

Integration Strategies and New Identities in V.S Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* and Caryl Phillips's *Cambridge*

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Abstract: *This paper investigates characters' quest for integration into the British society as presented in V.S Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* and Caryl Phillips's *Cambridge*. It equally seeks to examine the new identities which the West Indians and some Africans develop in the course of this integration. The hurdles of integration were one of the major problems that immigrants faced on their arrivals in major cities in the Western World, especially Britain. Most migrants overcame this barrier by abandoning their cultural identities in favour of the host's identity. The researchers approach the texts under study with qualitative method as well as the Post-Colonial theory to illustrate that immigrant' quests for integration expose them to new cultures. This study tentatively concludes that the quest for integration is the genesis of multicultural identities and cultural transformation in the Western World.*

Key words: *Integration, Culture, New Identity and Post-Colonialism*

I. Introduction

Slavery and the slave trade mark the beginning of the transportation of Africans in larger numbers across the Atlantic Ocean. Most of these African immigrants settled in plantation farms across the Caribbean islands. Their longevity in these islands made them lost their ancestral roots and became Caribbeans. Ralph R. Premdas in "Identity, Ethnicity, and the Caribbean Homeland in an era of Globalization" concedes that, "the Caribbean, however and wherever we choose to locate its boundaries, is usually visualized as an area populated by a diverse polyglot of peoples. There are whites, blacks, browns, yellows, reds, and an assortment of shades in between" (815). This explains that Africans became part of people who are today referred to as the Caribbeans or black West Indians as a result of their settlement in that area.

Windrush Generation is used to refer to People arriving in Britain especially in London between 1948 and 1971 from the West Indian countries. These immigrants boarded a ship, which have been labelled the Windrush Generation. This labelling was in reference to the ship MV Empire, which brought workers from Jamaica, Trinidad, Tobago and other islands, to help fill the post Second World War UK labour shortages. Phillips Mike, Charlie Phillips and Trevor Philips in a news article entitled "Windrush-the Passengers" concede that, "If it hadn't been for the Second World War, the Windrush and her passengers might not have made the voyage at all. During the war, thousands of Caribbean men and women had been recruited to serve in the armed forces" (1). In the same line of thought, Flavia Loscialpo in "I Am an Immigrant": (sic) Fashion, Immigration and Borders in the Contemporary Trans-global Landscape" acknowledges that, "After WWII, the immigration boom from Commonwealth countries, encouraged as a response to post-war labor shortages in the UK" (27). These two articles lay emphasis on the fact that the Second World War orchestrated the perilous voyage to Britain after the Great War.

The aftermath of the war saw most cities in Britain in disarray and British citizens could not indemnify the city from the damage. So, the British government through the leadership of Winston Churchill, instructed British Dockers to bring in immigrants from the British Empire of the West Indian to help in the reconstruction of the British society.

Most West Indians who thought of Indians as their homeland were overwhelmed by the news to travel to Britain on board MV Empire, the reason being that they were going to reconstruct their 'motherland'. This thus ignites the origin of the name the Windrush. Explicitly, 70 percent of the Caribbean youths desperately took part in this journey. Bill Schwarz in "Crossing the Seas" reveals that:

There exists a moving photographic record of West Indian emigrants arriving in British cities in the 1950s, first by steamship and steam train, then later, by the end of the decade and into the 1960s, by plane. We still see, in our own times, these images of men and women who, for all their apprehensions, were stepping across the threshold into new lives, bringing with them a certain *presence*. These are images which evoke a sense of

hardships in the past overcome and hardships just around the corner yet to confront. They give the form to the dreams which had compelled a generation of migrants to pack and cross the seas. And they capture too a sensibility founded on the conviction that these dreams were rightfully theirs: a dream, in other words, of colonials who believed that the privileges of the empire were their due...The images which fix this history as social memory are images of the West Indians. (1)

Schwarz in the foregoing submission upholds that the influx of West Indians who were seen in varied anchors of English shores in the 1950s had the conviction that they were going to help develop their motherland. In fact, he further claims that more than 70 percent of West Indian's average youths were involved in this journey. This is explicit as he notes that, "We still see, in our own times, these images of men and women who...give the form to the dreams which had compelled a generation of migrants to pack and cross the seas" (1).

However, the British society that the West Indians studied in subjects like Geography, History and Literature as illustrated in Phillips's *The Final Passage* (140-141) and Naipaul's *Half a Life* (10-12), was different from the one they met on their arrival in Britain. This marks the beginning of regrets and trauma. Sharon Catherine Sewell relatively relates this in *Culture and Decolonization in the British West Indies Literature and Politics, 1930-1980* as she points out that, "Residents of the British Caribbean colonies always considered themselves British. When they arrived in England in great numbers to find work or pursue careers after World War II, they discovered that the British viewed them as foreigners" (2). Sewell in this statement approves the illusive experiences that most West Indians faced in England.

The traumatic situation which Indians in the Britain found themselves in affected their social life. Talking about the social life, after the reconstruction of the British society, most of them decided to settle in Britain. Unfortunately, some of the British citizens were against the idea. In a bid to make life difficult for the Indians, the British resolved not to rent their houses to them or have them settled in their neighbourhood. Phillips again illustrates this segregated behaviour towards immigrants in *The Final Passage* as he uses Leila and other immigrants to declare that, "They walked along this empty road looking up to their left for signs, but the first three they saw gave Leila an idea as to what to expect 'No coloured', no vacancies', no children" (155-156). This proves that British citizens do not want immigrants in their neighbourhoods. Hence, this explains why immigrants settled either in slums in most British cities especially London. Sewell further interprets immigrants' disillusionment in London thus:

In London they are forced to deal with their individual problems; the united group dissolves. The poorer West Indians live a shabby, depressing existence. Even the middle-class immigrants, who can afford comfortably, are disillusioned by the experience of being outsiders. (188)

This foregoing excerpt illustrates the severe hardship that the West Indian immigrants went through in London. It also lays emphasis on the fact that the British government did keep to her promises to her erstwhile subjects. Loscialpo concedes that, "Members of the Windrush generation...despite having legally settled and built their lives in the UK, have recently been targeted by the government "hostile environmental" policies" (17). Hence, the British government contributed adversely to the detriment of West Indians in Britain.

he inherited affliction followed even those West Indians who went to Britain when most countries in the Caribbean islands had achieved their sociocultural independence from Britain. That is, when most Caribbean nations that consisted the British Empire in the islands achieved their independence, Caribbean who continued to pay reverence to Britain as the motherland embarked on a journey to Britain with the idea to settle there. They met a Britain which was adamant to change and the affliction that was meted on their predecessors followed them too.

Despite the hurdles of integrations, some of these Caribbeans still managed to settle in London. When they discovered that they were considered *Persona non grata* in most British cities in the aftermath of the reconstruction of the cities, they crafted means, which they thought would pacify their stay in the cities. Although these means actually worked to their favour, it later contributed to the development of new cultures and identities on their original identity. V.S Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* and Phillips's *Cambridge* dwell much on this and many more. Postcolonial theory guides the interpretation and the analysis of this research as it exposes the cultural legacy of imperialism while focusing on the consequences of the control and exploitation of the colonised. The West Indians who worked so hard to reconstruct the British society after the First and the Second World War were denied the British citizenship. Although, these immigrants developed schemes, which permitted them to integrate into the British society, they also exposed them to new cultural identities. What are the strategies that the West Indians adopted in order to be integrated into the British Society? How did the West Indians become transformed in the course of their integration?

The objective of this study is to make people realise that no matter what they do in order to develop a foreign land, they will never be considered as citizens of that land. Hence, while they develop the foreign land, they should also think about their own land, which needs to be developed as well. Therefore, this study is a wake up

all to the West Indians who are in the British society, to think about their island rather than continue to seek integration into the society, which barely recognises their values.

This study evolves on the hypothesis that V.S Naipaul and Caryl Phillips's *The Mimic Men* and *Cambridge*, respectively present characters that were taken from the Caribbean islands to reconstruct the British society but after the reconstruction, they were denied access into the British society. However, they created patterns of integration strategies which rather transform their cultural identities and exposed them to new identities.

II. Strategies of Integration

Strategies of integration refer to the various means through which immigrants' seek integrations into the British society. These strategies illustrate that, sometimes, West Indians immigrant pretence and or let go their social status just so to create a space for themselves in Britain. This section takes into consideration concepts of Post-colonialism such as hybridity, hegemony and mimicry.

West Indian Immigrants' livelihood in London during the cold war was unbearable and unpredictable. However, things became favourable for them after the war because a workforce was needed to rebuild major cities in Britain. Hence, those who immigrated to Britain purposely to help construct the cities were entitled to the best treatment and accommodations. In fact, the treatment that British citizens gave this second wave of immigrants was different as compared with those that fought to liberate Britain during the First World War. This subtle act of acceptance is in line with the concept of hegemony. In *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin assert that that term hegemony, "is useful for describing the success of imperial power over a colonized people ... often couched in terms of social order, stability and advancement, all of which are defined by the colonizing power" (107). Thus, the decision to uplift racial segregation on immigrants was because the British authorities knew that their presence was indispensable for the reconstruction of major cities in Britain.

Patently, Kripalsingh, the microcosm of the second wave of immigrants in Britain, attest in *The Mimic Men* that "When I first came to London, shortly after the end of the war. I found myself after a few days in a boarding-house, called a private hotel, in the Kensington High Street area" (7). It is surprising that Kripalsingh is not only hosted in one of the prestigious part of London, he is hosted in a private hotel. This explains why, alluding to the aftermath of the war and the influx of immigrants from the West Indian, Phillips declares in *A Distant Shore* that, "England has changed. These days it's difficult to tell who's from here and who's not. Who belongs and who's a stranger" (1). This statement from Phillips indicates that England has begun to accept and accommodate immigrants unlike it was the case just after the First World War.

Kripalsingh develops utmost self-composure to be fully integrated in London. Although Londoners, following changes that have occurred, are beginning to accept immigrants into their neighbourhoods, these immigrants have to create self-esteem which is suitable to that of the Londoners. Kripalsingh asserts that, "I was not used to the social modes of London or to the physiognomy and complexions of the North, and I thought Mr Shylock looked distinguished like a lawyer or businessman or politician. He had the habit of stroking the lobe of his ear...I copied it" (7). This falls in line with the concept of mimicry in Postcolonial studies. Bruce King in *V.S Naipaul* aligns that, "In *An Area of Darkness* Naipaul often uses words like mimic and mimicry to suggest imitation or copying of American or European civilization" (67). Therefore, mimicry is one of the many themes in Naipaul's literary works.

Kripalsingh, the erstwhile politician in his homeland, degrades his social status in order to create a space for himself in the London society. It is a phenomenal act for every West Indian, who immigrates to England to lower their social status in order to integrate the English society. The immigrants adopted the tactic because they are conscious of racial segregation and class distinction in the British society. This explains why some very prominent West Indians demeaned their social status, which they achieved through hard labour while at home, in order to be integrated in the British society. This is evident in *The Mimic Men* as Kripalsingh notes that, "There are many of us around living modestly and without recognition in small semi-detached suburban houses... The pacific society has its cruelties. Once a man is stripped off of his dignities he is required, not to die or run away, but to find his level" (11). Naipaul through Kripalsingh's statement excavates a phenomenon of assimilation which West Indian communities in the diaspora are exposed to. This fits squarely with the concept of integration, which according to Rinus Pennix and Blanca Garcés-Mascareñas, in "The Concept of Integration as an Analytical Tool and as a Policy Concept" associate this fact with integration as they elaborately define integration thus:

The term integration refers to the process of settlement, interaction with the host society, and social change that follows immigration. From the moment immigrants arrive in a host society, they must "secure a place" for

themselves. Seeking a place for themselves is a very literary task: Migrants must find a home, a job and income, schools for children, and access to health facilities. They must find a place in a social and cultural sense as well, as they have to establish cooperation and interaction with other individuals and groups, get to know and use institutions of the host society, and become recognized and accepted in their cultural specificity...The host society does not remain unaffected. The size and composition of the population change, and new institutional arrangements come into existence to accommodate immigrants' political, social, and cultural needs. (11)

In the preceding passage, Pennix and Garcés-Mascareñas expatiate on the concept of integration. In their lucid explanation of the concept, we realise that not only immigrants conceive new ideas and new identities, the host society equally witness some changes. That is, the host population increases and new laws as well are put in place to accommodate these immigrants. Thus, the political, social and cultural institutions of the host society are bound to change too.

The change from native names to British names is another measure through which the West Indians are integrated into the British society. Olumide's name is replaced with series of English names such as Henderson, Thomas and Cambridge. These names play huge roles for his integration into the British society. When Olumide is captured in an unnamed village in Africa, he is given Thomas after his master's name. The master gives him the name as a licence through which he uses to be integrated into the British society. This is because the name Olumide has no affiliation with the British nomenclature and whoever bears such a name is not welcomed into the British society. Evidently, Olumide declares in *Cambridge* that, "On the dark subject of my name [my master] was unable to assist, and the will of my captain prevailed. [Hence, my name was] No longer Olumide, but Thomas" (140). The name Olumide is clouded with smudges of dark spot as it is not an English name. It is obvious that Olumide could not have entered the British society with a name, which is considered cloudy and senseless by some British. Otto Hieronymi in "Identity, Integration and Assimilation: Factors of Success and Failure of Migration" describes this process as assimilation. He presents this thus:

Assimilation means that the newcomers are welcome to become full members of their host community. Their foreign origin will fade – it may remain a fond or dark memory –and will not affect their place in the community that will turn from "host community" to their "own community". This is the true sense of "melting pot" of countries of immigration. (137)

Contextually, the replacement of Olumide's name gives him the visa to become a British. Thus, the excerpt above illustrates that for an Indian or black immigrant to settle in British, they need to negotiate for social integration. This is often done with replacement of name.

Some West Indians engage themselves into skin bleaching to become British citizens by colour affiliation. Christopher A. D. Charles in "Skin Bleaching and the Prestige Complexion of Sexual Attraction" concedes that, "European culture became synonymous with civilization in the minds of some Blacks. These Blacks believe that they will gain social acceptance by attaining whiteness" (379) and for them to attain whiteness, they resort to skin bleaching.

After bearing the name Thomas for a considerable length of time, Olumide realises that it does not serve the considerable purpose. He then pleads with his master to allow him becomes a Christian and as a Christian, he is named Henderson. This logical presentation of Olumide's traits of life is vivid in *Cambridge* as he notes that, "I begged my master for full and proper instruction in Christian knowledge so that I might be received into church fellowship with both experience of the Bible and a conviction of belief" (143).

As hinted already, the English society after the First and Second World War was controlled by the church and anyone who wanted to integrate it needed to be converted into Christianity. It is on this backdrop that Olumide pleaded with his master to allow him become a Christian.

Olumide's knowledge of the British culture gives him integration permit into the British society. When Olumide studies the Bible and becomes a preacher, he is sent to Africa to preach the word of God to his fellow brothers. Unfortunately, he is captured on his way and taken to the West Indies, where slavery is still practiced but for him to survive in this second captivity, he decides to exhibit his mastery of the English culture. This is explicit as he acknowledges in *Cambridge* that, "I faced these white men, with more knowledge of their country than they could possibly imagine, believing that through hard work and faith in the Lord God Almighty, my bondage will soon cease" (157). Phillips in this quote from Olumide declares that when immigrants master the English culture, they are automatically integrated into the English society.

III. Cultural Transformation and New identity

Immigrants' integration into the British society culminates in the suppressions of their original culture and the transformation of the cultural identity, which results to the creation of a new culture.

Kripalsingh, the protagonist in *The Mimic Men* highlights the process of cultural transformation as he refuses to go back to his homeland on the ground that he has been forgotten by his people back home. He declares his fate thus, "I know that return to my island, and to my political life is impossible. The pace of colonial events is quick, the turnover of leaders rapid. I have already been forgotten; and I know that people who supplanted me are themselves about to be supplanted" (10). Kripalsingh is worried that lot of things have changed in his political career and that he will not be noticed or welcomed as a political hero in his homeland. This is certainly because he drops down his social status in order to secure a place for himself in the British society. Evidently, Kripalsingh asserts in *The Mimic Men* that, "Once a man is stripped off of his dignities, he is required, not to die or run away, but to find his level" (11). This statement suggests that Kripalsingh got transformed in the course of his integration into the British society.

Kripalsingh flickers an achiever's identity in order to stay in London. Caroline Oliver and Ben Gidley elucidates on the domain of integration in an article entitled "Integration of Migrants in Europe" as she concedes that, "Achievement and access across a variety of sectors is both a 'means' to integration as well as a marker" (3). This statement shows that achievement is the basis of identity marker as well as a means to achieve integration in Britain. Kripalsingh is from a poor background in Isabella but needs to be cautious and lucid in order to create a place for himself in London. This explains why he points out that:

I was the dandy, the extravagant colonial, indifferent to scholarship. In fact my income was small, and the allowance I had fixed for myself was half of this; I didn't think I could be happy spending without earning. But I let it be known that on my island my family were the bottlers of Coca-Cola. (24-25)

This contention illustrates mimicry and the stake of transformation in postcolonial literature. It is mimicry because Kripalsingh pretends to be who he is not. The course of this pretentious life gives him and his background an extraordinary image, which rather alienates him from his culture. King further aligns with this thought as he points out that, "the story of [*The Mimic Men*] are in part about communal antagonisms and the cultural confusions and mimicry of cultural behaviour that occur when different groups are brought together and the society is in a period of change" (69). He therefore insinuates that cultural transformation takes place when two people with different cultural background come together.

Kripalsingh, an erstwhile politician in his native land, is transformed into a vagabond in London in order to create a space for himself. When Kripalsingh arrives London, he realises that if he upholds the personality whom he brought with him from the Islands, he will not be integrated into the society. Hence, he decides to stoop low in order to create a space for himself. This is evident in *The Mimic Men* as he notes that, "There are many of us around living modestly and without recognition in small semi-detached suburban houses" (11). Naipaul uses this statement to illustrate that despite how prominent of a postcolonial character in his homeland, the moment he arrives London, the epaulette of his greatness is taken off his shoulders before he is given a place in the London society. Kripalsingh as great as he is should not be living in an out-of-town residential area in London but because he is from the West Indian, he is forced to live there or return to West Indian.

Kripalsingh's cultural transformation reaches its peak the moment he returns to the Islands. Although Kripalsingh leaves London unprepared and unwillingly, he notices that he has undergone changes in his personal culture only when he finally arrives the islands. This is obvious in *The Mimic Men* when he sustains that:

Within me, with that very placidity, with that departure from London and that acceptance of a new, ready-made way of life, I felt that I had changed. I recognized that, the change was involuntary, so that my 'character' became not what others took it to be but something personal and ordained. (68)

Kripalsingh's statement indicates that Naipaul sustains the idea that when one stays with foreigners for a long time, one tends to behave like them. This action is called acculturation. Sun Sun Lim and Becky Pham in "If You a Foreigner in a Foreign Country, You Stick Together": Technologically-Mediated Communication and Acculturation of Migrant Students" declare that, "Acculturation is a multi-faced process of cultural and psychological changes that involve various forms of mutual accommodation, leading to some longer-term psychological and sociocultural adaptations between both groups" (2175). Hence, it is normal that Kripalsingh

should possess a culture which is completely different from his. This is explicit as he explains that it is not his wish to change but that change occurs on him involuntarily.

The spirit of mimicry, which Kripalsingh develops while in London lives with him till he arrives the Islands. During his stay in London, as already indicated in the preceding paragraph, Kripalsingh develops a strategy in order to ascent status that warrants him to live in London. Though he succeeds, it creates an extra-terrestrial culture, which lives in him till he returns to his homeland in Isabella. This is illustrated in *The Mimic Men* as he acknowledges that:

I gave myself a new name. We were Singhs. My father's father's name was Krispal. My father, for the purposes of official identification, necessary in that new world he ordained with his original costume, ran these names together to give himself the surname of Kripalsingh. My name was Ranjit; and my birth certificate said I was Ranjit Kripalsingh. That gave me two names. But Deschammpneaufs 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 singed myself R.R.K. Signh. At school I was known as Ralph Signh. The name Ralph I chose for the sake of initial, which was also that of my real name. In this way I felt I mitigated the fantasy or deception. (112-113)

Kripalsing's impersonation of British citizens, which earns him a space in London, has equally infected him culturally. He is transformed to a point where his personal culture is denigrated to the benefit of an alien culture. This explains why he splits his family name Kripalsingh and even adds Ralph just to make it easy to pronounce and sound extraordinary like his French's friend.

In *Cambridge*, cultural transformation begins in Olumide's life the moment that his name changes from Thomas to David Henderson and then to Cambridge. What makes Olumide feel attached to Africa is his name and the moment he is given a new name, he is detached and culturally transformed. This explains why as soon as he is given Thomas, he pleads with his master to allow him become a Christian.

Naipaul and Phillips reveal that cultural transformation comes with alienation. Alienated as the result of cultural transformation, Olumide does not want to know anything about his original homeland and family. In fact, Olumide is made to believe that his family members back in Africa are heathens and that any discussion about them is a dark subject, which warrants no one's attention. Olumide makes this statement in *Cambridge* as he intimates that, "Of my life in the bosom of my family I confess to having little knowledge" (133). Olumide in this confession as seen in the quotation is an indication that the English culture has overridden personal and African culture in Olumide. It should be recalled that the African culture was rooted out of Olumide when the slave merchant who bought him ceased the golden metal which was given to him by his parents.

Olumide becomes a preacher and decides to travel to Africa to preach the gospel. It should be noted that for a slave to be associated with the church and its affairs, they need to renounce his affiliation with Africa and everything related to Africa. In fact, it is necessary to become English at all cost as well as pay alliance to the authority at the time before they are given an active role to play in church. Olumide accords to this idea about England when he affirms that, "I faced these white men, with more knowledge of their country than they could possibly imagine" (157). Although Olumide makes this statement when he is captured the second time, it reveals his lucid knowledge of the English culture which serves as the licence for his acceptance to study the Holy Bible. However, cultural transformation manifests itself on Olumide when he finally becomes a preacher and leads a delegation of reformists to Africa. Unfortunately, they do not reach their destinations. His intention to go and preach the word of God in Africa is evident as he affirms that, "We would travel to Africa in the office of missionaries and preach the Gospel in the hope of spiritually reforming my former countrymen" (147).

The change of Olumide's name from Thomas, David Henderson and then Cambridge, also brings about cultural transformation. The series of names mark particular cultural manifestations in Olumide's life. 'Olumide' is given to him by his parents and it reflects his African identity. Thomas is the name, which is given to him by a captain in honour of the slave master who buys him off as a slave from his parents. David Henderson gives him access into Christianity and the Holy Bible. The name Cambridge is given to him when he is recaptured on his way to Africa and resold into slavery in the West Indian Islands. These names which are outcome of significant events in Olumide's life transform him culturally. Thus, he is right to declare that, "Of my life in the bosom of my family I confess to having little knowledge" (133). This confession testifies the numerous stages of cultural transformations that Olumide has undergone throughout his stay in Britain.

IV. Conclusion

This paper investigated the strategy of integration in V.S Naipaul *The Mimic Men* and Caryl Phillips's *Cambridge* with focus on Kripalsingh and Olumide in the two texts respectively and found out that the two protagonists incarnated the West Indians and African community in the diaspora, especially in Britain. It was also realized that although the two texts were set in different epochs in history, they all spurred the strategies of integration and cultural transformation, which immigrants experienced in Britain during and after the slave trade and the great wars in Europe. It was based on these historical facts that the researchers conclude that the quest for integration is the genesis of multicultural identities and cultural transformation in the Western.

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