

Tripartite Color, Racial Segregation and Violence: Tracking the Paradigm of National Identity in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*

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Abstract:

This article examines the colonial insights in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992). In the main, the study tackles the representation of national identity in the novel. In the course of the analysis, the study will shed light on three inextricable colonial issues. First, color will be discussed as the discrepancy between the colonized and the colonizer portrayed in the novel. Both the colonized and the colonizer perceive each other on colonial grounds. The analysis will pinpoint the colonizer as being misjudged on the premise of color considerations. To explain, the colonizers perceive and treat the colonized in the light of their color. The colonized people's blackness is a symbolical token of their racial status. Therefore, they are judged by the colonizer because they are black. The issue of color leads to another colonial matter i.e., racial segregation. As the colonizers treat the colonized in terms of their color considerations, they develop a sense of racial segregation. They begin to consider them as being superior to the blacks. As a result, violence springs out between the colonized and the colonizers after such racial segregation. Thus, the blacks' national identity gets negatively influenced by this violence.

Keywords: Colonialism, Identity, Ondaatje, Racial Segregation, Violence

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1. Introduction

The concept of national identity conveys the sense of belonging in texts that advocate national affairs, like color, race gender and so forth. For this reason, critics postulated several reasons of the way by which authors project their critical insights about the national identity and its pertinent issues in the broader context of colonial peripheries. The significance of studying the national identity corresponds to the fact that literary texts provide sufficient information about the cultural background against which the text is written. In this sense, literary texts offer ample embodiment of national identity in literary works. Moreover, the concept of national identity is an inclusive term that applies the text's specific details about national affairs, including the author's interest in the cultural subject matter. As such, culture represents one key factor in dealing with the colonial dimensions of national identity.

Race is another representative feature of the concept of national. Colonial authors tend to depict race as an influential symbol of national identity. This is because race specifies people's color. Such color comprises two discrepant races. They are either white or black. Some critics, however, prefer to replace these colors with more critical terminologies i.e., the colonized and the colonizer. In this regard, the contiguous relationship between the colonized and the colonizer depends largely on the portrayal of the two races in literary works. As such, critics emphasized the importance of race since it contributes to the general understanding of colonial issues treated in the text. Being so, the text could be grasped in differ and various critical discipline; and the possibility of finding genuine meanings inside the text would be more flexible.

Both culture and color are integral factors of national identity. The concept of national identity might not be considered without reference to these issues in literary texts. Yet,

violence is tackled as another indication of the concept on national identity. The violent scenes, like war and bombing are analyzed within the limitations of the concept of national identity. The reason behind this is that people strive for subjectivity and independence by war. When other nations wage war against them, they react back and try to rebuff this attack. In this context, the violent aspects of war are judged as exemplifications of the concept of national identity. Thus, this essay will apply the concept of national identity to examine the issues of color, race and violence in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992).

The issue of color will be analyzed an indication of the colonized people in the novel. The focus will be on the depiction of their physical traits. Therefore, the study's textual analysis is going to shed light on the black people and their psychical peculiarities because they represent Ondaatje's concern with color as a representational token of the national identity. In this way, color stands for the author's portrayal of color within the limits of colonial atmospheres; and the blacks react to this colonialism because they are suppressed by their colonizers.

The other component of the concept of identity will be race. In fact, race is always associated with the color. They often indicate the position of the colonized as inferior. As such, color corresponds to the fact that race is relative to specific ethnic group. Furthermore, the analysis of any ethnic group relies on the depiction of that group in literary works. Here, the literary text provides illustrative examples of race. In this essay, the focus will be on the race as a definitive feature of black people who suffer from war and its pertinent sequences. Accordingly, the colonized blacks will be discussed in the course of the analysis.

The third issue will be violence. Violence plays an integral role in defining the critical characteristics of the concept of national

identity. This is due to the fact that when the colonized minorities feel they true oppression, they react back to their poor conditions. In this essay, therefore, the focus will be on the violence at war circumstances. The selected novel presents some war events in which the blacks are involved. As such, the blacks' position in the war's violence will be interpreted as an indication of national identity. Their fight conveys the implicit meaning of their refusal of oppression in all its aspects. Thus, color, race and violence will be examined by applying Homi Bhabha's concept of national identity in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994).

2. Color and the National Identity

Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992) focuses on colonial issues and its relative issues. He deals with the colonial subjects that influence the world since the beginning of colonialism up to the present day. In his novel, he depicts many thematic issues that have a universal appeal. One of these issues is color. This is issue is of paramount importance since it relates to the treatment of black people in different ways (Bhabha 42). Before the mid-twentieth century, color was a great subject to the public opinion in all over the world. The black people were deprived of their human dignity (Abu Jweid 534). They are treated in a lower position that affects their identity and human dignity. There were no serious steps to be taken in order to limit the treatment of black people in inferior positions. So, color was interrogated many times during the first part of the twentieth century because the colonial and imperial plans were spreading all over the world (Bhabha 43). At the beginning of *The English Patient* (1992), Ondaatje's omniscient narrator tells the story of black women who is dedicated to her domestic affairs: "Every four days she washes his black body, beginning at the destroyed feet" (1). In a striking way, the narrator recounts the suffering of the woman's boy who is severely injured.

This injury is caused by the oppression practiced against them.

The boy's injury relates to his color. His oppressors tried to harm him. The boy is black, and, accordingly, he became a subject of destruction. Bhabha highlights colonial destruction and its relation with color. The issue of color, according to Bhabha, is sustained with the issue of power in colonial writings. It portrays the colonial power that is used to construct hegemony over the black people. The colonial powers do not leave the colonized people alone. They are exploited in an inhuman manner (43). They do not have any chance to build their own nation (Ahmad 14). They are completely restricted by the colonial power. In Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992), similarly, the oppression power is directed towards the black people: "She walks over the paved stones, grass in the cracks. He watches her black-stockinged feet, the thin brown dress" (8).

Color, thus, causes psychological sufferings for the colonized people. These sufferings take the shape of internal and external representations (Amoko 60). The internal representation of color is their psychic influences; and the external representation is the physical sufferings. Both of them exemplify the negative practices of colonialism. The internal representation of power make the colonized people suffer from psychic complexities (Bailey 87). They do not have a sense of belonging to their homelands. They lack the resisting power. They are interrupted by the colonial hegemony. The colonized blacks are not as equal as their colonial whites. As a reaction, the colonized blacks need psychic compensation. They use their own ability to oppose colonialism. This is the core of the internal representation of colonialism. The blacks develop psychic problems which culminate in their psyches and do not have outlets for their dilemmas. In

Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992), blackness is the cause of the characters' sufferings: "but this opponent had not just concreted the thing but painted all the characters black" (24).

The external representation of colonial color is the physical sufferings. The colonized people are tormented by the colonizers. They are exploited for domestic drudgery. They do not have any choice to be free of this torture. The white colonial masters do not allow them to be free. The blacks, here, undergo pain and sufferings. They are both psychically and physically suffering. These sufferings leave their apparent impact upon their individuality. They lose their confidence in their national ideals because they do not have the resisting power. Similarly, Ondaatje presents this power in a weak position. The colonized blacks are subjugated. Consequently, all what they think is to get rid of this daunting life. They do not invent resistant strategies to cancel their colonial treatment. They lose integral human features. Kip is an illustrative example of this subjugation: "Kip was being pulled into a psychological vortex" (24).

National identity is one of the human features that Ondaatje deals with in his novel. The loss of identity belittles the black ability to be equal to their colonial counterpart (Bruce 109). They are "relative" to their colonial masters. Here, the word relative means dependent; that is, the colonized blacks become dependent on their white colonizers. They are not able to depend on themselves to get rid of their colonial presence over their lands. Ondaatje portrays the issue of identity in a historical context. Identity is one of the most complicated issues since the start of colonialism (Buell 54). The issue of identity paves the way for other issues treated in Ondaatje's writings. In *The English Patient* (1992), this is evident in the black people's life: "when the black giant raiders

crossed a desert which supposedly has no water or pasture. This was a world that had been civilised for centuries" (32).

One apparent issue in Ondaatje's writing is color and its literary implication. Color and its narrative dimensions are used as survival strategies. It is utilized as a way of obliterating colonialism and the colonial enterprises. In essence, color includes supernatural elements that defy common sense. It does not undergo the laws of nature. The postcolonial appropriation of color is to reject colonialism in a form of non-military contact. Color is the proper tool to encounter colonial events and how to underscore the national sense of belonging. It is concerned with the narrative depiction of survival. The oppressed people seek refuge of colonialism through color (Burton 71). This is due to their lack of ability to accept colonialism as reality. Color, as this point, serves as a vehicle of empowerment. The oppressed people are empowered with color. Yet, the author is the ideational creator of this empowerment. The fictional characters are empowered with color by the author who also tries to reject colonial hegemony. In *The English Patient* (1992), color plays an integral role in identifying this type of color: "Now he [Kirpal] was a black figure, the background radicalizing the darkness of his skin and his khaki uniform" (43).

Ondaatje uses color simultaneously with the colonial narrative moments. It is used in this fictional fashion to render the characters special from of empowerment. By depicting color, the characters could escape their negative destiny. This destiny could be the colonial slavery. Colonialism might be resisted by utilizing repetitive narrative structuring. This structuring is saturated with color al moments. As such, the narrative repetitive structuring is the authorial reflection in the plot. Ondaatje utilizes color as a decisive agent against colonialism. When the enslaved people are presented in colonial

atmospheres, they might be portrayed in slavery places. In *The English Patient* (1992), for example, color is equally evident: “Every four days she washes his black body, beginning at the destroyed feet” (1).

Ondaatje accentuates colonialism as the site where color al moments might take place. These moments are characterized by psychic phantoms or ghosts that haunt the main characters. The characters use their color al power, or color al situations, to express their ability to be free of subjugation and its relative sequences. The colonial tokens, like color, accompany the color moments in the novel’s plot structuring.

Ondaatje, in so doing, has an implicit tragic, and blameful, voice in his writings. He indicts colonial subjugation that does not recognize the blacks. There is not proper justification for subjugation. It has destructive agendas. It brings about plights and sufferings upon the black people’s lives. His fictional characters and narrators refuse colonialism as they do not want to surrender or yield to colonial powers. Moreover, the issue of slavery is connected with racism. Racism is the tangible exemplification of subjugation. Ondaatje has an implicit voice that tries to reject racial segregation against the black people. Racism leaves psychological harmful memories in the colonized people’s experiences. They become a victim for their conditions under subjugation. Racism, therefore, does not make them normal human beings. These are the general features of Ondaatje’s novel.

Ondaatje is profoundly committed to his domestic affairs. He keeps watching the colonial life in a monotonous routine. By time, he discovers that this routine, especially watching colonialism inspires his writing mood. Nevertheless, his family and domestic life does not distract his writing time because he used to write with interruption as he holds approximately nine jobs simultaneously. During his work time,

he has been able to compose the majority of his novel. Therefore, he is considered as an industrious fictional author who struggles with tough life belongings, namely, family and work. He finds enjoyment by writing in difficult times; and he finds it a rare luxurious experience. The demands of family life and work requirement trigger his writing faculty when he forms fictional sentences as he works or attends to family requirements. Ondaatje’s writing amusement is, thereupon, motivated by such arduous commitments.

Ondaatje did not only commit herself to family and domestic affairs, but also to fictional writing. He is considered a principal postcolonial writer of the last decades of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty first century. He has written different topics on the issue of post-colonialism and its influence upon the colonized individuality. One of these issues is identity racial segregation. The postcolonial treatment of commodity in the fictional trajectory between the African and American literature (p.99).

3.Racial Segregation

The idea of racial segregation is quite conspicuous in *The English Patient* (1992). Ondaatje is an obtrusive example of the complexity of identity and how it is tackled in the context of the colonial fictional texts. Moreover, the novel’s protagonist exemplifies the notion of racial segregation that is a fertile subject for the identity crisis. The protagonist could not gain self autonomy to obtain personal identity. In fact, the protagonist stands for the long inherited discrepancy between the white man and the blacks who are somewhat rendered inferior to the white mainstream. Racial segregation brings about new decisions to be made by the protagonist in order to get rid of color inferiority. The protagonist works he becomes convinced with the idea of having color as a sign of self-autonomy. Consequently,

the protagonist craves for gaining such color as an indication of “identity affirmation” (Bhabha 100). This is true to the white men depicted in the novel: “Wise white fatherly men shook hands, were acknowledged, and limped away, having been coaxed out of solitude for this special” (25).

Ondaatje deals with other racial segregation notions in his novel. Cultural conflict is another dilemma discussed in Ondaatje’s narrative plot. In post-colonialism, cultural conflict is treated in within various themes and topics. Bhabha contends that cultural conflict is associated with racism (p.83). Accordingly, he examines racism as an illustrative example for his arguments. In Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* (1992), the rationale of racial segregation lies in the novel’s authenticity to reflect upon the real meaning of racism within postcolonial peripheries. Presumably, the novel abounds with postcolonial elements that clarify the implications of racism which, in turn, yields to the cultural conflict. Therefore, the novel teams with racial scenes. This is because the novel abounds with racial patterns that correspond to the inherent meaning of cultural conflict. Such segregation manifests in the novel’s depiction of the war between European countries on African lands: “All of Europe were fighting their wars in North Africa, in Sidi Rezegh, in Baguoh” (5).

Ondaatje is obsessed with colonialism; and he tries his hands to expose some of its defects through fiction. He sheds light on cultural conflict in *The English Patient* (1992) that has implicative conceptualization of races. He embarks on new readings of the colonialism in all its aspects, and he perceives cultural conflict that comes about in many contexts. As a result, he writes the novel as a manifestation of cultural conflict in the broader sense of colonialism. The novel’s characters encounter different events during war times. At this point, Ondaatje portrays cultural conflict

takes place in African circumferences. These distractive changes embody Ondaatje’s notions of racial segregation in terms of cultural conflicts. This conflict takes places on African places: “Some of the English love Africa. A part of their brain reflects the desert precisely. So they’re not foreigners there” (8).

Bhabha analyzes racial segregation to support his claims about colonialism. He says that the utilization of the omniscient narrator is significant to tell the precise nexus of these “racial” events that swirl through colonialism and its pertinent notions (83). To illustrate the notion of cultural conflict, Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* (1992) explores the cultural conflict from omniscient narrative perspective. It tells the story of war on African demarcations; whereby many races meet. All these races exemplify cultural conflicts. More specifically, these races encounter military encounters in African territories: “South African sappers packed iron and gelignite into four-gallon petrol cans that could then destroy armoured cars” (66). Such conflict reflects the cultural conflict between the European and the African.

Bhabha, furthermore, argues that racial segregation involves the white and the blacks. It is deemed one conspicuous token of Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* (1992) within the larger postcolonial contexts. He addresses the complexities of his time with meticulous expressions conveyed by fictional quasi-real stories. All of this depends on his source of inspiration. To more specific, there are some events or things that affected in his novel. Postmodern narrative is another writing style found in Ondaatje’s novel. He develops the notion of colonialism via the war actions in the novel. At this point, the novel unfolds his desire to recover from traumatic moments which tormented the characters during the war. In the course of the events, he thwarts his intention to the panoramic view of war. Consequently, he

directs his anger against her white colonizer to relieve the blacks' racial segregation. This experience comprises consensus and difference which are postcolonial oppositional assumptions (Bhabha 113). This segregation is conveyed through the depiction of war in Africa in Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992): "What did most of us know of such parts of Africa? The armies of the Nile moved back and forth—a battlefield eight hundred miles deep into the desert. Whippet tanks, Blenheim medium-range bombers" (5).

Ondaatje, in this sense, has diverse colonial themes concerning war and racism. He deals with real and imaginative settings that resemble the experiences of real people. These are delivered in *The English Patient* (1992). By exposing these themes, Ondaatje left a literary legacy of African themes which could be cited as fine postcolonial fiction. They provide readers with the comprehensive panoramic view on the experiences of Afro-European nations and their hardships. He gives us a vivid picture of how people, whether, males or females, perceives and conceptualized each other on racial premises. They have undergone the real events happened in Ondaatje's life time. They also tell us of the internal conflicts of their experiences. This is delivered through the portrayal of the extensive spatial spaces between European countries and African ones: "The scale of the laying of mines in Italy and in North Africa cannot be imagined" (66). Here, the narrator's description of these vast places is a symbolical indication of how harsh is the colonial encounter between Europe and Africa really is. The novel represents the foundation desire to establish positive visions regarding colonialism in Africa. Ondaatje's exquisite fictional savvy is what makes this tangible. He depicts the very sense of racial segregation by dealing with primal contacts between Africa and Europe.

Postcolonial critics are attentive to a kind fiction produced by the colonial authority and literary works created by the colonized. Ondaatje is a prime practitioner of this kind (Bhabha 117). Consequently, postcolonial criticism is concerned with the function of the western literary canon and the history of western as prevalent types of enlightenment in her fiction (Bhabha 56). The division terms of 'first world,' 'second world,' 'third world,' and 'fourth world' communities are critiqued by postcolonial critics for the reason that they support prevailing status of western cultures as establishing first world position which are sometime conveyed in colonial works. Ondaatje tackles these ideas by approaching the essences of war and the participants in it: "South African sappers laid 2,700 Mark 11 mines in Mersa Matruh in one day. Four months later the British cleared Mersa Matruh of 7,806 mines and placed them elsewhere" (66). In this quotation, the clash among several countries exemplifies the racial segregation practiced in wide colonial varieties.

Racism, accordingly, is an obvious feature of Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992). It stands for a double consciousness which is a mark that refers to the situation of a person who believes and sees himself as recognized by the others. In this meaning, he looks at one's self through the eyes of others. Double consciousness, in racial segregation, is a mark of challenge to the massive popularity of ideas about the correspondence and purity of cultures of combating communities that have adopted an authentic land as their new homes (Bhabha 72). In the new land the individuals compare themselves to the original people who look at them in disdain and compassion. So, when they judge those people, they regard them as being different. This is the essence of the concept of segregation which is often inherent in combating communities. Additionally, the meaning of racial double consciousness is a

double hesitation concerning the belonging to conflict places. Ondaatje treats this colonial peculiarity via the combats among some nations during World War II. The war scenes, in *The English Patient* (1992), are illustrative examples of this colonial combat: “Mines were made out of everything. Forty-centimetre galvanized pipes were filled with explosives and left along military paths. Mines in wooden boxes were left in homes. Pipe mines were filled with gelignite, metal scraps and nails. South Africans packed iron and gelignite into four-gallon petrol cans that could then destroy armoured cars” (66). This combat, in the long run, leads to racial segregation on the ground of colonial considerations.

The racial segregation and double consciousness in the colonial discourse of ethnicity exemplifies the awareness of belonging to discrepant cultures in Ondaatje’s novel. The minority through the colonial discourse feels itself as having no genuine self-esteem and views itself through the construction of the self in the new world. Thus, the suppressed people experience a fractured sense-of-self because it has sunken in the host culture that is different from the original national identity and socio-cultural beliefs (Bhabha 74). Ondaatje tries to keep these beliefs as parts of the original traditions that are devastated by war and sustained by some people who lose the sense of belonging to homeland. Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* (1992), the sense of belonging is devastated by war and the relevant combats: “one nation was ‘so enraged by this evil wind that they declared war on it and marched out in full battle array, only to be rapidly and completely interred’” (5). In fact, war combats are indicative tokens of violence in colonial terminologies (Zidan 39). Scenes of violence during war embody the need for stability and commitment to national identity. The next section will discuss racial otherness in relation to

nation identity in Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* (1992).

4. National Identity and Violence

In essence, the themes of interconnectedness, displacement, homeliness, and alienation are the colonial body that emerges out of the disowned people’s difficulty for the purpose of differentiating their sense-of-self identity in colonial works depicting violence (Bhabha 91). This is because they are deep rooted in a certain place. In reference to the last point, the violent discourse of national identity is relevant to an awareness of otherness as well as an issue of multi-local supplement. Therefore, national identity represents the image struggle for those who are expelled from the status of settlement (91). In other words, the image of cultural politics that locates its objectives against nationalism and assimilation is considered within colonial awareness of national identity (Netzer 2). Consequently, the word otherness is appropriate to most of the expatriate groups in any case of the purpose of their violent situations. Here, violence is initiated to expose the importance of the place as a certain geographical location from the appearance of the discourse of self-identity. Ondaatje is faithful to describing violent scenes people in *The English Patient* (1992). In so doing, he maintains the lost cultural traditions in the past i.e., before the advent of war that distorted the inherited cultural manners. The war vices are the indicators of colonial violence brought about war portrayed in the novel: “it is still terrible out there. Dead cattle. Horses shot dead, half eaten. People hanging upside down from bridges. The last vices of war” (7).

These violent actions represent the atrocity of war in Africa. Post-colonialism is considered as the most important feature in Ondaatje’s writing style used in the novel. This is because the colonized existence depends on the formation of its identity and the way it

searches to achieve and establish its identity (Bhabha 92). There is no factual methodology to construct the national identity since there is no real threat behind the ability to formulate any kind of identity autonomy (Macqueen 26). The colonizer, therefore, is studied from the negative aspect of the colonial human perspectives. It does not cope with any necessary change as the surroundings around it change and transform rapidly. The colonizer does not also have the potential to present itself on the position of a powerful entity which can forge its existence and presence in life as other entities. It is surrounded by its traditional conventions and traditions which have no any indication of reality or the pursuit of life (27). This is the colonial aspect perceived in Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992). It is the negative position of the combatants that could not find their stable way among violent fights. Ondaatje depicts this colonial issue through tackling the combatant position in during war: "the Germans retreated burying and installing mines as they went. A terrible place for a hospital. The smell of the dead is the worst. We need a good snowfall to clean up this country. We need ravens" (7). In this quotation, the severe conditions of violence include references to war's participants, like the Germans who experienced bitter life during the military fights. Such fights exemplify violence that devastates the sense of national identity of the combatants.

Violence, in Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992), is studied in terms of powerful entity. It has the possible qualities to subjugate and suppress the war casualties. At the onset of the relationship between the combatants, there is no peace. There is no even any degree of similarity or discrepancy. But the whole difference has been analyzed in the light of identity. This identity is pursued in the study in terms of the combatants' ability to exploit war participants for their own benefits (Bhabha 93).

The combatants have a powerful agents which enable it utilize the war casualties to the limits. The combatants exert different methods to improve their power and sustain its ability to continue surviving over the casualties. They use the colonial power to settle in the casualties' land and traditional territories. In this way, violence establishes its power against the national identity. Violence used many agendas to procreate its permanent existence in the casualties' lands, which are African. In the novel, Caravaggio, who represents the foundational national identity, is upset by violence caused by war: "Caravaggio is familiar with this state. He has often met people at the moonlight. Disturbing them at two a.m. as a whole bedroom cupboard came crashing down by mistake. Such shocks, he discovered, kept them away from fear and violence" (19). Here, Caravaggio undergoes a severe violent life. This violence is caused by war which influences his sense of belonging.

Violent ambivalence is another conspicuous feature of Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992). As the term suggests, ambivalence requires two sides (Bhabha 94). Such binary ambivalence is present in the majority of Ondaatje's novel. Ondaatje exposes the internal structure of his novel's narrative in order to explore the congruent relationship between violence and colonialism. He delves into the thematic representations of violence and colonialism that are relative to the war qualities in the bulk of colonial senses. The themes of violence and national identity take the shape of ambivalence; whereby the relationship between the protagonist and other people is set in military situations. Ondaatje, in this regard, is highly concerned with the intrinsic mechanism narrative devices of his novel. Katharine, for example, is greatly influenced by violence around her. She becomes a casualty (victim) or military violence: "a year later the other, more

dangerous, peaceful dreams came. And even within the first one of these she recalled the hands at her neck and waited for the mood of calmness between them to swerve to violence” (36).

Ondaatje, consequently, puts forth the radical differences between violence and peace in war times. These differences are measured by the multifaceted claims; whereby citizens can affirm their ethnical roots in the context of cultural history regarding identity and ethnicity (Bhabha 95). Accordingly, ethnicity is superior to race in the cultural history because ethnicity is an inherited trait rather than a biological one (Wilson 71). Yet, this fact sharply contradicts with the appreciation of race as an equal trait among all ethnical groups portrayed in Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* (1992). Therefore, Ondaatje deals with various violent issues that are projected in his novel. These issues have universal appeal as they reveal the most critical moments of people’s needs to be equal in stable communities after war. In this respect, violence mingles with individual awareness to complete the necessity of individual pursuit of national identity (p.80). On the other hand, the violent actions are quite detrimental results. In the novel, the life of a German man is influenced by the military violence caused by war: “he was interrogated more than seven times, in differing stages of tact and violence—at the end of which the authorities were still uncertain about his confession” (66). This violent war radically changes the life of this man who became a casualty of war. He, simultaneously, tries to pursue his national identity out of war’s violence. Thus, Ondaatje depicts war at its most severe moments.

The violent moments exemplify the threat of gaining identity since it supports the existence of collective experience at the expense of individual consciousness (Bhabha 96). Being so, Ondaatje furnishes his novel with these

cultural facts to expose the meticulous fabrication of communities and their individuals’ quest to gain identity. In sum, the cultural memory is a remedial mode of reminiscences. It is the self-centered idealization that claims to regain the impossible. As such, it reclaims the individual’s necessity to get back identity by reverting to ancestry. Violent memory is more melancholic. It destroys life; and it consequently does not relate to ancestry as it is “a mode of being-for-death” (Wilson 72). Thereupon, this narrative trait unravels Ondaatje’s tendency to have a fictional sense of diverse violence, which is a discrepant style in his narrative compositions. Both the narrator and Kip feel the need for stability and belonging to homeland because they encounter harsh conditions during war: “Kip and I are both international bastards—born in one place and choosing to live elsewhere. Fighting to get back to or getaway from our homelands all our lives” (43). Fight in this quite, symbolizes the notion of war violence.

By depicting violence, Ondaatje writes in two opposing fundamental fictional modes. They are mainly the materiality and the ideality of narrative fundamentalism. They stand for the world views presented in Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* (1992). The materialistic view corresponds to the tangible reality of war. This reality is utterly conscious. It is the essence of existence that is the bed of harsh facts. It is basically the foundational premise of the existence of tangible matters before the mind. In contrast, the idealist view of life corresponds to the fact that the unconscious mind pre-exists tangible matters experienced during the war. The inherited dichotomy between the matter and the mind and what is superior to the other in terms of violence as a postcolonial concept (Bhabha 96). Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* (1992) offers a deep reflection of the influence of war upon Ondaatje’s fictional ideas. The duality of fight and violence are evident in the bulk of

Ondaatje's fictional events. The horrible world view is deemed the experimental (tangible) essence of violent war. The idealist world view of violence is considered as the epistemological holds factual to knowing the reality of military events. These events are conveyed in Ondaatje's philosophical narrative style. In the novel, Ondaatje uses the character of Kirpal Singh to demonstrate the influence of military fights upon combatants' personalities: "he found another, similar title. *Pierre*, or the *Ambiguities*. 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. Singh. And the ambiguities" (45).

Bhabha explains the inherent differences between the materialist and idealist world views in war fiction. The idealist view is like claiming that the universe dominated by an omnipotent power (97). Such power is not able to change society. The materialist view, however, results in a violent fight. It simultaneously results in the individual ways of thinking that inevitably leads to change (Warren 54). Bhabha accentuates the materialist world view because it is associated with violence (97). Consequently, violent literature is a product of society; and Ondaatje is a member of such society (p.19). Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992) highlights the effect of materiality on the fictional events depicted in narrative plot.

This materiality holds affinity to violence and its relevant casualties because Ondaatje deals with people-oriented events that resemble real people who suffer from real war problems. The bulk of these problems approach the complexities of military people afflicted with exploitation and oppression during the war. In so doing, Ondaatje executes materialist concepts as they military problems concerning the plight of war combatants, such as the Japanese and the

English: "the sapper says this, his eyes closed tight, mocking the metaphor. 'Japan is a part of Asia, I say, and the Sikhs have been brutalized by the Japanese in Malaya. But my brother ignores that. He says the English are now hanging Sikhs who are fighting for independence'" (52). These combatants represent Ondaatje's obsession with violence and its influence upon the identity of the combatants. More specifically, combatants slightly lose the sense of their belonging to home as they experience harsh reality during the war. They become extremely detached from their homeland as they fight on far fronts. They do not have direct access to their homelands' affairs. Consequently, they lose the sense of their national identity since they are engaged in violent war actions.

5. Conclusion

This essay has tackled Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992) from a postcolonial perspective. It has discussed three pertinent subjects. They are color, racial segregation and violence. It has paraded Ondaatje's obsession with many literary modes within the larger context of colonialism. The study has identified the importance of the novel in the context of the colonial. The novel reflects Ondaatje's literary modes that deal with everyday's difficulties of war combatants. Ondaatje's colonial fictional writings reflect his visions of the military power and its transformation into scenes of colonial violence. In addition, the study has discussed the war casualties' sufferings during war periods.

This particular theme put Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992) on the global map of world distinctive literature. This is because his writing style is so innovative that it tackles the presence of racial segregation and violence in the world. Color is considered a distinctive theme in Ondaatje's plot because it is against human dignity in post-colonial studies. It advocates the voice of the black suppressed

minority, and at the same time, it exposes the faults of the white's exploitive colonial powers. Both violence and racism have a long history. Post-colonialism focuses on the colonial reality in the black societies. Color and racism result in a cultural division among the colonized black communities. Consequently, post-colonialism is concerned with the imperial plans to subjugate the blacks and harness them for the whites' colonial benefits. In this sense, racial segregation emerges out as an imperial rule which legitimizes the whites' ability to exploit the blacks. Being that so, post-colonialism deals with the whites' hegemony over the blacks' suppressed people's territories. This notion has been analyzed in terms of violence depicted in the novel. Thus, the analysis of color, racial segregation and violence has relied on Bhabha's postcolonial critical arguments.

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