

## **CHAPTER TWO**

UNLOCKING THE DISPOSSESSED: *THE MYSTIC  
MASSEUR, MIGUEL STREET AND  
A FLAG ON THE ISLAND*

I am a man without identity. Hate has consumed my identity....how terrible to be Caliban, you say. But I say, how tremendous. (Naipaul, *A Flag on the Island* 154)

In my moods I tell myself that the world is not being washed away; that there is time; that the blurring of fantasy with reality which gives me the feeling of helplessness exists only in my mind. But then I know that the mind is alien and unfriendly, and I am never able to regulate things. (Naipaul, *A Flag* 158)

Much of the exile's life is taken up with compensating for disorienting loss by creating a new world to rule....The exile's new world, logically enough, is unnatural and its unreality resembles fiction. (Said, *Reflections*, 181)

Naipaul's subject was an impoverished area of Port of Spain with its cultural diversity, fantasies, chaotic and changing standards, its fashions and imitation of style, its mistaken notions of masculinity and mistreatment of women, its self-defeating excuses, its limitations and the improbability of achievement from those living in such an environment. (Bruce King, *VS Naipaul* , 24)

The aim of this chapter is to examine the predicament of dispossession, identity crisis, mimicry and inferiority as reflected in VS Naipaul's *The Mystic Masseur*, *Miguel Street* and *A Flag on the Island*. As a postcolonial writer, Naipaul's works deal with anxieties of uprooted Indians in Trinidad, their longing for the ancestral landscape amidst assimilation into multicultural and multi-racial Trinidad. From his own position of displacement, Naipaul turns his attention to other half-made societies of the world which are afflicted by the burden of a borrowed culture, alienation, inferiority, and mimicry.

Displacement of people as a result of transcontinental migration associated with colonialism and its aftermath, has raised issues relating to the experiences of homelessness, the predicament of minorities, identity crisis, race, ethnicity, sexuality etc. These issues have been intensively explored in both postcolonial theory and postcolonial literature. The postcolonial diaspora narratives demonstrate the nostalgia of the people for their distant homelands and the effort to retain their racial and ethnic identity in their

host countries. The concept of home incorporates ideas of inclusions as well as exclusions. In the condition of migrancy, 'home' and 'abroad' are mingled in such a way that they no longer remain merely as fixed geographical locations. They are always in a constant process of appropriation and negotiation that makes up the diasporic subjects. The concept of 'home' has undergone a process of change. It is increasingly considered as a construct of the imagination.

Migrants live in one country but acknowledge their cultural and emotional affiliation with the old country. It is important to note that as only the first generation diasporas have direct experience of 'past migration,' the sense of alienation they encounter is more acute. The descendents of diasporas may not feel the same emotional and spiritual attachment with the homeland of their ancestors. "Generational differences" make the formation of a monolithic diasporic identity a contesting one.

In the case of diasporas, the uprooting, the loss of home have a disintegrating effect on their mind and spirit. Home is the character and atmosphere of a place in which one's childhood has flowered and matured into youth. Home stands for security, shelter and comfort. Home is not simply a place where one lives. It is one's identity--national, cultural, spiritual. Home is the soil that has nurtured one's body and spirit. The concept of Home encompasses one's joys and miseries, all the sights, smells and sounds that envelop one's childhood and form part of one's consciousness.

According to James Clifford, "Diaspora cultures...mediate, in a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place" (*Postcolonial Studies Reader* 453). The idea of 'home' and belonging is integral to the diasporic condition. Being in a diaspora implies a conflict between being in one location physically and longing for another distant land. They try to maintain and restore what is clearly an idealized homeland. They often express a desire to go back to their homelands. But the truth is that they can never be 'at home' again in the homelands they dream of. In this fast changing world, they cannot regain their homelands in their pristine states. Even if they get the opportunity to return they may discover themselves alienated in their former homelands.

A conflict between the culture of origin and culture of adoption is common to diasporic communities. Naipaul's fiction deals with a variety of migrations, dislocations, exile and the enigma of dispossessed individuals in the postcolonial world. Diasporic writing

oscillates between real and imaginary homeland. As the former geographical territory becomes unattainable, the settlers reconstruct an imaginary homeland in the new location. They leave home and take up residence in an alien territory. But the concept of home is not confined to a home, but may be extended to a wider social space, even a nation' (Gera 28).

Due to generational differences migrants occupy different subject positions and they may share both similarities and differences with their descendents. So, we cannot think of constructing an essential migrant identity, as, migrants are heterogenous and diverse in their nature. Totalising notions of race, ethnicity, nationalism attempt to accommodate individuals within a homogenized group. Discourses of migrancy and diaspora challenge such essentialised notions of identity constructions and facilitate hybrid spaces where binary opposites no longer remain separate and distinct. Rather, complex forms of representations emerge suggesting *in-between* sites of ambivalence which may dismantle essential subject positions.

It may not be out of place here to mention Patrick French's contention that there may not be complete homogeneity within a diasporic community. While discussing the traumatic experience of the Indian immigrants during their voyage and their subsequent hardships as plantation workers, French notes:

Hundreds of passengers might die from a contagious disease during a single voyage. They lived below decks in three compartments – men, women and couples – lit by fixed coconut-oil lamps, and in the daytime were allowed to come to the upper deck to walk, wrestle or engage in stick fighting. Flogging was the standard punishment for disobedience....On the plantation, coolies would start work at six in the morning, stop for breakfast at ten thirty and continue work until four in the afternoon. They were paid a token wage of two to four shillings a week. (*The Authorised Biography of VS Naipaul* 11)

It is important to note that, their purpose of migration was never identical. French writes that among the Indian migrants, there were many displaced, landless peasants for whom the voyage to Trinidad "as a bonded or indentured labourer was an alternative to destitution" (5). Discussing the diverse socio-cultural backgrounds of those Indian migrants, French further notes: "Most single women who chose to emigrate were recruited from urban areas rather than villages, and in many cases they had already run

away from home or a bad husband, or been expelled for a social transgression, and were seeking to avoid prostitution” (10). Considering French’s statements, it can be argued that as those migrant Indians belonged to diverse cultural and economic backgrounds, they cannot be easily homogenized as an essential diasporic community. Therefore, the construction of a generalized diasporic community and an essentialised diasporic subject is not always justifiable.

For the Indian migrants in Trinidad, India becomes a dream land, as they are far removed from their ancestral landscape. For them, India exists only in the imagination. Naipaul comments: “The India where Gandhi and Nehru and the others operated was historical and real. The India from which we had come was impossibly remote, almost as imaginary as the land of the *Ramayana*, our Hindu epic” (*Literary Occasions* 89). From India, Trinidad was viewed and imagined as a place of possibility and promise. But the hardships and miserable conditions they encountered after their arrival reversed their earlier notions. So, at the end of their contracts, many of them decided to come back to India. But their journey back to India proves that the ‘imaginary India’ they constructed in Trinidad ‘is *discontinuous* with the real location’ (McLeod 209). Thus, they are caught in a dilemma: neither Trinidad nor India can provide a sense of home.

In his early novels set in Trinidad, Naipaul is mainly concerned about the miserable conditions of dislocated Indians. For the first generation migrants, India exists as a real location. They could establish a direct and “natural” link with their original homeland. But for the later generation immigrants India had become an imaginary and illusory place. Thus, for those Indian migrants, home becomes a mental construct and the ‘imaginary homelands are constructed...to compensate for a loss occasioned by an unspeakable trauma’ as Mishra points out (*Postcolonial Studies Reader* 449).

To compensate the loss of their ancestral homeland, the Trinidad Indians make efforts to re-create an imaginary India in the alien landscape. Naipaul notes: “They were taking India with them. With their blinkered view of the world they were able to re-create eastern Uttar Pradesh or Bihar wherever they went” (*Literary Occasions* 43). The India they had recreated was the India they could recall, based on their knowledge of a part of the vast country. Naipaul explains that the India they had created endured because

Trinidad was stagnant in the nineteenth century....It was an India in which a revolution had occurred. It was an India in isolation...without caste or the

overwhelming pressures towards caste. Effort had a meaning, and soon India could be seen to be no more than a habit, a self-imposed psychological restraint, wearing thinner with the years. (43)

For them, India has become illusory—a land of no return. It turns into a land of imagination rather than a real physical location. For the indentured labourers India becomes, as Brah points out, ‘a mythic place of desire.’

Naipaul’s novel *The Mystic Masseur* deals with the acculturation of the East Indians in Trinidad, their move from isolated rural existence to city life and creolization which means moving away from their East Indian identity. In the novel, the fact that Ganesh Ramsumair becomes G. Ramsay Muir indicates both personal and cultural transformation. Ganesh moves from Indian peasantry to metropolitan life. To escape and overcome the shortcomings of the society, Ganesh is ‘advantageously juxtaposed’ (using Benedict Anderson’s phrase), to Trinidad’s racial plurality. Ganesh changed from *dhoti and koortah* to trousers and shirts. In his new persona, the tenets of Hinduism and Christianity, superstition and rationality, tradition and modernity, Indian and western merge. This is a significant change.

*The Mystic Masseur* exemplifies the attempts of Trinidad Indians to re-create their ancestral homeland through re-enactment of Hindu rituals. But, it is important to note that migrant experience cannot be generalized. The construction of a homogenized migrant community is contested on the ground that different generations of migrants may respond differently to their migrant experience. It is seen that generational differences also play a crucial role as first generation migrants often occupy different positions from their descendents. Besides, differences of class and gender also influence migrant communities and may challenge the representation of an essential migrant subject.

Naipaul is “highly critical of the mythologized, claustrophobic orthodox Hindu world reconstructed in Trinidad’ (Gera 28). The attempts by the settlers to retain a link with the original homeland through a reenactment of rituals, appears unrealistic. In this attempt to bridge the gap between past and present, between the lost homeland and the new location, there always remain elements of lack, of discontinuity. On his father’s death, Ganesh performs the rites of cremation in a mechanical manner which signifies the loss of the sense of sanctity associated with this experience.

Ganesh didn't sleep that night and everything he did seemed unreal. Afterwards he remembered the solicitude of Ramlogan – and his daughter; remembered returning to the house where no fire could be lit, remembered the sad songs of the women lengthening out the night; then, in the early morning, the preparations for the cremation. He had to do many things, and he did without thought or question everything the pundit, his aunt, and Ramlogan asked him. He remembered having to walk round the body of his father, remembered applying the last caste-marks to the old man's forehead, and doing many more things until it seemed that ritual had replaced grief. (20)

The East Indians in Trinidad held on to the rituals and other religious practices although some of them became diluted in time. Ganesh performs his father's funeral rites but has too many things on his mind for genuine grief. The mechanical adherence to custom and ritual may be a desperate attempt on the part of these settlers in Trinidad to hold onto memories of their original culture and at the same time to meet social requirements through these performances.

Some of the mechanical conduct or apathy of the East Indians in the Caribbean, especially Trinidad, is mentioned by Naipaul in *The Middle Passage*:

There was an occasional racial protest, but that aroused no deep feelings, for it represented only a small part of the truth. Everyone was an individual, fighting for his place in the community. Yet there was no community....There was no nationalist feeling; there could be none. There was no profound anti-imperialist feeling; indeed it was our Britishness, our belonging to the British Empire, which gave us any identity. So protests could only be individual, isolated, unheeded. (36)

In decolonized Trinidad, there was no nationalist feeling in the real sense. There was no 'deep, horizontal comradeship' (using Benedict Anderson's term) for the making of a nation. Although the settlers lived amongst their own folk and community, there was no community in the sense of the members speaking with one voice. Then again members had to fight for a place within the community. The settlers from other parts of the world had their own cultural memories to cling to and this made for multi-ethnic, multi-cultural identities on these Caribbean islands. In view of the motley crowd and cultural identities,

it was most convenient to be presented as subjects of the British Empire.

In *The Mystic Masseur* Naipaul offers a subtly broader focus on the lives of individuals of the East Indian community. Distinguished by its alienation from the larger society, the East Indian community of this novel shares an openness to other cultural influences. The novel is concerned with the issues of colonial mimicry, and the conflict between tradition and modernity. The work examines Ganesh Ramsumair's rise to prominence from masseur to mystic to the position of an MBE (Member of the British Empire). The novel shows the duality of the East Indian's experience in Trinidad, as exemplified in the description of Ganesh's hut:

Nothing had prepared me for what I was to see inside Ganesh's hut. As soon as we entered my mother winked at me, and I could see that even the taxi-driver was fighting to control his astonishment. There were books, books, here, there, and everywhere; books piled crazily on the table, books rising in mounds in the corners, books covering the floor. I had never before seen so many books in one place. . . . I tried to forget Ganesh thumping my leg about and concentrated on the walls. They were covered with religious quotations, in Hindi and English, and with Hindu religious pictures. My gaze settled on a beautiful four-armed god standing in an open lotus. (5-6)

Ganesh was clearly trying to convey the image of an Indian ascetic, religious and scholarly, for the sake of his customers. He was also trying to show that he was at home with the Western and Oriental knowledge systems.

Migrant communities are seen trying to integrate with the life and culture of the new location even as they maintain certain ethnic differences. They are drawn inevitably into the assimilation process which may not always turn out to be a smooth kind of acculturation. Their old beliefs, customs and traditions – which stand for their identity and uniqueness – may become the subject of ridicule in the new land. In the novel, when Ganesh, dressed in a khaki suit and a khaki toupee, and his father with dhoti, *koortah*, white cap got to St Joseph, they become objects of ridicule for others. “Their dress and manner were no longer drawing looks of respect. People were smiling, and when they got off at the railway terminus in Port of Spain, a woman laughed” (*The Mystic Masseur*10). This points to the mixed nature of the population with cultural differences



that set one group apart from the other. There is also the generational gap—seen in the dress of Ganesh and his father—which indicates a greater degree of assimilation amongst the migrants in succeeding generations.

Further, migrants negotiate between two polarities—exile and homeland. The loss of roots creates this sense of exile. The old land – the land of security – is lost due to their migration. They have landed in a new territory which is alien, strange. In the novel, when Ganesh entered the Queen’s Royal College, he felt awkward because of his Indian name. As a member of a typical Indian family, Ganesh developed certain habits which also turn out to be peculiar in the new environment.

Ganesh never lost his awkwardness. He was so ashamed of his Indian name that for a while he spread a story that he was really called Gareth. This did him little good. He continued to dress badly, he didn’t play games, and his accent remained too clearly that of the Indian from the country. He never stopped being a country boy. He still believed that reading by any light other than daylight was bad for the eyes, and as soon as his classes were over he ran home to Dundonald Street and sat on the back steps reading. He went to sleep with the hens and woke before the cocks. (10-11)

Besides, as a part of the initiation ceremony, Ganesh’s head was shaved. When he goes to school, he becomes an object of laughter among the boys. He becomes a source of disturbance in the school for which the teacher gives him a warning: “‘Ramsumair, you are creating a disturbance in the school. Wear something on your head’” (11). This incident clearly shows the dilemma of dislocated individuals in an unfriendly atmosphere where their cultural traits become exotic for others.

The novel is concerned with negotiation between the Western world and the traditional Indian social reality. The safety and identity granted him by the country district and his Hinduism give way to insecurity and loss of identity in the city. In the case of Ganesh, a sense of alienation is created due to the clash between the urban world and religious/ethnic rituals from their former Indian world. Later on Ganesh engages in manipulation of Hindu rituals and ceremonies for political advantage, and at the same time exploits the benefits of western education in pursuit of recognition and success. Ganesh’s identity is constructed through negotiation and transaction between the world of Trinidad East Indians and the Western World. On the one hand, Ganesh is ashamed of

his Indian name and declares that he was actually called Gareth. On the other hand, Ramlogan's daughter Soomintra calls her son 'Jawaharlal, after the Indian leader' and her daughter 'Sarojini, after the Indian poetess' (74). In Soomintra's case, there is a looking at the past, old customs and tradition. On the contrary, Ganesh looks forward to the future, seeking new vistas, metropolitan recognition and success. Despite his attempts at integration, Ganesh is not above using the benefits of a hybrid culture and identity as and when they suit him.

Unable to adjust himself with the urban world Ganesh returns to the countryside and meets Mr. Steward, an Englishman, who advises him to find the "spiritual rhythm" of his life. Steward reminds Ganesh how ordinary his life is and tells him about the beauty and wonder of foreign lands. Mr Steward is a rootless individual whose identity is really ambivalent. When he appears in South Trinidad he dresses 'as a Hindu mendicant' and claims that 'he was Kashmiri' (27). But "nobody knew where he came from or how he lived...it was generally assumed that he was English, a millionaire, and a little mad"(27). One day he also showed Ganesh "statuettes he had made of Hindu gods and goddesses" (29). Mr Steward also told Ganesh "all about his life, his experiences in the First World War, his disillusionment, his rejection of Christianity" (30). Later on, Ganesh came to know that "he had returned to England and joined the army. He died in Italy" (31). Steward's ideas had a significant influence on Ganesh. Steward's case stands as an example of identity crisis of an Englishman who suffered from a sense of loss and dispossession.

A sense of desolation and gloominess pervades in the Trinidad landscape. The labourers had to live and work on that land. Trinidad had little else to offer:

The villagers went to work in the cane-fields in the dawn darkness to avoid the heat of day. When they returned in the middle of the morning the dew had dried on the grass; and they set to work in their vegetable gardens as if they didn't know that sugar-cane was the only thing that could grow in Fuente Grove. They had few thrills. The population was small and there were not many births, marriages, or deaths to excite them. Two or three times a year the men made a noisy excursion to a cinema in distant, wicked San Fernando. Little happened otherwise. (57)

Apart from the cinema, the rest of the landscape appears to be straight out of nineteenth century Trinidad. Very little seems to have happened there till the striking of oil offshore much after Naipaul had left the place as he informs. Trinidad was poor when he was a child. As he observes in *Finding the Centre*:

Trinidad was small, an island, a British colony. The maps...concentrating on British islands in the Caribbean, seemed to stress our smallness and was part of my past. That past lay over the older past...the setting of the aboriginal history I knew and had written about. (50)

What Naipaul tries to draw attention to is the encrustation of layers of culture and development, with time, on that desolate landscape. The Trinidad he had grown up in and the Trinidad he had returned to as a successful writer, were two different places altogether. For the early indentured workers from India, Trinidad did not have much to offer. Development or progress had not even distantly touched it. Even in Naipaul's childhood it had been a slow and sleepy place. Interestingly, however, this was the place where the East Indians had thrived as seen from the exploits of the characters in this and other Naipaul novels.

Returning to the world of *The Mystic Masseur*, it is seen that writing is the only means Ganesh has for imposing some sense into this world, though at this point in his development the act of writing is a curiosity whose implications Ganesh does not yet grasp. World War II further eroded feudal relations in the East Indian society and opened up new possibilities for the East Indians. More important, it encouraged Ganesh to undertake a deep examination of the Gita:

It gave a new direction to his reading. Forgetting the war, he became a great Indologist and bought all the books on Hindu philosophy he could get in San Fernando. He read them, marked them, and on Sunday afternoons made notes. At the same time he developed a taste for practical psychology and read many books on *The Art of Getting On*. But India was his great love. It became his habit, on examining a new book, to look first at the index to see whether there were any references to India or Hinduism. If the references were complimentary he bought the book. Soon he owned a curious selection. (102)

Through a process of ritual and magical incantation, Ganesh is brought into the mainstream of society. Taking advantage of his popularity as a mystic Ganesh explores his prospects in politics. What begins as a purely religious and social matter becomes a national matter. Ganesh's running for the Legislative Council in this election signals his new consciousness and involvement in the newly emerging social order. Indeed, the election allows Ganesh to combine his religious, social, and political convictions.

Through the character of Ganesh, the ironies of Third World Development, public masks of the politicians and public leaders are highlighted. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon had attacked a similar mask that the colonized wear. In *The Mystic Masseur*, the colonial mimicry is seen in the desperate attempts at modernization. Ganesh's house is a mixture of tradition and modernity, Indian and Western, the conservative and revolutionary. "His hovering between given identity and escape from it shows the necessity for mimicry to overcome the stiffening, arid and static life pattern that the Indians were fixed in. The rites and rituals, the religious ceremonies, the Hindu purity are used by Ganesh to exploit his talent in fooling the populace having little sense or opportunity to match his machinations" (Singh101). The English language and English book are the resources for Ganesh to separate himself from the static and closed life of the other inhabitants.

In the novel, the lives of the Indians are marked by a duality which results in cultural ambiguity and disintegration. The conflicting pulls between the Eastern and the Western world create a cultural confusion among them. The cultural disintegration is perceptible in the use of language. The novel exemplifies how English has taken the place of Hindi. In the initiation ceremony of Ganesh, Dookhie, the shopkeeper use English instead of Hindi: "As arranged, Dookhie the shopkeeper ran after him, crying a little and begging in English, 'No, boy. No. Don't go away to Benares to study'" (11). Even during a sacred ritual, Hindi was no longer used. Further, the walls of Ganesh's room are "covered with religious quotations, in Hindi and English, and with Hindu religious pictures" (6). He is able to incorporate elements from other religions.

He took as much interest in Christianity and Islam as in Hinduism. In the shrine, the old bedroom, he had pictures of Mary and Jesus next to Krishna and Vishnu; a crescent and star represented iconoclastic Islam. 'All the same God,' he said.

Christians liked him, Muslims liked him, and Hindus, willing as ever to risk prayers to new gods, didn't object. (128)

This is obviously a sign of dilution of the old Hindu culture, not only through translation or substitution of rituals but also indicative of the process of adaptation, hybridization, and cultural dualism. The pictures of different gods and prophets do not just indicate a cynical tolerance for facilitation of business. They also point to an eclectic and increasingly secular ethos.

Naipaul appears to make colonial mimicry an intrinsic part of his fiction. Unlike Naipaul, Bhabha keeps alive the possibility of radical resistant styles of imitation which may challenge prevailing hegemony. He insists that mimicry may itself contain ambiguous expressions of resistance. In his essay 'Of Mimicry and Man' Bhabha conceives of mimicry as a facet of both colonial dominion and colonial resistance. According to him, "Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed recognizable other as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (86) He contends that the mimicry of the native combines deference and disobedience and there occurs a slippage, a misappropriation and the beginning of anti-colonial resistance. For Bhabha, colonial presence is ambivalent, split between the two positions: the appearance of colonial presence as authority and original and its articulation as repetition and difference. This split is the site of potential resistance by the colonized.

Naipaul represents mimicry as a sign of inferiority on the part of the colonized. His characters mutely appear to accept the ideology of the colonizer. There is hardly any room for appropriation and resistance. In the novel *The Mystic Masseur*, Ganesh does not employ mimicry through language to camouflage protest and hatred against the colonizing culture. It is not a strategy to undermine the colonizing culture through mockery and 'menace' either. Rather, it is a technique to enter a class seeking importance and recognition.

The dinner party attended by Ganesh at the Government House serves as a commentary on the drawbacks of a society striving to imitate upper class respectability which at once contradicts their social reality. Ganesh feels alien and uncomfortable in the party and this happens to be the last time Ganesh appears in traditional clothes. In fact, Ganesh adopts the traditional Indian attire only when he becomes a professional masseur. In the novel,

Ganesh is not the only person who tries to internalize the notion of being a British citizen. At the dinner party of the newly elected Member of the Legislative Council, ‘the blackest MLC wore a three piece blue suit, yellow wollen gloves, and a monocle. Everybody else, among the men, looked like penguins, sometimes even down to the black faces’(194). The meal that was served for the occasion created a sense of alienation in Ganesh. “The meal was torture to Ganesh. He felt alien and uncomfortable. He grew sulkier and sulkier and refused all the courses. He felt as if he were a boy again, going to the Queen’s Royal College for the first time” (197).

In *Miguel Street*, the characters are adrift, aimless and culturally, politically and economically impoverished. They live life without realizable ideals. They live in a world without any purpose, in the midst of humiliation and failure rather than achievement. Sudden disappearance of characters as a result of frustration and failure is one of the characteristics of the street. In a static, impoverished society where there is no spiritual bond between man and the landscape, alienation is inevitable. In this work, the predicament of the characters is the result of a psychological inadequacy produced by the colonial situation. As pointed out by King:

Incongruity between pretence and reality is characteristic of Miguel Street. Gestures, words and ideas do not have the same meaning in an impoverished colonial society as elsewhere. What appears self-expressive turns out to be masks for failure and is the result of Trinidad being a colonial backwater, a place without the means to enable a better life. Even leaving is difficult. (25)

What King draws attention to is that everybody in *Miguel Street* appears to engage in role playing stemming from an innate sense of uncertainty, both cultural and personal. It is a consequence of the situation they find themselves in—neither truly British nor anything clear and decisive.

In *Miguel Street*, Naipaul portrays his characters through a mixture of truth and imagination. For example the character named Bogart did really exist among the residents of Miguel Street. Naipaul presents the biographical details of Bogart in the following way:

The connection of Bogart with my mother’s family was unusual. At the turn of the century Bogart’s father and my mother’s father had travelled out together

from India as indentured immigrants. At some time during the long and frightening journey they had sworn a bond that was being honoured by their descendants. (*Literary Occasions* 55-56)

Naipaul provides further information about Bogart:

Bogart's people were from the Punjab, and handsome. The two brothers we had got to know were ambitious men, rising in white-collar jobs. One was a teacher; the other (who had passed through the servant room) was a weekend sportsman who, in the cricket season, regularly got his name in the paper. Bogart didn't have the education or the ambition of his brothers; it wasn't clear what he did for a living. He was placid, without any pronounced character, detached, and in the crowded yard oddly solitary. (56)

But Bogart was not his real name. It was an essential part of his masking, taken from Humphrey Bogart, the filmstar, and enabling him to try different options as he played different characters across varying cultural backgrounds.

Bogart "made a pretence of making a living by tailoring" (10). He lacks consistency in the jobs he engaged himself. He simply imitates the styles of job and fails to achieve fulfillment. Each successive job is an attempt to conceal earlier failure.

He had got a job on a ship and had gone to British Guiana. There he had deserted, and gone into the interior. He became a cowboy on the Rupununi, smuggled things (he didn't say what) into Brazil, and had gathered some girls from Brazil and taken them to Georgetown. He was running the best brothel in the town when the police treacherously took his bribes and arrested him. (*Miguel Street* 14)

The impoverished colonial society provides little opportunity to fulfill any dream and to assert one's identity. Changing of roles and mimicry among the inhabitants is self-defeating as it alienates them further from the surrounding environment. The stories depict the uncertainty of the West Indian society in which the individuals try to get away from the immediate reality of the landscape into a world of fantasy. The inhabitants of the society have chosen to escape from their realities. The inorganic society fails to provide any environment for the individuals to fulfill their ambitions. Alienated from the landscape, the only option left to the inhabitants is to imitate other cultures, other values. There is no national consciousness among them. They lead their lives without any

purpose. It is a conglomeration of people from different social, cultural and racial backgrounds. They pretend to be engaged in uncertain jobs. Their pointless actions can be viewed as outer manifestation of inner fragmentation. There is no strong social bond among the inhabitants. The burden of a borrowed culture debars them to engage with the surrounding in a rational way. They are always in search of finding ways to escape from reality. Their pointless works produces no result.

Bogart was like Popo, “the carpenter next door, who never made a stick of furniture and was always planning and chiseling...” (10). Popo pretends to be “making the thing without a name”. Another important thing noticed is the sudden disappearance and return of characters. Moral degradation of characters is also noticeable. Popo’s wife “worked at a variety of jobs; and ended up by becoming the friend of many men” (10). During the period of Bogart’s absence, his room was used by Hat and his friends for their own purpose:

Hat and his friends began using Bogart’s room as their club house. They played *wappee* and drank rum and smoked, and sometimes brought the odd stray woman to the room. Hat was presently involved with the police for gambling and sponsoring cock-fighting; and he had to spend a lot of money to bribe his way out of trouble. (12)

Bogart continued to disappear and appear after periods of interval. When he appeared again he had changed in physique and manner:

he had grown a little fatter but he had become a little more aggressive. His accent was now pure American. To complete the imitation, he began being expansive towards children. He called out to them in the streets, and gave them money to buy gum and chocolate...The third time he...came back he gave a great party in his room for all the children... He bought cases of Solo and Coca-Cola and Pepsi-Cola and about a bushel of cakes. (24)

Bogart gives the impression of an affluent and friendly businessman in his home town. This is worth noting because the place has a general air of neglect and decadence.



The street appears to be a slum to a stranger, but for its inhabitants the street is a distinct world where each inhabitant is different from others.

A stranger could drive through Miguel Street and just say ‘Slum!’ because he could see no more. But we who lived there saw our street as a world, where everybody was quite different from everybody else. Man-man was mad; George was stupid; Big Foot was a bully; Hat was an adventurer; Popo was a philosopher; and Morgan was our comedian. (79)

In Miguel Street, people left Man-man alone declaring that he was mad. Man - man contests in every election and every time ‘he got exactly three votes’ (46).

The only friend he had was a little mongrel dog, white with black spots on the ears. The dog was like Man-man in a way, too. It was a curious dog. It never barked, never looked at you, and if you looked at it, it looked away. It never made friends with any other dog, and if some dog tried either to get friendly or aggressive, Man-man’s dog gave it a brief look of disdain and ambled away, without looking back. (49)

Popo calls himself a carpenter. He is never idle and is “always busy hammering and sawing and planning” (17). But when the narrator asks him what he is making, his reply is: “Ha, boy! That’s the question. I making the thing without a name” (17). Popo was jailed because

It was a fantastic story. Popo had been stealing things left and right. All the new furnitures, as Hat called them, hadn’t been made by Popo. He had stolen things and simply remodelled them...Even the paint and the brushes with which he had redecorated the house had been stolen. (24)

The inhabitants of the street believe that anything worth is possible only in England and America. The narrator comments: ‘There is no stupid pride among Trinidad craftsmen. No one is a specialist’ (71). Another noticeable side is that in the colonial society people donot remain stable in their jobs. From a carpenter Big foot becomes a mason. Then, he takes up boxing. When he is defeated in the ring by an English boxer, he leaves the place to look for options elsewhere. The characters continue to invent and re-invent themselves in Miguel Street

The peripheral figures in this work are without any hope of better conditions of life. They are the products of a static, stunted colonized society. As they are alienated from their surrounding environment, their actions appear incongruous, fruitless. Their lives become directionless - aimless drifting in search of meaning and stability. This aimlessness of life is perceptible in the following conversation between a policeman and B. Wordsworth:

The policeman said, 'What you doing here?'

B. Wordsworth said, 'I have been asking myself the same question for forty years.' (60)

Morgan does not get recognition and appreciation from the inhabitants of Miguel Street. Very few people in Trinidad "used Morgan's fireworks" (80). This leads to Morgan's frustration which he wants to compensate by seeking recognition from America and England. He says: "...I go have the King of England and the King of America paying me millions to make fireworks for them. The most beautiful fireworks anybody ever see" (82).

They said Morgan went to Venezuela. They said he went mad. They said he became a jockey in Colombia. (92)

In the racially mixed community of Trinidad, there are Spanish, Portuguese and 'whites' who are also pointlessly drifting. They also share the same sense of loss along with the other inhabitants of the street. Coming back, the narrator is confused by the place:

I found about six Miguel Streets, but none seemed to have my house. After a long time walking up and down I began to cry. I sat down on the pavement and got my shoes wet in the gutter.(94)

The narrator is disoriented by the aura of staleness about the place. The different communities appear to have suffered the same plight as they continue with their humdrum lives. The narrator's sense of loss is not just related to his immediate problem of not finding his house but a deeper indication of not finding his moorings.

People living in a colonial society experience a similar kind of alienation and loss along with the colonized. The tendency to generalize the racial superiority of the whites is not always justified. Sometimes, they also appear to share the same predicament of loss and disorientation.

One such character is Miss Hilton who gets ‘the swiftest and most private funeral in Miguel Street’ (130). The residents of Miguel Street do not know her. She lives a secluded life and dies alone.

Nobody in the street knew Miss Hilton. While she lived, her front gate was always padlocked and no one ever saw her leave or saw anybody go in. So even if you wanted to, you couldn’t feel sorry and say that you missed Miss Hilton.  
(130)

Just as the colonized people internalize inferiority complex, they also inculcate positive virtues for the white world. They develop a psychological inadequacy as they begin to see the white world as complete and ordered.

The homogenization of the white world attributes to some timeless, unchanging notion of racism. But exploring into the lived experience of whites may uncover such ambivalence and difference which the term racism doesnot immediately address. The superiority of the whites is constructed not only through the projection of backwardness and inferiority of the colonized but also through an effacement of differences of gender, class etc. The concept of essential white subject is also a contested one. The white discourse is constructed through “the privileging and naturalising of white experience, making the white subject invisible by normalising it” (Wemyss 14). Only exploring the lived experiences may uncover inconsistencies and contradictions within the whites.

Hat said, ‘White people don’t do that sort of thing, putting advertisement in the paper and thing like that.’

Eddoes said, ‘You ain’t know what you talking about, Hat. How much white people you know?’ (139-140)

Eddoes points out that one cannot arrive at sweeping conclusions like that about anybody. There is no fixed norm for white or black.

Another character Toni is despised by everybody because he cannot 'carry his liquor' and people generally find him 'sleeping in all sorts of places, dead drunk' (136). Hat comments about Toni: "...I feel that if I look at him long enough I go vomit. You see what a dirty thing a white skin does be sometimes?" (137). Mrs Hereira does not fit in with the other inhabitants of Miguel Street as she is 'too well dressed... a little too pretty and a little too refined...' (132). One day, she runs out from her house to save herself from her husband's beatings and rushes to the narrator's house. The narrator's mother behaves with Mrs Hereira in an 'excessively refined' way "bringing out all her fancy words and fancy pronunciations, pronouncing comfortable as cum-fought-able, and making war rhyme with bar, and promising that everything was deffy-nightly going to be all right" (134). The narrator comments: "I never saw my mother so anxious to help anyone" (134).

Like inferiority, superiority is something which also has to be inculcated and internalized. It can be argued that internalization of the sense of superiority can also sometimes be burdensome. The superiority which the whites inculcate in opposition to the black debar the former to share and assimilate with the colonized. In a similar vein, Frantz Fanon argues in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) that just as the white man is 'locked in his whiteness' the black man is sealed in his blackness (xiii-xiv). In the novel, Mrs Hereira becomes conscious of her position as a White woman which is clearly perceptible when she says to the narrator's mother: "I don't want your help or advice" (136).

Towards the end of the novel, the narrator's attitude to Trinidad remarkably changes. At first, he starts drinking 'in the customs' - 'drinking like a fish' - and becomes 'a first class drinker' at last (215). He degrades himself to the extent of making wild parties and taking 'rum and women to Maracas Bay for all-night sessions' (216). He holds Trinidad responsible for his downfall: "Is not my fault really. Is just Trinidad. What else anybody can do here except drink" (216). After becoming aware of his degradation, the mother of the narrator decided to take him to Ganesh Pundit. When the Pundit asks him what he wants to study abroad, the narrator replies: "I don't want to study anything really. I just want to go away, that's all" (217). This statement clearly indicates a desire to withdraw—a desperate wish to get away from the impoverished world.

Thus *Miguel Street* brings to the fore some of the disjointed, lonely and inadequate lives of people living amongst everyday realities. In order to keep at bay their frustrations they take recourse to fantasy and mimicry.

*A Flag on the Island* is a collection of short stories and a novella. The stories depict the dilemmas of immigrants due to the erosion of their traditional structures. The stories deal with the disintegration of Hindu family in the face of multicultural forms of life in Trinidad, life of meagre opportunities, life in the colonial school, ambition thwarted due to poverty. The stories present the lives of the colonials ironically, reflecting their peripheral existence in an alien world.

In a climate of acculturation, there is always a natural pull between stable, unitary and fossilized identity and the dispersed, de-centred one. In such condition, complex racial conglomerations are produced which sometimes question racial binary division. In the “The Baker’s Story” there is the mentioning of racial condemnation of the Grenadian blacks by the Trinidadian blacks. The narrator of the story, who is a black Grenadian, states that the ‘Trinidad black people don’t forgive a man for being: a black Grenadian...’ (135). Thus, it can be argued that racial tension cannot always be simplified as antagonism between White and Black. The above one is an instance of black against black which contends the possibility of a ‘pure’ black identity. Stuart Hall argues that the ‘extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities’ question the ‘innocent notion of the essential black subject’ (Hall in Ashcroft *et al*: 200). Heterogeneity of interests and identities contests the construction of a homogenized black community.

Mixing of people coming from different cultural background questions the essentialist notions of identity. In a multicultural society, there is always transaction of cultural traits and behavior among the inhabitants. Such a hybrid society opens up possibility of thinking beyond stable notions of identity based on ideas of racial, cultural and national purity. In the island, the black feller selling coconut is suggestive of hybrid identity resulting from inter-racial and cultural transactions.

It was as funny as seeing a black man wearing dhoti and turban. The sweetest part of the whole business was that this black feller was, forgetting looks, just like an Indian. He was talking Hindustani to a lot of Indian fellers, who was giving him jokes like hell, but he wasn’t minding. It does happen like that

sometimes with black fellers who live a lot with Indians in the country. They putting away curry, talking Indian, and behaving just like Indians. (143)

In the story, the black baker adopts a conscious business strategy and he employ a Chinee boy to serve in his shop and tells him ‘to talk as Chinee as he could, if he wanted to get that Carnival bonus’ (145). He also collects one big Chinee calendar with ‘Chinee women and flowers and waterfalls’ and hangs it up on the wall and renames his shop as ‘Yung Man Baker’ (146). The scrubbing off the old name of the shop and replacing it with a new one may be interpreted as the acceptance of a new identity cancelling out the earlier one. It shows how identity splits between positions. Negotiation of identities in the hybrid space questions the formation of any essential subject position. At the end of the story, it is seen that the baker strategically hides his black identity to prosper in business.

I never show my face in the front of the shop again ... And soon I was making so much money that I was able to open a branch in Arima and then another in Port-of-Spain self. Was hard in the beginning to get real Chinee people to work for a black man. But money have it own way of talking, and when today you pass any of the Yung Man establishments all you seeing behind the counter is Chinee. Some of them ain’t even know they working for a black man. My wife handling that side of the business, and the wife is Chinee. (146)

The story “My Aunt Gold Teeth” underscores the cultural confusion among Hindu families in Trinidad. To get release from the worry of childlessness, the narrator’s aunt Gold Teeth decides to ‘try any means - any ritual, any prayer’ and ultimately she crosses the boundaries fixed by Hinduism and indulge in ‘surreptitious Christian practices’ (13). In spite of her firm belief of Hinduism as a superior religion she expresses her readiness to ‘incorporate alien eccentricities into her worship’(14). Her reading of ‘the mysteries and the miracles, of penances and indulgences’ gives birth to ‘a quickening, if reluctant, enthusiasm’ for Christianity (14). Caught in the dilemma between skepticism and enthusiasm she accepts Christianity and goes to a church one day: ‘She carried herself into the churchyard ... She undid the knot in the end of her veil, where she kept her money, took out three cents, popped them into the box, picked up a candle and muttered a prayer in Hindustani’ (14-15). Later on, she attributes her husband’s sudden illness to her ‘religious transgression’ and decides to be ‘on the safe side’ – use of insulin

prescribed by the District Medical officer and consultation with Ganesh, the mystic. Thus, the story is suggestive of cultural ambiguity among the Indians living in Trinidad. However, Ganesh is able to successfully resolve such conflicts.

In his professional capacity Ganesh was consulted by people of many faiths, and with the licence of the mystic he had exploited the commodiousness of Hinduism, and made room for all beliefs. In this way he had many clients, as he called them, many satisfied clients.(17)

In another story “The Christmas Story”, Naipaul deals with the dilemmas of a hybrid colonial existence. This story is about the life of Randolph (Chunilal) who, seeking advantage of Presbyterianism, alienates himself from orthodox Hindu family bond. However, he has to face “constant ridicule” from his relatives who speaks his name Randolph, “with accents of the purest mockery” (36). Alienated from the traditional Hindu ties, he has to lead a lonely life.

I had cut myself off from my family, and from those large family gatherings which had hitherto given me so much pleasure and comfort, for always, I must own, at the back of my mind there had been the thought that in the event of real trouble there would be people to whom I could turn. (38)

Besides, his clothes become ‘less resplendent’ and he feels it ‘as a disgrace to go to church in them’ until he takes ‘pleasure in the darns’ of his sleeves and elbows’ (39). The story shows that his teaching profession fails to bring success. He begins to feel a sense of loneliness growing inside. He feels rejected everywhere, and ultimately, becomes ‘a stranger’ to his professed faith. He comments: “Everywhere I felt rejected. I went to church as often as I could, but even there I found rejection. ... The carols, the religious services, the talk of birth and life, they all unmanned me” (52).

The story “The Raffle” shows the exploitation of child within the colonial school system. The story is about Mr Hinds, the poor schoolmaster, who gives ‘private lessons’ to students for ‘extra money’. ‘Every boy paid fifty cents for that. If a boy didn’t pay, he was kept in all the same and flogged until he paid’ (25). To get rid of a goat, which will not yield milk, Mr Hinds bestows it on Vidiadhar. Vidiadhar and his mother takes great care of the goat and spends money in buying bundles of grass.

We were buying five, sometimes six bundles a day, and every bundle cost six cents. The goat didn't change. He still looked sullen and bored. From time to time Mr Hinds asked me with a smile how the goat was getting on, and I said it was getting on fine. (27)

Ultimately, the teacher punishes Vidiadhar for taking the liberty to dispose of the goat and he decides to stay away from the school that day: 'It was the last day I went to that school' (29).

"The Enemy" is about the hostile relationship between the narrator and his mother. "I had always considered this woman, my mother, as the enemy" the narrator says (77). Besides, the conflictual relationship between the narrator's father and mother is also hinted: 'She hated my father, and even after he died she continued to hate him' (77). Here, Naipaul draws parallel between antagonistic family relationships and the unfriendly environment of Cunupia (one part of Trinidad) where the narrator along with his parents are destined to live. The narrative provides clear suggestion of inhospitable living condition of Cunupia: "...Cunupia and Tableland are the two parts of Trinidad where murders occur often enough to ensure quick promotion for the policemen stationed there" (78).

The two stories "The perfect Tenants" and "Greenie and Yellow" are set in a boarding house in England. The first story is about the growing antagonism between the landlady, Mrs Cooksey, and the tenants the Dalkins. Once, for the landlady, the Dalkins were favourite tenants: "Their behaviour was exemplary. They never had visitors. They never had telephone calls.... They never allowed their milk bottles to accumulate and at the same time they never left an empty milk bottle on the doorstep in daylight. And they were silent. They had no radio" (105). But towards the end of the story hostility began between the landlady and her once-favourite tenants, the Dalkins. The Dalkins expressed their resentment against Mrs Cooksey in this way: "The washing-up was done noisily, the carpet-sweeper banged against walls and furniture, and Mrs Dakin sang loudly" (117). Selwyn R. Cudjoe (1998) argues that "the story can be seen as Naipaul's attempt to understand his home situation through an imaginative projection into another society..." (32).

"Greenie and Yellow" is the story of three budgerigars – Bluey, Greenie and Yellow. The story shows how the arrival of Greenie and Yellow deprived Bluey from the



effectation of the landlady. The advent of Greenie – the “smart fellow” - made Bluey’s life uncomfortable as Greenie started enjoying much freedom. “Life became hard for Bluey. Greenie never stopped showing off; and Bluey, continually baited and squawked at, retaliated less and less. At the end of the week he seemed to have lost the will even to protest” (94). According to Bruce King, the story is “an example of how the strong destroy each other while the dominated try to survive, although they will be crippled, by keeping a low profile” (71). The story metaphorically deals with larger issues of domination and occupation of space by powerful outsiders which lead to frustration and hopelessness of original inhabitants of a given territory.

The novella *A Flag on the Island* depicts a new phase of history in the postcolonial situation of an island. Trinidad and other Caribbean islands have witnessed a new type of colonialism even after the granting of independence. These erstwhile colonies still need the white men—experts, bureaucrats, the technologists from America and other Western countries. It indicates that the granting of independence fails to bring total freedom. Instead, there is continuation of dominance, perpetuation of a new brand of colonialism in the name of modernization in the colonies. But, in this postcolonial scenario, the relationship between the white men and the Third World residents has gained a new dimension.

Frankie, the first person narrator of the novel is an American soldier who visits the island again. During the Second World War, Frankie was posted there at the American base. Being an outsider, Frankie is able to offer an objective analysis of the landscape. In his second visit to the island he was haunted by a sense of not belonging which heightened his anxiety. When Frankie goes into the island, he comes to know that the island has got a flag of its own. The island had seemed flagless to Frankie: “There was the Union Jack of course, but it was a remote affirmation” (157). Granting of independence could not make the residents of the island free from psychological dependency. It is clearly perceptible when the taxi driver tells Frankie about the new flag of the island: “To tell the truth I prefer the Old Union Jack. It look like a real flag. This look like something they make up. You know, like foreign money?” (156-157)

The flag carries the message that the island exists. It is the flag on the island that provides Frankie a sense of reality which otherwise gave the impression that “the reality

of landscape and perhaps of all relationships lay only in the imagination” (157). For the inhabitants of the island, the western world is a world of fantasy, a world of desire.

The presence of the West in the form of images and symbols indicates that the granting of independence fails to bring complete freedom to the residents of the island. Still they are psychologically dependent upon the culture of the colonizer. Any attempt to ‘exalt’ the island also proves futile as the burden of a borrowed culture does not coincide with the island’s real existence.

The hotel was new. There were murals in the lobby which sought to exalt the landscape and the people which the hotel’s very existence seemed to deny. The noticeboard in the lobby gave the name of our ship and added: ‘Sailing Indefinite’. A poster advertised The Coconut Grove. Another announced a Barbecue Night at the Hilton, Gary Priestland, popular TV personality, Master of Ceremonies. A photograph showed him with his models. (157-158)

Contrary to the murals in the hotel lobby which lend a touch of the exotic, the entertainment provided by the hotel is mainly Western. The island people might have their own culture but in the large hotels catering to multinational tourists, a different Euro-American Culture was allowed to dominate.

The inhabitants of the island live there like temporary residents. They are always motivated by a tendency to escape. For them, the soul of the island is lost. It is beyond their reach. Mr Blackwhite comments: “This place...is nowhere. It doesn’t exist. People are just born here. They all want to go away...”(187). Their inability to feel themselves as a part of the island has disintegrating effects on their lives. The island does not provide any scope for inner transformation of the residents. As the wish to leave the island is uppermost in their minds, they fail to engage themselves with its inner reality. Even Frankie also becomes aware of duplicity of his position in the street. He says: “We turn experience continually into stories to lend drama to dullness, to maintain our self-respect. But we never see ourselves; only occasionally do we get an undistorted reflection” (187).

The unanchored residents of the island always find themselves in contradictory positions. The island doesnot provide any scope to fulfill their ambitions. Their endeavour to attain fulfillment and meaning of life is thwarted by the unreality of the landscape. They are

afflicted by a sense of inferiority which is the product of a static postcolonial society. Blackwhite tells Frankie what would have happened to Churchill if he had been born on the island: "... He would have been working in a bank. He would have been in the civil service. He would have been importing sewing machines and exporting cocoa" (187). Characters like Selma, Mr Lambert, Mono are unanchored and dispossessed aimlessly drifting without any real purpose of life. Blackwhite says Frankie about these peripheral figures in the following way:

You like this street. You like those boys in the back-yard beating the pans. You like Selma who has nowhere to go ... You like Mr Lambert sitting on the steps drinking his one glass of rum in the morning and tacking up a few ledgers ... You like seeing Mano practising for the walking race that is never going to come off. You look at these things and you say, "How nice, how quaint, this is what life should be." You don't see that we here are all mad and we are getting madder all the time, turning life into a Carnival.' (188)

Blackwhite's comment clearly indicates the pangs of dispossessed individuals drifting aimlessly in search of meaning and solidity in life. They are seen to be afflicted by a precarious sense of temporariness which debars them from reaching the solidity of things.

The novella underscores the themes of mimicry and inferiority of postcolonial societies. The carnival episode foregrounds the mimicking tendency of the inhabitants of the island. On the first day of the carnival, Blackwhite goes dressed in a fantastically braided uniform: "MacArthur, promising to return" (165).

On the Tuesday evening, when the streets were full of great figures—Napoleon, Julius Caesar, Richard the Lionheart: men parading with concentration—Blackwhite was also abroad, dressed like Shakespeare. (188)

Frankie develops a sense of frustration, an alienation from the landscape. Frankie fails to grasp the reality of the island as he is also an alienated individual, drifting and unanchored. In the unfriendly environment of the island, he loses touch with solidity of things, reality of existence. He says: "... I know that the mind is alien and unfriendly, and I am never able to regulate things" (158). Frankie's alienation, his anxiety of pointless, drifting life can be traced from his conversation with Selma.

‘...Lovely house, Selma. Lovely, ghastly, sickening, terrible home.’

‘My home is not terrible.’

‘No, of course not to you.’

‘You can’t insult me. You are too damn frightened. You don’t like homes. You prefer houses. To fit into other people’s lives.’

‘Yes. I prefer houses. My God. I am on a treadmill. I can’t get off...’ (228-229)

In the novel, characters like Blackwhite and Ma-ho cherish dreams of hope in another secure world. They live in the island with possibilities of escape to another land. In the case of Blackwhite:

His walls were hung with coloured drawings of the English countryside in spring. There were many of these, but they were not as numerous as the photographs of himself, in black and white, in sepia, in coarse colour. He had an especially large photograph of himself between smaller ones of Churchill and Roosevelt.

‘The trouble, you know, Blackwhite,’ I said, ‘is that you are not black at all.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘You are terribly white.’ (186)

The island does not provide the “plentitudinous sense of home” (McLeod 211). Ma-ho also usually expresses a longing to escape to another world. He says that he wants to “go back to China, back to the old wan-ton soup and Chiang Kai-shek” (199). He acknowledges a link with, China - the older territory - that serves as a source of emotional affiliation.

The walls of his grocery carried pictures of Chiang Kai-shek and Madame Chiang. They also had pictorial calendars, several years out of date, with delicately tinted Chinese beauties languid or coy against a background of ordered rocks and cultivated weeds, picturesque birds and waterfalls which poured like oil: incongruous in the shop with its chipped grimy counter, its open sacks of flour, its khaki-coloured sacks of sugar, its open tins of red, liquid butter. These pictures were like a longing for another world; and indeed, Ma-Ho did not plan to stay on the island. (190-191)

The coloured portrait of Haile Sellasie that Blackwhite kept in his front room and the photograph of Chiang Kai-Shek that Ma-ho kept concealed between his Chinese calendars were described as ‘ridiculous affirmations’. They live

in the island with the idea to leave it when necessary. They are unable to develop the sense of belongingness with the island. They live with the idea of escape to a secure land. Blackwhite lives with the idea that the island doesn't exist. Living life with this sense of temporariness, the inability to cope up with the soul of the land indicates the predicament of postcolonial subjects in a spiritually dead world.

Ma-ho's family maintained their integrity by keeping themselves aloof from their immediate surrounding which can be interpreted as a sign of resistance to assimilation.

His children remained distinctive, and separate from the life of the street: a small neat crocodile, each child armed with neat bags and neat pencil boxes, going coolly off to school in the morning and returning just as coolly in the afternoon, as though nothing had touched them during the whole day, or caused them to be sullied. In the morning the back door of his shop opened to let out these children; in the afternoon the back door opened to swallow them in again; and nothing more was heard from them, and nothing more was seen of them. (191)

It is precisely Ma-Ho's desperate attempt to restore the lost home as it exists only "in a fractured discontinuous relationship with the present" (McLeod 2010: 211). It may be seen as Ma-Ho's endeavour to protect the family from the dangers of an insecure world. It may also be interpreted as Ma-Ho's attempt to retain and restore a distinct Chinese identity from hybridization or contamination of other cultures. They were people "who kept themselves to themselves, who gave the impression of being only temporary residents on the island, always packed for departure..." (203). After Ma-Ho's death, his family comes out and participates in the life of the street which clearly implies the impossibility of forming an essential migrant subject.

Henry is afflicted by a sense of non-belongingness as he comes from another "pretty little island" (173). Sometimes, Henry even has to face "troubles with the natives" who always try to get him deported from the island. When any such trouble about "Illegal Immigrant Business" arises, Henry is assisted by Alfred Gordon, a black lawyer in the island. It suggests that the unifying modes of representation of black identity are questioned from within the black community. Different subject positions within the black community contest such totalizing modes of representation.

It is not the promise of resolution of conflicts and tensions among cultures, but it is the intervention, 'discursive temporality', and negotiation of contradictory subject positions that characterize the space. This space is marked by a temporality of transaction between binary opposites. Both ideological positions and the material reality curiously posit postcolonial subjects in the contractual space. The necessity to move beyond initial subject position is clearly hinted in the following statement of Henry. Henry tells Frankie:

'Frankie ... You know, I don't think people want to do what they say they want to do. I think we always make a lot of trouble for people by helping them to get what they say they want to get. Some people look at black people and only see black. You look at poor people and you only see poor. You think the only thing they want is money. All-you wrong, you know.' (194)

The relationship of Mr Lambert and Mrs Lambert provide ample scope to reconsider some of the assumptions upon which the representation of black/white binary rests. "Mr Lambert was black and Mrs Lambert was white" (190). Mr Lambert demands his link with a Scotland and discards his black identity: "They say I am black. But black I am not ... I am a Scot" (195). Once, Mrs Lambert was 'a very poor girl' and Lambert had 'job in the civil service' (193). Their marriage was like a 'fairy tale. Wur-thering Heights' (193). After the demolition of their house by enraged workmen, Mr Lambert starts the habit of drinking and he degrades into a 'good for nothing idler' in the eyes of Mrs Lambert (195). In a drunken state, he expresses his anger against Mrs Lambert: "I led her up from the gutter. I gave her bread. I gave her butter. And this is how she pays me back. White is white and black is black." (196).

Priest is another character, who first frightens people with his sermons about death and then sells them insurance. Then there is Mano who joins walking races but 'he does always end up by running and getting disqualified' (181). Mano finally wins the race but instead of rejoicing he commits suicide: "Mano had done what so many others on the island had done. He had gone out swimming, far into the blue waters, beyond the possibility of return" (196). As Henry says, Mano "... really wanted to be a runner. But he didn't have the courage. So when he won the walking race, he went and drowned himself" (197).

Towards the end of the novella, we see that the island is marked by an artificial change which is sought in the name of modernization. It is clearly perceptible that although an effort has been made at a superficial level to transform the island with the help of commodities imported from Europe, there is no inner transformation of the residents.

No place for us now. Change, change. It was fast and furious. Through mine-free, dangerless channels ships came from Europe and the United States to the island ...

I saw the buildings bulldozed. I saw the quick tropical grass spreading into the cracks on the asphalted roads. I saw the flowers, the bougainvillaea, poinsettia, the hibiscus, grow straggly in the tropics we had created. (208-209)

The above passage exemplifies the continuation of exploitation of erstwhile colonies by imperial powers. Even after the granting of independence, the island is still in the hands of the Westerners who retain their hegemonic control to meet their own social, economic and political ends.

In the name of modernization, an artificial change is brought to the island. But this change, without inner transformation of the inhabitants, is meaningless. Their life in the island turns out to be a kind of momentary recluse without any promise of lasting change. It is not possible for them to escape from reality by mimicking the world projected before them by the Americans. Selma's house stands an example of imitation of western style of living:

... Selma's house was in the modernistic style of the island. Lawn, garden, a swimming pool shaped like a teardrop. The roof of the veranda was supported on sloping lengths of tubular metal. The ceiling was in varnished pitchpine. The furnishings were equally contemporary. Little bits of driftwood; electric lights pretending to be oil lamps; irregularly shaped tables whose tops were sections of tree trunks complete with bark. (228)

The imposition of modernity on the territory further alienates the inhabitants from their surrounding environment as their lives are already shattered by slavery and colonialism. It simply opens up a possibility of momentary escape through mimicry and fantasy.

Towards the end of the novella, it is showed that the island remains as a desolate territory. Its dereliction and barrenness is conveyed through the description of the sea

beach. The desolate sea beach symbolically implies the inner emptiness of the inhabitants of the island.

Morning, dark and turbulent, revealed the full dereliction of the beach. Fishing boats reclined or were propped up on the sand that was still golden, but there were also yellow oil drums on the beach for the refuse of the fishermen, whose houses, of unplastered hollow-clay bricks and unpainted timber, jostled right up to the limit of dry sand. The sand was scuffed and marked and bloody like an arena; it was littered with the heads and entrails of fish. Mangy pariah dogs, all rib and bone, all bleached to a nondescript fawn colour, moved listlessly, their tails between their legs, from drum to yellow drum. Black vultures weighed down the branches of coconut trees; some hopped awkwardly on the sand; many more circled overhead. (231)

The symbolic barrenness of the sea beach implies the bleakness of the island. The bony pariah dogs represent the misery and suffering of the dispossessed inhabitants of the island. The impoverished society of the island cannot provide its residents any real opportunity to achieve a sense of self-knowledge.

All the three works of Naipaul discussed above reflect pains and dispossession of colonized subjects. Their societies do not provide them any real alternatives to liberate themselves from the sense of insecurity and inferiority. Most of them live with a perilous sense of transitoriness, expressing an inability either to escape or to cope up with their immediate surroundings.