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ROOTLESSNESS AND ALIENATION

IN

WEST INDIAN LITERATURE

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By

JENNIFER ANN YIP CHOY

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AUTHOR: Jennifer Ann Yip Choy

SUPERVISORS: Dr. James Dale and Dr. Gary Warner

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CHAPTER ONE

SLAVERY AND COLONIZATION

> Tu compris soudain que cette histoire n'avait été qu'une féroce poussée pour échapper à la mesquinerie qu'on imposait à ce pays, à la petitesse dont on l'accablait en même temps qu'on lui distillait la honte et la misère.
>
> You suddenly understood that this story had been nothing more than a fierce push to escape the meanness that has been imposed on this country, the pettiness with which it has been overwhelmed while it was being made to feel ashamed and wretched.[1]

The literature of the West Indies countries is by and large a new one, and like all things in an embryonic stage, it is obsessed with a curiosity for the past and a zeal to create the future. Writers see themselves as the spokesmen of their people, and the West Indian writers have taken it upon themselves to lead the struggle for identity, to create, as it were, a past, a present, and a future for their people. But before any feeling of "roots" can be engendered within society, it is first necessary to know one's history. As a result, one of the characteristic features of writers from the West Indies is their compulsive preoccupation with the past. Michael Dash notes in his article "Marvellous Realism":

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[1]Edouard Glissant, La Lézarde, as quoted by Vere W. Knight in "Edouard Glissant: The Novel as History Rewritten", Black Images, III, No. 1 (Spring 1974), 64.

> One feature of Third World writers which distinguishes them as a distinct literary fraternity is the fundamental dialogue with history in which they are involved.[2]

As the Caribbean novelist Edouard Glissant puts it: "Qu'est-ce que le passé sinon la connaissance qui te raidit dans la terre et te pousse en foule dans demain?"[3]

It is impossible to discuss adequately the literature of any of the Third World regions without first giving some background information on the history of the area. The mood of the writers and the tone of their writings reflect political tensions and the indignities and injustices which their people have endured. In The Wretched of the Earth, Fanon remarks on this fact:

> Sometimes this literature of just-before-the battle is dominated by humor and by allegory; but often too it is symptomatic of a period of distress and difficulty, where death is experienced, and disgust too . . . . . the native . . . . turns himself into an awakener of the people; hence comes a fighting literature, a revolutionary literature and a national literature.[4]
>
> . . . . The artist who has decided to illustrate the truths of the nation turns paradoxically toward the past and away from actual events. What he ultimately intends to embrace are in fact the cast offs of thought, its shells and corpses, a knowledge which has been stabilized once and for all.[5]

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[2]Michael Dash, "Marvellous Realism - The Way Out of Negitude", Black Images, III, No. 1 (Spring 1974), 88.

[3]Edouard Glissant, Le Quatrième Siècle, as quoted by V. W. Knight in "Edouard Glissant: The Novel as History Rewritten", Black Images, III, No. 1 (Spring 1974), 65.

[4]Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, trans. Constance Farrington, (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1968), pp. 222-223.

[5]Ibid., p. 225.

There is a common theme in Caribbean literature and a common purpose. The writers of the regions are trying, through their writings, to establish a feeling of identity, trying to restore to their people a feeling of self-respect and pride. But although there is this bond, the islands' history cannot boast of the same unity. Fragmentation in the West Indies has created, for each island, a different past with varying problems, and it is for this reason that this brief discussion of the history of the islands cannot be complete or thorough. Each island was and is governed separately and had and still has its own peculiar internal problems. For example, the Maroons and the Morant Bay rebellion occurred only in Jamaica. There was another serious slave revolution in British Guiana (now Guyana). Some of the other islands had no such trouble, but one thing was common to all, and that was the system of slavery and colonization which was imposed on the islands. The following section is merely a brief survey which, it is hoped, will help to place in some perspective what will be discussed in the following chapters.

When Columbus "discovered" the New World in the late fifteenth century, it marked the beginning of numerous problems for Europe and the West Indies. The indigenous people of the Caribbean, the Caribs and Arawaks, two Amerindian tribes, were treated with such brutality and ruthlessness by the Spaniards that they had little hopes of a long survival. In 1516, 200 Amerindians were burnt alive, and it was not seldom that many

were put to death for various crimes.[6] The Amerindian population was not large, and such wanton killing facilitated the gradual extermination of the people. A slave trade began and Amerindians were moved from one end of the Archipelego to another without any regard for family ties and personal preferences. The Amerindians, not accustomed to such treatment or willing to endure the enslavement, revolted in 1699 and several people, including members of the clergy, were killed in what is now known as the "Arena Massacre". In retaliation, the Spaniards pursued and captured a number of the "rebels", and after torturing killed their victims. Those who were not taken avoided this fate mainly because they chose to die at their own hands rather than be captured by the Spaniards.[7] Fortunately for the Amerindians however, they found a protector in Las Casas, who agitated for better treatment and human consideration for them. Laws were established to protect the native people and to provide for their needs. That same man, Las Casas, while advocating humane treatment for these people, was the very person who suggested that the Africans be imported to replace the Amerindians in the fields. The Amerindians were indeed ineffective in the fields so the Africans were introduced into the workforce. By 1870, when a census was taken, 5.3 million Africans had been brought to the Caribbean.[8]

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[6]Eric Williams, The History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago. (London: Andre Deutsch Ltd., 1964), p. 24.

[7]Ibid.

[8]People, II, No. 1 (1975), 13.

This massive importation of slaves made the ratio of Africans to their European masters very high, and in order to maintain discipline and prevent rebellion various methods of control were employed. One common technique was to separate, geographically, the slaves from their friends, kinsmen, families and leaders. It was found that a small group of slave owners could control a relatively large group of slaves if they were from different tribes because of the differences in their languages and their inherent distrust for each other. In Capitalism and Slavery, Williams points out that under slavery, practising and maintaining one's culture was made extremely difficult when those who shared the same culture were separated as soon as they arrived.[9] So, not only were these people torn away from their homes and treated as animals, but they were also deprived of the right to foster their native habits and culture and this eventually led to the state of cultural uncertainty in which the twentieth century found them. What aggravated this uneasy state even after the abolition of slavery, was the system of Colonialism which will be discussed a little further on in the chapter.

This policy of separating families was not implemented when the Indians and Chinese were brought to the Caribbean as indentured labourers. Unlike those of the slaves, their families and friends were not dispersed throughout the land nor were they sent off to some other island. Consequently, they were able to

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[9]Eric Williams, Capitalism and Slavery. (New York: Capricorn Books, 1966), p. 173.

avoid cultural disintegration and this explains the existence of many Indian customs in the West Indies even to this day. However, while it was possible for the first indentured labourers to feel a close link to the motherland, as the generations increased, so did the feeling of attachment to the land of their fathers decrease. Again, as in the case of the slaves, Colonialism was instrumental in effecting this breakdown of affiliation to India and China.

In all, some 535,000 indentured labourers were brought to the Caribbean, most of whom were Indians but some were also from China and Java.[10] Very few Chinese were imported for it proved to be too expensive a venture and the Indian people seemed best suited to the type of work required on the plantations. Bridget Brereton explains the reasons for the massive importation of Indians:

> India had a large population; millions of her people lived in destitution and so would be likely to emigrate in the hope of a better life; most of India was under British control, which meant that it would be an emigration of British subjects from one British colony to another, . . . India's climate was not unlike that of the West Indies, and most of the people were accustomed to agricultural work. The cost of importation, though high, was not prohibitive as it was in the case of China.[11]

Most of the Indians were sent to Guyana (then called British Guiana) and Trinidad and this is the reason for such a large percentage of Indians in these two regions.

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[10] People, II, No. 7 (1975), 13.

[11] Bridget Brereton, "The Experience of Indentureship: 1845-1917", Calcutta to Caroni, ed. John LaGuerre (London: Longman Caribbean, 1974), pp. 25-26.

And so it came about that by the beginning of the twentieth century there were people from Europe, Africa and Asia all congregated in this relatively small area, the West Indies. However, although there was this amalgam of races, one factor remained constant throughout: the ruling class was always white, that is to say, it consisted only of those of European stock. From outright slavery to disguised slavery (indentured labour) to Colonialism, this was the pattern of development.[12]

The feeling of rootlessness which enveloped the people of the West Indies would have been avoided if they could have been made to feel at ease in their new home. One wonders how it is possible that such a large percentage of the population could be made to feel so alienated. The reason is to be found in the form of government which existed at the time. The Colonial system, though largely an economic one, was influential in all spheres of life, and though in theory it was not as oppressive as slavery, in practice these two systems were no different.

Albert Memmi presents a very clear picture of Colonialism and its implications in The Colonizer and the Colonized. The

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[12]The only real difference between indentured labour and slavery lay in the fact that the former came voluntarily, were paid some sort of wage and were allowed, if they wished, to return to their native land after their period of indentureship was completed. The Indians were subjected to stringent laws and were treated as badly and inhumanly as the slaves. Bridget Brereton's article supports this statement. See footnote 11.

colonizer initially leaves the mother country in the hope of bettering his economic and social position. Leaving for a colony is "simply a voyage towards an easier life"[13] and the colony is a place where "one earns more and spends less . . . jobs are guaranteed, wages high, careers more rapid and business more profitable".[14] Thus the Colonizer comes to the Colony, not with the intention of making it his home and improving the colony; rather, he seeks only to exploit the country, bleeding it of all its resources. The money he makes, he hoards with the intention of sending it back or returning with it himself to his home country. Because of the colour of his skin he is automatically granted the privileges of the colonizer by the colonized themselves, such has been the extent of the latters' conditioning. Memmi explains:

> He [the colonizer] enjoys the preference and respect of the colonized themselves, who grant him more than those who are the best of their own people; who, for example, have more faith in his word than in that of their own population . . . . He possesses a qualification independent of his personal merits or his actual class.[15]

Colonialism is damaging, degrading and inhuman, not only from the economic, but also from the psychological point of view. By its very nature, it deprives the colonized of his self-respect, makes him see himself as inferior, and the colonizer (the white man) as almost a God; for colonialism is really

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[13] Albert Memmi, The Colonizer and the Colonized. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), p. 3.

[14] Ibid., p. 4.

[15] Ibid., p. 12.

an off-shoot of slavery. The master was inevitably white, and the slave black, and so white became an admirable and an inspirational symbol, and black a cause for shame and suffering. To better one's condition it was necessary to "improve" one's colour, possibly through marriage; the fairer one's skin, the more fortunate one was considered. As a direct result of colonialism there was an urgent need to mimic the white man's way of life, for at least, if one could not be actually white in skin, at least one could be white in culture. Contingent upon this was an almost complete severing of ties with what was considered bad, the African way of life, and later, to some extent the Indian or Chinese culture; and so, while one discarded the natural for something which was considered better, the better proved to be so foreign as to be beyond reach. The result was naturally the growth of an extreme frustration and a deep feeling of alienation even in one's homeland. Under such adverse conditions, it was not possible to develop true roots. Feelers were sent out which reached nowhere and left the individual still unstable, still vulnerable to every passing breeze.

Before going on to discuss some of the Caribbean novelists and their works, one other aspect should be uncovered and that is the animosity which existed (and still exists to some extent today) between East Indians and Africans. This discussion is necessary for it will help to clarify much of what Mittelholzer refers to and will help to explain, perhaps, some of Naipaul's prejudices and fears as seen in his novels. It will also show what an obstacle and, how damaging the colonial system

has been in the formation of a homogeneous and racially peaceful community within the West Indies.

After the abolition of slavery, most of the slaves left their former masters. Many moved to the cities and worked as semi-skilled labourers. Gradually this sphere of activities in urban areas continued to spread until the ex-slave occupied the lower echelons of the civil service, police force, public schools and other such institutions. Those who remained in rural areas indulged in widespread "squatting" on Crown lands where subsistence farms tended to develop, but the African never succeeded in becoming a landowning class because of the legislation which was designed to prevent this. Heavy land taxes were levied by the colonial office in order to prevent the African from owning land.[16]

The Indians, while also considered undesirable by the Colonial Office, were greatly depended on to fulfill the needs of the plantocracy. Since the Africans refused to work on the plantations, it was necessary to encourage the Indian to come, and then to remain on the plantation for some time. Thus, the indentureship was formulated whereby the Indian was bonded for five years after which he was free to return to India, but at his own expense. Since his wages were frugal, this return passage was almost impossible and he was forced to remain for another five years if he wished to be granted a free return trip. However, the Indian was enticed to remain permanently with the

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[16] Williams, p. 211.

promise and hope of acquiring land. In fact, by the end of the 1860's a new policy was introduced which offered "time-expired indentured workers a few acres of Crown land . . . . if they would give up their claim to a return passage to India".[17] In the article "East Indians and the Larger Society", Kelvin Singh goes even further to describe the implications of this policy. The land granted to the Indian was invariably of an inferior quality and in most cases, the land produced so little that the owner was forced to seek employment elsewhere. Since, however, his estate was adjacent to the plantation it became his only means of supplementing his income.

> But the interests of the sugar plantation were regarded as paramount by the planters and by the colonial and imperial governments, and the grant of land was regulated in such a way to encourage the settlement of Indians around the plantations, in the hope that they would work a part of the year, especially during the crop season, and supplement their low wages by cultivating their small plots of land, thus providing themselves with subsistence crops.[18]

However, the most important factor was that the Indian was made to feel privileged; and though his actual situation was no better than that of the slave, the mere fact that he was free to leave after a certain stipulated period, and the fact that he was allowed to own land, made him see himself as better than the African. It should be pointed out that the colonial office did nothing to discourage this way of thinking.

The Indians lived under extreme and adverse conditions.

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[17] Kelvin Singh, "East Indians and the Larger Society", Calcutta to Caroni, p. 40.

[18] Ibid.

Added to this was the fact that they entered the country with strong cultural traits which were not discouraged. These factors and other incidents only made the African view the Indians with suspicion and disdain and the rift between the two groups grew wider as ignorance and fear increased. Kelvin Singh explains:

> The fact that they [the Indians] entered the society as unskilled labourers, bound to the plantations during their indentureship, caused them to be regarded as semi-slaves, people nearest the condition that Negroes had recently emerged from and heartily despised. This contempt was reinforced by the picture often painted by planters and officials of Indians being contented with their working and living conditions . . . . Thus the Indian was viewed as an inferior human species who would accept conditions of life that other races would reject.[19]

Because of this mutual distrust and disdain for each other (the Indians considered the Africans inferior for they were once slaves) these two large bodies of people were kept quite distinct and as long as they remained so, they offered no threat to the colonialists' position in society.

The attitude toward the Indians on the part of both the Africans and the Europeans created a feeling of shame in the later generations and the feeling of cultural confusion eventually began to grow among the Indians. As always, these younger generations began to aspire to be white, for to them, that too meant upward mobility.

The East Indian and African, being both at the lowest rung of the colour and social ladder, vied with each other for

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[19] Ibid., p. 43.

the second-to-last lowest place. They despised and mutually distrusted each other. The East Indian hated to be referred to as black or negro, for according to him, his hair was of a better quality and his skin not as dark. To the East Indian, the Negroes are a race of slaves, and in many ways they maintained the opinion which was held by their white masters. The East Indians came from a country with strong cultural traits, and as indentured workers did not feel the same sense of loss and lack of roots which the African slaves experienced. It should be clarified at this point that while the East Indians wished to be white in the sense that they wished to be wealthy and influential, they resisted, for the most part, cultural assimilation, and interracial marriages. There was nothing more shameful than to have one's son or daughter marry into another race, especially that of the negro. On the other hand, the blacks despised the Indians, considering them nothing better than "dirty coolies" and discrimination against the East Indians did little to prevent this stereotype from festering into something quite serious.

The strategy of most rulers has been, as Tony Thomas puts it, "to divide and conquer"[20] and the government of such places as Trinidad and Guyana where the population of the country comprises a large percentage of Negroes and East Indians, followed this rule. This internecine racial warfare prevented both groups

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[20]Tony Thomas, "Mass Upsurge in Trinidad", Black Power in the Caribbean. (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972), p. 4.

from bettering their economic and social positions, for while they were engaged in their futile hatred, the man at the top felt secure and could indeed, feast.

Before dealing with any of the novels, it is first necessary to explain one other factor, that is, the colour hierarchy which existed in the West Indies, for it will help to avoid some confusion later on in the discussion. The most important and influential people were the whites, that is, those people who are of European or from European stock and who have in them no East Indian or Negro blood. They were the first-class citizens. The second most important group of people were the creoles or the coloureds, those people who had white or European but also Negro blood in them. Because of their white ancestry, many of the coloureds were able to move into better economic and social positions and so it came about that they became quite an influential group in the community, and this is especially true during the time of which Mittelholzer is writing. The Negroes and East Indians formed the lowest echelons of the community.

The far reaching psychological effects of this system of colonization cannot be denied. Colonialism in itself was founded on racial inequality and requires distinction to be made between the plantation owner or the colonizer and the worker or the colonized. It is a system which breeds rootlessness and the only way out, the only way to establish roots, is to destroy, to remove it and all that it represents. In Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth is seen the tragedy of colonization as he discusses

the chaotic and distressing situation in Algeria. Mittelholzer's A Morning at the Office dramatizes the deep psychological scarrings of colonization. As Albert Memmi points out, it is a circle which closes in on itself. The colonizer may not wish to irritate or perpetuate these problems, but his mere presence, his position, ensures these troubles.

The West Indian writers have looked at colonialism from different perspectives and they each offer a different solution to the problems. Colonialism has been responsible for the feeling of rootlessness which exists among the people. And by rootlessness is meant, not belonging, dispossessed, without anything or anywhere to call one's own. Colonialism has generated the feeling of alienation. Definitions of alienation are numerous. However, as Joachim Israel says, "Theories of alienation are based . . . . upon the relationship between the individual and society". Conflicts and antagonisms occur between the individual and society and the demands are often "incompatible with each other".[21] Erich Fromm's definition of alienation best fits that which is seen in West Indian writings. He says:

> By alienation is meant a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as alien. He has become, one might say, estranged from himself, he does not experience himself as the creator of his world, as the creator of his own acts - but his acts and their consequences have become his masters, whom he obeys, or whom he may even worship. The alienated person is out of touch with himself as he is out of touch with any other person. He, like the others, is experienced as things experienced; with the senses and with common senses, but at the same

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[21] Joachim Israel, Alienation from Marx to Modern Sociology. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1971), p. 11.

> time without being related to oneself and the world outside productively.[22]

These two by-products of Colonialism have been dealt with quite differently. Salkey suggests looking at history for the source of the problem, and then, having discovered the cause, getting rid of it. Clarke sees the situation as hopeless and emigration as the only answer; Naipaul struggles with his feeling of alienation and finally sees the answer in universal brotherhood. From this point on, we shall focus our attention on the writers themselves and examine what they have to say about the problem of rootlessness.

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[22] Erich Fromm, The Sane Society. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1956), pp. 120-121.

CHAPTER TWO

THE WEST INDIAN MILIEU

Rootlessness manifests itself in many ways, but the West Indian writer concerns himself mainly with the feeling of alienation which the immigrant experiences and which the individual, living at home under colonial rule, feels. The works chosen to be discussed in this chapter deal mainly with the latter form of rootlessness, that is, with the feeling of alienation as experienced in one's own homeland. It deals with more than one West Indian writer for the aim is to examine this theme in the literature of several regions and by different people. Salkey represents Jamaica and his poem Jamaica deals with the Jamaican struggle against colonialism. Samuel Selvon, a Trinidadian writer is mentioned briefly to support what Mittelholzer wrote about in A Morning at the Office. Naipaul is not referred to here as his works are discussed in the following chapters. Clarke's novel, The Survivors of the Crossing is set in Barbados and touches on life in that island. Even though Mittelholzer writes about Trinidad in A Morning at the Office, the peculiarities and prejudices which he so carefully notes are also to be found in the land of his birth, Guyana. His autobiography A Swarthy Boy is proof of this.

A Morning at the Office explores the various layers of society in terms of race, class, wealth and shades of colour.

The office staff is made up of the representative racial groups to be found in Trinidad: white, Spanish-creole, coloured, Chinese, East Indians and Negro. Mittelholzer carefully describes each ethnic group and goes even further to elaborate on the differences which occur between two people of the same race but who come from separate socio-economic strata.

Horace Xavier and Mary Barker are the only two full-blooded negroes employed. Horace is the office boy and Mary, the cleaner. They occupy the humblest positions in the office and both are from poor families. The attitude of Horace's mother and his family life is supposedly typical of his ethnic group. His father, given to drink and gambling, deserted his mother when Horace was six years old. His mother is a hard-working, patient woman who struggles to educate her son and so, hopefully, prevent him from following his father's example. His mother instills in him the accepted norms of society. For example, he must always smell sweet and clean:

> When you smell sweet and clean, people will respect you, and you will get on in de world, but when you smell sweaty and nasty de bacra people turn away from you and call you a stink nigger - and you punish and dead bad.[1]

When Horace confesses to his mother that he wishes to be a doctor her only consolation is:

> "Ah know you would mek a good doctor, me boy. You got it in you. But dat not for you. Dat not for you, Horace. Your skin black and you poor". (p. 7)

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[1]Edgar Mittelholzer, A Morning at the Office. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1950), p. 5. Henceforth, all page references are included in the body of the text.

Horace is black and poor and because of this, his ambition and desires will be frustrated.[2] This is illustrated only too clearly in his secret love for Mrs. Nanette Hinckson. Though he usually tells his mother everything, this he does not reveal to her. He knows that she would not be pleased:

> Some intuition warned him that his audience would not applaud, that his audience would be unsympathetic, might even subject him to ridicule and contumely. (p. 8)

He considers his infatuation a shameful weakness and he

> .... should have remembered that he was only a black boy, whereas she was a coloured lady of good family. His complexion was dark brown; hers was a pale olive. His hair was kinky; hers was full of large waves and gleaming. He was a poor boy with hardly any education, the son of a cook; she was well off and of good education and good breeding. He was low-class; she was middle-class. (p. 9)

The problem is two-fold; not only is he black and therefore, racially inferior, but also he is from a poor and lower class family.

Horace knows that his love is "out of place" and the other members of the staff, when they discover his infatuation, thrill in the scandal of the affair. Mr. Jagabir, an East Indian, also from a poor family, from the same economic level as Horace but racially different, is astonished and amused at this "Lil' half-penny black boy" (p. 90) and his love for Mrs. Hinckson. Though the other characters in the story take some delight in the absurdity of the situation, it is only Mr. Jagabir who becomes obsessed with making it as difficult as possible for

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[2]Israel, p. 11.

Horace.

Mittelholzer deliberately outlines Mr. Jagabir's predicament for in so doing, he offers some explanation for the petty bickering and tension between Mr. Jagabir and Horace. Jagabir comes from a very poor family; his parents were once indentured labourers and are now employed by one of the large plantation owners. Mr. Jagabir would normally have followed in his parents' footsteps and worked in the fields, but he is too ambitious to allow himself to be tied to the land. He makes use of the first opportunity to secure an office position for himself. He is a hard and dedicated worker who tries his best to please his superiors. Inspite of all his efforts, and even though he is aware that his services are invaluable to the chief accountant, Jagabir continually feels threatened. Years of training have taught him that

> . . . . an East Indian's place was in the Field - the cane-fields of a sugar estate, cocoa or citrus plots; shovelling and weeding. An office was meant for white people and good-class coloured people. (p. 22)

He feels that at any given moment he could be dismissed from the office and sent to work in the fields. His fear of dismissal reduces him to grovelling, prying, sycophancy and to bullying his fellow workers. He is indeed a despicable person. However, Mittelholzer takes time to explain the reason for his meanness of character. One of the explanations given is his history of suffering at the hands of the white man which caused him great humiliation.

> Still, felt Mr. Jagabir, he was an East Indian, and that made all the difference. He was a coolie; he had worked in the fields for four years after leaving primary school; he had been cursed at and threatened and humiliated by white overseers - once nearly kicked: only his agility had prevented the muddy boot landing in the seat of his pants.
> The fourteen years he had spent working his way up in the Tucurapo office had not been easy, either; he had had to suffer in silence many an insult, many an unjust scolding, many a threat of dismissal. Never for a day had his white superiors forgotten to make him know his place.
> (p. 32)

In order, then, to compensate for his lack of feeling of importance, Mr. Jagabir needs to bully those he can, and as much as possible, impress upon them his position of importance and superiority in the office. The more he tries to convince them of his dignity, the better he confirms their opinion of him as "an officious coolie". (p. 91)

No one in the office harboured kind feelings towards Jagabir. Horace dislikes him and so does Mary, the sweeper over whom he tries to exert his authority. In spite of all his efforts, however, he is unable to discipline the two negroes into recognizing his superiority. He continually tries to get Mary to address him as Mr. Jagabir and always finds fault with her work though no one else ever did. To Mary, Jagabir is inconsequential, a "cheap coolie" (p. 20) whose opinions are of no value. Horace too, has no respect for him and Jagabir knows that his race coupled with his social status is responsible for his behaviour. This point is developed with the introduction of another East Indian, Miss Bisnauth.

Miss Bisnauth, though she is also an East Indian, does not experience the same prejudices and difficulties which surround Jagabir. She is educated and her father is a wealthy provision merchant. She does not have to work for a living. Jagabir considers her a threat to him for he feels that she is contemptuous of him, regarding him as nothing but a "dirty coolie" (p. 69). The great difference between Jagabir and Miss Bisnauth is further emphasized in their speech patterns. The latter is careful of her grammar and never lapses into the idiom of the people. When, for example, Mary, Jagabir and Miss Bisnauth discuss Mary's missing five dollars, the social difference is unmistakeable. Mr. Jagabir asks:

> Ent you is keep de broom in de lunch-room? . . . . Just what Ah tell you! I found it on de lunch-room floor - not far from de broom, besides. (p. 72)

Miss Bisnauth says:

> You're sure you couldn't have dropped it in the office here when you were sweeping? (p. 71)

and Mary replies:

> Ah don't t'ink so, Miss, but Ah come back here to tek a look-around. If Ah drop it in de office here Ah woulda sure to notice it when Ah was sweeping. Me eyes been on de floor all de time. (p.71)

Speech then, is also a determinant of class and importance. Miss Bisnauth's family have divorced themselves from the Hindu culture. In every way they have been Westernized. They do not speak, read or write Hindi, nor do they in any manner follow

the Indian cultural traditions. Miss Bisnauth's wealth protects her from many of the things which Mr. Jagabir has experienced. It gives her a feeling of security which he does not have, and makes her more open and kind to other people, especially those who are not as fortunate as herself. Instead of laughing at Horace's infatuation for Mrs. Hinckson, for example, she pities him and has tears in the place of laughter. Her job in the office is not necessary for her livelihood. She chooses to work because she sees it as an outlet whereby she is able to meet people.

Unlike Miss Bisnauth, Mr. Jagabir thinks it necessary to ingratiate himself with his superiors in order to ensure his job in the office. Because he feels threatened, he tries his best to please all the influential people. But whenever possible, he tries to create as much trouble as possible for others for by so doing, he believes he can strengthen his position. When a mistake has been made on the Burke's grocery account, he is quick to place the blame on Miss Henery, and tries to make it seem to Mr. Murrain that it is a result of her, and not his, negligence. He says to Mr. Murrain: "It was Miss Henery's fault. I always talking to her and warning her to be more careful when she is typing out de accounts." (pp. 35-36) There is no response or reaction to his complaint. As far as Mr. Murrain is concerned, Miss Henery is quite efficient. But Jagabir, not content with trying to create havoc, gently and cautiously reprimands Miss Henery for her mistake, testing his strength, seeing how far he can take liberties with his authoritativeness.

Miss Henery, one of the coloureds and one of the more secure and confident people in the office does not take too kindly to Mr. Jagabir's insinuations and retorts: "Mr. Jagabir, I'm getting tired of this thing. You're always making your sevens like nines - and vice versa. You expect me to be forever trying to decipher your figures?" (p. 90) All Jagabir's bravado vanishes under such a reply. Immediately he begins to fear that she would complain to the manager that she is unable to read his writing. His imagination takes over:

> Fear rose in Mr. Jagabir. He saw Mr. Murrain reporting it to Mr. Waley that his handwriting was illegible, and, as a result, the typist could not make out the figures he wrote. It was causing much inconvenience and annoyance. Several firms were beginning to complain. Mr. Waley reported the matter to Mr. Holmes, the Manager of the Tucurapo estate, and Mr. Holmes came to town for a conference . . . . This coolie, Jagabir, was no good, after all. He was growing grossly inefficient. They would have to get rid of him . . . . It would be better to send him back to the estate to some field job . . . .
> (p. 91)

Nothing could seem worse to Mr. Jagabir than to lose his office position, and nothing could be more abhorrent to him than to have to return to the fields. Office jobs are the most sought-after occupations for they represent respectability and upward mobility away from the fields and manual or blue-collared jobs. He becomes extremely and unnecessarily apologetic, and for all his efforts, he succeeds only in making it uncomfortable for himself and in annoying Miss Henery.

Jagabir is ashamed of his heritage. He feels completely alienated from everyone. He believes that all his co-workers his superiors included, dislike him because he is East Indian,

because his parents were indentured workers, because they are coolies, and poor. He feels that Trinidad is not his home. He is uncomfortable there. He does not belong. Yet he belongs nowhere else. He has been stripped of his dignity, of his self-respect, and it is because of this that Mr. Jagabir continually needs to reassure himself of his importance, of his ability to be respected by others. Poverty is added to the burden of his skin and culture and aggravates his problem of alienation.

Mr. Jagabir, Miss Bisnauth, Horace and Mary portray one aspect of society: the poor Indian, the rich Indian, the conflict between Indian and Negro. Miss Henery, Mrs. Hinckson, Mr. Benson, and white superiors and the other office members reveal another preoccupation of Trinidad society, the concern over colour and hair texture. Miss Henery is coloured and is "very conscious of her background of gentility and her social superiority over the Negro, East Indian and Chinese elements which counted, in her estimation, as low-class." (p. 45) She has all the prejudices of the coloured middle-class. Even when considering choosing a marriage partner, she is careful to select someone of a "good class" (p. 58) and with good hair. As Mittelholzer explains:

> . . . . as a member of the West Indian coloured middle-class, she conceived of human hair in terms of "good" and "bad" - sometimes "good" and "hard"; "good" hair is hair that is European in appearance: "bad" or "hard" hair is hair of the kinky, negroid type. (p. 58)

Hair and colour are important elements for they serve as reminders of one's burden. Mr. Benson, also coloured, has kinky

hair. He regrets that his mother was a negro. (p. 169) He congratulates himself, however, on having a good complexion: "Watch my complexion. No nigger could show a complexion like this". (p. 169)

There is constant reference to "good" class, good hair and light, olive complexions. Bad hair and dark skin is to be avoided and the natural deduction is that "good" refers to white. The people in the office who hold important positions are the two Englishmen who are objects of envy and dislike. Miss Henery considers herself the white man's equal but she wishes to be like him in colour. Colonialism has made everyone wish to be white, and since they could not be white, it makes them mimic the white man's standards, his way of life, his way of thinking, his morals. It has bred dissatisfaction with what one was, and caused prejudice to develop among the people. F. M. Birbalsingh has laid the blame for colour-consciousness and its accompanying spiritual torment at the feet of miscegenation.[3] This can be refuted by Mittelholzer's A Morning at the Office and many other works by Caribbean novelists. Rather, colonialism can be held largely responsible for the fragmentation of the West Indian people who have had to toil under the white man's yoke.

In Turn Again Tiger, Samuel Selvon shows that even a timid and humanitarian person such as Tiger can eventually become bitter towards his white "massa". Tiger, liberal though

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[3]F. M. Birbalsingh, "Edgar Mittelholzer: Moralist or Pornographer?", The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, VII, (July 1969), pp. 88-103.

he is, resents having to return to estate work and labouring for the white man. Quite unconsciously, the resentment he feels comes to the surface as he thinks: "Working for the white bosses, day after day. The white man was making all the money, and they had all the work to do . . . . Everybody grumbled, but they still worked, because not to work was to starve".[4] Tiger is determined not to be servile towards the white boss, and all his actions reflect a conscious effort to show that he is not afraid, that he does not care, and that he will endure no humiliation. One of his struggles to overcome the feeling that white is right manifests itself in his desire to possess the wife of the overseer. When finally, he makes love to her, he does so with "hatred and lust". (p. 177) This conflict which rages within him, to possess and yet to discard the white person is seen again in Prekash who suddenly realizes that everything "taught him to behave as the white man, to think like him, to talk like him, to live like him". (p. 29) He wishes to be like his boss because he sees it as one way of becoming important and of getting the woman he loves. Yet, something deep within him resents this desire to be the mimic. It is this conflict which leaves the colonized so confused, so rootless. He is undecided as to which direction to follow. He knows that he can never be white, but he also knows that being

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[4]Samuel Selvon, Turn Again Tiger. (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1958), p. 60.

what he is does not help him to get ahead in his world.

Selvon considers this question of colour and nationality "balls" (p. 79), and although he acknowledges the problem, he offers no solution. His stories are idyllic; his characters ask such questions as "Is why everybody can't live good together?" (p. 79). Mittelholzer's characters also raise the question, and the answer is that it is human nature to discriminate. Mrs. Hinckson thinks to herself that even if there were no races and everybody was of the same complexion, possessed the same type of hair, people would still find something to quibble over.[5]

Clarke's novel, The Survivors of the Crossing, illustrates this point quite adequately. Life is very difficult for the people of the village. Everyone has been laid off from their jobs except Rufus and Boysie, who, though they work because they need the money, resent having to be constantly reminded that they should be grateful for being able to work. After years of oppression, the natural outcome would be violence. Rufus begins to feel the twinge of revolt within him as he stops to light a cigarette and says, "My hand' itching like hell to burn down these plantation canes".[6] The match burns itself out but Rufus cannot so easily burn the years of frustration out of him, the years of having to endure humiliation and answer "yessuh" to the white man, the years of cursing himself for having been born on the island, of crying in shame, and of

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[5]Mittelholzer, pp. 156-157.

[6]Austin Clarke, The Survivors of the Crossing. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, Ltd., 1964), p. 12.

being treated like an animal. He is not content to leave things as they are. He is determined to have things change, and has made up his mind to call a strike.

Rufus' guiding light, his source of inspiration, is Jackson and the letter he receives from him. To Rufus, Jackson should be the village's symbol of liberation. Jackson is living in Canada and reportedly enjoying a life "cool as arse" (p. 9), free from the shackles of colonialism and the sugar-cane estates. Since Rufus, unlike Jackson, does not have the wherewithal to leave the island and settle in another country, he must either endure life as it is, or try to fight the system to the end. It is the latter which he decides to do and it is with this intention in mind that he calls a meeting of all the people in the village. When the villagers learn of Jackson's remarkable and easy life in Canada, they begin to believe that there is hope for them, hope for a change to occur in the village which will make life a little more bearable for them. Their conviction turns to action and they decide to march to the manager's mansion, to protest and to "get the plantation people to see some sense". (p. 42)

Village people, and people in general, are by nature cautious, unwilling to commit themselves or go against the grain. Clarke emphasizes the villagers' degree of desperation and frustration when he shows their willingness to support Rufus. They have been kept down for too long, trampled over too many times, and made to feel as inferiors too often. Jackson's letter gives them hope, and defies the myth of the white god. He says that

in Canada there is none of this "Mister, sir", that he is treated as an equal, treated as a man even by his superiors, and he ends the narration of that incident with "You boys down there on the plantation should be treated in that manner" (p. 11). Having heard the letter, their cry becomes a cry for equality.

Rufus did not count on Biscombe, his confidant, betraying him. And Biscombe eases his conscience by telling himself that he has to protect himself as well: "A rum shop must sell rum. With a strike who knows what would happen" (p. 28). To the minister and the schoolmaster he explains: "Strike in this village, mean one thing. People outta work. No work mean' no money. And no money mean' my sales dropping" (p. 29). The schoolmaster and the minister are both horrified at the thought of a strike, the latter claiming that "it was not ordained by God for people to rise up against their leaders, whether spiritual or temporal" (p. 29). For this reason many people turn against the church, for they see it as part of the institution which is helping to keep them down. As Naipaul explains in The Middle Passage:

> The missionary must first teach self-contempt. It is the basis of the faith of the heathen convert. And in these West Indian territories, where the spiritual problem is largely that of self-contempt, Christianity must be regarded as part of the colonial conditioning. It was the religion of the slave-owners and at first an exclusive racial faith. It bestowed righteousness on its possessors.[7]

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[7] V. S. Naipaul, The Middle Passage. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1969), p. 172.

However, though they are against the strike in the beginning, as events progress they too, begin to see the injustices of the system. Mr. Turnbull, the overseer and the manager of the plantation, with utter ruthlessness seek to quell the spirit of rebellion, and curb any further desire on the part of the villagers to strike or to cause trouble.

The first attempt at a strike proves a failure. Rufus retains a souvenir for his efforts, a bullet wound. He does not allow his first failure to deter him and doggedly refuses to be beaten. According to Rufus:

> That bullet have make me a new man. They make me a martyr. And now I not only looking forward to tomorrow, or the next two days, or even pay-day I looking to futures. I dreaming . . . . 'bout that day, when I could look up in Turnbull' face and say "kiss my arse", when a piece o' this land I working on all these years belongst to me, when Stella could wear high shoes like the manager' wife, . . . when them two starved-out childrens o' mine could go to Harrison College and Queen's College like the children o' the Rev, or the manager, or even like how Turnbull trying to get his two scatter-brain' children in at the Lodge School for Gentlemen's Sons. Them is the things I have in mind.[8]

Rufus has reached a point of desperation where he no longer cares about himself or his life. He has nothing to lose for he is a man without roots, a man who does not belong, who has nothing to live for or look forward to. As far as he can see, he is still enslaved. Rootlessness has finally brought on violence, a violence bred out of desperation. From this point onwards, Rufus stands alone in his fight against the plantocracy,

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[8]Clarke, p. 66.

although the villagers give him their full moral support. The plantation managers have decided to teach the instigators of the trouble a lesson, and realizing that Rufus is alone responsible, set out to persecute him into silence. Rufus, knowing that he is unable to fight them, tries to get even at least in one small way. He sets fire to the canes, causing much damage and being a thorough nuisance to the owners. Finally, however, Rufus has to face up to reality, and as he once said, even though they may have abolished slavery years ago, "they forget to abolish the next kind" (p. 24).

Rufus, and others like him, are still shackled to the land, still have no place in society. They do not belong. Nothing is theirs and they are made to feel like the underdogs, inconsequential human beings whose only purpose is to work the land, and produce the sugarcanes for the plantocracy. Clarke, like Mittelholzer and Selvon, illustrates this feeling of alienation, of rootlessness, which existed among the "local" (that is, non-white or creolized) people of the West Indies, and like the other writers, Clarke sees the situation as hopeless. His characters, like Rufus, seek to instigate a change, only to be beaten back, and beaten badly by the system. Their only alternative is to leave.

During the novel he mentions one point which is later developed by Salkey, and that is the need for education. Rufus says to the schoolmaster that he would spend his last penny on his children's education for "Is education what going to release this village, this island, from the tyrannies o' slavery" (p. 24).

Indeed, it is only through education that people can begin to fight the problem of suppression, of rootlessness. Years of slavery and colonialism have taught the black man and the East Indian that he is an inferior human being, that his place is in the fields, planting and reaping cane. When, for example, Urmilla, one of Selvon's characters, wishes: "Only white people. If only they could be like white people!"[9] she expresses a sentiment that was encouraged and held by the people. Everything that they learnt was oriented toward the white culture. They thought and spoke like their white masters and imitated in every way possible their habits. The more educated a person was, the more white he became. When Clarke talks of education what he really means is the re-education of the people, educating them to see themselves as good as or even better than their white oppressors, to make them see themselves for what they are and to accept and be proud of their colour and race.

Rootlessness in the West Indies, that is, rootlessness among the coloured or non-white people, existed because they were discriminated against for their colour and race. These people, mostly of African and East Indian descent, were poor and uneducated. When things began to change, when they began to realize that because of their numbers they had power, then the tables began to turn. In an attempt to establish roots, in an attempt to convince themselves of their power, they began a revolution which involved violence for there can be no peaceful

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[9]Samuel Selvon, A Brighter Sun. (London: Longman Caribbean, Ltd., 1972), p. 31.

revolution when there has been a history of violence. (Slavery involved physical violence and colonialism, mental violence). Nothing could seem sweeter to the underdog than to do as Rufus dreamed of doing, that is, of telling his tormentor to "kiss his arse".

Salkey's poem Jamaica revolts against all the conventions of white society. He uses, with great vitality, the spoken idiom of the local people; his language echoes with the anger and violence which they feel; and his poem can be seen as an attempt to establish roots. His is one answer to the West Indian dilemma of rootlessness.

Education is Rufus' cry because he believes it will bring freedom. Salkey endorses this and, appropriately, his first poem in the collection is entitled "I into history, now".[10] Most people know very little about their past, know nothing about their ancestors or where they came from. Salkey's point is that it is impossible to know where one is going unless one knows where he is coming from. Without this knowledge, there can be no culture, no roots. Like Naipaul, Salkey claims that:

> We don't got not'ing
> that we can call we own!
> We don't 'ave a t'ing!
> We's empty people,
> wit' not a single 'chievement
> f'dog bark wit'! (p.10)

But unlike Naipaul, Salkey believes that something can be achieved in the West Indies, in Jamaica, if people acknowledge

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[10] Andrew Salkey, Jamaica. (London: Hutchinson and Co. Ltd., 1973).

with pride, their heritage and are determined to make something of themselves. As he says:

> Culture come when you buck up
> on you'self.
> It start when you' body make shadow
> on the lan'. (p. 11)

When the people of Jamaica, or the West Indies in general, take the power into their own hands, it is only then that they will be able to make something of their lives, of themselves. The spirit should be one of resolution, fearlessness, even violence. Salkey claims:

> Is only time, rockstone, cutlass,
> gun an' some class o' bomb in we arse
> goin' catch the gal an' bwoy them,
> you an' me,
> in a sweet rass change o' clothes,
> an' wit'out Sunday come, too. (p. 11)

Salkey's poetry becomes doubly effective as it reaches its climax towards the closing of the poem. The language, the words and their meaning are heightened by the rhythm of the verse which he uses to emphasize his point:

> I don wit' you.
> I into history, now.
> Is not'ing but song I singin'
> an' name I callin'
> an' blood I boilin'
> an' self I raisin',
> in a correc' Anancy form,
> a t'ing I borrow
> an' making me own,
> wit'out pretty please
> or pardon. (p. 12)

The spoken idiom which Salkey so skillfully employs in the opening poem of his work is particularly effective, for it stresses the call to arms (mentally and physically) by the local man, and his urgent tone in demanding a change.

The violence which began to take shape in Clarke's novel, The Survivors of the Crossing, is carried through in this poem. Since the writing of Clarke's book and Salkey's poem, however, times have changed, and so has the locale. And as Salkey points out in his poem, each island differs:

> Peel-neck John Crow
> does fly 'igh:
> so Bajan people sayin'
> . . . .
> But while that turkey
> in B'bados takin' time
> an' ceilin' 'nough zero,
> Jamaican John Crow circlin' deat',
> sof' an' low, (pp. 101-102)

In other words, Barbados and Barbadians, like Rufus and Boysie, may consider a revolution and make a half-hearted attempt; the Jamaican man has no time to wait. They are close to their victim, their target, and are ready to begin in full force.

The body of Jamaica recalls Jamaica's turbulent history, which Salkey refers to in order to show how unbalanced were the scales, how the slaves and Amerindians suffered, how the land was raped. After slavery men were still not free. Here, Salkey elaborates on his idea of what true emancipation means, reiterating what Clarke said in The Survivors of the Crossing.[11]

> "Free is shit,
> . . . .
> Free is when them gone,
> an' you' lan' come back home
> to you in one piece;

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[11] Rufus claims that it is only when the land becomes his that he will be satisfied. See The Survivors of the Crossing, p. 66.

free is when them gone f'true,
when them lif' up an' fly 'way like wasp,
when them shadow x itself out,
an' you' lan' wrap it two han' roun' you
wit' love, ...
Free is when you' yard
only grow f'you own rich mineral,
f'you own sugar cane an' banana,
an' f'you own dandelion tea,
an' when the groun' spread out
an' is f'you own,
in life an' deat',
top an' bottom". (pp. 40-41)

This is why even though the days of slavery are long passed, and even though the islands may have gained their independence, the people have never beem "free". Freedom will come only when as Salkey says, the entire wealth of the island belongs to the people, when the imperialists' forces have been completely wiped out. It is only then that true roots can be established, roots that will grow deep into the land. Appropriately, Salkey concludes his moving poem echoing what he said at the beginning. This time, there is more resolution, a finality in his language:

I don wit' you
I into history, now.
Is the lan' I want
an' is the lan'
I out to get. (p. 107)

Trinidad, Barbados, Jamaica, the most important English-speaking islands of the Caribbean, supposedly the most advanced and developed, are socially and economically as backward as the smaller islands.[12] Mittelholzer, Selvon, Clarke and Salkey acknowledge the dilemma of rootlessness, and all see the source of the problem to be in the islands' history of slavery, colon-

[12]This is in the sense that the wealth of the islands does not belong to the people but is controlled by foreign investment.

ialism and imperialism. The novelists quoted have each dealt with a different time and a different island. Mittelholzer, writing before 1950 and about Trinidad, could see the great displacement of the East Indian and the Black Man in society. Perhaps he had not enough foresight to be optimistic. Clarke wrote The Survivors of the Crossing about ten years later and the feeling of alienation and rootlessness had still not changed. He wrote of Barbados, however, where the plantation system was even more rigidly controlled. Barbados still prides herself on being referred to as "Little England" and that in itself explains the colonial mentality of the island. Salkey's poem reflects the mood of the present times. It is a call for national consciousness, for the assertion of oneself and one's rights.

CHAPTER THREE

THE IMMIGRANT COLONIAL SOCIETY

Of all the Caribbean novelists referred to so far, no other has expressed such a keen sense of loss, of rootlessness as has V. S. Naipaul. Whether he is writing about the West Indian or Englishman at home or abroad, the theme is always the same, that of alienation and homelessness. Of East Indian descent, Naipaul expresses in his works what it is like to be an outcast, to be neither East Indian enough for India, and this is reflected in An Area of Darkness, nor West Indian enough for the West Indies, and this is the underlying theme of The Middle Passage.[1] Like An Area of Darkness, The Middle Passage reveals the author's feelings and biases as he examines the situation in Trinidad, British Guiana (now Guyana), Surinam, Martinique and Jamaica. The book is an interesting commentary on the rootless society of the Caribbean, and is appropriate to begin the discussion on Naipaul; for it supports what has already been discussed in the first two chapters and adds another dimension to the discussion.

It is significant that the first sentence of the narrative should be so ambiguous in its sentiments. It reads:

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[1]Naipaul has been severely criticized for his stand taken on the West Indies. In a recent talk given at the University of the West Indies in Trinidad, he was subjected to hostility because of his well-known rejection of all that seems to be representative of the West Indies and West Indian culture.

"There was such a crowd of immigrant-type West Indians on the boat-train platform at Waterloo that I was glad I was travelling first class to the West Indies."[2] The immigrant-type West Indian is obviously not a complimentary term. They are the people with the Nat King Cole hair styles, with ribbons and frills, felt hats and pink stockings, gauze-like dresses and fiery pink petticoats. (p. 9) Naipaul records the story told by one of the immigrants of his fight with a previous landlord. His sympathy is not with the victim, the immigrant, and this is apparent from the slant given to the story flavoured by the interruption of the narrative with a description of a "Negro with the ruined face": (p. 11)

> So yo want rent? the baby-feeder was saying.
> I tell you I ain't paying any more than what I was paying before. He say, Blackie, I coming up to get my rent or to get you out of that room. I watch at him and I say, Good. Come up, bakra. He come up. I give him one kick bam!
> He roll down the steps bup-bup-bup.
> I pass round there last week. He have up a big sign in green paint. Please No Coloured. In green paint. I tell you, man, is like Stork.
> (p. 11)

The description is topped off by the gentle sign "Please No Coloured". The violence of the man's words is a direct contrast to the sign and it is this contrast which reveals the inner meaning of the author's words, that is, his biases and prejudices. There is, in his description, some feeling of embarrassment of being associated with the West Indies and hence the type of man who refuses to pay the rent and then commits

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[2] V. S. Naipaul, The Middle Passage. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1969) p. 9.

an act of violence. Does the black man then, not deserve the discrimination? This question seems to be implicit in the author's tale.

The "Francisco Bobadilla" is made into another West Indies as the West Indians board the ship. Most of the passengers are West Indians and Naipaul notes their attitude as typical. Even before they arrive in Trinidad, the prejudices of the people are revealed. An elderly coloured man observes: "A lot of these black fellers in Tobago are damn intelligent." (p. 13) And as Naipaul himself explains: "We were in the West Indies. Black had a precise meaning". (p. 13) Ethnic groups are clearly defined. If one is not black, then one is coloured, Portuguese, Chinese, Spanish and so on. Yet the Spanish lady cannot speak Spanish, nor can the Chinese speak Chinese, or the Portuguese man Portuguese. Mr. Mackay, the coloured man, reveals the contradiction that is himself. With one breath he rails against the Blacks: "You see how these black fellers going to England and stinking up the country" (p. 16) and with another defends the Black cause. In a discussion on the strike "Quite suddenly he was identifying himself with the black fellers. He was an old man; he had never risen to the top; superiors had always been imported from England " (p. 16); yet right after stating his bitterness, he says, "A lot of these black fellers provoke the English people". (p. 18) Mr. Mackay sets himself apart from the blacks, but being black himself (at least in England), he has experienced discrimination. Yet he cannot purge himself of the idea that

White is better; so even though one part of him recoils from the Whites, another has been too long trained to accept that White is better, has been trained to respect, admire and obey. It is such a conflict which displaces a person like Mr. Mackay, alienates him from himself and others of his own group, creating in him such a confusion that he does not know where he stands in any matter.[3] It makes him a philistine, and as Naipaul says, "he owed no loyalty to the island and scarcely any to his group". (p. 78)

Naipaul's fear of crowds shown in An Area of Darkness and expressed in The Middle Passage culminates in near hysteria as he approaches Trinidad. Trinidad represents the overcrowded atmosphere, the claustrophobic attitude of society which he abhors and from which he wished to escape when he left Trinidad.

> Port of Spain is the noisiest city in the world. Yet it is forbidden to talk. ... the radios and the rediffusion sets do the talking, the singing, the jingling; the steel bands do the booming and the banging; and the bands, live or tape-recorded, and the gramophones and record-players. In restaurants, the bands are there to free people of the need to talk. Stunned, temples throbbing, you clamp and chew, concentrating on the working of your jaw muscles. In a private home as soon as anyone starts to talk the radio is turned on. It must be loud, loud. If there are more than three, dancing will begin. Sweat-sweat-dance-dance-sweat. Loud, loud, louder. If the radio isn't powerful enough, a passing steelband will be invited in. Jump-jump-sweat-sweat-jump. In every house a radio or rediffusion set is on. In the street people conduct conversations at a range of twenty yards or more; and even when they are close to you their voices have a vibrating tuning-fork edge.
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> (pp. 58-59)

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[3] Césaire, in his Return to My Native Land, presents a similar episode illustrating the black man's alienation, pp. 68-69.

To Naipaul, such behaviour is uncivilized and one suspects that this is the reason for his strong dislike for steelband.[4] He thinks, also, that Trinidad and society's way of thinking is too small to allow people to develop as individuals. He claims that "dignity was allowed to no one. . . . We lived in a society which denied itself heroes." (p. 43) Now he is returning and he quite honestly expresses his phobia. As such, he is not always objective in his attitude towards the island, and as Gordon Rohlehr points out, ". . . one has constantly to differentiate between his sensitive examination of history and his honest expression of hysteria. He confesses a pathological dislike for Trinidad."[5] He explains his fear and anticipation as similar to what the slaves and indentured labourers might have felt when they made the journey across the Atlantic. Like the slaves and indentured workers, he feels temporally suspended, uprooted, fearful of the new land. In his own words, he sees it as "one journey answering another". (p. 27)

The picture is indeed a bleak one but Naipaul's extreme pessimism cannot altogether be justified. He claims that "Nothing was created in the British West Indies" (p. 27) which bred a society "without standards, without noble aspirations,

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[4] In A Morning at the Office, Mittelholzer illustrates the attitude of society towards the steelband. Mr. Jagabir's feeling is representative: "The steel band, he felt, was a degrading institution". (p. 15)

[5] Gordon Rohlehr, "The Ironic Approach", The Islands In Between, ed. Louis James (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 127.

nourished by greed and cruelty" (p. 28) and all he sees around him is a "West Indian futility". (p. 29) But Naipaul's vision is blurred by his deep fear of and revulsion for the country. Rohlehr's criticism of Naipaul's reaction is justified:

> The West Indian experience, as Naipaul has expressed it, is not a fusion or coalition of cultures to enhance their separate excellences, but their degradation to a new norm of anarchy. Naipaul uses Trinidad as an example of all that is degrading in the West Indian experience and, because of this, is in a sense not writing about Trinidad at all. He is writing an essay about the horrors of acculturation, and an explanation of why he had to escape. He sees only what was destroyed in the West Indies.[6]

In discussing Trinidad, the country of his birth, Naipaul strains to be objective. All he can remember of Trinidad is:

> The wooden houses, jalousied half-way down, with fretwork along gables and eaves, fashionable before the concrete era; ... L-shaped verandas and projecting front bedrooms, fashionable in the thirties (p. 42)

and the crowded, noisy houses and streets which denied privacy to everyone. (Such a world is described in A House for Mr. Biswas.) Naipaul sees this un-private world together with the mixture and melting of races as contributing to the rootlessness of the society:

> Everyone was an individual, fighting for his place in the community. We were of various races, religions, sets and cliques; and we had somehow found ourselves on the same small island. Nothing bound us together except this common residence. There was no nationalist feeling; there could be none. There was no profound anti-imperialist feeling; indeed it was only our Britishness, our belonging to the British Empire, which gave us any identity. So protests could only be individual, isolated, unheeded. (p. 45)

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[6] Ibid., p. 129.

Naipaul considers the Trinidadian to be the most philistine of all West Indian groups, willing to adopt the habits and peculiarities of any life-style, and quite easily influenced by such things as the American movie, its film stars and their respective roles. He claims that the Trinidadian has no standards of his own and is quite content to remake himself "in the image of the Hollywood B-man." (p. 65) One suspects that at this point, Naipaul has ceased to be objective, and is merely content to make blanket statements, riddled with invective and cynicism. He sees very little of value in Trinidad, and cannot always appreciate the gaiety of the people though he admits at one point that "Everything that makes the Trinidadian an unreliable, exploitable citizen makes him a quick, civilized person whose values are always humane ones, whose standards are only those of wit and style." He is scornful of what he refers quite bitingly to as a "high manifestation of West Indian Culture", (p. 43) the steel band, the sound of which he detested. Rohlehr refutes Naipaul's attitude when he writes, "It is apparently beyond Naipaul to be able to understand why there is music in spite of the rubbish-heap, and to recognize in such merry-making not merely cynical indifference to the dunghill, but evidence of an affirmation and vibrancy of life, however crude."[7] In Naipaul's adopted cynicism for Trinidad, he has alienated himself from the people he knows best. He has generalized his narrow, stifling East Indian life which

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[7] Ibid., p. 130.

he experienced in his youth and which he writes about in A House for Mr. Biswas, into the whole of Trinidadian life. He is intolerant of everything the life has to offer, and yet, as he admits later on in An Area of Darkness, neither England nor India has anything better to offer.

He accuses Trinidadians of narrow individualism which is ruining the island, for instead of trying to make something of themselves in Trinidad and better the economic and social conditions, they seek only to get their names in the celebrity column of the newspapers and be invited to and have cocktail parties.

In the closing section of the chapter on Trinidad, Naipaul touches on the race conflict which has existed and still exists between the East Indian and the Black man. As has been mentioned before, racism exists not only between White and Black, but also and even more seriously, between East Indian and Black. Naipaul's explanation of the latter prejudice is offered when he says, "the animosity that might have been directed against the whites has been channelled off against the Indians". (p. 85) He goes on to explain that "The Negro has a deep contempt...for all that is not white; his values are the values of white imperialism at its most bigoted " (p. 86) and he attacks the Indian for assuming "all the white prejudices against the Negro." (p. 86) Naipaul's criticism of the two groups becomes rather biting as he accuses the two groups of being "like monkeys pleading for evolution, each claiming to be whiter than the other... [appealing] to the unacknowledge

white audience to see how much they despise one another." (p. 87) He analyses the cause of the alienation to be self-contempt on the part of the Negro, and sees the East Indian as living in a fast decaying land of dreams which threatens to destroy him. He exists without true meaning, without establishing true roots, for like Naipaul's father, he has abandoned India yet denied Trinidad,[8] and the only thing that gives meaning to his life is the hatred he harbours for the Negroes.

Naipaul advocates "racial coexistence, if not co-operation" (p. 22). He sees the situation in Trinidad between the East Indians and Negroes as threatening to destroy the island, and, though there is a similar problem in Guyana, says that Guyana is better able to avoid racial conflict because of its size. Yet, what threatened to destroy Trinidad in the late 1950's and early 1960's actually took place in Guyana in the 1960's.

In his record of his visit to Guyana, Naipaul senses the forthcoming racial explosion as he reveals a country torn apart by mutual distrust and hatred between the two largest and most powerful groups. The "Negroes were afraid of Indian dominance" (p. 139) and the Indians of Negro dominance. Naipaul seems to be in favour of the Jagan Government. As Hamner notes, "Naipaul seems to have been favorably impressed with the progressive efforts of Cheddi and Janet Jagan to implement Government pro-

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[8] V. S. Naipaul, An Area of Darkness. (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1970), p. 30.

grams under the strictures of a depressed agrarian economy."[9] While acknowledging Burnham to be "the finest public speaker I have heard" (p. 143) he admits that he has "little to say" (p. 143) and regrets that "Mr. Burnham - in private a man of such charm" should be a politician. (p. 144)

The two largest groups, the East Indian and Black, are at war with each other. Naipaul lays the blame at the feet of "slavery, the land, the latifundia, Bookers, indenture, the colonial system, malaria" (p. 130). They are all diseases of society which weaken and destroy the people. Bookers represents the largest imperialist concern in Guyana, a fact of which Naipaul was constantly reminded:

> It was also the prevalence of the name Booker's, a name which went around the world during the crisis of 1953. Booker's are the largest firm of merchants and planters in British Guiana, and at one time virtually controlled the country. (pp. 94-95)

He holds Bookers responsible for helping to reinforce the weaknesses inherent in any colonial society saying, "They must bear responsibility for what they have been and what, with the best will, they could not help being...for creating a colonial society within a colonial society; a double confinement for the Guianese". (pp. 129-130) But, added to this burden, is the presence of the indigenous people of Guyana, the Amerindians, who, as a result of historical circumstances, are not considered a part of Guianese society. In the days of

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[9]Robert D. Hamner, V. S. Naipaul. (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1973), p. 21.

slavery, the Amerindians hunted and killed runaway slaves and both Amerindians and Negroes are aware of this fact: "The Negro, the black man from the coast is still a symbol of threat and terror: the runaway slave, once the enemy of the Amerindian is now his corrupter " (p. 107), and he goes on to explain, "Everyone knows that Amerindians hunted down runaway slaves, ...and whenever one sees Amerindians, it is a chilling memory." (p. 107) There is the Negro-East Indian problem, and there is also the Negro-Amerindian situation, and compounding the already bickering atmosphere is the underlying affinity to the British Empire. One of the policemen on the Rupununi unconsciously refers to himself as English: "But you know the English people and their land. We chase them back". (p. 105) In this area, one had to be either Brazilian or English. This mêlée of loyalties compounds the problem of racial antagonism. The Trinidadian may be rootless because he is philistine, but the Guianese is rootless because he is confused. However, one thing is clear, and that is, the problem of rootlessnes is common to the entire Caribbean region colonized by different European powers.

In Surinam, the problem of identification, of loyalties, also exists, though not to the same extent as in Guyana or Trinidad. The racial co-existence which Naipaul so wishes is found here. (p. 187) He notes, however, that of all ethnic groups, the coloured or Black man suffers most from the disease of rootlessness. "The cultural problem in Surinam is mainly a problem for the Negro; it is only he who has rejected his past,

all that attaches him to Africa." (p. 187) Corly and Theresia are examples of such people. They know nothing about the Bush-Negroes and their culture and wish to know nothing about them. Once again, it is this shame which creates the feeling of alienation and Corly and Theresia are like so many others caught between two worlds. Even though they may try to reject one or the other, it is not at all possible to do so comfortably.

The racial co-existence which Naipaul longs to see in Trinidad and Guyana confronts him here; yet he is not convinced. The Javanese are not in Java, the Bush-Negroes not in Africa, the Indians not in India. The old Indian man whom he meets in Coronie disturbs him profoundly and perhaps he recoils from him because this old man represents what he, the author feels and sees in himself:

> A derelict man in a derelict land; a man discovering himself, with surprise and resignation, lost in a landscape which had never ceased to be unreal because the scene of an enforced and always temporary residence; the slaves kidnapped from one continent and abandoned on the unprofitable plantations of another, from which there could never more be escape: I was glad to leave Coronie, for, more than lazy Negroes, it held the full desolation that came to those who made the middle passage. (p. 209)

And so, the most cheerful and hopeful of the chapters concludes with a heavy note of despair.

Martinique is the country whose people have been dispossessed, degraded and sold into a new slavery. (p. 216) Here, alienation, is shown at its worst. Martinique's dependence on France is a glaring fact. Her newspapers and milk have

to be flown in every day. In every aspect of life there, Naipaul is confronted by what he refers to as the "mincing mimicry" (p. 231) of the people.[10] All that he sees in Martinique is an inauthentic Frenchness. As Robert Hamner points out, "It is...their assumed 'Frenchness' that ultimately unifies the inhabitants of the island."[11]

The story is the same all over the West Indies. The Jamaicans have also sold themselves into the new slavery, that of the tourist trade. The poor suffer and live in a dream world. Though these people live in Jamaica, they (a group called the Rastafarians) look to Africa, to Ethiopia for deliverance.

> Their country is Ethiopia,and they worship Ras Tafari, the Emperor Haile Selassie. They no longer wish to be part of that world which has no place for them - Babylon, the world of the white and brown and even yellow man, ruled by the Pope, who is really the head of the Ku-Klux-klan - and they want only to be repatriated to Africa and Ethiopia. (p. 238)

Naipaul, however, does not seem to understand the reason for such behaviour. Jamaica suffers from severe economic and social conditions. The poor are so poor that they see very little hope in Jamaica. The poor are oppressed and kept poor and when Marcus Garvey offered them hope, telling them to look

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[10]French Colonialism has preached cultural assimilation. The French were convinced that their civilization is superior.

[11]Hamner, p. 21.

to Africa where a new king shall be crowned, the last descendant of Solomon, who shall be their saviour, their king of kings and Lord of Lords, the poor and oppressed, with nothing to look forward to in Jamaica, heeded his words and looked to Africa. When Haile Selaisse was crowned shortly after Garvey's pronouncements, they believed that Sclaisse was indeed, another God. Thus, the formation of the Rastafarians has been the direct result of a depressing economic situation, generated by the system of colonialism which offered no hope to the poor classes. In a way, it is a form of protest against their situation, against a society which has "socialized its members to doubt their own worth and the worth of things that are indigenous to the society."[12]

Naipaul has been harsh in his criticism of the West Indies but not altogether without reason. To look at the West Indian situation objectively is to see the absurdity of the struggle to be white, black, East Indian or whatever the case may be. Instead of seeking to differentiate between ethnic groups, there should be a struggle to better the living conditions in the West Indies. Naipaul rejects this mimicry of the white culture. It is not always clear what he proposes instead, for just as he sees mimicry of the whites ridiculous, so too does he consider the position of the East Indian who strives to maintain the culture of the old country. Racial harmony, or co-

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12 Errol Miller, "Self and Identity Problems in Jamaica - The Perspectives of Shame. Part I", Caribbean Quarterly, XVII (Sept. - Dec. 1971), p. 34.

existence, is not necessarily the answer, as he points out in "Surinam". One suspects, however, that oblivion to race is the solution, rather than racial cooperation or coexistence. The ideal situation would be as Trinidad's Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams, says: to recognize only one mother country, that of Trinidad and Tobago:

> There can be no Mother India for those whose ancestors came from India...There can be no Mother Africa for those of African origin... There can be no Mother England and no dual loyalties...No Mother China...No Mother Syria or no Mother Lebanon. A nation, like an individual, can have only one Mother The only mother we recognize is Mother Trinidad and Tobago..."[13]

Nevertheless, as Rohlehr so appropriately points out, protests against the past and a posturing or declaration of one's race is "a vital transitional stage in the reconstruction of a sense of personality."[14]

After his rather disenchanting journey through the Caribbean, Naipaul's sense of loss is almost complete. It takes him another journey, another couple of years to finally believe that he is indeed, a lost soul. In the hope, however of regaining some feeling of belonging, some roots, Naipaul undertakes to travel to and through India, perhaps also with the intention of some discovery of self.

In An Area of Darkness he shows no joy at being in the land of his ancestors; there is only revulsion and hysteria.

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[13] Williams, The History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago, p. 279.

[14] Rohlehr, p. 132.

> Hysteria had been my reaction, and a brutality dictated by a new awareness of myself as a whole human being and a determination, touched with fear, to remain what I was.[15]

Naipaul is afraid of being assimilated into any group. As he wrote in The Middle Passage, "To accept assimilation is in a way to accept a permanent inferiority." (p. 181) Any form of assimilation denies a person his individuality and to the author, this is as bad as being homeless. His abhorrence for being a nonentity, and hence his fear of crowds, of the stifling life-style which the Indian culture in Trinidad offers is expressed quite clearly in the book.[16]

> Now in Bombay I entered a shop or a restaurant and awaited a special quality of response. And there was nothing. It was like being denied part of my reality. Again and again I was caught. I was faceless. (p. 43)

In the West Indies, a feeling of alienation, of a class apart, is imposed on the East Indian. He does not belong in Trinidad and England; "recognition of my difference was necessary to me." (p. 43)

The India which is revealed through the author's eyes is not a pleasant one. Decay, dereliction, degradation, these are all the outward signs of India and like the India of the West Indies, all that really exists is "the formless spirituality and decayed pragmatism." (p. 82) And as he begins to discover the country, his childhood fantasies are slowly stripped away. They are replaced by a horror and a revulsion, the image

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[15] Naipaul, An Area of Darkness, p. 13.

[16] This type of life-style is shown in the Tulsi household in A House for Mr. Biswas.

of a decayed and diseased society (pp. 73-74). "The landscape was harsh and wrong. I could not relate it to myself" (p. 141).

In India, Naipaul is astonished to see the dominating presence of the English influence. The names on cranes and buildings are "so oddly, English" (p. 16). England's influence has extended beyond that to the people who admire and mimic the English ways. Those who succeed in becoming totally anglicized can no longer fit into the life style of India. Malik and Malhotra are two such individuals. The author explains,

> They are not interested in the type of adventure the society can provide; their aspirations are alien and disruptive. Rejecting the badges of dress and food and function, rejecting degree, they find themselves rejected. They look for Balzacian adventure in a society which has no room for Rastignacs. (p. 55)

To see India reduced to Englishness chastened Naipaul and one suspects that of all things, this is the most difficult for him to accept. In Trinidad the Indians resisted anglicization and now to see its great impact on India is to him, disheartening:

> For in the India of my childhood, the land which in my imagination was an extension, separate from the aliennes by which we ourselves were surrounded, of my grandmother's house, there was no alien presence. How could such a thing be conceived? Our own world, though clearly fading, was still separate; and an involvement with the English, of whom on the island we knew little, would have seemed a more unlikely violation than an involvement with the Chinese or the Africans, of whom we knew more. Into this alieness we daily ventured, and at length we were absorbed into it. But we knew there had been change, gain, loss. We knew that something which was once whole had been washed away. What was whole was the idea of India....Before the reminders of this England of India, then, I ought to have been calm. But they revealed one type of self-deception as self-deception; and though this was

> lodged in that part of the mind where fantasy was permissible, the revelation was painful. It was an encounter with a humiliation I had never before experienced. (pp. 187-188)

Naipaul talks about India's "ever receding degrees of degradation" (p. 47). To him, India has reached her nadir and the humiliation he feels is a humiliation caused by the vision of a country under the conqueror's yoke. The area of darkness that was the India of his imagination, finally materializes into a land of darkness, of loss. India and all its symbolic rituals become but another symbol of loss: "I was not English or Indian; I was denied the victories of both." (p. 98)

What Naipaul saw in India disquieted him to such a degree that when the journey was finally over he wrote: "It was a journey that ought not to have been made; it had broken my life in two." (p. 265) It incited him to anger and violence and he wished to escape from this world into the privacy and protection of his solitude for it was only then that he was "released from the delirium of seeing certain aspects of myself magnified out of recognition" (p. 92). India reduces him to "stillness, shame and exhaustion" (p. 92). It offers no respite. He knows now that it is not only language which alienates him from the country. As he says, "I was without belief or interest in belief; I was incapable of worship, of God or holy men; and so one whole side of India was closed to me....I saw that to this country I was not at all linked" (pp. 41-42). Trinidad he rejects, he despises, he fears, and when he goes to London in the hope of recovering the self that was forever bombarded in the narrow provincialism of East Indian life in Trinidad, he

discovers that he is lost:

> I came to London. It had become the centre of my world and I had worked hard to come to it. And I was lost. London was not the centre of my world....but there was nowhere else to go.... Here I became no more than an inhabitant of a big city, robbed of loyalties, time passing, taking me away from what I was, thrown more and more into myself, fighting to keep my balance and to keep alive the thought of the clear world beyond the brick and asphalt and the chaos of railway lines. All mythical lands faded, and in the big city I was confined to a smaller world than I had ever known. I became my flat, my desk, my name. (p. 42)

After having read An Area of Darkness it is impossible to deny that Naipaul expresses a deep feeling of homelessness. His favourite words centre around the theme of loss, decay and dereliction. His vision of life as presented so far has been a totally negative one. He has nothing and no one. He is without roots. Gordon Rohlehr has said, and it is indeed true, that "Naipaul is a Trinidad East Indian who has not come to terms with the Negro-Creole world in Trinidad, or with the East Indian world in Trinidad, or with the greyness of English life, or with life in India itself, where he went in search of roots."[17]

Among all this alienation, Naipaul discovers one similarity between India and himself. He realizes that the Indian philosophy of "despair, leading to passivity, detachment, acceptance" (p. 188) has been his and has helped him to survive the lonely years in London. He says,

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[17]Rohlehr, p. 122.

> It had enabled me, through the stresses of a long residence in England, to withdraw completely from nationality and loyalties except to persons; it had made me content to be myself alone, my work, my name....it had convinced me that every man was an island, and taught me to shield all that I knew to be good and pure within myself from the corruption of causes. (p. 188)

By such a declaration, Naipaul has accepted his loss, his homelessness.

In The Middle Passage he rejected the Caribbean and Trinidad; in An Area of Darkness he saw India to be beyond his reach. He believes that every man is an island and his solution is to make a home, to establish roots, not in something or somewhere, but in oneself. Until there is complete satisfaction in one's self, there can be no peace. In The Middle Passage, Naipaul wrote: "History is built around achievement and creation" (p. 29); history is roots and so one can only have roots if one achieves something. And this basically, is what he tries to show in A House for Mr. Biswas.

The life of Mr. Biswas exemplifies what Naipaul calls the "West Indian futility", (p. 29)[18] for his life is a constant struggle against the overpowering threat of total assimilation into the overcrowded and derelict household of the Tulsis who frown upon any form of independence or individuality. As Gordon Rohlehr points out, Biswas is engaged in a "classic struggle for personality against a society that denies it".[19] Biswas

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[18] Naipaul, The Middle Passage, p. 29.

[19] Rohlehr, p. 134.

has nothing, is nothing and continues to be nothing until he manages to achieve his goal, his very own house, independent of the Tulsis. Yet it is typical of Naipaul that even in his character's final achievement, there should be disillusionment. But it is not without significance, however, that in spite of bad weather and severe shaking, the house does not fall.

Kenneth Ramchand has suggested that A House for Mr. Biswas tells something of Naipaul's own life, that the disintegration of the Tulsi household is dated at the same time as the factual one. He also claims that "Hanuman House represents something in the Trinidad Indian past".[20] Indeed, in his satirising of the lives of the people in A House for Mr. Biswas, it is impossible not to realise the author's own horror and disgust, and if the world of the novel is one from which Naipaul escaped, it is not surprising to find expressed, in The Middle Passage, such fear and uncertainty as the author approaches Trinidad.

In the novel Naipaul has dealt with all aspects of West Indian rootlessness and alienation, so Kenneth Ramchand is quite accurate when he says, "A House for Mr. Biswas ... is the West Indian novel of rootlessness par excellence."[21] Mr. Biswas is born into a poor family and from the very moment of his birth he is considered different. Life holds no promises or rewards for Biswas and had his father not died, he probably

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[20] Kenneth Ramchand, The West Indian Novel and its Background. (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 191.

[21] Ibid., p. 192.

would never have learnt to read; thus, he would have been deprived of his world of Samuel Smiles fantasies. Shortly after the death of his father, however, he and his family "leave the only house to which he had some right" and for the next thirty-five years "he was to be a wanderer with no place to call his own".[22] From a very early age Biswas knew the pains of homelessness and when he finally joins the Tulsi household he experiences the full blast of alienation.

The Tulsi family is an engulfing, stifling one. The only people with authority are Seth and "The Old Hen", Mrs. Tulsi. Everyone else is of no importance, and their main function is to answer and serve the needs of Mrs. Tulsi and Seth. All that Naipaul saw in India and despised and all that he hated about Trinidad is seen in the Tulsi household which revealed only dereliction and decay and denied the man his masculinity. The house, like the inhabitants, is pretentious, false, decaying:

> The concrete walls looked as thick as they were, and when the narrow doors of the Tulsi store on the ground floor were closed the house became bulky, impregnable and blank. The side walls were windowless, and on the upper two floors the windows were mere slits in the facade. The balustrade which hedged the flat roof was crowned with a concrete statue of the benevolent monkey-god Hanuman. From the ground his white-washed features could scarcely be distinguished and were, if anything, slightly sinister, for dust had settled on projections and the effect was that of a face lit up from below....

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[22] V. S. Naipaul, A House for Mr. Biswas. (London: Fontana Books, 1966), p. 35.

> The Tulsi Store was disappointing. The facade that promised such an amplitude of space concealed a building which was trapezoid in plan and not deep. There were no windows and light came only from the two narrow doors at the front and the single door at the back, which opened on to a covered court yard. The walls, of uneven thickness, curved here and jutted there, and the shop abounded in awkward, empty, cobwebbed corners.
> (pp. 70-71)

The description is very telling. The house seems impregnable and such is the life of the occupants, closed to all outside influences except those who are allowed to filter in through Seth and Mrs. Tulsi, like the two narrow doors which permit the only light. The parallel could be taken even further to suggest that Biswas controls the "back door" region, for it is also through him that some life is introduced into the household. The Hindu monkey-god is white-washed, a significant detail, for it reveals the hypocrisy and the extent of acculturation in the supposedly orthodox Hindu family. Yet the elder god, Biswas' nickname for the elder of the Tulsi boys, did wear a crucifix and Mr. Biswas, with a good rejoinder to Seth's denigratory remarks could quite justifiably say, "'Well, since I been in this house I begin to get the feeling that to be a good Hindu you must be a good Roman Catholic first.'" (p. 109) Indeed, the Tulsis, are, in their superstitions, not all that orthodox. Making the best of both worlds, "The elder god [wears] a crucifix. It was regarded in the house as an exotic and desirable charm " (p. 109) and before any examination leaves the house "laden with crucifix, sacred thread and beads, a mysterious sachet, a number of curious amulets, consecrated coins, and a

lime in each trouser pocket" (p. 109). The Tulsis even go so far as to eat only fish on Good Friday. Biswas recoils from this pretentious, decaying world. He cannot understand nor tolerate the hypocrisy and this is his reason for making such scathing remarks to the "elder god".

Contrary to East Indian customs which demand that the girl live with her mother-in-law, Biswas instead joins the Tulsis. The reversal of roles emphasizes Biswas' helpless position and thus his need for rebellion. In the first place Biswas is homeless, rootless. He is merely one of the numerous people in the overcrowded house. He has also alienated himself totally from the others by refusing to accept a position of inferiority and servitude. He recognizes his individuality and as well, his weaknesses, but only a little later in life. When he first moves into Hanuman House, Biswas reveals the constant verbal battles with the rest of the household. It is for him, at this time, the only method of asserting his difference, his personality. But as time wears on, he begins to realize the futility of this invective which to him seems "pointless and degrading" (p. 114) and begins to find that "All his joy at that had turned into disgust at his condition". (p. 114) It occurs to Biswas now that his life has been totally meaningless. He has nothing; he is a nobody; and if he were to disappear, he would not be missed, neither by his wife or her family: "In none of these places had he ever been more than a visitor, an upsetter of routine....There was nothing to speak of him." (p. 114) Biswas talks of "paddling his own canoe" but when

actually left on his own to be his own paddler, he discovers that he loses all ambitions and desires in the absence of opposition. The fights and bickering have become his only means of identifying and asserting himself. Alone at The Chase, he is confronted by his own uselessness. He misses Hanuman House and there at The Chase he could only think at first,

> How lonely the shop was! And how frightening! He had never thought it would be like this when he found himself in an establishment of his own. It was late afternoon; Hanuman House would be warm and noisy with activity. Here he was afraid to disturb the silence, afraid to open the door of the shop, to step into the light. (p. 126)

Biswas lives for six years at The Chase, six years of unproductivity, years "squashed by their own boredom" (p. 158). During those six years Mr. Biswas ages but he is still, at the end of that period, homeless, still unclaimed and still without anyone to claim. Even though he is married, Shama and the children are strangers to him and "he never ceased to feel alone" (p. 197). The return to Arwacas and Hanuman House did little to restore his dignity or to help him to establish himself. Once again he is reduced to the role of clown and antagonist, and here the full realization of his position dawns on him. Beyond the close walls of the small room Biswas could not see. He feels trapped and until he manages to obtain his own house, the feeling of mental and emotional claustrophobia does not cease.

At Green Vale, another decaying property of the Tulsis, also doomed to failure, Biswas finally decides to assert some independence. He builds a house after having decided that "He

had for too long regarded situations as temporary" (p. 230). He then makes a resolution to give direction and purpose to every moment and action of his life. But the house at Green Vale could not last because it is on Tulsi land. Like the Tulsi foundations, it is weak and vulnerable. Under the pressure of trying to assert himself in a futile world, with opposition from everyone, Biswas crumbles and once again has to take refuge in the arms of the Tulsis. However, each time Biswas returns to the Tulsis, his spirit changes, grows stronger not weaker, and each time he leaves and asserts himself again, it is with added strength and vigour:

> He reviewed his situation. He was the father of four children, and his position was as it had been when he was seventeen, unmarried and ignorant of the Tulsis. He had no vocation, no reliable means of earning a living. The job at Green Vale was over; he could not rest in the Blue Room forever, ... Yet he felt no anxiety. The second to second agony and despair of those days at Green Vale had given him an experience of unhappiness against which everything had now to be measured....He was going out into the world, to test it for its power to frighten. The past was counterfeit, a series of cheating accidents. Real life, and its especial sweetness, awaited; he was still beginning. (pp. 263-265)

In spite of Biswas' pettiness and weaknesses,the reader is endeared to Biswas for his resilient spirit, his ability to laugh at himself and others which makes him an entirely realistic and heroic figure. As Rohlehr says, even though "Biswas is at times petty, cowardly and contemptible...part of the book's triumph is that Naipaul has been able to present a hero in all his littleness, and still preserve a sense of the man's

inner dignity."[23]

Like the house at Green Vale, the house at Short Hills is doomed to fall for it is still constructed on Tulsi land. It is only when Biswas is capable of severing ties with the Tulsis that he will be able to make anything of himself. Until then, he continues to be an appendage, a parasite. However, even though the house at Short Hills meets with the same fate, it is a symbol of Biswas' growing determination to establish himself and his identity, and when he finally moves into it, it is seen as a "confident, defiant gesture" (p. 244).

At this point of his life, just when the Tulsi manor begins to disintegrate, Biswas manages to improve his position. He obtains a job as a reporter at the Sentinel , followed by another lucky break when he is offered a position with the Community Welfare Department. He manages to buy a car, and for the first time it begins to seem that he will eventually get his house. But it takes a while yet for Biswas to make the final assertive step. As things reach their climax, the noisy public atmosphere drives both his child and himself to near madness. Finally, one night Biswas loses his temper and the following day, he invests in a house.

Homeless, penniless, alienated for all these years among the Tulsis, Biswas could not gather enough strength to leave. The situation is realistic for it is human nature to be cautious,

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[23]Rohlehr, p. 135.

to be afraid of the unknown, and like Biswas, people prefer to endure rather than to leave the security that they know. Biswas could not be settled, could not establish any roots until he creates or obtains something that is entirely his own. A good solid house has always been his dream, for it meant to him stability, security and belonging. To Biswas, nothing could have been more terrible than to have "died among the Tulsis, amid the squalor of that large, disintegrating and indifferent family; to have left Shama and the children among them, in one room; worse, to have lived without even attempting to lay claim to one's portion of the earth; to have lived and died as one had been born, unnecessary and unaccommodated." (p. 12)

But Biswas' house is not the house of his dreams as he later discovers. It is badly built with nothing sound:

> They discovered the staircase, unhidden by curtains, it was too plain. Mr. Biswas discovered the absence of a back door. Shama discovered that two of the wooden pillars supporting the staircase landing were rotten, whittled away towards the bottom and green with damp. They all discovered that the staircase was dangerous. At every step it shook, and at the slightest breeze the sloping corrugated iron sheets rose in the middle and gave snaps which were like metallic sighs. (p. 497)

The conclusion is typical of Naipaul's vision of life. No matter how hard one tries to establish roots, the soil is never deep enough. Making a home does not entail having a house, but being secure means confidence in one's self. The house is weak

because Biswas is weak, and like the Tulsis, the house is dressed to give a false air of soundness so that when the Tuttles come they are greeted "by an enclosed, shining, softly-lit house" (p. 503). Naipaul seems to be suggesting that even though one may be able to lose the feeling of homelessness, the threat of homelessness is never eradicated. The security will only last as long as there is hope and belief. The structure of the house is irrelevant. It is the feeling and faith that counts. So, as Naipaul tries to convince the reader in An Area of Darkness, true roots can only be in self reliance, in the belief in oneself, and happiness with one's own company. The conclusion of A House for Mr. Biswas, is in keeping with Naipaul's philosophy: "every man was an island",[24] for just as Biswas achieves a touch of success, he dies, to face another world of uncertainty, without his much craved house, penniless and rootless.

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[24] Naipaul, An Area of Darkness, p. 188.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONTRACTING OUT

Naipaul's first novel, The Mystic Masseur, incorporates the theme of rootlessness and alienation which is to be found in all of his other works. The theme of alienation and rootlessness runs through Naipaul's first novel, The Mystic Masseur as well as The Suffrage of Elvira and The Mimic Men. The characters are, at first, well-intentioned men, but become corrupt after the acquisition of power, lose whatever noble aspirations they may have harboured and seek only their glorification and gratification. In this way they become estranged from the people whom they represent and whom they can no longer face. They have ceased to relate to their worlds productively and have imprisoned themselves in what can be referred to as a world of political exile.[1] Naipaul sees the West Indian social and political condition as chaotic, a chaos which breeds destruction, dissension, disillusionment and, inevitably, alienation. These three novels, The Mimic Men, The Suffrage of Elvira and The Mystic Masseur are reflections of Naipaul's vision of the Caribbean.

The Mystic Masseur tells the story of Ganesh Ramsumair, school teacher, masseur, mystic masseur and then politician. His life is a process of "contracting out"[2] of his world.

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[1] See Erich Fromm's definition of alienation quoted in Chapter One, p. 14.

[2] Naipaul, An Area of Darkness, p. 34.

Ganesh leaves the protective and closed environment of Fourways to attend school in Port of Spain, the frightening, cosmopolitan city where, for the first time, he feels ashamed of his Indian name and his Indianness. He feels alienated from the rest of his schoolmates because of the obvious and glaring differences between their city customs and his country ways. The disparity is emphasized even further by his pronounced country-Indian accent. He is unable to make any friends while at school and eventually, the only person with whom he manages to establish a friendship is another Indian boy who considers Ganesh useful in boosting his ego.[3] After he graduates from high school, Ganesh goes to a Government Training College and then teaches at a school in the east end of the city. There, he also feels alien because of his Indianness and after being insulted by another teacher, Ganesh leaves the school and the teaching profession.

The first part of Ganesh's life illustrates his early experience of alienation, and touches on one of Naipaul's subjects, that of being Indian in a society which has little tolerance for other non-white ethnic groups. However, one does not feel that Naipaul is suggesting that there should be a strict adherence to the East Indian culture in the face of these prejudices. Rather, he seems to be illustrating the difficulties that the East Indian experiences because of a refusal to be assimilated into the creole community. However, to say that Naipaul is

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[3]V. S. Naipaul, The Mystic Masseur. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1969), p. 22.

recommending acculturation is not correct. Sometimes he wavers between the two, but he is never consistent or clear when he discusses this point. When, for example, he relates the rituals of the Indian culture, he does so with amusement and even scorn. Ganesh's initiation ceremony illustrates this quite clearly:

> The initiation ceremony was held that very week. They shaved his head, gave him a little saffron bundle, and said, "All right, off you go now. Go to Benares and study."
> He took his staff and began waling away briskly from Fourways. As arranged, Dookhie the shop-keeper ran after him, crying a little and begging in English, "No, boy. No. Don't go away to Benares to study."
> Ganesh kept on walking.
> "But what happen to the boy?" people asked. "He taking this thing really serious."
> Dookhie caught Ganesh by the shoulder and said, "Cut out this nonsense, man. Stop behaving stupid. You think I have all day to run after you? You think you really going to Benares? That is in India, you know, and this is Trinidad." (p. 21)

In An Area of Darkness, Naipaul refers to the ceremony as a "pleasing piece of theatre".[4] India lives on in outward show, and Naipaul seems to be saying that the rituals are empty, meaningless, and quite funny. It is significant that Dookhie should say, "That is in India...and this is Trinidad." Even though it is in Trinidad, the Indians still maintain the customs of the old country. However, Naipaul's position is still not established. One feels that the author is unable to appreciate the significance of the ritual, fails to see it as an attempt to preserve some of the culture of their forefathers in this foreign

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[4]Naipaul, An Area of Darkness, p. 34.

place. Perhaps it is this inability to accept his culture which has left Naipaul stranded on his lonely island. In discussing India in An Area of Darkness, Naipaul is disenchanted with the Indians and their adoption of the English ways. He sees their anglicism as something shameful and to be mourned. On the other hand, whenever he relates the Trinidadian Indians' attempt to preserve their culture, he seems to do so with disapproval.

After the death of Ganesh's father, he returns to Fourways. He is only too happy to get away from Port of Spain where he has spent five years of his life but had never felt comfortable, had never ceased to feel a stranger, an alien. Fourways is a happy place for him, for while there, he is able to postpone making any decisions about his life for a while.[5] He allows everyone who is willing to take control of his father's funeral arrangements and, in general, everything. And after the funeral, he spends two months in inactivity:

> He didn't know what he wanted to do or what he could do, and he was beginning to doubt the value of doing anything at all. He ate at the houses of people he knew and, for the rest, merely wandered around. (p. 32)

Everyone in the village sympathizes with him and he takes full advantage of their feelings. Inevitably, however, Ganesh begins to feel "a little strange and feared he was going mad. He knew

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[5] In "Symbolic Action in Three of V. S. Naipaul's Works", The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, IX, No. 3 (April, 1975) Bruce F. Macdonald refers to Fourways as "The place of indecision", (p. 43).

the Fourways people, and they knew him and liked him, but now he sometimes felt cut off from them." (p. 32) City life has finally taken its toll.

Ganesh is an opportunist at heart. He allows everyone to do things for him. In the same way, he is directed into marrying Leela, Ramlogan's daughter. He sees the marriage as an advantageous venture and allows himself to be persuaded into marrying her. Later on, his aunt, "The Great Belcher" (p. 53), arranges for him to become a masseur and then a pundit. It is she who encourages him to be a pundit. She tells him that he has the Power to cure people, to "Cure the mind, cure the soul" (p. 116). At first, Ganesh is sceptical, and unwilling to take the role seriously, and it is only when he finally accepts the rituals and the facade for what they are that he manages to achieve success. As B. F. Macdonald points out, "Ganesh begins to succeed when he realizes that the people of Trinidad are willing to accept the symbol without testing its reality, as he did with his trip to Benares."[6] Indeed, Ganesh accepts his role to its fullest, donning a dhoti and speaking only Hindi to the people.[7] His success is attributed to the people's love of rituals and holy men. Ganesh constructs a miniature India in Fuente Grove, which, as B. F. Macdonald says, "attracts to it a people who are anxious to preserve their cultural identity. They accept Ganesh's India as a substitute for the real thing, until Ganesh himself leaves and even this India is taken from

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[6] Ibid., p. 42.

[7] In An Area of Darkness, Naipaul comments on India's love of holy men and rituals, p. 41.

from them."[8]

An analogy can be drawn here. Ganesh represents the Indian culture in Trinidad, which, on the surface appears to be authentic, but in fact, is only superficial, and in the end, leaves the people feeling more alienated, and lost. In clinging to the customs of India, Ganesh does not help his people deal with the problems of living in Trinidad, or become part of Trinidad. His false representation leads them only into further alienation and this is what Ganesh finally realizes when he becomes involved in politics.

At first, Ganesh dabbles in politics in the hope of helping the Hindu community of Trinidad and Tobago. As a politician, however, he loses all his scruples and thinks nothing of disrupting his father-in-law's taxi business. He even goes so far as to undermine one of his own people, Narayan, his rival, in order to acquire his position. At the height of his political career, Ganesh is once again faced with his own inadequacy, his awkwardness and his cultural difference. At a dinner party given at the Governor General's house he is mortified and feels uncomfortable. (p. 209) It is his aim, however, to "civilize" himself. He becomes a staunch defender of the colonial government, and for his efforts as a politician is awarded the MBE, after which Ganesh Ramsumair remoulds himself into G. Ramsay Muir, MBE.

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[8] Op.cit., p. 43.

The process of "contracting out" is complete. In discarding the only thing he knows and feels comfortable with, that is, his pseudo-Indian identity, and assuming an entirely foreign demeanour, Ganesh alienates himself from his own people and even from himself. His cold withdrawal from society and from his people, and his English name represent all that Naipaul sees in the Trinidad politician. They are selfish, aloof, false and dishonest people. Even though Ganesh is at first well-intentioned, his good intentions do not last for too long after his success. His life story has been a gradual process of alienation and withdrawal.

The political intrigue and the eventual alienation of Ganesh in The Mystic Masseur is similar to what takes place in The Suffrage of Elvira. Harbans, like Ganesh, jumps into the election race and finishes first, but without a purpose. Harbans has no good intentions, and his main purpose is to win the seat of Elvira. There is no concern for the place or the people. The novels are similar in the portrayal of the confusion and chaos which are an integral part of elections and politics in Trinidad, as Naipaul sees them.

In this novel, Naipaul ridicules the second general election in Trinidad. He renders the whole situation and procedure farcical, and his characters, while not intrinsically bad, are nevertheless, incredibly stupid. Harbans is portrayed as a nervous fool, who stumbles through the election campaign in Elvira always nervous and unsure of himself. When confronted

with a problem, he suddenly becomes "absent-minded. He would look down at the grey hairs on the back of his hands and get lost studying them".[9] Naipaul paints a picture of a "thin, dyspeptic man. His hair thin and grey, his nose thin and long" (p. 10) who is given to moroseness, anger and fits of depression. He is shown to be a weak, self-pitying man, who seeks only to win the seat of Elvira.

From the very start, Harbans shows little concern for Elvira. He is a stranger to the place and feels alienated from the people. He has to solicit the help of two of the more influential people of the village if he is to win the election. He expends time and energy in Elvira only because he wants the votes. He shows no interest in the affairs of the place and forever on his lips is: "Elvira, you is a bitch! A bitch! A bitch!" (p. 147). And even after his victory, he continues to say, "Elvira, you is a bitch." (p. 206) There is nothing in Harbans that is admirable. To Naipaul he is representative of Trinidad's politicians, men who are incapable and who lack integrity. Harbans has nothing to give to Elvira; he cannot even represent himself, far less the people of Elvira who are so isolated from his little house in Port of Spain.

In direct contrast to the hypocritical and self-seeking Harbans, is the honest Preacher who not only has the interest of Elvira at heart but who has also "lived among you, toiled among you, prayed among you, worked among you" (p. 66) and who

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[9] V. S. Naipaul, The Suffrage of Elvira. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1969), p. 10.

carries on a house-to-house campaign (p. 19). Baksh is afraid of Preacher because he is not like the other politicians and is not going around "making no big noise or nothing. He just walking about quiet, quiet and brisk from house to house." (p. 19) Preacher is not able to win the campaign because he is not flamboyant enough for the people. He does not pay out the necessary money either, to win. In the final analysis, even Baksh obtains more votes. Preacher is the only honest character in the story, the only man with integrity, and the only one who really cares about Elvira, yet he does not succeed. Instead, Harbans, the one who is from out-of-town, the city man, manages to win most of the votes. It seems to be true then, as Hena Maes-Jelinek says, when Naipaul's "characters are genuine, they are inevitably failures."[10]

One other factor which helps Harbans to be successful in Elvira is his religious and cultural affiliations. Harbans is Hindu and the majority of people living in Elvira are Hindu. There are at least five thousand Hindus there and if the election is to be won by racial support, then Harbans could count on at least one thousand more Muslim votes. There are only eight thousand eligible voters in Elvira. Race, religion, superstition, intrigue are seen to be an integral part of the elections in Elvira. In this aspect, it bears a close resemblance to The Mystic Masseur. Gordon Rohlehr points out that "The tone of

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[10] Mena Maes-Jelinek, "The Myth of El Dorado in the Caribbean Novel", The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, VI, No. 1 (June 1975), p. 81.

these two books is almost the same. A situation of superstition, ignorance, absurdity, knavery and self-interest, is presented as the reality in Trinidad social and political life.... The deeper implication...is that West Indian society, emerging from ignorance and superstition, is peculiarly susceptible to depredation by fraud and the politician, and by all opportunists who are prepared to exploit the social unease for their personal ends."[11]

Naipaul has very little faith in the island's politicians and this is shown not only in these two novels, but also in The Mimic Men. Politics in The Mimic Men also leads to the destruction of the personality and the integrity of the character. In retrospect, Ralph Singh says of politicians (and I believe this to be Naipaul's opinion also):

> Politicians are people who truly make something out of nothing. They have few concrete gifts to offer....They are manipulators; they offer themselves as manipulators. Having no gifts to offer, they seldom know what they seek. They might say they seek power. But their definition of power is vague and unreliable.... The politician is more than a man with a cause, even when this cause is no more than self-advancement. He is driven by some little hurt, some little incompleteness. He is seeking to exercise some skill which even to him is never as concrete as the skill of the engineer; of the true nature of this skill he is not aware until he begins to exercise it. How often we find those who after years of struggle and manipulation come close to the position they crave, sometimes indeed achieving it, and then

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[11]Rohlehr, p. 123.

> are failures....But more often we see the true politician in decay.[12]

Naipaul has been severely criticised for his negative and sometimes scornful attitude towards the West Indies, and in particular, Trinidad.[13] In many aspects, The Mimic Men echoes what Naipaul has written in The Middle Passage. He talks about the self-seeking people of the West Indies, and this is exactly what Ralph Singh relates about the life he lives in Isabella. Ralph tells of his phobia for Isabella and Naipaul, in The Middle Passage, talks about his fears.

Ralph Singh's fear of returning to Isabella is reminiscent of Naipaul's trepidation on his return trip to Trinidad. Ralph also feels the restlessness and loss which Naipaul so frankly admits to in An Area of Darkness and The Middle Passage. Ralph leaves Isabella initially to seek the peace and order of a foreign country. Instead he finds the same disorder there: "So quickly had London gone sour on me. The great city, centre of the world, in which, fleeing disorder, I had hoped to find the beginning of order." (p. 18) He discovers that there, he is lonely, an alien, a wanderer and rootless, without anywhere to call his own, or without anyone to lay claim to:

> 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. (p. 27)

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[12] V. S. Naipaul, The Mimic Men. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1969), p. 37.

[13] Parry, John H. and P. M. Sherlock, A Short History of the West Indies. (New York: St. Martin's Press), 1971.

Travelling from place to place, room to room, the feeling of not belonging, of having no identity remains with him, as it remained with Naipaul even after he settled in England, and even after he had visited the land of his forefathers, India.

Ralph returns home with an English wife, a wife acquired in the hope, perhaps, of establishing some link with the human world. Sandra may have been to him an anchor in his drifting world, but she proves to be inadequate. She is unable to give him the security he needs, and which he will only find within himself.

In Isabella, he manages to make a success of his business ventures. With his wealth comes power and with this power, the unavoidable road to politics. Ralph finds, however, that events are taken out of his hands and the situation becomes chaotic and dangerous for him. His marriage slowly falls apart and his little world begins to crumble. At this point in his life Ralph attempts to write. He says:

> It was my hope to give expression to the restlessness, the deep disorder, which the great explorations, the overthrow in three continents of established social organizations, the unnatural bringing together of peoples who could achieve fulfilment only within the security of their own societies and the landscapes hymned by their ancestors, it was my hope to give partial expression to the restlessness which this great upheaval has brought about...I am too much a victim of that restlessness which was to have been my subject. And it must also be confessed that in that dream of writing I was attracted less by the act and the labour than by the calm and the order which the act would have implied. (p. 32)

He sees his situation as a result of historical circumstances, and he had hoped that by attempting to order the restlessness and the chaos which is his life, in writing, he would have been

able to purge himself of this loss, this chaos, this restlessness.

However, as in all of Naipaul's novels, the characters achieve little. The final reward is disillusionment and the knowledge that their life is and always will be restless, rootless. Even though the character may achieve something in the way of success, the success is only temporary, always fleeting, never permanent. And this is Naipaul's vision of life. Slavery and colonialism have created a rootless society within the West Indies, a result of this "unnatural bringing together of peoples who could achieve fulfilment only within the security of their own societies and the landscapes hymned by their ancestors". (p. 32) Naipaul seems to be in agreement with what Réné Depestre says: "The colonial system...was intended to make the West Indian lose not only the worthy use of his human energy in his work, but also essential truths, his culture, his identity and himself."[14]

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[14]Réné Depestre, "Problems of Identity for the Black Man in the Caribbean", trans. G. Irish, Caribbean Quarterly, XIX No. 3 (Sept. 1973), p. 52.

CONCLUSION

> ...to withdraw completely from nationality and loyalties except to persons;...to be myself alone, my work, my name...every man was an island...[1]

Rootlessness and alienation have been an integral part of West Indian life. Selvon, Clarke, Mittelholzer, Salkey and Naipaul have illustrated this quite clearly. One wonders if it is possible to live anywhere without feeling this loss and homelessness. Naipaul suggests a solution to the problem in his recent book, In A Free State which is a fitting novel to conclude the discussion on rootlessness and alienation.

In A Free State is the title of a collection of stories all dealing with the problem of rootlessness and alienation. Everyone is making or has made a journey. In the prologue Naipaul talks about the Egyptian Greeks on board the ship who have been expelled from Greece. They have nowhere to go; they are refugees.[2] There is also a Tramp on board the ship who has been a wanderer for thirty-eight years, yet he does not consider himself homeless. He says, "I think of myself as a citizen of the world". (p. 9) He does not need anyone; he is sufficient company for himself, but he knows that he is a misfit in society so he seeks "the camouflage and protection of company". (p. 10) His oddity, however, causes him to be rejected and persecuted by the others who consider themselves normal.

In the story Santosh, like the Tramp, has made a journey. He has left his home in Bombay to live in Washington with his

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[1] Naipaul, An Area of Darkness, p. 188.

[2] Naipaul, In A Free State. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1973), p. 7.

master. For a while, Santosh is too afraid to venture out into the new city and remains, except for brief shopping expeditions, locked up in the apartment. Life is lonely for him and puzzling, and, clinging to the customs of his country, he is unable to experience anything new. When he finally decides to make the break, to escape from the stronghold of his culture, he does so to its limit. Marrying the hubshi woman is taboo to his people and this final step, while giving him one type of freedom, limits him in other ways. He is cut off from his people and in fact feels suspended:

> I have closed my mind and heart to the English language, to newspapers and radio and television, to the pictures of hubshi runners and boxers and musicians on the wall. I do not want to understand or learn any more.
> I am a simple man who decided to act and see for himself, and it is as though I have had several lives. I do not wish to add to these....Soul Brother. I understand the words; but I feel, brother to what or to whom? I was once part of the flow, never thinking of myself as a presence. Then I looked in the mirror and decided to be free. All that my freedom has brought me is the knowledge that I have a face and have a body, that I must feed this body and clothe this body for a certain number of years. Then it will be over. (pp. 57-58)

Once he was "part of the flow", part of the Universe, "never thinking of himself as a presence" now he is no longer free, no longer part of the flow. Here, another contradiction by Naipaul presents itself. The Tramp is free; he has made himself a "citizen of the world" (p. 9) by disassociating himself from all national ties, yet Santosh does this and instead is lost in a void. He needs to belong. When Naipaul talks about being

"part of the flow" (p. 57) he is referring to Santosh's ties with the Indian tradition. He is no longer part of the flow when be breaks away. Naipaul himself suggests that "to withdraw completely from nationality and loyalties except to persons"[3] is perhaps the best action; yet he shows that one should not deny one's culture. This conflict is to be seen also in The Mystic Masseur and The Mimic Men.

"Tell me who to kill" is a story of a man's struggle to make something of himself in the terrifying city of London. Like Ralph in The Mimic Men, the narrator of this story leaves his home in order to seek his fortune in London. Instead, he experiences absolute displacement and this is exemplified when he says: "I don't know what bus we will take when we get to the station, or what other train, what street we will walk down, what gate we will go through, and what door we will open into what room". (p. 60)

The Tramp, Santosh, Dayo's brother, these three all seek something new, some solution to their problems of homelessness, and they find rejection, alienation and displacement. In the same way, Bobby and Linda discover that while they are in what supposedly is a free state, they are not all that free, that there their actions are restricted by society.

Bobby tries to associate with the people from the state, tries to convice them and himself, that though he is white and representative of one of the colonialists, he is nevertheless,

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[3]Naipaul, An Area of Darkness, p. 188.

open-minded, a colonial.[4] What promises to be an uneventful trip through the free state, turns out to be a threat to Bobby and his companion. Their white skin and British citizenship, once a protective factor, no longer serves its purpose. The very fact that the state is free, robs them of their shield. Bobby's threat to report the soldier (p. 231) has no quelling effect. In fact, it only incites more violence. In the final analysis, as open-minded as he pretends to be, Bobby is a colonialist. When, for example, Luke (his African servant) laughs at him, he thinks, "I will have to sack Luke". (p. 238)

The story concludes with a bitter note. Like all of Naipaul's novels, he exposes only the negative and offers nothing positive. To be in a free state means nothing; to reject one's culture causes dissatisfaction; to be a citizen of the world stimulates rejection; "to be myself alone, my work, my name" is the only solution. To "withdraw from nationality and loyalties except to persons" is perhaps the only alternative; to make roots in rootlessness; a home in homelessness, to be content with oneself is Naipaul's answer.

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[4]Albert Memmi makes a clear distinction between a colonial, and a colonialist. According to Memmi, a colonial is a "European living in a colony but having no privileges, whose living conditions are not higher than those of a colonized person of equivalent economic and social status." Memmi goes on to say that "a colonial so defined does not exist, for all Europeans in colonies are privileged." The Colonizer and the Colonized, p. 10.

Naipaul, however, is operating within a vacuum. The answer to a negative situation cannot be negative. In The Middle Passage Naipaul says "Living in a borrowed culture, the West Indian, more than most, needs writers to tell him who he is and where he stands", (p. 73) and he does not do this, for Naipaul himself is too much involved in the spiritual anguish of being rootless and homeless to offer any positive solution. Rather, Salkey's call for pride in one's race, in one's country, in one's history and the repossession of the land is perhaps a more realistic alternative for, having recognized the Caribbean problem of alienation and rootlessness, the West Indian should set about to eradicate it.

> All o' we losing' out,
> 'cause we won't own up to weself,
> grab we soul,
> grab weself like we know weself,
> an' tradition-up we tradition,
> an' fuck the nex' man
> who laugh after we
> an' say it small
> an' slave-make
> an' fragment-up
> an' dark night as Dung'll
> an' client-tie
> an' don't got no industry
> an' no technology.
>
> Fuck him, yes!
>
> Culture comes when you buck up
> on you'self.
> It start when you' body make shadow
> on the lan',
> an' you know say
> that you standin' up into mirror
> underneat' you.
>
> I say to meself
> Is how the mento music go?"

You say,
"Is how the river flow?"
or, "How the sea does lay down so?"

I done wit' you.
I into history, now.
Is the lan' I want
an' is the lan'
I out to get.[5]

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[5]Salkey, Jamaica, p. 107.

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