

Assimilation/Self-discovery: A Study of Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992)

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Abstract

This article studies Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992) as a journey for self-discovery after the characters' passive and failed assimilation in Europe. It tries to discuss the three following issues: Kirpal Singh's process of assimilation, the side effects of assimilation, and finally the main reasons for the failure of assimilation. This topic, "Assimilation/Self-discovery: A Study of Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*", is investigated within the framework of the following: the concept of the 'Other', Third space, and Multiculturalism. This study also elucidates the main different definitions of assimilation, and how Western societies (European/American) have miscellaneous reactions to/applications of such an elusive concept. The researcher has come to prefer integration to assimilation. The former enables us to participate without suppressing our identities. Finally, this study also comes to highlight the dignity of the East and to resist the spirit of mimicry, hegemony and rigidity.

Keywords: assimilation, distortion, domination, other, self-discovery

1. Introduction

Michael Ondaatje (1943) is a prolific Canadian writer. He is classified as a postcolonial novelist. The main characteristics of his works are evocative narrative, simple dialogues, and blending both documentary and fictional events. Throughout his oeuvre, he focuses on the oppressed and marginalized (Eastern) people: he wants to make them visible. All *The English Patient's* characters are defeated due to the war: Kirpal (the Indian immigrant) is tired; the English patient (Almásy) is burnt beyond recognition; Hana (the Canadian nurse) has lost her father, husband and unborn child; and Caravaggio (the Canadian thief turned military spy) is incapacitated. By the end of the novel, these characters come to understand the true reality of their passive assimilation. In brief, their life in a ruined villa in Italy at the end of WWII is a journey for self-discovery; they restore their original identities and harmony with their lives. The novel is written in backwards and forwards in a poetic language. They have returned from a nation of others to that of their own. Ondaatje endeavors to disfigure and distort the West in a kind of revenge:

So the king is killed. A New Age begins. There are poems written about Gyges in iambic trimeters. He was the first of the barbarians to dedicate objects to Delphi. He reigned as King of Lydia for twenty-eight years, but we still remember him as only a cog in an unusual love story. (*The English Patient*, 1992, p. 234)

This paper aims to elucidate the three following issues: Kirpal Singh's process of assimilation as a journey for self-discovery, the side effects of assimilation, and finally the main reasons for the failure of assimilation. This topic, "Assimilation/Self-discovery: A Study of Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*", is investigated within the framework of the following: the concept of the 'Other', Third space, and Multiculturalism. Equally important, this study also tries to shed more light on the main different definitions of assimilation, how Western societies (European/American) have miscellaneous reactions to/applications of such an elusive concept, and why integration is preferable to assimilation.

2. Definitions of Assimilation

According to Park and Burgess (1921), assimilation is defined as a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments and attitudes of other persons or groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life (p. 735). In other words, assimilation is “an approach for achieving ‘incorporation’ and ‘amalgamation’, through which not only immigrants but also other marginalized groups are “wrapped into” an integrated conventional society” (Pokhriyal, 2011, p. 2). It is a process where a minority group gradually adopts the customs and habits of the dominant culture. Berry states that:

By assimilation we mean the process whereby groups with different cultures come to have a common culture. This means, of course, not merely of such items of the culture as dress, knives, forks, language, food, sports, and automobiles, which are relatively easy to appreciate and acquire, but also those less tangible items such as values, memories, sentiments, ideas, and attitudes. Assimilation refers thus to the fusion of cultural heritages, and must be distinguished from *amalgamation*, which denotes the biological mixture of originally distinct racial strains. (Berry, 1951, p. 217)

In brief, assimilation is the substitution of one’s nationality pattern for another.

Gordon (1994) classifies assimilation into seven types: Cultural (absorbing the cultural norms, beliefs, and behavior patterns of the “host” society), Structural (entering and becoming integrated into the formal social, political, economic, and cultural institutions of the host country and developing numerous long-lasting personal friendships with the members of the majority group), Marital (Large-scale intermarriage), Identificational (developing of [a] sense of peoplehood based exclusively on host society), Attitude Receptional (absence of prejudice), Behavior Receptional (absence of discrimination), and Civic (absence of value and power conflict) (Gordon, 1994, p. 71).

3. Kirpal’s Process of Assimilation

In *The English Patient* (1992), Kirpal Singh, the Indian immigrant, is considered assimilated as soon as he has acquired the language as well as social, economic and political rituals of the English society:

He walked over to a wall and stared at a barometer, was about to touch it but pulled back, just putting his face close to it. Very Dry to Fair to Stormy. He muttered the words to himself with *his new English pronunciation* [my emphasis]. “Wery dry. Very dry.” (*The English Patient*, 1992, p. 187)

Kirpal admires the West for its superiority; he comes to share the same body of sentiments, traditions, and loyalties. In light of Fanon’s analysis of the colonial subject’s psychology (1968), Kirpal feels inferior to the English; he has to adopt the language, culture, and traditions of the colonizer to get over that sense of inferiority (p. 325).

Kirpal has secured his social and economic position after becoming a sapper in the English army against his family’s desires and expectations: Now he has an occupation, accommodation, some friends (Lord Suffolk & Hardy) and later a lover (Hana): “So he had won passage, free of the chaotic machinery of the war. He stepped into a family, after a year abroad, as if he were the prodigal returned, offered a chair at the table, embraced with conversations” (*The English Patient*, 1992, p. 189). In other words, Kirpal seeks a place in England throughout assimilation; he has to melt up in the majority by adopting all their values, customs and ways of life. Consequently, he has to abandon and give up his original and traditional morals, ethics, lifestyle, and sometimes his language and religion. This means he has already suppressed his Indian identity:

Kirpal Singh had been befriended, and he would never forget it. So far, half of his time during the war had taken place in the slipstream of this lord who had never stepped out of England and planned never to step out of Countisbury once the war ended. (*The English Patient*, 1992, p. 187)

Later, he discovers that he deceives himself by befriending the colonizers. According to Homi Bhabha (1994), the nature of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized should be a matter of exchange of benefits. He stresses that

It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance. For a willingness to descend into that alien territory... may open the way to conceptualizing an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s *hybridity*. (p. 38)

This concept of cross-cultural exchange has negated some specific differences between cultures. Ashcroft et al. (2000) argue that Bhabha’s concept of hybridity has been widely criticized due to negating and neglecting the

imbalance and inequality of the power relations it references. By stressing the transformative cultural, linguistic and political impacts on both the colonized and the colonizer, it has been regarded as replicating assimilationist policies by masking or 'whitewashing' cultural differences... These critiques stress the textualist and idealist basis of such analysis and point to the fact that they neglect specific local differences. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2000, p. 109)

According to Bhabha (1994), there are three spaces. The first space refers to the dominant culture (colonizers), the second to the colonized, and the third belongs to the hybrid. Hybridity asserts that there are no pure cultures. Ondaatje is a Canadian citizen; however, he always wants to feel at home in Sri Lanka; he is a member of both countries.

According to Robert Young (1995), hybridity is defined as a cross-breeding between different human races in the 19th century. In the 20th century, it describes how people became a blend, a mixture of different cultures. There are two types of hybridity: racial and cultural (p. 6). The former refers to amalgamation (a biological process, the fusion of races by interbreeding and intermarriage) while the latter signifies cultural assimilation. The Indian sapper has to change his name into Kip as it sounds strange to the English; such miniaturization of the name is a manifestation of the colonizer's domination and takeover:

They pass numerous bonfires on the sides of the road and Caravaggio diverts the young soldier's attention to them. The sapper's nickname is Kip. "Get Kip." "Here comes Kip." The name had attached itself to him curiously. In his first bomb disposal report in England some butter had marked his paper, and the officer had exclaimed, "What's this? Kipper grease?" and laughter surrounded him. He had no idea what a kipper was, but the young Sikh had been thereby translated into a salty English fish. Within a week his real name, Kirpal Singh, had been forgotten. He hadn't minded this [my emphasis]. Lord Suffolk and his demolition team took to calling him by his nickname, which he preferred to the English habit of calling people by their surname. (*The English Patient*, 1992, pp. 87-88)

4. Mutual Misrepresentations: the Concept of the 'Other'

Fanon (1986) thinks that "Colonization is not satisfied with merely holding a people in its grip and emptying the natives' brain of all forms and contents. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it" (Fanon, 1986, p. 109). The Western world has the power to violate and dominate the other; this flouts the basic principles of humanity and imposes a merciless process of dehumanization. According to Gramsci, there are two societies: political and civic. While the first is ruled by absolute power, the second is by constitution/consent:

Gramsci has made the useful analytic distinction between civil and political society in which the former is made up of voluntary (or at least rational and noncoercive) affiliations like schools, families, and unions, the latter of state institutions (the army, the police, the central bureaucracy) whose role in the polity is direct domination. Culture, of course, is to be found operating within civil society, where the influence of ideas, of institutions, and of other persons works not through domination but by what Gramsci calls consent. (Said, 2003, pp. 6-7)

However, Bhabha argues that we should not see colonialism not only as straightforward oppression, domination, and violence but also as a period of complex and varied contact and interaction; there are no pure cultures: People all over the world are mixed, blended and sometimes muddled. Bhabha is accused of "dehistoricizing and delocating cultures from their temporal, spatial, geographical and linguistic contexts, and of leading to an abstract, globalized concept of the textual that obscures the specificities of particular cultural situations" (Ashcroft et al., 2000, p. 109).

The concept of the 'other' was firstly used by the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. However, it has acquired a blend of social, economic and political connotations and implications because of Said's *Orientalism* (1978). While Kirpal Singh is waiting for being interviewed for his volunteer job, he

turned and caught the woman's eyes on him again. He felt as guilty as if he had put the book in his pocket. She had probably never seen a turban before. *The English! They expect you to fight for them but won't talk to you* [my emphasis]. Singh. And the ambiguities. (*The English Patient*, 1992, p. 188)

Therefore, he remains a token of the 'other' no matter how hard he tries to get assimilated. Gordon (1994) confirms that immigrants are denied equal rights and are subject to hostile feelings because they are different in skin color, religion, or country of origin (Gordon, 1994, p. 3). This situation implies that this Indian immigrant is going to be alienated; he is not seen as a white. James Baldwin (1924-1987) postulates that

Color is not a human or a personal reality; it is a political reality; that whites can only truly liberate

themselves when they liberate blacks, indeed when they “become black” symbolically and spiritually; that blacks and whites “deeply need each other here” in order for America to realize its identity as a nation. (Editorial Review, 1992)

The West should not instill the inferiority complex in the other: the Europeans themselves had seen the Americans as the ‘others’. In the same line of argument, Fanon (1994) adds:

The experience of colonial domination shows that, in the effort to perpetuate exploitation, the colonizer not only creates a system to repress the cultural life of the colonized people; he also provokes and develops the cultural alienation of a part of the population, either by so-called assimilation of indigenous people, or by creating a social gap between the indigenous elites and the popular masses. As a result of this process of dividing or of deepening the divisions in the society, it happens that a considerable part of the population, notably the urban peasant petite bourgeoisie, assimilates the colonizer’s mentality, consider itself culturally superior to its own people and ignores or look down upon their cultural values. (Fanon, 1994, p. 57)

According to Bhabha (1994), the colonizer tries to “construe the colonized as a population of degenerated types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction” (p. 70). Kip’s comrades at the army do not treat him as a true English man, or as an equal; he is always ignored because of his skin: “But he knew he did not like it. He was accustomed to his invisibility. In England he was ignored in the various barracks, and he came to prefer that” (*The English Patient*, 1992, p. 196). Though he is included, he is still named the ‘other’: this is a kind of exclusion; he has turned into a blurred image. This is also a kind of ambivalence for both the colonizer and the colonized. However, this ambivalence opens up space for resistance and revolt.

The English Patient represents both the West and the East differently. The former symbolizes discipline, ideals of clarity, established identities, nationalism, civilization, sophistication and knowledge. The East, on the other hand, stands for chaos, mystery, hybridized identities, oppression, poverty, primitiveness and hesitant protection. According to Hall (1996), the West has the power to make us see and experience ourselves as ‘other’ (p. 225). This is quite clear throughout Kip’s relationship with Almásy, Hana, and Caravaggio. Bhabha attacks the Western production and implementation of certain binary oppositions: center/margin, civilized/savage, and enlightened/ignorant. He argues that cultures can be understood to interact, transgress and transform each other in a much more complex manner than the traditional binary oppositions can allow (Tibile, 2010, p. 13). In *Orientalism*, Said (2003) emphasizes this hateful fact saying:

The two aspects of the Orient that set it off from the West in this pair of plays will remain essential motifs of European imaginative geography. A line is drawn between two continents. Europe is powerful and articulate; Asia is defeated and distant. Aeschylus *represents* Asia, makes her speak in the person of the aged Persian queen, Xerxes’ mother. It is Europe that articulates the Orient; this articulation is the prerogative, not of a puppet master, but of a genuine creator, whose life-giving power represents, animates, constitutes the otherwise silent and dangerous space beyond familiar boundaries. (Said, 2003, p. 57)

Almásy, the burnt and distorted character, represents the West that has a colonial and postcolonial domination over the other because of his knowledge: “Knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control” (Said, 2003, p. 36). In contrast, Kip refers to the other who is seeking assimilation, amalgamation and acculturation or integration into the Western civilization. Western children are brought up to be unique and self-determined. In other cultures, infants are brought up to be group-oriented and cooperative in order to be easily assimilated with other foreign children. Almásy is highly educated; he has information like a sea in him:

The Bedouin were keeping me alive for a reason. I was useful, you see. Someone there had assumed I had a skill when my plane crashed in the desert. I am a man who can recognize an unnamed town by its skeletal shape on a map. I have always had information like a sea in me. I am a person who if left alone in someone’s home walks to the bookcase, pulls down a volume and inhales it. So history enters us. I knew maps of the sea floor, maps that depict weaknesses in the shield of the earth, charts painted on skin that contain the various routes of the Crusades. (*The English Patient*, 1992, p. 17)

However, his penis sleeps like a sea horse (*The English Patient*, 1992, p. 3): he is powerless. On the other hand, Kip argues

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. You stood for precise behavior. I knew if I lifted a teacup with the wrong finger I’d be banished. If I

... tied the wrong kind of knot in a tie I was out. Was it just ships that gave you such power? Was it, as my brother said, because you had the histories and printing presses? (*The English Patient*, 1992, p. 283)

Foucault (1975) connects knowledge with power. Obviously, this is in fact the meaning of the Original Sin and the cause of the negative valorization of knowledge in most religions, but especially in Christianity. The person who has knowledge has power, and power is to be feared (as cited in Sireteanu, 2012, p. 165). This is quite clear in Kip's comment on the status of the Arab little girl:

As I was leaving I saw a mirror tacked up high against the skin wall, and looking at it I saw the reflection of the bed. There seemed to be a small lump, a dog possibly, under the covers. I pulled back the djellaba and there was a small Arab girl tied up, sleeping there. (*The English Patient*, 1992, p. 138)

Almásy also represents the Western humanist civilization/globalization/ugly face of Europe. Briefly, he stands for civilization: he is burnt and blindfolded. This means that Europe is about to diminish very soon.

Distortion/disfigurement is one of the main themes of postcolonial literature: the West tries hard to impose its culture on the East by destroying and uprooting the others' origins/identities. It always sees the Orient as barbaric and inferior though it had been civilized for centuries: "This was a world [the East] that had been civilized for centuries, had a thousand paths and roads" (*The English Patient*, 1992, p. 140). In order to perpetuate the stigmatization of the colonized, the colonizer circulates stereotypes about the laziness and stupidity of the colonized population through biased jokes, cinematic images... etc (Bhabha, 1994, p.66). After the independence of some Arab and African countries, their governments' policies have outdone the colonizers' ones by committing the same or more absurdity and foolishness with their local inhabitants, especially the south and villagers in addition to some political opponents. There, people are divided according to their ethnic groups and religions. Ashcroft et al. (2000) comment that "The historiography of Indian nationalism, for instance, had long been dominated by elitism—colonialist elitism, bourgeoisie- nationalist elitism—both the consequences of British colonialism" (Ashcroft et al., 2000, p. 217). In some Arab countries, for example, people are racially segregated; they are unfairly governed due to their tribes, urbanism or faith (Sunni/Shiite/Liberal/Secularist): Those downtrodden majorities are treated like dirt by people with authority and power. Those subalterns are in dire need of freedom, freedom from both the colonizers and the indigenous elites of their countries.

In return, some writers of postcolonial literature do their best to write back and decenter the West; it is a kind of mutual misrepresentations. Katherine, an English aristocratic lady, hates lies, but is infidel to her husband: she commits adultery with the English patient. They embody the West's policy of double-dealing: "What do you hate most?" he asks. "A lie. And you?" "Ownership," he says. "When you leave me, forget me" (*The English Patient*, 1992, p. 152). She dies alone in the desert. The patient is deprived of his name and is burnt beyond recognition: he has betrayed both his friend and the Allies. This reminds us of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) where the Africans are not given names; they are denied "not only cultural histories but personal histories" (Su, 2011, p. 295). Being without a name epitomizes absence: this reduces the person's ability to nothingness and emptiness. Names as well as knowledge give power. The patient's physical appearance is distorted; he is a man without a face:

In the Pisa hospital she had seen the English patient for the first time. A man with no face. An ebony pool. All identification consumed in a fire. Parts of his burned body and face had been sprayed with tannic acid, that hardened into a protective shell over his raw skin. The area around his eyes was coated with a thick layer of gentian violet. There was nothing to recognize in him. (*The English Patient*, 1992, p. 48)

This patient is displaced in a room, which is metaphorically called a grave. Hana has to store all mirrors in an empty room lest both the patient and she should see the true realities of their characters: "She has removed all mirrors and stacked them away into an empty room" (*The English Patient*, 1992, p. 23): this way of behaving reveals that their original identities make-up resists such deliberate burial. During the British conquest of Egypt, the English colonels had to return to their countries as soon as they grew old; they should always be physically strong. The patient lives in the past. This means he has neither present nor future. This also asserts that the future of the world is not Western; it is Eastern: All English characters (Lord Suffolk, Madox, Katherine and other members of the Sand Club) die. On the other hand, Kip is portrayed as healthy, intelligent, cooperative, and affable. He also has a name, a past, a present, and a future. The Bedouins are able to cure the English patient; they are silent, but powerful; the Western medicine cannot carry out the mission.

Intertextuality is also common in postcolonial writings. The purpose of such rewriting is to overthrow the imperial histories or ideology and to present an alternative or a subaltern voice. Throughout intertextuality, Ondaatje gives his silenced characters (Eastern/marginalized people) the right to write down their histories and memories of the homeland: the English characters only exist in the memories of the four main characters

(Yun-Chih, 2006, p. 32). In other words, the oppressed have to come into the center in order to be able to expose the side effects of colonialism and the ugly faces of colonizers. Ondaatje conjures up Kipling's *Kim* (1901) and Herodotus's *The Histories* in order to prove the artificiality of history and how history combines both fact and fiction. In short, the subalterns do have the right now to speak:

He did not yet have a faith in books. In recent days, Hana had watched him sitting beside the English patient, and it seemed to her a reversal of *Kim*. The young student was now Indian, the wise old teacher was English. But it was Hana in the night who stayed with the old man, who guided him over the mountains to the sacred river. They had even read that book together, Hana's voice slow when wind flattened the candle flame beside her, the page dark for a moment. (*The English Patient*, 1992, p. 111)

According to *The Histories*, Ondaatje has added to, cutting and gluing in pages from other books or writing in his observations in order to distort the colonial history of Europe. According to Tansley (2004), Herodotus emerges repeatedly in the narrative to provide a tripartite linkage between the explorer, the spy, and the lover, weaving them tightly to the multi-thematic concerns of the book (p. 231):

This is a story of how I fell in love with a woman, who read me a specific story from Herodotus. I heard the words she spoke across the fire, never looking up, even when she teased her husband. Perhaps she was just reading it to him. Perhaps there was no ulterior motive in the selection except for themselves. It was simply a story that had jarred her in its familiarity of situation. But a path suddenly revealed itself in real life. Even though she had not conceived it as a first errant step in any way. I am sure. (*The English Patient*, 1992, p. 233)

In short, Tyson (2006) thinks that the "oriental is an invention of the West, by contrast to whom it has been able to define itself positively and justify any acts of military or economic aggression" (Tyson, 2006, p. 421). The English patient (now he represents a country which was previously conquered by Russia; later he turns out to be Hungarian, not English: he himself is called the other) accuses the West of distorting and disfiguring the other by giving names to things that have already been named:

Ain, Bir, Wadi, Foggara, Khottara, Shaduf ... Fenelon-Barnes wanted the fossil trees he discovered to bear his name. He even wanted a tribe to take his name, and spent a year on the negotiations. Then Bauchan outdid him, having a type of sand dune named after him." (*The English Patient*, 1992, p. 139)

5. Multiculturalism

The majority of immigrants are torn between reconciliation with their own original identities or the adoption of the identity of the host country: This is called double consciousness/vision. They make miscellaneous efforts, either legally or illegally, to change their economic, social and cultural status. There is an intrinsic triangular relationship between: the immigrant, the place of belonging and the destination countries. Warner and Srole (1945) argue that immigrants' behavior will become in due course increasingly similar to that of natives (Warner & Srole, 1945, p. 6). However, Gans (1979) argues that greater length of stay in the host country is not necessarily associated with a visible improvement in the migrants' economic and social conditions. Kip is well-employed but never feels part of the local society or the larger host country:

Immigrant stories bear witness to hope but also to a history of impoverishment, persecution and misunderstanding. Memoirs and novels of those who made the journey to these shores in search of wealth, material comfort, ready acculturation and assimilation often relate the realities of personal struggles that prove stark contrast to the promise. New immigrants often found themselves laboring at menial jobs for long hours at low wages, conquering overwhelming language barriers, and beleaguered with religious and cultural disparity. The bitter truth proves that a dream of wealth and acceptance turns out, for some, to be just an illusion. For all, the journey proves to be one of self-discovery and awakening understanding of the soul of humanity. (Angel, 2003, p.1)

Pokhriyal (2011) asserts that Canada offers a mosaic of multiculturalism; this persuades people to preserve their unique cultural characteristics. The USA and Europe, in contrast, proffer an assimilating melting pot to persuade all to become part of a homogeneous mass (Pokhriyal, 2011, p. 6). Gordon (1994) adds that some groups try to preserve their own societies and cultures. However, these host countries' policies, directly/indirectly, are inimical to their wishes (Gordon, 1994, p. 12). John Adam (1818) declares,

They [immigrants to America] come to a life of independence, but to a life of labour—and, if they cannot accommodate themselves to the character, moral, political and physical, of this country with all its compensating balances of good and evil, the Atlantic is always open to them to return to the land of their nativity and their fathers. To one thing they must make up their minds, or they will be disappointed in every

expectation of happiness as Americans. They must *cast off the European skin, never to resume it* [my emphasis]. They must look forward to their posterity rather than backward to their ancestors; they must be sure that whatever their own feelings may be, those of their children will cling to the prejudices of this country. (as cited in Sollors, 1986, p. 4)

Das (2012) thinks that Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* recalls how people of different nations come together in adverse conditions by negating their individual identity and embracing a oneness of mind and spreading love that would make their lives livable (Das, 2012, p. 366). These four characters form a small multinational community in a ruined and isolated villa in Italy at the close of World War II: this novel may symbolize Canada. Kip represents the East while the other characters represent the West. In other words, Kip is portrayed as a mediator between the West and the East. The English patient's bed is located at the center of the villa: this refers to Euro-centralism. Bache (2004) adds that Kip represents a colonial past and postcolonial present in the novel. His identity falls in-between his Indian origin and his devotion to the country that educated and colonized him (Bache, 2004, p. 22).

6. Failure of Assimilation

Assimilation can succeed "if the personality of the native is first destroyed through uprooting, enslavement, and the collapse of the social structure, and this is in fact, what happened – with debatable success, however - in the 'older' colonies" (Mannoni, 1956, p.27). There are different reasons behind Kip's failed assimilation in this small world. They are the death of Lord Suffolk and Hardy and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These incidents remind them of their original identities.

Kip has to heartily follow up Lord Suffolk's codes and orientation like a dutiful disciple. He describes his mentor as the best kind of teacher: "He was introducing the customs of England to the young Sikh as if it was a recently discovered culture" (*The English Patient*, 1992, p. 184). In brief, Kip asserts that Suffolk is the best of the English. Hardy had arrived with Kip in the same rainstorm. He and Lord Suffolk keep this Indian a human:

When Hardy left, Kip slowly pulled off his wet trousers and wrapped himself in the blanket. Then he sat there. Too cold and tired even to unscrew the Thermos of hot tea on the seat beside him. He thought: I wasn't even frightened down there. I was just angry—with my mistake, or the possibility that there was a joker. An animal reacting just to protect myself. Only Hardy, he realized, keeps me human now. (*The English Patient*, 1992, p. 216)

The Americans had dropped such deadly atomic bombs on Japan in order to put an immediate end to WWII. The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki has reminded Kip of his brother's advice that he should neither trust nor shake hands with the Europeans/Americans: "But we, oh, we were easily impressed—by speeches and medals and your ceremonies. What have I been doing these last few years? Cutting away, defusing, limbs of evil. For what? For *this* to happen? What is it? Jesus, tell us!" (*The English Patient*, 1992, p. 284-5). Unconsciously, he tries to kill the English patient, but he cannot: "If he closes his eyes he sees the streets of Asia full of fire" (*The English Patient*, 1992, p. 284). Caravaggio cannot bear turning and looking at the sapper or look towards the blur of Hana's frock. He knows the young soldier is right. He agrees with Kip that the Allies/Axis would never have dropped such a bomb on a white nation; this is the death of civilization (*The English Patient*, 1992, p. 286). America has been killing people since it was established in order to live and settle: they have annihilated the Red Indians (27 millions), Vietnams, Trinidadians (200.000), Cubans, Iraqis, and Somalis...etc. Fourteen million Africans were enslaved to build America; more than two millions of them died due to bad transportation. A million and a half Mexicans died so that America can expand. More than two million Vietnamese were killed. Two million Iraqis were slaughtered so as to provide America with energy.

At the end of the novel, these characters revolt and rebel against those colonial powers after having adopted and integrated themselves into the west earlier in the novel. They have mistakenly thought it would be a kind of exchange of benefits. They have also thought that the West is the land of opportunities, humanity, equality and welfare. They finally realize that their assimilation is passive: "My brother told me. Never turn your back on Europe. The deal makers. The contract makers. The map drawers. Never trust Europeans, he said. Never shake hands with them" (*The English Patient*, 1992, p. 284). This asserts that it is better for them to integrate rather than assimilate. Integration enables them to take part in without being uprooted from their origins.

Kirpal (now he restores his Indian name.) has finally fulfilled his family's ambition; he has married and become a dentist: he does his best to forget the Canadian nurse:

He would not think of Hana. In all the silence within the bike's noise he did not think of her. When her face appeared he erased it, pulled the handlebars so he would swerve and have to concentrate. If there were to be

words they would not be hers; they would be names on this map of Italy he was riding through. (*The English Patient*, 1992, p. 293-4)

Caravaggio and Hana have enjoyed their lives in Canada. Hana says to her stepmother, Clara: "I wanted to go home and there was no one at home. And I was sick of Europe. Sick of being treated like gold because I was female" (*The English Patient*, 1992, p. 85). The Western characters have neither existence nor power. Friedman (2008) comments, "The re-establishment of Kip's Indian identity seems to undo the rest of the novel's postcolonial move towards a counternationalism and a model of identity not based on the lethal category of the nation (Friedman, 2008, p. 50).

7. To Use English or Not to Use, That Is the Question

Writers of postcolonial literature are divided into two parts. The first uses the language of the colonizers for creativity and fame. The second group insists on using the language of the oppressed in order to express their personal suffering and liberate themselves from the language which has invaded the mind and controlled the process of production, distribution and reading. Unfortunately, those who write in English or French are highly honored and regarded by the West: Salman Rushdie (1947-), Al Taher ben Geloun (1944-) and AssiaDjebbar (1940-) are to cut a very long list short. In turn, Al Tayeb Saleh (1992-2009) and Muhamad Zafzaf (1945-2001), among others, are not; they have distorted the West who had colonized their countries: In *Season of Migration to the North (Mawsim al-Hijraila al-Shamal)* (1969), Mustafa Sa'eed, the hero, invades and destroys the English women in the name of freedom: "Yes, my dear sirs, I came as an invader into your very homes: a drop of the poison which you have injected into the veins of history 'I am no Othello. Othello was a lie' (*Season*, 1969, p. 95).

Moreover, some African writers, such as NgugiwaThiong'o and Chinua Achebe, try to write a pure and unique African literature mainly concerned with the African identity. This literature should have a direct organic connection with their societies. Achebe stresses, "the principal feature which differentiated African artists from their European encounters was that they privileged the social function of writing over its function as a tool of individual expression" (Ashcroft et al; 2002, p. 125). The African artists' passion and thought should be distinguished. The concept of Negritude was developed by AiméCésaire (1945) and Leopold SedarSeghor (1977): it claimed that Black culture "was emotional rather than rational; it stressed integration and wholeness over analysis and dissection" (Ashcroft et al; 2002, p. 20).

The use of some Arabic words-*Aajej, ghibli, haboob, mezzar-ifoullousen-* in Ondaatje's *The English Patient* stems from a desire to expose the reader/the West to another language. The immigrants struggle to make sense of English; the English readers, in turn, have to struggle with the foreign words. This is a good way to reject colonialism and to restore one's pre-colonial identity. However, Tyson (2006) argues:

When they do so, however, they face the difficulty of surviving in a publishing industry, both in their own countries and internationally, that requires the use of English. The use of native languages often requires native writers to put forth the double effort of writing in their indigenous languages and then translating their work into English or having it translated. (Tyson, 2006, p. 422)

We can neither devalue the significance of English nor restore our pre-colonial cultures; nothing remains frozen and preserved in time. Cultures should reconcile and interact rather than fight and clash.

8. Conclusion

Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* has tried hard to restore the voices of oppressed and marginalized people by rereading and decolonizing the colonial discourse. He has given those characters the chance to rewrite their personal histories in order to challenge the West, to reconstruct their past, and to restore harmony. Therefore, the marginalized and silenced people have come into the center and become important. Ondaatje has given them due respect in order to struggle against those who have distorted and disfigured the different faces of history. In brief, this novel highlights the dignity of the East and resists the spirit of mimicry, hegemony and rigidity. This paper has come to prefer integration to assimilation. The former enables us to participate without suppressing our identities. In short, this study has tried to "interrogate European discourse and discursive strategies from its position within and between two worlds, to investigate the means by which Europe imposed and maintained its codes in its colonial domination of so much of the rest of the world" (Ashcroft et al; 2002, p. 196).

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