

Conflict on The “Home”-ness In VS Naipaul’s *The Enigma of Arrival*

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Abstract— VS Naipaul, the Nobel Prize Winner on Literature, in 2009, appears to present his Caribbean’s voice. However, his status also stimulates a conflict with his ancestry people, especially about the concept of postcolonial home. This phenomenon seems applicable to almost all VS Naipaul’s works, since those works’ tone about Trinidad, his ancestry colonized land, refers to its position of being inferior, in comparison to England, the colonizer of Trinidad. Also, in the novels, Naipaul applies the strategy of “the character I,” in which readers might interpret that all facts of all his novels were about VS Naipaul’s true experiences. One of the models is the novel *The Enigma of Arrival*. On the other hand, as a matter of fact VS Naipaul has an interesting and important concept, dealing with his ideology on the postcolonial home. Here, he inserts a new paradigm in holding the notion of home, which is not about the past but the future. By focusing on *The Enigma of Arrival*, this paper specifies the discussion on how the conflict concerned with the “home”-ness appears. This study applies postcolonial approach, especially in the context of Caribbean postcoloniality as the new paradigm of postcolonialism.

Keywords—home, Caribbean, postcolonialism, ancestor, Naipaul

I. INTRODUCTION

When the World held a celebration of honoring VS Naipaul as the winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, (<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2001/summary>, n.d.), there was also a sensitive conflict due to it. In one hand, the person was acknowledged as the hero of civilization, through his voice to represent the colonized and marginalized Caribbean societies. However, on the other hand he was also accused of underestimating his own ancestry existence. People of his ancestor even showed disagreement of the celebration by stating that what VS Naipaul spat on the face of the ancestry land (<http://www.postcolonialweb.org/caribbean/naipaul/meena.html>, n.d.). Surely, this phenomenon is common in the context of interpreted meanings given by various readers. Some readers might have their own perspective towards a work, including its ideology of humanity voices as well. Moreover, many of VS Naipaul’s works apply “the character I” and their tone tends to be cynical against the colonized society, i.e. Trinidad, which is VS Naipaul’s motherland.

As the Caribbean writer, VS Naipaul had his novels to discuss and depict the conditions of the colonized Trinidadian society, from where he was born. From his works, such as *An Area of Darkness* (1964), *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), and *A*

Way In The World (1994), he indeed delivers cynical tone addressed to Trinidad. The character I, in those works, could possibly be interpreted as VS Naipaul himself, since some his historical journeys also completed those novels’ facts. Due to this, people would certainly be easy to come into the conception that VS Naipaul was retelling his own facts. However, in *The Enigma of Arrival*, for instance, there is a printed phrase on its cover, that the work is “a novel”.¹

This paper focuses on *The Enigma of Arrival*, in which the conflict about “home” is uplifted. The novel itself has 5 divisions, and each specifically talks its own topic. The first part, titled in “Jack’s Garden”, delivers the story of “I”, who struggles to adapt to his new environment. His stress due to cultural and psychological alienation is the start of conflict, though in fact the place is actually not totally new because he was previously there for twenty years. The next part, “The Journey”, depicts the two journeys of “I”. The first is already done when he is still 18 years old, and it is the trip to gain freedom of being marginalized and poor. The second journey is about to revise and to complete the concept of being free. Meanwhile, in the next part, “Ivy”, the story is about the landlord of “I”. The way the landlord treated the ivy plant, which is poisonous and destructive, is weird for I’s mind. Usually people destroy it, but on the contrary the landlord wouldn’t allow the gardener to destroy it and even instructs to survive it. The next story, “Rooks”, deals with deaths, and finally, the last part, “The Ceremony of Farewell”, emphasizes that death is to renew the past because it enables the coming changes.

From the novel’s depictions, the lying conflict of a postcolonial home becomes the main concern. This concept is drawn from the idea of freedom that the character “I” has fought since his young age. Freedom he expects to gain metaphorically is the freedom of the postcolonial society, and in this context it is about the postcolonial Trinidad. Prior to the focus, it’s worth delivering some historical facts due to the establishment of the Caribbean Trinidad.² Historically the European explorers landed on Caribbean lands around 1492,

¹ Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, New York, 1987

² Based upon DH. Figueredo and Frank Argote-Freyre, 2008; Rudyard J Alcocer, 2011; Silvio Torres-Saillant, 2006; and Ron Ramdin, 1999.

and those were Spain, France, England and Netherlands. It was the beginning of their setting up colonies, and even then the famous name addressed to it, i.e. the “new world” (Torres-Saillant, 2006: 15). There was also an important fact to note, that they destroyed almost all the natives (DH Figueredo and Argote-Freyre, 2008: 23) because those people were considered uncivilized. As the consequence, those colonizers then brought migrant slaves to the lands (Cohen, 1997: 137) to support industries in the area. Alcocer (2011: 75) stated that almost all the slaves brought to Caribbean came from Africa or the African descendants. It appeared then the terminology “A Triangle of Misery” (DH Figueredo and Argote-Freyre, 2008: 62), or “Middle Passage” (Rom Ramdin, 1999: 10), in which there was a connection of slavery trade from Africa to America to Europe, or vice versa. This system then was abolished totally by UK in 1883, and replaced by a new system of indentured labors, which enabled many labors from China, India, and also South Asia to come to join the industries in the Caribbean islands (Jacobsen and Kumar, 2004: x). From those slaves and indentured workers, many of them didn’t returned to their own home countries but they established groups of people or societies. Trinidad was one of them. In the next era, called as the era of decolonization, the spirit of postcolonialism was born, including the intellectual movements, or the West Indian Renaissance. Among those intellectuals, there were the names of Derek Walcott and VS Naipaul, who were “the two giants” of the Caribbean because of their achievements in the Nobel Prize in Literature.

II. SOME CONCEPTS OF CARIBBEAN POSTCOLONIALISM

The establishment of Caribbean societies has historically started from the new comers or migrants, who previously were colonized. Most of them came from Africa or the African descendants, and they lived together with the other ethnics from the other parts of the world, especially from South Asia or India. This phenomenon has consequently created the unique position of the people in the Caribbean islands. In one perspective, they have been colonized and inferior to the European colonizers, and in the other perspective they have had many ancestry identities. In other words, the Caribbean inhabitants in fact have lived in the condition of diaspora. And, in the process of decolonization they have brought two burdens with them to face, i.e. the burden of being colonized and the burden of the diversity of ethnics. Even, the fact that each of the ethnics has been alienated physically and culturally from their own ancestry identity has been real since then. It is physical due to the distant place of the ancestor’s home, and it is cultural due to the next generations who have lived away from the original customs of the ancestor but attached to many other customs.

A. *Diaspora*

The common understanding of diaspora refers to the group of people who live in foreign land/s and are away from their ancestry land/s. Culturally they still hold their ancestor’s identity, since diaspora usually is related to the events of colonization and/or repression that creates collective trauma and there is a hope of returning home but is in the condition of

being exiled (Cohen, 1997: ix). Judith M Brown (2006: 1) delivered that the diaspora phenomenon covers also the migration of the African slaves, of the Chinese traders, of the European individuals, and also of the Indian people who spread to many parts of the world. Certainly, there were many backgrounds dealing with the reasons of those people in leaving their ancestors’ homes. Meanwhile, to understand the Caribbean societies, since they are in some islands, is the fact that they are not native to the area (Cohen, 1997: 137). Even, they have come from many parts of the earth, and diversity is the main characteristic for their identity. If at the beginning the phenomenon of diaspora is the experience of being painful under the fact of colonialism, but finally diaspora appears to become the identity, as stated by Stuart Hall (2003: 244)

B. *Alienation*

Alienation is the common condition of the Caribbean societies, as they were the newcomers to the lands and suffered from their diaspora, especially due to their position as the slaves and indentured workers in the Caribbean islands. The people should have strategies and efforts to adapt to the new place, which will be their future home. Walder (2011: 49) emphasized that “... a sense of alienation is more likely if you have been obliged to depart from your place of birth and upbringing, and make a new home for yourself elsewhere—”. In this context, the relation with “the past”, with the homelands and ancestors, has lost. Previously the first generation was helpless as the colonized group of people under the control of colonials, and then the coming generations have happened to appear as the “lost generation” since they have been culturally displaced from time to time. This condition of alienation, completed by the similar other groups of people, has created their crisis of identity, as the start of their establishment of new identity (Ashcroft et al, 1981: 10).

From the facts of diaspora and alienation, the Caribbean societies have undergone new ways to construct their new identity, i.e. identity of hybridity. There are some people who have delivered the concepts to define it. CL Innes (2007: 38) said that the concept of hybridity was understood by Hommi Bhabha in the context of constructing “the third space” or “in-between”, but Glissant, as well as Hall, emphasized that it was not about to come back to the original culture or ancestors since it’s the process of difference and transformation. Meanwhile, Shalini Puri (2004: 45) stated [discourses of hybridity] elaborate a syncretic New World identity, distinct from that of its “Mother Cultures”;.... At least, there is a similar concept about “newness”, which is the main characteristic of New World, as uplifted by Hall. Here, the perspective is not the past but the future for the sake of the many newcomers. This is a way of stating the impossibility of presenting the past, which has created gap or discrepancy, both physically and culturally, due to the events of colonialism in the previous eras. In other words, diaspora firstly appears as the problem of being colonized and oppressed for the first generation of the Caribbean peoples, but then it becomes the strength of the hybridity for their identity. In this perspective, hybridity is also a weapon to resist the colonial’s cultural hegemony, and a way of solving their crisis of identity.

III. PERSPECTIVE OF "NEW WORLD" AS HOME IN *THE ENIGMA OF ARRIVAL*

In general, the novel is about the developing character in solving his problem of being alienated in his new environment, and this is caused by the fact that he has been uprooted from the previous place or home. Since then, he seems rootless and has no place for his identity. He is the bird flying to find a nest for home. In the steps of adapting and settling, he finally proves that constructing a new paradigm is significant in establishing a home for him. The paradigm is about hybridity, which focuses on the future and not on the past, and the paradigm holds the concept of "New World".

The ideology of "New World" clearly is uplifted in Jack's Garden. How Jack prepares and cultivates the garden is the idealism of postcolonialism owned by the character "I" who came from the colonized country, Trinidad. However, this idealism comes up after the process of overcoming his crisis of identity as his internal conflict. The conflict covers the condition of being uprooted from the ancestor and of being alienated from the new environment which provides gap or discrepancy due to his reality as part of the colonized country which is inferior. The conflict could gradually be done by the existence of the Jack's garden. By comparing objectively the garden with the other places, he appreciates it as the perfect garden, because it doesn't emphasize the past's power, like the place he's staying at (35), and it doesn't put the priority on the rapid changes, as the gardens around it (55). Even, the existence of Jack, as the gardener, is also important to uplift because Jack is in fact also a newcomer to the area.

... that he might at some stage have been a newcomer to the valley;...that out of the little piece of earth which had come to him with his farm worker's cottage (one of a row of three) he had created a special land for himself, a garden, where (though surrounded by ruins, reminders of vanished lives) he was more than content to live out his life.... (15).

It means despite the newcomer for the area Jack proves to appear an individual who could control and create for himself a perfect garden. In this context it seems the quality of the individual is the prominent factor in creating the perfect garden. Through the depiction of Jack's Garden, there are two important concepts which are delivered. In one aspect, it is about the capability of an individual in dealing with the crisis of identity due to his conditions of being uprooted and alienated. Meanwhile, by the second aspect, the text wants to emphasize an ideal identity that could be constructed, after "The antique ship has gone. The traveler has lived out his life." (99). As the metaphor against the Caribbean society, it's obvious that the oppressed positions as the society of diaspora and alienation are the firstly focused conflict that must be solved by the awareness against it. Meanwhile, the appearance of Jack, who is young and a newcomer to the area, is a prominent factor to construct newness in the being cultivated garden.

Therefore, Jack's Garden in the text of *The Enigma of Arrival* exists to present the ideology of the "New World" for the Caribbean peoples. It is the metaphor of success in constructing a new society, in which the paradigm of undergoing it is prominent. The existence of Jack as a young

man at least identifies the quality of newness, Jack as the newcomer provides the aspect of the importance of the will to work hard, more than the aspect of locality, and also the ideology of diversity which supports the hybridity. Those three aspects might lead into the concept of change/s that will be the consequence of the postcolonial Caribbean society.

In the second part, *The Journey*, change is the keyword, and it can be achieved only by undergoing journeys or trips. Here, there are two kinds of journeys, in which each gives a certain characteristic to the changes it brings. The first journey is about the first freedom that a young man may gain, and it is about to change of being ignorant, uneducated, and poor. It is like the journey, which had indirectly fed that fantasy of the classical world. (104). Even, it is related to artificial freedom, since it is about a young man who could change his capability to become a writer. There is a strong motivation to change his poor position and condition (52, 92, 104), and it is the start of his awareness to undergo changes for his life. However, then he must do the next journey in order to revise and renew his awareness against what he means by freedom. He needs real freedom since he has misunderstood the freedom and achievement as a writer (100), and consequently he undergoes the second journey.

A great packed education those two years had been. And I had such faith in what I was writing,... And I behaved foolishly. Without waiting for that response, I dismantled the little life I had created for myself in England and prepared to leave, to be a free man.... The house I had bought and renovated in stages I sold, and my furniture and books and papers went to the warehouse. (101—102).

For the sake of the second journey, he releases himself from anything attached to him, such as the property and the books. He wants to start from the beginning with the concept of facing the future only without the link with the past. This deed also indicates that he does not want to return back but he hunts for the "new world" for the next life. It means that the second journey is the trip to leave and not the trip to return, which was his previous journey.

The concept of journey, in the second part of the novel, is addressed to the postcolonial will to leave totally the past. The condition of being culturally and physically alienated from the ancestor's identity is in fact the opportunity to experience it. There is no burden any more dealing with the past, since the past does not exist anymore. To leave Trinidad in order to stay in England is an interesting metaphor about releasing the past. Trinidad might refer to the stigma of being lower, colonized, oppressed, and also marginalized, while England to the condition of being dignified and powerful in controlling anything about the future.

Meanwhile, in the depictions of Ivy and Rooks the novel suggests the other concepts in order to emphasize the burdens given by the past. There are some characters who are depicted not competent in facing the future. The old paradigm of the people would only disturb and trap the next generations to step to face the future. The idea of letting the poisonous ivy, which is destructive (214), alive is a way of destructing the will to change. It clearly proves the helplessness and incompetency in constructing a new world in the new world. This is more or

less an indication of waiting for their own death, or likely a way of committing suicide in the context of establishing a new life. The indication is similar with the existence of rooks, which commonly denotes the coming of death. In this context, the Caribbean postcoloniality seems to need people who have the will to move forward and not being burdened by the interests of the past. The facts of diaspora and diversity are the capitals to develop as the society of the New World. Any poisonous thoughts to distract the steps to move forward will be only the indication of the coming failure or death for the new construction of identity.

Though the last part of the novel, *The Ceremony of Farewell*, is also about death, but the aspect discussed is different. Here, death is viewed as the way of starting the future's changes.

We had made ourselves anew. The world we found ourselves in—...—was one we had partly made ourselves, and had longed for,...; we couldn't go back. There was no ship of antique shape now to take us back. (352).

The event of death represents the coming of the new time and also the end of the old time. It means the past has its own time and the new one will replace it, and even in this context in order to step in the new era, death is the only way to stop the past. As a metaphor death is the consequence to gain hopes in the future, and there is nothing to regret the past. Even people must daringly say good bye to the past in order to change into the new era. The Caribbean's diaspora might be the idea of death against the past identity, and consequently the people would step ahead to face the future in their new environment in the New World.

IV. CONCLUSION

The New World is just a paradigm of the Caribbean peoples in facing the future to establish home. The title of the novel, *The Enigma of Arrival*, is literally to stress the death of the relation between the past and the future. The term "arrival" may mean the process of leaving the past by offering a hope in the future. There will be changes in the future, and that's the hybridity of the new identity for the new society of the Caribbean people.

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