

# Home as Postcolonial Trope in the Fiction of V.S. Naipaul

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## Summary

JanMohamed (1992), in his work on the postcolonial literature of migrants, argues that their "positionality [as] specular border intellectuals" is not merely the combination of initial dislocation, together with a Western education that rules out the possibility of "gregarious acceptance" of any new home culture, but that "homelessness cannot be achieved without multiple border crossings or without a constant, keen awareness of the politics of borders" (1992: 112).

Through their migration as specular border intellectuals, a new form of community becomes possible, a community of individuals Bhabha terms the "unhomely"; a new internationalism, a gathering of people in the Diaspora: "To live in the unhomely world, to find its ambivalences and ambiguities enacted in the house of fiction, or its sundering and splitting performed in the work of art, is also to affirm a profound desire for social solidarity" (1992: 18).

This article offers an analysis of the house (of fiction) and home as a postcolonial trope characteristically problematised by Naipaul, who shows that while offering some intellectual and cultural possibilities, finds that these are nevertheless endangered and delimited by the possibilities afforded in a globalised world.

## Opsomming

In sy werk oor die postkoloniale migranteliteratuur voer JanMohamed (1992) aan dat die posisie van migrante as "reflekerende intellektuele op die grensgebied" nie bloot 'n kombinasie is van aanvanklike verplasing en 'n Westerse opvoeding wat die moontlikheid van 'n gewillige aanvaarding van enige nuwe tuiskultuur is nie, maar dat "ontheemdheid slegs deur middel van talle grensoorskrydings sonder 'n konstante, uitgesproke bewussyn van die politiek van grense bereik kan word" (1992: 112; vertaling A. Visagie).

Deur hulle migrasie as reflekerende intellektuele op die grensgebied word 'n nuwe gemeenskapsin moontlik, 'n gemeenskap van individue wat Bhabha beskryf as die "*Unheimliche*", 'n nuwe internasionalisme, 'n samevoeging van mense in die diaspora: "Om in die *unheimliche* wêreld te woon, om die ambivalensies en ambiguïteite van hierdie wêreld in die domein van die fiksie terug te vind, of die verwydering en gespletenheid hiervan in die domein van die kunste tot uitvoering te bring, is

tegelykertyd ook die bevestiging van 'n diepliggende verlangete na sosiale eensgesindheid" (1992: 18, vertaling A. Visagie)

Hierdie artikel bied 'n analise van die huis (van fiksie) en die tuiste as 'n postkoloniale troop wat gereeld deur Naipaul ge-problematiseer word. Naipaul dui aan dat hoewel die huis/tuiste 'n aantal intellektuele en kulturele moontlikhede open, hierdie moontlikhede nietemin bedreig en beperk word deur die moontlikhede wat deur die geglobaliseerde wêreld veroorloof word.

Bhabha in (1994) *The Location of Culture* points to the cultural syncretism which becomes possible after the binary and totalising structures of power have been fractured and displaced. Bhabha sees that diasporic communities, by virtue of their dispossession after colonialism and decolonisation, and by virtue of the growth of democratic systems, can form a new community of what he terms the "unhomely", a new internationalism, a gathering of people in the diaspora: "To live in the unhomely world, to find its ambivalences and ambiguities enacted in the house of fiction, or its sundering and splitting performed in the work of art, is also to affirm a profound desire for social solidarity" (1994: 18). The civilising impulses of this new community (to borrow from Fernandez-Armesto (2000: 445)), are reflected in postcolonial literature. Although I am aware that Bhabha makes the point that to be "unhomed" does not mean to be homeless, it is the state of the home and the differentiations between home and house (the domesticated space as opposed to the structures created to hold domestic functions and domesticity) that concern me here. This article draws upon selected novels and travel journalism of V.S. Naipaul to explore the representation of domestic spaces, to argue that such representations have changed over time to signal an awareness of the fading of old constellations of power (Empire and decolonisation) and the development of new constellations (globalisation) in which identity is interpolated and reconstituted through an ideological lens. I suggest that Naipaul, in the course of some forty years, develops a critique of ideological "locations" in favour of locatedness and that notions of locatedness (or its absence) are made evident in the representation of home in his work. The article, which draws initially from the criticism and scholarship of home (as articulated primarily by geographers and philosophers of culture), explores race, gender and ethnicity in Naipaul's oeuvre as enduring preoccupations in the texts dealing with decolonisation and those which anticipate and interrogate globalisation.

The literature concerning housing, houses, and homes is substantial, particularly in the area of human geography and philosophy. A survey of the critical literature selected for this article demonstrates that while locating domesticity in spaces (houses), nevertheless demonstrates that it is in fact not the representation of houses as structures which preoccupies scholars, but rather the representation of home as the location of culture and domesticity, in which the private and public, the political and social aspects of identity come to be embodied. This literature informs my rethinking of

home in Naipaul's fiction. Of concern in much of the critical literature is the relationship between home and environment, identity, and power. Heidegger (1993: 362) argues that "[o]nly if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build". For Heidegger "dwelling" is thus a precondition for building. Dwelling is the internalisation of social and civic norms, behaviour and ideology, that comes to take the form of a relationship (with another person, with the land). This enables one to create meaning out of location, and to internalise this meaning within the domestic space, thereby also transforming the relationship between the environment and its inhabitants. Mezei and Briganti (2002) have further explored the house from a feminist literary perspective arguing for a reading of domestic spaces that is situated and gendered: situated in terms of its association with the novel, and gendered in terms of focus on patriarchal and other relationships which take the house as context (Mezei & Briganti 2002: 837). In literary forms the house is most often a function of home, and it is for this reason that houses abandoned, ruined, or destroyed have come to stand in the literature as markers of the absence of civilisation, or its decay. Drawing from Heidegger, post-structural critics such as Young (1997: 161) define home as "attached to a particular locale as an extension and expression of bodily routines". This attachment is not located only in the present according to Young: "Home is a complex ideal ... a nostalgic longing for an impossible security and comfort, a longing bought at the expense of women and of those constructed as Others, strangers, not-home, in order to secure this fantasy of a unified identity" (Young 1997: 164). Early feminist theorists differed from such positions suggesting that home, because it differed from work, was ascribed culturally as a feminine space, where domestic labour and nurturing came to be associated with gender oppression. More recent accounts of home are provided by postcolonial and feminist theorists of colour. For example, feminists (such as bell hooks 1991) and postcolonial theorists (such as Said 1993; and Blunt 2005) who have discussed home, do not construct it as a site for oppression, but rather point to the possibilities in which home becomes a site for resistance to the dominant class and race ideologies associated with Western capitalism "pointing to the complex and politicised interplay of home and identity over space and time" (Blunt & Dowling 2006: 21). Blunt and Dowling argue that

[t]he conflation of house and home has been widely criticised ... home is a series of feelings and attachments ... home as spatialised feelings of belonging and alienation, desire and fear ... for Marxists (Harvey 1978) it is a space in which labour is reproduced; workers fed, rested, clothed and housed. For humanists (Dovey 1985) home is the centre of human agency and creativity, comfort and belonging.

(Blunt & Dowling 2006: 10-11)

For literary and cultural theorists like Edward Said (1993), the concern is to demonstrate the complicity between constructions of domestic activity (dwelling in Heidegger's terms), and wider constructions of imperial exploitation, power, class, and privilege. Critical to all theories of home is that it is not a location, not necessarily a place apart from work, nor simply the site of gender oppression, nor the only site of cultural reproduction, but rather a fluid concept in which identity and power, community and isolation are in constant dynamism and relation (Blunt & Dowling 2006: 22-24).

Though the eleven novels selected for this article suggest a chronological reading of the home as postcolonial trope, I have sought also to bring to the fore themes long associated with Naipaul's fiction, and selected criticism surrounding it. The article suggests that the "house of fiction" as defined by Bhabha (1994) and the house as fiction reflect one another in Naipaul's writing since both form a theme to which the writer is shown to return, if only to re-envisage in light of contemporary historical developments. And, while it has been a simple exercise to point to Naipaul's petty affectations (the obsession with hygiene, for example), or the apparent contempt for postcolonial societies, there remains those concerns of greater significance: the plight of humanity, class affectation, and the consequences of misunderstanding a context and its complexities of connection, dislocation, migration, and dispossession. Although it has been argued that Naipaul has been most concerned with the postcolonial condition and its impact, his oeuvre appears more concerned with the unrealised promises of modernity, and the demands made on individuals, families and communities; a point to which I return at the end of this article. Inevitably the treatment of the selected texts must sacrifice plot in favour of a focus on home in particular, but what I do attempt to do is to locate character and environment in relation to representations of home; to suggest, as Bhabha argues, that "[t]he home does not remain the domain of domestic life, nor does the world simply become its social or historical counterpart. The unhomely is the shock of recognition of the world in the home, the home in the world" (1997: 445).

In *A House for Mr Biswas* (Naipaul 1961) the promise of modernity is revealed as compromised the moment at which Biswas takes possession of the house he has sought to make as a home for his wife and family: "The very day the house was bought they began to see flaws in it" (1961: 12). The houses from which Mr Biswas graduated, before settling on his Sikkim Street house in Port of Spain, include those associated stereotypically with pre-colonial life: the mud hut, the wooden shack, both of which Biswas despises and hides from his school- and work associates. "It would have pained Mr Biswas had anyone from the school seen where he lived; in one room of a mud hut" (1961: 48). As a location of spatialised feeling (Blunt & Dowling 2006: 21) the mud hut is a source of denial and shame; and the extended family dwelling, as shown in *Hanuman House*, becomes a location of corruption and exploitation.

Biswas takes up work as a signwriter for a prominent Indian trading family and comes to Hanuman House, where he meets his future wife Shama. Hanuman house, a conglomeration of mud-brick, timber, and brick, is shown to be a corrupted version of extended family life, where the labour of extended family members is shown to be similar to the serf duties of medieval times. The marrying-off of Shama comes at a price, not least of which is that which has to be paid by Biswas to Mrs Tulsi, Shama's mother: "What about her? She's a good child. A little bit of reading and writing .... Just a little bit .... Nothing to worry about. In two or three years she might even forget ..." (1961: 90). Life in the Tulsi house is described as follows: "The world was too small, the Tulsi family too large" (p. 2).

While Naipaul locates houses as the sites of domestic exploitation and ignorance (of women particularly) or squalor, he is also at pains to emphasise the historical locality of the postcolonial home in time and space: the home as produced by forced migration, as a location for the exercise of sexism and race hatred. On his way back from the Tulsis, on the same day he settled with Mrs Tulsi to marry Shama, Biswas passes houses on the streets of Isabella and notices "that they [are] ambitious, incomplete, unpainted, often skeletal ... their owners [live] in one or two imperfectly enclosed rooms" (p. 92). As marriage looms for Biswas, so the need to establish his independence of the Tulsis increases, and with that ambition comes debt and his eventual illness. At the time of his death, the house for Mr Biswas is still mortgaged.

Mishra (2003), a postcolonial critic and Naipaul scholar, describes *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961) as the search for stability and security in the violence of Empire. The novel also describes the search of a father and husband determined to escape the family serfdom of the extended Tulsi family and their compound. The inspiration for Hanuman House is the house belonging to Naipaul's grandmother in Trinidad, which he describes as being in two parts (and two worlds):

The front part, of bricks and plaster, was painted white. It was like a kind of Indian house .... It was ambitious in its decorative detail, with lotus capitals on pillars, and sculptures of Hindu deities, all done by people working with only a memory of things in India .... At the back of the house, and joined to it ... was a timber building in the French Caribbean style ... two worlds. We lived inwards; the world outside existed in a kind of darkness; we inquired about nothing.

(Mishra 2003: 187)

Feder (2001) remarks that "[t]he house, into which he and his family move near the end of the novel, and where he dies not long after, reflects the naiveté of its owner and the petty corruption of his society, but it remains standing" (2001: 175). That corruption, and the determination to create a life of meaning in spite of it, to make himself at home in the act of purchase and the settlement of his family, also lie at the base of the novel, *The Mimic*

*Men* (Naipaul 1967), in which a disgraced colonial minister, Kripal Singh, reflects, in London, on his past as a politician from one of the former colonies. Singh's trajectory, like that of Biswas, has been outward, and his attempts at location equally frustrating in the postcolonial state, or the erstwhile metropolitan centre. Significantly Singh's absence of family connection, or connection to place or space, appears to be confirmed in Naipaul's description of his house. Although this distinction between house and home is not always neat in Naipaul's fiction, it is particularly revealing in *The Mimic Men* (Naipaul 1967) since Singh's inability to make himself at home leads to his nomadism or migration. The absence of authentic location leads to flight and disturbance. In later novels characters such as Indar in *A Bend in the River* (Naipaul 1979) appear to create a life out of perpetual dislocation, but this too is revealed to be problematic – a point to which I return later.

The novel *The Mimic Men* (Naipaul 1967) opens with a description of a boarding house and the lives lived in it: "Between attic and basement, pleasure and penalty, we boarders lived, narrowly" (1967: 5). The house itself is used by its owner, a man by the name of Mr Shylock, as the secret bolt-hole for his extramarital affairs. The secret mistresses, and the secrets of the boarders, make for an environment which is false and deathly: "[L]ight outside was strange. It was dead, but seemed to have an inner lividness ..." (p. 6). Allusion is made here to the condition of the post-colonial whose emulation of the Other is recognised as false. Readers are returned to this impulse some forty years later when Chandran describes to his mission teachers in India an entirely fictionalised holiday excursion to the Rockies, with an equally fictive family. He writes what he thinks his teachers want to read (see *Half a Life*, Naipaul 2001).

Kripal Singh's failed political career ends in London: "For those who lose ... there is only one course: flight. Flight to the greater disorder, the final emptiness: London and the home counties" (1967: 8). And his solution to emotional and physical distress is a deliberate exercise in identity dislocation: a refusal to locate himself and the wilful creation of a persona at variance with himself: "It was during the time of breakdown and mental distress ... I travelled ... with no purpose, not pleasure" (p. 41). "In London ... I chose the character that was easiest and most attractive. I was the dandy; the extravagant colonial" (p. 20). "I tried to give myself a personality" (p. 26). He imagines that he will spend his remaining days writing his memoirs, but recognises that even this derives from an idea of settled personality and achievement which is not true of him. He also dwells on a corrupted form of colonial nostalgia: the past recollected in tranquility without recognising the connections to slavery and racism: "There is no finer house than the old estate house of the islands" (p. 30), but when describing his family life as a child he says: "Our house was something to get out of whenever we could .... It was one of those large timber town houses of the old colonial period, slightly decaying ... we had never succeeded in colonizing it" (pp. 70-71).

With his family home the site of another failed marriage, dysfunctional family relationships, the possibility of sustaining colonial nostalgia (as Young has argued: 1997: 164), or the nostalgia for home, diminishes. If, as Mezei and Briganti (2002: 838) argue, the representation of houses is associated with the rise of the stable bourgeoisie, then representation of colonial homes reveals in Naipaul's fiction their instability, fractiousness, and even corruption. And while it might be true, as Bachelard suggests that "the house image would appear to have become the topography of our intimate being" (1994: xxxii), the postcolonial home, typically occupied by migrants such as Biswas or Singh, reveals an intimacy that is anything but stable or comfortable.

In the course of his life, Singh has studied in London, married an English "shop girl" named Sandra, and returned to the island as a property speculator. Soon after his return, Sandra and Singh's relationship deteriorates, and the deterioration is described in parallel with the construction of the house they build for themselves: "the house's emptiness ... the feeling of failure" (1967: 71). The house (and not the home) which forms the backdrop for the breakdown of his relationship is designed as an imitation of the Vettii house in Pompei. Naipaul describes the mimicry of an idea of style which, for the postcolonial official, is much a tribute to an idea of Western civilisation and his personal success. Of course, that a ruined house and destroyed home should be emulated by Singh is an irony of the novel; one of which he remains unaware throughout. Singh, now wealthy from property speculation (of the kind associated with the attorney's clerk in *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961)), displays a typical obsession with luxury at the expense of "shelter, water, and power supply or proper sewage systems" (Reader 2006: 163). In *The Mimic Men* (Naipaul 1967) the postcolonial dilemma is the turn inward (the Roman house represents an ideological deference to the West, and, in its "inwardness" a social and political disregard of the reality of the island) only to find that the outward impulse (in this instance the imposition of Empire) that led to the inward impulse (deference and mimicry) has gone (1967: 38). As alluded to earlier, Singh is frustrated because, as suggested by Heidegger (1993: 362), he is incapable of dwelling even if he has attempted to build. However, aside from the houses of people caught up in the diaspora, there are also those built by expatriates like the house built in the hills of the postcolony island. Singh says to the Swedish owners: "I wish you would make up your minds whether it is a cottage or a country house ... it contained an enormous fireplace so out of keeping with its context in the rain forest" (Naipaul 1967: 41). The "country house" represents here the dislocation between "dwelling" and "context" (historical, social, material).

Feder argues that "the contrast between the outer manifestation, in this case, the house, a 'sacred symbol' awaiting only the 'installing of the household gods', and the apathy of Singh and Sandra, emphasises the emotional damage of self-deception. Finally, at the house-warming, the household gods are violated ... in frenzy [by] the guests ... breaking a

window, plates, and glasses” (2001: 188). But as the personal is “evacuated” Naipaul links the home to the public and the political.

After Sandra’s departure the house becomes the centre of the political movement Singh founds with an acquaintance who is a political activist named Browne; and the house, associated at once with the Roman empire, is now the scene in which the power struggles of the dying British empire are being played out: “The truth of the Movement lay in the Roman house” (Naipaul 1967: 106). Typically then, in Naipaul’s fiction, the house is also a politicised space, and the political purpose of the house in relation to the Movement established by Browne and Singh, reveal the tensions between its private and public functions; between the despair and fraudulence that lie at the base of Singh’s personal and public lives. Within the first novels (1960s) written by Naipaul there are already indications of powerful ideas of location as explored in the lives of indigenes, diasporic settlers, colonisers, and expatriates. The preoccupations remain powerful but changed in the later works (1990s).

The close relationship between history and Naipaul’s fiction recalls the point raised by Blunt and Dowling (2006: 18) who argue that “private and public spheres are not predetermined, but rather emerge out of particular historical and geographical circumstances”. Home becomes the means by which the inhabitants interpret their locality in time and history in relation to the political and social environment. Rather than simply being dwelling spaces, homes in the fiction of Naipaul are associated with “high ideas” of purpose, value, and civilisation. This is demonstrated in *Guerillas* (1975) in which Jimmy Ahmed’s socialist commune is represented by two dwellings; one in which the indigent youth recruited to the commune are housed in “a long hut with concrete-block walls and a pitched roof of corrugated iron. It stood alone in the emptiness ... it cast no shadow” (1975: 13) and the erstwhile industrial estate manager’s house is “on low concrete pillars ... the corrugated roof was complicated: an attempt at what was known as the Californian style” (1975: 23). In the former, Jane reads Jimmy Ahmed’s communiqués about the regulation of life and the agrarian activities of the commune; a stark contrast to the evident absence of labour and activity around the long hut. In Ahmed’s home the furniture, along with the *Hundred Best Books in the World*, is imported from England. The imported values, as associated with the books (great literature), in addition to the ideology (of socialism and Black Power), are housed without being homed (that is: contextualised). Out of their contexts, they are revealed to be equally inappropriate to the island setting; each a perverse comment on the context, and perverted out of recognition. Such themes are anticipated in *A Bend in the River* (1979) and *The Return of Eva Peron with the Killings in Trinidad* (1980).

The confluence of geographical location and points in history becomes prominent in *A Bend in the River* (Naipaul 1979), probably the most



exemplary text in which settler and citizen lives in an African state in the aftermath of decolonisation are described. The novel begins with the destruction of old ways of living and their rebuilding: Salim describes the family home on the coast of an African state as an overcrowded compound where the distinction between the servants, descendents of erstwhile slaves owned by the family, and family members has faded: “The slaves had swamped the masters: the Arabian race of master has virtually disappeared” (1979: 20). “We continued to live as we had always done, blindly” (1979: 23). Rather than the settled Indians of the Caribbean islands (of Isabella in *The House for Mr Biswas* (1961), and *The Mimic Men* (1967), who came as labourers to the sugar plantations), Salim, Nazruddin the merchant, and their families, in *A Bend in the River* (1979) are descendents of a colonising trading race (the Arabs).

When he arrives at the town at the bend in the river, Salim discovers a marker of civilisation in decay. The fate of the colonial houses of the settler Europeans is described as follows: “The houses had been set alight one by one .... The big lawns and gardens had returned to bush; the streets had disappeared .... You were in a place where the future had come and gone” (1979: 32-33). Salim recreates, with Metty, a family retainer sent to him after the destruction of their coastal home, the family compound, but this time in a flat once owned by a Belgian woman who departed at independence: “The Belgian lady had attempted to introduce a touch of Europe and home and art, another kind of life, to this land of rain and heat .... She would have had a high idea of herself; but, judged on its own, what she tried to do wasn’t of much value” (1979: 47). Human geographers such as Young (1997: 137) have argued that “[t]hose who build dwell in the world in a different way from those who occupy the structures already built”; a point which resonates in Naipaul’s fiction and particularly in *A Bend in the River* (1979) where the re-creation of home is always prefixed by the knowledge that home cannot be possessed and is never permanent. Home is also interpolated; previously owned and dwelt in.

This problem of identity, belonging, and location is visited on the post-colonial settler and the post-independence citizen, like Ferdinand who returns to his village (an illusive home to which settlers like Salim have no access or knowledge) when civil unrest occurs: “[Salim] Even the raggedest of them had their villages and tribes ... [Ferdinand] I didn’t want to come here. I don’t know anyone here ...” (1979: 76-77). Rather than imagine anywhere as home, Salim, like many settler populations, invests security in gold, and currency rather than fixed assets: “two or three kilos of gold I had picked up in various little deals; there were my documents – my birth certificate and my British passport ... in a hole just at the bottom of the external staircase ... buried” (1979: 74-75); a fragile identity that anticipates only flight and loss.

In *A Bend in the River* (1979) a new idea of belonging, strongly associated with ideologocial allegiances so characteristic of Cold War politics, is repre-

sented in the New Domain created by the President to symbolise his power to the people of the region. The New Domain is situated outside the town and as such marks its difference from the European settlement at the bend in the river. Like it though, it is characterised by the same features: built in haste, and unsuited to the climate, the New Domain shows signs of ruin almost as soon as it is completed: “A parallel town developed of which we in the town knew little” (1979: 109). In its symbolism, the statues and streetlamp standards along its paths and roads, the New Domain parallels the old European colonisation of space, its attempted domestication in light of a “high idea” of purpose and national pride. It remains fundamentally disconnected from the pre-colonial, and postcolonial lives of the region’s inhabitants and recalls, albeit in another form, the ideological bankruptcy of Jimmy Ahmed’s “commune” in *Guerillas* (1975). Mamdani has suggested that to ignore the continuities of conflict that predate the colonial state, and which were transfigured by it, is to recreate the very conditions for exploitation in the aftermath of Empire. He argues that “[t]he continuity between the form of the colonial state and the power fashioned through radical reform (in the post-independence nation) was underlined by the despotic nature of power” (1996: 26). The link between the cruel and capricious exercise of such power with identity, gender, race, and powerlessness comes together when Salim (in his flatlet formerly owned by a Belgian woman) rapes and beats (the Belgian) Yvette with whom he has had an affair. In the domestic rape scene it is Yvette’s complex race and gendered positioning that renders her most vulnerable to Salim’s violence: a violence that stems from a misogynised racism, but which is located in the domesticity of the home; where it is simultaneously secreted and enacted.

Despite recognising as false to its context (1979: 110), and compromised, Salim is envious of Ferdinand’s sense of belonging as a student at the New Domain. Salim longs for home: “But home was hardly a place I could return to. Home was something in my head. It was something I had lost. And, in that I was like the ragged Africans who were so abject in the town we serviced” (1979: 114). Young (1997: xx), as mentioned in the introduction to this article, suggests that home is a creation of a nostalgic imagination but as Naipaul’s writing of the 1980s attests, the nostalgia is dangerous because of what it masks. And, as the 1990s accelerated the end of a painful twentieth century, Naipaul’s representation of home began to shift, anticipating and also interrogating the new forms of belonging associated with globalisation and cosmopolitanism.

The inhabitants of compound or Domain houses in *A Bend in the River* (1987) are also of interest because they are almost always cosmopolitan intellectuals working on a “project” (with all the associations with the high ideas espoused by Kripal Singh and Jimmy Ahmed of earlier novels). The cosmopolitan ideal, of not being located in a fixed place, is associated with globalisation, and has been described in theoretical terms by Appiah (2006). Appiah suggests that typically the cosmopolite assumes a “global” identity

in which local identities can be exchanged variously depending on will and the means of the (individuated and Western) individual to migrate. Appiah argues that the features of cosmopolitanism are individuation, freedom from local connection and the past, the will to multiple identities, the extreme control of, and isolation from feeling or association, and the need for disassociation in the form of travel and migration (2006: 167-168).

These features are embodied by Indar, Salim's friend, who visits him in the interior, and speaks of the need to free oneself of connection: "I didn't think my heart could stand it [going back to Africa]. But the aeroplane is a wonderful thing. You are still in one place when you arrive at the other. The aeroplane is faster than the heart .... You stop grieving .... You trample on the past" (1979: 119, 120). Indar, on invitation from the Domain, has a house there: a location in the dislocality. "In the artificiality of the Domain, he had found his perfect setting" (1979: 125). In these descriptions of the Domain, its shifting population, Indar makes himself at home without regarding it as home. He is the global citizen in the most antithetical sense; with obligations only to the present, no fixed location, no loyalties or local connection. In Appiah's (2006: 168) terms, the "intelligence and curiosity" he displays is artificial because it lacks compassionate engagement. In Indar, Naipaul suggests that belonging is not afforded by high ideas, but rather through living and forming connections in a place over a period of time. Salim suggests: "Wasn't the truth what we in the town lived with ... I felt between us lay some dishonesty" (1979: 31).

In his reflections on the created compounds and communes set in the contexts of new nation states Naipaul returns to the dwellings and their inhabitants in *A Way in the World* (1994) where he describes expatriate academics who live in houses similar to those described in the New Domain, stating that "[m]ost people in the compound decorated their rooms with standard African artifacts – drums, zebra-skinned pouffes, carved figures ... some rubbish" (1994: 360). Their inhabitants are damaged whites (like Raymond in *A Bend in the River* (1979)), some black houseboys, intellectuals; either African, American, or West Indian, with ambitions to higher civil positions. As with the houses of the New Domain, the compound house begins its narrative life as the product of a higher idea (development and intellectual projects), but once these have failed, the gardens end up as vegetable patches for the people who replace the drifting and dislocated academic staff. The compound, with its infantilisation of domestic labour (houseboys), inward-looking organisation, and disconnection within its context, parodies the post-independence intellectual project with its hangers-on; the Roman house in *The Mimic Men* (1967). Ultimately the context cannot sustain the physical, social, and intellectual bubble that is the compound returns to the bush. The intellectual labour of the inhabitants of the communes and compounds is revealed as banal or dishonest and it is such dishonesty that Naipaul explores in *The Return of Eva Peron with the*

*Killings in Trinidad* (1980) which focuses on a black activist intellectual (Malcolm X), who forms a counterpoint to Raymond, the white expatriate intellectual.

Malcolm X and the Black Power Killings in Trinidad (in *The Return of Eva Peron with the Killings in Trinidad*, Naipaul 1980) opens with a scene set in a suburban Trinidadian house which has been commandeered by Malcolm X and his following and renamed the “commune”. Like compounds described in the earlier novels, the commune is envisaged as a place, and project, where the communitarian ideals of Black Power will be put into practice by Malcolm X. Its inhabitants are meant to exist in a self-sufficient nonracist environment, but race hatred eventually turns the agricultural patch into the shallow grave of “Gale Ann Benson, a twenty-seven-year-old middle-class English divorcee who had been living with Hakim Jamal: an American Black Power man ... Benson wore African-American clothes and renamed herself Hale Kinga ... a fake among fakes” (1980: 13). She was executed “in her African-style clothes ... and buried not yet completely dead”, suspected of being a British spy. The hoax of Malcolm X’s project is revealed on a number of levels. In England, the Black House project is bankrolled by the white heir to a property empire, and through its failure “came to exist only in its brochures and letterheads” (1980: 43). In journalistic prose Naipaul (1980) charts the development of the Michael X personality cult, the number of murders, the shambolic organisation of a sham commune, of which the reports sent by X to followers in the States and the UK, described fictive crops, and fabulous successes. The Black Power house in Christina Gardens (in the city of Port of Spain) in Trinidad comes to stand for what Hardt and Negri (2000: 132-134) have called the poisoned gift of nationalism, built as it was on a corrupted deference to a Western audience, neocolonial dependence, and race hatred.

If the effects of colonial brutality are explored in postcolonial settings in the early novels, the novels after 1980 begin also to explore their effects on metropolitan culture, and over the next two decades several novels stand in this regard; the first being *The Enigma of Arrival* (Naipaul 1987) which appears to be a semi-autobiographical account in which the writer-narrator character describes his experience of country life in England: “I saw what I saw very clearly. But I didn’t know what I was looking at” (1987: 12). This misreading of the context, and the attempts to understand his experience are an immigrant’s challenge. Sen (2006) argues that postcolonial societies in which immigrants might settle, have become complicated as a consequence of decolonisation and another massive diaspora of formerly colonised peoples to erstwhile metropolitan centres: “The immigrant’s job in making sure that he is really integrated into ... society could otherwise be exacting, if only because it is no longer easy to identify ... the dominant culture” (Sen 2006: 153). Identifying that culture, and assimilation into it, remain powerful motivators for migrants from postcolonial settings.

In *The Enigma of Arrival* (Naipaul 1987), the narrator describes Jack's cottage as "hard to heat" (and thus hard to inhabit) and its inhospitability provokes an anxiety about his place in England, anxiety about his work as a writer. He settles in a cottage on an old, neglected, and decaying estate. Although ostensibly about the writer's struggle with an unfamiliar subject, the English landscape and rural way of life, Naipaul focuses on the Edwardian manor house built at a time when Empire was a given, and where postcolonial migrations had not yet occurred. He notes the changing seasons and the seasonal workers whose attitude to the land is one of disconnection. Typically this is represented also in the manner in which their homes are created; "[t]he house as a place of shelter, not as a place to which you could transfer (or risk transferring) emotion or hopes ..." (1987: 55).

Writing about an imaginary character in a de Chirico painting he sees the narrator recreating the anxiety of arrival and uprooting:

He would enter interiors, of houses and temples. Gradually there would come to him a feeling that he was getting nowhere; he would lose his sense of mission; he would begin to know only what was lost. His feeling of adventure would give way to panic ... it did not occur to me that that Mediterranean story was really no more than a version of the story I was already writing.

(Naipaul 1987: 92)

In *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) the Edwardian manor house as centre of a great family now dispersed and flourishing in other parts of the world, the house as home to a reclusive and self-indulgent landlord whose love for decay is evident in the unchecked destruction of the forest by the ivy, the house as centre of family obligations, and their consequent betrayals; the house as the centre which determines relationships to other houses, the land, and people, is also the context of the writer's emotional breakdown, dislocation, failure, and as such is key to understanding the complexity of postcolonial power relations between diasporic people and those formerly at the metropolitan centre.

In *The Mimic Men* (1967) Naipaul describes a boarding house in London. The 1990s, as suggested earlier, saw several texts produced by Naipaul which may be described as travel literature and which interrogated new forms of belonging and location; new houses or the ruins of old houses. In *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (Naipaul 1990) Naipaul returns to The Hotel Liward, a post-independence creation in violence-torn Kashmir, which he first described in an earlier travel book called *An Area of Darkness* (1964). In retrospect the narrator sees that Kashmir and the Hotel Liward were what he could regard as "a point of rest" in the past (1990: 493). In the 1990s Kashmir is a place of tourism, high security, and the rage of the dispossessed: "a county (and a hotel) remade ... but the liberation of spirit that has come to India could not come as release alone. In India, with its layer below

layer of distress and cruelty, it had come as disturbance. It had come as rage and revolt. India was now a country of a million little mutinies” (1990: 517).

Liberation, oppression, and the rage at the unfulfilled promise of modernity bring to completion four decades of contemplation of what it means to be part of the unhomely in *Half a Life* (Naipaul 2001) and *Magic Seeds* (2004). Much of Naipaul’s fiction also deals with what JanMohamed (1992) has described as “border intellectuals” like Chandran in *Half a Life* (2001) who was a writer, and Sarojini, his sister, a maker of documentary narratives. Like Salim and Indar they know the contours of their displacement by virtue that no place can ever be home, and no country can ever be owned. In the house of fiction, it is the nation state that might have offered such possibilities in the aftermath of decolonisation.

In *Half a Life* (2001), the narrator (Chandran) and his wife Ana settle in a Portuguese colony shortly before its independence and become estate owners and part of the colonial establishment. The Correia’s beach house is meant to be a symbol of the success of a colonial Portuguese settler family. Proud of their achievement, the family take Chandran and his wife Ana to see the house one weekend: “We found a half ruin. Windows had been broken .... Half in and half out of what should have been the sitting room there was a high-sided boat propped up on timbers as in a dry dock” (2001: 176). The house has been appropriated by the local labourers employed by the family as caretakers. The inability to achieve “location” (or settlement) by settler populations in relation to lands which they have come to occupy is referred to, obliquely, by a family friend of the Correias, Mrs Noronha, who describes to Chandran and Ana another house she visited in Durban:

The riots were against the Indians ... I got caught up in the trouble one day. I didn’t know what to do .... In the distance I saw a white lady with fair hair and a long dress. She led me without a word ... to a big house and there I stayed until the streets were quiet. I told my friends .... And somebody said, “But that house was pulled down twenty years ago. The lady you met lived there, and the house was pulled down after she died.”

(Naipaul 2001: 177)

In this ghost house, and as a refugee from the struggles of decolonisation in a South African city, this colonial settler woman finds refuge, but this house too is revealed to be fraudulent. The fantasy house, the ghost house, the estate houses, are shown to be what Mezei and Briganti (2002: 341) refer to as “disturbed houses” because there is no connection, other than the force of occupation, between their inhabitants and the context. Later in the novel an architect explains that “houses have their destiny” (2001: 219), their magic, and connection, and disconnection from the people who create, then inhabit, and finally leave them.

In his last novel, *Magic Seeds* (2004), Naipaul takes up the story of Chandran and Sarojini again. Sarojini who left her father’s ashram with her

German lover, comes to regret her armchair activism in Berlin where she has been abandoned by her husband for his other family, and returns to her father's ashram. There she is frustrated by its (im)possibilities, and returns to Germany, disenchanted by her protected life but still unaware of its fraudulence: "I am not too happy with what I have done, though everything was always done with the best of intentions" (2004: 159). The novel closes with Chandran attending the wedding of a long-time acquaintance named Marcus (an African). Marcus, now a respected diplomat for an African country, delights in the marriage of his anglicised son, Lyndhurst, into a local English aristocratic family. The marriage is set in the ruins of their once great estate, not unlike the decaying Edwardian manor house described by the narrator in *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987):

This was the view, once grand, that the big house looked over. The roofless house, an established ruin now ... but not at all ghostly, more like a big piece of conceptual art set down with deliberation in clean, tall, vivid green grass. And, that was how the wedding guests appeared to deal with it, offering the ruin a glance, but not dawdling ....

(*The Magic Seeds*, 2004: 287)

The ruin is clearly the ruin of Empire, and in its wake one black man who migrated to England in the aftermath of decolonisation marries a white woman. The grand house is rendered harmless by the passing of time in this marriage scene. Empire's effects can no longer impede the aspirations of a man like Marcus, who takes delight in the fact that his black son will marry a white girl. This seems to echo a point raised by Mamdani (1996) about the relationship between the development of civic society, the institutions of democracy, and the waning of tribal affiliations and obligations: "The anecdote to a mode of rule that accentuates difference, ethnic in this case, cannot be to deny difference, but to historicise it ... to transcend the rural-urban and the interethnic" (1996: 296). Naipaul does not accept this proposition unequivocally, since the shadows of Empire loom large enough still, but nevertheless acknowledges the possibility of a less conflicted identity and relationship.

Although it is not clear from the criticism (Mamdani 1996; Appiah 2006) how such transcendence might be achieved, Naipaul explores the ways in which people attempt to move beyond the exigencies of the present, and the damaging legacies of the past. This is done in two ways. First, through the form a book might take; for example, the development of investigative or journalistic prose is one means which Naipaul has developed to attend to the challenge of describing and exploring the pain of poverty and neglect in many postcolonial contexts. And second, through the structural devices of the novel; for example, the playing with chronological time sequences, or the semi-autobiographical voice in *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), in which

the lives of characters arising as they do from their historical contexts, are brought into contact and connection with each other.

I began by stating that Naipaul's fiction in the past four decades seems more concerned with the unrealised promises of modernity for people who have rightful expectations to their fulfilment, than with postcolonialism as a historical phenomenon. Benedict Anderson (2006) has described what it means to create, and be part of, an imagined community: "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (2006: 6-7). The absence of such comradeship, of care and dignity, is shown in Naipaul's fiction to have similar consequences irrespective of epoch or political or social movement. Modernity, as the will to mass production, urbanisation, and technological advancement, has served us with a number of massive migratory shifts, some of which have been associated with industrialisation, colonisation and its aftermath, and still others with globalisation. Over four decades, Naipaul, in prose fiction and in journalistic prose, has explored some of these shifts and their effects on a world in which people seek as much as ever to be connected to communities in places of their choice despite a history of migrations of an unimagined, and unwanted kind. Between the imagined community, or the new internationalism, and the lived reality of involuntary migration, and dislocation, there remains the need for the considered perspective and a discourse of compassion; found always in the pathos of homes in Naipaul's work. Perhaps this pathos is described best by Appiah's (2006) ideal of cosmopolitanism as constituting those beliefs concerning human dignity that appear common to many cultures, and which make possible in *Magic Seeds* (2004) Chandran's tentative abandoning of an identity associated with place and ideology, in favour of the development one based on connection, value, and relationship. In this sense home is reimagined in the last two novels as a series of relationships in which care and support are almost always implicit as components, and where activities or relationships as based on ideology (the house as fiction) are rejected. Rather, as Mezei and Briganti suggest, "Our imagination, our consciousness, needs to locate itself in a particular space, to find a home, to articulate its homelessness, its longing for home, its sickness for home (nostalgia). Thus, novels and houses furnish a dwelling place – a spatial construct – that invites the exploration and expression of private and intimate relations and thoughts" (2002: 839).

I began with reference to the representation of the home as postcolonial trope, but, as has been demonstrated, Naipaul deploys this trope, understanding its connections to culture and nation, rather than the "expression of private relations and thoughts", to anticipate further radical shifts in how we understand location and place, homelessness and connection in the context of globalisation. While it might be argued that the representation of home yields insights into the postcolonial and globalised condition, it is equally



significant that there are few, if any, examples suggested by Naipaul where migration allows for the possibility for home to be articulated without disturbance, at least not in the first generation of settlement. If *Magic Seeds* (2004) is any measure of this potential, then the slight possibility offered to the reader (of Marcus's grandchild) is already compromised by the hopes that Marcus has that his black genes will recede into whiteness over a generation of interbreeding. What appears to have been internalised by Marcus is thus not the creation of home and location, but rather race supremacy; a reading which is as deterministic as it is hopeless. Although the hopes of a damaged earlier generation of migrants do not necessarily become the realities of their descendants, Naipaul remains careful of such hopes.

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