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Sömürge Dönemi Sonrası Romanlarda Toplumların Benlik ve Kimlik İnşası

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ÖZ

Bu tezin amacı, sömürgeleştirilmiş toplumların, sömürge sonrası dönemlerde yaşadıkları kimlik çatışması, kimlik arayışı, benlik algısını ve kimlik inşasında etkili olan dinamikleri incelemektir. Tez, David Malouf'un **Remembering Babylon** ve V.S. Naipaul'un **The Mimic Men** eserlerindeki karakterlerin mevcut kimlik tanımlamalarının dışında kalarak arada kalmışlıklarını, aidiyetsizliklerini analiz etmektedir. Bu çalışma bunu yaparken, kimlik tanımlamalarının yapaylığını vurgularken, mevcut düzende kendini konumlandıramayan karakterler için tanımlamaların dışında üçüncü bir alanın mümkün olduğu savı üzerinde durmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kimlik, Aradakalmışlık, Beyazlık-Siyahlık

Sömürge Dönemi Sonrası Romanlarda Toplumların Benlik ve Kimlik İnşası

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the identity conflict, search for identity, self-perception and the dynamics influential in the construction of identity of the once-colonized societies. It analyzes the in-betweenness, and un-belongingness of the characters, who remain outside the conventional dichotomic definitions of identity, in David Malouf's **Remembering Babylon** and V.S. Naipaul's **The Mimic Men**. While doing this, the study elaborates upon the possibility of a third space for the characters who cannot position themselves in the present societal definitions in terms of identity as well as emphasizing the artificiality of identity definitions.

Keywords: Identity, In-betweenness, Whiteness-Blackness

ÖNSÖZ

Bu çalışma sömürge sonrası toplum bireylerinin maruz kaldığı kimlik krizini ve asimilasyon sonucu oluşan arada kalmışlık hissini araştırmayı amaçlar. Ralph ve Gemmy aracılığıyla, deri rengi bazlı geleneksel dikotomik yaklaşımların başarısızlığını araştırır.

Giriş kısmında, tezin anahatları ve Remembering Babylon ile The Mimic Men'in ortak noktaları açıklanmıştır. Bu kapsamda, ötekilik, İngilizlilik ve taklit sunulmuştur. Birinci bölümde, ötekilik, beyazlık ve anlamı ile Babil adı ve alt metni ve yazının benlik üzerindeki onarıcı ve yıkıcı etkisi incelenmiştir. İkinci bölümde, The Mimic Men analiz edilmiştir. Temelde, Üçüncü Alan, Lacan ışığında baba ve anne ilişkisi, Ralph'ın kadınlarla ilişkisi ve taklit incelenmiştir. Sonuç bölümünde iki romanın karşılaştırması yapılmıştır.

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PREFACE

This study aims to analyze the identity crisis that post-colonial community subjects are exposed to and the sense of in-betweenness they go through as a result of assimilation through a foreign culture and language. Through Gemmy and Ralph Singh, it examines the failure of conventional dichotomic approaches towards identity based on skin color.

In the Introduction, the main outline of the dissertation and the common points of **Remembering Babylon** and **The Mimic Men** are mentioned. The issues that form the basis of the discussions in the dissertation, like otherness, Britishness and mimicry are introduced. In Chapter I, the issues of in-betweenness in **Remembering Babylon** is studied. In section 1.1, otherness is examined. Section 1.2. “I’m a B-b-british Object” examines Gemmy’s dilemma regarding his background as British. Section 1.3 elaborates on whiteness and its meaning and function. Section 1.4 dwells on naming taking the name Babel into consideration. Section 1.5 examines the constructive and deconstructive effect of writing. In Chapter 2, **The Mimic Men** is analyzed. In section 2.1, the third space with the effect of writing is elaborated on. In section 2.2, the relationship with the father and mother is examined under the light of Lacan’s theories related to symbolic order. Ralph’s relationship with women is studied in section 2.3 and in section 2.4, mimicry is taken into consideration. In section 2.5, the deconstructive effect of mimicry is examined. Finally in the Conclusion, a comparative view is employed on both novels and the characters.

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INTRODUCTION

The post-colonial novels **Remembering Babylon** and **The Mimic Men** explore the construction of national, cultural and racial identity against an 'other'. Identity is, however, an artificial construction manipulated by power. What makes the issue more complicated here is the fact that this takes place in a post-colonial context where identity involves extra layers that may not be necessarily considered under 'conventional circumstances'. But in Australia, the setting of **Remembering Babylon**, and in the Caribbean, the setting of **The Mimic Men**, the white settlers demonstrate a sense of superiority while the non-whites demonstrate the inferiority and subordination. The novels are mainly about the transgression of the exclusionary binaries and otherness is an important constituent of this subject. Hence, I will start by dwelling upon what it means to be the other, what makes 'one' and an 'other'.

The presence of the other requires above all the presence of the 'one'. And to be the other necessitates the alienation of one subject from the other. Hegel draws attention to this in his consideration of the one and the other in his **Phenomenology of Spirit**,

One (is) a unity which excludes an other. The One is the moment of negation; it is itself quite simply a relation of self to self and it excludes an other; and it is that by which 'thinghood' is determined as a Thing. Negation is inherent in a property as a determinateness which is immediately one with the immediacy of being, and immediacy which, through this unity with negation, is Universality. As a One, however, the determinateness is set free from this unity with its opposite, and exists in and for itself. (69)

That is to say, the existence of the one requires its "negation". The other, in a sense, becomes the alter-ego of the one and finds existence only as negated. The "determinateness" of the subject means an oppositional or hostile stance towards the existence of an other. The thing or the subject "possesses intrinsic being" simply by existing.¹ But this intrinsic being is not independent of other intrinsic beings. It needs the others' existence to be aware of its own "essence" which differentiates it from them because "Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-

¹ **Ibid.**, p.73.

consciousness”.² The “own essence” on the community level is associated with a general self-perception and cultural belonging. Otherness in essence incorporates “difference” and this difference works on both individual and cultural level of which the individual is a part. Every individual is a cultural subject and every culture or individual brings division with itself from the others. However, Abu-Lugho asserts “The culture concept is problematic, because it focuses on difference, and in doing so it operates to enforce separation that inevitably carries a sense of hierarchy”³ (qtd. in Sax 293). The presence of the other, then, makes up the basis for a hierarchy which causes a racist approach tending to make some cultures inferior while placing another culture in a superior position. This also leads to the assumption that some people or races need the superior people or race’s help to develop, which forms the basis of colonialism. At this point, it is relevant to relate Pandian’s list “of some of the dominant others used in this discourse which includes the fossil other, savage other, black other and the ethnographic other”⁴ (qtd. in Sarukkai 1406). Pandian points out that “the west’s search for the basic human condition” was a result of the discourse of “progress, development and rationality...[which] gave rise to the fossil other”. The non-western stands on this scale where the “western was before its progress” and thus the non-westerns were seen as ‘living fossils’.⁵ This other-ization and inferior-ization served for the construction of domination over the non-western, non-white while it helped to create a “savage other and black other, whose continued importance lies in the validation of racism”.⁶

This “black other” is degraded in the presence of the “white” at the center while blackness functions just as a means for the validation of the presence of whiteness. It is consequential at this point to dwell upon the historicity of whiteness. Whiteness as a structure of power gains momentum especially with the start of colonialism which dates back to the discovery of America and was followed by the rise of the British Empire as a world power. Before this, in the Enlightenment period,

² **Ibid.**, p.111.

³ Abu-Lughod, Lila. *Writing against Culture inn Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*. Richard G. Fox, ed. Pp. 137-162. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press,1991.

⁴ Pandian, Jacob (1985): *Anthropology and the Western Tradition*, Waveland Press, Inc.

⁵ **Ibid.**

⁶ **Ibid.**, p.1407.

Europe makes a distinction between itself, the “civilized” west, and the “barbaric” east (Kain 106). With the advance in industrialization and the increasing need for new markets, the basic need for the justification of colonialism came up and the encounter with the other in these colonized countries led to a system of hierarchies based especially on skin colour. And this appeared as whiteness versus blackness and more broadly, whites and non-whites. To subordinate the other, with the economy of power, whiteness transcended colour to a state of “privileges”. Cheryl I. Harris concerning this issue writes in his article “Whiteness as a Property” as follows,

Even after the period of conquest and colonization of the New World and the abolition of slavery, whiteness was the predicate for attaining a host of societal privileges, in both public and private spheres. Whiteness determined whether one could vote, travel freely, attend schools, obtain work, and indeed, defined the structure of social relations along the entire spectrum of interactions between the individual and society. Whiteness then became status, a form of racialized privilege ratified in law. Material privileges attendant to being white inhered in the status of being white. After the dismantling of legalized race segregation, whiteness took on the character of property in the modern sense in that relative white privilege was legitimated as the status quo. (1746)

Whiteness was the center for any regulation which was based on discrimination and it became an asset to be owned only by the whites and protected against non-whites.⁷ It becomes an essential way of existence for the whites who alienate any other from any claim on it. That status quo was reinforced with the rise of the slave codes between 1680 and 1682 in the New World. The blacks were deprived by law of any liberty. “Blacks were not permitted to travel without permits, to own property, to assemble publicly, or to own weapons; nor were they to be educated”.⁸ Accordingly, being white became associated with everything that is freedom, liberty, human rights, while being black was associated with enslavement, subordination and subjection. The idea of a white slave was inconceivable and the social stratum could not allow it, just as Jim Sweetman in **Remembering Babylon** is horrified at the possibility that the savage Gemmy, who is white having lived among the blacks, might be white. For the whites in the settlement, he could not be addressed or treated as a white person, nor could he be considered to be totally black. Because if he were black in skin colour, he couldn’t “transgress boundaries, cross borders, spin on

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.1713.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.1718

margins, travel between dualities of Manichean space, rigidly bifurcated into light/dark, good/bad, white/Black”.⁹

Cheryl I. Harris in the same article relates his grandmother’s trespassing story. It is understood that she was a light-skinned “Negro” and after getting a job in a catering company where only whites could work, he relates that “no one ever asks her if she was Black”, because the question was unthinkable. It was a company which was a “fine establishment” and which served the upper-middle class, which was, unnecessary to say, White. He writes that she had to pretend to integrate with the society and “she came to know them, discuss their worries, children’s illnesses... but they did not know her. For she occupied a completely different place. That place – where White supremacy and economic domination meet- was unknown turf to her White co-workers. They remained oblivious to the worlds within worlds that existed just beyond the edge of their awareness and yet were present in their very midst” (1712). The exclusion of the blacks from the economic arena where the main capital was shared among the whites led the blacks to create different identities for themselves to survive. Those “worlds within worlds” will be the lot of the suppressed, excluded and alienated. White dominance allowed only whites “economic, political and social security in the long run.” Harris gives a definition of being white as “gaining access to a whole set of public and private privileges that materially and permanently guaranteed basic subsistence needs and, therefore, survival. Becoming white increased the possibility of controlling critical aspects of one’s life rather than being the object of other’s domination”.¹⁰

Britishness made use of the power aspect of whiteness, and as any other nationality, cannot define itself just by taking “essence” or essential qualities as a basis - even for this it needs an other. Every person, culture and nation is determined in relation to an other that is either different or resembles it. Peter Sahlin points out that “national identity is relational and contingent and it is defined by the social or territorial boundaries drawn to distinguish the collective self and its implicit negation, the other, rather than being dependent on objective criteria such as

⁹ **Ibid.**, p.1712.

¹⁰ **Ibid.**, p.1714.

language or race or cultural uniformity”¹¹ (qtd. in Colley 311). Britain does not have any difficulty in finding an other to position itself against since the presence of all its dominions will reinforce its position through which it places itself above all. Linda Colley starts her article “Britishness and Otherness: An Argument” with the following quotation, “There is no more effective way of bonding together the disparate sections of restless peoples than to unite them against outsiders”¹² (309). Britain, a huge empire which had colonies all over the world until the Second World War, did not feel a necessity to look inside and dwell on an identity inquiry, because it assessed itself in accordance with the other and united inside, consisting of four nations— England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales.¹³ However, Colley goes on by saying that though similarities both geographical and cultural helped keep these nations together,

what most enabled Great Britain to emerge as an artificial nation, and to be super-imposed onto older alignments and loyalties, was a series of massive wars between 1689 and 1815 that allowed its diverse inhabitants to focus on what they had in common, rather than on what divided them, and that forged an overseas empire from which all parts of Britain could secure real as well as psychic profits.¹⁴

Wars with other nations allowed Britain to foster a sense of security, that is, smooth over internal conflicts. Fear of the other kept the four nations together. And it came to be understood that “Britishness” is an artificial “composite structure forged out of different cultures or kingdoms.”¹⁵ However, it does not mean that there were not any conflicts among the British. The Britons preferred Protestantism, while the Irish were Catholic devotees. So Ireland has always been the most “other” among the four nations but the presence of the outsider throughout the empire helped keep all these nations together for centuries. Then, under the light of the quotation from Colley above, “Britishness” can be said to be an artificial construction to keep different nations together under a common aim, which is to remain in unity inside to sustain unity outside. What makes Britishness remain strong is the ability to sustain

¹¹ Peter Sahlin, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain* (Berkeley, 1989), pp. 270-71.

¹² Hobsbawm, E. J. *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*. Cambridge, 1990. p. 91.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

the loyalty of its subjects through ignorance of the internal conflicts for the sake of dealing with the external ones, because “Britishness was never just imposed from the center, nor can it be understood solely or even mainly as the result of an English cultural or economic colonization of the so-called Celtic fringe”.¹⁶ The relationship between the four nations that compose Britain is a way of “integration and homogenization of disparate cultures”.¹⁷ Also inside, the superiority of being British was imposed on the subjects and the distinction between eastern and western, superior and inferior was created for the justification of the empire’s colonialist aims under the cover of bringing “civilization”. This sense of Britishness was widely spread not just through the superior white westerner’s discourse of the colonizer and colonized, but also “disseminated far more widely by way of the theater, ballads, journalism, the music hall, children’s books, art of all kinds, and, of course, by novels”.¹⁸ Being white and having a British background, Britishness becomes a harbor for Gemmy in **Remembering Babylon** to take shelter in and obtain protection against any attack from those who he assumes to be British. Namely, he comes from a black tribe having lived with them for a long while. His whiteness and British background saves him from any attack from the white settlers. For Ralph, in **The Mimic Men**, it becomes the superior identity through which he tries to overcome the sense of disorder and inferiority. Disorder stems from his being displaced from his native land, India. He views Britishness as the ultimate identity through which he can overcome this feeling.

However, it is difficult to say that Britishness serves the protagonists search for a self, sense of identity. They feel alienated from both their native and British roots. The sense of in-betweenness dominates and the categorizations fail to place those subjects. Homi Bhaba observes this gap and in return suggests the “Third Space”, which I would like to elaborate on. It is of crucial importance regarding the arguments related to the failure of dichotomies. In his groundbreaking book **The Location of Culture**, Bhabha writes,

¹⁶ **Ibid.**, p.315.

¹⁷ Hosbawn, 1-45.

¹⁸ Colley, **loc. cit.**, p.325.

The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process destroys (the) mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code. Such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People. In other words, the disruptive temporality of enunciation displaces the narrative of the Western nation which Benedict Anderson so perceptively describes as being written in homogeneous, serial time. It is only when we understand that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation, that we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or 'purity' of cultures are untenable, even before we resort to empirical historical instances that demonstrate their hybridity. (37)

Bhabha draws attention to the Eurocentric way of social classification which shapes the other according to certain dichotomies which serve its superiority. In order to disrupt this linear and narrow positioning, he suggests the “space of enunciation” which is outside the present system which is based on, in Freudian terms, the Father. The third space also suggests a way out of language, which forms the basis of societal classifications based on oppositional realities. According to Bhabha, the third space renders it possible to “elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves”¹⁹ on the grounds that the “in-between spaces” are a means of the emergence of new “signs of identities”. These in-between spaces displace the binary logic because the space is neither the one nor the other, it is something formed by the two, but it is not the total of the two. That is to say, it cannot be determined or fixed. This indeterminacy is what constitutes its power. Bhabha relates this to the power of the “beyond”. He argues that “Beyond signifies spatial distance, marks progress, promises the future, but our intimations of exceeding the barrier or boundary, the very act of going *beyond* – are unknowable, unrepresentable, without a return to the ‘present’, which, in the process of repetition, becomes disjunct and displaced”.²⁰ Consequently, the “Third Space” attains the sense of time and place as well as identity-based values. Bhabha incorporates the sense of time as well by violating its linear progress, by which he also disrupts the “dichotomic linearity” (my emphasis) of language. Therefore, “The present can no longer be simply envisaged as a break or bonding with the past and the future, no longer a synchronic presence: our proximate

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.38.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.14.

self-presence, our public image, comes to be revealed for its discontinuities, its inequalities, its minorities”.²¹ From this point of view, the sequential construction of time and history is broken and the other finds a space of representation outside the pre-structured codes.

What Bhaba suggests as a way to sustain the third space for the disruption of dichotomic linearity concerning the perception of the self and identity is mimicry. Bhaba describes it as a destructive force for the colonized on the one hand, and the colonizer on the other hand. Bhabha quotes Lacan at the beginning of his article “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse” as follows, “Mimicry reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called an itself that is behind. The effect of mimicry is camouflage ... It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled-exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare”²² (5). What Lacan emphasizes here is the lack of a “self”. This lack leads the subject to a course in which s/he tries to take the form of the “other”. This other, for the colonized subject, has a self in the background and for this reason wishes to be “like” him/her. In other words, the “background” stands for the “colonizer”, and the subject that stems from this background is the “colonized”. Since the subject does not have an identity or self, nothing like harmonization is possible. However, if there is mimicry, such a mixture is not possible. What’s more, the attempt to be “like” never results in being the same, either. Bhabha relates that “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as *a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.”²³ From Bhaba’s point of view, this has a discursive side, which I will discuss in the second part. Firstly, I will dwell upon mimicry at face value, and then how Homi Bhabha argues about its deconstructing effect.

²¹ **Ibid.**

²² Jacques Lacan, "The Line and Light," *Of the Gaze*

²³ **Ibid.**, p.86.

What marks mimicry is its nature which disrupts any attempt to fix the subject. Since the subject of mimicry is exempt from a “self” behind it, s/he will by nature be destitute of determinacy. Derek Walcott illustrates mimicry as follows,

To mimic, one needs a mirror, and, if I understand Mr. Naipaul correctly, our pantomime is conducted before a projection of ourselves which in its smallest gestures is based on metropolitan references. No gesture, according to this philosophy, is authentic, every sentence is a quotation, every movement either ambitious or pathetic, and because it is mimicry, uncreative. The indictment is crippling, but, like all insults, it contains an astonishing truth. The only thing is that it is not, to my mind, only the West Indies which is being insulted by Naipaul, but all endeavor in this half of the world. 6

The “metropolitan references” function as the tools for mimicry. From this aspect, the “Third World” subjects generate distorted models of the culture, language and way of life of the metropolitan subjects, namely the western. Mimicry is the loss of originality as in this case; however, if there is already nothing “authentic”, and every sentence is a “quotation”, this is inclusive of all the social existence and codes of the colonizer and the colonized. What differentiates the colonized at that point is the fact that the subject is exposed to “double colonization” due to mimicry.

Naipaul uses mimicry in **The Mimic Men** as a tool through which, as Susan Layton writes, “the colonized person (or an entire colony) search(es) for identity through the adoption of the imperial overlord’s language and extensive imitation of his material culture and way of life, his literature and arts, his values, beliefs, and attitudes”²⁴ (59). Naipaul’s general attitude to the once colonized, including his own society, is filled with anger and contempt to some extent. His general attitude could be observed to be based on blaming the colonized. He tries to detach himself from them and searches for different tools, like writing, to disrupt his attachment to the society and criticize their ways. To get a clearer insight into Naipaul’s views toward the colonized societies, the following abstract from an interview with him can prove helpful,

²⁴ Consult V. S. Naipaul's travel essay *The Middle Passage* (London, 1962). See also the treatment of Indians as a "people at play," "actors" out of Kipling, in Naipaul's incendiary account of his first trip to India, *An Area of Darkness* (1964; reprint ed. London, 1968), 191.

You have to become adept in looking for the truth of your own responses. I think it's much more important for me, coming from a place which is not real, a place which is imperfectly made, and a place where people are, really, quite inferior, because they demand so little of themselves. They are colonials, in a type of perpetual colonial situation. Coming from such a society, I didn't really have views of my own; I didn't know what I thought about anything, because the world was out of my hands. So this establishing of a position, an intellectual stance, has come to me quite recently. In writing my first four or five books (including books which perhaps people think of as my big books), I was simply recording my reactions to the world; I hadn't come to any conclusion about it. (It was the reviewers who came to a conclusion!) But since then, through my writing, through the effort honestly to respond, I have begun to have ideas about the world. I have begun to analyze: first of all, the deficiencies of the society from which I came; and then, through that, what goes to make this much more complex society in which I have worked so long. (Rowe-Evans 194)

Naipaul possesses a lack of trust in the new nations of the Caribbean in terms of self-governance and producing something and existing independently economically and culturally. He defends Western culture as the civilized, advanced one that stands as a model for these countries that are dependent on the West for their existence (Greenberg 214). For this reason, from Naipaul's point of view, since the "Third World" subjects have to take the West as a model to advance, they will always be in a state of mimicry. And the very reason for this is, as Bhaba argues, that they will be in a state of being "almost the same but not quite". Derek Walcott focuses on "powerlessness" that leads to imitation. He points out that it "leaves the Third World, the ex-colonial world, no alternative but to imitate those systems offered to or forced on it by the major powers, their political systems which must alter their common life, their art, their language, their philosophy".²⁵ Consequently, parallel to Naipaul's views, he argues that the colonials "imitate" power as well and "their mimicry of power defrauds their own people". But for this very reason of "imitation", the colonized cannot be controlled and manipulated totally. They cannot be placed properly by the colonizer. David Malouf creates a character like Gemmy to play on the disruptive existence of the colonized. Unlike Naipaul, he is not filled with anger against them. On the contrary, he writes in a way to make the reader approach emphatically to the suppressed. The protagonist's mimicry, then, deconstructs the norms in the white settlement.

²⁵ Walcott, *loc. cit.*, p.5.

1. REMEMBERING BABYLON: IN-BETWEENNESS

The story in **Remembering Babylon** starts with a scene where white settlers' children are playing in the bush. We learn that the settlement's name is Queensland, which is in Australia and the story takes place in the mid-19th century, when settler families move to Australia and establish settlements.

The children are Janet McIvor, her little sister and their cousin from Scotland, Lachlan Beattie. While they are playing, they notice "something" is approaching from the other side of the fence, which they are prohibited to cross. The "dark" person, Gemmy, turns out to be a "white". They take him to their family. At first Mr. McIvor is hesitant whether to accept him or not since Gemmy cannot even speak English and though he is white, he comes from the other side of the bush, which is inhabited by the black. Yet, at least his complexion is white and they accept to take him into their family with the hope to regain him his whiteness in terms of culture and language. It is related that Gemmy spent his childhood as an orphan in the streets of London till the age of 16, used, suppressed and oppressed by a rat-catcher, Willet. Escaping from him and getting on a ship sailing overseas, Gemmy falls and is rescued by the natives of the Queensland and has lived with them ever since. When returning to white civilization, the settlers cannot make sense of this 'anomaly' that can be relegated to neither end of the superior white and inferior dichotomy.

The white settlers sympathize with him at first. However, they are divided in terms of the acceptance of Gemmy. Some are mild, thinking that it is possible to "tame" him and make him serve them while some reveal a harsh stance against him and think that he must be expelled from the settlement. For this reason, Janet's father, Jock McIvor's relationship with the other settlers deteriorates till one day a chasm comes into being between them when two tribesmen visit Gemmy in the white settlement. Jock McIvor resists the pressure of the other settler's at first, but he and Gemmy are harassed and their house is exposed to attacks. In the end, he agrees to send Gemmy to the house of an old woman living just outside the settlement, a bit isolated from the settlers, living an isolated life.

But Gemmy can't stand his departure from the natives. After getting the papers on which the school teacher George Abbot notes down Gemmy's life during the interview with Gemmy on his first arrival to their settlement, Gemmy disappears without being seen later on. The reason why Gemmy gets the papers back is that he thinks they have a magical, negative influence on his life. Later on, Janet and Lachlan, who become part of the government and parliament, in vain search for him. They learn that he might be killed during an internal conflict. They both remember him like in their first encounter with him climbing the fences in the bush.

One important point that occupies a place as a crucial factor in shaping identity and self-perception is language. Language determines and shapes the ideas and the way in which people perceive the world. As Jacques Derrida argues, it is an artificial system, a contract whose meaning is shifty and indeterminate (78). Gemmy's in-betweenness, indeterminacy parallels this structure. The artificiality of language stands as a designating reference for the artificiality of identity. What's more, Gemmy is exposed to different languages and he almost forgets English but for a few words. Later on he remembers many more since once it was his native tongue. But still he cannot speak English as the white settlers do and the mere existence of a language other than English is perceived as a threat by the whites and an intrusion which they cannot tolerate and which is a cause of their fear. English functions as the language to express their existence while the "other" language is the "unknown" language" which emerges as a threat to their existence and that's why it is not tolerable for them. Related to language, naming occupies an important place in the text. Australia is to be "named" with its parts and regions to be claimed by the newcomers; naming is also what supposedly gives the whites the right of possession and the feeling of belonging.

All throughout the book, Gemmy is treated as a child to be tamed and civilized. The fact that he cannot properly speak English, which is the language of the settlers, and that he doesn't find it odd to go around half-naked puts him in the position of a child while the settlers, who represent the West, stand as the father who is in charge. This father-child relationship takes its roots from the Christian belief of God, namely Jesus, as the father. From this perspective, the Father, in the image of

God, is the omnipotent, omnipresent who observes and protects his subjects and shows them the truth, which they are incapable of acquiring. The child in this case is the undisciplined, irrational and the anarchic one who is in need of guidance. From this respect, the east should be 'educated' and 'taught' what freedom means by the West. Edward Said, in **Orientalism**, theorizes this as follows:

the theme of Europe teaching the Orient the meaning of liberty, which is an idea that Chateaubriand and everyone after him believed that Orientals, knew nothing about. Of liberty, they know nothing; of propriety, they have none: force is their God. When they go for long periods without seeing conquerors who do heavenly justice, they have the air of soldiers without a leader, citizens without legislators, and a family without a father. Already in 1810 we have a European talking like Cromer in 1910, arguing that Orientals require conquest, and finding it no paradox that a Western conquest of the Orient was not conquest after all, but liberty. Chateaubriand puts the whole idea in the Romantic redemptive terms of a Christian mission to revive a dead world, to quicken in it a sense of its own potential, one which only a European can discern underneath a lifeless and degenerate surface. (88)

This point of view which the West adopts functions as a justification to colonize, in more comprehensive terms, the non-Western. Gemmy, for them, is such a subject. However, Malouf forms Gemmy in such a way that he depositions him from all these classifications. That is why **Remembering Babylon** addresses many issues still lingering in the formation of societies and their identities in the post-colonial era. Malouf harmonizes many intricately related elements that shape or distort the self-perception of a country, previously a colony, then a nation, Australia. The subjects he treats in the book, however, are not peculiar to Australia, the white settlers there and the Aborigines, but it sheds light on the general ongoing interaction between the whites and the blacks, cause-effects of this interaction, the self-perception and the positioning of the self in the face of an "other". Obviously, the encounter with the "other" constitutes the basis of the definition of identity and the self-perception of the individual and a community (not necessarily a nation, as in the case of Aborigines). The fears and the conventional pre-conceived notions related to the other finds expressions on different bases like skin-color, whiteness versus blackness. Malouf not only elaborates on blackness and its alienation and subordination to whiteness, he also leads the reader to delve into inquisitions like

“what does it mean to be a white? Is it an objectively defined word, “race”¹, society or does it need the black, the other to be positioned?” positioning the white-settlers among the black as minority. These questions constitute an important part in the book. However, it is not only an issue of black and white. Malouf tries to seek a third way, exempt from dichotomic classifications, an alternative where a reconciliation might be feasible.

Whether it is feasible or not is difficult to figure out or come to a definite conclusion since Malouf does not give a certain framed answer, but still suggests or implies an alternative way by forming a character like Gemmy. Malouf plays on the colours and the perceptions and reactions of the one and the other in the face of unexpected reconciliations which find an expression on Gemmy. As to be elaborated later on, Gemmy’s intricate existence bearing the traces of both whiteness (his skin) and blackness (his background among the natives) perplexes the white settlers. Their reactions and treatment of him is a matter of contemplation since “in-betweenness” comes up as another form of existence. Gemmy’s in-betweenness, being a white and not white, and a black and not black at the same time making himself the other of himself and of the people he wants to belong to make the novel the footprint of many problematic subjects finding a presence under the mastery of Malouf’s narration and characterization. Through Gemmy, Malouf problematizes the race issue and tries to show that dichotomic classifications are only too artificial and can’t respond to the problem of belonging. In-betweenness remains out of these dichotomies which can be a alternative space for the subjects.

Gemmy’s reaction on the border to his confrontation with the children, Lachlan and his cousins, which is “Do not shoot... I am a B-b-british object!”², suggests another issue. In this case, the question “what does it mean to be British?” should be elaborated upon as well as the reasons that lie behind his definition of himself as an “object”. The white-settlers in **Remembering Babylon** come from Britain and are Scottish in origin. Britain and Britishness have a radical effect on the

¹ As to be discussed later in more detail, the words “race”, “essence” are not used from an essentialist point of view. On the contrary, they are handled from a perspective of being superficially constructed in accordance with politics of power.

² Malouf, **op. cit.**, p.3

formation of the colonies in a normative way and this issue will be dealt with in detail.

Another important point in **Remembering Babylon** to be elaborated upon is the master-slave dialectic hand in hand with a colonizer-colonized reading. The treatment of Gemmy by the white expatriates reveals a moment of subordination of the colonized other; while the colonizer bears the burden of civilization to civilize the colonized. Therefore, the colonizer situates himself in the shoes of a master while the colonized can do nothing but to surrender, enslaved by the master. Gemmy is treated not as an adult but as a child (there are some factors in the text like language that prevents him to be taken seriously) to treat kindly, to be entertained in his presence. However, Malouf does not approach whites in an essentialist way; on the contrary, it is as if he takes a reconciliatory stance by introducing the McIvor family and some other whites as protectors and friends to Gemmy. But later on things will turn to their disadvantage and cause paranoia because of the intrusion of his Aboriginal friends from his previous tribe. Malouf presents the readers with two types of whites, those who are the “other-friendly” whites and those who are racist whose existence relies on the creation of an enemy and other. The latter represents the historically dominant and ongoing perspective and the way of sustaining the superiority of a race, which is whiteness.

Identity is not exempt from the environment where the subject lives and breathes its air. And when the environment in question is related to Australia, it is more than a landscape which holds a stance and transmits a meaning to the settlers and Aborigines. The settlers’ and aborigines’ approach to nature differ from each other. Australia stands as an unpenetrated continent with its own nature untouched and the aborigines living in harmony with it while the white settlers become intruders and try to shape the land as well as aborigines. But whether they shape the land or are shaped by it or both will be examined as well.

1.1. OTHERNESS

The issue of otherness finds a place from the very start in **Remembering Babylon**. Gemmy, the character upon whom Malouf draws the plot, enters the scene as a total other. The first lines of the book are as follows,

One day in the middle of the nineteenth century, when settlement in Queensland had advanced little more than halfway up the coast, three children were playing at the edge of a paddock when they saw something extraordinary. (1)

What is striking in this introduction is the description of Gemmy as “something extraordinary”. The children, two little girls led by their cousin Lachlan, at first can’t grasp what they see. This is not simply because it is not clear what they are looking at, but much more than this which foreshadows the perception about Gemmy’s identity. The children are playing at the “edge” – the border of their settlement beyond which they can’t surpass. They are on the border, and they meet Gemmy at this spot. “...in a shape more like a watery, heat-struck mirage than a thing of substance, elongated and airily indistinct, was bowling, leaping, flying towards them”.³ Gemmy is presented as if exempt from any shape, or substance. He is like an unidentified object. The “water” imagery connotes “shapelessness”, but at the same time having the ability to adapt to, mimic and be the substance it is included in. As mentioned above, Hegel argues that the one has a determinateness which leads to the desire to make the other the same.⁴ But here Gemmy does not have determinacy; he is “airily indistinct”, cannot be placed or positioned that is what scares the beholders, namely the children. The fear of the “black other” appears in the scene uttered by Lachlan, “A black! That was the boy’s first thought. We are being raided by blacks. After so many false alarms, it had come”.⁵ This reveals the fear-struck community of the presence and raid of blacks and gives the general framework of the novel, a white community surrounded by a black one.

Lachlan now becomes aware that it is not a “raid” since “there was just one of them”. But the reference is still of an object instead of a subject:

³ *Ibid.*, p.2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.115.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.2.

the thing, as far as he could make it out through the sweat in his eyes and its flamelike flickering, was not even, maybe, human. The stick-like legs, all knobbed at the joints, suggested a wounded waterbird, a brolga, or a human that in the manner of the tales they told one another, all spells and curses, had been changed into a bird, but only halfway, and now, neither one thing nor the other, was hopping and flapping towards them out of a world over there.⁶

Gemmy cannot be identified, he remains a “creature” at most for them at that point.⁷ Lachlan pretends to have a gun, which is a stick actually, and threatens Gemmy to stop. Just at that moment, Gemmy is “leaping up onto the top rail of the fence, hung there, its arms outflung as if preparing for flight”. For reference, “it” is used since neither his name nor his identity is known by the children and Malouf, from their point of view, narrates it. Gemmy, afraid to be shot by the boy, shouts “Do not shoot. I am a B-b-british object!”.⁸ This utterance from Gemmy is a striking one since as we learn later it is the only meaningful sentence Gemmy could form since he forgot English in time living among the natives. In this sentence, on the one hand the idea of “Britishness” should be highlighted since he associates with Britishness, which is the biggest colonizer power, to prevent shooting while on the other hand his self-identification as object instead of British “subject” should be subjected to examination. It is relevant to look through Gemmy’s background as the first step.

It is not clearly stated in the novel which country in Britain Gemmy is from originally. However, it is certain that he is from Britain. He does not have a family and he is “brought up in a workhouse orphanage” (Mitchel 771). “He had been one of an army of little shitty creatures”,⁹ they crawled under the “machines in a timber mill”, picked out boltheads with their nails, “mixed with dust and ate”. Mitchel views Gemmy as “the victim of the metropolis, of a Dickensian Britain”¹⁰. That will be the reason why Gemmy gets raided by his past memories in Mrs. Hutchence house getting the smell of timber. When he gets too old to do this, he is sold to Willet, who

⁶ **Ibid.**

⁷ **Ibid.**, p.3.

⁸ **Ibid.**

⁹ Malouf, **op. cit.**, p.146.

¹⁰ Mitchel, **loc. cit.** p.771.

is a rat-catcher, as “Willet’s Boy”.¹¹ Having no one else, Gemmy internalizes Willet as his master, possessor, “He is Willet’s boy, as the boots are Willet’s boots. He has nothing of his own. Everything that comes to him comes through Willet, including his name Gemmy, which is what Willet calls him when he is not just ‘Boy’”.¹² The following passage reveals Gemmy’s attachment to Willet the rat-catcher distinctly:

Having known no better life than this, he cannot imagine one. Willet provides the only bit of closeness he has ever been offered, and since he has nothing else to love, he loves him with a fierce intensity, a fear too, which is the greatest he knows, that he may get lost, or that Willet one day may abandon him, taking with him the whole world as he conceives it: Ketch, the ferrets, the streets Willet is king of, the razor, the sweet garden smell of his hands, his curses his kisses... his name, Gemmy, his claim to existence as a boy, as Willet’s Boy.

His attachment to Willet is so much that he sees him as a reason for his own existence. On the other hand, this attachment does not stem from Willet’s treatment of him affectionately. On the contrary, Willet uses, curses, tortures even abuses him. He makes Gemmy pull the rats out of their cage, “he plunges his arm into the musky dark and hauls the sewer- and ditch rats out of the hot, drain-smelling interior, they squeal and tumble over one another’s backs, and fight, using their teeth, something horrible, and he gets many wounds that turn to open sores”.¹³

It goes without saying that Gemmy is a victimized subject, even less than a subject who is exempt from free will. Gemmy, from Lacan’s perspective, “is being who (is) looked at, in the spectacle of the world. That which makes us conscious institutes us by the same token as *speculum mundi*... [I]n the so-called waking state, there is an elision of the gaze and an elision of the fact that not only does it look, it also shows”¹⁴ (qtd. in Devlin 803). “*Speculum Mundi*”, which means a glass representing the face of the world, functions the same as the gaze of the other. That is to say, the gaze of the other shapes the subject, or the subject’s gaze shapes the other, taking the function of a mirror. Gemmy is what Willet views him as and Gemmy surrenders totally to the gaze of Willet. However, the “*speculum mundi*” shatters

¹¹ Malouf, *op. cit.*, p.147.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.148.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.150.

¹⁴ Lacan, Jacques. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho- analysis*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Norton, 1978

only when Gemmy cannot bear the attacks on his personality and the distortion they created on his perception of himself. Though he has no one else to go and he doesn't have any belonging to anywhere or anyone other than Willet, one day, after he was beaten by him, he sets the house on fire, "there, he thinks as he watches it catch. He could not say what he has in mind. Nothing, perhaps. He is eleven or twelve years old and some darker nature has begun to emerge in him. He has resentments".¹⁵

Gemmy has always been aware of the gaze of the other, of Willet and therefore tried to shape his actions and himself so that he could satisfy him. Therefore, Willet's gaze worked as the "speculum mundi" so far as Gemmy felt possessed belonged to somewhere, something. The moment he comes to the awareness of the "resentments" he was exposed to, he shatters let alone the other's gaze, but the other's total existence. The "darker nature" which began to emerge inside Gemmy is the reaction or self-defence to the other's gaze whose "determinateness" distorted Gemmy's determinateness and though the treatment of Gemmy by others show that he is "objectified" and he is redeemed exempt from his subjectivity, individuality which at the end led to the annihilation of the cause of all these things. Gemmy walks "aimlessly" after that in the streets and finds himself in the docks. But at first "it does not occur to him that he has stepped off the world".¹⁶ Namely, Willet was his only base to stick to, now that he, the one to whom he owed his existence, does not exist, Gemmy

cast himself loose and the world had run away with him; he was lost, he was dangling, and would remain so till Willet, in an odor of char... turned up again to curse and wallop him, then with a growl, take him back. He never ceased to expect that event and to fear it. He expected it still. A world from which Willet had entirely disappeared was inconceivable to him.¹⁷

Though victimized by Willet, Gemmy has difficulty getting used to the idea being all alone, which is something he has no idea about and though he is free, he has his own subjectivity, he is afraid because he is no one's "anything". The fear of not belonging suppresses the need for freedom and causes him to yearn for and be in expectation of

¹⁵ Malouf, **op. cit.**, p.151.

¹⁶ **Ibid.**, p.152.

¹⁷ **Ibid.**, p.153.

being captured by Willet and returned to the old life. He even has images of Willet's boots as if real in front of him.¹⁸

After years of bullying and abuse on the decks, and suffering from fever, he finds himself boarded on the shores of Australia, where an aboriginal clan notices him and with some hesitation, take him with them.¹⁹ After years of living with the clan, one day Gemmy comes to the boundary where he shouldn't have surpassed and meet the children and utters "Do not shoot! I'm a B-b-british object".

¹⁸ **Ibid.**, p.154.

¹⁹ **Ibid.**, p.122.

1.2. I AM A B-B-BRITISH OBJECT!

It is not surprising after having gone into detail of Gemmy's background that he calls himself "object". He feels the belonging to Britishness not as a subject, but as a property since he was objectified all through his life. But one question to be addressed here is that "what does it mean to be British?". This is relevant to our discussion because Britain has formed a huge empire and gained millions of subjects through either assimilation or force. More than inside, Britain was occupied with the outer boundaries as a colonial power and became the biggest colonial power and empire in the nineteenth century. The relation between Britain and Australia conjures discussions regarding the identity issue as well. Are Australians still British while they are of British descent? I will elaborate on these questions in this part.

Gemmy in his encounter with the children, where Lachlan, with the instincts of manhood to protect the girls pretends to hold a gun, takes refuge in Britishness but as an object. Based on the background of Gemmy given above, where he is not treated as someone of personality and individuality, his "object-ified subject-ivity" (my emphasis) by Willet might be one reason why he defines himself as a "commodity" instead of uttering the sentences "I'm British" or "I'm a British subject". "Objectify" is used here not in the meaning of objective but of making an object. On the other hand, I use "subjectivity" as the conceptual noun form of the "subject". The dark past of Gemmy removes, if any formed, the sense of "essence" inside to feel a belonging. What's more, it shouldn't be ignored that he spent many years among the natives, so it can be deduced that it had been years since he uttered these English words for the first time when he came to the border of the Queensland settlement. On the other hand, Robert Hughes brings a more historical perspective to the word "object" in his **The Fatal Shore**. He says that "In the mid-nineteenth century, convicts transported to Australia from England referred to emigrant settlers as 'free objects', a bitter allusion to the convicts expulsion from the domain of rights"²⁰ (qtd. in Brittan 1158). Being an "object" was associated with the convicts not only because they were expelled and alienated from the society and the contempt

²⁰ Hughes, Robert. *The Fatal Shore: The Epic of Australia's Founding*. New York: Knopf, 1987.

freeman and tradesman felt towards them, but also, and more certainly, “because the convicts were no longer British subjects according to law but human property of the law”.²¹ They are not alienated from “Britishness”, however they are not more valuable than a commodity.

Gemmy is not a convict, he didn’t do anything illegal to be alienated or rid of his Britishness but starting from an early age, he spent many years among the aborigines and by uttering that he is a “British object” instead of “English object” we understand that he is not English but he might be one of the other three nations that constitute Britain. He staggers when he pronounces the word “B-b-british”. Years of being exposed to a different culture, language, traditions and subjects other than British could be interpreted as one cause that led him to stagger when pronouncing the word. He tries to associate with them because the feeling of Britishness isn’t annihilated inside him totally but the way he identifies with them is that they are also white like him and he is also white-skinned as well. Gemmy identifies with the children since they are also white and Britishness was associated with whiteness as well and though he lived among the aborigines so many years enough to cause him to undergo a transformation, he still retained a sense of belonging to that nationality, though an insecure one.

The novel is set upon the ambivalence of Gemmy’s identity which is deeply associated with the skin color and the in-betweenness it causes him among the whites. Whiteness is intricately related to the self-perception of the “self”. However, what if there is a conflict or discrepancy in the way what the self feels and what it is in reality? In the case of Gemmy, the skin color is in a conflict with his constructed self-perception and identity. I’ve used the word “constructed” since, it connotes a meaning that is defined as “to build something or put together different parts to form something whole”.²² To put it in other words, artificiality is always marked in identity and it is always in a state of flow affected by inner and outer codes. Gemmy lives among the blacks for many years and his return will create suspicion among the whites, though he is still white. To be able to come to a judgment about the conflict

²¹ Colley, **loc. cit.** p.115.

²² <dictionary.cambridge.org>

represented by Gemmy regarding the skin-color and the self-perception, I would like to elaborate on whiteness, its meaning and its function regarding Gemmy and also the white settlers who are surrounded by black communities.

After Gemmy is taken hostage by Lachlan, he is brought to the settlement and in a short time “a crowd gather(s) to see this specimen of – of what? What was he?”.²³ This indeterminacy related to the “being”, “essence”, “existence” of Gemmy is a recurring issue throughout the book. Malouf puts it at the center of the novel to create an intricate existential crisis putting so many conflicting elements in the person of Gemmy. While the crowd tries to decipher “what” he was, instead of “who” he was, Malouf relates their first point of view about him as “half-naked savage”.²⁴ The main reason is that Gemmy cannot speak any other words than the ones he uttered at the first encounter with Lachlan and the girls, Janet and Meg. His inability for speech and communication and his half-nakedness, out of the norms set by the whites, renders him to be called “savage” in the eyes of the others. What makes Gemmy a fearful “creature” for them is that it is already a fear-stricken community which is bordered by lines invisible. Here is an insulated area where only the whites live and the fear of the other side is utmost. To get a better grasp into the state of mind the white settlers are in this vast continent as a tiny group, the following description will be clarifying:

And all around, before and behind, worse than weather and the deepest night, natives, tribes of wandering myalls who, in their traipsing this way and that all over the map, were forever encroaching on boundaries that could be insisted on by daylight – a good shotgun saw to that – but in the dark hours, when you no longer stood there as a living marker with all the glow of the white man’s authority about you, reverted to being a creek-bed or ridge of granite like any other, and gave no indication that six hundred miles away, in the Lands Office in Brisbane, this bit of country had a name set against it on a numbered document, and a line drawn that was empowered with all the authority of Law.²⁵

The tension rooted in the lives of the settlers is explicitly revealed in the passage above. Their existence is based on the fear of the other and any means for self-defence. Fear is omnipresent in their daily life and they are aware that they are

²³ Malouf, *op. cit.* p.5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.9.

vulnerable. This vulnerability is related to the “dark” other, the unknown in an unknown place, a threat to their whiteness, which no authority could protect. Gemmy intrudes in such a tension. What adds to the complication is his “indefinability”, to be out of the norms set and practiced by the white way of thinking and classifying, which is based on dichotomies. The presence of the “white” as a color necessitates the presence of the “black”, however a third form, as in the case of Gemmy, poses a threat to them. The unknown, the inability to position violates the hierarchy-based social construction where whiteness superior-izes, and inferior-izes at the same time. Gemmy violates the pre-constructed norms by his intrusion and comes with the potential to change the categorized definitions. He bears the potential to suggest that “beings” cannot be defined, categorized or totalized.

He enters the white community as an object of entertainment and since he cannot speak English properly, he introduces himself through “signs, partly with words that he dragged up at need, but in such a distorted form, as he hummed and hooted and shot spittle of his mouth...”²⁶ In this way, they learn his name is Jimmy or Gemmy and his surname is Fairley or Farelley. This turns into a game of guessing where Gemmy is set in the middle half-dressed surrounded by a curious crowd with children as well. Jim Sweetman, an ex-blacksmith who is respected among them thinks in a way relating their fears, “grown man and women idling about, grinning and shouting while a plain savage, or marionette or imbecile, jigged about and played up to them. Bad enough if he was what he appeared to be, a poor savage, but if he was a white man it was horrible”.²⁷ They cannot place a white in such an imagery, “a white savage” is unimaginable for them, it violates all the norms the white subjects are encoded with.

²⁶ **Ibid.**, p.10.

²⁷ **Ibid.**, p.13.

1.3. WHITENESS: COLOR OR PROPERTY

At this stage, it is of significance to elaborate on “whiteness”. What is it that confuses whites about Gemmy’s whiteness? Is whiteness only a matter of skin color or is it a bundle of power full of constructed meanings? Malouf plays on the issue in a sophisticated way both through Gemmy and other white characters as well.

Whiteness’ dominion does not have to do with anything related to color actually. As already mentioned, whiteness or blackness is all about the economy of power. The fact that racism stems from such distinctions is not a different issue. As Smedley has argued “race...[is] a worldview,... a cosmological ordering system structured out of political, economic, and social realities of peoples who had emerged as expansionist, conquering, dominating nations on a worldwide quest for wealth and power”²⁸ (qtd. in Hill 680). Victimization and racism doesn’t actually depend on being white or black as these colors are “racialized” and encoded with meaning under the hegemony of the powerful. The powerful has the potency to promote its color and historically it has been white. The social structure’s hierarchical composition permitted such a formation throughout history. As Matthew Frye Jacobson puts it, whiteness scholars emphasize that “race has no biological or genetic basis. Race is not transhistorical; it is ever changing, always mutable. Consisting of public fictions, it is an ‘historical fabrication’ and a cultural construct”²⁹ (qtd. in Arnesen 6). It is man-made, not essence-based, neither innate nor inborn. For this reason the “race” issue as well as identity has “fluidity” in essence. To put it in other words, it is exempt from stability. Lisa Douglass puts it in a clear way as follows,

I view gender, color, and class not as descriptions of particular groups or persons, but as categories that act as principles of distinction.... What these categories (or principles) mean, how they may combine in different ways, and how they affect a person at a given time vary; they are neither rigid, nor fixed, nor timeless. Above all, they are not real, even though they often have concrete effects.³⁰ (qtd. in Hartigan 497)

²⁸ Smedley, Audrey. *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993.

²⁹ Matthew Frye Jacobson. *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*. Cambridge: 1998. p. 280

³⁰ Douglass, Lisa. *The Power of Sentiment: Love, Hierarchy, and the Jamaican Family Elite*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992.

Considering the white settlers in **Remembering Babylon** and the way the mentality of whiteness is inscribed into their way of life, thinking and treating others, it is not out of question to expect a sense of apprehension in the face of a threat of a “dislocation” against their historically shaped self-perception mentioned above from different perspectives. In practice, there mustn’t be a disjunction between what it is defined by the whites and what it is in essence. What is defined and accepted normal sets the normative way of thinking imposed consciously and unconsciously by the “white-archal” (I coined this term to refer to the whiteness-based enforcement of social structure). Whitearchy becomes the norm which is internalized so much so that it is accepted as the usual way of social order. Page and Thomas call this state “White public space: a morally significant set of the practices of a racializing hegemony, in which whites are invisibly normal, and in which racialized populations are visibly marginal”³¹ (qtd. in Hill 682). This space which exists in its all clarity in a white society is carried to a new location where whites intrude, claim a right to live and possess while the fear of the other is reinforced as many times as it is in a white dominated society. In an untouched, unshaped nature close to its origin which is inhabited by aborigines, who is the dark other for them, they set up a settlement with their cultural and traditional practices and set out to live and shape the place in their own way. Their reaction to Gemmy at first sight stems from his disjunction to their definitions. He came from the other side of the fence of the white settlement, where the black aborigines lived, in a half-naked way with the inability to speak. In their eyes, he had lost his whiteness living for so many years with the Aborigines. The following passage reveals their point of view about him,

Poor bugger, he had got lost, and as just a bairn too. It was a duty they owed to what they were, or claimed to be, to bring him back, if it was feasible, to being a white man. But *was* it feasible? He had been with them, quite happily it appeared, for more than half his life: living off the land, learning their lingo and all their secrets, all the *abominations* they went in for. Were they actually looking at a man, a white man, actually putting a knife into his hands, and passing him bread, who had —.³²

³¹ Page, Helan E., and Brooke Thomas. *White Public Space and the Construction of White Privilege in U.S. Health Care: Fresh Concepts and a New Model of Analysis*. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 8: 1994, 109-116.

³² Malouf, **op. cit.** p.39.

Having lived among the blacks is a taint on his whiteness. Whiteness, the skin color which is constructed through cultural meanings, loses ground in terms of color. Gemmy is a white-skinned English, but the constructed meanings are annihilated after he returns from the black's settlement. And they take it as a duty to search for the ways, the possibility, to "bring him back". Returning to whiteness becomes a matter of "feasibility" though they are already sure that it is not possible since their suspicions about him and his past will never cease. But still his skin's color does not totally exclude such feasibility. However, the suspicion is overt in the question "were they actually..." And by not finishing the sentence, it is implied that they even don't want to think of any possibility of him as being totally a black:

they broke off, unwilling to let the shadow of it pass their lips and become a fact in their world. If he had, he showed no sign of it, none at all. There was nothing in his snub-nosed, squint-eyed looks and the innocence with which he bit into a crust and went at it with his ground-down, blackened teeth, to show what he might have been privy to in those sixteen years.³³

They are in search for a sign to be able to come to a judgment about his past and himself too. The white's "innocence" didn't totally lose its track on him. However, they can't let go the suspicions. The fears that are related to the other, the black other rise to the surface within Gemmy's arrival, "was he in league with the blacks? As infiltrator, as spy? Did he slip off when they were not watching – and make contact with them? Did they visit him secretly at night? Maybe they did not even come in the flesh but had other less visible ways of meeting and passing information that a white man would not recognize because it was not in a white man's mind to conceive of it. Even those who were well-disposed to the fellow found him unnerving".³⁴

The prejudicial view on the blacks is clear here. The Black stand as everything mysterious and unknown to the White and therefore they are associated with superstition, illogicality, backwardness against progress, darkness against light. The white, or since whiteness is associated with the west, we can also say the West stands as the innocent one, taking part in progress, ration against superstition.³⁵ The white settlers think they cannot place or fix him somewhere, "even when he was

³³ **Ibid.**, p.40.

³⁴ **Ibid.**, p.38.

³⁵ Said, **op. cit.**, p.120

there, in full sunlight, refusing to meet your gaze but engaged, so far as he was capable of it, in conversation, he was halfway gone, across a line, like the horizon, that was not to be fixed in real space and could begin anywhere”³⁶. Gemmy’s in-betweenness causes this slippage. He is a dislocated white person exposed to a black culture. He is neither totally white nor totally black. Homi Bhaba’s theory about the hybrid doesn’t actually apply on Gemmy but the rhetoric he uses is still applicable, which I will go in a deeper sense in **The Mimic Men**, Gemmy is “almost the same” as the whites “but not quite”.³⁷ There is something distorted in him. He couldn’t be redeemed a white any more,

but a parody of a white man. If you gave him a word for a thing, he could, after a good deal of huffing and blowing, repeat it, but the next time round, you had to teach it to him all over again. He was imitation gone wrong, and the mere sight of it put you wrong too, made the whole business somehow foolish and open to doubt.³⁸

As it seems here, Gemmy lost the essence of whiteness for them and that’s why he turns out to be an “imitation”. A white “which” is imitation is certainly out of the norms for them. If he were total black, it would be easier to position him and treat him under the white/black dichotomy, which is much more preferable for a white settlement. Deep inside, they want him to remain still white otherwise they wouldn’t try to understand him, his skin color is of importance for them. However, they are afraid that he might be “emptied” of the constructions related to whiteness. They are still in a state of contemplation about him, “He started out white. No question. When he fell in with the blacks, at thirteen, was it? He had been like any other child, one of their own for instance. (That was hard to swallow.) But had he remained white?”³⁹ What makes them question this is, from another point, to protect whiteness, not to let it get tainted, or let the distinctions blur because, as Cheryl I. Harris argues,

the set of assumptions, privileges, and benefits that accompany the status of being white have become a valuable asset that whites sought to protect and that those who passed sought to attain - by fraud if necessary. Whites have come to

³⁶ Malouf, **op. cit.**, p.38

³⁷ Bhabha, **op. cit.**, p.86.

³⁸ Malouf, **op. cit.**, p.39.

³⁹ **Ibid.**, p.40.

expect and rely on these benefits, and over time these expectations have been affirmed, legitimated, and protected.⁴⁰

The mere possibility of “being” like them, the blacks, is enough to cost Gemmy the loss of this “asset” and the “privileges”. Distinctions, thick, unsurpassable lines must remain untouched so that the present racial hierarchy and status-quo can continue. Acceptance of Gemmy as a white will disrupt this hierarchy, will lead to a redefinition of whiteness, blackness and all other racial issues. Dichotomies will get destroyed and a third form, definition will take place, which is something difficult to “swallow” for the whites since it means the loss of their “property” as well. On the other hand, they are agonized with the covert fear of “resembling” what they hate or abstain from. Gemmy’s presence is a threat in this sense. Though he is just one subject among them, the threat he bears is much more apprehending. Their state of mind can be analyzed better with the following passage,

They looked at their children, even the smallest of them chattering away, entirely at home in their tongue, then heard the mere half-dozen words of English this fellow could cough up , and even those so mismanaged and distorted you could barely guess what he was on about and you had to put to yourself the harder question. Could you lose it? Not language, but it. It.⁴¹

What is meant by “it” here is, in a broad sense, civilization. In the presence of the black, the white’s domination, self-preservation is reinforced since there is no threat to the discriminating categorization drawn distinctly. The reality that the other is not fixed but in-between, that s/he bears from both whiteness and blackness makes her/him close to both sides and that’s what is “terrifying” for the whites, a blackened white, where whiteness is “tainted” and it exists with this “taint”. Ernesto Pujol relates his observation about how the “mulatto” was viewed when he moved from the Caribbean to the USA in the late 1970s as follows,

[I was] struck by the extent to which color was still understood in terms of extreme racial purity. Whiteness obsessively operated as if it were a fortress under siege, defining everyone outside itself as people of color, so that whiteness ceased to be a color with many shades. And blackness, traditionally disempowered, uncritically accepted this simplistic polarized construction of race and took the world into its fold, as if there were nothing between whiteness and blackness. Of course, the Caribbean colonial notion of the mulatto as a

⁴⁰ Harris, **loc. cit.**, p.1713.

⁴¹ Malouf, **op. cit.**, p.40

tragic figure, neither white nor black, is highly problematic. But having been born and raised in the Caribbean, I see it as a notion that ultimately robs whiteness of its power because it engenders an intrusion. The so-called purity of whiteness is made suspect by a third people, a new people neither white nor black, a people who provide whiteness with many shades, making it less pure, turning it into a richer color. (99)

Pujol, as a Caribbean, views this issue from a positive aspect as a tool to fight the domination and exclusion whiteness has imposed on the other. The thing is that “the other” is the one in regard to which whiteness described, drew its borders, shaped and positioned itself. That’s a unique moment to violate those borders and categorizations. That will be the first moment the non-white can define themselves in a white-free way. For this reason it stands as an unacceptable issue for the whites, while it might prove a way out of the restricted definitions for the blacks.

As to Gemmy, he is still scrutinized by the white settlers to determine what he is. “For the fact was, when you looked at him, sometimes he was not white. His skin might be but not his features. The whole cast of his face gave him the look of one of Them. How was that then?”.⁴² While he is not always white, and “sometimes” black, though this word is not used in fear of “taking substance”, it is the slippage that puts them in apprehension. Mr. Frazer gives an answer for the discrepancy between his skin color and features, “because his teeth had been worn down almost to the gums from eating the native food. The white man’s facial structure came from the different and finer diet. It was the grinding down of his teeth, and the consequent broadening of the jaw that gave him what they called a native look”.⁴³ It cannot be known exactly whether these definitions are true or not but they are certainly some result of a struggle to differentiate between themselves and Gemmy and this struggle goes on as in the following passages which I find essential to quote to get a clear understanding of the white settlers way of thinking,

Or – this too came from Mr. Frazer and was a harder nut to crack – it was the languages he had learned to speak. He spoke five languages. His jaw, over the years, had adopted itself to the new sounds it had to make. Mightn’t it happen that the whole cast of a man’s features would be shaped by that, the way a French man for instance differs in his whole facial form from an Englishman or a Scot, and so come to share a likeness with the other speakers of the tongue?...

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.25.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.28.

Or both of these, but also the effort he must have made in those sixteen years to blend in and make himself one of them, to find facial expressions, picked up by imitation or reflection and all quite different from a white man's, that would make easier their daily intercourse with him. In taking on, by second nature as it were, this new language of looks and facial gestures, he had lost his white man's appearance, especially for white men who could no longer see what his looks intended and become in their eyes black... They chewed on this... But were more impressed by something simpler and more disturbing, since it touched on themselves... Wasn't it true... that white men who stayed too long in China were inclined to develop, after a time, the slanty eyes and flat faces of your yellow man, your Chinese?⁴⁴

The narrator relates these from the point of view of the white characters and the narration continues with the furrow in (Gemmy's) brow,

Was it a white man's thought that set it there, or the knowledge of something (they would not name it) that could hardly be conceived of in a white man's thinking, which when the dark recollection of it flickered over his brow, brought it right into the room with you, as a thing you could *smell*. Because for all the scrubbing with raw soap... he had kept the smell he came with, which was the smell of the myall, half meat, half-mud, a reminder, a depressing one, of what might be in him that could not be reclaimed. His very way of moving was a reminder. He could be in a room before you knew it, his feet scarcely whispering over the hard dirt floor. Your hand would go to the back of your neck as if a fly had lighted there.⁴⁵

As can be observed above, everything Gemmy does is a reminder of his "black" side. And this blackness consciously or subconsciously is fed with fear and even behind this lies his "un-expectancy", that they cannot be sure what to expect Gemmy to do or not to do. It was the "mixture of monstrous strangeness and unwelcome likeness that made Gemmy Fairley so disturbing to them, since at any moment he could show either one face or the other; as if he were always standing there".⁴⁶ While the fear of resembling the "other" lingers in the whites' minds, another fear of the "other" to resemble them also persists subconsciously. That's one reason they seem reluctant to accept Gemmy into their community. Even though they don't admit explicitly, Gemmy's return is not welcomed for the reason that the fear of being like them again after blending in with the natives persists. This leads to a sense of threat to their whiteness.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.41.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.42.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.43.

In an unknown place, where settlers are certainly in a different mood from the place they would be back home regarding their comfort or discomfort in the face of blacks, a “composition” like Gemmy functions to dislodge pre-conventional notions about themselves and the other. In accordance with this, being white in a settlement overseas conjures up a sense of distance at the same time. Over time, the white settler’s identity will inevitably be susceptible to difference from the one that is broadly described above. Even the word “settler” alone marks a difference. Their position as “white settlers” instead of just “whites” makes it inevitable to acquire an identity somehow different from just the “white” identity. In no unusual terms, whiteness is de-ethnicized. That’s to say, as Dyer points out “white people consider themselves to have no race. They are just humans”⁴⁷ while Morrison considers “whiteness’s impenetrability, its boundarylessness”⁴⁸ a problem (qtd. in Ingram 160). As he argues, whiteness represented as an “unmarked frontier” in the new world might pose a threat at the same time due to its synonymy with “blankness, an identity not formed yet”. He adds that “whiteness also represents nothingness; if it is the mark of anything, it is the mark of a lack, of a cultureless, formless existence. Because whites find themselves in the position of universal human, they cannot lay claim to the specificities of marked cultural attributes”. That’s why Penelope Ingram argues that white settlers who landed on a new world, meaning Australia, needed to get “racialized” in order to have an identity. In the presence of the aborigines who had specifically their different and distinct culture with its unique practices, whiteness alone represents “the concomitant experience of absence and it is this association of whiteness on the one hand as powerful because unmarked and universal, and yet on the other, absent or cultureless that proves white people’s greatest weakness, for in it lies the desolate suspicion of non-existence”.⁴⁹

This racialization can take place in the presence of the Aborigine other and the white settlers are embedded with the “shades” normative whiteness denounced. This racialization, as Ingram puts it, takes place through a

⁴⁷ Richard Dyer, *White* (London, 1997), p. 122; hereafter cited in text as W.

⁴⁸ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), p. 52; hereafter cited in text as PD. 4

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.160.

depiction of whiteness as marked, differentiated, particular. By seeking whiteness that is marked, settlers attempt to assert their own definition of, in Malouf's case, Australian identity, and in the process to unproblematicize their always already mediated claim to belonging.⁵⁰

To put into other words, white settlers in **Remembering Babylon**, I would claim, experience impliedly an in-between whiteness. Ingram's argument about racialized whiteness supports, from one aspect, this in-betweenness; what he does is to position whiteness to a fixity, to the known, to the specific in a new world to save it from the dangers of un-belonging in the face of a fixed, cultured aboriginal culture, "visualizing a whiteness that is raced, hence visible, real, yet still powerful, strong."⁵¹ He argues that "By racializing their whiteness, Malouf illustrates how settlers can abandon once and for all their status as settlers and become indigenous whites, not through a form of 'race trading' or racial appropriation but through embracing the discourse and ideology of difference"⁵². However, this attempt of racialization or turning whites to "indigenous" of the land marks a culture of difference not only from the Aborigines but from the whites as well. Such a case will result with an exclusion from the whites back in the mother country. But **Remembering Babylon** already gives pieces connoting this "ideology of difference". Ingram calls it "racialization", but from my point of view it is the dilemma of whites, (and actually any color and race exposed to dislocation), since, in the case of white settlers, it leads them to differentiate from the whiteness which is accepted as universal. Gemmy's case points out to exclusion by white settlers since he spent many years living among the aborigines, in a similar manner, white settlers are inevitably exposed to differentiation from the "universal whiteness" because they are, in a sense, bordered with aborigines, which, viewed from a broad scale, will shape them a bit different from those whites back home (no matter whether through fears or the landscape, nature, climate).

The footprint of this can be observed in the white settlers in **Remembering Babylon**. To start with, Lachlan comes to the settlement later than the settlers and his arrival causes a rivalry between him and especially Janet. Janet represents the

⁵⁰ **Ibid.**, p.161.

⁵¹ **Ibid.**

⁵² **Ibid.**

yearning for “home”. She listens to her mother about their past back in Scotland “in a kind of dream” because by relating the events in their previous lives, her mother “(brings) the past back there alive in her; she clung to every detail, she couldn’t get enough of it”.⁵³ She does not feel a belonging to the new land where she lives and though she was born in Australia, she takes her mother’s life in Scotland as “her time too, extending her life back beyond the few years she could actually recall, and giving reality to a world she had need of; more alive and interesting, more crowded with *things*, with people too, than the one she was in.”⁵⁴ For her, Scotland stands as the primary place which she feels attachment though she has never been or lived there, while she feels dis-lodged in the new land. She looks for a reality to base her life and the life she lives in Australia doesn’t present her with this feeling. “Scotland, home, was sacred to her... There were times when she felt helpless against a place which, as her parents evoked it in every word they uttered, belonged so much more strongly to all the highest emotions in her than the place she was in.”⁵⁵ That’s why she tries to build a past from what her mother tells her about the life in Scotland, how she met her father, Jock McIvor, and married him. She relies on “words” to construct a base for her identity. For this reason, the children “loved to hear the names” from Scotland, about relatives or squares or streets since “there were so few names in their lives.”⁵⁶ Australia stands as a *tabula rasa* for them and they cannot form any emotional belonging to it. To fill the gaps that came to existence in time in terms of identity and belonging, an attempt to go back to the past, to get into contact with it in some way or the other becomes of prior importance for the children. Therefore, everything that is associated with home lights a sparkle for them. When her mother talks about Lachlan’s family background, “Janet saw them, in her mother’s telling, sat down at tea together, still in their pit dirt, black-fisted, noisy, only their eyelids, when they fell to eating, and their teeth when they grinned...”⁵⁷ Imagination becomes their reality or the only means to catch the glimpse of it. However, since this case of imagination doesn’t turn into reality or experience, Janet will never come

⁵³ Malouf, **op. cit.**, p.54.

⁵⁴ **Ibid.**

⁵⁵ **Ibid.**, p.55

⁵⁶ **Ibid.**, p.76

⁵⁷ **Ibid.**, p.53

to the realization that, if she went to her motherland, she will feel alienated as well. She would encounter the similar conflicts Gemmy experienced among them. This stems from the fact that she is a child of foreign-born immigrant. While she cannot feel integrated to Australia, the distance to her native land grows historically and culturally. In this case, she would experience the case of in-betweenness. But for the moment, Scotland is in an ideal position as home for her.

In this state of mind, Janet looks forward to the arrival of her cousin Lachlan who lives in Scotland. When he arrives, Janet finds herself always in a comparison with him since he comes from where she imagines to be. They show him “bacon-and-eggs bushes” but he answers scornfully “That’s no’ them. That’s no’ the real wans”, because he had seen “bluebells”. And when he stands and sings of them in his “high clear voice, Janet (gets) overwhelmed... He glowed. He was radiant. The light of some far-off place she had only imagined shone through his skin. She slipped away and stared into a glass but could find no such beauty – no promise of it either – in herself. She was gangly and freckled. She had warts on her hands.”⁵⁸ The difference, differentiation between them is revealed from Janet’s perspective. Psychologically, she feels “inferior” to Lachlan though both of them share the same roots in terms of hometown and family lineage; what’s more, both are white. But her whiteness, compared to Lachlan’s, has lost its brilliance. Her skin was a “settler” white’s skin; accordingly, she has differentiated from the “universal white.”⁵⁹ In this case, they will not be accepted as “normal” whites back home, there will always suspend on air a sense of rupture between them and the other “original” whites. The mother country sees the white immigrant as an object of racial impurity – tainted by daily contact with blacks. And this is more than enough to cause a sense of in-betweenness.

Jock, Janet’s father, is exposed to a similar situation as a consequence of the white’s suspicions of him and his family due to their acceptance and protection of Gemmy. After Gemmy settles in a lean-in next to McIvor’s house, those whites who don’t approve his presence in the settlement try to impose pressure on Jock to expel

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.57

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Gemmy by playing on the white's fears of the blacks, especially those fears concerning their wives and children. Ned Corcoran, who hates Gemmy's presence and who sees his presence as a trespassing of the line from the first, says that "On'y I wouldn't want 'im hangin' roun' my place. Couldn't sleep at night – I k'n hardly sleep now" and he inserts the suspicion inside the minds, "I'd be askin' myself – you know – if 'e wasn't – you know – receivin' visits. From ol' frien's" (71). Similarly, the Masons, their close family friends, "were never worried about fences or boundaries", however, after Gemmy starts to live in the settlement, Barney Mason "was forever out there pacing the line and looking for signs of trespass, except that there was no line, and the trespass too might be no more than a shadow on Barney's thoughts, and how could you deal with *that*?"⁶⁰ In the face of these reactions, Jock tries to assure them that Gemmy is not so dangerous and that he is not the one that could do harm to them. Jock finds himself in-between concerning Gemmy and the settlers' reaction to him. He resists, without offending or distancing them, though. It is made clear through his wife Ellen's point of view that "neighbors meant a great deal up [t]here."⁶¹ But Jock's defense of Gemmy and abstaining from drawing him out of the settlement causes a rupture between him and the community which he belongs to, "they had begun to regard Jock McIvor, who was one of the little inner band, with a closer eye; as if he had developed a mark of difference, or some deformity had emerged in him that they had failed till now to observe."⁶²

Jock starts to get exposed to "other-ization" and alienation by his fellows of the same "race" and "color". Just because he supports someone who is not accepted by the society, he is viewed differently. For them, he starts to look like Gemmy, though it is not certain if it has anything to do with physically, but they certainly shape him mentally in this way. However, his wife realizes a difference in him physically as well as she relates in the following quote, "Work in the outdoors had burnished him; he was ruddy. His flesh, when his sleeves were rolled, had none of the dead marble whiteness she knew from her brothers and associated with the

⁶⁰ **Ibid.**

⁶¹ **Ibid.**, p.108

⁶² **Ibid.**, p.72

sunless world underground. It glowed. You felt the heat of it right through his shirt.”⁶³

The change in his skin color, his *difference* starts to be visible now and he actually represents the general differentiation in the settlement though it becomes visible through the eyes of the others due to Gemmy. He becomes *racialized* in the eyes of the others, though it is the *racialization* of all the settlement. The awareness of skin color which Janet experiences through a newcomer, Lachlan, takes place in Jock through the arrival of Gemmy. Therefore, it is “the other” which brings the subject into a kind of awareness. On the one hand, the settlers start to view Jock differently from before, on the other hand, Jock comes to an awareness about his fellow settlers as well and he is exposed to an *epiphany* in terms of relations, the meaning of being part of a group and how easy it is to be “the other” at the same time. The main reason for this is Jock’s insistence of still keeping Gemmy under his care even though Gemmy is visited by two blacks of his previous tribe.⁶⁴ In the face of such a development, Jock undergoes a severe pressure by the majority of the neighborhood, “[he], however, was determined to insist for as long as he could that there was a reasonable center to things, though he too had been shaken in these months, not by what Gemmy threatened but by what Gemmy had begun to see in others.”⁶⁵ What Gemmy had seen in others is his isolation. The settlers begin to scrutinize him with eyes that are in search for a way to remove him out of the settlement and so far Gemmy “no longer strayed where he was not wanted – not by daylight anyway, though once or twice when he was out last thing at night.”⁶⁶ And now, Jock feels a similar isolation from his friends as well. Since he takes position near Gemmy, he becomes the other with him. And after Gemmy is visited by two blacks, Andy, who is Barney Mason’s gardener and the only one who witnesses the event, relates it to the settlers in a great provocation. After that, Gemmy is abducted and beaten in the middle of the night by some white fellows and the more shocking to happen is the time when the “throat of a goose” is cut, “and there, smeared across,

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.74

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.93

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.103

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.99

was a stain, a gathering of greenflies that heaped and bubbled and the air that came to [Jock's] nostrils rich with its stink. Someone had plastered the place with shit. Someone else – Gemmy he guessed, tried to clean it off with a handful of grass but had only succeeded in spreading the filth.⁶⁷ This event proves to be the ultimate shock for Jock after which he will grow “aloof” from everyone. And the self-questioning starts in him, “Was he changed? He saw now that he must be, since they were as they had always been and he could not agree with them.”⁶⁸

Jock represents a different character and differentiates from the white settlers in his treatment of the other. The newcomers treatment and approach to the native is illustrated by the white settlers as Sarukkai summarizes it,

The process of the anthropological 'stranger' seeking to define the native has made the native alien while upholding the autonomy of the western self. In this scenario, the alien who invades the territory of the native takes over the spirit of the native by constructing them as the other. The nature of the other in this case is very clear: it is other as 'not-self. The initial anthropological other suffers continuously from this violence, a violence of the refiguration of the constitution of the native self. (1407)

Malouf doesn't approach the subject of the other just from the ordinary dichotomy of enmity, exclusion as illustrated above. He also represents the reader with a different approach intertwining a plot which goes with and against the flow at the same time. In this flow, there are the whites who treat the other as “the other”, that's to say, alienating, excluding, assimilating while Malouf balances them with characters like Jock and his family functioning as antidotes. Gemmy might not be exactly an aborigine but the way he is treated and “grasped” is the one of an aborigine, or black, or the other. Jock resists the majority's pressure at the expense of exclusion from the group he belongs to. He is afraid, he turns aloof and more thoughtful, but he doesn't sacrifice Gemmy by his own doing. The extent of fear and despair Jock is exposed to is read in the scene after he saves Gemmy from the others who abducted him,

He dragged Gemmy into the shelter of the lean-to. Laying aside his rifle, he crawled with him into that musty, dark-smelling place, and did a thing he could not for his life have done a week, perhaps even an hour ago: he sat huddled close to him in the dark, and when he shivered, drew him closer, pulled the old

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.115

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.106

moth-eaten blanket round the two of them, and with the man against him, heard his juddering breath, and smelt it, while outside moonlight fell on the cleared space round the hut where his wife and children waited.⁶⁹

Jock finds shelter in Gemmy who is the one rejected and excluded, who “simply vanished; not into the bush... but into his own skin.”⁷⁰ These events cause a change in Jock in terms of self-identity. Until then, he acts as part of a group and the way he judges everything is based on such a point of view. As Ronald G. Alexander argues, “how we conceive of ourselves is due in part, not only to the inner story provided by our memories, but by the perspective others take in regard to us. Recognition by others is a significant part of our self-constitution” (86). In other words, Jock and all the settlers have an identity constituted not exempt from each other but from a social perspective. They exist socially, act socially, think and react considering the social bonds, and sometimes without thinking, because it comes to be subconsciously similar since absorbing things in a social way turns innate in them in time. Gemmy’s coming brings a rupture to this and Jock is the first person to get affected from it as well as Lachlan, the effect of which will lead him to defend a member of a minority group, Walter Goetz, “A fortitude pastry cook, a naturalized German” against fanatical racist behaviors of a gang of patriotic football fans.⁷¹ In the case of Jock, it was as if

he had seen the world till now, not through his own eyes, out of some singular self, but through the eyes of a fellow who was always in company, even when he was alone; a sociable self, wrapped always in a communal warmth that protected it from dark matters and all the blinding light of things, but also from the knowledge that there was a place out there where the self might stand alone.⁷²

He views the world differently, “wading through waist-high grass, he was surprised to see all the tips beaded with green, as if some new growth had come into the world that till now he had never seen or heard of.”⁷³ His recognition of the elements of the ordinary nature that always surrounds him, seeing it as “new growth” proves to be a foreshadowing of the emergence of a new identity away from the social one and

⁶⁹ Malouf, *op. cit.*, p.126.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.114

⁷¹ Malouf, *op. cit.*, p.170.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.106

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.107

turning to himself to discover what he doesn't know about himself. This change in him even shows itself in the relationship between him and his wife,

He had turned his full gaze upon her – that is what she felt. He wanted to know what her life was beyond what he saw and had taken for granted, a shirt washed and shaken to make it soft, food on the table; to enquire into her affections. It was amazing to him – that is what his tentativeness suggested – that he had known so little and had not looked. There were times now when the intensity of his looking made her blush.⁷⁴

As in the case of Jock, Gemmy intrudes as the other but starts a change in the lives of the settlers though he cannot survive in the settlement. He is sent to Mrs. Hutchence's house, which is a little bit out of the settlement, and allotted a room there. His removal from the settlement causes Janet to go to the Hutchence's to visit him. Janet's change takes place quite symbolically. Through the book, there is an emphasis on Janet's skin, that she doesn't like it and aspires for a new one and this happens at Mrs. Hutchence's. She is surrounded by the bee swarm, which she learns to tend from Mrs. Hutchence and appreciates their mysterious world in time. She gets attacked by the swarm and her whole body is covered by them. Mrs. Hutchence repel them. The bees "peel away... like a crust" and "she stood in her own skin again, which was fresh where the air touched it."⁷⁵ That happens at the same moment of being a "woman", "she had emerged with a new body which the world, and this was the point – had dealt with to its limit and let go, and which from now on... it could not destroy."⁷⁶ In this process, Gemmy recognizes what Mrs. Hutchence doesn't, and his look is what convinces her of her new self. She goes through change in the company of Gemmy, gets a new skin and steps into womanhood in his presence.

By bringing the unexpected on him, Gemmy acts as a medium of change in the society, and he shows that the assumed identity of the white settlers is actually not a fixed one but constructed and is exposed to change and flow in the face of the new, the other, the unexpected.

⁷⁴ **Ibid.**, p.108

⁷⁵ **Ibid.**, p.143

⁷⁶ **Ibid.**, p.144

1.4. NAMING: BABEL MEANS CONFUSION

One element that is of crucial importance in the formation of identity is language and in **Remembering Babylon** its effect is reflected especially through naming and writing. Language is of omnipresent quality when it comes to identity and it acts as a constituent part the absence of which meaning the absence of identity. Derrida argues in his groundbreaking book **Of Grammatology** that “Since language is not an element but the element of culture, one must first locate, both in the language and in nature, the oppositions of corresponding and inter-articulated values”.⁷⁷ At the same time, he reveals the dichotomy-based nature of the language. It is this dichotomy actually which lies in the base of categorization, essentialization. Culture is embedded in language and absence of language, as in the case of Gemmy’s first encounter with the settlers, when he couldn’t tell his story which led him to be mocked by the others and categorized as “savage” bereft of any language, any means to express himself. Because the moment one can speak is the moment when he can assume identity and categorize things around from the self’s perspective. Gemmy is unable to do it, that’s why he was seen as cultureless and couldn’t be categorized by the white settlers. Actually he knows an aboriginal language, the one of the tribe he came from. But the threat of an unknown language, one they can’t decipher and understand, is revealed in the following quote from the book:

In fact a good deal of what they were after he could not have told, even if he had wanted to, for the simple reason that there were no words for it in their tongue; yet, when... he fell back on the native word, the only one that could express it, their eyes went hard, as if the mere language they did not know was a provocation, a way of making them helpless.⁷⁸

In the face of the unknown, the white settlers lose their power and domination and this is so for language as well and it happens even in deeper level in which the unknown language is a menace to their existence, self and it takes the level of “otherness” to the extreme. At the same time, the excess of the aspiration for domination is increased as well. For this reason, Gemmy is aware that “there was no

⁷⁷ Derrida, **op. cit.**, p.260.

⁷⁸ Malouf, **op. cit.**, p.65.

way of existing in this land, or of making your way through it, unless you took into yourself, discovered on your breath, the sounds that linked up all the various parts of it and made them one. Without that you were blind, you were deaf, as [Gemmy] had been, at first, in their world”.⁷⁹ And Gemmy keeps silent when they “clench” and “shout” at him because they don’t understand. They try to dominate him by silencing him since the presence of the unknown language is a menace to their attempt of domination, assimilation as well.

An important function of language that takes place more than artificially is “naming”. On a new continent, which is intact and unnamed, therefore unshaped, naming for the settlers becomes an issue of possessing. But it might be better to take up this issue starting from the name of the book, **Remembering Babylon**. It is a subject of wonder why Malouf has chosen this but the roots of the name of “Babylon” goes back to religious history in ancient times. It bears religious importance since it is the name of the city of which the story of Babylonians is narrated in Genesis. It would be relevant to quote it originally as follows,

1 And the whole earth was of one language and of one speech.
 2 And it came to pass, as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there.
 3 And they said one to another: ‘Come, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly.’ And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar.
 4 And they said: ‘Come, let us build us a city, and a tower, with its top in heaven, and let us make us a name; lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.’
 5 And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded
 6 And the LORD said: ‘Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is what they begin to do; and now nothing will be withholden from them, which they purpose to do.
 7 Come, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.’
 8 So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth; and they left off to build the city.
 9 Therefore was the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth; and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ **Ibid.**

⁸⁰ Genesis 11-1:9

At first glance, different conclusions might be drawn from the story. But what is most striking is that from the very first line, it is understood that the name Babylon is about language, speech. Unity of language and speech is disrupted due to their wish to reach heaven by building a city and a tower, the city being Babylon. The main reason lying behind this wish of construction is to maintain unity in the earth, but not only this but, as put openly above, “making a name”, “a tower with its top in heaven”. It connotes the wish of human beings to be immortal through materialistic aspirations, the wish to be visible, recognizable, the best, the top. Alice Brittan views it as “idolatry” of Babylonians because of giving up “the needs of the spirit” while pursuing “the pleasures and the needs of the body... by reaching heaven with bricks”.⁸¹ As a result, the constructed tower is destroyed and the languages are “confounded”. Confusion prevails and the name “confusion”, as Derrida writes in “Des Tours de Babel”, comes to have the same meaning as Babel.⁸² He writes that “The proper name Babel, as a proper name, should remain untranslatable, but, by a kind of associative confusion that a unique tongue rendered possible, one thought it translated in that very tongue, by a common noun signifying what we translate as confusion”.⁸³ And as it is written in Genesis, the ninth verse says that “Therefore was the name of it called Babel, because the lord did there confound the language of all the earth”. As Derrida relates, Babel is a proper name and can’t be translated into another language but due to its religious context, the name is associated with confusion. Voltaire elaborates on this issue by delving into the word’s linguistic background, relating that “*Ba* signifies father in the Oriental tongues, and *Bel* signifies God; Babel signifies the city of God, the holy city.” But he comes to terms with Genesis as well as he writes “But it is incontestable that Babel means confusion, either because the architects were confounded after having raised their work up eighty one thousand Jewish feet, or because the tongues were then confounded” (qtd. in Derrida 218). Derrida shows God as “the origin of language” since it is God who named Babylon and even associated it with confusion. And in the end, after a reading of so much background, the title **Remembering Babylon** could be read as

⁸¹ Brittan, *loc. cit.*, p.1168.

⁸² Derrida, Jacques. **Psyche: Inventions of the Other**, trans. The Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University, ed. Peggy

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.218.

remembering confusion, unintelligibility of the other as well as “incompletion, impossibility of finishing, of totalizing, of saturating, of completing something”,⁸⁴ those words in quote are Derrida’s suggestions to how to read the tower of Babel as well. This perspective supports the thesis that nothing is fixed and complete and everything is in a state of change and Malouf’s choice of Babylon refers well to the confusion of the minds in terms of identity, which is always in a state of construction. It could be seen starting from Gemmy extending to the other characters like Jock, Janet and Lachlan as already discussed.

From another perspective, naming functions as the means of claiming possession for the white settlers. But from a reverse perspective it is a “violation” as well. Derrida writes,

The mere presence of a spectator is a violation. First a pure violation: a silent and at the moment when the intimacy of proper names can be opened to forced entry. And that is possible only at the moment when the space is shaped and reoriented by the glance of the foreigner. The eye of the other calls out the proper names, spells them out, and removes the prohibition that covered them.⁸⁵

The foreigner, who is a colonizer in this case, renders this act of violence as an act of claim of possession in time and uses naming as the triggering tool. Australia, which is a huge continent without any central power to shape, name and possess it, stands as a place for the colonizers to be claimed. In this case, the British Empire doesn’t encounter huge resistance since there is no “civilization” (in western terms). White settlers who come to live here name things in their own language and, places, most of the time with reference to the names back home, so that they get the feeling of belonging. Naming is applied to remove the sense of dislocation white settlers are exposed to. When the settlement was newly established, “[there] was not yet a street and [the road] had no name”.⁸⁶ It is when the white power is helpless against the black power “in the dark hours, when you no longer stood there as a living marker with all the glow of white man’s authority about you, [it] gave no indication that six hundred, miles away, in the Lands Office in Brisbane, this bit of country had a name

⁸⁴ **Ibid.**, p.219.

⁸⁵ Derrida, **op. cit.**, p.113.

⁸⁶ Malouf, **op. cit.**, p.5.

set against it on a numbered document”.⁸⁷ The fact that the settlement still isn’t named throughout is a proof to the lack of domination of the white settlers. It stands only as a dot on the map with a name, which signifies a lack of control at the same time.

The book switches in time to years later, to Brisbane, where members of the parliament and governors are narrated. Sir George is the governor and he tries to impress the rulers back home in Britain by relating what he has done and achieved “describing in grandiloquent terms, all classical allusion and analogy, the names he has bestowed on a nameless part of the empire, the towns he has founded... He sees himself as a kind of imperial demiurge, out of mere rocks and aircreating spaces where history may now occur – at once the Hesiod of the place, its Solon, and its antipodean Pericles”.⁸⁸ That reference to the past by the governor proves to be an attempt to go back to the source of western civilization and re-starting it so that it could track the exact steps the West followed and came to be what it is in the contemporary sense. The need to go back to the ancient times is a necessity for the governor since he believes, as many others, that it is from where the western civilization set out and the identity which is possessed is the one that stems from the ancient. Accordingly, Australia proves to be a place where “the archaic and the classical, indeed the prehistoric and the classical, exist side by side... They are in the age of wonders here, where forms, nameless as yet, are just beginning to emerge out of the dark, the dreamlike”.⁸⁹ It proves an ideal place for the colonizers to possess on the grounds of which Sir George forms an analogy to Homer “where the shepherd kings feed their cattle in a similar climate to that of Arcadia.”⁹⁰

The western point of view of the colonized is reflected in an incontestable way through Sir George. The search for identity goes back to history since it gives the feeling of a rooted civilization. An important issue that should be pointed out here is also that words aren’t uttered in an arbitrary way, that is to say, “words assumed substance, took shape” when they are spoken, the *axe* for example, when uttered,

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.9.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.168.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.169.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

“you heard the swish of its blade through the stilled air in the suspension of their breath.”⁹¹ This can be seen throughout the novel. That is why the word that is written on the hut of Jock’s with shit is never spoken by him and it remains as a gap the reader is unable to fill.⁹² Another case is when Andy lies and narrates to the settlers that the black visitor brought a “stone” to Gemmy, “the stone, once launched, had a life of its own. It flew in all directions, developed a capacity to multiply, accelerate, leave wounds, and the wounds were real even if the stone was not, and would not heal”.⁹³ Brittan brings an explanation to this case “when the meaning of objects is under siege, particularly when those objects represent membership in a distant and dreamed of world, the act of speaking their names acquires an unusual weight. This weight is expressed in the gravity assigned to naming and in a literal heaviness that causes words to become palpable, take up space, exert force”.⁹⁴

Words gain a different dimension in a different landscape, this new world, Australia. The vastness of the land and its un-processed situation destabilize the use of language and the words as well. What causes this tension is the insecurity they feel in the middle of an impenetrated huge piece of land with almost nothing to fulfill it, which causes them denial of belonging. George Abbot, whose main aim was to go to Dark Continent, as a place of “proper search of his own soul and a great consideration.”⁹⁵ However, he turns out to be in Australia where “nothing tempered his soul and it was on every side oppressive, lushness and quick bloom followed by dank putrescence”.⁹⁶ The narrator associates nature with the existence and being of the natives as follows, “Even the natives were of a dingy greyness. Thinshanked, dusty, undignified, the life they lived was merely degenerate, so squalid and flea-ridden that it inspired nothing but a kind of horror at what human nature might in its beginnings spring from, and in such a place so easily sink back to.”⁹⁷ These descriptions, which evoke Conrad’s **Heart of Darkness**, puts the use of words and

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.78.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p.115.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.102.

⁹⁴ Brittan, *loc. cit.*, p.1166.

⁹⁵ Malouf, *op. cit.*, p.49.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.51.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

language under a certain purpose and renders naming a strong tool to fill in the gaps that the white settlers wish to fill. That's why children were keen on hearing names from their parents about back home, "there were so few of them in their lives".⁹⁸ However, since it is a fear-stricken settlement surrounded by the enmity of nature and the aborigines, uttering words that were a menace to their existence was abstained from while words that reinforced their link to each other and past is reinforcing due to the same reason that words claimed substance. That's one reason why Sir George resorts to naming so heavily. He does the same thing that James Cook, the initiator of the *Endeavour Voyage* did after he boards on the island with his settlers in 1770, "repetitious naming becomes a kind of narrative defense against what he perceives as the fearful scarcity of the Aborigines".⁹⁹

⁹⁸ **Ibid.**, p.65.

⁹⁹ Brittan, **loc. cit.**, p.1160.

1.5. WRITING: CONSTRUCTING AND DECONSTRUCTING

Related to naming and with no less impact on the culture and identity in **Remembering Babylon** is the effect of writing. Malouf gives place to the function of writing especially through Gemmy and he assigns it with a shaping characteristic that can be used as a tool to categorize the other, to position and fix. Taken historically, this process amounts to the accumulation of a central power which has self-righteously the omnipotence to define and categorize, subordinate or colonize. In this sense, Derrida argues that writing “opens the field of history – of historical becoming (and) historicity itself is tied to the possibility of writing”.¹⁰⁰ The history which owes its existence to writing develops under in the direction which writing leads. To put into a framework, writing, history and power interact supporting each other. And Derrida sees writing as an extension of “speech” and the presence of writing turns to be the “originary of violence itself: pure impossibility of the ‘vocative mark’, impossible purity of the mark of vocation”.¹⁰¹ The absence of vocation in writing causes the impossibility of representation of speech and in a sense it kills what it tries to represent. Writing silences the object or subject that it “represents” and the moment anything is “represented”, it is annihilated. That’s the very point Derrida discusses. He argues that “writing is nothing but a *supplement* of speech”.¹⁰² He places writing in a secondary, even lower position similar to a Platonic hierarchy. He writes,

Speech *represents* thought through conventional signs, and writing represents speech in the same way; thus the art of writing is nothing but a mediated *representation* of thought... The movement of supplementary representation approaches the origin as it distances itself from it. Total alienation is the total reappropriation of self-presence. Alphabetic, writing, representing a representer, supplement of a supplement, increases the power of representation. In losing a little more presence, it restores it a little bit better.¹⁰³

That’s why, the essence is exempt from representation and anything that is represented loses “presence”. Writing de-essentializes in two ways. The first one is discussed above as Derrida relates that it silences and whatever represented or put

¹⁰⁰ Derrida, **op. cit.**, p.95.

¹⁰¹ **Ibid.**, p.161.

¹⁰² **Ibid.**, p.326.

¹⁰³ **Ibid.**

into writing loses from itself and enters a different presence, which is a represented presence alienated from essence. The alphabet consists of signs which are arbitrary and which can't present but re-form in a quite different way. This difference, which Derrida calls "differance", causes a postponement in meaning as well and joined with the drawback in representation, essence is annihilated totally. The second way concerns the perspective from which writing is applied. To put in other words, on the one hand writing itself annihilates what it represents; on the other hand, the subject which applies writing distorts reality or essence due to its own way of thinking, believing through which it represents no matter what it represents.

Looking through Gemmy's story under the light of the arguments above, one can see that the episode where Mr. Frazer and George Abbot try to write down Gemmy's story is not a simple act of noting down some information. Mr. Frazer and George set out to question Gemmy upon his arrival and write down his background. After they finish writing, Gemmy is aware of what they do and for him, writing was "magical", it meant recognition, "he was known".¹⁰⁴ His "historicity", in the sense Derrida uses the term, starts with writing and "he was filled with gratitude. He had shown them what he was. Left alone with the sheets, the whole of what he was, *Gemmy*, might come back to him, and he began to plot, as he thought of his life out of sight there in the minister's pocket, how to steal it back". As it is clear, for Gemmy, writing functions as a standpoint to position himself or find presence through the representation and gets into expectation that through the magic of writing he can find his self, what makes him *Gemmy*. He defines writing as magic since its quality that "all that had happened to him, all his fortune good and bad, and so much sweat and pain, and miles travelled and bones picked and nights of freezing dew, and dreams, should be reduced now to what a man could hold in his hand and slip into a pocket".¹⁰⁵ He is aware of the reducing quality of writing, but for him this is magic. However, his "historicity" starts through being shaped from two white men's perspectives. George Abbot has the duty to write what Mr. Frazer says while he examines and asks questions to Gemmy. But George, as an assertion of personality,

¹⁰⁴ Malouf, **op. cit.**, p.20.

¹⁰⁵ **Ibid.**, p.21.

independence, “refuses to be a mere tool” and writes Mr. Frazer’s sentences in his own words and changing even the meaning. This bears the two ways mentioned above that writing distorts the essence. It represents - it would be wrong to say it fails to represent - but this representation is a distorting, changing representation. So whatever comes out, it is not the one before the representation. That is applicable to Gemmy. Gemmy, the human, existing with his essence, is annihilated through writing. Another Gemmy is created through the imaginings or distortions of two white men. It is quite symbolic at the same time since they hold in their hand the thing which starts historicity, which is, writing. And as a means of communication, the primary function of writing, as Lévi-Strauss defends, “is to facilitate the enslavement of other human beings”¹⁰⁶ (qtd. in Derrida 178). The act performed by Mr. Frazer and George is actually an act of enslavement, though neither are aware of it and though Mr. Frazer is one of those who are mild in their approach to the black. They cannot exactly understand his name but assume that it is Gemmy.¹⁰⁷ The act of distortion starts from the beginning and naming him as they assume or understand creates a personality independent of the real one. They put him into a shape. And Gemmy’s already in-betweenness doubles this process of distancing him from essence through writing. He is “enslaved”, and he becomes an object since he is “written” by others. Derrida relates the manipulative and manipulated aspect of writing as follows, “the power of writing in the hands of a small number, caste, or class, is always contemporaneous with hierarchization, let us say with political difference; it is at the same time distinction into groups, classes, and levels of economico – politico technical power, and delegation of authority, power deferred and abandoned to an organ of capitalization”.¹⁰⁸ Gemmy represents the non-western, the written, the categorized, the silenced based on power relations while the west, as represented by the two whites, is the executor, performer of the act of writing. Accordingly, writing object-ifies the subject in question.

Gemmy, unable to cope with his psychological problems related mainly to his childhood, associate his suffering with the writings that Abbot owns. Quite

¹⁰⁶ Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Tristes Tropiques*. p.335

¹⁰⁷ Malouf, **op. cit.**, p.18.

¹⁰⁸ Derrida, **op. cit.**, p.178.

symbolically, Gemmy decides to destroy them to get free of the spell he is put through, “he was going to claim back his life; to find the sheets of paper where all that had happened to him had been set down in the black blood that had so much power over his own...”¹⁰⁹ When he goes to the school to see George Abbot, who sits there with a “pen in his hand”, Gemmy likens him to a “sorcerer”. And since he possesses the papers that narrate Gemmy’s life, he is “the more powerful one” for Gemmy.¹¹⁰ Gemmy takes the papers from George, who understands from the looks of Gemmy that he demands the papers in his hands at the moment of their confrontation. He keeps them in his pocket and takes them out while it rains:

Rain had begun to wash the writing from them, the names, the events; their black magic now watery sky-color... the paper turning pulpy, beginning to break up in his hands, dropping like soggy crumbs from his fingers into puddles where he left them, bits all disconnected... *and my friens Billy an.. pretty...*¹¹¹

However, while Gemmy thinks that the rain washes and cleans all the written things about himself, he is not aware that those writings are Abbot’s students’ exercises and what is washed is not his past. Hence, he cannot remove the categorization, re-creation of another identity of himself by two men who are white and assess him in total subjectivity. He remains written on the papers and quite symbolically cannot get rid of the shape they put him into.

The ending of the novel might be said to complement the effect of writing on Gemmy. Years later, after the settlers totally lose touch with Gemmy, Lachlan and Janet (who becomes Sister Monica and Lachlan now a parliament member) set out to seek him and get help from a woman who recognizes that the one they are looking for is Gemmy, who is from their tribe. But they learn that there occurs a “dispersal” against the members of their tribe from the old woman and among those who are killed in this massacre, she says, was Gemmy.¹¹²

Gemmy, who carries the potential to bring a change to the settlement, to the settlers, dies at the end of the novel. But he successfully achieves this and though the

¹⁰⁹ Malouf, *op. cit.*, p.176.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.177.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.181.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p.196.

change still does not pervade all throughout, the very end of the novel, where Janet is in a state of contemplation, gives hope and paves the way for a thought of an even better future. The novel ends with the description of moon tide from Janet's perspective,

The sea, in sight now, ruffles and accelerates. Quickly now it is rising towards us, it approaches. As we approach prayer. As we approach knowledge. As we approach each other. It glows in fullness till the tide is high and the light almost, but not quite, unbearable, as the moon plucks at our world and all the waters of the earth ache towards it, and the light, running in fast now, reaches the edges of the shore, just so far in its order, and all the muddy margin of the bay is alive, and in a line of running fire all the outline of the vast continent appears, in touch now with its other life.¹¹³

This could be taken quite metaphorically. It connotes "reconciliation" with the other, a better future to mix. The moon (and obviously its light) might be said to represent Gemmy through the approach of whom the waters get closer to him as well. The world, which could be said to represent the world of the whites, gets enlightened through this approach, the "muddy margin" represents the dark side of the western point of view against the non-western and the only way to get out of its darkness could be reconciliation with the other, when it gets "in touch with its other life", which represents the non-western, or in this case the Aborigines. As Carolyn Bliss argues,

Gemmy is the essence of the unknown, both to them and to himself. He belongs nowhere or perhaps everywhere, and as such, while he violates the myths of black and white, us and them, self and Other on which white settlement has been founded, he also offers himself as a vehicle of a new myth, one of reconciliation and synthesis, one of future possibilities. (730)

The change that Gemmy brings with him is reflected in Mr. Frazer in a broader sense regarding colonizer – colonized dialectic as well. Mr. Frazer has a notebook on which he has a keenness to note down his emotions, ideas. He goes through these notes, and they bear a kind of advice, guide to the western man who comes on a vast continent in which he is a total foreigner, and intruder. He admits that their coming to the island is "to make this place too part of the world's garden, but by changing ourselves rather than it and thus adding richness and variety of things".¹¹⁴ He goes on

¹¹³ **Ibid.**

¹¹⁴ Malouf, **op. cit.**, p.132.

to relate how Gemmy could actually survive in this continent. He sees him as a “forerunner” but laments the fact that “he is no longer a white man, or a European”, but goes on saying that “whatever his birth, but a true child of the place as it will one day be, a crude one certainly, unaware of what he has achieved – an exemplum (that is) the simplest and most obvious sort, deeply moving to those who are willing to look, and to see, without prejudice, that in allowing himself to be at home here, he has crossed the boundaries of his given nature”.¹¹⁵ Though he does not see the westerns as intruders or doesn’t deny them access to the continent, he doesn’t bear the typical approach of a colonizer, and quite unusually suggests change in themselves instead of any imposition or assimilation on the place and its subjects. Unlike the way the Eurocentric point of view, which tends to subordinate the other by positioning itself as the superior, civilized in the hierarchy, Mr. Frazer’s suggestion goes against the flow and is in itself a solution to the darkness the West created in the non-West. He doesn’t view Gemmy as the others do in the settlement. On the contrary he sees him as totally adapted to the nature of where he lives, which is the only and the truest way to do. This might be read as an attempt to form an Australian identity that makes it distinct in some way from the one back home as well. To be Australian, it is crucial to be part of Australia and this necessitates reconciliation with the nature, the aborigine. Gemmy stands as the reconciliatory character and he violates all the norms related to identity and categorization. He shows that there is no fixity, and that dichotomies to name fail to give a world to live, on the contrary they serve to subordinate, position as superior or inferior. Gemmy clearly shows the artificiality of skin color and how power relations play a significant role in determining the meaning of it.

¹¹⁵ **Ibid.**

2. THE MIMIC MEN: BEYOND DICHOTOMIES

Naipaul's **The Mimic Men** tells the story of a character, Ralph Singh, who is a displaced subject living on an island called Isabella, a colony of Britain and suggestive of Trinidad, the Caribbean. Ralph, a colonized and displaced subject, feels that his life is full of disorder because he is away from his ancestor's land, India. Therefore he is always in a state of quest for a fixed identity.

The novel starts in a hotel room in London where Ralph is sitting at his table writing his memoirs. He sees writing as a solution to his sense of disorder. As he relates the events, he disturbs the chronological order and relates his story with great shifts between the past, present and future. First, he describes his life in London, his relationships with his friends and women and how he is disappointed when he arrives in London and experiences life there. Then he goes back to his childhood years in Isabella and lets us learn about Isabella life and its demographic structure. Ralph wants to get out of Isabella with the expectation of gaining his sense of identity back. After graduating from college, he is sent to London and after living a few years there he decides to go back to Isabella with his friend Browne with the political initiative to liberate Isabella from the hegemony of the colonizers. They start a movement eventually and unite the people around themselves. However, they realize that they are dependent on the colonizers in many respects and see that they cannot break the colonial bondage without gaining skills and a profession and becoming economically independent. When the movement ends in failure, Ralph returns to London and begins to live there, setting down writing as a solution to the disorder in his life. At the end, his experiences change his ideas about identity and belonging.

The Mimic Men, as in the case of **Remembering Babylon**, underscores postcolonial identity by deconstructing the artificial construction of binary oppositions. Instead of possessing an identity as a colonizer or colonized, the characters, and especially Ralph Singh, represent subjects who do not exist in a fixed way. However, the characters are in a state of search for a rootedness in which they desire to base their existence. This state of being creates a “Third Space” for those exposed to colonial rule, as Homi Bhabha calls it, and it becomes a route toward salvation for those who are enabled to emerge from their bondage to the colonizer.

The “third space” comes into being as a result of the interaction between the oppressor and the oppressed, the colonizer and the colonized or, in Hegelian terms, the master and slave dialectic. In the case of Ralph Singh, one constituent element of this space is mimicry and mimicry represents the “negative positivity” (my emphasis) that adds to the “being” of the subjects who are liberated from the power stratum occupied by the powerful, regardless of whether the powerful are colonizers, oppressors or governors in the modern world. Mimicry, as Bhabha puts it, is elusive though at first glance it seems to be the absence of an identity on the side of the oppressed. In other words, mimicry turns to be a means of power against the colonized since it leads to resistance by exempting the subject from categorization. Ralph’s self-scrutiny and sense of displacement and homelessness causes a gap which compels him to search for ways to fill it. Mimicry can fill this void and help create the third space due to its ambivalent nature. That is to say, it works against the power stratum at the same time. As will be elaborated later, it reverses the colonial process and gives the colonized an indefinable, unidentifiable quality which invests them with power against the colonizer.

I would like to first explore the Caribbean and Naipaul’s relationship with it before beginning to elaborate on the subject of the “third space” on the grounds that the Caribbean represents the background of Isabella in **The Mimic Men**. It is of great benefit to get a glimpse of the structure of the Caribbean, in terms of population, ethnicity and colonialism, to get a better understanding of Naipaul’s novel.

Naipaul, in his speech "Two Worlds: The 2001 Nobel", points out the ambivalence of his background as "at once exceedingly simple and exceedingly confused" (5). He was born in Trinidad, which he describes as "a New World plantation colony" that consists of Indians, Hindus and Muslims. Naipaul belonged to the East Indian Hindu minority which started to form in the wake of the migration from India after 1880. Similarly, Ralph's Aryan ancestors belong to the East Indian Hindus and they move to Isabella for job opportunities they are offered after the abolition of slavery. As Naipaul points out, the abolition of slavery did not bring independence since it was replaced by the indenture system, by which immigrants made a deal to work as laborers for a certain time at the end of which "they were given a small piece of land, perhaps five acres, or a passage back to India".¹ But the indenture system's abolishment in 1917, as Naipaul reasons, worsens the situation of the immigrants since they are left destitute.

Naipaul's Trinidad is composed of a convergence of racial diversities. However, this convergence, instead of forming a harmony, implies separated communities casted into their own sphere with their own cultures and languages. C.G. Clarke draws attention to the Caribbean reality as follows:

In Britain we take our identity for granted. Our long history of uninterrupted political independence and our insularity have provided us with a keen awareness of community and continuity. In the Caribbean, however, the deep imprint of colonialism has militated against the development of local consciousness. "The Caribbean", writes David Lowenthal, "is a place but not a people."² Moreover, insularity so fragments the region that its 20 million inhabitants - less than half the number of United Kingdom citizens - are divided among fifty societies. Allegiances at their broadest are insular, and autonomy everywhere is constrained by external influences. (8)

The co-existence of so many different societies stands as an important obstacle in the way of forming a unity and establishing the sense of a single communal identity. Instead, communities are divided into compartments. As Clarke adds, "Smallness has condemned the islands to a history of tutelage and, in some cases, to micro- scopic versions of political dependence. A decade and a half ago only the three largest units

¹ **Ibid.**, p.6.

² C. G. Clarke, "Political fragmentation in the Caribbean: the case of Anguilla", Canadian Geographer, vol. iv, no. 1, 1 07 1. DD. I3-2Q.

- all in the Greater Antilles - were independent, and some of the smallest islands were dependencies of dependencies”.³

The phrase “dependence of dependencies” reveals the challenge in front of independence. The fragmentation and dependence of these islands date back to the arrival and dominion of the countries Spain, France, Britain, Germany and Denmark during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This condition, Clarke argues, “[has] ensured that each island’s connexions – political, economic, and intellectual – have been forged almost exclusively with metropolitan countries in Western Europe or North America”.⁴ This situation leads to further dependence and what is more, to an inferior self-positioning in comparison to the metropolitan dominant cultures and societies. Naipaul relates the reality of the Caribbean as follows: "Caribbean territories are not like those of Africa or Asia, with their own internal reverencies that have been returned to themselves after a period of colonial rule. They are manufactured societies, labour camps, creations of empire"⁵. Therefore, the Caribbean stands out as an artificially constructed community. This leads to both interaction and insulation of the communities there”.⁶ This is especially true of the East Indian Hindus. As Richard Smyer argues, Trinidad has “the history of unresolved racial and ethnic tensions that produced the divided society of Naipaul's youth – that of a not-so-tight little island where a wall of ignorance, distrust, fear, and even animosity has kept the East Indian Hindu minority separated from the black majority” (579). Naipaul defends this separation on the grounds that he views the West Indians in Trinidad as “dependent” people, while seeing the East Indians as people belonging to a real civilization which is based on a history.⁷ That is why Ralph is in a position between Cecil, the Frenchman, and the Negro, not lower than the Negro while not higher than the Frenchman. While Naipaul assigns Ralph an Indian background, the Negroes are represented as people without a history living to serve the powerful. However, from my perspective, such a separation would only serve the present categorization and hierarchy and would not suggest any solution.

³ **Ibid.**

⁴ **Ibid.**, p.9.

⁵ Naipaul, "Power?" **op. cit.**, p. 250

⁶ **Ibid.**

⁷ Naipaul, **op. cit.**, p.252.

2.1. The Third Space and Writing

On the whole, Homi Bhabha presents us with groundbreaking ideas to pave the way for the “beyond” of the borders, boundaries, lines drawn in a clear-cut manner all throughout history. In this manner, “beginnings and endings”, “space and time” cross “to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion” (11). He sees it as the ultimate way to initiate a new definition of the societal system which ignores differences and the other forms of representations. It can be argued that Ralph Singh tries to emerge out of those dichotomies mentioned above among which he cannot find a place for himself. The novel starts with the scene in a London house where Ralph sets out to write about his past. For Ralph, it can be argued, writing accommodates the possibility of a presence in the Third Space. It is the tool over which Ralph has his own individual control and it may enable him to get rid of the disorder he has experienced. He relates what writing means for him as follows:

In keeping of trophies and writing-up of experience, I was expressing a non-existent side of myself. As if we ever play. As though the personality, for all its byways and willful deviations, all its seeming inconsistencies, does not hang together... Coming to London, the great city, seeking order, seeking flowering, the extension of myself that ought to have come in a city of such miraculous light, I had tried to hasten a process which had seemed elusive. I had tried to give myself personality.⁸

Ralph views writing as a tool of re-defining himself. This re-definition signifies a rupture from his former self pre-defined through societal norms. Fawzi Mustafa, considering Ralph, comes to the conclusion that “the knowledge that is supposed to stem from 'self-knowledge' through the agency of writing is, for Ralph Singh, only an existentialist epiphany of marginality through choice.” (qtd. in Greenberg, 226).⁹ Ralph sees writing as a matter of existence. Actually, Mustafa is critical of Ralph’s inability to act and his reliance only on writing as a way to remove the sense of disorder. However, Ralph confesses that through writing he is not in pursuit of a total removal of the sense of displacement. He sees writing as

⁸ Naipaul, **op. cit.**, p.32.

⁹ Mustafa, Fawzia. **V S. Naipaul**. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995.

hope to give expression to the restlessness, the deep disorder, which the great explorations, the overthrow in three continents of established social organizations, the unnatural bringing together of peoples who could achieve fulfillment only within the security of their own societies and the landscapes hymned by their ancestors, it was my hope to give partial expression to the restlessness which this great upheaval has brought about... In that dream of writing I was attracted less by the act and the labor than by the calm and the order which the act would have implied.¹⁰

Ralph's emphasis on writing has to do with Naipaul's view on writing as well. In an interview by Rowe-Evans, Naipaul gives his opinions on writing as follows:

I might even begin in terms of caricature and animosity; but in the course of writing, something will happen. That side of me, that comes out in the writing, is the better side, and better not because it's nicer, but because it's truer; it's the side that in one's rage one might wish to forget. I began my recent book about Africa [In a Free State] with a great hatred of everyone, of the entire continent; and that had to be refined away, giving place to comprehension.¹¹

From this perspective, writing serves to alleviate the sense of loss and hostility and foregrounds understanding, sense-making instead of the imbalance caused by emotions. Naipaul adds, "Through my writing, through the effort honestly to respond, I have begun to have ideas about the world. I have begun to analyze: first of all, the deficiencies of the society from which I came; and then, through that, what goes to make this much more complex society in which I have worked so long".¹²

Writing, as Derrida argues, "opens the field of history—of historical becoming Before being the object of a history—of an historical science".¹³ From this perspective, unlike the oral aspect of language, it is a way of staying permanent instead of being temporary. Although Ralph does not have such an aim as reaching eternity, it is obvious that he wants to get rid of the sense of "disorder", being "shipwrecked" (a word which lingers throughout the book). After a life destitute of order, success, and the failure to attain the sense of belonging, Ralph sets out to write, through which he aims to get what he could not in life. John Hearne sees it as the way of salvation for Ralph regarding his experience of transcontinental experience as follows:

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.38.

¹¹ Rowe-Evans, *loc.cit.*, p.96.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Derrida, *op. cit.*, p.96.

Europe, Asia and Africa: these have, in a gigantic and impersonal conspiracy, defrauded Singh of what might have been his fulfilment; shipwrecked him in the slum of Isabella with its "horrible man-made landscape"; ensured that any other journey he takes will end in shipwreck also; condemned him forever to relationships that can only be fraudulent or cruel, sterile or grotesque. He lives on the edge of an imminent starvation. And, in the end, the only thing that salvages him from the most horrible death of the spirit is that he can write about his emptiness and perhaps even more important - write about himself writing about his emptiness. For this, finally, is what saves Singh from disintegration: his discovery of writing as "a process of life" ... This is not 'Art for Art's Sake', which is a proposition of dubious validity, but which is, at least debatable. This is art as anodyne, as aspirin. (32)

Though Ralph is aware that this alone cannot remove all the negative experiences, through writing, it can be argued, he aims to create the third space for himself and accommodate himself here where the purpose is not to live via positive experiences, on the contrary, via "Negative Capability". John Keats, using the term for the first and last time in his letters to his brothers George and Thomas, defines it as "when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."¹⁴ To be in uncertainties and doubts serves for "fluidity" instead of "solidity" of fixation. In this way, it confirms the "unknowability", "unrepresentability" of the subject in the third space. In this sense, throughout the book, Ralph takes refuge in writing. First and foremost is the memoir he is writing and through which he sets the reader off not only on a personal biographical journey but also on a journey through a national history. Through writing his memoir, Ralph is writing a history at the same time, in other words, he is creating and shaping his own past, coinciding with the past of his nation, by putting it into words. This act of writing bears the function of filling the void stemming from the displacedness of Ralph. Through writing a memoir filled with history, he is trying to remove the sense of in-betweenness by giving himself a solid background. This background is given from his own perspective without any manipulation by others. That gives him power which he is devoid of in the social order. Writing his own history, memoir as well as article about his father and historicizing him in this way endows Ralph with power which compensates for his disappointments and failures throughout life. As to the significance of history writing, Michel Foucault writes,

¹⁴ Keats, John (1899). *The Complete Poetical Works and Letters of John Keats*, Cambridge Edition. Houghton, Mifflin and Company. p. 277.

Continuous history is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject: the guarantee that everything that has eluded him may be restored to him; the certainty that time will disperse nothing without restoring it in a reconstituted unity; the promise that one day the subject – in the form of historical consciousness – will once again be able to appropriate, to bring back under his sway, all those things that are kept at a distance by difference, and find in them what might be called his abode. Making historical analysis the discourse of the continuous and making human consciousness the original subject of all historical development and all action are two sides of the same system of thought. (qtd. in Hutcheon 158)

In Foucault's terms, we can say that Ralph is trying to "restore" himself using writing to deposition himself from where he is situated by the other, in Hegelian terms, the Master. What pushes Ralph to the realms of writing is the dissatisfaction and disappointments he encounters in his search for "himself" (my emphasis). Before writing, he is exposed to disappointments and failures. To illustrate, at first, he sees Isabella as the reason for his personal failures and insufficiencies and he is haunted by the dream to go to London, where he supposes he will overcome the sense of disorder. However, he sees that it was just an illusion when he gets familiar with the cosmopolitan reality of the city and in a conversation with people of multiple ethnicities, he relates his observations as follows,

The several damp, macintoshed Maltese came in together and talked glumly in English and their own language. I got the impression they were talking of jobs and money and the current London prejudice that turned every Maltese into a white slaver. The Countess smiled at everyone and said little. Johnny the fascist came in with his wife... It was always good to see them, familiar in all the unknown of the city. But this was how they always appeared: two-dimensional, offering simple versions of themselves. Conversation, apart from that Maltese group was not easy.¹⁵

As can be deduced from what he says above, his disorder and displacedness doubles instead of getting alleviated through his coming to London. London represents the heart of the mother country, England. After he goes back to Isabella and experiences failure in the political movement he finds himself in, especially through the initiative of his friend Browne, he returns to London and starts writing his memoir. It is significant that the writing process of his memoir takes place in London. Ralph chooses London to begin his writing and remove disorder. Though London is a city

¹⁵ Naipaul, *op. cit.*, p.17.

he could not penetrate, he tries to overcome this state through writing. He narrates the meaning of this experience in London as follows,

My first instinct was towards the writing of history, as I have said. It was an urge that surprised me in the midst of activity, during those moments of stillness and withdrawal which came to me in the days of power, when with compassion for others there also came an awareness of myself not as an individual but as a performer, in that child's game where every action of the victim is deemed to have been done at the command of his tormentor, and where even refusal is useless, for that too can be deemed to have been commanded, and the only end is tears and walking away. It was the shock of the first historian's vision, a religious moment if you will, humbling, a vision of a disorder that was beyond any one man to control yet which, I felt, if I could pin down, might bring calm. It is the vision that is with me now. This man, this room, this city; this story, this language, this form. It is a moment that dies, but a moment my ideal narrative would extend. It is a moment that comes to me fleetingly when I go out to the center of this city, this dying mechanized city, and in the window of a print shop I see a picture of the city of other times: sheep, say, in Soho Square. Just for an instant I long to be transported into that scene, and at the same time I am overwhelmed by the absurdity of the wish and all the loss that it implies; and in the middle of a street so real, in the middle of an assessment of my situation that is so practical and realistic, 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 horsemen, among whom I am one, riding below a sky threatening snow to the very end of an empty world.¹⁶

"The days of power" which Ralph refers to are the time when he and his friend Browne could mobilize the crowd to protest against the colonizers to get independence. For the first time Ralph gets the sense of power when he sees they can manipulate the crowd and lead it. However, at the peak of this power, he feels the urge of "withdrawal". He sees politics as a "child's game" and he can be said to foresee the failure of their movement. In this child's game, as will be elaborated on later, he is already in a state of acceptance that they, the colonized, play the children while the colonizers play the adult. Ralph has the feeling that whatever they do, they are under the influence and control of the colonizers. This is one reason why he chooses London to start writing in instead of his hometown Isabella. Constructing his past in the land of the colonizer seemingly gives him a feeling of freedom instead of oppression.

¹⁶ **Ibid.**, p.97.

Another reason is that he wants to get closer to the colonizer since he is already aware of what he sees as the weakness of the oppressed and instead of being part of them he tries to associate with the powerful. Ralph's relationship with his father and mother is suggestive of this urge as well. On the one hand, Ralph associates himself with his father and their ancestors. On the other hand, as will be elaborated upon later, it is implied through his dream that he does not want to enter the "symbolic order" but wants to stay unified with his mother. Ralph tries to overcome and bring reconciliation to this conflict through writing. He will break the bonds surrounding him both by his father and mother, getting rid of "locality" and reaching "universality". He starts this journey by leaving Isabella. He tries to dissociate himself from this place and its subjects as well. However, it is not just an escape, what he does is to settle down to write to make sense of his being.

One of the endeavors that bears such a function is the article he writes on his father on the request of Browne to summon the mob against governors who are in alliance with the colonizers. He writes something for the first time, as he relates, and he writes it after he accepts Browne's offer to start a political movement and returns to Isabella. The reason why Browne asks Ralph to do such a thing is because Ralph's father has a reputation due to his rebelling against the Coca-Cola company and retreating to the mountains with a group of followers. As to the process of writing, Ralph states that

The essay about my father for *The Socialist* wrote itself. It was the work of an evening. It came easily, I realized later, because it was my first piece of writing. Every successive piece was a little less easy, though I never lost my facility. But at the time, as my pen ran over the paper, I thought that the sentences flowed, in sequence and without error... It was the first of many such pieces: balanced, fair, with the final truth evaded, until at last this truth was lost. The writing of this book has been more than a release from those articles; it has been an attempt to rediscover that truth.¹⁷

Ralph reveals that the process of writing gets refined as he goes on writing. The power of writing is revealed by its manipulation of the crowd. With the article about his father, he and his friend Browne start the political movement. He is aware of the political atmosphere of Isabella and even at the dawn of this political movement as

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.226.

he says, “The nature of the political life of our island must be understood. We were a colony, a benevolently administered dependency. So long as our dependence remained unquestioned our politics were a joke”.¹⁸ Since his father’s act did not have such a collective aim as to operate in a systematic way, it was ineffectual. Ralph writes:

A man like my father, extravagant as he was, had been a passing disturber of the peace. He fitted into the pattern of dependence, as did those who came after him, taking advantage of the limited constitution we were gained just before the end of the war. These politicians were contractors and merchants in the towns, farmers in the country, small people offering no policies, offering only themselves. They were not highly regarded. Their names and photographs appeared frequently in the newspapers, but they were slightly ridiculous figures; stories about their illiteracy or crookedness constantly circulated.¹⁹

Ralph gives a general picture of the political life on the island and the reasons for the potential failures that lie behind any movement against the colonizers in the present order. Together with Browne, he aims to establish a strong resistance. For this reason, they try to benefit from Ralph’s father’s influence on the people. And Ralph achieves this through writing his very first “piece of writing”. This is important to show the influence of writing. Though Ralph admits that it was not a refined piece and though he is critical of his father, the way he writes the article moves people. This shows the manipulative power of language and writing. From another perspective, he historicizes his father and re-creates him as a hero. Consequently, writing is used as a means to connect the past with the present as a means of shaping the future. He does not reveal the content of the article but says instead that he wrote it “in his picture”. He can move them because he shows them through the article that it is possible to resist and rebel. In this way, he is actually promising them “subjectivity”, “self-control”. This constitutes the main reason behind mobilizing the people. The power of writing stems from language since, as Emile Benveniste argues, “language... is the possibility of subjectivity because it always contains the linguistic forms appropriate to the expression of subjectivity because it consists of discrete instances.”²⁰

¹⁸ **Ibid.**, p.227.

¹⁹ **Ibid.**

²⁰ Hutcheon, **loc. cit.**, p.168

Although they can move the mob and bring them around to resist, Ralph, due to his rapid and unexpected rise as a politician, is always in expectation of failure, which results from the fear that he is not the right person for such a position. Indeed, Ralph and his friend Browne have collected many people for their movement promising “drama” and “distress” on the way to a better future.²¹ So they have benefited from the psychological situation of the society. However when their movement comes to be successful and they get enough votes to gain control, their once collective power dies out and those who once promised an independent future with more dignity lose their enthusiasm. Ralph confesses, “And dishonesty: those speeches, whose brilliance so many commented on and travelled distances to hear, had as their basis contempt, the knowledge that it did not matter what was said.”²² The weakness in such a society is that it cannot stand on its own feet and act independently. Ralph also adds: “Confusion: in the end it possessed us all. We were dazzled by success. We did not know whether we had created the movement or whether the movement was creating us.”²³ The indeterminacy, awkwardness of the politicians and their supporters in this phase is obvious. Only during the time when they come together in pursuit of victory can they form a unity. But now all of them exempt themselves from any difficulty and responsibility, and they step back in the face of duty. This situation is one of the reasons why Naipaul accuses the colonized. He describes the society of Trinidad, where he was raised, as “a place which is not real, a place which is imperfectly made, and a place where people are, really, quite inferior, because they demand so little of themselves. They are colonials, in a type of perpetual colonial situation.”²⁴ Naipaul’s contempt for the colonized societies stems especially from his observations that these societies are, he claims, dependent and irresponsible. Ralph can be said to reflect Naipaul’s ideas about these cultures. Ralph defines the politicians as “unproductive, uncreative men.”²⁵ Later he realizes that his power “was a matter of words” and even the power they think they gathered is not a “real internal source” and it is “a society not held together by common interests”, as

²¹ Naipaul, **op. cit.**, p.232.

²² **Ibid.**, p.236.

²³ **Ibid.**, p.237.

²⁴ Rowe-Evans, **loc.cit.**, p.194.

²⁵ Naipaul, **op. cit.**, p.228.

a result their power is “air”.²⁶ In the end he admits that the colonial politician is “an easy object of satire.”²⁷

²⁶ **Ibid.**, p.245.

²⁷ **Ibid.**, p.250.

2.2. Symbolic Disorder: Death of The Father

Ralph writes the article after his father was killed. He gets the news while he is in London, "The news came in a guarded letter from my sister. I went to the British Council reading room, to which I had been long a stranger, to look at our local newspapers... My father had been shot dead, and a woman with him. The weapon was a Luger."²⁸ Ralph's reaction to the news is ambiguous at a first glance. He says,

The news required a response. It required sentiment and the opposite of sentiment. I walked about the streets. Later I went with a prostitute. I was full of my news. But I saved it for the end. Her shallow whorish reaction, of sentiment and reproof, was all I could have asked for. Later, in the blankness of night, I cried on Sandra's breasts and suddenly I discovered I was ready to leave. (215)

Ralph feels the "necessity" to show a "sentiment" and he feels forced to show some reaction in the face of his father's death. This creates a doubt regarding his relations with and attachment to his father. As a matter of fact, the reason for his father's death is not given or even alluded to. However, the fact that Ralph states it was a "Luger" that his father was killed by, implies certain things about the murderers. For this we should get back to Ralph's college years in Isabella where he was friends with Cecil Deschampneufs.

Ralph sees a Luger on a trip in Cecil's car to the shore, the Negro also being one of the party. During their journey in the car, Cecil asks Ralph to "open that glove compartment for [him] a little."²⁹ Ralph does as he is asked and studies the pistol. Unaware of the fact that he is holding the pistol that is going to kill his father, he says, "I took out the big pistol. I had never held a pistol. I had thought it was all metal, but now I saw that it had wood facings. I was astonished at the precision of the moulding. This precision was like beauty. I passed my fingers along the edges."³⁰ Ralph is in a state of admiration while studying the pistol, amazed at how big and heavy it is. Naipaul does not openly reveal who killed Ralph's father, neither does Ralph try to form a relation between the Luger he saw in Cecil's car and his father's

²⁸ **Ibid.**, p.215.

²⁹ **Ibid.**, p.191.

³⁰ **Ibid.**

death. He just mentions the fact that it was a “Luger”. Even giving a space to such a detail would suffice to raise a doubt in the reader’s mind. It would not be unreasonable to think that Cecil killed or made the Negro kill Ralph’s father. If the Luger is the strongest proof of the murder, Ralph’s father’s rebellion against and hatred of the Coca-Cola Company proves to be the second strong proof since Cecil is associated with it strongly.

Cecil can be said to function as the alter ego of Ralph since he is on the side of the powerful. As mentioned earlier, Ralph’s attempt to find a self/identity for himself is also about his desire to be in the place of the colonizer (which will be spoken about in more detail). In parallel with this, he was reluctant to detach himself from his mother in his dream of being in unity with her, since he was reluctant to enter the symbolic order. Now his alter ego kills his father, who represents the patriarchal order. Though he cannot confess it, it can be said that he is filled with this desire to destroy the Father and unite with the mother. This case can be explained from a Freudian perspective. Ralph’s Oedipus complex results in an ambiguous approach towards his father. Sara Beardsworth sheds light on the father – son relationship elaborating on Freud’s concept as follows:

The developmental account of subjectivity has the complex arise in and through the necessity of separation from the mother's body and of psychic autonomy. The complex turns on a conflict between desire for the mother's body and fear of the father. The motivating factor in the dissolution of the Oedipus complex is the expected aggression from the father, imagined as the threat of castration, if the mother's body is not given up. The dissolution of the complex is owed to the triumph of the narcissistic interest in a highly valued part of the body over the object-cathexis for the mother, which is to say, the triumph of the instinct of self-preservation over the erotic instinct (Freud 924)³¹. However, the dissolution of the Oedipus complex is not its destruction. The complex persists as unconscious conflict in adult sexuality, a conflict composed, not only of fear and desire oriented to the paternal and maternal apices of Oedipal triangulation, but of what appears to Freud to be a more consequential ambivalence in the feelings towards the father. (57)

Ralph may be said to go through this process which pops up in his dream when he calls it a “shame” to wake up and get separated from his mother’s body. His jealousy of his mother due to his father might account for Ralph’s changeable attitude towards

³¹ Freud, Sigmund. 1939. Moses and monotheism. In The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud. 1953-1974, vol. 23. London: Hogarth Press. (Henceforth SE)

his father. As a child, he wants to associate with his father's ancestors, the Aryans. As he grows up, however, he becomes distant to his father and does not respond emotionally to his attempts to develop emotional ties between them. For example, his father makes a touching speech about the importance of family as he says,

It is good for all the members of a family to be together from time to time, breaking bread. I feel it strengthens the bonds of the family. The family is the unit which is at the basis of all civilization and culture. This was something I learned as a boy from the greatest of the missionaries who came to this island, to whose home, as I believe you know, I was admitted more as friend than student.³²

Ralph finds this speech "bizarre" since he is not used to his father's speeches in this way, "referring to the past" for the first time. In Freudian terms, the family constitutes the core of the social order which the Father tries to maintain. Ralph's father applies to history in a sense to sustain the future of his family and to ensure the continuity of traditions. As David Carroll argues, "It is the subject itself, as an individual or collectivity (type) that depends on teleological views of history for its support. The derivation of the individual subject itself... is problematical when history is not accepted in its 'domesticated', rational, metaphysical form as the optimistic resolution of contradictions: as either History or Rhetoric."³³ For the Father, the history in its linear form and rationality (which is a patriarchal rationality) is crucial to maintain the present authority. However, Ralph is not much affected, or the effect did not last long, as it just caused them to eat "in miserable silence". In another instance, he sees his father in the street on a bicycle during a downpour. His father stretches his "arm in invitation" and Ralph sits "on the crossbar" and they ride under the rain, much to the unease of Ralph. They get soaked and Ralph feels exasperated but does not say a word. Later he questions himself as follows, "I wonder if I would have said anything, if I would have made some statement of gratitude or sympathy, if I had known that that was to be our last contact, that afterwards we were both to follow our separate destinies and that mine, for all my unwillingness, was to be linked to his."³⁴ He still cannot decide whether he would

³² Naipaul, **op. cit.**, p.144.

³³ Hutcheon, **loc.cit.**, p.170.

³⁴ Naipaul, **op. cit.**, p.149.

have acted differently that day. That shows the distance between him and his father; it has grown to such an extent that he does not want even their roads to cross.

That is why on hearing of his father's death he feels under obligation instead of any natural emotion, such as grieving. It is also suggestive of revenge against his father that he meets a prostitute for nothing but to observe her reaction and then cries in Sandra's arms. He resorts to women in the face of the loss of his father/ the Father. That still accounts for his wish to stay in unity with the mother and eventually mother country. Related to this is Beardsworth's description of Freud's dialectic related to the father and son going back to "totem and taboo" as follows:

It is well known that Freud presents an analogy between the prehistory of the subject and that of religion, in which he outlines the social and historical import of the emotional ambivalence felt toward the father. We recall the notorious story from Totem and Taboo of the foundation of the first human societies. Taking up Darwin's notion of the primal horde, Freud speculates on the prehistory of social organization, in which a violent and jealous father keeps all the females for himself and drives away his sons as they grow up. "One day the brothers who had been driven out came together, killed and devoured the hated but admired father and so made an end of the patriarchal horde." The consequences of this act rest on the fate of their ambivalent feelings of love and hatred for the tyrannical father. Their hatred is satisfied by the act of murder and their affection appears with the remorse felt for the deed. "The dead father became stronger than the living one had been", for in a psychological procedure of deferred obedience, the sons "revoked their deed by forbidding the killing of the totem (the substitute for the father) and renounced its fruits by resigning their claim to the women" (Freud 1912-13, 141-43)³⁵. (58)

Ralph's rapport with his father is analogous to Freud's story. The murder of his father makes him cry on the one hand, which accounts for his "feeling of love" while his distance from his father and the wish to surpass him and unite with the mother (country) comes true through his father's death. Just through the act of historicizing his father, he makes his dead father stronger and more influential and for this reason the article functions as a "totem", which is writing. The father gains through it immortality and the power to influence the mob.

Though Ralph uses writing as a means for a certain socio-political purpose, that is, to influence people for a cause, he ignores that high aim which Bhabha

³⁵ Freud, Sigmund. 1912-13. Totem and Taboo, ed. and trans. James Strachey. In SE 13.

describes as “political agency”. According to Bhabha, the writer, the critic should have a social mission while writing. He argues as follows:

If we are seeking a 'worlding' of literature, then perhaps it lies in a critical act that attempts to grasp the sleight of hand with which literature conjures with historical specificity, using the medium of psychic uncertainty, aesthetic distancing, or the obscure signs of the spirit-world, the sublime and the subliminal. As literary creatures and political animals we ought to concern ourselves with the understanding of human action and the social world as a moment when something is beyond control, but it is not beyond accommodation. This act of writing the world, of taking the measure of its dwelling, is magically caught in Morrison's description of her house of fiction - art as 'the fully realized presence of a haunting'³⁶ of history. Read as an image that describes the relation of art to social reality, my translation of Morrison's phrase becomes a statement on the political responsibility of the critic. For the critic must attempt to fully realize, and take responsibility for, the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present.³⁷

Bhabha draws attention to the “understanding of human action and the social world” as the duty of the writer and the critic. Ralph to some extent fulfills his duty by writing his society, trying to figure out its nature. However, he cannot be considered as dedicated to this responsibility since he admits that he “began keeping a sexual diary” when he goes to London for the first time.³⁸ He adds, “I began it, I remember, out of boredom and idleness; but soon it developed into a type of auto-erotic enterprise”, but he stops writing it only when he “discovers that who had been sending me out into the world to conquer, read this diary as regularly as I wrote it”.³⁹ Lieni is his neighbour who he is intimate with. By writing sexual diaries, Ralph violates the mission of a political agent. However, at that moment, Ralph may not be considered a political agent since, as he admits later, his father's article is his first piece of writing to start such a political movement and Hannah Arendt suggests that “the author of social action may be the initiator of its unique meaning but he or she cannot control its outcome.”⁴⁰ As a writer, Ralph exercises power on the mob by initiating a movement, the results of which he cannot control. However, he may be

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³⁷ Bhabha, *op. cit.*, p.12.

³⁸ Naipaul, *op. cit.*, p.31.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Bhabha, *op. cit.*

disrupting this position through the sexual diaries which propagate no social cause. On the other hand, by writing the article about his father and also the pamphlets to move the mob, he fulfills this duty as a political agent. But, as aforementioned, he starts the movement but cannot control the results with Browne.

One reason they cannot succeed in the political movement is, as Ralph admits, that they promised “drama and disorder” through the movement.⁴¹ Ralph and Browne made use of the power of writing. However, they could not control the outcomes as mentioned previously. “Confusion: in the end it possessed us all. We were dazzled by success. We did not know whether we had created the movement or whether the movement was creating us”.⁴²

If we go back to the root of the main problem of detachment and the sense of not belonging to any solid background, we can see that Ralph possesses the feeling of belonging neither to the society he lives in nor to the institutions which this society founded. It is clearly observable that he distances himself from the student associations when he talks about them:

Those student associations! Playing at being students, playing at being questioning and iconoclastic, playing at being young and licensed, playing at being in preparation for the world! The dishonesty of the young! I belonged to none of their associations. The confession, I know, will surprise those who try to link my subsequent career with my membership of this celebrated School. Its reputation, I have since seen, lay especially heavily on those who were to sink without a trace into their respective societies.⁴³

Ralph, from an early age, feels a distant from the institutions. He expresses this distance through protecting himself from the bonds that would hold him and integrate him into the space of dichotomies. Ralph’s general attitude of conflict with and detachment from institutions is suggested in his dream which can be explained with Lacan’s “symbolic order”. He narrates his dream as follows:

I had dreamt that I was a baby again and at my mother’s breast. What joy! The breast on my cheek and mouth: consoling weight, the closeness of soft, smooth

⁴¹ Naipaul, *op. cit.*, p.153.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.237.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.50.

flesh. It had been at dusk, in a vague setting, no lights in a back veranda, all around a blur of dark bush. My mother rocked and I had the freedom of her breast. What pain then, what shame to awaken!⁴⁴

Ralph dreams this as an adult and this dream reveals his wish to get rid of the “symbolic order”, which, for him, just stands for disorder. The stage which Ralph describes in his dream is the stage before he gets detached and enters the “symbolic order”, the moment when he gets out of the “imaginary stage” and enters the world of language (Searle 90). To put it simply, Lacan, as Searle relates, makes a distinction between three stages, which are “the imaginary order, the mirror phase and the symbolic order”. The symbolic order is the stage when the child breaks his bond with his mother and enters the structure of language and society, the principal element of which is the Father. The dream in which Ralph sees himself at his mother’s breast, as suggestive of the imaginary stage, is described in full joy by him. At that point, he is out of the symbolic order and accordingly of language. To “wake up” signifies his entrance into the symbolic, showing his reluctance by the expression “what a shame!”. This can be explained by the structure of the language which authorizes the Father. In this authorization, the society and all the norms and codes are shaped and designed based on power relations. However, the power relation is not fixed in or based on one center. It has multiple polars and each center is in a state of exercising domination over the other. Bhabha elaborates on this perspective and relates Foucault’s ideas on the subject as follows:

The productivity of Foucault's concept of power and knowledge lies in its refusal of an epistemology which opposes essence/ appearance, ideology /science. 'Pouvoir/Savoir' places subjects in a relation of power and recognition that is not part of a symmetrical or dialectical relation - self/other, master/slave - which can then be subverted by being inverted. Subjects are always disproportionately placed in opposition or domination through the symbolic decentring of multiple power relations which play the role of support as well as target or adversary.⁴⁵

Ralph is kind of lost among those “power relations”. His un-willingness to enter the symbolic order stems from the fact that he cannot find a position in society. He represents the decentered and displaced subject which cannot have a say in an institutionalized society. This institutionalization which favors the more powerful, or

⁴⁴ **Ibid.**, p.139.

⁴⁵ Bhabha, **op. cit.**, p.230.

in other words, which creates the powerful, leads Ralph to grow distant from the associations at his college. Behind all this “-archy-oriented” (my emphasis) societal order lies language, and language signifies “the entrance into the symbolic order and departure from the unity with the mother.”⁴⁶ Ralph’s wish to stay attached to his mother is based on his desire to stay away from the present order. As he repeats all throughout the book, he is “born to disorder”, which means that the moment he enters the symbolic order, as a colonial subject, he is decentered, oppressed and suppressed. That is why through clinging to his mother, he tries to get support from her and abstain from entering the borders of language. In this way, he wants to stay away from knowledge and the responsibility it necessitates at the same time. He will later admit that the political movement which Browne and he led developed independent of him and that he did not have such an aim and did not want to bear such a responsibility. He confesses this as follows, “Understand my unsuitability for the role I had created for myself, as politician, as dandy, as celebrant... Why I said, I would return to my business affairs and the life I had led before...”⁴⁷ and in another instance, he talks about responsibility as he says “I did not feel responsible for what had befallen me, I always felt separate from what I did. Time alone has erased the feeling of reality, violation and self-awe.”⁴⁸ These examples show Ralph’s state of dependence on a figure stronger than him, which is a “mother”. The “mother” in his dream could be said to symbolize the mother country, which is Britain. Ralph’s clinging to his mother and taking pleasure from the milk from her breasts is symbolic in terms of reflecting the colonial discourse. He wants to associate with the powerful. In fact, his struggle to get rid of the in-betweenness and belong to something solid and fixed ironically finds an expression in the desire to identify with the oppressor. From this respect, he does not want to detach himself from his mother/ mother country.

Another point that would be useful to elaborate on regarding the mother-child relation in the colonial discourse is the mother country’s treatment of the colonizer as an irresponsible child that should be educated by his mother. This point of view

⁴⁶ Searle, **loc. cit.**, p.95.

⁴⁷ Naipaul, **op. cit.**, p.47.

⁴⁸ **Ibid.**, p.72.

functions as a sort of justification for the colonization process. Sir Edward Cust, as Bhabha quotes in the beginning of his essay, argues, “To give to a colony the forms of independence is a mockery; she would not be a colony for a single hour if she could maintain an independent situation.”⁴⁹ This brings to the surface the Western civilization’s approach and mentality concerning the colonized countries. As Nandy writes in **Intimate Enemy**:

There was an almost complete consensus among the European intellectuals that colonialism was an evil, albeit a necessary one....not only the arch-conservatives and the apologists of colonialism were convinced that one day their cultural mission would be complete and the barbarians would become civilized, even the radical critics of Western society were convinced that colonialism was a necessary stage of maturation for some societies. (14)

These were the times, as Nandy relates, when the British Empire was being formed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The phrase “stage of maturation” has important connotations. It implies that the colonized country is not mature yet and needs help and even the guide of a more civilized unity to be “civilized”. In this sense an analogue of the mother – child relationship can be formed between the colonizer and colonized countries. Ralph’s dream is quite symbolic in these terms as well. He enjoys the idea of being by his mother. Nandy explains that the “modern concept of childhood” was produced in seventeenth-century Europe: “Before then the child was seen as a smaller version of the adult, now the child became an inferior version of the adult... and had to be educated through the newly-expanded period of childhood.”⁵⁰ So childhood was not an innocent stage anymore, but like the colonized country, a child should be educated and as Nandy adds “it increasingly looked like a blank slate on which adults must write their moral codes – an inferior version of maturity, less productive and ethical, and badly contaminated by the playful, irresponsible and spontaneous aspects of human nature.”⁵¹ So both the child and the colonized country are seen as savage, wild and inferior. Fanon’s comment on this issue is of crucial importance:

On the unconscious plane, colonialism ... did not seek to be considered by the native as a gentle, loving mother who protects her child from a hostile

⁴⁹ Bhabha, **op. cit.**, p.85.

⁵⁰ Nandy, **op. cit.**, p.15.

⁵¹ **Ibid.**

environment, but rather as a mother who unceasingly restrains her fundamentally perverse offspring from managing to commit suicide and from giving free rein to its evil instincts. The colonial mother protects her child from itself, from its ego, and from its physiology, its biology, and its own unhappiness which is its very essence. (446)

So the childhood image, slowly but surely, was associated with “primitiveness”. Western civilization became sometimes an adult to guide this “wild, primitive child”, and sometimes a “mother” to prune its protrusions. This argument parallels Naipaul’s ideas of “ranging the Third World cultures between the ‘primitive’, at one extreme, and the ‘mimic’, at the other” (Nixon 110). Naipaul evaluates the two as related to each other and, to him, while the primitives are “pure natives”, the metropolitans are their “*évolués*”. As a result, for him, in both cases the third world cultures are doomed either to mimicry or primitiveness.

2.3. Ralph and Women

Ralph is far from reaching his aims through remaining attached to his mother. On the one hand, he associates with his mother's family since he never met his father's and also because his mother's family is richer than his father's. On the other hand, his mother is not described in strong terms. Her family gets rich after she gets married and Ralph's father stays in the position of

an underpaid teacher with whom the family of the rich industrialist had impudently formed a marriage alliance. And it didn't help that my mother's behavior was that of someone who quietly accepted her own guilt. My mother had received little English education and so was separated as by a generation from her brother and sisters who came later, at the period of wealth. One result was that she exaggerated her age. She liked to think that she was old-fashioned and had more in common with her parents than with her sisters and brother. In this way she tried to resolve a difficult situation. I think she succeeded. Her old-fashioned upbringing, which prescribed acceptance without complaint, was a help to her. She accepted my father's abuse; she accepted her family's tacit – in Cecil, open – disapproval of my father. By a display of perpetual guilt she continued to show loyalty to both sides, even after my father had stopped going to her parents' house.⁵²

Ralph's mother also occupies an inbetween position to reconcile the two families. However, she is suppressed and is not presented as a strong character. For Ralph, she does not seem so much a role-model. To get a sense of attachment with the motherland, he finds himself in a hectic relationship with women. Sandra is not the first but the foremost character of all. One point that should be underscored here is that Ralph is not the only character who bears this sense of displacement. Sandra, whom Ralph will marry later on, shares the same feelings with him and that's what draws him closer to her. What makes her special is the fact that she is English while she is closer to the oppressed, the colonized, more than she is to her family or culture. Ralph relates her situation and state of mind as follows, "It was with surprise that I discovered that, though of the city, her position in it was like my own. She had no community, no group, and had rejected her family. She saw herself alone in the world and was determined to fight her way up."⁵³ She may not be colonized, she is even, as in this case, on the side of the oppressor in terms of belonging or position.

⁵² Naipaul, *op. cit.*, p.101.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.53.

This gives an insight to Ralph's restlessness, originates in his "double-displaced" state. In other words, both Sandra and Ralph experience the existential crisis on personal and societal level which is caused by an outer force. I should note that I do not use the phrase "existential crisis" in a negative way in my arguments. On the contrary, it constitutes just another step that is essential for the third space. The narrator does not provide us with detailed information concerning the reasons behind Sandra's feeling of detachment. But it is obvious that she is alienated from society and does not have a high social status because she wants to soar up in the social ladder. Though she might be deemed one of the common people,

She hated the common – her own word- from which she nevertheless freely acknowledged herself to have sprung and about which she therefore claimed to speak with authority... To the end she had a cruel eye for the common... No family, two or three school friends, now scattered: it was easy to see how she felt imprisoned and fearful and how important it was to her to be free of the danger of that commonness which encircled her.⁵⁴

Sandra has a sense of contempt for the social stratum she belongs to. She hates the lower class and "commonness" and wants to soar up in the hierarchy. The colonization process goes on in both ways, "macro-colonization" and "micro-colonization" (my emphasis). To illustrate, in the case of a relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, the oppressor and the oppressed, the lowest social stratum represents the closest one to the macro-colonized society. Under the light of this dialectic, Ralph's relation to Sandra is not surprising. Though Sandra is not physically displaced unlike Ralph, she is emotionally displaced and does not possess the sense of belonging towards her society. On the contrary, the sense of belonging is transferred to another detached character, who is Ralph. In return, Sandra represents a means for Ralph to breach the class difference. Baidik Bhattacharya's point is illuminating:

Through Sandra he could access the cosmopolitanism of London, the pure core of the real world; the vast and anonymous city had earlier reduced Singh to "futility," and it is Sandra who "showed [him] how much could be extracted so easily from the city; she showed how easy occasions were" (54). The smoothness of this passage into purposefulness for Singh is a sharp contrast to the unreal existence in Isabella and a respite from his feigned self. Though this relationship is inter-meshed with colonial history, the pivotal point being the

⁵⁴ Ibid.

exotic romance of a "mixed" marriage (59), it also provides Singh with an opportunity to revisit the larger colonial imaginary without necessarily being a latecomer. It is an opportunity to enter the real space of history. His belatedness, so to speak, has been compensated for by his resourcefulness, his ability to cross the Rubicon of color line. The body of the white woman is the fetishized object in this relationship. It is a fetish since the body stands for something lost or denied to him altogether; it provides a presence, an access and solace. (262)

Sandra's body gives Ralph a sense of access to the colonizer's position. For, the colonized, consciously or subconsciously, as Bhabha argues, is "precisely to occupy the master's place while keeping his place in the slave's avenging anger."⁵⁵ Consequently, the colonized yearns for the colonizer's position. Sandra and London symbolize the colonizer and the metropolitan, while Ralph and Isabella symbolize the colonized and the rural. But here Ralph represents masculinity, which is associated with the colonizer, and Sandra femininity, which is associated with the colonized. Sandra's firmness is what affects Ralph deeply on the grounds that he is aware that he lacks such firmness. He relates this as follows:

I had such confidence in her rapaciousness, such confidence in her as someone who could come to no harm – a superstitious reliance on her, which was part of the strength I drew from her – that in that moment it seemed to me that to attach myself to her was to acquire that protection which she offered, to share of her quality of being marked, a quality which once was mine but which I had lost.⁵⁶

Ralph's search for "attachment" to Sandra relates his search to be part of the colonizer in an expectation to overcome his sense of displacement. However, Ralph is all passive in his relations with women. Even the marriage proposal takes place only after Sandra pushes him, when she says, "Why don't you propose, you fool?"⁵⁷ This is not different in the case of another woman, Beatrice, a tourist whom Ralph meets on the London train before Sandra. For Beatrice, he says, "I had fallen in so completely with her mood. She had led; I had followed... I did not know whether during that day I had simply become what she wanted me to be."⁵⁸

Although Ralph is willing to yield himself to women in an expectation to have a "character" and to find his way in London, eventually this relationship with

⁵⁵ Bhabha, *op. cit.*, p.44.

⁵⁶ Naipaul, *op. cit.*, p.56.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.55.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.29.

women does not endure and it fails to function as a remedy to the “shipwreckness” he feels inside. Concerning Beatrice, he relates that,

it was the moment I dreaded. Both of us adrift in London, the great city, I with my past, my own darkness, she no doubt with hers. Always at these moments the talk of the past, the landscapes, their familiar settings which I wished them to describe and then feared to hear about. I never wished even in imagination to enter their Norman farmhouses or their flats in Nassjo, pronounced Neshway, or their houses set atop the rocky fiords of geography books. I never wished to hear the relationships that bound them to these settings, the pettiness by which they had already been imprisoned. I never wanted our darkneses, our auras, to mingle. Understand the language I use. I am describing a failure, a deficiency, and these things can be so private.⁵⁹

What adds to Ralph’s in-betweenness is, as he relates above, his sense of detachment which he cannot overcome even when he has a chance to do so in his relationship with women. For this reason, he does not want to share what he sees as his own “darkness” with other “darknesses”. To remain unknown, to speak a different language and be in a world to himself in his relationships reveals Ralph’s mental loneliness and what he describes as “disorder”. As a consequence, he cannot form a stable relationship with Beatrice, who wants to introduce him to her father coming to London. In the face of the unusual speed with which their relation grew while his aloof attitude persists, Beatrice retreats and Ralph describes it as follows, “My luck... intervened. She had sensed more than the absurdity of our relationship; she had sensed more than the absurdity of our relationship; she had sensed its wrongness.”⁶⁰ He views it as “luck” to split up with her, because he does not foresee a permanent relationship or attachment to women. For this reason, when Beatrice tells him about meeting her father, he becomes aware of her seriousness concerning their relationship. Still, as in the case of proposing to Sandra, he is not the one to jump to action. It is Beatrice who ends the relationship while Ralph just feels relieved after her decision.

His marriage to Sandra does not last, either. After living with him for a while in Isabella, she decides to leave for Canada in the wake of the political disturbance on the island. The beginning and the end is manipulated by Sandra while Ralph

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.30.

occupies a passive role. As Ralph admits, some social and gender roles are switched between them, Sandra leads and he follows, and the sense of belonging which comes into existence between them does not compensate for the search for identity for either of the characters. He reveals his passivity in the following words, “Sandra was after all in a position to leave: other relationships awaited her, other countries. I had nowhere to go; I wished to experience no new landscapes; I had cut myself off from that avidity which I still attributed to her. It was not for me to decide to leave; that decision was hers alone.”⁶¹

Because of his passive role in his marriage, Ralph does not even try to dissuade Sandra from leaving. His firmness remains in his passivity. At that point, I feel it is relevant to form a connection between Ralph’s situation and John Donne’s poem “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning”. In the poem, Donne describes his love for his beloved in the metaphor of the compass, saying,

If they be two, they are two so
As stiff twin compasses are two;
Thy soul, the fix'd foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if the' other do.

And though it in the centre sit,
Yet when the other far doth roam,
It leans, and hearkens after it,
And grows erect, as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to me, who must
Like th' other foot, obliquely run;
Thy firmness makes my circle just,
And makes me end, where I begun.

Although Donne situates the woman in a central position which is fixed, she is only a means to let the other foot be mobile. While attaching love to the beloved, she is imprisoned and disempowered. The central leg in the compass moves only when the mobile foot moves and only to enable it to draw a circle. While it is a woman who is centered and demobilized in the poem, Ralph’s and Sandra’s roles are reversed, he becomes the demobilized foot in his relation with Sandra.

⁶¹ **Ibid.**, p.91.

All in all, Ralph is exposed to failure in his relation to women. Women generally function as a “guide” for Ralph and Ralph is in a state of acceptance to be “guided” by them. In this sense, they function as “mothers” to Ralph, who lead him in the “mother country”. On the one hand, he tries to attach himself to them to compensate for the loss, incomplete part he suffers inside; on the other hand he sees that they are not a remedy to his search after he witnesses his isolation.

Let us get a clearer insight into Ralph’s motives regarding his sense of lingering unease. It is obvious that Ralph’s “restlessness” stems from his struggle to place himself and form a sense of belonging to a fixed identity. It is illuminating to scrutinize his journey from his homeland to Isabella. Isabella is not his native land since he is an Indian immigrant, specifically of Aryan ancestors. All throughout the novel, he tries to associate himself with these ancestors. He relates which side he and his college friend Hok, who shares a similar background with him, prefer to associate with as follows:

I cherished my mother’s family and their Bella Bella Bottling works. But in my secret life, I was the son of my father, and a Singh. China was the subject of Hok’s secret reading. Mine was of Rajputs and Aryans, stories of knights, horseman and wanderers. I had even read Tod’s difficult volumes. I had read of the homeland of the Asiatic and Persian Aryans, which some put as far away as the North pole. I lived a secret life in a world of endless plains, tall bare mountains, white with snow at their peaks, among nomads on horseback, daily pitching my tent beside cold green mountain torrents that raged over grey rock, walking in the mornings to mist and rain and dangerous weather. I was Singh. And 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.”⁶²

Naipaul also has a similar background and it can be said that Ralph bears traces from Naipaul’s background. The only source that gives Naipaul a feeling of ground is the “short stories (his) father wrote”. He says that, “Those stories gave me more than knowledge. They gave me a kind of solidity. They gave me something to stand on in the world. I cannot imagine what my mental picture would have been without those stories.”⁶³ Since his only basis for his past consists of these “short stories”, he will

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.117.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.10.

have to depend on his imagination to be able to fill this gap in his life. To alleviate the sense of displacement, he has to rely on fiction. Similarly, in his college years, Ralph lives in a world of fantasy based on books. Books become the tools through which he tries to produce a background for himself. He tries to form images of his ancestral lands searching for the books with his friend Hok, who also bears similar characteristics to those of Ralph in terms of displacement. Isabella does not provide Ralph with a ground to feel a sense of belonging. That's why he yearns for his ancestors' lifestyle in plains with horses, of which he forms an association through his father. Ralph reflects on Isabella as follows:

To be born on an island like Isabella, an obscure New World transplantation, secondhand and barbarous, was to be born to disorder... Now I was to discover that disorder has its own logic and permanence... Even as I was formulating my resolve to escape, there began that series of events which, while sharpening my desire to get away, yet rooted me more firmly to the locality where accident had placed me.⁶⁴

Naipaul reflects his Caribbean experience on Isabella. Isabella is an imaginary island which bears the societal characteristics of the Caribbean. The aforementioned sentence of Ralph, which reads as "the unnatural bringing together of peoples who could achieve fulfillment only within the security of their own societies and the landscapes hymned by their ancestors" connotes this resemblance. To understand Isabella and its social realities, it is of great importance to get a gist of the reality of Trinidad. Of course it should not mean that the book is a biographical footprint of Naipaul, on the contrary, it is just a tool to give us a glimpse of the social realities of Isabella. As Kris Rampersad points out, "the land that he has left (Trinidad) becomes now the fictional land, the land where his imagination dwells. And so, Naipaul returns again and again to Trinidad imaginatively in his writings; in his real visits, he is contented to remain a shadowy elusive figure." (34).

⁶⁴ **Ibid.**, p.141.

3. MIMICRY

In spite of all the negativities, that is to say, Ralph's wish to associate with the colonizer, his looking down on his society and alienation from it and breaking off the politics, mimicry adds a positive aspect to the novel as well as a way out. It renders change possible. It plays an important part as a resulting constituent in the formation of or search for identity. **The Mimic Men** foregrounds the colonized, the displaced, the homeless by displaying their "ambivalence", and the feeling of disorder that comes into existence as a consequence of a historical, spatial, and cultural distance to a fixed point or background.¹ Ralph Singh's displacement causes him to be always in a state of search for a self which is based on the place he comes from originally. His "spatial distance" to his home leads to a cultural distance at the same time, which when combined build on the historical distance. What adds to this is the discourse of colonization, which challenges any attempt to search for an identity apart from a "formation" (I use this word because the colonizer's imposition is based on assimilation, that's why there is not a certain identity predicted by the colonizer but a formation). Being both displaced and under colonization forces the subject under all this pressure to look for a way out. This search, as aforementioned, is an unconscious struggle to reach the third space. Mimicry becomes a way for the colonized to form and get access to this space. Firstly, I will dwell upon the definition of mimicry and its traces in **The Mimic Men**, especially under the light of Homi Bhabha's arguments.

The protagonist of **The Mimic Men** Ralph is imbued with a search for an authentic identity, and one that is not based on imitation or mimicking. However, as aforementioned, since he is destitute of the conditions which lead to "normal" acquisition of identity and belonging, whatever he does, he is in a state of mimicry. We encounter Ralph Singh in a private hotel in London writing his memoir. From the very start, he talks about "copy(ing)". It is symbolic that it is given at the beginning of the book. He says he "copied" the gesture of Mr. Shylock, the owner of the Hotel,

¹ Bhabha, **op. cit.**, p.4.

which he found “attractive”.² It is clarifying to add that Mr. Shylock is an Englishman, a subject of Britain, that’s to say, part of the colonizing power while Ralph is represented as the oppressed. At the base of mimicry, there is the desire to acquire the characteristics that the subject cannot identify in himself/herself. Bhabha illustrates this point in **Location of Culture** as follows:

The desire for the other is doubled by the desire in language, which splits the difference between Self and Other so that both positions are partial; neither is sufficient unto itself... the very question of identification only emerges in-between disavowal and designation. It is performed in the agonistic struggle between the epistemological, visual demand for a knowledge of the Other, and its representation in the act of articulation and enunciation.³

For Ralph, language represents the most important step to get access to the other, namely the colonizer since he already acquires the language of the other and speaks and writes in that language. This gives him the essential power to resemble, to be like the Other. Language constitutes the main structure of the system the colonizer acquires. It is based on a hierarchy which is based on patriarchy and power. Ralph is in search of power and he thinks that the best way to possess it is to be like the powerful. However, Ralph is always in a state of “disavowal and designation” which causes ambivalence. Before coming to London, Ralph is a student at Isabella Imperial College. As any other student who studies at the Imperial College, after graduation, he has the chance to go and study in London. Ralph, full of the sense of disorder and shipwreck, is under the illusion that he will overcome these feelings and fill the void. However, just four months after his arrival to London, he is faced with disappointment. On the way from Isabella to London on the ship, he relates his thoughts as follows:

I thought of Colombus as hour after hour, day after day – with no pause at night, as I had been half-expecting – we moved through that immense ocean. The wind whipped the crests of the waves into rainbow-shot spray. The sunlight grew paler and faded; the rainbows disappeared. I thought of that world which, as I was steadily separated from it, became less and less discovered, less and less real. No more foolish fears: I was never to return.⁴

² Naipaul, **op. cit.**, p.7.

³ Bhabha, **op. cit.**, p.50.

⁴ Naipaul, **op. cit.**, p.214.

However, he becomes aware that his expectations are just dreams and that they do not have a solid ground after his arrival to London, "...and witness me then, just 4 months later, standing in the attic of a boarding house called a private hotel in the Kensington High street area, holding a photograph of a girl and praying for a little bit of immortality, a prophylactic against the greater disorder, the greater shipwreck that had come to me already."⁵

Ralph experiences alienation in London upon his arrival. He discovers that coming to London does not cure his lingering sense of detachment. "Shipwreck:" he says, "I have used this word before. With my island background, it was the word that always came to me. And this was what I felt I had encountered again in the great city: this feeling of being adrift, a cell of perception, little more, that might be altered, if only fleetingly, by any encounter."⁶ Coming to London, he just adds to his sense of displacement. Whatever he does proves to double his feelings of negation. He becomes "double-displaced", "double-colonized" and so on since his search is a desire to mimic, to become like. He experiences "personality division" in London. Sense of reality disappears in the face of the reality of the city. Upon his disappointment in London, he describes an abstract that leads him to such feelings as follows,

In the great city, so three-dimensional, so rooted in its soil, drawing color from such depths, only the city was real. Those of us who came to it lost some of our solidity; we were trapped into fixed, flat postures. And in this growing dissociation between ourselves and the city in which we walked, scores of separate meetings not linked by even ourselves, who became nothing more than perceivers: everyone reduced, reciprocally, to a succession of such meetings, so that first experience and then the personality divided bewilderingly into compartments. Each person concealed his own darkness.⁷

For Ralph, being "rooted" means a great deal and he describes the city in these terms. Detachment signifies unreality. He does not view any attempt in the city with a meaningful reason. By "Each person", he refers to the other immigrants from all around the world, say, Maltese, Chinese, Dominican and so on. London becomes the convergence point of displaced subjects. However, it does not provide them with any

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., p.32.

⁷ Ibid.

sense of fulfillment. Even the relationship between those subjects is insecure. Ralph reveals his fear of the division of his personality, “Little twinges of panic too, already. Not the panic of being lost or lonely; the panic of ceasing to feel myself as a whole person. The threat of other people’s lives, the remembered private landscapes, the relationship, the order which is not mine.”⁸

He realizes the conflict between fantasy and reality and that he can neither start a new life and order nor form a new identity. He says “It is so whenever, moving out of ourselves, we look for extensions of our selves...In the city as nowhere else we are reminded that we are individuals, units”⁹ that it does not work by looking for new lives and escape from one’s own self. Paradoxically, he feels he does not have a self either. So he is in emptiness, in the middle of nowhere. London is far from being a remedy for Ralph’s identity search. He still is an individual and cannot feel as a part of the society. His disappointment can be observed in these words of his: “...no one to link my present with my past, no one to note my consistencies or inconsistencies. It was up to me to choose my character.”¹⁰ But he could not, or as Walcott relates, “We align ourselves to this bloc or that, to that way of life or the other”¹¹, adding that this “tiredness” falls on the “powerless”. Ralph illustrates this picture especially when he is in England. He often desires to see new places, landscapes that he has never been before. The reason for such a need is the same expectation with which he comes to London: to construct a feeling of belonging and order. Then this turns to a desire of “escape”, so he travels from port to port in England, sees different places, but all are just “landscapes to which (he) couldn’t attach (him)self”.¹² He has to remain with what he has or rather with what he does not have.

The problem does not seem to be with London, it actually lies in Ralph’s own idealization and dreams. But then, as Ralph admits, it was always “elusive” and the

⁸ **Ibid.**, p.33.

⁹ **Ibid.**, p.22.

¹⁰ **Ibid.**, p.24.

¹¹ Walcott, **loc. cit.**, p.5.

¹² Naipaul, **op. cit.**, p.36.

moment he would feel he is closest, it would slip from his domain.¹³ He sees life “two-dimensional” in comparison with the city. Ralph’s description of London reflects the dilemma of the modern man at the same time. It can be observed that he is in search of more socializing and be part of the culture he is in, but out at the same time. He relates that, “The tram was filled with individuals, each man returning to his own cell. The factories and warehouses, whose exterior lights decorated the river, were empty and fraudulent... In the great city, so solid in its light (is) to me as colorless as rotting wooden fences and new corrugate iron roofs” (23).

Ralph is alienated in London emotionally as well. Since he does not have a guide “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. I was the dandy, extravagant colonial, indifferent to scholarship” (24). “Easiness” and “simplicity” become the main points Ralph takes into account in his choices. When he meets Sandra, he surrenders himself totally to her since he appreciates her decisiveness and dominance. In this case, she has the characteristics of the Masculine West as opposed to the Feminine non-West.

Ralph’s search for something other than what he possesses goes back to his childhood years. He relates that his childhood was “a period of incompetence, bewilderment, solitude and shameful fantasies” (109). He is exposed to a sense of “incompetence” among his friends. He is always in a state of assessment of their actions. His way of evaluation of his friends is related to what he lacks. He describes his black friend Browne as follows, “Browne too knew his way about the world; his speech to me was the very distillation of the wisdom of a hundred Negro backyards... He was famous. He knew many funny songs and whenever a song was required at school he was asked to sing” (111). Overwhelmed with the sense of inferiority compared to his French friend Cecil’s family name “Deschampsneufs”, Ralph wants to complicate things to compensate for the gap he imagines between himself and his friends. He elaborates on this process with much detail that is of relevance to relate as well:

¹³ **Ibid.**, p.22.

I gave myself a new name. We were Singhs. My father's farher's name was Kripal. My father, for purposes of official identification, necessary in that new world he adorned with his aboriginal costume, ran these names together to give himself the surname of Kripalsingh. My own name was Ranjit; and my birthcertificate said I was Ranjit Kripalsingh. That gave me two names. But Deschampsneufs had five apart from his last name, all French, all short, all ordinary, but this conglomeration of the ordinary wonderfully suggested the extraordinary. I thought to compete. I broke Kripalsingh into two, correctly reviving an ancient fracture, as I felt; gave myself the further name of Ralph; and signed myself R. R. K. Singh. At school I was known as Ralph Singh. The name Ralph I chose for the sake of the initial, which was also that of my real name. In this way I felt I mitigated the fantasy or deception.¹⁴

Changing his name as a child, longing for an "ancient fracture" reflects Ralph desire for the Other, to be like the Other. After he goes to England and faces the disappointment, he returns back to Isabella and after years, at the suggestion of his friend Browne, he finds himself in politics. However, since he could not overcome the feeling of emptiness, unreality, he is still in a search and the political movement, initially, seems to provide him with the sense of power. However, it turns out to be just a matter of mimicking the power of the colonized as well.

¹⁴ **Ibid.**, p.113.

3.1. Deconstructing Mimicry

So far, I've tried to illustrate how mimicry becomes a trait of the colonized subjects and represents an indispensable way due to oppression and hierarchization of cultures. However, though it seems as a drawback and obstacle in front of the oppressed, it bears a function to deconstruct what is aimed through mimicry itself. As Bhabha argues,

Mimicry is stricken by an indeterminacy: [It] emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus, the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which "appropriates" the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both "normalized" knowledges and disciplinary powers.¹⁵

Bhabha underscores the "ambivalence" of mimicry in his dialectic. Mimicry turns into a "menace" in the colonial discourse while it is a "resemblance" at the same time. What marks it as a threat to the colonizer is its elusive nature. Behind its elusiveness, Bhabha points to the "partial presence."¹⁶ In other words, whatever is taken or mimicked is attained and performed in a partial way. This partiality stands behind the non-fixation of the mimic subject. It is inappropriate to any normative knowledge, it cannot be positioned, categorized and put into a space in the hierarchy based on dichotomies. Accordingly, "the menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority and it is a double-vision that is a result of the partial representation/recognition of the colonial object."¹⁷ Namely, mimicry paves the way for the "Third Space", which is beyond the conventional and patriarchal social system. It problematizes existence as it is established based on a certain formula, which is power basically. Categorization is applied on this basis and it has a clear-cut distinction, which is formulated to protect the power relations. Mr. Deschampsneufs, father of Cecil who is Ralph's college friend, reflects such a classification in his conversation to Ralph as follows:

¹⁵ Bhabha, *op. cit.*, p.126.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.127.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.12

It's what I always say. You fellows from the Orient and so on, ancient civilization etcetera, you are the long visioned types. You give up too easily. Just the opposite of our Afric brethren. Short-visioned. Can't look ahead, and nothing to look back to. That is why I'm sorry to say I can't see our Afric friends coming to much. Lot of noise and so on, but short-visioned. I'll tell you. You know those fellows in the South American bush, when they kill something, say a deer or something like that, you know they just sit down and eat out the whole damn thing, man. They not putting aside any for the morrow, you know.¹⁸

In that case, Mr. Deschampsneufs makes racial divisions based on the vision he defines. While he sees the two racial groups, Africans and Indians as illogical, the "medium visioned" ones are the "doers, the survivors", by which he refers to the West. What mimicry achieves is to disrupt those classifications and create a space to get out of the colonizer's positioning. Ralph is of Indian origin. He does not fit exactly into the definition of Mr. Deschampsneufs since he is displaced and went to an English college whereas living on an island called Isabella away from his native lands. That's why he cannot be classified and is not appropriate for any classification. Ralph stands as a "menace" against the classifications of Mr. Descampsneufs because he bears traits of each classification albeit partially. He is neither one nor the other completely. His "partial presence" de-positions him and the fact is that he cannot be controlled, fixed, which Ralph is actually in search of.

That is why Ralph has the potential to do the unexpected. To illustrate, the political movements Ralph and his friend Browne started was the result of questioning the established system of the colonial power. Ralph comes to interrogate this power and further tries to determine how they can be successful in their movement saying, "The nature of the political life of our island must be understood. We were a colony, a benevolently administered dependency. So long as our dependence remained unquestioned, our politics were a joke."¹⁹ This inclination to question their "dependence" is what Bhabha defines as the "menace" of mimicry. The moment Ralph and Browne offered "distress" and "drama" to their people was a phase in which they tried to trigger the mass by disclosing the racial, historical "disturbances" caused by the colonizers. This is only possible if one acts against

¹⁸ Naipaul, *op. cit.*, p.205.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.227.

mimicry, as Ralph suggests, “It takes courage to destroy any system, however shabby, which has permitted one to grow.” He adds that they “did not see this shabbiness as a type of order appropriate to (their) circumstances.”²⁰ This represents the desire for the rearticulation of “the whole notion of identity.”²¹ Through questioning the system and aiming to destroy it, the colonized aim to prepare the basis for being able to re-evaluate their presence, history and identity. Since “mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask”, it is possible that mimicry swings in either direction as a result of ambivalence; while the subject becomes “appropriate” for the colonizer and serves him as he desires, it is always among possibilities that he turns to be “inappropriate” and serves his own “desire”. And it is this desire that pushes the colonized subject to transgress the line prepared for him beforehand. This process can be in line with Foucault’s “thinking the unthought”, which, Bhabha explains in his essay, provides “the ending of man’s alienation by reconciling him with his essence.”²² “Thinking the unthought” in a way symbolizes turning away from the accepted truths. It is Browne who suggests to Ralph to establish a journal and write against the colonial power. Browne, black and of African origin, is also a displaced subject. Ralph’s father symbolizes the man doing the unexpected as well. Ralph describes how his father attacked the Coca-Cola parlour as follows:

Late in the evening he went out. He stopped at the parlour at the corner for a soft drink. Something must have happened there to irritate him, because without any provocation he began to break the place up. It was a simple breaking-up at first, but soon my father began to concentrate on Coca-Cola; he broke bottle after bottle... He broke ninety-six bottles in all... as if he had been paid to do it.²³

This action continues with his father collecting hundreds of people behind him surprising and scaring the colonizers. Bhabha explains that “This results in the splitting of colonial discourse so that two attitudes towards external reality persist; one takes reality into consideration while the other disavows it and replaces it by a

²⁰ **Ibid.**

²¹ Bhabha, **op. cit.**, p.129.

²² **Ibid.**, p.132.

²³ Naipaul, **op. cit.**, p.208.

product of desire that repeats, rearticulates ‘reality’ as mimicry.”²⁴ In other words, while the colonizer takes the reality as it is, as he imposed it on the colonized using his power, the colonized rearticulates it again as a result of the ambivalence mimicry causes which results in the “desire” to change and reform it.

Whether the movement reaches a success or not is not the matter of focus but the starting point, getting out of the colonial discourse and starting a movement against colonialism is the crucial effect of mimicry. It has a disrupting function starting from the personal level penetrating into a whole system which is basically “occi-centric” (my emphasis). Homi Bhabha illustrates this as follows,

The struggle against colonial oppression not only changes the direction of Western history, but challenges its historicist idea of time as a progressive, ordered whole. The analysis of colonial depersonalization not only alienates the Enlightenment idea of ‘Man’, but challenges the transparency of social reality, as a pre-given image of human knowledge. If the order of Western historicism is disturbed in the colonial state of emergency, even more deeply disturbed is the social and psychic representation of the human subject. For the very nature of humanity becomes estranged in the colonial condition and from that ‘naked declivity’ it emerges, not as an assertion of will nor as an evocation of freedom, but as an enigmatic questioning.²⁵

Bhabha’s argument could be said to base itself on a result beyond the linear way of thinking and positioning the subject. For this reason, instead of promising a cause-effect relationship which ends with the freedom of the subject, he foresees a situation of “enigmatic questioning”, through which the “Third Space” can be created. Ralph is aware that their movement alone is not bound to succeed in the short run. However, they make visible that they possess the ability to disturb the historicist order of the West through mimicry. He admits that “the order to which the colonial politician succeeds is not his order. It is something he is compelled to destroy; destruction comes with his emergence and is a condition of his power.”²⁶ As a consequence, they create “drama and insecurity”, through which they “destroyed the past”. Ralph and Browne see disturbance as the starting point to breach the present order the people are exposed to and made to believe is the sole order they should obey. They start to disobey, build a “Roman House”, which functions as their

²⁴ Bhabha, *op. cit.*,

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.41.

²⁶ Naipaul, *op. cit.*, p.43.

headquarter, which is always filled with people. They mimic the colonizer's tools, weapons in their attempts to create chaos, disorder. The Roman House is such an example. They meet there with Browne and prepare pamphlets, slogans, plans to lead people and create awareness and raise it.²⁷

Another aspect about mimicry that is disturbing for the colonizer about mimicry is the "gaze of otherness, that shares the acuity of the genealogical gaze which, as Foucault describes it, liberates marginal elements and shatters the unity of man's being through which he extends his sovereignty"²⁸ (qtd. in Bhabha 129). The gaze of the partially present subject begins to appropriate the colonized instead of being appropriated. The power relation is reversed "now producing a partial vision of the colonizer's presence". That is why Bhabha argues, "the partial representation rearticulates the whole notion of identity and alienates it from essence."²⁹ Therefore, the essentialist and linear point of view of history and culture is disrupted as well and the idea of essence is decentered, the normative knowledge being disrupted. Bhabha emphasizes "the impossibility of claiming an origin for the self within a tradition of representation that conceives of identity as the satisfaction of a totalizing, plenitudinous object of vision". For this reason, it problematizes "totalization", and instead indeterminacy, a dialectic between polar positions is featured.

The main cause that triggers this process in colonial discourse is the disrupting presence of the colonized. Though the colonized subject, which is positioned as an object by the colonizer, seems passive in the active presence of the colonizer, this passive and partial presence represents a menace against the colonizer resulting in a mutual penetration through the gaze. Bhabha argues that "The white man's eyes break up the black man's body and in that act of epistemic violence its own frame of reference is transgressed, its field of vision disturbed."³⁰ Cecil, with his position gained through his family, represents the West, the colonizer, , and although he is a child, he behaves like an adult in the presence of his friends and tries to look

²⁷ **Ibid.**, p.230.

²⁸ Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, p. 153.

²⁹ **Ibid.**

³⁰ **Ibid.**, p.42.

aggressive, and as Ralph relates, “he was the only person I knew who even as a child tried to be a ‘character’.”³¹ As if complementary to this attempt, he has a “Negro man” to escort him “of about forty whom he had attached to himself as a bodyguard-companion Valet. He called this Negro Cecil. It might have been the man’s real name; it might just have been Cecil’s fancy.”³²

Cecil’s giving his name to the Negro reveals his desire to depersonalize the Negro, who stands as his black Other. Naming can possess a set of functions one of which could be an attempt to position, categorize and classify. The Negro even is not referred to by his name. He is just the “Negro”. “The Negro was illiterate and penniless and seemed to have no family. He depended entirely on Cecil and I got the impression that when they were together in public they liked playing a very dramatic master-and-servant, gangster-and-henchman game.”³³ Before being named, he is just positioned as a “servant” or “henchman” and he is rarely called by his name, which is Eden. Cecil’s aim is not to give him an identity or a self, but it stems from his desire to reflect his own self, from the fact that he is afraid of the “partial gaze” of the Negro. He is disturbed by this gaze which he cannot take under control, neither can define nor can actually see what he supposes to see. Bhabha’s notion of the visibility of the mimic man, the oppressed, the colonized is of crucial value,

The familiar space of the Other (in the process of identification) develops a graphic historical and cultural specificity in the splitting of the postcolonial or migrant subject. In place of that ‘I’- institutionalized in the visionary, authorial ideologies of *Eng. Lit.* or the Notion of ‘experience’ in the empiricist accounts of slave history – there emerges the challenge to see what is invisible, the look that cannot ‘see me’, a certain problem of the object of the gaze that constitutes a problematic referent for the language of the self.³⁴

From this aspect, the colonized’s presence is never a presence as it is seen. The condition of mimicry which makes the subject “almost the same but not quite” represents a cover, “camouflage” in front of the colonizer in his perception of the colonized. In this sense, whatever s/he sees is not what it is. Mimicry provides the colonized with the ability of invisibility because mimicry is always in a state of

³¹ Naipaul, **op. cit.**, p.104.

³² **Ibid.**, p.189.

³³ **Ibid.**, p.189.

³⁴ Bhabha, **op. cit.**, p. 46

slippage. Identity is exposed to slippage and the “representation of a unified image of the self [which] is borne out by the most decisive and influential formulation on personal identity in the English empiricist tradition”³⁵ is destroyed through a substitute of a Third Space, which destroys the unity of historicism, culture and identity.

Another alternative explanation for the Negro would be that he represent’s Cecil’s alter ego and Cecil desires to be the Negro because, though despised, the Negro’s body was a matter of property envied by the colonizer subjects. The following abstract by Ralph illustrates this issue, “It was known that in the slave days The Deschampsneufs had kept a slave stud-farm on one of the islets off Isabella; the Negros there were said to be super-race still.”³⁶ It is this “superb physique” which Eden possesses and Cecil is destitute of that grows in Cecil as a desire to possess or destroy. Naming the Negro becomes the only way Cecil can perform to put his fancy into practice since he is unable to destroy him, one reason being physical superiority of the Negro. The Negro is “stereotypified” (my emphasis) through his strength.

The colonial discourse uses “stereotypification” as a functional tool in designing the colonized. As Bhabha points out, “colonial discourse produces the colonized as a social reality which is at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible. It resembles a form of narrative whereby the productivity and circulation of subjects and signs are bound in a reformed and recognizable totality.”³⁷ Mimicry creates the resistance to the colonial discourse which has a Euro-centric approach which makes a division as the West on the one hand, and the non-West on the other. Such a discourse “desubjectifies”(my emphasis) the colonized assess everything related to the oppressed relying on dichotomies, superiorizing itself while inferiorizing the other. However, Fanon draws attention to the mutual “enslavement” as follows, “The Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation.”³⁸ And since the

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.48.

³⁶ Naipaul, *op. cit.*, p.163.

³⁷ Bhabha, *op. cit.*, p.71.

³⁸ Naipaul, *op. cit.*, p.43.

seemingly active subject which exercises power over the other is the colonizer, the colonized breaches this oppression through his “inappropriate” “partial presence”.

For Ralph, this journey of searching for identity does not end in finding fixity and settling down. For these terms are dichotomic in nature and are part of the colonial discourse. On the contrary, Ralph’s search results in non-entity, de-fixity, de-unity, ambivalence. Not home but homelessness emerges as an element of the Third Space. Initially, Ralph sees Isabella as the cause of disorder. As he confesses, “We, here on our island, handling books printed in this world, and using its goods, had been abandoned and forgotten. We pretended to be real, to be learning, to be preparing ourselves for life, we mimic men of the New World, one unknown corner of it, with all its reminders of the corruption that came so quickly to the new.”³⁹ At this point, Ralph is ignorant of the world outside Isabella. Therefore, he sees escape as the only solution for his search for order, identity and sense of belonging. However, when he goes to London, he sees that he is mistaken and gets disappointed by confronting a much bigger disorder in this metropolitan. He cannot find what he looks for and returns to the island in a different mood and expectation. After an involvement in the political movement with Browne, confessing later that politics was not for him and he did not take this way intentionally, he returns to London, this time without any further search or expectation, because he has reached a point where he is beyond binary oppositions. This can be called the Third Space, where he cannot be appropriated; he is beyond the societal positioning. In fact, this space does not only address the colonized, it can be said that it represents an alternative way out of the identity problem.

³⁹ Naipaul, **op. cit.**, p.175.

CONCLUSION

The attempt of creation and classification attempt of the other by those who are in power is often resisted by the one exposed to being “objectified”. This resistance finds expression in the search for a form of existence which is beyond the imposed categorization, which is based on power relations. Otherness is the result of a societal system which is based on patriarchy and colonialism, feeding the power and authority exercised on the other. In this power relation, whiteness finds existence only in relation to blackness and in this relation it is positioned as “other-izing” blackness. This otherization creates a hierarchical order assigning the other an inferior place place restricted by definitions of the present patriarchal order which is also shaped by language, where gender representations and definitions favor the man, the Father.

Among all the restrictions and classifications, the other that is expected to be passive and obedient tries to look for the ways to breach this dichotomic positioning. As aforementioned, the third space comes into being where the other, the colonized cannot be positioned and categorized by the colonizer. Even if it is “almost the same”, it is not “quite” so. This tension is what disrupts the linear and categorical ways of thinking for the colonizer. In both Malouf’s **Remembering Babylon** and Naipaul’s **The Mimic Men**, the colonized subjects are pushed into a search for identity, for a self in which they are not defined by the colonizer. In an order constructed by the colonizer/ the Father, the story of Gemmy and Ralph represents disobedience to authority through just their way of existence which is beyond any fixation.

Gemmy and Ralph disrupt the definitions in different ways. Before starting, it is worthwhile bearing in mind that they follow different paths in their journey. In a world of in-betweenness, Maoluf forms the character Gemmy in such a way that he draws the pictures of otherization and power relations playing on colour-based definitions, namely whiteness and blackness while Naipaul’s protagonist Ralph is

overwhelmed by especially mimicry through which he can find the third space for himself.

Gemmy's in-betweenness when skin color is taken into consideration smashes the pre-conceived notions regarding skin-based identity into pieces. His white skin is contrasted with the fact that he lived among the blacks, who were tribesmen. Malouf's composition of the unthought, unspoken and even the unimaginable through Gemmy proves groundbreaking in the sense that it breaks the conventional notions concerning color and identity. As mentioned previously, whiteness functions as a "property". But what is understood by whiteness is revealed through Gemmy. He is considered skeptically and towards the end he is totally alienated from the settlement since the settlers consider him to be "tainted" since he has lived among the blacks. Consequently, Gemmy's acceptance as both black and white couldn't be internalized by the present social order. He is neither exactly black nor white. He is *almost the same but not quite*, a state of existence which finds its place only in the third space where Gemmy could sustain his existence in this way. Since the social order is not ready to grasp the existence beyond dichotomies, Gemmy is drawn out of the settlement. The third space becomes possible by getting out of the world of dichotomies.

On the other side of the coin is Ralph. He is a little bit different from Gemmy since Naipaul does not form him especially on the basis of skin color but puts cultural assimilation into focus. Of course, the white and non-white discrimination is obvious in both novels. Ralph's identity crisis mainly stems from his sense of inferiority imposed by the colonizers and his displacement. Consequently, he is overwhelmed by the feeling of disorder. Ralph's journey is about overcoming this feeling and having a sense of belonging. Unlike Gemmy, he is of Indian origin. Gemmy is of British origin. What they both share is that they are displaced subjects inflicted with the sense of in-betweenness. Ralph grows up miles away from his hometown in a society which is colonized. Where he grows up, he sees so little of his culture and language since the members of his own society are distanced to their own language and culture. The practice of Aryan culture is lost in time and the continuity of it between generations is disrupted since language is also lost. Ralph goes to

Isabella Royal College, which is a British school. English is spoken there and Ralph never mentions his native language. The only association that he forms with his own culture is the stories his father related about their home and ancestors. He reads about them in books with a friend sharing a similar story with him.

Ralph puts the blame for his sense of unbelonging and disorder on Isabella and the people there. For this reason, he sees the solution as leaving Isabella and going to London. Ralph's journey represents an indeterminate state since he is in-between Isabella and London while Gemmy leaves London for good. As a result of this indeterminacy even in terms of places, Ralph searches for other ways to have the feeling of being "fixed", while Gemmy tries to associate with the whites coming to the settlement, which implies a lack of the sense of belonging to the blacks. Consequently, the more Ralph and Gemmy search for this feeling, the more they get away from it.

Ralph is in a state of search throughout the novel in an expectation for something to save him from his present state of mind. He tries to cope with his sense of indeterminacy and disorder through escape. He has the wrong impression about the place that it causes these feelings. However, one reason that lies behind his afflictions is that he was the passive subject which was "objectified". Both Ralph and Gemmy are exposed to being "objectified" in their childhood. Ralph's sense of identity is disrupted in the face of Cecil, who is of French origin, namely part of the colonizer culture. He is treated by him and the Negro in his command in a disparaging manner. His sense of inferiority manifests itself even in his changing his surname so that it gets as long as his college friend Cecil's, which is "Deschampneufs". This is not so different in Gemmy's case. He does not have a family, no father to root him in a past and take as a model, neither a mother to do this. He grows up in an orphanage and then finds himself on the streets working for Willet the rat-catcher. He is exposed to abuse and violence by Willet. Gemmy tends to fill the void caused by his lack of a father and mother through his attachment to Willet. For him, Willet is the reason for his existence. Without Willet, he cannot live and that is why he shows obedience to whatever he is commanded to do. He is even beaten and tortured by Willet. However, since he does not have a sense of "self" and

was treated as an “object”, he could not detach himself from Willet. What Ralph experiences as a desire to stay in the imaginary stage is experienced by Gemmy even when he is a child. However, this ends when Gemmy cannot stand being treated in this way anymore and decides to burn Willet’s house while Willet is in it. This is the very moment Gemmy gets a taste of freedom and a sense of subjectivity. While for Ralph, this step towards emancipation will be taken through writing.

Writing emerges as a solution for Ralph. He tries to cope with his indeterminacy and disorder through writing. In this way, Ralph has the power to reshape his past and create a history of his own. For this reason, he starts writing down his past. He can get access to the power he longs for through writing. As mentioned previously, Ralph desires to get rid of his low self-esteem and occupy the colonizer’s place. That is why he wants to associate himself with the mother country and go to London. He wants to strike back in the heart of the mother country through writing. Now he has the power to create and shape from his own perspective. Through writing, he historicizes the west and the colonizer as well. He moves from being objectified to “subjectifying” himself on his own device. In other words, he becomes independent by discovering writing. After he starts writing, he comes to the understanding that he has overcome the need for belonging and being fixed to a certain culture or identity. To put it into other words, he transcends the present form of existence, namely dichotomies, and becomes a universal subject.

Writing has a similar function in Gemmy’s case. We see the importance and function of writing when Mr. Abbot, a teacher, and Mr. Frazer try to interview Gemmy on his arrival to the settlement. Gemmy cannot speak properly. He is very passive and can only get himself across through body language and some English words that he remembers from his childhood. As a consequence, Gemmy is “written” and historicized there from the point of view of white settlers, in other words, the colonizers. He does not have a say in what they are writing and how they are shaping him. We even see a competition between Mr. Frazer and Mr. Abbot in terms of authority over what should or should not be written. Mr. Abbot has the duty to write while Mr. Frazer asks the questions and dictates the writing. Mr. Abbot, though he does not admit, does not want to be dictated to by Mr. Frazer. That is why he

distorts some of the sentences Mr. Frazer tells him to write and he puts down his own ideas about Gemmy. This shows that writing is a means of authority as well and Mr. Abbot tries to have the feeling of authority through writing though he cannot show it openly to Mr. Frazer as he is respected among the white settlers.

Gemmy is shaped regardless of the realities. His existence, his past becomes only a matter of satisfying the sense of authority of the white settlers. Gemmy is not aware of this, no one except Mr. Abbot is actually. But Gemmy knows that what they are writing is about him and he sees writing as magic and he knows that unless he gets what they write about him, he will stay under their “spell”. For this reason, before he leaves the settlement for good, he comes to the school while Mr. Abbot is inside. He snatches the papers that he thinks are about him and annihilates them. The moment he does that, he feels relieved since he believes he destroyed whatever was written about him. He de-historicizes himself in this way and stops being an object defined by the other. His self is not determined and put into shape by another anymore.

Though both Mr. Frazer and Mr. Abbot strive to categorize and classify Gemmy, they will see that in reality this is not possible due to Gemmy’s racially in-betweenness. In both of the novels, the protagonists are presented beyond the dichotomies. Ralph cannot be positioned since he has a complicated background and cannot be labeled and classified. On the other hand, Gemmy as a character is formed in a very intricate way. Oddly enough for the white settlers, he has white skin but lived among the black tribesman for years. He is white, but color does not mean anything for them at that point. They think he is one of the blacks and they start to view his whiteness in a different way. His face, his jaw becomes similar to that of the blacks. His whiteness is not pure bright white anymore. It has dulled over the years. He lost his whiteness, he lost his property and now, for them, he is “tainted” white, which means he is both white and black or neither. This is an unimaginable representation they cannot grasp, or do not want to comprehend. It is something that does not make any sense to them, because someone is either black or white according to the definitions based on dichotomy. So the in-betweenness, the hybridity, the third space is what saves the characters from being alienated and silenced.

Both Ralph and Gemmy disrupt the dichotomies through being undefinable, and mimicry functions as a weapon in the face of the colonizers' attempts to classify. When Gemmy comes to the settlement, he cannot speak the language of the settlers, English. He mimics people's actions and behaviors just as Ralph does when he tries by lengthening his surname. He tries to mimic the authority that he lacks and sees in the other people. Both Gemmy and Ralph do not have a fixed stance but they claim presence through mimicking. Mimicry functions as a "camouflage", as Bhabha calls it, and it allots them a space beyond classifications and gives them the freedom to act independently. They are now in the third space. Both Gemmy and Ralph are "almost the same but not quite." In other words, after Gemmy has lived among the blacks, his skin color 'decreases' to "almost white but not quite". On the other hand, he is not black in terms of skin and he becomes "almost black but not quite". As in Ralph's case, he lives away from his own society and in time grows alienated from his own culture and language since he cannot practice his own cultural traditions and customs even in his own family. As he distances himself from his own culture, he gets closer to the colonizer's. However, in this way, he cannot belong to either of the cultures completely. He cannot be completely English or will not be accepted as an Englishman while being alienated from his culture as well. That is why he is bound to experience exclusion from both cultures. In that case, he has to remove himself from all these forms of belongings and build a self that cannot be manipulated or positioned. Similarly, Gemmy loses his 'whiteness' and consequently is beyond its categorization while he is not exactly black, which allots him a free space to re-define his self.

Mimicry gives a voice to the silenced and colonized members of the societies. If we try to give an answer to Spivak's question, "Can the Subaltern speak?", we may say that it can be possible through mimicry. Ralph and Gemmy represent the silenced and other-ed communities who are "stereotypified" and assigned a low position in the hierarchy of the social order. Disruption and reversion of this order can be possible by striking back through writing and mimicry. The authority objectifies the subject in society leads those who have been silenced to search for a space that enables them to have a voice to claim existence. Mimicry and the third space can complement each other with the manipulative and historicizing power of writing. From this respect, Britishness which is a representation of the mother country creating an "other", positioning itself in relation to its subjects "objectifying" them, can be "objectified" in return through writing and mimicry. Ralph and Gemmy earn their subjectivity through gaining the ability to "create" by writing about themselves, which rids them of their passive roles and making them active subjects in society.

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