

# Heideggerian Out-of-Joint Situation and New Horizons in Postcolonial Literature: Interpreting the Zizekian ‘Extimacy’ in *The Mimic Men* by V.S. Naipaul

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## Abstract

Though Naipaul’s geo-spatial dislocation from periphery to centre generates an optical distance that helps observe postcolonial reality objectively, he simultaneously attaches to the reality that he initially left behind. This can be termed ‘ex-timated’ fictionalization, where the inner is intimately ex-centred with outer. This sense rises from Naipaul’s territorial dislocation that does not indicate a decisive ontological detachment from the postcolonial reality that he is alienated with. His de-territorialization is unable to fully embrace the new metropolitan reality and forget the former completely, as shown mainly in fictional characters i.e. Salim (*A Bend in the River*) and Ralph Singh (*The Mimic Men*). This review considers *The Mimic Mento* explore this postcolonial situation, even though the symptom is visible even in his other novels, where major characters are positioned between tradition and modernity that emerged from post-colonial reality. While accepting the fact that his repetitive literary revisits to postcolonial Asia and Africa could provide the objective reality within the failed project of decolonization, a Zizekian analysis suggests that Naipaul could not effectively elevate himself from his Heideggerian ‘out-of-joint’ situation and exploit his ‘homelessness’ to discover a better reality. Instead, he is ex-timately confined to an ‘ex-static’ (or *ex-centric*) postcolonial situation that leaves him in the deadlock of ‘de-personalized objective narrations’ and ‘situational consciousness’ of Third World Literature. On the basis of the said *extimated alienation* of Naipaul’s existential literary endeavor, this review suggests that to understand the postcolonial situation better, Zizek’s idea of extimacy is of substantial significance.

Key words: Extimacy, ‘Out of Joint’ Situation, Slavoj Zizek, Postcolonial Literature, V.S. Naipaul

## Introduction

Many critics consider V.S. Naipaul to be one of the most significant novelists in contemporary postcolonial literature. Naipaul is popularly known as a person who looks at the postcolonial reality from an outsider’s perspective [Chakraborty, 2011, Cader, 2008, Cudjoe, 1988, Feder, 2001, Joshi, 1994, Kelly, 1989, Park, 1996, Wijesinha, 1998] though he is more than an outsider. His fictional and other works deeply engage in what can be termed as the formation of ‘identity politics’ [Hall & Gay, 1996, Hardt & Negri, 2000, Habermas, 2006] of the postcolonial subject after the Empire. Though he ‘de-territorializes’ his focal point from the Third World periphery to the center, Caribbean Islands to London metropolitan, he effectively uses the very same geo-political shift to articulate the complex postcolonial existence in a vast geo-political terrain cross Asia and Africa. Naipaul spatiotemporally revisits the colonial landscape to (re)narrate the subjectivity of the postcolonial man and his struggle to reinvent a new identity in a territory which his European masters once exploited and then left behind. It can also be said that he (and many other postcolonial writers) re-projects the miserable experience of the postcolonial man to the exotic fantasy of the European reader. However, by so doing he ‘universalizes his displacement’ for a global readership while criticizing the post-independent

nations for their backwardness and ‘incapability of self-renewal’, not forgetting to blame the British narcissism of their ruthless exploitation, cultural superiority and racism. In this context, Naipaul is appreciated for his contribution to postcolonial literature that illuminates the conditions of postcolonial life which suffer from cultural dislocation, alienation and loss of identity. The deep sense of subjectivity and psychological dependency and the unhealed wounds of imperialist humiliation that never set the postcolonial man free even after the so-called independence are his recurring themes. In many of his texts, Naipaul also emphasizes the significance of education in changing the transitional postcolonial man when he or she steps into modernity by getting rid of centuries old subjectivity.

Naipaul travels in between the postcolonial world and London metropolitan and advantageously uses his experiences to compose his fictions. However, the postcolonial in-between situation has elevated him as a renowned postcolonial writer. The truth is that the above in-between transposition itself is his literary limitation. It can therefore be argued that he was never free to discover something that is neither postcolonial nor metropolitan. This means that when he ‘de-territorialized’ himself from the postcolonial Caribbean, he has never been fully ‘out-of-joint’<sup>1</sup> from his original

<sup>1</sup>This phrase was borrowed from Slavoj Zizek’s popular text

setting. However, to contextualize this 'out-of-joint' situation and the element of 'extimacy'<sup>2</sup> in Naipaul, more attention must be paid to how he constructs his fictional reality in his novels. Naipaul's postcolonial reality is nothing new in comparison to the other postcolonial writers. It is full political chaos, barbarism, nationalistic slogans, third world dictatorial regimes, identity politics based on individual identity crises. Though he leaves this bitter reality, like Ralph in *The Mimic Men*, the psychological bondage brings him back to the same reality which he reproduces in his novels. Though he locates himself far away from the above reality, this reality becomes 'externally intimate' to him. In other world, postcolonial experience that he leaves behind suddenly becomes his real inner core that he catharsis through his fictions which are widely known as the best postcolonial writings [Park, 1996, Kelly, 1989, Cader, 2008, Hapugoda, 2015]. So, his centre is *ex-centric* with the inner postcolonial life despite his central existence is geographically located in the London metropolitan. Hence, this 'in-between-ness' (transposition between London and postcolonial world) is the very limit of his long and prestigious literary career.

It seems that even Naipaul fictionalizes his experiences by returning to his own postcolonial life despite he left it long time ago. So, his failure to invent 'something new' in his metropolitan life can be detected within this deadlock of his extimated postcolonial nostalgia which he eagerly projects to his international readers who seeks nothing but the fantasmatic *otherness* in exotic Asian and African geographies. It can be argued that Naipaul and many other postcolonial writers are never free from providing stories of exotic horrors in the Third World to cater to the fantasmatic *gaze* of the European (Western) masters [Dolar, 1998]. The failed political projects and rising despotism that Naipaul is

interested in the Third World are a rich source for such fantasmatic content which forever desires to keep the subject at that level. Since the primitive and irrational subject in the East caters to the Western fantasy, since fantasy-object always sustains its desire, the Western master did not want to change its fantasy-object entirely (*the deadlock of impossibility* from Master's point of view). The only thing was that the Western Master somewhat 'modernized' primitives so that he could desire it more and exploit it more. Naipaul stands right in between two paradoxical historical forces. Hence his tedious literary effort unfolds in two significant directions. First, he tries to understand how the West projects its fantasy towards the East (the colonized Third World) while exploiting them, and second, how the East saw the Western other as an 'intruder' who tries to destroy their historical harmony (essence) while also unconsciously welcoming them to offer the conditions of societal modernization. It is this ambiguous and paradoxical position that made many postcolonial critics to claim Naipaul was either 'Eurocentric' or catering to the gaze of the Western other.

*The Mimic Men* written in 1967 is widely considered as Naipaul's own political autobiography. As the title signifies, it reveals how the postcolonial men, who are deprived of their own identity, imitate and reflect the life-style and world views of the former colonial masters. The novel establishes an important landmark in Naipaul's own literary career while also capitalizing on his de-territorialized experiences in London which he geographically chooses for the start of his literary journey. Living in totally dissimilar worlds, after moving from the Caribbean Island to London metropolitan but still reflecting on what he left behind, Naipaul projects the reality of people in the newly independent postcolonial nations to a reader who is interested in reading the agony of those nations which have lost 'order' mostly during the decolonization process. While searching for 'law and order' for the postcolonial world, Naipaul in his novels such as *A Bend in the River* (1979), *Guerillas* (1975) and in the travelogue *Among the Believers* (2002) foresees that it has no future in the near horizon and confirms that the former colonial master is never going to help it. The future is totally in the hands of those who run the power game now in those nations and they have to be really smart to break the stagnation. They should stop catering to the European gaze which unconsciously demands irrational, barbaric and mysterious existence from them, which is legitimized through identity politics. This means that the 'inner core of the European fantasy' about the Oriental man, as a distant other, is structured in a manner that he is organically subjective to the despotic practices in dealing with power. In line with this fantasy projection, Naipaul depicts in his novels that the postcolonial world is gradually falling into the trap of the despotic master deviating from rational Enlightenment heritage. *The Mimic Men* is a preliminary example that displays how the postcolonial ex-

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*On Belief (Thinking in Action)* (2001). [Zizek, 1997, Zizek, 2001] often uses this reference in his essays to mean that man does not have a previous 'home' out of which he is 'thrown into' this world. Though there is a Gnostic tradition which believes that our Soul has been thrown into a foreign inhospitable environment, the horizon of our being, according to Zizek, is always a dislocated one and it is this dislocation situation that constitutes the primordial condition of our being. He says, 'Heidegger points the way out of this predicament: what if we effectively are 'thrown' into this world, never fully home in it, always dislocated, "out of joint", and what if this dislocation is our constitutive, primordial condition, the very horizon of our being? What if there is no previous home "home" out of which we were thrown into this world, what if this very dislocation grounds man's ex-static opening to the world?' [Zizek, 2001].

<sup>2</sup>The word 'extimacy' in Lacanian psychoanalysis is made with combination of two words; 'externally' and 'intimate'. The word 'ex-timacy' first appears in Jacques Lacan's text [Lacan, 1992] *The Seminar, Book VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. (trans. Dennis Porter). Detailed explanation of this concept by the Zizekian School is found in Tony Myers' *Slavoj Zizek* (2000). This concept means that the centre of the subject is outside or that the subject is ex-centric to the outside. In other words, the real is as much inside as outside. To explain this a bit further, the subject (in this case Naipaul) can be considered to be 'constituted by a 'loss', by the removal of itself from itself, by the expulsion of the very Ground or essence from which it is made' [Myers, 2000]

istential crisis, its schizophrenic psychology and paranoia, historical nostalgia and the feeling of insecurity seek comfort in identity politics that erupts under the banner of nationalism. It is perhaps the best Naipaulian novel to show the postcolonial fantasy about his former white master still holds the kernel of the subjectivity of the postcolonial man and is therefore always *ex-centric* to his present existence. Similarly, the fantasy to return to a historical essence again causes his subjectivity further restricting his 'out of joint' freedom.

## Methodology

This paper uses the critical hermeneutic approach to interpret the novel *The Mimic Men* to discover how the Heideggerian 'out-of-joint' situation and Zizekian 'extimacy' [Zizek, 2001, Zizek, 2002, Zizek, 2011] operate in the context of postcolonial literature that is presented by Naipaul. The analysis will mainly concentrate on the transposition of the main character Ralph Singh who is located between historical gaze of his own past (Asiatic horseman) and the gaze of the colonial master who sets standards for his existential situation. Hence, in contrast to the general inside-outside dialogue that prevails among critiques on Naipaul, this interpretation attempts to examine the true (dis)location of the narrator. Selected dialogues and descriptions that support the development of the conditions of 'extimacy' and 'out-of-joint' in the main character Ralph Singh will be chosen for the analysis. Hence, the textual evidences that articulate historical and political anxieties in Ralph when he is caught in postcolonial Isabella will be paid more attention to while the sections that illustrate his existential crisis and 'un-freedom' in London will also be focused on. Those evidences are hermeneutically interpreted to expose how Ralph's existential crisis in London metropolitan drives his psychology towards historical nostalgia. It further investigates how the historical memory of lost glory inspire identity politics and how Ralph Singh gets imprisoned in a paradoxical political transposition of the 'gaze' of the master while also becoming a subject of his own fantasized historical gaze. Ralph who fictionally represents Naipaul in this biographical novel shows the very 'unfreedom' that Naipaul encountered during his transposition between the postcolonial world and London metropolitan. Hence, using the Zizekian toolbox and critical hermeneutics this review attempts to argue that the ex-timated situation or the '*ex-centric* limit' that Naipaul displays can be universalized to articulate the very politico-aesthetic limit of postcolonial literature. It takes into account selected sections of the novel *The Mimic Men* for fictional evidence and the main character Ralph Singh for psychoanalytical evidence to support above argument.

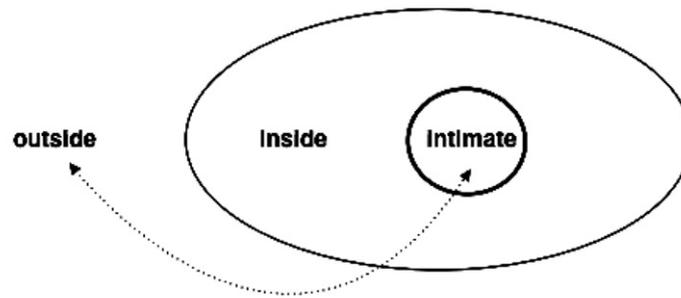
## Results and Discussion

### The True Location of the Narrator

The hermeneutic analysis of the text *The Mimic Men* and its main character Ralph Singh reveals that there is a parallax between the author's real life evidence and Ralph's no-place-ness in both Isabella and London. Naipaul literarily revisits his postcolonial despite his fixed existence in London but Ralph finds his London life as meaningless as his failed country Isabella. Since there is an autobiographical element to consider in analyzing the characters Naipaul and Ralph, the major similarity can be found in the fact of inescapable nostalgia that they both suffer from. Ralph carries a fantasy of an ancient Asiatic horseman who freely and gloriously rides northwards, a fantasy of perfection, yet Naipaul wants evidence from the postcolonial world to detect its deadly failures, a dream of imperfection. Ralph's fantasy derives from a pre-colonial world which, often in the postcolonial world, is politicized in order to be re-actualized to replace the present failure and humiliation. This is exactly the dream that is shared by Browne and Deschampsneufs who encouraged Ralph to witness it before entering politics. Since dreams of utopia are always political, the postcolonial fantasy of pre-imperialist unpolluted landscape, despite the biases of their feudal past, is highly a political one. But Naipaul is stuck within the remnants of the failed imperialist project in the postcolonial world yet he exposes its present misery, political failures, anti-modern motives and totalitarian symptoms back to the European reader. When he reveals 'the suppressed histories' of those nations in Asia and Africa Naipaul offers nothing radical as a viable alternative for those who struggle there whereas Ralph at least carries an unrealizable fantasy of glory. Hence, there is a parallax in the transposition of locations and the imaginary destinations of these two personalities. In this context, the following points are as the new theoretical and literary interpretations of this review.

### Inside and Outside as One Entity

Naipaul is made by a fundamental *loss* of his own rootlessness and dislocation from his originality with which he maintains a degree of nostalgic, unconscious relationship though this particular nostalgia is not visible to the outside. From a psychoanalytical point of view, it is from this *loss* his creativity originates. On the other hand, he maintains a fair distance with the above (lost) reality to gain an objective picture of the ground. It is this optical distance that Naipaul gains through his de-territorialized geo-spatial shift to London but his 'reality' was always 'grounded' elsewhere. According [Myers, 2000], this ground (reality) must remain 'outside of the subject for the subject to retain its consistency as a subject'. This means that Naipaul becomes 'Naipaul' whom we now know because of his Ground of postcolonial Indo-Caribbean entity that he once left behind but continued to write about as an ex-



**Figure 1:** The Transcendental Position of the 'Intimated Outside' of the 'Extimated Inside' of a Subject. By [Tupinambá, 2017]. Retrieved from <http://ideologyatitpurest.blogspot.com>.

ternalized reality from a distant point of view. According to above [Myers, 2000], 'The subject, in other words, must externalize itself in order to be the subject at all'. What is externalized from Naipaul's subjective inner is the literary and travelling content of his long career. For example, as [Chakraborty, 2011] mentions, 'While travelling through India, his [Naipaul's] subjective and emotional demands are bound to qualify his intellectual curiosity of objective truth'. At the same time, it reveals the palpable division between the man and the writer in him' (2011) is revealed through his 'externalized intimacy' with his own reality in the past which he now thinks that he is not part of.

Because of the above 'externalized interiority' the two halves of his 'self' (man and writer) are not two but one though it (the two halves of his "self") does not 'appear altogether incompatible with each other' [Chakraborty, 2011]. What is implied by this 'unity' is that 'the subject is no longer opposed to the object', rather 'subject and object are implicated in each other-the subject is the object outside of itself' [Myers, 2000]. The postcolonial reality that Naipaul is alienated with (and he leaves from) and the same reality that he later revisits to are un-detachably 'one' phenomenon; it is a revisit to his own interiority that he externalized long time back. In other words, the interior that Naipaul revisits to as a 'man' is the externalized Ground through which his inner journey is made as a 'writer'. The outcome of this internal revisit is his complex postcolonial narratives that composite universal accounts of the postcolonial world which receive higher critical insight. The phenomenon resulted from this union between man and writer is effectively phrased by [Chakraborty, 2011] as follows, 'with each revisit the man and the writer come closer to each other and engage themselves in a productive dialogue'. Though Naipaul is identified as an 'unattached observer' [Walsh, 1973], according to the theory of 'ex-timacy', his core or the centre is always situated external to himself or, in other words, the only way to see himself as Naipaul is strictly determined by the 'mirror' called postcolonial world itself. In a psycho-analytical sense, his inner is attached to the outer. As Myer (2000) illustrates, 'you can see everything except

the part of you that does the seeing- your own eyeball. The only way you can see your eyeball is by looking in a mirror where it is outside of yourself'. The validity of his epistemological position is that not only what Naipaul sees as reality (outside of eyeball) can be empirically validated for scholarly purposes but he himself is ultimately revealed through what he is seen by him (his own eyeball itself). If the subject (Naipaul) is 'thrown into' some in-between-ness, then he can easily become self-identical not only with the reality from which he 'was thrown' but with what he is 'thrown into'. He is identical with the reality that he has externalized once or, in the guise of this very opposite, *he finds himself outside himself*. So, what the reader finds in his texts as his inner self is reader's own outside.

### The 'Ex-timacy' in Naipaul's De-territorial Alienation

Though Naipaul's geo-spatial distance helps portraying the postcolonial reality objectively, he, on the other hand, becomes a subject of his own reality that he left behind. So, his existential 'centre' has always been nothing but the postcolonial world itself. Naipaul uses this fantasy transposition to express his experiences from an *ex-centric* (his center is externally internal) point of view, by travelling to the third world (outside) to discover his own dislocation and alienation (inside) from his metropolitan and return (*extimated inside that is 'out there'*) to re-narrate them. He was never 'free' from this transposition of dual location but able to produce some memorable account of postcolonial existence using the very same paradox. This situation can be termed as an 'ex-timated' fictionalization where the inner fantasy is intimately ex-centred with the outer. What becomes then problematic is that his territorial dislocation does not indicate a decisive ontological or aesthetic detachment from the postcolonial reality that he is alienated with. The de-territorialization has been unable to fully embrace the new metropolitan reality and forget the former completely, as shown in the fictional characters like Ralph Singh (*The Mimic Men*) and Salim (*A Bend in the River*) and others. While accepting the fact that his repetitive literary revisits to the postcolonial Asia

and Africa could provide an objective reality within the failed project of decolonization, a Zizekian analysis suggests that Naipaul could not effectively elevate himself from his Heideggerian 'out-of-joint' situation [Zizek, 1997, Zizek, 2001] and exploit his 'homelessness' to discover a better aesthetic-existential integrity for his fictions. Instead, he is ex-timately confined to an 'ex-static' (or *ex-centric*) postcolonial situation that leaves him in the deadlock of 'de-personalized objective narrations' and 'situational consciousness' of Third World Literature [Jameson, 1986]. On the basis of the above *extimated alienation* that exists within Naipaul's existential literary endeavor, this review suggests that the postcolonial situation can be more meaningfully contextualized by using Slavoj Zizek's idea of extimacy [Zizek, 2011] and it will in turn add more sophistication to the existing literary criticism and textual analysis.

Figure 1<sup>3</sup> illustrates the transcendental position of the 'intimated outside' of the 'extimated inside' of a subject and it shows that even though the centre seems inside it is always in motion between inside and outside.

Figure 1 graphically shows how the Naipaulian inner essence is intimately positioned outside to his metropolitan inside but it always communicates with the postcolonial world for his inner need to catharsis what he traumatically experienced there. The intimate object within the inside can be named in psychoanalytical terms 'the deeper inside' which Naipaul attempts to represent through that *object* is the torturing psyche of his body that struggles to reveal some inner truth. In *The Mimic Men*, Ralph Singh could never recover from his traumatic postcolonial experiences even if he wanted to escape from the disorder in the Third World. Similarly, Salim in *A Bend in the River* is never free from his intimate attachment with the chaotic African entity called Zaire which he was reluctant to leave till the last moment. Both Ralph and Salim (like Naipaul himself) retroactively 'visualize' about the traumatic world they left behind (may be with a guilt consciousness). Naipaul lives through these visualizations which ultimately reflect in his writings. It is this transcendental topological figure who moves between London and postcolonial world is what the reader sees in Naipaul's fictions and travelogues. In other words, what Naipaul represents is the *extimate center* that all postcolonial subjects carry in their existence. So, in between London (the dream land of snow) and the chaotic territories of Africa and Asia, there is an imaginary *third extimate place* (to slightly alter what Sudipta Chakraborty, 2011 notices in her PhD thesis) that combines the two extremes and makes a totality. When Naipaul feels that he is a stranger to both worlds, it can be argued that he represents this third unknown place (transcendental entity) that reduces the tension in his in-between-ness and produces anaesthetic and objective neutrality while

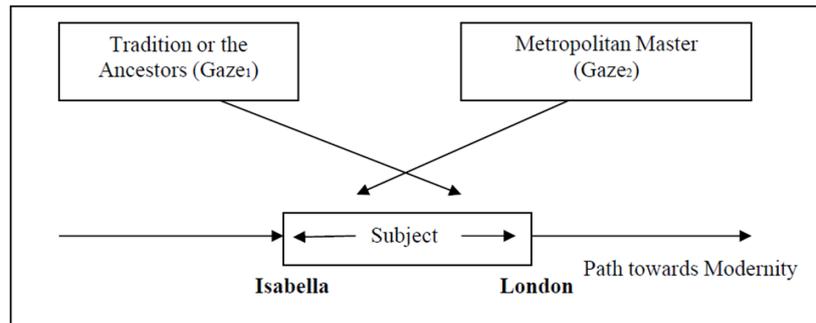
making a readable postcolonial reality in his hands.

## Transposition of the Gaze or Un-freedom

The postcolonial subject becomes, in his aesthetic experience, a prisoner either of his native world or of his new world. Mostly, they are unable to break away from this extimated transposition to discover something radically different from both worlds. This becomes symptomatic not only when Naipaul decides to move to London but when he universalizes it through some of his major fictional characters like Ralph Singh and Salim. At the same time, his other novels and travelogues too provide similar evidence. Ralph is caught in between the memories of his ancestral past and the values of the modern metropolitan life which he finally found meaningless. He assumes that his tradition is looking at him through a celestial eye, the *gaze* of the dead paternal signifier, when he opts to live in a modern-urban setting. But he longed to be in London to escape from the chaos and disorder in Isabella Island, assuming that the former master could offer him security and guidance; mistakenly the gaze of the European master. This interchangeable transposition of gaze is applicable to Salim too in *A Bend in the River* where his 'spatiotemporal' existence in Congo could never provide a sense of belongingness. Instead, Salim thinks that his life is somewhere else, his future wife waits in London or he is far away from civilization etc. though his real business is in the 'bush' to which he made an anxious reverse journey.

This transcendental situation illustrated in Figure 2 can be termed as the very deadlock in postcolonial literature or its *situational consciousness*. The psychological inferiority and servitude in the postcolonial subjects, intensified by the global neo-colonial Empire building led by America, did not disappear even after so called 'independence'. The ontological gap further widened during the post-capitalist stage when it constantly threatened the traditional societies in the postcolonial world making their life further complex and miserable. In this juncture, the noteworthy postcolonial authors such as Wole Soyinka, Hanif Kureishi, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy or Nuguib Mahfouz use to project the miserable conditions (historically given situation) of their present existence to the former white masters despite some of them were either physically or existentially absorbed to the capitalist metropolitans. None of them were 'fully free' or 'out-of-joint' from the given conditions of postcolonial existence to produce something remarkable or path-breaking ('elevated works') to overtake the twentieth century writers in the canon. Thereby, it can be concluded that the postcolonial authors were unable to create a genre of 'modern literature' that is more creative, imaginative and existential than twentieth century classics which breaks free from their 'national situation' and does not remind the European readers 'of outmoded stages of our own first-world cultural development'. So, the ex-timated transposition and the de-territorialization, the very strength of Naipaul, is the

<sup>3</sup>This figure (1) originally appeared in google images yet it actually corresponds to the following blog site: <http://ideologyatitspurest.blogspot.com> [Tupinambá, 2017]



**Figure 2:** Transposition of Gaze between Tradition and Modernity for the Postcolonial Subject in Transition. By Researcher's Analysis, 2016.

very limit of his literary journey.

### Ralph Singh: Deadlock between Metropolitan and Traditional Landscape

When it comes to Third World postcolonial politicians, with their inability to construct something path-breaking to come out from the existing socio-economic deadlock due to their dead spirit and psychological bondage to the former master, there seems to have no hope in the horizon for those nations. Despite their local popularity as leaders and success in mobilizing mass, much like Ralph's socialist movement, post-independent politicians were unable to bring in radical changes. They lacked the psychological assurance and guarantee to do so in so far as they could never recoil from their permanent resignation to their own schizoid ego. Though they are 'aware' of the gravity of the political realities that they encounter, they are not authentically 'affected' by bloody racial divisions or never truly sensitive to the burning economic issues. Metaphorically, Ralph finds solace in aimlessly riding to the end of the empty world and further retreating to the infinite emptiness itself. His subconscious urge to recover from his 'shipwrecked situation' drives him, rather than eliminating his past, further to the empty world of his Asian ancestors. His withdrawal as a Third World politician had a tremendous impact on the progress and futurism that his nation is eagerly waiting to achieve. From a philosophical point of view, he should have courageously embraced modern progressiveness and creativity in order to overcome the very servitude of miserable postcolonial existence. His identification with the metaphor of the ancient horsemen seems symptomatic to his rootlessness (or the lack of strength in his own roots to meet the future). The horseman's dual goal, according to Deodat's (1979) description, is escape and extinction.

Ralph is a reminder of many post-independent politicians<sup>4</sup> in the failed Third World. He quickly runs away

<sup>4</sup>As [Wijesinha, 1998] points out in relation to Sri Lankan post-independent experience, there is a need to fundamentally alter the symptomatic attitudes of those who hold governmental responsibility 'if there is to be any progress'. The corruption and ignorance in the J.R. Jayewardene regime whom he compares to the Big Man in *A Bend in the River* (1979) made the monster grows

from the given circumstances of immensely challenging nature. Yet the feeling of 'betrayal' overwhelms him [Naipaul, 2002a]. He is not ready to conceive and adapt to the new realities after independence with which he has to evolve. There is a greater mismatch between his representation and country's expectations. It is accurate to say that 'His political career effectively ends even before he fails on his mission to London on behalf of his government' [Deodat, 1979]. Ralph cannot represent 'anything' because virtually he does not belong to anywhere. From his melancholic mood; he withdraws further into the anachronistic images of ancestry or the vanishing values of English life. As can commonly be detected in many post-independent elites, the failure to embrace the complexities in modernity is the major symptom in Ralph Singh too. Ralph says, "my irresponsibility extended to even myself" and feels "physically limited" [Naipaul, 2002a] to make a fresh start even though he wants to be a free man. Hence he remains unanswered to his own burden of responsibility for the others (for the country). Then he does not know what is to be a free man in the free world and where to begin, 'What this action will be I cannot say. I used to think of journalism; sometimes I used to think of a job with the UN. But these were attractive only to a harassed man. I might go into business again. Or I might spend the next few working on a history of the British Empire' [Naipaul, 2002a]. It seems, at a superficial level, Ralph is gambling with his future with wide range of choices but these are all 'forced-choices' that are pre-determined by his postcolonial condition itself. That is why he feels 'limited' in his existential new beginning. This ontological uncertainty resembles the very 'de-centeredness' or the 'direction-less-ness' of the post-independent politicians after they 'earned' so called independence from the colonizers.

Ralph descends from a generation of failures and that sense of impotency overwhelms him throughout his life and increases his fear; fear for failure. The growing disorder in Isabella creates more and more anxiety in him

too large to be controlled. The Big Man is the next radical development that can rise from this Ralph Singh's ambivalence and 'elitist dilemma' towards modernity.

and distances him further from that territory; very origins of his fear. Then Ralph longs to be in London to get away from his neurotic attachment, location of the memories of his ancestral failure and to 'relocate' himself in a land of success. Though he "longed to leave" [Naipaul, 2002a], he was never fully aware of what 'leaving' truly means as to how it can 'break' someone's roots and open up new pathways towards freedom. His freedom was always restricted by his attachment to the old fantasies that derived from his past. His father's withdrawal to the jungle in search of the lost glory and beauty in of his country had a tremendous impact on his psychology. When Browne and Descampsneufs encouraged Ralph to discover Isabella he finally decided to enter politics to actualize the ideal land that his father as well as Browne and Descampsneufs nostalgically dreamt of. When he realized that postcolonial politics in Isabella could never materialize the fantasy ideal, he then decided to go back to London. Within this geopolitical shift Ralph never finds a solution for his existential anxiety which he tries to release through female bodies he came across in London metropolitan. His sexuality becomes a cathartic recovery for the sense of loss, no-place-ness and dislocation that he was suffering from. He uses those females, both Leini and Sandra, for his maternal signifier of his guideless and directionless

Ralph lacks the most needed 'radicalness' to make a free choice in this new radically free situation. From a psychoanalytical perspective, this mostly refers his psychological bondage to liberate himself from traditional cultural life-worlds [Wells, 2014] to embrace new conditions of emancipation. The postcolonial middle class are the ones who are most reluctant to give up not only their own traditions, customs and rituals but the outdated Victorian values imposed on them during colonization. Ralph, representing the same middle class, needs courage to give up the burden of history and to take up the universal responsibility to improve the living conditions of his countrymen after independence. The novel shows that he is not 'trained' (or prepared) to enjoy such creative freedom. However, it is also true that such cognitive preparation itself can restrict 'freedom' but the creative energy and forwardness have to spring up from a broader understanding to traverse such freedom. The losing equilibrium and the structural break down are further evidenced by his inability to establish and maintain intimate relationships; from Sandra to the fat prostitute. So, his failure is two folds, public and private, political exile as well emotional deadlock. This failure is metaphorically signified by 'home'; his Roman mansion at a private level and country at a public level. At both levels, his presence at 'home' becomes problematic; his national belongingness glues himself to nationalistic roots while distancing him from his European fantasies at a personal level. He is a dislocated alien in his own family 'home' yet not fully identifying with its traditional values [Cader, 2008]. Then he seeks another 'home' to settle down to. When he relocates him-

self in London, another geo-spatial 'home' away from his chaotic native 'home', again he becomes ambivalent.

## New Life Confronting Old Fantasies

The failure in 'After the Event' is also relevant to understand Ralph's personal life. His real failure starts with his own crisis after meeting the new metropolitan realities. It is therefore important, within the context of this review, to note how Ralph Singh comes to terms with the new socio-cultural realities in this strange but dreamy land. After his arrival to London (after the Event) he starts naively comparing things, light in the tropics and the artificial lights in London, low night sky in London and the night succeed the day at tropics, famous names and places in London and nothingness in his home city, etc. At the same time, he encounters the complex secular life in London, homosexuals, bisexuals, party girls who are willing to share their erotic life, girls who are willing to come to his apartment, etc. Ralph for a moment indulges in this life in the first section of the novel. He was not prepared or ready to embrace this new life when the memories of his father's ancestry started troubling him. Instead of accepting the present conditions in his new urban life he found that "there was no one to link my past, no one to note my consistencies and inconsistencies. It was up to me to choose my character, and I choose the character that was easiest and most attractive" [Naipaul, 2002a]. He chose to be 'indifferent' amidst those famous names and empty streets in the city, while also being amazed to see the 'London Girls', drunken parties, open sexuality, mostly 'observed' from the 'basement' of Lieni's boarding house. Despite his dream of snow, Ralph starts to feel detached from the London environment too and this detachment is the beginning of his deeper existential deadlock that never sets him free. The true existentialism is all about the total freedom from alienation but Ralph live in an existential imprisonment between London dream that erupts from modern urbanization and home nostalgia that derives from Asiatic glory and heritage.

About the confused worlds in between, Ralph once said, "So, already I had made the double journey between my two landscapes of sea and snow. To each, at the first parting, I thought I had said goodbye, since I had got to know each in my own way it was little like the tourist trying to summon up a response to the desired object which, because it is too well known, leaves him cold. So too it was with London later" [Naipaul, 2002a]. If Ralph did not truly belong to any of these landscapes, then he can be contextualized in a Zizekian (Heideggerian) situation called 'no-place-ness' where he loses the gaze from these two symbolic entities. This means that neither tradition nor the London life is observing his behavior and expecting him to commit to either of these ends. In short, there is no celestial camera (eye in the sky) that observes him. The real problem with Ralph is that the transposition between these two contrasting landscapes never makes him symbolically free

to 're-invent' something brand new; something truly different from both these territories. On one hand, Ralph becomes a defeated, shipwrecked soul in the London metropolitan life and the third world looks at him as a Eurocentric personality. On the other hand, London may conceive him as stranger who can never get adapted to their modern urban life while Isabella understands him as a betrayer of her Asiatic tradition and the past glory of the riding horseman. Within this paradox, when he thinks to settle down in the metropolitan life, he becomes then caught in his past life. Then when he goes back to Isabella to seek his nostalgic past, he longs to be in London. Still his bondage (tie) to the Asiatic heritage remains unbroken (reminds of Fromm's metaphor 'mother's womb') despite his radical territorial shift yet it does not provide a strong ontological link for him to relate to the present.

His [Ralph's] failure in marriage, sex, politics, and business - his twenty years of parenthetical existence that denied the truth of his fantasies-can at last be controlled and given shape in words, paragraphs and chapters. The memoirs enable Singh to re-create himself in language, leaving him with "the final emptiness" that the author experiences upon the completion of a major work' [Kelly, 1989]. About the main character Ralph and Naipaul himself, about the failed fantasy in both of them, what is noticed by Richard Kelly (1989) is that the overwhelming emptiness that leads to a degree of defeat. Rather than becoming melancholic in the new confused reality what Ralph (and Naipaul) should have attempted to do is to create 'something' out of their own nothingness that is given to him as a precondition of their in-between existence. Theologically, according to [Zizek, 1996], "the miraculous emergence of a new symbol against the background of the void of the Thing" can be termed as *creatio ex nihilo*<sup>5</sup> It is true that wherever he goes he encounters an intolerable nothingness but the very void that prevails everywhere is the very condition that man (even God) experienced from the very beginning of his being in the world. God created the world out of nothing and was the precise precondition of 'before the beginning' (before beginning the world) prior to his Creation. The inherent situation for man (and for God) is the very nothingness out of which he was created and 'thrown into' this world. What must be remembered is the thing that he creates out of nothing in turn always

<sup>5</sup>The phrase *creatio ex nihilo* derives originally from Latin which means 'creation out of nothing'. As often used by Slavoj Zizek, this refers to teleological fact that "for God had to create the world he first had to create nothing" [Pound, 2008]. Without an original nothingness God did not have a space to fill his creation with. According to Marcus Pound, "God had to create first "a vacated space" for creation itself to subsequently fill. This was achieved by God's founding act of contraction, a withdrawing into himself, reducing his essence to an immeasurable point from which there appears a place of possible separation" [Pound, 2008]. Tracing back the religious origin of before the Beginning of this world, this gesture evidences the fact that there must be a preliminary and an original 'nothingness', 'vacuum', 'void' or 'no place' for a thing to start (or to be). Hence, the 'no-place-ness' is nothing strange to humanity.

restructures him in a brand new manner, because it is a new beginning. It is this beginning that Ralph must long for and then capitalize on to produce more than the memoirs that melancholically deal with his 'situational consciousness' and nostalgia.

Therefore, in true existential terms, Ralph should not have worried too much about the emptiness that is around him. Compared to the divine madness 'before the beginning', he must accept the feeling of anguish and despair as a positive human condition that has the potential to regenerate a new man out of him. Instead of getting caught in the 'situational consciousness' of the postcolonial reality or of the chaotic existence in the London city life, Ralph must sweat to go one further step to discover something brand new that essentially surpasses both realities that he is familiar with. In case of Naipaul too, a new form of aesthetic literature and a brand new existential integrity was possible when his limitless freedom in the 'no-place-ness' (de-territorialized 'out-of-joint situation') is concerned. If *The Mimic Men* deals with Naipaul's own problem, especially that of 'the disassociation of a man from the simplicity around him' [Kelly, 1989], despite he denies a close kinship with the narrator, the application of the positive side of alienation and dislocation (as shown by [Zizek, 1993]) becomes universal both in relation to the author and narrator who undergo a similar phenomenological situation. Either in the postcolonial world or in the metropolitan reality one must be courageous enough to undergo the situation of nothingness that is predominantly prevalent around him. It is true that both worlds do not offer a meaning to his existence. But 'tarrying with the negative' [Zizek, 1993] is the biggest and the most challenging task of modern humanity. The impossibility in traversing nothingness is the deadlock that both Ralph and Naipaul encounter in their lives.

This situation is somewhat insightfully cited by Paul Theroux (1972) where he says, "He [Naipaul] is in his own words 'without a past, without ancestors', 'a little ridiculous and unlikely'. His is a condition of homelessness. It has the single advantage of enabling him to become a working resident as much resident in India as anywhere else and allows him a depth of insight that is denied the metropolitan. For the rootless person, every country is a possible temporary home; but for Naipaul, there is no return, either to a past or a place" [Theroux, 1972]. The sense of belonging to nowhere is signified in Theroux's 'temporary home' but for Ralph Singh 'returning to ancestry' is a possible option and it is where Naipaul becomes different from his fictional character. Theroux forgets to mention that 'a working resident who does not have a fixed home' itself makes him a universally metropolitan citizen but Naipaul did not seem to hundred percent accept this ultimate vacancy and the freedom that this vacuum generated in his career. Through this 'no place' context, as a colonial migrant and an interpreter of English culture and society as well as an interpreter of the Third World

[Cader, 2008] Naipaul has acquired an authoritative position in the literary world but it is doubtful to say whether he could be fully free to generate an existential postcolonial literature that is liberated from its usual despair and melancholia of the loss and nostalgia. The question remains unanswered, given his characters who are caught between modernity and tradition and given that there is no clear ontological break from the familiar postcolonial discourse, whether Naipaulian literature too is imprisoned in the contemporary framework of 'situational consciousness' that repeatedly reproduces the postcolonial master-slave dialectic and its phenomenology. Though Theroux says that Naipaul is a man 'without a past, without ancestors', his constant revisits to the postcolonial reality proves that he is not entirely broken free from his own past, from the ontological link, his own reality and 'his own home'.

Quoting Henry Lefebvre, Sudipta Chakraborty defends Naipaul's in-between situation and says, "configuring the past and present in an imaginary symmetry is also central to Naipaul's ontological needs as a migrant subject of the metropolitan "center". In Lefebvre's view, there could be no past totally lost to the present as it is difficult to imagine a perpetually "present" space in complete disregard of its roots in the past" [Chakraborty, 2011]. Past epistemologically reflects in the present in formulating the fictional reality of Naipaul's postcolonial ontology that creates a totality in his in-between existence. Rather than an ontological break, what can be found in Naipaul is a continuation of the past (postcolonial experiences during his childhood and later revisits) in an imaginary landscape. This is true for his fictional character Ralph. A new ontology always springs from a gap that is created from a broken heritage and a historical lineage which Ralph still could not experience before or after his arrival to metropolitan. In simple words, he did not have a 'guide' for an ontological mapping of the new surrounding. Ralph says, "there was no one to link my present with my past, no one to note my consistencies and inconsistencies. It was up to me to choose my character, and I chose the character that was easiest and most attractive" [Naipaul, 2002a]. His parents could not link these two elements nor could his Isabella education. Even his intimate relationship with Sandra was of no use in this establishment of connection between past and present and thereby between fantasy and reality. The 'missing link' (which according to Zizek, 2002) is "not only epistemological but primarily ontological" [Zizek, 2002] between past and present is what makes his life miserable. And this where the two fantasy worlds started overlapping over one another where the ancestral horseman (fantasy) started haunting in his mind when he was adrift with Lien in the London metropolitan (reality). Ralph says, "Both of us adrift in London, the great city. I with my past, my own darkness, she no doubt with hers" [Naipaul, 2002a].

Then Ralph shifted the landscape. He returned to Is-

abella. About this de-territorialization, he says, "I linger now on this moment of arrival more than I did at the time. This return so soon to a landscape which I thought I had put out of my life for good was a failure and a humiliation" [Naipaul, 2002a]. Though he first thought that this tainted island was not made for him and he did not belong to this landscape, with the restlessness in the metropolitan life, he quickly decided otherwise. With no other option, he returned to his primary fantasy. Ralph once says, "I could never feel myself as anything but spectral, disintegrating, pointless, fluid" [Naipaul, 2002a]. In this withdrawing gesture, he even mythically seeks luck in Sandra whom he did not feel any intimate closeness in his life with. The abyss of fantastasmatic that he revisits in Isabella to is obvious here. The use of a female metaphor highlights the fact that his defeated ontology seeks refuge in a motherly console by returning to an exotic landscape that can heal his 'modern' wounds very much like loving Sandra's extotified 'painted' breasts. Departing from the confused life in London and accepting a new, ready-made life in Isabella, Ralph thinks that his life "had changed" [Naipaul, 2002a] dramatically but he soon realizes that others have different judgements about this life. His visitors used to criticize the narrowness of the island life. "The absence of good conversation or proper society, the impossibility of going to the theater or hearing a *good* symphony concert" [Naipaul, 2002a] were the complaints from his 'civilized' friends. In addition, 'Sandra battled on with her North London tongue' signifies that there is a serious mismatch when it comes to life conditions in Isabella. She once said, "I suppose this must be the most inferior place in the world" [Naipaul, 2002a].

He then developed an interest in Negros in Isabella as pointed out to him by Deschampsneufs who says that the only hope for Isabella lay in the large-scale settlements of Asiatics. When the modern world was fast moving towards rational education, economic prosperity through technology and globalized setting deviating from local fantasies, Ralph thinks of (re)writing the Isabella history with the picturesqueness of the Negro slave population and their civilizational virtues. This mostly occurs to him "during the moments of stillness and withdrawal which came to me in the days of power" [Naipaul, 2002a]. Through (re)writing and (re)visiting history, Ralph's nostalgic longing 'to return to the past' becomes obvious in the following statement, "I am like that child outside a hut at dusk, to whom the world is so big and unknown and time so limitless; and I have visions of Central Asian horseman, among whom I am one riding below a sky threatening snow to the very end of an empty world" [Naipaul, 2002a]. He tries to escape from a 'deep, silent shame' caused through generations of failures to a "homeland of Asiatic and Persian Aryans" [Naipaul, 2002a] which he visualizes over the bare mountains as far away as the North Pole. Then amidst the obvious failures, his narcissist fantasy projection towards his own ego becomes stronger when he

says, "I would dream that all over the Central Asian plains the horsemen looked for their leader. Then a wise man came to them and said, 'you are looking in the wrong place. The true leader of you lies far away, shipwrecked on an island the like of which you cannot visualize' " [Naipaul, 2002a]. However, he then realizes that there is a "paradox of his fantasy" (2002a) when he found that this very island life becomes 'unbearable'. The paradoxical transposition between two extreme (and unrealistic) fantasy worlds makes Ralph's life a total impossibility and immobility. This schizoid sickness, from a subjective point of view, places him in between idealism and practicality and this unconscious deadlock that is only capable of expressing 'myth, tragedy, dream' and producing a 'dissociated ego' that is 'cut off from the world' never ceases to be his 'very own world' [Deleuze & Guattari, 2000].

He further hangs on to the same dreamy Aryan land, "Chieftaincy among mountains and the snow had been my innermost fantasy. Now, deeply, I felt betrayed and ridiculed. I rejected the devotion that was offered me. I wished to fly, to begin afresh, lucidly" [Naipaul, 2002a]. Within the withdrawal from modern London life to the fantasy land of horsemen, Ralph tries to rediscover his delirium that cuts off from the actual life conditions and confirms the existence in his own specific world. The conjoining of spiritualism and positivism [Deleuze & Guattari, 2000] that his father was trying to find in Hinduism becomes another ego-centric phenomenon for Ralph too when it comes to his rediscovery of spiritualism in the Asiatic phantasmatic. Nationalism was a good ideological vehicle for the purpose of seeking and rediscovering this lost glory, the lost essence or the lost fantasy. In the novel, the complex London reality quickly disappears and his old fantasy starts dominating as an avatar of his own soul. That is where Ralph keeps on refocusing on his own ego where the repeating I could restore his ability pronounce the hollowness that he (and his father) was experiencing. This neurotic symptom [Deleuze & Guattari, 2000] starts affecting not only his unconscious but his practical (political) life. Such patience, according to [Deleuze & Guattari, 2000], "becomes apathetic, narcissistic, cut off from reality, incapable of achieving transference" [Deleuze & Guattari, 2000]. The Asiatic horseman and the glory of the past, spiritualism in Hinduism repeat several occasions in the novel. This neurotic 'return' is further materialized by Ralph's father's over-identification with Hindu sanyasi tradition while Ralph over-identifies with historical idealism of the Asiatic horsemen. Wherever these subjects received their education from or wherever they travelled, this ontological drawback and the deadlock of fantasy are the true failure of decolonization.

### Homelessness as a New Opening

What if Ralph, as a politician who represents a Third World postcolonial nation, could attain a situation of

total freedom; that he is fully free from all gazes or celestial cameras? What if his situation offers him an 'absolute and unconditional freedom' to choose whatever he wants for the sake of his own people (and for himself)? But could the postcolonial individuals understand this new form of freedom that was given to them? Could they realize that the force of colonization could detach them from tradition while the process of decolonization (post-independence) gave them *a precious situation to reinvent themselves in a brand new universe?* The postcolonial authors are in the opinion that things started deteriorating after the white masters left the former colonies and they project our present misery to the same European eye through postcolonial literature. Most importantly, the major postcolonial authors such as V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Wole Soyinka and Hanif Kureishi structure their literature in such manner that our follies, anti-democratic moves, religious chaos, barbarism, obstinacy and irrational authoritarianism (even totalitarianism) are reduced to some mysterious desire that always seek anti-enlightenment motives which are projected towards catering to the phantasmatic of the European reader. So, we are forever prisoners of the European gaze and the situation of vacancy that was created by abandoning us by the white masters was never effectively utilized as a new opening to create a brand new form of existential and aesthetic literary genre.

What if the abandonment of the white master itself is a new condition of freedom where, despite neo-colonial economic dependencies, the indigenous can make absolutely free choices? Do they realize that the postcolonial man 'betrayed' this opportunity because of some imaginary homeland of nostalgic nature? Because of their paranoia for failure and the sense of insecurity coupled with isolationism, they wanted a new form of *subjectivity*, legitimacy and acceptance from their former masters who tamed them for centuries and made their psychology dependent. This is the fundamental failure symptomized by Ralph in *The Mimic Men*. As Hegelian slaves, they were always afraid to experiment something new because they were scared of failures (or afraid of errors). According to Zizek, one must make free choices despite their inner potential of making serious mistakes. He says, "the error is immanent to the truth" [Zizek, 2005] and "the fear of error is error itself" [Zizek, 2005]. Despite the fact that failure is the first step towards success, it so happened because they were never trained to take risks by their own and experiment something truly new. They could only mimic what the white masters were doing centuries back and never occurred to overtake them in their own feet. Instead of hanging onto useless nationalization or welfare liberalization as imposed by the former colonizers, knowingly or unknowingly, the postcolonial politicians were offered a magnificent opportunity to 'choose' their own actions after independence. They did not try to 'choose the impossible' but resolved to mimic what the masters wanted

them to choose. To choose what is already there to be chosen is always 'a forced choice' or, in other words, a choice already pre-conditioned for them to choose is not a choice at all [Zizek, 2011].

## Conclusion

The semi-autobiographical novel *The Mimic Men* provides strong evidence about the 'no-place-ness' of a postcolonial subject whose existential crisis ends up in a deeper involvement in identity politics which is a common symptom in the postcolonial world. Though Ralph Singh leaves Isabella and settles in London, he never seemed to be 'free' to invent something path-breaking; something more existential and profound; something more modern that demarcates a radical break with the tradition. In a gesture of 'returning to the past' he revisits his nostalgic Asiatic fantasy when his existential crisis deepens in London. As far as this psychological returning to his primary fantasy is considered as 'returning to an intimated core', his interior becomes nothing but the postcolonial world itself. Based on this 'de-territorialization' and re-narrating the reality on the basis of this geo-spatial shift, his memoirs and rewriting history can be compared to Naipaul's own postcolonial ontology and writings. It can therefore conclude that the above 'externalized intimacy' is the ontological literary limit of many postcolonial authors. It has been rather difficult for them, including the most prestigious of them V.S. Naipaul, to use the very condition of alienation to create a more aesthetic and existential literature that can replace the present situational consciousness. Caught unconsciously in a form of master-slave dialectic, Naipaul and other postcolonial writers cater to the European fantasmatic of their metropolitan readers. It is where subjectivity unconsciously enters into postcolonial fiction, and the unencompassible *Otherness* begins. For instance, the moment in which Naipaul starts projecting his postcolonial reality to the European gaze, his imaginative and creative energy to produce a brand new reality (different from that of his postcolonial experience or of the metropolitan existence) stops there. This means that they are never fully 'out-of-joint' from the world that they once left behind.

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