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## V. S. NAIPAUL'S *THE MIMIC MEN*: THE STORY OF A SHIPWRECKED MAN

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### Abstract

Naipaul, in his Nobel Prize-winning novel *The Mimic Men* (1967) examines the problems after colonization through the first person narration of the protagonist, who might be taken as his mouthpiece, Ralph Singh. The narrator unchronologically recounts his childhood and youth memories as well as his experiences as a politician both in London and in a newly-independent fictional state, the Isabella Island. The novel provides the panorama of a decolonized nation whose members are unable to define themselves, who are impotent to act without the colonial interference. In this context, this paper seeks to examine the notion of home, the effect of the feeling of homelessness on the individual psyche, and writing as a strategy to erase the feeling of unbelonging. The discussion starts with the concept of nation based on definitions and explanations from different perspectives on the formation of nation. It focuses on the "failure" of a nation with references to the critics and on the influence of the colonial discourse in estranging the colonized peoples from each other afterwards. It leads the discussion to the estrangement from the self; therefore Ralph's "search for home" is portrayed. In this context, "writing" is offered as a healing strategy against the destructive psychological effects of colonization on the individual and against the sense of homelessness. The analysis is concluded with the final remarks regarding the process Ralph undergoes as a decolonized individual.

**Keywords:** Home, Exile, Mimicry, Hybridity, V. S. Naipaul, Nation, Postcolonialism.

### 1. Introduction

Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul's Nobel prize-winning novel *The Mimic Men* (1967) unchronologically narrates the childhood, youth and adult memories of a displaced character, Ranjit Kripalsingh, who suffers from homelessness all throughout his life. Ranjit, as the forty-year-old first person narrator and protagonist of the novel, serves as Naipaul's mouthpiece with his pessimistic portrayal of the experiences of a helpless decolonized nation and politician. Ranjit, whose lifespan includes several journeys back and forth between the fictitious newly-independent island Isabella and the so-called mother country England with the hope of finding order, ends up in a suburban hotel room, a reflection of his rootlessness, and he resorts to writing in order to provide order to his turbulent existence. He suffers from the trauma of colonisation whose case lays bare the psychological influences of the colonial period on the psyche of the individual as well. The people in the island are unable to create a national self-awareness which is of utmost importance in the creation of nation; Ralph is conscious that they are still under the influence of the colonizer, so he cannot find peace in his homeland. Ralph is portrayed as a shipwrecked character who can neither associate himself with his people in his island nor with the community in London, which is indicative of his exiled and homeless situation. He is a stranger both in the island and in London. He suffers from the feeling of unbelonging and homelessness; his solution is the nomadic experience to erase the feeling of homelessness. Because of his borderline position, he first resorts to politics -since he opines that via politics he can overcome his sense of impotence- which ends in failure; then, he finds remedy in writing his memoirs which functions as a space in which he can establish his identity and home to escape from disorder. He starts writing his own history contrary to the one written by the official discourse. Writing becomes his psychic home -liminal space to establish his identity- in a world where there is no home for Ralph as he feels like an outcast both at home and in London.

### 2. Critical Approaches to Nation and Nationhood

The better understanding of the root of the problems Ranjit is influenced by and the people he lives with are to be examined in this section. The term "nation" is not used deliberately to qualify the Isabellan people since being a nation necessitates some requirements which are not available in the novel. The myriad of answers to the questions "what is a nation" and "what constitutes a nation" should be clarified. According to John Hutchinson, "[t]he nation can be understood only by reference to its goal, a nation-state whose legitimacy in turn rests on the will of 'the people' constituted as the body of citizens" (1994: 4). For

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him, the nation-state whose legality has been acknowledged by the awareness of its citizens who regard themselves as *citizens* is of substantial importance for the emergence of a nation. He adds that “[w]hat is crucial is the self-awareness of a population that it constitutes a nation” (1994: 6). Hutchinson emphasizes the acknowledgement of the people belonging to the same nation as the foothold of the nation formation, and Benedict Anderson perpetuates his idea: in Anderson’s view, nation “is an *imagined* political community . . . [i]t is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members . . . yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (2006: 6). The reason why Anderson states that the nation is imagined as a community is the fact that “the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (2006: 7) among whose members fraternity reigns. Hutchinson’s and Anderson’s ideas converge in the sense that while the former emphasizes the will and cognizance of the people, the latter underlines the imagined aspect of the nation which would be possible with the discernment of the people too. Ernest Gellner, in line with the two aforementioned critics, regards nation as the fulcrum in establishing one’s identity and presents a view similar to that of theirs in terms of the mutual recognition of the people: “Two men are of the same nation if and only if they recognize each other as belonging to the same nation. In other words, nations maketh man; nations are the artefacts of men’s convictions and loyalties and solidarities” (1986: 7).

Albert Memmi, on the other hand, problematizes the concepts of nation and nationhood, and suggests that becoming an autonomous nation is not as easy as the above-mentioned critics put for the formerly colonized people since colonization decelerates their nationalist awareness:

It is repeated that the colonization precipitated the awakening of national consciousness of the colonized. One could state equally well that it moderated the tempo of this awareness by keeping the colonized apart from the true conditions of contemporary citizenship. It is not a coincidence that colonized peoples are the last to awaken to national consciousness. (1967: 96)

Partha Chatterjee, as a response to Anderson’s viewpoint, questions the constituents of a nation. Even though he also draws attention to the imagined nature of a nation, where Anderson puts that a nation is present when the people imagine themselves to be the part of a nation, Chatterjee argues that the former colonizer still controls the (de)colonized nation and influences the way its citizens think of themselves. He argues that “[i]f nationalism in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain ‘modular’ forms already made available to them by Europe . . . what do they have left to imagine?” (2010: 25-26). He also underlines the imagined aspect of a nation but makes it clear that it is impossible for the formerly colonized peoples to have a pure outlook of themselves; so, mimicry is inevitable: “[e]ven our imaginations must remain forever colonized” (Chatterjee, 2010: 26). To reinforce his argument, Chatterjee speaks of anticolonial nationalism which separates the world of social institutions and practices into the material and spiritual spheres. “The material is the domain of the ‘outside,’ of the economy and statecraft . . . a domain where the West had proved its superiority and the East had succumbed . . . The spiritual, on the other hand, is an ‘inner’ domain bearing the ‘essential’ marks of cultural identity” (2010: 26-27). According to him, preserving this inner domain is of utmost importance for the maintenance of a nation:

[i]f the nation is an imagined community, then this is where it is brought into being. In this, its true and essential domain, the nation is already sovereign, even when the state is in the hands of the colonial power. The dynamics of this historical project is completely missed in conventional histories in which the story of nationalism begins with the contest for political power. (2010: 27)

While Hutchinson calls attention to the *legitimacy of a nation-state* as the starting point of the nation formation and Anderson links it to the idea of imagined *political community*, that is, while they both emphasize the political aspect -the material, the outside domain in Chatterjee’s formula, Chatterjee illustrates the importance and reinforcement of the *inner cultural dynamics* and of the native identity markers for the achievement of nation formation. Since the national struggles fundamentally hinge on the independence on the political platform, the decolonized nation “has no option but to choose its forms from the gallery of ‘models’ offered by European and American nation-states” (Chatterjee, 2010: 31)<sup>1</sup>. The fact that the decolonized nations have to *import* a model to follow for themselves, or that the nation is an imagined organization, or that it is based on the apperception of the people to see themselves as citizens points out the artificial and constructed nature of the concept of the nation. Within this framework, what is nation *but* merely a myth?

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<sup>1</sup> Chatterjee concludes that “[t]he result is that autonomous forms of imagination of the community were, and continue to be, overwhelmed and swamped by the history of the postcolonial state” (2010: 33), which is remindful of Althusser’s assertion that ideology is a “representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (1988: 56).

Homi Bhabha, on the other hand, in “DissemiNation” criticizes such an essentialist understanding of nation, “propos[es] this cultural construction of nationness as a form of social and textual affiliation” (1990: 140) and argues against the discursive formations that “function in the name of ‘the people’ or ‘the nation’ and make them the immanent subjects of a range of social and literary narratives” (1990: 140). He draws attention to the narrative construction/aspect of the nation which attempts to define the Third World nations under a totalizing and homogenizing worldview. While Anderson points to the nation as a limited entity since “even the largest of them . . . has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations [and] [n]o nation imagines itself coterminous with the mankind” (2006: 7), Bhabha disseminates the boundaries of the nation; rather than focusing on the binary oppositions between the First World and Third World nations, he is more interested in borderline positions where identities are formed, re-formed and challenged/contested. Nation suggests the “liminality of cultural modernity” (Bhabha, 1990: 140) and as opposed to “the polarity of a prefigurative self-generating nation ‘in itself’ and extrinsic other nations,” Bhabha prefers “dissemi-nation . . . cultural liminality *within the nation*” (1990: 148). Rushdie in his novels such as *Shame* and in *Imaginary Homelands* adopts a similar stance and emphasizes the migrant positions of the people that deny any clear-cut cultural boundaries. Recounting the word ‘translation’ which descends from the Latin ‘bearing across,’ he suggests that “having been borne across the world, we are translated men” (1991: 17) and stresses the idea of the *man of the world* disseminated regardless of national and cultural borders. He warns that “[t]o forget that there is a world beyond the community to which we belong, to confine ourselves within narrowly defined cultural frontiers, would be, I believe, to go voluntarily into that form of internal exile” (1991: 19). He celebrates the flight from a fixed national identity. Bhabha and Rushdie share parallel ideas regarding the notion of nation due to their appraisal of the unfixed national/cultural boundaries. They both regard blurry frontiers as liminal spaces thanks to which man can (re)build his identity. They cherish and suggest a positive outlook on such an understanding of a nation as a *vague* entity.

### 3. Home and Homelessness

The intimate connection between nation and man sheds light to Ranjit’s exilic condition in the novel but it will be beneficial to clarify the concept of home and homelessness, which would be equally beneficial for the furthering of current discussion. In *The Mimic Men*, the process of quest both for personal and for national identity ironically results in homelessness, since Ranjit’s disillusionment originates from the fact that he cannot establish a healthy bond with the country which is *allegedly* his home. In this context, it is possible to provide several definitions and characteristics of home. The environmental psychologists “emphasize the significance of “familiarity” (Duyvendak, 2011: 27) and define home “as a safe and familiar space, be it a haven or shelter, where people can relax, retreat and care” (2011: 27). Home “is an inclusive and distinctive sort of place with which people have strong social, psychological and emotional attachments” (2011: 27). Bourdieu stresses the connection between “familiarity” and “feeling at home” (qtd. in Duyvendak 2011: 27) as well: “[w]hereas the unfamiliar is ‘out of place’, home is the place ‘to be’ -a place so familiar that it feels almost like a ‘natural’ place” (2011: 27). The dominant perception regarding the concept of home among the environmental psychologists is that of “familiarity, order, permanency, comfort and *place-bound* culture” (Duyvendak 2011: 28). However, what should be noted is that home does not necessarily have to be a physical entity. “Feelings of home can also be attached to a virtual space” (2011: 36) to “non-territorialized homes” (2011: 37). Concordantly, Easthope suggests that “[w]hile homes may be located, it is not the location that is ‘home’” (qtd. in Duyvendak 2011: 37). He underscores the difference between ‘home’ and ‘house’ suggesting that “a house only becomes a home as meanings and feelings -in other words, a certain symbolic value- become attached to it . . . ‘[h]ome’, then, is more the result of home-making than the effect of the place itself” (2011: 37). Duyvendak also lists the elements of home that will be helpful in the analysis of the novel as follows:

#### I. Familiarity

Knowing the place

#### II. Haven: secure, safe, comfortable, private and exclusive

Physical/material safety; mentally safe/predictable

Place for retreat, relaxation, intimacy and domesticity

#### III. Heaven<sup>2</sup>: public identity and exclusivity

A public place where one can collectively be, express and realize oneself; where one feels publicly free and independent. Home here embodies shared histories; a material and/or symbolic place with one’s own people and activities. (Duyvendak, 2011: 38)

<sup>2</sup> “Home-as-heaven can be a particular place (a neighbourhood, a city or even a nation)” (Duyvendak, 2011: 39).

The definition of home merges with the definition of nation as suggested by Anderson and Hutchinson since they all focus on the collective realization of nation and home based on shared history and community, on the familiarity and mutual acknowledgement of the people. In the same vein, Hage “describes homely belonging as the most common of nationalist discourses, whereby national subjects identify with a homeland” (qtd. in Blunt, 2005: 28). He elaborates on the idea of home and makes a distinction between the motherland and the fatherland in the colonial context. In his view, “[t]he site of homely belonging is most commonly imagined through the nation as motherland because ‘all qualities that are valued in the homeland are those that are normally associated with mothering: protection, warmth, emotional and nutritional security’” (2005: 28) while “a fatherland correspond to the ordered and empowered spaces of governmental and sovereign belonging” (2005: 28)<sup>3</sup>.

There is not a consensus on the appreciation of the state of homelessness either. Although some deplore homelessness, some celebrate it. For instance, whereas Heidegger is of the opinion that “homelessness is coming to the destiny of the world” (qtd. in Duyvendak, 2011: 9), Said mentions “a generalized condition of homelessness” (qtd. in Duyvendak, 2011: 9) keeping in mind the destiny of the people who have been forced to abandon their native countries. Beatley does not welcome the sense of homelessness either: he concludes that “[w]e need places that provide healthy living environments and also nourish the soul-distinctive worthy of our loyalty and commitment, places where we feel at home, places that inspire and uplift and stimulate us and provide social and environmental sustenance” (qtd. in Duyvendak, 2011: 9-10). Braidotti, however, regards “postmodern nomadism as a rather positive condition” (qtd. in Duyvendak, 2011: 9). In parallel with her opinion, “cosmopolitans [such as Rushdie] embrace ‘nomadism’ [or multiple belongings] and consider the de-placement of home as a positive development” (Duyvendak, 2011: 30). The cosmopolitans regard the world as their home irrespective of national boundaries yet the ones such as Naipaul’s Ranjit is anxious to find the *genuine* home, to hold on to his roots and to erase the sense of not belonging. As Gourevitch remarks,

[Naipaul’s] approach has been to sort out, rather than to celebrate, the Third World mixing and fragmentation of cultures, histories, religions, languages, castes, ideologies, and ethnicities. Against this confusion, Naipaul has posited his own rigorous discipline of dissecting the dissonant medley back into its essential elements so that it can be known and understood. (1994: 27)

Ranjit’s, however, is a futile quest for homeland. He cannot find reply to the question *where he belongs to* in his motherland and leaves the island to look for answers in the fatherland. Unable to find one in either place, Ranjit chooses to write his memoirs with an attempt to question the idea of home and to give insight into his exilic condition. He decides on a nomadic existence in a hotel room once he cannot find solace either in the motherland or in the fatherland. *The Mimic Men* successfully portrays the relationships between nation and home, nation and people, and home and people. Within this framework, the condition of the people and the island, with the macrocosm whose influence is felt on the microcosmic entity of Ranjit, is the starting point for the analysis of the novel.

#### 4. Isabella Island and Its Dwellers

The people in the Caribbean island of Isabella are unable to create a national self-awareness, a foothold in the constitution of nation. Even though the state has gained its independence, decolonization - “the process of revealing and dismantling colonialist power in all its forms” - (Ashcroft et al, 1998: 63) is rather torminous since the inhabitants of the island have always regarded themselves as seen through the lenses of the colonial man and have long identified themselves with the colonizers. Even though the dwellers -intentionally not ‘citizen’<sup>4</sup>- of the island have theoretically gained their independence, they still cannot totally internalize their independent state and behave accordingly. They regard the Western ideals as a reference point upon which they (re)build their identity. Sally reads European magazines and aspires to look like the Western actors in appearance; Ranjit imitates Mr. Shylock’s<sup>5</sup> “habit of stroking his ear” (Naipaul, 2011: 1); and the school children take apples to the teacher even though they do not grow in the island. Fanon’s scrutiny of the psychological effects of the colonial activity on the colonized people in “On National Culture” indicates that the colonial conquest begins with the conquest of a foreign territory and

<sup>3</sup> In this context, Ranjit’s yearning for the breasts become quite meaningful in that what he cannot find within the geographical home, he tries to satisfy with several women -with the spiritual motherland. Even though in the postcolonial context, the colonial country is associated with the motherland, I will refer to it as the fatherland in accordance with the present definition.

<sup>4</sup> I base my comment on the following definition: “a native or *naturalized* member of a state or nation who owes *allegiance* to its government and is entitled to its protection.” [italics mine]

<sup>5</sup> “The opening and closing allusions to Shylock imply an analogy between the wandering, displaced Aryan and the homeless Jew, both cosmopolitans rejected by the societies in which they attempt to settle” (King, 2003: 78).

carries on to format the psyche of the colonized peoples, who, in time, believe in their inferior and bestial status which alienates them from themselves. With an analogous reference to the familial relationships so far employed regarding the issue of home, Fanon concludes that “the colonial mother protects her child from itself, from its ego, and from its physiology, its biology, and its own unhappiness which is its very essence” (1963: 211). Since the people in the Isabella still continue with the act of mimicking instead of successfully decolonizing their culture and identity and feeling themselves as part of the island, their condition refutes the idea that the existence of a nation-state is a prerequisite for gaining the awareness of belonging to a nation as forming a national comradeship depends on the united feelings of all inhabitants. Remembering that sharing the same community and imagining oneself as belonging to a nation are important factors in nation formation, it is observable that the condition in the island does not fit in the definition of nation of Hutchinson and Gellner because the colonized mind is still *contaminated* by mimicry. The colonized people cannot consider themselves “an imagined political community” now that they still imitate the colonizers. As Ranjit expresses, “[they], [t]here on [their] island, handling books printed in this world, and using its goods . . . pretend to be real, to be learning, to be preparing [them]selves for life, [they are] mimic men of the New World” (Naipaul, 2011: 157). Nixon’s biographical account of Naipaul also suggests that the nations in the West Indies, in reality, were devoid of the idea of unity which, according to him, might have resulted in Naipaul’s abandonment of his native land:

in moving from the Indian countryside to the city, the young Naipaul must have been bruised by the pervasive hostility of Afro-Trinidadians toward Indians and that such experiences of racial bigotry crucially underlie his angry rejection of his homeland. (1992: 9)

By the same token, Cudjoe is of the opinion that Naipaul regards the Caribbean society “as being static, depicts the inhabitants as generally philistine, and perceives the existence in the Caribbean (and by extension, in all colonial countries) as futile” (1988: 38). Within this framework, it is neither surprising nor improbable what Naipaul experiences is expressed by his protagonist as follows: “[t]o be born on an island like Isabella, an obscure New World transplantation, second-hand and barbarous, was to be born to disorder” (Naipaul, 2011: 127). His assertion is also an indication of his brainwashed mentality in that Ranjit perceives the world through binary oppositions of order and disorder which he associates the former with the fatherland and the latter with the motherland. As Ashcroft et al suggest in *The Empire Writes Back*, “[i]n imperial terms this can be seen as a geometric structure in which the centre . . . stands as the focus of order, while the periphery . . . remains a tissue of disorder” (2002: 87). Ernest Renan defines nation in 1882 as “a spiritual family, not a group determined by the shape of the earth” (qtd. in Bhabha *Nation and Narration*, 1990: 19) and Ralph is disenchanted once he sees that even the political entity cannot bring the people together: “[Isabella] lacks the homogeneity of population, culture and traditions that might provide unity of purpose” (King, 2003: 72). The people on the Isabella Island cannot erase the feelings of their “previous nonentity” (Naipaul, 2011: 8). They cannot constitute a nation as they cannot imagine themselves as a community<sup>6</sup> under the shadow of the same flag. It turns out to be the reason why Naipaul abandons his homeland, thus making him the target of arrows of criticism:

I saw myself as leaving the rather empty, barren place where I was born and rejoining the old world. It was as simple as that. Joining the real world again. I used to spend so much time trying to analyse why the world I was born was not real . . . The society was such simple one that I don’t think there would have been room for me . . . If you’re from Trinidad you want to get away. You can’t write if you’re from the bush. (Jussawalla, 1997: 23)

For Naipaul, the society he was born in is not real since they are the mimic men of the world. He and Ranjit criticise the colonial politicians who create a drama -acting out in a play- for themselves and who are drowned in what they perform<sup>7</sup>:

A man who was only he saw of himself in others, and an intimation came to me of chieftainship in that island. This was my political awakening. This might be said to have been my first

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<sup>6</sup> The fact that the island is composed of people of different origins make it harder to create national consciousness: “We went through purely mulatto villages . . . [The] Spaniards were a small community . . . distinguished by an almost superstitious fear and hatred of full-blooded Africans and indeed of all who were not like themselves. They permitted no Negroes to settle among them; sometimes they even stoned Negro visitors. We drove through Carib areas where the people were more Negro than Carib . . . Now the Caribs had been absorbed and had simply ceased to be. We were not far from the city -the little shops stocked familiar goods and carried familiar advertisements- but it was like being in an area of legend” (Naipaul, 2011: 130-131).

<sup>7</sup> According to Said, it is due to Ralph’s exilic condition that he wants to be part of an ideology, a group: “[e]xiles feel, therefore, an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people” (2001: 177).

political lesson . . . Whatever the impulse, that lesson, so easily learned, so easily carried out when the time came, was an exceedingly simple and foolish one. (Naipaul, 2011: 107-108)

Ranjit soon understands that “the career of the colonial politician is short and ends brutally” (7) and that they can never be successful since “[they] lack order. Above all, [they] lack power, and [they] do not understand that [they] lack power” (7). He confesses that nationalist feelings are not prevalent even among the politicians, that they merely use “borrowed phrases” (215)<sup>8</sup> so “[their] power [is] air” (223), that they “think of no cause” (215) and “no purpose” (215), and that “[they] ha[ve] no force of nationalism even” (Naipaul, 2011: 223). It is confusion what possesses them in the end as the manifestation of “pointlessness and helplessness of [their] situation” (216). Ranjit concludes that even though the island is an independent state, it is still dependent on the colonial intervention and is influenced by its politics. It also illustrates Naipaul’s pessimistic attitude towards the decolonized nations and why he regards his native land unreal: “[t]he nature of the political life of our island must be understood. We were a colony, a benevolently administered dependency. So long as our dependence remained unquestioned our politics was a *joke*” (206)<sup>9</sup> [italics mine]. What Ranjit portrays in *The Mimic Men* is a pseudo-nation<sup>10</sup>. Theirs is a paralysed, half-moribund and “a diseased society in which internal dynamics no longer succeed in creating new structures” (Memmi, 1967: 99).

### 5. Flight to London: “The Greater Disorder” & Exile

The present situation results in leaving the country he does not belong to. “For those who lose, and nearly everyone [all colonial politicians] in the end loses, there is only one course: flight. Flight to the greater disorder, the final emptiness: London and the home counties” (Naipaul, 2011: 6-7). Ranjit *does* flight because “[i]t is the human instinct for order” (66). The narrative line allows one to call him Ralph since, having coveted his French neighbour’s surname -Deschampsneufs- during his childhood, he changes his name into “R. R. K. Singh” (100). It is suggestive of/reinforces his displaced and mimicking character from the early beginning.

What is and where is home for Ralph? Is it the place of birth? Is it the island on which he is re-located? Is it London which he moves with the hope of finding home? Is he in exile? Why is he in exile? Ralph travels back and forth between Isabella and London, a constant quest for finding home, the “ideal landscape” (9). Even though in his first visit to London he hopes to find the order which he has always associated with the fatherland under the enthralling influence of the novels he has read, there he finds a greater disorder, which is in opposition to what he expects. London cannot be an ideal landscape for him either:

Shipwreck: I have used this word before. With my island background, it was the word that always came to me. And this was what I felt I had encountered again in the great city: this feeling of being adrift, a cell of perception, little more, that might be altered, if only fleetingly, by any encounter. (26)

Why he does not feel at home in Isabella? It has been afore-stated that home functions as a motherland offering protection, warmth and emotional security to its inhabitants. Likewise, it has been defined as a haven in which one can feel safe, secure and comfortable; the familiar and ideal place for retreat, relaxation, intimacy and exclusivity. Ralph’s childhood account, thus, proves that Isabella is not the home for him. Descending from the labourers of indentureship system, he is neither the slave nor the native inhabitant of the island; he is “the late intruder, the picturesque Asiatic, linked to neither” (85) and he feels “like that child outside a hut at dusk, to whom the world is so big and unknown” (85). He does not feel secure and comfortable because he is not rooted in the island. It is the hut of whose preservation he is devoid. The island is not familiar to him either. He cannot perceive the tranquillity of domesticity as he is from a foreign land. He has “visions of Central Asian horsemen among whom [he is] one, riding below a sky threatening snow to the very end of an empty world” (86) instead. The following quotation is illustrative of what he endures and how he survives his homelessness:

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<sup>8</sup> “What did we talk about? We were, of course, of the left. We were socialist. We stood for the dignity of the working man. We stood for the dignity of distress. We stood for the dignity of our island, the dignity of our indignity. Borrowed phrases! . . . we used borrowed phrases which were part of the escape from thought, from that reality we wanted people to see but could ourselves now scarcely face. We enthroned indignity and distress. We went no further” (Naipaul, 2011: 215-216).

<sup>9</sup> Since there is no solidarity between the politicians and the common folk, they cannot constitute a nation: “An audience is never important. An audience is made up of individuals most of whom are likely to be your inferiors . . . The actor is separate from those who applaud him; the leader, and particularly the popular leader, is separate from the led” (Naipaul, 2011: 122).

<sup>10</sup> “We were a haphazard, disordered and mixed society in which there could be nothing like damaging exclusion . . . There were no complicating loyalties or depths; for everyone the past had been cut away” (Naipaul, 2011: 57). He also suggests why their society is not real: “that in a society like ours, fragmented, inorganic, no link between man and the landscape, a society not held together by common interests, there was no true internal source of power, and that no power was real which did not come from the outside” (Naipaul, 2011: 224).

I must explain. I cherished my mother's family and their Bella Bella Bottling Works. But in my secret life I was the son of my father, and a Singh. China was the subject of Hok's secret reading. Mine was of Rajputs and Aryans, stories of knights, horsemen and wanderers. I had even read Tod's difficult volumes. I had read of the homeland of the Asiatic and Persian Aryans, which some put as far away as the North Pole. I lived a secret life in a world of endless plains, tall bare mountains, white with snow at their peaks, among nomads on horseback, daily pitching my tent beside cold green mountain torrents that raged over grey rock, waking in the mornings to mist and rain and dangerous weather. I was a Singh. And I would dream that all over the Central Asian plains the horsemen looked for their leader. Then a wise man came to them and said, 'You are looking in the wrong place. The true leader of you lies far away, shipwrecked on an island the like of which you cannot visualize.' (104-105)

Ralph has a nostalgic desire for returning to his lost home as its material existence cannot soothe his yearning, and he creates a visionary one to which he seems to belong, in which he is the chieftain. "As an imagined point of origin and return, home becomes a temporal signifier that implies a longing for an imagined and unattainable past" (Blunt, 2005: 14), and being aware that he cannot attain the home imbedded in history, Ralph dwells in a fanciful home contrary to his real "shipwrecked and lost" (Naipaul, 2011: 177) situation. Besides, the fact that home is the place where one can express oneself freely and feels independent reinforces the idea that Ralph's imaginary creation is his genuine home. It should also be noted that the definitions of home and nation concur in the sense that home as haven/heaven could be a nation and that, to qualify as home and nation, there should be strong social, emotional and psychological bonds among the people. Ralph's lengthy confession lays bare the reciprocal relationship between nation and home: he does not feel commitment to his people because he is not of the opinion that they constitute a nation, and the fact that they are not a nation renders him an exile as he lacks the *home* he can take shelter in. The island becomes unbearable and suffocating, and he is horrified that he will be compelled to stay in that encircling island:

Withdrawal: it became urgent now for me. Before it had been part of fantasy, part of the urge to escape shipwreck and to return to lands I had fashioned in my imagination, lands of horsemen, high plains, mountains and snow; and time had been as unreal as place. Now I felt the need only to get away, to a place unknown, among people whose lives and even language I need never enter. (156)

Instead of the colonial island suggesting captivity, he aspires to reach the lands of horsemen as the symbol of freedom. "Fresh air! Escape!" (Naipaul, 2011: 193). To cut it short, "[t]he sea. Not [his] element" (173).

"Snow. At last; [his] element" (4). Ralph finds a way out of the tainted island with a scholarship and he desires to compensate for his homelessness<sup>11</sup> and disorder by finding home and order in London. It has been stated that home as heaven can be a city; it can be a site of relaxation or it can be the place where one blossoms. Ralph in London "wait[s] for the flowering to come to [him]" (18); however, he soon realizes that London has "gone sour on [him] (17) and what he finds in "[t]he great city, centre of the world [is] fleeing disorder" (17) . . . "the greater disorder, the greater shipwreck" (194)<sup>12</sup>. Home suggests order, permanency and familiarity that Ralph is unable to find in Isabella. Ironically enough, he tries to construct home in a totally alien land which he associates with order only due to the books he has read. Home should be natural: Ralph as a formerly colonized person cannot be tied to London with inborn bonds and he cannot establish strong emotional attachments with the Westerners who have always regarded themselves superior to the colonized people. As opposed to his chieftainship in his Aryan land, Ralph can solely become in the West "an outsider" (18), an "adrift" (24), a rootless mimic man lacking substantial identity. Indeed, having been unable to find what he seeks for, he is disillusioned soon. London does not function as home either. The Western home in his imagination shatters:

I have seen much snow. It never fails to enchant me, but I no longer think of it as my element. I no longer dream of ideal landscapes or seek to attach myself to them. All landscapes eventually turn to land, the gold of the imagination to the lead of the reality. (9)

Ralph can find home in London neither as a fatherland with its promise of ordered space nor as a motherland with the hope of achieving warmth, protection and security. Contrary to intimacy and exclusivity of home, what he only gets is "growing dissociation between [himself] and the city in which [he] walk[s]" (27).

Ralph is in exile because the physical homes in Isabella and in London do not function as healthy places for him to be substitutes for home and he cannot return back to his native land either. Being an

<sup>11</sup> "I had made my decision to abandon Isabella, to eschew my shipwreck on the tropical desert island" (Naipaul, 2011: 142).

<sup>12</sup> "I thought of escape, and it was escape to what I had so recently sought to escape from" (Naipaul, 2011: 30).

intruder in Isabella and an outsider in London, according to him, now, “[t]he city and snow, the island and the sea: one could only be exchanged for the other” (254). Within this context, whether it is possible to return home or if it really exists, both questions have to be answered in the negative because even though Ralph has home he rejects it and never feels comfortable with it. During his childhood, for instance, he develops the fear/obsession that their old timber house is unsafe and that it will tumble down during the heavy rain (158). He is supposed to feel comfortable and relaxed within the boundaries of home yet he can only feel safe and lucid when he is out of it. He cannot find solace in it since he has already created the oppressive walls of his psychic home within himself. His imaginary homes propound two explanations: only when he is imagining his past and the remote native land can he find peace, but in the Isabellian house out of which he has formed a suffocating mental house for himself he only feels burden.

There is another occasion that Ralph has got the chance to create home with Sandra but he cannot manage it either. A house for him is “one of those things in which the principle of inertia is clearly demonstrated” (76) and immobility is what he is afraid of. Most probably, he would cherish the fixity and exclusivity of home and he would be content with his chieftainship in it, but since he thinks that he is devoid of the genuine home, even building one with Sandra does not bring happiness and comfort. He can never associate himself with his creation; the house builds itself (76); he even copies it from the Roman houses, and it becomes a product of mimicry (a metonymic expression of the condition of his nation). He never calls it *my home* but says the *Roman house*:

Was it the house? It was one of those large timber town houses of the old colonial period . . . We both thought it attractive but for some reason we had never succeeded in colonizing it. Large areas of it remained empty; it felt like a rented house, which soon has to go back to its *true owner*. It had never seemed important to us to have a house of our own. *I had no feeling for the house as home, as personal creation.* (73-74) [emphasis mine]

Ralph is estranged from his own creation. He can never conquer it. He can never turn it into a personal territory. It remains an empty place: “[they] couldn’t obliterate the feeling of failure, the feeling of the house’s emptiness, the feeling that whatever solution [they] achieved would be only temporary” (73). The house at Kripalville, “speedily corrupted to Crippleville” (61) turns out to be the embodiment of his own crippled (or disabled) situation. If house is depicted as “a building that serves as living quarters for one or a few families” and home as “a familiar or usual setting; congenial environment,” it is safe to conclude that Ralph has a *house* but he does not have a *home*. He is not successful at *home-making*.

Ralph does not “like returning to the physical dangers of [his] own house” (166) thinking that he can only get rid of this “absurd disorder [and] placelessness” (166) when he leaves Isabella. He can never feel himself as part of “the slave island” (225) and pretend it to be his only when he is a politician. He is not, however, aware that he cannot escape from the enclosures of his own mind. His vision of London fails soon.

The houses by which I was surrounded . . . the red brick houses became interchangeable with those in our tropical street, of corrugated iron and fretted white gables, which I had also once hoped never to see again. Certain emotions bridge the years and link unlikely places. Sometimes by this linking the sense of place is destroyed, and we are ourselves alone: the young man, the boy, the child. (166-167)

Ralph reckons London to be a substitute for his homelessness yet it turns out to be another disappointment. Two totally different places -the colonized’s and the colonizer’s land- become identically alien and stultifying yet, what is worse, unbeknownst to him, Ralph is colonized by his psyche within himself. So long as he is captured in the prison of his psyche, “the nameless pain from which one feels there can be no way out” (78), he cannot achieve a sense of belonging either in Isabella or in London. Hence, his reliability<sup>13</sup> as a narrator comes to the fore when he suggests that it is his *choice* to belong nowhere: “I prefer the freedom of my far-out suburban hotel, the absence of responsibility; I like the feeling of impermanence” (Naipaul, 2011: 9). Does he really like the sense of rootlessness? Is he really content with his unbelonging and homelessness? Is it another role he has to perform as he has done all through his life? The answers to these questions do not have answers. According to Ashcroft et al in *The Empire Writes Back*,

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<sup>13</sup> His perception of the hotel changes depending on his roles, leading us to question his reliable narrator position: From the traveller to the politician, his description changes within a paragraph: “Glamour touches everyone: the chambermaid, the telephone girl, whose accent and intonation remain with one, the men at the desk, the girl at the newspaper kiosk. They are part of the fairyland, which continues as fairyland until one catches sight of the telephonist at her winking board, the weary uniformed figures sitting slackly on chairs in the laundry rooms, and one sees the pale night-clerk arriving in his shabby macintosh, until the structure of fairyland becomes plain, and the hotel becomes a place of work, linked not to the glamour of airline timetables in racks but to houses such as those seen on the drive from the airport” (Naipaul, 2011: 243).



[a] valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or voluntary removal of indentured labour. Or it may have been destroyed by cultural denigration, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model. (2002: 9)

Similarly, Ralph has been deracinated, and thus, he has no past to refer to in order to establish his identity. Beatley has suggested that individuals need places that inspire, uplift and promote them but, as Ralph lacks such an environment, he becomes a spiritual (and also physical) nomad. The effect of the feeling of homelessness on the individual psyche can be observable in his behaviour.

#### **6. Ralph Kripalsingh: The Shipwrecked Man**

As a man for whose homelessness and character the floating snowflakes can be the symbol, Ralph has an unstable identity. It “does not hang together” (Naipaul, 2011: 26) and all his actions address to his rootless, homeless situation. When he is a child, as homework, he applies “for the vacant post of shipping clerk” (98) seemingly to flee from the Isabella island desiring to be one of those goods he ships. During his youth in London, it depends on Ralph himself to choose his character; he becomes the dandy or the extravagant colonial in accordance with what he wishes<sup>14</sup>. Ralph does not have any membership to “those student associations” (43); he has “no community, no group” (46); having a “spectral, disintegrating, pointless, fluid” (53) identity, he is always in need of the recognition even from the employees in Bella Bella Bottling Works and of the guidance of others; it is Lieni the Maltese girl who chooses his clothes, dresses him, approves of him, sends him out, and advises him to use public transport; it is Browne who pulls him in politics. Since he has not experienced the serenity of intimacy and warmth offered by home, “[i]ntimacy: the word holds the horror” (24) for him; and, Browne’s friendship becomes “a burden” (158). He moves from room to room, from district to district. He is adrift in his personal affairs following numerous women too: for example, Beatrice leads and he follows but he is terrified that he will have a stable relationship with her, which means that he will be tied to someone. He turns out to be an insensitive womanizer: he starts to “frequent prostitutes” (27); and it is just after the marriage to Sandra -he is even passive during the sexual intercourse (also passive with Lady Stella and the prostitutes)- that he thinks of it as “the awful deed” (51) since he will have to be intimate with and connected to her. After the divorce -it seems that his trial of establishing roots fails- his interest in prostitutes revives as well as his arbitrary relationship with Lady Stella. The “stripped remains of a great tree . . . drifting on the ocean night and day for weeks, for months, for a year, until *stranded* on [their] island” (115) [emphasis mine] obviously stands for Ralph’s shipwrecked condition on the island as a person who has been drifted there without his consent just as the drowned children’s “rolling, drifting bodies” (118) refer to his dragged, half-moribund state. Likewise, he drives at nights “just for the sake of motion” (72) and sits at the airport to see “intransit passengers, listening to the names of foreign cities” (72). Rather than associating himself with the home, he desires to identify himself with those flying people. Then, he embarks upon the “role” (210) of the politician which imprisons him: “there also came an awareness of myself not as an individual but as a performer” (85). It is seen that Ralph does not want to hold on to any house, title, status or women and he is always uneasy in his unsuitable roles as a student, as a politician<sup>15</sup> and as a husband in which he is entrapped. He is never at home with himself under the influence of the “distance from any clear-cut national identity or notion of home” (Nixon, 1992: 3). He is the oxymoron: he is shipwrecked but his identity is a shipman. Edward Said points out the intricate relationship between nation and home, a useful explanation to illustrate why Ralph is an exile: “[n]ationalism is an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture, and customs; and, by so doing, it fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages” (176). Said avers that where there is nationalism, homelessness cannot grow up yet as Ralph does not consider Isabella as a harmonious society/nation, exile is inevitable for him.

#### **7. Writing: A Healing Strategy or Not**

Ralph cannot reach the ideal landscape he longs for yet he attempts to create home-like occasions in which he can feel safe, sovereign and independent. How does Ralph create home? What is the remedy, the healing strategy he chooses to create home for himself and to identity with it? Having been colonized/entrapped by his psychic barriers, Ralph initially tries to find solutions within himself. He tries to

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<sup>14</sup> Because “[t]o be descended from generations of idlers and failures, an unbroken line of the unimaginative, unenterprising and oppressed, had always seemed to [him] to be a cause for deep, silent shame” (Naipaul, 2011: 89).

<sup>15</sup> ‘And, sir, if all this were to come to an end tomorrow, what would you do?’ It was my technique instantly to begin a reply to any question. But now I hesitated. So many absurd pictures came to me. Relief: this was my first reaction” (Naipaul, 2011: 40).

bring his impotent and fragmented self together. He starts with giving himself another name<sup>16</sup> which will serve as a token of competence. Being the descendant of the Singh family but with a surname returned to Kripalsingh, Ralph omits the first word and makes his surname more familiar with him. If home suggests familiarity and the means for free self-expression, renaming himself serves as a strategy to create home for him. When he is a politician, he becomes obsessed with naming the things around him<sup>17</sup> too. In so doing, he tries to claim ownership of the island through which he can be spiritually safe. It is his way of constructing a mentally predictable place, a context of domesticity and intimacy with the island he governs. The act reinforces his belonging to the island which, then, overlaps with the idea of home. Likewise, when he starts “retaining trophies from the girls who came to the book-shaped room: stockings, various small garments, once even a pair of shoes” (Naipaul, 2011: 25), he bears similar anxieties. He strives to create a home of his own with the familiar objects which he finds warmth, protection and intimacy as well as emotional attachment. They, however, only provide temporary solutions and he ends up with “the shipwreck which all [his] life [he] had sought to avoid” (6).

Ralph simmers down only with writing when he begins penning his memoirs. He brings together his fragmented memories to soothe the pain of not belonging to anywhere and to get rid of his crippled homelessness. Does writing really work? What is its function? According to Said, “[Naipaul’s] subject was extraterritoriality -the state of being neither here nor there, but rather in between-things” (2001: 99). Likewise, Ralph cannot situate himself anywhere, and his writing activity provides him with a liminal space in which he can openly express himself (quickly remindful of the definition of home) and shed light on his surroundings. It is important to note that he starts writing after his political career ends<sup>18</sup>, which paints a promising picture in the sense that he will no longer be in a drama and that he will write sincerely without masking/distorting the reality. He, indeed, confesses that he will suppress the politician in him (Naipaul, 2011: 9). His aim is “impose order on [his] own history” (266), to expose “the malaise of [their] times pointed and illuminated by personal experience” (6); he wants to display the ailing nature of a decolonized nation; his urge is “to secure the final emptiness” (9); that is, having lived an empty and barren life all throughout, he is triggered to guarantee that he will change the course of his life via writing. And, it is his hope to “give expression to restlessness, the deep disorder” (32) which he considers himself the victim. Labelling himself thus, he seems to put the blame for his failure as a politician on the derivative society (which might also be another reason for his deep estrangement from his people). Above all, he resorts to writing because there is no alternative for him, and he views writing as the only way out against the disorder and emptiness he endures: “[a]nd it must also be confessed that in that dream of writing I was attracted less by the act and the labour than by the calm and the order which the act would have implied” (32). Writing for the sake of writing is not his real purpose but it is only instrumental for pouring his heart out. It calms him down. Before starting to write his memories, Ralph is relieved to take shelter in a hotel room. Ironically enough, the hotel suggests transience in opposition to fixity/rootedness of home yet Ralph can find everything what the safe nature of a home offers in the hotel room. That is how he depicts the hotel room which becomes his tranquil home:

It is a relief to get back from this to the hotel [with his unchanging room]. Here at least there is decorum and calm; no one insists on an impossible communication. The management is unobtrusive but vigilant. If nothing pleases the eye, everything works; everything has that gloss and warmth which comes from daily use and daily cleaning. Impersonality is softened by little touches, such as the fresh flowers on my table in the dining-room. This room is like a great hall. It is panelled and dark; it has a large decorative fireplace with a high mantelpiece. We dine below oil portraits of our lord and lady. The originals eat with us, separated not by the height of their table but, in this technological age, by a sliding partition of plate glass which permits the same mutual inspection and maintains the same respectful distance. We do not think this distinction is unsuitable; we are grateful for what they provide and we look to them for a continuation of order. For here is order of a sort. (36)

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<sup>16</sup> “My reaction to my incompetence and inadequacy had been not to simplify but to complicate. For instance, I gave myself a new name . . . I broke Kripalsingh into two, correctly reviving an ancient fracture, as I felt; gave myself the further name of Ralph; and signed myself R. R. K. Singh” (100).

<sup>17</sup> “So I went on, naming, naming; and, later, I required everything -every government building, every road, every agricultural scheme- to be labelled. It suggested drama, activity. It reinforced reality. It reinforced that sense of ownership which overcame me whenever I returned to the island after a trip abroad” (Naipaul, 2011: 235).

<sup>18</sup> “Writers and politicians are natural rivals. Both groups try to make the world in their own images; they fight for the same territory. And the novel is one way of denying the official, politicians’ version of truth” (Rushdie, 1991: 14). This is what Ralph is trying to do. He decides to create his own reality as a writer as opposed to the imposed one he has to perform as a politician.

His description indicates that the impersonal hotel room offers the qualities of a home<sup>19</sup>. It turns out to be a haven or a surrogate mother/fatherland because it provides emotional and nutritional security; it is calm (place for retreat and relaxation), warm (everything has that gloss and warmth), intimate and domestic (fresh flowers), mentally predictable (daily cleaning), familiar (daily use and unchanging room), exclusive (sliding partition provides distance), private (no impossible communication), spiritually safe and protective (continuation of order), sovereign and governmental (vigilant management). The hotel is “[o]rder, sequence, regularity” (267) he has yearned for all throughout his life. It is the perfect place that can incite Ralph for writing.

Apart from the hotel room, writing becomes Ralph’s “virtual space,” his “non-territorialized home” through which he can question his deeds. As a man who has been drifted by others for so long, writing enables him to find his “chieftainship” (127) he used to seek when he was a child. It is noteworthy that for the first time in his life he is not driven by someone else but chooses to write with his own *will*. Writing matures him. It holds a mirror to his past and his ideas. It transforms him into a man with an indivisible personality from the one who rearranges it according to the view of the others. It gives him an identity out of chaos<sup>20</sup>. He comes closer to himself. He learns himself better. He recovers. He starts to be at home with himself.

AS I WRITE<sup>21</sup>, my own view of my actions alters. I have said that my marriage and the political career which succeeded it and seemed to flow from it, all that active part of my life, occurred in a sort of parenthesis. I used to feel they were aberrations, whimsical, arbitrary acts which in some way got out of control. But now, with a feeling of waste and regret for opportunities missed, I begin to question this. I doubt whether any action, above a certain level, is ever wholly arbitrary or whimsical or dishonest. I question now whether the personality is manufactured by the vision of others. The personality hangs together. It is one and indivisible. (Naipaul, 2011: 199)

Writing becomes a driving force for him to make a fresh beginning out of sombreness as well. Having recovered from the roles strangling him, writing is the starting “action of a free man” (274) now that “[d]espair and emptiness [burn] themselves out” (265). He wants to retrieve power by representing himself and writing becomes the tool. As Judith suggests, “[f]or the writer who is forming not only a text but a bicultural identity (especially one who is still asking “Where do I belong?”), the page might very well be the place where [he] feels most ‘at home’” (206). The page might be the home Ralph strives for succeeding in achieving one.

Ralph’s current situation leads to a problem, though. Ralph previously emphasizes the importance of language in expressing oneself. His assertion that “the descendant of the slave-owner could soothe the descendant of the slave with a private patois” (85) illustrates the significance of the native language, referring to innate language, in healthily expressing one’s feelings and ideas. Similarly, when he wants to escape from Isabella, Ralph feels the need “to get away, to a place unknown, among people whose lives and even language [he] need[s] never enter” (156). With writing, however, he enters into the English language; to enter suggests coming from outside. (It has already been evident that Ralph has never been able to be the part of the Western society.) Moreover, language is a social construct. It is not the reality itself but it represents reality carrying always the problem of misrepresentation with it. Regarding the writings of Browne and Ralph in *The Socialist*, about Ralph’s father’s -Gurudeva- uprising, which “builds on the lie, or metaphoricity, of the phenomenon rather than its sociological bearings” (Mustafa, 1995: 104), Mustafa calls attention to the problem of representation as well and suggests that so long as the colonized people do not represent themselves truly based on their awareness of their circumstances and self-knowledge, they will not be able to clear away the distortions created by the colonial discourse: “Naipaul is suggesting that only in the profit of an articulated literacy -one that addresses “truth” through “self-knowledge” and “knowledge,” that the framing narrative itself is illustrative of- lies the salvation of colonialism’s disruptions” (1995: 104). Mustafa finds Ralph’s writing problematic and distorted regarding it as the record of his “marginality” (1995: 106) and, quoting from Bhabha, puts forth that he misses the important point that “[w]hat emerges between mimesis and mimicry is a *writing*, a mode of representation, that marginalizes the monumentality

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<sup>19</sup> The writing table has the similar qualities too: “It wasn’t part of the standard hotel furniture. It had been provided specially; it was a junkshop article, belonging to no one, without a function. Now it feels rehabilitated and clean; it is familiar and comfortable; even the scratches have acquired a shine” (Naipaul, 2011: 267).

<sup>20</sup> It is equally interesting that for the first time he feels united with the people around him: “[w]e are people who for one reason or another have withdrawn . . . We have simplified our lives. I cannot believe that our establishment is unique. It comforts me to think that in this city alone there must be hundreds and thousands like ourselves” (Naipaul, 2011: 269-270).

<sup>21</sup> The capital letters suggest that he raises *his* voice via writing.

of history, quite simply mocks its power to be a model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable" (1995: 87). In line with the argument, Mustafa thinks that even though Ralph's knowledge is supposed to be originating from self-knowledge thanks to "the agency of writing" (1995: 106), his is "only an existentialist epiphany of marginality through choice" (1995: 106). In this case, how responsibly can Ralph represent his people? By the same token, language is an ideology carrying the values, judgments of its speakers. Individuals are all born into language. They are acculturated by language and ideology from which there is no escape. Given the situation, how far is it possible for Ralph to express himself with a foreign language bearing the Western ideology which has put the colonized people into an inferior status for ages? How healthy is Ralph's writing? How objectively can he represent himself and the experiences of his people? Mustafa's comment is worth quoting at this point:

Mimicry and repetition, therefore, are the two narrative forms that Naipaul locks the colonial and postcolonial characters he creates and their respective situations into. Fiction in the Caribbean, then, apparently originates in self-deception, not self-invention. (1995: 106)

Through writing Ralph creates a psychic home but, still, it is not his natural home; still, it is artificial and constrained. It is still alienated from himself; it is still not based on his self-knowledge. In this sense, it is ironic that the colonial man's language -an alien entity- has become his home and "an end in itself" (Naipaul, 2011: 267) and it is equally (or more) ironic that "this present residence in London, which [he] suppose[s] can be called exile, has turned out to be the most fruitful" (271). Soon, however, Ralph convinces himself of the fruitfulness of his writing as regards to its function to reconnect him to his Aryan background:

I no longer yearn for ideal landscapes and no longer wish to know the god of the city. This does not strike me as loss. I feel, instead, I have lived through attachment and freed myself from one cycle of events. It gives me joy to find that in so doing I have also fulfilled the fourfold division of life prescribed by our Aryan ancestors. I have been student, householder and man of affairs, recluse. (274)

Ralph reckons that he gives meaning and order to his history only through writing<sup>22</sup>. He makes peace with it. "So writing, for all its initial distortion, clarifies, and even becomes a process of life" (274). It is also remindful of Rushdie's assertion that immigrant writers or exiles are driven by an urge to reclaim their past through writing. Ralph, in his childhood, re-creates his Aryan past in his imagination and his childhood habit recurs when he starts penning his fragmented memories. The forty-year-old Ralph creates fiction, he creates imaginary homelands to retrieve "some sense of loss" (Rushdie, 1991: 10): "that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind" (Rushdie, 1991: 10). Where Rushdie celebrates multiple belongings, however, Naipaul's hero strives for reaching his pure glorious Aryan origin<sup>23</sup>. Rushdie's evaluation together with Ralph's spiritual experiences also bring us to the conclusion that it is not possible to return home. Stuart Hall concludes the discussion: "[m]igration is a one-way trip. There's no "home" to go back to" (qtd. in Frank, 2008: 95). Rushdie conjoin with Ralph at another point too: he negates the idea opening sentence of Hartley's novel that "[t]he past is a foreign country" instead claiming that "the past is home, albeit a *lost home* in a lost city in the mists of lost time" (1991: 9) [emphasis mine] while the present is what is foreign. In this sense, he suggests that, contrary to Ralph's belief who is aiming at giving meaning to his past, writing cannot provide reconciliation with the past since it is long-lost, and what is left to the writer is to create imaginary homelands.

Writing has another function in the novel: with its non-linear construction, Ralph's writing subverts the official discourse of history, which is one of the characteristics of a post-colonial writer, and as a refugee-immigrant-politician-writer living in diaspora, it provides Ralph with a chance to observe the society from the centre. Just as he filters his past with a critical eye, his borderline position renders him potent to criticise the West from within in the long run. He (and his writing) also challenges the "myths of order" (King, 2003: 76) imposed by the Western discourse that the West is the source of order, intellect, refined manners, culture and reason. It is only "by creating narratives" (King, 2003: 76) that one can give order to his life, which is what Ralph is desperately trying to do. Based on the argument, King elucidates that for Naipaul writing has another purpose:

Singh is a parody of the writer, someone who thinks writing is easy, but he is also a Naipaul-like figure who has made writing his life and who in writing about the world really is writing about himself and his discontents. As usual Naipaul has been there long before his critics, examining himself, criticizing, even exaggerating his possible faults . . . It is never clear what

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<sup>22</sup> Cudjoe offers an opposite interpretation to his situation: "[H]is eventual residence in London is the ultimate statement of his alienation and a reflection of his unresolved (and somewhat unhealthy) relationship with the past" (1988 111).

<sup>23</sup> Bhabha, on the other hand, proposes "a Third Space of enunciation" (1994: 37) aka the liminal space which denies the purity of any culture.

Singh intends by writing his book, his purpose keeps changing until the act of writing itself becomes his existence, a mimicry of life, a mimicry of the writer's life. (2003: 77-78)

King's comment points out that it is unfortunate that Ralph, even though claiming to unmask his role of a performer, will embark on a different role and continue the life of a writer this time mimicking his acts. He will not break loose from the gyre. His work will not be the authentic production of an authentic writer because, after all, he will be writing in English:

The more [Naipaul and Ralph] aim at literary richness, the more [they] will insert parallels to previous literature. A novel written in English . . . will be modelled on the European tradition which he adapts and revises to his personal situation. How to avoid the mimicry inherent to art? (King, 2003: 83)

As the various opinions of the critics have suggested, much as Ralph Singh makes himself believe in the sacredness of his writing to connect himself to his origins, to represent his people and his own experiences, and to subvert the Western tradition of writing, according to Naipaul, writing does not have a celebratory function since, through Ralph, he lays bare how Ralph is unaware of himself and how he is estranged from his social environment. Naipaul problematizes language as to its problematic issues of representation and mimicry.

## 8. Conclusion

In *The Mimic Men*, Naipaul creates a non-linear *bildungsroman* laying bare the personal development of his protagonist. The novel, as the portrayal of the self-construction of the chieftain R. R. K. Singh "as student, politician and as a refugee-immigrant" (Naipaul, 2011: 266), also illustrates the painful experiences of a decolonized nation under the umbrella of a personal story. The Isabellan islanders cannot create nation in the sense explained by eminent literary critics because the islanders are devoid of the consciousness necessary to build a nation. The decolonized people are still psychically colonized and they tend to perform mimicry. The intricate connection between nation, nationhood, and the concepts of home, homelessness and exile are analysed through Ralph who stands at the intersection of these terms. Ralph, as a descendant of the indentureship system, feels homeless by birth. Ralph, as a representative of his people, is devoid of a history from which he can take strength and in his search for home, neither the Isabella Island nor London proves successful. He abandons his "little bastard world" (131), "the slave island" (262) to find order in the West but what he faces with is a greater chaos. Shipwrecked in an alien territory, he becomes the embodiment of suffering from rootlessness and makes one question the notions of nation and home. In an island where nation is merely a myth and the people are not united with nationalistic energy, the idea of home as embracing all and provider of shelter becomes defunct. What remains to the homeless individual is a life of agony and painful experiences in pursuit of order. The search for home ends up with barrenness when the formerly colonized individual understands that there is no home and that he is doomed to exile. It is partly because of the influence of the colonization on the individual psyche that the individual denies the existence of home. His disillusionment results in a nomadic experience at a hotel room where he starts writing to heal his *artificial* self. Much as it has been discussed that language is an ideological tool and if writing is exempt from the colonial influence, it serves as a useful strategy for him to reach his soul. Only writing *uncurtains* the man to himself who comes to harsh realization that he has been captured in his own prison and only writing grows into a healing strategy to the anguished shipwrecked man.

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