# Postcolonial Cultural Hybridity in *The English Patient* by Michael Ondaatje

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Tutkielma käsittelee jälkikolonialistista kulttuurillista hybriditeettiä kanadalaisen Michael Ondaatjen romaanissa *The English Patient*. Tutkielman teoreettisena viitekehyksenä toimivat postmodernistiset teemat ja kerrontatyyli sekä jälkikolonialistinen kirjallisuusteoria. Tavoitteenani on selvittää, voiko jälkikolonialistisia kulttuurillisia hybriditeettiteorioita soveltaa teoksen teemojen tulkintaan. Tutkielma keskittyy teoksen jälkikolonialistisen kulttuurillisen hybriditeetin tarkasteluun ja kolmannen tilan teoriaan, mitä ei ole käytetty syventävästi teoksen aiemmissa tulkinnoissa.

Teoriatausta esitellään luvussa kaksi. Tutkielmassa hyödynnetään kolonialismin kritiikkiä, kuten Edward Saidin teoriaa länsimaisesta kulttuurikäsityksestä ja sen projisoimasta itämaisesta toiseudesta. Teoksen tulkintaan käytetään Stuart Hallin kulttuurillisen identiteetin muodostumisen sekä Homi Bhabhan kulttuurillisen hybriditeetin ja kolmannen tilan teorioita. Hallin teoria painottaa konstruktiivista kulttuurillista identiteettiä essentialistisen identiteetin sijaan. Bhabhan jälkikolonialistinen kulttuurillinen hybriditeettiteoria pohjautuu kulttuurien törmäykseen kulttuurillisten määritelmien ja rajojen ulkopuolella sekä niiden sekoittumiseen kolmannessa tilassa kulttuurillisten hierarkioiden kantamattomissa.

Tutkielman analyysiosio jakautuu kahteen lukuun: ensin luvussa kolme tarkastellaan miten kulttuurillinen hybriditeetti voidaan neuvotella uudelleen kolmannessa tilassa. Tarkastelussa käsitellään kulttuurillisen identiteetin muokkautuvuutta ja tapoja, millä teos haastaa länsimaiset toiseuteen liittyvät kulttuurin, kansallisuuden ja rodun stereotypiat, sekä kolmannen tilan tarjoaman mahdollisuuden hybridisaatioon sivuuttamalla kulttuurilliset stereotypiat ja hierarkiat. Luvussa neljä analysoidaan aluksi halua yhteisöllisyyteen ja kulttuurilliseen vuorovaikutukseen, minkä jälkeen analysoidaan kulttuurilliseen hybriditeettiin liittyviä ristiriitaisuuksia ja lopuksi tehdään kulttuurillisen hybriditeetin uudelleenarviointi. Hybridisaatiossa muodostuva kulttuurillinen hybridi on epästabiili ja voi uudelleenmuokkautuessaan aiheuttaa sisäisiä jännitteitä.

Jälkikolonialistinen kulttuurillinen hybriditeetti mahdollistaa kulttuurillisten määritelmien uudistumisen. Luen Ondaatjen teoksen jälkikolonialistisena ja postmodernistisena tarinana, jonka loppu jää tulkinnallisesti avoimeksi: teoksen tarkastelussa tarina, kulttuurillinen hybriditeettiteoria ja kolmas tila pakenevat tarkkaa määrittelyä ja vaativat jatkuvaa uudelleentulkintaa. Yhteenvetona totean, että tutkielma tarjoaa uusia näkökulmia teoksen jälkikolonialistisiin ja postmodernistisiin teemoihin.

Avainsanat: Jälkikolonialismi, hybriditeetti, kolmas tila, Michael Ondaatje, Homi Bhabha

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

And this is the world of nomads in any case.

*The English Patient*[1]

Crosscultural encounters have become a significant theme within the field of postcolonial literature and theory. The work of the Canadian based novelist and poet Michael Ondaatje has been recognized for the complex mapping of postcolonial cultural hybrid experience. Cultural hybridity, identity and otherness entangled together form a novel entity. The work of the Sri Lankan origin Ondaatje represents a complex thematic linking of these issues; in fact, they can be seen as central preoccupations in his work. The hybrid experience that Ondaatje writes about is a contradictory one and it contains internal tensions.

My thesis will examine hybrid cultural experience in the postcolonial context in Michael Ondaatje's novel *The English Patient* (1992). It is a story of a badly burned man with an enigmatic identity. The story is sensuous, mysterious, and philosophically inspirational with tones of loss and sadness; it is a story of allegiances in war, love and history and takes place in a ruined Italian villa north of Florence at the end of the Second World War. The main characters include a 20-year-old Canadian nurse Hana, who has volunteered to stay behind to care for the unidentified burn patient and has grown wary of the war and life. The villa is a base for a young Indian sapper Kirpal Singh, a Sikh, nicknamed Kip by his English collegues in the bomb disposal unit in the Royal Engineers. He defuses bombs in a land ruined by war where everything around him is unsafe, and is challenged by a foreign culture. Hana's old family friend from Canada, David Caravaggio, also arrives at the villa

[1] (Ondaatje 1992, 248)

to look for Hana. He is a thief with the thumbs cut off, searching for his identity, having to find himself again. The four of them gradually form a fragile community amid the war. The story of the presumably English patient, who will be revealed as Ladislaus de Almásy, a Hungarian Count, unravelles through narrated flashbacks of his desert explorations in the Libyan desert, Northern Africa. The tragedy of his injury is connected to his love affair with Katharine Clifton, a young wife of one of his fellow explorers of the British Geographical Society.

This thesis is located within two approaches, namely postcolonialism and postmodernism. The studied novel could be read as a postmodern text of fragmentary narration, with Ondaatje's trademark style of writing riddled with past memories and glimpses of vision, which allow for a historical perspective woven into the texture of the story. On the other hand, the past events place the present national and cultural conflicts into a postcolonial perspective. The themes of the novel and its narrative style are postmodern, and what is more, the novel is postmodern and postcolonial because it discusses the loss of the grand narratives of Western culture by questioning the validity of national distinctions, emphasizing cultural or geographical dislocation, and dealing with experiences of foreignness – which can be considered postcolonial literary themes. In addition, fluctuating cultural identity is found in postmodern literature, exemplified by the literary work of Salman Rushdie, among others. Rushdie's work also deals with postcolonial themes, such as cultural transformations, migrant experience, diaspora or displacement between cultures of the East and West.

In general, postcolonial theory has addressed such issues as cultural, social, racial, ethnic and economic representation of colonized people as well as agency, globalisation, and hybridity to give a voice to those marginalised by Western hegemony. Postcolonial

literary theory addresses cultural and other issues in the aftermath of colonial rule, demanding academic criticism to acknowledge historical realities and contexts, and marginalised experiences. It continues to criticise various abusive cultural as well as economic practises resulting from the colonial rule and imposed on colonized territories. Postcolonial literary theory also questions issues concerning positions of power. The posing of one's own perspective over the perceived other is analogue to bestowing power. This conquest and control of the other, the use of power over the other, form the basis of postcolonial criticism of the West. Postcolonial theory criticises the homogenising tendencies of Western culture to superimpose itself over other, local, systems. It also intervenes in Western hegemonic discourse to challenge and interrupt it. The postcolonial approach exposes dichotomies, or alterity, of cultural identity and otherness in the postcolonial context, and has focused, among other things, on representing hybrid cultural experience. I will introduce these theories in more detail later and next, I will briefly refer to some of the most influential postcolonial thinkers and their work.

In postcolonial criticism, some of the central critics have been Frantz Fanon with his work on nationalism and hybridity, Edward Said with *Orientalism* (1978), Robert Young with his challenging of history and the West, Homi Bhabha with his key text on cultural hybridity, *The Location of Culture* (1994), Gayatri Spivak with subaltern studies, and Stuart Hall with questions on cultural identity. Postcolonial literary themes challenge the binary oppositions used to designate colonized cultures and people as irrational, degraded, naïve and other, in opposition to the West described as rational, virtuous, mature or as the norm. Postmodern themes, while they are admittedly widely disputed, also challenge binary oppositions.

In my thesis, I will be using Bhabha's theory on cultural hybridity and Hall's theory on cultural identity due to the possibilities they provide for textual analysis and points of junction with the central themes of *The English Patient*. The viewpoints brought forward by Bhabha's theory are most important because they share the notion of fluctuating and diffuse nature of cultural identification and hybridization. The main research questions of my thesis are the way cultural hybridity and the third space are depicted in the novel and how cultural hybridity creates tension. Cultural hybridity can be defined as a mixture of different cultural fragments, including among others such features as nationality, race, and religion. In Bhabha's work, cultural hybridity refers to mixedness of cultural influences, subverting the notion of pure or authentic cultures. This study aims to use the concepts of postcolonial identity and otherness, crosscultural influences in cultural hybridity and the third space as tools to analyse Ondaatje's work.

In Ondaatje's novel, the main characters have multiple cultural identities, for example vague national affiliations, and the novel challenges the notion of any original or pure cultural identity. The central character is referred to as the English patient, although in fact, he is a Hungarian expatriot turned citizen of the world without one specific national identity and therefore he also embodies cultural hybridity. All characters experience their cultural identity as a fluctuating and fluid process. They fluctuate between many associations and express "the variousness of things" with the interconnectedness and mixedness of various cultural influences which constitute an unstable and continuously shifting state of cultural hybridity (Bush 1994, 248). In this thesis and in my view, cultural identity is shaped and continually adjusted by cultural hybridity and its mixed cultural influences. The site of cultural hybridity is diffuse and it is continually shifted; fluid and without any clear borders. This fluidity creates tension connected to the cultural hybridity that the main

characters face as anxiety. Bhabha shares these viewpoints on postcolonial hybridity in his theorising of the instability of cultural identity and otherness, the in-betweenness and the third space where all parties are altered in the cultural interaction.

In my reading of the novel, the theme of postcolonial cultural hybridity is prevalent in the story of *The English Patient*, however, it has not been explored in depth in former studies; previous criticism on Ondaatje's works have mainly concentrated on aspects such as nationality, displacement, and alienation (Ty 2002), while some critics have noted the novel's postcolonial themes (Simpson 1994). In contrast to these previous studies, my reading of the text challenges clear cultural distinctions and concentrates on how the novel creates a new space for previously undefined cultural experience in the shape of the third space outside cultural hierarchies. Mainly Bhabha's theories will be used in the analysis of the theme of cultural hybridity in the novel. In addition, critics of the hybridity theory are acknowledged. Some critics have accused Ondaatje's work of dismissing postcolonial struggles and challenges, and also these issues will be addressed.

One aspect that will merit from some discussion, in connection to the manners and attitudes portrayed in the novel, is the genre of the story of the novel. The present of the novel takes place in the spring of 1945, right before the end of WWII and Allied victory in May. *The English Patient* was published in 1992 and, in fact, it is historical fiction: decolonization and the collapse of the British empire have taken place before the writing of the novel. As a genre, postcolonial historical fiction shapes the reader's understanding of the past and challenges historical truth to suggest new ways of thinking of the past. Some of the themes, such as detailed accounts of Kip's meticulous appearance, could be read as belonging to the genre of historical fiction to provide a stark contrast to possibly negative and widely held racial prejudices of the period towards Indian immigrants in England. In

the beginning of the novel, some detailed descriptions of Kip's arrival to military training show the shock and prejudice of the English who have never met a Sikh man with a turban.

The theoretical terms in relation to postcolonial cultural hybridity, namely postcolonial alterity, cultural hybridity and the third space, as advanced by Bhabha, will be introduced and defined in chapter 2. The fluidity of cultural identity, displaced cultural otherness and cultural hybridity in the third space as well as the need to renegotiate cultural hybridity in the third space will be explored in chapter 3. In chapter 4, tension within cultural hybridity will be analysed including themes such as desire for unity despite cultural differences, and an underlying anxiety connected to cultural hybridity. Finally, the possibilities to reconsider the dynamics of cultural hybridity in the novel will be assessed.

# 2 POSTCOLONIAL HYBRIDITY

In this chapter, theories and issues surrounding potscolonial cultural hybridity will be presented as the theoretical background of my thesis. I will firstly consider the construction of postcolonial alterity. Premise of postcolonial alterity will be analysed by defining the basic concepts the idea is built upon by addressing Hall's theory of cultural identity. Then, secondly, I will move on to Bhabha's notion of cultural hybridity and examine the basic presumptions surrounding the issue. Finally, I will explore the third space and principles that govern its operation in postcolonial encounters as defined in Bhabha's theory.

## 2.1 Postcolonial alterity

This chapter deals with themes surrounding postcolonial thought and discourse. Firstly, I will introduce Hall's theory of cultural identity, where also the loss of stable national and cultural identities is discussed, and the construction of the colonial self and the other. Secondly, I will explore the role of the binary categories of the self and the other in the formation of postcolonial alterity, and also the theory of racial stereotyping by colonizers by Bhabha. The inherent hierarchy incorporated in postcolonial alterity is examined by Said's *Orientalism* together with Bhabha's affirmation of the role of the inbuilt hierarchy in the construction of cultural otherness, and cultural hybridity. It is important to note that Ondaatje's writing and themes in *The English Patient* are not reflective of the colonial situation that Said concentrates on. Therefore Said's theory is considered only briefly and I will analyse the text mainly with Bhabha's theoretical framework on cultural hybridity

which approaches the theme similarly to Ondaatje. Thirdly, I will briefly discuss the criticism of postcolonial representation and commitment in Ondaatje's work.

I will start by clarifying some of the terms used in the theory of my thesis: I use the term "colonial" in the same vein as it is used in *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), meaning critique of the Western hegemony of culture, whereas the term "postcolonial" describes a process which encompasses everything from the first contact between colonizer/colonized onwards. In other words, postcolonialism refers to a process of disengagement after the initial colonial encounter (Loomba 2002, 19). Ania Loomba has emphasized the multiple meanings of the term: the prefix "post" refers to both temporal and ideological aftermath of colonial domination and control in cultural, economic, and social issues (Loomba 2002, 11-12). In contrast, other approaches to postcolonialism support a relative view of cultural encounters and promote the notion of "difference on equal terms" to explore hybridization in the postcolonial cultural context (Ashcroft 1989, 36). According to Loomba, however, this view is problematic because it makes universal claims about the nature of postcolonial encounters without distinguishing the general from the specific in terms of class, gender, or location (Loomba 2002, 178). I will explore some of these issues in chapter 4.3 and Loomba's criticism of Bhabha's theory of a hybrid colonial subject.

In addition to the terms defined above, also the meaning of the term 'culture' requires closer examination; Hall addresses the difficulty of defining culture in the introduction to *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997). Culture seems like a straightforward term yet complex upon closer inspection; it encompasses classic high culture such as philosophy, literature, music and visual arts and also mundane popular culture. According to another definition, culture refers to a "typical 'way of life' of a people, community, nation or social group". In a yet another definition, culture includes

"the 'shared values' of a group or of society". However, Hall does not endorse the view of culture as a list of things but rather "as a process…concerned with the production and the exchange of meanings…between members of a society or group" (Hall 1997, 2). In short, Hall defines culture as a continuous process that gains its meanings from shared values of a group. In my reading of the novel, Ondaatje approaches a corresponding definition of culture as a continuous process with fluctuating meanings.

Cultural identity by Hall

According to Hall, we possess a myriad of different cultural identity positions resulting from the multiplicity of sources so that identity stems from nationality, ethnicity, race, social class, language, gender, and sexuality. Different identity positions, including national and cultural identities, have become fragmented or dislocated. This postmodern formulation of cultural identity as something that is in a constant movement, endlessly redefined and relocated is useful in the analysis of the novel's themes of hybrid cultural identities (Hall and Du Gay 1996, 2). In the same way, Bhabha argues that any neat categories of cultural identity are virtual, and he is against "the restrictive notions of cultural identity" denying the chance of change (Bhabha 1995, 157).

The construction of cultural identity needs more clarification; there are two basically contesting views of cultural identity construction, both in wide use in literary studies. The first one is essentialist cultural identity, as noted by Hall: "[C]onstructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation"; the other is termed a "discursive approach" to cultural identity, which "sees identification as a construction, a process never completed – always 'in process'" (Hall and

Du Gay 1996, 2). The latter defnition is an approach that Hall mostly agrees with. The view of cultural identity as a dynamic process connects to the postmodern notion of cultural identity endlessly redefined in constant movement. Hall continues, to note that in addition to the variety of identity positions and their modes of construction, cultural identity is something unstable, continually shifting. According to Hall, cultural identity is of a fluid nature and ”transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us” (Hall, Held, and McGrew 1992, 272). Ondaatje promotes a similar approach with the themes of the novel where cultural, national, and racial differences are questioned, and in the way the English patient narrates his past, constructing his identity through narration. Hall agrees with the view that we ourselves create a ’narrative of the self’ in order to secure some coherence according to the principles of the discursive approach (Hall, Held, and McGrew 1992, 277). As an example of a narrated identity, national identities are fabricated to build a community, a nation of subjects with a shared national identity around a myth of a pure, original people. The concept of ”imagined communities” has been coined by Benedict Anderson in his key work titled *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Rise of Nationalism* (1983). Nationality is an invention, based on the claim of a shared cultural origin or race; it is a shared myth that is narrated. In Bhabha’s theory of the postcolonial context, nations and homelands are imaginary narrations: ”Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind’s eye” (Bhabha 1990, 1).

Colonial self and other

Postcolonial theory postulates that the colonial power’s culture in the central metropole needs an opposing culture, that of the colonized people in the periphery. The categorization

of the colonial self and the other establishes separate divisions for the West and the colonized cultures. It is necessary to note that although there have been colonizers who have not been Western, the most prominent colonial powers, including Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, Belgium and the Netherlands, have represented the West. The other is needed in order to establish the boundaries of the Western self; a certain interdependence is established. Western culture requires the other to receive rejected qualities and repressed desires of the West. This exclusion of the negative and its projection onto otherness is connected to the stigmatising of the other by the use of stereotypes. I will next move to the idea of colonial stereotypes by Bhabha.

According to Bhabha, the formation of colonial stereotypes proceeds via the projection onto the racial other one's own properties that pose a threat or are experienced as negative. From the point of view of colonial discourse, the colonial other is defined as a racial other that is easily distinguished by virtue of being visibly different in appearance. In Bhabha's theory, this satisfies the colonizer's ”pleasure of seeing” and further gratifies the need to distance and distinguish oneself from the other that is represented by the colonized (Bhabha 1994, 109). Bhabha argues that this is the way prejudice is formed: ”It is not the colonialist Self or the colonized Other, but the disturbing distance in-between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness – the white man's artifice inscribed on the black man's body – and contributing to the creation of “the liminal problem of colonial identity” (Bhabha 1994, 64). This notion of liminality locates colonial otherness in an in-between space, which is truly neither of the two binary categories. In Bhabha's terms, the character of this liminal space is ”not Self and Other but the otherness of the Self inscribed in the perverse palimpsest of colonial identity” (Bhabha 1994, 64). Therefore, it is the act of overwriting, the forcing of a stereotype on the colonial other that secures Western colonizer's identity.

Hierarchies

The concept of postcolonial alterity is challenging to define in any precise terms because there have been various geographical and historical colonial situations by different colonizers. Postcolonial terms such as postcolonial alterity would therefore require specific points of reference of time and location to gain any meaning. One approach to this issue would be to consider various postcolonial relations of inequity and domination in a specific context, as noted by Loomba (Loomba 2002, 16). Other critics agree that the term 'postcolonial' must be used carefully in reference to specific location and multiplicities of temporality; or different times, to expose "abhorrent imbalances of power that continue to proliferate in the current geopolitical arena" (Ray 1993, 38). In practice, postcolonial alterity is constructed along the self/other or the West/non-Western axis and I will introduce the theory in the next subchapter.

The concept of postcolonial alterity is labeled with hierarchical values where the West, representating colonizers, is highly valued, whereas colonized people and their cultures are considered, by definition, fundamentally inferior. Similar concepts of cultural representation and fundamental difference together with inbuilt cultural hierarchy were introduced in *Orientalism* by Said (1978), where he argued that the Western discourse about the East, 'the Orient', contributed to the development of a supposedly superior Western self and its double, inferior non-Western other. Said claims that the very concept of discrete cultures was produced by colonial discourse which is built on solid categories and hierarchies of different cultures (Said 1993, 17). In the next subchapter, I will briefly examine some criticism of the postcolonial commitment of Ondaatje's work.

Postcolonial representation and commitment

Ondaatje's work has received criticism because of his seemingly aesthetic treatment of postcolonial themes and I will examine and evaluate some of the criticism. Ondaatje, a native Sri Lankan immigrated to Canada via England, has been criticized, for example, for his failure to write about his cultural otherness which is relevant because it shows his commitment to the postcolonial discourse and its key issue of representation. Arun Mukherjee criticizes Ondaatje's work and, in particular, his semi-autobiographical and fictionalized memoir *Running in the Family* (1982) of his family's life in the island of Ceylon, now the nation of Sri Lanka, for exotism: "Ondaatje, coming from a Third World country with a colonial past, does not write about his otherness…[T]here is no trauma of uprooting evident in his poetry; nor is there a need for redefinition in a new context: the subjects that preoccupy so many immigrant writers" (Mukherjee 1988, 33-34). However, an opposing view is presented by another critic, Ajay Heble, who disagrees and questions whether all immigrant writers are liable to respond to colonial pasts, and whether writers, such as Ondaatje, have a moral obligation to limit their literary work to the portrayal of social and political realities of their country of origin. The accusation that Ondaatje dismisses themes of postcolonial cultural otherness, is an obvious simplification and easily rejected by Heble: "Ondaatje's work is perhaps best understood if situated within the context…of the emergence of alliances of marginalized or misrepresented groups attempting either to reclaim the past or to map out a space for the possibility of resistance to forms of cultural domination" (Heble 1994, 186-187). In the case of *The English Patient*, the character of Kip can be read as a figure of resistance with his final rejection of the West and support of the Indian independence. Also Sri Lankan critics have contested simplistic

interpretations of Ondaatje's work or his alleged rejection of cultural rootedness, racial grounding or disregard for colonial consciousness (Warnapala 2007, 97); indeed, the anxiety and passion Ondaatje incorporates into the story of his native land and culture can be appreciated by careful reading of the tone of stories in *Running in the Family* (Warnapala 2007, 110). Ondaatje's characteristic fragmented narrative with glimpses of vision in a mixed timeline of events together with ambivalent moral views have also been interpreted as portrayal of hegemony of Western culture faced with postcolonial trauma of "cultural imbalances" as well as "psychic and material domination inherent in ethnocentrism and the invisible power structures of whiteness" (Burrows 2008, 164). Victoria Burrows defends Ondaatje's style of writing for its virtue of "[exposing] the way in which the developed world turns away from the experience of trauma" in her reading of Ondaatje's novel *Anil's Ghost* about the traumas left behind by the Sri Lankan civil war (Burrows 2008, 162). In my view, Ondaatje's work engages with postcolonial themes and offers an alternative point of view to experiences of cultural hybridity. However, his work refrains from definitive conclusions, and instead, provides a new interpretation of postcolonial hybridity and cultural otherness.

With these considerations, it can be concluded that Ondaatje is concerned with the challenges of postcolonial struggles in his distinctive writing style of postcolonial themes and discontinuous narrative from multiple perspectives.

In the preceding subchapters I have discussed the construction of the colonial self and the other, and their role as opposing pairs in postcolonial alterity. In addition, I have examined the theory of racial otherness and stereotypes. In the next chapter, I will combine these theories to discuss cultural hybridity.

## 2.2 Cultural hybridity

This chapter moves from the construction of postcolonial cultural hybridity to dispute the premise and the presumptions of the binary categories. I will also discuss how postcolonial cultural hybridity and self/other opposition are challenged when cultural otherness is moved to a new context or dislocated, in other terms. The theory deals with various definitions of cultural hybridity, the dynamics and fluidity of cultural hybridity and, in addition, transnationalism and cultural nomadism.

### Cultural hybridity

Cultural hybridity is a challenging term to define due to multiple meanings associated with both culture and the notion of hybridity. In this thesis, the term 'postcolonial cultural hybridity' provides a very broad frame of reference for different forms of cultural hybridity in the postcolonial context of the novel.

According to Bhabha, cultural hybridity challenges cultural hierarchies: "[H]ybrid strategy or discourse opens up a space of negotiation where power is unequal but its articulation may be equivocal. Such negotiation is neither assimilation nor collaboration. It makes possible the emergence of an 'interstitial' agency that refuses the binary representation" (Bhabha 1994, 34). This opposes Said's categorization of cultures of East and West; in fact, Bhabha steps outside cultural binaries and hierarchies with his theory of cultural hybridity.

Hybridity is a result of a mixture, a métissage. Hybridity implies the simultaneous presence of different fragments, it is both and neither, in parts. Hybridity remains as a highly debated term in postcolonial theory, but in the postcolonial context, cultural

hybridity generally refers to "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2000, 96).

According to one formulation, "[h]ybridity is the essence of the postcolonial self. It is made up of the prodigal and the foreigner in one. In other words, a self inherited from its history and blood translated into a self-made self. The prodigal son is an apt metaphor for the relativity of the postcolonial point of view" (Ganapathy Dore 1994, 7) This definition of postcolonial hybridity mixes interestingly the essentialist view of identity with the discursive approach.

Ondaatje writes about an ideal world, without any geographical or cultural borders, where hybridity reigns, and the theme of cultural hybridity is strongly portrayed in *The English Patient*. Bhabha evokes the concept of global citizenship or transnationalism by positing that, "The territoriality of the global 'citizen' is, concurrently, postnational, denational or transnational" (Bhabha 2003, 30) and similarly to Ondaatje, he promotes cultural hybridity instead of clearly marked national identity with fixed borders. The notion of transnationalism is portrayed in the same vein in *The English Patient* in connection to cultural hybridity and hybrid cultural identities. Nomadism is characterized by constant dislocation and the concept of 'displacement' can be understood as referring to "the separation of people from their native culture either through physical dislocation (as refugees, immigrants, migrants, exiles, or expatriates) or the colonizing imposition of a foreign culture" (Bammer 1994, xi). In the novel, both national and cultural borders are diffuse and permeate. Nomadic cultural identities are formed as a result of constant geographical relocation and layers of hybridization. However, it is important to distinguish between the privileged nomadism of Western travellers and the forced dislocations of disadvantaged, most often non-Western, refugees due to war or some crisis situation.

Alterity presupposes the existence of differences; it operates within the politics of difference, constructing meaning between the positions of different coordinates. Canadian critic Winfried Siemerling, in his book *Discoveries of the Other*, develops a dynamic theory of alterity which will lead to "potential alterations of both parties involved…[and to] reciprocal alterations" (Siemerling 1994, 3), in other words, formation of cultural hybridity. In my reading of the novel, the concepts of colonial alterity and cultural hybridity will be combined; new transcultural or hybrid forms are created by dynamic cultural alterations within the contact zone generated by colonialism. In my view, the contact zone is a site for the clash of cultures which engenders novel forms of cultural hybridity. Next, I will link this theory of cultural hybridity to a notion of dynamic alterity in connection to disassembling binaries.

Disassembling binaries

Cultural interactions between different cultures create different varieties of cultural hybridity. The close proximity of the respective cultures of colonizer and colonized creates an interdependence between the cultures, and as a result of the two-way process, both cultures are transformed and their meanings are shifted. In close interaction, both the colonizer and the colonized carry the weight of the impact in the clash of cultures, as I showed in the preceding subchapter with new formations of cultural hybridity. This destabilizes the binary categories of colonizer and colonized and allows the development of new modes of cultural exchange in the postcolonial situation.

Ondaatje's work is involved with disassembling of cultural binaries. Siemerling notes in connection to Ondaatje: "Boundaries separate and connect the spaces in Ondaatje's text, and allow for highly 'unlimited' travel crossing the thetic boundaries between the self and

the other" (Siemerling 1994, 152). This dynamic alterity, constantly vacillating between different positions, transfigures the categories of the self and the other and invalidates premise and the presumptions of the binary categories.

The binaries are also challenged in Bhabha's work to dispute the purity of cultural categories such as something purely "English" in relation to cultural interactions between colonizers and colonized. Bhabha uses the term 'mimicry' in the colonial context to describe how the colonized adapt to and eventually adopt the colonizer's culture, however, 'mimicry' in Bhabha's work means exaggeration and it also entails mockery in the act of repetition. As a repetition, or a replicate of the original, it cannot by definition be authentic. Bhabha argues that in the colonial context, it is firstly the act of repetition itself that actually overwrites the original concept of "Englishness". Secondly, the colonial representation of something "English" is dissimilar to the original notion because it takes place after the cultural and racial difference has been imposed on colonized peoples and cultures (Bhabha 1985, 165). Due to the fundamental difference of the other, the meaning of something "English" is dislodged in the act of repetition, and it is only a partial representation. Bhabha writes that, "[C]olonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" (Bhabha 1994, 86). Bhabha summarizes that "The desire to emerge as 'authentic' through mimicry–through a process of…repetition–is the final irony of partial representation" (Bhabha 1994, 88). The colonial mimicry of Englishness is therefore an interpretation with inherent variations upon a theme and not an exact representation of the original (Bhabha 1985, 165). Here, I read Bhabha's theory parallel to Siemerling's notion of highly unlimited travel

crossing the categorical boundaries on the self/other axis. In both cases, and also in Ondaatje's novel, the cultural categories become transfigured and altered, or to put it shortly, hybridized.

Dislodging cultural otherness

Cultural hybridity provides tools to dislodge forged cultural notions of otherness. By depicting characters outside normative categories of cultural stereotypes, Ondaatje rewrites cultural otherness and creates new space for crosscultural encounters. The portrayal of the Sikh sapper Kirpal Singh, or Kip as he is addressed in familiar terms by the English, defies many stereotypes typically associated with representatives of colonized countries such as India: he is portrayed as a highly trained professional in a demanding position, self-sufficient and devoted to his craft, yet kind and courteous towards the Europeans and Canadians he shares the villa with, gallant in his demeanour.

This chapter examined the construction of postcolonial cultural hybridity and cultural nomadism, as well as ways to disassemble cultural binaries in the colonial context. In the next chapter, I will discuss methods to dismantle cultural hierarchies in the third space.

## 2.3 Third space as hybridity

This chapter deals with themes such as cultural interaction and challenging of cultural hierarchies in the third space based on Bhabha's theory. The possibilities the third space provides for cultural encounters are examined, and its role and function in cultural hybridization.

Third space of reconciliation

In Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity, the interaction between different cultures can effectively take place only outside the influence of normative stereotypes in order to be wholly renegotiated in what he terms the third space; it is another formulation of the contact zone where the clash of cultures occurs, whereas the third space additionally requires to renounce all hierarchies. Bhabha formulates that cultural hybridization takes place in the "third space of enunciation". In the third space, Bhabha argues, the international or transnational encounter is possible and postcolonial binaries can be surpassed, and "we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves" (Bhabha 2006, 157). The third space is a virtual no-man's-land, it is located outside cultural territories and in-between what is perceived as belonging to the self and that what is perceived as the other. The constantly permeating boundaries create a liminal space, a space in-between. The third space needs to be renegotiated on each occasion and remains an unstable location.

Bhabha's theory is based on the assumption that cultural categories need to be emptied of all comparative hierarchical structures. The third space is an open translation of differences without any hierarchy involved. More specifically, the third space is a site of opportunity, where ideas and attitudes are questioned as it allows the renegotiation of old representations and stereotypes (Bhabha 1994, 32). The third space "creates opportunities which promote something different, new and previously unidentified" (Bhabha 1991, 211). The importance lies in disposing of binaries in order to open the enunciative practice (Bhabha 1994, 177-8). Bhabha introduces the third space of utterance within the context of producing meanings in language to describe "ambivalence in the act of interpretation":

> The pact of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the You designated in the statement. The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy which it cannot 'in itself' be conscious. (Bhabha 1994, 53)

In the above passage, Bhabha defines the third space as a process of interpretation between two parties, and further, the production of meaning takes place by interaction between the parties, and what is more, the meaning is gained by new interpretation process that is mobilized through the third space. Therefore, the third space is a place where interactive and dynamic interpretation occurs to produce new meanings. For Bhabha, hybridity moves past simple binaries of the postcolonial context, "[C]olonial hybridity is not a problem of…identity between two different cultures which can then be resolved…What is irremediably estranging in the presence of the hybrid…is that the difference of cultures can no longer be identified…cultural differences are not simply there to be seen or appropriated" (Bhabha 1994, 114). In this quotation, colonial hybridity forms a new entity, and both cultures are altered in the process of hybridization. In an interview Bhabha states: "[F]or me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge" (Bhabha 1991, 211). The state of hybridity is a novel entity and cannot be traced back to its original cultural influences. Therefore, based on the assumption that the hybrid entity resembles only itself, limitations connected to the cultural differences

that have played a role in the formation of the hybrid state, will not be applicable to the way it operates. In short, the third space is an opportunity for alternative ways to perceive.

In this chapter, I have introduced the theoretical framework of my thesis; the background of the postcolonial theories of alterity by Said, and the key concepts of cultural identity construction by Hall, and the postcolonial hybridization process without hierarchies in the third space by Bhabha.

# 3 RENEGOTIATING CULTURAL HYBRIDITY IN THE THIRD SPACE

In this chapter I will firstly examine fluidity of cultural identity, then I will move on to how cultural otherness is displaced in the novel, and finally, I will analyse cultural hybridity in the third space in *The English Patient*. The fluidity and instability of national and cultural identity are central preoccupations in Ondaatje's work and fundamental themes in the novel. The issues concerning cultural identity are in close proximity with cultural otherness, another essential leitmotif in the story. The novel questions cultural otherness by representing the characters outside stereotypical notions of national or colonized cultures. In the novel as well as in Bhabha's work, cultural encounters are examined in the exterior space of predefined cultural definitions, in a location that Bhabha formulates as the third space of cultural hybridity where the old cultural stereotypes are evaded and cultural encounters create a novel entity of cultural hybridity.

## 3.1 Fluidity of cultural identity

This chapter deals with different constructions of cultural identity and examines how these constructions can be used as tools to analyse the central themes of the novel. These different constructions of cultural identity include the essentialist view of cultural identity based on a common origin or shared characteristics of a group and also, the idea of cultural identity as a continuous ongoing process or cultural identity constructed through the act of narration, a central theme in the novel. The narration and stories of the English patient play

an important role in the novel, constructing vivid memories of past events as his story unfolds.

Construction of cultural identity

The character of the English patient is surrounded by an air of mystery. His enigmatic identity is revealed little by little as his narration divulges his past secrets and actions in desert exploration missions. Like Herodotus's *The Histories* interprets the past and thus constructs culture by narration, the patient also narrates his past, so that the act of narration constructs his identity. However, Almásy's narrative is unreliable because despite his initial injuries, he also hides his national identity because of his German affiliations: he claims that he cannot remember his name or nationality, but in my reading, it is part of a defensive measure as he is presently injured and receives care from the Allied forces. He is adding layers to his story, like the English garden, to mask his identity. Another version of a layered history can be read in connection to the book by Herodotus: "It is the book he brought with him through the fire – a copy of *The Histories* by Herodotus that he has added to, cutting and gluing in pages from other books or writing in his own observations – so they all are cradled within the text of Herodotus" (16). In the above quotation, Almásy writes himself into the old text and is thereby adding to it his own identity. The allusion to 'cradling' suggests that identity construction through narration is maturing gradually, and it is nurtured by the older text. This follows Hall's formulation of cultural identity as a process that is continuously constructed (Hall and Du Gay 1996, 2; Hall, Held, and McGrew 1992, 272), and Bhabha's idea of cultural hybridity as a layered construct of multiple influences (Bhabha 1994, 34).

The central characters are not strictly defined by their national or cultural origin, therefore the essentialist view of cultural identity based on a common origin is not valid. Alice Brittan remarks how the characters are doubly displaced in the way the Canadian Caravaggio disguises himself in fascist Italy by speaking fluent Italian, and how Almásy hides his national identity and consequent Nazi affiliation from the Allies by his perfect command of English language and culture. In addition, they are spies who skilfully construct alternative identities and expose those of others; Almásy guided Germans in the desert, Caravaggio tracked spies and fed false rumours to expose double spies in Cairo, while also the English were doubly false: Almásy's desert companions Geoffrey Clifton and Bagnold reported to British intelligence all information relevant to military operations (Brittan 2006, 205).

The construction of cultural identity can be an abrupt process. In the novel, characters are depicted in dramatic instances in which characters are altered or modified by their own actions or by those of others or by the surroundings, for example, in the scene where atomic bombing is depicted and its dramatic effect on Kip as he violently renounces his Western affiliations and leaves the villa. Similarly for Almásy, he is transformed from a man of few words to a mode of constant narration by the loss he suffered when Katharine Clifton died in the desert waiting for him to rescue her and his tragic plane crash when he was finally able to return to find her body in the Cave of Swimmers years later. Characters are examined in moments when alterations occur, and I read these as moments when their cultural hybridization takes place. Another context of hybridization in the novel is the theme of dislocation, and I will explore it next.

The importance and connection of individual and collective identities are emphasized in the context of modern globalisation where cultural and national borders disappear (Tötösy

de Zepetnek 1999) In the context of WWII in the novel, the characters have been dislocated by the war. The meaning of dislocation in their case encompasses both physical and geographical dislocation as well as mental. I will discuss the meaning of dislocation of their mental state in the analysis chapter dealing with anxiety of hybrity and how characters are in mental ruins in the story of the novel. In the novel, cultural and national borders disappear with characters that have multiple cultural identities due to their past; the patient has multiple national and cultural connections spanning from Hungary to the Levant, France, England and Libyan desert; Hana and Caravaggio are Canadians with a mixed background of immigration including Italy for Caravaggio's family, while Hana is a French-Canadian of Finnish and Slovenian origin (her family was already introduced in Ondaatje's previous novel *In the Skin of a Lion*, (1987) and Kip is a Sikh who immigrated from Punjab, India, to England to work in the British Royal Engineers. Now he is in Italy defusing German bombs and "fighting English wars" (122). Caravaggio aptly sums it up by saying, "The trouble with all of us is we are where we shouldn't be" (122).

As to his multiple cultural influences, Almásy spent time in "his childhood in the Levant", consisting of the Middle East of Cyprus, Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, and Syria, but "went to school in England" (165). Almásy views himself as someone who has created his own cultural and national identity. In his view, he has no national identity in the traditional sense; he is a citizen of an undefined nomad culture with his fellow desert explorers, including Madox and Bagnold, as he states, "[W]e became nationless. I came to hate nations. We are deformed by nation-states. Madox died because of nations" (138). Madox is Almásy's closest friend within the group of desert explorers and died shortly after his return to England in 1939 as protest of war when he "sat in the congregation of a church, heard the sermon in honour of war, pulled out his desert revolver and shot himself"

(240). His death can be read as a silent gesture of opposition against nationalism. Almásy glorifies the desert life and his own construction of a self-defined cultural identity outside normative nationalities. However, he is one of the privileged in society; as Count Almásy he "embodies the ideals of an aristocratic, cosmopolitan world, which has the ability and privilege to move itself beyond nationality and identification" (Novak 2004, 218). Almásy prefers cultural hybridity and nomadism, and by doing this, he also criticizes nationalist thinking. Together with his companions they support the colonial cause of mapping and exploring the nations of Northern Africa to bring them into the realm of English influence at least in cultural terms. Libya, for example, was colonized by Italy and decolonized right after WWII. In the story of the novel, Hana has also acquired a nomadic cultural identity. She prefers "to be nomadic in the house" by inhabiting different locations, moving her hammock wherever she feels like sleeping according to her moods (13). This trope of nomadic identity is echoed later in the novel by Almásy's recollection of the desert community he formed with other explorers and the Bedouin and the way they "disappeared into landscape" (139). The nomadic identity is acquired by repeated dislocations, and it is a non-essentialist view of cultural identity construction. Nomadic experience connects to Bhabha's theory of the third space because both are renegotiated after each dislocation or alteration (Bhabha 1994, 53).

According to a non-essentialist view, cultural identity is shaped continuously and constructed as a process. In the novel, Almásy has undergone a dramatic change of identity, personal as well as cultural. Prior to the plane crash, when the plane he was flying "fell burning into desert" and he along with it burst in flames, Almásy was an independent adult white male with a strong affiliation with the English (5). He was part of a European elite in Libya of the 1930's, privileged to satisfy his desire of exploration and to indulge himself in

a travelling lifestyle. At the present of the novel, he is a helpless invalid, totally dependent on others for mere survival, physically weak and fatally maimed. Therefore, he is entirely powerless and without any privileges, the vestiges of a white European man stripped off power and position. The blackness of his skin − blackened to colour of aubergine by the oils of the Bedouin tribe that anointed him after the plane crash and fire − is juxtaposed to his supposed English nationality. This can be read as a criticism of Western racial stereotypes and, according to Eleanor Ty, challenges the normative colonial concepts of nation, identity and race (Ty 2000, 10), because he is presumed to be English and he no longer fulfils the cultural stereotype of a fully independent white European man.

These different approaches to the construction of cultural identity show Ondaatje's engagement with the postcolonial theme of shifting identities. As a conclusion, the novel centres on the construction of cultural identity as a continuous process instead of essentialist views. The need to construct new cultural identities is a consequence of instability of national and cultural identities. The loss of stable national and cultural identities will be explored in the next subchapter.

Loss of stable national and cultural identities

The context of the story of the novel is the war situation which triggers experiences of dislocation when armies invade new territories and refugees are forced to leave their homes; they become dislocated without a homeland. In addition to this material loss during the war, national identities are also lost in mental terms due to disillusionment. The novel suggests that Hana is shellshocked and Hana has lost her faith in the cause of the war, for example, she has discarded her uniform: "Coming out of what had happened to her during the war, she drew her own few rules to herself. She would not be ordered again or carry out

duties for the greater good. She would care only for the burned patient − her only communication was with him" (14). The characters are culturally dislocated or become so in the novel. The four of them share the villa as their new homeland, and they are leaving old cultural identities behind as they are, according to the terminology used in the novel, "shedding skins" (117), or ridding themselves of their old identities from their old lives before the war. They have grown wary of life and suffer from disillusionment: "They could imitate nothing but what they were. There was no defence but to look for the truth in others" (117). In my reading of *The English Patient*, "shedding skins" means discarding disguises, and characters are faced with the naked reality of things.

Themes concerning 'skin' are closely connected to notions of identity in the novel; 'like a second skin' is, by definition, something intimately adapted and it therefore connotes close identification. Caravaggio tracked spies and their helpers in the desert, including Almásy, during the war. After befriending the patient, he ponders if he could do the kindness of constructing a new identity for him: "[P]erhaps invent a skin for him, the way tannic acid camouflages a burned man's rawness. Working in Cairo during the early days of the war, he had been trained to invent double agents or phantoms who would take flesh…spent weeks clothing [phantoms] with facts, giving [them] qualities of character" (117). However, the reference to skin is most likely an instance of intertextuality with Ondaatje's novel *In the Skin of the Lion* where Caravaggio also appears as one of the central characters. In her discussion of the migrant experience, Susan Spearey notes how in *In the Skin of a Lion* "[t]he skins that each character wears can be seen as manifestations of various personalities and subject positions rather than disguises which serve to conceal as essential and predetermined character" (Spearey 1994, 52). In the story of the English patient, the narrative functions as his camouflage in this sense that it enables him to remain

unidentified, as a comparable trope to 'skin', allowing him to assume alternative identities reminiscent of the spy identities Caravaggio created as cover stories. Almásy's stories of English gardens and "flower beds in Gloucestershire" (163) serve as a fake national background. Presumably, Almásy wants to avoid being identified as the desert guide for German spies that Caravaggio hunted during the war. Skinning is also present as a positive trope of desire for unity in the novel: "Hana unskins plum with her teeth, withdraws the stone and passes the flesh of the fruit into his mouth. He whispers again, dragging the listening heart of the young nurse beside him to wherever his mind is, into that well of memory he kept plunging into during those months before he died" (4).

The construction of cultural identity can be read in the novel, for example, when Caravaggio is shocked to see the change in Hana from the girl he knew in Canada and how her identity has evolved during her war experiences: "What she was now was what she herself had decided to become" and he marvels "at her translation" (222). The idea of Hana's identity as a translation fits well Hall's view of identity. Hall's theory of cultural identities asserts that they are acquired through processes that are "never completed – always 'in process'" (Hall and Du Gay 1996, 2). There is a pattern in the novel concerning Hana's identity construction. Kip envisions Hana in future years after the end of the war:

> She will, he realizes now, always have a serious face. She has moved from being a young woman into having the angular look of a queen, someone who has made her face with her desire to be a certain kind of person. He still likes that about her. Her smartness, the fact that she did not inherit that look or that beauty, but that it was something searched for and that it will always reflect a present stage of her character. (300)

The key points in describing Hana in relation to Hall's theory of identity construction process are that her countenance and mien have evolved driven by "her desire to be a

certain kind of person", and that "it was something searched for" suggesting a controlled process, and in my reading, she narrates her own story behind the countenance. The continuous nature of the identity construction process can be read from the line "that it will always reflect a present stage of her character", and this confirms further the connection to Hall's theory. The fluidity of cultural identity construction process will be discussed next.

The fluidity of cultural identification is seen in the way travellers are present in the story, how they obtain multiple identity positions in translocation. One interpretation of cultural identity construction is connected to the concept of nomadism. Nomadic identities and their culture of travelling, migration and translocation are idealized in *The English Patient*. Hana's life as the nomad of the house is part of her resolution to make her own rules and to live free of any attachments to one place or cultural constructions: "Some nights she opened doors and slept in rooms that had walls missing" (13). I read this as a contrast in practical terms to Almásy's privileged idealization of nomadism to be free of cultural obligations or national restrictions. The rooms that had walls missing could be read to represent besides demolished architecture, and also hybridized cultural constructions outside normative structures.

The novel also depicts the nomadic cultural identities of the Bedouin nomads, the desert tribes of Bedouin, are people whose land continually shifts shape. Almásy recalls his rescue by the Bedouin after his plane crashed and burned in a blaze, and how he "[stood] up naked out of it. The leather helmet on my head in flames" (5). Their nomadic wisdom and civilisation saved him: "They poured oil onto large pieces of soft cloth and placed them on him. He was anointed" (6). The Bedouin have reputed medicinal skills covering even cure for severe burn wounds: "[G]round peacock bone…the most potent healer of skin" (10). This passage, also present in the 1996 film by Anthony Minghell, has been criticized for its

orientalism and “stereotypical portrayal of the Bedouins as backward practitioners of witch-medicine” (Morgan 1998, 165). I disagree with this accusation, and read the Bedouin skills surpassing the scope of Western knowledge of the time with their practical, ingenious, and efficient approach to both healing severe burns and recycling all available materials including the parts of a wrecked airplane. Almásy praises the Bedouin who inhabit the Libyan desert without reserve and admires their land without borders. For him, the Libyan desert is a glorious antithesis of a nation-state which has no boundaries. Bhabha also defends the representation of cultural otherness on equal terms outside of colonial stereotypes (Bhabha 1994, 64), and I read his theory as a support to my argument of the resourceful practicality of the Bedouin medicinal skills.

Bhabha presents the notion of a nationality that is very similar to the one that the English patient narrates. For both, nationality is something contiguous, citizenship is global but without solid borders. The group of desert explorers that Almásy and Madox, his most trusted friend and a fellow desert explorer, are part of, are the ”nomads of faith” of desert (139), their land is without shape or borders. However, their nomadism is one of privilege, as noted earlier, and must be evaluated separately from the forced dislocations of refugees. Bhabha theorises that instead of stable or permanent nature of national identities, cultural and national identities are in a continuous process of transition. Bhabha does not differentiate between the voluntary or forced processees of transition, and this can be read as a valid point of criticism of his theory. He also postulates that the interconnectedness of our cultural identities should be emphasized with the notion of global citizenship rather than one solid national identity (Bhabha 2003, 31).

In reality, the vast area of the Libyan desert is divided into tribal lands, and there are active routes of commerce crisscrossing it. Therefore, it is not empty land without culture

or civilisation. Almásy has himself noted the medicinal skills of the Bedouin, and lauds the lost era of water people and the Cave of Swimmers. It remains unclear why Almásy extols the desert, is it because desert nations are not visible in the European maps of the time? Perhaps it is because for desert nomads, there is no value in where you were originally from, and the Hungarian Almásy merely feels the urge to evade European cultural categorization and construct the cultural identity he desires, possibly an English cultural identity. This reading follows the same pattern as Hana's analysed above using Hall's discursive approach to identity construction through narrative.

Almásy has initially come to the Libyan desert to explore and map it which could be read as a remnant of Western colonial conquest of foreign lands and cultures by mapping, naming, and categorizing. The next level of colonial cultural conquest would involve establishment of cultural hierarchies. While this never materializes in the course of the novel, the question remains what were the final intentions of the European desert exploration missions of the members of the British Geographical Society. When the war erupts, the tranquil oasis of the desert life is brutally disrupted when the different armies and spies invade the desert: it becomes an active stage of war where even the desert tribes are split into camps, forced to take sides and form alliances and became enemies. This forced split to opposing camps can be read as a critique of the European presence in the lands of the desert tribes. Almásy is grieved: "Everywhere there was war. Suddenly there were "teams". The Bermanns, the Bagnolds [his former fellow desert explorers], the Slatin Pashas – who had at various times saved each other's lives – had now split into camps" (168). From the perspective of postcolonial literary criticism, the Western nations dominated and abused the desert civilisations, however, Almásy seems oblivious to moral implications of his own part. He idealizes the nomad life and culture but, on the other hand,

he is indifferent to the effect of the European presence in the lives of the local tribes. He turns a blind eye to child abuse by Fenelon-Burnes, one his fellow desert explorers, an Englishman who kept a small Arab girl tied up to his bed. The novel shies away from taking a political stance that the postcolonial approach generally requires. Some critics, such as Mukherjee, have reproached Ondaatje's writing for its political neutrality despite the postcolonial literary themes he discusses (Mukherjee 1988; Mukherjee 1998), however, I will discuss this in more detail later in chapter 4.3.

According to the view presented in the novel, cultural identity is adaptable. The boundary virtually separating self and other is a fluid one; a view not based on formal ties of nation, family, or society, but one which responds to the concerns of the moment, to the necessities of circumstance. In a rather elegiac passage after the death of Katharine, the English patient remarks: "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….We are communal histories, communal books. We are not owned or monogamous in our taste or experience" (261). The novel states that the construction of cultural identity is a continuous process influenced by many different sources. This pattern can be read in connection to many historical layers contributing to the meaning of things: the desert has been explored on numerous occasions in history by new tribes and desert explorers; the Cave of Swimmers has been a holy place for different people in different eras, including Almásy; the villa has functioned earlier as a nunnery, now it is a hospital; the story of Herodotus is annotated by Almásy. In Ondaatje's view, hybridity is formed by layers, like these layers of history (Wachtel 1999, 251). These layers of history and civilisations can be interpreted as succession of conquests, and WWII with invasion and occupation of foreign nations

continues this pattern in the historical context of the novel. The layers of history can be seen in Almásy's veneration of Herodotus, a fifth century BC Greek historian, in the novel. Herodotus was the first to systematically collect and organize historical materials in order to create a historiographic narrative. Almásy literally writes footnotes on *The Histories* by Herodotus (118-9). This admiration is in continuation with the ideal of self-defined cultural identity that Almásy praises.

In conclusion, the postcolonial theme of loss of stable cultural identities and different approaches to reconstruct cultural identity through narration, translation, and surroundings are portrayed in the novel. It is important to note that the continuous nature of the process is emphasized rather than one distinct mode of cultural identity construction. However, as their cultural identities are continuously shaped, characters acquire new hybrid cultural identities of mixed influences. This theme of cultural hybridity will be discussed in more detail later.

In the next chapter, I will analyse different ways that cultural otherness is displaced and dislocated in the novel.

## 3.2 Cultural otherness displaced

In this chapter, I will discuss cultural otherness and its dislocation in the novel. Firstly, I will consider ways to challenge Western stereotypes concerning the cultural other and the different strategies presented in the novel. In addition, instances where the non-Western looks back at the West are explored together with abusive deeds of the West against the non-Western in the context of the novel.

Dislocating cultural otherness

Colonial cultural stereotypes are displaced and disrupted by multiple themes in the novel, such as the manners, appearances and attitudes of the central characters. The Sikh sapper, Kip, is a highly trained professional, which already challenges the stereotype of the colonized Indians as low skilled manual workers. Furthermore, Kip is an engineer, an expert in bomb disposal and therefore part of an elite. The act of defusing a bomb is narrated from Kip's mind through focalisation which makes him gain agency in the eyes of the reader. As an expert in the British Intelligence, he challenges the cultural otherness of the postcolonial situation in several ways. These professional qualities of Kip question the stereotypes created in the West of the colonized. Kip is the only one of the four at the villa who still wears a uniform at the end of WWII but when war is still ongoing, and therefore more the Westener in his conduct according to the colonial stereotype than the actual Europeans or North Americans. Kip uses a set of crystal earphones to stay up to date with all that is going on in the world when he is defusing a bomb. He is continually focused with all his wit and knowledge on the mission at hand, a true researcher of the art of hidden weaponry. When Hana observes Kip's habits through binoculars, she notes how he handles his gear with expertise and effortless flow. From the postcolonial perspective, this is an instance where the Western cultural stereotype would assume an Indian−albeit a trained engineer and a Sikh who are renowned for their technical abilities−would not be capable of taking control of the situation and stay in command under extreme stress. The colonial culture fantasized of a "reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite" (Bhabha 1994, 86). Kip's character challenges further the

Western stereotype of the professional capacity of the people of the formerly colonized countries opposed to the English engineering skills because his engineering skills are presented in connection to his Sikh culture of origin and therefore his professional skills are not the result of Westernization or cultural assimilation.

The postmodern narrative paradoxically inscribes and contests tropes of cultural recognition and representation. This postmodern theme can be read in dislocation of cultural otherness. An instance of double dislocation of cultural otherness is shown when Caravaggio briefly talks to Kip in a false Welsh accent, "The English patient wants to see you, boyo", and when Kip retorts "Okay, boyo" with an additional Indian twist (201). In this scene, the racial other is not stereotyped. This could be read as cultural otherness mixed and layered which suggests a complex hybridization process. Cultural hybridity is formed through a hybridization process. The hybrid experience in the novel is more an ongoing process rather than a static result, and this is one of the ways Ondaatje departs from mere postcolonial literature of resistance (Cook 2004).

In his reading of the novel, Simpson points out that Kip challenges the colonial racial stereotypes in several ways. In fact, Kip could be read as an Indian version of Rudyard Kipling's character Kim: Kip arrives at the villa after Hana has been reading *Kim*, and his English nickname echoes both Kim and Kipling. Kim is an Irish character which creates a contrast to Kip's Indian background, and also shows different projections of racial stereotypes of different eras (Simpson 1994, 220). Kipling's story centres around "claims of opposed [Indian and British] cultures as father-quest, a narrative of cultural and political development" (Shin 2007, 215). The set up is dislocated in Ondaatje's novel when Hana observes "it seemed to her a reversal of *Kim*. The young student was now Indian, the wise old teacher was English", as she watched Kip sit beside the English patient: now the wise

teacher is English, the young student is Indian and Hana is the young boy, which also reverses gender stereotypes (111).

The postcolonial perspective is addressed in both novels together with different projections of cultural otherness. Ondaatje reiterates the story of *Kim* with Kip's postcolonial rejection of Western dominant culture and return to his home and family in India and its independence from British rule. Equally for Hana, her return to Canada can be read as a metaphor of separation from the former colonial rule of England and about the way the different colonies have won their independence. Challenging a stereotype of colonized peoples, Hana asserts that Kip would never desert his post because he is a civilized man, more English in attitude than Caravaggio or Almásy. In the novel, Kip's separation from the others is stressed in his "self-sufficiency" (73), and therefore I do not read his demeanour as a result of an internalized colonization or Westernization.

The novel questions racial otherness and national identity in the ways cultural otherness is deliberately displaced or presented from a point of view that challenges stereotypes, through characterization, ideologically disruptive images, through exotic scenery, and through structure (Ty 2000, 10). In my reading of the novel, Kip's character explicitly challenges cultural and racial stereotypes: colonial otherness is reversed in instances where Kip studies Europeans with his rifle telescope as if part of a scientific appoach with a microscope and as an act of domination. He "looks back" at the cultural representatives of the Westeners, by using their technology and by adopting their techniques. The Westeners are now the object of Kip's gaze through his rifle telescope and he is in a position of power through the potential use of violence.

The stereotypes are also reversed because the representatives of the West are depicted as wounded wrecks. The white males, the Westeners Almásy and Caravaggio, are

disempowered, maimed, and ripped of their physical strength and social stature, whereas Kip is in uniform and portrayed as an expert which suggests he is in control, ordered and organized. This reversal could be read as lack of agency of Westeners. Ondaatje challenges colonial cultural presumptions, or "pattern of empire", in the novel, by both unwriting and confirming Western cultural signs (Simpson 1994, 227). These themes will be explored in more detail in the next subchapters concerning cultural hybridity. The next subchapter will evaluate the abusive acts of the Western world.

Abusive deeds of the West against the non-Western world

The actions taken by the West are also criticized. The West and its cultural identity is ripped of its high moral ground by depicting some of the most inhuman activities. The horrible and abusive acts of the West include, for example, sexual violence and abuse. Almásy witnesses an act unfitting an Englishman, when he sees how Fenelon-Burnes, a fellow desert explorer of the British Geographical Society, kept a small Arab girl tied up in his bed. Even a suggestion of such conduct would be legally and morally unacceptable back in England. Further, it is the ultimate act of war of dropping atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the Allies that shocks Kip and dehumanizes the West for him.

The strong images of violence in an aesthetic context have triggered response to *The English Patient*, and also the rich symbolic and mythological connotations of these images of violence have been noted (Smythe 1994, 7). This extreme violence denies the grounds of the superior moral and ethics of the West and exposes the violent and monstrous otherness inside the Western culture.

In conclusion, the novel challenges Western stereotypes of cultural otherness by a strategy of displacing of otherness outside stereotypes. In the novel, ethics of Western

culture are strongly criticized in the colonial context as well as during WWII to challenge Western self-perception and to erase cultural hierarchies.

For closer examination of the issues concerning dynamics and fluidity of cultural hybridity, I will next discuss cultural hybridity in the third space.

## 3.3 Cultural hybridity in the third space

This chapter deals with themes such as postcolonial cultural hybridity and construction of cultural hierarchies according to Bhabha and also Said's theory of *Orientalism*. The methods to elude the hierarchies are discussed, including the recurrent images of borderlessness and cultural in-betweenness in the third space that are relevant in the story of the novel.

Cultural hybridity

In the novel, the theme of cultural hybridity is closely associated with a pattern of movement and transformation; characters acquire their cultural hybridity through experiences that have a deep impact on them; they are transformed by the surroundings, language, narration, and cultural influences.

Almásy narrates the process of leaving civilization and entering the 'sea-state' during "the first two days of a trek out [to desert], when he was in the zone of limbo between city and plateau. After six days…he was moving in ancient time, had adapted into the breathing patterns of deep water" (246). The transformation is complete when he was located in "that pure zone between land and chart between distances and legend between nature and

storyteller" (246). In these moments "he was alone, his own invention. He knew during these times how the mirage worked, the fata morgana, for he was within it" (246). Almásy's hybridization process is closely connected to the influence of the surroundings, and the desert can be read as a no-man's-land outside cultural territories like the third space. However, this reading ignores the desert tribes and their cultural territories, and is therefore only partly valid.

To initiate his hybridization process, Kip accesses Western culture through works of art that influence his perception of the West and its cultural images; he is hybridized while acquiring a deep appreciation of Western art: in Naples, his fate seems to be weighed by a pair of statues of Annunciation to Mary, and a religious theme of cultural pilgrimage is suggested by the use of such imagery as "the tableau now, with Kip at the feet of the two figures, suggests a debate over his fate. The raised terracotta arm a stay of execution, a promise of some great future for this sleeper, childlike, foreignborn" (281). The choice of words in this passage could be read as suggesting that Kip will be roused from his sleep to some grand mission as a "childlike, foreignborn" subject of the West and its culture. The passage can be read in both positive and negative terms; it can be read as a positive praise of Kip's future potential, while it also suggests that he is a "childlike" foreigner which denigrates him. I read it as a critical metaphor of Westernization: the colonial subjects are rewarded, but still subjugated to Western cultural hegemony and its stereotypes. Therefore, this hybridization process does not evade colonial cultural hierarchies according to the requirements of the third space, and Kip's hybridization is incomplete and fragmentary.

It can be concluded that cultural hybridity is acquired through a process of hybridization which varies for different characters; for Almásy, the desert helps him to acquire a nomadic cultural identity; for Kip, the Western art functions as a gateway to a partial

hybridization experience. The exact phases of the hybridization process are not explicitly expressed in the novel; rather, it is a metaphor for gaining sensitiveness, responsiveness, and cultural insight. This hybridization process proceeds through a space of translation, the third space, and it will be explored next.

The third space

Ondaatje admits in an interview his interest in "mongrel literature, stories about people who fall into the gaps between cultures" (Weich 2000, 3). Cultural hybridity is located into the third space whenever old cultural stereotypes are surpassed, new meanings are located, and where cultural differences are met without any hierarchies. After his return back home to his Sikh family, Kip realizes that the sun of India exhausts him. He thinks momentarily of Hana, of contacting her. Kip sees Hana in silence in moments of revelation while sitting in his garden, and their connection remains. Both Hana and Kip are altered by their shared experience and love in the villa, their connection remains despite the distance of space and time, and they have become hybrids, there is no-one quite like them in the world. Their connection is an example of new cultural meanings where cultural differences are met outside of predetermined hierarchies. Personal affiliations are also factors contributing to cultural hybridity and therefore personal closeness and connection Hana and Kip continue to share are part of their continuing hybridization experience. In my opinion, these situations approach Bhabha's concept of the third space where each alters the meaning and the context of the other (Bhabha 1994, 114).

The third space is characterized by Bhabha as a location of cultural encounters where cultural presumptions are avoided. This is exemplified in the novel in an instance where Kip explains his meticulous habit of washing hands to Caravaggio by merely casually

mentioning that he was from Punjab. Hana replies in the same effortless vein of conversion that she was from "Upper America" (76). Here, the colonial stereotypes are dismissed and cultures meet and greet each other casually outside of any pre-existing binarities, in the third space.

In the third space, categorical borders are erased and replaced by an interstitial experience. Inhabiting the interstitial space is visible in how Hana "slept in rooms that had walls missing" (13). She is in an in-between space where "there seemed little demarcation between house and landscape, between damaged building and the burned and shelled remnants of the earth. To Hana the wild gardens were like further rooms" (43). Critics have noted Ondaatje's move beyond binary oppositions of meanings into undefined regions in the novel: "[N]o mere binaries, the legible and illegible buzz together nearly dialogically in order to vibrate in intertextual references…and in extratextual or paratextual readings of painting, of maps, of bombs, of bodies" (Simpson 1994, 217). The theme of legibility and inability to read are found in passages where Hana tries to decipher and read Kip: "Everywhere she touches braille doorways" (270), and when she is the only one to read him when he grieves his dead bomb disposal tutor: "No expression of sadness, nothing to interpret…She watches Kip lean his head back against the wall and knows the neutral look on his face. She can read it" (178). Hana reads Kip because she has also been altered by the harshness of the war.

In my reading of *The English Patient*, there are several occurrances of cultural hybridity in the third space. Affirming my reading of the reading of *The English Patient*, Beverly Curran sees Ondaatje not interested in "maintain[ing] self-other relations of dominance", but instead she interprets the narrative of the story as a translation process that is never definitive, given the inherent deferment of meaning in translation, or the inability to

translate the entire meaning in the same sense (Curran 2004). The metaphor of translation can be read together with Said's formulation on how poetry "becomes a place where the impossible union of very distinct spheres of experiences becomes actual" (Said 1993, 281), where the difficulty of a translation process can be surpassed by poetry. According to Bhabha, the passage through the third space produces interpretation and meaning by "represent[ing] both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative…strategy" (Bhabha 1994, 53). I read the narrative of the story as continuous process of translation, and Bhabha's theory of the third space is therefore a suitable framework to analyse the themes of the novel.

In this chapter, I analysed the fluidity and construction of cultural identity, the loss of stable national and cultural identities, how cultural otherness and stereotypes are challenged in the novel, and the suitability of Bhabha's postcolonial third space to the analysis of *The English Patient*. In conclusion, the third space is an elusive concept of cultural encounters outside cultural hierarchies. However, several critics have affirmed similar readings of the novel but in slightly different terms. Nevertheless, I read these different formulations as examples of the third space in my analysis of the novel.

In the next chapter, I will analyse the tension that the characters experience within cultural hybridity.

# 4 TENSION WITHIN CULTURAL HYBRIDITY

In this chapter, I will firstly discuss the theme of desire for unity present in the novel, in the sense that characters with hybrid cultural affiliations nevertheless long for shared cultural connection. Secondly, I will address issues concerning anxiety of hybridity in the context of cultural hybridity and its ambiguities, and finally, I will investigate ways to reconsider cultural hybridity according to the themes of the novel.

## 4.1 Desire for unity

This chapter deals with themes such as desire for unity by exploring the possibility of an alternative community outside of national distinctions or cultural differences, the theme of tentative healing, and the promise of peaceful coexistence. The desire for unity is closely connected to the theme of tentative healing in the novel because all four central characters in *The English Patient*, namely Almásy, Hana, Kip, and Caravaggio, suffer from physical, mental, or cultural constraints.

Peaceful coexistence at the villa

Ondaatje has mentioned the theme of close interaction of strangers, ”There are situations…when the characters are all suddenly stuck together” (Weich 2000, 3), when asked about writing the novel and how he visualised the interaction between the characters. Ondaatje has admitted that the novel is centred around the theme ”tentative healing” of the four main characters in the villa (Wachtel 1999, 255). This tentativeness implies that the unifying process of healing of their mental state is not certain or definite. In the novel, the

Italian villa is a site of peaceful coexistence where the four of them, Almásy as the English patient, Hana, Kip, and Caravaggio, gradually form a fragile community despite differences in nationality or origin. According to Ondaatje, the four characters at the villa all long for a community, even if imagined: “Those migrants don’t belong here [in the villa] but want to belong here and find a new home” (Wachtel 1999, 260). The characters are all migrants in their own way: Almásy has various national affiliations that he nevertheless dismisses, Hana and Caravaggio are Canadians and also “vagrant” (14) spirits, and Kip is an Indian in the British troops in WWII. Their cultural and national identities surpass many borders and critics have noted the transnational aspect of the themes of the novel. Despite their self-suffiency, they desire human connections and unity amid the war.

In her article, Victoria Cook explores the transnational identities in Ondaatje’s work. She uses Bhabha’s hybridity theory where in Bhabha’s view the construction of cultural hybridity proceeds through a hybridization process of formerly uniform cultures: "[T]he very concepts of homogenous national cultures...are in a profound process of redefinition...there is overwhelming evidence of a more transnational and translational sense of the hybridity of imagined communities" (Bhabha 1994, 7). Cook notes that Bhabha’s statement makes allusion to Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities" and to the book of same title (Cook 2004, 2). In my reading of the novel, this allusion suggests that national identities are constructed in a constant process of adjustment which follows closely also Hall’s view of construction of cultural identities (Hall and Du Gay 1996, 2). The four characters form an imagined community at the villa in their desire for unity amid war and destruction. They share unifying collective habits, coming together at meal times, sharing breakfast and dinner. Sharing the scarce supplies and commodities, they form a small unit of essentially four strangers, a small war time community, where all care for

each other in their own way. In his portrayal of an "imagined community" of four strangers torn by war, Ondaatje moves beyond the concept of nation-states towards an ideal of borderless societies (Ty 2000, 19). This possibility of recovery and acceptance of difference can be read as a way of gaining a sense of self and reconstruction of identity (Glover 2000 80), and this can be seen in how the English patient gains a sense of his identity, Hana recovers from her nearly suicidal state of mind back to life and society of others, Caravaggio accepts his injuries and continues with his life. Kip, on the other hand, reverts back to his culture of origin and returns to his family, but in his case this can be read as reconstruction of cultural identity as an Indian and a Sikh. I read that for Kip, the "imagined community" is located in decolonized India.

This desire for unity is based on basic human need for friendship, love, and social interaction. The extreme nature of the war experience is a stark contrast to the human need for social interaction and the formation of an alternative community fulfils this need. Isolated from the world, in a country ravaged by war and without a family, friends or a place to call home, the characters take refuge in each other's company. The process is not direct, some characters take more distance than others; for instance, Kip is self-sufficient in his demeanor towards the others at the villa, and he moves among them as "some kind of loose star on the edge of their system" (75), gradually gravitating towards them. This initial distance is possibly due to his cultural background, and lack of cultural common ground: Caravaggio thinks how Kip's diet resembles that of "some rare animal" (87). Further, Kip is also a vegetarian which was likely to be extremely rare in Europe of the 1940's and especially during the war and with scarceness of all resources. Nevertheless, I read Kip's initial distance towards the others at the villa more as characteristic courteous behavior. Despite their cultural differences, the four characters at the villa gradually form a tranquil

oasis of peaceful coexistence. I read this as a hybridization process, and this progression of ”cultural displacement into a declaration of the possibilities of solidarity” is, in fact, a recurrent theme in Ondaatje’s work (Heble 1994, 200).

Desire for unity

When Kip first arrives in England, he is a stranger to English culture: ”Singh had arrived in England knowing no one, distanced from his family in the Punjab. He was twenty-one years old. He had met no one but soldiers” (187). His encounter with the English culture was rough: “The English! They expect you to fight for them but won’t talk to you” (188). Kip is delighted of the possibility of community or unity when Lord Suffolk welcomes Kip, as if he was a family member, a ”prodigal returned, offered a chair at the table, embraced with conversations” (189). In this setting, Lord Suffolk is not only a professional tutor but also a father figure and even a godfather of foreign English culture: ”Lord Suffolk chatted about the migration of robins from the war zones of Europe, the history of bomb disposal, Devon cream. He was introducing the customs of England to the young Sikh as if it was a recently discovered culture” (184). This friendly approach surprises Kip who suffers from the cultural distance with other Englishmen, and he even felt as if the secretary Miss Morden was staring at him in the waiting room at bomb disposal unit’s office because he was the only Indian among applicants. In fact, Miss Morden’s stern look turned out to be one of approval and encouragement, and she tells him later: ”I was sure you would be chosen” (189). Lord Suffolk and Miss Morden helped Kip become an initiate of English culture and to take the first steps towards gradual cultural hybridity in the hybridization process. I do not read Kip’s hybridization as Westernization because he does not discard his

cultural values or change his demeanour. The difference is visible in comparison to Almásy who embraces the desert and nomadic cultural identity.

This process is different for the other characters. In his repressed desire for unity, Almásy yearns to possess Katharine Clifton. These events have taken place prior to Almásy's burn injuries and the present events, and even though Katharine is not physically present at the villa, her spirit comes alive through Almásy's endless narration. The news of their affair had reached slowly Katharine's husband Geoffrey Clifton, a desert explorer and a spy for British intelligence, although the affair had already ended. On a tragic murder-suicide mission, Geoffrey Clifton tried to kill all three of them by crashing his plane and Katharine as passanger into Almásy waiting for them at the isolated desert plateau of Gilf Kebir. Almásy was forced to leave wounded Katharine behind in a desert cave and fetch for help. To his great tragedy, Almásy was arrested by the Allies on suspicion to be a German spy upon his arrival to the desert town of El Taj which sealed Katharine's fate. Almásy claims to abhor "ownership" in love: "When you leave me, forget me" (152) he says to her, but despite his convictions, he desires to possess Katharine, and is obsessed by "that hollow at the base of a woman's neck" (162) which is called "the vascular sizood" (241). He thinks about their relationship after they had ended the affair, if their love story was born out of "desire of another life" (239). They were worlds apart: "She had always wanted words, she loved them…Whereas I thought words bent emotions like sticks in water" (239). There are elements of violence in their sexual relationship, and Katharine recalls dreams of "hands at her neck and waited for the mood of calmness between them to swerve to violence" (150). This could be read as extreme desire for unity with strong sexual connotations. Further, when he is finally able to return years later to the Cave of Swimmers to find Katharine's body, there is a disturbing suggestion of an act of intimacy with a corpse, as Almásy tells:

”I approached her naked as I would have done in our South Cairo room, wanting to undress her, still wanting to love her” (170). Despite his claims to be emotionally unattached, his self-sufficiency and his fear and hate of ownership, Almásy tragically realizes his desire to be united with Katharine only after her death in the Cave of Swimmers.

Desiring to return to Katharine and the Cave of Swimmers, Almásy sides with the Germans and turns into an ”English spy” (165) who ”guided Eppler through the desert into Cairo on Rommel’s personal orders” (164). Almásy unwittingly assaults British national security and severes his allegiance with the English, his close cultural affiliation. Caravaggio reveals Almásy’s false judgment to him, ”you had become the enemy not when you sided with Germany but when you began your affair with Katharine Clifton” (255). This accentuates Almásy’s loss of unity with the cultural community of English desert explorers, a loss that led him to his tragic fate.

In another sense, the desire for unity can be explored as traits, leitmotifs and recurrent images that unite different characters through shared desire. The patient and Caravaggio are dependent on morphin to numb their physical pains, and they have become drug addicts – they are thus both citizens of morphin:

> He holds out his arm, the bruised veins horizontal, facing up, for the raft of morphine. As it floods him he hears Caravaggio drop the needle into the kidney-shaped enamel tin. He sees the grizzled form turn its back to him and then reappear, also caught, a citizen of morphia with him. (243)

Although they desire the same substance to alleviate pain and yield a morphin rush, a physical drug addiction is not desire in the sense of longing for social interaction or a shared culture, especially in the case of injured patients such as the badly-burned English patient and severely maimed Caravaggio. However, their dose of morphin allows them to

function in normal life and regain some of their wholeness which I read as a form of desire for unity because they have lost their position as independent white European men. Hana knows Caravaggio has had his dose of morphin when he moves with ease, like his old self before the injuries: ”War has unbalanced him and he can return to no other world as he is, wearing these false limbs that morphine promises” (116). It is also an ’imagined community’ that the patient and Caravaggio share ”where toxin not nation constitutes the originary fantasy” (Simpson 1994, 231).

Also the desert functions as a newly discovered, shared community for Almásy and his fellow explorers, although it is a privileged community. Almásy recalls how the desert explorers were “a small clutch of a nation between the wars,” forming an alternative “oasis society” by “mapping and re-exploring” together in search of Zerzura, a lost oasis (136). They occasionally joined Bedouin caravans and Almásy recalls how in the early 1930’s there were ”[j]ust the Bedouin and us, crisscrossing the Forty Days Road” in the Libyan desert. Before the war, for the Bedouin “[w]e were German, English, Hungarian, African — all of us insignificant to them. Gradually we became nationless. I came to hate nations. We are deformed by nation-states” (138). This new alternative desert community was sacred for them, embodied by the continually shifting, borderless landscape of the desert, as Almásy exclaims: “All of us, even those with European homes and children in the distance, wished to remove the clothing of our countries. It was a place of faith. We disappeared into landscape. Fire and sand…. Erase the family name! Erase nations! I was taught such things by the desert” (139). This fantasy of nomadic cultural identities and anonymity in the desert is ironically disrupted by Almásy falling in love, against all his vows of detachment and indifference, with the wife of a British spy, and becomes an enemy target of the British intelligence. Ironically, because after all they were not ”nationless” (139) in the desert and

also because Almásy's self-perception was so tragically flawed when his desire for unity with Katharine overruled past personal convictions. Alice Brittan remarked how Almásy rewrote *The Histories* in a similar false perception "by concealing the origin and result of each episode in its narrative, so that every drama appears without lineage and then vanishes without consequence" (Brittan 2006, 207). In my reading of the novel, Almásy's false perception is exposed by his desire for unity with Katharine. Quite ironically, his wish of anonymity is granted in his death when he is buried as a nameless, unidentified burn patient: "Caravaggio and the girl will bury him…They will bury everything except the book. The body, the sheets, his clothes, the rifle" (286). Caravaggio and Hana will not expose Almásy's true identity but pass on his narrative in *The Histories*. However, all this is left open in the ending of the novel.

According to Hilde Staels, Almásy can be read as 'a foreigner to himself' because of his distant and detached manner towards others in his desire and his desert dream of anonymity and invisibility in the height of his strength as a white European man exploring the Libyan desert. The dryeness and barrenness of his human affections can be interpreted through his constructed cultural identity as "a lover of the desert" (240) (Staels 2007, 983) . He has repressed his emotions that have been buried deep like water in desert: "Still, today it is water who is the stranger here. Water is the exile, carried back in cans and flasks, the ghost between your hands and your mouth" (19). The distance and boundaries that Almásy upholds are annihilated by the passion of the relationship with Katharine; he is submerged and swallowed by his desire for unity. Staels continues to remark that in the story of *The English Patient* the tensions and affiliations between characters "who are strangers to one another as well as to themselves are shown to reconnect briefly with the alienated parts of themselves and with each other" (Staels 2007, 987). I read the story of the novel similarly

as a brief encounter of hybridized characters that are eventually torn away from their fragile community due to anxiety of hybridity.

While it would be tempting to dismiss Almásy merely as a ”romantic adventurer who cultivates alienation as a way to break out of the constraints and relationships of life” (Shin 2007, 213), he could also be read differently. He promotes Western discourse of progress and science, he is devoted to a scientific cause and deeply engaged with challenges of desert exploration, he speaks the languages of different desert tribes, commands an impressive array of knowledge of history. He denies lack of affect and defends his immersion in his desert art: ”I have spent weeks in the desert, forgetting to look at the moon…as a married man may spend days never looking into the face of his wife. These are not sins of omissions but signs of preoccupation” (4). In his neutral view, he is a skilled craftsman of the desert, and devoted to his tasks and not concerned with anything else. This is not so much affirmation of fierce independence or immortality but desire in an altered state; a desire for the desert life and its various communities. In his jackal shape Almásy tells: ”I am the man who fasts until I see what I want”, when he watches Katharine during her Oxford days. Almásy is selective with his desire; he is not barren or impotent with his wants. There are some aspects of his behaviour that are morally questionable, such as his affiliation with the Nazis in order to return to Katharine’s grave in the Cave of Swimmers. Even this professes of his desire for unity, in my opinion, against claims of his ”illusion of autonomy and infinity” (Shin 2007, 213).

The novel addresses different desires to form a community, to establish cultural connections, personal relationships or even drug addiction: these are all imagined communities, in a sense, and could be read as dreams of unity, love, and desire. The theme of dreams will be explored in more detail in the next subchapter.

World without maps

The novel is scattered with recurring reference to maps and mapmaking. This constitutes one of the main patterns of the text which can be read in the colonial context as the desire to define borders in order to rule lands and their people by naming and fixing place on physical maps that can be archived to secure Western hegemony of control. The maps provide the colonizers a tool to inscribe and maintain property and territories.

Ondaatje creates a pattern of desire for unity in visions and dreams the characters experience. This can be read in Almásy's dream of a nationless desert community: anonymity in a world without maps, where all people are nationless and share the same community. Almásy yearns for a borderless ideal: ”All I desired was to walk upon an earth that had no maps” (261). His privileged ideal world fits the postcolonial context where dislocation, migrant life and nomad cultural identities are valued. This ideal does not address, for example, the situations of forced dislocation, the slave trade, or the flight of the refugees, and this is the major point of criticism against theoretical abstractions and generalizations detached from the realities of life. Almásy's dream is “to slip across borders, not to belong to anyone, to any nation” (139). Unfortunately his dream is disrupted by the brutal reality of the war that demands national distinctions to identify enemies and to control areas with clear borders for armies to efficiently occupy them.

As Sharyn Emery remarks, the acts of naming, owning and boundaries of identity are all explored in the novel together with themes of nationalism with possession or colonial desires. While Almásy desires to eradicate all such labels and boundaries, it is nearly impossible to move beyond ”names that define who we are” (Emery 2000, 214). The impact of naming can be read in the passage where Almásy is not able to convince the

English to rescue Katharine from the desert. Tragically, he calls her ”my *wife*…*Katharine*” (250), rousing suspicions and arrested: ”I was yelling Katharine’s name…Whereas the only name I should have yelled, dropped like a calling card into their hands, was Clifton’s” (251). Almásy unwittingly omitted the name of Katharine’s perished husband, and in the same instant, with false naming, signed her death sentence because he gave them his Hungarian name which was immediately dubious to the English troops. As Kyser aptly points, the characters of the novel have multiple national and cultural identity positions which leaves them faced with “frustration of identity”, divisions, and finally, “excluded from unity” (Kyser 2001, 893). This “frustration of identity” culminated for Almásy in his exclusion from unity with the English culture and in the consequent death of Katharine.

In this subchapter it can be concluded that the unity the characters find in their respective imagined communities offers them possibilities of healing and cultural interaction. Despite their brief rejoice in their tentative community, the characters are still anguished in different ways, confronted with the anxiety of hybridity which I will analyse in the next chapter.

## 4.2 Anxiety of hybridity

This chapter deals with cultural hybridity and anxiety closely connected to it in the novel’s themes. Firstly, I will examine one of the central themes; the way different characters are in ruins, disillusioned, or suffer from a loss. These different states of being in ruins are somehow connected to their hybrid cultural identities or are consequences of the hybridization process. Secondly, I will explore dissolution of cultural boundaries in cultural hybridity, and also cultural vagueness in connection to cultural hybridity. I will also

examine the notion that hybridity, escaping exact definitions, may cause anxiety of hybridity. Cultural hybridity and anxiety are connected by the notion that hybridity is an unstable condition; cultural hybridity is situated in the in-between space of different cultures. Finally, ways to overcome the anxiety are suggested based on the themes of the novel.

## In ruins

In an interview, Ondaatje tells that all the habitants of the villa are wounded in some way (Wachtel 1999, 253). In the story of the novel, the central characters are visibly uneasy. They are in ruins, like the villa, walking in mental mine fields, booby trapped by their memories, and everything is about to explode. This is seen in how Hana has been mentally blown into pieces, shellshocked, and emotionally exhausted: "You felt you could be shot anytime there, not just if you were a soldier, but a priest or nurse. It was a rabbit warren, those narrow tilted streets. Soldiers were coming in with just bits of their bodies, falling in love with me for an hour and then dying" (83).

The present of the novel's story takes place in Northern Italy during WWII, where the ruined landscape, eradicated buildings and also cultural boundaries have disintegrated amid the war. The villa is literally in ruins; has walls missing, rooms full of mortar rubble or soiled by soldiers. It is a hybrid of constructed architecture and surrounding landscape, and in continuation with the sky and the wild garden, allowing in the moon and rain.

The characters are dealing with loss in connection to traumatising experiences they have suffered: Hana has lost her adoptive father Patrick, her only family, who died in the war in France after a serious burn injury; she lost her boyfriend, who died in the war; she lost her baby that she aborted after the death of her boyfriend. She is deeply altered by her

experiences and mentally anxious. In several passages in the novel Hana is distracted by troubling thoughts and memories: ”A scurry in her mind like a mouse in the ceiling, a moth on the night window” (7). Now she cares for the unidentified burn patient, as a helpless gesture and in a dark parallel trying to nurse her father who died of severe burn injuries in France: she writes to her aunt Clara about his death: ”He was a burned man and I a nurse and I could have nursed him. Do you understand the sadness of geography?” (298).

Almásy mourns the loss of Katharine and their love affair, whereas Kip grieves quietly with deceptively ”neutral look on his face” the death of his tutor and father figure, Lord Suffolk, in an explosion at site defusing a bomb (176). The war has also unbalanced Caravaggio, who is in near ruins because his thumbs were cut off in a mock interrogation. In an attempt to help Hana cope with her anxiety, Caravaggio tries to coax her back into life because she has ”withdrawn utterly from the world” (Wachtel 1999, 253) and also the English patient has helped Hana by persuading her to read to him because she was so withdrawn from life. The books and the stories became Hana’s way out of her anxiety, ”the only door out of her cell” (7).

The most tragic change in the course of hybridization, although a physical one, has altered Almásy from a Hungarian Count, a desert explorer, and a virile man, into a nameless burnt-out patient, the vestiges of a man; he is physically in ruins. He has also been altered in other ways: he was a man of few words but now the narrative power and the stories of his past are all he has left. This notion of someone being completely altered by an accident was what intrigued Ondaatje, although he is careful to note that the plane crash was not the sole cause of Almásy’s altered identity (Wachtel 1999, 254). Almásy has become altered in the interaction with others, and he is no longer detached from or indifferent to the world as he claimed earlier, when he was submerged in the world of

desert explorations in the height of his powers. He narrates his story as his final swan song, as his final effort to relate his story of desert dream to the world.

A pattern of luring in death and can be read in the novel when the patient's unintentional deathlike posture irritates Hana "[a]s if he was preparing himself, as if he wanted to slip into his own death by imitating its climate and light" in a mock imitation game (62). Although the patient is inevitably dying, Hana dislikes it because it would push her towards her final resolution as well. Hana is nearly suicidal in the beginning of the novel, although it is merely suggested: "In darkness, in any light after dusk, you can slit a vein and the blood is black" (62). In an interview, Ondaatje eloborates: "There's a pivotal scene in the book in which Hana is at her lowest – almost suicidal, though it is just hinted at. She starts playing the [possibly booby trapped] piano in the villa, and at that point two soldiers walk into the room" (Wachtel 1999, 253). In a dramatic scene full of anxiety, she defies the threat of hidden explosives: dignified and ready to face her fate, Hana starts to play a slow and tentative dance of death; *danse macabre*, to lure in death. This menacing scene is disrupted when the two sappers, Kip and Hardy, walk in. She did not lure in death but her salvation, and the moment of anxiety passes in this scene.

Dissolution of cultural boundaries

Postcolonial and postmodern cultural theories promote the idea of dissolution of clear cultural boundaries; a world without nations. It is the fulfilment of Almásy's dream "to slip across borders, not to belong to anyone, to any nation" (139). In the postcolonial situation, the dissolution of traditional cultural boundaries leaves behind cultural insecurity and instability. In such a situation where the cultural boundaries are of little importance, and where the foundations of essentialist cultural identity are eradicated with the erasing of the

importance of a shared origin, the experience of cultural ambiguity may cause anxiety. The indeterminate and diffuse nature of cultural hybridity is characterised by vagueness which leads to feeling of anxiety. This postcolonial and postmodern eradication of traditional cultural boundaries and absence of cultural attachment or any solid point of reference for one's cultural identity accentuates the experience of dismay in the situation.

Cultural hybridity is also something dubious due to any clear identification or allegiance. It is presented as something suspect in Almásy's tragedy leading to his demise; he cannot claim Englishness because he does not fit neatly into national or cultural categories. The tragedy was that Katharine died because of Almásy's foreign name. He was "[j]ust another international bastard" (251) to the English military at El Taj that he tried to persuade to rescue the injured Katharine from the desert; he was suspect due to his foreign, non-English name when the war broke out. The "multiple sites of belonging" or the multiple cultural identities of characters cause contradictions with dissolution of boundaries.

Anxiety of hybridity

The war situation in the novel is exigent in demanding clear national allegiances and national borders that are, together with nationalities, of utmost importance. Cultural hybridity was therefore a disastrous disadvantage for Almásy and the greatest cause of anxiety that determined his tragic fate of losing Katharine. Also Hana suffers the consequences of cultural hybridization which is hinted at when she "has not found her own company, the ones she wanted" in life as she is depicted years later in her life in Canada (301), possibly due to cultural hybridization by the events that have made her too dissimilar to blend in culturally or to be united with similar cultural hybrid identities. In Hana's

future, the mixedness of her cultural identity results in absence of unity and therefore to anxiety of hybridity. The villa was a place of gradual healing to the charatcters, and therefore, the future absence of unity is not due to the war trauma alone.

Other characters are similarly confronted with acute anxiety of hybridity when the situations reach a climax. Kip rejects his cultural hybridity when the atomic bombs are dropped in Japan by the Allied forces: ”If he closes his eyes he sees the streets of Asia full of fire. It rolls across cities like a burst map, the hurricane of heat withering bodies as it meets them, the shadow of humans suddenly in the air. This tremor of Western wisdom” (284). He can no longer side with the Western culture or the small community of its cultural representatives at the Italian villa. Kip was in the process of slowly becoming assimilated into the Western cultural sphere; however, it was the brutality of the bombing of a non-Western nation that made him see the situation in the light of harsh reality — the atomic bomb could have never been dropped on a white nation. Their cultures were not considered equal, the Western hegemony was based on a hierarchy which claimed the right to annihilate the lives of the civilians of the other, supposedly inferior, cultures. Kip’s anger at his adapted cultural world of the West results in his realization of ”seeing everything…in a different light” (284). According to critics, this scene in the novel unveils the false pretence of the West’s ”cultural myth, the narrative of western sacrifice, heroism, and ultimate triumph” in WWII (Hawkins and Danielson 2002, 139). Kip is devastated and disillusioned by the news which is in stark contrast to what he considered earlier in connection to his craft and how ”succesful defusing of a bomb ended novels. Wise white fatherly men shook hands, were acknowledged, and limped away” (105). In taking this moral stance, Ondaatje exposes the contradictions of the Western discourse of superior morality and the complexity of the situation as well as Western guilt concerning the

bombings (Hawkins and Danielson 2002, 151). I read this as postcolonial cultural criticism on Ondaatje's part, as the novel was written decades after the end of the war. In doing this, he highlights the postcolonial theme of decline of colonial power and cultural influence of the West.

After the news of the bombing, Kip rejects the West: ”Never turn your back on Europe. The deal makers. The contract makers. The map drawers…Never shake hands with them” (284). He rejects the colonial power position of the West and targets the English patient with his rifle in a reversed, violent reassertion of power: ”I grew up with traditions from my country, but later, more often, from *your* country. Your fragile white island that with customs and manners and books and prefects and reason somehow converted the rest of the world” (283). In his anger, Kip disregards the fact that Almásy is not English, and he sees the patient as a representative of the colonizers, the English, and the West. He renounces the totality of Western civilization, and in his view, WWII was one of ”Barbarians versus the Barbarians” in the English patient’s words (257), declaring he is ”no longer their sentinel” (286). He also rejects his friends at the villa although they are equally appalled by the news; in Caravaggio’s words: ”A new war. The death of a civilization” (286). This scene re-establishes cultural unity of postcolonial alterity of the self/other axis that characters have sought to evade.

Some critics read the English patient through Bhabha’s theory as a figure of ”colonial presence [which] is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference” (Bhabha 1994, 107), thus constructing nationhood through repeated narratives that build national culture (Shin 2007, 214). I disagree with this reading because the English patient is not a figure of authority or power, as Bhabha’s theory posits, although he is assumed to be an English cultural presence

at the villa. In his essay ”Signs Taken for Wonders”, Bhabha elaborates that the image of colonial power is used as a universal symbol in order to construct a difference between the colonial self and the colonized other. In my reading of the novel, the act of narration does not function as a tool of cultural domination to assert difference. Rather, it is used as a smoke screen or a *trompe l'oeil*; as Caravaggio remarks to Hana before Almásy's identity is confirmed, ”[I]t is mostly the desert now. The English garden is wearing thin. He's dying.” (164) The interesting point of view in this passage is that although identity is constructed through narration, it also needs to stem from a core identity because an outer layer might wear thin. This could be argued as an example against Hall's theory of constantly constructed identities which are without a solid core since they are always in a state of flux.

Kip leaves the villa fueled by anger at the Western culture and its racist stereotypes. He strongly rejects the racial otherness projected by the West and the Allied ”bombing the brown races of the world” (286). Kip's rage is justified by the acute realization that this attack is directed at racial others including himself, and ”never on a white nation” (286) would such atrocity be legitimized by the Westeners. His fury is mixed with disappointmet at his deception, and not seeing people like him were ”not quite/not white”, meaning the denigration of the non-white people, to quote Bhabha, from Western point of view (Bhabha 1994, 92). The ”power structures of whiteness” have become visible the very instant atomic bombs were dropped in Japan (Burrows 2008, 164). Burrows reads Kip's enraged reaction as a result of his closeness with the Western culture and Westeners; she reads it through Almásy's notion of 'propinquity': ”Propinquity in the desert. It does that here”, when he comments Katharine's violent dream (150). In Kip's case, 'propinquity' means the nearness of the colonial relationship of India and England. The colonial trauma is triggered in Kip by realization of underlying cultural power structures exposed by war. He becomes altered by

his rage, and this ”traumatic disordering and disruption of all Kip has believed in for so long” leaves a mark on him (Burrows 2008, 166). In my reading, his close relationship with Hana is the instance of ’propinquity’ that marks him, and this is seen in his longing for her later.

In an interview, Ondaatje remarked that Kip’s uncharacteristic rampage mirrors Almásy’s loss of Katharine in all its rage in a ”kind of parallel story of fate” rendering them both insane in the moment of fury (Kamiya 1996). Their fates are also parallel in their grief: Almásy mentally paints Katharine’s dying body with ceremonial colors in the Cave of Swimmers to transform her eternal: ”He looked up to the one cave painting and stole the colours from it. The ochre went into her face, he daubed blue around her eyes…so she would be immune to the human” (248). In similar spirit, he imagines the ”slight brown figure” of infuriated ”young sapper” to return to ”foot of his bed” and in his dream remains convinced that ”[i]f the figure turns around there will be paint on his back, where he slammed in grief against the mural of trees” (298).

This chapter explored the different states of anxiety of characters and their causes in the context of the novel. In the next chapter I will analyse the different ways to reconsider hybridity in the novel.

## 4.3 Hybridity reconsidered

This chapter deals with themes such as how cultural identity is renewed through narration, the ways cultural hybridity gains novel meanings in a new context, and how it is continuously reinterpreted through the third space, as proposed by Bhabha. I will also discuss Bhabha’s theory on interconnected, global network of complex processes of

cultural interactions, and magic realism, and how they can be used as tools to read *The English Patient*.

In defence of hybridity

In my reading of the novel, and as I have shown in this thesis, the story traces diverse influences contributing to cultural and national identities of characters and their cultural hybridity. The classifications of race, nationality, and other cultural affiliations are momentarily discarded in the story. However, Ondaatje steers away from providing definite explanations or solutions to contradictory themes in colonial/postcolonial context of *The English Patient*. The ambivalences and ambiguities remain in the ending of the novel. In an interview, Ondaatje eloborates on his work and how to him ”reclaiming untold stories is…essential” and also voicing ”complicated version of things” (Bush 1994, 247). His approach towards writing is best depicted by his motivation ”to capture the variousness of things. Rather than one demonic stare” (Bush 1994, 248).

The variousness of things and stories is claimed by the English patient who states that “this is the world of nomads in any case, an apocryphal story” (248). Something that is apocryphal is dubious, suspect or even possibly untrue. Although it might at first seem like an odd statement coming from Almásy, it could be read as referring to the possibilities of narration and the connection between nomads or travellers and the stories they tell of their past travels. Cultural identity is renewed through the act of narration, “re-telling of the past” as Hall puts it, because the narrative process generates new viewpoints and therefore new hybrid entities (Rutherford 1990, 224).

The migrant experience Bhabha’s presents is characterised solely by displacement. Loomba challenges this: ”[D]espite the accent on hybridity and liminality, Bhabha

generalises and universalises the colonial encounter. Thus, ironically, the split, ambivalent, hybrid colonial subject projected in his work is in fact curiously universal and homogeneous – that is to say he could exist anywhere in the colonial world" (Loomba 2002, 178). I agree with Loomba's complaint but move on to remark that Bhabha's theory is only applicable when used as a general framework on cultural encounters in the postcolonial context. This is a general formulation but nevertheless functional when dealing with undefined themes and new emerging cultural encounters. The open space of interpretation leaves possibility for new perspectives to emerge without predetermined hierarchies and I see this as the main argument in Bhabha's hybridity theory. Cultural hybridity gains different meanings each time it is interpreted anew. In an interview, Ondaatje confesses that the theme of hybridity is important to him: "I'm a great believer in the mongrel", when he talked about mixing different cultural influences and genres in his work (Bush 1994, 244). The concept of a 'mongrel' art fits the indefinite scope of postcolonial writing, and also the style of magic realism. Magic realism simply means instances of magic in the rational world, and it is one of the reoccurring themes in Ondaatje's works, including *The English Patient*.

This subchapter examined the challenges of the cultural hybridity theory in the analysis of the novel. Loomba criticizes Bhabha's hybridity theory and generalization of the colonial encounter. In my opnion, Bhabha's theory can be used as a general framework to study cultural encounters, however, it is poorly applicable to the analysis of time or place specific colonial encounters.

Ondaatje dismisses any specific explanations of the themes of the novel; rather, they could be read through metaphors. But even beyond symbolic meanings, there are elements of magic in the novel that I will discuss in the next subchapter.

Magic realism and the third space

Kristina Kyser affirms that *The English Patient* surpasses binary oppositions and thus challenges the grounds of dualist narratives ”without reinscribing the dualism…simply reversing the ’good’ and the ’evil’” (Kyser 2001, 891). In other words, Ondaatje proceeds pass dualism or binaries to a different ”zone of limbo” located off the chart (246), outside of defined lands, which I read as the third space following Bhabha’s formulation of cultural hybridity beyond established boundaries. Kyser agrees, with a slightly different formulation, when she discusses Ondaatje’s wish to ”capture the variousness of things” (Bush 1994, 248). ”Ondaatje takes the cubist objective of viewing the same object from multiple perspectives simultaneously”, and continues: ”It is a zone of limbo in which categories and demarcation erode and a new way of seeing emerges” (Kyser 2001, 892). This reading of the novel gains more support from Nicola Renger who asserts that ”[i]nstead of the binary polarizing of colonialism, Ondaatje aims for a dialogic mode, a merging of the unfamiliar and the familiar, of fiction and reality...[and] draws more flexible and hybrid maps of the future” (Renger 2000, 123). I interpret the ’dialogue’ Renger refers to as one formulation of the postcolonial third space where cultural dialogues and negotiations can occur outside predetermined cultural hierarchies.

The use of magic realism is a recurrent theme in postcolonial writing; indeed, Bhabha confirms that magic realism is ”the literary language of the emergent post-colonial world” (Bhabha 1990, 7). The connection between these in Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* can be established via postcolonial literary theory and Bhabha’s concept of the third space. In the novel, the use of magic realism could be read as a narrative tool to describe moments surpassing constraints of reality, and therefore surpassing everyday categories of reality

towards a new space which could be interpreted as the third space. A moment of magic realism occurs when Almásy lays down Katharine, seriously injured in a suicide-murder plane crash piloted by her husband Geoffrey: it seems like Almásy is transformed into a jackal; a deity of Egyptian mythology in the shape of a wolf standing at the prow of a boat and leading the way to afterlife. In his jackal form, Almásy watches and accompanies Katharine throughout her school years, London parties and witnesses those early hours of the morning she met Geoffrey Clifton in the Oxford Union Library:

> But the spirit of the jackal, who was the ”opener of the ways”, whose name was Wepwawet or Almásy, stood in the room with the two of you…you have found your fates. At three a.m. you feel you must leave, but you are unable to find one shoe. You hold the other in your hand, a rose-coloured slipper. I see one half buried near me and pick it up. The sheen of it. They are obviously favourite shoes, with the indentation of your toes. Thank you, you say accepting it, as you leave, not even looking at my face. (258-259)

In his jackal shape, Almásy resuscitates Katharine in the Cave of Swimmers:

> It was almost too late. I leaned forward and with my tongue carried the blue pollen to her tongue. We touched this way once. Nothing happened. I pulled back, took a breath and then went forward again. As I met the tongue there was a twitch within it.
>
> Then the terrible snarl, violent and intimate, came out of her upon me. A shudder through her whole body like a path of electricity. She was flung from the propped position against the painted wall. The creature had entered her and it leapt and fell against me. There seemed to be less and less light in the cave. Her neck flipping this way and that…What had I done? What animal had I delivered into her? (260)

The enduring personal connection between Hana and Kip as well as their shared cultural hybridity that has marked both can be observed and tangled with a touch of magic: ”A stone of history skipping over the water, bouncing up so she and he have aged before it

touches the surface again and sinks…And something this evening has brought the stone out of the water and allowed it to move back within the air towards the hill town in Italy" (299-300).

Postcolonial aspect of the novel is visible in the ending of the story when a moment of magic mixes Hana's life in Canada with Kip's life in India. I read an element of regret in both Hana's and Kip's demeanour in this last passage, despite his moment of frustration and anger when he departed the villa, in continuation with the theme of healing:

> And so Hana moves and her face turns and in a regret she lowers her hair [reminiscent of their time at the villa]. Her shoulder touches the edge of a cupboard and a glass dislodges. Kirpal'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, a wrinkle at the edge of his eyes behind his spectacles (301-302).

This simultaneous scene is a moment outside the realm of reality and its geographical scope gives it a postcolonial aspect where the West and the non-Western tangled together in a strange relationship of dependence. The separate world's of Kip and Hana resonate as their shared hybrid connection oscillates between this world and that, thus establishing a bridge between their spheres of life in Canada and India. Staels emphasizes this connection across distance of nations as proof of Ondaatje's ethics of encountering otherness with love and affection (Staels 2007, 988), while others comment this "implied continuity" as something "mysterious", "irrevocable", and "perpetual" which links on different levels besides affection of Kip and Hana – also the colonial past and the decolonized future in India and Canada (Younis 1998, 6). This is phrased as Ondaatje's metaphor of meeting of "two nations, two nationalities, meet and the space of the intersection is transformed". Again, this is a confirmation of the third space, an image of the moment, when the encounter of

two national and cultural identities leads to transformation in the space of intersection. The novel's ending gives the reader a glimpse of the "complicated version of things", to quote Ondaatje, and leaves the fate of characters unresolved.

To conclude, Ondaatje uses magic realism as a suitable tool to convey the message of cultural encounters that surpass all boundaries. I will discuss the elements of hybridity in the ending of the novel and its elusive meanings in the next subchapter.

Open endings

The story leaves the final fate of Caravaggio suspended and the death of the patient is never explicitly described. After the war has ended, Kip and Hana return to their respective homelands, at least symbolically speaking. Despite leaving in anger, Kip still says goodbye to Hana by gently touching her arm. Their connection remains despite the years and miles of distance, albeit a limited connection depicted in the way Kip sees visions of Hana, living her life now on the other side of the globe.

Postmodern theme of open endings leaves fate of characters unresolved, and this is seen in how the reader has no notion of Caravaggio's fate and the fates of Hana and Kip are open to interpretation. Ondaatje speaks of the challenge of resolving a story: "In *The English Patient*, there is a new life beginning for Hana and Kip. I don't see novels ending with any real sense of closure. I see the poem or the novel ending with an open door…It's a balancing act. You want to suggest something new, but at the same time, resolve the drama of the action in the novel" (Weich 2000, 2). I read the metaphor of an "open door" as magic realism which opens the door between reality and magic.

The enduring connection between Hana and Kip could be read as cultural hybridity that needs to be renegotiated over time; the connection endures but the situations in their

respective lives change. Their relationship is at times one sided, sometimes only a partial connection but nevertheless in continuation of their shared experience. I read the mysterious enduring connection between Kip and Hana as cultural hybridity residing in the third space, outside of cultural notions or even normative representation:

> Now where does he sit as he thinks of her? These years later. A stone of history skipping over the water, bouncing up so she and he have aged before it touches the surface again and sinks. Where does he sit in his garden thinking once again he should go inside and write a letter or go one day down to the telephone depot, fill out a form and try to contact her in another country. It is this garden, this square patch of dry cut grass that triggers him back to the months he spent with Hana and Caravaggio and the English patient north of Florence in the Villa San Girolamo…And he watches Hana…This is a limited gift he has somehow been given, as if a camera's film reveals her, but only her, in silence. (299-300)

Their personal connection remains despite the temporal and geographical distance. It is clear that both of them have been altered not only by the war experience or their shared time at the villa but also by their personal, intimate relationship. The cultural hybridity theory does not particularly address the issue of personal passions as it is for the main part applied to politics of representation. Nevertheless, personal relationships are included in cultural identity in the way they leave a mark in the parties involved, in other words, hybridizing them. Using Bhabha's theory to read the themes of the novel, they seem to connect through a complex network of global cultural interactions despite the distance and time. This ending bears resemblance to Ondaatje's trademark of complicated, deferred endings (Smythe 1994, 7).

In my analysis, a clash of cultures does not necessarily lead to alteration of both parties. The postcolonial situtations are diverse. In order for the cultural hybridization to take place, there are qualitative demands that need to be met. Both parties have to be oriented prior the

new cultural contact in order for hybridization to occur. This accentuates the importance of orientation, or the openness, of all cultural parties for new interaction. However, Bhabha disputes the notion of discrete cultures or the clash of cultures. Instead, he advances the concept of a connected, global network of continuous and complex processes of cultural interactions. The enduring connection between Kip and Hana could therefore be read as a manifestation of a complex global network of cultural hybridity.

# 5 CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have analysed the narrative style and some relevant postmodern themes as well as some postcolonial literary themes in Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, mainly with the postcolonial and colonial theories advanced by Hall, Bhabha, and Said, and I aimed to assess the validity of the theories in the analysis of the novel.

The postmodern fragmentary narrative style as well as the fluidity of cultural identities portrayed in the novel demonstrate the validity of Hall's discursive approach of cultural identity construction in the analysis of the novel. The postcolonial approach is suitable to describe the fluctuating cultural hybridization process that is continually adjusted which is in accordance with Bhabha's postcolonial cultural hybridity theory. The cultural renegotiation processes are described through the use of recurrent themes, patterns, and metaphors in the novel.

The novel can be read together with Said's colonial criticism of the abusive practices of the West against the non-Western nations and people. Said criticizes cultural hegemony of the West, however, the novel resists colonial stereotypes and clear divisions along the self/other axis, and the colonial binaries are evaded. Therefore, Said's colonial criticism is only partly valid in the thematic analysis. The novel disassembles cultural binaries, hierarchy of cultures, and cultural distinctions, and criticizes nationalism; instead, it presents an ideal of cultural hybrids and nomadic cultural identity, and a new hybrid form of cultural encounters in the third space.

The portrayal of the ideal nomadic identity is flawed in its aesthetic depiction of the desert explorations and nomadism disregarding the privileged power position of the

Western explorers in comparison to the local people's reality. I read the aestheticization as a submerged criticism of the blindness of the Westeners to the moral implications of their actions towards the non-Westeners. The Western moral is also questioned in relation to the atomic bombings at the end of WWII.

In my reading of Ondaatje's work, it engages with postcolonial themes and offers new points of view to postcolonial cultural hybridity. I read the third space as a relevant theme in the novel; it creates a new space for cultural hybrid experience outside of cultural boundaries and predetermined cultural hierarchies. The third space remains an unstable location of postcolonial cultural hybridization, and it necessitates renegotiation on each occasion. However, the shifting nature of the third space helps produce new meanings in cultural interactions and enables new positions to emerge. In these instances, the postcolonial approach of analysis, Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridization and the third space offer valuable perspectives to the analysis of the themes in *The English Patient*. A corresponding finding, although in slightly different terms, has been presented by some critics who have arrived at a similar interpretation (Kyser 2001; Younis 1998).

I read the theme of cultural hybridity in *The English Patient*, not as an outcome of a process, but rather as a source of energy for cultural renewal. Cultures and histories have the potential to be re-interpreted and gain new meanings in a different context, the same way the book by Herodotus is annotated by Almásy's observations. Simpson remarks that *The Histories* can be read as a "hybrid discourse [of an] array of marginal insertions and narrative prostheses" (Simpson 1994, 222). The novel does not to provide further details about the nature of this unspecified realm of cultural hybridity, and the meaning of this new interpretation or translation is left unclear. Also, Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity is open-ended and leaves room for interpretation, and it has been criticised for the

indefiniteness of its claims (Loomba 2002, 178). I read Bhabha's theorizing as an open discourse that deliberately leaves an element of deferment in its interpretation. Equally, Hall's theory of cultural identity construction is vague because he does not present specific claims. In my opinion, the style of the novel and theories brought forward by Bhabha and Hall possess corresponding qualities in their vagueness and open-endedness.

In my analysis of the novel, I cannot validate or dismiss any specific claims or provide exact answers to these diffuse and multifaceted discourses with evasive concepts and deferred meanings. Nevertheless, I hope this framework has provided points of access to the novel and the theories used in its analysis to iniate new discussions, and hopefully, this thesis has succeeded in highlighting some relevant discussions surrounding the novel and its themes. *The English Patient* and its rich postcolonial thematics offer themselves up for futher analysis in the future.

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