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**Towards a New Geographical
Consciousness:**

**A Study of Place in the Novels of V. S.
Naipaul and J. M. Coetzee**

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Doctor of Philosophy in English literature

The University of Sussex

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In the Name of God

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Sussex. The work is original except where indicated by special reference in the text and no part of the thesis has been submitted for any other degree. The thesis has not been presented to any other university for examination either in the United Kingdom or overseas.

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ABSTRACT

Focusing on approaches to place in selected novels by J. M. Coetzee and V. S. Naipaul, this thesis explores how postcolonial literature can be read as contributing to the reimagining of decolonised, decentred or multi-centred geographies. I will examine the ways in which selected novels by Naipaul and Coetzee engage with the sense of displacement and marginalization generated by imperial mappings of the colonial space. My chosen texts contribute to the decentralizing tendencies of postcolonialism by deconstructing the tropes of boundaries from the perspective of those who have been marginalized on the basis of their race, gender or geographical origins.

The work of Edward Said, bell hooks, Edward Soja, Gillian Rose and Homi Bhabha provide a means for me to explain how the displaced subjects relate to places in the postcolonial context. Accordingly, Coetzee's and Naipaul's visions of place and geography are examined in this study in relation to the situational complexity of their habitats. Naipaul's view of place in terms of the binary oppositions between the colonial and metropolitan places is discussed in relation to the sense of displacement that is generated by his colonial upbringing. On the other hand, Coetzee's view of place as the product of imperialist divisive discourses is also interpreted against the historical contest over land and belonging in South Africa. It is argued that both writers contribute to the decentralizing mission of postcolonialism by locating themselves in the margins and advocating sensitivity towards the tropes of boundaries that subject people to displacement and marginalization.

Part I discusses *A House for Mr Biswas*, *The Enigma of Arrival*, *Half a Life* and *Magic Seeds*. I will explore how Naipaul's sense of marginality results in his view of the world in terms of a binarism between the centre and the margin. However, I will argue that among these novels, the last three acknowledge that the longing for homeliness is an unlikely quest for a displaced subject, and that the

imperative of the postcolonial world requires the displaced to see the world as unhomely, changing and hybrid.

Part II interprets Coetzee's experience of apartheid in South Africa as a legitimate reason for resisting the ways in which the dominant powers in the social and cultural spheres implement marginality. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, and *Life and Times of Michael K* and *Foe*, Coetzee deconstructs boundaries and asserts the entitlement of the displaced and the marginalized to the land and its representation. The distinctive approaches taken by these two canonical writers remind us of the increasing necessity, yet the complexity, of moving towards a decentralised and dynamic view of the world.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND REFERENCES

Part One

- BR** *A Bend in the River* (1979; London: Picador, 2002)
- EA** *The Enigma of Arrival: A Novel* (1987; London: Picador, 2002)
- FC** *Finding the Centre: Two Narratives* (London, Andre Deutsch, 1984)
- HB** *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961, London: Picador, 2002)
- HL** *Half a Life* (London: Picador, 2001)
- IAD** *India: An Area of Darkness* (1964; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968)
- IWC** *India: A Wounded Civilization* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1977)
- MP** *The Middle Passage: A Caribbean Journey* (1962, London: Picador, 1996)
- MS** *Magic Seeds* (London: Picador, 2004)
- OB** *Overcrowded Barracoon and Other Stories* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1972)

Part Two

- B** *Boyhood* (1997; London: Vintage, 2004)
- D** *Dusklands* (1974; London: Vintage, 2004)
- Disgrace** *Disgrace* (London: Vintage, 2000)
- DP** *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992)

- F** *Foe* (1986; London: Penguin Books, 1987)
- HHM** *He and His Man: The Nobel Lecture in Literature* (London: Penguin Books, 2004)
- IHC** *In the Heart of the Country* (1977; London: Vintage, 2004)
- MK** *Life and Times of Michael K* (1984; London, Vintage 2004)
- WB** *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980; London, Vintage 2004)
- WW** *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988)

INTRODUCTION

Towards a New Geographical Consciousness

A whole history remains to be written of spaces ... from the grotesque strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat ...

(Foucault, 1980a, pp.94-103)

The fact that colonisation was a geographic violence, as it mainly involved contest over land and its resources,¹ renders a critical approach to geography a necessity in postcolonial studies. Such a revision of geography and the geographical order is advocated primarily by Edward Said (Said, 1993, pp.1-15). The impact of the geographic violence of colonisation appears to Said to be not only territorial but also cultural. Patterns of displacement of the people subjected to colonisation made them struggle and engage with loss and belonging. It is for this reason that in *Culture and Imperialism* Said declares:

[J]ust as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting, because it is not only about soldiers and cannons, but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings. (Said, 1993, p.6)

This sentiment hints at the main concern of Said in his book, and that is the manner in which the imperialist discourse propagated through literature

¹ See Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993, pp.1-15).

influences our vision of geography, of our place in the geographical order and of the world at large.

Said's preoccupation with anti-colonial geographical vision is further expressed in his essay "Geography, Literature and History" (Said, 2000b). The article is a reflection on the place of spatiality in the western tradition where Said compares and contrasts the evolving dialectics of temporality and spatiality in the theories of a few western scholars and thinkers.² Said contends that the main body of approaches to history in the western tradition lacks what he views as 'a powerful *geographical* sense', as such approaches are founded on the taken-for-granted ideology of the centrality of Europe (Said, 2000b, p.458, original emphasis). Said defines his notion of a geographical sense in terms of a 'spatial sense of discontinuity that complicates and renders far less effective than before the possibility of correspondence, congruence, continuity, and reconciliation between different area of experience' (Said, 2000b, p.458). What Said is suggesting here is that the production of any intellectual or cultural work is conditioned by what he calls 'situational complexity', meaning the correspondence of culture, history and geography (Said, 2000b, p.458). Thus, any approach to culture and history would be valid only if it addresses and shows awareness of the situational complexity. Said's emphasis on the need for a geo-

² Said argues that western Eurocentric thinkers like Lukacs and Auerbach strongly believed in the centrality of Europe and downplayed spatiality in favour of temporality, and according to Said, both Lukacs and Auerbach regard aesthetics and politics as 'temporal activity' in following suit with the Hegelian tradition. Temporality to them is on the one hand, a mode of understanding historical reality, and on the other, a form and process through which a possible understanding between a subject and object can be achieved. Said argues that among these critics, Lukacs and Auerbach are prejudiced towards the centrality of Europe, while Gramsci believes that awareness of history is contingent on geographical awareness. See (Said, 2000).

political sensitivity in current critical thinking and the need for a distancing from the Eurocentric ideology concludes with him raising a significant question (which is the point of departure of this thesis):

...what if the world has changed so drastically as to allow now for almost the first time a new geographical consciousness of a decentred or multi-centred world, a world no longer sealed within watertight compartments of art or culture or history, but mixed, mixed up, varied, complicated by the new difficult mobility of migrations, the new independent states, the newly emergent and burgeoning cultures?
(Said, 2000b, p.471)

The fact that Said proposes his call for developing a decentralised geographical consciousness in the form of a question suggests that he is aware of the complexity of such a move both at the local and the global level.

Decentralization of the highly polarized world in which we live, as Said suggests, begins with intellectual works developing an awareness and sensibility toward practices that tend to polarize power relations. To this end, the main task of these works would be engaging with the ways in which independence, migration and emerging postcolonial cultures have necessitated re-imagination of the world as decentralised and decolonised.

The following thesis explores how postcolonial literature can be read as contributing towards reimagining of decentred or multi-centred geographies by analysing approaches to place in selected novels of V. S. Naipaul and J. M. Coetzee. A crucial point argued in the thesis is that while it is necessary to develop a new geographical consciousness in literary works, it is not feasible to

expect to come to a unified decentralization strategy. The study of selected novels of Naipaul and Coetzee shows that the re-imagination of topographical metaphors and the ways in which people relate to the places are informed by the sense of place that each of the subject writers has established in relation to situational complexities of their backgrounds and their habitats.

In reading place and belonging in the novels of Naipaul and Coetzee this thesis argues that, firstly, their vision of place is informed by the way they each identified their writing self against the local political forces and their background, which is the main reason for their distinctive approaches to the possibility of decentralization of colonial spaces. Secondly, the two writers negotiate theories of decolonising strategies such as hybridity and habitation and adapt them in the complex and transformative ways they re-imagine local and cultural spaces. However, the two writers share in their approach to place and belonging a decentred and multi-centred view of postcolonialism, as their works engage with defining and articulating new ways of relating to and belonging in place. The following section lays out how the polarization of geographies was generated through hegemonic imperial practices on the global scale (colonial vs. imperial) and on the local scale (based on race and ethnicity), and how postcolonial theory challenges such geographical and spatial perceptions.

I. The politics of place in post-colonial theory:

A. The creation of colonial space in the Caribbean and South Africa

European colonisation during the nineteenth century was motivated by competition between various European empires for extraction of riches and occupation of land and involved displacing large populations and transforming the landscape of certain colonised lands like the Caribbean and Southern Africa (Young, 2001, pp.1-11). The establishment of economic market bases and European settlements in these areas required moving large numbers of indigenous people from different parts of the world to work in settlements, mines, and plantations, just as it required a re-structuring and re-mapping of space in the colonies (Ashcroft et al., 2000). When in 1492, Christopher Columbus on an expedition to the Orient, landed in the Caribbean, the history of the people and landscape of the islands entered a new phase.³ A contract between Columbus and the Spanish government was signed by which the government agreed to finance the voyage in exchange for royal control of the lands and a high proportion of the profits of the discoveries. Subsequently, the Caribbean became a site of rivalry between European colonisers, specifically the Spanish, the French, the Dutch and the British, who took turns as the colonial power until the late nineteenth century.

³ The historical information about colonisation of the Caribbean islands is taken from first, Eric Williams' political and social history of Trinidad and Tobago. See WILLIAMS, E. E. (1962) *History of the people of Trinidad and Tobago*, [S.I.], PNM Publishing Co. Secondly, it is taken from G. Heuman's detailed account of how colonisation transformed the human and geographical landscape of the Caribbean; see HEUMAN, G. J. (2006) *The Caribbean*, London : Hodder Arnold.

The human and geographical landscape of the islands was transformed through colonial policies and practices. In the sixteenth century cultivation of sugar cane under Spanish rule transformed the landscape of the islands' population and space. The Amerindians, Tainos, the Caribs and others were either annihilated or were forced to serve the Spaniards. In the course of two centuries Africans were enslaved and transported in millions to the Western Hemisphere to work on plantation lands. Trinidad, the birth-place of Naipaul, was 'discovered' in 1498 and was named after 'the Holy Trinity' by Columbus (Williams, 1962 ,p.8). The colony was handed to the French who governed under the Spanish reign, until the year 1797 when the British Naval force took over the island, whose total population was 17, 643 over ten thousand of which were Negro slaves (Williams, 1962, p.66). Slavery was officially abolished in 1834, yet, alternative supplies of cheap labour were required for the plantations to continue functioning profitably and this labour was sought from China and India. Indian immigrants to whom Naipaul's ancestors belonged were indentured for five years with low wages of twenty five cents a day and kept in poor living conditions. The numbers of the Indian labourers grew to the extent that in the early twentieth century the Indian community constituted forty percent of the population of Trinidad (Williams, 1962). When in 1962, Trinidad and Tobago became independent from the United Kingdom, it was already a multi-racial nation, yet racism persisted as a social and cultural force. The white rulers vilified and misrepresented the civilizations of Africa in order to justify slavery, just as they maligned Indian civilization to justify ruling over the Indians and depriving

them of their right to equality (Heuman, 2006, pp.88-119). In effect, racism began from the top ruling group down to the working populations, with each group feeling superior to those who had lower status (Heuman, 2006). The ideology of white superiority that created unequal spatial relations on the global scale with Europe at the centre, in the Caribbean served to generate patterns of racism that prevented unity of the inhabitants and maintained the control of the European masters over alien lands.

On the Southern part of the Atlantic, at the tip of the African continent, over a century and half after the first discovery of the Caribbean, in 1652 a settlement was established by a Dutch trading Company to provide fresh supplies for tradesmen travelling between the Netherlands and Asia. From 1652 until the late eighteenth century the settlement expanded inland as a reservoir of natural resources (Lester, 1998, p.15). The pattern of annihilation of indigenous inhabitants of the land (known as Khoikhoi, Hottentots, Xhosa, amongst others), transferring slaves and indentured labourers to work on plantations or settlements and treating the land as an empty space to be re-constructed and re-mapped repeated in Southern Africa similar acquisitive imperial practices as was the case in the Caribbean (Lester, 1998). However, with the discovery of mineral resources and the expansion of the settlement, migration of white settlers was encouraged, which distinguishes South African colonial history quite sharply from the Caribbean where the percentage of whites in the population was always small. In South Africa, both the white settlers and the black labourers were displaced in two distinctive ways. While the early settlers expressed a sense of

unhomeliness in the African landscape, Coetzee suggests that the black labourers were doubly displaced because they were first displaced from their homes in Africa and second, marginalized as they were denied equal access to the land, status and material welfare of the white settlers (Coetzee, 1988, pp.1-11). The social relations of South African society were formed during the British and the Dutch rule in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century and created a racial order based on labourers being black and landowner and employers white (Lester, 1998, pp.15-36). As race became the determinant of status and class, it made room for the emergence and grounding of an exclusivist white Afrikaner ideology that swept to power in the middle of the twentieth century and founded the apartheid regime. Segregation and hegemonic policies of apartheid led to strict geographical, social and political marginalization of the South African non-white population for over forty years. The spatial divisions in South Africa through implementation of visible and invisible boundaries that displaced non-white residents remained a persistent force even after the general election of 1994 when power was transferred to the main black party, the African National Congress (Lester, 1998, pp.226-252).

The discursive practices of imperialism resulted in the colonised territories a shared narrative of displacement. There are many features that unite and separate South Africa and the Caribbean in the ways in which their territory was appropriated by colonialist powers. There are geographical, economic and political differences between the two countries as well as different racial, ethnic and social configurations. The experience of apartheid and segregation of space

in the middle of the twentieth century did not happen on such a scale and form in Trinidad. However, the two countries' common experience of being ruled by the British Empire at a point in their history, and their being developed as plantation colonies unites them across geographical divisions. In the settler colonies, to various degrees, the lands were treated as empty spaces to be re-structured, re-built, re-named and mapped out, whilst implementing western laws of property that dispossessed indigenous peoples of what they assume as their natural right to the land (Darian-Smith et al., 1996). South Africa and the Caribbean are no exception. Just like South Africa, Trinidad was formed as a plantation and merchant colony, its indigenous inhabitants annihilated and the land was adapted and organized in accordance with models drawn from industrialized and capitalist Europe.⁴ Not only appropriation of the land, but also spatial divisions between different racial and ethnic groups generated in the two territories what Darian Smith et al call a 'fragile interior' (Darian-Smith et al., 1996, p.3). The multi-racial and multi-ethnic social configurations of Trinidad (and South Africa) that have been produced by racist discourses of imperialism have rendered national unity a contested issue (Williams, 1962, pp.103-122).

B. Colonial space in colonial discourses

The divisions within the social and cultural sphere of the Caribbean and South Africa need to be seen in the wider context of colonial discourse across the

⁴ Eric Williams, the former prime-minister of Trinidad and Tobago in his account of the history of Trinidad contends that the Spanish, the French and the British each in their own ways implemented European view of land on the island's space (Williams, 1962, p.7). Darian-Smith et al make similar claim with regard to South Africa and Australia (Darian-Smith et al, 1993, p.6-7)

colonised territories. It is for the recurrent pattern of appropriation of land based on exclusions and divisions, that 'place' and 'dislocation' are featured as key concepts in postcolonial studies.⁵ While geography is a general term referring to the arrangements of land and the study of these arrangements, the concept of place explains the 'interaction of language, history and environment' (Ashcroft et al., 2000). Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin use the term 'dislocation' to refer to such cultural and psychological effects of displacement. Dislocation is used to describe the experience of those European settlers who left their 'home' in order to live and work in the colonies, but found lack of fit between their language and the land in which they settled. But in general terms, it refers to the feeling of not-being-at-home, which encompasses all those who through hegemonic imperial practices feel what Ashcroft et al call 'cultural denigration', referring to practices that make the colonised feel marginal in power, social and cultural relations (Ashcroft et al., 2000, p.75) . Such re-conceptualization of place and critical engagement with the sense of dislocation is the response of anti-colonial discourse theory to the way geography was appropriated as knowledge and as a territorial configuration in the course of colonialism.

Spatial and geographical ordering is implemented at both global and local levels. At the local level, a process is deployed by the imperial powers to restructure and represent the colonial territories based on a hierarchal divisions, which is called by John Noyes as the creation of 'colonial space' (Noyes, 1992). Parallel to creating colonial space in travel and exploration writings, hegemonic

⁵ The concepts of 'place' and 'dislocation' are two entries among key concepts on Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin's text book, *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (2000).

processes are used to create what Mary Louise Pratt calls a 'planetary consciousness' that systematically generated Eurocentric geographical polarization (Pratt, 2008). The notion of planetary consciousness refers to an 'orientation toward interior exploration and the construction of global-scale meaning through the descriptive apparatuses of natural history' (Pratt, 2008, p.15). According to Pratt, the construction of global-scale meaning is encouraged by two major events that shaped the understanding of Europeans of themselves and the rest of the world: first, the launch of the classification of all plant forms on the planet, and second launching of an expedition to determine the exact shape of the earth. Modern Eurocentrism is the result of this new planetary consciousness (Pratt, 2008, p.15). The systematising of nature represents European discourse about the non-European world. Scientific expedition did not involve the violence and exploitation carried out by mercantile expansion and colonial domination. Thus, the ordering mechanism appears to be a legitimate means that make 'a picture of the planet appropriated and redeployed from a unified, European perspective' (Pratt, 2008, p.36). This process of production of knowledge legitimizes the ideology of Eurocentrism and the peripheral position of non-Europeans.

The process of knowledge formation did not stop at scientific exploration. Such a process was followed persistently as exploration of the interior of the alien lands was encouraged in Europe. John Noyes studying colonial travel writings and exploration texts argues that these texts contributed in the making of the colonial space (Noyes, 1992). Noyes defines colonial space as a general term

which signifies the formation of a spatial entity through a process that has been adapted in almost all settler colonies and even partly in colonies of occupation. The trajectory of colonial space is organised based on division and hierarchy. According to Noyes, colonisation is 'an expression of social forces which structure subjectivity in a certain manner' (Noyes, 1992, p.19). Combining the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan with Henry Lefebvre's theory of space, he explains how the production of subjectivity coincides with the production of social forms in the colonial spaces. As Noyes argues the colonial social space is formed through a dialectic between the coloniser's *imago* (a subject collected in an image) and Other, on to which the subjectivity of the coloniser is mapped out. By the means of aggressive and narcissist forces the colonisers mapped out their mastery over the colonised lands, and restructured it in accordance with their own interest and desires. Naming the landscapes on the one hand, and creating unequal power relations based on the master and slave model on the other hand, generated an image of superiority and mastery of the European colonisers. The foundation of colonial space, in Noyes' view, is a process of 'unification of a chaotic multiplicity' (Noyes, 1992, p.96). The colonialists viewed the boundless space of South Africa or the islands of the Caribbean as a threat to their authority and control. Thus, colonisation involved ordering a boundless space and producing *place* which can be integrated into colonial social structure and administration. To this end, the colonisers empty the spaces that existed originally as multiple and disoriented, and created ordered unequal spaces both on the landscape and in the social sphere. This method of appropriation of the

land, according to Noyes, suggests that the spatial essence of the colonial space lies in its ability to transform multiplicity and disorientation into aggregate forms (Noyes, 1992).

According to Noyes' model, the process of reorganizing the landscape is based on three interrelated functions; the creation of boundaries, writing and looking (Noyes, 1992, pp.107-108). Since colonisation is territorial, and territory is signified through enclosures and boundaries, the production of colonial space depends on the articulation of boundaries. However, the tropes of boundary gain credibility through writing, as imperial texts, particularly maps and travel writings facilitate the fixity of boundaries. The traveller's gaze leaves a trace as it moves through the native spaces, and the gaze is legitimised via writing (Noyes, 1992). The point that Noyes' model makes is that the production of colonial space and the process of turning a space into a colonised place are highly dependent on those cultural products which legitimize the imperialist discourses about the alien lands.

The critique of knowledge formation and unequal power relations based on geographical and spatial marginalization are the themes of the novels of V. S. Naipaul and J. M. Coetzee studied in this thesis. *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Foe*, and *The Enigma of Arrival* can be read as manifesting the ways in which the knowledge of division between lands, cultures and people generated by the ideology of Eurocentrism contributed to the justification of colonial and imperialist practices. The creation of ethnic or racial divisions in line with colonial territorial expansion is best pictured in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. In this novel, Coetzee

creates an imaginary landscape in which the dominant imperial power creates a colonial space by ideological and physical boundary-making, establishing the discourse of the otherness of the indigenous inhabitants in order to maintain its authority and control over the territory. A similar critique of boundary-making and marginalization is seen in *The Enigma of Arrival*, and *Foe*. These two novels while showing the cultural grounding of British imperialism, also demythologize the idea of the superiority of England versus the colonies by showing that the identities of both sides of the binary opposition were culturally and imaginatively produced with no firm grounding in reality. *A House for Mr Biswas* and *Life and Times of Michael K*, on the other hand, manifest the struggle of individuals against local forces that tend to control their space and keep them in the margins.

The mission of the decolonisation of space through representational practices in these novels has taken two main directions: first, redefining the identity and meaning of both metropolitan and postcolonial places, and second, resisting the sense of dislocation that is generated through cultural denigration. These two decolonizing directions in postcolonial studies are not followed separately; rather in many cases they are integrated and interrelated. With respect to the first direction, many critics have worked on reversing imperial knowledge formation about colonised lands, and engaging with creating a 'new' history of the lands, examples of which are Mary L. Pratt's theory of the 'contact zone' (Pratt, 1992), and W.J.T. Mitchell's study of the relationship between representation of landscape and power (Mitchell, 1995). Postcolonial critics like Darian Smith et al advocate deconstructing the geographical knowledge

disseminated under natural science and travelogues, because in their view through 'imagining, seeing, historicizing and remembering that space is transformed into place, and geographical territory into a culturally defined landscape' (Darian-Smith et al., 1996, p.3). Helen Tiffin also argues that 'the intimate nature of human being in the land is accorded not by ancestry or migratory adaptation but through absorption, interrogation, and rewriting of the human history of its representation' (Tiffin, 2005, p.212). These postcolonial critics in one way or another advocate re-shaping a new collective place-consciousness that acknowledges influence of and a deviation from the colonial era.

Michel Foucault's identification of the convergence of power and knowledge has been the main intellectual influence for the postcolonial critique of unequal power relations on the basis of geographical divisions. In "The Eye of Power" and "Questions on Geography", Foucault gives an insight into the manner in which geographical knowledge produces power relations. Foucault discusses the manner in which power creates the discourse of the knowledge of spatiality in "Questions on Geography" where he contends that geographical metaphors are not truly geographical, but, are in many ways political because '[T]erritory is no doubt a geographical notion, but it is first of all a juridico-political one'(Foucault, 1980b, p.68). This implies that one cannot be sure these spatial notions are borrowed from geography rather than from what formed the knowledge of geography:

Once knowledge can be analysed in terms of region, domain, implantation, displacement, transposition, one is able to capture the process by which knowledge functions as a form of power and disseminates the effect of power (Foucault, 1980, p.69).

Foucault's argument on how power constructs knowledge has pertinence to the formation of colonial space. Practices that created a social space based on unequal power relationships in the colonies and in the global scale have been also supported by the discourse that presented the spaces as empty and the people as primitive and savage. The circulation of such discourse as the knowledge of the colonised lands instigate a new meaning and vision of the lands that was far from the way these places were perceived by their inhabitants. If we define place as 'a space to which meaning has been ascribed' (Carter et al., 1993, p.xii), then colonial space can be defined as a colonised space in which colonisers establish meanings and values in line with their own interests.

Foucault's call for renewal of the knowledge of space, (articulated in the epigraph with which this chapter is opened), has implications for the decolonisation of space. He appears to suggest that not only Eurocentric ideas labelled as "knowledge" should be challenged, but also the meaning and representation of lands and landscapes that were appropriated in the course of colonisation. I have discussed how the ideology of Eurocentrism and colonial appropriation of space created geographical and cultural hierarchies. The next section explores how the postcolonial writers' sense of place, particularly Naipaul and Coetzee, is shaped through the matrix of ideology, history and culture they have been

exposed to in their home countries. I will also show how a sense of place can be transformed into a vision of place that is aware of the relations of power.

C. From displacement to emplacement

Stephen Daedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* says that 'the artist is a product of this race, this country and this life' (Joyce, 2000). Yet, Helene Cixous reflecting on the phrase rightly explains that this must be understood as meaning, 'it is not this race, this country and this life that "produces" Stephen or Joyce, but the artist who produces himself against or outside of these determining factors' (Cixous, 1972, p.xiii). The necessity of Cixous's explanation is inherent in the fact that not all artists of similar background necessarily express identical senses of place. But a work of art reflects its creator's self-realization against determining factors of his/her background and the situational complexities of the place he/she comes from.

Explaining how a displaced subject can develop a decentred consciousness of place requires an understanding of how a consciousness of place develops initially. The relationship between the social and cultural imperatives of place and identity formation have been explained by philosophers of place (particularly scholars in the field of phenomenology of place) such as J. E. Malpas and Edward Casey, as well as human geographers like Gillian Rose, Edward Soja and bell hooks who have theorised identity formation in a place and the role of place in social life. According to Edward Casey, human way of life is

shaped by the local and situational complexities (Casey, 1993). Drawing on Aristotle who regarded place as “prior to all things”, Casey argues that ‘to exist at all ... as an object ... or as an event ... is to be *implaced*, however, minimally, imperfectly or temporarily’ (Casey, 1993, p.13). Consequently, the phenomenon of displacement derives from ‘a failure to link up with places’ though, it should not be regarded as ‘loss of a vital connection with place itself’ (Casey, 1993, p.xiv).

J. E. Malpas similarly observes place as “being-in-the-world” and a significant element in the manner in which we experience the world (Malpas, 1999). The particularity of such an approach to place is manifested in Tim Cresswell’s *Introduction to Place*, where Malpas’s approach is compared to that of David Harvey (Cresswell, 2004). David Harvey contends that ‘[p]lace in whatever guise, is like space and time, a social construct’ (cited in Cresswell, 2004, p.29). The notion of place as socially constructed means that place is not a given entity, but, made by human forces and can be dismantled by human forces. Harvey’s Marxist approach to geography upholds the idea that the place that we experience in the West is the outcome of the materiality of capitalist forces and its meaning is driven from media, power structure and the people who live in it. Yet, Malpas, in contrast to Harvey, argues that our experience of the world is limited by the place and the society in which we live:

Place is instead that within and with respect to which subjectivity is itself established – place is not founded *on* subjectivity, but is rather that *on which* subjectivity is founded. Thus, one does not first have a subject that apprehends certain features of the world in terms of the idea of place;

instead, the structure of subjectivity is given in and through the structure of place. (Malpas, 1999, p.35)

Malpas believes that human beings recognize their selfhood, location and orientation within a spatial structure, but such an idea does not provide any explanation for how social transformations or change in the structure of place are implemented by the will and authority of human beings. In other words, if we assume that subjects and their agency are formed in a structure that extends beyond the subject's individual control, we cannot explain how transformations happen in the real world. While Harvey's idea lacks a vision for limited agency of the subject in a pre-structured socio-cultural context, the idea proposed by Malpas lacks room for transformation within the structure by human forces. Place is neither pre-structured free of our will or consciousness nor completely made through existing forces that can mould it in any desirable way. Tim Cresswell has possibly the most sophisticated critique as he synthesizes the two theories and concludes that place 'is a construction of humanity but a necessary one – one that human life is impossible to conceive of without' (Cresswell, 2004, p.33), and by elaborating on Cresswell, place is not simply a social construct, but, is created out of social relations. The singularity of place lies in the specific social and cultural interactions that takes place in it, but, as social relations are dynamic and transform in the course of time, the identity of place also changes as the identity of the people who inhabit it.

Approaching place from the viewpoint of humanist geography, Gillian Rose explains how individuals develop a particular sense of place in social contexts by using specific examples that demonstrate the relationship between senses of place with structures of power (Rose, 1995). According to Rose, while a sense of place may be personal and natural, such feelings and meanings are shaped in large part by the social, cultural and economic conditions in which individuals find themselves (Rose, 1995, p.98). Rose argues that a sense of place is constructed by underlying structures of power and identity politics at work in a society. For example, the identity politics which define the borders between Same and Other, and between different groups in a society generally results in individuals having different senses of place. The determining social factors that contribute to a sense of place are varied. The factors include cultural difference, invisible boundaries between insiders and outsiders, economic inequality, and so on. Awareness of cultural difference may encourage one group to mark its difference by claiming that they *belong* to another culture or place to which other groups do not belong. Moreover, social boundaries may encourage a sense of division between insiders and outsiders within a society. The fiercer the boundary, the wider is the gap between the insiders and the outsiders. These boundaries can be national, racial or religious and can exclusively identify those who belong to a particular group *against* those who do not belong. Inevitably the divide might then entail social inequality and the marginalization of those who for any reason do not belong to the

established dominant group. Gillian Rose uses the example of Orientalism where the Orient is the “other” of the West and such othering negates viewing non-Western cultures in their own light (Rose, 1995). The “other” is not limited to one group but it is someone who is constructed as different to the dominant group. The other, according to Rose, ‘is socially marginalized, the less powerful, the working class, black, female, gay, lesbian, disabled, the geographically peripheral’ (Rose, 1995, p.104). Here Rose insists that the boundaries set by powerful institutions segregate people, polarize one side against the other and make the less powerful exiled or displaced at home. However, less powerful communities are not necessarily passive as they ‘may develop a challenge to the dominant senses of place’ meaning that marginalized groups might insist on their own interpretation of place, a good example of which is the massive body of postcolonial and migrant narratives (Rose, 1995, p.105).

The cultural denigration of the colonised people which paralleled racial and ethnic marginalization of the colonised is usually regarded as the main source of dislocation. The colonised people identified with or against or outside the European standards. In fact, identification is a spectrum of degrees as the colonised subjects might adopt, interrogate or hybridize a sense of place based on the centrality of Europe or they might identify against this centrality. A strong widely circulated example of identifying with an idea of the centrality of Europe by some Africans is proposed by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin White Masks* (1952). Fanon argues when the black

French-speaking inhabitants of the francophone Caribbean islands used French expressions when speaking their local language, they are measuring themselves against a European standard and this is 'evidence of *dislocation*, a separation' (Fanon, 1967, p.25, my emphasis). Fanon expands dislocation as follows:

Every colonised people ... finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonised is elevated above this jungle status in proportion to his adaptation of the mother country's cultural standards (Fanon, 1967, p.18).

But Fanon, rising against what he calls the white man's cultural standards, is an epitome of identifying against the dominant sense of place and resistance to dislocation. In his celebrated works published in the 1950s, Fanon openly expresses his own personal experiences to analyse the psychology of blackness, and it is against the sense of alienation and marginalization that he experienced, that he criticizes racism, racial division and ethnic marginalization. In this line, Fanon shows that a gap between him and his people has widened that makes him express a sense of unbelonging to his people (of Antilles). To Fanon, such a gap is inevitably created between 'an educated negro' and his community as education highlights the disharmony and inequalities. In effect, '[the educated negro] *rarely wants to belong* to his people. And it is with rage in his mouth and abandon in his heart that he buries himself in the vast black abyss' (Fanon, 1967, p.16, my emphasis).

Resisting a sense of displacement begins with questioning the cultural denigration and the boundaries that regulate marginalization and maintain unequal power relations as indeed displacement can be a platform from which resistance begins. Just as Fanon writes against cultural and racial displacement, Edward Said writes against geographical displacement. In *Out of Place* (1999), Said's memoir on a life-long sense of being out-of-place or in a way displaced, he says that 'Along with language, it is geography –especially in the displaced form of departures, arrivals, farewells, exile, nostalgia, homesickness, belonging, and travel itself – that is at the core of my memories' (Said, 1999, p.xvi). Just as Fanon's blackness gives him insight to racial prejudice, it is fair to say that Said's Palestinian origin and his displacement from his homeland are significant factors in his sensitivity about geographical consciousness. For Said, who actively involved with the Palestinians' plight, an issue that during his life-time was never resolved, geographical marginality consciously and unconsciously lay at the core of his intellectual works.⁶ The resisting strategy that Said chose was to struggle against geographical marginality and cultural displacement of the colonised people and the non-Western nations in general.

Before noting how Naipaul and Coetzee identify their writing self with/against/outside their background, there is a need to consider the fact that a writer's engagement with geography and place is as much informed by his sense of place as it is informed by treatment of these concepts in art and culture of his

⁶ The relationship between Said's theories and his Palestinian background is also mentioned by Aijaz Ahmed In *In Theory*, Ahmad writes: '...Edward Said is not only a cultural critic, he is also a Palestinian. Much that is splendid in his work is connected to the fact that he has tried to do honour to that origin...' (p.160).

period. The deconstructive practices of postmodernity, the ‘de-naturalising’ practices of postmodern art in representation of familiar forms, and the move towards decentralization and multi-centralization in art, culture and social relations, has influenced the vision of places and spaces.⁷ In the 1980s and the 1990s three influential but distinct critics, bell hooks, Edward Soja and Edward Said advocated a move towards a new geographical consciousness inspired by the decentralising practices of postmodernism. The fact that these critics came from different intellectual backgrounds – bell hooks the African-American critic known for her feminist and anti-racist criticism, Said known for his post-colonial criticism and Soja a critic in human geography – signifies the encompassing importance of the concept of place and spatial relations in different social and cultural spheres. In the works of hooks, Soja and Said the postmodern merges with the postcolonial as they criticise identity politics as well as national and geographical divisions at the local and global levels and call for an intellectual move towards a decentralization of spaces on the local and global scale.

Long before Said’s article on geography, bell hooks in her book *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural politics* proposed the idea of “choosing the margin as a space of radical openness” as a resisting strategy against marginalization of any kind (hooks, 1990). She believes that marginalization based on race, class, geography and gender are all related and should all be resisted. She has the experience of not only geographical marginality (living in a suburban area which was segregated from the central town) but also racial and gender marginality.

⁷ Linda Hutcheon defines features of postmodern art and postmodernity in detail. See HUTCHEON, L. (1989) *The politics of postmodernism*, London, Routledge.

Her feeling of belonging to several peripheries is her main drive to define her resisting politics of identity based on dismantling the divisive boundaries of race, class, gender, and geography. Her resistance politics involves, firstly developing an awareness of how structures of domination work in one's own life and secondly, a move to generate 'new, alternative habits of being and resists from that marginal space of difference, inwardly defined', where in fact, it is transformation of margin that would result in decentralization of the centre (hooks, 1990, p.15). In "Choosing the margin as a space of radical openness", an article in the same book, hooks specifically mentions the locatedness of her resistance in the margins of society and the power structure. The very opening of the article is expressive of this characteristic: 'As a radical standpoint, perspective, position, "the politics of location" necessarily calls those of us who would participate in the formation of counter-hegemonic cultural practice to identify the spaces where we begin the process of re-vision' (hooks, 1990, p.145). Such a margin is not the marginal space that is created by unequal power relations; rather it is located in the intersection of home and centre, meaning that it is a virtual place beyond boundaries and division. She locates her writing self in this particular space: 'I am located in the margin' (hooks, 1990, p.153). It is to say that re-thinking and re-structuring cultural and social spaces begins with decentring power and our own perception of it.

Edward Soja, inspired by bell hooks and Homi Bhabha, proposes developing a new vision of space in the context of postmodern and decolonizing movements towards decentralization, which he calls Thirdspace consciousness

(Soja, 1999). He argues for the recognition of a space which is beyond the conceived space and the perceived space, but, which is a space of “lived” experiences (Soja, 1999, p.270). According to Soja the recognition of the Thirdspace is crucial, for it acknowledges the non-physical, non-visual aspect of space, and assumes space as dynamic and experiential rather than static and physical. Exploration of such a space expands the scope of geographical imagination in approaching and engaging with the spatial aspects of the life of marginalised subjects, as Soja argues. Unlike many postcolonial critics Soja’s methodology is not to analyse colonial discourse, but, to analyse the spatiality of the actual socio-cultural spaces of people’s habitat, whose understanding, as he argues, ‘enables us to see beyond what is presently known, to explore ‘other spaces’ (...) that are both similar to and significantly different from the real-and-imagined spaces we already recognize’ (Soja, 1999, p.269). The significance of Soja’s notion of Thirdspace, is the potentiality to ground collective struggle and thus the transformation of the existing unequal power relations (Soja, 1999, pp.269-270). Such a space is open to exploration for everyone, whether those who live in the margin or in the centre, or the margins of the centre as it is up to the critic or the writer to consciously expand the scope of their geographical imagination and resist discriminatory boundaries. In Soja’s words:

[Thirdspace] is a meeting ground, a site of hybridity and *mestizaje* and moving beyond entrenched boundaries, a margin or edge where ties can be severed and also where new ties can be forged. It can be mapped but never captured in conventional cartographies; it can be

creatively imagined but obtains meaning only when practiced and fully *lived*. (Soja, 1999, p.276, original emphasis)

Having a Thirdspace consciousness can be a means with which writers explore life in marginal spaces. While a critic like bell hooks has used her personal experiences of marginalization as a drive to locate her writing-self in the margins, a writer like Coetzee, as a white male South African with the privilege of access to the centre of power before liberation of South Africa, similarly locates his writing identity in the margins.

Although Naipaul developed a more complex geographical consciousness late in his career, his sense that old colonial boundaries still remains an enduring preoccupation in his work. His novels give an insight into how colonised subjects develop a sense of cultural inferiority and/or a sense of unhomeliness. In his later fictions he views places as changing, notions of home and belonging as unstable and the geographical order – the difference between primitive and civilised societies – as a fabrication. The concluding point here is that postcolonial writers and critics might have different approaches to place, but they are unified in addressing the necessity of establishing a decentralised geographical consciousness as a prerequisite of ending the imperially-created sense of dislocation.

II. How to inhabit the world?

At this point, it is worth addressing the following question: How do writers developing new geographical consciousness contribute to the way they re-imagine the idea of belonging to places and the way places are represented? In fact, while there is a consensus among postcolonial critics on the necessity for developing a new decentralised geographical consciousness, there is no consensus among them on the way topographical concepts such as home or land should be re-imagined. Neither is there any agreement on whether we should establish a sense of belonging to our habitat, and if so, how.

What is interesting is that despite the forces of globalization that render local cultures and places redundant, the notion of home and the idea of belonging still resonate in the works of postcolonial and immigrant writers. Critics' attempt to re-conceptualise concepts such as home and belonging clearly attests to their importance in the way subjects understand the world and inhabit it. However, one should also take into consideration the contradictory stances that cultural and postcolonial critics have taken in their engagement with the notion of home. Doreen Massey (1992) and Homi Bhabha (1992) believe that the notion of home is redundant. Bhabha advocates the move towards the feeling of not-being-at-home or what he terms as 'unhomeliness' (Bhabha, 1992, p.9). Bhabha negates what he calls 'fixity and fetishism of identities' that claim relation to specific locations and cultures in favour of

a bridge, where 'presencing' begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world –the

unhomeliness – that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations (Bhabha, 1992, p.9).

Bhabha's notion of unhomeliness can be interpreted as a conscious development of unbelonging; a meaning that also lies in the way he defines it: '[t]o be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the 'unhomely' be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres' but rather unhomeliness is a way of existing in a space where all the boundaries are broken (Bhabha, 1992, pp.9-10). Bhabha calls for 'the inscription of [a] borderline existence' as a starting point for creativity rather than having place-based identities (Bhabha, 1992, p.9). Doreen Massey makes a similar argument from a different perspective where she argues that globalization has dissolved geographical boundaries and has dispensed with the idea of 'place as a source of belonging, identity and security' (Massey, 1992, p.14). In the face of the spread of global products –Coca Cola, McDonalds, and so on – and the spread of globalization, examples of which are endless World Cups and World Music, there is a sense of homogenization of geographies, and this signifies to her a sense of 'placelessness' (Massey, 1992, p.9). Although she might not see unhomeliness as potentially a creative force as Bhabha does, she contends that dispensing with the idea of belonging to a place called home is an inevitability of our period. In her article, "A Place called home?" she gives a negative answer to the title question: 'A large component of the identity of that place called home derived precisely from the fact that it had always in one way or another been open; constructed out of movement, communication and social relations which always stretched beyond it' (Massey, 1992, p.14). Unlike Massey, bell hooks

does not dispense with the idea of home, and on the contrary, she argues that for those who experience marginalization, decolonisation and alienation, 'home is no longer one place. It is locations. Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and ever-changing perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference' (hooks, 1990, p.148). Her understanding of home as 'locations' stands against the idea of home being nowhere, as home for bell hooks is a place to be established, a site that needs to be re-imagined and re-lived (hooks, 1990).

Rosemary, J. George in *Politics of Home*, explores the ideology of home and belonging in English literature and literatures in English (George, 1996). She concludes by arguing that in literature 'imagining a home is as political an act as is imagining the nation', as both are a 'display of hegemonic power' (George, 1996, p.9). She also concludes that while postcolonial literature in its struggle against the colonial and the hegemony of discourses of power has challenged the security and comfort associated with home and belonging, it has not dispensed with the idea altogether and in response to direct question of, 'where, then, is home?' she answers:

Home is a place to escape to and a place to escape from. Its importance lies in the fact that it is not equally available to all. Home is the desired place that is fought for and established as an exclusive domain of a few. It is not a neutral place. It is community. (George, 1996, p.9)

George's definition flexibly binds negative and positive dimensions of home, its 'exclusions and inclusions', its 'violence and nurturing' but above all her definition signifies that holding on to the space of belonging is a political necessity (George, 1996, p.3). While the new consciousness of place renders the idea of home as a source of security and identity obsolete, there remains the question of whether to dispense with the idea of home altogether or to preserve it, though in a dynamic mode. To Naipaul and Coetzee, the idea of home is significant as they have been separated from their ancestral homelands and have adopted their home in an alien land. They challenge the traditional definition of home as a place of belonging and security but in different ways. In Naipaul, home is a social and cultural construct, as his displaced characters look for it in Trinidad, England, India and Africa. In his early work, Naipaul suggests that the colonized subject is homeless but this idea is modified in his later work where ideas of home are universally elusive. For Coetzee, though, home is not a socially grounded space, nor is it a concrete and constructed entity; rather it is a land, a place that an individual constructs a sense of entitlement to and establishes a sense of belonging to. In the contexts of dispossession and displacement, home appears to have been lost, as in *Life and Times of Michael K* where the home of Michael K's mother is shown to be an abandoned farmhouse, and also in *Foe*, where the sea is shown as Friday's home. In fact, the assertion of belonging and entitlement to a place in these novels is distinguished from the desire for a homely place. The homeless character resists the process through which he is

dispossessed and made homeless; and the imagery of unconventional homes evokes the idea of the need for resistance to marginalization.

Similar disagreements persist with regard to how displaced subjects are to inhabit the world in the aftermath of the break up of the European empires. In the postcolonial era the problem is no longer finding a home in the traditional sense, (because the very notions of home and belonging have been transformed), but reassessing our ways of belonging to the postcolonial world. The notions of 'habitation' and 'hybridity', which are proposed by Bill Ashcroft and Homi Bhabha respectively, as new ways to inhabit the world and to establish a sense of belonging in the postcolonial era are explored here. Ashcroft argues that we have to reactivate the sense of belonging and emplacement (Ashcroft, 1997), whereas Bhabha believes that the time for returning to the absolute authority of culture has changed and the only way to inhabit the world is to occupy an 'in-between' space, where cultures are hybridized and exchanged (Bhabha, 1992). Here, it is to emphasise that what is missing in these proposed treaties are considerations of specific locations. It is to say, the sensibility and effectiveness of these ideas in practice, to a large extent is contingent on consideration of local power relations and social structures.

Homi Bhabha when introducing the notion of hybridity in *The Location of Culture*, emphasises the need for viewing postcolonial culture as a 'Third space of enunciation' which is a space created in the contact zone of the cultures of the colonisers and the colonised (Bhabha, 1992). He states that we are to 'understand that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in [the]

contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation', the consequence of which is recognition of the fact that 'hierarchical claims to the inherent originality and purity of cultures are untenable' (Bhabha, 1992, p.37). Following the challenge to the idea of the purity of cultures, Bhabha argues that as a result of cross-cultural contact between the cultures, what is created is hybridity, which is defined as the creation of cross-cultural forms which are at the same time 'the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal', meaning denial of any claim to pure and original identity or authority (Bhabha, 1992, p.112). According to Bhabha, hybridity was employed long before the break up of empire in the colonies as a strategic rejection of the culture of the colonisers, and the hybrid culture posed a threat to the essential standards and values that the colonisers imported in the colonised societies. In the postcolonial era thus, hybridity would be an alternative cultural form that can be encouraged and implemented in societies to replace essential identities and cultures.

On the other hand, Bill Ashcroft in an essay entitled "Habitation", offers a distinctively different perspective on the manner in which postcolonial subjects should/can inhabit places (Ashcroft, 1997). The concept of 'habitation', refers to 'a way of being in place, a way of being which defines and transforms place' (Ashcroft, 1997, p.27). Ashcroft argues that in the coercive context of globalization and postcolonialism the notions of belonging and place are widely under scrutiny and right at such a moment in history human social space gains its substance and ideological identity through the practice of inhabiting. This practice, according to Ashcroft is 'a dense fabric of interwoven acts in the issues

of inheritance, ethnic identity, belonging, history, race and land [which] are intertwined' (Ashcroft, 1997, p.28). Habitation and a way of creating 'this interwoven fabric' for those historically displaced by colonialism is best presented in the motif of construction of place 'as a factor of a way of inhabiting', and this signifies 'how dense and how *intense* is the rhizomic pattern of relationships in which place is located' (Ashcroft, 1997, p.29, original emphasis). Ashcroft's notion of habitation, like Bhabha's hybridity, is formulated both as a cultural form and a resisting strategy. To Ashcroft, the success of postcolonial literature in engaging imaginatively with deconstruction and reconstruction is a first step towards the complete dismantlement of the unequal spatial structures.

The response to whether habitation or hybridity should be deployed as a postcolonial way of belonging to the habitats is mainly determined by the situational complexity and the complexity to which a writer or critic is subjected. In the context of the apartheid era in South Africa, Alex Callinicos is right to argue that it was not a hybrid view of the South African society, but a series of insurrectionary mass struggles that forced the transfer of political power (Callinicos, 1995). The most efficient approach to place in this context was habitation in the sense that the oppressed in South Africa could/should inhabit the place of power and assert their entitlement to South Africa's land and riches. On the other hand, in the context of the independent Trinidad and Tobago, the prospect of unity and nationhood lies in the idea of creating and introducing a new hybrid culture that is generated by the fusion of cultures of different

communities and ethnicities.⁸ Thus, it is feasible to conclude that decolonizing places towards an independent identity of place is a strategy that every writer and theorist adopts and propagates on the basis of his/her own sense of place and the situational complexity that his/her theory is engaging with.

Postcolonial literature could play a crucial role in the re-imagination of new decentred and decolonised territories. Such a possibility lies in the capacity of a narrative that allows re-imagination of new places, new ideas and applicability of intellectual ideas in particular contexts. While in the real world reconstruction of places and relations in a decentralised way seems to be a long and challenging process, in the narratives possible ways of reconstruction of places is put to test. How narrative does so, is explained by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. He argues that 'every story is a travel story, a spatial practice' and the vehicle of this traverse in space and means of organizing places are 'metaphors' (Certeau, 1984, p.118) . Stories, as de Certeau contends, 'carry out a labour that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places' (Certeau, 1984, p.118). De Certeau observes that stories have had a decisive role in the 'formation of myths', however, they also have the capacity to challenge boundaries set by those myths and engage in the process of demythologization (Certeau, 1984, p.126). Accordingly, postcolonial narrative can be seen as contributing to demythologizing the grand narrative of colonialism. Such an approach to place in literature is in line with contemporary approaches to

⁸ The notion of hybridity in the case of the Caribbean (or 'creolization') has been developed by critics such as K. Brathwaite and Edouard Glissant well before Bhabha's idea of hybridity. Their approaches to these notions are discussed in chapter two.

geography. Gillian Rose argues that 'everyday experience of fragmentation and dispersal' requires intellectuals and critics to reconsider geography as fragmented and un-fixed (Rose, 1993, p.159). According to Rose, white masculine ideology of a polarized geography should be replaced with the idea of geography as uncertain, multiple and diverse (Rose, 1993). Thus, one can conclude that places in postcolonial literature are informed by the situational complexity as well as the shared experience of systematic implementation of racial, gender and geographical boundaries. Colonisation rendered empire what Elleke Boehmer calls an 'intertextual milieu', meaning that it generated cultural symbols that exhibited a remarkable synonymity (Boehmer, 1995, p.52). However, the decolonisation of space entails consideration of these synonymous patterns while also addressing the idiosyncratic characteristics of every locale.

Postcolonial novels, such as the works of Naipaul and Coetzee, expose the formation of imperialist myths of places, challenge them and deconstruct them. Both of these writers deploy place in a complex and multi-faceted way that explores how place is constructed, represented, perceived and lived through boundaries that are set by power. Avoiding the re-mythologization of lands and societies, Naipaul and Coetzee re-imagine places as more dynamic and less fixed, and represent the boundaries that enclose and define places as subject to re-alignment.

III. Land, home and belonging in V. S. Naipaul and J. M. Coetzee

Naipaul and Coetzee are two of the most renowned writers of our time. Their work has been acknowledged by prizes worldwide, the most prestigious of which is the Nobel Prize that they won in 2001 and 2003 respectively. International recognition of their work is clear evidence that the themes and ideas of their works go well beyond the borders of the countries in which they grew up and mark the transnational and trans-cultural nature of their work. On the other hand, the communities in which they grew up (Indio-Caribbean and white South African respectively) have been displaced from their ancestral homelands and consequently, have gone through a long process of adjusting to their adopted countries. But what makes these two writers particularly a viable case study with regard to a study of place and belonging is that they both refuse and elude attempts to regard them simply as writers of their respective societies, through having their narratives set in variety of settings and contexts, and addressing different cultural, social and ethical issues that transcend any specific geography. Thus, despite the variety of fictional settings and trans-cultural and transnational worldviews, the body of their work to a large extent is informed by the socio-political conditions they have experienced as much as it is informed by their intellectual agendas.

The following chapters explore the manner in which the novels of Naipaul and Coetzee contribute to the move towards a decentralization and decolonisation of geography. Two main arguments are made here: firstly, Naipaul and Coetzee share the idea that geography should be re-imagined and

represented from the consciousness of the displaced, the marginalized and the homeless, and secondly, the distinct ways in which they negotiate territorial and spatial concepts such as home and land are directly related to the socio-cultural contexts in which they grew up.

In the study of Naipaul the focus will be the idea of home as its significance in Naipaul's novels is both personal and collective. His autobiographical accounts show that he has always been involved with searching for his roots and his place of belonging and his anxiety over homelessness. Such a concern also reflects the collective sense of displacement of the Caribbean nationals over their detachment from their ancestral homes in Africa and India and the difficulty of establishing nationhood due to the diversity of cultures. In an intertextual reading of Naipaul's *A House for Mr Biswas* (1960), I will argue that Naipaul initially viewed colonial societies metaphorically in the form of shaky and unstable houses against the grand house of historically grounded nations (like England). As it is manifested in *The Enigma of Arrival* (1989), *Half a Life* (2001) and *Magic Seeds* (2005), Naipaul self-reflexively questions his earlier idea that there are certain places that are homely in the sense that they provide security, stability and a sense of belonging for their inhabitants. Indeed, he acknowledges that the unhomeliness of the postcolonial world is a reality that renders the desire for an ideal place or a stable home untenable.

In Coetzee's work, there is no gradual coming to a new consciousness of place, as there is in Naipaul's. The selected novels of Coetzee in this study are

seen against the historical process of dispossessing, marginalizing and segregating people in the process of colonisation and establishment of settlements in South Africa. I have chosen to study the notion of land in three of Coetzee's novels which were published before the general election (1994) in South Africa: *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983) and *Foe* (1986). These novels in one way or another advocate resistance to appropriation and representation of the land that intend to marginalize individuals or groups who belong in places. Coetzee's novels refuse to accept homelessness and unhomeliness as conditions of the modern world. In contrast, these novels show that displacement and homelessness are created by unequal power relations and it is vital to challenge them by cultural means, the way characters such as Susan Barton and Michael K do.

PART ONE

The Novels of V. S. Naipaul

Chapter One

Placing Naipaul and Place in Naipaul

I. A writer from a wrong place

When Naipaul was asked about his sense of place in Trinidad, he replied that 'I just wanted to go to a prettier place. ... I just felt I was in the wrong place' (Levin, 1997, p.93). Naipaul's consciousness of place until he left his homeland to go to England was shaped by classifying the world into right and "wrong" places. The persistence of such ideas prevails in some of his commentaries and his travelogues on India, Africa, the Caribbean or the Muslim countries such as Pakistan and Iran among others. In these works Naipaul seems to have an imaginative idea of the "right" place with which he constantly compares and contrasts the (post)colonial or non-western societies at large. At the time when international critics and intellectuals negotiate and examine the ways of dismantling colonial hegemonic discourses that generated throughout the world geographical and racial marginalities, Naipaul's worldviews pose a challenge. The first part of the thesis engages with the following question: What is Naipaul's position in relation to the decolonizing impulses of postcolonial writers and thinkers? This introduction and the following three chapters explore Naipaul's representation of colonial and postcolonial places and read in his texts the possibility of a new geographical consciousness.

Naipaul's obsession with places is apparent from his persistence in writing travelogues and enquiring into cultures. However, he is particularly interested in

those places and cultural issues with which he is linked through his background; Trinidad and the colonies of the British Empire, in particular. He identifies these subjects and places of his interest in the following way: '[t]he land; the aborigines, the New World; the colony; the history; India; the Muslim world' (Naipaul, 2002, p.484). Naipaul has extensively criticized the places that he identified here, particularly Trinidad and the New World. In his earlier works such as *Miguel Street*, *A House for Mr Biswas* and *The Middle Passage* he engages with the socio-cultural shortcomings of the Caribbean. The product of his first return to the Caribbean is *The Middle Passage* (1962), a travel book in which he expresses his anxiety and his disappointment with what he views as the cultural vacuum of the Caribbean. Naipaul dismissively contends:

Though we knew something was wrong with our society, we made no attempt to assess it. Trinidad was too unimportant and we could never be convinced of the value of reading the history of a place which was, as everyone said, only a dot on the map of the world. Our interest was all on the world outside, the remoter the better; Australia was more important than Venezuela, which we could see on a clear day. (*MP*, p.36)

To Naipaul Trinidad is unable to progress fully into a developed, modern state because it is fractured by racial divisions, is politically corrupt with various socio-cultural problems such as racial prejudice, political corruption and lacks knowledge of a common historical background. His travel to Trinidad coincided with the declaration of independence of Trinidad and Tobago, but Naipaul doubts that Trinidad as a 'materialist immigrant society' with no political or cultural

orientation can ever become truly independent (*MP*, p.49). He does not see any profound anti-imperialist feeling among the Trinidadians, or 'nationalist feeling' but 'occasional racial protest(s)' (*MP*, p.37). In his eyes, there is no escape from the colonial past or the prospect of an independent nationhood, because 'it was only our Britishness, our belonging to the British Empire, which gave us identity' (*MP*, p.37).

Naipaul is just as critical about African and Indian societies. His trilogy on India, from their very titles, *An Area of Darkness*, *India: A Wounded Civilization*, *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, to their content, embody the flaws and degeneration Naipaul perceives in the post-independent India. In *India: a Wounded Civilization* (1977), Far from admiring India's anti-imperialist movement, Naipaul argues that India's downfall began the moment it decided to return to its past and pre-colonial values, as '[t]here always was a contradiction between archaism of national pride and the promise of the new; and the contradiction has at last cracked the civilization open' (*IWC*, p.18). He is critical of what he views as inactivity and intellectual bluntness, when from sociology to mathematics, 'the borrowed disciplines remained borrowed' (*IWC*, 1977, p.129). Similarly, he criticizes Africa in his books such as, *A Bend in the River* and *Half a Life* which are partly or completely set in the African continent. African countries in these works are pictured as barren landscapes with violent and lawless social structures. The people according to Naipaul are failures who like the protagonist of *A Bend in the River* wonder 'how incapable we had become of understanding the outside world', and express their incapability to 'make some contribution to it

ourselves' (*BR*, p.165). Even attempts for change are futile because Africa, to Naipaul, 'has no future' (Hardwick, 1997, p.49).

Naipaul's view of the postcolonial societies as degraded and backward has been challenged by many postcolonial scholars who dismiss him as an imperially complicit writer. Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1992) disparages Naipaul's absorption and unquestionable fascination with the authority of the West on the one hand, and his condemnation of colonial societies on the other hand (Bhabha, 1992). Bhabha criticizes Naipaul for his dismissal of what Bhabha sees as hybrid cultures saying that 'Naipaul turns his back on the hybrid half-made colonial world to fix his eye on the universal domain of English literature' (Bhabha, 1992, p.107). Similarly Edward Said criticizes the 'anger, desperate bewilderment, and bitter sarcasm' of Naipaul's work (Said, 2000a). He censures what he calls the "extraterritoriality" of Naipaul's vision, by which he means that Naipaul appears to be in-between unable to take a stand for or against imperialism: 'the state of being in-between things ...that cannot come together for him; he wrote from the ironic point of view of the failure to which he seems to have been resigned' (Said, 2000, p.87). Even Said admits that Naipaul is a talented writer; yet he sees that Naipaul's talent in depicting the socio-political shortcomings of the postcolonial condition is directly in line with imperialist ideology about the primitiveness of the colonial societies (Said, 2000, pp.86-88).

Apart from the postcolonial critics, it is the Caribbean writers who have found Naipaul's approach to colonial places, particularly his assessment of the

Caribbean societies unjust. Writers like Wilson Harris, Derek Walcott and Jamaica Kincaid have criticized Naipaul's stance against the marginal world which he calls 'the primitive societies' (Hardwick, 1997, p.45). Such an outlook is criticized by Wilson Harris in *Tradition, the Writer and Society*, where he criticizes Naipaul for his fixed conception of humanity, borrowed from a European tradition of writing (Harris, 1967, p.40). Rather, Harris advocates a new way of seeing and 'a capacity for plural forms of profound identity' which is a more dynamic vision of humanity (Harris, 1967, p.41). Similarly Jamaica Kincaid censures Naipaul's worldview saying he 'just annoys me so much, all my thoughts are intemperate and violent. ... I think probably the only people who'll say good things about him are Western people, right-wing people'.⁹ Derek Walcott also accuses Naipaul of snobbery in relation to Africans and the Caribbean subjects whom he perceives as lacking art and culture. Walcott insists that Naipaul 'is unfair and unjust ... at the cost of those who do not have his eloquence, his style' (Walcott, 1998, p.129).

However, Naipaul is as much praised by some other scholars for his insight into contradictions in an individual's identity. Nadine Gordimer has a statement on Naipaul which is published on the back cover of Naipaul's Penguin editions: 'I know of no other contemporary novelist who can deal so devastatingly, yet so quietly, with the sensation and terror at the core of ordinary encounters'.¹⁰ Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin have also acknowledged Naipaul's

⁹ Kincaid's statement is cited in Scott Winokur, 1997 "The unsparing Vision of V. S. Naipaul," in *Conversation with V. S. Naipaul*, ed. Jussawalla, p.121.

¹⁰ The statement is from the back cover of *In a Free State* (1977, Penguin: London).

contribution to the critique of colonial discourse, especially in terms of the exploration of power relations and identification of 'a geographic structure of power' (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p.87). Similarly, Helen Hayward gives credit to the idea that Naipaul's work 'invites meditation on the nature of individual identity, and on its relation to self-contradiction' (Hayward, 2002, p.3). These critics rather than focusing on the satirical aspect of Naipaul's work, emphasise his ability in depicting the complex socio-cultural contexts in which colonial identities are shaped.

In order to analyse Naipaul's approach to place in his novels consideration of two factors are necessary: first, Naipaul's sense of displacement, and second, the ideology through which he looks at the world. Both of these factors have a determining role in the way Naipaul explores places and analyses them. In several autobiographical works and interviews Naipaul has expressed the extent to which his Indo-Trinidadian family and his colonial background have shaped his writings.¹¹ In his Nobel Prize Speech *Two Worlds* in which he expresses his literary beginnings and aspirations as a writer, Naipaul states that his worldview as a child was shaped by the division between two worlds: his Indo-Trinidadian family background and 'the world outside [that] existed in a kind of darkness' (Naipaul, 2002). The gap between these two worlds, the Indo-Trinidadian community and the rest of the world, was created as a result of the historical displacement of his Indian family from their ancestral homeland, which in return

¹¹ In particular, Naipaul's "Prelude to an Autobiography" in *Finding the Centre, The Middle Passage*, and his Nobel Prize acceptance speech express his sense of place and how his family background shaped his writing-self.

made them live a secluded Indian lifestyle in Trinidad: 'to live in our own way and according to our own rules, to live in our own fading India' (Naipaul, 2002, p.482). From an early age, Naipaul developed a strong sense of un-belonging to the Indian community of Trinidad. His sense of distaste for his colonial land and his interest in the world beyond Trinidad increased throughout his colonial education. From cultural figures and products like Shakespeare's dramas and Wordsworth's poetry to the imagery of the English landscape, all generated in the young Naipaul a sense of marginality and cultural displacement that is explored in detail in *The Enigma of Arrival*. The British colonial education in Trinidad on the one hand and the isolation of his Indo-Trinidadian family on the other, generated a sense of dichotomy between the culture and place he belonged to and what he considered as the civilized world: 'I developed a fantasy of civilization as something existing away from this area of barbarity. The barbarity was double: the barbarity of my family and the barbarity outside' (Levin, 1997, p.93). The word 'fantasy', manifests that the existence of the dichotomy between the civilized and the uncivilized world is more an assumption rather than one based on facts. Indeed representation of England in the colonial education system and books made him fantasize about a world which was free from the social and cultural issues of Naipaul's birth place. In effect, Naipaul as a young man developed a sense of cultural displacement (a sense of being in the wrong place) which is pervasively reflected in his novels, commentaries and autobiographical writings.

There are writers like Wilson Harris and George Lamming who in one way or another have experienced similar cultural displacement, but contrary to Naipaul, they have decided to undertake the responsibility that Chinua Achebe ascribes to the writer in the course of independence and forming the nationhood and that is 'to help [their] society regain its belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-denigration' (cited in Nightingale, 1980, p.40). For example George Lamming, in *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960), admits that the society of the British Caribbean in the late 50s, 'is deeply lacking in both political unity and creative pride', but by drawing attention to the fallacy he hopes for a positive recovery (Lamming, 1984, p.225).¹² Unlike him, Naipaul refuses to acknowledge that many of the socio-cultural problems of the Caribbean stem from the colonial policies of the European imperialist, whose culture Naipaul admires. In fact, Naipaul chooses to observe the Caribbean societies with a sense of detachment and through the imperialist ideology. In *Finding the Centre* (1984), a book which is partly about his writing initiations, Naipaul admits that he likes people who, like him, intend 'to find order in the world, looking for the centre' (*FC*, p.10). He refuses to identify the 'centre' or the order based on which he looks at the world, but a close look at his work shows that the framework through which he explores and analyses places is based on the binary structure established by the imperialist discourse. The world order based on primitive (or barbarous) versus civilized societies, half-made versus

¹² Lamming in *The Pleasures of Exile* parallels the Caribbean colonial legacy with the paradigm of power relations in *The Tempest*. Lamming argues that much of the problem of the Caribbean societies is the immediate result of the colonial system. He distinguishes his critical stance from that of Naipaul, saying that he is not 'ashamed of his background' and he feels not a slight desire 'to prove himself through promotion to the peaks of a "superior" culture whose values are gravely in doubt' LAMMING, G. (1984) *Pleasures of exile*, London; New York, Allison and Busby. p.225.

developed societies and wrong versus (presumably) right places, recurring in Naipaul's analysis of places, is identical to the hierarchal world order established by unequal power relations. The framework of such an ideology is best expressed in Naipaul's highly quoted essay on Conrad, where approving of Conrad's view of the colonised lands, he says:

To be a colonial was to know a kind of security; it was to inhabit a fixed world. ... The new politics, the curious reliance of men on institutions they were yet working to undermine, the simplicity of beliefs and the hideous simplicity of actions, the corruption of causes, half-made societies that are doomed to remain half-made: these were the things that began to preoccupy me. (Naipaul, 1977, p.59)

As the above sentiment shows, the order of the world in Naipaul's view, is founded on the values and standards of the imperialist ideology with which he constantly compares and contrasts the newly independent countries. His view of colonised places as ungrounded and 'half-made' is set against metropolitan places as 'fixed' and grounded, which is out of reach for the colonised subjects like Mr Biswas, in *A House for Mr Biswas*.

But Naipaul is also a revisionist. In his later novels like *The Enigma of Arrival* he unsettles some of the binarism he supported early in his career.¹³ He recognizes that the world is in constant 'change and flux' and that the idea of

¹³ Given the change in Naipaul's perspective, some literary analysts have divided Naipaul's work into two or three phases. Helen Hayward referring to Naipaul's several reinventions of the narrative of his life and his past works, divides Naipaul's narratives into earlier and later works in the introduction to her book. See HAYWARD, H. (2002) *The enigma of V.S. Naipaul : sources and contexts*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.. Timothy Weiss divides Naipaul's work into three phases of 'meditation, alienation and syncretism' (p.19). See WEISS, T. (1992) *On the margins : the art of exile in V.S. Naipaul*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press.

England as the measure of a perfect place is constantly challenged (Nasta, 2004, p.105). The manner in which he (or his writer- protagonist) comes to the recognition of change and dynamism is expressed in *The Enigma of Arrival*. The process shows that Naipaul realizes that the world order his earlier fiction manifests is indeed constructed through colonial and imperial discourses and that with the break up of the British empire there is a need to adopt new ways of seeing the world. He realizes the idealized view of the world is flawed: 'It is wrong to have an ideal view of the world' (MS, p.294).

The change in Naipaul's worldview, as I see it, has not been a total retreat from past views. As the discussion of his novels in the following chapters attempt to show, Naipaul upholds the idea that there is a fundamental gap between the colonial versus metropolitan places based on progress, order and social stability. However, the following chapters show that Naipaul begins to question that concepts such as homeliness and belonging can ever be associated to a particular place. This voyage (of Naipaul the writer and his writer characters) can be seen as a voyage from displacement to placelessness. In other words, while in his earlier fiction such as *A House for Mr Biswas* he attributed displacement to the colonial subjects and unhomeliness to the colonial places, in some of his later works, he acknowledges that displacement and unhomeliness are the attributes of the postcolonial condition. In *The Enigma of Arrival*, a novel with autobiographical resonances, he asserts a vision of place that endorses change, cultural exchange and a break with the imperialist hierarchy of geographies. His

stance reflects the transitory condition of space in our era – the transition from a fixed view of place to a more dynamic view of it.

II. From displacement to placelessness

The four novels that are discussed in the following three chapters study Naipaul's developing view of place in relation to the notions of home and belonging. The reason for the choice of *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961), *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), *Half a Life* (2001) and *Magic Seeds* (2005) among Naipaul's novels is that first, these works explore the idea of home and homeliness in different contexts; second, they show Naipaul's changing attitude towards the idea of homeliness of certain places. While *A House for Mr Biswas* shows Naipaul's vision that colonial subjects are entrapped in an unstable colonial social context in which they cannot feel independent or securely at home, *The Enigma of Arrival* shows that unhomeliness is not just the attribute of the colonial societies, but it is also an attribute of the metropolitan centre. The last two novels, *Half A Life* and *Magic Seeds*, engages once again with the theme of quest for home, but this time from the perspective of a postcolonial migrant. These novels suggests that while the very essence of homeliness is lost in the era of postcolonialism and capitalism, the postcolonial migrant *can* consider new ways of belonging to their habitats. Naipaul's approach to place in his novels is read here as validating Doreen Massey's argument that notions of place (particularly home) as a source of belonging and security are untenable (Massey, 1992).

Chapter two, discusses *A House for Mr Biswas* with regard to its expression of a colonised man's sense of place. The reading of *A House for Mr Biswas* in this study is focused on the theme of a quest for home, and how the protagonist of the novel's failing attempts in buying a good house and achieving independence reflects the unhomeliness of Trinidad for its inhabitants. The chapter analyses the way the novel displays the crucial ways that an individual's identity is constructed in relation to place, and the defining importance of social context.

Chapter three discusses how Naipaul revisits his notions of places as divided into stable and unstable, or as homely and unhomely as presented in his earlier novels. In *The Enigma of Arrival*, Naipaul recreates the encounter of a Caribbean boy with the metropolitan landscape, and in an autobiographical narrative he questions his earlier assumptions of England as a land of security and homeliness. The young man's stay in a grand country house in a state of ruin right after the break up of the empire prompts his realization of the idea that England was not a grand place per se, but that the grandeur was made through the wealth of the empire which in turn has become inscribed in cultural and literary practices. The final message appears to be that all places are subject to transformation and decay. It is only the realm of culture and literature that can be considered as a lasting and secure place.

Half a Life and *Magic Seeds* sum up Naipaul's view of an ideal habitat which is discussed in **chapter four**. The two novels follow an Indian immigrant's quest for home in India, Africa and England, through which Naipaul explores why

people settle in a particular habitat or why they refuse to do so, when there is a possibility for them to choose their habitat. I interpret the novels as showing that it is difficult for postcolonial migrants to develop a sense of being-at-home anywhere due to first, the complexity of their hybrid background, and second, the complexity of social structures in the modern world in which the idea of homeliness is lost. It is only based on new ways of belonging (through hybridity, cultural exchange and multi-culturalism) that they can choose their habitat. England, among the three countries, is shown to accommodate a shift towards hybridity, and thus it is seen as a better dwelling place for immigrants. *Magic Seeds* examines and negotiates the possibility of developing cultural hybridity as a way of belonging for the postcolonial subject and ending the nostalgia over displacement.

Chapter Two

A House for Mr Biswas: the Unhomeliness of a Colonial House

After coming to England and before his first return to the Caribbean, Naipaul in a series of satirical stories reflects social and cultural issues of his homeland, Trinidad. *Miguel Street*, *The Mystic Masseur*, *The Suffrage of Elvira* and finally *A House for Mr Biswas* project the way Naipaul views and analyses his place of birth. Later, he admitted that these works stem from a sense of insecurity about place, saying that 'the early comedy was really hysteria; the hysteria of someone who was worried about his place as a writer and his place in the world' (Nasta, 2004, p.106). The sentiment shows the extent to which Naipaul, early in his career, felt insecure and uncomfortable because of his colonial background. *A House for Mr Biswas* is studied in this chapter as manifesting the unhomeliness of the Caribbean nations because they appear to Naipaul lacking historical grounding, strength and stability that is necessary to establish a sense of homeliness. The homeless anti-hero of the novel, Mr Biswas, attempts to establish and ground his identity through the quest for home. His quest is contextualised in Trinidad, whose socio-cultural constraints hinder Mr Biswas's achievement of the security and independence that he desires.

A House for Mr Biswas is written in the literary tradition of *bildungsroman*, a novel of education and development. Through exploration of the psychology of Mr Biswas, within a traditionally structured family of Indian descent, the novel

enacts the relationship between the community and its individuals as creators of each other. Steven Conner, drawing on Franco Moretti's thesis on 'Bildungsroman', explains that 'such a novel offers a reciprocal mirroring between the individual and society' (Conner, 1996). This reciprocal interaction suggests that as much as an individual's personality is formed within the society, he/she is also a constituent part of a force for social mobility and development. In such novels, 'society becomes visible as the enabling field of operations for an individual, and the individual as the actualization of social possibility' (Conner, 1996, p.6). *A House for Mr Biswas* also embodies the reciprocal mirroring between a colonised subject and the colonial society in which he lives.

Throughout his life, Mr Biswas aspires to independence from his wife's family who deny him his individuality. He attempts to buy or build his own house, yet, due to lack of experience and a strong personality all his attempts fail dramatically. Even when he finally succeeds in buying his own house, the building turns out to be poorly constructed, over-priced and unhomely.

This chapter will argue that *A House for Mr Biswas* rather than portraying, what Conner calls 'social possibilities', portrays *social impossibilities*. In other words, the novel attempts to project on the one hand, the constraints that a colonial socio-cultural structure imposes on its individuals which in effect limits their agency for action, and on the other hand, the impossibility of social mobility when the colonial subjects as makers of the society fail to aspire to self-decolonisation. These two aspects manifest the reciprocal relationship between colonial subjectivity and the place in which the subjectivity of the colonised is

developed. Looking at Naipaul's novel through the philosophy of place, one can argue that place is identified not so much as a 'social construct' than a 'being-in-the-world', as discussed in the introduction to this thesis. Naipaul's vision of a colonial subject, including himself, as always peripheral and insecure is reinforced in this novel by showing that individuals cannot simply break away from the conditions of their background. From this perspective, place is within and with respect to which subjectivity is founded (Malpas, 1999). What makes Naipaul's vision of place contested is that he goes far beyond acknowledging the idea that people are situated in places and that their identity is formed in certain social and cultural contexts. If he viewed place as a social construct, he could show that people are responsible for its construction and in effect, through social forces they could equally undo it. Instead, he suggests that colonial beings are *entrapped* in place and spatial relations rather than *located* in certain social forms. This chapter will explore firstly, how the formation of the colonial identity of Mr Biswas is shown through allusion to the story of Oedipus, in order to show that Biswas is suffering from the sense of displacement and insecurity which is the main reason for his identity crisis and psychological distress; secondly, the manner in which Biswas's search for home embodies his need for security and grounding. The meticulously developed relationship between place (the community and social context) and formation of identity in *A House for Mr Biswas*, might be the reason for it being credited as 'Naipaul's most prodigious piece of imaginative writing' (Michener, 1997, p.64). Such a relationship here is read as substantiating the idea that colonial lands produce ungrounded

individuals and that such ungrounded individuals produce ungrounded societies – a vicious cycle in the colonial world.

I. Homelessness and the psychological need for home

Mohun Biswas is a West Indian born to a poor Indian family on a plantation estate located in the suburbs of Port of Spain. As a child he loses his father and is brought up by his mother. She sells the family house under its market value and is forced to send her children to stay with her relatives. Biswas stays with the family of his aunt Tara and starts working as a sign-writer to pay for his living. One day while at work as a sign writer in the Tulsi shop, he falls in love with one of the daughters of the extended Tulsi family, Shama, and soon he finds himself pressed into marrying her and moving to the Tulsi's large household, Hanuman House. He takes up several jobs, as a shopkeeper and as a sign writer but all fail to secure him independence from the Tulsi family. Finally he is employed as a journalist and moves his four children and his wife to Port of Spain where they can live in relative comfort. Following his ambition, Mr Biswas buys the modern-looking house he longed for a few months before his death, but the house turns out to be ill-designed, and unstable.

There are two sides to Biswas's character: he is ambitious and rebellious but he repeatedly fails to put into action his ambition. His limited agency in acting on his desire comes to light in the course of his quest for buying or building his own house. Mr Biswas's achievement in finally buying a house should not be

overestimated. Indeed, his several failures, his psychological distress, and the poor condition of his final house renders his achievement ambivalent, in the sense that his final purchase embodies simultaneously his failure and his success. In two celebratory readings of the novel by West-Indian critics Gordon Rohlehr and Maureen Warner-Lewis, the novel is read as the success of Biswas's rebelliousness in breaking the frames of traditional family life towards an individualistic style of living. Through such a reading the two critics attempt to show Naipaul belonging in the West-Indies and believing in the possibility of progress through rebellion against the given social circumstances. Gordon Rohlehr opens his reading by emphasising the significance of the rebellion of a mediocre man (Rohlehr, 1977). He points out that Biswas's rebellion is against the social structure of Hanuman House and its leaders which according to him can be seen as a microcosm of a slave society which suppress its members' aspirations to independence. Despite the fact that the house Biswas buys in the end is mortgaged to his uncle and that Biswas fails to own it, according to Rohlehr, Biswas succeeds in 'expressing [his] identity in the very act of searching for it' (Rohlehr, 1977, p.93). Rohlehr in support of Mr Biswas's endeavours argues that his rebellion arose from his desire 'to understand existence and make sense of his milieu' (Rohlehr, 1977, p.84). In other words, Rohlehr relates Biswas's struggle within the family structure to the struggle of Trinidad as a nation still struggling with the legacy of its slave plantation history. Maureen Warner-Lewis also reads Mr. Biswas as a rebel, yet, rather than giving credit to Biswas, she observes such rebellion as an outcome of cultural change (Warner-

Lewis, 1977). She argues that the conflict between Biswas and Tulsis is a cultural clash between the traditional versus the creole, the rural versus the urban and traditionalism versus individualism. According to Warner-Lewis, Tulsidom, which might be defined as 'encapsulating an idea of India-in-the-Caribbean' has to come to terms with change which is reflected in the behaviour and attitude of the younger generations who do not speak Hindi and aspire to go abroad (Warner-Lewis, 1977, p.97). This change, as Warner-Lewis argues, was initiated by Biswas who fought for his independence despite the financial security and emotional support of the traditional culture of Tulsidom, a trajectory that would be followed by the next generation who experience the Western-oriented creole culture of Trinidad (Warner-Lewis, 1977).

Although Warner-Lewis's reading rightly marks the coming of change in the Caribbean societies of the 1960s which will be discussed later in this chapter, it fails to explain how Biswas's inability to own a secure and modern house (despite his success in achieving some degree of independence) can be interpreted. The problem with Rohlehr and Warner-Lewis's reading is that their focus is only on Biswas's rebellion against the status quo at the expense of ignoring the dominant motif of the novel which is the quest for home. In fact, I would argue that the quest for a home is inextricable from the representation of Biswas as a colonial character. By focusing on the quest for home rather than Biswas's rebellion against the Tulsis family, Biswas's lack of cultural and psychological capacity to act on his will comes to light. Mr Biswas is not looking for *any* house but he is looking for a *homely* one.

Mr Biswas's birth and childhood resonates with the life of the classic character of *Oedipus the King*. Having been born with 'six fingers' and in 'a wrong way', Biswas is different and distinguished from other children (p.14). He was unwanted, unloved and viewed as the bearer of bad luck to his family, just as Oedipus was as a baby. Like Oedipus, quite accidentally and unintentionally Biswas causes his father's death when the father dives into a pond to save him from drowning. The incident vilifies Mr Biswas and becomes a turning point as it starts the process of "homelessness" that characterizes his life thereafter. He is sent to stay with his relatives and '[f]or the next thirty-five years he [is] to be a wanderer with no place to call his own' (p.38). Biswas is destined to share Oedipus's misery; the latter is blinded and banished and the former is left displaced and homeless.

Oedipus the King is a key text in Freudian psychoanalytic studies. Freud uses the classic story of Oedipus and particularly his relationship with his biological parents in order to explain the process of sexual identity formation in a boy-child (Wright, 1998). The notion of the Oedipus complex refers to the male child's rivalry with the father over the nurturing mother, and of his fantasies of killing the father and possessing the mother. In the Freudian paradigm, identity is formed when the Oedipus complex is accompanied by the castration complex in a male child. The father is seen as the source of authority and power so the boy abandons his love for the mother and moves towards identification with his father in the hope that he too can occupy the position of power (Wright, 1998, p.13). In the case of Biswas, the absence of a father leaves Biswas with no role model to

identify with and in effect the process of identity formation is left unaccomplished for him. Another possible reading is that Biswas as a child refuses to adopt his father's colonial identity. The child's symbolic unintentional father-killing can be interpreted as a positive gesture to dispense with the legacy of dependency and colonial identity. Naipaul uses this as an opportunity for the young Biswas to acquire a new independent and decolonised identity for himself and his descendants.

Thus, Biswas sets on self-education to develop his own identity and to find his *selfhood*. The first step for him is to start looking in foreign magazines and books for a model of an ideal life: 'He read the novels of Hall Cain and Marie Corelli. They introduced him to intoxicating worlds. ... they made him despair of finding romance in his own dull green land' (p.77). There is a gap between what these books and pictures offer as the ideal life and that of life in the small Indian community of Trinidad. Biswas is aware of the cultural distinctions between the two distinctive geographies –the West and his own small island –and continues to look for a lifestyle compatible with his milieu. The second step would be to look around himself, and his own community to find the meaning of life on the island. In Aunt Tara's house, he develops his sense of need for a stable family life and the home he has been deprived of. Biswas thinks he has to have this stability if he is to have his own family. Discovering his talent for drawing and his love of writing, he chooses sign writing for shops as his profession, but the job turns out to be unstable, as he is out of work for several weeks. Similarly his marriage to Shama Tulsi, and his move to the Tulsi household, Hanuman House, does not

bring him the homeliness he expects. Living in the authoritative organism of Hanuman House requires the individuals to give up their individual identity and adopt the collective identity of the Tulsis family. The members were expected to respect the already established power relations in order to maintain the authoritarian system. Despite the fact that Biswas needs the financial support of the Tulsis, due to his own career being unstable, he refuses to exchange his individuality for the security of living with the Tulsis.

Carl Jung in an autobiographical text develops a thesis that regards an individual's home 'as the universal archetypal symbol of the self' (cited in George, 1996, p.19). George drawing on Jung's thesis argues that depiction of houses in literature could signify interrogation of self-identity (George, 1996, pp.13-20). In the case of Biswas it is so. Biswas views the idea of ownership of a house as a means through which he could assert his selfhood. To Mr Biswas his house would indeed embody his self-worth and his independence and a sense that he has not lived an 'unnecessary' life (p.8). The prelude to the novel makes it clear how Mr Biswas feels towards his final achievement:

How terrible it would have been, at this time, to be without it: 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.8).

Apart from an assertion of individuality, owning a house would show Biswas's ability to provide security for his family. In fact Mr Biswas is

determined to change the 'fate' he is born with. His grandfather's expression used to be '[f]ate. There is nothing we can do about it' (p.11). But Mr Biswas is determined to rebel against the fate of displacement and to break the cycle of homelessness he inherited from his parents. Such determination is better revealed in his relationship with his son, Anand. He attempts to provide him with a good education and particularly with a grounded identity. His quest for a house is also to a large extent due to his concern for the children not to be as displaced as he is, a concern that he directly asserts when he says to Anand, 'I don't want you to be like me' (p.253). Here, instead of an oedipal rivalry between the father and the son, they form a relationship in which they occupy each other's position:

Father and son, each saw the other as weak and vulnerable, and each felt the responsibility for the other, a responsibility which, in times of particular pain, was disguised by exaggerated authority on the one side, exaggerated respect on the other. (p.394)

Such a relationship is in contrast to the relationship between Biswas and his own father, whose identity he refused to adopt. Biswas has no established identity or individuality Anand can identify with, but as the father and the son are both vulnerable and insecure, they help each other in the creation of an established and grounded identity.

Mr Biswas's unconventional relationship with his son on the one hand, and his excessive ambition for owning a house on the other, show the extent of the psychological pressure to ground himself and his family. Yet,

Mr Biswas's strong determination to have his own home signifies a deeper cultural homelessness rather than just a personal identity crisis. This is a point that Homi Bhabha refers to in passing when elaborating on his thesis of *unhomeliness*. According to Homi Bhabha, the 'overdetermined' and 'unaccommodated postcolonial figure' of Mr Biswas is not compatible with the Anglo-American tradition of novels of big houses, like that of Charles Dickens or Jane Austen which are founded on sovereignty of characters and individual freedom (Bhabha, 1997). He says:

I couldn't fit the political, cultural, or chronological experience of [A House for Mr Biswas] into the traditions of Anglo-American liberal, novel criticism. The sovereignty of the concept of character, grounded as it is in the aesthetic discourse of cultural authenticity and practical ethics of individual freedom, bore little resemblance to the overdetermined, unaccommodated postcolonial figure of Mr Biswas. (Bhabha, 1997, p.446)

Biswas's derelict life before marriage and his loss of individuality amongst the Tulsis are the environmental factors imposed on him by the small society in which he lives. All these factors deprived him of what Bhabha calls 'individual freedom' and elevate his need for independence. Thus, a concrete entity like a house takes on an inflated significance in embodying an idea of independence. Yet, the houses he attempts to build or buy fail to fulfil such a need for independence and homeliness. Analysis of the structure of the houses of Mr Biswas and the manner in which he relates to them help us to see the underlying problems that render them unhomey.

II. The unhomely houses of Mr Biswas

The quest for home is a motif around which Biswas's character and his life story takes shape. However, he repeatedly fails to buy or build a homely house. The question here is why he is not at home and how his failure to end his homelessness should be read? Before discussing the possible answers, there is a need to expand the notions of home and unhomeliness in the postcolonial arena. The traditional definition of home presented by Douglas Porteous (1976) regards the idea of home as a space that provides 'three territorial satisfactions [identity, security, stimulation]' in the sense that home is 'an assertion of identity and a means of ensuring stimulation' (cited in George, 1996, p.21). Yet, this take on home, as a place that provides and ensures identity, security and stimulation, has been challenged in the postcolonial context. As already discussed, the experience of colonisation and immigration entailed projecting onto colonized subjects a powerful sense of dislocation, displacement and the feeling of not-being-at-home. Postcolonial theorists, particularly Homi Bhabha, bell hooks, and Rosemary George argue that in the postcolonial world with the experience of displacement and exile, the fixity of the notion of home and its securing quality is under question (George, 1996). To George, the notion of home is political, because it is as much a space of exclusion as it is a space of inclusion, be it cultural or physical inclusion/exclusion (George, 1996, p.9). Homi Bhabha and bell hooks attempt to reinvent the idea of home by redefining it more dynamically. To bell hooks, home in the postcolonial era has been transformed

from a bordered and walled place to an open space which is not bound to a certain location (hooks, 1990). A postcolonial subject has to carry home with him/her to different locations as home is at times nowhere and at other times everywhere. What bell hooks implies is that the idea of home and the sense of belonging are to be constructed in accordance with ones' political agenda. On the other hand, Bhabha argues that a postcolonial subject, rather than regretting homelessness, should embrace the idea of being unhomed (Bhabha, 1992). While the homeless is looking for home, the 'unhomed' is the one who turns homelessness into a sphere for new beginnings. A postcolonial subject, according to Bhabha should live on the borderlines of the home and the world rather than in the inscribed frames and structures of the old notion of home (Bhabha, 1991, pp.8-10).

But Mr Biswas is not 'unhomed', he is *homeless*. His idea of home is that of the traditional definition of home, which regards home as the embodiment of a grounded (masculine) self-identity. But the satirical narrative of Naipaul attempts to show how elusive the promise for territorial satisfaction of home is for a colonised individual. A strong white concrete house is the ideal structure that preoccupies Mr Biswas's mindset, but the houses of Mr Biswas are in one way or another far from this ideal home. There are houses which become a source of inspiration like Hanuman House or the Doll's house, and those which Biswas builds or buys, like the half-built building in the Chase and Mr Biswas's final house. But the fact that none of these houses provide him with the territorial satisfaction he looks for, is indicative of a deeper cultural displacement that

cannot be homed. In fact the major houses and buildings that Biswas is closely involved with fail to provide him with identity, security and stimulation in one way or another.

The idea of owning a house as a way of asserting his individuality comes to Biswas in Hanuman House, where he moves after marrying Shama. Hanuman House is a grand family house which is known in the area as a traditional and religious household. The Tulsis, a traditional Hindu landowning family have preserved their traditional customs as well as traditional family structure by cutting themselves off from outsiders and running the household as a self-sufficient enclosed state within the Indian community. To Biswas, 'Hanuman House was a world ... everything beyond its gate was foreign and unimportant' (p.195). The appearance of the house from outside is like an 'alien, white fortress' which is suggestive of power and authority (p.195). The internal structure of the house, though, corresponds with the power relations established within the household. Hanuman House consists of two buildings, the main building is in concrete and it consists of the visitor's room, a large hall and the residence of those in authority in the family, Mrs Tulsi, her two sons and Seth (Mrs Tulsi's brother-in-law). The rest of the family, that is the girls and their husbands who come second on the scale of power, live in an old wooden building called 'the old barracks' (p.196), a term which Naipaul knowingly deploys because of its association with the barrack-like structures in which indentured Indians were housed during the colonial era. The hierarchy of power which is minutely identified is to be preserved and respected: Chinta below Padma,

Shama below Chinta, Savi below Shama and so on. All the members, including the sons-in-law, work under Seth's authoritative watch over the family businesses. Such a well-established structure suggests that Hanuman House is as Naipaul defines it, 'a microcosm of the totalitarian state' (cited in Nixon, 1992, p.85).

Mr Biswas is impressed by the grandeur of the house at the beginning, but he soon becomes aware that he cannot enjoy the authority of the heads of the family and that his place is a small room in the worst part of the building. Mr Biswas upset by the unequal power relations in the house and the privileged position of Seth, Mrs Tulsi and her sons, rebels against them. He fights with some men of the family but he understands that the structure of Hanuman House would not be dismantled with such trivial gestures. Looking more deeply Biswas views the traditional household as 'an organism that possessed a life, strength and power to comfort' (p.315), but the price for enjoying these qualities is to give up independence and individuality:

Suppose, Mr Biswas thought in the long room, suppose that at one word I could just disappear from this room, what would remain to speak of me? A few clothes, a few books. The shouts and thumps in the hall would continue ... in the morning the Tulsi store would open its doors.

He had lived in many houses. And how easy it was to think of those houses without him! ...even more remote, that house of mud and grass in the swamplands: probably pulled down now and ploughed up. Beyond that, a void. There was nothing to speak of him. (p.135)

Biswas cannot stand being nobody any longer. He expected Hanuman House to be more than a family house, to be a home where he could feel he belonged, but it failed to bring him the sense of homeliness. Thus, Mr Biswas aspires to own a house which along with independence would give him the sense of homeliness which he craves. The traditional Tulsis observe such assertions of individualism with contempt, mocking Biswas for wanting 'to paddle his own canoe' (p.139).

Aspiring to buy his own house, Mr Biswas looks for a model and he finds it in the image of a doll's house as a Western model of an ideal house. He watches other people's houses and compares his desired house to the ones that he sees in different places. His mental engagement with doll's-house imagery goes to the extent that he projects the fantasy image onto the real buildings around him: 'he fixed his eyes on a house, as small and as neat as a doll's house' (p.324). Mr Biswas's obsession with the doll's house shows that his criterion for an ideal house is limited to the outside appearance rather than the internal foundation of the building. He even decides to share his fantasy world with his family. At Christmas, Shama and the children stay in Hanuman House and Mr Biswas, on his way to pay a visit to them, buys his daughter, Savi, a doll's house as a Christmas present, for which he pays more than a month's wages. This extravagance leaves him with no money to buy anything for Anand. But more than the disappointment to Anand, Savi's expensive and flashy present upsets the residents of Hanuman House, Mrs Tulsi and her daughters. Mr Biswas while ignoring the hostile reaction of Hanuman House to the doll's house enjoys Savi's

sense of pride and authority over the other children, a sense he was denied in the household:

Mr Biswas ... was pleased when the children acknowledged Savi's ownership by asking her permission to open doors and touch beds. Even as she explored, Savi tried to give the impression that she was familiar with everything. (p.225)

Mr Biswas's choice of present for Savi reveals first, his unconscious desire to buy a perfect neat-looking house for himself and his family, and second, to assert the child's individuality in a household where her presence is rarely recognised and make her distinguished from the other children. In Hanuman House though, the action is regarded as crossing an implicit but important boundary and thus not tolerated. The next time Mr Biswas visits Hanuman House, he faces Savi in tears and the doll's house shattered. Shama had smashed the toy house as the hostility of her sisters towards her grew. Mrs Tulsi also sees Mr Biswas's action which gives Savi some kind of privilege over the other children as a threat to the long-held power relations and hierarchy in the household: 'I'm poor, but I give to all' (p.226). Any ambition to go beyond the established positions (Mrs Tulsi as the Santa Claus, for example) and to break the equality of children in the organism of Hanuman House leads to exclusion. The power of such exclusion goes to the extent that Shama is forced to break the means of privilege and return to her own place. Mr Biswas is angry at what has happened, yet, he does not react harshly to the incident as he usually does. It seems that he comes to accept that he has to direct his ambition in another way. Thus, while keeping in

his mind the image of a neat house like a doll's house throughout the novel, he sets out to build his own real house.

Biswas's vulnerability and naivety and his lack of a clear perspective on his abilities are best presented by his attempt at building his own house on a piece of land owned by the Tulsis. The Green Vale house is Biswas's first attempt to test his ability to achieve homeliness and independence and he starts personalizing his ideal home in his imagination, while this imaginary house seems to him to be 'real':

He had thought deeply about this house, and knew exactly what he wanted. He wanted in the first place, a real house, made with real materials. He didn't want mud for the walls, earth for floor, tree branches for rafters and grass for roof. He wanted wooden walls, all tongue-and-groove. (p.219)

But it turns out to be the embodiment of his incapacity to manage the construction project of a good and stable house. Given that he is inexperienced in house-building, he hires a builder. The black builder Maclean realizes within minutes of speaking with Biswas, that he is inexperienced and naïve, and plans to exploit him. Mr Biswas is so inexperienced that when asked what he wants to build, he has no idea other than, 'small thing. But neat.' (p.249) It is Maclean who starts giving shape to Mr Biswas's image of his house: 'You want two bedrooms ... And a gallery' (p.250). Mr Biswas's lack of a clear perspective on the project hints at a dramatic failure to come. Mr Biswas and Maclean have different ethnic origins. The troubled relationship and the lack of trust between

them imply the lack of trusting communication between the Trinidadians of different origins. Such a lack of trust appears to be one of the many factors that contribute to the failing of the project of building a homely house for the Trinidadian nationals. Mr Biswas's vulnerability lies in his inexperience in handling such a project, and Maclean, who doubts Mr Biswas's ability to manage the project, takes advantage of him. As the construction progresses the problems appear: asphalt hanging from the roof, the smell of rust filling the rooms, and so on (p.276). Mr Biswas at this stage senses the problem, but he does not dare to face it. Instead of confronting the builder and handling the problem, Mr Biswas becomes distressed:

And every day the rain fell, the sun blazed, the house became greyer, the sawdust once fresh and aromatic became part of the earth ... and Mr Biswas worked more and more elaborate messages of comfort for his walls with a steady, unthinking hand, and a mind in turmoil. (p.276)

Biswas's anxiety heightens as the constant rainfall causes the deterioration of the unfinished house. He starts biting his nails, having nightmares and becoming paranoid. The deterioration of Mr Biswas' state of mind can be explained in relation to his lack of agency to act upon his will. Mark Malpas's theory on the relationship between subjectivity, agency and place explains the manner in which mental state is closely connected to one's subjective position and his/her agency to act on will (Malpas, 1999). Malpas starts by making a distinction between the willingness to act and the capacity for action that is the possibility for agency:

Talk of 'willing', 'trying to bring about', or of some 'act of volition' can, however, easily obscure the fact that such willing does not, in itself, provide the actual *means* by which some enacted intention modifies an object or event that is otherwise distinct from it (Malpas, 1999, p.112).

Any subject capable of directed action should not just be located in a certain space or spaces to act, but should have a grasp of the space in which he is located. In fact the possibility for agency is dependent on, first, 'a grasp of the difference between the world, and the things in the world *on* which one acts'; second, awareness of 'oneself *through* which, or *by means* of which, one acts' (Malpas, 1999, p.112, original emphasis). The awareness of the world and oneself, which Malpas regards as prerequisites of agency do not guarantee a successful performance; but they provide the ground to enact one's *will to do*. On the other hand, agency is indispensable from the structure of the individual's subjectivity (or in other words, an individual's identity in relation to the world), for according to Malpas 'any particular subject is identified only in relation to its own located, oriented, *spatialised* agency' (Malpas, 1999, p.136). That is to say, an individual's identity is dependent upon his/her capacity for action within his/her social, cultural and personal limits. The subject's awareness of such capacity for action and his embodied possibility for action determines his directed behaviour. The order of mental life is also dependent on one's directed behaviour, for as Malpas argues, 'the capacity for organised, directed behaviour –is crucial in enabling the organization and integration of mental life ... irrespective of the conceptual abilities of the creature concerned' (Malpas, 1999, p.109). Thus, to summarise Malpas, the ordering of mental life is grounded in the ordering of the

space in which the subject is situated. It is not the success or failure of activity which determines a subject's mental state, but his/her awareness of the world and his/her selfhood as a means of action in the world.

The above thesis can be used to explain the collapse of Mr Biswas's mental order when the procedure of the house-building goes dramatically wrong. Mr Biswas's assertion of his individuality depends on building a house of his own and his determination and willingness to act on his will. But, Mr Biswas's lack of experience in house building, his financial strains and his lack of trust in the builder puts him in a vulnerable position. He senses that things are not as they are supposed to be, but he is incapable of setting things right. Mr Biswas knows what he wants and carefully plans his house in his imagination, but when put into action, his limited agency and his limited capacity to act on his will is revealed. Mr Biswas, with the collapse of the unfinished building, has a nervous breakdown. In fact, as the ordering of space goes wrong, Mr Biswas's mental order collapses. Such a stressful experience makes him give up his ambition for quite sometime. He is resigned to failure for a while before saving and borrowing to buy his long awaited house, though as it transpires even the final house is ill-designed, poorly constructed and far from his imaginary ideal home.

Rosemary George informed by Conrad's perspective on colonised people, argues that for Biswas 'the strongest of desires are those that are, of necessity, unobtainable by one of his class, geographic location, and in other situations, color' (George, 1996, p.91). She says that for Naipaul 'masculine failure is endemic to the very colonial situation' and failure in his novels 'serves as a direct

commentary on the pressures of negotiating with the competing allegiances that are available at ... historical junctures' (George, 1996, p.93). While George's commentary on the motif of failure in Naipaul sounds feasible, there is a need to observe such a failure in the social and cultural context of postcolonial Trinidad. In the following, the social and cultural factors that contribute to Biswas's failure are discussed.

III. Trinidadian society: colonial or Creole?

Shortly after the publication of *A House for Mr Biswas*, Trinidad voted for political independence in 1962. Whether Mr Biswas's quest for independence from the authoritative Tulsi family implies Naipaul's outlook towards the upcoming independence in the Caribbean at that time, will be discussed in relation to the political context of independence and its aftermath. Gordon Lewis analyses the political condition that led to the general election of 1961 and the island's ultimate independence in the Commonwealth Caribbean (Lewis, 1973). In his detailed article, Lewis highlights the achievement of the PNM (People's National Movement) party under the leadership of Dr Eric Williams, the party in power at the time of the election, but cautiously declares that Trinidad and Tobago's independence should be considered as 'the promise of things to come rather than their final arrival. But it is assuredly, an encouraging beginning' (Lewis, 1973, p.126). The achievements that Lewis numbers are mainly in two areas: first, political evolution which marks transference of power from an expatriate colonial civil service to Creole political leadership; second, educational revolution;

which includes improved college exhibitions and an increase in scholarships in the span of five years. Yet, as Lewis argues, there are several problems and shortcomings in the socio-political sphere that need to be addressed following the achievement of independence by the state. These problematic spheres can be divided into three categories: first, economic improvement, second, the need for 'interracialism', and third, establishment of new national principles and culture. Economic development, in brief, is to be focused on bridging the class divide and the separation between rural and urban areas. Lewis, while referring to Naipaul's *A House for Mr Biswas* as an example of social commentary, contends that the novel highlights the dividing nature of 'forces of property and privilege' in Caribbean nationhood (Lewis, 1973, p.132). In terms of interracialism and national culture, Lewis contends that the two factors are interdependent. Materialization of national culture is contingent on racial integration. According to Lewis the main factor that can contribute to an inter-racial relationship is to promote the idea that 'the society is one'; but due to a 'lack of common standards rooted in the cement of common social ideals', oneness and nationhood seems at the time remote (Lewis, 1973, p.126). Given the divisions between racial and ethnic groups, Lewis argues the need for 'emphasis on national culture and active promotion by the state of cultural activities to counteract the legacy of cultural imperialism' (Lewis, 1973, p.128). What Lewis foresees as an ideal Caribbean state is a pluralist society constituted of several ethnic and religious groups welded together to form a 'harmonious community' with shared national goals (Lewis, 1973, p.135).

Naipaul's novel covers many aspects of the socio-cultural issues raised in Lewis's article both in *A House for Mr Biswas* and in his travelogue *The Middle Passage* (1992). Yet, while Lewis is optimistic that many of his suggested resolutions are attainable, Naipaul is cynical about the possibility of an established nationally oriented culture in the Caribbean. His two books reflect three main socio-cultural shortcomings that according to Naipaul hinder true independence and decolonisation in Trinidad: first, racial and ethnic tensions, second, no will for national growth, and third, looking towards the west for direction and orientation. These three factors are all explicitly stated in *The Middle Passage* and implicitly mapped out in the small community in which Biswas lives.

In *The Middle Passage* Naipaul describes Trinidad as a 'materialist immigrant society', which is mainly formed by the immigration of many ethnic groups from Africa, China, and India to the island on different scales since its formation (*MP*, pp.47-49). According to Naipaul, the very structure of the society which consists of people with different cultural and historical backgrounds, on the one hand, and the persistence of Christian-Hellenic tradition among the people according to which 'the past has to be denied and the self despised', on the other hand, created racial and ethnic prejudices (*MP*, p.63). Accordingly, 'the West Indian accepted his blackness as his guilt, and divided people into the white, fusty, musty, dusty, tea, coffee, Coco, light black and dark black' (*MP*, p.64). In *A House for Mr Biswas*, however, there are scarcely any explicit references to the racial divisions or tensions. The Indian community in which Biswas lives has no

close contact and friendship with black people. The very absence of black characters in the novel and the absence of Indian/black close interaction are indicative of the lack of racial integration in the wider social sphere in Naipaul's view. There are two incidents in which two minor black characters appear, Maclean, the builder Biswas employs who turns out to be dishonest and the black woman who fights with Shama about her alleged racist insult in the shop. Both of these scenes show lack of trust between the Indians and the black Trinidadians and their refusal to communicate if it is not necessary.¹⁴ Even within the Indian community there is 'an enmity as established and unexamined as the enmity between Hindu and Muslim' (p.118).

The absence of determination for national progress and growth is the second critique that Naipaul projects in the novel. While Lewis insisted that educational revolution would transform the society, Naipaul shows that the significant transformation in the attitude of older and younger generations towards the necessity of education is not necessarily in the service of national progress. Naipaul acknowledges in the novel, that in a society where people are 'uneducated from top to bottom' (p.250), the importance of education for the younger generation is widely recognized by parents. Children compete over winning the college exhibition and the state grants to study abroad. Among the parents in Hanuman House, whoever could enrol his/her children in the Guardian Tinymites League, or could send his/her children abroad to get a profession

¹⁴ The question of integration between Africans and Indians in the Caribbean has a complex and very well documented history. However, as Naipaul does not concern himself in this novel with this wider context, this chapter refrains from offering extensive coverage of this sociopolitical complexity.

would share the pride of that success. Due to the emphasis on education Naipaul calls the children of the household 'readers and learners' (p.458). However, the rise of interest in education is not at the service of the society, rather it aims at the pursuit of personal and individual interests. In the Hanuman House, which upholds the traditional wealthy Indian families' mindset, education has the role of a platform to allow the children to go abroad, most of whom like Anand might not return to live in Trinidad.

The colonial legacy and dim prospect of decolonisation is projected in Naipaul's idea that Trinidadian's 'interest was all in the world outside' (*MP*, p.36). He says that due to lack of a shared historical background, people in the Caribbean look towards the metropolitan centre to identify their values. In Trinidad, he says their identity is embodied in 'belonging to the British empire' (*MP*, p.37). In the novel, similarly the obsession with the West and western powers is manifested as a symptom of a fragmented postcolonial identity. Nowhere in the novel is such fascination better revealed than in the return of Mrs Tulsi's son, Owad, who is studying in England, to pay a visit to his family. The household respect Owad not because of his education but mostly because he is living in England. People's interest and belief in his stories about Russia and his far-fetched accounts of Russian achievements –red and blue cotton, or shooting rice from an aeroplane (p.588) – on one level portrays a community so detached from the outside world that it has lost its grip on reality, and on another level reveals the society's reaching out for direction and orientation from the world powers rather than relying on themselves. Mr Biswas, in spite of his disbelief in

Owad's stories, expresses his admiration for the West and what it offers to individuals: 'There, where Owad had been, was surely where life was to be found' (p.571). The sentiment shows to what extent for an insecure person like Biswas, despite his struggles to anchor his existence on the island, life seems to be lacking value and substance in comparison with the ideal model of the West he has in his mind.

On the other hand, with the growth of America's investment on the island and the 'sudden flow of American dollars' (p.490), the country turned away from the European colonial powers to America for direction. The younger generations, the Tulsi children, have high regard for working for Americans and consider it as an 'unimpeachable job' (p.465). Such shifts of power in the international stage, as Naipaul shows, directly affects Trinidadian society. Yet, despite all the surface changes, in the critical eyes of Naipaul neither independence, nor the break up of colonialism, would have a positive effect in implementing a better social order or uplifting a sense of national culture. Although Mr Biswas recognizes that '[c]hange has come over him without his knowing' (p.522), the change which is looming in the background, at least for Biswas's generation has no promise of a bright future. He is sacked from his job weeks before his death and while still heavily in debt.

Naipaul's pessimistic attitude towards the possibility of a positive change in his society did not waver even a decade later. In the 1970s with the rise of 'the Black Power' movement and the social crisis that followed, he, like many other critics acknowledged the many ways that independence had failed to deliver on

its promises. The background of this movement in Port of Spain is described by Lloyd Best (1973, pp.306-329). According to Best, the social crisis in the 1970s which led to such public protests began when a group of students organised a march in Port of Spain throughout which they denounced the regime (Best, 1973). This non-violent demonstration was like a match in a tinder box and initiated violent protests across Trinidad and Tobago, which later made the government impose a state of emergency. The movement was connected to the Black Power movement in the USA in the 1960s; in Trinidad it was a reaction to the continuing economic, political and cultural power of the white elite as well as to racial division between the Indians and Africans which was the basis of the old political order in the West Indies.¹⁵ While Best regards Eric Williams' inefficient leadership as the main cause of the problem, Naipaul argues that the deep roots of the problem are embedded in the island's cultural vacuum and lack of resources. Naipaul's article titled 'Power?' reflects his attitude towards the "The Black Power" movement in Caribbean islands (Naipaul, 1972). To Naipaul the whole spectacle of the protest, from passionate speeches to media coverage of cities ablaze is a fraudulent impression of power. With his ironical tone, Naipaul

¹⁵ According to Best, Dr Eric Williams whose accession to power brought about hope for a better social system, later was seen as a leader who 'threw [the island] into disorder' and who added to the frustration of the people with the authorities. The problem with Williams' government, as Best argues was mismanagement, for he began 'to fall back on external resources' rather than relying on the island's own resources. This policy sustained dependency on imperial power and darkened any prospect of national alliance. Best concludes that it is Dr Williams' government which is responsible for such chaos: 'No leadership left. All the terror in the system is police terror, official terror' (p.327). See BEST, L. (1973) The February revolution. IN LOWENTHAL, D. & COMITAS, L. (Eds.) *The aftermath of sovereignty*. New York, Anchor Press.

goes on to disclose the hollowness of such power and the futility of idealism on the islands. Naipaul cannot envision a promising future for the islanders:

They will forever consume; they will never create. They are without material resources; they will never develop the higher skills. Identity depends in the end on achievement; and achievement here cannot but be small. (*OB*, p.250)

Naipaul's pessimism about the possibility of restoration of dignity and identity in the Caribbean is due to his approach to the very foundation of Caribbean society as an imperially constructed society, rather than a generic one:

[Caribbean societies] are manufactured societies, labour camps, creations of empire; and for long they were dependent on empire for law, language, institutions, culture, even officials. Nothing was generated locally; dependence became a habit. How without empire, do such societies govern themselves? What is now the source of power? (*OB*, p.254)

This sentiment defies the argument that Naipaul is an imperialist or has affiliation to the imperial powers. In fact Naipaul is aware that the root of the problem in the first place is colonial rule and its historical legacy of negligence from slavery onwards to the establishment of the Caribbean nationals. But any policy to reverse the negative effects would be ineffective, for what is at issue is the very structure of the islands, from the geographical smallness to their fragmented culture and identity. In other words the problem to Naipaul is inherent in the "place" itself as it is fashioned by the colonial forces. As he says:

Black Power in these black islands is protest. But there is no enemy. The enemy is the past, of slavery and colonial neglect and a society uneducated from top to bottom; the enemy is the smallness of the islands and the absence of resources. (*OB*, p.250)

Naipaul views the entrapment of people in their colonial place as inevitable. When he offers a solution to decolonise the country, he targets the structure implemented by colonial rule and suggests a change in the foundations:

What is needed is access to a society, larger in every sense, where people will be allowed to grow. ... Colonial rule in the Caribbean defied geography and created unnatural administrative units; this is part of the problem. Trinidad for instance, was detached from Venezuela. This is a geographical absurdity; it might be looked at again (*OB*, p.253).

The article is quite revealing about the manner in which Naipaul envisages the power of individual and collective forces and the future of the Caribbean. *A House for Mr Biswas* belongs to the beginning of the transitional era –the transition of Trinidad from a colonial state to an independent state. The novel and the article, in different ways, portray Naipaul's idea that an individual's growth is embedded in social and cultural autonomy, while any development in the social sphere requires cooperation of self-decolonised and grounded subjects, a vicious cycle that seems to be unbreakable in the Caribbean. The lack of resources for growth and the possibility of rebellion against the status quo, is shown when Mr Biswas considers breaking away from the restraint of the Tulsi family to follow his ambitions: 'But go where? And do what? What could he do? Apart from becoming a bus-conductor,

working as a labourer on the sugar-estates or on the roads, owning a shop' (p.162). All the enthusiasm and motivation for progress dissipates because it has no clear focus.

Mr Biswas finally succeeds to 'lay claims to [his] portion of the earth', but in a house that is far from homely (p.8). After years of living in several houses which belonged to the Tulsis, Hanuman House, the cottage in the Chase, the decaying wooden house at Shorthills, and the house in Port of Spain, he finally tastes the moment of independence. Yet, there is a sense of failure in his achievement. As the story progresses, one realizes the house is poorly designed and over-priced. In the beginning Mr Biswas enjoys the sense of freedom and independence ownership offers him, that he can 'walk in through his own gate, to bar entry to whoever he wished, to close his doors and windows every night, to hear no noises except those of his family' (p.2). He also enjoys the fact that the building has a modern concrete front and looks respectable. But settling down in the house, the family realizes that the building is not professionally built. It is built by a solicitor's clerk who buys land and builds one-storey houses as a hobby in his free time. Not only is the man unprofessional, but also a cheat. He has provided the frames and materials needed for construction from dismantled American Army camps and has made everything look nice outside but poorly constructed inside:

They discovered none of the windows downstairs would close. Some grated on the concrete sill; others had been so warped by the sun that their bolt could no longer make contact with the grooves. They

discovered that the front door, elegant with white woodwork and frosted panes ... flew open in the strong wind even when locked and bolted' (p.606).

Mr Biswas's obsession with respectable appearance means that he could not imagine that there might be serious flaws with the construction. Such dual features of the house –beautiful outside and poorly-built inside –suggests the ambivalence of his achievement. The house is as much a failure as an achievement. The beautiful facade of the house indeed covers up its lack of solid foundation and a good design, but Mr Biswas takes comfort in the idea that he is finally independent and a house owner, regardless of the shortcomings or even dangers that might await the family within the house.

The modern concrete house of Mr Biswas can be interpreted as embodying the ungrounded and unstable independence of Trinidad, as seen by Naipaul. There is a prevalent view of the Caribbean being a Creole society, rather than colonial. But Mr Biswas's final house is not Creole in the sense that it can be compared to an autonomous multi-cultural society; rather it is unhomey because it lacks a firm foundation and a practical design. Yet, to some scholars of the Caribbean, a united Creole society founded on its own national culture is not inconceivable. A review of a few proposed models of Creolization in the Caribbean reminds us of alternative perspectives to that of Naipaul's. The term Creole according to O. Nigel Bolland means 'something or somebody derived from the Old World and developed in the New' (Bolland, 1992, p.71). Bolland studies several models proposed for synthesis and approach to the Creole

society, that attempt to explain and conceptualize the social and cultural dynamic of the Caribbean societies and the future they head toward. According to Bolland, the 'Plural-society model', the 'Creole-society model', and the 'dialectical model' are established models which despite their different outlooks, all support the idea of Caribbean nation as people who 'survive, adapt and recreate' (Bolland, 1992, p.71). While the "plural-society model" –developed mainly by M.G. Smith –draws attention to social segmentation' and 'cultural and institutional differentiation and complexity of Caribbean societies', 'the Creole-society model' –which is mainly developed by Edward Kamau Brathwaite –emphasises oneness and 'evolving cultural unity' (Bolland, 1992, p.72). The most recent model developed by Bolland, proposes a dialectical vision of Creolization that highlights the challenges and conflicts in the process of social change. These difficulties include lack of human agency in certain social spheres as well as established power relations between the dominant and the subordinate both in class and racial structure of the Caribbean societies. Bolland calls his model 'dialectical', because unlike the other two proposed models which are based on duality of colonial/Creole, it regards colonial and Creole culture in a dialectical relationship in the Caribbean. He draws on Brathwaite's title question, "Jamaica: Colonial or Creole?", which implies the dichotomy between the two colonial and Creole cultural forms, and attempts to find an answer to the question. In response, Bolland turns the question into 'Colonial and Creole?' to which he gives a positive answer. Colonial and Creole, in Bolland's view is the phenomena of colonial domination and of Creole responses to such domination in the Caribbean. The

achievement of Bolland's model lies in its attempt to redefine colonial societies 'as social forces and social systems that are characterized by conflicts and contradictions. And that consequently give rise to their own transformation' (Bolland, 1992, p.53).

Bolland's model is not in contradiction with the previous models, but attempts to provide an explanation for the question of whether the Caribbean should be seen as a colonial or Creole society. The focus is to be placed on the fact that such models provide a space for cultural creativity and cultural hybridity while accepting colonial legacy in the culture. This approach is in contrast to Naipaul's approach which regards the Caribbean as colonial societies for which the prospect of true independence is dim. *A House for Mr Biswas* shows that the coming together of races and ethnicities in the course of colonisation has not resulted in the construction of a hybrid social structure, but it appears to have rendered the structure of the society inefficient and ungrounded. Mr Biswas's independence by owning his house is over-shadowed by the heavy mortgage and unstable foundation, suggesting that political independence, in spite of its promising outlook is overshadowed by the lack of resources and colonial legacy of the islands. But to Edward Kamau Brathwaite Naipaul's depiction of Caribbean society in the form of the novel of the house is flawed (Brathwaite, 1976). In an essay titled: "Houses in the West Indian Novel", he argues that the English tradition of the novel of the house cannot be set as the model for the West Indian novel, reminding us that in the majority of these novels, 'the house hardly comes into picture at all' (Brathwaite, 1976, p.114). He believes novels

about houses commit to certain defined physical, emotional and traditional boundaries, whereas the concern of writers like Harris, Carew, Lamming and others is to look for 'substitutes for houses, not alternatives' (Brathwaite, 1976, p.115). Such a substitute, according to Brathwaite, is achieved in the novels of contemporary writers by crossing the boundaries of traditional narratives and initiating a new tradition based on a free-floating narrative rather than linear development:

The language and structure of the novels of Lamming and Wilson Harris cannot be properly understood ...unless the nature of his tradition is recognized. There is no linear development in Lamming's work and in none of Harris' novels is there a 'character' in the Biswas sense. Instead, there are transformations, continual overlapping of consciousness, a free moving from inner to outer reality and back again; and a general dispersal and development of energy instead of 'development' of narrative. (Brathwaite, 1976, p.117)

Thus, he concludes that the tradition of the novel of the house does not give space for a free-floating movement of narrative. Brathwaite agrees that Naipaul's novel has given the 'house' a symbolic stature in the West Indian novel, yet he refutes the tradition of the novel of the house and linear narrative as a suitable form for depicting the social structure of the Caribbean. What is needed, for Brathwaite is a narrative 'without the material hindrance of walls' (Brathwaite, 1976, p.118), meaning that the narrative should show awareness of the shortcomings of the society and help re-build the society from within.

A House for Mr Biswas interrogates and negotiates the notion of identity and individuality through the idea of home. It manifests the complexity of feeling at-home in the colonised places while aspiring to independence and autonomy. In the Bildungsroman, typically, the hero declares, 'personal autonomy achieved in a self-extrication from the clinging matrix of the homeland' (Conner, 1996, p.84). In Biswas's case, his final house in Port of Spain has such a poor and unsafe structure, that it embodies doubts about the homeliness and grounding that Biswas seems to have achieved from the constraint of his homeland. To Naipaul, unlike Homi Bhabha, Mr Biswas, as a colonial subject cannot be 'unhomed', in the sense that he may live on the borderlines of the home and the world and turn 'unhomeliness' into an opportunity for creative initiations. In this novel the possibility of a portable idea of home, suggested by bell hooks, which provides a space for resisting marginality and establishing home everywhere, looks impractical. While holding on to the traditional view of home as the source of independence and security, the novel reinforces the idea that for the population of Trinidad who are dislocated from their ancestral home by historical circumstances (slavery and indentured labour in particular), the colonised islands remain unhomely places. The idea of being-at-home is deferred for the generation to which Mr Biswas belongs, as it is circumscribed by the ideologies of domesticity, autonomy and historical grounding.

For the younger generation in the novel, despite the promise of change the narrative of homelessness continues in other ways. Biswas's children leave for England in the quest for better education and life opportunities. While Savi

returns to Trinidad seeking better social status, Anand, on whom Mr Biswas invested all his hope refuses to return. It seems that in the unhomely house of Mr Biswas there is no room for him. To an ambitious person like Anand, Trinidad has little space for growth, and he appears to share his father's worldview that,

The heroes had rigid ambitions and lived in countries where ambitions could be pursued and had a meaning. He had no ambition, and in this hot land, apart from opening a shop or buying a motorbus, what could he do? (p.78)

Geographies and societies for the father and son are caught in the hierarchy of power relations and they determine individuals' identity and place in the world at large. Anand as a second generation of postcolonial Trinidadian might have a better life in a metropolitan country, free from the social restraint of Trinidad, yet, due to his belonging in the colonial world, he carries the baggage of his father's legacy of homelessness. The novel refuses to acknowledge that in the changing world, it might be possible to transform or dispense with the very idea of homeliness.

Chapter Three

The Enigma of Arrival: New Ways of Seeing England

The Enigma of Arrival can be considered a turning point in Naipaul's career, because not only is it based on the motif of change and flux, but also it manifests a renewal of Naipaul's earlier vision of place. *The Enigma of Arrival* is the life-story of an Indo-Trinidadian writer during his ten-year stay in a country estate in Wiltshire. The solitude of the countryside and closeness to nature provide him with an opportunity to reflect, in a self-critical fashion and in the form of a self-reflexive narrative, on his developing identity as a writer from his moment of arrival in England twenty years earlier. The un-named narrator of the novel could be Naipaul, who came to England following his aspiration to become a writer. It could also be Anand of *The House for Mr Biswas* who was sent to England in pursuit of his ambition for a better life. Whether it is Naipaul, Anand, or any other immigrant writer, the narrator reflects his literary identity and worldviews in *The Enigma of Arrival*, hoping 'to arrive ... at a synthesis of the worlds and cultures that had made [him]' (p.172). But the novel that according to the narrator is supposed to deal with worlds and cultures is predominantly about England, which indeed implies the extent to which the narrator's subjection to the standards and values of England, as the metropolitan centre, have had a monumental effect in the formation of his worldviews. The narrator of the novel like many other postcolonial writers came to England in the 1950s, in Doris

Lessing's words, is 'in pursuit of the English'.¹⁶ However, he finds out that there is a discrepancy between the England that he experiences personally, and the idea of England presented to him through his colonial education and upbringing.

This chapter reads *The Enigma of Arrival* as an interrogation of the ideas with which the imperialist representation of England was created and how such representations generated a sense of cultural displacement in the margins of the empire. Transformation of England from an imperial state to a post-imperial one is embodied in the image of a grand country estate in a poor condition. The imagery can be read as suggesting that the stability and antiquity associated with the grand house of the British Empire was an idea created in imperial discourses. *The Enigma of Arrival* demonstrates that in the aftermath of the break up of the British Empire, the grand house of the empire appears to be as unhomely as the colonial house of the Trinidadian nation, depicted in *A House for Mr Biswas*.

The following analysis deals with the process through which the narrator renews his perception and mental image of England. Simon Gikandi's approach to English national identity defined by alterity is employed here to discuss the manner in which the imperial cultural hegemony in the production of meaning for places generated a sense of cultural displacement for the narrator. Gikandi argues that Englishness is 'a cultural and literary phenomenon produced in the ambivalent space that separated, but also conjoined, metropolis and colony' (Gikandi, 1996, p.xii). The significance of Gikandi's point is revealed in the novel

¹⁶ *In Pursuit of the English* (1961) is the title of an autobiographical book by Doris Lessing about her life in London in the 1950s.

when the narrator begins to see the place beyond the imperial representation of it and he realises that the ideas of antiquity and stability of England (as central doctrines of Englishness) were dependent on imperialism and that in the absence of the wealth and power of empire, the grand house of the British Empire appears to be unmanageable and unhomey.

Considering the fact that as Erica Carter et al argue, 'place is a space to which meaning has been ascribed' (Carter et al, cited in Darien-smith et al, 1996, p.3), the novel suggests that it is time the task of representation of places and ascribing meaning for places is carried out by the postcolonial margins and from the marginalised viewpoint. However, the shift of perspective by no means suggests dissociation of the novel from Western culture all together. Rather, by writing the novel in the pastoral form, Naipaul pays tribute to the English literary tradition and acknowledges that postcolonial narratives claim their place in the tradition by renewing its ideas and its ways of seeing.

I. The enigma of encounter with England

The Indo-Trinidadian narrator arrives at a village in Wiltshire in Salisbury, twenty years after his first arrival in England in pursuit of his ambition to become a writer. He says that the decision to stay in the countryside is made out of his longing for solitude and his fascination for nature and countryside life. The narrator's description of the Wiltshire landscape, in his long solitary walks along the river bank, his classification of vegetation and his watching the village people working on their lands are the manifestation of such a fascination with nature.

Being close to nature would also help him with his writing aspirations. As he states, the solitude of the walk and the vast, empty landscape enables the narrator to surrender to his 'own way of looking' and to indulge his 'linguistic and historical fantasies' (p.18). Yet, his view of the English landscape is directed and framed by his colonial upbringing in Trinidad. In a suggestive opening to the novel, the narrator says that during the first four days of his arrival it rained constantly, so he could not 'see' where he was which metaphorically implies the narrator's inability to see the land for himself, because as he says he feels 'adrift, only supported by the abstractions of [his] colonial education' (p.117). The narrator at this point is unable to see the place for itself, but he sees it through the myth of England he has long been familiar with.

Although the narrator is a newcomer to the English landscape, like other immigrants from the colonies of the empire, he was familiar with England and its landscape before he set foot there for the first time. The immigrant writers of Naipaul's generation from the British colonies were related to England through colonial education and background (Brannigan, 2003). Among them writers like George Lamming, Jan Carew and Edward Brathwaite travelled to the country after the Second World War and particularly in the late 1950s, and their experience of England at the time proved to be totally different from what they had assumed.¹⁷ The responses of these writers' encounters with England according to Brannigan, resonated with 'disappointment, disillusionment and

¹⁷ Such enigmatic encounters with the metropolitan centre have been the subject of many travel books and autobiographies in the postcolonial field, which is discussed in (Brannigan, 2003)

despair', generated by what they perceived as the discrepancy between the 'real' England and the 'mythic' place they knew about (Brannigan,2003, p.65).

The narrator of the novel clarifies how the myth or what he calls the 'fantasy' of England was shaped in his mind (p.17), before he moves on to discover that post-imperial England was far from that mythic place. His first impression of England is mediated through the body of English literature that he had studied in his school days before his arrival in the metropolis:

So much of this I saw with the literary eye, or with the aid of literature. A stranger here, with the nerve of a stranger, and yet with the knowledge of the language and the writing, I could find a special kind of past in what I saw; with a part of my mind I could admit fantasy. (p.17)

His description of the landscape is accompanied and supplemented with a pinch of 'fantasy' which he borrows from the literature and history of England. For example, he views the traditional ceremony of sheep-shearing in the village as something out of a novel by Thomas Hardy, and the cold autumn day brings about the memory of winter in the poem of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The narrator even imagines the village people as historic and literary figures, fusing the past and present: he characterizes Jack's father-in-law, a bent old man going about his daily life as a 'Wordsworthian figure' (p.22). His stretch of imagination goes to the extent that he says that the old man with a load of wood on his bent back could be the subject of a Wordsworth poem that he might have called 'The Fuel-Gatherer' (p.22). He acknowledges the literary influences on his way of looking and thinking about the place by saying that '[t]he ideas of literature

enveloped this world' (p.19). In the narrator's mind the 'great geography of the plain' (p.24) evokes ideas, images and worldviews of English literature.

The hegemonic ideologies of imperialism were propagated through 'the power of English literature as a vehicle for imperial authority', according to Ashcroft et al (Ashcroft et al., 1989). They argue that ideological notions (such as social order, stability and advancement) interpolate colonial subjects, in the sense that these notions are set as values based on which societies and cultures are assessed. In the novel, the narrator questions two key terms that have been presented by English literature as the epitome of English national values: 'antiquity' and 'continuity'. For the narrator the idea of antiquity is the measure of cultural value. That is why the narrator looks for signs of antiquity in the English landscape: 'I saw the antiquity' (p.24). In *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism*, Simon Gikandi maps out the manner in which English imperial power created power relations with its colonies by defining its own culture against colonial cultures (Gikandi, 1996). He states that one of the means to credit a culture is by sustaining the idea of 'antiquity': 'every nation needs a myth to sustain its sense of antiquity' (Gikandi, 1996, p.45). According to Gikandi, 'the outward expansion of the English imagination', especially as it is pictured in the literature and travel writings of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, created such a myth for England (Gikandi, p.1996, p.46). Writers of the West Indies, as Gikandi states, were obsessed with 'the epic dimension of England', because of the *absence* of that myth or epic tradition in their own culture (Gikandi, 1996, p.46). The idea of the antiquity and fixity of imperial identity thus,

creates a cultural gap between England and the newly formed Caribbean nations who lack such historical grounding. The result is the imposition of the sense of a dislocation and cultural denigration in the colonised subject, such as that exemplified in the narrator of the novel.

The primary difference between landscape and place is that landscapes are looked at whereas places are 'very much things to be inside of' (Cresswell, 2004, p.10). It is not only the landscape that the narrator views through the myth of England, but England as a cultural and historical dwelling place. In his imagination, the narrator sees a harmony between the English villagers and the village. This is best shown in the narrator's characterization of Jack, a local gardener. His garden is clean and beautiful with a tight clipped hedge that marks the boundary between different parts: fruits, flowers, and the land outside (pp.15-16). Although Jack has little communication with the narrator throughout the novel, his work on his garden and his care for the vegetation preoccupies the narrator's mind as an indispensable part of a larger perspective of a cultured place: 'Jack himself, however, I considered to be part of the view. I saw his life as genuine, rooted, fitting: Man fitting the landscape. I saw him as remnant of the past' (p.14). The way the narrator views the interaction of Jack with the landscape is a symptom of a fit and compatibility which is not adopted but is formed in the course of history. It is this interaction between the man and the landscape in the course of history that creates the identity of a place and its people. Thus, it is feasible to see Jack as part of a cultured place rather than simply the landscape. On the other hand, the narrator, burdened by colonial

history, feels a strong sense of non-belonging to the metropolitan land: '[t]he history I carried with me: The rawest stranger's nerves' (p.56). The sentiment can be read as suggesting the young man is estranged from the values and standards of Englishness, as he has no share in the antiquity of England. Indeed the narrator is as much attracted to the English literature and landscape as estranged by it. The following paragraph maps out the power of the colonial cultural enterprise to commodify and disseminate an idealized image of itself as a model of pastoral perfection in the colonies:

I had seen the cows on the hillsides against the sky, heads down, grazing, or looking with timorous interest at the passing man. And they had seemed like the cows in the drawing on the label of the condensed-milk tins I knew in Trinidad as a child: something to me as a result at the very heart of romance, a child's fantasy of the beautiful, other place, something which when I saw it on the downs, was like something I had always known. (p.90)

It seems that everything the narrator is viewing, from the gardens to the cows, is meditated through constant comparing and contrasting between England as the perfect pastoral idyll and Trinidad as an imperfect small island that enforces the sense of dislocation.

Jamaica Kincaid in *A Small Place* similarly shows the extent to which the identity of Antigua is overshadowed by the idea of England, which is presented in the adoption of English laws, English street names and English national holidays (like the Queen Victoria's official birthday) on the colonised island (Kincaid, 1988). The pervasive presence of England in Antigua, gives a sense of

metaphorical dislocation to the colonised, as his/her homeland lacks a genuine identity separate from the identity of the metropolis:

Have I given you the impression that the Antigua I grew up in revolved almost completely around England? Well, that was so. I met the world through England, and if the world wanted to meet me it would have to do so through England (Kincaid, 1988, p.46).

Unlike the narrator of Naipaul's novel, Kincaid is aware that England as an idea is created through imperialist practices and expresses her dismay at such commodification of cultures. The narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival* though, views both his homeland and England at the beginning of his arrival at the countryside through *the idea* of England. The narrator's exposure to English culture and his fascination for English literature makes him a believer in the myth of Englishness. He would be an exemplar of the way the imperial policy of defining Englishness by alterity would work. Rather than finding his own way of seeing and evaluating the place, the narrator attempts to find a framework to fit what he sees into, and as we have already seen, the framework through which he views the landscape, people and culture is English literature. However, such a preoccupation with the imperial way of seeing places changes over the course of thirty years, and he begins to adopt a new way of seeing.

Helen Tiffin (Tiffin, 2005) and Barbara Bender (Bender, 1993) have analysed the significance of the novel's approach to the English landscape. They both in one way or another argue that the novel manifests how the colonial educational system in the Caribbean exercises a divide between the imperial and

colonial landscape. In Tiffin's words such an education has exerted a 'hegemonic power of English perception of land' (Tiffin, 2005, p.201). On the one hand, the Caribbean landscape is 'perceived as richly but degeneratively tropical, frightening, fecund, even pathological; through colonialist interpolation, it became exoticized for its own inhabitants by the dominant European vision' and on the other hand England was presented as 'ideal, axiomatic, or static' (Tiffin, 2005, p.201, 206). According to Tiffin, the influence of such perceptions is to the extent that the Caribbean writers, in order to deal with or represent their local environment, should meditate it through English perceptions. *The Enigma of Arrival*, Tiffin argues, set out to challenge such assumptions by destabilizing the notion of ideal versus imperfect, whose standards are set by European myths of the Garden of Eden. The Garden of Eden is the 'ideal' nature, whose essential component is its immutability; that is to say it exists without erosion and decay. *The Enigma of Arrival*, as Tiffin argues, destabilizes the notion of the ideal by emphasizing that the English countryside is as much subject to change and decay. In a wider scope, the novel revisits the conception and creation of place, as Tiffin argues, the narrator stresses 'through the myth of the garden and a literal and imaginative return to the landscapes of the English countryside, the "indigenous" conception of "man fitting the landscape"' (Tiffin, 2005, p.206).

Barbara Bender also argues that the novel challenges the production of meaning for landscape by the imperial power. She says that Naipaul's landscapes, unlike the representation of England in the literary works mentioned in the novel, are 'postmodern –fragmented and contradictory. But you could also say that that

fragmentation and contradiction are in some measure expressive of, created by, the conditions of a post-imperial world' (Bender, 1993, p.9).

The two critics from two distinct perspectives make the argument that Naipaul's representation of the English landscape is in line with contemporary post-imperial worldviews. The two readings are insightful about the way Naipaul's view of the English landscape is mediated through his colonial background. However, here, there is a need to insist that the significance of England for the narrator (as a displaced postcolonial man) goes well beyond the beauty of the English landscape; England appears to be an example of an ideal dwelling place because of the idea of the stability and fixity associated with it. The following discusses the ways in which the narrator's view of antiquity and stability of the metropolitan centre changes over the course of time and how the rupture in the history of colonialism has changed and transformed the house of the British Empire.

II. Decay of the house of England

According to Gikandi, the massive migration in the second half of the twentieth century marked a disjuncture in the mythology of the English nation, a disjuncture which Gikandi calls the 'postcolonial moment' (Gikandi, 1996, pp.48-49). The postcolonial moment is that moment between the nation and empire when the interrogation of identities begins and the outcome would be the re-writing and realignment of colonial and metropolitan identities (Gikandi, 1996, p.49). The narrator's narrative should also be seen as signifying this particular moment, because it interrogates the dominant imagery of England through the

ideology of the antiquity, fixity and grandeur of the British Empire. The narrator begins to see change and flux in the place (human and physical landscape) which shows the disjuncture between the imperial view of England and the postcolonial view of it.

There are two scenes in the novel that create the sense of disjuncture in imperial identity in *The Enigma of Arrival*: first, the narrator's view of some gardens going wild in the absence of care; and second, his encounter with the landlord of the country house in which he stayed. These two moments disrupt the idea of pastoral perfection of the English landscape that I discussed earlier. The narrator's first realization is that places are indeed man-made and thus in the absence of care they are subject to decay. This idea is prompted mainly by the gradual diminishing of the beauty and neatness of Jack's garden when he falls ill. In Jack's absence there is no cutting and tidying up, no turning over of the earth, no work on the vegetable plot; the garden runs wild. It is the view of a disorganized and wild garden and decay of vegetation in the absence of care that makes the narrator revisit his way of seeing the garden. Rather than seeing the place through the idea of antiquity, he begins to realize that lack of control and care can turn landscape to decay and antiquity into disorder. Yet, the narrator as a child assumed that the idea of decay belongs only to the colonial world: 'I had grown to live with the idea of decay' (p.23). As a child he used to imagine England as a symbol of power and continuity and Trinidad as a place of decay and change. But he gradually realizes that England is also part of 'a world in

decay, a world subject to constant change, and of the shortness of human life' (p.23).

The climax of the narrator's change of mind and re-thinking of his ideas of England occurs when he notices the deterioration of the condition of the country house in which he lives. The neat and ordered garden is turning wild and the grand house is in a state of decay. High maintenance costs have led to a substantial reduction in services and care: 'In the great days of the manor sixteen gardeners looked after the garden, but there was only one left' (p.230). The meadows that were kept irrigated all the time were turning dry, as 'the secret of drowning and draining the meadows were now lost' (p.218). The grand country estate, in a wider socio-political context, stands for post-imperial England which in the absence of imperial wealth gradually loses its grandeur.

The problem appears to be, on the one hand, the high maintenance costs of the estate, and on the other hand, the inactivity of the English heir, whose life is summed up by the narrator as follows: 'Inertia, habit, friendships, a wish to be where his worth was known – perhaps these things had kept him in his inherited house' (p.230). The aristocrat landlord of the Wiltshire estate is a bachelor, living alone, served by gardeners and maids. Despite his 'excessive worldly blessings', he lives like 'a recluse, accessible only to his intimate friends' (p.56). The narrator believes that the landlord's lack of communication with common people is due to his wealth and that such a snobbish attitude is inherent in the nature of aristocratic life style in Britain. The landlord keeps his distance from those below his social status, which the narrator see as his way to safeguard himself from

criticism and thus, to maintain his masterly position. One day while watching the landlord sunbathing, the narrator comes to a new perspective of his character, which is best expressed in the following:

This wish of my landlord for nakedness and physical self-cherishing – stories had come my way ... of the great beauty of my landlord – this idea of the beauty and the flesh now went with the opposite reality: the fatness of self-indulgence and inactivity. (p.230)

This climactic moment makes the narrator suspect that the grand country house embodies the stagnation and inertia of England rather than its grandeur. The country estate that was once an instance of antiquity and continuity of national inheritance, handed down as a family heritage from one generation to another, is pictured as unmanageable for the landlord. Here, there is a parallel line between the unstable house of Mr Biswas and the Wiltshire country house. Both of these houses stand in one way or another as the epitome of instability and unhomeliness. While the former appears to lack a firm grounding and a practical structure, the latter looks to be unmanageable and in need of repair.

In the absence of imperial wealth and imperial income for the aristocrats, even the last remaining gardener, Pitton, is made redundant near the end of the story and the garden's beautiful ivy dries out (p.307). The nostalgia over the death and decay of the house and the plants correlates with the loss of the English imperial state. For those who come to look after the place, a couple in their forties, the estate has no national significance and the couple, free of any emotional attachment, view the estate just as a shelter and a source of income:

The house as a place of shelter, not as a place to which you could transfer emotions or hopes – this attitude of the new couple to the thatched house seemed to match the more general attitude to the land. The land, for the new workers, was merely a thing to be worked. (p.59)

Materialistic values replace servitude and loyalty in the hearts and minds of the servants of the houses as the above sentiment shows. The imperial national consciousness, along with the landscape seems to have undergone change.

The imagery of the country house in Wiltshire is closely related to post-imperial English national consciousness. David Cannadine in his study of the importance of country houses as English cultural heritages says that, '[N]o artefact in modern England has been the subject of such fanciful, romanticized and well-articulated veneration as the country house (Cannadine, 1989, p.99). He argues that artists and writers in the nineteenth century through to the twentieth century, pictured country houses in order to bring about either a 'magical, glamorous, enchanted moment' or to evoke a more mellow and 'fanciful rather than factual' world (Cannadine, pp.99-100). But Cannadine stresses that there has been a shift of interest towards the grand country houses since the Second World War. In his words, 'this Indian summer has turned to autumn: The creeper has withered and the sunshine faded', and due to rapid destruction of the country houses in recent years, he contends, 'few writers today set contemporary novels in country houses' (Cannadine, 1989, p.100). One can add that even if a writer like Naipaul does so, rather than evoking a fanciful or a glamorous picture of a country estate, he evokes the deteriorating condition and unhomeliness of these estates. After the decay of English country estates, 'a powerful yearning

for lost national glory' is evoked in a couple of 'postwar' English novels, according to John J. Su (Su, 2002).¹⁸ These narratives, which Su calls, 'the crisis of inheritance' narrative, through evoking nostalgia, re-invent what constitutes 'genuine Englishness' (Su, 2002, p.555). *The Enigma of Arrival* has the characteristics of 'the crisis of inheritance' narrative based on Su's definition, yet, what the novel acknowledges is that the crisis did not lead to a fall and collapse of English identity, but made the English culture yield to a regeneration and renewal of ideas and standards.

The change is not a negative transformation. The ideas of death and decay seem disappointing for the narrator because he fears loss. However, what redeems him is the idea that death and decay might entail renewal and re-creation if it is well-managed. The promise of re-creation makes his earlier anxieties unnecessary: '[b]ut that idea of an unchanging life was wrong. Change was constant. People died; people grew old; people changed houses; houses came up for sale. Everyone was aging; everything was being renewed or discarded' (p.32). To the narrator his earlier anxieties over decay and his wish for fixity are associated with his unstable colonial background and family life:

To see the possibility, the certainty, of ruin, even at the moment of creation ... had been given me as a child in Trinidad partly by our family circumstances: the half-ruined or broken down houses we lived in, our many moves, our general uncertainty. Possibly, too, this mode of

¹⁸ John J. Su supports his argument through comparative analysis of Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1944) and Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989) (See Su, 2002). In the case of Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, Su states that the novel shows 'dignity and greatness' as the spirit of English national identity. Su reads the novel as an exemplary narrative that parallels the decline of the country estate with the decline of English greatness and dignity in the aftermath of the Second World War and postcolonial era (Su, 2002, p.555).

feeling was an ancestral inheritance, something that came with the history that had made me: not only India, with its idea of a world outside men's control, but also the colonial plantations or estate of Trinidad, to which my impoverished Indian ancestors had been transported in the last century –estates of which this Wiltshire estate, where I now lived, had been the apotheosis. (p.55)

The anxiety of the narrator recalls Mr Biswas's insecurity, his half-ruined houses and his determination in finding a home. Just like Mr Biswas the narrator is conscious of his marginal position in power relations and that the flow of life is out of his hands. But the narrator encounters the world with new approaches. He belongs to the post-imperial generation, the era when the old world order is dismantled and the imperial boundaries are constantly challenged. Recognition of change, flux and renewal distinguishes the narrator from Mr Biswas. Unlike Biswas, the narrator is not seeking security by owning a house or searching for a home. When he sees that the world is changing, he abandons the idea that identities should be associated with secure and historically grounded places, and recognizes that places can be remade by new social and cultural forces.

The transformation the narrator perceives in England is directly related to the global relational and geographical transformations. If it was not for the possibility of change in the relationship between England and the colonies, a Trinidadian young man's stay on the estate could not be possible. The following meditation of the narrator acknowledges such a transformation:

Fifty years ago there would have been no room for me on the estate, even now my presence was a little unlikely. But more than accident had

brought me here. ... The migration, within the British Empire, from India to Trinidad had given me the English language as my own, and a particular kind of education. This had partly seeded my wish to be a writer in a particular mode, and had committed me to the literary career I had been following in England for twenty years. (p.55)

As the narrator highlights, it is the transformation not only in England but also in the idea of Englishness, caused by the historical rupture in British imperialism that has provided a space for an immigrant from the former colonies to present a postcolonial narrative of a decaying country house in England.

The novel's approach to post-imperial England substantiates Simon Gikandi's argument that the dominance and authority of the English cultural phenomenon has been dismantled by the decolonising movements in postcolonial cultural products. As he says, '[n]arratives of nationalism that had emerged from the decolonised polis and the postcolonial narratives that migrant writers were producing in the heart of the English metropolis were to serve as the clearest signs of the ways in which the colonial narrative had been supplanted by new stories of Englishness' (Gikandi, 1996, p.xiii). *The Enigma of Arrival* is one of these narratives that set out to present a new view of England in the aftermath of the break up of the empire. But, according to Gikandi, despite the fact that these new narratives appeared to be bound to the project of resistance against colonial rule, and its discourses,

such narratives still functioned *within* the epistemology established by the dominant culture of colonialism. For this reason ... these narratives could not be conceived as postcolonial if we considered that term to

refer to a system of knowledge –and its narrative –that lay beyond the colonial enterprise (Gikandi, 1996, p.xiii, my emphasis).

Indeed Gikandi insists that despite the fact that postcolonial writers refused to fit into the hierarchies of colonial culture, they still affiliate themselves with values that are the basis of colonialism itself: ‘civilization, progress, literacy, and civility’ (Gikandi, 1996, p.xiv). To Gikandi, postcolonial writers have been less keen to acknowledge such a relationship between their narratives and the English literary tradition. However, Naipaul’s novel acknowledges such a relationship. At the end of the story he says that he feels ‘in tune with the landscape’(p. 384), and indeed he insists that he overcomes the sense of dislocation that English cultural values imposed on him and he finally finds his own way of relating to and seeing England. Naipaul’s novel also manifests its borderland existence simultaneously within and outside the English literary tradition, which is going to be discussed in the following.

III. Finding a place in English

The Enigma of Arrival is a pastoral novel. But the question raised here is why a novel that is supposed to synthesize the worlds and cultures that created the writing identity of the narrator is written in one of the most traditional genres? Paul Alpers in *What is Pastoral?* observes pastoral as a literary form that is initiated in Roman and Greek classical antiquity, one of the most celebrated of which is Virgil’s *Eclogues* (Alpers, 1996). Despite some modifications in the course of history, it remained a well-used form through to modern times and in

modern genres like the novel (Alpers, 1996, pp.1-2). According to Alpers there is no consensus among the critics on the definition of pastoral. A literary form that depicts idyllic nature, longing for innocence and happiness and hostility to urban life are among the most widely-known definitions. Yet, to Alpers the defining characteristic of pastoral is that it represents 'a way of life' in the continuous literary tradition. *The Enigma of Arrival* similarly represents an English rural life style and landscape in the post-imperial context.

Regarding Naipaul's intention in writing an auto-biographical story in a pastoral form, Rob Nixon argues that by writing a 'postcolonial pastoral' Naipaul intends to 'elect himself to the great pastoral tradition' while at the same time his racial presence in the village would be a disruption in the lineage' (Nixon, 1992, p.102). Nixon reads the narrative form of the novel as an expression of the writer's admiration for English culture and his wish to be part of it. Nixon's consideration of the novel as pastoral is significant in two ways: first, it explains the narrator's fascination with English culture, literature and nature; second, it suggests that the narrator is not breaking from the tradition of English literature by challenging some aspects of it, rather it seeks to register a new approach to it in the light of postcolonial and postmodern transformations. His reading becomes even more plausible when we juxtapose his approach with that of Helen Tiffin and Barbara Bender that is discussed earlier in this chapter. While Tiffin and Bender's argument on the novel's alternative postcolonial vision of landscape is persuasive, it is also worth agreeing with Nixon's argument that it is not landscape into which he tries to fit, but the pastoral tradition. Yet, Nixon

views Naipaul's use of the pastoral tradition as a way of seeking credit for himself (Nixon, 1992, pp.102-3). Such a view is too pessimistic. The novel is a celebration of the Western literary tradition as the only *place* (in the metaphorical sense) safeguarded from decay. Naipaul can be seen as electing himself to contribute to the change and transformation in the tradition while he respects the foundations of it.

In order to show how the novel gives a postcolonial dimension to the pastoral novel, it is worth comparing it with John Berger's *Pig Earth* (1979). Alpers regards *Pig Earth* as an example of a pastoral novel because of first, the narrator being both an inhabitant and a permanent outsider in his village, and second, his being a writer which 'makes him eligible to be part of the village's ongoing cultural life' (Alpers, 1996, p.376). To Alpers, the novel's attempt in 'blurring the boundaries between oral and written' makes it resemble an Eclogue book by Virgil, due to its concern for nature and the realities of village life. Because of the postmodern narrative techniques, Alpers calls the novel 'an unusual "way of telling"', because everywhere in the novel the details are *being told* which complicates the boundaries between the real experiences and fictional stories.¹⁹ Although there is little resemblance between Berger's and Naipaul's novels, a similar argument can be employed in the case of *The Enigma of Arrival* to characterize it as a postcolonial pastoral novel. The difference between Berger's and Naipaul's novels is that while the former is an experiment in a way of telling, the latter is an experiment in a *way of seeing*. The narrator of *The*

¹⁹ Alpers borrows the phrase "way of telling" from the title of a collection of photographs by Berger and Jean Mohr, *Another way of telling*. See Alpers (1996, p.377).

Enigma of Arrival is an outsider in an English village who observes and speculates about village life and English nature from his postcolonial migrant perspective. His narration blurs the boundaries between the real and literary accounts of the English landscape and English country life. What makes him eligible to be part of [England's] ongoing cultural life is that first, he is a writer who has decided to recount the life-experiences of villagers and draws on their past and their culture to indicate a sense of continuity,²⁰ and second, he comes to the village at a historical moment that can be considered to represent the break from imperial to postcolonial narratives and as a writer from a former colony, he can open a new chapter in narratives of Englishness.

The idea of adopting a new way of seeing evokes revisiting the central values the discourses of imperialism produce, mainly identity, and geographical divisions. With regard to identity, the novel reflects on the anxious experience of the cultural vulnerability of a migrant from a colonial society in relation to English people and England. The fusion of the genres of the autobiography and the novel in *The Enigma of Arrival* (subtitled 'A novel in five sections') makes the narrator a believable character, yet fictional. There are many autobiographical links between Naipaul and the narrator, such as the Indo-Trinidadian family background, studying at Oxford University and staying in an English village.

²⁰ *The Enigma of Arrival* due to the pervasive motif of death can even be considered as a pastoral elegy. Like Milton's famous pastoral elegy, *Lycidas*, which is written in memory of Edward King a fellow student at Cambridge, *The Enigma of Arrival* is dedicated to the memory of Shiva Naipaul, the author's brother who died at the age of forty in 1985. The death of an unsuccessful writer, Alan; the suicide of a villager; and the death of the narrator's sister, Sati, all in one way or another indicate the novel's seeing life along with death. In other words, death of both people and nature throughout the novel emphasises that death is endemic to existence and an inalienable reality.

Naipaul has already explained in *Finding the Centre* his hesitation in writing about himself: '[w]hen it came to the self-writing, I was uncertain about the value I should give to the traveller's "I" ' (FC, p.11). The reason might be the complexity of the grasp of *self* and self-analysis that drives Naipaul to reject the idea that the first person narrator is Naipaul himself. It might also be because of what Christian Crowle explains as the complex and unstable relationship between human identity and the environment (England), which in the case of Naipaul makes representation of a unified "I" evermore elusive (Crowle, 1995). Drawing on Foucault, Crowle contends that when the postcolonial writer inserts his own subjectivity into the discourses of race and gender, or in her own words 'when he articulates his embodiment, he is enmeshed in [...] paradigmatic webs of race and gender' (Crowle, 1995, p.100). After all, the distance that Naipaul creates between himself and the "I" of the story helps him freely question, speculate, and reveal the identity crisis that the narrator encounters.

Indeed, distancing is the narrative strategy used in the novel to show the challenges imposed on a colonised individual by cultural displacement and the process through which he overcomes it. Naipaul distances himself from the narrator which provides him with a space to depict his own life story through the constant erasing, rewriting and renewing of identities and ideas. Distancing himself from the narrator, Naipaul looks back at the time of his arrival and reflects on the immaturity, insecurity and anxieties of his younger self, embodied in the narrator:

For years in that far-off island whose human history I had been discovering and writing about, I had dreamed of coming to England. But my life in England had been savourless, and much of it mean. I had taken to England all the rawness of my colonial nerves, and those nerves had more or less remained, nerves ... of youth and inexperience, physical and sexual inadequacy, and of undeveloped talent. (p.110)

Just as Naipaul distances himself from the narrator, the narrator also distances himself from his past by saying that he had a divided subjectivity at the beginning of his career: his travelling self that was experiencing and his writing self that meditated on the experiences (p.107). The divide was mainly because he could not overcome his anxiety over his colonial background. His travels unconsciously affected him and introduced him to the world beyond the island and England, yet, he could not express those experiences in his writings: 'I witnessed this change in my personality; but not even aware of it as a theme, wrote nothing of it in my diary. So that between the man writing the diary and the traveller there was already a gap, already a gap between the man and the writer' (p.117). The way the narrator looks at his writing initiations suggests that it took him a while before he could find a solid writing identity. The main obstacle was a sense of colonial insecurity that is further revealed when there are discussions on colonial identity. In one of his journeys from New York to London there is a discussion about racial divides on the ship: 'It was too close to my disturbance, my vulnerability, the separations of my two selves. That was not the kind of personality the writer wished to assume, that was not the material he dealt in' (p.135). Avoiding his background and imitating English writers, in hindsight,

proved to be a mistake. He later realizes that he immaturely stood on the wrong side of history by avoiding his background and struggling with the old standards rather than the new ones: 'I had to pretend to be other than I was, other than what a man of my background could be. Concealing this colonial-Hindu self below the writing personality, I did both my material and myself much damage' (p.159). His colonial background and his experiences of being subjected to imperialism were experiences that he constantly avoided because of his anxiety about identity.

In order to adopt his own way of seeing he decides to enter the world of literature and take refuge in that space: 'I was like a man entering the world of a novel, a book; entering the real world' (p.140). The play with the notion of 'real', on the one hand, is an attempt to dismantle the divide between the real versus the fictional world, and on the other hand, is suggestive of his disillusionment with encountering the 'real' England which was far from the imaginary one the colonial education introduced him to. Knowledge of literature would give the narrator the possibility to express his sense of place through representation, for a sense of place is inseparable from representation of that place.²¹ Thus, he starts backing his experience of the world with self-education during his stay in London. He reads novels such as *Hangover Square*, a book that, as he says, would give some sense of the metropolitan milieu for he 'always need[s] these proofs from books, some sharper sense of [him]self' (p.144). He watches movies too. Twelve

²¹ Gillian Rose ROSE, G. (1995) Place and Identity: a sense of place. IN PAT JESS & MASSEY, D. (Eds.) *A Place in the World?* UK, The Open University. Rose drawing on Doreen Massey states that senses of place are articulated through the processes of representation. (Rose, 1995, p.88).

years after his arrival in London his view of cinema has changed. He no longer watches movies for pleasure; he doesn't view them as a fantasist but 'as a critic' (p.147). Through reading and testing different literary movements, he attempts to find his own literary voice. In his reflection on his literary experiments he expresses how he was inspired by various texts and philosophies, the ideas of the aesthetic movement of the nineteenth century and the ideas of Bloomsbury, which he would later leave behind.

The result of this self-education process is that he finally adopts his own ways of seeing places and people informed by his colonial background. He concludes that the old world order and its values 'bred essentially out of empire, wealth and imperial security' are in the process of transformation in the postcolonial period (p.159). Through reading, travelling and seeing he realizes that he lives in an era when the new themes are not in the metropolitan centre but in the margins of the empire and that the ideas come from the break up of the boundaries of the European empires. He acknowledges that his Trinidadian origin and his background make invaluable assets with which he could contribute to the cultural interest of the postcolonial time:

... the island –with the curiosity it had awakened in me for the larger world, the idea of civilization, and the idea of antiquity; and all the anxieties it had quickened in me – the island had given me the world as a writer; had given me the themes that in the second half of the twentieth century had become important ... (p.167)

Just as much as he tried to distance himself from his background, now he attempts with curiosity to learn about Trinidad and its colonial history in order to achieve a better perspective of his homeland and the historical pulse of his period. Consequently, he realizes that the small island he came from, contrary to his expectation, is not a stranger to history or antiquity:

...so now I was amazed, reading the documents of my island in London, by the antiquity of the place to which I belonged. Such simple things! Seeing the island as part of the globe, seeing it sharing the antiquity of the earth! ... The landscape in my mind's eye during the writing of this book became quite different in its feel and associations from the landscape of the earlier books. (p.171)

In the above sentiment the narrator implicitly deconstructs the way the concept of 'antiquity' is associated with certain geographical locations such as England, and challenges the imperial mapping of cultures and geographies based on the discourses of civilization and antiquity. In other words he insists that places and the boundaries that define them are human constructions rather than pre-existing.

Brannigan, reading postcolonial writers' representation of England, argues that the travel experience 'taught them to acknowledge the irrevocable hybridity of their own cultural identities' (Brannigan, 2003, p.72), which has pertinence with regard to Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*. Yet, Brannigan excludes Naipaul, saying that 'Naipaul ... refused to see anything of substance in the Caribbean beyond the traces and shadows of England's presence' (Brannigan, 2003, p.72). Here, it is notable, that Naipaul in his earlier works might not have acknowledged

the close integration of cultural identities, but in *The Enigma of Arrival*, he certainly does. He even expresses regret for his earlier ideas and his avoidance of seeing change and flux in the identities of places and people. He certainly distances himself from his earlier assumption that 'to be colonial ... was to inhabit a fixed world' (Naipaul, 1977, p.59), and dropped the 'fantasy of the ancient-world setting' (p.186).

The climax of the narrator's writing career comes finally when he finds a way to see England through his postcolonial perspective and from his sensitive place in a predominantly English village. He projects his own migrant imagination onto the English landscape; ideas that are informed by his life in Trinidad and his travels to Africa and the colonies. In brief, rather than being the recipient of meaning and ideas, he becomes their creator:

Now, in Wiltshire in winter, a writer now rather than a reader ... I projected the solitude and emptiness and menace of my Africa on to the land around me. When four days later the fog lifted and I went walking something of the Africa of my story adhered to the land I saw.
(p.186)

The significance of such a reversal of the process of production of meaning is not in its reaction to past representation, but it appears to be in its reconstruction and re-imagination of places according to the historical transformation in the postcolonial era.

The realization of his place and his potentiality for producing meaning ends his sense of dislocation. The metaphorical gap between the man and the

writer finally closes and the integrity of the narrator's identity is achieved. His divided subjectivity conjoins in the light of the realization that the English empire's claim to superiority is constructed through ideological and cultural practices. Thus, as the realization dawns that places are constructed through a cultural process of remembering and re-imagining, it leads him to reconstruct both the house of England and his sense of Trinidad from a new perspective. He imaginatively remakes the house of England, not as homely as he imagined in Trinidad, but as a poorly maintained house on the verge of decay. Similar imaginative reconstruction needs to be carried out for the colonised lands in literature. In relation to his small island, he contends that each generation remakes the place in every era: 'we remade the world for ourselves; every generation does that' (p.387). The reconstruction is both physical and imaginary, and the narrator regards his writing career as a way to contribute to this remaking and remapping of place in a postcolonial era. Breaking away from old assumptions and creating new ideas, appears to him to be a 'rebellion' against the old ways of seeing, for as he says, '[w]riting as a rebellion. No one is born a rebel. Rebellion is something we have to be trained in'(p.167).

The remaking of places by writing, particularly writing in the pastoral form apart from contributing to postcolonial culture, would safeguard the writer (or the narrator) from a personal fear, which is death. After receiving the news of his sister's haemorrhage and her consequent death, the narrator flies home to participate in her cremation. In the last chapter which is a reflection on death, the narrator shows that the idea of writing is closely related to death. He says that it

is due to 'awareness of death' that he began to write the book in the first place (p.384). The idea of the story came to him long before he began to write, but his main drive for writing came to him as he encountered the deaths of different people and his own illness. It is precisely the fear of shortage of time and his wish to resist death and decay that drives him to writing. In fact, like Scheherazade, the Persian storyteller of *One Thousand and One Nights* who tells stories for the king in order to defer her death, the narrator tells stories to resist death and forgetting. It is for this reason that the story is told in the pastoral form, one of the most enduring literary traditions. As Alan Sinfield states, the attempt of the critics and scholars in defining (modern and traditional) pastoral, aimed mainly for recognition of the historicity of pastoral and its transcendence of history (Sinfield, 2001). He says, '[t]he project [of defining pastoral] ... is to recognize historical sequence, but also transcendence of that sequence; since, without such transcendence the text is ultimately neither literary nor pastoral' (Sinfield, 2001, p.151). It is the transcendental quality of the pastoral that renders the place of *The Enigma of Arrival* in the tradition possible, despite the distinct outlook it presents. The novel transcends the defined perspective of the pastoral, while it holds on to its defining elements, to safeguard its place in the literary tradition which is informed by the historical specificity of the postcolonial moment.

Western culture is a tradition safeguarded from death and forgetting, in the narrator's eye. Thus, while the narrator sets his story in the English landscape with which he has been familiar due to his colonial education, he consciously

draws on the classical cultural works for the theme and title of the book that go well beyond the borders of England. The title of his book, *The Enigma of Arrival*, is taken from the title of a painting by deChirico, portraying a Mediterranean wharf, in classical times of ancient Rome: 'it speaks of the mystery of arrival' (p.106). DeChirico himself borrowed the title from one of Apollinaire's poems, a poet who died in 1918, 'to the great grief of Picasso and others' (p.106). Naipaul fits his novel into the continuity of the series of "The Enigma of Arrival(s)", by creating his own unique story under a similar title. This story, like its predecessors, is a narrative of the mystery of arrival. DeChirico's painting is an image of encountering the unknown when a passenger gets off a ship; the poem by Apollinaire expresses such an enigma in words; and Naipaul narrates the story of the enigmatic encounter of a colonial migrant with the metropolis.

The Enigma of arrival challenges the imperial mapping of the world and it does so by decentralizing the centre (England). This act signifies that a new era in the process of representing, identifying and constructing meaning for places has begun. After all, '[I]and is not land alone, something that simply is itself. Land partakes of what we breathe into it, is touched by our moods and memories' (p.366). The novel seems to be confident that he is having a share in the new process of identifying a new meaning for the land. The contribution of the novel to devising a new approach to places is primarily in two ways: firstly, it interrogates the values already ascribed to places (such as antiquity and pastoral perfection of certain locations), and secondly, it renews representation of places from the perspective of an outsider who is aware of the decolonizing and

decentralizing impulse of the postcolonial moment. Just as the stability of imperialism bred the idea of antiquity of the imperial house of England, the postcolonial condition necessitates representation of this house as less grand or stable. The house indeed appears homely to a postcolonial subject who used to imagine England as the ultimate secure home. Simon Gikandi reminds us that English literature might have subjected colonised subjects to the imperialist ideologies, but it has also provided a platform for postcolonial writers for decolonizing practices (Gikandi, 1996). *The Enigma of Arrival* celebrates this capacity of Western culture and employs this platform to advocate remapping of spaces.

Chapter Four

Half a Life and Magic Seeds: Dispensing with the Idea of Home and Considering New Ways of Belonging

At the start of the new millennium and after decades of a writing career so intricately bound up with questions of belonging, Naipaul once again depicts the theme of the quest for home and belonging in *Half a Life* and *Magic Seeds*. The young Indian protagonist of the novel, Willie Chandran, undertakes a journey through three different societies in order to find his place of belonging. Given that in *The Enigma of Arrival* Naipaul acknowledges the need for new ways of seeing places, the question raised here is whether Naipaul sustains his transformative vision of place in the two recent novels. There is a clue to the response to the question in Willie's concluding lines at the end of the quest, when he says that, 'It is wrong to have an ideal view of the world' (MS, p.294). This chapter explores how this line can be read as questioning the idea of home as a place of belonging and instead implies that home is 'nowhere' for profoundly unsettled postcolonial individuals. In doing so, this chapter analyses how the two novels portray India, Africa and England in terms of their relative qualities as promising or unpromising habitats. In the postcolonial and postmodern context where boundaries and idealistic visions of place are unsettled, the idea of immigration and choosing habitats, is shown to have replaced the idea of being-at-home.

Willie Somerset Chandran, in the opening of *Half a Life* asks his father about the origin of his Anglo-Indian name. From this moment he enters a journey in search of his hybrid Anglo-Indian roots. He travels to and lives in England, Africa and India. Having lived in these very different contexts, and feeling at home nowhere, he finally gives up his quest for a place of belonging. *Magic Seeds*, which is a sequel to *Half a Life*, manifests a revision of Willie's earlier ways of seeing places. While the former novel shows the futility of the quest for home and belonging, the latter novel examines the new ways an individual can relate to the world and societies. In *Magic Seeds*, Willie Chandran returns to India with the idea of contributing to change the system. But the experience of joining the revolutionaries proves to be idealistic. In effect, he decides to return to England where multi-culturalism and hybridization of identities appear to Willie to allow the possibility of integration to immigrants like Willie and to allow an opportunity to live in a progressive and ordered society.

The two subject novels explore and weigh up the relative merits of Africa, India and England as places of belonging for an immigrant from a postcolonial country. These are in fact the three places with which Naipaul is affiliated, due to his Trinidadian background and via his extensive travels. What binds these geographically and socially different places together is their shared history of colonialism which subsequently shaped their social systems. In fact, the two novels identify these three societies as what Pierre Bourdieu calls 'habitus'; referring to a social system and the dynamics associated with it (Bourdieu, 2002). Bourdieu introduces the notion of 'fields' in the sociological study of every habitat,

which refers to the tensions and contradictions at work which make up the characteristics of every system and help to maintain the system while allowing space for change. Every society according to Bourdieu allows for 'inventions and improvisations within limits' (Bourdieu, 2002, p.31). Bourdieu's sociological approach to place (habitus) is pertinent here because in these two novels, England, India and Africa are each presented as a system of disposition with their distinct and dynamic social relations. Among them, India and Africa are shown as lacking the capacity to change towards a progressive and stable society in the post-independent era.

Willie finally chooses to settle in England not because England appears homely to him, rather, as this chapter argues, it is because he views England moving towards a multi-cultural society with a hybrid culture where cultural exchange has made the society more dynamic. The two novels here are read as showing that for a postcolonial migrant of a hybrid background the possibility of a sense of homeliness and belonging is lost in the postcolonial world. The novel suggests that hybridity can be considered as what Fiona Allon calls alternative 'ways of belonging' (Allon, 2000, p.285). However, Naipaul in *Magic Seeds* negotiates the notion of hybridity, in ways distinct from Homi Bhabha's approach. Unlike Bhabha, I will argue, Naipaul refuses to view hybridity and the sense of unhomeliness as the empowering assets of migration. Rather, rejection of absolutism and acceptance of hybridity is shown by Naipaul to be the only viable way of belonging for postcolonial migrants in the increasingly unhomely world.

I. India, a place divided by castism

Willie Somerset Chandran, the protagonist of *Half a Life* and *Magic Seeds* is born and brought up in an Indian family in a village in India. However, his Anglo-Indian name suggests that due to two centuries of colonisation of India, Willie has a hybrid background rather than a purely Indian identity. His curiosity to know more about his hybrid identity and the cultures which have formed his identity drives him to commence a journey of self-discovery in relation to the places he assumes he belongs to. There are two settings of India in the novel: the India in which Willie is brought up, and the India to which he returns later with the hope that he might change it. Willie's understanding of India is shaped by these two encounters which do not contradict but complement his idea of India. The idea is that castism has hindered the socio-cultural progress of the country and achievement of a unified nationhood.

The story of Chandran family's involvement with castism for three generations (his grandfather, his father and himself) reveals the depth and rootedness of this cultural system in India. Willie's father, a Brahmin of high caste, was an outcast as a young college boy and always at odds with the standards that the school and his father set for him. Willie's grandfather, who was a clerk at the maharaja's palace, wanted his son to continue in the way of life of high caste and to marry a schoolmaster's daughter. Yet, Willie's father was determined to rebel against them. His rebellion as he notes was not informed by a thoughtful cause, but simply out of defiance of the rules set by those who had authority over him. Thus, despite his father's disapproval and at the cost of his

scholarship to study medicine he marries the first low-caste girl he meets at school, in order to, in his own words 'live a life of sacrifice' (*HL*, p.12). His defiance unexpectedly leads him to more serious political involvement. His fight with the high caste people, who created a fraudulent case against him in court, is followed by a procession and a strike against the maharaja state. He gradually becomes a 'holy man' fighting for the disadvantaged caste of 'untouchables' (*HL*, p.14). Yet as he confesses, it was not any political agenda that gave him such a heroic role, but people who need a hero to lead their war for them: 'I had wished, after all, only to follow the great men of our country. Fate, tossing me about had made me a hero to people who, fighting their own petty caste war, wished to pull them down' (*HL*, p.29). Willie's father's character is similar to the character of pundit Ganesh in Naipaul's *The Mystic Masseur*. Like Ganesh, Willie's father becomes involved politically through "fate", rather than an insight into politics. Consequently, the novel suggests that their holy wars are doomed to failure. Willie's father, far from pursuing his cause, contradicts his own ideas and political vision later in life. Despite the fact that his courageous stand is praised by foreign media and gains him a reputation in 'certain intellectual circles' (*HL*, p.31), he gradually grows to feel ashamed of his marriage to a low caste woman and of his support for the low-castes. He also begins to feel ashamed and melancholic over his low-caste daughter, Sarojini, who looks after her mother. He names his daughter after a woman poet of the independence movement, Sarojini. Yet, as the daughter grows up, the father sees the signs of low caste in her face and begins to dislike her. The high values of equality he campaigned for fade away

when it comes to personal experience. The social forces of castism in the country turn out to be stronger than his will to fight them. Ultimately he yields to the caste values that dominate Indian society.

Willie and Sarojini, who belong to the post-independent generation, resist such traditional Hindu values, especially castism, in a different way to their father. They might not have the contradictory stance of their father towards the discriminatory and corrupt caste system, but they are as much involved with it on a daily basis. At school Willie sees obvious discriminations against a low-caste student and he experiences hierarchal social relations on a small scale: '[the school servants] said they would starve rather than serve in a school which took in backwards' (*HL*, p.38). A servant of Willie's school having caste prejudices reveals the depth of the social divide based on class and caste. In other words, despite the fact that servants are marginalized through the class divide, it does not prevent them from discriminating against those of the low caste. It is not just well-to-do people like the headmaster who are obsessed with hierarchy, even those who stand at the lower level of social order have caste prejudices. In effect, Willie begins to feel the shame of his background, himself the son of a low caste mother. He also feels ashamed of his father's average job, and distances himself from his low-caste mother, whom he loves. He expresses his anxiety about his family background by writing stories which at one level mask, but at another level reveal his troubled mind. In one of his stories he pretends to be a Canadian and going on holiday with his 'Mom and Pop' which reveals his inner longing for another identity and nationality (*HL*, p.39). In another story called 'Life

of Sacrifice', he implicitly draws a parallel line between his father's secret shame for the appearance of his children and a fictional character who sacrifices his own two children to the devil. The stories, although not explicit about Willie's true feelings afford him an opportunity to reflect on his identity and his troubled emotions.

The mode of socio-cultural analysis that Naipaul adopts for India is limited to castism. Indeed the dynamic and complex social disposition of India as a habitus is reduced in the novel to the conflict between castes and the maintenance of the tradition due to the strong prejudice of Indians towards their caste. The India that Willie knows is the claustrophobic small town he is brought up in. He has no sense of Indian history before or during colonisation and no sense of city life. The point to note here is that the stand off of Willie's father against castism in his small town in the late 1940s coincides with anti-imperialist movements throughout the country. But in *Half a Life* anti-imperialist movements are shown as insignificant in the small cities and communities where the hegemony of caste and class was far stronger than the British. In fact, in the closed community of the maharaja state, imperialism is not as much of an issue as the caste divide is. On the other hand, anti-imperialism is shown as a national movement completely separate from the caste struggle in small towns. Willie's father is aware that his defiance against castism looks insignificant at the time in comparison with the anti-imperialist movement in the wider political context of India:

Everywhere in the country they were talking of Gandhi and Nehru and the British. Here in the maharaja's state, they were shut off from those politics. They were half-nationalists, quarter-nationalists, or less. Their big war was the caste war. (*HL*, p.8)

Here, the message is that although between the two political struggles, anti-imperialism received more publicity, the more difficult struggle is the caste war which has a stronger root than imperialism in India's culture and history. Uprooting a tradition is shown to be far more difficult than dismantling a foreign authority in a country.

The idea presented in *Half a Life* – that castism hinders the unity of India against oppression and corruption is not new in Naipaul's writing. Indeed, Naipaul views India as a society with several fields of complexities: religion, class, caste and colonial history. Each of these complexities has in one way or another created an unbridgeable gap in the social sphere that hinders progress in the country according to Naipaul. Such an idea sums up his view of India presented in his non-fictional trilogy, *India, an Area of Darkness* (1964), *India: A wounded Civilization* (1977), *India: a Million Mutinies Now* (1990). A similar argument about the influence of caste on Indian society was made nearly four decades earlier in *India, an Area of Darkness*, where he denounces Indians' and Gandhi's lack of racial sense:

Race is something that they detect about others but among themselves they know only the sub-caste or caste, the clan, the gens, the language group. Beyond that they cannot go; they do not see themselves as belonging to an Indian race; the words have no meaning. (*IAD*, p.157)

Naipaul attempts to prove that Indians have no national unity or sense of nationhood and that in effect the very notion of independence is thus, meaningless in India. A decade later, in *India: A wounded Civilization* (1977); Naipaul upholds a similar idea about India, though from a new angle. He argues that the 'crack' of civilization in India is wide open, because of a twofold reason (*IWC*, p.39). He says that there is on the one hand, 'archaism of national pride' which has been aroused by nationalist movements and on the other, 'the promise of the new' (*IWC*, p.39). In other words, he considers that in the absence of 'the intellectual means' (*IWC*, p.40) there is a lack of understanding about India's past history and its need to regenerate new ideas and visions. Accordingly, the positive change that independence promised to bring to India's culture did not materialize.

The idea that revolution or national movements for reform are doomed to failure reappears in *Magic Seeds*. Willie leaves India to go to England and then to Africa. But disappointed by his unsuccessful quest for home and a place of belonging, he decides to return to India and join a revolutionary movement for equality and reform of the political system. Willie's role model is Mahatma Gandhi. But he and Sarojini show little understanding of Gandhi, and have a simplistic approach to anti-imperialist movements in India. Sarojini asks Willie, 'Don't you see a little bit of yourself in that young Gandhi?' (*MS*, p.19) She compares Willie to Gandhi and the caste war to anti-imperialist movements based on two trivial factors: first, that both Willie and Mahatma stayed in England and Africa before they set out on their revolutionary journey; and second, that

Willie is a latecomer to political activism, just as Gandhi was when he started his revolution at the age of forty-six, five years older than Willie. To Sarojini, it was Gandhi's insight and determination that took him all the way to the leadership: 'He made things happen. He created the wave. He was a mixture of thought and intuition. Though above all, he was a true revolutionary' (*MS*, p.21). Based on such a view of anti-imperialist movements, she persuades Willie that such a leadership could also be repeated in relation to caste war. In Gandhi's heroic image, and at Sarojini's prompting, Willie finds an inspiration. The idea of living like Gandhi and following his path gives him a new identity, and the ambition of fighting for a big cause becomes his new pride:

For the first time in his life he began to experience a true pride. He felt himself, so to speak, taking up space when he walked in the streets ... Gradually, with this pride, there came to him an unexpected joy, which was like further reward, the joy of knowing that he rejected everything he saw. Sarojini told him that the people he saw lived for pleasure alone. They ate and watched television and counted their money; they had been reduced to a terrible simplicity. (*MS*, p.22)

The above sentiment is quite ironic as Willie himself has reduced war against castism 'to a terrible simplicity' (*MS*, p.36). Sarojini and Willie underestimate the complexity of the social and cultural condition of India which hints at Willie's imminent failure. It is only after Willie joins the revolutionaries that he realizes the root of the problem lies in a Hindu tradition and thus fighting against it is far more complicated than an anti-imperialist war.

The ideology of the revolutionaries, in the Gandhian tradition, is to fight the oppressiveness of social divisions and poverty that have made India 'one of the saddest places in the world' (*MS*, p.37). The main obstacles in the way of change in India towards a democratic and progressive system are identified by the leaders of the guerrilla fights. Joseph one of the commanders believes that it is the historical class and caste discriminations that have oppressed villagers and people of lower social standing. According to Joseph:

The old lords have gone away. We are the new lords. People who don't know will look at [village women] and think of the cruelty of Indian caste. In fact, we are looking at the cruelty of Indian history. ... The old lords oppressed and humiliated and injured for centuries. Now they are gone away. ... They have left these wretched people as their monuments' (*MS*, p.41).

Joseph upholds the Marxist ideology that revolution and communism would be an alternative to oppression. Unlike Joseph, Ramachandra, another commander, believes that the proletariat is also part of the problem. To him, the main hindrance to success is lack of a strong will for change. In their guerrilla warfare against landowners, Ramachandra says that he tries to persuade the villagers to take over the land of the lords, but among villagers there is no sense of urgency to take action:

We've told them about the wickedness of the rule of the old days. They agree with all of that. But when we tell them that it is up to them now to take over and plough these acres, they say, "it's not our land." ... You can get them to clean out water-tanks. You can get them to build roads. But you can't get them take over land. I begin to see why revolutions

have to turn bloody. These people will begin to understand revolution only when we start killing people. (*MS*, p.117)

It is not specified what 'old rules' the revolutionaries are fighting against, but it implicitly refers to two main factors: first, to the people's fanatical mentality towards the system, and second, to people's submission to the higher caste landlords and their passivity in the face of change. These factors appear to hinder victory over the old rules: 'They all want the old ways to go. But the old ways are part of people's being. If the old ways go, people will not know who they are, and these villages which have their own beauty, will become a jungle' (*MS*, p.120)

However, revolution is hardly an alternative to the oppressive system, as the novel characterizes the leaders as corrupt and their intentions in the guerrilla fight not as genuine as they claim. In the course of long dialogues with Willie on oppression, Joseph reveals his own ambition for leadership and that he would do anything to obtain power. On one occasion he says, '[t]he government thinks I am the cheerleader for the guerrillas. Well, I am that. I would love to see the revolution sweeping everything away. The very thought of that makes my heart light' (*MS*, p.39). On the other hand, if Joseph is ambitious for power, for Ramachandra revolutionary activity is a psychological drive to cover up his physical weakness. He claims that his ambition is land redistribution and empowering the peasants. Yet, as the story unfolds it becomes clear that this man of high caste has sexual inadequacies, and his incompetency in communicating with women is the main drive for him to find a psychological

substitute for masculine power. He confesses that books like *The Three Musketeers* never attracted him, but love stories directed at female readership, such as 'Mills and Boons' books were his favorites providing ways to improve his communication skills with girls. The characterization of the leaders raises suspicion about the possibility of any positive transformation in the event that revolution actually happens.

The picture of corrupt political activism in *Magic Seeds* is a confirmation of Naipaul's skepticism about Gandhism, expressed in *India: a Wounded Civilization*. The book is highly critical of manipulation of people under the name of intellectualism and a return to the principles associated with Gandhi. The notorious example is Jagan, a Gandhian freedom fighter. Jagan as Naipaul portrays him is a symbol of a freedom fighter abusing Hinduism and taking advantage of the supposedly simple-minded Indians for his own ends (*IWC*, pp.40-43). Jagan's success in recruiting people was mainly due to his adopting Gandhi's strategy, as 'intuiting just where the Hindu virtue of quietism and religious self-cherishing could be converted into selfless action of overwhelming political force' (*IWC*, p.42). He ultimately won his 'holy war', which was a claim to a cleansed and purified India. Yet, his worldly corruption turned his Gandhism into what Naipaul views as 'self-cherishing, faddism and social indifference' (*IWC*, p.43). According to Naipaul, Jagan led a Hindu retreat, which was a retreat from creativity and growth that confirmed 'the death of a civilization' and 'the final corruption of Hinduism' (*IWC*, p.43). Revolutionary leaders in *Magic Seeds* are just as insincere as Jagan. Freedom fighters like Ramachandra and

Joseph, regardless of their ideology, primarily follow personal advancements rather than nationalist agendas. At best, a revolutionary leader in India is like Gandhi. However, from Naipaul's cynical perspective, even Gandhi lacked the credentials for leadership, and in focusing exclusively on the anti-imperialist struggle, he failed to address caste, class and religious divisions *within* India adequately.

Contrary to Naipaul, Robert Young argues that Gandhi's 'voluntary poverty', was a strategy oriented towards the support of the peasantry and subaltern classes (Young, 2001, p.321). His view contradicts Naipaul's claim that Gandhi ignored castism and class divisions. Also challenging Naipaul, Vasant Patel argues that Gandhi stood against what he saw as British snobbery against poor Indian traders and questioned such snobbery in the name of civilization (Patel, 2005). Patel defends Gandhi by arguing that his *Hind Swaraj* means 'more than wanting the English to leave'; rather he called for an unconditional cultural reform and freedom (Patel, 2005, pp.157-8). Ashish Nandy in *The Intimate Enemy* argues that Gandhi's ideal cultural form was not a pure pre-colonial India; rather it was the model of a hybrid culture (Nandy, 1983). To Nandy, Gandhi saw the salvation of India in the mixing of Western and Eastern culture as well as Hindus and non-Hindu populations as a substitute for colonial culture. In fact, Nandy suggests that long before Rushdie and Bhabha introduced the notion of hybridity to postcolonial studies, Gandhi proposed his own version of cultural hybridity, though without using the term (Nandy, 1983, pp.46-63). If the model failed to be substantiated completely and flawlessly in

India, it is unfair and imprudent to hold Gandhi or the anti-imperialist movement responsible for it. It is even more imprudent to denigrate and underplay the achievement of independence in India, due to the persistence of oppression and divisions. Naipaul seems unable to acknowledge that the non-violent anti-imperialist movement led by Gandhi is evidence of the will of the Indian nation for change. Naipaul's attempt to underplay the achievements of Gandhi seem propelled by an overinvestment in Western democracy as the only model for the modern nation-state.

To Naipaul the complexities of caste and the lack of prospects for change are enough reasons to make India an uncomfortable habitus and an unlikely home to Willie Chandran. Willie finally gives up freedom fighting and surrenders himself to the police. He serves years in jail before he moves to England. His failure in making a contribution to the reconstruction of India is not a personal failure, but as the novel implies, it is a failure of India as a nation. In an interview after the publication of *India: a Million Mutinies Now*, when asked what sort of change he expects in India, Naipaul replies:

I would like to see people get away from an unexpressed faith in magic. A play of mind would mean opening oneself to the outside world – opening oneself to inquiry of all sorts, asking about history, getting some sense of time ... getting some sense of human contract. (Naipaul, 1990, p.39)

Such a change would not be achieved through political activism but should start from within the culture and every individual, in Naipaul's view. A similar argument

is made in *Magic Seeds*. When Willie leaves India, he leaves his hopes for return behind. The social space presented in the novel lacks any progressive element or room for transformation. Neither is there any prospect of unity across historical divisions generated by the Indian tradition.

Timothy Weiss interprets Naipaul's approach to India as, an 'idea' rather than observation of place, saying that for Naipaul 'India is not precisely a place, but an idea, a state of mind' (Weiss, 1992, p.18). Here, there is a need to add that Naipaul's 'idea' of India is closely connected to Naipaul's idea of postcolonial places in general. India's unhomeliness here is comparable to the idea of Caribbean unhomeliness pictured in Naipaul's earlier novels. Naipaul views India as lacking direction towards progress. The identity of these places is directed by traditional forces (such as castism and authoritarianism) that not only restrict the agency of the colonial subjects for personal or national growth, but also resist transformation of the corrupt and passive system. Thus, Naipaul implies that, given that places cannot be easily transformed, individuals can only choose their habitats. For Willie Chandran, who has the possibility of immigrating to more dynamic and less divisional place, living in a divided place like India is shown not to be the best option.

II. Africa; unstable and futureless:

The next place that Willie explores and assesses as a dwelling place is Africa. Willie meets Ana, an African girl of Portuguese decent, in a club in

London. After a few years living a lonely life in London, Willie marries Ana and follows her to Africa. His decision to settle in Africa is made not out of love for Ana, but because the prospect of living a family life in a large homely estate appears comforting to Willie. To Ana also Willie's presence seems a good opportunity because she also needs 'a man on the estate' (*HL*, p.141). But neither is Africa the home Willie assumed, nor is Willie the supportive man Ana looked for. Indeed Willie fails to have the connection to Africa that Ana had. Willie fails to integrate with African settlers during his stay and until the end he remains 'Ana's London man' whose presence is just a means 'to reinforce Ana's authority' (*HL*, p.145). The extravagant social life of the European settlers in Africa attracts Willie in the beginning. He indulges himself with parties and affairs with women, something he did not have in India or London. However, gradually he realizes that such a rich and exciting life leaves him feeling deeply insecure and hollow inside. The settlers' enjoyment of the parties, and their boasting about their colonial or aristocratic past, fails to compensate for the discomfort he feels and the sense that he is living in the shadow of an impending disaster. For example, the Correias, an immigrant couple of Portuguese decent, keep their investments in bank accounts in London and Switzerland, in case of war. Willie is easily attracted to the life of perversity among the settlers. While Ana is busy with the estate management, Willie spends his time with women. He begins an affair with the daughter of Ana's maid, following his visit to an underground place, and later with a married woman in their neighborhood. It is only after the

excitement of seeing the surface wealth and pleasure of life in Africa fades that Willie realizes such a life is contaminated by a sense of insecurity.

Life in the community of European settlers is portrayed as a life of indulgence, extra-marital relationships and violence. Such an image of life in Africa is familiar as Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* (1979), published over twenty years earlier than *Half a life*, portrays a similar social space in the cities of African countries. Salim, a young man from an Indian family of traders owns a small shop in a bend in the river on an African country. On his return from a journey to central Africa and then to England, he finds his shop sold to the African supporters of the president. The president of the country, the Big Man, and his policy of crackdown on dissidents recalls some anti-imperialist African leaders like the Ugandan president, Idi Amin, or the president of Zaire, Mobutu Sese Seko. The story of Salim's loss and displacement due to a racial and national purge is used by Naipaul to show the futility of the hopes for an independent and flourishing Africa.

In both of these novels the setting is an unspecified African country in the post-independent time. Unlike other settings in *Half a Life* and *Magic Seeds*, which are all identified countries and nations, the country in Africa to which Willie travels is viewed neither as a state, nor a nation. Such an approach emphasizes Naipaul's view of Africa as a homogenous and static continent. It seems that Africa homogeneously appears to him as a disorderly land of social crackdown, dictatorship, and instability. Naipaul's Africa is informed to a large extent by a pessimistic Conradian view of Africa. Naipaul has already paid tribute to Conrad

and acknowledged the influence of his writings, which he read for 'clues, hints and encouragement' (Naipaul, 1977, p.54). Naipaul approves of what he reads as Conrad's view of Africa, and describes the continent as "the demoralized land" of plunder and licensed cruelty' (Naipaul, 1977, p.58). On the influence of Conrad on Naipaul, Rob Nixon criticizes Naipaul's portrayal of 'apparently endemic African degeneration' (Nixon, 1992, p.91). To Nixon the influence of Conrad on Naipaul's vision of Africa is twofold: 'Naipaul's familial and autobiographical attraction to Conrad converges with something else: the Western tradition of "doing" Africa via *Heart of Darkness*' (Nixon, 1992, p.91). There is little difference between Naipaul's Africa and the European presentation of Africa, which is predominantly a perspective of corruption and violence – the former is directly related to colonial and post-independent states and the latter to all socio-cultural spheres (Nixon, 1992, pp.100-1). In *Half a Life*, similarly one can see the same paradigm of a society of corruption, violence and immorality at work. On the one hand, the Big Man holds all the means of power and authority in his hands, with which settlers like Ana should comply. On the one hand, the fear of guerrilla attack or robbery looms large in the settlers' life, as if the country is on the verge of an imminent war. The specter of violence unconsciously makes Willie violent in his relationship with Ana and in his affair with his mistress, Graca. Even in his fantasies he imagines Graca having affairs with other lovers and the jealousy of those lovers gives him a 'sense of the brutality of the sexual life' (*HL*, p.211).

It is in this context that with the breakout of violence and the news of a guerrilla's attack, Willie decides to leave Ana and Africa. Ana stays in Africa, though. Unlike Willie, she has financial and emotional bonds with Africa. Ana is of a hybrid African-European background. The story of Ana's African-Portuguese family who for three generations lived in Africa and took root in the land explains why Ana, despite her European connections, has a sense of belonging to Africa. Ana's Portuguese grandfather came out to Africa during the First World War. Like many other Europeans he made a fortune in the country. His marriage to an African woman and his establishing an estate on which he grew cotton, cashews and sisal consolidated his sense of connection with Africa. The mixed (African-Portuguese) identity of Ana, her fair skin but curly hair is a sign of her non-belonging to a particular 'race', culture or habitat. In fact her sense of belonging is established through living, working and protecting the land she inherited from her grandfather. Her husband, Willie, lacks such a sense of belonging. But their difference is not only their place of belonging, but also their lack of an emotional bond. Willie's affair with other women comes to her as one in the stream of betrayals to which her family has been subjected since their settling in Africa. Just as her father betrayed her mother and just as her father betrayed Ana by taking half of her assets, Willie betrays her by sleeping with other women in Ana's home. Ana's powerlessness in the face of Willie's betrayal and in the face of the imminent handover of the town to guerrillas is expressive of the settler's insecurity in the face of the insurgencies that Africa has undergone after independence. Despite her wealth and her apparent comfort, Ana has to face

both 'insider enemies' like Willie as well as outsider enemies, like the guerrillas whose imminent attack haunts the life of the settlers. The 'primitive government' in Africa fails to secure the assets and life of its countrymen (*MS*, p.36). But, despite the insecurity and lack of support from the government, Ana is determined to stay. She says: 'I'm not running away. Half of what my grandfather gave me was stolen by my father. I will stay here and protect the other half. I don't want people squatting in my house or sleeping in my bed' (*HL*, p.226). The remark shows that her feeling towards her place has economic and financial reasons.

Indeed, Ana's insistence on staying in Africa reveals the complex ways in which individuals establish a sense of place and belonging. Despite the insecurity and instability of the country, Ana feels responsibility for the estate which three generations of her family have cared for and which now belongs to her. This shows that the sense of place and belonging are quite personal and conditional. In the two novels discussed here, the individual's affiliation to a place is conditioned by their background and their status. To Ana the idea of home is not yet forgotten. Home is the place to be constructed and protected. She has the possibility of leaving to live in England or Portugal, which might be more secure habitats. Instead she stays to protect the roots that her grandparents established in Africa, at all costs. To Ana, Africa is not homely, yet, her familial and financial bonds render the place her place of belonging, and she attempts to keep the bonds and the roots intact.

Africa in *Half a Life* is shown to be an unhomely place, due to its instability and insecurity. The unhomeliness of Africa was also the subject of Naipaul's earlier novel, *A Bend in the River* (1979). Unlike in *A Bend in the River* where the problems of the African continent are associated with a dictatorial system, in *Half a Life* social imperatives as much as political issues make Africa a degenerative habitat. The common message of both of these novels seems to be that Africa is unhomely, be it for political reasons or for its violent and disoriented societies. Helen Tiffin, in a reading of *A Bend in the River*, argues that the theme of the novel is 'survival' in the sense that Africans will carry on with their lives despite all (Tiffin, 1986, p.25). She reads Salim's ultimate return to Africa in spite of losing everything to the state, as a signifier of 'survival in a world in which no person any longer has a place, a home' (Tiffin, p.28). Although Tiffin is right that there is no place to provide the security and stability of the traditional idea of 'home', the idea of carrying on in spite of the hardships does not seem to appeal to all Naipaul's characters who find themselves living in Africa. Tiffin's argument has pertinence in Salim and Ana's case, as they both have familial and financial bonds in Africa that make them choose Africa as their dwelling place, even though they are not at-home there. However, Tiffin's argument does not provide any explanation for Willie's refusal to stay. Unlike Ana who believes in staying and surviving due to her familial bonds, Willie, with no such emotional and financial affiliations, decides to leave Africa. Willie is homeless, yet, for him the idea of living for the sake of survival in places like Africa or India is meaningless. So, to add to Tiffin's statement that people will survive in a world where there is

no longer a secure home, *Half a Life* suggests that there are possibilities to choose a habitat, a place where individuals can establish some kind of connection with or a prospect of a comfortable life. For some individuals like Willie putting an 'axe to the roots' (*MS*, p.228), is easier than others like Ana. Having no emotional or financial bond to preserve in any particular place, Willie prefers to settle down in a more secure society where he can have at least a prospect of a hopeful future.

III. England, as a potential site of hybridity:

Right before Willie returns to India for the second time, to join political activists for change, he ponders where he belongs. The conclusion he draws on his place of belonging reflects Naipaul's view of the world as divided in two and it is as follows:

One world was ordered, settled, its wars fought. In this world without war or real danger people had been simplified. They looked at television. And found their community [...] In the other world people were more frantic. They were desperate to enter the simpler, ordered world. (*MS*, p.10)

Based on such an outlook, India and Africa belong to the disorganized world that lacks direction and orientation, but Willie thinks it is to this world that he belongs: 'The two worlds co-existed. It was foolish to pretend otherwise. He was clear in his own mind now to which world he belonged' (*MS*, p.10). Willie at the time chooses the less organized world in which he is brought up and where his familial

roots are as his place of belonging. Given the situation in India and the complexity of change, Willie realizes that establishing a sense of belonging to the world he hopes to change is idealistic rather than realistic. Thus, rather than fighting for home, the way Ana does in Africa, Willie decides to choose a habitat for himself, rather than a place of belonging. Between India, Africa and England, he decides finally that the England of the 1980s provides him with the means for a comfortable life.

The process through which he comes to his decision to settle down in England illuminates Willie's changing attitude towards places. Willie settles in England twice in his life; once in the 1950s when he escaped from the confines of the caste system of India and his father's authority, and second in the 1980s, after giving up his vain quest for political activism in India. On his first arrival in London in the late 1950s, Willie shares a similar sense of place with Naipaul – he has a sense of alienation and loneliness. Both Naipaul and his character find the metropolis dull, unwelcoming and lonely. Naipaul in an essay entitled "London" published in *The Overcrowded Barracoon* (1976) expresses his dislike of what he called, 'the privacy of this big city' (Naipaul, 1976). Even after a show or a play, Naipaul believes, one 'comes out alone into the cold streets, private' (Naipaul, 1976, p.15). However, London was at the same time a space for creativity for many writers from the former colonies (Brannigan, 2003). In his essay on the postcolonial writers' visit to London, he says that London 'represents the centre of the world, and has some degree of symbolic importance and romantic power as it had for colonial writers like Orwell and Kipling' (Brannigan, 2003, p.62). Yet,

he emphasizes that most of these writers express ambivalent feelings towards the city. On the one hand, there is the loneliness of the city and its people, and on the other, the fact that 'London is the storehouse of the treasures of a quarter of the globe, and made itself the home of the world's culture and art' (Brannigan, 2003, p.62). It is these ambivalent qualities that have made London a popular topic in some of Naipaul's novels. London is the city of immigrants. For them, London is a meeting place of people of different cultures and the meeting place of world art, a quality that makes it exotic to explore (Brannigan, 2003).

Similar to Naipaul, Willie finds the sense of being lonely and an outsider (an immigrant) disturbing. When Naipaul was asked many years after his arrival, about his sense of place in England, he replied, 'I am a refugee in the sense that I am always peripheral' (Hamilton, 1997, p.16). Willie also shares Naipaul's sense of un-belonging. He walks around London longing for a companion. He initially saw the privacy of the big city and his anonymity as an opportunity to escape from the hatred of his father's un-heroic manner and the identity he gave him. In London, he begins to fictionalize his background and fabricate a new identity for himself:

No one he met ... knew the rules of Willie's own place, and Willie began to understand that he was free to present himself as he wished. He could, as it were, write his own revolution. ... He could within reason re-make himself and his past and his ancestor. ... He kept his father as a Brahmin. He made his father's father a 'courtier'. So, playing with words, he began to re-make himself. It excited him, and began to give him a feeling of power. (*HL*, pp.60-1)

But this happiness over anonymity does not last long and it is replaced by a nostalgic longing for belonging to a community or a family. The chance of having a family is not given to him in London which is individually-oriented rather than family-oriented. Families and relationships are shown as unstable. The relationships between men and women are predominantly physical and sexual rather than emotional. Willie's affair with his friend's girlfriend is an example of a loveless relationship in which betrayal seems a common practice. On the other hand, immigrants in London appear to be outsiders with no prospect of integration or of a hopeful future: 'few of the immigrants had proper jobs, or secure houses to go back to. Some of them were truly on the brink and that gave an edge to the gaiety' (*HL*, p.72). Living in a lonely city, he begins to develop an idealist vision of the world that existed but at that time was out of his reach: 'one day something would happen, an illumination would come to him, and he would be taken by a set of events to the place he should go' (*HL*, p.122). *Half a Life* ends with Willie still holding on to the old perception that places are given, and that there is an ideal place for every one. It is in *Magic Seeds* that such an outlook is revisited and, in the concluding lines of the novel a questioning of the very concept of an ideal place is expressed.

In *Magic Seeds* Willie arrives in London thirty years later than his first arrival, and begins to see the place anew. His second arrival is particularly interesting, because not only has the place transformed from a gloomy post-war state to a multi-cultural society, but also Willie has changed from an inexperienced man into a mature middle-aged man with knowledge of different

places and societies. Driven by experience rather than emotion, he returns to London, viewing it as a habitat with its own exclusive dynamic relations and social forces.

England of the 1980s appears to Willie a better habitat because the tensions and contradictions of the post-war situation seem to have resolved in such a way that a hybrid and coordinated society is created. The change in England is not in terms of the appearance or architecture, because as Willie moves around London he views 'the same little college with mock-Gothic arches, the fearful Notting Hill squares' just as thirty years ago (*MS*, p.195). Similar bohemian parties are held but despite these gatherings the expatriates feel lonely. Individualism in the metropolis still persists. Yet, Willie notices that the human landscape of London has changed with migration. In the streets of central London he found 'black people everywhere, and Japanese; and people who looked like Arabs' (*MS*, p.196). Willie realizes that poverty-stricken immigrants have developed into diasporas who have contributed to make London a vibrant, multi-cultural metropolis. Cultural exchange and the breakup of boundaries are new forces that postmodern and postcolonial society has generated. As Willie observes, the challenge of such socio-cultural forces has been immense: '[t]here has been a great churning in the world. The world is now being shaken by forces much bigger than I could imagine' (*MS*, p.196). In the new world of the metropolis, the old sense of belonging to the places of one's origin is lost. It seems that these diasporic subjects have accepted a sense that 'home' is elusive: there are just habitats.

It is not only England that has changed but also Willie's 'way of seeing' (MS, p.230) England. He recognizes that the view of place based on homeliness or unhomeliness cannot be maintained. He can belong to England by adapting himself with the social and cultural imperatives of the place and the capitalist era. Willie takes courses in architecture, and pursues a career in accordance with the needs of the capitalist market. On the other hand, in the vibrant cosmopolitan and multicultural space that is created in the metropolis, he no longer feels an outsider. This process of coordination between individuals, cultures and places in England can be recognized as a process of hybridization. In other words, it is the move towards hybridity that renders England in Willie's eyes a more comfortable habitat for immigrants from the former colonies.

The question raised here is whether hybridity (the most discussed concept in postcolonial studies) has worked well in practice in Britain, and if England has the right disposition of habitus for immigrants, just as Willie assumes. Before discussing Naipaul's interrogation of the idea of hybridity in the context of post-imperial Britain, which is best presented in the wedding scene towards the end of the novel, I want to examine the evaluation of social analysts of hybridity in Britain. In *The Location of Culture*, hybridity is presented as a new cultural form which can enact strategic reversal of the process of domination. The space created in the society or cultural sphere would be a synthesis of colonial and anti-colonial spaces (Bhabha, 1992). The manner in which such a third space has been created in Britain is studied by Paul Gilroy in terms of formation of black culture, as well as V. S. Kalra, Raminder Kaur and John Hutnyk in terms of

integration of immigrants and diasporas. To Paul Gilroy the possibility of the formation of a hybrid culture is contingent on transgression of fixed categories and absolutist notions of national and racial identity (Gilroy, 1991). In his influential article, 'It Ain't Where You're From, It's Where You're at', Gilroy suggests that identity is a combination of both the 'routes' that take one to the place you are at, and one's 'roots' in a particular place (Gilroy, 1991). By emphasizing the importance of the place you are *at*, rather than *from*, Gilroy challenges the national, racial and ethnic borders that create divisions between routes and roots when identifying people.²²

In a more recent study, Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk (2005) have examined the extent to which hybridity has been implemented in Britain. Their definition of hybridity as 'an articulation of rights and assertion of autonomy against the forces of essential identities', is in line with that of Gilroy, in the sense that they also emphasize a change of categorization of identities (Kalra et al., 2005, p.70). They strongly believe in the possibility of the formation of a hybrid cultural and multi-cultural society as, according to them, typologies of immigrants can form social groups which act within the social and legal boundaries of the states. That is to say, while immigrants hold onto their ethnic affiliations they also conform to the social rules of the state. The social and cultural configuration that results from this format displaces the equation of national belonging and national identity and

²² In *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, drawing on the notion of "double-consciousness" coined by W. B. Du Bois, Gilroy argues that for a black British person developing a way to identify him/her as both black and British is necessary. Gilroy's thesis has pertinence in the case of immigrants, just as for the black English people. Immigrants (like Willie), in Gilroy's view, should develop a double-consciousness to identify with both their culture of origin and the culture of the country they adopt as their habitat. See GILROY, P. (1993) *The black Atlantic : modernity and double consciousness*, London, Verso.

a new hybrid space is created. Yet, despite many advocates for such a cultural configuration, as Kalra et al observe, the efficacy of hybridity is challengeable in the metropolis. One of the challenges posed to hybridity is that in the metropolis one group is seen as the host and the other as the visitor which makes the claim to home and ownership the right of the host rather than the visitor. In fact, the host in the cultural exchange is not hybrid, but reinforces 'white supremacy and national chauvinism' (Kalra et al, 2005, p.88). The example they give is the racial landscape of urban Britain which appears to manifest a 'geography that disguises deep-seated entrenched inequalities' (Kalra et al, 2005, p.89). The second challenge to this notion of hybridity is its incapacity for resisting the hegemony of the dominant cultures. According to Kalra et al, chicken Tikka Masala being the favorite food in Britain or the Indi tattoo running up David Beckham's arm are not manifestations of hybridity. Such celebrated forms of integration, 'that enables an opening for the capitalist market to difference, migration and the exotic does little to challenge "practices of hegemony"' (Kalra et al, 2005, p.95). In other words, the point that Kalra et al note is that inviting people to engage in cultural exchange is usually carried out within the limits and boundaries of the benefit of the systems of power, rather than in line with true integration. They are right in expressing their concern about how hybridity in practice has not truly achieved the objectives defined for it. Having said that, such challenges should not discourage the attempts for formation of a relatively more integrated social space, in which cultural divisions are displaced.

The outlook that *Magic Seeds* presents of hybridity in Britain is also ambivalent but approving. Establishing a bond between colonial and metropolitan identities and cultures is presented in terms of the marriage between an English girl and son of Marcus, a West African diplomat, whose dream is 'to have a white grandchild' (*MS*, p.240). The way the groom's father is characterized has prompted one book reviewer to argue that 'Naipaul is suggesting that our racial and ethnic fate is sealed; we can never escape who we are ...' (Atlas, 2004). Another reviewer reads the novel as an expression of Naipaul's typical cynicism, saying that the novel 'attempts to explain multi-racial Britain seem to be located within a depressingly archaic framework of ideas about race' (Phillips, 2004). To James Atlas and Mike Phillips the postcolonial clash in the novel ends with a disappointing conclusion.

Here, in contrast to those responses to the novel, I read the wedding scene as confirming that Britain is now recognizing cultural exchange. The novel neither reduces the idea of hybridity in Britain to a festival of difference, nor does it ignore the dominance of the late capitalist culture that overshadows the efficacy of the discourse of a hybridity. Indeed the novel negotiates the way hybridity has worked in England. Homi Bhabha argues that colonial and postcolonial cultures and social structures are created in an 'in-between' space, a space of enunciation where absolutism and hierarchy between the cultures is dissolved and new forms are created. (Bhabha, 1992). But in *Magic Seeds* hybridity is not shown as a celebratory dominant cultural force that levels the hierarchies. Rather, in *Magic Seeds*, firstly, hybridity is shown in terms of creation of new art

forms (such as new music), and new ways in which people of different backgrounds co-habit in equal terms. Secondly, while there is nostalgia over the loss of home, hybridity is shown as an *inevitable* cultural form in the postcolonial era, when the idea of home and belonging is no longer tenable. The image of a decaying grand country house in which the wedding is taking place brings to attention the timing of the emergence of hybrid cultural forms. Just as in *The Enigma of Arrival* the decaying grand country house represents the end of imperial grandeur and the beginning of the postcolonial era, in *Magic Seeds*, the wedding taking place in a roofless country house symbolically suggests that it is only at this point in history (after the break up of empire) that the marriage between the colonial and metropolitan cultures is possible. The aristocratic family of the bride, just like the house, is past its prime:

The founder of the girl's family was actually a great man, early in the nineteenth century. He was a supporter of the practical scientist Faraday, who was a kind of early Edison. ...Something happened to the family after this moment of glory. They produced no other great figure. Complacency perhaps, or genetic failure. In the great imperial period which followed, while so many other families came up, they went down, generation and after generation. Some years ago they decided to let their house rot. (*MS*, p.286)

In a sarcastic tone, the narrator downplays the background of the English family and what remains from their past glory. The decline of the English family's grand past parallels the decline of the state of their 'roofless house' (*MS*, p.286). Such imagery quite suggestively emphasizes that the marriage between an English girl and the son of a West African diplomat marks a moment in the history of the

relationship between the former colonies and the metropolis which was only possible in the aftermath of the break up of empire.

The wedding is presented as being exotic as the house in which it takes place. The exoticism is displayed in the music of the ceremony and a black and white couple among the guests. The black and white couple who catch the attention of Willie and other guests show the spirit of the turn of the millennium. The black man with his braided oily hair, his bare chest and his sandals looks to the narrator, 'a fantastic production' (*MS*, p.290). Although the manner and outfit of the white girl and the highly fashionable black man seem to defy the sacredness of the occasion, together they form the new image of 'late-capitalism'.²³ The presence of the couple at the wedding, a child passing wind in the middle of the ceremony all appear to, 'mim[e] out the symbolism of the occasion' (*MS*, p.289). Moreover, the bride and the groom having had two children before they get married is another signifier of change in the traditional and cultural values.

But the climax of the wedding, with which the idea of hybridity is reinforced, is the music, with which the novel ends. After parts of Othello and some of Shakespeare's sonnets are recited to the guests, a Dutch-Antillean band plays African-Caribbean music. The music gives an air of strangeness to the ceremony:

²³ The term 'late capitalism' is borrowed from the famous book by Fredric Jameson's, *Postmodernism and the cultural logic of Late Capitalism* (1991)

The Aruba-Curacao band, when they began to play was fierce. The black drummer sat at the drum as high as a dining table. At first easing himself into his chair, and settling his wrist on the edge of the high drum, he looked only like a man about to eat or to write a letter. ...

Other metallic instruments of the Dutch Antillean band then obliterated such patterns as the drum made, and over it all someone began to sing in Dutch Antillean patios that no one there could have understood. (*MS*, pp.292-3)

The combination of English literature and the Caribbean music in the wedding signifies the marriage of two cultures. What is interesting about the music is not the performance, but that the guests attempt to pick out the beat and despite the fact that the music sounds unfamiliar, they attempt to be in tune with the music: 'The din was fearful, but some of the fair women in new frocks were swinging their slender shanks, as if they were picking out a beat, and it was already too much to resist ...' (*MS*, p.293). Appreciation of ethnic and black music as a fluid cultural practice by the English guests suggests that they are trying to become in tune with cultural exchange in their country. Paul Gilroy regards Black music as a creative expression and commitment to a better life (cited in Kalra et al, 2005). To Gilroy, their music is 'produced in Britain by the children of the Caribbean and African settlers from the raw material supplied by Black Chicago but filtered through Kingstonian sensibility' (cited in Kalra et al, 2005, p.38). The aim of such products, as Gilroy argues, is 'to bring Africa, Europe and the Caribbean seamlessly together' (Cited in Kalra et al, 2005, p.38).

The music in the final scene of the *Magic Seeds* is not presented as a resisting anti-colonial cultural tool, nor is it just to add a 'bit of flavor' to the ceremony.²⁴

The music per se is not a manifestation of hybridity. However, the hybrid Caribbean music invites people of colonial and imperial cultures to be in-tune with hybrid forms and consequently in harmony as a nation. The music is the only part that stays with Willie through to the end of the novel. The music 'invaded his sleep and mingled with other memories' (*MS*, p.293). As the sentiment shows, the music transcends time and place and has an enduring effect not just on Willie but on the reader. The memories that it brings are of history, particularly memories of slavery and the plantation system through to the migration of the descendents of former plantation laborers to the metropolis. It seems that through the endurance of music, the final scene is reminding us of the endurance of the racial groups in different courses of history up until Willie's time, when he can see the possibility of marriage between the races. Such a cultural exchange is not romanticized. Rather, the imperatives of immigration, and the new dynamics of postmodern and postcolonial society render such an exchange *inevitable*. The black fashionable man manifests as much the influence of the materialist culture of the West on the blacks, as the band's performance at an English wedding manifests the impact of colonial culture in the post-imperial West.

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²⁴ Those critical of the contribution of music to cultural exchange according to Kalra et al, argue that ethnic music (like Asian dance music) has 'been reduced to the latest 'bit of flavor' for multicultural taste buds of Western urban cosmopolitans' (Kalra et al, p.39)

Half a Life and *Magic Seeds* sum up Naipaul's approach to how individuals relate to places. These two novels show that individuals' quest for home and a place of belonging is complicated first, by the reality of homelessness, and second, by the socio-cultural complexities peculiar to every place. In other words, the reality of homelessness renders the desire for home, elusive. Thus, Willie, as an individual with a hybrid identity, has to choose his habitat (rather than home) among India (where his familial bonds are), Africa (his wife's dwelling place) and England (where he studies and pursue a career). To Willie, living in multi-cultural materialist England would not be ideal, but it would be better than living in social systems which are unstable, divided and corrupt. Before the publication of the two novels, when asked what it is about the English society that he likes, Naipaul replied: 'I think it's that people have worked out a good way –perhaps the best way –of men getting on with men. I think there is a wonderful sense of human right and human need here' (Wheeler, 1997, p.44). The sentiment can be employed to identify Naipaul's idea of hybridity. Hybridity is shown as unattainable if we consider it meaning that there is integration of cultures on equal grounds in such a way that everyone feels at home. However, hybridity is shown as a new way of belonging for hybrid postcolonial individuals in the postcolonial era when homelessness is a reality.

PART TWO

The Novels of J. M. Coetzee

Chapter Five

Placing and Place in the Novels of J. M. Coetzee

I. Coetzee's place and his transcendence of place:

In the late 1980s, at the time of socio-political upheavals prior to South Africa's liberation when every voice in intellectual domain was regarded as having political resonances, Coetzee expressed his dissatisfaction, not because of critics' tendency to read his novels in the context of South Africa, but on account of the canonisation of his novels and how his writing-self was placed as belonging to South Africa. In an interview with Tony Morphet he stated that 'I sometimes wonder, isn't it simply that vast and wholly ideological superstructure constituted by publishing, reviewing and criticism that is forcing on me the fate of being a "South African novelist"' (Morphet, 1987, p.460).

Coetzee's objection to being uncritically labelled a "South African novelist", raises the critical question of where Coetzee (as a writer) and his oeuvre belong, and to what geography his writings correspond if he is not just a South African novelist. As already discussed, a writer's consciousness is formed in place but writers can also transform place and its features as they write, to adapt it to their own social and collective needs. Coetzee's consciousness is shaped during and by the apartheid regime in South Africa. If Coetzee's subject matters and themes on the one hand and his personal statements on the other hand, suggest that he should not be simply identified as a South African novelist, there is then a need to

study the dynamics of place in his novels and the relation of his background to the treatment of place in his novels.

It is true that Coetzee is a relative latecomer among his generation of writers to anti-apartheid creative writing. He was born in 1940, eight years before the accession of the apartheid regime to power, and he was about thirteen years old when Gordimer's first novel *The Lying Days* (1953) was published. It was in this decade that a significant literary movement of 'black consciousness' was initiated by black writers (Gray, 1979, p.460). Writers such as Nkosi and Mphahlele were extensively publishing articles and stories in *Drum*, the English-language magazine which became a 'harbour' for intellectual resistance to apartheid and politico-cultural awareness for mostly black writers (Gray, 1979, p.122). The 'Drum generation' in the 1950s shared the vibrancy of black urban culture (Lester, 1998, pp.134-135). Also a number of so-called "coloured" writers like Peter Abrahams and Alex La Guma founded District Six literature based on the experience of living in the coloured residential area of District Six in Cape Town which was declared as a white-only area and accordingly demolished by the state (Van Wyk Smith, 1990, p.99).²⁵ In the 1960s, with the extension of the scope of oppression as well as cultural and social resistance to apartheid, white liberal South African writers like Andre Brink and Breyten Breytenbach joined the literary resistance front and became main literary figures of the decade (Van Wyk Smith, 1990). In 1964, the same year that Breytenbach published his first

²⁵ According to Smith, examples of District Six literature, are Peter Abraham's *Mine Boy* and La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* (1962), whose works are 'compassionate and startling revelation to many white eyes of the actuality of township life and resilience of township culture' (p.99-100).

collection of stories, *Catastrophes*, and first collection of poems, *The Iron Cow Must Sweat*, Coetzee had been granted MA by University of Cape Town and set to study for a PhD in the USA. It was a decade later (1970s) that Coetzee published his first novel, *Dusklands* (1974), followed by *In the Heart of the Country* (1978). Despite the fact that both of these novels were set in South Africa (*Dusklands* is partly set in South Africa), neither of them directly engaged with the political upheavals of the apartheid era. In his first few novels, Coetzee showed that rather than engaging with literature of protest,²⁶ which was the dominant mode of writing during apartheid, he was moving in line with international postmodernism whose main concerns were textuality, the problematization of representation and the challenge to the discourses of power. Coetzee's engagement with South Africa's history and historical conflicts in novels such as *Dusklands*, *Life and Times of Michael K*, *Age of Iron*, and *Disgrace* on the one hand, and his choice of real and fictional settings unrelated to South Africa in novels such as *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Foe* and *Slow Man* on the other hand, have conferred on him a contested position as a South African anti-apartheid writer, whose novels as Huggan and Watson contend 'seem almost deliberately constructed to escape any single framework of interpretation' (Huggan and Watson, 1996, p.1). The elusiveness of Coetzee's works has indeed caused a bifurcation among the influential critics deciding whether to position him in international postmodernism or South African resistance literature.

²⁶ Njabulo Ndebele in his article 'Rediscovery of the Ordinary' (1984), names the dominant mode of writing in South Africa during apartheid as protest literature. While he shows his disapproval with such a writing method, he calls for writers to engage with ordinary daily lives of individuals in struggle for freedom. The article is in NDEBELE, N. S. (1994) *South African literature and culture : rediscovery of the ordinary*, Manchester, Manchester University Press..

Critics like David Attwell (1993) and Dominic Head (1997) read Coetzee's novels against the background of South African politics and the predicaments of the apartheid era, while Lewis Nkosi (1989) regards Coetzee's stance in relation to South Africa's turmoil as evasive. Other critics such as Derek Attridge and Michael Marias have stressed the ethical dimensions of Coetzee's works, which, in their view, are universal and go well beyond South Africa or any geographical border.²⁷

Derek Attwell places Coetzee's novels in the contexts of political turmoil in South Africa and argues that the main concern of Coetzee's work is to dismantle racial and colonial discourses dominant in South Africa (Attwell, 1993). Attwell emphasises that Coetzee's elusive narrative strategy is influenced and determined by the complexity of politics of agency and authority of a white South African writer in addressing the politics of the community to which they belong not by ideology but by race and colour. For Attwell, Coetzee's concern with themes of marginality, voice and discourse are not out of political or ethical correctness but are the fruits of what he calls 'biographical accident', meaning that such themes of marginality are directly inspired by the apartheid state policies and resistant to its domination: 'Coetzee's "self-of-writing" resides within a web of dangerously consequential connections defined by relations of power in a society in contradictory stages of casting off the colonial yoke' (Attwell, p.25). Dominic Head offers a more or less similar argument without trying to South Africanise

²⁷ For ethical reading of Coetzee's novels see ATTRIDGE, D. (2004) *J.M. Coetzee & the ethics of reading: literature in the event*, Chicago; London, University of Chicago Press. Also MARIAS, M. (2000) "Little Enough, Less than Little: Nothing": ethics, engagement, and change in the fiction of J. M. Coetzee. *Modern Fiction Studies*, 46, 159-181.

Coetzee's work (Head, 1997). For Head, Coetzee's revision and re-presentation of the colonial history in *Dusklands* and *Waiting for the Barbarians* for example, is a stronger move than his sense of commitment to intellectual resistance to South Africa's apartheid regime. Head views Coetzee as 'a postcoloniser' and his recognition a result of the widespread international credibility that is given to decolonisation particularly 'textual decolonisation' that Coetzee performs in *Dusklands* and *Foe* (Head, 1997, pp.20-24).

But there are also critics who read Coetzee's works as manifesting disinterestedness towards South Africa's political affairs in favour of moving in line with literary postmodernism and thus criticize his refusal to deal directly with criticism of apartheid policies. Andre Brink, a fellow South African writer, contends that unlike Gordimer whose essays over three decades involved the necessity of 'commitment' to political crises and the 'relevance' of art to politics and 'the necessity for protest' in the 'interregnum',²⁸ Coetzee remained less entangled with politics of the late apartheid era (Brink, 1998, p.29). Lewis Nkosi interprets Coetzee's refusal to engage with direct critique of apartheid, as an intellectual 'pose', saying, '[t]o my knowledge Coetzee has never participated in or lent his very considerable prestige to the anti-apartheid struggle' (Nkosi, 1989, p.293). These critics view Coetzee's works as being dissociated from the anti-apartheid struggle. The fierce intellectual disagreements about how Coetzee's novels correspond to South Africa's situational complexities renders

²⁸ Gordimer's collection of essays in *The Essential Gesture*, engage with the role of a writer in South African predicament in the apartheid period. The specified words are from some of the titles of some of her essays.

consideration of local context as much necessary as consideration of the influence of world-wide cultural moves (such as decolonisation and postmodernism) for any study of place and its dynamics in Coetzee's novels.

In his comments on fellow South African writers, Coetzee delineates his vision of an intellectual resistance strategy and the way he identifies and locates his writing self. In his essay on Gordimer's collection of essays, *The Essential Gesture* (1988), Coetzee argues that while Gordimer insists on the necessity of the narratives' commitment to political and historical currents, her own narrative is less political than ethical (*DP*, pp. 382-5). Regarding the collection which is specifically about the place of the writer in South Africa, Coetzee argues that 'though some of the pieces reprinted here are polemical –against the current government censorship policy and more generally against apartheid –they provide no evidence that Gordimer has an appetite for polemics' (*DP*, p.387). His impression is that Gordimer is not a political writer and she has written about polemics only because there is no one else who can do this job better than her. Coetzee's final words are straightforward, in a way not frequently seen in his writing: Gordimer 'is an ethical writer, a writer of conscience, who finds herself in an age when any transcendental basis for ethics ... is being denied in the name of politics' (*DP*, p.387-8). He could have said the same statement about himself; and in fact he implicitly clarifies his own notion of ethics, politics and their distinction. Yet, when it comes to the style of narration, Coetzee sees himself closer to Breytenbach than Gordimer, for 'Breytenbach accepts more easily than

Gordimer that stories finally have to tell themselves, that the hand that holds the pen is only the conduit of a signifying process' (*DP*, p.341).

Apart from the politics of agency that Coetzee appreciates in Breytenbach, there is a feature in his narrative technique that Coetzee gives credit to: 'it *stops at nothing*: there is no limit that cannot be exceeded, no obstacle that cannot be leaped, no commandment that cannot be questioned. His writing characteristically *goes beyond* in more senses than one ...' (*DP*, p.379). Here, borrowing Coetzee's phrase, it is feasible to argue that Coetzee's oeuvre *goes beyond* the time and space of its articulation, and such a characteristic as Coetzee says will have the novels survive the test of time (*DP*, p.379). To be more precise, Coetzee's novels is to be seen to correspond with *South Africa and beyond*, in the sense that they are rooted in South Africa's contested geography and history, but they find routes to other contested histories and locations. What he says about Breytenbach has pertinence for his own writing as the concern of his body of works "stops at" no single geographical border. Rita Barnard in *Apartheid and Beyond*, which is a study of sense of place in those of Coetzee's novels that are set in South Africa, argues that Coetzee's sense of place is generated by the 'political geography of apartheid' and she argues that Coetzee's novels 'forces us to ask what political and imaginative failures passions [for South African landscape] might conceal' (Barnard, 2007, pp.18-19). Barnard's thesis, thus, falls short of explaining how novels like *Waiting for the Barbarians* or *Foe* whose narratives are not directly related to South Africa can be seen as a literary response to apartheid.

Against such shortcomings, in this part of the thesis, Coetzee's oeuvre is not read as dealing exclusively with apartheid's political geography; rather it is studied as a critical engagement with the ways places are mapped out during the processes of colonization and marginalization of colonised subjects, which corresponds to South Africa's geographical complexities but goes well beyond its borders. This study argues that Coetzee's vision of place, as manifested in three of his novels published during apartheid, is influenced by South Africa's history of contest over land, its representation and belonging to it, but he also shows that such a contest is to be seen as part of a historical contest against colonisation, marginalization and racism in colonial domains and even in cultural domains. Through such an approach it is possible to explain how Coetzee engages in the critique of spatial policies in South Africa in *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983), as much as his engagement with the critique of colonisation of alien lands in *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) and his critique of the classics that were complicit in the colonisation of lands and people in *Foe* (1986).

Coetzee in the 1980s in *White Writing* and the three selected novels engaged closely with the issue of contest over land. In *White Writing*, a study of South African literature, he states that one of his main concerns is 'with the land itself, South Africa as landscape and landed property' (*WW*, p.10). The concern with land and its representation are also the main motifs of *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Life and Times of Michael K* and *Foe*. These novels, as this study will argue, attempt to re-imagine the land in the manner that they manifest what James Graham calls 'the idea of land' (Graham, 2009, p.2) or what Liz

Gunner terms 'the land as the deposit of myth and memories' (Gunner, 1996, p.115). However, contest over land in these novels is not seen as exclusively related to South Africa; rather it is discussed in three different contexts (including South Africa) in a way that Coetzee demythologizes imperially constructed ideas of land in South Africa and beyond. In the following, the symbolic significance of land in South African culture is studied, in order to explain why in Coetzee's selected novels, land and landscape imagery are dominant, rather than any other spatial configuration.

II. From dispossession to reclamation of the land

For a country with a history of struggle over land and material resources, the image of the land signifies a contested cultural symbol. In the opening to *White Writing* Coetzee contends that the only myth that has ever exerted an animated cultural force in South Africa is the myth of 'a *lui-lekker* land (land of ease and plenty), [which is] the story of the wanderings of the Israelites in search of a Promised land, a story of tribal salvation appropriated as their own by the wandering Afrikaner tribes' (*WW*, p.2). From the establishment of a European settlement by Jan Van Riebeeck for the Dutch East India Company in 1652 through to the apartheid, the claim over what Coetzee calls the 'land of ease and plenty' has shaped the core of South Africa's history and has been a long-held matter of contention between racially and ethnically defined inhabitants of the land (*WW*, p.37). Contest over land can be roughly divided into two main phases, before and after 1910, the year the South African nation was formed and

the British colonial rule officially ended. Before the formation of the South African nation, the establishment of the settlements and expansion of the frontiers involved white settlers' occupation of the land and resistance of the indigenous inhabitants, through which indigenous African tribes have either been annihilated or pushed inward to the continent. On the other hand, there was also a contest between what R. W. Johnson sees as 'competing forms of white rule' over territorial expansion and control over resources, the culmination of which was the Anglo-Boer war at the end of the nineteenth century (Johnson, 2004, p.86). However, after the Anglo-Boer war and precisely after 1910, the idea of 'white' South African nation was born out of the shared interest of the British and Afrikaners and changed the dynamics of contest over land. The objective of the white settlers who were in the ruling position was no longer the expansion of the frontiers, but maintenance of white domination over agricultural lands and urban spaces. The ideological basis for white domination was provided by social Darwinism to legitimize their control over the spatial structure of the country and land distribution (Dubow, 1987).²⁹ The main policy of white rule was to guarantee their ownership of the majority of land particularly urban spaces at the expense of African dispossession. Such an objective was pursued through legal actions including passing two Land Acts in 1913 and 1936 through which African land

²⁹ Saul Dubow in his study of the emergence of racist discourse in South Africa, argues that social Darwinism of the Victorian era had a great impact on segregationist policies. Social Darwinism had the 'task of classifying the world's races according to a natural hierarchy' and application of the evolutionist idea of 'survival of the fittest' to human beings (p.72). Such discourses as he says performed 'as a mechanism to deal with problems of poverty and the physical and moral "degeneration" of the urban proletariat' in South Africa (p.73). The poor condition of white proletariat held up warning against the unrestrained rise of African proletariat. In effect Social Darwinism in the form of political debates such as 'speculation about the relative intelligence of blacks and whites' and the fear of 'racial degeneration' created discourses to legitimize segregationist legislations (p.75).

occupation was to be limited to designated reserves that comprised 13 percent of the South African territory (Lester, 1998, pp.59,83). The policy of marginalization of the non-white inhabitants accelerated in a more structured way by the succession of the Nationalist Party to power by the end of the Second World War, and confirmed a geographical re-modelling of South African human landscape through segregation of public spaces and racial zoning of urban spaces (Johnson, 2004; Lester, 1998). Thus, it is crucial to contend that the resistance of black South Africans to apartheid was a movement that along with reclamation of civil rights pursued reclamation of entitlement to the whole South African land.

Coetzee's novels during apartheid, from *Dusklands* to *Foe*, in one way or another, manifest the struggle over land and domicile which is closely related to the historical contest over land in South Africa. However, such a struggle in Coetzee's novels goes *beyond* South Africans' anti-apartheid resistance, and criticizes the history of colonial occupation, mythologization of land and hegemonic practices against some groups of inhabitants in a wider context than South Africa. Coetzee's works (even those not set in the South African landscape like *Foe*), are in essence informed by South Africa's history and literary tradition in so far as they reflect what John van Wyk Smith, in the following lines, terms 'an endless drama of domicile and challenge':

Just as the history of South Africa essentially became the history of the struggle for the land and its resources, so its serious literature would turn out to be a record of the mythology developed by its people to

justify or resist that process. Thus every subject treated, from frontier to feminism, from King Solomon's Mines to District Six, from mining to miscegenation, has turned out to be another act, another aspect, of an endless drama of domicile and challenge. (Van Wyk Smith, 1990, p.6)

The struggle for domicile, as Smith contends, has been the main motif in the writings of both the white and black writers. Coetzee views pastoral narratives as a literary expression of white settlers who are in Coetzee's words, 'no longer European, not yet African' (*WW*, p.11), implying the sense of *cultural dislocation* of white inhabitants of the country. Yet, according to Coetzee white South African literature has been so much engaged with finding a way to relate to the alien landscape of Southern Africa that it ignored the fact that feeling at home in South Africa requires white writers to address their relationship with black labourers and the black population in general (*WW*, p.11). South African pastoral narratives failed to recognise 'black labour', as 'the black man becomes a shadowy presence flitting across the stage now and then' (*WW*, p.5).

Apartheid posed a challenge to white liberal intellectuals with regard to unequal spatial and political structures. One of the challenges they are still faced with in the post-apartheid era is how to re-imagine space in a way that the right of the racially marginalized groups to South African land is recognized. For example Nadine Gordimer, in *The Conservationist* (1974) deals with the necessity of recognition of black labour and the subjugation of the African population under the apartheid regime (Gordimer, 1974). Gordimer pictures a

farm, in the form of a pastoral narrative,³⁰ yet, instead of having the farm standing for the simplicity and happiness of rural life, she imagines the farm founded on the blood and bones of dead black men. By having the pieces of the dead bodies re-surfacing before the horrified eyes of the wealthy Afrikaner owner of the farm, Gordimer insists that turning a blind eye to the ongoing brutality against the black people would no longer be possible. The farm, washed with blood and bones in Gordimer's novel, is comparable to the degenerating and decaying farm in Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country* that attempts to mark the end of patriarchal white rule over farms and the inevitable dependency of the new generations of white settlers to the working black population for survival on the land.

In the three novels published before the end of the apartheid regime, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Life and Times of Michael K* and *Foe*, Coetzee attempts to engage with the historical challenge of the dispossessed and the marginalized over land and domicile in the process of colonisation. The following chapters will argue that the novels are attempts to demystify the imperially constructed discourses about colonised lands and their inhabitants and the novels acknowledge the entitlement of the marginalized to the land, its representation and its meaning. Coetzee's approach to place and particularly to land belongs to a particular literary phase that Steven Gray calls the 'multicultural

³⁰ The popular definition of pastoral is that it is a narrative that expresses hostility of urban life and expresses a longing for tranquility of idyllic life and landscape. See ALPERS, P. J. (1996) *What is pastoral?*, Chicago ; London, University of Chicago Press..

phase' (Gray, 1986). According to Gray, in this phase in settler societies, particularly South Africa, some writers acknowledge the idea that,

a sense of place is no longer a geographical condition, or a classificatory principle, but it is located at the heart of a writer's society, his or her class, and culture, and his or her very being, important only in so far as it relates to the region before the whole' (Gray, 1986, p.11).

Coetzee's oeuvre should be identified as belonging in the multicultural phase, because he attempts to see how place across geographical borders and socio-cultural boundaries is lived and experienced. The sense of place in his novels is closely related to his concern for how margins are lived. He sets his three successive novels in three different colonial landscapes, South Africa (in *MK*), an unidentifiable empire in the desert (in *WB*) and the fictional island of Robinson Crusoe (in *F*), and with doing so he manifests a multicultural concern for place, in the sense that his concern for marginality goes beyond any specific geographical, cultural or racial domain.

In the novels selected for this study, Coetzee sets the narrative in the spaces of the margins and follows in the footsteps of the displaced to show his/her resistance to dispossession and displacement. In doing so, Coetzee's novels attempt to devise a postcolonial 'habitation' – to have the colonised subject inhabit the position of power (rather than powerless) by challenging, negotiating and re-aligning boundaries. **Chapter six** discusses how *Waiting for the Barbarians* envisions a microcosm of an imperially controlled land as a barren and desert landscape (as opposed to the myth of ease and plenty of colonised

lands). The chapter argues that the novel demythologizes the threat of the barbarians, by showing them as the dispossessed indigenous inhabitants of the land, who are victims of the expansion of the colonial territory. In **chapter seven**, which focuses on *Life and Times of Michael K*, the life story of a homeless coloured gardener is examined as an engagement with the contested issue of entitlement of coloured and black Africans to South African land without enforced restrictions. Michael K declares his belonging to the South African land through gardening, rather than through Western laws of ownership, and establishes the idea that it is labour rather than tropes of ownership that entitles one to the land. **Chapter eight** reads Coetzee's recreation of the story of *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* from a woman's perspective in *Foe*. In this novel, the marginality of land (a colonised island) intersects with the marginality of the narrator (Susan Barton) and racial marginality of Crusoe's black companion (Friday), which signifies how literary classics contributed to the cultural dislocation of colonised subjects and colonised geographies. The novel, along with Coetzee's Nobel Prize address, which is a recreation of the same story, are discussed here as an attempt to re-imagine a fictional island from the viewpoint of the margins. In doing so, Coetzee manifests his intellectual commitment to reclaim a rightful place in literary tradition for those who were marginalized geographically, racially or for reasons of gender.

Chapter Six

Construction of a Colonial Desert Landscape in *Waiting for the Barbarians*

In an interview with Joanna Scott, J.M.Coetzee refutes her reading of *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) as a 'description of an unfamiliar landscape', by saying that, 'the challenge was not to describe or represent an unfamiliar landscape. It was to construct a landscape, a landscape that I've never seen and that probably doesn't exist. Construct or perhaps even fake it' (Scott, 1997, p.82). The landscape that Coetzee has pictured or 'constructed' is the landscape of 'colonial space'.³¹ In this, his third novel, Coetzee moves away from the South African landscape and sets the novel in an unidentified territory called 'Empire' at a vague point in history. The Empire is controlled by allocated guards and officers of 'the imperial administration' and embodies a well-structured imperial practice of administration and enforcement.

The story is narrated by a conscientious military officer in the imperial administration who recounts his one-year experience of military service during which he encounters the so-called enemies of the Empire, named 'the barbarians'. The magistrate rescues a barbarian girl by returning her to her tribe, but he is punished as a result. The unspecified time and geography and the stereotypical characters of the novel – Colonel Joll (a fierce imperial commander), the barbarian (a typical enemy) and the magistrate (a humanist

³¹ The characteristics of what John Noyes (1992) calls "colonial space" are explained in the Introduction.

officer) – create a mode that suggests *Waiting for the Barbarians* is an allegorical novel. Among the early critical responses to this mode of writing, was Nadine Gordimer's comment in the review of *Life and Times of Michael K*. Whilst Gordimer praises allegory as a 'discovered dimension' in this review, she censures the lack of territorial and historical determinacy in the novel, at the time when the critical condition of South Africa needs such recognition on the side of writers. Gordimer relates the allegorical mode to the devastating situation of South Africa, as she proposes that:

It seems he did so [chose allegory] out of a kind of opposing desire to hold himself clear of events and their daily grubby, tragic consequences in which, like everyone else living in South Africa, he is up to the neck, and about which he had an inner compulsion to write. So here was allegory as a stately fastidiousness; or a state of shock (Gordimer, 1984).

Teresa Dovey, on the other hand, has a quite different vision of the function of allegory in Coetzee's novels (Dovey, 1988). Drawing on a redefinition of allegory in contemporary critical theory, she argues that allegory has a postmodernist deconstructive impulse and also it provides a space for postcolonial writers to 'destabilise history's fixity' and open it to 'imaginative revision' (Dovey, 1988, p.139). Thus, as Coetzee is both a postcolonial and postmodernist writer, she concludes that the allegorical form works for him in both ways. Dovey's vision of the function of allegory is inspired by Paul de Man's revalidation of allegory for its historicity. Dovey's own reading of Coetzee's novel

also focuses on the novel's problematization of history: 'in Coetzee's novels allegory allows, not for an ideal time, but for a space between past and future, [which] takes into account both history as discourse and history as event' (Dovey, 1988, p.140). Dovey explains that allegorical narrative 'implies a mode of interpretation which recognises neither historical materiality nor the motivation of its own intervention' (Dovey, 1988, p.144). At the centre of this approach to history lies the disavowal of a claim to project 'pure meaning', which pre-empts a deconstructive reading of allegory itself (Dovey, 1988, p.148).

The novel's rejection of historical specificity and simultaneous mapping, boundary forming and landscaping presents a solid statement of its concern with the spatial aspects of colonisation. Unlike the above readings of the novel which analysed the novel as an allegory and emphasised the novel's concern with historicity, the following chapter is focused on the spatiality rather than temporality of colonisation. The chapter analyses *Waiting for the Barbarians* as an attempt to demystify 'the dominant myth of southern paradise' through imagining the territory of empire as a desert and barren landscape (Van Wyk Smith, 1990, p.2). Disruption in the natural cycle of the seasons and the subsequent desertification mirrors how the creation of colonial space changed the spatial attributes of the territory. The novel, as this chapter argues, attempts to show that the colonial space which was created through enforcement, control of space and ideological processes has imposed its history on the colonised territories and in effect has symbolically rendered the territory what T.S. Eliot

once called 'the waste land'.³² The possibility of regeneration of the land is seen in the peace between the settlers and the indigenous inhabitants, which should accompany dismantling the ideological and physical boundaries. The novel's engagement with place and spatiality poses a challenge to the imperially constructed discourses about 'the barbarians' which primarily aimed at justifying the geographical violence and denying the entitlement of the natives of the territories to their motherland. Against such imperial practices, as discussed below, the novel declares the entitlement of the indigenous inhabitants to the territory which originally *belonged* to them.

I. Mapping out the political geography through 'othering'

The English explorer, John Davis, reportedly said of the Cape and its inhabitants that, 'we found such, for plenty and pleasure, as seemed to deserve far better sort of inhabitants than it had' (Van Wyk Smith, 1990, p.2). His sentiment about the indigenous inhabitants captures the ideology that supported and justified the colonisation of alien lands. Without any consideration of the rights of the natives, Davis perpetuates the discourse that the Europeans' civilization (rather than their force and military power) has made them more worthy of 'plenty and pleasure' of lands, and in effect he justifies the displacement and dispossession of the indigenous inhabitants. Davis's statement can be seen as historical proof of the plausibility of John Noyes's

³² The phrase refers to the title of T. S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* published in 1922.

argument that a domain is created in the colonies where ‘the production of subjectivity coincides with production of social forms’ (Noyes, 1992, p.19).

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, a model of colonial space is created that shares many features with Noyes’s model. In the model that Noyes presents, colonial space is a framework of administration, enforcement and representation that is used in the process of colonisation. *Waiting for the Barbarians* also shows that the creation of colonial space, the control of space was accompanied by subjection of the indigenous people to the discourse of barbarity and threat, which Gayatri Spivak has named as ‘othering’.³³ The point which should be made here is that the discourse of the threat of the barbarians needs to be seen as a practice that contributes to the setting up of colonial space that involves boundary making, incarceration and torture, all of which justify and prolong geographical violence.

Waiting for the Barbarians alludes to the title of C. P. Cavafy’s poem (1898), and both these texts explore a similar theme. The poem questions the imperially constructed discourse of the threat of barbarians. Such a discourse, as the poem shows, is developed to keep the administration in power and control. The following lines show how, after centuries of dominance, the imperial power uses the discourse of the threat of the barbarians in an attempt to postpone decolonisation; yet, the colour of the strategy has faded away:

³³ Definition of othering is provided by Ashcroft et al in their encyclopaedic book, but it is mainly drawn from Spivak’s coinage of the term. See ASHCROFT, B., GRIFFITHS, G. & TIFFIN, H. (2000) *Post-colonial studies : the key concepts*, London ; New York, Routledge. pp.171-172

Why this sudden restlessness, this confusion?

(How serious people's faces have become.)

Why are the streets and squares emptying so rapidly,

Everyone going home so lost in thought?

Because night has fallen and the barbarians have not come.

And some who have just returned from the border say

There are no barbarians any longer (Lapham, 1997, p.1).

Cavafy's poem suggests the claim of protection of the colonized territory against the threat of the unknown 'other' (the so-called barbarians) to be an ideologically constructed discourse that has justified occupation of the territories. The poem reveals the fact that the barbarians have been ideologically constructed as the enemy. Just as the threat of the barbarians is revealed to be baseless, the imperial power appears to lose its excuse to prolong its control over the territories:

And now, what's going to happen to us without the barbarians?

They were, those people, a kind of solution (Lapham, 1997, p.1).

The barbarians have been a 'solution' to the imperial power as the power gained its legitimacy from 'othering'. It refers to the process through which the empire confirms its own authority by excluding a group of colonised subjects (Ashcroft et

al., 2000, pp.171-2). Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin, drawing on Spivak, state that othering happens in three ways: representing non-Europe as other; debasing the natives of the lands; and finally separating and excluding of the natives of the land. Thus, it is right to argue that the labeling of the other as barbarians, in the sense that they are savage and the enemy is a place-based identity rather than an attribute or a characteristic of a group. In Cavafy's poem, such labeling of the state's *others* as "barbarians" is under scrutiny. The barbarians seem to be that unknown other who is excluded and pushed beyond the borders of every territory.

Inspired by Cavafy, the novel recreates the myth of the barbarians in order to show the historicity and continuity of the fact that 'once in every generation, without fail, there is an episode of hysteria about the barbarians' (p.9). But who are the Empire's 'others'; the barbarians? The novel pictures them from two perspectives, first from the viewpoint of Colonel Joll, the agent of the Empire, who labels them as a brutal and savage group, and secondly from the magistrate's viewpoint, whose story shows that the so-called barbarians are, in fact, the indigenous inhabitants who are banished from their homeland. The manner in which Colonel Joll attempts to label and introduce the barbarians as the enemies of the Empire manifests the process of othering through which the subjectivity of the barbarians takes shape. The discourse of the brutality of the barbarians and the rumours of their imminent attack invokes frenzy among the settlers who imagine barbarians 'setting fire to the curtains [and] raping [their] daughters' (p.9). In order to show off the authority of the state, Colonel Joll has

some of the barbarians arrested and debases them by making them kneel naked side by side and labelling them as enemies: '[t]he Colonel steps forward. Stooping over each prisoner in turn he rubs a handful of dust into his naked back and writes ENEMY ... ENEMY ... ENEMY ... ENEMY. He steps back and folds his hands' (p.115). Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin analyse Colonel Joll's policy as 'the business of *creating* an enemy', through which the empire 'confirms its own reality' (Ashcroft et al, 2000, p.173). The process of creating the discourse of harmless and powerless barbarians as enemy, as Ashcroft argues, is the imperialist's strategic move 'in the pursuit of that power within which its own subjectivity is established'; the imperial power 'locates its "others" by this process' (Ashcroft, 2000, p.173, original emphasis). Colonel Joll's practice of "othering" is a combination of vilifying barbarians to legitimize occupation of their land. David Attwell views this practice as the Empire's self-identification (Attwell, 1993). Attwell argues that 'Coetzee interrupts and suspends the teleology of the colonial state; by showing that the Empire's images of the barbarians are wholly contingent on its own need for self-realization, he breaks open the enclosed world of signs on which Empire depends' (Attwell, 1993, p.71). Here it is the universalizing function of imperial discourse as a system by which the imperial power identifies itself and its other that is revealed.

The significance of Attwell's argument comes to light when we compare the function of discourse in *Dusklands* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Just as Colonel Joll subjects the natives to the discourse of barbarity, Jacobus Coetzee uses the discourse of 'taming the wild' (referring to South Africa's landscape and

inhabitants) in his exploration report (*D*, p.78).³⁴ Colonel Joll enacts othering through administrative strategies, while the Dutch explorer, Jacobus Coetzee, contributes to othering through representational practices that identify the natives of South Africa as ‘wild people’ or ‘savages’ (*D*, pp.78, 80). Jacobus Coetzee’s narrative begins with him explaining how Europeans’ Christianity ensures that the settlers are superior to the indigenous inhabitants like Bushmen or Hottentots, whom he views as ‘a wild animal with an animal’s soul’ (*D*, p.58). Such a mode of narration reveals how the racial discourse was created at the time of occupation of the colonies and how the idea of white supremacy was introduced through the representation of the natives of the land as an uncivilized and primitive ‘other’. The following Narcissistic sentiments show the dependence of “white” identity on black identity for recognition: ‘I hugged my white shoulders. ... I longed for a mirror. Perhaps I would find a pool, ... [and] see myself as others had seen me’ (*D*, p.97). It is against the *otherness* of the natives that the very *self* of Jacobus Coetzee is defined. More specifically, it is against the black colour of their skin that Jacobus comes to admire his own whiteness. The racial and ideological boundaries that are set between him and the indigenous inhabitants are part of the process of creating a colonial space.

The discourses that Colonel Joll and Jacobus Coetzee attempt to establish, justify and pave the way for administrative enforcement and colonial expansion. Such practices have been followed according to Noyes in some Southern colonies including South Africa (Noyes, 1992). Jacobus Coetzee

³⁴ Here, only ‘The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee’ is discussed.

performs all the three main elements of colonial space that Noyes identifies in the model of colonial space: boundary setting, looking and writing (Noyes, 1992). Through 'looking' and 'writing', he structures the space and gives meaning to the landscape. With his gaze the explorer sets up boundaries on the place of the local people which he calls 'wilderness', and thus redefines its structure: 'I become a spherical reflecting eye moving through the wilderness and ingesting it' (*D*, p.79). Here, it is Jacobus who writes himself onto the land, rather than the land being reflected as it is, a process, which he implicitly confesses is destructive: 'Destroyer of the wilderness I move through the land cutting a devouring path from horizon to horizon. There is nothing from which my eyes turn, I am what I see' (*D*, p.79). Through Jacobus Coetzee and Colonel Joll the two novels show how establishing the subjectivity of the indigenous inhabitants has been indispensable from appropriation and re-mapping of the land in the course of territorial expansion, as if the former necessitates and justifies the latter.

The magistrate's narrative, however, provides a different perspective on the territory and its inhabitants. The magistrate's preoccupation in the course of his twenty-year service in the imperial administration has been providing the map of the region. In the war with the barbarians, it is 'the excellent maps of the region provided by [the magistrate]' that pave the way to the Empire's victory. But his one-year story (the result of which is the novel) seems to highlight some crucial happenings and images that maps are unable to show. Indeed, the magistrate's story maps out the manner in which an imperial state set up

ideological and physical boundaries with its ideologically constructed enemies, the barbarians. He also maps out the lived spaces rather than the physical spaces of the lives of people in the settlement, such as the torturer, the barbarians, Colonel Joll. He attempts to find a way into the lived experience of the *other* (whoever it is) and recount the experience he/she goes through. In contrast to Colonel Joll's vilifications of the barbarians, the conscientious magistrate describes them as harmless 'pastoralists, nomads, tent-dwellers' who have been living as nomads off the land since they were banished from their homeland through expansion of the empire (p.16). With the 'spread of empire' that pushed the natives off the lands into the mountains. The barbarians live across the mountains on the North East of the imperial territory. According to the magistrate, barbarians have been the victims of imperial aggression, and that their stand off against the imperial state is to be seen as their resistance to dispossession and their claim to their motherland: 'They want an end to the spread of settlements across their lands. They want their land back, finally. They want to be free to move about with their flocks from pasture to pasture as they used to' (p.54). It is their entitlement to the land, and resistance to dispossession, that has rendered their defiance of colonisation meaningful and purposeful. The magistrate implicitly mentions an intuitive relationship between the barbarians and the land, in his attempt to prevent the Colonel from fighting them: '[t]he barbarians you are chasing will smell you coming and vanish into the desert while you are still a day's march away. They have lived here all their lives, they know the land. You and I are strangers you even more than I' (p.12). The

magistrate acknowledges the fact that he and the colonialists are 'strangers' on the land that originally belonged to the barbarians. His contention shows that what Colonel Joll regards as animosity of the barbarians towards the state, is indeed their resistance to displacement and dispossession.

As the magistrate shows, the spatial arrangement of the territory corresponds with the subjective spaces created by the imperial power to control the spaces and lives of the inhabitants. The frontier is marked by high walls and checkpoints. Barracks, prisons and torture chambers each in their own respect separate the insiders from the challengers of the imperial state. The network of state institutions that are featured in the novel have similar functions to their counterpart in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe. The argument can be supported by Michel Foucault's description of the function and objectives of the penal system in Europe in *Discipline and Punish* (1977). Foucault's study of the European penal system in modern times has implications for imperial administrative strategies in the former European colonies (Foucault, 1995). According to Foucault, the prison is part of the vast network of state institutions whose role is to display the authority of the state through disciplining the delinquents. In prison the body is arranged, disciplined and supervised to be ready for social services. Thus, the prison along with schools and barracks should be perceived as a space that is closely integrated into the city and infiltrates everywhere (Foucault, 1995). In *Waiting for the Barbarians* also, the prison is located in the main part of the settlement. Prisons and torture chambers are the dominant imageries in the novel. They are built to display the authority of

imperial control and to generate the impression of divisions between insiders and outsiders. Thus, the project of marginalization of the barbarians is followed both ideologically and spatially. In the 1986, reflecting on the restrictions faced by South African writers when representing the socio-political situation of the state, J. M. Coetzee opens his discussion by noting that there are laws against the representation of prisons in South Africa. In the opening paragraph of "Into the Dark Chamber", Coetzee states, 'Prisons, those "black flowers of civilized society," burgeon all over the face of South Africa' (*DP*, p.361). The reason behind such laws that tend to censor representations of prison and the related news lies, according to Coetzee, in the state's attempt to hide away its vices and prevent the white electorates or the international community capturing the real situation. He meditates on such a response from the state, as follows:

If people are starving, let them starve far away in the bush, where their thin bodies will not be a reproach. If they have no work, if they migrate to the cities, let there be roadblocks, let there be curfews, let there be laws against vagrancy, begging, and squatting, and let offenders be locked away so that no one has to hear or see them. ... Certainly there are many lands where prisons are used as dumping-places for people who smell wrong and look unsightly and do not have the decency to hide themselves away' (*DP*, p.361).

Waiting for the Barbarians portrays the landscape of one of those many lands in which imprisonment and torture of innocent people because of their otherness is a common practice. The role of prison, as Coetzee contends, is not only to show the authority of the state, but also to hide the pain of the people that the state refuses to acknowledge.

The dispossessed barbarians are shown as criminals who are in effect subjected to incarceration and torture. The magistrate's attempt to understand the experience of the tortured barbarian girl is in line with his mapping out of the lived spaces of the margins. The tortured barbarian girl, with her blind eye and her misshapen feet is an embodiment of control of the bodies in an authoritarian state. She is blinded, and her feet have lost shape in the course of torture. Foucault argues that torture was carried out earlier as a form of punishment for two purposes: firstly, reflecting the violence of the original crime on the convict's body, and secondly, enacting the revenge of the sovereign body, as breaking the law was seen as equal to hurting the body of the sovereign (Foucault, 1995). In an imperial system torture is used by the state as a means of suppression of resistance. Thus, the torture of the colonised subject because of his/her challenge to the system is doubly inhumane as in this case the guilt of the convict is resistance to colonisation. Coetzee, in his article, describes a torture room as 'a metaphor, bare and extreme, between authoritarianism and its victims', that aims at 'if not destroying [an individual], then at least of destroying the kernel of resistance within him' (*DP*, p.363). Thus, the room becomes the site of 'an extreme human experience' (*DP*, p.363), an experience which is physical, psychological and moral. The tortured body of the barbarians in the novel, far from displaying the authority of the system, presents the brutality and simultaneously fragility of a system that is challenged by powerless nomads like the barbarian girl. The mutilated body of the girl is the evidence of the brutality of the authoritarian system. The body of the girl here is to be seen as a map upon

which the historical abuses of the Empire are inscribed. Jolly is right to argue that the magistrate treats 'her body as a surface, a map of a surface, a text' (Jolly, 1989, p.72) . She further interprets the reunion of the girl with the barbarian lands, which lay outside the settlement, her reunion with freedom. She argues that when the magistrate sets the girl free, he returns to prison, as the settlement is the true prison in the novel (Jolly, 1989, p.72). Her argument sounds plausible because the magistrate contends that the girl's body and her contradictory state signify 'a hint of an old free state' (p.36). The idea of a free state is now lost as the Empire expanded over the region, but the longing for that freedom is still in the magistrate's heart. Before colonisation the land of the barbarians was free of human control, but as the land lost its freedom, so did the inhabitants of the land. It is feasible to argue that the body of the barbarian girl also bears the signs of abuse of the land that has been colonised, classified and bordered. Contrary to her nomadic life-style which is suggestive of freedom from boundaries, her body, like a map, marks out the loss of freedom of the land.

Colonial discourse projects meaning onto geographical space just as othering projects an identity onto the indigenous inhabitants of the territory. Here, the magistrate's story that maps out the life experience in the settlement and the hegemonic practices of empire such as incarceration and torture, undermine Colonel Joll's colonial discourse. The discourse of civilization versus barbarity which is the pre-dominant discourse that agents of Empire like Colonel Joll spread, tends to set a border between the Empire as the epitome of barbarity. The practice of enemy-making of the Colonel Joll and the torture of

innocent and defenceless people like the barbarian girl undermines the definition and above all the boundaries between the notions of “barbarity” and “civilization”. The magistrate by showing awareness of ‘the ironies of the word [civilization]’, implicitly suggests that barbarity and savagery is to be associated with the behaviour of people like the torturer and Colonel who commit crimes under the name of civilization. In remapping the space, he reclaims the idea and definitions of wilderness and civilization. His interest in spatiality and re-mapping the colonial geography of the Empire is particularly shown when he addresses the torturer. Contemplating how a torturer treats the prisoners, the magistrate asks the torturer: ‘Do you find it easy to take food afterwards? ... Do not misunderstand me, I am not blaming you or accusing you, I am long past that. ... I am only trying to understand the *zone* in which you live. I am trying to imagine how you breathe and eat and live from day to day. But I cannot’ (p.138, my emphasis). The point the magistrate is trying to make in his address is that, the act of torture seems to the magistrate beyond any known categories (or zones) of humanity. The magistrate similarly addresses Colonel Joll angrily and states the fact that the discourse of the threat of barbarity should be attributed to the imperial administration rather than the natives of the land: ‘*You* are the enemy, you have made the war, and you have given them all the martyrs they need – starting not now but a year ago when you committed your first filthy barbarities here!’ (p.125). The torturer and Colonel Joll who order enforcement, imprisonment and torture in a system that claims civilization, reminds the reader of the highly quoted statement of Walter Benjamin who says: ‘[T]here is no

document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism'.³⁵

By exploring the hardship of the living in the margins and mapping out the predicaments of displacement, the magistrate attempts to redeem himself. His representation of the imperial geography is an attempt to acquit himself from the ideological and physical abuse of the people whose crime is nothing but reclaiming their land. Maps claim to spatialize knowledge (Noyes, 1992, p.276). Given that they are intended for special purposes, they are dissociated from the truthful representation of space (Noyes, 1992, p.277). But unlike maps, the magistrate's story without claiming geographical knowledge, attempts to picture how in colonial space, spaces of exclusion and confinements takes shape. The magistrate decides to free the barbarian girl and return her to her family in their land, and he returns to the confines of the settlement he polices. He is honest enough to confess that he made the girl his maid, his companion and used up her body, and that his setting the girl free is not wholly impersonal and humanitarian: 'here I am, patching up relations between the men of future and the men of the past, returning with apologies, the body we have sucked dry' (p.79). The magistrate confesses that he is aware of his dubious standing in and outside the system, by identifying himself as 'a go-between, a jackal of Empire in sheep's clothing!' (p.79). However, he is indeed a mediator between the oppressor and the oppressed who gives an insight to the essence of oppression. In remapping the territory, the magistrate attempts to reclaim the meaning and

³⁵ The quote appeared in Walter Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History VII* (1940, First published in English in 1955)

representation of the Empire (civilization) and the wilderness. His story, as the next part discusses, manifests how the identity of space is changed in the course of colonisation and the so-called lands of plenty have been turned into barren spaces.

II. Reimagining a colonial territory as a barren landscape

The dominant metaphor of the novel, as Rosemary Jane Jolly states, is territorial (Jolly, 1989). The novel shows that the colonial territory metaphorically stands as a desert landscape. This section will discuss the manner in which the Empire is held responsible for the barrenness of the land. The geography of the novel is desert, 'flat, sandy landscape' (p.6), at the heart of which is a walled town which designates the frontiers of territory of the Empire. The settlement built inside the territory is stretched out along the frontier with wilderness, and on the other side, it is the wall and its several gates that mark the borderline. The wall separates the territory from the desert, which is more or less the frontier between the barbarians and the Empire. There is a lake between the mountainous barbarian lands and the settlement and a river runs into the lake. The north and south of the lake is desert. Along the walled border of the town there are several checkpoints for monitoring people's entrance and exit, as well as several watch towers from which the guards monitor the enemy's actions and movements across the desert, and report the barbarians' movements and any pertinent attack.

The way the territory's landscape is mapped out marks the settlement in the south and the barbarians' lands in the north which suggests that the

settlement is a southern colony. However, the barren landscape of the novel stands in contrast to what Smith calls, the “dominant myth of Southern paradise” (Van Wyk Smith, 1990, p.2). The walls and checkpoints are the borderline between the space ‘inside’ and ‘outside’. While they embody power and control over the inhabitants, they reinforce the threat of the space outside too. Apart from the barbarians who are assumed to be the enemy, the desert itself, because of its lack of border and divisions, and above all for its not being controlled, is an ultimate ideological threat to the Empire. It is through structuring and dividing the space that colonisation has been possible. Thus, any land without borders and boundaries has been regarded as “wilderness”, which is in essence an uncontrolled space. In *Dusklands*, Jacobus Coetzee in the South African forests, says that ‘the wild is one because it is boundless’ (*D*, p.78). What Jacobus Coetzee fears in the wilderness is not the wild animals, but in fact it is the loss of ‘mastery of the explorer over the space’ (*D*, p.80), a mastery that can only be achieved when the wild African landscape as unified and undivided space is divided into many controlled spaces.

Yet, in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the landscape of Southern African forests is replaced by a barren and desert landscape. The motif of the spatial freedom of desert which stands in contrast to the controlled space of the estates is also the dominant motif of Michael Ondaatje’s novel *The English Patient* (1992). In both of these novels it is around and in contrast to desert that other images and geographies take shape. In both of these novels, ‘desert’ as a dominant metaphor puts forth the question of territory, yet in each of these works

it raises different agendas (Ondaatje, 1992). Just as desert in *The English Patient* reflects its migrant writer's concern with divisions of identities based on territorial and geographical divisions, the desert setting of *Waiting for the Barbarians* reflects how creation of colonial space through enforcement and incarceration and torture have rendered colonised territories as barren lands within which time seems to have stood still.

The main setting of *The English Patient* is Italy in the Second World War, yet the narration moves across Europe and North African deserts. It is the story of an English explorer –Count Almásy – whose plane has crashed in the desert and his body is burnt to the extent that it is unidentifiable. While being nursed by a Canadian nurse in a deserted villa in Italy, he recalls his past and recounts his story of war and love and the loss of his beloved in the desert. Postmodern techniques of narration, especially the fragmented narration and disruption of narrative continuity serve to develop the main idea of the novel which is problematization of national and individual identity. In *The English Patient*, the desert is geographically identifiable as North African desert. Despite the fact that Count Almásy is a member of an expedition group, he shows his reluctance to contribute to the exploration of the free space of North Africa. In fact, he praises the spatial freedom of the landscape:

It was a place of faith, we disappeared into landscape. Fire and sand. We left the harbours of oasis ... I didn't want my name against such beautiful names. Erase the family name! Erase the nations! I was taught such things by the desert' (Ondaatje, 1992, p.139).

Yet, the narrator knows that even deserts are not totally free from geo-political contestations. Nations are in war over land and identity and individuals are in competition for discovery and stratification of the free spaces. In Almasy's eyes, the exploration of space for fame is vanity and he nostalgically admires the impossibility of ownership of desert and its unyielding nature: 'The desert could not be claimed or owned –it was a piece of doth carried by winds, never held down by stones, and given a hundred shifting names' (Ondaatje, 1992, p.139). In *Waiting for the Barbarians* the spatial freedom of desert also stands in contrast to the heavily controlled space within the borders. Indeed, there is nostalgia over loss of free spaces in both of these novels. Yet, in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the desert is not a natural phenomenon like North Africa, rather it stands as the 'land we [colonisers] have raped' (p.118). While the free spaces outside the Empire, where the barbarians live, give rise to a sense of longing for freedom in the magistrate, he is not overly enthusiastic about that freedom, as he is aware that the spread of Empire has affected the fertility of the land and in effect the life of the barbarians. *The English Patient* manifests the idea that a totally "free space" is no longer attainable, but transcendence and passages across and between the borderlines are still possible. In *Waiting for the Barbarians* there is no illusion of the possibility of free spatiality. In fact, unlike Count Almasy, the magistrate is aware that breaking away in order to take refuge in the free spaces of the desert is only an illusion:

For premonitions of winter are everywhere. ...The bleak north wind will be howling all day, withering life on the stalk, carrying a sea of dust across the wide plateau, bringing sudden flurries of hail and snow. I cannot imagine myself, with my tattered clothes and cast of sandals, stick in hand, pack on back survive that long march ... What life can I hope for away from this oasis? If I were to join the exodus it would be as one of those unobtrusive old folk who one day slip away from the line of march, settle down in the lee of a rock, and wait for the last great cold to begin creeping up their legs. (pp. 144-5)

Unlike the war in *The English Patient*, the war between the barbarians and the Empire is not a war between nations; it is resistance of a marginalized group against displacement from the fertile land on which their survival depends. While the desert imagery in *The English Patient* stands for freedom from boundaries and longing for modification of socio-cultural relations, in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the desert landscape signifies the rupture that the history of colonisation of lands and their inhabitants has brought forth in the balance of life and the natural environment. Desert here signifies barrenness and infertility.

The landscape and the weather at the frontiers of the Empire in *Waiting for the Barbarians* are sterile and hostile. This might indicate that most of the southern territories like the colonised lands in southern Africa were stretched along the best fertile lands, and what lay beyond was a relatively hostile space. But a more plausible reason is that the novel avoids a pastoralist vision or glorification of free spaces. The desert landscape and the hostile weather indeed correspond with the hostile colonial space that is created in the territory, as if the colonial space created and administered on the land had an impact on the

natural cycle. One of the noticeable features is that the one-year narrative is built around one season – winter. The fact that the seasonal cycle has stopped from the time that Colonel Joll arrived in the settlement until the moment that all the administrative officers leave the settlement for the fear of barbarians, shows a break in the chronological passage of time. David Attwell points out this unrealistic narrative feature and analyses it in terms of the novel's engagement with historicity:

Rather than representing an attempt to absorb history into Nature, it represents deployment of a more restricted truth that can be traced crudely as follows: historical time is a construction imposed on formless chronicity, as part of the work of culture; fiction can restore the perspective in which the constructedness of time becomes apparent. ... [The novel's] critical effects depend on its ability to *disorganize* historical time. (Attwell, 1993, p.86, Original emphasis)

Attwell is right that Coetzee calls into question the history of colonisation in *Waiting for the Barbarians* by disorganizing the natural course of time. As the seasonal cycle is temporal, it appears that disruption in this cycle has a historical significance. But such a disorganization of the natural cycle is closely related to the space in which it happens. The manner in which the landscape reflects and embodies history can be explained through Ann McClintock's notion of "anachronistic space" (McClintock, 1995). The definition of "anachronistic space", as presented by McClintock, is that it is a space in which 'time –just when it appears most historical – stops in its tracks' (McClintock, 1995, p.40). McClintock associates the invention of this notion to a trope that appeared in the

late Victorian era. McClintock argues that within this trope 'the agency of women, the colonised and the industrial working class are disavowed and projected onto anachronistic space: prehistoric, atavistic and irrational, inherently out of place in the historical time of modernity'. In contrast to modern societies, the colonies and the empire's expansion in space were regarded 'as a journey backward in time to an anachronistic moment of prehistory' (McClintock, 1995, p.42). Thus, according to this trope historical and industrial progress was a movement forward in time and the colonies' lack of such progress was *temporally* a journey backward. In McClintock's words, '[g]eographical difference across *space* is figured as a historical difference across *time*' (McClintock, 1995, p.40, original emphasis). The argument established by this trope became central to racial and colonial discourses.

Waiting for the Barbarians' one-seasonal cycle, can be regarded as a counter-discourse to such a trope. The novel challenges such a discourse by having the time stagnate, in order to show that imperial expansion *did* stop time by interfering in the natural course of history in these territories. There is an occasion when the flying birds from the south seems to the magistrate a sign of the approaching spring as he says, 'Spring is on its way, one of these days it will be time to plant' (p.62). But it is not long before he realizes there is no warmth or promise of fertility, as 'the sun glows like an orange but warms nothing' (p.66).

The novel by breaking away from historical time attempts to call our attention to the spatial aspects of the imperial administration; an aspect that the discourse of backwardness attempts to hide. It is for the very space created by

the power that history stops moving forward and prevents time having its natural cycle. When the magistrate reflects on what the causes of chaos in the passage of time are, he finds out the answer is the Empire:

What has made it impossible for us to live in time like fish in water, like birds in air, like children? It is the fault of empire! Empire has created the time of history. Empire has located its existence not in the smooth recurrent spinning time of the cycle of the seasons but in the jagged time of rise and fall, of beginning and end, of catastrophe. (p.146)

The phrases 'beginning and end' or 'rise and fall' signify bounded closures rather than the free flow of time. In other words, the sentiment shows how the empire has 'located' itself in bounded closures. As we have already discussed, according to Noyes' and Soja's theories of space, the mechanism at work in colonial space is based on fixed subjectivity and signification in physical space. This fixity in the novel is shown not only in the colonial discourse which hinges around social stratification and territorial zoning, but also in terms of temporality stagnating in the colonised land.

The dominant imagery of the desert invokes the idea that as time stagnates in colonial space, so does nature. The all-year winter causes the plants to die and renders the land sterile. Stagnation of time and landscape is embodied in the image of the lake that is located between the settlement and the desert: '[e]very year the lake grows more brackish as the river eats into its banks and sweeps salt and alum into the lake. Since the lake has no outflow its mineral content keeps rising' (p.64). As the lake is the main supplier of water to the

settlement the troubling question that comes to the magistrate's mind is 'what will become of the settlement if the lake grows into a dead sea?'(p.64). Stagnation of the lake and it turning into a swamp warns of the looming desertification of the land. There is one occasion when the magistrate holds the empire as responsible for the ruin of the landscape. What lies in the north of the settlement where barbarians have taken refuge is nothing but 'a dull grey-brown of empty landscape' (p.67), which signifies the image of death. The image of the land and its vegetation as dead in the barbarians' land is best pictured by a soldier saying, 'You can't live on the fruit of that land out here, can you? I've never seen such dead country' (p.109). The visible desolation of the land where the barbarians reside is directly generated by the imperial order and administration. There is a scene where a wildfire starts along the river and in the form of a large brown shroud covering the river, the magistrate sees the men in the Empire responsible for the fire, explaining that, 'Someone has decided that the river-banks provide too much cover for the barbarians, that the river would form a more defensible line if the banks were cleared. So they have fired the bush. With the wind blowing from the north, the fire has spread across the whole shallow valley' (p.89). A wildfire which is started by imperial soldiers causes damage to the vegetation of the land and indirectly affects the cycle of nature and helps desertification.

Indeed the main reason for the barrenness of the landscape is shown to be the war between the two parties. The Barbarians are not passive and in the face of dispossession and lack of military power, they take revenge by ruining the

crops of the settlers. In the spring time, when signs of the first shoots appear, they flood the fields of the settlers. The result is as follows: 'The spring wheat is indeed ruined. ... Many of the young plants have been right out of the ground. All show a yellowish discoloration of leaf' (p.109). War, colonisation and resistance have a direct impact on the landscape.

The unspecified time and geography relate the struggle over domicile across different occupied territories and their different history together. The land is depicted as war-stricken and thus a land apart, which reminds the reader of the state of South Africa in the 1980s or the Israel - Palestine war over the course of more than sixty years. Coetzee, in his Jerusalem Prize address of 1987 (in *Jerusalem in 1987*), recounts how the gap between the two parties (whites and non-whites) is widened by dispossession and oppression, as if it is this particular division that relates South Africa to many other occupied territories. In the address, Coetzee deploys a similar imagery of a war-stricken land to describe South Africa of the time, saying, '[f]or centuries South Africa was the society of masters and serfs, now, it is a land where the serfs are in open rebellion and the masters are in disarray' (*DP*, p.96). Although *Waiting for the Barbarians* is not a story of master and slave relationships, the dispossessed have similarly rebelled and the occupiers are in disarray. The novel ends with the men of Empire leaving the land for the fear of the barbarians. The retreat of the imperial commanders and soldiers is seen by the magistrate as sign of possibility of peace and regeneration for the future:

The barbarians have withdrawn with their flocks into the deepest mountain valley, waiting for the soldiers to grow tired and go away. When that happens the barbarians will come out again. They will graze their sheep and leave us alone, we will plant our fields and leave them alone, and in a few years the frontier will be restored to peace. (p.145)

The magistrate views there is possibility of peace only if the settlers acknowledge the right of the barbarians to the land, and both sides commit themselves to live together in peace. What is notable in the magistrate's sentiment is that through visualizing a pastoral imagery, he suggests that regeneration of land and nature is contingent on making peace.

Waiting for the Barbarians raises some serious questions about the ways in which the creation of colonial space affected life and nature in the colonised territories. It can be seen, as stated in the novel, 'to find in the vacuousness of the desert a special historical poignancy' (p.18). Just as some early explorers mythologized southern Africa as southern paradise, through to the end of the twentieth century, when many imperial states have been dismantled, the novel visualizes the end of the story of Empire happening in a waste land. *Waiting for the Barbarians* is not just a historical account of an imaginary empire; rather it is one drama among many dramas of challenge over domicile, in which the displaced barbarians resist displacement from the fertile land they belong to. The colonial space and the policy of vilification of the *other* are unsustainable in the novel. In this context, the narrative of the magistrate displays a new perspective of space which, unlike the maps, is neither a claim to knowledge of space, nor a one-dimensional view of space. Rather, the narrative displays how a space is

lived in the margins, and by the marginalized which adds a new dimension to the knowledge of space. The lived space contradicts and questions the dominant representations of the explorers and the colonisers.

Chapter Seven

Keeping the Memory of Belonging Alive in *Life and Times of Michael K*

The secret and sacred word that binds him to the farm is belonging. Out in the veld by himself he can breathe the word aloud: *I belong on the farm*. What he really believes but does not utter, what he keeps to himself for fear that the spell will end, is a different form of the word: *I belong to the farm*.
(J.M. Coetzee, *Boyhood*, pp.95-6)

In *Life and Times of Michael K*, Coetzee explores the historical contest over land in South Africa from the viewpoint of a marginalized character. The allegorical and symbolic contest over land in *Waiting for the Barbarians* was territorial and it was staged between the imperialists and those who were dispossessed of their lands, while in *Life and Times of Michael K*, contest over land is not territorial; rather it is staged as the struggle of an individual against displacement and marginalization within the territory. The novel raises the question of who will survive in South Africa from such an age-old contest through depicting the life story of a coloured South African gardener, Michael K, who is displaced because of the civil war in the country and attempts to find a way to avoid displacement. He settles in the abandoned farm of a white South African family where his mother used to live as a child, but he moves away from the farm with the arrival of the young heir, and begins planting seeds in a plot of land which is owned by no one. Since then he stands against all the forces that tend to incarcerate him in resettlement camps, and resiliently continues gardening. The Garden in *Life and Times of Michael K*, just as the desert in *Waiting for the*

Barbarians, is a symbolic territory in which the struggle for domicile and survival takes place. Unlike desert which signifies barrenness, garden signifies fertility, regeneration and fruitfulness. The significance of garden and gardening in relation to resistance to marginalization and colonization is explored in this chapter.

The South African setting and particularly the epigraph of the novel on war, encourages a reading of the novel in the context of South Africa's unrest and upheaval during the apartheid. Nadine Gordimer and Dominic Head analyse the novel with regard to the idea of resistance. Nadine Gordimer sees the "idea of gardening" as a form of meaningful resistance for the black population: 'Coetzee has been drawing upon the strength of the earth to keep his deceptively passive protagonist ... alive', and this 'keep[ing] the earth alive', is the only way that brings 'salvation' and 'survival' (Gordimer, 1984, p.5). Dominic Head analyses the novel in allegorical and symbolic terms. He defends the resisting qualities of the novel more fiercely than Gordimer. In "Gardening as Resistance", Head views gardening as Michael K's resisting strategy against the governing power and argues that Michel K is 'a symbol of geopolitical defiance, resistance to spatial control' (Head, 1997, p.105). However, from a different perspective, Derek Attridge views the novel as an exploration of the consciousness of the 'other' (Attridge, 2004). Attridge says that 'It would be crudely reductive to say that Coetzee here ... celebrates or advocates ecological sensitivity'; however, he agrees that 'K's relation to the earth and cultivation ... implies a resistance to modernity's drive to exploit natural resources' (Attridge, 2004, p.53). But his

main point of argument is that Coetzee's novel attempts to explore the consciousness of the 'other' by 'sustain[ing] throughout the fiction the otherness of K's responses' (Attridge, 2004, p.50).

There is a possibility of a third approach to the novel that takes into consideration both of the above-mentioned approaches. The novel is indeed exploration of the consciousness of the 'other' in the way he/she connects to the land and his/her milieu. Michael K's engagement with gardening performs a sort of resistance to displacement and the break in the connection between himself and the land; but such a resistance is more cultural than political. Michael K's insisting on gardening defies control of space, and systematic dispossession based on tropes of ownership, but, as some critics argue, it lacks forcefulness as a viable resisting strategy against the apartheid regime. *Life and Times of Michael K* is more an ad-vocation of seeing the land and relating to it differently, rather than resistance to apartheid. I will argue that Michael K's struggle for keeping his connection to the land alive through gardening is to be seen as a cultural resistance (rather than an activism); in line with the resistance that bell hooks articulates where she identifies her cultural resistance as 'a struggle of memory against forgetting' (hooks, 1991, p.149).

The plausibility of this argument lies in the fact that the historical point at which the story happens is unspecified, or as Attridge says, the story 'occurs in a setting that is outside actual history' (Attridge, 2004, p.48). The challenge for land and domicile for the marginalized has happened in the course of history from when the first settlement is established in South Africa. Thus, the novel

focuses on the complexity of struggle over domicile rather than the historical specificity of this struggle. Michael K's gardening is to be seen as holding onto the memory of belonging and entitlement to the land despite forces that displace and dispossess him. Such a way of relating to a land, territory or place is indeed in defiance of modern ways of belonging which are defined on the basis of tropes of ownership and homeliness. Sarah Nuttall informs us of a new approach to land and belonging in South African fiction of the early 1990s that views the possibility of a relationship, 'beyond an appropriative ownership of the land', or 'exclusivist sense of belonging' (Nuttall, 1996, p.228). Nuttall fails to mention that *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983) projected a similar approach to the land. This chapter studies the novel as advocating a cultural resistance by developing the idea that land should be seen, represented and belonged to beyond the appropriative tropes of boundaries and ownership. Liberation of South Africa from apartheid, as this chapter argues, proved the provisionality of the tropes of ownership and their vulnerability in the face of the insistence of marginalized subjects on belonging to the land.

I. Michael K's growing consciousness in the face of displacement

Njabulo Ndebele in an article entitled, "Rediscovery of the Ordinary" (1984), argued that black South African literature had long been engaged with what he called 'representation of the spectacle', meaning displaying and demonstrating the trend of oppression against black people (Ndebele, 1994). To Ndebele, such practice was to be replaced by focusing the attention on the daily

hardships that black people face in their lives, a practice that he called 'rediscovery of the ordinary' (Ndebele, 1994, p.52). Michael K's life, in other words, is particularly interesting as it shows the 'growth of consciousness' of an ordinary marginalized person of his milieu and his own place in the milieu, and his determination to challenge the power relations that keeps him in the peripheral position. He insists on the need to create distance from the 'heroic' and spectacular dimensions of resistance and focusing on 'growth of consciousness' (Ndebele, 1994, pp.53-4). Depiction of Michael K's life is indeed an attempt in 'rediscovery of the ordinary', as he is neither a hero, nor a historical figure, but an ordinary coloured South African, who embodies resistance to marginality. The title of the novel, *Life and Times of Michael K*, brings to mind biographical novels on historical and heroic characters, yet, as Dominic Head argues, with this choice of title, 'the novel ironically undermines the association of the life of an anti-hero who resists all the obvious contact with the social and political milieu' (Head, 1997, p.93). The title is suggestive of the fact that South African history and literature can no longer afford to ignore these figures, as they have posed serious challenge to the authority of the central power.

From the opening of the novel, Michael K is shown to be a marginalized and homeless character, as he is born with 'hare lips' and he is brought up in the houses where his mother was working as a housemaid. Michael K's difference in terms of the disfiguration of his lips is paralleled with marginalization based on racial difference in the apartheid South Africa. Yet, the break-out of the war is in fact a turning point, in South Africa's social condition and in effect in the lives of

marginalized and displaced individuals like Anna K and Michael K, as it prompts new tropes of displacement and hardship. But even white families like the Buhrmanns, for which Anna K used to work, or the Visagies family in whose farm Anna spent her childhood, all are forced to leave their houses for the fear of war, just as Michael K leaves his job as a park keeper. The war is shown as a force that has firstly, created social disintegration, and secondly rendered the wealth and status of white landowners who hold on to the majority of South African land fragile and provisional.

Michael K's growing consciousness of resistance is seen firstly in his abandonment of the idea of home, as a place of security, and secondly, in his attempt to set himself free from all the boundaries, be it a home, a garden or state controlled camps. The process of coming to the idea of resisting the domination of power is in fact a gradual process that Michael K undergoes. Just after the outbreak of the civil war that results in Anna and Michael K losing their jobs, Anna decides that they should shelter in a secure home in the farm of Visagies family in Prince Albert, where Anna spent her childhood. Anna K's memory of the farm in Prince Albert recalls a pastoral outlook that pictures childhood farms as the lost idyllic rural life. Anna K describes Prince Albert for her son as a dream place of tranquillity and peace where Anna K assumes they can settle down and end their wanderings. In the midst of such an uncertain atmosphere of war, Anna K firmly holds to her dream of escaping from violence and the food queues to the tranquil rural life in her childhood farm. She shares her mental picture of Prince Albert just the way it was when she left it with her

son, Michael K, and asks him to find exactly the same dream place: ‘there was a chicken-run against one wall of the wagon house, and a pump on the hill. We had a house on the hillside. There was prickly pear outside the back door. This is the place you must look for’ (p.27).

The manner in which Anna K visualises her childhood farm is comparable to the literary tradition of Afrikaans’ writing about childhood farms that is featured in *White Writing*. Coetzee in *White Writing* argues that the appreciation of nature through the innocent eyes of the child or childhood memories, such as those famous representations in English literature through Wordsworth, were absent in Afrikaans writing and instead what emerged is a literature about memories of ‘the childhood farm’: ‘[t]he farm, rather than nature, however regionally defined, is conceived as the sacral place where the soul can expand in freedom’ (WW, p.175). Depiction of family farm and carefree childhood in early Afrikaans writing reflects nostalgic longing for independence, for as Coetzee says, the idea of free spaces of farms harks back

... to a lost ideal economic independence, to the idea of the farm as a “konikrykie” (little kingdom), where man can be his own master ... and, by extension, to the enduring dream of a free state, a “Free State” where the Afrikaner will at last be left in peace to run his affairs in his own way’ (WW, 175).

Anna K also wishes to be in a similar place where she and her son can be left in peace, independent and free in their own ways. It is notable that Anna K views a family farm just the way white Afrikaners do, despite being a member of the

coloured minority. Her vision of the South African farm as a symbol of 'economic independence' and 'freedom' is influenced by the white people's perception of it. It is as if, she has accepted and internalized the mastery of the white man and his ideals and Anna K lacks a resisting consciousness to find the freedom and economic independence for herself. Thus, Michael K under his mother's influence, initially began to dream about having a home and a peaceful family life on the farm. The image of his mother's family farm becomes a utopian imagery of a warm home that Michael K never had and thus it captures Michael K's imagination: 'He saw ... in his mind's eye a whitewashed cottage in the broad veld with smoke curling from the chimney, and standing at the front door his mother, smiling and well, ready to welcome him at the end of a long day' (p.9). Michael K's vision of 'home' recalls the traditional view of home as a place that gives security and stimulation. His passion for an imaginative 'home' that his mother's memories of the farm in Prince Albert inspires, drives Michael K to find the place even after the death of Anna K on the way to Prince Albert. However, when he reaches the place, he finds the farm an abandoned and ruined wilderness, that is far from the utopian picture that his mother visualised.

This scene is the first point in the novel that dispenses with traditional approaches to home and place. Disillusioned by the image of a ruined farm which is far from home, K acknowledges that home is somewhere that needs to be built. The idea of home as a place which welcomes those who belong to it is replaced by the idea that places are man-made. Michael K acknowledges realization of this idea by symbolically scattering the ashes of his mother over the

earth, at which point he 'begin[s] his life as a cultivator' (p.59). The act can be interpreted on the one hand, as a move to declare that he wants to take root in the land, and on the other hand, the gesture can be seen as declaration of belonging to the land as he let his mother rest in the land (the farm) he believes his mother belongs to.

The death of Anna K and her ashes that lie in Visagies' farm, mark the end of an era in the way place has been traditionally viewed in South Africa. Michael K's era is no longer the time where place can be seen as a source of security, as not just because the notion of security is fragile, but also because the stability of home, ownership and belongings are shown to be provisional. The arrival of the Visagies' grandson, to the farm and his ultimate failure to settle down in peace in the place shows how 'ownership' at the time of war is provisional. The Visagies' grandson, just like Michael K, comes to the family farm in quest for the lost warmth and happiness of the family farm. The arrival of the grandson comes as a disappointment to Michael K: 'I let myself believe that this was one of those islands without an owner. Now I am learning the truth. Now I am learning my lesson' (p.61). Michael K's decision is not that he cannot own a place called home, rather it is necessary to dispense with the idea of home, and the trope of ownership all together.

The encounter between the two men, the coloured South African workman and the white Afrikaner land owner, is another turning point by which the futility and inadequacy of tropes of ownership at the time of the civil war is revealed. The white heir is unable to revive the land despite the fact that the farm officially

belongs to him, as he is dependent on Michael K's labour for revival of the farm. The white heir embodies those white Afrikaners whom according to Coetzee, failed to realise that their 'future [is] linked with the growing black proletariat' (WW, p.6). Earlier in *In the Heart of the Country*, Coetzee raised the issue of the decline of white feudalism and how the new generation of white South African landowners would become ultimately dependent on the rising black proletariat, and that their collaboration is a necessity in order to prevent degeneration of the South African landscape. There is a similar relationship between Michael K and the Visagies' son. From the moment of his arrival in the abandoned farm, it is easy to foresee that the one who stays is not necessarily the 'owner' but it is the one who can revive the dead land. Unable to farm, Visagies' son leaves the farm disillusioned, while Michael K stays and makes his own garden.

Michael K's growing consciousness of his milieu and his resistance to displacement is to be seen in his dispensing with the traditional notion of home and appropriative use of space. Michael K gives up the idea of fixed attachment to a particular place through the trope of ownership, having seen displacement of Visagies' grandson despite his wealth. Thus, he decides that for survival and claiming his belonging in the land, he needs to establish a new way to connect to the land which is not provisional but lasting. Such an understanding is manifested in the scene where Michael K confesses that he has a new feeling towards the earth. He says that he longs for another kind of earth other than that of the park, which is not soft and cared for, but the kind that is hard and needs to be nurtured: 'I no longer care to feel that kind of earth between my fingers. It is no

longer the green and the brown that I want but the yellow and the red; not the wet but the dry ... not the soft but the hard' (p.67). Implicitly Michael K here declares that he is ready for the tough challenges of resisting displacement, through gardening, as he becomes a true gardener who can cultivate any land, anywhere. The quest for grounding and independence was also the theme of Naipaul's novel, *A House for Mr Biswas*, as discussed in chapter two. Mr Biswas failed to detach himself from traditional view of home as a source of grounding and security whereas Michael K soon realizes that in order to achieve grounding he does not need to have a home or garden, but knowing gardening would be enough. In this light, when he returns to his garden and finds it ruined, he begins to re-build it resiliently and passionately waits for the fruits of his own labour. Developing the idea of gardening is indeed the culmination of Michael K's developing a new consciousness of place.

II. Gardening as a trajectory to keep the memory of belonging alive

Gardening is a new trajectory for relating the individuals to the land that replaces the appropriative approaches to the land. The idea of gardening is a way through which Michael K obtains a sense of freedom from boundaries. He plants a small patch of pumpkins in a plot of land along the dam near Visagies' farm and decides to keep gardening until the end of war. His resort to gardening for survival is read by Dominic Head as an 'allegory of repossession' (Head, 1997, p.105). K's repossession of land, to Head needs to be seen symbolically: 'K represents a new era of subsistence "gardening" rather than accumulation and

“farming” (Head, 1997, p.105). On the other hand, Derek Wright reads the novel based on the idea of land in white South African literature, and argues that Coetzee’s concern is to create ‘a new myth of the land’, which challenges the myth of South Africa as a garden of Eden (Wright, 1992, p.435). He views Coetzee’s new myth however, not as a political myth but ‘primarily ecological’, because it suggests that ‘the land is to be returned not to the blacks but to itself’ (Wright, 1992, p.435-444). The above mentioned analyses of the novel attempt to interpret the act of gardening as having symbolic, mythological, or allegorical significance, which is to a large extent the result of the complex political situation of the apartheid period in South Africa. They are both right to emphasize that the novel advocates a new approach to the South African land beyond the ideas of accumulation and ownership. However, there is also a need to see the act of gardening not only in symbolic terms but also in literal terms. It is not clear what implications the idea of allegory of re-possession or the idea of returning the land to itself might have for the resistance of the black protagonist or how such ideas attain meaning in the context of apartheid.

In order to explain the resisting potentialities of gardening, Michael K’s worldview of resistance is used here. He has a clear idea of how his gardening differs from political activism, while it is also a form of resistance. When he is asked to join a couple of activists who fight against the state, he explains his reasons for refusing their offer in the following:

... because enough men had gone off to war saying the time for gardening was when the war was over; whereas there must be men to

stay behind and keep gardening alive, or at least the idea of gardening; because once that cord was broken, the earth would grow hard and forget her children. That was why. (p.109)

The above sentiment is a key quotation in the novel that highlights Michael K's ideology of resistance. His resistance can be seen as keeping the consciousness of belonging to South African land alive against forces that tend to disown and uproot him. In a way, he is saying that if he is displaced or disowned by the state, he resists being disowned by the land, so he keeps actively nurturing the land to resist 'forgetting'. Here, bell hooks' idea that '[o]ur struggle is the struggle of memory against forgetting' (hooks, 1990), has pertinence in the case of Michael K, though he replaces the idea of home with the idea of land. His struggle is seen as insistence on keeping the historical 'cord' with his milieu, which can be seen as parallel to bell hooks' cultural resistance against marginalization. The margins should remember that they equally belong to their habitat, as the dominant group, and they should not fail to challenge the boundaries that create centre and margin division.

The idea of gardening gives Michael K precisely the freedom that Coetzee says South Africans lack. Through gardening Michael K provides his own food that will give him independence and freedom from patronization of the state or white people in general. Having seen displacement of white and black people, Michael K realizes that he can only resist displacement if he lives independent and free from either boundaries of ownership or the mercy of the state in the confines of resettlement camps. Thus, gardening is to be recognized as Michael

K's trajectory to preserve his roots and remember his belonging in the land while he challenges forces that tend to control his living spaces and displace him. Looking from this angle, the idea of gardening, becomes meaningful not only in the figurative sense but also in the literal sense. In the literal sense, gardening is a skill that engages with the land but its practice is not bound to any particular location. While a garden or a farm can be confiscated or occupied by force, gardening is a passion and a skill that a gardener can carry from place to place, without being dissociated from the land. Gardening indeed gives Michael K a sense of freedom and means to keep the memory of his belonging to the South African land alive.

Michael K recognizes the potentialities of gardening as a way to set him free from the appropriative notion of space through two incidents: first his meeting with Visagies' grandson and second, his stay at the resettlement camp of Jakkalsdrif. From these two experiences Michael K realizes that freedom is an asset that neither Visagies' grandson with all his wealth, nor the homeless people in resettlement camp possess. Visagies' grandson returns to his family farm in pursuit of living 'in peace', yet it is not long before he realizes that providing food for survival is an issue, and that he depends on Michael K's 'co-operation', to survive on the farm. In the absence of Michael K at the time when he is sent to resettlement camp, Visagies grandson, could not survive in the farm and eventually left the place. His ultimate escape from the farm, manifests the idea that the dominance and control of white South African landowners is provisional. Similarly, the black and coloured inhabitants of the Jakkalsdrif camp are unable

to manage their lives independent of the state power. When Michael K is sent to Jakkalsdrif, charged with 'leaving his magisterial district without authorization', he notices to his surprise that the camp people do not strive to free themselves (p.79). As one of the residents of the camp says, camp people are jobless individuals, 'who go around from farm to farm begging for work because they haven't got a roof over their heads' (p.78). Unlike the camp people, to Michael K being free from the confines of camp or patronization of the state has priority over having a roof over his head. Michael K resists domination by repeatedly escaping the spaces of control; the camps and the hospital. Dominic Head takes these spaces as standing for disciplinary institutions set by power to establish domination:

Set against gardening, incarceration is the novel's counter-motif, the exercise of discipline through institution. K's life as a cultivator is only possible when he escapes the camps. The Jakkalsdrif labour camp is obviously Foucauldian, an anti-nomadic device to harness the utility of a homeless multiplicity. (Head, 1997, p.103)

Unlike the camp residents Michael K longs for freedom as to Michael K 'it is enough to be out of the camps, out of all the camps at the same time. Perhaps that is enough of an achievement for the time being' (p.182). Michael K has reached a point when he eludes any kind of containment, to the extent that he internalizes the sense of freedom. The medical officer at the camp notices Michael K's internalization of the idea of living free and pictures an imaginary map for the living zone of a free person like him in the following way:

what I have learned of life tells me that it is hard to keep out of the camps. Yet, I am convinced that there are areas that lie between the camps and belong to no camp, not even to the catchments areas of the camps –certain mountaintops, for example, certain islands in the middle of swamps, ... I am looking for such a place in order to live there, perhaps only till things improve, perhaps forever. I am not so foolish, however, as to imagine that I can rely on the maps and roads to guide me. Therefore I have chosen you to show me the way. (pp.162-3)

It is notable that Michael K's sense of freedom from all the spatial confinements is not to be seen as equal to endorsing displacement and un-belonging as through gardening; he indeed emphasizes his being grounded in the land. His freedom from boundaries is to be seen not as homelessness but as placelessness for the time being on the land while he keeps the memory of belonging in the land alive.

Michael K's refusal to eat any food other than the food of his own garden also needs to be read in the light of his resisting vision. He starts nurturing the land to turn it to a 'garden', in order to make it fruitful. This decision is made out of the realization that his independence relies on two things: his own labour and "the bounty of earth". His longing for the fruit of his own labour is clearly evident when he thinks of food: 'What food he ate meant nothing to him. It had no taste, or tasted like dust. When food comes out of this earth, he told himself, I will recover my appetite, for it will have savour' (p.101). As his sentiments show, Michael K perceives salvation in independent living, rather than survival under the watchful eyes in the camps: 'All that remains is to live here quietly for the rest of my life, eating the food that my own labour has made the earth to yield. All that

remains is to be a tender of the soil' (p.113). Patricia Merivale in an article draws an analogy between the protagonist of Kafka's *A Hunger Artist* and Michael K (Marivale, 1996). She argues that Michael K, as a hunger artist shapes his being by negating his being, by living minimally and by accepting no food (Marivale, 1996, p.160). And she rightly argues that '[i]n contrast to Kafka's implication, it is impossible in this world to find the food that [the hunger artist] liked', Coetzee's politico-economic point is that Michael needs for his substance explicitly that food which he is free to grow for himself (Marivale, 1996, pp.160-1). Unlike the protagonist of *A Hunger Artist*, Michael K does not resist eating, he only resists eating the camp food. The observations of the medical officer substantiate this argument, when he says to Michael K that, 'as time passed, however, I slowly began to see the originality of the resistance you offered. You were not a hero and did not pretend to be, not even a hero of fasting' (p.163). Michael K's resistance does not stop at food, rather he rejects anything that is offered to him as he believes the land could give him whatever he needs. At the end of the novel, when he is freed from the camp, people offer him food and even sex, but he refuses to 'become an object of charity' (p.181). What he dislikes about such offers is that in return for their mercy, people want him to tell them the story of his being 'caged' in prisons and camps and want a chance to express sympathy with him. In his solitude he ponders 'recklessly, *the truth about me, the truth about me. I am a gardener*', which indicates that he does not need sympathy but recognition of his profession and his independence (p.181, original emphasis).

Michael K's life experience can be viewed as a metaphorical journey from displacement to emplacement. His final achievement is not repossession, because the term refers to ownership of a property, but it can be seen as emplacement in the sense that it signifies the end of displacement. Michael K is emplaced in the sense that he overcomes displacement by drawing on the independence that gardening endows him. In a network of boundaries, camps and farms in the Cape Province, Michael K holds on to the idea of gardening in which he found a source of empowerment because it is sufficient for Michael K's survival at the time which survival for all the inhabitant appears to be a struggle. At the start of his journey, inspired by his mother, he was longing for the security of home, but soon he realized that the imperative of war in South Africa rendered such a quest futile. The experience of location for black and coloured inhabitants of South Africa in the apartheid era was a different experience. Michael K, conscious of his milieu, realizes that in a place where he is deprived of the primary rights of citizenship and basic freedom for choosing his dwelling place, the idea of home cannot substantiate. Thus, he changes the way he viewed place in terms of homeliness and begins to perceive place as a milieu in-the-making. If it was not for Michael K and his people the making of South Africa could not be possible. Michael K once again draws on his labour to reconstruct the land free from the established segregating borders and tropes of ownership.

Ashcroft's notion of habitation has pertinence in the case of Michael K. According to Ashcroft, the philosophy of enclosure, private property and map-

making 'is related to perspectival view of space' (Ashcroft, 1997, p.33).³⁶ The 'perspectival view' is a fundamental aspect of western thinking that chooses boundary between the concepts of horizon ('the region of imaginative possibility' (Ashcroft, 1997, p.33)) and boundary. The idea of gardening in Coetzee's novel not only defies commitment to the concept of closure, but also refuses accepting the perspectival view of space. Postcolonial habitation is defined by Ashcroft as 'a capacity to appropriate, renegotiate, re-align and re-place boundaries' (p.38). Unlike the garden which is bound to closure, gardening is an act, which is not bound to any boundary. If like Ashcroft's we view 'place is a practice' (Ashcroft, 1997, p.30), then Michael K's gardening can be interpreted as a practice of emplacement. That is why after being freed from the camp in the final scene of the novel, Michael K refuses to return to his ruined garden. He comes to the realization that it is a mistake to be bounded to one particular place, even if it is his own garden, as it can be confiscated or controlled. He is determined at this point to open up the horizons that were closed by trope of closure and ownership. Gardening indeed is a trajectory for him 'to keep out of the camps' (p.162). His pockets full of 'seeds' (p.162) in the final scenes signifies that he is going to *practice* inhabiting a new space which is borderless. The closing lines of the novel marks out the extent to which keeping the idea of gardening alive is important for the undernourished and dying Michael K: 'He would clear the rubble from the mouth of the shaft, he would bent the handle of the teaspoon in a loop

³⁶ According to Ashcroft, 'a perspectival view of space', envisions space from the perspective of the philosophy of closure and private property. See ASHCROFT, B. (1997) Habitation. *New Literatures Review*, 34, 27-41..

and tie the string to it, ... there would be water in the bowl of the spoon; and in that way he would say, one can live' (p.184). Michael K's life and struggle is summed up in challenging, appropriating and re-placing the established boundaries.

III. The struggle over land in the context of the liberation of South Africa

Some critics have expressed their doubts about the resisting force of Coetzee's novel in the socio-political context of South Africa. Nadine Gordimer reads the idea of gardening as an allegorical and symbolic connection with land and argues that Michael K stands for 'the whole black people of South Africa' or 'inmates of Auschwitz or Stalin's camps', yet, she is sceptical of the forcefulness of the resistant aspects of the novel in the face of the predicament of South African blacks (Gordimer, 1984, p.1). She observes that Coetzee fails to acknowledge that the black majority can run the country better than the white rulers, thus, his fictional hero rather than being 'the one who makes history', is the one who ignores it (Gordimer, 1984, p.3). Gordimer criticises Coetzee and contends that 'he does not recognize that the victims seeing themselves as victims no longer, have done, are doing, and believe they must do for themselves' (Gordimer, 1984, p.4). Benita Parry is equally (or even more) unconvinced of the resisting potentiality of Coetzee's novel. According to Parry, Coetzee's novels are mainly concerned with textuality and discursive postmodern techniques that question power and authority of the writer to deal with socio-

political issues (Parry, 1996). Such an engagement with textuality is a weak point in Coetzee's works, in Parry's view, because as she argues, 'the social authority on which their rhetoric relies and which they exert is grounded on the cognitive systems of the West' (Parry, 1996, p.39). Parry's specific critique of this postmodern aspect of Coetzee's work is that she doubts the oppositional energies of his work in the face of the political turmoil of South Africa, while there are paradoxes, gaps and silences in his characterization of the marginalized subjects like the barbarians and Michael K. Unlike Coetzee's admirer, David Attwell, who analyses such a writing strategy as 'Coetzee's sensitivity to the problem of authority within the fractured and unequal context of South African nationhood' (Attwell, 1993, p.93), to Parry such a practice is a way to 'confirm, the quandary of white writing's insecurity or dislocation in South Africa: a quandary Coetzee as a critic has detected' (Parry, 1996, p.39). In her reading of Michael K's inability to express himself and gaps in his story, she is more appreciative of the work rather than dismissive and emphasises that 'failure to attain and articulate self-consciousness is not rendered [in *Life and Times of Michael K*] as disappointment, since silence is privileged as enabling the euphoria of desire unmediated by words' (Parry, 1996, p.46). Yet, she maintains her questions: 'But who, in South Africa, does Coetzee's fiction address? And whose attention has been procured?' Coetzee's novels fail to provide satisfying answers to Parry. It seems that Parry prefers realistic novels committed to the plight of the oppressed and to depiction of liberation movements, like the novels of Andre Brink or Nadine Gordimer to those of Coetzee. Gordimer in a collection

of essays speaks of the need for ‘the essential gesture’ and that ‘the white writer’s task as a “cultural worker” is to raise the consciousness of white people, who unlike himself, have not woken up’ (Gordimer and Clingman, 1988, p.293). Andre Brink in *Mapmakers* (1983), published in the same year as *Life and Times of Michael K* states, ‘if I am pleading a literary cause, it is the cause of a literature wholly committed to humanity, which requires a peculiar *awareness* in those who write in this country’ (Brink, 1983, p.52, original emphasis). Unlike Brink, Coetzee has refused to necessitate for himself direct engagement with politics of South Africa.³⁷

However, contrary to the above mentioned critics’ analyses, Coetzee performs a kind of cultural resistance that transgress the political context of South Africa. This claim is substantiated by the fact that Coetzee sustains his idea that through looking at the land differently the marginalized South Africans can resist displacement and can declare their entitlement to the South African land. The epigraph with which this chapter opens is from *Boyhood* (1997), a memoir that Coetzee published after the liberation of South Africa. While the young Coetzee’s father is dispossessed of the family farm and this farm officially belongs to other members, the young Coetzee see his relationship with the farm

³⁷ Even in the realm of fiction Michael K refuses to join political activism, whereas the protagonist of Andre Brink’s *A Dry White Season* (1979), Ben De Toit, the white South African teacher, feels a strong sense of responsibility towards the murder of black people by apartheid regime and thus, actively pursues justice for them. For Ben De Toit, the truth behind the mysterious death of his gardener in detention and the gardener’s son at the peak of riots in Soweto should be uncovered, even at the cost of his life: ‘The end seems ineluctable: failure, defeat, loss, the only choice I have left is whether I am prepared to salvage a little honour, a little decency, a little humanity –or nothing. It seems as if a sacrifice is impossible to avoid, whatever way one looks at it’ BRINK, A. P. (1979) *A dry white season*, London, W.H. Allen..

beyond the tropes of ownership and insists he is *owned by* the farm: 'I belong to the farm' (*B*, p.95). Quite similarly, Michael K insists on keeping the memory of belonging and connection to the land alive – an idea that became meaningful in the light of liberation in South Africa. Coetzee chooses an unconventional approach to resistance, which distinguishes it from the realist novels of the time. What distinguishes Coetzee's approach to the plight of the marginalized is that unlike other South African writers like Andre Brink or La Guma, he refuses to resort to a tragic narrative to show the hardships of township life or tragic endings of activists.³⁸ Michael K far from being a tragic hero, attempts to highlight the empowering and unbeatable potentialities of the struggle over keeping the memory of belonging alive. Before discussing how such an approach can be viewed as a resisting strategy, there is a need to address Coetzee's reasons for refusing to resort to a tragic outlook (as explained in his analysis of the novels of Alex La Guma) and the implications of his critique of tragic fate in La Guma's work for his own novels.

Coetzee in an analysis of Alex Guma's fiction expresses his own perspective towards how life of the margins can be depicted in fiction without reducing the narrative to a protest literature (*DP*, p.351) . In "Fate in the Novels of La Guma", Coetzee praises La Guma's insight into the dynamics of power and into the consciousness of the Coloured working class manifested in *A Walk in the Night*; however, he criticizes La Guma's novel for its depiction of oppression as

³⁸ Isidore Diala in an article argues that Andre Brink's approach to apartheid within the matrix of tragedy is at the heart of his art and his political outlook. See DIALA, I. (2003) Andre Brink and the implications of tragedy for apartheid South Africa. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 29, 903-919.

fate. The novel depicts the tragic life of Michael Adonis, a young man in the Coloured community in District Six. Michael Adonis, the protagonist of the novel, is sacked from his job by his white boss, and while drunk and angry he kills an old Irish actor who lives with his Coloured wife in the township. Michael Adonis escapes from the scene, while the scream of a woman draws the attention of another black man, Williboy, who, horrified at the sight of the murder scene, attempts to escape the place but he is shot dead by a white officer who mistakenly thinks that he is the murderer. Adonis is blackmailed to work for the underworld criminal gang who know the truth about the murder. Coetzee reads the novel as a naturalist tragedy; a reading that is encouraged by first, the plot of the novel and tragic death of a black boy, and second, the allusion of the novel to Shakespeare's Hamlet, as the out-of-work actor who is killed in the story was the actor of the ghost of Hamlet's father. However, Coetzee argues that the cycle of irrational death in La Guma's novel manifests 'the bitter ironies of crime and punishment in a state in which Law and Crime overlap' which is oppressive rather than tragic (*DP*, p.352). As Coetzee argues, La Guma could either develop the idea of the state's oppression of marginalized communities, or he could develop the tragedy as lack of consciousness of the Coloured working class on how their anger towards their rulers is redirected to themselves as crime (*DP*, p.352-3).

Life and Times of Michael K also depicts the life-story of a Coloured working class man; however, far from being tragic, the novel manifests a cultural resistance through developing the consciousness of belonging in the face of displacement. Unlike characters like Williboy or Michael Adonis who lack

consciousness of their milieu and their social position, Michael K gradually develops a consciousness of resistance to displacement. Michael K's *idea* of gardening is suggestive of the need for establishing ideas of freedom and belonging as liberating forces.

The liberation of South Africa proved the effectiveness and relevance of cultural resistance. Just as Coetzee's novel predicted, liberation proved that forced removals and segregation policies of the apartheid regime were not sustainable in the long term. In District Six, the township in Cape Town that is depicted in La Guma's fiction, after liberation, a District Six museum is built. In a conference held in 2005 under "Hands on District Six", the objectives of the museum and the conference are identified as enlivening the memory of 'complex histories and geographies of forced removals' (Bennett, 2007). The importance of working with memory of place in post-apartheid is expressed by one of the panellists, Angela Impey, as follows:

Land, locality, and place attachment are keys to the development process in post-apartheid South Africa. Finding one's place under the new dispensation involves a complex disentangling from the hegemonies of the past, and a conscious re-valuation of cultural identities and places. (cited in Bennett, 2007, p.19)

The ongoing land restitution process in District Six, highlights the validity of the idea that insistence on attachment and belonging to the land and places would ultimately bring about the possibility of revaluation of identities and reconstruction

of places.³⁹ District Six is only one example among many townships and resident areas like Sophiatown or Soweto that have experienced dispossession and displacement and tragic massacres in the course of apartheid. Yet, just as the dynamics of power changed in South Africa with the succession of the ANC, reconstruction of the demolished sites was necessitated. Reconstruction projects could not be possible if the memory of dispossession of people and forced removals had not been kept alive in literary and cultural practices and if these works had not struggled against forgetting.

It is in this light that engaging with the idea of land becomes a meaningful resistant force in literature. As for black writing, Van Wyk Smith argues it has been inseparable from giving symbolic value to places and community life. He argues that the growth of Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa during the apartheid regime has been indispensable form literatures that gave symbolic values to place, the best examples of which are 'District Six' writing and Soweto poetry.⁴⁰ Places such as 'Marabastad, Orlando, Sophiatown ... acquired the symbolic value' through writings that engaged with their violence, poverty, misery (Smith, 1990, p.98). The projection of a sense of belonging to the land or the

³⁹ Christiaan Beyers in a series of articles published in different South African journals have followed re-development of District Six and the land distribution and land restitution in the area. Although she is critical of the justice in the processes at work in some ways, she acknowledges that the process aims at empowering the ex-residents to claim their right and entitlement to the land under Restitution Act BEYERS, C. (2007a) Land restitution's 'rights communities': the District Six case. *Ibid.*33, 267-285.. Also See BEYERS, C. (2007b) Mobilising 'community' for justice in District Six: stakeholder politics early in the land restitution process. *South African Historical Journal*, 58, 253-276..

⁴⁰ 'District Six' is a literary school initiated by a number of so-called "Coloured" writers, like Peter Abrahms, and Alex La Guma, who used to write about community life in the township of District Six. Soweto poetry also is refereed to a few wave of writings which began in the early 1970s with the appearance of collections of poetry by Mongane Serote, James Matthews and other writers. See (Smith, 1990, pp.99-109).

community in schools of literature that are named after places, manifest the increasingly structured dispossession of South Africa's marginalized population from their right to the land and their resistance against oblivion and forgetting through envisioning and celebrating their sense of belonging in places.

White liberal writers also took their part in acknowledging the need for abandoning the traditional perceptions of land and belonging, if unity and nationhood were to be achieved in South Africa (Nuttall, 1996). According to Sarah Nuttall writers like Damon Galgut in *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* (1992) address the issue of the contest over land, and were advocates for adopting a new approach to land.⁴¹ Damon Galgut's novel, for example, happens on two sides of the Namibia/South Africa border, and depicts the journey of a South African soldier to the other side of the border to meet a SWAPO activist who fights against South Africa. The killings and violence stand on the one side of the divide and friendship on the other. Through the motif of a journey the novel encourages border transgression and dismantling of the divisions.⁴² It is characteristic of this rite of passage that the narrator begins to see the land beyond divisions of nationality and conflicts over ownership:

The desert enveloped us all. Through the flickering bodies of people around me, I saw the sand shining through. ... Years of war and

⁴¹ Galgut, D. 1992, *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, London: Abacus.

⁴² Patrick a soldier at the border fighting for South Africa, happens to make a journey to the other side of the border to meet his mother's black boyfriend, Godfrey, who is a SWAPO activist and fights against the cruelty of South African army against people on the other side of the border. Before the journey, Patrick shoots a white SWAPO fighter when he was on post who happens to be a friend of Godfrey. When taking part in the funeral of the man he had just killed, he says: 'I feel dislocated ... Not part of life' (106); which indicates a transition in his attitude towards war over land.

ideology had converged on this land. All the law and guns and blood for this –rock, sand, and air. Barren, omnipotent, emptiness waited beneath us. When we had gone, this arid earth would remain. White and implacable, burning with light like the moon. (The *Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, p.106)

According to Sarah Nuttall, there was a persistent call in the early 1990s for ‘the transition of perceptions of the land and its ownership’ in white South African writings (Nuttall, 1996). White South African writers like Boehmer and Galgut, to Nuttall, represent a space free of the confining historical attitudes towards the land and attempt to ‘clear a space beyond an appropriative ownership of the land, a space for a different relation, one which might institute a less exclusivist sense of belonging’ (Nuttall, 1996, p.228). Yet she criticizes these works by saying that although in each work the idea of a clear space has different implications, in all of these novels ‘such a space remains, as yet, largely unformed and uncertain’ (Nuttall, 1996, p.228). Nuttall’s critique is applicable to *Life and Times of Michael K* to a large extent. The novel asks for a different relation to the land, yet, the image of land undivided by rites of ownership is unformed. This might be due to the fact that at the heart of the war and the complexities of the political situation, it was challenging and to a large extent unimaginable how power-sharing or land sharing with the black population might work out. In *Life and Times of Michael K*, gardening is shown as a reclamation of entitlement of the South African landscape for those who have been denied access to it. However, the novel, at that particular moment, fails to engage with the idea of co-habitation and land reform in South Africa. Although the novel

encourages resistance, its resistant quality is to be understood not in terms of its attempt to suggest a clear image of how South African nationhood can be achieved (in which case the novel has not been successful), rather how it encourages the dismantlement of their authority and functionality of boundaries.

It is after the liberation of South Africa, and precisely in *Disgrace* that Coetzee addressed the urgency of reconciliation and co-habitation of the white and black South African population. Before the liberation, he argued that time proved to the English-speaking whites that political and cultural attachments to England would fade out and 'the ultimate fate of white was going to depend a great deal more urgently on an accommodation with black South Africans than on an accommodation with the South African landscape' (WW, 1988, p.8). Indeed, Coetzee views reconciliation with the black population as the only way out of the political and social impasse.

In *Disgrace*, Coetzee directly engages with the necessity for reconciliation and co-habitation on equal terms. The relationship between Lucy Laurie, a white farmer and her black neighbour, Petrus, in *Disgrace* parallels the white landowner heir, Visagies, and Michael K. However, in *Disgrace*, the question no longer is who ultimately survives, the black South Africans or the white. The question after liberation is how South Africans of different racial and ethnic origins might recover from violence and historical divisions. *Disgrace* in the form of a realistic narrative depicts the downfall of a white South African university professor for his illicit relationship with a young black student, which coincides

with the tragic rape of his farmer daughter by a gang of black men. The suspects of the rape incidents are close to Petrus, the co-farmer who owns a patch of land next to Lucy's. Disagreement between David Lurie and his daughter on how to deal with the rape incident displays the complexity of the issue of reconciliation and co-habitation. Lurie, insists that the incident should be reported to the police, but Lucy disagrees with reporting and regards the tragic incident as a price that she has to pay for the history of 'subjection' and 'subjugation' of the black and the price for surviving on her farm (*Disgrace*, p.159). Lucy, as a second generation of white farmers in South Africa, unlike her father, has recognized what Coetzee see as the need for urgent accommodation and reconciliation with black South Africans, and in effect, she decides not only to sell part of her land to Petrus, but also to marry him despite her being a lesbian. There is a sense of continuity between the two novels of Coetzee in terms of their approach to the land despite the fact that liberation of South Africa caused a dramatic disruption in the ways literature responded to socio-political issues.⁴³ In *Life and Times of Michael K*, ownership and private property at the time of war is shown to be provisional. The white South Africans are shown as leaving their farms and houses for the fear of violence. In *Disgrace* the drama of violence and war seems to continue despite the settlement between the two parties in the post-apartheid era. To end such a continuous war turns out to be costly for the white South Africans, but land-

⁴³ This disruption between in the narratives of apartheid and post-apartheid era is marked out by David Attwell and Barbara Harlow. There was at the time a sense of 'the end of literary careers built on the diagnosis of apartheid ills or the celebration of resistance to it' ATTWELL, D. & HARLOW, B. (2000) Introduction: South African fiction after apartheid. *Modern Fiction Studies*, 46, 1-9. (p.3) However, Coetzee's novel do not fall under such a category and their ideas transcend the apartheid policies.

sharing and reconciliation appears to be the only way to move towards nationhood.

Life and Times of Michael K is Coetzee's attempt to show how boundaries in South Africa could be defied. The ideal is to live outside boundaries and camps whose primary function is to dispossess and marginalise. Michael K longs to settle in 'certain mountaintops, for example, certain islands in the middle of swamps, certain arid strips where human beings may not find it worth their while to live' (p.162). But while the ideal cannot be achieved, the novel invites the marginalised to inhabit the space of power and not to succumb to forces that tend to incarcerate, displace and control the space. Place from this viewpoint is a practice of negotiating and re-placing and pushing against the boundaries. Belonging is also an idea to be lived and remembered. Michael K shows how one can establish a relationship with the land outside the restrictions of ownership. He establishes a tie (a metaphorical umbilical cord) between him and the South African land through gardening and by remembering the idea of belonging. Michael K trusts mother-nature to own her children only if they engage with her imaginatively (like him dreaming about his garden in the camps) and actively (like him planting seeds and looking after them). South Africa's liberation proved that Michael K was indeed right in his belief in the strength of this tie in the face of dispossession.

Chapter Eight

Advocating a New Approach to Geography in *Foe*

Almost three centuries after the publication of what is known as one of the first English novels,⁴⁴ *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Coetzee re-writes and re-imagines the original story in two different versions, in *Foe* and in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech. The previous two chapters discussed how Coetzee's novels criticized the manner in which inhabitants of the colonised territories were culturally and physically displaced and uprooted through discursive imperial practices. In *Foe*, Coetzee directs his criticism to discursive cultural supports for imperialism. This chapter focuses on the ways in which *Foe* criticizes the creation of geographical marginality in the literary canon and manifests a new decentralised geographical awareness.

Daniel Defoe's novel uses the motif of adventure to show the possibility of colonisation of alien lands by an ambitious white man who succeeds in turning an unknown island into landed capital. On the other hand, Susan Barton, the narrator of *Foe*, claims that she is the one who originally recounted the story of the island and the life of Crusoe to Mr Foe (fictional Daniel Defoe) but he manipulated it and published it under his own name. Barton claims that neither the island nor the life-experiences conform to Mr Foe's representation of it.

Gayatri Spivak and Hermann Wittenberg read *Foe* as a critique of imperial spatial

⁴⁴ In John Richetti's study of Daniel Defoe's works, Defoe is presented as the founder of the modern fiction. (p.1) See RICHETTI, J. J. (2008) *The Cambridge companion to Daniel Defoe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

arrangements, which is close to the main argument of this chapter. Spivak reads *Foe* as manifestation of how literature 'commodif[ies] marginality' (Spivak, 1991, p.154). She argues that *Foe* is Coetzee's attempt to engage with women's fight for a voice which has been denied in the course of history (Spivak, 1991).

Hermann Wittenberg also argues that *Foe* criticizes novelistic narrative as a key feature of what he calls 'the dominance of a Western, rational, male subjectivity over colonised domains' (Wittenberg, 1997, p.127). Wittenberg's reading of *Robinson Crusoe* emphasises that the novel contributed to the imperialist project of '“opening up” the non-Western spaces for surplus value', through configuring 'a space in which a male middle-class subject [...] can assert his power and superiority over a plain terrain' (Wittenberg, 1997, p.144). The idea that *Foe* challenges the ideology of white male supremacist imperialism (noted by Wittenberg) and the establishment of marginality (noted by Spivak) are rightly emphasised. Yet, one question remains and that is how a white male writer like Coetzee re-imagines space and geography in a manner that is different from Daniel Defoe.

Wittenberg hardly engages with the question of Coetzee's agency. However, Spivak, while admiring Coetzee's attempt in giving voice to marginalized characters like Friday and Barton, insists that a writer who does not occupy a marginal social position should be wary of what she calls 'overdetermination' of the voice of marginalized subjects, referring to narrative voices that might over-determine the desires and aspirations of people the writer can not identify with because of his background (Spivak, 1991, pp.160-3). In

order to avoid 'overdetermination', Spivak argues that a writer should deploy new modes of narration which leave out closures and uphold the aporia (unknown). To Spivak, Coetzee has overcome the problem of overdetermination by creating a meta-fictional narrative that questions its own narrative authority:

Perhaps this is the novel's message: the impossible politics of overdetermination (mothering, authoring, giving voice to the native "in" the text; a white male South African writer engaging in such inscription outside the text) should not be regularized into a blithe continuity where the European redoes the primitives' project in herself. (Spivak, 1991, p.174)

Spivak defines marginality as deprivation of voice for subjects like Susan Barton and Friday. Thus, Spivak fails to recognize that Barton's fragmented view of the island and her experience of living both in the mainland and in the island are the result of her marginalized subject position, rather than merely Coetzee's meta-fictional narrative strategy.

In this chapter I examine the difference between Coetzee's narrative and that of Defoe not in terms of 'voice' but in terms of the 'consciousness' from which the story is narrated and the ways in which the space and geography of the island are perceived. In order to explain how the geography explored by a female castaway is different from the one represented by Defoe, I borrow Gillian Rose's approach to geography through feminism. Gillian Rose in *Feminism and Geography* argues that masculinism has dominated geography and that feminism attempts to imagine an alternative space (Rose, 1993). She argues that feminist resistance imagines a new 'geography not on the exclusions of a mode of

knowing that is dependent on a relationship of dominance between Same and Other, but on an acknowledgement of difference' (Rose, 1993, p.14). The new geography (which she calls 'paradoxical space') is created in opposition to transparent spaces that are created by masculinism, and articulate hegemonic spatial relations (Rose, 1993, p.159). Rose concludes her new approach to geography, asking for 'a geography that acknowledges that the grounds of its knowledge are unstable, shifting, uncertain and above all, contested' (Rose, 1993, p.160). Rose's approach is not to be understood as advocating women should take charge of geographical knowledge. Rather, inspired by feminist criticism, she calls for a deconstruction of the white male supremacist view, replacing it with a new vision of geography that decentralises spatial binaries established through the discursive policies of imperialism.

In the same light, *Foe* is seen as an attempt to recreate the fictional geography of the castaways' island different from the imperial masculine imagination of it in the original story. By having a woman narrator, Coetzee invites the reader to re-imagine the terrain and the space of the original story caught in the matrix of imperialist ideology. Thus, gaps, silences and doubts about narrative authority are not to be read as Coetzee's strategy to avoid 'overdetermination' (as Spivak argues); rather, such a technique is to be seen as inherent in the way space and geography are seen from the consciousness of those who live in the margins of power. That is why Coetzee recreates *Robinson Crusoe* from the consciousness of Friday and Susan Barton, two marginalized characters. Coetzee's *He and His Man* (the Nobel Prize acceptance speech), in

which Friday reports to Crusoe, is evidence of the idea that Coetzee has identified his writing self as belonging in the margins.

I. The adventure that led to colonial domination

Before studying *Foe*, there is a need to discuss why *Robinson Crusoe* needed to be re-imagined from a new perspective. Edward Said asks for a 'contrapuntal reading' of canonical works, by which he means reading such works back from the view of the colonised.⁴⁵ In *Culture and Imperialism* he argues that it was the imperialist missions of territorial expansion that made imagining the adventures of Crusoe ever possible. The introduction of the novel in English with *Robinson Crusoe*, according to Said, marks out the establishment of the ideology of overseas expansion and Robinson Crusoe is seen as 'the founder of a new world, which he rules and reclaims for Christianity and England' (Said, 1993, p.83). *Foe* similarly through what one can call a contrapuntal narrative, shows the dense interrelation between imperialism and masculinism and the shaping of English literature.⁴⁶ The ideology behind the novel generates the 'imperial eyes' through which *Robinson Crusoe* constructed its subordinate 'others' and created the discourse of the mastery of white male colonist.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ See the study of Said's theory by Ashcroft and Ahluwalia in ASHCROFT, B. & AHLUWALIA, D. P. S. (1999) *Edward Said : the paradox of identity*, London, Routledge.

⁴⁶ The term contrapuntal narrative is taken from Ashcroft's elaboration of Edward Said's theory. I use it here to show that Coetzee's work as much presents a challenge to the classical novel of Daniel Defoe, as criticism of a critic like Said does. Reading Robinson Crusoe contrapuntally is seen as a way to explore and display interrelatedness of culture and imperialist and patriarchal politics be it in the form of a story or a criticism.

⁴⁷ Imperial eyes is a term borrowed from Mary Louise Pratt's title book.

Robinson Crusoe is neither an explorer nor a colonialist, but his life experience is imagined in such a way that he conforms to what Europe regarded as its merits, civilization and Christianity. The 'imperial eyes' in *Robinson Crusoe* shapes the subjectivity of Crusoe and his others through establishing unequal relations of power between Crusoe's and the island's nature as well as Crusoe and Friday. The two relationships are imagined in ways which manifest Crusoe's ability to bring under his control the wilderness and the inhabitants of the land. Crusoe lands on the island somewhere between the America and African coast in the course of a shipwreck . In the beginning Crusoe sounds scared and disappointed as he imagines himself 'perishing with hunger or being devoured by wild beasts' (Defoe, 1906, p.39). But he recovers from the incident and determines to make a comfortable living on the island for himself by digging a cave in the rocks to shelter himself from the attack of what he calls 'cannibals', and bringing necessary tools like a few guns from the sinking ship onto the island. In the course of his twenty-eight year stay in the island, he is transformed from a miserable shipwrecked castaway, who used to call the place 'the Island of Despair', into a proud ruler who wants the island to 'be governed by [his] orders' (Defoe, 1906, p.193). The turning point of the novel comes when after ten years, Crusoe ventures to explore other parts of the island, and to his surprise, what seemed to him as a place lacking enough edible vegetation, appeared to be 'a country ...so fresh, so green, so flourishing, everything being in constant venture or flourish of spring, that it looked like a planted garden' (Defoe, 1906, p.72). His investigation goes further and he finds pigeons, turtle and grapes to eat. The site

of plenty prompts Crusoe to build up a plantation and harvest vegetables, through which he gains control over the food supply.

Crusoe is shown to gain mastery over the wilderness and take it under control by harvesting it, marking out boundaries and regulating the plantation fields. Such a process of turning a wilderness into a governed and civilized space, according to W. T. Mitchell is 'tailor made for the discourse of imperialism' as the expanding civilization and culture into natural spaces is 'understood as an inevitable, progressive development in history' (Mitchell, 1995, p.17). In other words, the imperial development which is quite pre-planned and political is shown as a natural course in the history of the world that could inevitably happen. On the other hand, David Bunn shows that from the seventh century through to the nineteenth century landscapes are exported from metropolitan Britain to the imperial periphery, in poetry and travelogues (Bunn, 1994). He argues that colonial landscapes respond to a 'local contest over symbolic power on the periphery' (Bunn, 1994, p.128). The shared features of the representations of landscape is that in them, first, the colonial landscape is staged in a way to create 'popular picturesque', and secondly, the picturesque is narrated or staged by 'a historical subject concerned to write his or her symbolic presence, despite previous inhabitants' (Bunn, 1994, pp.129-131). The representational patterns that Mitchell and Bunn mention are present in *Robinson Crusoe*. The process of occupation of the island by a middle-class sailor is shown as a natural and progressive course. Crusoe's declaration of mastery is justified by his intelligence, his physical labour and his merits. Accordingly, Crusoe's attempts in

marking out boundaries on the island, and his harvesting plans present him as a progressive man who brings civilization to the island. His description of the way he domesticated the island by carving caves and refuges or planting crops in a plot of land and his registering the inhabitants as 'barbarians', 'savages' and 'cannibals', are all inscriptions of the mark of Crusoe on the island that later is used by him to legitimately call the island his property.

Crusoe's mastery over the inhabitants of the island is justified in an even subtler way. His control over the island could not be possible without the help of Friday, yet Friday is shown to be an obedient servant of Crusoe who owes his life to his master. Crusoe's encounter with Friday is planned in a way to show that Crusoe saves him by shooting down the cannibals who entrapped him. Crusoe says that in token of acknowledgement for his saving Friday's life, 'the poor savage' (Defoe, 1906, p.165) kneeled down, and even refused to join his people, just to live alongside Crusoe. What in Crusoe's view distinguishes Friday from the so-called savage are the two fundamental features of civilization, which are 'true Christian religion' and command of a language (Defoe, 1906, p.165). Crusoe willingly shares the two features with Friday, but the superiority of Crusoe is then confirmed by these features, and Friday is shown to have been transformed from a savage to a civilized man, yet, a servant. The subjectivity of Friday is constructed as a subordinate along with the construction of the subjectivity of Crusoe as a superior. The novel confirms Crusoe's mastery by having Crusoe teaching Friday 'to say Master' (Defoe, 1906, p.155) and showing Friday declaring his servitude for the rest of his life. Despite all attempts to show

Crusoe as sympathizing with Friday and Friday serving Crusoe willingly, it is clear that one of the main images that it intends to create is the master and slave relationship between the two individuals. The fact that the first word that Crusoe teaches Friday is 'Master', and that he names the native man Friday rather than asking his name shows the manner in which Crusoe clarifies for Friday the boundaries and relations.⁴⁸

The island can be seen as what Mary Louise Pratt calls 'the contact zone' meaning 'a space of colonial encounter' (Pratt, 2008). The island is imaginatively created as Europe's other. The periphery and its inhabitants are constructed in Defoe's story by showing the mastery and superiority of European civilization. Thus, *Robinson Crusoe* can be seen as an ideological construct whose production is closely related to the momentum for interior exploration in the eighteenth century (Pratt, 1998, p.9). As argued in the introduction, Mary Louise Pratt's notion of "planetary consciousness" suggests that creation of the imaginative geographical division of the world into central and peripheral, led to the construction of modern Eurocentrism (Pratt, 1998, p.15). It is thus understandable that culturally created spatiality in the stories that deal with exploration of what was seen at the time peripheries of Europe, ideologically support colonisation of the peripheries and declaring them a private territory.

⁴⁸ The argument made here is not new, and indeed it is made in a few studies on colonialism in *Robinson Crusoe*, in one way or another. Some of these studies are cited in (WITTENBERG, H. (1997) Imperial space and the discourse of the novel. *Journal of Literary Studies*, 13, 127-150.

In *Robinson Crusoe*, Crusoe's ability to bring under his command both the nature and the inhabitants of the island, gives Crusoe the legitimacy to regard the island as his rightful possession:

My island was peopled, and I thought myself very rich in subjects, and it was a merry reflection which I frequently made, how like a king I looked. First of all, the whole country was my own property; so that I had an undoubted right of domination. (Defoe, 1906, p.189)

Robinson Crusoe's sentiments shows how a shipwrecked sailor could make his subjectivity as a king by constructing the inhabitants of the island as peripheral and in need of governing. Thus, the imperial articulations and territorial appropriations of a white male authority on the island appear to be natural progress. Indeed, the novel can be seen as reflecting the ideology of the imperialist expansion era that asserted European male authority over the planet.

II. Retelling the story from the perspective of castaways and island dwellers

In the previous section, I explored how Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* projects the manner in which imperial rational masculine subjects arranged geographical order in the peripheries, and turned what initially was an adventure into a form of colonial domination. Now, there is a need to explore how the narrative of *Foe* recreates the lived spaces of the margins. *Foe* is narrated by a woman who claims that she lived for over one year along with Friday and Crusoe (Coetzee's Crusoe) on the island, before they were rescued by an English ship. Substituting

a female first person narrator for a male first person narrator, the unequal power relation is explored from the site of the margin. The unequal power relation is established on two levels: first, it is between Cruso as the ruler and Friday and Barton as the subordinates; second, between Barton the story-teller and Mr Foe the writer, who stands as the guardian of the male-dominated literary canon that prevents Barton's authorship. Susan Barton's narrative, which is discussed in the following, deconstructs the ideological basis of *Robinson Crusoe* by challenging the idea that place conforms to its representation. Comparing Susan Barton's account of life and nature on the island to Defoe's story, I will argue that representation of the island is a culturally created spatiality that manipulates the truth and constructs racial, gender and geographical marginality.

Susan Barton begins her story by introducing herself as a shipwreck castaway who lands on the shore where Friday finds her unconscious and brings her to Cruso's domain. From the first moment on the island she notices how different the island is from commonly known representations of '*desert isle*' in travel writings (p.7). Thus, she emphasises the distinctiveness of her narrative from such representations by stating that 'the island on which [she] was castaway was quite *another place*' (p.7). Contrary to representations of the desert isle in travel writings, she finds no brook under the shady trees, or no ripe fruit falling into her hand, or animals such as snakes or turtles; rather, she views the landscape as mainly 'a great rocky hill with a flat top' (p.7), on which there are lizards, apes and birds everywhere. She finds out that the island is mainly a 'barren and silent' place in which life looks tedious and boring (p.8). The island,

to Barton, has nothing to offer for exploration, and life is less than an adventure, and more a monotonous passage of time: 'wind, rain, wind, rain: such was the pattern of the days in that place, and had been, for all I knew, since the beginning of time' (p.15). The cycle of time shown in terms of a sequence of natural happenings suggests that the island is outside historical time, as it is untouched by the interference of civilization and modernization. The nature of the island appears to Barton, who has the experience of living in civilization, to be a tedious and repetitive cycle: '[T]o me sea and sky remained sea and sky, vacant and tedious' (p.38). It appears that life on the island follows a monotonous pattern. Emphasis on the stagnation and inactivity of life on the island is in contrast to the idea presented in *Robinson Crusoe* that the motivated and diligent Crusoe could transform the island from wilderness into a progressive society.

The image of the beautiful and fertile kingdom of Crusoe on the island is shattered in Susan Barton's story. Barton, who is a settler in the island, claims that she has experienced and seen nothing but inactivity and degeneration. Sara Mills' study of gendered spatial relations in colonial space explains why Barton views the island life so differently, apart from the fact that she claims to have closely experienced it, whereas Daniel Defoe merely imagined such life in his novel (Mills, 1996). While emphasizing the importance of 'viewing position', Mills argues that women adopting a different position in subjective relational space, presents a distinctively different view of the sublime, landscape, knowledge and colonial space in their writings. Mills argues that a woman's representation – as a subject of colonisation – of the experience of sublime when viewing a landscape

or colonial space is different from a man's representation as a 'colonial individual' (Mills, 1996, pp.130-1). While men are usually represented 'as being in control, fearless, competent, and the colonial landscape, is usually represented as overwhelming, strange and potentially dangerous', women's writing 'wavers between the sublime ... and the banal'. The word 'banal' suggests detailing the difficulties of everyday activities in the colonies, as in the gendered colonial contexts women lack the 'power/knowledge/sublime position' that men enjoy having (Mills, 1996, p.136). The lack of a power position should not be seen as a defect; rather, as Mills observes, it gives women a chance to present alternative viewpoints which challenge dominant male representations.

The encounter of Crusoe with cannibals and his fight with them that ends in Friday's rescue from their hands, is another example which in the original story is designed to show Crusoe in what Mills calls the 'power/knowledge/sublime position' (Mills, 1996, p.142). The scene pictures Crusoe as superior to cannibals. He seems to be physically more powerful, because of his prudence as well as the power of his gun. In contrast, in Susan Barton's story, there are no cannibals living on the island and Friday does not belong to a cannibal tribe. The threat of cannibals in Defoe's fiction is one of the discursive imperialist discourses that aim to justify colonisation. As we discussed in chapter six, imperial rule is conditioned first by the threat of the uncivilized cannibals or barbarians and second by the idea of a civilizing mission on the alien lands. Cultural products such as *Robinson Crusoe* could justify imperialism and colonialism through denying

the abuse but emphasising the necessity for civilizing savages and cannibals like Friday. However, in *Foe* Barton makes Mr Foe confess that the fabrication of the encounter with cannibals was only to market the story, because as Mr Foe says to Barton 'as an adventure it was very dull' (p.65), if he did not have anyone to challenge Crusoe in the story.

The life of Crusoe on the island, far from a progressive life of a European authority, is shown to be stuck in stagnation and degeneration. Crusoe's life in *Foe* is portrayed in accordance with what Coetzee sees as the living state of the first generation Dutch Boer settlers in South Africa. In *White Writing* Coetzee argues that the degeneration of the white colonists in South Africa 'threatened one of the arguments by which expansive imperialism justified itself: that those deserve to inherit the earth who make best use of it' (*WW*, p.3). In *Robinson Crusoe*, Crusoe is imagined as a determined civilized man who transforms wilderness through establishing law, plantation base and introducing civilization. On the contrary, *Foe* shows that the imperialist ideology fails to substantiate in the settler colonies in reality –the point that Coetzee makes in *White Writing*. According to Susan Barton, it is indeed wilderness that has diminished Crusoe's desire for return to his home in England. Susan Barton criticizes Crusoe for failing to keep a journal, failing to make a plantation base, and refusing to establish law and order on the land, and critically stating that 'Crusoe would brook no change on his island' (p.27). In response to Barton's question that 'Would you not regret it that ... what you have passed through shall not die from

memory?’ or the question that ‘would you not wish for a memorial to be left behind?’, Crusoe shows that he relies on his memory, saying that ‘Nothing is forgotten ... Nothing I have forgotten is worth the remembering’ (p.17).

Crusoe is as dismissive about Barton’s request for establishing laws on the island, saying that ‘as long as our desires are moderate we have no need for laws’ (p.36).

The lack of law, relationship with the outside world and track of time indicate a gradual move towards infertility and degeneration on the island. The degeneration is symbolically presented in the lack of seeds for plantation. Crusoe is shown to have prepared terraces and plots of land for cultivation all his life but as he does not have seeds to plant, the terraces remain useless. He justifies his work saying that having ‘nothing to plant ... is our misfortune. ... The planting is reserved for those who come after us and have the foresight to bring seed. I only clear the ground for them’ (p.33). Crusoe far from being a ruler or a king, is shown to be as much a castaway as Barton and Friday are. Crusoe is stuck on an island from which he cannot save himself and he sees how his life has wasted away on the island. Crusoe appears to Barton to a large extent the victim of his own inaction and passivity than his fate, for he neither tries to create a better habitat on the island nor does he attempt to rescue his people and himself from the island by making a boat. Barton blames Crusoe for their entrapment in the island and holds him responsible for the degeneration of the life of settlers.

But it is Friday among all of them that is more marginalized and subjugated. Friday in Barton's story is neither a fast language learner, nor does he serve Crusoe willingly. Indeed his true feelings are obscure as his tongue is cut and he cannot communicate or express himself. He follows and obeys Crusoe as if he has no other option. Friday's past, his background and how he ended up on the island remain a mystery. Barton and Crusoe assume a background for Friday in their own terms. Crusoe says to Barton that Friday has lost his tongue by slave-traders (p. 69). Although Susan Barton never understands the truth about Friday's past, the voiceless slave embodies the historical subjugation he has been subjected to, as 'bodies are their own signs' (p.157). From what exact point the trauma of Friday began seems to be unclear, but after the story of his past appears less important than the suffering he has been subjected to and his body speaks what he fails to express. Friday's voicelessness is as much an advantage as a disadvantage for him. It is impossible to understand the inner desire of Friday or what freedom means to him or where he feels free. But on the other hand, his trauma is not reduced into words, and his story cannot be forged by storytellers. His life story signifies 'a hole in the narrative' (p.121), that everyone curiously wants to investigate. Barton refuses to fill in the gaps by speaking for him. The only step he takes for Friday, is to teach him to express himself in language, though with little success. Friday is doubly displaced as a castaway, because while Barton finally gets that chance to come out of the shadow and tell her part of the story, Friday does not get the chance to tell his part, or reveal the trauma he was subjected to. Thus, his story is manipulated by

writers like Foe who speaks for him, fabricate an identity for him as a savage and deny him freedom by expressing on his behalf his consent for serving the masters. Friday occupies a marginal space within the margins of empire (if we consider the island as part of the British Empire), that cannot be expressed by anyone but Friday himself. On the other hand, the inaccessibility of Friday's story protects his story from manipulations, as Spivak contends (Spivak, 1991).

Spivak describes Friday as an 'unemphatic agent of withholding in the text', and argues that '[f]or every territorial space that is value coded by colonialism' for the native there is 'a space of withholding' (Spivak, 1991, p.170). Spivak's point is that Friday's silence renders him 'the curious guardian at the margin' who prevents his story from manipulation (Spivak, 1991, p.172). Rather than speaking for Friday, Susan Barton attempts to bring Friday to speech (though in vain) through the end of the novel. Yet, when she fails to do so, she leaves Friday's story as uncertain and vague as it is, and avoids re-making it by using her imagination. She lets Friday's story remain ambiguous like a dark 'hole', an imagery that is reinforced with Friday writing and pronouncing only the letter (O). The act proves her to be the 'guardian' of stories, who recounts only what appears to her the truth.

The difference of Coetzee's story from that of Daniel Defoe lies in the point of view and the subjective position from which they tell their stories. Daniel Defoe was an English writer and an ambitious business man who combined his aspirations in writing and commerce in his adventure novels (Richetti, 2008) .

Coetzee's narrator, Barton, however, is shown as a colonised woman entrapped

in an island and later in England where her story is dismissed as untrue. She experiences male hegemony long before being shipwrecked. Her daughter is kidnapped and taken out of England. Being forced to travel across the continent in search of her abducted daughter, she is dismissed from the society in which women's behaviour is defined within a specific framework of relations. The abduction of her child, lack of support and the difficulties of travelling around the world that a woman could face in the eighteenth century endow Barton with a diasporic sensibility and the consciousness of a marginalized character. From the very opening of the story Susan Barton identifies herself as a 'castaway': 'I am a castaway. I am all alone' (p.5). She is a castaway not because she is shipwrecked or she is a woman, but mainly because she is a woman who has stepped out of the accepted social forms of English society of the eighteenth century.

Barton's experience of being marginalized by the patriarchal society helps her develop a sense of place in her new habitat sooner than Crusoe. She is transformed from a displaced castaway who is caught in a place from which there is no escape into a settler, or in her own words, 'an island-dweller' (p.26). Recognition of being an 'island-dweller' is the equivalent of recognition of one's marginality, something that Susan is not ashamed or upset about. She expresses her diasporic sensibility through comparing the island life with life on the mainland. This is best presented in an important scene which highlights the spatial differences the novel draws between the margin and centre. Susan is lying down to sleep when all of a sudden she feels 'the earth sways beneath' her:

I thought: It is a sign, a sign I am becoming an island-dweller. I am forgetting what it is to live on the mainland. I stretched out my arms and laid my palms on the earth, and yes, the rocking persisted, the rocking of the island as it sailed through the sea ... I fell asleep smiling. I believe it was the first time I smiled since I embarked for the New World. They say Britain is an island too, a great island, but that is a mere geographer's notion. The earth under our feet is firm in Britain, as it never was in Crusoe's island. (p.26)

This moment of a new realization of her habitat is a climax in Susan Barton's life and her becoming a different storyteller. She has become a settler on the island, and thus, her sense of place and her presentation of the island would be different from those of travellers and explorers embarking on an alien land.

It is not irrelevant if we mention Stephen Gray's study of 'sense of place' in settler writing to explain the change in Barton's view of the island. Stephen Gray divides settler literature into four phases, the first and second of which are relevant here (Gray, 1986). According to Gray, the first phase begins in the seventeenth century with travel writing, and the second phase begins as a reaction to this, and occurs when 'the colonised writer sees the overseas landscape from the viewpoint of his or her belonging to it rather than to the motherland' (Gray, 1986, p.8). The new sense of place develops when the writer discovers coherence in the life overseas, and in his/her life as a settler (Gray, 1986, p.8).⁴⁹ Although the island life of the castaways cannot be regarded as an

⁴⁹ Stephen Gray (1986) divides white South African literature into four phases based on sense of place factor (yet he believes that this pattern is applicable to most of the settler countries): a) tourist phase, b) era of colonial writing, the best example of which is Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African farm*, presenting South African landscape from the second generation of settlers' point of view, c) national phase in which racial and political divide is shown as complicating

equivalent of life in the settler colonies, where there was established societies and long-term plans for settlement, yet, there is a parallel line between Barton's expression of her life as "an island-dweller" and the sense of place in the phase of colonial writing. Her stance as a colonised writer rather than a metropolitan writer distinguishes her outlook from that of Mr Foe.

On the other hand, Susan Barton as a colonised woman manifests a distinguished awareness of the levels of power relations between men and women and between the coloniser and the colonised. Cruso establishes unequal power relations in his own small society in a manner that is driven by his white bourgeois masculine mindset. Cruso claims "ownership" of the island by naming it after himself, 'Cruso's island', which reinforces not only his ownership of the colonised island but also his mastery over the inhabitants, Barton and Friday. Barton questions Cruso's authority and ownership: 'the island was Cruso's (yet by what right? By the law of islands? Is there such a law?)' (p.37). Here, Gillian Rose's argument that masculinist geography reflects 'a relationship of dominance between Same and Other' has pertinence (Rose, 1993, 159). While Barton acknowledges differences, Cruso attempts to assert his authority and hegemony over the geography and its inhabitants. The evidence is when Barton leaves Cruso's settlement to explore the island for a few hours, on her return she faces Cruso's rage and out burst of anger, saying that, 'while you live under my roof you will do as I instruct!' (p.20). It looks as if Cruso has established on his island

approaches to place, and and lastly, the 'multicultural phase', in which a sense of place is related a writers' society as much as it is related to the world-wide geo-political relations. See GRAY, S. (1986) A Sense of place in the new literatures in English, particularly South African. IN NIGHTINGALE, P. (Ed.) *A sense of place in the new literatures in English*. St Lucia; London; New York, University of Queensland Press. .

similar power relations that is at work on the mainland between a man and his wife. His declaration of mastery is accordingly driven from his white supremacist outlook. However, Barton is aware that Cruso's claim to power and the right for ownership and mastery are arbitrary and provisional:

I found a hollow in the rocks where I could lie sheltered from the wind and gaze out to sea. In time I grew to think of this as my private retreat, the one place reserved for me on an island owned by another; though in truth the island no more belonged to Cruso than to the King of Portugal or indeed to Friday or the cannibals of Africa (p.26).

Cruso might be able to control Barton and make her retreat, just as he controls the island with the power of his gun, but Barton believes that ownership of a geographical territory as provisional and unsustainable. Cruso's power can be challenged by anyone stronger than him.

Unlike Defoe, Coetzee's narrative lacks an authoritative voice. Her narrative is fragmented as she narrated the story partly in the form of a story, partly in the form of a diary or a letter. She fails to verify the story of how her daughter is lost or whether the suspicious girl who claims to be her daughter is telling the truth. Lack of an assertive voice, fragmentation and uncertainty appear to be a disadvantage for a woman's voice, yet these can also be seen as a strength, for it is an index of multiplicity and subversion of the historical dominance of certain voices. Barton's fragmented narrative challenges the assertive white male imperialist outlook of the world. The feminine imagination of the island presented by Barton marks the paradoxes, differences and gaps that

Foe refused to include in his story. She offers a new knowledge of exploration of an alien island. Stories, according to Barton, teach that 'the world is not ... a barren and silent place' (p.59), however, every individuals' perspective of the world is determined by the subject position he/she takes up. It is one perspective of many that can be presented of the island. In other words, Barton's voice is one voice among the many voices that can tell the story of the island, and it struggles to be heard.

Barton's fate as a storyteller is determined by structures of power that promote imperialism and masculinism. She says to Mr Foe that she 'seem[s] to exist only as the one who came, the one who witnessed, the one who longed to be gone: a being without substance, a ghost beside the true body of Crusoe. Is that the fate of all storytellers?' (p.51). A possible answer to Barton's question is that deprivation from domains of authorship is the fate of those who are marginalized due to their race, gender or geographical origin. Mr Foe uses Barton's story for his own benefits, and ignores Barton's plea when she says, 'Return to me the substance I have lost, Mr Foe: that is my entreaty' (p.51). The term "substance" refers to the means through which a story is published, circulated and recognized in the canon. Barton lacked the power and influence that Mr Foe enjoyed when the literary canon was exclusively for men. Thus, Barton feels marginalized at the heart of her home, in England. She draws a parallel line between marginality of an island-dweller and her marginal state as a woman writer, by recalling a statement from Crusoe: '[t]he world is full of islands, said Crusoe once. His words ring truer every day' (p.71). The statement highlights

the idea that racial, geographical and gender marginality are all different forms of unequal spatial relations, created by hegemonic structures of power. Such structures of power have Barton's voice silenced and have her story written by people whose 'trade is in books, not in truth' (p.40). However, she finally could keep her promise to Cruso, who died on his way to England, to tell their story to the world. Barton might not have written the classic novel of *Robinson Crusoe*, but *Foe*, by displaying the imaginative collection of her letters, diaries and memories of life on the island questions ideological basis of the original novel.

III. The recreation of Robinson Crusoe in Coetzee's Nobel Prize acceptance speech

Narrating *Foe* from a woman's perspective raised the question of agency – the ability of the writer to identify with another gender or subject position despite the different ways in which their identities are constructed. Susan Barton is indeed Coetzee's imaginative creation. Although like Barton, Coetzee is a white settler who has experienced living in a colonised domain, yet one question remains and that is how much credit we give to Barton's voice, while we know that it is indeed Coetzee who creates her voice and her plight. David Attwell, Derek Attridge and Spivak all attempt to explain how Coetzee treated the question of agency by having *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* narrated through a woman's voice. David Attwell says that Barton's voice displays the 'question of authorship, the tension between reader, storytellers and the subjects or characters of the story' (Attwell, 1993, p.58). On the other hand, Spivak

regards Coetzee's use of a woman's voice as an attempt to join the women's struggle (Spivak, 1991). She argues that, 'It is *not* impossible, but new ways have to be learned and taught, and attention to the wholly other must be constantly renewed. We understand it more easily when folks of the other *gender* inscription wish to join *our* struggle' (Spivak, 1991, p.139, original emphasis). According to Spivak, Coetzee uses a fragmented narrative form in order to avoid what she calls 'overdetermination', in the sense that he is cautious about claiming to understand women's predicaments and needs.

Derek Attridge, however, views Coetzee's use of a woman's voice as a way through which the novel 'addresses the question of marginality' (Attridge, 1996, p.171). Attridge, whose analysis is directed towards a critique of canonisation, argues that "voice" in this novel calls our attention to 'who is speaking' (Attridge, 1996, p.169). Criticizing the politics of canonisation, Attridge argues that *Foe* through having the narrative of Barton, uncertain, fragmented and dissociated 'demonstrate that what we call "insights" are produced and conveyed by the narrativizing agencies of culture; experience in itself is insufficient to gain credit as knowledge or truth' (Attridge, 1996, p.174). Attridge, while pointing out the general fact that acceptance to the canon confers values, observes that in *Foe*, Susan Barton's inaccessibility to the domain of authorship because of her gender as well as Friday's inaccessibility to communicating means are projections of the oppressiveness of the historical production of values (Attridge, 1996, p.186). Attridge's reading is closest to this chapter's analysis. Barton's struggle over voice in the literary canon should not be reduced

to women's plight only, but to what Attridge also ascribes as the plight of the marginalized. To have a feminine narrator or to have a feminine geography in *Foe* does not mean that the novel advocates women re-writing knowledge of space or place, rather, feminism as we have seen in Gillian Roses' discussions, offers a new critical perspective that can be shared by the scholars regardless of their gender, in order to view geography formed through a matrix of historical, social, sexual and racial positions rather than a white masculine supremacist perspective. The evidence is Coetzee's re-imagination of the continuation of *Robinson Crusoe*, where the narrator is Friday. Coetzee through writing a continuation of the novel from Friday's viewpoint manifests the idea that he is determined to look at the world from the eyes of those who are in some ways marginalized.

In his Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, where Coetzee had the chance to present his missions and aspirations as a writer, he imagines Robinson Crusoe's fate on his return to England in a story called *He and His Man*. The significance of the work lies in the fact that Coetzee shows his tribute to the European art and literature and acknowledges that his art is indeed a continuation of the way paved by literary masters, and secondly he deviates from the original novel's narrative techniques and ideologies, through having Friday as one of the narrators reporting to Crusoe from different places. Crusoe, here, is shown as a retired man who, tired of adventure, has retreated to a peaceful life in his hometown, Bristol. Instead of Crusoe it is Friday who travels around and reports incidents and happenings from England and other places. Crusoe then turns the report

into materials for novels. Friday in *He and His Man* is neither the obedient slave happy to serve Crusoe, nor is he the speechless black man pictured in *Foe*. In Defoe's story Friday is shown to express that he is indebted to Crusoe and that Crusoe has the right of mastery over him. In *Foe*, on the other hand, he is pictured as unable to express himself or learn a language. He has been oppressed and speechless for so long that Barton suspects that the meaning and essence of words such as Africa or freedom might be 'lost' for him (*F*, p.146). The term 'freedom' fails to substantiate for Friday, because 'how can Friday know what freedom is, when he barely knows his name' (*F*, p.149). Friday, who is considered as "a hole in the narrative" in *Foe*, in *He and His Man* is transformed into a narrator and indeed the eyes of Crusoe, the writer. The story begins with the report about how Lincolnshire duckoys survive on seashore foods, and about the engine of execution in Halifax during the rein of King James from which one could escape before the blade could descend. The third report is a recount of the London plague which caused many to flee from England. Friday's story indeed has replaced Crusoe's narrative. The time for the old Crusoe to go on exploration and tell stories seems over, for as he says, the 'old ease of composition has ... deserted him' (*HHM*, p.18). While Crusoe stays in Bristol, his man Friday explores the world and provides the material for Crusoe's stories. Friday is the one who chooses the words and phrases, and the one who passes judgement on the incidents, and without him, Crusoe lacks any ability to write. Reflecting on one of Friday's reports Crusoe says to himself, '*death himself on his pale horse*: Those words he would not think of. Only when he yields himself

up to this man of his do such words come' (*HHM*, p.15). His man looks to be his eyes, not only seeing but also pondering on the depth and significance of what he looks at.

Friday is indeed Crusoe's writing self. He is that voice of the margins that Crusoe has developed within himself and has educated him, so that he travels and reports for Crusoe. In other words, Friday is Crusoe's *consciousness*. The evidence is that Crusoe's man is not a character in flesh, but a voice, whose presence is felt only through his writings. Coetzee makes it clear that the man 'with whom [Crusoe] shares his evening and sometimes his nights too' (*HHM*, p.19), cannot see or be with Crusoe:

Will this man in the course of his travels, ever come to Bristol? He yearns to see the fellow in the flesh, shake his hand, take a stroll with him along the quayside and hearken as he tells of his visit to the dark north of the island, or of his adventures in the writing business. But he fears there will be no meeting, not in this life. (*HHM*, p.19)

Friday is not a character, but the writing-self of a writer. He is that eye through which Crusoe looks at the world, his own country England, and he is the consciousness through which Crusoe explores and analyses the world. He confesses that the newness of his stories could not be possible if it was not for Friday's narration. The idea that within a writer there should be a Friday who tells the stories highlight Coetzee's belief in the possibility of developing a consciousness of margins. Coetzee wrote *Life and Times of Michael K* from a similar perspective, and he sympathetically explored the world from the

consciousness of a marginalized coloured South African. In *Waiting for the Barbarians* also the narrator explores the lived spaces of the barbarians who have been vilified and marginalized through hegemonic practices. The fact that *He and His Man* is presented as part of Coetzee's Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech reinforces the idea that the distinguishing figure of his novels, according to the writer himself, lies in his choosing the margin as a viewing position from which his stories are narrated.

Through Friday, Crusoe develops a new geographical and spatial consciousness, because Friday as a racially and geographically marginalized individual projects racial and geographical sensibility. The idea that through Friday Crusoe has developed a geographical consciousness is noted by Crusoe in the story when he compares himself and his man to 'two ships sailing in different directions, one west, the other east' (*HMM*, p.19). Two ships exploring two different sides of the world shows that Crusoe is aware of the dynamics of the power relations that have divided the world into margin versus centre and east versus west. Crusoe, however, changes such a dynamic of power in his novels. Friday, the African colonised man who belongs to east and south (in metaphorical terms), is now educated and thus moving towards the west to explore the western world from the viewpoint of an outsider. On the other hand, Crusoe, the western man, is moving more towards east, because adopting Friday's consciousness helps him to understand and explore the east, which symbolically stands for the geographical margins. Exploring two opposite sides endows the writer with a multidimensional insight. Thus, Crusoe identifies with

the marginalized despite his background which bestows him a central position. Coetzee dismantles imperatives of geographical divisions and tropes of identification by having his men move in different directions, each against his background. If one is to read the usual autobiographical elements in his Nobel Prize speech, then, Coetzee is in some ways identifying himself with Crusoe, who despite his privileged position, chooses to view the world from the perspective of someone like Friday.

Coetzee's *Foe* and *He and His Man* go well beyond criticizing imperialist ideology in the literary canon and both of the stories ask for a new knowledge and understanding of geography. In both of these narratives, Coetzee insists on the 'continuity' of literary tradition. The very act of writing the continuation of Crusoe's story as the main part of his Nobel Prize Acceptance speech, is a recognition of his indebtedness as a writer to the legacy of literary classics. Coetzee's tribute to the literary tradition is evident where in *He and His Man*, Crusoe says that 'it seems to him now that there are but a handful of stories in the world; and if the young are to be forbidden to prey upon the old then they must sit forever in silence' (*HHM*, p.16). However, Coetzee's commitment to truth and the imperative of the postcolonial era, obliges him to strip Daniel Defoe's version from its racial, masculine and imperialist ideologies that served the political agendas of the eighteenth century Britain, and show what those ideologies do to the story of exploration of an island by a shipwreck sailor.

Coetzee's two versions of the exploration of an unknown geographical domain can be looked at as a positive response to Foucault's call for the

knowledge of geography to be revised, because of the function of relations of power in their dissemination. Coetzee's reevaluation of cultural works about exploration of alien lands exposes and criticizes the manner in which Eurocentric and masculinist ideologies are propagated to create divisions on global scale. In opposition to such an ideology, his re-creations of *Robinson Crusoe* manifests that spaces are complex, and formed through matrix of historical, social, sexual and racial positions. Geography and space are represented and explored through a consciousness which is sensible and sensitive to difference. Coetzee has consciously chosen to view the world from the fragmented, uncertain and shaky consciousness of the marginalized people. The new vision of geography acknowledges that it is only one narrative among many other (and others') versions.

CONCLUSION

To conclude this thesis I want to return to the opening discussion in which Edward Said invited critics and writers to resist Eurocentric ideology and move towards a decentralised vision of geography. Here, I showed that such a move is indeed a continuous cultural practice that is possible but has its complexities. It is a practice, because it involves a process of first, identifying boundaries, hierarchies and divisions, and second, decentralizing, challenging and re-placing them. Just as the colonisation of space was a process of unification and then stratification of space, decolonisation of space is a practice of multiplicity and multi-centralization. Decolonisation of space means to re-imagine places as culturally defined landscapes in a less fixed and in a more dynamic manner.

I chose novels of V. S. Naipaul and J. M. Coetzee to explore both the complexity and the possibility of the task of re-imagining places and landscapes that were defined by the imperialist ideology in a decentralised manner. They both show that it is essential to represent, re-imagine and redefine the meaning of places from the viewpoint of those who have been subjected to marginalization. However, Naipaul sees the limitations and Coetzee the possibilities: Coetzee's characters (the magistrate, Michael K and Susan Barton) manifest the *possibility* of transgressing, negotiating and re-placing the boundaries, while Naipaul's characters (like Biswas, the narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival* and Chandran), reveal the complexity of such a task, by showing how

the restrictions of place restrict the agency of the colonised subjects to enact change.

The bifurcation between Naipaul and Coetzee's approach to place can best be shown in a comparison between *A House for Mr Biswas* and *Life and Times of Michael K*. Mr Biswas and Michael K in two different contexts engage with a life-time struggle 'to lay claim to [their] portion of the earth' (*HB*, p.8) against the colonial and cultural forces that tend to keep them homeless and marginalized. *A House for Mr Biswas* shows how the struggle of a Caribbean man to assert his independence and his individuality fail to materialize due to lack of socio-cultural means. Biswas might have succeeded in buying his own house, but his ill-designed and shaky house renders his achievement ambivalent. The unhomely house of Mr Biswas signifies the idea that the legacy of colonial history and lack of socio-cultural means for progress hinder Caribbean nations in their quest to be fully independent states. Naipaul's 'message' is that colonised territories can no longer provide 'home' for the formerly colonised subjects. However, in *Magic Seeds*, Naipaul shows that it is not just the colonial world which appears unhomely, but the whole world is unhomely for a postcolonial individual. The most homely habitat, this novel suggests, may be found where there is a possibility of hybridity and cultural exchange.

On the other hand, Coetzee views place as constructed and appropriated by ideology, discourse and enforcement. His protagonist, Michael K, does not struggle to re-gain what he is denied which is the ownership of a house, a farm or a garden. Instead, he attempts to deconstruct the tropes of boundary and

ownership set by the apartheid regime of South Africa. No force can deny Michael K his entitlement to the land, when the South African land owns him and owes him for his labour and gardening skills. The two other novels of Coetzee discussed here, uphold a similar perspective of resistance to displacing forces. *Foe* challenges geographical and gender marginalization, while *Waiting for the Barbarians* demythologizes the discourse of the barbarity of the indigenous people, by revealing that they were indeed removed from their motherland by force. Coetzee prefers to engage with the colonised places and the colonial spaces as political, social and cultural formations that can be decentralised and decolonised through resistance.

But what united Coetzee and Naipaul is the fact that they both show that the process of meaning-making for place and space should be generated from the margins of power. Their novels, *The Enigma of Arrival* and *Foe*, are indeed a dialogue with English literature. Where English literature was deployed to promote imperialist ideology, Coetzee and Naipaul engage with English literature to challenge that ideology. These two novels challenge the myth of centrality of the British Empire and English culture that is constructed against its marginal *other*. The uncivilized island of Robinson Crusoe is identified against the civilized England. *The Enigma of Arrival* and *Foe* question such imperial identification of places. Instead, *Foe* rewrites the story of the island from the consciousness of a castaway woman, while *The Enigma of Arrival* offers a pastoral version of English landscape written by a postcolonial man, reversing the tradition of colonial explorers writing about the colonised landscapes. Although the two writers

censure the function of English as vehicle of cultural hegemony, they acknowledge that their own works belong to the same tradition. In fact, instead of dissociating themselves from the English tradition, they provide textual possibilities for cultural and ideological renewals informed by the imperatives of the postcolonial world. Their approach to English literature resonates with what Simon Gikandi views as 'claiming a space in the culture that colonialism built and acknowledging [their] alienation in this category' (Gikandi, 1996, p.231).

Approaches to place, particularly the idea of "home", has been as much debated by the postcolonial critics as by the feminist critics. This thesis attempted to see how feminism and postcolonialism intersect in the way they view places. Indeed, gender marginality and geographical marginality are two forms of marginality against which critics of different disciplines have taken position. Since the writers studied in this thesis are both men, logically, there was little discussion on gender issues. The stereotypical view of home as a domestic space was irrelevant to the novels discussed here. Naipaul's view of space/place implies that it is gender-neutral in that his focus is entirely on what it means to the colonized male writer. Obviously, ideas of place are not gender-neutral, yet, Naipaul's novels take the male subject as normative. Coetzee, however, shows awareness of the fact that marginality can be as much related to race or geographical origin as it is to gender. *Foe* reveals how the values and concerns of the marginalized (Barton, Friday and Cruso) overlap in resisting colonisation. The body of feminist critical approaches used in this thesis, particularly critical works of Rosemary J. George, Gillian Rose and bell hooks, shows that these

critics, Naipaul and Coetzee have a shared concern for marginality. Naipaul's and Coetzee's concern for marginality does not make them feminist writers, because they have evaded questions about the marginality of women within the colonial and postcolonial contexts. However, their critique of geographical marginality can be seen as a platform from which questions about other forms of marginality can be raised.

These distinctive approaches of Coetzee and Naipaul to colonial geography and place are complementary rather than contradictory. This thesis is not offering a model of postcolonial space. In fact, its insistence on the multiplicity of worldviews, and in keeping global and local spaces decentred or multi-centred defy any attempt at presenting an encompassing model. The contribution I make here is to show how approaches to place, like the sense of place, can be both collective and individualistic; it is personal before it reflects the grand narratives of displacement or dispossession of communities and people at different points in history. Consideration of the situational complexity that Naipaul and Coetzee have experienced justifies this approach. The experience of segregation and displacement of South Africans based on their race necessitated an outlook that supported resistance. The possibility of decentralizing space is justified by the general election of 1994, which proved that cultural resistance along with political engagement would have the potentiality to re-place and dismantle boundaries. Meanwhile, Naipaul also reminds us of the complex ways in which unequal power relations within or between cultures persists, and that it is

wrong to underestimate the power of colonial and neo or postcolonial power structures in shaping our vision of place.

Colin Wright argues that the idea of space as a 'free-floating neutrality' that deconstructionists such as Spivak advocate, dismisses place as a material reality and thus fails to transcend the theoretical domain (Wright, 2002, p.21). Indeed, a realistic and dynamic approach to place insists on deconstructing boundaries, but it does not dismiss the authority of boundaries, or categories, such as the West. It is vital to hybridise the tropes and concepts, but the persistence of borders and divisions cannot be ignored. Naipaul and Coetzee can be seen both as informed by the postcolonial movement and contributing to it, in projecting a sensitivity and sensibility towards the boundaries that determine the nature of spaces and places in which we live. Both writers are aware that geography from global geopolitics to, in Foucault's words, 'little tactics of the habitat', needs to be redefined and represented in literature from the viewpoint of those who have been dislocated on the basis of their race, gender, and geographical origins. Indeed, the view of our postcolonial era is presented from the consciousness of those in the margins of power.

Since 1999, when Said advocated a decentralised consciousness of geography, global geopolitics has undergone major transformations. The attacks of 9/11 in New York, the 7/7 bombings in London, and the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan led to a re-inscription of boundaries. Long before that, the occupation of Palestine by Israel began a new chapter of colonialism in the Middle-East. The dominant discourse of our time is the discourse of "war on

terror”, but it cannot hide the fact that these invasions are indeed forms of geographical violence. In this context, the postcolonial approach to space and place finds a new significance. Neil Lazarus even declares that after the invasion of Iraq it is ‘more absurd than ever to speak of ours as a postcolonial world’ (Lazarus, 2006, p.20-21). Security is the right of every nation. However, the new geopolitics requires us to be wary of hegemonic practices that tend to re-inscribe boundaries based on geography, ethnicity or religion. It is vital to resist the myth of ‘the barbarians’ being used once again for colonizing agendas. Thus, at this particular historical moment postcolonial theory and literature need to be seen as a guide to resistance to the re-imposition of the polarized geographical order.

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