (1994:3) does, that space is a part of 'an ever-shifting social geometry of power and signification' in which the material and the ideological are co-constitutive. (5)

Space is both physical and conceptual, social and spiritual. It is forever shifting in the sense that it enters into newer social equations. She explains further that

This is by no means a settled notion of space, but rather a troubled social/spatial dynamic. It is, to toy with one of Said's (1993:6) notions, a 'geography which struggles'. These spatial struggles are not simply about control of territory articulated through the clear binaries of colonialist constructs. They are formed out of the cohabitation of variously empowered people and the meanings they ascribed to localities and places. They are constituted from the way in which the global and the local always already inhabit one another. They are products of the disparate and contradictory geographies of identification produced under modernity. (5)

Space is open to negotiation and may obtain in complex arabesque like adjustments. It might consist of depths and domains not obtaining on the surface of ideas or things.

Again, Doreen Massey's interpretation of space as multiplicity is being quoted here to help explain this further:

the sphere of...multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality...in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity. Without space no multiplicity; without multiplicity no space. If space is indeed the product of interrelations, then it must be predicated upon the existence of plurality. Multiplicity and space are co-constitutive. (9)

It follows that space has to be seen in terms of plurality. A space without multiple, heterogeneous types of inscriptions, or interrelated dimensions cannot be perceived. Such a reading of space takes it closer to the modernist versions of evaluating space in terms of complex constructs like the arabesque or the palimpsest. No space is simple or without intertwining of multiple influences.

In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefevre talks about the production of Space through the conflictual unity of a spatial triad—the perceived, the conceived and the lived. The perceived space is captured as spatial practices. Lefevre says that “the spatial practice of a society secretes that society's space, it propounds and presupposes it...the spatial practice of a society is revealed through the deciphering of its space.” (38) The conceived space embodies representations of space. It is a conceptualized space “the space of scientists, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent...” (38). Further, that it is “the dominated and hence passively experienced space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate.” (39). Lefevre also argues that we need to construct a theoretical unity among physical, mental and social space.

Massey points out that

since social relations are inevitably and everywhere imbued with power and meaning and symbolism, this view of the spatial is as an ever-shifting social geometry of power and signification. Such a way of conceptualizing the spatial, moreover, inherently implies the existence in the lived world of a simultaneous

multiplicity of spaces: cross-cutting, intersecting, aligning with one another, or existing in relations of paradox or antagonism (3).

No space can be free of ideological intervention or mediation or some kind of signification. Moreover, intersection of spaces through migration and lack of boundaries ensures that

it includes relations which stretch beyond—the global as part of what constitutes the local, the outside as part of the inside. Such a view of place challenges any possibility of claims to internal histories or to timeless identities. The identities of place are always unfixed, contested and multiple. (Massey 5).

The seamlessness of space results in a socio-political fabric which discourages any attempt at upholding an inherited order which is homogenous at the same time. As space ceases to withstand outside influences, identities connected to it become fluid, unstable or multiform.

Again, space is real and/or virtual and imagined. All human subjects move between various spaces of belonging – physical and symbolic. Human subjects develop their sense of being and becoming in relation to the interconnected space, which they might experience or be excluded from. This is seen in the novels included in this chapter where the migrants/settlers coming from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds negotiate their identities in hybrid *in-between* spaces. In the multicultural hybrid world, the territory, natural substance and boundedness of space are increasingly challenged. Transnational mobility of people across the globe, challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about identity. Migrant and diasporic cultural and political activities develop across boundaries and so does the sense of belonging to a particular group or a community. The juxtaposition of migrants, diasporas and other groups marginalized in a transnational space provides scope for understanding identity, its meanings and its limitations. Migrant people assert simultaneous belonging in various communities, and they assert their identities through negotiation of contested spaces and multiple ‘political’ representations of their existence.

The spaces in which these characters are located are presented in a continuous process of negotiation and change. As these spaces are characterized by ambivalence, the characters located there experience the sense of both belongingness and withdrawal. Constant

cultural interventions challenge the myth of places having fixed immutable identities. So, a geographical notion does not stand for only one absolute notion. A geographical location is characterized by plurality of vision, coexistence of diverse ways of life, multiple identities. A place is not simply a physical location, a material reality. It is also a product of imagination.

The above critiques of space notwithstanding, Appadurai's comments in "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," may be brought in here to provide a frame for this discourse:

The new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models (even those that might account for multiple centers and peripheries). Nor is it susceptible to simple models of push and pull (in terms of migration theory), or of surpluses and deficits (as in traditional models of balance of trade), or of consumers and producers (as in most neo-Marxist theories of development). (*Modernity at Large* 32)

He goes on to propose

that an elementary framework for exploring disjunctures is to look at the relationship among five dimensions of global cultural flows that can be termed (a) ethnoscaples, (b) mediascaples, (c) technoscaples (d)financescaples, and (e) ideoscaples. The suffix -scape allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes shapes that characterize international capital as deeply as they do international clothing. These terms with the common suffix -scape also indicate that these are not objectively relations that look the same from every angle of vision but, rather, that are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors: nation-states, multinationals, diasporic communities, as well as subnational groupings and movements (whether religious, political, or economic), and even intimate face-to-face groups, such as villages, neighborhoods, and families. Indeed, the individual actor is the last locus of this perspectival set of landscapes, for these landscapes are eventually navigated by agents who both experience and

constitute larger formations, in part from their own sense of what these landscapes offer. (33)

Venn explains what Appadurai has to say:

These processes...direct attention to the flows and turbulences and networks in the circulation of goods, peoples, cultures, technologies, and ideas that have come to characterize the global. These flows and networks establish mobile and complex relationships between what Appadurai calls 'scapes', that is, the flow of people, communication forms and practices, technology, money, ideologies....They constitute the 'building blocks' for 'imagined worlds'; they are 'the multiple worlds which are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the world' affecting everything from clothing styles to the working of capital. (*The Postcolonial Challenge* 5).

Returning to Appadurai's contentions, it is seen that all negotiations assume fluid, irregular, perceptual relations which offer themselves to multiple angles of vision. They are 'inflected' by various factors determined by historical, linguistic, and political situatedness vis a vis subject positions. As far as individual positions are concerned they are both individual and mediated by social landscapes.

II

In Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*, the negotiations between multiple -scapes and spaces are traced as the character struggles with confusion, betrayal, alienation and uncertainty. Ralph Singh, the narrator of *The Mimic Men*, is a forty-year-old colonial minister who lives in exile in London. By writing his memories, Singh tries to impose order on his life, reconstruct his identity, and forge a meaningful relationship with himself and his surroundings. In other words, Singh as the representative of the displaced and disillusioned is shown as part of a process that takes away their identity, culture, history and sense of place. In his hotel room in a London suburb Singh reevaluates his life in the hope of achieving order as against the island of Isabella where he was born as the land of disorder. He says: "[T]o be born on an island like Isabella, an obscure New World Transplantation, second-hand and barbarous, was to be born to disorder" (141). He felt that the island could not give him a determinate culture and identity.

The novel is not in the form of a linear, chronological memoir. To achieve a stable identity the narrator Ralph Singh imposes a deliberate order on the events and experiences of his life. The narrator is free from the burden of limitations of a chronological and sequential narration. It enables him to muse upon his childhood experiences dispassionately and analytically with an adult mind. Singh constantly moves backwards and forwards, writes about his childhood and adulthood, his life in England, his political career and marriage and his education to give shape to the past and his experiences, and to achieve order in his life. Like an artist he strives to create something, to find some meaning in the disordered state of affairs. He interprets his experiences to find some order within the chaos of the present and the unpredictability of the future in the contemporary colonial society. Here, he undertakes a social interpretation, which extends to the entire Third World:

It was my hope to give expression to the restlessness, the deep disorder, which the great explorations, the overthrow in three continents of established social organizations, the unnatural bringing together of peoples....But this work will not now be written by me; I am too much a victim of that restlessness which was to have been my subject. And it must also be confessed that in that dream of writing I was attracted less by the act and the labour than by the calm and the order which the act would have implied. (39)

By juxtaposing different times, places and situations, Singh tries to put the parts together to come to terms with his inner sense of unreality and confusion. The constant shift between the past, the present and the future may also indicate Singh's internal chaos. However, the irony is that in his search for order, Singh is unable to follow a chronological pattern to impose order on his writing. The act of writing provides him the final explanation to his sense of dislocation. Through writing he is at last able to take control of the fragments of his past and shape them.

In the novel *Ralph Singh* the disgraced Colonial politician, living in London as an exile, records his new impressions of London which are quite opposite to what he had felt in the past, shortly after the war. Staying in a hotel he looks for some kind of order to counter the sense of unease and disorder that he recalls from back home. The hotel in itself presents a semblance of order and calm:

For here is order of a sort. But it is not mine. It goes beyond my dream. In a city already simplified to individual cells this order is a further simplification. It is rooted in nothing; it links to nothing. We talk of escaping to the simple life. But we do not mean what we say. If is from simplification such as this that we wish to escape, to return to a more elemental complexity. (42-43)

The opposition between centre and periphery is beautifully incorporated in the novel. The metropolitan centre is projected as the source of power, whereas the periphery of the colonial world stands for confusion and powerlessness. However, although the centre is projected as the source of power in sharp contrast to the disorder and powerlessness of the peripheral, the novel also reveals the so called reality and order of the centre as an illusory one.

To the colonial politician, neither the centre nor the periphery provides him the sense of reality and security. The quest for order and authenticity only lead him to greater chaos and unreality.

We lack order. Above all, we lack power, and we do not understand that we lack power. We mistake words and the acclamation of words for power; as soon as our bluff is called we are lost. Politics for us are a do-or-die, once-for-all charge. Once we are committed we fight more than political battles; we often fight quite literally for our lives. Our transitional or makeshift societies do not cushion us. There are no universities or City houses to refresh us and absorb us after the heat of battle. For those who lose, and nearly everyone in the end loses, there is only one course: flight. Flight to the greater disorder, the final emptiness: London and the home counties. (10-11)

Ralph Singh's assessment of politicians is gloomy to say the least. It is a cut throat world where survival depends absolute engagement or the opposite—flight. He looks upon politicians as “people who truly make something out of nothing,” as “manipulators.” He goes on to say that “the true politician is by his nature a man who wishes to play the game all his life. The politician is more than a man with a cause, even when this cause is no more than self-advancement....Power alone proves the politician; it is ingenuous to express surprise at an unexpected failure or an unexpected flowering (40). Singh's

assessment of politicians, however, is not unrealistic as he skims over their unstable destinies to sum them up as lost causes.

The following passage is indicative of some of his dark thoughts:

But more often we see the true politician in decay. The gifts, unexpressed, the skills, undiscovered, turn sour within him; and he who began as wise and generous and fighting for the good cause turns out to be weak and vacillating. He abandons his principles; with every defeat he becomes more desperate; he loses his sense of timing, changing too early or too late; he even loses a sense of dignity....And through everything he never gives up....Offer him power. It will revive him; it will restore the man he once was. (40)

Interestingly, this appears to have happened to him as well as he recalls. Ironically, however, Singh dissociates himself from the manipulative world of real politics. He clarifies that it is not himself or the likes of him that he describes. For him “politics remained little more than a game, a heightening of life,” and power which came to him easily left him ill equipped for the responsibilities that accompanied it, as he observes. It was as if, while finding himself at the centre he was actually conscious of being on the periphery of things, of experience.

With the notion in his mind that his island society lacked order, he comes to London, the great “city of miraculous light”, seeking order. He tries to give himself a personality. He left Isabella in quest of security and order of the “centre.” To escape from the unreal and inauthentic experience of the margin, he comes to London—the seemingly authentic and “real” world. But in London he also starts thinking of the “certainties” and support of the peripheral island. The paradoxical relationship between “centre” and “periphery” is highlighted in the following lines.

Coming to London, the great city, seeking order, seeking the flowering, the extension of myself that ought to have come in a city of such miraculous light, I had tried to hasten a process which had seemed elusive. I had tried to give myself a personality....But now I no longer knew what I was; ambition became confused, then faded; and I found myself longing for the certainties of my life on the island of Isabella, certainties which I had once dismissed as shipwreck. (32)

In the novel, the seemingly coherent and ‘real’ world of London is projected against the disorder and unreality of Isabella. For Singh, London represents security, order, reality and authenticity. On the contrary, Isabella stands for disorder and powerlessness. The distinction between centre and periphery is repeatedly projected while examining his dilemma in his quest for meaning and wholeness in life. As pointed out by Ashcroft *et al*, it is repeated “in an aggregation of opposites: order and disorder, authenticity and inauthenticity, reality and unreality, power and impotence, even being and nothingness” (87). The differences remain as the dilemma continues.

Thus, the novel foregrounds illusion of both “center” and “periphery.” The materiality of lived experience can turn centre into periphery and make periphery the centre. The novel also offers a critique of the quest for real and authentic experience. It challenges the essentialising tendencies that go into the making of “centre” and “periphery” as binary opposites. In London, Singh comes to realize that the idea of reality and order of the centre is an illusion. That being so, London and Isabella are both real and unreal. As Ashcroft *et al* argue:

The idea of the centre as permanent and unrefractory is endlessly deferred. The centre of order is the ultimate disorder. This perception is both the ultimate rebellion and the ultimate unveiling performed by post-colonial literature. There is no centre of reality just as there is no pre-given unmediated reality. If language constructs the world then margins are the centre and may reconstruct it according to a different pattern of conventions, expectations and experiences. (*Empire* 89-90)

Just as Ralph Singh’s centre proves to be unstable and unreal, to apprehend any centre as clear, stable and permanent would be fallacious. There would be multiple points and angles of vision, not to say, degrees of refraction. What is central and what is peripheral would remain in a continuous state of deferral. With a constructed world in terms of language, the variations in the balance of things would depend upon the combinations and expectations of the author and readers.

But now, with all the experiences and affairs in the city, he seems to be completely disappointed.

So quickly had London gone sour on me. The great city, center of the world, in which, fleeing disorder, I had hoped to find the beginning of order (22).

In the 'solid three-dimensional city' Singh could never feel himself 'as anything but spectral, disintegrating, pointless, fluid.

Ralph Singh persistently tries to maintain the illusion of London as a city of "Magical light" (267). He comes to London three times in total: as a student, as a politician and as an exile. Each time, he attempts to experience the magic of the city that he paradoxically knows that it does not really exist. Even after his initial disappointments, the young Singh continues to tell himself that London's

heart must have lain somewhere. But the god of the city was elusive. The tram was filled with individuals, each man returning to his own cell. The factories and warehouses, whose exterior lights decorated the river, were empty and fraudulent. I would play with famous names as I walked empty streets and stood on bridges. But the magic of names soon faded. (23).

As a political figure, Singh tries "to recreate the city as show: that city of the magical light." (267). But he encounters "the terrible city. Wider roads than I had remembered, more cars, a sharper smell. It was too warm for an overcoat; I perspired." (268). Even as an exile he spends the first part of his stay in England in search of tranquility. But, instead, he finds noise, highways, crowded hotels and squalid surroundings.

Singh seeks to assert his identity by adopting various roles (student, dandy, husband and politician). Each time he thinks to find a stable harmonious identity by adopting a role. But he fails to achieve order and completeness in life because each role he adopts represents only a part of his consciousness. His identity is so diverse that it cannot be expressed through the adoption of one particular role. Ralph describes his role as a dandy in the following lines:

In London I had no guide. There was no one to link my present with my past, no one to note my consistencies or inconsistencies. It was upto me to choose my character, and I chose the character that was easiest and most attractive. I was the dandy, the extravagant colonial, indifferent to scholarship. (20)

Singh finds himself in a vacuum and tries to give some shape to his existence by donning various masks. It was as if his whole person was a blank space to be inscribed upon. Away from responsibility and the familiar spaces of home, Singh decides to try out

different options to fit into the London scene. In this he is tempted to choose what seems to him as the exotic.

Singh finds support in his role playing from Lieni, the Maltese woman staying in the basement, “who was willing to play the game” as he reports:

But she it was...who, by suggestion and flattery, created the character of the rich colonial. We become what we see of ourselves in the eyes of others. She pretended that I was richer than I said. She made me aware of my looks, to which up to then I had paid little attention, content with the knowledge that I was no monster....It was Lieni who led me through the stores and chose my clothes, and suggested the red cummerbund....I became her apt pupil. (25)

It is Leini, the Maltese housekeeper of Mr. Shylock, the Jewish Landlord, who creates his role as a dandy. Leini flatters Ralph Singh by calling him a rich colonial. He is willing to be shaped by her. This puts Singh on the path towards self-awareness. He is an unformed individual who tries to define himself by accepting any role assigned to him by others. He continues to float but his discontent remains in his spiritual exile.

It may not be out of place to cite Said's observations on the kind of world the exile seeks to build up. According to him the exile “is always out of place”(Reflections 181) :

The exile's new world...is unnatural and its unreality resembles fiction....Exiles are always eccentrics who feel their difference....Clutching difference like a weapon...the exile jealously insists on his or her right to refuse to belong....Willfulness, exaggeration, overstatement: these are characteristic styles of being an exile. (182)

Ralph Singh's role playing in London can be studied in the light of Said's remarks as a kind of fictive exercise removed from reality. There appears to be little justification of his charades. Singh chooses to call himself a dandy and in a dandy, the external features proliferate, thereby fitting into the mode of exaggeration and overstatement.

Ralph's disappointment is revealed in many of his outbursts. In that state of distress he roams pointlessly about England where he comes across Sandra at the school notice board. This unexpected meeting later ends up in marriage. Like Ralph, Sandra had “no community, no group, and had rejected her family. She saw herself alone in the world

and was determined to fight her way up”(53). Singh records certain things about Sandra that have fascinated him. Language was one of the prime things. Sandra was English. He observes that with her “the mere fact of communication was a delight” (53). Besides, her solitary state is similar to his own. Singh comes to feel that with her ingenuity and enthusiasm she could guide him through life’s uncertainties.

I had such confidence in her rapaciousness, such confidence in her as someone who could come to no harm—a superstitions reliance on her, which was part of the strength I draw from her that in that moment it seemed to me that to attach myself to her was to acquire that protection which she offered, to share some of her quality of being marked, a quality which once was mine but which I had lost. (56)

With too many hopes and a lot of firmness and self assurance he leaves for Isabella hoping to set right the damaged pieces of his life through a new relationship—the bond of marriage with Sandra. Once on the island, all his hopes and dreams turn into nothing. Their relationship did not last long.

When Singh married Sandra, he had desired her “confidence, ambition, rightness” (81), qualities that he sought in the English landscape. But he discovers that Sandra carried her own darkness. Once he discovers her insecurity, and sense of dislocation, his love for her begins to disappear.

She had begun to get some of my geographical sense, that feeling of having been flung off the world....She told me that she had awakened in the night with a feeling of fear, a simple fear of place, of the absent world....The very things I had once admired in her – confidence, ambition, rightness – were what I now pitied her for. (81)

Much later as he writes his memoirs, Singh sees his failed marriage and failed political career as “something that happened in parenthesis” meaning that he can compartmentalize that part of his life and move ahead. For a while, however, the marriage brings in luck and success to some extent.

When Singh and his wife arrive in Isabella as a married couple, his mother performs Hindu religious rites. These religious sanctions are a form of mimicry. While Ralph sees that they are strange in the island, he also realizes the need to reconnect with an exiled

past : “My mother’s sanctions were a Pretence, no doubt ; but they were also an act of piety towards the past, towards ancient unknown wanderings in another continent. It was a piety I shared” (68). Ralph believes that his mother’s maintaining of the link with the past is an attempt to acquire a greater sense of continuity wholeness and totality. But he acknowledges that these gestures do not co-exist with the immediate reality.

Achievement comes to Ralph Singh in the form of wealth which brings him and his wife rank and recognition in the rich, elitist society. But these things in no way are capable of easing the psychological turmoil and uncertainties growing between husband and wife.

We could not obliterate the feeling of failure, the feeling of the house’s emptiness, the feeling that whatever solutions we achieved would be only temporary...we had taken to sleeping in separate rooms so that the sleeplessness of the one might not disturb the other....It only remained now for Sandra to leave. It could not have been an easy time for her. But the true wound I thought to be mine, and I believed by saying nothing I was behaving well. Sandra was after all in a position to leave: other relationships awaited her, other countries. I had nowhere to go....It was not for me to decide to leave; that decision was hers alone. We continued to go out together; we continued to try out new restaurants and nightclubs. But I was waiting for her to leave. The time for quarrels between us was past. (83-84)

Singh appears to blame Sandra for the failure of their marriage. A sense of apathy creeps in to the relationship as they go about their business even as they drift apart. Singh feels that by saying nothing he was being stoic and gentlemanly about the whole thing. The lack of interest in rebuilding the relationship, or working out the problems, and generally presenting himself as the victim reflects Singh’s narrow and closed mind. He is dismissive of his wife’s future as if he is in a hurry to wash his hands of any responsibility.

With England and his English wife having failed to achieve coherence in his wrecked life Singh turns to India as the center of his dream. He goes to the Aryan Culture imagining it to be his own to explain his experience:

How right our Aryan ancestors were to create gods....The larger erotic dream, the god, has eluded us. It is so whenever, moving out of ourselves, we look for extensions of ourselves....We seek the physical city and 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. (22)

As a child, Singh responds to his sense of dereliction by dreaming of India, the homeland and of his origin. He reads books on Asiatic and Persian Aryans and dreams of horsemen who look for their leader. He creates an ideal and heroic past which is in conflict with the real life condition in Isabella. For example he goes to the beach house owned by his grandfather and one day he sees the death of three children who drowned in the sea while the fishermen do nothing to rescue them. At this point he realizes that Isabella cannot be an ideal landscape he is searching for. Hence, Singh's experience on the beach makes him aware of the distance between Isabella and his true, pure world.

Singh's longing for an ideal Aryan Past can be seen as his longing for an abstract ideal world. He is completely bewildered when his father performs the greatest of the ancient Hindu sacrifices, *Asvamedha*, the horse sacrifices in his killing of Tamango, the racehorse. The aim of the sacrifice is to acquire prosperity, wealth and fertility. Although Singh idealizes his Hindu past and culture, he is in fact unable to understand Hinduism. When the horse is killed, the ideal past collapses and the concrete experience bewilders the child. Although Ralph is aware of the symbolic significance of the act, he feels deeply betrayed and wishes only to leave Isabella and to start a new life. He began to develop an ambivalent response to Hinduism. He finds Hinduism immensely fascinating as long as it is confined to his private fantasies. But once its rituals are given concrete expression, he is repelled. It is an action that typifies his more general problem of wanting to live in an idealized mental world, withdrawn from physical action. In other words, this sacrifice causes Ralph to see an Indian world that is in contrast with the noble and ideal realm of imagination. Hindu rituals have lost their meaning in Isabella as the people have lost their connection with India, its culture, customs and tradition.

Naipaul discusses the status of the so called "East Indians" who were distinguished from the American Indians and the West Indians in the West Indies:

In the British territories the immigrants were called East Indians....After a generation or two, the East Indians were regarded as settled inhabitants of the West Indies and were thought of as West Indian East Indians. Then a national

feeling grew up. There was a cry for integration, and the West Indian East Indians became East Indian West Indians. (*Overcrowded Barracoon* 34)

He goes on to explain how this name was not acceptable to the Dutch who had control of the island of Surinam where the settlers were from the East Indies—Sumatra and Java—and were different from the Hindustanis (as the Dutch called them) or British Indians as they were also known. He explains that whatever they are called, it was still a different world from the countries of origin.

Moreover the local and other influences in the island of residence ensured that the people, despite holding on to some elements of their original culture, had also embraced the West Indian culture. Naipaul observes that

the West Indies are part of the new world and these Indians of Trinidad are no longer of Asia. The temples and mosques exist and appear genuine. But the languages that came with them have decayed. The rituals have altered... There is no Ganges at hand... And the water that the Hindu priest sprinkles with a mango leaf around the sacrificial fire is not Ganges water but simple tap water. The holy city of Benares is far away, but the young Hindu at his initiation ceremony in Port of Spain will still... say that he is off to Benares to study. (35)

Naipaul goes on to remark that

It is the play of a people who have been cut off. To be an Indian from Trinidad... is to be unlikely and exotic. It is also to be a little fraudulent. But so all immigrants become... Immigrants are people on their own. They cannot be judged by the standards of their older culture. Culture is like language, ever developing. There is no right and wrong, no purity from which there is decline. Usage sanctions everything. (35-36)

Naipaul's comments in *Overcrowded Barracoon* cited above may be taken to understand Ralph Singh's dilemma in *The Mimic Men*. Singh experiences disenchantment on Isabella and his dream of reconnecting with India remains just a distant fancy.

Like Singh, his Chinese friend, Hok, reads books on his own origin, China and idealizes his past and is humiliated when it is discovered that he has black ancestors. Browne, Singh's black revolutionary friend, also fantasizes his origin and his room is full of

pictures of black leaders. Each boy in fact obsessed with his own racial origin and the ethnic group to which he belongs. It implies that emotional security and a real sense of identity are unattainable in the heterogenous societies of the Caribbean. As Naipaul observes in *Overcrowded Barracoon*, the settlers from India tried to re-create India in Trinidad (37). The same might be said of other settlers who had come from other parts of Asia and Africa. But the little worlds they created—be it India or some other Asian cultural world—were isolated worlds which could not meet the challenges of Europe and America:

At the first blast from the New World—the Second World War, the coming of Americans to the islands—India fell away, and a new people seemed all at once to have been created. The colonial, of whatever society is a product of revolution; and the revolution takes place in the mind....Certain things remain: the temples, the food, the rites, the names, though these become steadily more Anglicized....Certainly it was odd when I was in India...to find that often listening to a language I thought I had forgotten, I was understanding. Just a word or two, but they seemed to recall a past life....But fleetingly, since for the colonial there can be no return. (37-38)

As Naipaul sees it, with the advent of Western culture in the West Indies, whatever diluted strains of Asian culture remained was overwhelmed by the new. Things went through a sea change. Instead of claiming their separate diasporic identities, the West Indians were content to be recognized as one people—colonials in Naipaul's words.

Returning to *The Mimic Men*, we see what problems beset him as he became disenchanted with the limitations of life on the island of Isabella. Singh's sense of self arises from a mixture of incompatible realities. As a child, Singh is surrounded by realities which are divided into the Aryan past of his race, his present circumstances on Isabella and influences from the West. He considers his presence in Isabella as a temporary situation, an unhappy "shipwreck." He dreams of an escape to the glorified Aryan past of his race and a future in London.

Thus, the narrative draws individuals into a web of imaginary but meaningful relations to their actual circumstances, to realize their existence as social subjects. The relationship between the individuals and society is necessarily a mixture of the imaginary and the

real, resulting in an ambivalent attitude to both of them. The construction of identity is determined by this ambivalent cultural space.

Bhabha describes this cultural space and the social and historical poles as forming a “double time” (145). He differentiates the people as ‘historical ‘objects’ of a nationalist pedagogy’ and the people as “‘subjects’ of a process of signification” (145). In the same context he defines the two sides of the double time as *pedagogical* and *performative*. The pedagogical pole signifies the presence of people as ‘object’ in history. On the other hand, the performance pole implies “people constructed in the performance of narrative” (147). Thus, the pedagogical pole indicates the discourse coming to the subject from the outside. The performative pole is the discourse produced by the subject by ordering experiences in day to day life. Both these discourses are united in Singh’s narration and produces an ambivalent third space.

In the novel *A Bend in the River*, Naipaul reveals the reality of a newly independent African state. There are a few Belgians, some Greeks, Italians and Indians who occupy a small town at the bend in the river. These Arabs, Persians and Indians are estranged from their ancestral homes—Arabia, Persia, India. On the other hand, they also fail to identify themselves fully with Africa. So, they fluctuate between two locations—Africa and ancestral homeland. This fluctuation of transnational involvement force them to perceive themselves as having dual identities. Salim, the narrator of the novel, tells us of this contradictory relationships with multiple locations.

African was my home, had been the home of my family for centuries. But we came from the east coast, and that made the difference. The coast was not only African. It was an Arab-Indian-Persian-Portuguese place and we who lived there were really people of the Indian Ocean. True Africa was at our back. Many miles of scrub or desert separated us from the up-country people; we looked east to the lands with which we traded—Arabia, India, Persia. These were also the lands of our ancestors. But we could no longer say that we were Arabians or Indians or Persians; when we compared ourselves with these people, we felt like people of Africa. (12)

This assertion of Salim that Africa is his home indirectly indicates a position of instability and uncertainty. Due to the unstable position of his community, Salim decides to break away from it to make a new life for himself. He says, “To stay with my

community, to pretend that I had simply to travel along with them, was to be taken with them to destruction. I could be master of my fate only if I stay alone".(22). To escape from the sense of uncertainty and alienation Salim takes possession of a shop in the town at the bend of the river and becomes a businessman.

Unlike Ralph Singh in *The Mimic Men* Salim is neither close enough to India, nor westernized enough. He is a non Arab Muslim in an African country that has been dominated first by Arabs and then by Europeans. Awakening to the ambiguous position of his community and his awareness that there would be no place for them in the changing political scene, he decides to break away from his community to make a new life for himself in another African country. Salim moves away from his family home to take possession of a shop in the town at the bend in the great river. He becomes a trader in a central African town. This town is far away from the coast and in a way represents a journey into the heart of Africa:

As I got deeper into Africa- the scrub, the desert, the rocky climb up to the mountains, the lakes, the rain in the afternoon, the mud and then, on the other, wetter side of the mountains....[A]s I got deeper I thought, "But this is madness. I am going in the wrong direction. There cannot be a new life at the end of this.(4)

Salim's desire to cut loose takes him towards uncertainty and physical discomfort. Although his experiences along the way are enough for him to question his own sanity, he can only hope for light at the end of the tunnel.

As he ponders over the long and troublesome journey, he tries to imagine the plight of the slaves who had made the journey on foot in the opposite direction:

each day's drive was like an achievement each days achievement made it harder for me to turn back. And I could not help thinking that was how it was in the old days with the slaves. They had made the same journey...on foot and in the opposite direction, from the centre of the continent to the east coast. The further away they get from the centre and their tribal area, the less liable they were to cut loose...the more nervous they become...until at the end, on the coast, they were no trouble at all, and were positively anxious to step into the boats and be taken to safe homes across the sea. Like the slave far from home, I became anxious only to arrive. The greater the discouragements of the journey, the keener I was to press on and embrace my new life. (4)

While the slaves had made that journey towards uncertain bondage far away from home, Salim is left to figure out what awaits him in the heart of the continent. Against all odds he wants to complete the journey to begin a new life.

Salim has grown up in the community where “the past was simply the past,” without chronological reference. Salim says: “We simply lived, we did what was expected of us, what we had seen the previous generation do we never asked why we never recorded. (12). Salim, however, develops the habit of detaching himself from a familiar scene and trying to consider it from a distance. The price he pays for this detachment is a permanent sense of insecurity. Salim attributes his pessimism and insecurity to the lack of faith. He says:

It was the price for my more materialistic attitude, my seeking to occupy the middle ground, between absorption in life and soaring above the cares of the earth. (18)

When things begin to move fast, a sense of insecurity prompts Salim to flight, to a country at the centre of Africa. Feeling insecure and unconnected he strives to make sense of the turmoil around him by isolating himself. People there lived as they had always done sensing no break between the past and present.

The town at the bend in the river is inhabited by outsiders. Naipaul describes his narrator, Salim, in relation to different people he encounters. Characters like Metty, Zabeth, Ferdinand represent African civilization. In the novel, there are two sets of characters. The first set of characters consists of Metty, Zabeth, Ferdinand who represent African history and civilization. The other set consists of Nazruddin, Mahesh, Salim, Indar, Raymond, Yvette, Shobha and Mahesh who carry with them the predicaments of global dislocations, while Zabeth, Ferdinand and father Huisman are the insiders, trying to adjust to the perturbing realities, living between the old and the new regimes.

When, Salim comes to know that Metty has been living with a local African woman by whom he has also had a child, he feels deserted and betrayed. He feels as if he had lost Metty and also the life he had been thinking of in that town. The wish to leave the town is strengthened in Salim’s mind with the reappearance of Indar in his life. Over a series of conversations Indar reveals that it was not an easy matter for him to turn his back upon the past. He says:

We have to learn to trample on the past, Salim....Everywhere...men are in movement, the world is in movement, and the past can only cause pain. It isn't easy to turn your back on the past. It isn't something you can decide to do just like that. It is something you have to arm yourself for (163-164).

What Indar means is that it can be difficult to give up on the things that one has inherited. In countries with an unstable political climate, like their own, they have to be prepared to dissociate themselves from their past heritage.

The plight of the migrant settlers in these African countries remains at the mercy of the new rulers. With a fresh round of racial and ethnic profiling in the aftermath of colonialism, people who can claim their ancestry in that land to only a few generations are forced to contend with the dominion of the so-called local forces. As Salim faces this predicament later on in that town in the interior when his employee becomes his master as ownership of the shop changes overnight, Indar conveys his feelings in the following passage:

The thought of losing that house built by my grandfather, the thought of the risks he and my father had taken to build up a business from nothing, the bravery, the sleepless nights—it was all very painful. In another country such effort and such talent would have made us millionaires, aristocrats, or at any rate secure for some generations. There it was all going up in smoke. My rage wasn't only with the Africans. It was also with our community and our civilization, which gave us energy but in every other way left us at the mercy of others. (165)

Leaving home meant losing out on a once secure future. But changed circumstances had shaken that steady platform, making it difficult for erstwhile settlers to hold onto their business and property in the face of neocolonialism. They had to run for their lives or stay and be humiliated. Indar voices the confusion felt by every settler who finds his identity and existence challenged at a much later date.

In London, Indar thinks that he would be able to put Africa behind him. But as it turns out, he is left to realize that

I hadn't understood to what extent our civilization had also been our prison. I hadn't understood either to what extent we had been made by the place where we had grown up, made by Africa and the simple life of the coast, and how incapable we had become of understanding the outside world. (165)

Herein lies the dilemma of the settler communities. They had lost contact with the country/countries of their origin and made Africa their home. Yet several generations later they are asked to leave or live without dignity, losing all rights to property. If they have to leave the place of their domicile, they do not know what to look forward to. India or Arabia are no longer home to them and London is totally strange to those who manage to make their way there.

And it is in London that Salim comes to a full understanding of what Indar had said to him earlier; that is, 'to trample on the past'. The realization comes to him with full force that the idea of going home is a pretension.

The idea of going home, of leaving, the idea of the other place...was a deception. I saw now that it comforted only to weaken and destroy...There could be no going back; there was nothing to go back to. We had become what the world, outside had made us; we had to live in the world as it exists.(285-286)

In Salim's case we see the predicament of the displaced for whom the very idea of home is uncertain or unstable. What was home to them had ceased to be so after the new government had taken over. What they thought as home no longer mattered; it was forced into their consciousness by the indigenous people of that country. Consequently they were made to realize that they did not belong there. Most of them looked to Europe, especially London, for some kind of permanent address but find that they do not belong there either. The Asian country of their forefathers is equally alien to them as Salim finds out. That is when they are left wondering what and where 'home' could be.

However, like many others in Naipaul's fiction, Indar's fascination with London as a location to form a new identity is filled with the basic negative features—the loss of roots and culture of one's ancestors. Indar's excessive self-esteem, his illusions of importance that he measures in terms of dollars is in the end as frail and empty as his failure to live merely on ideas. Again Indar's disorientation and disillusionment in India House and around London only underline his heightened awareness of difference. Salim decides to go to London to see Nazruddin who has learned to survive in a totally different atmosphere. Nazruddin was able to adjust himself. According to Salim "He had made himself at home in the Gloucester Road. The London setting was strange, but Nazruddin appeared to be as he had always been" (280). Salim, however, learns the art

of survival in a painful way after Ferdinand helps him to leave the troubled African country.

Prior to that, however, Salim observes that

in the town, where all was arbitrary and the law was what it was, all our lives were fluid. We none of us had certainties of any kind...We stood for ourselves. We all had to survive. But because we felt our lives to be fluid we all felt isolated, and we no longer felt accountable to anyone or anything. (223)

The chaotic and disorderly Society of the town at the bend in the river does not provide much possibility of any kind of fulfillment. Yvette, Raymond, Mahesh, Salim, Indar are all outsiders unsettled and lost without any definite identity of their own.

Salim who earlier wanted to be like Indar, realizes that his personality too has a disintegrating quality. He does not allow himself to become nothing. He realizes that he must act if he is not to become like Indar and Mahesh. Salim is surprised how Mahesh, the motor parts seller is able to carry on with Big burger when all the business in the town is being 'radicalized' by the Big Man. Indar has learned to survive in the world through numerous odds. He is fascinated by the airplane. His fantasies about the new Africa are shattered when the plane serving the town has been requisitioned by the Big Man. London attracts him but his stay of three years there disappoints him.

In the novel, Naipaul shows the changes brought to the African society in the name of 'modernization'. The appearance of a polytechnic, a modern farm and residence for intellectuals is a clear indication of westernization of Africa. But many inhabitants could not identify themselves with this new image of Africa as they are divided between two ways of life. For people like Ferdinand there is no home in this modern Africa as he can neither become a part of the new, nor can go back to the old. Salim says that neither the Domain nor the town can provide him with a home.

Sometimes as I was falling asleep I was kicked awake by some picture that came to me of my African town – absolutely real (and the aeroplane could take me there tomorrow), but its associations made it dreamlike. Then I remembered my illumination, about the need of men only to live, about the illusion of pain. I played off London against Africa until both became unreal, and I could fall asleep. After a time I did not have to call up the illumination, the mood of that

African morning. It was there, beside me, that remote vision of the planet, of men lost in space and time, but dreadfully, pointlessly busy. (281)

At the end of the novel, Salim is in a totally helpless condition. He finds that 'radicalisation' has taken over the entire town. The changes brought by the radicalization seem to take everything towards a great disorder. In the name of state authority, Salim's business, property, assets have been taken over. Even his servant, Metty, betrays him and Salim finds himself arrested on charges of illegal possession of ivory. But fortunately enough, he is rescued by the town's new commissioner, Ferdinand. The society of the town at the bend of the river does not provide much possibility or any kind of fulfillment. In this way, Salim, remains unsettled in life without any definite identity of his own.

The diasporic space is a contested and shifting one as all these displaced people like Salim, Indar, Mahesh do not share the same emotional attachment to the old country. All of them do not have the same sense of living in one country and looking across time and space to another territory to recover the sense of loss of home. As all diasporas are heterogenous and differentiated, it challenges the notion of collectivity and community in the construction and reconstruction of diasporic identities. In the novel, characters like Indar, Mahesh and Nazruddin have learnt the art of survival whereas Salim does not want to break his links with the past to come to terms with the present. He cannot subjugate his sense of loss with the casualness of Mahesh and Indar. For his rich friend Indar the "Dream of home is of isolation, anachronistic and stupid and very feeble" (175). But Salim is always in search of solidity and comfort of home and the sense of loss of home always troubles him. He says, "Home was something in my head. It was something I had lost." (124). But Indar's attitude is different in this regard. He says: "Home What for? To hide....I want to be a man myself" (124). Thus, there are the two opposite attitudes – on the one hand Salim is looking for home for emotional security and identity and Indar is trying to escape from home to assert his individuality. So, the notion of a typical diasporic community and an essentialised diasporic subject is political, allowing scope for their interrogation. Instead of nostalgically dwelling upon this loss of home, the diaspora may accept the displaced position as a valuable one to assert this individuality. Besides, the diaspora seems in a better position than others to realize that all representations of the world and all systems of knowledge are incomplete. In the words of Salman Rushdie: "Meaning is a shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people

hated, people loved. Perhaps it is constructed from such inadequate materials that we defend it so, fiercely, even to the death” (12). Diasporic memory and imagination are a pastiche if not a palimpsest of nostalgic traces, nuances, ideas, values, thoughts and feelings open to repeated scrutiny and reconstruction.

The ambivalences and contradictions of exile have been highlighted through complex operations of fact and fiction, illusion and reality. Naipaul, in his fiction, transcends particular social, political and geographical locations to achieve wide-ranging universality encompassing absurdity and existential trauma of modern man.

Dependence—political, economical, intellectual and psychological—and self contempt are invariably the marks of colonial societies. The colonized people of different lands, races, cultures and histories, sharing nothing but the common misfortune of having been dominated by Western civilization, are all innately inferior and deficient. With their land, language, religion and culture under siege and under erasure they had to adopt the dominating culture and all its assumptions. Migrants are put in that enigmatic condition where there is no way to come out of that chaos. In their lives, the conflict between inherited traditions, culture and religion and an acquired way of life cannot be reconciled. The sense of estrangement can be different from one exile to another but the enigma is always present; it cannot be obliterated altogether.

Colonialism distorts the identities of the colonized. The displaced man must learn to accept the finality of his displacement. As observed by Manjit Inder Singh in *Writers of the Indian Diaspora: VS Naipaul* :

the past is always constructed through memory, narrative fantasy and myth. Within the discourses of history and culture, the unstable points of identification are located at crucial junctures. There are thus, always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which cannot be grounded in an unproblematic, unchanging law of “origin”. (85)

The first problem of identity lies in the tendency to posit an aspect as the sole cause or determinant constituting the social meanings of an individual’s experience. Further, identities are constituted differently in different historical contexts. Identity categories are neither stable nor internally homogeneous. No experience or categories can be held

as the ideal or the norm. Any attempt to define identity would involve marginalization as well as epistemological difficulties even possible distortions.

Migrancy is a particular mode of existence which gives rise to problems and also new possibilities. On the one hand, the in-between position of the migrant is a perilous one as “the transformation wrought by the experience of migrancy make impossible the recovery, of a plenitudinous sense of home” (McLeod, 2). Conventional ideas of belonging depend upon the clearly defined notions of being firmly rooted in a particular community and a specific geographical location and the lack of this rootedness made Salim feel: “We none of us had certainties of any kind.... We stood for ourselves. We all had to survive. But because we feel our lives to be fluid we all felt isolated, and we no longer felt accountable to anyone or anything” (233). On the other hand, this in-between space of the diaspora can be rethought as a space of manifold possibilities as the cultural routes take them to various unknown places and into contact with different people and the realization of new knowledge in new geographical locations challenge the authority of older ideas of rootedness and fixity”(McLeod, 215). Besides it also provides a scope to assert one’s individuality for which Salim decides to break away from his community to make a fresh start.

Salim who lives in the in-between homelands usually expresses a desire to move beyond the immediate realities. The space of this ‘beyond’ is defined by Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*: “the ‘beyond’ is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past...we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complete figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion’ (1). This space of this ‘beyond’ is a space of performance where new identities can be negotiated which challenges the notion of ordinary subjectivities, “These ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation...”(1-2). In the novel, Salim’s subjectivity is constructed from different sources, many locations-which challenge the fixed notions of identity based on ideas of rootedness and national cultural and racial purity and which question the notion of subjectivity as stable and pure. The sense of selfhood of the diasporas is perceived through negotiation rather than assertion of a stable identity.

The novel *Guerrillas* is about spaces, landscapes, journeys. The journey indicates not only change of place, change of identity but also elision of the geographical and cultural, the individual and the collective. The narrative deals with space that moves between locations—England and the unnamed Caribbean Island—between the familiar and the strange, between fact and fiction. Contrasts and comparisons between the two spaces, open up new possibilities and dangers, extending the fluidity of one's given existence.

The story of the novel centres round Jimmy Ahmed, Peter Roche and Jane who carry within a sense of loss, desolation and sterility. The opening of the novel exposes poverty, waste and chaos in post-colonial Caribbean. The unnamed Caribbean island contains poverty, backwardness, the naked children, the heat the racially divided world. This sense of dereliction is felt by all the characters of the novel.

The novel beautifully highlights spaces contested, interplay of fact and fiction, shifting of places. The story centers around Jimmy, Peter and Jane. Jimmy, the leader of Black power movements in the Caribbean, is a 'half black nobody' (62), of half-Chinese descent. He is the negro leader who tries to transcend his blackness. He lives in his house with a desire to be accepted by the white world. He wants to look at himself through the eyes of Jane, the English woman. He loses his sense of self and identity because he can see himself only through the White world.

Jimmy, though the leader of a commune, chooses to stay away from it in a managerial house:

Jimmy didn't live at Thrushcross Grange. His house was a little distance away, separated by a block of forest from the commune hut. There was a path through the forest; but there was also a way through the side roads of the former industrial estate; and they went in the car....The house stood by itself at the end of a narrow road that stopped some distance away from the forest wall. During the days of the industrial estate it had been the house of an American factory manager....pink and white oleanders had grown tall around the house and bougainvillaea had run wild....The house which stood on low concrete pillars...was...an attempt at what was known locally as the Californian style. (22-23)

That Jimmy has delusions of grandeur is clear from his occupation of the above mentioned house. As the so-called leader of a future revolution, there is nothing

egalitarian about his quarters. His sitting room is decorated in the English style with furniture and books from England. Some of the shelves are covered with mementos, photographs of mostly Jimmy with some English people of significance. When Jane remarks at the Englishness of the room Jimmy replies: "You may not be able to make a living in England, but England teaches you how to live"(24). Jimmy makes clear that he is through with England where he was treated as a plaything by the people who joined him in his projects. He concludes that England is not real, cannot be real for the black man.

On the other hand, on that Caribbean island, he is willing to meet the challenges that come his way. He tells Jane and Roche: "To me it's life. It's work. I'm a worker" (27). According to him people had expected him to be reduced to the level of a 'nigger.' He uses the word 'hakwi' which he informs, is nigger in Chinese. Jimmy believes that he has managed to turn the tables on the islanders as instead of marginalizing him, they find themselves with the option of joining him or give in to an anarchy of sorts:

They've got to support me, massa....They've got to make me bigger. Because....I'm the only man that stands between them and revolution....That's why I'm the only man they're afraid of. I'm not like the others. I'm not a street corner politician....I'm not subversive....I'm not going out on the streets to change the government....I am here, and I stay here. If they want to kill me they have to come here. I carry no gun....I am no guerilla. (27-28)

As Jimmy points out, he holds the lesser threat of uniting the black people on the island without posing a serious challenge to any capitalist government. If Jimmy feels the people need him he needs them equally. He tries to present himself as a thinker and writer with some sway over the people through the strength of his ideas. Interestingly, he turns his back on England but some of the methods he adopts appear to be influenced by the West, if not wholly Western.

He eagerly waits for the recognition and acceptance of Westerners. He was previously rejected by the English. To overcome his sense of marginality and isolation along with the poverty and desolation that surrounded the island, Jimmy identifies himself with Heathcliff, the dark outsider of Emily Bronte's novel. Jimmy is the mimic man who presents himself in such ways to get Western acceptance if not approval.

At others, he becomes conscious of the inadequacies or contradictions in himself: “As he had been talking to Jane and Roche, as they had let him run on, he had begun to feel unsupported by his words, and then separate from his words...” (38). Despite his claims that the people were bound to support him to avoid greater upheavals, he is disturbed by visions of

Jimmy’s ‘writing’ is an attempt to escape, a way to deal with his inadequacies and emptiness. But his attempt to reorder his life by writing a personal memoir is temporary as it fails to provide him release from the burden of the surrounding desolation. Besides, the memoir is written from the point of view of an English woman whom he names Clarissa. In Jimmy, we always see a desire for acceptance and identification in the White world.

He could write no more. He wakened from his dream to the emptiness about him, to the interior he had so carefully prepared, for an audience that didn’t exist. He was restless.... At such a time he needed crowds, adventure, encounters, something in which he could forget himself. (65)

Jimmy’s writing a memoir can be compared to Ralph Singh’s memoir in *The Mimic Men*. Both seek to bring some order into their lives through writing their memoirs. Unlike Ralph, Jimmy uses a borrowed perspective of a White woman. His writing however remains incomplete and his personal demons unresolved. Failing that, Jimmy feels that he may fare better in a different socio-cultural space.

If Jimmy’s dilemma lies in his past and in his confused ideology, Roche and Jane go through changes in their relationship and attitudes through changes of location. Jane with an unhappy marriage in her background had gone through numerous lovers and abortions as she informs Roche:

She hinted at a procession of lovers, a continuing violation....She spoke as though she had never exercised choice. Events, society, the nature of men, her own needs as a woman, had sent her out...to play perilously with the unknown. (97)

Despite Jane’s troublesome past, Roche enters into a relationship with her. As Naipaul sums it up, “Jane the violated, he, with a life in ruins, the comforter....And that understanding, at which they had arrived...turned out to be the limit of their

relationship”(97). The changes in place and occasion do not allow the relationship to stretch these limits, resulting in a feeling of inadequacy in Roche.

Roche realizes that:

He was without a function; he saw himself as she had begun to see him; and there was this that depressed him now, and it was like a confirmation of his present futility, that though his attitudes and Jane’s seemed to coincide, though they seldom argued because they were seldom opposed in what they said about the island and its possibilities, he had begun to long for some sign of admiration from her, some generosity, some comprehension of the life he had lived, the wasted endeavours, the spent optimism. He had never looked for this kind of approval before; he recognized it as a danger signal. Every morning he thought: I’ve built my whole life on sand. (102)

As Roche suffers from a sense of having lost out on that relationship, he becomes conscious of things which were not evident in London:

she had...begun to relapse into her class certainties. And so what London had masked the Ridge had layer by layer exposed. That obsession with England and her class, that vision of decay, of a world going up in flames: he had thought, in London, that it came out of her conviction that the world was not what it ought to be. The truth was simpler: the world was to go up in flames because it wasn’t what it had been. At the back of that vision lay the certainties, of class and money, of which, in London, she had seemed so innocent. (100)

His troubled thoughts lead Roche to reflect on England and how there was no escaping it : “And there was so many Englands; his, Jane’s Jimmy’s, Lloyd’s, and the England...in that old woman’s head” (108).

A place is both real and imagined. It is both a region and a construct. Places are both physical reality and a metaphorical construction. The novel contributes to the sense of identity as heterogeneous and diverse and always in a process of mediation and reconfiguration. In the novel, both the spaces of Africa and England come into conflict producing newer ways of thinking about both the places. Jane, the white English lady arrives at Africa with England in her mind. It shows the intermingling of real and the imagined spaces. Jane carries an England in her mind which works in her exploration

in the real African territory seeking a meaning and solidity in her fluid existence. Thus, the real and the imagined, material and the metaphorical are juxtaposed which facilitates hybridity. The negotiation of real and the imagined spaces produce border-crossing identities that challenge conventional models of fixity, rootedness and belonging. Real geographical territories are mediated through psychological spaces. Spaces are constantly mediated, interrogated, reproduced. Instead of “pure” space we come to terms with overlapping of spaces: psychological space intruding upon geographical space; imagined space becoming part of real space; mythic space conquering factual space with the result of beclouding their so called boundaries.

The contested spaces presented in this novel are the result of the dialogic relation between the real and the imagined, physical and the psychological. This overlapping of spaces facilitates an environment where the traditional ideas of rootedness and fixity are replaced by multiple belongingness and the centre of reality is displaced by multiplicity of reality. Such crisscrossing of spaces produce malleable identities and question all fabricated notions in the construction of essential subject positions.

In the novel, the name “Thrushcross Grange” for Jimmy’s commune is taken from Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*. In Emily Bronte’s novel, Thrushcross Grange is the home of the Lintons, a home with pastoral beauty and grandeur. But Jimmy’s Grange is portrayed as barren and desolate. The naming of the commune as Thrushcross Grange is clearly indicative of Jimmy’s unfulfilled desire—the desire for recognition and acceptance in the White English culture.

Heathcliff’s longing for acceptance in Bronte’s novel is parallel in a way to Jimmy’s seeking of recognition in the White world. In Jimmy’s case, he is motivated by both dream of acceptance and dream of revenge. His dream of revenge is fulfilled by torturing Jane—the White English lady. So, Jimmy is motivated by both hate and desire towards the White English people and culture.

The quest for identity of the characters in the novels *The Mimic Men* and *A Bend in the River* and the social spaces they are made to inhabit are characterized by a constant process of hybridization and negotiation of identities. The contested spaces and fluidity of identity presented in the novels are the result of interaction, hybridization and exchange. The constant negotiation in the contested social spaces questions the concept of a stable homogenous identity. The notion of a stable identity is challenged by the

heterogeneity that is to be found in the myriad characters found in the novels. The concept of space portrayed in the novels is larger than the mere geographical locations. We have seen characters who imaginarily cross geographical territory in an attempt to trace their roots and negotiate their status in the present circumstances, thus the novels portray a plural, hybrid space where a homogenous identity is questioned throughout. Following Henri Lefevre, it can be said that the novels analyzed above offer alternative 'representational spaces'. They portray contested spaces where the real and the metaphoric, literal and the symbolic interact and negotiate.