Cultural Identity and Construction of Subjectivity: V. S. Naipaul's *Half a Life*
文化屬性與主體建構：奈波爾的《浮生》之文本分析研究

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Abstract

In the domain of postcolonial literature, different ethnic groups, based on their different original cultural heritages, have their ethnic, cultural, and historical specificities. This study aims to explore the construction of subjectivity and/or otherness, complexity of colonial predicament, rupture of identity definition, sense of alienation of diaspora, among other things, reflected in V. S. Naipaul's *Half a Life* through postcolonial cultural perspectives. V. S. Naipaul plays a paramount role in the postcolonial writings. He has an urge to articulate his fluid, multiple and unstable identities in terms of his unique postcolonial cultural perspectives. *Half a Life* records Naipaul's exiled life and manifests the ruptures among subjectivity, geography, and language toward multicultural and fluid identity. The masterpiece also portrays the protagonist Willie's constant exiled life from India, England, Africa, Germany so as to rediscover and affirm his self-identity. In this research, Stuart Hall's assertion of unfixed identity, James Clifford's traveling theory, Doreen Massey's concept and definition of place, Homi Bhabha's theories of mimicry, hybridity, and "third space" as the identity-making process will be applied to explain the identity-making process in V. S. Naipaul's *Half a Life*. Simultaneously, this study aims at displaying Naipaul's distinctive heterogeneity of postcolonial writing in the process toward his self-identity.

Keywords: post-colonial discourse, cultural reconstruction, self-identity, placelessness

摘要

2001 年諾貝爾文學獎得主奈波爾在後殖民文學中佔有一席重要的地位，具有三種不同的文化背景並不斷地追求其自我定位，其《浮生》堪稱集奈氏精華之作，紀錄奈氏一生漂泊離散的際遇並呈現主體、地理與語言之斷裂，其身分認同終歸多元而流動不居。主角威利猶如奈氏終生為追尋自我而不斷流亡，始自印度、英國、非洲終至德國。奈氏用諷刺角度批判印度的種性制度及階級文化，終至反省與肯定自我。本研究嘗試用後殖民文化視角對奈波爾(V.S. Naipaul)的《浮生》(*Half a Life*)進行分析研究，包括霍爾(Stuart Hall) 的不固定身分認同(unfixed identity)、克里夫(James Clifford)的旅行理論(traveling theory)、梅希(Doreen Massey)的地方概論(concept and definition of place)、巴巴(Homi Bhabha)的模仿(mimicry)、雜揉理論(hybridity)及第三空間概念(third space)等，希冀揭露主體/客體、自我/他者間之關係，並呈現其複雜的殖民困境、身分認同之斷裂、漂泊離散之不安與疏離感，進而勾勒出印裔英國人的文化屬性及主體建構。

關鍵詞：後殖民論述、文化重構、自我認同、格格不入

I. Introduction

Postcolonial discourse, like other minority discourses, is mainly about the location of culture. This newly emergent literary study describes an on-going process of identity loss and identity recovery for non-Westerners. In the domain of postcolonial literature, different ethnic groups, based on their different original cultural heritages, have their ethnic, cultural, and historical specificities ; hence, the condition of the dislocated and dispossessed is especially poignant and complicated because they cannot find a "home" of their own. Andrew Gurr argues that "deracination, exile and alienation in varying forms are the conditions of existence for the modern writer the world over. The basic response to such conditions is a search for identity, the quest for a home, through self-discovery or self-realization" (14). The slave colonies of the West Indian Islands exemplify this genre to which many displaced people belong. They have been uprooted from their native land to be transplanted into an alien environment which gives rise to their sense of homelessness, placelessness, alienation, and deracination." Lacking a sense of belonging, they may nonetheless be able to develop an inner urge to construct their subjectivity in order to confirm their own identity.

V. S. Naipaul himself experienced, and repeatedly described in his fiction, this particular urge. Throughout his life he has desired a place to identify with. From genealogical mining, especially in his homeland (the Caribbean), through the quest for his cultural roots (India), and finally to his place of education (England)—he has attempted to search for his own identity. Being an Indian by ancestry, a Trinidadian by birth, and an Englishman by education, V. S. Naipaul possesses a multi-cultural background. As a colonial, he has always needed to locate his place in the world through writing. Prolific and critical in both fiction and nonfiction, he presents colonial anxieties in his quest for self-identity. For him, travel is a way to understand oneself, to achieve self-knowledge. In *Finding the Center*, V. S. Naipaul particularly mentions the significance to him of traveling for self-understanding. He states that "[t]o travel was glamorous. But travel also made unsuspected demands on me as a man and a writer, and perhaps for that reason it soon became a necessary stimulus for me. It broadened my world view; it showed me a changing world and took me out of my own colonial shell; it became the substitute for the mature social experience – the deepening knowledge of a society – which my background and the nature of my life denied me…I learned to look in my own way" (11). Thus, his physical journey echoes his mental one, and his writing is a journey toward self-identification. As shown in *Half a Life*, the protagonist Willie, just like Naipaul, intends to search for his self-identity and construct his own subjectivity in the world via traveling. Willie initially departs from his hometown India to England in search of his own world at the adolescent age like Naipaul. After that, he goes through Africa and Germany in order to find his own place in the world. Eventually, he can courageously confront his identity loss and open up his new life in the future.

V.S. Naipaul has always constructed his subjectivity in terms of his unique postcolonial cultural perspective and through the sophisticated and subtle art of his fiction. He attained knighthood in 1990 and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2001. He delineates his process of writing by intuition in his 2001 Nobel Lecture entitled “Two Worlds”:

> I have trusted to intuition. I did it at the beginning. I do it even now. I have no idea how things might turn out, where in my writing I might go next. I have trusted to my intuition to find the subjects, and I have written intuitively. I have an idea when I start, I have a shape; but I will fully understand what I have written only after some years. (480)

Through his writing, Naipaul is able to rediscover a link between his unknown past and his present self-understanding: “I am the sum of my books. Each book, intuitively sensed and, in the case of fiction, intuitively worked out, stands on what has gone before, and grows out of it. I feel that at any stage of my literature career it could have been said that the last book contained all the others” (“Two Worlds” 480). His West Indian voice is heard from the margins through his writing. Similarly, Willie, like Naipaul, as a writer, realizes the connection between his unknown past and his present situation through his writing. Willie, in *Half a Life*, implicitly reflects Naipaul’s shadow.

The related themes of homelessness, alienation and dislocation are characteristic of Naipaul’s novels. Kenneth Ramchand suggests that *A House for Mr. Biswas* is a novel of “rootlessness par excellence” (92). Bruce MacDonald further expounds on the novel using “colonial psychoanalysis.” John Thieme penetratingly presents the colonial dislocation of Naipaul’s more complicated novel, *In a Free State*. Other critics including Andrew Gurr, Anthony Boxill, Robert Hamner, and Timothy F. Weiss also explicate the interrelated themes of Naipaul’s works. However, most critics deal with Naipaul’s sense of homelessness, focusing on his early writings, especially those works prior to *The Enigma of Arrival*. Naipaul’s philosophy of life significantly changed from negative to positive after the publication of this novel. *Half a Life*, can be regarded as the pinnacle of Naipaul’s career of more than four decades, leading Naipaul’s life of writing toward self-definition.

Naipaul indeed goes through a series of life-stages between homelessness and home, as so vividly portrayed in his fiction and nonfiction. In his early fiction, the Trinidad trilogy including *Miguel Street, The Mystic Masseur,* and *The Suffrage of Elvira*, the author wields irony in order to manifest the corruption and failure of Trinidad. He cannot bear the stifling atmosphere and must find a position in the world for himself. In *A House for Mr. Biswas* and *The Mimic Men*, Naipaul demonstrates the colonials’ predicament and their struggle for a place in the world stemming from their feeling of alienation, isolation, homelessness, rootlessness, and placelessness. He even lays bare the more complicated problems of dislocation faced by

the exile in *A Bend in the River* and *In a Free State*. However, in his later works such as *The Enigma of Arrival*, the author comes to adopt a more conciliatory stance and seems to accept that men, to a certain extent, must adapt themselves to new places. He seems to move toward a clearer feeling of place, of being at "home." I thus regard Naipaul's novelistic writing as a process of identity recovery undergoing a series of transformations: he denies or negates his Caribbean homeland, adopts a stage of mimicry in England, searches for his cultural roots in India, and finally reconstructs his identity out of his multi-cultural particularity and uniqueness. His writing career comes in four stages: (1) placelessness and alienation, (2) colonial predicament, (3) cultural heritage in India, and (4) writing for self-definition. By accepting his homelessness and statelessness, he (re)creates a new identity in exile. He makes a voice not only for himself but also for other marginalized people. Through writing, he translates his "cultural incommensurability" to the world and articulates the representation of his cultural particularity (Bhabha, "Culture's In-Between" 59).

V. S. Naipaul plays a significant role in the postcolonial writings. For him, identity is not given, but constructed and contingent. *Half a Life* records Naipaul's exiled life and manifests the ruptures among subjectivity, geography, and language toward multicultural and fluid identity. *Half a Life* also delineates Willie's constant exiled life from India, England, Africa, Germany toward affirming self-identity. This study aims to explore the construction of subjectivity and/or otherness, complexity of colonial predicament, rupture of identity definition, sense of alienation of diaspora, among other things, reflected in V. S. Naipaul's *Half a Life* through postcolonial cultural perspective. In this research, Stuart Hall's assertion of unfixed identity, Doreen Massey's concept and definition of place, James Clifford's traveling theory, Homi Bhabha's theories of mimicry, hybridity, and "third space," as the identity-making process will be applied to explain the identity-making process in V. S. Naipaul's *Half a Life*. Simultaneously, this study aims at isplaying Naipaul's heterogeneity of postcolonial writing in the process toward his self-definition.

V. S. Naipaul belongs to the marginalized people. He intends to make a voice for his ethnic identity from the margin to the center. Through *Half a Life*, he successfully makes the mapping for his ethnicity and discovers a position for himself toward self-identity and construction of subjectivity.

II. Post-colonial Discourse on Identity and Place

A number of cultural theorists have expounded on the fluid and unstable status of "culture." Stuart Hall speaks of unfixed identity, James Clifford's traveling theory, Doreen Massey of identity and place, Homi Bhabha of mimicry, hybridity, and "third space." All of these ideas can be applied to explain V. S. Naipaul's position of (both voluntary and involuntary) exile. Stuart Hall claims that identity makings are "never singular but multiple,

constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions" ("Who Needs Identity?" 4).

Travel also has a significant effect on one's concept of place and home. James Clifford speaks of the need to rethink cultures as sites for dwelling and traveling. He sometimes equates "travel" with "displacement." Travelers are comfortable with more than one culture, so the question is not "Where are you from?" but "Where are you between?" ("Traveling Cultures" 109). Travelers are affected by the sites they travel to; traveling and dwelling conjointly affect (and help to determine) one's identity. Even if he had a largely mono-ethnic, mono-cultural background, Naipaul would be regarded as a "citizen of the world" as a result of his excessive and constant traveling. Thus even in the more "normal" case culture and identity may be relatively moveable, changeable, unfixed entities. However, someone like Naipaul, with a complex and diverse ethnic and colonial background, needs a special kind of strength and resilience, a special ability to contain and manage his/her multiplicity of cultural identities. In addition, such people are especially likely to be not just travelers and tourists but immigrants and even refugees.

Naipaul also describes, in some works, the particular suffering and identity-confusion of immigrants. Aiming to assert "himself," to claim his identity and find his place in the world, then, Naipaul must articulate his multiple identities; eventually he is satisfied with the state of exile, of belonging nowhere and yet everywhere, although he undergoes a long period of solitude in his life.

In our "post-colonial" world, the concept of identity is linked to a local sense of place, and identity-creation shifts on account of the effect of colonialism and globalization. In terms of Doreen Massey's concept of identity and place, tying the traditional sense of place to one's original roots can offer a stable identity. Nevertheless, "the concept of place is not static but unstable" and "places are processes" (Massey 155). Massey says of the reproduction of place:

> Places do not have single, unique "identities"; they are full of internal conflicts […] [such as] conflict over what its past has been (the nature of its "heritage"), conflict over what should be its present development, conflict over what could be its future. None of this denies place nor the importance of the uniqueness of place. The specificity of place is continually reproduced. (155)

In an interview with Bernard Levin in 1983, Naipaul metaphorically explained his concept of multi-cultural identities: "I don't think any of us can claim that we come from one single, enclosed, tribal world. We are little, bombarded cells, aren't we? – many things occur to make us what we are, and we can surely live with all the things that make us" (98). Massey's theory

lends support to the observation that Naipaul, as a nomad, can live in different places, though he may not feel himself to be ever intrinsically “at home.”

In addition, Homi Bhabha’s concept of mimicry, hybridity, and the third space best sums up Naipaul’s colonial situation (or predicament), his ambivalence, his search for identity and the narrative strategy that emerges from it. At first “mimicry” was the method by which the British imperial power controlled and dominated the colonized people in the nineteenth century: the British rulers made the colonials “imitate” the culture and language of the colonizer (the British Empire); thus the ideology of the colonized was drastically changed, and became—as an inevitably “poor imitation” of the “original”— inferior to that of the colonizer. However, in the post-colonial era writers began to use mimicry as a counter strategy, “writing back” to the imperial power and negotiating their own position or place with respect to the mother country. In “imitating” the English language and even the form of the English novel, writers like Salmon Rushdie (and to a lesser degree also Naipaul) can of course also mock and parody various aspects of the “imperial” tongue and culture; they’ve learned so well from their “masters” that they now know how to make fun of what they have been taught, show its intrinsic weaknesses and absurdities. The process of mimicry thus creates a new entity through the difference between self and other.

The attitude of a colonial also determines whether the inevitable stage of mimicry can create obstacles or greater force in one’s search for self-identity. Consequently, Naipaul’s hybrid identities can never be wholly constructed “from the origin” because he needs to renew his powers of articulation. Although Naipaul was educated in the mother country, England, it still remained his second home. Even Trinidad was an alien land for him because he always felt slightly like a stranger. He could not authentically feel truly at home in any one place; therefore, all of his “homes” form his hybrid identities. He himself must creatively articulate his distinguishing cultural “features.” To Homi Bhabha, such hybridity is “the most common and effective form of subversive opposition” (Ashcroft 9); Robert Young says that Bhabha’s concept of hybridity has transformed Bakhtin’s intentional hybridity into “an active moment of challenge and resistance against a dominant cultural power” (23). The hybridity of colonial discourse reverses the dominant structures in the colonial situation. Thus, it deploys dialogue between the dominant and the subordinate, forming (in Bakhtin’s terms) a “double-voiced talk.”

Bhabha further employs the concept of “the third space” to explicate the concept and the goal of hybridity. Speaking from a colonial standpoint, he elaborates on “the third space” as a strategy for opening up the possible space of cultural discourse by transcending cultural hegemony and crossing over its historical boundaries. Bhabha sees the key problems of cultural diversity as tied to the initial “norm given by the host society or dominant culture,”

and to a multiculturalism based on racism (*Identity* 208). Therefore he tries to look for the "productive space of the construction of culture as difference, in spite of alterity or otherness," to show that different cultures have their own unique characteristics and that they are incommensurable (*Identity* 209). Bhabha introduces the notion of "cultural translation" as a way of negotiation between two cultures. This translation is a way of imitating an original which can be "simulated, copied, transferred, transformed, made into a simulacrum" (*Identity* 210). Translation is the passage between the original and the simulacrum. Thus the original is always being created again and again, just like the simulacrum itself. Cultural translation "opens up the possibility of articulating *different*, even incommensurable cultural practices and priorities" (*Identity* 210-11). The so-called "third space" is thus produced in the process of translation, and negotiation can become a form of aggressive subversion and aggression through which a new site is established. Identity can then be produced as a new site through the process of hybridization. Bhabha insists that a "cultural and political identity is constructed through a process of othering" because the history of containment is now overcome and minority discourse emerges (*Identity* 219). Hence, the dialogue between cultures "beyond Orientalism" (Said) erases the misrepresentation or mere imagination of a given culture. Bhabha also speaks of the responsibility of intellectuals. He thinks that intellectuals (like Naipaul) should "intervene in particular struggles, in particular situations of political negotiation" (219). In other words, they are in a position of opposition from which to examine cultural politics: thus Naipaul, as an intellectual with his own cultural particularity and position, can and should speak for the marginalized. Bhabha also claims that the colonial is neither "the colonialist Self nor the colonized Other but the disturbing distance in-between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness" (*The Location of Culture* 45). Bhabha's theory of in-between borderlines challenges the traditional concept of "place." Naipaul then turns his sense of alienation into a powerful capacity to feel at home in any place.

The cultural critic Andrew Gurr argues that a definition of home can be derived from the relationship between the exile and his writing in the modern world; that is, the displaced exile may obtain his/her identity primarily through his/her writing. As Breyten Breytenbach points out, "To be in exile is to be free to imagine or to dream a past and the future of that past. To be an exile is to be written" (69). Naipaul, as an exiled writer, can create his own place through traveling and writing. This "in-between" space provides him with a broader imaginative and creative space. The space of the "in-between" also gives the exile, the immigrant, the migrant, the colonial to have more chance to choose possibilities from their multi-cultural background. It goes without saying that their identity will not be fixed, won't be defined by the past. The exile of the twenty-first century inevitably negotiates between spaces as between cultures; he negotiates and makes or finds a temporary "place" for himself between cultural spaces. And writing is a very potent way of performing such a negotiation. Also, writing, as reflected in *Half a Life*, for Willie, offers a way to create and construct his racial subjectivity; meanwhile,

provides him with the opportunity to re(in)trospect his past history so as to understand more about his cultural heritage.

III. An Analysis on *Half a Life*

In 2001, Naipaul published *Half a Life* in which he accentuates the issue of the chronically dispossessed, the characteristics of the permanent exile. We see in this novel that Naipaul still feels like an outsider, though the ending leaves a ray of hope for readers. *Half a Life* is a *tour de force* and can be regarded as the culmination of Naipaul's career of more than four decades because the novel includes almost all of Naipaul's thematic concerns; simultaneously, it is a melting pot which mixes Naipaul's main concerns with key issues of the colonial and post-colonial worlds, especially the problems of man's loss, placelessness, isolation, and alienation. The masterpiece delineates Willie Somerset Chandran's search for self-development and self-knowledge. Naipaul masterfully manipulates the protagonist Willie Somerset Chandran's colonial predicament, his anxiety and dislocation in this novel.

Half Brahmin and half Untouchable, Willie was born in India in the 1930s. He is stuck in the conflict between his father from Brahmin family and his mother from untouchable class. He despises his father's ridiculous opinion to fulfill "a life of sacrifice" by getting married with his mother from a low-class family because his father leads the so-called sacrifice life out of his hypocrisy (*Half a Life* 36). He couldn't accept the Brahmanism and racism. Nevertheless, he falls into the racial loss after departing from India to England in order to construct his own subjectivity. The novel begins with the words, "Willie Chandran asked his father one day, 'Why is my middle name Somerset? The boys at school have just found out, and they are mocking me'" (*Half a Life* 1). From Willie's father's story, Willie understands his family history, culture, heritage and roots. However, he couldn't accept that his second name is named after the famous English writer Somerset Maugham, who visited Willie's town in the years before Independence since he thinks that he should be named after his family. Willie thus possesses only "half a name." The novel seems to reveal Willie's father's intention that his son "mimic" the whites, since he gave him half of a white man's name. Willie can clearly see the gap between the colonial's mimicry of the colonizer and his desire to construct himself in a chaotic world. He is aware of the paradoxical nature of his mimicry. However, he becomes a "mimic man," the person people expect him to be, just like Ralph Singh in *The Mimic Men.* As a matter of fact, the Western name is hollow because he cannot possess a Western identity simply by possessing a western name. In contrast, identifying with the Western name and dismantling his Indian name symbolizes the loss of his original culture. He is still excluded in and from "Western space" though his father intends to "bleach" him via giving him a half-whitened name.

In the novel, Naipaul presents characters who are products of a racial and cultural mix

and shows how they struggle to find their identity in the multi-cultural society they live in. In general, these characters tend to deny one or more racial characteristics in order to become "more respectable," in their estimation. However, they eventually discover that their identity cannot be fixed because they are the fruits of multiple cultures. All through the novel, Willie is drifting without a solid and fixed identity. His identity is multiple, unfixed, and changing, just like the concept of identity expounded upon by Stuart Hall, James Clifford, Doreen Massey, and Homi Bhabha, etc. He cannot try to achieve one fixed identity because of his multi-background. The novel has three settings: first there is post-independence India, then London, and finally pre-independence Africa. All three are places that Naipaul can identify with. However, the three locations seem to signify different meanings in the novel. India and Africa are "inexact and vague," while the representation of London "with street names and other markers" is clearer; thus, Meenakshi Mukherjee contends that "for Naipaul, England is situated at a different level of reality, firm and stable, while other regions can be relegated to haziness" (4). In the narrative Willie's preconceived notion is proved false. Like Naipaul, Willie initially thinks of London as a "solid" place; however, he senses that he is still in limbo as a marginalized wanderer in the big city. This situation is just like Ralph Singh's experience in *The Mimic Men*. Such dispossessed people as the colonial, the exile, the immigrant, the marginal, and the uprooted must confront their being in an indefinite state of suspension. Caught up in this limbo, Willie the Indian immigrant loses not only his native cultural heritage but also his sense of place. He identifies neither with his homeland, an old world, nor with the new world he desires. In the 1950s, Willie moves to London and drifts into bohemian circles; feeling lost, he half-heartedly faces his English education at school:

> The learning he was being given was like the food he was eating, without savour. The two were inseparable in his mind. And just as he ate without pleasure, so, with a kind of blindness, he did what the lecturers and tutors asked of him, read the books and articles and did the essays. He was unanchored, with no idea of what lay ahead. (*Half a Life* 58)

Worst of all, Willie cannot face his real ancestral history, his true genealogy. He employs his imagination to shape a make-believe identity and tries to live behind its mask:

> […] [H]e adapted certain things he had read, and he spoke of his mother as belonging to an ancient Christian community of the subcontinent, a community almost as old as Christianity itself. He kept his father as a Brahmin. He made his father's father a 'courtier.' So playing with words, he began to re-make himself. It excited him and began to give him a feeling of power. (*Half a Life* 61)

Likewise, Percy Cato, "a Jamaican of mixed parentage [who] was more brown than

black," falsely fabricates his family history (*Half a Life* 61). He is in reality Willie's shadow. He misleads Willie to believe that his father is a clerk in Panama; in fact, his father went there "as a labourer" (*Half a Life* 62). Willie and Percy's fictional recreations only seem to end up cheating themselves; they are an escape from an unbearable reality. Their make-believe identities are their performances. The creation of identity here has doubled meanings. Apparently, Willie seems to forsake his Indian tradition and family history. It is his loss of cultural heritage. Even so, when he looks back on his life, he will understand his loss of cultural heritage at the stage of being in London. On the other hand, his performance of creating identity displays Homi Bhabha's so-called "the third space." He constructs his own subjectivity in London by learning to create his identity. The content of the third space is what Bhabha called "hybridity," through which other, non-Western-centric positions may emerge to articulate and set up "new structures of authority, new political initiatives" (*Identity* 211). The process of hybridity thus produces "something different, something new, and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (*Identity* 211).

In England, Willie is continually drifting: "[h]e was unanchored, with no idea of what lay ahead. He still had no idea of the scale of things, no idea of historical time or even of distance" (*Half a Life* 58). He intends to discover his own identity. Finally, he apprehends that the construction of subjectivity can be created freely: "Willie began to understand that he was free to present himself as he wished. He could, as it were, write his own revolution. The possibilities were dizzying. He could, within reason, re-make himself and his past and his ancestry" (*Half a Life* 60). This is just like Stuart Hall's assertion: the process of identity making is unstable; it can even be created. Similarly, Willie's identity is "in-between," subject to "change." In terms of Stuart Hall's theory, identity-formation is not a static "being," but a dynamic "becoming." Stuart Hall states:

> The processes of forced and "free" migration […] have become a global phenomenon of the so-called "post-colonial" world. Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not "who we are" or "where we came from," so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves: not the so-called return to roots but a coming-to-terms-with our "routes." ("Who Needs Identity?" 4)

Indeed, to some degree it is true for Willie, in this increasingly complex, culturally diverse and ambiguous world, that his identity has become a condition that is not given but that he must continually negotiate anew, construct or create afresh. Thus, Willie may construct

non-one identities and “the identities of places are inevitably unfixed” (Massey 169).

Failing to obtain a concrete place of his own in London, Willie doesn’t know where he is going. He can “only go back to India, and he [doesn’t] want that” (*Half a Life* 121). The cultural identities focus on searching for a new route and creating new meanings in the flow. Just like James Clifford’s assertion on travel, Willie must undergo the journey of traveling toward his self-identity. Willie decides to go to Africa with Ana, the first woman who has admired his writing. Later he marries Ana, who is of mixed Portuguese-African descent. Willie follows her to her inherited estate in one of Portugal’s East African outposts in an attempt to make a new beginning. He intends to construct his own identity. In his wife’s home country the colonial system is gradually breaking down. Willie remains a stranger and outsider in this country, just as in India and London; indeed, now he suffers an even greater sense of alienation. Readers know only that Willie has arrived “at a little low built concrete town” and that he does not want to stay here long: “I don’t know where I am. I don’t think I can pick my way back. I don’t ever want this view to become familiar. I must not unpack. I must never behave as though I am staying” (*Half a Life* 135). In Africa, then, Willie does not have a sense of belonging. He feels he is “nowhere.” Ironically, he stays here for eighteen years. In search of a place for himself, he has gone to Africa, but he becomes lost. In London, at least, he was a writer known as Willie Chandran, but in Africa he becomes merely “Ana’s London man” (145). He is unable to find a place for himself in Africa; worse, he loses his autonomy. He goes nowhere. He becomes nothing. His only consolation is that he ironically discovers an affinity with “half-and-half friends” (162) in this “half-and-half world” (*Half a Life* 160). These friends regard themselves as “the second rank” (*Half a Life* 160) including Correias, Ricardo and Luis (the estate manager of Carla Correia) and his wife Grace. Willie portrays Correias’s plight:

> To destroy a Portuguese like himself would have been to break caste, according to the code of the colony, and to become disreputable. There was no trouble at all in throwing a man of the second rank into darkness, someone from the half-and-half world, educated and respectable and striving, unusually knowledgeable about money, and ready for many reasons to do whatever he might be required to do. (*Half a Life* 174)

The exiled people share Willie’s sense of loss, disorientation, and dereliction. Willie sees his own shadow in his half-and-half friends. Through their images of reflection, he gets epiphany to understand that, by employing the perspective of the “other,” he becomes even more trapped.

Furthermore, immigrants develop a sense of not-belonging in a new and alien world on account of the loss of their native language. In his Nobel lecture, Naipaul recalls what it felt

like to lose his original language due to migration:

> The world outside existed in a kind of darkness; and we inquired about nothing. I was just old enough to have some idea of the Indian epics, the Ramayana in particular. The children who came five years or so after me in our extended family didn't have this luck. No one taught us Hindi. Sometimes someone wrote out the alphabet for us to learn, and that was that; we were expected to do the rest ourselves. So, as English penetrated, we began to lose our language. ("Two Worlds" 483)

Language articulates a man's identity. Losing one's original language entails the loss of one's original culture and indigenous identity. From India through London to Africa, Willie is constantly drifting from one place to another, and losing his native language. Educated in London, he handles English very well. He becomes a writer in London and achieves a certain public status. Yet in Africa he is forced to communicate in another language. He is confused about this linguistic shift during his journey from Southampton to Ana's African country:

> He thought about the new language he would have to learn. He wondered whether he would be able to hold on to his own language. He wondered whether he would forget his English […]. Willie was trying to deal with the knowledge that had come to him on the ship that his home language had almost gone, that his English was going, that he had no proper language left, no gift of expression. (*Half a Life* 132)

It is quite ironic that English, the language Willie loses, is his "proper language" as a writer in London, since he once was seen there as "a subversive new voice from the subcontinent" (*Half a Life* 122). When a writer loses the language he is used to writing in, he is truly silenced and deprived of his power. To Ana, English is a very important language because a man can "expand his knowledge" through it. She states why she is learning English:

> I wanted to break out of the Portuguese language. I feel it was what had made my grandfather such a limited man. He had no true idea of the world. All he could think of was Portugal and Portuguese Africa and Goa and Brazil. In his mind, because of the Portuguese language, all the rest of the world had been strained away. And I didn't want to learn South African English, which is what people learn here. I wanted to learn English English. (*Half a Life* 154-55)

Here we see the significance of English as a universal language, since this means it is also the "language of the diaspora"; this imperial language, as *lingua franca*, is we might say a

necessary evil. Identifying with the imperial language, as in a sense he is forced to do, means man's assimilation to the empire. The preservation of one's original language, one's mother tongue while learning the imperial language is the most important task for immigrants, migrants, colonial subjects. Willie doesn't want to follow his father's way of life to lead a life of sacrifice with hypocrisy. At his adolescence, Willie intends to master English fabricating his ancestral and cultural history. With the power of English usage, Willie can write back to the imperial power and create his own position of place in the future, just like Bhabha's theory of mimicry.

After staying in Africa for one year, Willie witnesses his "half-and-half friends" who intend to bleach their identities:

> But then after a year or so I began to understand – and I was helped in this understanding by my own background – that the world I had entered was only a half-and-half world, that many of the people who were our friends considered themselves, deep down, people of the second rank. They were not fully Portuguese, and that was where their own ambition lay. (*Half a Life* 160-61)

Through his objective observation, he consciously understands that he shares the homogenous cultural heritage and loss with them. Originally, he intended to bleach his family history and cultural roots; however, Willie discovers his loss of his precious cultural background when he looks back on his journey from India, England and then to Africa. Thus, he finds his cultural heritage and desires to construct his subjectivity. Finally, he decides to end his wandering time and escape days.

Having lived half a life in Africa for eighteen years, then, Willie consciously senses his "loss" in this new land, especially after slipping "on the front steps of the estate house"(*Half a Life* 135). At this moment he has an epiphany: living with Ana in Africa only mirrors for him (in her) the intrinsic limitations of his half-life. This self-realization forces him to get back the time he has wasted. Therefore he decides to leave Ana in the hope of discovering his own true identity:

> "I mean I've given you eighteen years. I can't give you any more. I can't live your life any more. I want to live my own."
> "It was your idea, Willie. And if you leave, where will you go?"
> "I don't know. But I must stop living your life here." (*Half a Life* 136)

He makes a decision to courageously face any possible challenge in the future. After leaving away from Africa, Willie goes to Germany where his sister lives. He sees Tamil boys who raise "funds for the great Tamil war" on the street:

> They were of another generation, but Willie saw himself in them. He thought, "That was how I appeared in London. That is how I appear now. I am not as alone as I thought" Then he thought, "But I am wrong. I am not like them. I am forty-one, in middle life. They are fifteen or twenty years younger, and the world has changed. They have proclaimed who they are and they are risking everything for it. I have been hiding from myself. I have risked nothing. And now the best part of my life is over." (*Half a Life*138)

Willie deeply realizes that he must seize the time to construct his subjectivity because he has spent too much time leading a life of escapism.

Willie is looking forward to starting anew with the future half of his life. The rest of his story is left open: Naipaul leaves an imaginative space for his readers. Willie will continue to search for his identity and a place of his own in the world. In the process of constructing subjectivity, Willie confronts the sense of placelessness and discovers that he can't create a fixed identity. He therefore comprehends that identity is not stable but created in the process making just like the assertion of the postcolonial discourse. He learns to accept the cultural significance of "unhomely" asserted by Homi Bhabha:

> …To be unhomed is not be homeless, nor can the "unhomely" be easily accommodated in the familiar division of social life into private and the public spheres…In the stirrings of the unhomely, another world becomes visible. It has less to do with forcible eviction and more to do with the uncanny literary and social effects of enforced social accommodation, or historical migrations and cultural relocations. The home does not remain the domain of domestic life, nor does the world simply become its social or historical counterpart. The unhomely is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world. ("The world and the home" 141)

Willie will obtain broader and more multiple perspectives to examine his life. His identity making will continually in process. The life of culture exists in the continuous boundary crossing and represents the self-identity through the way of hybridity. Only through the hybridity, can Willie find his own way to make a whole new, hybridized, and multiple construction of subjectivity. Finally, Willie will recreate a new sense of place, and thus of self, through a profound acceptance and "working through" of his own position as a permanent exile, so will Naipaul.

IV. Conclusions

The autobiographical writing, *Half a Life* presents a more optimistic attitude toward the

future than the previous ones: when a man can candidly face the dilemma of his own situation in life, he will fear nothing. Significantly, Naipaul empowers himself through his writing. Like his father before him, he is seeking his own home in the world; he constructs a home for himself through his creative writing. He constructs his own subjectivity via the powerful writing. Breytenbach discusses the relationship between writing and identity: "The individual creative act is certainly an attempt to make consciousness. This implies drawing upon memory. Memory, whether apocryphal or not, provides the feeding ground or the requisite space allowing for the outlining of imagination." (68).

Through the "geographical imagination" of his writing, Naipaul creates a home for himself. He makes an effort to resist the sense of insecurity and of uncertainty. Willie in *Half a Life* decides to start a new life, no longer desiring to live under Ana's protection. He rethinks his life and decides to face challenges of the future without attempting to escape or withdraw. Willie remarkably rebuilds his identity and finds the placeslessness as a kind of placeness. He is caught in in-betweenness. Also, he must enjoy the third space. Naipaul, as an exiled writer, is caught in-between: writing between home and homelessness, he takes advantage of being an exile to create his own space, his own home, one which is simultaneously nowhere and everywhere. This is just like Timothy Weiss's critique on Naipaul's works:

To be on the margins is to be part of yet not part of; in the self's encounter with others, the exile can live a "double exteriority" for he or she belongs to two cultures without identifying wholly with either. The exile can engage in a cross-cultural dialogue and through that dialogue can affirm both his uniqueness and the interrelationship between himself and others. (13)

Thus, in terms of postcolonial perspectives, Willie in *Half a Life* just like Naipaul himself, has the unfixed identity in the construction of subjectivity though he must experience the ruptures among subjectivity, geography, and language toward multicultural and fluid identity.

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