

CHAPTER SIX

*TOWARDS A CONTRACTUAL SPACE: IN A FREE
STATE, A WAY IN THE WORLD, HALF A LIFE, AND
MAGIC SEEDS*

You have asked me what I would do and what I would not do. I will tell you what I will do and what I will not do. I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home... and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use—silence, exile, and cunning. (Joyce, *Portrait* 218)

‘It is wrong to have an ideal view of the world. That’s where the mischief starts.’
(Naipaul, *Magic Seeds* 294)

This chapter seeks to examine how identities mutate in the ‘contractual space’ created by Naipaul’s fiction. This chapter deals with four of Naipaul’s novels: *In a Free State* (1971), *A Way in the World* (1994), *Half a Life* (2001), and *Magic Seeds* (2004). These novels are dominated by dislocation and displacement where different subject positions try to prevent any essentialist form of identity from emerging. Contractual spaces—produced, among other things, by colonialism, diaspora, displacement, exile, migration, etc.—account for complex forms of negotiation that challenge any pre-conceived notions of self and other. It is important to recognize that such mutations have consequences, in that subjects carry these notions out of their homes into their new locations.

I

In the contractual space, people encounter the possibility of transnational models of identity that go beyond older models of representation. As elsewhere in Naipaul, people are forced to recognize that binaries are never fixed or stable and that they are contingent on socially symbolic narratives of order and disorder. What comes to the fore is the realization that social cohesion and stability take shape only through the forced erasure of certain constructions whose revelation may dismantle the basic assumptions of a specific binary. The materiality of everyday life rests on the continual formation and erasure of social and epistemological assumptions that provide the foundation for social and epistemological binaries in the first place.

It is true that universalizing modes of representation conceal the specific socio-economic, cultural and political realities that produce them in the first place. In multicultural situations, universalizing modes pass through complex inter- and intra-ethnic cultural negotiations that produce new forms of self-fashioning. These negotiations in a way tease out identity formations and reveal unaccounted-for intimacies

and interrelationships between polarized categories. What is at stake is border-crossing, rather than stable and fixed boundaries and binaries. However, any such comingling and juxtaposition of multiple subject positions and seemingly conflictual states, does not necessarily produce a complete new entity where all antagonisms and contradictions disappear. Rather, this process of co-mingling challenges essentialist subject positions and opens up transnational models of identity and belonging.

In the contractual space portrayed by Naipaul, identity formations begin by accommodating multiple sources of meaning production for a human being to make sense of his/her social state. Contractual spaces—say, those created and validated by migration or settlement by colonial rule—already challenge essentialist and universalizing notions of identity formation. As Bhabha argues in *The Location of Culture*, existing or emerging social contradictions and antagonisms are “negotiated rather than sublated” (162), in this process. New cultural meanings are produced in the liminal space where public and private, high and low and “the pedagogical and the performative are antagonistically articulated” (*Location*, 154). In the contractual space it is the working of the “performative” that dismantles conventional models of identity through “slippage” and displacement. In addition, specific ideological positions are forced to renegotiate the self and the other by the materiality of everyday life.

This understanding of contractual space allows for intervention and mediation in the sphere of already polarized identities that mostly feed on unity and fixity of culture. Through a process of translation and displacement, it prohibits individuals from taking up absolute subject positions, constantly pushing them towards a heterogeneity not available in binary positions. To the extent that each position is relative, not exclusive, it is also determined by other positions. It is this interconnectivity of positions that foregrounds the notion of rolling identities. Clearly, the contractual space is marked by ambivalence and contradiction rather than patterned constructions. However, it is also to be noted that the ruling sense of unease in these novels produces unexpected combinations and alliances that result in the tragicomedy of Naipaul’s fiction.

II

The novel *In a Free State* is about the floating and fractured lives of homeless migrants and their search for freedom. They are already in a “free state” in the sense that they are free from the social and moral codes of the caste and ethnic groups they would have

experienced in their native country. Paradoxically, however, this freedom is fearful, given that they remain uprooted and unanchored in this free state. *In a Free State* weaves the twin vectors of homelessness and exile into a recurring pattern. As displaced people lead exilic lives, or live exilic roles under pressure, they realize that freedom has a high price. In the prologue, titled “The Tramp at Piraeus,” the overcrowded ship on its journey from the Greek port of Piraeus to Alexandria, Egypt, prefigures the homelessness of migrants and exiles all over the world. The most conspicuous of the poor and homeless groups are the Egyptian Greeks, now going to Egypt as economy tourists:

They were travelling to Egypt, but Egypt was no longer their home. They had been expelled; they were refugees. The invaders had left Egypt; after many humiliations Egypt was free; and these Greeks, the poor ones, who by simple skills had made themselves only just less poor than Egyptians, were the casualties of that freedom. (1-2)

What is interesting about this narrative is the parade of exiles and expatriates, and men and women with no fixed nationality or national identity on board. While three are Spaniards on vacation there are also Lebanese nationals on a business trip. There are South Americans and Africans too. But the person who draws the narrator’s attention is the tramp:

The tramp, when he appeared on the quay, looked very English; but that might only have been because we had no English people on board. From a distance he didn’t look like a tramp. The hat and the rucksack, the lovat tweed jacket, the grey flannels and the boots might have belonged to a romantic wanderer of an earlier generation; in that rucksack there might have been a book of verse, a journal, the beginnings of a novel. (8)

Looks apart, the tramp is already man without a country, a type valued by Naipaul. He tries to befriend people on board, persuading them to see him as a global citizen. Though he does not make it explicit, he cannot hide his fear of his homeless status. He tells the narrator:

Between you and me, they’re a cut above the Australians. But what’s nationality these days? I myself, I think of myself as a citizen of the world.’ His speech was like this, full of dates, places and numbers, with sometimes a simple opinion

drawn from another life. But it was mechanical, without conviction; even the vanity made no impression; those quivering wet eyes remained distant. (9)

The narrator's analysis of the tramp's conduct is not only indicative of his homeless status but also of a kind of enlargement of his character. The tramp now does not represent himself, he represents a whole class of exiles, émigrés and migrants who do not want to give away their true identity:

The tramp neither saw nor heard. He couldn't manage a conversation; he wasn't looking for conversation; he didn't even require an audience. It was as though, over the years, he had developed this way of swiftly explaining himself to himself, reducing his life to names and numbers. When the names and numbers had been recited he had no more to say. Then he just stood beside the Yugoslav. Even before we had lost sight of Piraeus and the *Leonardo da Vinci* the tramp had exhausted that relationship. He hadn't wanted company; he wanted only the camouflage and protection of company. The tramp knew he was odd. (9-10)

The narrative of the tramp in Naipaul's book foregrounds the Joycean theme of "silence, exile and cunning" seen in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, but without any hint of romance or hope of release that one sees in the latter. The tramp is not exactly silent, but his speech reveals a well-rehearsed design to disguise his identity. It is important to note that in his world, company guarantees a certain kind of camouflage and a protection from meddlers. If one kind of identity is lost, another is gained by one's association, personal, physical, social or situational.

The second narrative, titled "One out of Many," traces a series of dislocations in the life of Santosh. He is a man from an Indian village in the hills, who first moves to Bombay looking for work. His sense of the village community is challenged by his journey to Bombay. His first (dis/re)location takes place when he leaves his village and becomes a 'city man', in reality the domestic servant of a company official. Here, however, he becomes part of the community of pavement sleepers. This community provides both protection and camouflage. From Bombay, he moves to Washington with his employer as the latter is posted there on a Government assignment. In Washington, he is initially content with the meagre facilities and sub-human accommodation that his employer provides for him. But soon he sees that his employer is as poorly placed in the larger American set-up as he is in his employer's 'cupboard' accommodation. He forays out

into the city where he sees expatriates of different hues struggling and fighting for green cards. He finds freedom in the streets:

So at last, rested, with money in my pocket, I went out in the open. And of course the city wasn't a quarter as frightening as I had thought. The buildings weren't particularly big, not all the streets were busy, and there were many lovely trees. A lot of the *hubshi* were about, very wild-looking some of them, with dark glasses and their hair frizzed out, but it seemed that if you didn't trouble them, they didn't attack you. (29)

Soon he sees, among others, the hippies and Iskon enthusiasts imitating Indians, chanting Sanskrit songs and hymns. The sighting of the 'fake' spiritual questers reminds him of India and its mendicant travellers but further alienates him for himself and his peripatetic existence. He sees the blacks—called *hubshis* here—more than any other community.

Some of the *hubshi* were there, playing musical instruments and looking quite happy in their way. There were some Americans sitting about on the grass and the fountain and the kerb. Many of them were in rough, friendly-looking clothes; some were without shoes; and I felt I had been over-hasty in condemning the entire race. (30)

During a day of Bloomian wanderings, he is drawn into the city's underbelly.

But it wasn't these people who had attracted me to the circle. It was the dancers. The men were bearded, bare-footed and in saffron robes, and the girls were in saris and canvas shoes that looked like our own Bata shoes. They were shaking little cymbals and chanting and lifting their heads up and down and going round in a circle, making a lot of dust. It was a little bit like a Red Indian dance in a cowboy movie, but they were chanting Sanskrit words in praise of Lord Krishna. (30)

Not knowing the exchange value of the American dollar in relation to the India rupee he blows up a large part of his income in buying tidbits he does not even like and cannot afford. But the most foolish purchase is a loose-fit green suit and a green hat, which he buys in spite of friendly warnings by the salesman: "Ignorance, inexperience; but I also remember the feeling of presumption. The salesman wanted to talk, to do his job. I didn't want to listen. I took the first suit he showed me and went into the cubicle and changed. I

couldn't think about size and fit" (36). The ill-fitting coat, it emerges, is symbolic of the green card, suggestive of the desperation of those looking for one, irrespective of whether or not it serves their purpose.

He goes back to his kitchen-shelf home in his employer's apartment but feels restless. He folds the green coat away in a corner. It is no substitute for the green card, a card for which refugees illegal migrants give their lives. In a feat of desperation, he leaves his employer, gets work in a venture Indian restaurant and soon becomes an illegal Indian immigrant. In his search for a green card that would also give him freedom from his Indian employer—and the Indian past—Santosh loses his sense of selfhood. He says: "[T]he Indians I had seen on the streets of Washington pretended they hadn't seen me; they made me feel that they didn't like the competition of my presence or didn't want me to start asking them difficult questions" (36).

He gets into a one-off relationship with a *hubshi* woman, though he has strong reservations about consorting with an alien female, especially when prompted by half-remembered and half-digested lines from the holy books back home. Desperate for a community and sense of belonging, he eventually decides to marry this *hubshi* woman. He becomes a "SOUL BROTHER"—a signboard in front of his house says it loudly enough, but the desperation and the distancing should not be missed here—to the African American community. Naipaul does not say who puts up the signboard, but it shows that the black neighbourhood where he lives with his *hubshi* wife will perhaps own and disown him, depending on the occasion and the need, as he keeps a part of himself to himself.

Naipaul is acutely conscious of the racial dilemma of the Indian diaspora. Their abhorrence for the blacks is as strong and illogical as the abhorrence the whites may feel towards them. Santosh's plight is borne out by the fact given that the colour codes Indians as a rule cannot align with any of the settled communities in the west. His confusion and sexuality in a way force him to consort with a black woman.

This nameless woman is simultaneously fascinating and disgusting to Santosh, given his racial prejudice, now curiously unhinged without the ground support of a home community:

She disturbed me while I was watching the Americans on television. I feared the smell she left behind. Sweat, perfume, my own weed: the smells lay thick in the room, and I prayed to the bronze gods my employer had installed as living room ornaments that I would not be dishonoured. Dishonoured, I say; and I know that this might seem strange to people over here, who have permitted the *hubshi* to settle among them in such large numbers and must therefore esteem them in certain ways. But in our country we frankly do not care for the *hubshi*. It is written in our books, both holy and not so holy, that it is indecent and wrong for a man of our blood to embrace the *hubshi* woman. To be dishonoured in this life, to be born a cat or a-monkey or a *hubshi* in the next! (34)

It is necessary to recall here that his marriage frees him from the pigeonhole where his first employer accommodated him. He is also free from the fear of deportation. But this 'freedom' costs his cultural identity. He says, in a revealing moment: "I was good-looking; I had lost my looks. I was a free man; I had lost my freedom" (43). This is ironical, to say the least. Conscious of his corporeality, Santosh is now clearly without a sense of self. He has the security of a green card and membership of the black community as a 'soul brother'. The narrative ends with a revelatory passage, reminiscent of the ending of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, where the hero at the end of the novel leads the in-between life of a man-ghost in a New York City manhole:

I am a simple man who decided to act and see for himself, and it is as though I have had several lives....I was once part of the flow, never thinking of myself as a presence. Then I looked in the mirror and decided to be free. All that my freedom has brought me is the knowledge that I have a face and have a body, that I must feed this body and clothe this body for a certain number of years. Then it will be over. (57-58)

The other narrative "Tell Me Who to Kill" deals with the dilemma of rootless individuals due to lack of connection with reality. The lack of communication between reality and fantasy always lead to frustration and despair. The narrator-protagonist of the story is a West Indian man who works hard to send his brother, Dayo, to London to see that he becomes an engineer. Later he moves to London and lives and earns in dismal working conditions. Dayo in the meantime blows his brother's hard-earned money. His brother gets to know that Dayo is part of a group of smalltime gangsters. He wants to rescue his

brother and punish the people who misled him. He tries to identify the enemy who is responsible for his predicament. He says, ironically:

I love them. They take my money, they spoil my life, they separate us. But you can't kill them. O God, show me the enemy. Once you find out who the enemy is, you can kill him. But these people here they confuse me, who hurt me? Who spoil my life? Tell me who to beat back. I work four years to save my money, I work like a donkey night and day. My brother was to be the educated one, the nice one. And this is how it is ending, in this room, eating with these people. Tell me who to kill. (98)

In desperation and anger he kills a man who was his brother's friend in the gang. At the end of the narrative, he attends the marriage of his brother to an alien woman. The irony is that he is 'secured' by a prison guard, when his search to secure his brother and himself lands him in prison. Separation from the native land always creates anxiety and alienation. In the case of expatriates, the acceptance of a new culture transforms them to such an extent that it became impossible to link with the "old." Besides, it also alienates an expatriate from his fellow expatriates. In "Tell Me Who to Kill", Dayo and his brother are separated from each other. It implies that the freedom exercised by the displaced individuals are not real freedom. They find themselves in complicated situations as their freedom ultimately took them away from their roots and traditional culture. The migrant space is marked by a temporality where past and present are juxtaposed in peculiar ways resulting in the construction of multiple subject positions.

The title of the eponymous narrative *In a Free State* refers to a newly independent—politically free—African state which is still in the grip of colonial power. It suggests that only political freedom cannot make people free from psychological dominance. The novel underscores the importance of psychological freedom; the absence of which causes alienation, anguish and loss of belongingness. In the novel, the pursuit of freedom and independence lead only to dislocation and alienation.

Here the two English expatriates—Bobby and Linda—travel by car across the country where the government is facing a revolution following independence. The writer creates a parallel between the political chaos of the country in post-independence period and the moral and psychological disorder of the couple. The country has given them the freedom to follow their mysterious cravings and other privileges. But it is also a place of violence

where they are humiliated and lose their so-called white supremacy and dominance. The expatriate British whites represent the rootless and homeless people of the contemporary world. Importantly, they find that freedom without a moral centre—like the freedom they cherish and pursue—can only lead to loneliness and anxiety.

The novel foregrounds the paradoxical nature of freedom in the modern African state and its attendant racial politics in the post-colonial phase. In a fictional replay of the horror of nationalism prophesied by Fanon, the novel shows how power politics and the tyranny exercised by indigenous African rulers unsettle the lives of outsiders and non-natives, irrespective of their contribution to the country. The modern-day African ruler in this Free State emerges as a new “oppressor”. On the other hand, the novel also shows the arrival of Westerners in the modern African state as advisers who play a crucial role in ensuring colonial control of the economy of the newly free nations.

Like Santosh, in the story “One out of Many,” Bobby is in a state of loss and helplessness in a newly independent African state. The African state is in turmoil but the white man has a role to play here. The very first lines of the novel signal a hybrid condition, contested positions:

IN THIS COUNTRY in Africa there was a president and there was also a king. They belonged to different tribes. The enmity of the tribes was old, and with independence their anxieties about one another became acute. The king and the president intrigued with the local representatives of white governments. The white men who were appealed to liked the king personally. But the president was stronger; the new army was wholly his, of his tribe; and the white men decided that the president was to be supported. So that at last, this weekend, the president was able to send his army against the king’s people. (99)

Bobby’s attitude towards the African landscape is shown as a mixture of participation and indifference. For both Bobby and Linda, the blacks that appear and disappear in the bush and the town are beyond their apprehension. They are presented as alienated individuals trapped in undesirable circumstances. In his very first encounter with a native in a bar, the homosexual Bobby is humiliated by the former. This South African Zulu boy spits on Bobby’s face as he tries to get familiar with him, clearly seeking sexual intimacy: “If I come in to the world again I want to come with your colour” (8). Bobby’s

humiliation at the hands of the native Zulu bears the unmistakable sign of degradation and threat to the westerner.

The whole bar is witness to this incident. The “blacks stared, whites looked away” and the event remained as Zulu “revolution: these visits to the New Shropshire, this fishing for White men” (8-9). The postcolonial scenario bears witness of a new kind of black/white relationship which is clearly hinted in Zulu boy’s comment: “Why do these white people want to be with the natives? A couple of years ago the natives couldn’t even come in here...” (102).

In the traditional colonial encounter, only the colonized were victims. But in the new world, there are colonizers too who were victims during colonialism or at the end of colonization. Clearly, in Naipaul’s work a colonizer-colonized encounter cannot anymore be presented as a one- directional will to power. The postcolonial world creates contractual and contested spaces that are fractured and full of contradictions. We find hints of such racial contamination in the Zulu boy's statement: “In this town there are even white whores now” (101).

The complex relationship between the colonizer and the colonized results in the destabilization of both. It is in this indeterminate hybrid zone that contractual spaces are marked and multiple identities emerge. This site is the site of slippage but also of a new contract. Here the hybrid is “half-acquiescent, half-oppositional,” and questions the authority of the colonizer.

Hybridity challenges cultural purity and authenticity and questions essential subject positions. In the African territory Bobby enters a contractual space that challenges his Western identity. The bar described in the novel turns out to be “the interracial pick up spot” where the young Africans came who were

high civil servants politicians or the relation of politicians, non-executive directors and managing directors of recently opened branches of big international corporations. They were the now men of the country and they saw themselves as men of power. They came to the New Shropshire to be seen and noted by white people. (100)

This bar is symptomatic of the contractual space that does not yield the expected results. Colonial ideology projected colonized women as sexually immoral and promiscuous. But

the presence of white prostitutes in postcolonial Africa raises questions about supposed white purity and white supremacy. Naipaul's sexual imagery pertaining to the bar points to a series of dramatic events:

The Zulu fanned himself with his cap and turned away. 'Why do these white people want to be with the natives? A couple of years ago the natives couldn't even come in here. Now look. It isn't nice. I don't think it is nice.' 'It must be different in South Africa,' Bobby said. 'What do you want to hear, mister? Listen, I'll tell you. I did pretty well in South Africa. I bought my whisky. I had my women. You'd be surprised.' 'I can see that many people would find you attractive.' 'I'll tell you.' The Zulu's voice dropped. His tone became conspiratorial as he began to give the names of South African politicians with whose wives and daughters he had slept. (102)

It can be argued that colonialism has adverse effects on both colonized and colonizing societies. It dehumanizes the colonizer just as it annihilates the identity of the colonized. In other words, in the contractual space there is no clear winner.

III

The language of literature can play out the tragedy of slavery and its consequences by way of indirection. Naipaul's *A Way in the World*, called a sequence in its English version, is a novel of such indirection. It uses socio-cultural, autobiographical and political elements. From his own sense of rootlessness Naipaul turns his attention to examine other displaced individuals who have become victims of colonialism. The book *A Way in the World*, like *In a Free State*, is comprised of a series of stories, both related and unrelated, told in sequence. So the stories are linked thematically by characters trying to make sense of their own lives in a contractual space. In a way, the novel offers alternative histories of the Caribbean islands that in turn come up as alternative histories of Spanish and British colonialism and imperialism. This time the contractual space is generated in alternative historiography where what is freedom for one is bondage for another. In a series of thematically linked narratives that historically reconstruct the lives and expeditions of Christopher Columbus, Sir Walter Raleigh and Francisco de Miranda, Naipaul presents several 'ordinary' characters whose lives cross the lives of the great figures. The narrator plays the role of interpreter of narratives that foreground the lives of

participants and witnesses in colonial history, which, viewed differently, can also be seen as the alternative history of freedom.

When the narrator first met Manuel Sorzano on a Venezuelan plane, his first assessment about Sorzano was that “he was an out-and-out Venezuelan, a coastal mestizo, a product of a racial mixture...” (219). When the narrator asked him where in Venezuela he lived, Sorzano answers in such a way which marks a sense of instability and fluidity: “All over. My work takes me all over. Presently I am in Ciudad Guayana. But I know all over. Barquisimeto, Tucupita, Maracaibo, Ciudad Bolívar. Even Margarita for a time” (220). Later on, the narrator comes to know that Manuel Sorzano is a Trinidadian Indian with a Hindi speaking Indian wife and children with Venezuelan names. He showed the narrator a plastic bag where he kept the “new records” of Hindi devotional songs which implies his desire to have a relationship with Hindu culture. But Sorzano’s children will no longer continue relationship to his ancestral culture as he has no “means of passing” the ancestral culture to his children who “had Spanish names and spoke only Venezuelan” (223). The character of Sorzano can be regarded as “an illustration of how Indians abroad have changed” (king 153). Thus Sorzano’s story shows the fluid and constructed nature of identity of diasporic Indians.

A new land, a new name, a new identity, a new kind of family life, new languages even (Surinam Hindi would have been different from the Hindi he would have heard in Trinidad) - his life should have been full of stress, but he gave the impression of living as intuitively as he had always done, making his way, surviving, with no idea of being lost or in a void. (222)

Referring to a book by Foster Morris titled *The Shadowed Livery* (1937), Naipaul argues that Morris’s book on the Trinidadian oilfield strikes is ‘well-intentioned’ but unrealistic:

What was missing from Foster Morris’s view was what we all lived with: the sense of the absurd, the idea of comedy, which hid from us our true position. The social depth he gave to ordinary people didn’t make sense. That idea of a background—and what it contained: order and values and the possibility of striving: perfectibility—made sense only when people were more truly responsible for themselves. We weren’t responsible in that way. Much had been taken out of our hands. We didn’t have backgrounds. We didn’t have a past. For most of us the past stopped without grandparents; beyond that was a blank. If you

could look down at us from the sky you would see us living in our little houses between the sea and the bush; and that was a kind of truth about us, who had been transported to that place. We were just there, floating. (79)

Referring to Leonard Side, a Trinidadian of Indian origin, the narrator shows that idea of hybridity is the core to one's ancestry and inheritance. Leonard has no clear idea of his ancestry. He was "a Mohammedan, everyone knew. But he was so much a man of his job—laying out Christian bodies, though nobody thought of it quite like that—that in that bedroom of his he even had a framed picture of Christ in Majesty, radiating light and gold, and lifting a finger of blessing" (6). Leonard's "idea of making dead body beautiful" upsets the narrator. Regarding the mysterious inheritance and confusing ancestry of Leonard the narrator says:

I can give you that historical bird's eye view. But I cannot really explain the mystery of Leonard Side's inheritance. Most of us know the parents or grandparents we come from. But we go back and back, forever; we go back all of us to the very beginning; in our blood and bone and brain we carry the memories of thousands of beings. I might say that an ancestor of Leonard Side's came from the dancing groups of Lucknow, the lewd men who painted their faces and tried to live like women. But that would only be a fragment of his inheritance, a fragment of the truth. We cannot understand all the traits we have inherited. Sometimes we can be strangers to ourselves. (9)

In the chapter "History: A Smell of Fish Glue" Naipaul focuses on the racial politics arising in Trinidad. The narrator meets his black friend's father, a lawyer, in Port of Spain. The father, whose first name was Evander, was a self-made man. In the course of his conversation, the lawyer brings up the issue of race:

"The race! The race, Man!"

The black race, the African race, the coloured races: I suppose that was what the lawyer meant.... (16)

Although the narrator is surprised at this disclosure, he is also a little embarrassed. The fact that an old man was thinking ahead to assertion of his raciality in a contractual space had its own implications. On one hand, he appeared to have his commitment to his race. On the other, he was purportedly working towards a mutual space of understanding:

This was in the late 1940s. Few black people at that time could see a way ahead. How strange, then, to find an old man, a man born in the last century, to whom the way ahead was clear, something he could even toast, with an instinctive gesture across the desk that twenty years later might have been seen as a black-power salute. What was stranger was that the public idea of Evander, my friend's father, was not like this at all. In the gossip Evander was the self-made black man who wanted only to be white, wanted to have nothing to do with black people, and in everything he did was fighting only for himself.

This other dream was like a family secret, which father and son were now admitting me to. I was moved, but at the same time embarrassed. I understood their feelings, shared them to some extent, but I wished, even with that understanding, to belong to myself. I couldn't support the idea of being part of a group. (17)

There was no scope for factionalism in the existing scenario. Hence, the embarrassment of the narrator in the face of Evander's race consciousness.

We are told about the missions of discovery of Raleigh and countless others to the New World. The myth of El Dorado, the city of gold motivated Raleigh to quest for it which ultimately led him to his own ruin.

Similarly, the chapter "A Parcel of Papers, A Roll of Tobacco, A Tortoise: An Unwritten Story" is the story of Sir Walter Raleigh, the English Explorer—his quest for gold mine of El Dorado in Guiana in South America, his imprisonment and subsequent execution. Raleigh was imprisoned in the Tower of London "because of some trouble with the king" (157). However, he was released from prison on condition that he would begin another exploration in search of gold failing which he would be executed. However, Raleigh failed in the expedition miserably and returned to England in a state of distress. We find him in a desolate state in prison with severe bruises all over his body awaiting his own execution. Raleigh's exploration, his futile endeavour to discover gold mine in El Dorado, the immeasurable physical pain, death and desolation in the course of the expedition shows that in the colonial conquest "there are equal dangers for the colonizing European" (Leavis 145). In the colonizing mission, many Europeans also became the victims of this process.

Much of the section takes in the form of dialogue between Raleigh and his surgeon. In this conversation, Raleigh reveals his adventures, his disappointments and frustration. In the words of Gillian Dooley:

It is as if the surgeon is speaking for Naipaul, putting to Raleigh the history of his activities in Trinidad and Venezuela, occasionally asking him for clarification on points that have puzzled him, but in the main, setting out the facts as in an indictment. There is a quasi-judicial air about it, like a public officer reading his evidence in court. (125)

Raleigh's story provides ample scope to reconsider the destructive impact of colonialism on the colonizer. In the name of colonial conquest, there were also many Europeans also who had to bear pain and suffering. The victimization of Europeans in the colonizing process may appear insignificant in comparison to the history of pain and dispossession of millions of uprooted and displaced people, the traumatic experience of the negroes in the name of slavery, the predicament of indentured labourers in alien territory and so on. But it may help us ample scope to reconsider certain assumptions upon which fundamental binary patterning like colonizer/colonized rests.

The story of Lebrun, the Trinidadian-Panamanian communist, is the story of hybrids:

He [Lebrun] belonged to the first generation of educated black men in the region. For a number of them...there was no honourable place at home in their colony or in the big countries. They were in-between people...They came and went; they talked big in one place—the United States, England, the West Indies, Panama, Belize—about the things they were doing somewhere else. Some of them became eccentric or unbalanced; some attached themselves to the Back-to-Africa movement (though Africa was itself at that time colonized); some became fraudsters. (119)

Lebrun's story is juxtaposed with that of Phyllis, a French speaking woman from Guadeloupe. In Paris, Phyllis marries an African, but the marriage "had broken down almost as soon as she had come to Africa with her husband" (135). When the marriage fails she goes to live in French speaking West Africa. Phyllis is showed as a woman on the move—without any sense of rootedness and fixity. So, the conventional ideas of "home" and "belonging" donot work in the case of Phyllis whose subject position

fluctuate between different spaces. Her identity constantly oscillates between different “constructs” of the world. Instead of emphasizing ideas of roots and rootedness; Phyllis’s subject position can be viewed as a process of movement and mediation between diverse spaces. Regarding the fluid nature of her character, Naipaul comments:

WE ALL inhabit “constructs” of a world. Ancient peoples had their own. Our grandparents had their own; we cannot absolutely enter into their constructs. Every culture has its own: men are infinitely malleable. And perhaps Phyllis, with the fluidity of character which her African life had given her, enabling her to be many things to many people (critical of Africans, critical of Europeans, critical of West Indians and black Americans, critical of one group by reference to another), perhaps Phyllis, with her initial French-speaking limitations (Guadeloupe, Paris, West Africa), had established her own further construct of the world. Perhaps in that fluidity, in that shiftiness, she had found freedom. Perhaps, as the years went on, she would recede more and more from her own background; perhaps logic would leave her. (154-155)

Similarly, there is the story of the Venezuelan revolutionary Francisco de Miranda (1750-1816):

[H]e had made himself over many times—becoming a lover of liberty among the Americans; a revolutionary among the French; a Mexican nobleman and a count among the grandees of the Russia of Catherine the Great; a ruler in exile among the British, a man who could open up a whole continent to British manufactures—so in his projections Venezuela and South America had been steadily adapted to the fantasies of late eighteenth-century European thinkers. (241)

Miranda is a victim of colonial power politics that leads to his doom. Miranda’s aspiration for power, wealth and fame leads to self degradation. Just as he betrays his men during the failed Venezuelan revolution, he is also betrayed by those very men who called him out from London to lead the Venezuelan revolution, and afterwards, ‘decide to hand him to the Spaniards’ (242). Miranda’s ambition and dreams end in failure. He dies a sad and pathetic man in jail in Cadiz.

Raleigh is executed and Miranda dies in jail. Both have had roles to play in Trinidad, though the history of the country never had any direct bearing on the grand dreams and failures of the two men. They evolve as agents of great colonizing missions as well as revolutionaries and intellectuals whose tragedies matched the tragedy of the men and women of Trinidad under colonialism. Once we look at history as a contractual space where human beings play out different roles, it is clear why Naipaul is interested in combining the histories of victors and victims together. In this combinatorial history, repeatedly played out in contractual spaces created for specific personnel and for specific purposes, the colonizer and colonized come together, sometimes as specular images of each other.

IV

The works of VS Naipaul focus on the themes of dislocation, fragmentation, exile, displaced histories, enigma of decentered experiences and quest for identity in a postcolonial world. In the novel *Half a Life* Naipaul deals with the dilemma of uprooted individuals and their struggle to discover their identities. The novel mainly recounts the life of Willie Somerset Chandran, his quest for identity, his experiences and his realization of halfness in life in a multi-dimensional socio-cultural environment. The novel records Willie's exiled life and his search for self-knowledge. Willie's search for a stable identity takes him across three countries, India, England and Africa. The first part of the novel is set in post-independent India. The second part constitutes Willie's struggle for existence in London and the third section is set in Africa.

The very first sentence of the novel reveals Willie's dilemma regarding identity: "WILLIE CHANDRAN asked his father one day, 'Why is my middle name Somerset? The boys at school have just found out and they are mocking me'" (1). Willie's query about his middle name unfolds before him the paradoxical nature of his existence—the complicated picture which relates to his family history, cultural heritage and roots. The revelation of history instills a sense of shame in him. Willie's father studied at the university and had English education which he decided to give up "in response to the Mahatma's call." (2) By marrying a low caste woman he also revolted against his family tradition and decided to sacrifice himself, "a lasting kind of sacrifice, something the mahatma would have approved of." (10) But it is ironical that he who begins his self discovery by revolting against his ancestry is compelled to take sanctuary in the very

tradition he detested. He tells Willie: “I began to think of taking sanctuary in the famous old temple in the town. Like my grandfather. At this moment of supreme sacrifice I fell, as if by instinct, into old ways” (26). Thus, he returns to the space provided by tradition which he previously shunned by embracing the revolutionary ideals of Mahatma.

Like his father, Willie also finds himself in a contradictory position between his Brahmin father and his low caste mother. Besides, Willie’s middle name Somerset, which is borrowed from the famous English writer Somerset Maugham, also leads to a crisis of identity. Willie cannot possess a western identity simply by possessing a western name.

It is interesting to see that Willie and his sister study at the mission school because their mother sends them to study there. Willie longed to go to Canada, where his teachers came from. He even thought of adopting their religion and “become like them and travel the world teaching.” (39) When Willie was asked to write an English ‘composition’ about his holidays “he pretended he was a Canadian, with parents who were called ‘Mom’ and ‘Pop’” (39)

All the details of this foreign life- the upstairs house, the children’s room- had been taken from American comic books which had been circulating in the mission school. These details had been mixed up with local details, like the holiday clothes and the holiday sweets, some of which Mom and Pop had at one stage out of their own great content given to half naked beggars. This composition was awarded full marks, ten out of ten, and Willie was asked to read it out to the class. (40)

To escape from the present circumstances and to redefine himself Willie goes to London “with no idea of what he wanted to do, except to get away from what he knew, and yet with very little idea of what lay outside what he knew, only with the fantasies of the Hollywood films of the thirties and forties that he had seen at the mission school...” (51). But he fails to obtain a place of his own in London.

Besides, the education he gets gives him no relief: “He was unanchored, with no idea of what lay ahead. He still had no idea of the scale of things, no idea of historical time or even of distance.” (58) At the college Willie had to “re-learn everything that he knew. He had to learn how to eat in public.” (58-59) He loses not only his native cultural heritage

but also his sense of place. He identifies neither with his original homeland nor with the new world. Willie tries to adjust there by re-making himself and his past. "By re-making himself intentionally, Willie invents or recreates a myth of origin centered on his family's history in an attempt to gain acceptability and to manage his developing new world." (Colon 173) In search of his identity in a strange place Willie projects a make-believe identity through fictional recreations of his past.

[H]e adapted certain things he had read, and he spoke of his mother as belonging to an ancient Christian community of the subcontinent, a community almost as old as Christianity itself. He kept his father as a brahmin. He made his father's father 'courtier'. So, playing with words, he began to remake himself. It excited him, and began to give him a feeling of power. (61)

In London, Willie comes close to other half lives and exiles. One of them is Percy Cato who was "a Jamaican of mixed parentage and was more brown than black" (61). Like Willie, Percy was ashamed of his background and he "appeared to have no proper place in the world and could be both Negro and not Negro in his ways." (62). When Percy tells Willie that his father went to work on the Panama Canal as a clerk, Willie thought that he was lying: "That's a foolish story. His father went there as a labourer. He would have been in one of the gangs, holding his pickaxe before him on the ground, like the others, and looking obediently at the photographer." (62)

As a youth, Willie failed to understand his father's dilemma. But, his struggle in London helped him to see his father in the proper perspective. He says: "I used to think that the world was easy for him as a Brahmin and that he became a fraud out of idleness. Now I began to understand how hard the world must have been for him" (58).

His writing helps him to understand himself a little better. After the release of his book of stories Willie receives a letter from Ana, a mixed race young girl from a Portuguese African country, who has admired his writing. In the company of the girl Willie feels like a complete man.

She behaved as though she had always known him, and had always liked him...And what was most intoxicating for Willie was that for the first time in his life he felt himself in the presence of someone who accepted him completely. At home his life had been ruled by his mixed inheritance. It spoilt everything. (125)

Willie was completely overwhelmed by “her voice, her accent, her hesitations over certain English words, her beautiful skin, the authority with which she handled money”(126). It was Ana’s halfness that brings Willie closer to her: “It was possible that she belonged to a mixed community or stood in some other kind of half-and-half position” (124).

Ana takes Willie to her estate house in Africa where he found himself alienated just as in India and London. He felt estranged from Ana, and visited African prostitutes. After spending eighteen years there, he told Ana that he couldn’t continue living with her. Willie was brought face to face with his own passivity, and he tells Ana that he is leaving. “I’ve given you eighteen years. I can’t give you any more. I can’t live your life any more. I want to live my own” (136), he says. His life in Africa did not help him to overcome the sense of being unanchored and he came to this realization: “I have been hiding from myself. I have risked nothing. And now the best part of my life is over” (138).

Willie keeps drifting from India through London to Africa to construct his own identity. In Africa, Willie remains a stranger, just as in India and London. Besides, the loss of his native language due to his migration aggravates his sense of alienation. In London, he learns to handle English well. But in Africa, Willie has to communicate in another language. During his journey from Southampton to Ana’s African country, Willie is in a dilemma whether he would be able to hold on to his own language.

He thought about the new language he would have to learn. He wondered whether he would be able to hold on to his own language. He wondered whether he would forget his English, the language of his stories.... Willie was trying to deal with the knowledge that had come to him on the ship that his home language had almost gone, that his English was going, that he had no proper language left, no gift of expression. (132)

Willie feels alienated from the environment in Africa, and swears to himself that he will leave as soon as possible. “I must never behave as though I am staying”, (135) he tells himself. But, despite initial reluctance he stays there for eighteen years. In Africa, Willie comes across ‘second rank Portuguese’ (145): estate owners who are mixed-race people, since ‘most of them have an African grandparent’ (145). In his attempt to assimilate in the new environment, Willie is divided within himself. His travels bring

him into contact with many more people who are leading half lives as exiles. He says: ...[T]he World I had entered was only half – and – half world, that many of the people who were our friends considered themselves, deep down, people of the second rank. They were not fully Portuguese, and that was where their own ambition lay” (160).

The novel shows the dilemma and predicament of those Portuguese who stayed back in the African country. The predicament of loss of belonging and identity is a product of colonization which afflicted not only the colonized but also the colonizers. During the colonial period, a huge European population dispersed from their ancestral homeland and many of them also settled in the colonies.

The identity of these Europeans is always constructed in an ambivalent contractual and in-between space where they have to negotiate between different locations, diverse cultures and identities. Ana’s Grandfather “had sent his two half-African daughters to school in Portugal, and everyone knew that he wanted them to marry proper Portuguese, to breed out the African inheritance he had given them in the hard days when he had lived very close to the land with less and less idea of another world outside” (152). The half-breed inheritance is a burden that he wants to get rid of. His progeny would get deeper into it in the process of trying to get rid of it.

It should be clear that the colonial detritus mutates and, in the process, forces other mutations within and without. There are also the Correias, for example, who “were proud of their aristocratic name” and who “lived with the idea of a great disaster about to happen” (161). To live with the idea of a disaster implies an unknown insecurity amidst which the Correias have to spend their days in the African country. They stayed there with a sense of loss and alienation. They are devoid of a secured space. Now, neither Portugal nor Africa can provide them the sense of security and comfort. Naipaul further comments:

They were not sure what this disaster was going to be, whether it was going to be local or worldwide, but they felt it was going to do away with their security both in Africa and Portugal. So, they had bank accounts in London, New York and Switzerland. The idea was that when the bad time came they would have an ‘an envelope’ of ready money in at least one of these places. (161)

Gouveia, the architect from Portugal “spoke with relish of the blood to come, almost in the way Jacinto Correia used to talk in the old days. We decided he was a white man pretending to be a black man. It was a type we were just beginning to get in the colony, playboy figures, well-to-do, full Portuguese, people like Gouveia, in fact, who could cut and run or look after themselves if there was any real trouble” (218). Similar was the situation with Graca whose “two children had gone with many of her relatives to Portugal. ‘I was angry with them. In Portugal they will have to prepare papers to say who they are. How can anyone do that? How can anyone say who he is? They will prepare papers to say they are Portuguese’” (225). It is impossible to make out who is pure and who is a half-breed, such is the power of dispersal under colonialism.

Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures on a global scale. As Said puts it: the “worst and most paradoxical gift” of imperialism “was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white, or black, or Western, or Oriental.” (*Culture and Imperialism* 407-408). On the other hand it created conditions where this belief was challenged by the comingling of people in spite of what the colonial state mandated.

Magic Seeds is a sequel to *Half a Life*. As the novel opens Willie has left Africa and is living “in a temporary, half-and-half way” with his sister Sarojini. He is aimlessly drifting in search of meaning and a sense of selfhood. But all his attempts prove futile when Sarojini ask him if there is anything he wants to do Willie replies: “I don’t see what I can do. I don’t know where I can go” (1). To escape from the half life in London, Willie goes to Africa seeking solidity and meaning in his disordered life and he spends eighteen years there among half-Portuguese people with his “half-white” wife Ana. Following Sarojini’s advice, Willie decides to go to India to join in a revolutionary movement whose leader was Kandapalli. The aim of this peasant movement is to fight for the emancipation of the poor low-caste Indian villagers from the exploitation of land owners. So, “[a]fter more than twenty years, Willie saw India again. He had left India with very little money, the gift of his father, and he was going back with very little money, the gift of his sister” (26). As Willie comes across various locales, different cultures, multiple identities during these years, he has to consider India in a new way:

‘Twenty years ago I wouldn’t have seen what I am seeing now. I am seeing what I see because I have made myself another person. I cannot make myself that old person again. But I must go back to that old way of seeing. Otherwise my cause

is lost before I have begun. I have come from a world of waste and appearances. I saw quite clearly some time ago that it was a simple world, where people had been simplified. I must not go back on that vision. I must understand that now I am among people of more complicated beliefs and social ideas, and at the same time in a world stripped of all style and artifice...’ (27)

Willie takes part in the peasant revolution which does not last. As Willie gradually comes to realize that the true spirit of revolution is missing he is totally perplexed and frustrated: “‘There has been some mistake. I have fallen among the wrong people. I have come to the wrong revolution. I don’t like these faces. And yet I have to be with them” (49). Willie is carrying experiences from various places. His movement from India to England and then to a Portuguese colony in Africa—and then back to India—is the sign of a restless soul in a restless world.

To Willie, places appear to be real from a distance. But his arrival in those places alters his ideas. The constructed nature of place is expressed in what Willie says to Bhoj Narayan : “... Words can give wrong ideas. The names of places can give wrong ideas. They have too many grand associations. When you are in the place itself, London, Africa, everything can seem ordinary...” (59). This passage brings forth the constructed nature of ‘place.’ In this regard, Robert Bartlett in *The Making of Europe* makes a striking observation:

[T]hat terms such as ‘Americanization’ and ‘Europeanization’ do not always imply a strictly localizable ‘Europe’ or ‘America’ behind the process. The ‘America’ in the term ‘Americanization’ is not geographically exact; it is a construct. Similarly, ‘Europe’ is a construct, an image of a set of societies that can be seen as sharing something. (269)

It is the co-presence of real and imaginary that produces a sense of temporality in Willie’s position as a subject. The interaction of fantasy and reality does not offer any clarity of vision. Rather it defers endlessly the possibility of the “ideal”. Meaning and identity are contested in an *in-between* space where fact and fantasy mingle in peculiar ways resulting in intervention of essential subject position. In a given context, a specific subject position may appear ideal and real. But the very next moment it may lose its seeming coherence and stability due to the presence of other positions. What matters

most is how and why, in a given situation, a specific subject position takes shape, acquires a seeming fixity and ideality, and configures with other positions.

The presence of both “actual” and the “abstract” is also perceptible in the case of the revolution where Willie takes part. It is seen that although it is a peasant revolution even the peasants doesnot not respond to it as they should be. In formal discussions, the squad leaders create “fiction of successful revolution” and their discussions turn out to be “more and more abstract” (140). Thus, the revolution gets dissociated from concrete reality and become pure abstraction. Among the leaders, debate on topics like landlordism and imperialism; peasantry and industrial proletariat alienate the revolution from ground reality and turn it into “a matter of these abstract words” (140). Thus, the gap between ideal and reality—that is, political reality and ideals of activism—creates contradictions and pushes the revolution from its intended path.

Willie joins what looks like a Maoist movement for the liberation of the lower castes in the forests of India. It is a difficult time for Willie, a lowering into yet another kind of life: “[P]atternless labour, without reward or goal, without solitude or companionship, without news from the outside world, with no prospect of letters from Sarojini, with nothing to anchor himself to” (108). Willie’s transformation into a nomad and an insurgent is ironical to say the least. He never knows what he is to do, or why. However, he tries to understand his comrades Bhoj Narayan, Ramachandra and so on.

When I first saw Ramachandra handling his gun with his small bony hands, I saw him as a killer and a fanatic. Now already I am losing that vision of him. In this of understanding I am losing touch with myself. (114)

Willie does not realize that he and his comrades are motivated by a “pastoral vision” of peasants and peasant labour. Ironically, however, “What this pastoral vision did not contain was the idea that the village ... was full of criminals as limited and vicious and brutal as the setting whose existence had nothing to do with the idea of oppression” (128). The comrades of Willie think of the peasants and the labourers as noble revolutionaries. At last, Willie abandons the revolution and surrenders to the police. In utter frustration, Willie writes a letter to his sister from the prison cell. In the letter, Willie writes: “That war was not yours or mine and it had nothing to do with the village people we said we were fighting for. We talked about their oppression, but we were exploiting them all the times. Our ideas and words were more important than their lives

and their ambitions for themselves.”(16). At last Sarojini recruits Roger, an English lawyer and publisher who had known Willie during his student life. With the help of Roger, Willie is out of jail and in London again. This book ends with Willie reflecting on his life and on Britain’s multi-racial identity.

The introduction of Marcus, the “West African diplomat,” into the narrative adds to the problem of half-breeds, not only of the body but also of the mind. Marcus’ only ambition in life is to have a white grandchild. Roger explains Marcus’s ambition in this way: “Marcus lived for inter-racial sex, and wanted to have a white grandchild. He wanted when he was an old man to walk down the King’s Road holding the hand of this white grandchild. People would stare, and the child would say to Marcus, ‘What are they staring at, grandfather?’” (240). His obsession with the white grandchild takes an interesting turn when his “half-English” son Lyndhurst gives him “two grandchildren, one absolutely white, one not so white” (240). The wedding can be viewed as an example of racial hybridity which takes place in their abandoned country house with “derelict gardens” (288) and “half-dead orchard” (289). The writer describes a scene where a black-and-white couple attends the wedding ceremony. This couple looks like

a “human installation” of modern art, miming out the symbolism of the occasion. The white girl, in a blue skirt and red silk top, clung to the man around his waist, hiding her face against his bare chest.... Every detail was considered. He drew all eyes. He outshone everyone, but he himself was lost behind his tinted glasses, concentrating on his burden. With the girl clinging on he appeared to be walking sideways and sometimes backwards because of her weight. People made room for them. They were like stars in the middle of a chorus on a stage. (289-290)

When Lyndhurst and the bride appear with their children “one dark, one fair, the fair supporting the groom, the dark supporting the bride” (291), someone read a speech from *Othello* and someone reads a Shakespeare sonnet. The irony is lost on Marcus, but what happens next is even more interesting:

The fair child began to cry. She was in some distress. Marcus ran to her, took her little hand and began slowly to walk her out of the box enclosure to where the toilet facilities were. Someone, an old lady, seeing the old grey-haired black man running to the distressed white child, imagined old sentimentalities and involuntarily clapped, very delicately; then someone else clapped; and then

Marcus and his grandchild were walking to general applause, and Marcus, understanding only after some seconds that the applause was meant for him, and meant kindly, began to smile, looking to left and right, bowing slightly, and leading the white child to where she wanted to go. (292)

This grand-parenting role played by Marcus is reminiscent of the role played by black servants—slaves as well as non-slaves—in white homes in England and colonial mansions abroad. Marcus realizes that the applause is not exactly one of approbation, given that it resonates with race histories. However, he realizes that one has to make peace with the emotional, economic and corporeal detritus created by colonialism and its aftermath. He says with a note of finality that looking for purity is wrong. This is important, given the interracial mix into which characters would be thrown with increasing regularity even after the end of colonialism. The irony of the magic seeds is finally clear.

V

We see that the Tramp, Santosh, Dayo's brother, Bobby, Columbus, Raleigh, Miranda, Lebru, Phyllis, Willie, and Marcus—and the other 'magic seeds'—operate in the *in-between* space where dominant notions of identity and belonging are no longer viewed as authentic and stable. This ambivalent space—contractual as well as contested—challenges the traditional ideas of fixity and rootedness. It also creates new ways of thinking about belonging and identity that question certainties of roots. It opens up transnational models of identity which emphasizes on both physical and imaginative crossing of border. Such border crossings produce new dynamic and complex forms of representation that deny dominant narratives of identity and belonging. Instead of positing identity in an unproblematic ground, it emphasizes on articulation of identity in a transitory, liminal, contractual space where seemingly opposed states come together and negotiate. It goes beyond older static models of identity and subjectivity.

In such a condition, binary opposites remain no longer separate and distinct. Rather, transnational models of representation pave way to transcend rigid binary patterning. In Willie's case, the mixing of diverse cultural forms and ways of life places him in a contractual space of negotiation which makes impossible for him to retain a stable subject position. The fluid *in between* space facilitates transformation and the traditional

rigid models of identity categories are dissolved giving way to new ways to define ourselves.

To live with a sense of fluidity is to live with the ideas of both freedom and uncertainty. It prepares a person to be adaptive to accept different roles in different places. On the contrary it also gives rise to a feeling of being lost and unanchored; separation from the material reality and solidity of things. Willie's subject position is constantly evolving and constantly reconfigured in different cultural climate. The mixing and oscillating of different cultural contexts makes Willie's identity rather an ambivalent one. Thus, any attempt to attain the 'ideal' and a fixed identity is endlessly deferred. Likewise, there is no pre-given ultimate reality which can be objectively known. Reality is always mediated by culturally constructed representations.

In Naipaul's work history and cultural identity are always under process and under erasure—always in the state of being negotiated, challenged and revised. Instead of having an unmediated reality, we can conceive identity through mutant representations. In a given context, cultural negotiations produce provisional truths which may appear to be fixed for a brief moment. However, in the long run, it is always replaced by alternative realities. Thus, new cultural truths produced through transactions are attractive and vulnerable. No system of thought can be held on an unproblematic ground of pre-given neutral reality. There are no magic seeds, Naipaul seems to suggest, whether in the contractual space or outside. The Joycean solution is the beginning, not the end, of the process.