

## Postcolonial Merger/Dissolution of Identities in In-Between Spaces: A Diaspora Study of Ondaatje's *The English Patient*

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### Abstract

*The epistemological shift from colonialism to postcolonialism refashioned the colonial conceptualization of gender, race, geopolitical locale and sexual orientation to focus on those processes theorized by Homi K. Bhabha as 'in-between spaces'. With the delimitation of Michael Ondaatje's The English Patient (1992), this research explores how these 'in-between spaces' led colonialism and its subjects to the postcolonial / post-World War II milieu. The colonizers were not psychologically resilient enough to survive the hybrid 'in-between space' that dismantled the binary of the self and the other. The post-colonial subject, like the colonial subject, is a collage, not stable or autonomous, because it exists in a hybrid space of the enunciation of two cultures which cannot sustain its independent identity: in The English Patient, the diaspora located at the cultural boundaries of the Europeans and their home countries merges and dissolves into the in-between spaces acquainted with their anxiety and passion of nationhood and the nationlessness.*

### Key Words:

Diaspora,  
Identity, in-  
between  
Spaces, Post-  
Colonialism,  
World War II

“A boundary is not that at which something stops but ... from which something begins its presencing”

(Heidegger, 1971: p. 154).

### Introduction

The colonial regime was the physical face of the imperialism that, for all its subtlety and power, failed to eliminate the resistance which ultimately resulted in 'in-between spaces' or hybrid culture(s) (Bhabha, 1994). The postcolonial or post-

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World War II claims of a new and whole national identity (Fanon, 1963 & 1986) could not classify the enduring influence of the West on the colonized. When the postcolonial studies demanded the eradication of the effects of colonialism (Thiong'o, 1986) to (re)construct the colonized cultural symbols they did not understand the influence of the cultural boundaries where the centrifugal forces – physical, philosophical and cultural claims that give unity to the colonial culture – encountered with the centripetal forces of the native culture. This cultural encounter comes forth “only at the signifiatory boundaries of cultures, where meanings and values are misread or signs are misappropriated” (Bhabha, 1994: p. 34). This cultural interpretation at the social borders is not a simple performance of communication between the ‘You’ and the ‘I’ embedded in different cultures but involves a “Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot 'in itself' be conscious” (Bhabha, 1994: p. 36). Homi K. Bhabha (1994) defines this Third Space as a discursive space of interpretation in which the symbolic meanings of culture(s) are moved and hence “can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew” (p. 37). This involvement of third space, Bhabha argues, “is to display the 'in-betweenness'” (p. 29) or hybridity which is eventually “uncontainable because it breaks down the symmetry and duality of self/other, inside/outside” (p. 116). With the interpretation of Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992), this article unfolds what Bhabha calls the ‘in-between spaces’ or hybridity which the diaspora characters inhabited during the post-World War II phase which bordered the colonial and post-colonial worlds. The characters’ movements ‘back and forth’ in different cultures unconsciously and eventually make them dismantle the western ‘transcendental signified’ around which the whole truth of identity was woven (Derrida, 1978). Hana, a Canadian nurse in the European hospital; Ladislaus de Almásy (the English patient), a Hungarian cartographer who later spied for British (Allies) and German (Axis) powers in Cairo, Africa; David Caravaggio, a Canadian thief who, in WWII, spied for the British; and Kip (Kirpal Singh), the Indian sapper in the British army, moved outside their geographical, and hence cultural, borders widely and ended in a smashed villa near Florence in Italy. Their shared experience(s) in the war shaded their ‘in-between spaces’ for a while in the villa of San Girolamo. But the destruction of the ‘transcendental signified’ of western culture which once made them emerge into the new world cannot help them thinking of bygone identities; their relationship with the new world was “mutually constitutive and dynamically unstable” (Tyson, 1999: p. 280) hence resisted against the colonial and postcolonial cultural settlement (Bhabha, 1994). The novel begins with the end of WW II which intersected different nations and its anarchy affected the lives of the surviving diaspora who discovered it easier to escape their western identity than to live with it but unconsciously were in ‘in-between spaces’ – “the accumulative and the adjunct, presence and proxy”

(Bhabha, 1994: p. xxx). These 'in-between spaces' enable them to pledge the new signs of their identity, the progressive sites of contestation and collaboration (Bhabha, 1994).

## **Literature Review**

Ania Loomba (2002) refers the term 'postcolonialism' to the disengagement from the colonial state (p. 19): she relates the prefix 'post' with the ideological outcome of colonial control in the social and economic issues (Loomba, 2002: pp. 11-12) arguing that postcolonialism as cultural encounters or the hybridization in the postcolonial context (Ashcroft, 1989: p. 36) ignores the distinction of postcolonial hierarchies regarding gender, class, or location (p. 178). Sangeeta Ray (1993) agrees with Loomba when he exposes how the imbalanced hierarchies of power keep proliferating "in the current geopolitical arena" (p. 38). Edward Said (1978) and tags postcolonialism with the hierarchical standards wherein the Western countries, representative of colonizers, are exceedingly valued whereas the colonized cultures and their people are assumed as essentially inferior. Franz Fanon (1986) explains that these hierarchical contents with their fundamental differences, by which the West differentiates itself from the East, contribute in the process of 'inborn complex - a Western superiority complex of self and the Oriental inferiority complex of othering (p. ). Said (1993) asserts that this distinction of cultures was the outcome of colonial discursive and non-discursive practices that remain even now in the hierarchies of postcolonial cultures (p. 17). Homi K. Bhabha (1994) claims that these hierarchies signified colonial stereotypes: the colonial other is easily differentiated by the standard of being that satisfies the colonizer's "pleasure of seeing" and that helps them to distinguish and distance themselves from the others, i.e. the colonized (p. 109). In this way, states Bhabha, prejudice is structured and produces "the liminal problem of colonial identity" (p. 64). This liminality places the colonial other in an 'in-between space', in neither side of the binary, where he does not represent "Self and Other but the otherness of the Self inscribed in the perverse palimpsest of colonial identity" (p. 64). So, the stereotypes the colonizers enforced on the colonial other made him bend to the colonizer's identity and hence to secure an 'in-between space'.

When the postcolonial writers in 'in-between spaces' write black (Ashcroft et al., 1995: p. 8) to the process of colonial othering, they, mentions Alan Sinfield (1983), resubmit the "possible images of self in relation to other" (p. 1). Arun Mukherjee (1988), however, does not acknowledge their writings as the response to the colonial othering: she exemplifies Michael Ondaatje, a postcolonial writer "from a Third World country with a colonial past, does not write about his otherness" (Mukherjee, 1988: pp. 33-34). Ajay Heble (1994) argues this question on the liability of the postcolonial immigrant writers like Ondaatje: "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: pp. 186-187). Eleanor Ty (2002) argues that these misconceptions about the absence of postcolonial cultural hierarchies in Ondaatje's work have prevailed for just the surface reading of his work: the former studies have primarily focused on the themes of displacement, alienation and nationality (Ty, 2002). This study engages the cultural encounters in Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992) to argue the experience of postcolonial/post-WWII subject in the 'in-between spaces': it debates how Ondaatje is concerned about the postcolonial/post-WWII struggle of the immigrants who find themselves in the “cultural imbalances” (Burrows, 2008: p. 164).

## Research Methodology

This study engages the cultural interaction and hierarchies concerning what Homi K Bhabha theorized (1994) as ‘the third space’ or ‘in-between space’ to open 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” (p. 34). Bhabha (2006) steps outside the Said's classification (1978) of cultural boundaries of West and East with the argument that the cultural encounters create the third space for the hybridization that renounces the colonial hierarchies and “we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves” (p. 157). This third space, according to Bhabha (1990) is located in-between the cultural territories of the self and the other hence is inevitably renegotiated regarding time and place, “creates opportunities which promote something different, new and previously unidentified” (p. 211). This postcolonial analysis of *The English Patient* focuses on how the ‘in-between spaces’ in a broader way negotiate the cultural hierarchies to identify the postcolonial/post-WWII diaspora.

## Postcolonial Merger/Dissolution of Identities in In-Between Spaces

The cultural symbols of a political atmosphere make it stable, locating one in one's world, while a venture of the cultural clash (e.g., colonialism) leads to the uncertainty of cultural symbols. Even the invaders who undertake authority on natives face resistance by inborn symbolic systems, which lurk continually inside the process of colonization, and generate a desire for hybridity (Fludernik, 1998; Easthope, 1998) that turns “the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power” (Bhabha, 1994: p. 112). *The English Patient* (1992) is examined to interpret the ‘in-between spaces’ in which the colonizers and the colonized find themselves in a transitional moment where time and space cross to generate a

complex illustration of identity and difference, inclusion and exclusion: past and present (Bhabha, 1994). The novel opens with the expected death of the English patient, the sign of characters' stay in the European culture, that let Hana, Caravaggio and Kip, "the immigrants of the twentieth century" (Jewinski, 1996: p. 178), go back to their home culture. Their longing for and belonging to the nationhood/nationlessness, self/other dichotomy, bodies/color, and names/nicknames/labels explicate their experiences into the 'beyond': a restless, exploratory location wherein they caught and moved in all directions - back and forth, hither and thither (Bhabha, 1994).

## **Nationalism**

Language, history, culture, geography, and religion are national affiliations that geared up the practice of othering in colonial regime (Kipling, 1901); helped politics make Allies or Axis for the powers in World War II (Heller, 1961); and later claimed to manage a postcolonial identity (Fanon, 1963). Hana, being a white Canadian, got privileges over Kip, an Indian with a dark complexion, in colonial hierarchy. They came close temporarily because of their shared war experience(s) as Allies but soon they realized their cultural representations were poles apart. The ending of the novel explores that they realize "the sadness of geography" (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 296) and hence go back to their respective countries. The colonialism which pushed its subjects to the new internationalism re-imposed nationalism in WWII to mobilize people in the name of a language, culture, history, religion, etc. against the Axis powers: "The consumer [wa]s indeed consuming everything in its path" (Deloria, 2006: p. xviii). But this 'back and forth' move of the diaspora into different culture(s) helped them realize their national location regarding gender, race, generation, sexual orientation, geopolitics, etc. (Bhabha, 1994) as Almásy, the English patient, states that his boon companion "Madox died because of nations" (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 138). His continuous movement into and outside of different geographies either to be a part of British Allies or German Axis made him confront the cultural boundaries of Africa, Asia, Europe and North America and which in turn helped him decide to be nationless and "disappear into [the] landscape" (Ondaatje, 1992: pp. 138, 139). Hana, Caravaggio and Kip who, also moved 'here and there' became nationless during their sojourn in the villa until the news of the atomic attack on Japan, that triggered their cultural and geographical differences: both Kip and Caravaggio recognized that Allies "would never drop ... a bomb on a white nation" (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 286). The shift from nativity to colonialism and later to post-colonialism involves the violence (Fanon, 1963) which describes the British colonial policy "to Asia" (Bolland 2002: 34). This indifference (re)established nationhood as a sign of postcolonialism, a world in which everyone may feel at ease in their inborn national identity. However, the 'in-between spaces' inhabited in the identities of

the postcolonial diaspora impeded a fixed postcolonial national identity: Hana returned to Canada to her stepmother but wrote letters to Kip who, according to his family norms, became a doctor but often thought about Almasy/the English patient and Hana.

### **Time and Place(s)**

The fragmented stories of Hana, Almasy/the English patient, Caravaggio and Kip depict that they “don’t belong [to the West] but want to belong [to the West]” (Ondaatje & Wachtel, 1994: p. 257). Their longing to settle down in the West explicates their actual belonging to different places in Asia, Europe, Africa and North America. The social isolation in times of war makes them think of their prewar affiliation to their motherlands but when a threat is shared commonly the people survive the devastation of social isolation (Waites, 1993: p. 31). The quest for peace drove them to the villa of San Girolamo, the place which was totally abandoned by the soldiers and civilians and hence the best place for the refugees of World War II to stay and share stories of their movement into the villa of San Girolamo. Their stories about the villa of San Girolamo suggest the formation of ‘in-between spaces’: once it was villa Birscoli which served as nunnery under Germans; and then as a hospital for the Allies; and later a temporary habitat of Hana, Almasy/the English patient, Caravaggio and Kip. Hence, it represents the signified of the time dimension in the novel for the understanding of the social and political world around the villa. The end of World War II in April 1945 is another historical time-dimension separating the pre-war colonial world and the future postcolonial world (Philips, 1999: p. 6). With its different usages, the villa connotes the synopsis of World War II: the proliferation of Axis powers which were later defeated by the Allies resulted at the end of the war. The hospital staff abandoned it because of its bad condition but the war refugees staying there felt secure: to remain silent, to play piano and read books (Ondaatje, 1992: p.11). In that [dis]placement the boundary between the home country and the rest of the world is blurred and makes them confused about everything which “is disorienting: ... a disturbance of direction” (Bhabha, 1994: p. 141): they realize that the surrounding landscape is also “a temporary thing” (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 87) but did not know where to go (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 269). They were in two minds, whether to retrieve their past community or to live with a future community that mutually condemned the war, adjusted the weather, food, and living ways. The timing of their sojourn in the villa of San Girolamo and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that unleashed the violence is significant to decide where they may go: Kip, Hana and Caravaggio go back to India and Canada but their liaison for their intangible journey into what Bhabha (1994) names the ‘beyond’ does not finish even when the novel ends. The English patient’s death, the sign of the western cultural decline, does not mean the end of the story of the center. It remains there



in the unconscious: Kip thinks that he gets “the body of the English man with him in this flight” (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 3).

## **Self/Other Dichotomy**

Michael Ondaatje, born in Sri Lanka, Asia lives in Canada, North America, writes the English patient (Hungarian) and Kip (Indian) as his “central characters” (Maynard, 1997: p. 68). It reveals that he fully realizes “the unspoken, unrepresented past that haunts the historical present” (Bhabha, 1992: p. 174) of the postcolonial countries. His characters inhabiting ‘in-between spaces’ did not belong anywhere until post-WWII – the ideal time for the exposition of the self/other dichotomy established in race and politics. These time-blurred boundaries of colonial cartography, which had turned even the desert into “the theaters of war” (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 134), because it became the referent of the post-colonial world which did not have a victorious outcome, for the bombing on Japan in 1945, but explicated the differences among the nations and their nationals: Hana, Almasy / the English patient, Caravaggio and Kip worked for the Allies but either (Kip) thought of their past, “from the opposite end of the white world” (Fanon, 1986: p. 123) or were ashamed (Hana, Caravaggio) to be a part of the war. The time of diseases, blood, hate, and prejudice made them realize the ‘in-between spaces’ among them: Kip sensed that the attack on Japan was an attack of Europe on Asia, of the West on the East: “American, French. I don’t care when you start bombing the brown races ... you’re an Englishman” (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 286). This attack interprets the whole world as the racial plain. Eventually the new epiphany (postcolonialism) and the old epiphany (colonialism) link with the ‘in-between spaces’ into which the colonizers and the colonized unconsciously move until “confronted with greater violence” (Fanon, 1963: p. 61) which dis/places them to the ‘beyond’ which is neither a new horizon nor the eliminating of the past but the emergence into “the antagonistic in-between of image and sign” (Bhabha, 1994: p. xxx). The stories of Almasy, the English patient, and Kip explicate that the diaspora who leave their home country for another one keep “[f]ighting to get back to or get away from [their] homelands all [their] lives” (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 176). Their interpretation of belonging argues that the ‘otherness’ is also a local issue: Kip (Kirpal Singh) being a Sikh represents a particular group in Punjab (India) that, at the time, was only 2% of the population of the subcontinent (Encarta, 2004); hence he lived as an ‘other’ in his home country. His otherness argues *why* the arrival of colonizers “was unconsciously expected – even desired – by the future subject[s]” (Fanon, 1986: p. 99). But the news of Atomic bombs on Asia pushed Kip back to his Indianness and made him feel disgusted by those elements which fed elitism, who “made [bomb]” (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 192). The epiphany begins the postcolonial world in which this idea that the war and the bombs are white-man-made is no more apathy for the ‘other’. Both the epiphanies – Kirpal

Singh's preference to be a part of the European world and war and to return home where he could live in his own "customs and habits" (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 301) – describe the function of 'in-between spaces'. Kip, an Asian had adopted the "English fathers, following their codes like a dutiful son" (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 217); but post-WWII-Kip is Kirpal Singh, an Indian who realized his 'otherness' when the whites did not accept him for whom he daily risked his life by defusing bombs. This revelation of the colonial dichotomy of self / other made him move through the space of memories into familiar places that value more than his physical belonging to the West because they resist the culture of dominant rules, gestures, colloquialisms "and all the nuanced signposts" (Longley, 1997: p. 12).

### **Body/Color**

The war-affected the characters physically, changed their bodies which defined their position of gender and race in the patriarchal colonial world. Caravaggio noticed that Hana's face was leaner and tougher, the face he "would meet later" (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 50); Kip observed that her face was seemed to search something that "reflect[s] a present stage of her character" (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 301). This reflection was inevitable because of the impact of time in 'in-between spaces' that changed the "half child and half adult" (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 14), a pre-war Hana, into a woman, a post-war Hana. She had an abortion because the pregnant body could not survive: her husband was dead and "[t]here was a war" (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 82). She could not feed her body part, son or daughter, in the poor circumstances, though anatomically her body was ready for a change. She peeps into herself to escape the chaos of the outside body. When she felt odd in the cultural chaos "[s]he picked up a pair of scissors ... cut her hair" (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 50). The abandonment of the body is an inevitable reaction to the war suffering which always consigns a body to an "alien entity" (Waites, 1993: p. 135). But she cannot separate her body and *herself* as the carelessness of a person to his/her body does not fade. WW II-Hana who never looked at herself in mirrors is moved to look into the mirror, "trying to recognize herself" (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 52). Being a woman, her body could not help feeling odd in World War II which was patriarchal but being white it secured itself from the racial obstacles that Kip's body could not manage. Kip's turban and dark skin which make him alien often draw the attention of the white people who "had probably never seen a turban before" (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 188). His brown body in the white world was not welcomed because he belonged to the race of "the invisible world" (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 197). The company of Lord Suffolk, a British sapper and Kip's guru, and his assistant Miss Morden, and later with Hana, shaded the superficial stereotypes of brown and black. During sex, Kip and Hana looked at each other and accepted their bodies regardless of their color or geography. The sexual relation is a gateway to escape the past and deliberately to fill the scars of the war but his feelings when



he heard the news of atomic bombs being dropped on Asia reveals that Kip's body was screaming inside for a long time: "[A] scream emerged from his body" which his companions never expected (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 282). Realizing its 'otherness' in the white world which used a brown or black body to reveal its whiteness, Kip's body understood that he never was a free subject but a European invention (Said, 1978).

Caravaggio's physical changes in war are unlike Hana's psychological body-alteration. The amputation in German custody made him feel useless. In bandages he became another body, transformed from a skilled thief into a taciturn victim. The mutilation of his body causes the mutilation of his identity because this subtle alteration in his body resembles "a kind of psychic death" (Waites, 1993: p. 21). The physical punishment of cutting off thumbs was due to the spying that caused him to feel useless. The physical bodily changes affect his inner 'self' whereas Hana's inner self affects her physical body. But the change whether physical or mental was in 'in-between spaces' as Hana gradually came back to her body, Caravaggio also came back to life when he was told of Hana in the villa. But with the changes in their bodies, their relationships change, growing from an uncle/child relationship to a man/woman liaison; he may be a possible lover of the fragile and mentally disturbed Hana. However, in the presence of Kip, Caravaggio turns to the English patient, Almsy, to "invent a skin for him" (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 117) because the familiarization survives the contact of different persons and places. The characters who are either inventing or shedding their skins cannot have a true representation because they inhabit the 'in-between spaces'. The English patient whose identity was consumed in the plane crash fire lets others make different perceptions about his Englishness which is later revealed as Hungarianness: he was acknowledged as English when he was admitted in the hospital and later the stories of other characters and the villa, which develop around the story of the English patient, explores the identities of other "ex-centric characters but seem to be unable to absolutely determine the identity of the central character" (Moya, 2002: p. 6). His burnt body hides his identity, his past affiliation with German spies. The integration of identity with the body makes the change in one be the cause of the change in the other: a wounded body whether of Caravaggio or Almsy damages the sense of identity.

### **Names / Nick Names / Labels**

In *The English Patient*, the characters' names or nicknames or labels reveal their social and cultural signification. A name even classifies the gender of a person and may describe cultural borders: the characters brought up with a family name, made an alteration in it outside their inborn culture; disowned it during World War II and retrieved it in post-WWII. The novel's opening at the end of WWII describes the social isolation in which the characters do not mention their names explicitly.

Caravaggio was the first name in the first thirty-one pages which shows the connection of the English patient and Hana and their daily routine in a chaotic villa. Before getting a name he was the muted soldier, only his serial number showed him “with the Allies” (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 27). This post-WWII situation explicates how they are alienated from their names: Caravaggio’s name was not important for the doctors; the important thing was his affiliation with the Allies or the Axis powers. Though he spent four months in the hospital without expressing a single word, his label, the serial number, proved his allegiance. This disappearance into the landscape “illustrates the moment into the communal [society]” (Whetter, 1997: p. 228). Separate from his name, he became part of the hospital community in which his label became his name. It was Hana who recognized and responded to him with his name as she knew him as her uncle, one of her father’s friends. Caravaggio’s initial ignorance about his name describes his deliberate escape from his previous identity. In the custody of Germans, he thought it better to give up his name because they cut his thumbs on their suspicion of his “nationality or what [he had] done” (Ondaatje 55). Renuccio Thomasoni, the German investigator, asks him: “Your name is Caravaggio, right” (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 59). The nod might lead him to death. And in the hospital, he was in the trauma of his punishment and they needed his label, not name, so he remained quiet. Later, in the villa of San Girolamo, when the English patient laughs at the absurdity of his name ‘David Caravaggio’ he did not mind because he knew well the significance to “have a name” (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 116) even in the worst circumstances.

The English patient who was consumed in a fire deliberately let others make different perceptions about his name and his Englishness to hide his past affiliation with German spies. It is nearly halfway into the novel that the name of the English patient is mentioned. Ondaatje seems more interested in his life and “into [the] fiction” (Wachtel, 1994: p. 255). With the description of the desert landscape, he mentions Ladislaus de Almasy, a desert explorer, who along with his companions, in the 1930s, explored the forgotten “oasis of Zerzura” (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 134). The exploration of the name of the English patient from the diaries, fragments of recollections often under the control of morphine, and the interrogation of Caravaggio make his identity ambiguous hence proving the slipping of names in different cultural borders which made different facts of one’s life. When he joined desert explorers as Count Ladislaus de Almasy, he “became nationless” (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 138) until World War II broke out and gave him patriotic jealousy. To map the desert for the Allies he joined Clifton, an English spy, who to hide his identity came with his newlywed wife, Katharine. The love-hate triangle of Almasy, Clifton, and Katharine had resulted in Clifton’s death and Katharine’s serious injuries in a suicidal plane crash. In search of aid, Almasy could not prove his identity to a patrolling English unit and joined the Germans to reach Katherine, carrying her dead body in an old war plane which caught fire. Almasy parachuted to the earth, his body on fire, in the striking image that opens the novel. He was

rescued by a faction of “civilization ... that understood the predictions of whether and light” (Ondaatje, 1992: pp. 8-9) for whom his name and nation were worthless. The interpretation gives the impression that uncomfortable in the communal part considered essential by the Cairo civilization, the English patient remained in the territorial boundaries of the desert, slipping between the ‘in-between spaces’, between the referent and the signifier, without a signified. The readers also link Almasy with the English patient according to their assumptions when they realize that “Almasy” is the only name without a clear referent” (Hilger, 2003: p. 4). The story of his interaction with Katharine’s dead body close to the end of the novel is an infringement of another boundary, between the dead and living.

Kip also represents the significance of names in ‘in-between spaces’. He escapes from Kirpal Singh to survive in western society as ‘Kip’. Being the part of Lord Suffolk’s sappers’ team he was privileged in English society. His nickname ‘Kip’ made him adjust to the white world. But the death of Lord Suffolk and his aide, Miss Morden, made Kip leave the bomb disposal unit in Britain and he joined the sappers in Italian campaign that revealed him as Kirpal Singh. In the villa of San Girolamo he, like the others who had their nostalgia of losing their names, again forgot Kirpal Singh, redefining temporarily his affiliation with the nationless diaspora until the news of bombing on Hiroshima and Nagasaki that erected the barriers between East and West and placed him in front of Kirpal Singh again. Gazing at his family photograph he questions himself that he is Kirpal Singh of India and “what he is doing here [in Europe] ” (Ondaatje, 1992: p. 281). Coming back home he is ‘Kirpal’, a doctor with a brown wife and two kids, not Kip, a British sapper. But at his regrets of not saying farewell Hana hints at the Kip inside him. He, like Almasy, the English patient, neither fits into nor escapes from a single name to retrieve a single identity. Both Kirpal Singh and Almasy express a need to adopt the label of Kip and the English patient in society for survival but later they escape the limitation of their names in their war experiences as they have experienced “alternation in self-experience” (Waites, 1993: p. 21).

## **Conclusion**

The impact of ‘in-between spaces’ on human interaction – how they come close to or abandon one another – argues the competence of human beings to escape the prejudices and limitations of the cultural borders in which they move into/out. To survive in different cultural borders, Hana, Almasy/the English patient, Caravaggio and Kip moved continuously inside/outside to what they conceive as familiar and suitable: they chose to live in Europe, stay in the villa of San Girolamo before leaving Italy for their home countries. Though three of them came back home they could not overcome the stereotypes attached to their places, names, bodies, etc. However, their eventual rejection of the meta-narrative of Eurocentrism/modernism allowed the post-colonial / postmodern mini-narratives

of post-World War II shape a new phase of human interaction, apart from the political insinuations of the society. The shared experiences of dissimilar circumstances (re)construct their names, bodies, and belongings, again and again, to engage them to move to/away from their family or friends, home, culture and generations.

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