

Ambivalence of Time and Space in Ondaatje's *The English Patient*

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled *Ambivalence of Time and Space in Ondaatje's The English Patient* is a record of first hand research work done by me during the period of my study in the year 2016-2017 and that this dissertation has not formed the basis for the award of any other Degree, Diploma, Associate ship, Fellowship, or other similar title.

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I hereby certify that the dissertation entitled *Ambivalence of Time and Space in Ondaatje's The English Patient* by Priyanka Choudhary for the award of M.A. degree is a record of research work done by the candidate under my supervision during the period of her study (2016-2017) and that the dissertation has not formed the basis for the award of any other Degree, Diploma, Associate ship, Fellowship or other similar title and that this dissertation represents independent work on the part of the candidate.

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Abstract

In the different stories about various characters set in diverse places and times in Ondaatje's works, one topic that recurs is that of identity. Actually one of the major concerns of almost all the main characters in Ondaatje's works is to know or to shed their identities. Like in his novel *The English Patient*, all the four major characters want to erase their identities because the characters face problems because of their identity.

Identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured, never singular but multiply constructed across different, often interesting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are ... constantly in the process of change and transformation. (Yuan Yao. 009)

Identity is a product that is socially constructed, and implies that there is no end to the process of construction. The tendency to question self/other distinction and the emphasis on the relatedness indicate the boundaries between identities are a cause of the identity problems people face and that blurring the boundaries may solve the problems. In Ondaatje's novel *The English Patient* the boundaries between identities become indistinguishable in physical spaces that are assigned symbolic meanings. The physical spaces in the novel *The English Patient* symbolize metaphorical third spaces where the characters can belong. In the third spaces boundaries between the identities are blurred, transformations of identities take place, and the characters that are caught between races, cultures and nations no longer suffer from pains and loss brought about by their identity problems.

Drawing on Homi Bhabha's idea of the third space and hybridity and Foucault's notions of space, this paper examines the issue of identity in Ondaatje's novel *The English Patient*.

The characters in *The English Patient* suffer from physical and psychological injuries brought about by the war, which is partly caused by violent baring between nations and escalated by extreme nationalism. All these characters live in a world in which essentialism and dualism involved in the understanding of identity lead to the setting up of boundaries between races, cultures and nations.

In the essentialist and dualistic view, identity is unified and fixed, and boundaries between identities remain stable. The essentialist view of identity can be traced back to John Locke. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke writes: "as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past actions or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person" (Yao Yuan, 16). His suggestion is that it is this consciousness that unites the different actions an individual performs and makes a person's self the same today and yesterday. His statement was influential in defining the individual as having an identity that stayed the same. Essentialist and dualistic conceptions of identity have been taken to define both individuals and groups.

In Ondaatje's novel *The English Patient*, however, "the intrinsic essence" of an identity as well as the stability of boundaries between identities is questioned. The historic territory of the nation is shown to be fluid, common histories and racial origins are proved to be untraceable. The characters identity in the novel *The English Patient* is not intrinsic and fixed, but it changes; boundaries between identities are blurred.

Saussure believes that we are not the authors of the statements we make, in the sense that meanings of words cannot be closed down, but are constantly sliding away from us. Philosophers

of language who are influenced by Saussure, like Jacques Derrida, argue that a speaker can never fix meaning, including the meaning of his/her identity. Supplementary meanings over which have no control always arise and challenge our attempts to create stable worlds. In other words Identity is not inborn in consciousness, but is formed over time, so it is always incomplete. All these theories de-centered the fixed identity into the contradictory and unfinished identities. For example, the identity of the de-centered subject who “has to speak and act in the social and cultural world” is formed in the interactive relationship between subject and his/her environment. As the interrelations change, identity takes on new elements and new meanings, and it changes too. Thus understanding the constant transformations of who one is or as Foucault put it, ‘who one is to become’ ”. Identity is not fixed, but is in the process of becoming. Hall emphasizes the multiplicity, fragmentation, fluidity and openness of identity. However, he is not saying that identity is so changeable as to escape our understanding. He explains:

So identities are sliding, but they are not forever sliding ... You have to stop, because if you don't you cannot construct meaning. You have to come to a full stop, not because you have uttered your last word, but because you need to start a new sentence which may take back everything you have just said. (Yao Yuan, 010).

From the view that identity is open and fluid it can be concluded that the so-called essence of a race, culture and nation is not fixed. It follows that boundaries between races, cultures and nations can be blurred, even erased. From the zone where identities interact with each other and transform, new identities may emerge and communities with no racial, cultural and/or national divides are built, so that the characters can have somewhere to belong to or break away from ties of identity. When transformations of identities take place, communities with no clear boundaries

between races, cultures and nations are formed. These communities can be described as third spaces.

According to Homi Bhabha “[t]he ‘locality’ of national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must it be seen simply as ‘other’ in relation to what is outside or beyond it” ; instead, “the problem of outside/inside must always itself be a process of hybridity” (Yao Yuan, 011). What emerges in this “process of hybridity” is a turning of boundaries and limits into the in-between spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated”. A culture does not have any essence that keeps it internally coherent or essentially different from other cultures. Boundaries between cultures can be negotiated and this negotiation can lead to a process of hybridization. The idea of identity as something fluid is important for those who want to find a space to belong to and those who want to shed their identities, these communities can be described as third spaces. The concept of third space in Michael Ondaatje’s novel *The English Patient* is drawn from Bhabha’s concept of third space or the in-between space where Bhabha mainly uses the term “third space” to describe cultural hybridity, the space he talks about is not physical and does not have any spatial dimension rather it is a metaphor of the state in which the hybrids live. But in Ondaatje’s works, however, the “third space” is embodied in the physical spaces that interact with the characters’ identities. The bombed-out Tuscany and North African desert in *The English Patient* are the physical spaces embodied as third spaces where characters like the English patient, Hana, Caravaggio and Kip inhabit and move through, they also play an important role in the characters’ search for and understanding of the identity. The Desert and the Villa with no clear spatial boundaries become spaces where the characters break away from national ties. The physical spaces interrelate and interact with the characters’ identities.

Key words: Space, time, social being, cultural hybridity, third space, identity, belonging, diaspora, boundary, immigrants, mixed blood, shedding identity, nation, nationality.

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Introduction

Philip Michael Ondaatje is an important contemporary Canadian writer. He is a poet, novelist, editor and a filmmaker. Michael Ondaatje also known as Ondaatje, Michael or Kip was born on September 12, 1943, in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), to Mervyn Ondaatje, and his wife, Doris Gratiaen in the midst of WWII. He has an elder brother, Christopher Ondaatje, who went on to become a successful entrepreneur. Ondaatje inherits multiple racial, ethnic and socio-cultural hybridities. He belongs to the Sri Lankan Burgher community that has mixed Portuguese, Dutch, English, Sinhalese and Tamil lineages. In a way, the Burghers epitomize the colonial history of Sri Lanka in their multilateral ethnicities.

“I am a mongrel of place. Of race. Of cultures. Of many genres.”

(The Guardian, 3)

The Burghers owe their origin to the colonial strategy of the Portuguese and later the Dutch to make up for the shortage of (Portuguese and Dutch) women and to gradually evolve a community that may prove an effective tool in the maintenance of their stronghold in Ceylon. Later on, the Burghers developed into two separate branches, the Dutch Burghers and the Portuguese Burghers. The Dutch Burghers were those who presumably had European ancestry in the male line and were ‘white, Dutch reformed and Dutch speaking.’ The Portuguese Burghers had a slightly uncertain European ancestry, had ‘dark skins were Catholics and spoke Creole Portuguese.’ However, even these differences did not last long as there were intermarriages between these two branches of the Burghers and also there were some other European nationalities that kept pouring in and the settlers, though there were not many, got absorbed in the Burghers. With the British conquest of Ceylon in 1796, the Burghers were quick to adapt

themselves to the ways of the new colonial power. Gradually they abandoned the use of Dutch language in favor of English and by the end of the nineteenth century there were not many Burghers who could claim the knowledge of Dutch language.

The end of the British regime in 1948 brought a complete reversal in the fortune of the Burghers as they lost most of their privileges and influence with the conversion of colonial Ceylon into independent Sri Lanka. The number of Burghers decreased drastically after independence as a large number of them migrated to countries like Australia and Canada. The immigration of the Burghers continued steadily and with the declaration of Sinhala, the official language of Sri Lanka in 1961 the Burgher population practically dwindled. There are still some Burghers in Sri Lanka and the Dutch Burgher Union of Ceylon still exists and so do the Dutch reformed Church under a new name the Presbytery of Ceylon. What remains are the relics of an affluent and glorious past and a rich multicultural heritage, a culture that evolved in the margins of history, at the cross-roads between the colonial powers from Europe and the natives of Ceylon. The Burghers were affluent, had positions of prominence in business and administration in the pre-independence era of Sri Lanka. Ondaatje's family too had a long line of ancestors who excelled in disciplines as various as medicine, law, botany and religion. Ondaatje writes about the arrival of his first ancestor on the island in his family memoir:

...my own ancestor arriving in 1600, a doctor who cured the residing governor's daughter with a strange herb and was rewarded with land, a foreign wife, and a new name this was a Dutch spelling of his own. Ondaatje. A parody of the ruling language. And when his Dutch wife died, marrying a Sinhalese woman, having nine children, and remaining. Here. At the center of the rumor. At this point on the map. (*Running in the Family*, 64)

With the passage of time Ondaatje's ancestry got further complicated as the Ondaatjes married into different communities. The Ondaatjes made some substantial contributions to the island in their different capacities while not being completely oblivious of their personal interests as they worked on the island. Ondaatje's grandfather Philip "Bampa" Ondaatje made a vast fortune by mediating between the British and the natives. He built the family home 'Rock Hill' that stretched in acres 'on a prime spot of land right in the center of the town of Kegalle' (Jewinski. 11). Michael Ondaatje spent his childhood in this house.

Ondaatje's childhood was not an ideal one, as his father was afflicted with alcoholism, which resulted in the separation of his parents before he was ten. As a result Ondaatje moved to England in 1954 with his mother, where he resumed his education at Dulwich College in London. After relocating to Canada in 1962, Ondaatje became a Canadian citizen. He studied at Bishop's College School and Bishop's University in Lennoxville, Quebec, Canada (for some time). He then moved to Toronto, where he received his B.A from the University of Toronto and his M.A from Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, in 1967.

Michael Ondaatje started his career as a teacher at the University of Western Ontario, London, in 1967. In 1971, he became a member of the Department of English at Glendon College, York University, Toronto. Determined to make a mark as a poet from an early age, he started his writing career alongside his teaching profession, establishing himself as a poet before turning to fictional as well as autobiographical works. His works in poetry and fiction are infused with sensual images, rich language and a deeply metaphorical bent. He has published 13 books of poetry and six novels in his literary career. Ondaatje's personal experience of being an immigrant has great influence on his writing. In almost all his works he deals with the issue of identity by telling stories of people caught between races, cultures and nations.

Ondaatje's literary journey began with the publication of his first collection of poetry, *The Dainty Monsters* (1967), *The Man with Seven Toes* (1969), *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left Handed Poems* (1970), *Rat Jelly* (1973), *Elimination Dance* (1976), *Claude Glass* (1979), *There's a Trick with a Knife I'm Learning to Do* (1979), *Tin Roof* (1982), *Secular Love* (1984), *The Cinnamon Peeler* (1991) and *Handwriting* (1998). Among these works, *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* and *There's a Trick with a Knife I'm Learning to Do* won the Governor General's Award, the most prestigious award for literature and arts in Canada, for Poetry in 1971 and 1980 respectively.

Ondaatje's prose works, better known than his poetry, include *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976), *Running in the Family* (1982), his memoirs about life in Ceylon; and *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987), two characters from this novel, Hana and Caravaggio, also appear in *The English Patient* (1992; film 1996), which takes place in an Italian villa that is being used as a hospital during World War II. Noted for the richly described interior lives of its characters, *The English Patient* was co-winner of the Booker Prize in 1992. Subsequent novels include *Anil's Ghost* (2000), and *Divisadero* (2007). *The Cat's Table* (2011).

Ondaatje's name has surfaced as a likely candidate for the Nobel Prize, John Porter in his article "A Canadian Nobel Prize Winner" refers to Ondaatje as:

A creator of a new art form from an inventor of a style, a man who has founded his own literary country and keeps putting flags there lest anyone be mistaken" (Academy of Canadian Writers Newsletter, Vol. 2. No. 2, 1981).

Ondaatje's new art form, according to Porter, is a collage of photography, poetry, interview, prose-narration and description, fairytale and biography.

Ondaatje's migrant status, his position as a front-rank Canadian writer, his Sri Lankan Burgher back-ground and his consistent concern with movement and transformation has also called upon the attention of critics. Most critics have also taken note of Ondaatje's move from poetry to novel writing, his acute awareness of generic borders and consistent challenging of these borders in his narratives.

Literature Review

Writing about the issue of race in *The English Patient*, Lisa Rundle and Elizabeth Kella both believe that Kip's experiences in the novel make it clear that racial difference is what finally set people apart. Rundle thinks it important for Kip to reclaim his name – Kipal Singh- near the end because it is only then that he knows where he belongs –he belongs to the brown races and should not work for the whites (9). Nothing not even love or loyalty can transcend race. Kella agrees with Rundle and points out that it is “racial difference that causes disintegration of the fragile community of war –traumatized individuals” (81). As the characters die or leave the villa and the community in the villa collapses, the novel “move[s] from cultural hybridity to racial separatism” (99). However, she notices that despite this trend, at the end of the novel there is a “dream of transcendent unity” between Kip the brown soldier and Hana the white nurse when they are miraculously united across geographical spaces, which shows Ondaatje's ambivalent attitude toward racial difference. (Yao Yuan, 003)

Chapter – I

Imploding Time and Geography: Space, Time and Social Being

Avinash Jodha in his *Michael Ondaatje's Fiction* points out:

Did it start with Bergson or before? Space was treated as dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile. Time, on the contrary, was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic. (Foucault, 22)

Time and Space plays a vital role in our experience of the world. Human life at any given point of time is the product of the complex ambivalence of time and space. However there is often an inclination in the favor of history and its linear accumulation of past as pointed out by Foucault in the above statement. History presents itself as a homogeneous body not only recording events and happenings but forging connections in terms of cause and effect relationships and with the backing of these interdependent occurrences, history also seize the claim to future happenings and shaping of the human world.

Edward W. Soja in *Postmodern Geographies* (1997) presents a keen investigation of the silencing of space in critical social theory and dissociation of time and space in increasingly historical, progressive theories of the past and the contemporary discourses. Soja traces the history of the silencing of geography and the excessive importance of history in his book. The radical questioning of the supremacy of history began in the 1980s but even before that, theorists like Foucault and John Berger posited a challenge to the authority of history, bringing into light the vital significance of space. The most explicit of his pronouncements regarding space were expressed in a 1967 lecture '*Des Espaces Autres*' but it received critical acclaim only after twenty years when it was published in a French journal *Architecture-Movement-Continuite* (1984). In his lecture Foucault spoke of the great obsession of the nineteenth century with history or past and predicted a radical shift in the attitude towards the dynamics of time and space in the twentieth century.

The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein. (Foucault, 22)

Foucault's criticism doesn't involve a rejection of history; he kept his professed association with history all along his life, but rather against 'historicism' and its tendency to ignore the vital significance of space in its historical master narrative. Foucault, Berger, Soja and other postmodern geographers does not propose a denial of time or history but they seek to establish a dialectical relationship between the two as they influence our individual and collective lives on this planet. As Soja points out it is a call for an appropriate interpretive balance between space, time, and social being, or what may now more explicitly be termed the creation of human geographies, the making of history, and the constitution of society" (23). However, an appropriate interpretive balance between space, time and social being demands a radical reformulation of established narrative structures whether historical or otherwise.

We hear a lot about the crisis of the modern novel. What this involves, fundamentally, is a change in the mode of narration. It is scarcely any longer possible to tell a story sequentially unfolding in time. And this is because we are too aware of what is continually traversing the storyline laterally. That is to say, instead of being aware of a point as an infinitely small part of a straight line, we are aware of it as an infinitely small part of an infinite number of lines, as the centre of a star of lines. Such awareness is the result of our constantly having to

take into account the simultaneity and extension of events and possibilities. (Soja, 22)

The complex architectonics of time and space, interplay of cultures, histories, memories and myth, transformations, the formation and formulations of identity acquire a crucial significance in expatriate writing. There is a constant engagement with the dynamics of time and space as the expatriate writers find themselves in a continual process of negotiation with the conflicting claims of disparate cultures, the immediacy of the geo-political and socio-cultural context of the adopted homes and the deep-rooted inheritance of diverse backgrounds of their countries of origin.

Critics have seen the treatment of time and space by the expatriate writers with great interest as they engage themselves with writing about inherited and adopted spaces or deliberately created 'third spaces' attempting to come to terms with the complexity of identity and its hints through the subtle and violent transformations it undergoes by moving out of the implicatory position of specific spaces of inheritance and of adoption.

The choice of specific spaces has specific implications in terms of socio-political and cultural positioning of the expatriate. The choices of first, second or a deliberate creation of third spaces are complex moves. The expatriate writers in their treatment of adopted and inherited spaces primarily concentrate on issues that deal with their coming to terms with the new culture, the trauma of dislocation and a search for identity and roots in their past. As expatriate steps out of both the countries of origin and of adoption into a third or a neutral space the dynamics of time, space and identity are opened up.

Ondaatje, over the span of his literary career, has been engaged in exploring a diverse range of subjects and locales that reflect his characteristic concern with cross-cultural initiations and their impact on the formation of individual identity and modes of perception.

Location of a work in a specific space has important implications but even more important is the treatment of that space, the meeting of the narrative challenge that demands both time and space to have a dialectical relationship privileging none over the other. Ondaatje locates *The English Patient* in a third space away from both Sri Lanka and Canada and in terms of time he chooses the last phase of the Second World War, a deliberate move from the contemporary to the historical.

In Ondaatje's novel both time and space has multiple implications. Time brings in the immediate time-frame of the novel, the constant presence of history in a physical form and its master narrative, the juxtaposed and supplementary narratives of myths, legend and rumor, memory and as the novel unfolds these devices meet and depart in significant ways. Space in Ondaatje is the immediate landscape projected in the novel, inner spaces embedded and evolving in the psyche of the characters, architecture and archaeology, individual, communal and nationalistic forging of geographical, social, cultural and political spaces, the physical space of the body and the awareness and projection of the novel and its texts as a space and a construct. The different time frames and spaces simultaneously co-exist and intersect with each other in Ondaatje's narrative. Ondaatje Spatializes history and historicizes space, each reflecting the other in their wondrous web of reflections and misreflections.

The immediate time frame of the novel *The English Patient* is the last few months of the Second World War, the place or space is Italy and most of the action takes place in the villa San

Girolamo. The novel is based on the historical context of the war and its sudden end with the dropping of the atom bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The novel has ten sections – The Villa, In Near Ruins, Some Time a Fire, South Cairo 1930-1938, Katherine, A buried Plane, In Situ, The Holy Forest, The Cave Swimmers and August. The sections do not reveal any linear order; reading out the names produces an impression of a loose grouping, an ensemble of spaces (The Villa, In Near Ruins, The Holy Forest, The Cave of Swimmers), time (Some Time a Fire, South Cairo 1930 – 1938, August). The plot of the novel is non-linear, and has loosely connected segments.

There are four narrative strands corresponding to the four major characters in the novel. Each character has his or her own story as they arrive in the villa and stay in for different reasons. The coming together of these four strangers is governed by time, a coincidence made possible because of the war, which compels them to seek refuge in the villa away from war and society.

The English Patient, Hana, Caravaggio and Kip have come from Hungary, Canada and India and are drawn into the war for totally different reasons and though physically and mentally wounded by the war, they are the survivors. Ondaatje's narrative moves back and forth both in time and space as it trace the tracks of each character walking into the villa and stepping out of it in specific spaces of belonging. The villa is occupied only for a short while and indicates an enclosed space yet the relationships between these four unrelated survivors of the war develop while they share their traumatic experiences of the war, the memories are excavated both in others and themselves in the process which gets embedded in their consciousness even as they move into future and are separated by geographical spaces.

The English patient or Almasy among all the four characters has the largest share of the narrative and when he speaks he opens up the doorways between histories, memories, myths, legends, rumors, lost civilizations, shifting from one level to another like a hawk, blurring the boundaries as the author allows him to shift from first person to the third, one age to another, from one space to others. The English patient peels off the layers of his consciousness and thoughts but remains unnoticeably mysterious, about his identity as if takes his burnt, expressionless face literally. No more interested in identification of names and nationalities.

Hana, Kip and Caravaggio have their pasts to which keeps unfolding at different moments in the novel but there is a major difference between their stories of the past and that of the English patient, none of them are willing to reveal their pasts unless faced with a specific question and even then there is a tendency to be elusive. Caravaggio keeps on reminding Hana of her childhood memories, to pull her out from her obsession with the English patient, but himself is reluctant to reveal his past. Similarly, Kip is not that keen to reveal his past. Therefore, a major part of their past stories is narrated by the author himself though there are subtle shifts from the first person to the third person narrative as if the character suddenly gets alive to his/her story, takes the responsibility for it or at other moments leaves it casually in the hands of author.

The narrative of the war in the backdrop and the stories of the individual characters constitute a considerable part of the narrative but none of these narratives unfold in any sequential manner. The narrative progressions/digressions in the novel are determined by the opening of time and space in relation with the present moment and the space in the text. A momentary thought, a small incident, an aspect of the surrounding geography takes the narrative into different directions as it alternates between the past, present and at times projections.

The central aspect of Ondaatje's treatment of the dialectics of time and space is that time and history are opened up within the dynamics of space. Ondaatje delves deep into the vast stretches of deserts and landscapes, and the smaller spaces of buildings, books, bodies, music, paintings and statues. A close consideration of different spaces in Ondaatje reveals intricate patterns of relationships between these spaces and their histories.

The Villa San Girolamo has a crucial significance in this context as it has its own history. Initially it was an old nunnery that was built to protect its 'inhabitants from the flesh of the devil' (*The English Patient*, 43); later, during the war it was taken over by the German army as it had 'castle like battlements', and with the retreat of the Germans, the Allies converted it into a temporary hospital. However the place was filled with hidden threats and dangers as there were hidden bombs everywhere in the villa and was eventually evacuated save for the patient and the nurse who simply refused to leave. However, as the novel progresses other possibilities regarding the past of the villa, its layers of history are opened up;

I think this was the Villa Bruscoli. Poliziano – the great protégé of Lorenzo. I'm talking about 1483. In Florence, in Santa Trinita Church, you can see the paintings of the Medicis with Poliziano in the foreground, wearing a red cloak.

Yes I think a lot happened here. This foundation in the wall. Pico and Lorenzo and the young Michaelangelo. They held in each hand the new world and the old world ... They sat in this room with the bust of Plato and argued all night. (*The English Patient*, 56-57)

The Patient claims that the villa could possibly be the Villa Bruscoli. The transformation that the villa has undergone with the passage of time in terms of the ironic different uses of its space

highlights the curious choreography of history and of production of space. From a residence of the pleasures of the senses to a place that kept its inmates away from the carnal desires. From a house of the soldiers to a place of treatment of their victims, the space of the villa undergoes multiple transformations as its occupants and the purposes of occupation change. The villa never remains static, it is charged up with each new occupant, and the old order is revised with every entrance, stay and exit.

A sense of history pervades the place. As if the dismantled state of the villa has not only dismantled the boundaries of space, between the villa and the landscape, but also of time. The villa is at once ancient and modern caught up in a complex web of the ironies of history and the acts of civilization. While in the fifteenth century the great artists argued beside the bust of Plato all night, there is now the patient and Hana reading books late into the night. The past and the present stand together in a close embrace, their complex architectures coincide with the curious choreography of time and deliberate interventions.

The past and present find their way into each other both in terms of mutual reflections and subtle intrusions into its architecture. Pianos, libraries, murals, trees reflect the deliberate playing of present with the seeming innocence of the past, using it as a kind of mask:

The retreating army often left pencil mines within musical instruments. Returning owners opened up pianos and lost their hands. People would revive the swing on a grandfather clock, and a glass bomb would blow out half a wall and whoever was nearby ... Bombs were attached to taps, to the spines of books, they were drilled into fruit trees so an apple falling on the lower branch would detonate the tree, just as a hand gripping that branch would. (*The English Patient*, 75)

Kip being a sapper is able to trace the hidden lines and does not trust what meets the eye, not even the past; his eyes penetrate into the hidden possibilities. There is subtle connection between the perception of Kip and that of the patient as both can see the hidden connection. While Kip can sense the hidden threats in the immediate landscape, the patient can sense hidden connections between the layers of history. Both, in their own way search for hidden possibilities, certain that they exist.

As with the villa there are others spaces with a pervasive sense of history in and around them. The vast stretches of the deserts that Almasry travelled in his expeditions and charted with his companions, had had other explorers in the past, Herodotus and even much earlier than him there were those who took the same routes. Almasry was credited for the discovery of the lost oasis Zerzura, but his sense of history makes him see the conceit of taking such credits, the conceit of the white eye 'first step by a white man across a great river, the first sight (by a white eye) of a mountain that has been there forever' (*The English Patient*, 141). So what Almasry does is to rediscover, it's an achievement not of claiming a place for the first time but of stepping into its intimate web of historical discoveries, of stepping into civilization:

I was walking not in a place where no one had walked but in a place where there were sudden, brief populations over the centuries – a fourteenth century army, a Tebu caravan, and the Senussi invaders of 1915. And in between these times – nothing was there. When no rain fell the acacias withered, the wadis dried out ... until water suddenly reappeared fifty or hundred years later, random appearances and disappearances, like myths and rumors through history. (*The English Patient*, 14)

However, Almasy's sense of history stretches farther back than the medieval or modern discoveries of the desert routes and scattered oases in it. He knows what meets the eye as a desert today was something else completely thousands of years ago and there are clues to this overlooked past all over the place. The desert too has undergone a journey from its ocean to the vast stretches of sand where 'water became exile':

In Tassili I have seen rock engravings from the time when Sahara people hunted water horses from reed boats. In Wadi Sura I saw caves whose walls were covered with paintings of swimmers. Here there had been a lake. I could draw its shape on a wall for them. I could let them to its edge, six thousand years ago. (*The English Patient*, 18)

Thus the shape of the desert contains much more than the ever shifting patterns of sand.

Along with the vast stretches of the deserts and the limited architectural spaces of villas and churches, Ondaatje uses body as a space. There is heightened consciousness of body in its textures, structures, scars, the intimate spaces within it and how an individual related to the space of his or her body, the physicality of his or her existence and relationships.

The English patient for Hana is 'A man with no face. An ebony pool'

Like the other spaces, the body too is embedded with history. The English patient's black burnt body, Caravaggio's lost thumbs, Kip's brown complexion of his continent, Hana's leanness and the lost child are histories impressed and imprinted not only in their psyche and memory but on their bodies too. Body becomes a site, a space where time leaves its marks as the body travels through age, passions, love, tortures, violence.

Almásy has a deep belief in the reflection of history on the body, the cartography of time on physical space:

We die containing a richness of lovers and tribes, tastes we have swallowed, bodies we have plunged into and swum up as if rivers of wisdom, characters we have climbed into as if trees, fears we have hidden in as if caves. I wish for all this to be marked on my body when I am dead. I believe in such cartography – to be marked by nature, not just to label ourselves on a map like the names of rich men and women on buildings. We are communal histories, communal books. (261)

Music too can be perceived as a space which has structure like a human body, and when played it opens the spaces of the past (memories). As Hana plays the piano in the villa, with each note, comes the song taught to her by her mother and she swings into the space of her childhood, the kitchen table where her mother wrote notes and wiped them later, the myth of the dwarfs told by her father, the space of memory is opened by the music.

Ondaatje projects an awareness of space in its surfaces, the complex patterns of history that lie beneath these surfaces, the stretches, the geographies that each space embraces and the way these spaces stand and open themselves in this context. The books too are spaces in this context. There is the paper, the cover, and the intimate print, the physical spaces of the book along with the spaces bound within their narratives.

The patient at one level tells Hana “I am a person who if left alone in someone’s home walks to the bookcase, pulls down a volume and inhales it. So history enters us” (*The English Patient*, 18)

Apart from the physical space of the books, the stories within the book open spaces and landscapes through their narratives and the paths in the books do not remain contained in their covers. With the opening of the books these paths extend their scope into the paths of the present, the paths of the readers and their lives. So when Hana opens and begins reading a book she enters into the imaginary spaces and landscapes described in the book through the stilted doorways and these spaces or landscapes in the course of reading and of time find their ways into her life as her life enters them – a mutual exchange of character. Kip's entry in the novel and into the lives of the English patient, Hana, Caravaggio has subtle connections with Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* as if while Hana reads the book the pages of the Kipling were rubbed accidentally like a magic lamp and Kip appears magically.

In recent days Hana had watched him sitting down beside the English patient, and it seemed to her a reversal of Kim. The young student was now Indian, the wise old teacher was English. But it was Hana in the night who stayed with the old man, who guided him over the mountains to the sacred river ... And in some ways on those long nights of reading and listening, she supposed, they had prepared themselves for the young soldier, the boy in the story. And Kip was anyone, he was the officer Creighton. (111)

Kipling's *Kim* gets into the narrative and the plot of *The English Patient* in multiple ways. At one point Kipal Singh the young Indian soldier is Kim in an irony of reversals, at other point Hana becomes Kim, and again Kip and Hana share the role of Kim. The plot of Kipling's novel exerts its influence in *The English Patient* and the plot of *The English Patient* has a counter influence on *Kim*, opening it to a contemporary situation.

These spaces can be compared to the Foucauldian notions of heterotopias – the places that bring together and juxtapose the otherwise contradictory spaces. They are not utopias as these spaces are real, as real as the spaces within which they lie. The villa in *The English Patient* is such a heterotopia where the different stages of the history of the villa along with the history of Italy and the present erosions of war and the strange ensemble of unlikely inhabitants juxtaposes different histories, cultures, identities in mutually influencing and negotiating relationships.

The desert is another heterotopia in its civilization of the ever-shifting patterns of sand and its past civilization of the oceans that survive miraculously in the oases in it. The desert does not have the boundaries in the sense in which they exist in nation states. Almsy and the other desert explorers took to the desert in the intermediate years between the two wars. They escaped into the borderless desert at a time when the nations around them were intruding into their neighboring territories and colonial states, fought for what they presumed belonged to them. These are ‘men of all nations’ those ‘who like Conrad’s sailors are not too comfortable with the etiquette of taxis, the quick, flat wit of bus conductors’ (*The English Patient*, 133). They cling to their maps and lecture notes and enter the city in the evenings, ‘anonymous time’, for the lectures in the Geographical Society. They were not simply English or European, while they belonged to different nations, the group itself was ‘a small clutch of a nation between the wars, mapping and re-exploring’, (*The English Patient*, 136) a nation that had its own culture, and citizens who despite their different nationalities held a common faith in layers of civilization rather than its surfaces and believed in the ever shifting borders of the desert, knew the necessity of moving like the sands because ‘if you pause sand builds up as it would around anything stationary, and locks you in. You are lost forever’ (*The English Patient*, 137). These men feel themselves ‘lost’ in the nation states and they are rather more comfortable moving in the borders of the desert. As

they move into the inner recesses of the desert they lose faith in the nation states. They meet desert tribes ignored by history as the desert itself:

There were rivers of desert tribes, the most beautiful humans I've met in my life. We were German, English, Hungarian, African –all of us insignificant to them. Gradually we become nationless. I came to hate nations. We are deformed by nation-states. (*The English Patient*, 138)

The distrust of nation-states emerges in the group as a result of their deliberate dislocation from the borders of these nation-states. Their faith is replaced by a faith in the desert. They inhale and internalize the spirit of the desert that defies ownership:

The desert could not be claimed or owned –it was a piece of cloth carried by winds, never held down by stones, and given a hundred shifting names long before Canterbury existed, long before battles and treaties quilted Europe and the East. Its caravans, those strange rambling feasts and cultures, left nothing behind, not an ember. All of us, even those with European homes and children wished to remove the clothing of our countries. It was a place of faith. (*The English Patient*, 138- 139)

Almasy and the other learn an important lesson about identity in the desert. Nations become piece of clothing that can be removed or put on never completely revealing the person within them. The desert's rebelliousness of ownership enters Almasy and others; like the desert they are not ready to be owned, to be restricted by nations or names. Almasy falls in love with the desire, 'I wanted to erase my name and the place I had come from. By the time war arrived, after ten

years in the desert, it was easy for me to slip across borders, not to belong to anyone, to any nation' (*The English Patient*, 139)

Almasy is not ready to be owned even in love (152, 238). Later on Almasy claims to be English, using national signification as a piece of clothing to camouflage his identity. So this gesture of his is rooted in his distrust of nation states, it is as true and as false as his Hungarian identity.

War in itself is a heterotopia of political difference, a space that brings together other spaces and individuals and leaves its marks on them, destroying the distinctions and boundaries between them through a common logic of destruction. War demolishes identity by capturing individuals into a similar situation but even when it is over the individuals cannot simply return to the cocoon of their national identities.

The English Patient proposes a complex dialectic of what Soja refers to as 'time, space and social being.' Ondaatje projects multiple dislocations through the war, the desert and the architectures. These dislocations in a way become the testing grounds for the specifics that are operational within different nation states. By dislocating individuals from their specific nations and putting them into a state of crisis Ondaatje attempts to remove the authoritarian claims of national significations. It is a situation where the barriers of nations, races and genders demand to be transcended into a realization of the human essence of being, By emphasizing the depth of character, the felt need for the other and the essential commodity of human suffering over narrow claims of identity, whether nationalistic or otherwise, Ondaatje's text exposes the fragility of rigid conceptions of identity. Almasy's distrust of nation states, the desire of not to be owned touches the raw nerve of expatriate sensibility. The expatriate seeks belonging but walks away from ownership. Ondaatje's use of history and geography reemphasize this belief.

Locating Dislocations

The immigrants, the exiles, and the wanderers, through ages, have traversed the fringes of the world. They have been the advertent/inadvertent carriers of their cultures across geographical divides, revealing civilizations in their affinities and contradictions. Diasporas have come to signify “any group living in displacement”.

However the history of the exile, of dislocations and of the dislocated can be traced even further back than the Jewish expulsion. It is hardly a linear tradition or a homogenous body of the exiles experience but is definitely is a tradition with a history as old as the formation of human societies on the earth.

Human societies have never been without their outcasts, prodigals, the willing and forced exiles. Etymologically ‘exile’ comes from the root “salire”, to leap, thus: ‘ex-silare’ – to leap out. Being an exile is ‘to leap out.’ Generally understood, this leaping out signifies a forced physical move out of one’s immediate geo-political and socio-cultural space but it can be subjective too. However the term has a strong political connotation in the contemporary context whereby it signifies an establishmentarian or societal expulsion of an individual or group; or a departure forced by hostile or unpleasant circumstances. The terms exile, immigrant and expatriate have been used in contemporary discourses both interchangeably and to signify exclusive states of being.

Abdul R. JanMohamed identifies four different modes of border-crossings, “those used by the exile, the immigrant, the colonialist, the scholar, the last typified by the anthropologist studying

other cultures (one might add the tourist and the traveler as subcategories of the scholar/anthropologist).” He goes on to argue that “the notion of exile always emphasizes the absence of “home,” of the cultural matrix that formed the individual subject”; therefore the nostalgia associated with the exile (a nostalgia that is structural rather than idiosyncratic) often makes the individuals indifferent to the values and characteristics of the host culture ... The immigrant, on the other hand, is not troubled by the structural nostalgia because his or her status implies a intentional directedness towards the host culture, which has been deliberately chosen as the new home” (Jan Mohamed, 101).

The above categorization is extremely intangible in nature and gets complicated if the other categories like refugee, expatriate and economic émigrés are taken into consideration. Bharati Mukherjee draws a line between immigrants and expatriates, in my fiction, and in my Canadian experience, ‘immigrants’ were lost souls, put upon pathetic. Expatriates, on the other hand, knew too well who and what they were, and what foul fate had befallen them” (Avinash Jodha, 2). The contradictory positions of JanMohamed and Bharati Mukherjee bring out the elusive nature of such categorizations. Very often these categories are based on the states of mind and the corresponding subjective attitudes and are seen through the binary of negative and positive attitudes towards the host culture but attitudes can certainly change and evolve.

The categories invariably overlap and admit of simultaneity. What brings the exile, immigrant, refugee and expatriate together is the experience of dislocation and this experience in its numerous forms has been marked in the writings of the diasporas. The narratives of dislocation have been approached from multiple theoretical and critical perspectives. They have been studied from the larger perspectives of the theories of the formation of nation-states by the likes of E.J. Hobsbawm, Partha Chatterjee and Benedict Anderson. They have also been explored

from the perspective of the culture studies and from various racial, communal positions and discourses of marginality and resistance. Some of the major theorists in the field are Homi Bhabha, Edward Said (Avinash Jodha, 3). These theorists have located the experience and narratives of dislocation from different subject positions and have attempted to forge reasonable frameworks of dislocations, marginalization and resistances.

Dislocation can be situated in a broader context. Dislocation is a preconditioning of existence. From a psychological perspective coming into being is a dislocation; the cutting of the natal cord signifies an individual's separation from the body of the mother and his/her simultaneous relocation in the body of the society. This relocation is only gradually realized. Furthermore, the identification of the individual with society as a natural entity, the transference from the body of the mother to the body of the society, establishes a resemblance of an organic relationship that if cut or abandoned produces a sense of loss, a desire to recover and reclaim. The spiritual/religious theory of Genesis sees human existence on the earth as a state of permanent exile, the severing from God as a result of the original sin. The expulsion from the Garden of Eden and thereby from the body of God, envisions human existence as an act of desire, and hope whereby an individual keeps devising ways to be with God again. Therefore, at one level dislocation, sense of loss and the desire to get back becomes the matrix of all existence.

The exile carries his/her culture in his physical being (the color of the skin, physical stature- the racial denominators), and his subjective self to the host culture that perceives in him/her a contradiction to its foundational beliefs and sees a potential threat (Avinash Jodha, 4). The diasporas, as they look for a place in the host culture, have to face its fears that are manifested in multiple discriminations racial, social, economic and political. The discrimination can be direct or disguised in several establishmentarian practices and the discourses of 'multiculturalism', but

the effort largely is to keep the diasporas at bay while making a productive use of the individual skills of the diaspora communities.

The experience of relocation entails a continual crisis in the diasporic feeling; the living reality of discrimination and secondary status in the host countries consistently compel a simultaneous backward and forward glance. The crisis is multifariously objective and subjective that may lead to a deliberate drift into the past, or to a conscious forgetting of the past, a superimposition of the host culture; or to the possibility of working a way through a critical acceptance of the past and the present, refusing nothing and working out a sustainable sense of identity and being.

Chapter – II

The Question of Belonging and Necessity of the Third Space

After

all Ceylon, Africa, America – as far as we go, they are only the contradictions of what we ourselves stand for are: and we're rather like Johnas running away from the places we belong.

... Ceylon is an experience – but heavens not permanence.

D.H. Lawrence (Avinash Jodha, 63)

Lawrence's statement addresses certain key issues in postcolonial writing. The italicized 'we' draws a clear line of distinction between European civilizations and the rest of the world. It brings into focus the Eurocentric ideas of identity and the modes of perception that emphasize the difference between the two worlds; primarily, upon two levels – what we stand for and are – that is, the difference in terms of culture, religion, ethics and ethos beside the other more visible

differences of race, color, and locale. Lawrence might have been gravely appalled by the Ceylonese natives, the excessive heat, rapidly changing weather and the noises of the Orient but these factors, somehow, did not restrain Europe from being pulled towards the Orient and the imposition of long centuries of exploitation under the eventual disguise of carrying and removing the 'white man's burden'.

However, Lawrence makes a significant point when he puts the European voyages in a mythical context – we're *rather like Jonahs running away from the places we belong* – a pattern that was to reverse; as with the dawn of the twentieth century the world was to be full of *Jonahs* and this time from the other world; running away from places they belonged to seek better opportunities, refuge and new homes; carrying with them their distinct cultures, the memories, the scars, real and imagined, of their colonial past right into the hearts of the ex-imperial centers.

The political and economic turmoils of the twentieth century exercised an unparalleled influence over the religious and socio-cultural realms of the world. The increased accessibility of geopolitical spaces between the hitherto separated worlds converted the world into a vast theatre of epic voyages with immigrants/refugees of economic, political and religious nature embarking upon individual exodus of their own. The Twentieth century to a great extent was the year of immigration, which brought the people of different racial and ethnic origins into close proximity, juxtaposed the colonizer and the colonized, thereby bringing the given and inherent differences between them into sharper focus and making the questions of identity, roots, the notions of selfhood and otherness crucial to contemporary enquiry.

Michael Ondaatje's position in this context is an interesting and intriguing example of the complexity of the contemporary questions of identity. J.E. Chamberlin in his review of Ondaatje's poems has observed:

... Canada offers Ondaatje geography but no inheritance; Sri Lanka offers him a family history, but no tradition, no way of passing things on; the English language offers him both an inheritance and a history, but no time and place.

Chamberlain's remark captures the dilemma of the expatriate writer, whereby the physical dislocation of the writer forces the geographical, socio-cultural belongings, the questions of history, inheritance, tradition and language into complex relationship. A relationship that has to be negotiated afresh, but while Chamberlin appears to suggest a kind of 'lost world' situation for the expatriate writer, and captures an essential disadvantage in the uncertain status of Ondaatje or that of the other contemporaries; it has to be acknowledged that the notions of history, inheritance, tradition and language are in themselves indeterminate, they evolve with inter-cultural influences and cannot be treated as 'givens'; something that can be carried or handed down through generations untainted, unaltered.

The expatriate writers, through their physical and multiple dislocations/relocations experience the cross-cultural influences, are transformed by them as they transform the cultures and spaces they step in and step through.

Michael Ondaatje's 1992 novel *The English Patient* brought him both critical and popular success. One of the themes of this novel is identity, which is also a main theme of his two previous works *Running in the Family* and *In the Skin of a Lion*.

The characters in the novel *The English Patient* – Almasy or the English Patient, Hana, Kip and Caravaggio are displaced people thrown together by the Second World War. They are from different races, cultures and nations, but they share two things in common, that is, they are powerless people and they all hope to find a refuge to shelter themselves from the war. In the desert and the villa the characters find physical shelters. In these two spaces they also form new communities with no national divides, which in their view are a cause of the war and a source of their pains. The necessity of the existence of the desert and the villa lies in that they are metaphorical third spaces in which national divides are erased. The characters make efforts to erase national divides, break away from national ties and shed national identities so as to keep themselves away from the war, a nation-sponsored violence, which has done them injuries.

Although *The English patient* does not give a straight explanation of the causes of the Second World War, it offers certain details to indicate that the war was nation-sponsored violence, and makes connections between the negative aspects of the nation and war. The English patient claims: “I came to hate nations. We are deformed by nations” (*The English Patient*, 138). His hatred of nations can be explained by the strong suggestion in his words of the connection between the nation and killing/death brought about by the war. This connection finds parallel in some critics’ comments on the essentialist view of the nation.

Critics believe that the essentialist view of the nation leads to us-them distinctions and acts of (violent) exclusion. In the essentialist view, the nation can be defined as “a community of people whose members are bound together by a sense of solidarity rooted in an historic attachment to a homeland and a common culture” (Johnston et al. 532). According to this view the nation is an organically grown entity and members of a nation share a common ethnic/racial origin, history, culture and territory. In other words, a nation has a pre-given essence which makes it different

from other nations. This idea that nations depend on sameness as well as on difference implies that nations, national identity and nationalism are “at one level all about ‘belonging’ ... [but] also all about exclusion” (Mitchell 262). On the one hand the nation produces a sense of belonging, or national identity, and evokes a feeling of loyalty, or nationalism, among its members. On the other hand, this sense of belonging and feeling of loyalty leads to “keeping out those you do not like” or acts of expulsion between nations.

Acts of expulsion may be destructive, threatening, and extreme behaviors including war. Gill Valentine writes –

The very fact that national identities depend constitutively on difference means that nations are forever haunted by their various definitional others. ... As a consequence, nations often engage in acts of violence, segregation, censorship, economic coercion and political oppression against those ... who are imagined as threatening or dangerous “Others” (298)

Valentine’s point is that violence, segregation, censorship and oppression are a result of the nations’ emphasis on the difference and their efforts to keep out their “Others”. James Clifford also suggests that “ ‘nations’ require constant, often violent, maintenance” (9). Other critics link the emphasis on difference with intolerance and racialized distinctions (Deutsch 63), with militarism (Howarth 84) and with animosity toward other cultures and nations and a consequent advocacy of annihilation (Aller 18). Highlighted in these critics’ comments is the connection between the nation and intolerance, animosity, aggression, violence and war.

War brings ruins to people directly or indirectly involved in it as well as to the spaces they are in. The English patient falls to the desert from the crashing plane and is burned so severely that he

never gets out of bed in the villa. Hana's stepfather Patrick suffers from injuries, pain and despair, before he dies alone in a dove-cot in France, far away from his home in Canada. Caravaggio is caught while trying to steal some documents for the English and both his thumbs are brutally chopped off by the Germans during a torture session.

What comes together with bodily ruins is psychological ruin. Caravaggio is described as a man "in near ruins" (27) when he is brought to the hospital the extreme pain and fear that he finds that he cannot steal anymore. The deaths of Hana's stepfather and lover separate her from them, bring her to the verge of suicide and make her kill her unborn baby. Kip's brother is imprisoned for refusing to fight for the English and his mentor Lord Suffolk is killed when diffusing bombs. The English patient loses his friend Madox and his lover Katherine. All these characters feel deserted, lonely and helpless after losing their beloved ones.

Physical injuries, deaths and psychological pains are brought about by the war as much as by extreme nationalism which sends members of the nation to the battlefield and over-emphasis on the members' national identity which can have negative effects. The English patient's hatred is directed toward the nation itself, but in his words is implied the hatred of extreme nationalism and the hatred of too much emphasis on national identity during the war.

When the English patient claims that he "came to hate nations" and that his friend "Madox died because of nations" (*The English Patient*, 138), he is not only suggesting that there is a connection between death and the nation but also implying that besides the war itself, there is/are (an)other nation- related cause(s) Madox's death. The nation related cause of Madox's death maybe more precisely interpreted as nationalism evoked by the nation and used as an excuse for war. When the Libyan Desert becomes a battlefield, the English patient, Madox, and their fellow

Oasis Society members can no longer go on with their explorations. Madox returns to England. One month later, he listens to the “jingoistic” sermon at the church:

When the sermon began half an hour later, it was jingoistic and without any doubt in support of the war. The priest intoned blithely about battle, blessing the government and the men about to enter the war. Madox listened as the sermon grew more impassioned; He pulled out the desert pistol, bent over and shot himself in the heart. (242)

Jingoism is nationalism carried to the extreme. The jingoistic sermon encourages people to go to the war for the seemingly sacred mission to fight for the nation. Because of the war, Madox and his colleagues have to stop their explorations. This research is used to turn the desert into a theatre of war. The war “imposes national boundaries on the desert, forcing the characters back into their respective national identities” (Piper 121). The explorers have to choose sides and friends become enemies. Madox’s suicide can be understood as a protest against the extreme nationalism.

Emphasis on national identity also causes the characters to suffer, even to die. During the war a person’s national identity becomes exceptionally important as it is regarded as a marker of the side he is on. People are deprived of their individual identities and are regarded only as dependent on a certain collective. Soldiers who have lost their plates with their serial numbers are thought to have “uncertain ... nationalities” (The English Patient, 95) and as a result are treated with suspicion and housed in criminal compounds. Their individualities are ignored and only when they are tied to a battalion, a squadron or a nation do these soldiers have identity.

The soldiers' experience shows that in the war between nations, the side a person is on, or the nation he belongs to, decides who this person is. This rule applies not only to the soldiers who fight the war, but also to those who are not directly involved in the fighting, such as Katherine. When she is severely wounded by her husband's suicidal attempt to kill her, the English patient tries to ask for help from the English, but they do not listen to anything he says and refuse to save her. They do not believe him because he has not given them the right name: "I was yelling Katherine's name. Yelling the Gilf Kebir. Whereas the only name I should have yelled, dropped like a calling card into their hands, was Clifton's" (251). Her husband's name is her calling card. She does not have her own identity, but exists only through her relationship to her husband. Her husband Geoffrey Clifton's name is recognized by the English because he "was a man embedded in the English machine. He had a genealogy going back to Canute" (237). The traceable ancestry line tells his family's as well as his own position in English history and the English nation. Moreover, Clifton works for the British government by keeping watch on the desert explorers; so is known and protected by the "English web" in the desert. In the war, only by belonging to her husband and his family can Katherine her English identity. When the English patient sweeps aside her tie to her husband, he is sweeping aside her tie to the nation, thus making her identity questionable. She also dies because of the nation, or more specifically, the negative aspects of the nation and national ties.

National divide leads to the war. Nationalism that is carried to the extreme emphasizes the divides and escalates the war. Emphasis on national identity as a dividing line between friend and foe during the war deprives people of their individual identities and even their lives. National divides and national ties are what cause the characters to suffer. One common reaction the characters make to the situation they are thrown in is to erase names as a means of erasing

identities. Names can verify one's individual identity as well as tie an individual to a group. In the hospital, Caravaggio never speaks, refusing to reveal anything, "not even his name." Jacques Lacan suggests that "naming constitutes a pact by which two subjects simultaneously come to an agreement to recognize the same object. (qtd. In Butler 152). Although names do not guarantee identities, they are offered and received as guarantees. Caravaggio's refusal to give his name can be understood as his unwillingness to reveal his identity. Moreover, a given name enacts an image of otherness, a "not-I, against which an individual can confirm his or her own identity". When Caravaggio's name is withheld, his identity is concealed from others; and when his identity becomes uncertain, his relationship to others –whether he is the same as or different from them –becomes unclear. His act of erasing his name implies an effort to erase his tie to others. This implication can also be detected in Hana's act of erasing the soldier's name after witnessing the injuries, pains and deaths, Hana begins to "call everyone buddy. ... Hello Buddy, good-bye Buddy" (*The English Patient*, 501). Calling every soldier the name "buddy" she erases the differences between them, or the distinctions between their identities. What is erased together with the distinction between "I" and "not-I" is the distinction between groups, since people who are all the same cannot form different groups.

While Caravaggio and Hana erase names without knowing why, the English patient consciously erases his all name as a means of erasing his tie to the nation. He is portrayed as a character who is aware of the relationship between names and identity. He talks about his "hate of ... being named" for "fear of ... being owned" (238) by an individual and/or a group. He explains that the English refuse to save Katherine because he has given them the wrong name, hinting at the relationship between the name and the nation. Being aware of the relationship, he never gives his name in the villa. Names are central to the issue of identity in Ondaatje's novel:

Names are capable of providing verification; they have the power to distinguish, substantiate and confirm, and above all they confer identity and establish identification. To be named, therefore, is to belong, to be located. ... to be nameless is, indeed, to be without an identity. (*The English Patient and Questions of History*" 8-9)

English patients' effort to erase his identity shows his wish not to belong, or the wish to free himself from the tie to a group, more specifically, to a nation. National divides and national ties cause the characters to suffer, and that is why they hope to erase the divides and the ties, or in the English patient's words, to "[e]rase nations" (139). To erase name is just one way to erase tie to a nation, "coming out of what had happened to her during the war she [Hana] drew her own few rules to herself. She would not be ordered again or carry out duties for the greater good" (14). The "greater good" Hana refuses to work for is similar to what is preached in the jingoistic sermon Madox refuses to listen to. Unlike Madox who kills himself, Hana insists on staying behind to look after the English patient when other nurses and patients move further south. It is her way of coming out of the war. The desert explorers, sensing the approach of the war, "wished to remove the clothing [their] countries" (139). The English patient "wanted to erase ... the place [he] had come from" and "not to belong to anyone, to any nation". Only when the characters erase national divides and national ties that cause them to suffer can they come out of the suffering. Spaces with no national divides are necessary for the characters to get away from the nation and the war. The Libyan Desert and the Girolamo Villa are such spaces.

Both the desert and the villa are boundary – blurred physical spaces in which the characters can live away from the divided world being destroyed by the war. Outside the dessert "there was just trade and power, money and war" (250), but in the changing space of the desert, the explorers

find it impossible to draw any long-lasting boundary. “In the desert it is easy to lose any sense of demarcation” (18) because it is a fluid space. What is now called the Sahara desert used to be a water world. Even today “[h]arpoons are still found in the desert” (19). Water-turned-desert is full of flowing sands which make it “a piece of cloth carried by winds, never held down by stones” (138), thus unable to be claimed or owned. Most of the desert explorers are brought together and tied to each other by their pursuit of pure knowledge and their sole purpose of finding the lost oasis of *Zerzura*. After living in this fluid space for some years, they “seemed to be interested only in things that could not be bought or sold, of no interest to the outside world” (143). They do not explore the desert for money, power or ownership, things many people outside the desert are interested in. Before the flames of war spread to the desert, it is a space away from the outside world, a refuge for the English patient.

In the villa, as in the desert, little physical demarcation can be found. “There seemed little demarcation between house and landscape, between damaged building and the burned and shelled remnants of the earth” (43). This disappearance of demarcation is a result of the exchange of fire between two warring parties. After mortar-shell attack which lasted for one month, the villa is in near ruins. Bombs have made craters in the walls, allowing moon and rain, leaves and birds, into the villa, so that the piano and paintings are exposed to lightning, beds are covered with leaves rooms with walls missing become an open aviary, and gardens are like further rooms. Inside and outside, nature and culture merge into each other in the space of the villa. In this devastated villa, however, the characters feel “protected” and “safe” (14). The boundary-blurred space of the almost ruined villa is free from military conflicts, not controlled by either side of the warring parties after both the Allied troops and the German troops have left the area. “The villa allows [the characters] space to retreat from the aftermath of the war in Italy

and to exist for a period of time outside of all marking of identity” (Schatteman 215). It becomes a refuge for the characters in the world at war.

The boundary-blurred desert and the villa are physical spaces away from the society and the war. More importantly, they are also metaphorical spaces in which the characters find it possible to erase national divides and national ties. The transformation of the space of the desert and the villa, the blowing winds and the flowing sands metaphorically “erase nations” and unsettle the characters’ national identity. Ondaatje’s description of the desert and the villa shows that it is possible to construct third spaces with no national divides or national ties. While critics such as Gill Valentine and James Clifford have focused their criticism of the essentialist view of the nation on the connection between the nation and the violence, other critics have aimed their attack at the idea that the nation has a pre-given essence. These critics propose that the nation is constructed instead of being an organic entity. Miroslav Hroch believes that the idea of the nation was initially promoted by a small elite, then spread to a larger network of patriots, and finally resulted in popular mobilization. Benedict Anderson points out that nation are “imagined communities” or artificial creations that emerged as a consequence of print capitalism. Joanne P. Sharp explains that ordinary acts such as the singing of a national anthem or the victory of a national sports team make members of a nation experience a sense of unison with their fellow citizens even though nothing connects them at all but an imagined sound or image. If the nation has no pre-given essence, then national identity is not originary and fixed. Anthony D. Smith, theorist of nationalism, proposes that it is the historians’ attempts to create and mythologize the past that fashion this past into a common national identity. Similarly, nationalism is created to meet certain needs. John Breuilly asserts that the rise of modern nations makes the ideology of nationalism necessary. In other words, nationalism has very little to do with ethnic mobilization

and everything to do with political mobilization –nationalism is a form of politics. The nation, national identity and nationalism are all constructed.

In the desert and the villa, historic territory which plays an important role in the construction of the nation and national identity is shown to be fluid, historical memories which members of a nation supposedly share are proved to be myths, and racial identity as a marker of national identity is made unclear. Thus the nation is deconstructed and boundaries between national identities are erased.

In the essentialist view, a historic territory, or a shared space which has become sacred in history, is fused with the nation, national identity and nationalism. More than a “metaphor of landscape as inscape of national identity” (*Nation and Narration*, 295) and a “means of producing a certain kind of loyalty, or sense of belonging, between people” (Mitchell 271), the terrestrial space called territory is a part of the essence of the nation and national identity. Guntrum Herb explains that territory “clarifies national identity by sharpening more ambiguous cultural and ethnic markers” (17). National identity becomes “geographically based” (2). Territory “situates the nation, giving it roots and boundaries and “expresses internal cohesion and external differentiation”, or in other words, it “enable[s] us to exert control from within and to restrict access from without” (1). Territory helps decide not only what a nation is, but also what a nation is not: it helps establish a physical boundary between nations. Because of the close link between the nation and territory, “the preservation of the territory that is occupied and sometimes controlled by the nation is the goal of the nationalist mission – arguably even more than the preservation of the people” (2). The preservation of a territory becomes crucial in the existence and maintenance of a nation.

However, Ondaatje's description of the desert and the villa in the novel shows that the spaces may change and territories are not permanent. The villa has undergone a series of transformations as social relations change. Once a nunnery, the building is rebuilt as a private villa during the time of the Medici's. The Germans have changed it into a military strong hold, and the Allies have turned it into a hospital. "The history of the villa is thus tied to a process of social secularization" (Kella 94). As social relations change, the space as well as the ownership changes. No one can claim it originally his own or own it forever. This point is made clearer in the description of the desert. In the desert where physical spaces are fluid, it is impossible to try to claim a space one's own and keep tied to it. In history, the desert "was given a hundred shifting names long before Canterbury existed, long before battles and treaties quilted Europe and the east" (*The English Patient*, 139). The hundred shifting names given imply the appearance and the disappearance of groups of people as well as changes of ownership of territory. Ernest Renan has pointed out more than a century ago that "it is no more soil than it is race which makes a nation" (11), meaning that neither race nor territory decides what a nation is. Gertjan Dijkink believes that the "historic territory" of a nation "implies a tale of invasion" defense, liberation and loss" (11). In other words, as a "nation's territory is formed as a result of conquest and loss, it is subject to change and its history cannot be traced. Similarly, Anssi Paasi thinks that "territories and their boundaries are in a continuous state of transformation"(19). Groups of people have tried to own the desert by giving it names, but "those strange rambling feasts and cultures [have] left nothing behind, not an ember" (*The English Patient*, 139). Invasions, conquests, defenses and liberation have made territories undergo a series of changes.

Ondaatje goes further to suggest that what ultimately erases all the boundaries, names and cultures is not the change of ownership, but the transformation of space. The villa is a porous

space. When all the controlling social forces are gone, the process of social secularization “ends with a movement back to nature” (Kella 94). Rains and winds destroy the roofs and walls, turning the villa into a space between inside and outside, nature and culture. No man-made boundary lasts. The desert is described as not a permanent existence, but a space that has always been in transformation. The English patient’s exploration leads him to believe that where there is dry sand now, there used to be water:

In Tassili I have seen rock engravings from a time when the Sahara people hunted water horses from reed boats. In Wadi Sura I saw caves whose walls were covered with paintings of swimmers. Here there had been a lake.

Ask a mariner what is the oldest known sail, and he will describe a trapezoidal one hung from the mast of a reed boat that can be seen in rock drawings in Nubia.

(The English Patient, 18 - 9)

Ancient paintings of swimmers and rock drawings of trapezoidal from the mast of reed boats found in the desert tell the changes Sahara has gone through. The desert has changed drastically over the centuries and the only thing that has remained the same is its fluidity. Sand, like water, is fluid. Desert winds continually transform the landscape into new configurations. There are “permanent winds that live in the present tense” as well as “less constant winds that change direction that can knock down horse and rider and realign themselves anti-clockwise” (16). There are private winds “[t]raveling along the ground like a flood. Blasting off paint, throwing down telephone poles, transporting stones and statue heads” (17). Finally there are dust storms in three shapes –the whirl, the column and the sheet –which can make “the horizon ... lost” and people “surrounded by ‘waltzing Ginns’”, wiping away any boundaries that may exist.

In the desert where there are blowing winds and flowing sands, it is impossible, even dangerous to be static or to be tied to anything static. The explorers have to keep moving. “If you pause sand builds up as it would around anything stationary, and locks you in” (137). Only the Bedouins are free in the desert. They “spilled and slid over sand and stones, their blue robes shifting like a spray of milk” (19). These nomadic people are like water “not contained within one space” (*Comparative Cultural Studies*, 39). They do not draw any boundaries to confine themselves to a certain physical space. Nor do they draw any boundaries between people to make us-them distinctions. The explorers’ national identities are insignificant to them” (138) and they save the English patient without asking what his name is or which side he is on. Living in the transformed and transforming desert, sometimes among the Bedouins, the explorers are able to brush aside boundaries between spaces and between national identities. “You do not go to the desert to find identity, but to lose it” because the “desert is ... but the absence of bounds” (Bauman 20). The explorers “[g]radually ... became nationless” and “[b]y the time war arrived, after ten years in the desert, it was easy for me [the English patient] to slip across borders, not to belong to anyone, to any nation” (138-9). The physical space of the desert in which nothing can be static, permanent and tied to becomes a metaphorical space in which national divides are erased as territory on which the existence of the nation supposedly depends is shown to be fluid.

Like territory which is shown to be fluid, thus unable to express a nation’s internal coherence and external differentiation, history is proved to be constructed, thus unable to be relied on to maintain the essence of a nation. “Not only is history a narrative of who we are,” but it “has had a major role in producing a sense of being itself on the national level” (Ashcroft 103). History is supposed to help decide what a nation is, or to make up the essence of a nation. However, this role of history is questioned in *The English Patient*. In the desert not only territorial boundaries

are erased but also historical facts are lost. “[I]n the emptiness of deserts you are always surrounded by lost history “which has now become “legends” and “rumors” (*The English Patient*, 135). Legends and rumors may mix fact and fiction, add in imaginations and make exaggerations and distortions, so that it becomes difficult to know the past. By pointing out the transformation of history into rumors, Ondaatje “foregrounds ... the difficulty of ever knowing what happened in the past” (*Michael Ondaatje and the Problem History*, 99). Actually there is nowhere to know the past except in books written by historians and memories told in stories, but neither books nor memories are to be relied on. Books written by historians cannot tell what historical facts are because it is difficult to gather historical information and because the writing of history is a process of reinterpretation and rearrangement. The book the English patient takes with him wherever he goes and sleeps with every night is Herodotus’ *The Histories*. Since *The Histories* is the oldest written record of European civilization, Herodotus is regarded as the father of Western historiography. However, the English patient “[s]ees more as one of those spare men of the desert who travel from oasis to oasis trading legends as if it is the exchange of seeds, consuming everything without suspicion piecing together a mirage” (*The English Patient*, 119). The source of the historical records is tribal legends, or oral narratives, of the past and the process of piecing together makes the records written narratives which involve the writers selecting and ordering.

Up until the 1970’s, many historians had “accepted a corresponding theory of truth holding that history portrays people who really existed and actions that really took place” (Iggers, 3) and they “assumed that there are objects of historical research accessible to clearly defined methods of inquiry” (8). However, that history is about facts and facts are accessible was never a common

understanding among historians. In the 19th century, more and more people began to challenge the assumption. In 1887, Friedrich Nietzsche observes in *Genealogy of Morals*:

There is no set of maxims more important for an historian than this: ... that everything that exists, no matter what its origin, is periodically reinterpreted by those in power in terms of fresh intentions; that all processes in the organic world are processes of outstripping and overcoming, and that, in turn, outstripping and overcoming means reinterpretation, rearrangement. (209)

Nietzsche is pointing out the distinction between the origin and the interpretation of a given phenomenon and hinting at the narrative nature of any account of the past. His point is developed in the understanding of history and the role of historian in the 20th century. Jacques Derrida asserts that the unity between the word (signifier) and the thing to which it referred (signified) no longer exists. For historiography this means a world without meaning and lacking coherence. Roland Barthes denies the distinction between history and literature and with it that between fact and fiction. Michel de Certeau regards history as “nothing more than a narrative” (287) and Linda Hutcheon believes that history is “a construction ... having made by historians” (*The Canadian Postmodern*, 14-5). Accordingly, a historian becomes a “creator of plausible facts” (Adhikari 45) instead of recorder of facts. The questioning of the role of a historian as a recorder of facts and of the possibility of conducting objective inquiry, or of whether “a coherent scientific explanation of change in the past is possible” (97), constituted a challenge to the assumption about history held before the 1970s:

The problem with historical narrative ...as Hayden White and other recent theorists of history have pointed out, is that, while it proceeds from empirically

validated facts or events, it necessarily requires imaginative steps to place in a coherent story. Therefore a fictional element enters into all historical discourse.

(2)

The fictional element in historical discourse as a result of imaginative steps makes the demarcation line between historical writing and literary writing, between the historian and the fiction writer, and between fact and fiction blurred.

Ondaatje chooses *The Histories* of all books to put in the hands of his main character, showing how a historian's writing can open up the possibility to understand history as made up. In Ondaatje's view, Herodotus's way of writing also enables the readers to be aware of the variety of perspectives from which history can be viewed and allows them to view history from different perspectives. He quotes from *The Histories*: "This history of mine,' Herodotus says, 'has from the very beginning sought out the supplementary to the main argument'" (*The English Patient*, 119). The quoted words show the role *The Histories* plays in enabling the readers to view history from the perspective other than that of the main argument, or the argument developed by what Nietzsche calls "those in power". "Historical works, like works of fiction, admit a variety of perspectives" (*Michael Ondaatje and the Problem of History*, 97). Viewing the same event from different perspectives may lead to narrating the event in different versions. Recording the legends which he has consumed without suspicion, Herodotus offers various and equally probable versions, instead of one authoritative version, of the same event and passes the message that there is no history but histories. The juxtaposition of history tells the impossibility of tracing the history, whether it is the history of a race, a culture, or a nation.

A nation depends on historic territory and shared history to maintain its sameness within and to differentiate itself from other nations. When historic territory is revealed to be fluid and history is deconstructed, the coherence within a nation becomes problematic and the boundary between nations is blurred. Consequently, national identity becomes unsettled. A nation depends on historic territory and shared history to maintain its sameness within and to differentiate itself from other nations. When the historic territory is revealed to be fluid and history is deconstructed, the coherence within a nation becomes problematic and the boundary between nations is blurred. Consequently, national identity becomes unsettled.

Besides ties to historic territory and common history, the tie to race is made problematic in the novel. The idea of the nation is often based on the naturalized myth that members of a nation belong to a same race and that racial purity distinguishes them from members of other nations. Race is regarded as an objective criterion for nationhood and one visible marker of race is skin color. “[S]kin, as the key signifier of cultural and racial difference in the stereotype, is the most visible thing, recognized as ‘common knowledge’ in a range of cultural, political and historical discourses” (*The Location of Culture*, 78). Skin color tells which race one belongs to and the race one belongs to supposedly signifies one’s national identity. However, in the novel it is not clear which race the English patient belongs to. He appears in the novel as a man with no identification, burned out recognition:

A man with no face. An ebony of pool. All identification consumed in a fire. Parts of his burned body and face had been sprayed with tannic acid that hardened into protective shell of his raw skin. The area around his eyes was coated with a thick layer of gentian violet. There was nothing to recognize in him. (*The English Patient*, 48)

What most strikes the readers and amazes his interrogators is his tarred black skin. “Everything about him was very English except for the fact that his skin was tarred black, a bogman from history among the interrogating officers” (96). For the English officers who interrogated him, without white skin, neither his English accent nor his familiarity with the English culture can assure them that he is English. Skin color is as crucial as, if not more crucial than, language and culture in deciding his national identity. With everything about him English but with black skin color, the English patient’s national identity becomes uncertain.

The possibility of keeping tied to the nation through race is also questioned when the English patient is juxtaposed with the Indian sapper Kip and racial boundary between them is blurred. The practice of separating people into different races “tends to be negative, in as much as [race] is much more usually proverbial role of racial stereotypes” (Hobsbawm 65-6). Racial stereotypes may lead to the idea of racial superiority. In the novel, however, brown-skinned Kip from India the former colony of Britain is not regarded as different from or inferior to the others characters. “While Kip’s dark skin and his racial otherness are mentioned several times, they are not what we remember most about him” (Ty 14). Details about his inner character, including his skill as a sapper, his idiosyncrasies and fears, make his presence in the novel as significant as that of the others. On the other hand, the burned patient is supposedly English, yet he is without power. Lying in bed, he can do nothing except turning his head a bit and talking. He “exists literally because of his connection to others” (Ellis 4). He is helpless and has to depend on others –Hana, the Bedouins and Kip –for survival. Traditionally white skin is linked with beauty, power and superiority and colored skin is linked with ugliness, submission and inferiority. Ondaatje’s description of Kip and the English patient subverts this traditional link. The boundary between beauty and ugliness, delight and horror, and black and white is blurred.

What adds to the doubt as to which race the English patient belongs to is his ability to slip between languages. The “importance attached to languages derives from their being signs of race” (Renan 9) and “primordial foundations of national culture and the matrices of the national mind” (Hobsbawn 54). Language, like skin color, is a marker of race and a signifier of national identity. Language seems to provide a clue to the English patient’s national identity”. Not knowing at all who the burned man is except that he speaks English, the nurses in the hospital call him the “English” patient. Language, however, can also conceal his national identity, he says: “You should be trying to trick me, make me speak German, which I can, by the way” (*The English Patient*, 95). His proficiency in an enemy language and his black body “signal that his burnt body is a labyrinth ... that cannot be reduced to one identity” (Stening – Riding 170). When language and race are used to decide one’s nationhood and which side one is during the war time, the English patient who speaks both English and German, two languages spoken by two enemy nations, confounds his interrogators, “leaving them never quite sure who he was” (*The English Patient*, 96). Thus, his proficiency in two languages enables him to erase his national identity, which is exactly what he wants to do.

As the historic territory, common history and race of the nation are deconstructed, the nation is deconstructed, or to use Ondaatje’s word in the novel, “erased”. The characters are freed from the nation, nationalism and national identity, and new communities emerge in the desert and the villa:

By portraying an existence outside of the traditional forms of family, class and nation; by depicting scenes of communication between strangers; by revealing human kindness which crosses boundaries of color, Ondaatje suggests that other kinds of social structures are possible. (Ty 19)

One kind of social structure is the two communities formed by characters from different geographies, races, cultures and nations who are connected to each other by love and care when national divides are erased. The two communities are third spaces for the characters. The explorers' community in the desert is a third space because there the explorers "gradually ... became nationless" and the English patient finds it "easy to slip across borders" (*The English Patient*, 139). While this community is mentioned only briefly in the novel, the one in the villa is described in details to show how the third space provides a refuge to the characters. "Like the desert, the Villa San Girolamo has also become at this excruciating point of history one of those 'holy places' (260) where ... individuals can chart their own routes to self-re-generation" (Ibarrola-Armendariz 41). The villa has become a "strange immediate space" in which "it is possible to become 'unconscious of one's own ancestry. To forget one's determinate self and become one's own invention" (*Being and Representation*, 47). In the devastated villa, the four characters are like the nomadic Bedouins, "the most beautiful humans" (*The English Patient*, 138) in the English patient's eyes, who are not confined by any boundaries. In the Villa situated in the war-ravaged landscape of Italy, where "[e]very river ... was bridgeless, as if its names had been erased, as if the sky were starless, houses doorless" (129), these characters are like explorers, searching not for lost oases, but for bridges between them so that they can build a microcosm away from the war and its injuries. The bridges are not common blood, language, history or national identity, but love and care.

The characters feel comfortable to live in the boundary-blurred space of the villa. Hana "prefe[s] to be nomadic in the house with her pallet or hammock, sleeping sometimes in the English patient's room sometimes in the hall, ... some nights she opened doors and slept in rooms that had walls missing" (13). She is free in the villa as the Bedouins are free in the desert. Kip, too,

likes to “sleep half in and half out of the tent” (76), not confined by any spatial boundary. He wears English uniform and Sikh turban, clothes that mark two cultures. He wears just one earphone, letting the other dangle free under his chin, “so he is not limited by any one world. In the villa they feel “more comfortable without home ... without traditional kinds of attachments” (Ty 12). Their mode of living “mirrors their preference for existence without ... boundaries”. For them, the boundaries are metaphorical as well as spatial.

Kip the Indian sapper is well aware of the difference between the British colonizers and the Indian colonized. However, unlike his brother who “refused to agree to any situation where the English had power” (*The English Patient*, 200)

During the Second World War, his brother insists on the divides between the Indian colonized and the British colonizers, refuses to fight for the British, and as a result is put into prison. On the contrary, Kip hopes to negotiate between Western dominance and Eastern oppression and voluntarily enlists in the British army to replace his brother. This act of negotiation brings him to the villa, to defuse bombs, another act to erase boundaries. His travels through Europe as a sapper are punctuated by entries into churches where he takes refuge from the destruction of the war and finds solace in the figures of medieval frescoes and renaissance statues. He scans the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel “as if he were searching for a brother in the crowd” (77). Kip can be said to “create and occupy what Homi K. Bhabha celebrates as an in-between space” (Kella 100-1) in which binary oppositions are disrupted.

The English patient and Hana go further in their attempts to erase boundaries between identities. Faceless and raceless, the English patient speaks both English and German, refuses to tell his name, neither admits nor denies that he is Hungarian. He “has no fixed identity. His identities are

fleeting, fluid, and difficult to pin down” (Younis 4). With an uncertain identity, he is able to slip between being white and black, English, German and Hungarian, enemy and friend rejecting a fixed, essential, homogenous, exclusionary identity. Hana, too, tries to erase her own identity by making herself faceless, genderless, ageless and nationless. She removes all mirrors in the villa and stacks them away, making herself symbolically as faceless as her English patient. She cuts her hair short and wears shoes and clothes taken from dead soldiers, making herself almost genderless. She is described as “half adult and half child” (*The English Patient*, 14), implicitly regressing toward a position of innocence, “effac[ing] the identity which is the product of her upbringing” (Kella 94). She also insists on staying behind in the deserted villa with her faceless and nameless patient, thus cutting the tie between herself and the allied forces she works for. To Caravaggio’s guess that the English patient might be the German spy, she responds; “I think we should leave him be. It doesn’t matter what side he is on, does it?” (*The English Patient*, 165) She has never asked her patient his name, nationality or which side he used to fight on. Her “devotion to the victim of the war who cannot be identified as either friend or enemy is a strong assertion of her rejection of nationality as definitive” (Kella 93-4). Obviously, in Hana’s idea, the English patient’s national identity is of no importance in their relationship.

Ties to the nation having been erased, what becomes important in the relationship between the characters is their love and care for each other, which heal their wounds. The characters not only care for each other but share stories with each other, which indicates “the readiness of the characters to immerse themselves in each other’s experience” (*Being and Representation*, 40) and “the need to immerse [themselves] in the lives of others” (*Imploding Time and Geography*, 121). In a villa where there is hardly a world around them” (*The English Patient*, 44). Hana, Kip and the English patient talk about the grief at the death of their families, lovers, friends and

ordinary soldiers, at the desert being destroyed by the flames of war and the streets that have become sewers of blood. Telling each other their war experiences is like talking cure, which helps them come out of the past. Besides, when they “emerge from” the stories after having “immersed in lives of others” (12), they realize that they are all the powerless people in the world at war, that they share pain and sorrow, and that they all hope to be free from national ties. Even Caravaggio, who has been trying to prove that the English patient is the enemy, admits that he has “become more fond of [him] than most of the people” (252). After exchanging their stories, he seems to have understood his “enemy’s” pain and wish, so when Kip threatens to kill the English patient after hearing the news of the bombing of Japan, he stops Kip, saying, “No. Not him. Mistake. Of all people he is probably on your side.” (268) He does not mean that the English patient is on the side of the English for whom Kip works, or that he is from a brown nation just like Kip, but that both he and Kip hate the war and the national divides that cause the war. Although the characters are from different nations, races and geographies, but their hatred of confrontations and their wish to be away from national ties enable them to form a new community.

In the third spaces of desert and villa the characters are “offer[ed] ... a suitable atmosphere to start their self-constructions from scratch” (Ibarrola-Armendariz 41). Old identities are shed and ties are broken away from, replaced by their love and care for each other, and both physical and psychological wounds are being healed. The third spaces, however, cannot shelter the characters permanently.

The desert and the villa are described as spaces away from the world, but they cannot remain in this situation forever. The communities in the desert and the villa fall apart in face of the forces

from the outside –the Americans who drop bombs in Japan and the autocrats who spread the war to North Africa.

The third space of the villa is formed when the characters have erased boundaries between races and nations in a space away from the war. However, it collapses when bombs dropped in Japan push the characters back into the reality of the war. For Kip, especially this incident makes him become aware of the difficulty to erase boundaries between the whites and the non-whites. Kip has believed that the distance between the East and the West, the whites and the non-whites can be negotiated. He willingly works for the English as a sapper to reduce the damages caused by the war. He loves English tea and is drawn to Western art. He loves Hana and enjoys the friendship between him and Caravaggio and the English patient. The news that the United States has bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, however, shatters Kip's belief that boundaries between races can be erased. He says to the English patient:

I grew up with traditions from my country, but later, more often, from your country ... You and the Americans converted us. With your missionary rules. And Indian soldiers wasted their lives as heroes so they could be pukkah. ... How did you fool us into this? (*The English Patient*, 283)

Even if the brown Indians accept the whites' ways and values and try hard so that they can be first class in their performance, they are still inferior to the whites. It is difficult for the brown people, or the radically marginalized people in the world, to erase boundaries between races.

The news of the nuclear attack also shatters Kip's belief that boundaries between nations can be erased. Hearing the news, he re-maps the world and divides it into two brown and white nations. "They would never have dropped such a bomb on a white nation" (286), he asserts. His

characterization of Japan as a “brown” nation may seem puzzling, but the harsh articulation of Japanese “brownness” arises from an awareness of “the persistence of whiteness vs. otherness” (Sadashige 246). In the eyes of the West, the non-whites, whether they are yellow, brown or black, are all racial others. When the United States decided to help push the Second World War to an end, it chose to drop bombs in Japan, a non-white nation. The American nuclear attack can thus be understood “as a historical event that divides the world into deadly racial oppositions between white and non-white nations” (Kella 105). Disappointed and disillusioned at the news of the nuclear attack, Kip picks up his rifle, walks into the English patient’s room, and threatens to kill the “Englishman”. His actions show that boundaries between the racial identities of the two characters are redrawn and the villa is not a third space anymore. It finally collapses when Kip goes back to India, The English patient dies, and Hana and Caravaggio go back to Canada.

The collapse of the community in the villa shows that the third space is vulnerable in face of the forces from the outside. When those in power change the world with force, there is little powerless people such as the characters in the villa can do. Similarly, the third space of the desert collapses when the “[financial and military autocrats [who] shape the world” (250) spread the war to North Africa.

What makes it possible for the autocrats to spread the war to the desert are the English patient and his fellow colleagues’ acts of exploration and mapping of the desert. The English patient describes himself to Hanna as an explorer and a reader and maker of maps, “a man who can recognize an unnamed town by its skeletal shape on the map” (10). He and his colleagues are interested only in their scientific discoveries. However, mapping is not an innocent act when its results are used by the autocrats. “Surveying, mapping and naming; these acts of exploration ... have never been innocent; they have always been profoundly political.” (Jacobs 4) The political

purpose may be “mapping out the boundaries of nation states, the limits of empire or physical geography” (Woodward 66). Maps made by the English patient and his colleagues become politically and militarily significant for the warring nations when they are used to occupy the desert and to draw boundaries between different sides at war. The English patient sometimes doubts his mapping job: “Had I been Madox’s demon friend? This country –had I charted it and turned it into a place of war? (*The English Patient*, 260) The explorers have no power against the autocrats. Their mapping helps turn the desert into a theatre of war and the third space of the desert collapses.

The collapse of the third spaces of the desert and the villa, however, is not a manifestation of Ondaatje’s pessimistic view of the third space. At the end of the novel, Kip has become a doctor involved in his community’s welfare and a loving husband and father, while Hana is in Canada, alone. As she moves in the house, “her shoulder touches the edge of a cupboard and a glass dislodges” (*The English Patient*, 302). At the same time, “Kipal’s left hand swoops down and catches the dropped fork an inch from the floor and gently passes it into the fingers of his daughter”. This ending somehow links Kip’s act in India with Hana’s in Canada, suggesting “a mysterious connection across space between Kip and Hana”, a connection which indicates that “the being of one affects the being of the other” (Younis 7). This link between the two characters is “the type of metaphor that Ondaatje highlights: two nations, two nationalities meet and the space of the intersection is transformed”. This magical and optimistic ending describes a “transcendent unity between Kip the brown soldier and Hana the white nurse” (Kella 111) and is a “fusion and compression ... of different cultural or national or personal identities” (*Imploding Time and Geography*, 120). It signals the disappearance once again of the boundaries between two races, two nations, two nationalities. In this magical connection hope can be seen of the

formation of a new third space after the war, after the collapse of the third spaces of the desert and the villa.

The third spaces appear, disappear and reappear as characters come together and interact with each other from communities not bounded by common racial or national identity. The (re)appearance and disappearance of communities without national divides in the boundary-blurred spaces of the villa and the desert in *The English Patient* indicate the vulnerability and necessity of the third space. In the third space identities no identity is fixed and all the boundaries between identities are blurred as it is a fluid space and is always under continual transformation. The third space is only a metaphorical, abstract or intangible which does not exist in reality and therefore is subject to outer violence and inner ruptures. The collapse of the two spaces of the villa and the desert indicates that the third space is temporary and vulnerable. However, it is worth constructing and looking forward to. Its temporality and fluidity make it impossible to maintain any long-lasting boundaries or ties in it. Ondaatje's description of the desert and the villa and his design of the ending of the novel illustrate the possibility of constructing the third space. More importantly, the third space is necessary for the characters who hope to free themselves from national divides that lead to war and injuries.

Conclusion

To conclude, we can say that Ondaatje is of the opinion that space operates as binary. It both unites and separates people. It won't be too farfetched acclaim to say that space also distinguishes us and affords us identity. According to Homi Bhabha, the imperialist pride brought in its wake, consideration such as 'self' and the 'other'. So, the colonializers claimed at times to be pure and identified the 'other' as the native. Infact, the whole process contributes to

what Gayatri Spivak spoke of in her Seminal essay, can the subaltern speak. It is a very well-crafted myth shaped in the cultural imagination that there is such a concept as original/indigenous native. History contributes to this cultural fictious. Anthropologists, Historians, archaeologists all draw an illusionary image of a virtual identity in ever changing boundaries. The evidences are fragmented and the linking arbitrary, a power play so to speak, space to Ondaatje is fluid, in a state of constant flux and subject to transformation. The question that we need to ask of ourselves that is history undefiable ? are there no parallel narratives? If yes, then which story is to be believed? The colonizers or the colonizeds. History therefore is constructed myopically with a skewed vision. Fact and fiction mixed irrevocably.

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