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Research Article

Section: Literature, Linguistics &amp; Criticism

Published in Nairobi, Kenya  
by Royallite Global.

Volume 4, Issue 2, 2023

**Article Information**

Submitted: 7th March 2023

Accepted: 16th May 2023

Published: 19th June 2023

Additional information is  
available at the end of the  
article<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

ISSN: 2708-5945 (Print)

ISSN: 2708-5953 (Online)

To read the paper online,  
please scan this QR code**How to Cite:**

Karim, M. R., Sharma, R., & Banu, S. (2023). Of a Free Man: Downplaying colonial crisis in the discourse of V. S. Naipaul. *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities*, 4(2). <https://doi.org/10.58256/rjah.v4i2.1192>

**Of a Free Man: Downplaying Colonial Crisis in the Discourse of V. S. Naipaul**Mohammad Rezaul Karim<sup>1</sup>, Ramesh Sharma<sup>2</sup> & Sameena Banu<sup>3</sup><sup>1</sup>Department of English, College of Science and Humanities, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Al Kharj, Saudi Arabia<sup>2</sup>Department of English, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Assam Don Bosco University, India<sup>3</sup>Department of English Language and Literature, College of Science and Humanities for Girls, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Al Kharj, Saudi ArabiaCorrespondence: [karimrezaul318@gmail.com](mailto:karimrezaul318@gmail.com) <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8178-8260>**Abstract**

V. S. Naipaul was one of the most prolific writers of the modern time. His writings fluctuate between a sense of psychological crisis triggered by collapse of colonization towards the midst Twentieth century and the meaning of a free man. In other words, his writings look at what does it take to be a free man in a decolonized world; whether this freedom is achieved at the cost of the crisis or within the crisis, or whether the crisis itself is a part of the freedom. However, the understanding of the answer to these questions in his readers seems to be very limiting. The sense of the crisis and the freedom in him has been understood as something narrowing and damaging. However, this can be contested and the sense of crisis, its cause and affect can be best understood with a point of reference to the idea of “irresponsibility” and “contamination” in Jacques Derrida and Gayatri Spivak. His discourse is a meditation on several world contexts- Indian, European, African and Caribbean for instance. This paper contends to say and establish that the sense of crisis in Naipaul as far as his writings on the Caribbean context are concerned, is not damaging, rather it is an enabling phenomenon ensuring a sense of freedom.

**Keywords:** contamination, crisis, freedom, irresponsibility

### Public Interest Statement

The aim of this study is to argue and demonstrate that, in the context of Naipaul's writings about the Caribbean, his feeling of crisis is not harmful, but rather a phenomena that ensures a sense of freedom. In order to prove that there is a parallel counter discourse that progressively shifts from the fictions' fabric to the conventional understanding, this paper examines how ambivalence is portrayed in V. S. Naipaul's works of fiction concerning the Caribbean Islands and how it affects the characters' psychological states.

### Introduction

I feel... I have prepared myself for fresh action.

It will be the action of a free man (274).

—Ralph Singh in *The Mimic Men*

The discourse in the fictions of V. S. Naipaul that concerns the Caribbean Islands and its postcolonial socio-cultural context has often been understood in terms of a sense of crisis. It has been understood as hunted by a feeling of ambivalence, a psychological state of belonging/not belonging, a crisis, to a place of existence. This sense of ambivalence has often been understood as triggered by the process of colonization which needs a brief contextualization here before proceeding further.

The colonization of the Caribbean islands began in the last decade of the fifteenth century. "The history of the Caribbean is peculiar," writes Julio Udofia, adding, "It does not evolve gradually and naturally out of a remote mythological and archaeological past, but begins abruptly with the 'discovery' of the Bahamas in 1492 by Christopher Columbus" (Udofia, 2013, p. 56). The detailing of colonial history, demography, and religion in Trinidad and Tobago by Surap P. Rath is quite significant here to get a clear picture of the islands that gradually become a heterogeneous and ambiguous space for racial, cultural, historical and political experience. The islands are, as Rath (2001) observes:

...often divided along their colonial settlement history into the English, the Dutch, the French, and the Hispanic Caribbean. Demographics of the population offers yet another basis for study, the inhabitants claiming their lineage from Amerindians, Caucasian plantation owners, poor laborers and farmers, criminals, exiles, social misfits, Middle-Eastern traders, African slaves, Asian immigrants under indentureship schemes...(p. 164)

Developing on the history of indentured labour after the emancipation of the slavery, Kenneth Ramchand gives a clear picture of Indian immigrants, on whom Naipaul generally grounds his narratives, into the Caribbean Islands and what number they contribute to its demography. Ramchand (2008) writes, "After Negro emancipation, India became the main overseas source of cheap labour for the British sugar island: between 1839 and 1917, no fewer than 416,000 indentured Indians were imported as substitutes for the freed Negroes. These new slaves were transported to Guyana (239,000) and Trinidad (134,000)" (95). The first ship that brought Indians into the Caribbean was the "Fatel Rozack, which arrived from Calcutta with 225 immigrants in 1845" (Eastley 47) and Naipaul belongs to this community of Indian immigrants in Trinidad and Tobago. About his roots, Naipaul writes in the "Foreword" to *The Adventures of Gurudeva and Other Stories* that his father's father "was brought to Trinidad as a baby from eastern Uttar Pradesh at some time in the 1880s..." ("Foreword" II). Until Naipaul, therefore, it is the third generation of their family in Trinidad.

The same individuals, societies and culture which were abruptly formed, displaced from their

roots and their subsequent generational crisis pervade the fictions of Naipaul. For a conventional reader of Naipaul, this is the origin and the meaning of the crisis. However, it is quite interesting to see how the fictions of Naipaul while giving a beautiful aesthetic bent to the experience of the immigrants with the crisis also downplay the crisis with a sense of personal freedom and thereby give a new dimension to its meaning beyond the colonial arch.

### Literature Review

The fictions of Naipaul, as mentioned above, have been often understood in terms of a sustained contradiction, supplying the sense of flux which comes with both the sense of belonging and not belonging to a particular spatial and temporal moment. As observed by Vineet Kashyap, they “give an insight into how colonized subjects develop a sense of.... unhomeliness... [Naipaul] views places as changing, notions of home and belonging as unstable...” (Kashyap, 2015, p. 221). Commenting on the major area of engagement in Naipaul, Said (2000) writes that Naipaul’s “subject was extraterritoriality—the state of being neither here nor there, but rather in-between things... that cannot come together for him...” (p. 115). This sense of “unhomeliness” and being “in-between” points to a crisis, a paradox of ambivalence.

In Naipaul, ambivalence has been often read as autobiographical. Bruce King draws upon the absence of stasis in the life of Naipaul, in his struggle in the Caribbean, English and Indian settings and observes its aesthetic reflections in his writings. King (2003) says, in Naipaul, “A novel will tell the story of a struggle for self-assertion, its excitements, rages, passion, problems, irritations, defeats, and conclude, sometimes triumphantly, sometimes with frustration, with ambivalence towards the worth of the struggle” (pp. 54-55). In this sense, the entire corpus of writings in Naipaul can be seen as diluted by the personal state of ambivalence. However, since Naipaul’s experience with his fictions is postcolonial, his ambivalence can still be understood as the e postcolonial context, and thus be general.

Even so, there is a research limitation in the use of ambivalence as a perspective in understanding Naipaul. The sense of ambivalence can be seen in Naipaul as demonstrative of an agency of intellectual achievement that can translate into a sense of emancipation from the postcolonial chaos. However, the receptions of the fictions from the perspective of ambivalence, though divergent, are political in the sense they do not consider the Naipaulean treatment of ambivalence as something different from its conventional understanding as arrival at a crisis. Thieme (2001), for instance, sees the treatment of the ambivalence as ironical in *Miguel Street* and writes that “in *Miguel Street* one finds Naipaul coming closer to a compassionate treatment of the black West Indian’s situation than in any of his subsequent works, even here there is more than a touch of ironic ambivalence” (p. 30). In *A House for Mr. Biswas*, Shojaan (2015) recognizes ambivalence as the colonial encounter and writes that,

ambivalence denotes that in the interaction between the colonizer and the colonized, complicity and resistance accompany each other... This way of behavior is seen in Mr. Biswas’ reaction to various events around. Although he at times claims to reject religious views, ‘Sooner or later someone was bound to surprise him, in dhoti, top-knot, sacred thread and caste-marks, reading *The Manxman* or *The Atom*’... (p. 78)

The religious views that Mr. Biswas rejects are Hindu views practiced and promoted by his orthodox relatives and most importantly by the Tulsi family who, in his view, trap him in a joyless marriage. Figuratively, the Tulsi family functions as an extension of the European empire in which its religious views equally become colonial. Similar to Shojaan’s view, in emphasizing the ambivalent nature of Ralph Singh in *The Mimic Men*, Saman Abdulqadir Hussein Dizayi observes that Singh’s

un-invested nature eventually leaves him nowhere, represented by Naipaul as neither “at home” in England nor at his native place Isabella. Dizayi (2019) writes, “Singh has neither rejected his previous values and traditions of Indian origin, nor has he completely adjusted to the Caribbean culture. Finally, Naipaul’s protagonist character has failed to become a part of London and, more precisely, the colonial empire” (p. 924). Mustafa (1995) charges that he is in a quest for a European model of history: “... Naipaul’s map is Conrad’s writing rather than colonial history and his quest canonical rather than historical” (p. 3). Charles (2022) writes that, “Naipaul indirectly absolves the imperialist and colonizer, in the Caribbean, Africa, or India” (p. 22). Dayan (1993) observes him as “racially specific and horrific in their implications for the so-called Third World” (p. 159). What is common in all the readings in spite of their different claims is the reinforcement of the same confused state of existence—a sense of split, irony, complicity to the colonial values, being nowhere, and alienation leading the Trinidadians to degeneration and deformation.

### Research Problem

The above conventional understanding of Naipaul by readers from the perspective of ambivalence is problematic. The sense of crisis in him is seen in terms of a failure, deforming in nature, which however is something that can be contested. Instead, a reading of Naipaulean writings will suggest that the conventional sense of ambivalence is gradually underscored by a sense of intelligence, creativity—an enabling phenomenon-leading to a sense of personal freedom from the post-colonial psychological crisis, as indicated in the epigraph above which this paper attempt to explore.

### Research Objective

The aim of this paper is to explore the representation of the sense of ambivalence in the fictions of V. S. Naipaul that concern the Caribbean Islands and its psychological impact in the characters with a conviction that there is a parallel counter discourse, which gradually evolves from the fabric of his fictions, to the conventional understanding. The objective is to study the representation through the following selections: *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958), *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) and *The Mimic Men* (1967).

### Research Questions

Through the course of this paper, it is intended to answer how a sense of ambivalence leading to a psychological crisis in the discourse of Naipaul eventually becomes an enabling phenomenon, that is, how the sense of crisis, unlike its conventional critical understanding, is downplayed by a sense of personal freedom, leveraged by a sense of intelligence and creativity.

### Perspectives: ambivalence and “irresponsibility”

The perspective of the ambivalence has a theoretical orientation in the postcolonial literature. Literally, the term ambivalence implies a sense of having both positive and negative feelings about something or somebody. In the postcolonial theoretical position, it implies a conflicting state of psychological existence triggered by a colonial encounter. It is a state of psychological crisis. The term owes its origin in the seminal work of Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994). Bhabha (1994) observes that its origins “from... a colonial encounter between the white presence and its black semblance, there emerges the question of the ambivalence” (p. 90) that problematizes colonial existence. In other words, the sense of crisis when located in a postcolonial situation is conditioned by the colonial presence, the functional residue of the colonial ideologies. But this semantic of crisis that implies only a colonial

presence is not completely true and therefore unconvincing in a writer like Naipaul. It gets a counter-orientation in his discourse and this can best be understood in the light of the sense of “irresponsibility” and “contamination” from Jacques Derrida and Gayatri Spivak.

Given the critical nature of the crisis in the discourse of Naipaul, as it is being explored, Naipaul’s author–figure affirms to the “duty of irresponsibility” (Derrida quoted in Royle, 2003, p. 135), that is not being limited to the sense of ambivalence in Bhabha and therefore acceding to the wide area of engagement, which can be understood through the notion of the “responsibility” of an author as “contamination” (Spivak, 1994, p. 23) or consideration of heterogeneous and conflicting areas of engagement. This is to suggest that the areas of engagement in Naipaul are multifarious and discordant and hence its outcomes. It engenders colonial politics, society, and identity, both wide and conflicting, and its epistemological scope, both Derridean and Spivakian. The crisis gets manifested through a representation of politics, society and identity, which eventually but not always, becomes a means to an existential and ethical sense of freedom, one not necessarily rooted in the national and political determination sought in the period of decolonization, but a more personal and individual sense of determination and will. This distinction proves enabling for the characters who are split in the sense of ambivalences across cultural borders in the heterogeneous contexts of the narrative geographies of Naipaul.

#### **Analysis: Downplaying Crisis**

Although all the works under inquiry can be seen as formulating a sense of ambivalence, manifesting a problematic state of existence, the focus area in each of them to dramatize this paradox is unique. As the title suggests, the focus of *The Suffrage of Elvira* is on the ramification in politics, *The Mimic Men* on identity occasioned by loss of home, and finally, an attempt to materialize the desire for house/home in *A House for Mr. Biswas*. However, in all the narrative discourse tends to take “irresponsibility” and “contamination” twists that sharply runs counter to the conventional understanding of Naipaul. The observation of Harveen Sachdeva Mann in reference to *The Suffrage of Elvira*, which strikes a positive note confronting the deadening sense of the conventional criticism, is quite appropriate to quote here as a precaution to the presence of an enabling sense in Naipaul that downplays his historical readings on behalf of all the narratives under investigation. Mann (1984) succinctly writes, “Despite its occasional bleakness and even grimness of tone, *The Suffrage of Elvira* is finally an optimistic novel... Although democracy may have corrupted many Elvirans, some more, some less, it has also benefited them. A beginning has been made” (pp. 483–484). The narrative discourse obliquely informs us that the “people began to see the possibilities” (p. 13).

As the title suggests, *The Suffrage of Elvira* is a meditation on the political crisis, the chaos brought by the colonial superimposition of democracy. Particularly, the narrative is the story of the process of the reception of the General Election 1950 with adult suffrage in Elvira (Trinidad and Tobago got independence from England in 1962) by these people. It was written in 1957 and published in 1958. John Gaffar La Guerre and Cherita Girvan write that “The first election to be held under adult suffrage in Trinidad and Tobago followed after some twenty years of ‘preparation’ with the first instalment of ‘representative’ government in 1925” (Guerre and Girvan, 1972, p. 184). The second General Election was held in 1950 and *The Suffrage of Elvira* accounts for this election. Bhat (2002) observes a very ironic situation of the unfolding politics there, writing, “Naipaul brings out the irony of the situation which involves the arrival of democracy in the islands but the people are not prepared and ready for it. The incongruity of the situation is viewed with an attitude of amusement...” (p. 53). The irony in the fiction implies an unpredictability in the operation of democracy and yet, as the narrative discourse suggests,

the irony, to recall Harveen Sachdeva Mann, is not hopeless; it has the sense of “irresponsibility.”

The second General Election to the Legislative Council of Trinidad and Tobago in which Mr. Surujpat Harbans is contesting from Elvira, a district in Trinidad manifests the dual sense of ambivalence leading to the crisis as well as the possibility of circumventing this crisis, a figuration of the “world outside” in *The Suffrage of Elvira*. John Gaffar La Guerre and Cherita Girvan write that “The first election to be held under adult suffrage in Trinidad and Tobago followed after some twenty years of ‘preparation’ with the first instalment of ‘representative’ government in 1925” (Guerre and Girvan, 1972, p. 184). The second General Election was held in 1950 and *The Suffrage of Elvira* accounts for this election. King (2003) has observed a very disturbing fruition of the election in Elvira which can be taken as coalescing these views and the narrative can be read further in the light of this observation:

At the conclusion the winners and losers are what individuals have gained and lost in relation to each other in the course of events connected to the election. Chitaranjan lost a son-in-law and Dhaniram lost a daughter-in-law. Elvira lost Lorkhoor and Lorkhoor won a reputation. (p. 38).

In other words, the notion of freedom and democracy realized through universal adult franchise cannot be measured as a neatly decidable political quantum; the possibilities that people see take a sharp, even dark, twist. As such, Harbans, Baksh, Foam, Chitaranjan, Lorkhoor, Ramlogan and other characters can be seen trying to cash in on the opportunity brought by the election in one way or another. For people like Mrs. Baksh, the election is not a possibility but a terror unfolding threat and suspicion: “She saw threats everywhere; this election was the greatest” (p. 22) and she suspects “Harbans in particular” (p. 23). The teacher Francis opines that the “new constitution is a trick... Just another British trick to demoralize the people” (p. 96) and has started feeling that ever since the election “Elvira had become a wilderness” (p. 97). He is of the opinion that the people in Elvira really do not know what political participation entails or what emancipatory value such politics engenders. The bitter reality according to Francis is that “the ordinary people of Elvira don’t really appreciate that voting is a duty and privilege” (p. 136). Summarily, the election in Elvira begins and reduces to a grotesque comedy that confronts the significance of the vital and serious historical turn in terms of the adult franchise in Trinidad. Naipaul blurs the historical change with a satirical comedy indicating a necessary critique of such a transition.

But the actual day of the election has a different message. It appears sunny and promising: “As the darkness waned the *mist lifted*... Every tree was distinct” (p. 212, emphasis added). And there is rain: “It rained. The roads became muddy and slippery; agents had to leave their positions under trees and move under houses; taxis, their windows up and *misted* over...” (p. 217). In other words, the lifted “mist” and the “rain” are symbolic and indicate that the discourse is enabling in nature; it is definitely marked by a sense of “irresponsibility” and “contamination” which virtually underscores the conventional discourse of failure. It is optimistic and hopeful about the future of Elvira and this sense downplays the apparently seemed “muddy” and “slippery” execution and practice of democracy.

A similar crisis of colonial subjecthood continues in the next fiction, *A House for Mr. Biswas*, but in a far more serious and intriguing plot where humour completely evaporates and though, as Owens (1962) puts it, “Naipaul has many humorous passages... his dominant mood is one of sympathy for a hopeless situation” (p. 219). *A House for Mr. Biswas*—the name “Biswas” is not insignificant in that it implies confidence, and therefore, the name of the protagonist itself suggests an undercurrent trait in the fiction which continuously looks for an enabling situation for him that can orient him toward a sense of freedom—is an attempt to express a possibility for an alternative to crisis. The comic representation in

the first fiction given previously gradually evaporates and what unfolds is the gravity of a tragedy of an alienated and exiled colonial figure. Argyle (2002) opines that “In its arrangement, the novel announces itself as an epic” (109) and Mr. Biswas “befits an epic hero” (p. 111). Roberts (1995) sees *A House for Mr. Biswas* as parallel to the Homeric epic. In reference to one of Derek Walcott’s fiction, he says, “Derek Walcott’s *Omeros*...successfully relocated Homeric epic in a West Indian setting. And Naipaul’s novel *A House for Mr. Biswas* is exactly such an achievement” (p. 182). In this sense, the epic struggle in *Odyssey* can be read in the figure of Mr. Biswas. Like in the epic, “From... incredible pressures and despite a mental breakdown, Mr. Biswas struggles to success—ownership of a home. He has refuge” (Bagai, 1962, p. 453).

The epic struggle, which connotes success through crisis, of Mr. Biswas has a trajectory through Hanuman House, to several other houses he builds after until his own house at the end. His search of a house and a job of his own, his identity, lands him at the Hanuman House. But his association with the Hanuman House is more psychological than literal. According to Chakrabarti (2005), “There is a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective to his condition at the Hanuman House. The sense of evasion (his desire to escape from the Tulsis)... is the result of his schizophrenic sense of angst from which he suffers as he feels trapped following his marriage with Shama” (p. 49), a daughter of the house. It is the abode of an orthodox Brahmanic Hindu pundit, Pundit Tulsi, Indian in origin at Arwacas. The Pundit has already died and the house is being managed by his widow, Mrs. Tulsi. It is a conventional Indian family: married daughters stay with the mother and sons-in-law assume Tulsi identity; mothers-in-law “were expected to be hard on daughters-in-law, sisters-in-law were to be despised” (p. 385). There is also a colonial angle of the house in which people are seen to be trapped. Kashyap (2015) adds, “*A House for Mr. Biswas* shows that colonial subjects are entrapped in an unstable colonial social context in which they cannot feel independent or secure at home” (p. 222) and Chakrabarti (2005) observes the Tulsi society as a “classic slavery”, writing, “The Tulsi society is actually founded on a system of classic slavery: food and security are battered with independence” (p. 48).

Hanuman House makes him realize that life is not a romance, but a responsibility but such responsibility takes on odyssey-like proportions, being exiled from resources and means to extricate oneself from the crisis that is represented by Hanuman House, and its paradoxical existence as colonial effect while also engendering colonial continuity. The rest of the story can be read as a manifestation of how Mr. Biswas remains in flux, and how he continuously struggles for freedom in terms of aspiring for a home. What follows is that Mr. Biswas will struggle to build a house of his own at each place he goes in pursuance of his desire for freedom from Tulsi connection. As Sharma (2015) states, “The house... is not any ordinary house made up of brick and cement. It has assumed the stature of the protagonist’s passionate urge for an independent identity in the background of crude suppressing postcolonial society” (p. 206). According to Farred (2002), “The house functions... as a complex metonymy... the house stands as the unfulfillable, but sustaining ambition” (p. 97). However, in the case of Mr. Biswas, the house is not completely “unfulfillable.” Bhat (2002) observes the metaphoric significance of the house:

The house stands for a rootless man’s longing for a home. The expatriate Hindu’s love for a home is personified in Biswas’ longing for a home; it is also the Third World rootlessness in general longing for a home and also the universal longing for an identity and home of one’s own. The home also stands for one’s identity for which every rootless person strives. (pp. 57–58)

Iyer (2005) further integrates the metaphoric significance of the house writing that it is “an allegory of the attempt to emancipate oneself from colonial, determinist dominance... house is not simply where one lives. It is one’s identity—national, cultural and spiritual” (p. 23). The meaning of the house for the continually dislocated family of Mr. Biswas is paradoxical, but herein emerges the negotiation between the structure of the house and the haunting memory of the home is made possible. The comment of Vineet Kashyap on the final house of Mr. Biswas is far more summative to conclude his whole ambivalent experience, part successful and part failure: “Mr. Biswas’s achievement in finally buying a house should not be underestimated. Indeed, his several failures, his psychological distress, and the poor condition of his final house renders his achievement ambivalent, in the sense that his final purchase embodies simultaneously his failure and his success” (Kashyap, 2015, p. 225). Eventually, as Davies (1972) notes, “Mr. Biswas accommodates himself” (294) and the reality of such accommodation is that it is an adjustment, negotiation with the crisis, an another instance of Naipaulean discourse manifesting the sense of “irresponsibility” and “contamination.”

This sense of the narrative of crisis may also be read in *The Mimic Men*. But in it the gravity of the situation erases the comedy and the tragedy of the earlier fictions from within and gets oriented towards a meditative mode on the cause and consequence of the crisis and their discovery in a similar context, which further validates the nature of “irresponsibility” in Naipaulean discourse. Although the protagonist Ralph begins with a dystopian vision of identity in a colonial situation, gradually, “at the end of his autobiography, he remains ambivalent, apparently free from the ‘cycle of events’ but enticed by ‘fresh action’” (Ghisalbherti, 2009, p. 90). Ralph is more introspective as a protagonist than Mr. Biswas, and reflects upon the cause of the sense. Dizayi (2019) has pointed out the threatened identity of the protagonist. Ralph “has abandoned his home, family, and self-identity... it has alienated him from his cultural origins... The alienation of his identity has resulted in the scattering of his personal being, resulting in the vulnerability and corruption of his inner self” (pp. 920–921). The narrative is introspective, a memoir of the protagonist’s vision of “disorder” triggered by his initial sense of failure within the colonial space—he is a failed student, a failed husband, a failed businessman and a failed politician. Thus, Ralph says,

My first instinct was towards the writing of history... It was the shock of the first historian’s vision... a vision of disorder that was beyond any one man to control yet which, I felt, if I could pin down... It is the vision that is with me now. This man, this room, this city; this story, this language, this form. (p. 85).

Ralph’s introspection leads him to an imperative to recognize the frames of cultural paradox triggered by the colonial experience that have diluted his capacity to meaningfully and productively live.

The narrative dramatizes the ramification of the duality of both belonging and not belonging in the colonial context. As observed by Culhaoglu (2015), “Ralph... feels he does not have a history, a background, a past, a pedigree, a character, and authenticity on which he can base himself. He feels he does not belong anywhere... In short, he suffers from a deep identity crisis and a lack of a sense of belonging” (p. 91). Singh (2005) concludes “A Journey of Rejection: V. S. Naipaul’s *The Mimic Men*” in comparison with Ralph Ellison’s *The Invisible Men* affirming that “*The Mimic Men* is not about politics or about a particular race or society but about the dissociation of sensibility, about displacement, isolation and identity crisis” (p. 165). Ralph’s existential anxiety is deeply connected to this paradox of both belonging and not belonging, and has been inferred as “homelessness” by Hurwitz (2012), who writes,



Even though Ralph by the end of the novel resides in London, the life he leads is not one of someone who has finally found his home but of someone on yet another stopover. Indeed, during the final pages of the novel, Ralph reflects while riding a train to the English countryside on his 'imminent homelessness' and his belief that he 'had no past'. (p. 150).

K. S. Narayan Rao's review gives a clear course towards understanding the story of Ralph henceforth. Rao (1968) writes that the novel is "in fact, a voyage of self-discovery, a search for identity, a record of conscious brooding against the evanescent background" (p. 167). The self-discovery comes from struggling through the crisis. On one level, Ralph thinks of Isabella and England in terms of his colonial education which insists on a dichotomy between the centre and its peripheries, confirming a sense of split in Ralph's identity. His impression of Isabella, as Manjit Inder Singh observes, is "the order-disorder theme itself, which is crucial to the understanding of Naipaul's fictional portrayal, is central to Ralph Singh's negative stance towards societies such as Isabella" (Singh, 1998, p.109). The "negative stance" is apparent in Ralph's initial impression of Isabella. For him Isabella is a "garden of hell" (p. 158) and a "shipwrecked" (p. 94) island (highlighting the psychological effect of colonization, a state of being "mimic men", justifying and valuing everything that is Western and condemning everything Eastern, a sense of ambivalence).

He was also a good learner. Every Friday used to be the "library day" at school. On such occasions, he used to read *The Aryan Peoples and Their Migration*. He also read *Asvamedha*, the horse sacrifice "ritual of victory", a "statement of power", performed by the Aryan kings. It was performed by Udhisthira, the Pandav King, followed by the Mauryans celebrating their expulsion of the Greek interloper Alexander from Aryavarta. This further drives his fantasy; he sees himself in these "truly brave" rulers. But the paradox of his situation is that he thinks he can revert to that bravery only in the West. He claims the fantasy of an Aryan lineage not in Isabella but in its topographical and geographical opposite, that is, the snow-capped mountains called the "Laurentians". Then he has appalling visions: first he sees his father as "shipwrecked", like Columbus, in the island of Isabella: "I used to get the feeling that my father had in some storybook way been shipwrecked on the island and that over the years the hope of rescue had altogether faded" (p. 94). Then he sees himself and his friends, for example Hok, shipwrecked there. The cumulative impact of the dreams and fantasies is that, as he says, "I resolved to abandon the shipwrecked island and all on it..." (p. 127). This leads him to conclude that Isabella is like hell, wherein "...we walked in a garden of hell" (p. 158); they are the pretenders, the mimic men: "We pretended to be real, to be learning... we mimic men of the New World, one unknown corner of it..." (p. 157).

Maxey (2012) has observed, "The first-person narrative of Naipaul's novel *The Mimic Men* is preoccupied with postwar questions of home, or rather escape: it is as much about the journeys which propel the bid to find a home as it is about arrival at actual destinations and the decision to remain in one place" (p. 33). As Maxey maintains, Ralph goes to England for higher studies with the desire of a promising "home", to escape the sense of not belonging to Isabella, and to gain a new identity. However, the search for a new "home" in Ralph, as it appears, fails and "the decision to remain in one place" is again contested by Naipaul. Home becomes a construct, a crucial aspect of *A House for Mr. Biswas* is reiterated by Naipaul. The irony is that Ralph's impatience for his dream home only precludes a descent into the sense of being "shipwrecked" in England too; the same sense of forlornness he experienced and desired to escape in Isabella engulfs him the moment he is in England. He finds he does not belong to England either. The two cultures, the different ways of Isabella and England, though varying in their

political, cultural and social undercurrents, become one in terms of their impression on Ralph—the sense of belonging and not belonging, of being lost and shipwrecked—and thus remain as panic until the end.

The panic continues and even the narrative flow is affected. In his “Preface” to *The Mimic Men*, Naipaul writes that “the book began as it were to write itself” (“Preface” viii). In other words, when the narrator is trauma stricken the writing itself is the writer; it takes its own order–disorder course reflecting the psychology of the narrator. In this sense the narrative itself can be considered as a symbol of the trauma. The structure takes a dream–like sequence: the first part of the book begins in the middle state of his life—his first arrival in England, loss, marriage, return to Isabella and the departure of his wife, Sandra; the second phase is about his early life in Isabella until his first departure; the third covers his political career, its fall and his final reclusive retreat to England. Put another way, the narrative itself suggests an unhoused and confused narrator.

Caught in the duality between the desire to belong and the sense of not belonging, Ralph drifts around England, around Europe, without purpose and without pleasure. At the end of each journey he returns more helpless and wasted. It is almost the state of a psychological breakdown. He was lost at school too; he did not feel part of “their associations” there. If Ralph projects his initial fantasies onto distant locales, in Isabella, he does the same in the figure of Sandra, the English girl, whom he will later marry. However, like Ralph, she is also lost and as Ralph states, “She reflected my own mood exactly” (p. 47). There are other qualities in Sandra that draw Ralph towards her. She has no community; like him she does not join any group or association. He thinks she is alone, like him, but somehow privy to a sense of place in the world, unlike him. She is “rapacious,” she has “consuming self–love.” In her, Ralph sees the entire “positive” about the city that has reduced him to nothingness. They rapidly develop an intimacy and soon marry. Ramadevi (1996) observes the reason why Ralph marries Sandra:

Ralph Singh sees the magnitude of her social ambition which attracts him more and more. Her rapaciousness and eccentricities fascinated him. He comes to feel that with her resourcefulness and avidity, she could guide him through life’s uncertainties. With too many expectations and a lot of confidence and self–assurance he leaves for Isabella in a mood of celebration hoping to set right the ruined pieces of his life through a new relationship, the bond of marriage. (p. 33).

But the marriage itself is paradoxical. Ralph is lost in the English way of life, yet he believes that the Englishness that he thinks he sees in Sandra can still salvage him. In other words, his mimicry still continues. Coupled with the mimicry, the marriage has psychological reverberations. Therefore, a psychoanalytic reading of Ralph, in the Freudian model, becomes inevitable here for a larger comprehension before deviating into the consequences of the marriage.

Sigmund Freud will be significant here from two theoretical paradoxes: wish fulfillment and the Oedipus complex. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud (2010) observes that “...the dream is not meaningless...It is a perfectly valid psychic phenomenon, actually a wish–fulfillment...” (p. 116). The dream has its origin in “sexuality” for him. Thus, in reference to a friend’s—Otto’s—idea of trimethylamine, an organic compound, as one of the products of sexual metabolism, he writes, “This substance thus leads me to sexuality, to that factor which I credit with the greatest significance for the origin of the nervous affections which I attempt to cure” (p. 111). Thus, sexuality implies the origin of a dream or a desire. But the desire also involves an object. The object of desire may also figure in other forms through a process of “sublimation”, or an acceptable figurative displacement. Freud has also

talked about the formation of a psychological “sexual whole” in the family relationship; mother–son form one sexual whole. For sons, the mother is the object of desire. He explains this in reference to the mythical story of the King Oedipus of Thebes and his unfortunate and ignorant conjugation with his own mother, Jocasta. He thus writes,

It may be noted that we are all destined to direct our first sexual impulses towards our mothers, and our first hatred and violent wishes towards our fathers; our dreams convince us of it. King Oedipus, who slew his father Laius and wedded his mother Jocasta, is nothing more or less than a wish–fulfillment, the fulfillment of the wish of our childhood. (p. 229).

However, under social and cultural restrictions, which work as the father figure, this union of the son and the mother will not be fulfilled and therefore it gets configured into the marriage of the son with another woman. The daughter–in–law, for Freud, is the “sublimation” of the object of desire. A marriage, therefore, can be seen as the agency for the figuration of a desire in Freud. As we have seen, the dream of Ralph is intense, but once in England, it is obliterated and hence not fulfilled. England thus becomes analogous to the Freudian father figure. Therefore, his marriage to Sandra can be interpreted as the displacement of his initial desire to belong. In other words, Sandra can be considered as the destination of the desire for Ralph, “the solution for his existential anxiety” which Hapugoda (2018) explains: “From a psychoanalytical perspective, this mostly refers his psychological bondage to liberate himself from traditional cultural life–worlds to embrace new conditions of emancipation” (p. 47). The marriage, however, fails but the intensity of the desire does not dissipate. Therefore, the narrative loci can also be traced in the suspended displacement, as well as the paradoxical ramifications of his encounter with England which fails to fulfill his desire. In other words, England plays the role of deception for Ralph; it lures and eventually traps him.

Next, Ralph becomes a real estate businessman at Isabella. Initially he succeeds a lot but eventually he gives in up and joins politics. Its leads to success. However, his political career gets a quick nose-dive as it is hit by a financial crisis leading to dire ramifications like racial riots and killings. His delegation to England for fund drive ends in a fiasco and thereafter he renounces politics, his country Isabella and becomes a recluse in England meditating on his history hitherto. This introspection leads him to several awakenings, which are more philosophical and confirms the complete intellectual possibility of Naipaulean discourse that downplays its understanding as failure. Ralph has the following discovery: Ralph initially has a different perception of human existence. In the beginning, he thinks it is what one sees in others: “A man was only what he saw of himself in others...” (p. 107). Next, whether the identity is what others see in us: “I question now whether the personality is manufactured by the vision of others” (p. 199) and eventually recognizes “that in conditions of chaos, which would appear hostile to any human development, the human personality is in fact more varied and extended. And this is creation indeed!” (p. 234). This leads him to a sense of personal freedom from the haunting sense of crisis, as quoted in the beginning: “I feel... I have prepared myself for fresh action. It will be the action of a free man (p. 274).

### Conclusion

Thus, in all the fictional discourse there is eventually an optimistic twist towards new possibilities–hope, success and intelligence that virtually underscore the critical claim of degeneration, deformation and failure. There is a certain hope that Dexu (2016) observes, for instance, as an enabling lesson,

with reference to *The Enigma of Arrival*, which otherwise is equally true of the novels explored in this chapter, writing, "...the lesson we can learn from the migrant narrator's self-inspection (as in Ralph) of his transnational experiences is to face up to difference, live with that difference, and refashion it to facilitate human communication and connection in a multicultural context" (p. 165). The tense and transformative interplay between crises form the undercurrent of the representation of the Caribbean Islands in general and Trinidad in particular, at the threshold of freedom from colonization and figuring in the narratives also in terms of, unlike the conventional understanding of Naipaul as derogating or denying the colonial subjecthood, an enabling sense of negotiating the duality of belonging and not-belonging, its resultant paradox, is arrived at although through a continuous and suspended struggle. It is where the ambivalent discourse in Naipaul takes the sense of "irresponsibility." Walder (2003) rightly queries, "...where might we find a set of discourses that promote this sense of identity as thus unsettled, hovering between reversal towards an older model... on the one hand, and a newer model as a process of struggle towards something decentred and deferred?" (p. 6) indicating a discourse having the sense of "irresponsibility" and "contamination" and, interestingly, finds its appropriate answer in Naipaul, which adds a more accommodative sense to this aspect of Naipaul's writing. He thus answers, "I have found one starting-point for developing such discourses through the work of V. S. Naipaul" (6).

**Funding:** This study is supported via funding from Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University project number (PSAU/2023/R/1444).

**Acknowledgments:** The authors would like to thank the Deanship of Scientific Research, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University for support.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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### Authorship and Level of Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study.

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