

Tribhuvan University

Transnational Identity in Micheal Ondaatje's *The English Patient*

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Central Department of English in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English

By

Srijana Mabo

Symbol No.:

T. U. Regd. No: 9-2-701-67-2014

Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

September, 2024

Tribhuvan University
Central Department of English
Letter Recommendations

Srijana Mabo has completed her thesis “Transnational Identity in Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*” under my supervision. She has completed her research on. I hereby recommend this thesis to be submitted for viva voice.

.....

Mr. Maheswor Poudel

Supervisor

Date:

Tribhuvan University
Central Department of English
Kirtipur, Kathmandu

Letter of Approval

This Thesis entitled “Transnational Identity in Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Srijana Mabo has been approved by the undersigned member of the research committee.

Member of the Research Committee:

.....
Mr. Maheswor Poudel
Internal Examiner

.....
External Examiner

.....
Prof. Dr. Dhruva Bahadur Karki
Head

Central Department of English T.U.

Date.....

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my reverence and heartfelt thanks to Mr. Maheswor Poudel lecturer of the Department of English, TU, Kirtipur, who supervised this research work. His wide-ranging knowledge and study have led to many improvements in the substance and helped me give the final shape of this thesis.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to Prof. Dr. Dhruva Bahadur Karki, Head of the Central Department of English, TU, for allowing me to conduct the research with constructive feedbacks for completing this research in this form. I am equally indebted to all the respected teachers of the Central Department of English for their support intellectual encouragement and continuous inspirations.

I am heartily grateful to my brothers and parents Mr. Khadga Prasad Limbu and Mrs. Dil Maya Limbu without whose continuous encouragement, motivation and support my hope of achieving Master Degree would remained the dream. I am also thankful my family members and relatives for their assistance in one or other way for getting this state in my life.

Last but not the least, I am grateful to the writer, critics and editors of the sources materials from which I've cited.

Abstract

This thesis explores transnational encounters in the Michel Ondaatje's novel The English Patient. Set during the final days of the Second World War, the novel weaves together the stories of characters from diverse backgrounds, reflecting a complex web of national and cultural identities. This research argues that the novel's narrative structure and characters' interactions highlight the fluidity of national boundaries and the interconnectedness of personal histories across different cultures and continents. The thesis illustrates how transnational experiences shape individual's identities and sense of belonging by looking at the connections and lives of figures like Almasy (the English patient), Hana (the Canadian nurse), Caravaggio (the Italian thief), Kip (the Indian Sikh sapper), Katherine Clifton and Geoffrey Clifton. The characters' journeys highlight the persistent human drive for connection and comprehension across cultural and national boundaries, underscoring the significance of empathy and unity in a divided world. The study uses literary transnationalism to examine how the novel portrays the dissolution of national boundaries and the emergence of hybrid identities in the midst of displacement and conflict. The English Patient thus acts as a powerful reminder of the potential to overcome borders and embrace the diversity of human experiences amid conflict and displacement.

Keywords: transnationalism, nationalionalism, identity, encounters, hybridity, boundaries

This thesis examines transnational encounters in Ondaatje's *The English Patient* as a lens through which to understand the complexities of identity during wartime. Through examining the connections between characters from different backgrounds, such as English patient Almásy and Sikh sapper Kip, Ondaatje

demonstrates how interpersonal relationships and international conflicts may challenge and reshape national identities. The novel provides an in-depth perspective on the interplay between personal and geopolitical domains by highlighting the flexibility of cultural boundaries and the significant impact of transnational experiences on individual and shared identities, “Transnationalism refers to multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states” (Steven Vertovec 2). Transnationalism, as we know, is a much-contested term in the globalized world of today, owing to its inflated overuse across the disciplines. It is “a multifaceted, multi-local process” that broadly denotes the “processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 6). It is a concept that transcends traditional national boundaries. It examines the intricate network of cultural, social, economic, and political interactions that extend beyond national borders, highlighting the fluid nature of identities and the interconnectedness of global communities.

Transnationalism is a key concept in contemporary literary and cultural studies that reflects the increasingly interconnected and interdependent nature of the world. Paul Jay has explored this phenomenon, particularly in relation to literature and culture. His work provides critical insights into how literature transcends national boundaries and engages with global contexts, challenging traditional notions of nationhood and cultural identity. In his book *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*, Paul Jay examines the implications of globalization for literary studies. Jay argues that transnationalism is not just a matter of recognizing the movement of people, goods, and ideas across borders but also involves rethinking the frameworks through which we understand culture and identity. This perspective shifts

the focus from a purely national context to a more expansive view that considers the complex, dynamic interactions between different cultures and societies.

Jay's analysis emphasizes that literature has always been a transnational phenomenon, even if it has often been studied within national frameworks. As a reflection of people migrating and cultures mingling, he notes that literary works usually explore themes of migration, exile, and dispersion. Through a transnational approach to literature analysis, Jay helps readers understand how works address global concerns and add to larger discussions about politics, society, identity, and the arts. One of the critical aspects of Jay's work is his exploration of how transnationalism challenges and complicates the concept of national literature. He argues that many literary texts cannot be fully understood within the confines of national boundaries. Instead, they must be viewed in relation to other texts, cultures, and historical contexts. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of how literature reflects and shapes the global landscape.

In his analyses, Jay often focuses on specific themes and case studies that illustrate the transnational dimensions of literature. For example, he examines the works of authors such as Salman Rushdie whose writing often addresses issues of migration, hybridity, and identity. Rushdie's novels, such as *Midnight's Children* and *The Satanic Verses*, are prime examples of how literature can transcend national boundaries and engage with global concerns. Jay also discusses the role of translation in transnational literature. Translation not only facilitates the movement of texts across linguistic and cultural boundaries but also highlights the complexities and nuances of cross-cultural communication. By examining the process and politics of translation, Jay underscores the importance of considering how literature is received and interpreted in different contexts.

Jay's work on transnationalism has significant implications for literary studies. It encourages scholars to move beyond traditional frameworks that prioritize national literature and embrace more inclusive, interconnected approaches. This shift reveals the dynamic ways in which writings engage with the outside world, which expands our understanding of literature. Jay's emphasis highlights the value of considering several points of view, which aids in scholars' understanding of the complexities of literary works. This promotes a more equitable understanding, acknowledging the contributions of marginalized and diasporic voices.

In *The English Patient*, Michael Ondaatje explores these ideas of shifting identities and cultural interaction. Paul Jay's perspective on transnationalism is crucial for analyzing characters like Almásy and Kip, who navigate multiple cultures and are not defined by a single national identity. Jay also emphasizes how Ondaatje portrays a "decentering of national identity" by creating characters who do not fit neatly into a singular cultural framework. The Indian Sikh sapper Kip, for example, must balance his colonial background with his responsibilities in the British army. As Jay notes, Kip's disenchantment with the British Empire reflects a "fracture in colonial authority" and highlights the ways in which transnational interactions challenge identities formed by empire.

As Jay suggests, crossing borders reshapes identity, which is reflected in the way Ondaatje's characters interact with the global world around them. This approach helps readers see how the novel questions fixed ideas of national belonging and highlights the complex identities formed through transnational encounters.

Identity generally refers to the characteristics, beliefs, and qualities that define a person or group. It is a multifaceted or complex theme in literature, rich with potential for exploration and analysis. It includes how people and groups perceive and

express themselves, often influenced by elements such as culture, ethnicity, gender, and personal experiences. Literature offers a distinctive perspective to examine these facets of identity, revealing the intricate complexities that define human existence.

Almásy's uncertain identification, according to Joseph Pivato, reflects the complexity of transnationalism, in which boundaries between nationalities and cultures are fuzzy. The story explores identity as a complex concept that is constantly altered by both internal and external pressures, and Almásy's ability to navigate many languages and cultures, along with his shifting allegiances, highlight this theme. The multifaceted nature of his identity, shaped by his relationships and the geopolitical context surrounding him, can be seen by his roles as a Hungarian cartographer, spy, and lover. The work portrays identity as dynamic and ever-evolving, and Almásy's varying loyalties—driven more by personal reasons than by nationalistic fervor—exemplify this. What's even more indicative of his multifaceted personality is his relationship with Katharine Clifton and his loyalty to the desert. The novel suggests that identity is not a fixed state but a continuous process of negotiation and transformation, shaped by both personal experiences and broader historical contexts. Through Almásy and other characters, Ondaatje examines the fluid and multifaceted nature of identity in a transnational world.

All things considered, the literary theme of identity offers a deep investigation of the human condition. Literature portrays the complex and frequently challenged process of developing an identity through the self-discovery journeys of characters and the relationship of diverse components. Identity is examined in literature in a way that provides insightful understanding of how people perceive and express themselves in the larger social environment, whether through the lenses of race, gender, culture, or personal history.

National identity is a deep and complex literary theme that includes the shared religion, customs, heritage, and beliefs that unite people to form a nation. Shared historical memories contribute to a collective national identity. Scholars like Bart Moore-Gilbert have delved into *The English Patient's* exploration of national identity from a postcolonial lens, revealing the novel's critique of the colonial and imperial power structures that rigidly define identity by nationality and race. The figure of the Indian sapper Kip captures the agony of an indecisive persona of the postcolonial subject in Ondaatje's novel. Kip's skill and conformity as a sapper in the British army, at the beginning, apparently indicate that he becomes an effective player in the colonial construct. However, getting through to Sepoy, the things he experiences such as knowledge of the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki lead to the disillusionment of the British Empire. This disillusionment leads to Kip rejecting the Empire which can be seen as the increasing consciousness of subjected peoples to their status and the fact that they are only tolerated within certain parameters in the imperial structure.

Thus, the novel stands as a representation of the paradox between being colonized or encompassed socially, and one's individual feeling of belonging and identity. Kip's transformation and search for identity also encompasses the general themes of the postcolonialism, isolation, and attempting to find a true self in a world that did not recognize them in colonial standards. His return to India in the end is an emancipation of sort and a reclaiming of the native on his own terms without the interference of the imperialist bias. This narrative arc highlights the broader theme of *The English Patient* concerning the fluidity and complexity of identity, challenging the simplistic categorizations imposed by colonial ideologies. In Kip as in the other

characters Ondaatje shows how such constructions are unreal and absurd and fail to represent the complex realities of people's lives.

National identity and colonial identity are deeply connected. Colonial rule often shapes national identity by forcing new customs on the colonized and creating disagreement in these individuals. Now I will provide a brief explanation discussion the colonial identity.

Colonial identity in literary analysis refers to the ways in which the experiences, cultures, and identities of both colonizers and the colonized are shaped and influenced by colonial rule. It is a complex theme in literature, often exploring the effects of colonial rule on both colonizers and the colonized. This theme includes the ways that resistance, cultural imposition, and power relations influence the formation of both individual and group identities. The tensions between native cultures and colonial influences, the internal difficulties colonized subjects encountered, and the long-lasting effects of colonialism on national and personal identities are all commonly highlighted in literature analyzing colonial identity.

Postcolonial literature often reflects on the enduring legacy of colonialism and its impact on identity in the post-colonial era. A significant reflection on postcolonial identity can be found in Ondaatje's portrayal of Kip, the Indian Sikh sapper. Kip's identity, according to Emily Johansen, is an ideal illustration of the conflicts that arise from postcolonial identities. Kip faces both inclusion and exclusion in the British army as a colonial subject. Although many recognize his skill and bravery, he is still seen as an outsider who is unsure of where he fits into the colonial power system. Though it offers a short break from these conflicts, his romantic engagement with Hana is unable to completely protect him from the institutionalized prejudices and cultural differences that shape his reality. The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

ultimately cause Kip to become disillusioned with the West, which prompts him to reject Western ideals and return to India, underscoring the lasting effects of colonialism on personal identity. Through its portrayal of colonial subjects crossing the difficult terrain of hybridity and cultural displacement, this voyage highlights the psychological and emotional costs of colonialism. Kip's identity highlights the difficulties of keeping a hybrid identity by exposing the constant struggle colonial subjects faced between resistance and assimilation. His narrative offers a potent charge of colonialism and its enduring impact on the development of identity, which resonates with *The English Patient's* larger themes of displacement and the quest for identity.

Writing about colonial identity in literature provides a rich environment for examining the complex connections that exist between colonizers and the colonized. It explores the challenges of hybrid identities, the imposition and resistance of cultural values, and the long-lasting consequences of colonialism on national and personal identities. Literature reveals the complex and occasionally traumatic process of forming an identity in colonial and post-colonial situations through these narratives.

Moreover, literature on colonial identity frequently addresses the psychological dimensions of colonization, including the internal conflicts experienced by individuals caught between two worlds. The exploration of colonial identity in literature is not confined to the experiences of the colonized. Works like E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* provide insight into the perspectives of the colonizers and the moral ambiguities of their actions. Forster's novel delves into the complexities of Anglo-Indian relations and the inherent biases and prejudices that hinder genuine understanding and connection between the British and Indians. Conrad's novella, on the other hand, critiques the dehumanizing

effects of imperialism on both the colonizers and the colonized, exposing the darkness at the heart of European colonial endeavors.

Through these varied narratives, literature offers a comprehensive examination of colonial identity, highlighting the multifaceted and often painful process of negotiating cultural differences and power imbalances. By shedding light on the historical and contemporary implications of colonialism, literary works contribute to a deeper understanding of the ongoing struggles for identity, autonomy, and justice in a post-colonial world.

The theme of shifting identities serves as a lens through which to explore the complexities of human experience. Identity shift involves changes in how individuals perceive and express themselves, often in response to life experiences or external influences. Identity crisis occurs when individuals experience uncertainty or conflict about their sense of self, prompting a reevaluation of their values, beliefs, and goals. Identity reformation then emerges as individuals actively work to reconcile these internal conflicts, leading to a renewed sense of identity that may be more authentic or aligned with their evolving understanding of themselves and their place in the world. Overall, these concepts are interconnected stages in the ongoing journey of self-exploration and growth. I will provide you with a brief analysis on both identity crisis and identity reformation.

Identity crisis, a concept first introduced by psychologist Erik Erikson, has been a subject of profound interest and inquiry across various disciplines, including psychology, sociology, and literature. Identity crisis is commonly understood as a period of intense self-examination and uncertainty about one's sense of self, values, and purpose in life. Identity crisis is a normal developmental stage that happens throughout adolescence but can occur at any time in life, according to Erikson's

psychosocial theory. Erikson argues that while unresolved crises can cause identity uncertainty or role diffusion, successfully resolving a crisis promotes the formation of a solid and stable identity.

Scholars also point to the Villa San Girolamo, which serves as the novel's location, as a representation of transnational space. The villa, according to Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, is a microcosm of the transnational world, where different cultures and ethnicities come together to create an independent area that goes beyond established national borders. Characters from many origins come together, share their experiences, and reshape their ideas of self, allowing for the merging and reformation of identities. According to Laura E. Savu, Ondaatje reinterprets the concept of home as a contested and flexible place. As per transnationalism's emphasis on the interconnectivity of global experiences, home for the characters in the novel is not limited to a particular geographical area but rather to relationships and shared experiences.

In all, identity crisis is a deep and complex theme that explores the human condition in literature. The complex processes of identity creation, the influence of cultural expectations, and the search of authenticity are all explored in literature through hidden character representations, symbolic imagery, and deep narrative development. Readers are prompted to consider their own experiences, beliefs, and sense of self by reading literary works that explore identity crisis themes. This process increases compassion, understanding, and appreciation for the variety of human experience narratives.

Identity reformation is a profound and transformative process often depicted in literature, where characters undergo significant changes in their sense of self. This theme explores the complex processes of identity redefinition in response to life

experiences, personal growth, and self-discovery. Identity reformation in literature often manifests through characters who face pivotal moments or crises that compel them to reassess and reconstruct their identities.

Identity reformation in literature explores the human ability to change and redefine oneself. Authors illuminate the complex mechanisms of personal development and the search of authenticity by presenting characters who undergo significant metamorphoses. Reading literary works that focus on identity reformation offers readers valuable insights into human resilience and the transformative journey of self-discovery.

Michael Ondaatje, the winner of the prestigious Man Booker Prize in 1992, is an internationally known poet and novelist born in Sri Lanka in 1943. In 1954 he migrated to Britain and in 1962 to Canada, where he lives now as a naturalized citizen. He is a writer celebrated for his lyrical prose and intricate narratives, frequently delves into themes of transnationalism and identity in his fiction. Characters in his writings frequently struggle with the challenges of one's identity and belonging in a variety of cultural and geographic contexts. Ondaatje provides a thoughtful reflection on the unclear nature of identity in a globalized world through his examination of these topics. His significant work of prose includes *Coming Through Slaughter*, *In the Skin of a Lion*, *The English Patient*, *Anil's Ghost* (AG), *Running in the Family* (RF), *The Cat's Table* (CT), along with books on poetry such as *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. He was also awarded with the Toronto Book Award, the Trillium Book Award and the Best Paperback in English Award. Ondaatje was made an officer of the Order of Canada in 1988 and also received the Sri Lanka Ratna in 2005 from the Government of Sri Lanka for his outstanding service to the nation as a non-citizen.

Ondaatje's *The English Patient* is set in the World War II era and explores the themes of love, identity and ruins of the war. This research looks over the conflict that was caused by the interactions between national identities and transnational ideas by using characters from the novel. One's identity is created by different parts of life such as culture, race, gender, geography, and religion. Nationality makes people feel like they belong to a place which, eventually shapes who they are. But the connection between identity and nationality is challenged by concepts like transnationalism, hybridity, post-nationalism, cosmopolitanism, and diasporas. These ideas question the traditional relationship between identity and nation by looking into the importance of factors like people, culture, and territories. In the novel, such factors affect the character's identities in both national and transnational contexts.

When identity is based on national characteristics, it becomes less stable because of the influence of transnationalism. The concept of transnationalism crosses national borders, cultures, and economies, combining different ideas and influences. Such circumstances divide the characters' identities. They become unclear and feel torn between their national identity, which is rooted in them with their country's traditions and values, and the challenges brought by transnationalism which often introduces new conflicting influences from other countries. As a result, the characters end up confused within themselves. They struggle to figure out their sense of belonging to their nation with the diverse ideas and cultures they encounter through transnationalism. The confusion they face makes it difficult for them to maintain a stable sense of identity. They are caught between holding on to their national roots or adapting to the new perspectives of transnationalism. They struggle to understand themselves and their place in this world, emphasizing the complex nature of identity in an interconnected world.

Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* has been widely analyzed through various critical lenses, with transnationalism emerging as a prominent theme. This literature review explores how scholars have addressed the transnational aspects of the novel, focusing on how it portrays the fluidity of identities, the intersections of cultural and national boundaries, and the impact of historical events on personal and collective identities. Many scholars view the villa San Girolamo in the novel as a symbol of transnational space. According to Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, the villa represents a microcosm of the transnational world where different nationalities and cultures converge, creating a unique space that transcends traditional national boundaries. This convergence allows for the blending and reformation of identities, as characters from diverse backgrounds come together, sharing their experiences and reshaping their notions of self.

The fluidity of identities in *The English Patient* is a recurring theme in scholarly discussions. Joseph Pivato argues that the novel's characters embody transnational identities through their complex personal histories and interactions. Count László de Almásy, the titular English patient, is a prime example. His identity is fluid and ambiguous, shaped by his roles as a Hungarian cartographer, a lover, and a spy. Almásy's ability to navigate multiple cultures and languages, along with his shifting allegiances, underscores the novel's exploration of identity as a dynamic and multifaceted concept.

Critics have also examined how Ondaatje addresses the intersections of colonial histories and postcolonial realities through his characters. Emily Johansen notes that Kip, the Indian Sikh sapper, exemplifies the complexities of colonial and postcolonial identities. His presence in the British army and his romantic relationship with Hana highlight the intersections of colonial power dynamics and personal

relationships. Kip's eventual disillusionment with the Western world and his return to India reflect the tensions and contradictions inherent in transnational identities, as he grapples with his dual identity as both a colonial subject and a soldier in the British army.

The themes of home and belonging are central to the novel's exploration of transnationalism. Laura E. Savu discusses how Ondaatje redefines the notion of home as a fluid and contested space. For the characters in the novel, home is not tied to a specific geographical location but rather to relationships and shared experiences. This redefinition aligns with transnationalism's emphasis on the interconnectedness of global experiences and the reformation of identity beyond national borders. The desert, as a setting, symbolizes both freedom and isolation, serving as a place where national identities can be both lost and rediscovered.

While *The English Patient* highlights the possibilities of transnational identities, it also addresses the inherent challenges. Susie O'Brien (2006) points out that the characters face internal and external conflicts as they navigate their multifaceted identities. Kip's disillusionment with the Western world and his eventual rejection of his adopted culture underscores the difficulties of maintaining a transnational identity in a world still deeply divided by racial and cultural prejudices. Similarly, Almásy's tragic romance with Katharine Clifton illustrates the personal costs of crossing cultural and national boundaries, symbolizing the complex and often painful nature of transnational relationships.

This research on the *English Patient* considers the ways in which individual and collective history intersect to shape the complex structure of human identity through his analysis of transnationalism and identity. Ondaatje's novel writings

highlight the idea that identity is a tapestry made of many experiences, relationships, and cultural settings rather than a fixed or united matter.

In *The English Patient*, love and war play big roles in the lives of the characters. The relationships among the characters show that love can surpass national and cultural barriers. Hana a Canadian and Kip an Indian, fall in love in spite of their diverse backgrounds. Their relationship is a clear example of theme of love and war. Their bond offers a brief but strong comfort from the surrounding chaos of war. They find comfort and understanding in each other's presence, representing a connection built in a time of destruction. Their relationship highlights how love can provide a safe place even in the darkest times. Likewise, the passionate romance between the English patient and Katharine, despite being forbidden by the circumstances of war, serves as a touching reminder of the enduring strength of love even in the most challenging of times. Despite their difference in their backgrounds and nationality, they find comfort and connection in each other. Their love story shows that personal connections can overcome the divisions created by nationality and race.

Even though the characters are drawn together by the war happening around them, it also tears them apart. In the novel, characters meet during the war but still create a strong bond overcoming the boundaries and limitations. Yet we also see some of them drifting apart by cutting off all the relations. Each of them carries the hurt and bad memories of what they have been through. The war makes their connections with each other even more important, showing how fragile and strong those connections can be, even when they are from different countries.

In *The English Patient*, the main setting is an old, war-damaged villa in Italy. Most of the story takes place in the villa. This villa becomes a shelter for the characters, offering them a place of safety and comfort during the chaos of World

War II. It serves as a transnational space where characters from different backgrounds come together. Hana was supposed to have left the villa with the other doctors, soldiers and other nurses, yet she chose to stay behind, as she was determined to take care of the English patient. The villa also becomes home to Kip, an Indian soldier who defuses bombs, and Caravaggio, an Italian Canadian spy. Despite their different backgrounds, these characters come together in the villa, forming a unique and diverse community.

The Villa symbolizes a place with no boundaries and limitations. Individuals from various nations can connect and support each other. It highlights the theme of transnationalism in the novel, showing how individuals can find common ground and humanity even in times of conflict and war. It is like they have set up a new community in the Villa which is completely isolated from the outside world of war and violence of the world. The villa, damaged by war yet providing refuge, symbolizes the possibility of peace and understanding in a world torn apart by conflict.

In the novel, the people's original nations are obvious. Their names and nations are shown in a way so that character's identities are limited. Nations have a great impact on identity creation as well. Names and not having names are really important in Ondaatje's book when it comes to understanding who people's identity. One of the very important functions of giving names is that it helps us to confirm who someone is. According to Victoria Cook, "Names have the power to distinguish, substantiate and confirm, and above all they determine identity and set identification. To be named, therefore, is to belong, to be located" (58).

In *The English Patient*, one of the first things we can notice is that all the characters have been forced to leave their home countries. They are all gathered at the

Villa San Girolamo at the end of World War II. Everybody's life has brought them to the villa for different reasons but they're all linked through their experience of trauma of the war.

Hana is a Canadian nurse, who's looking after Almásy, the English Patient. Hana had to have an abortion because the father of her unborn child had been killed. She then volunteered for war service. With the news of her father's death by burns, she was on the verge of losing her mind from dealing with the burned and the dead all the time. She is very determined to care for Almásy (the English patient), so she stays behind at the villa to look after him while the Canadian army continues to advance ahead in Italy.

Kip is another character in the villa. He is a Sikh. He is a very skilled sapper working in the British army. Kip enters the villa as part of the bomb disposal unit. He is assigned to defuse unexploded bombs and mines in the area surrounding the villa. He then starts living in a small house next to the villa.

The next character in the villa is Caravaggio. He is an Italian Canadian. He is also an old friend of Hana's father. He is a thief, who later worked as spy during the war. But at the villa, he stays passive for a while and later plays a role as a detective and searches for the truth about the identity of the English patient.

And the last character in the villa is Count Almásy, the English patient, the main character of the novel. He is a Hungarian adventurer and cartographer. He helped the Germans navigate the desert during the war. He was rescued from a plane crash. Thus, his identity is already erased as he is burnt beyond recognition. In the end, his own identity, which is him being an explorer and cartographer, has been erased, and he is only recognized as the English patient.

Almásy hates the idea of nations and their colonial identity. He thinks that its colonial identity is very self-centered and inconsiderate:

When we are young, we do not look into mirrors. It is when we are old, concerned with our name, our legend, what our lives will mean to the future. We become vain with the names we own, our claims to have been the first eyes, the strongest army, the cleverest merchant. It is when he is old that Narcissus wants a graven image of himself. (141)

Almásy believes that when we are young, we don't worry about how we look or what others think of us. But as we get older, we start caring about our reputation and legacy. He compares this to the story of Narcissus who became obsessed with his own reflection. In simple terms, Almásy is talking about how people become vain as they age.

Almásy openly criticizes the Western nationalism, or rather colonial nationalism, which lays down artificial borders, through mapping and wars, just for money and political power. Likewise, Almásy demonstrates that identities can change and be hard to pin down:

There were rivers of desert tribes, the most beautiful humans I've met in my life. We were German, English, Hungarian, African, – all of us insignificant to them. Gradually we become nationless. I came to hate nations. We are deformed by nation-states. Madox died because of nations. The desert could not be claimed or owned-it was a piece of cloth carried by the winds, never held down by stones, and given a hundred shifting names long before Canterbury existed, long before battles and treatises quilted Europe and East. Its caravans, those strange rambling feasts and cultures left nothing behind, not an amber. All of us, even those with European homes and children in the

distance, wished to remove the clothing of our countries. It was a place of faith. We disappeared into landscape. [. . .] Erase the family name. Erase nations! I was taught such things by the desert. (138-139)

In the vast desert, Almásy learns that national boundaries are not very important. There were people of different nationality naturalized Germans, English, Hungary and African and all felt in a way that their nations were not containing them. People from different backgrounds and nationality become united in the desert. He sees the desert as a place where individuals can escape the limitation of their nations and find a deeper connection to nature and humanity. Almásy's experiences in the desert teach him to value a sense of identity goes beyond nationality. It also highlights the importance of unity and belonging to something greater than oneself.

Almásy erased his national identity during the desert exploration as he hated his western nationalism and social identity and betrayed them during the war. He believes that he's a mix of different cultures, so he cannot be easily defined as he says, "Kip and I are both international bastards-born in one place and choosing to live elsewhere" (177).

Kip is another character who is presented with the similar shifting identity as Almásy's in the novel. Naturally because of his Sikh identity and mixed background, he sees things differently. Kip had to face the challenges of usual ideas of racism and colonialism. He changes his name to Kip from Kripal Singh, which shows him trying to blend into the English culture. Kip trying to blend into the culture is displayed as he sings the song: "They're changing guard at Buckingham Palace / Christopher Robin went down with Alice" (211).

Kip willingly joins the British army, despite his anti-Western Sikh nationalist brother advising against it, which will eventually lead him to disappointment. He is

treated badly by his other British colleges. During the war, he had to go to Italy to work as a sapper. There he met Hana, while defusing the bomb at the villa. Later, they fall in love and become lovers.

The English Patient explores themes of identity, and human connections at a very difficult time of World War II. The characters are forced to leave their homelands and come together at Villa San Girolamo, facing the scars of war. Despite coming from different backgrounds, they overcome the limitation of national boundaries and colonialism. Count Almásy expresses identity easement and strong rejection to nationalism and its limitations. In the middle of shifting identities, Almásy, Hana, Kip, and Caravaggio build bonds showing how they stay strong and the search for place they belong. The novel shows reflection on changing of identities and the power of connection across geopolitical borders.

The four characters Almaśy, Hana, Kip and Caravaggio go through a process of identity crisis to identity reformation. They go through a long journey before reaching a damaged villa in Italy, a place unfamiliar to all of them. Despite Villa San Girolamo being in an unfamiliar place, they will all rebuild their identities there. While they are reforming their identities in Italy, they are influenced by their environment and their own thoughts and memories. Identity reformation takes place, regardless of the characters' trying to escape the actual versions of their identities.

In the villa, they become unaware of the "outside world" as they start to reform into themselves. They completely withdraw themselves from the world. Another thing that can be noticed is that none of them are in the place they should be. Hana was supposed to have left the villa with the other doctors, soldiers and other nurses, but she chose to stay behind, as she was determined to take care of the English patient. Kip could have wandered anywhere in Europe to defuse bombs but chooses to

stay at the villa where he then falls in love with Hana. Caravaggio should be in a Rome hospital recovering from the injuries, but he ends up in villa where he tries to search for the truth about the identity of the English patient. Likewise, the English patient should have been dead, either by fire or the actions planned by the Allies' Intelligence as he betrayed them.

In a way, it is like they have set up a new community in the villa which is completely isolated from the outside world of war and violence. They are no longer bound or limited by the norms and expectations of the "world," which they do not agree on and are unwilling to keep following. So, the villa, which is off the maps, becomes a place where they temporarily escape. For example, in flashbacks, the English patient expresses how places and nations create distance between people, representing the outside world, "If he could walk across the room and touch [Katharine] would be sane. But between them lay a treacherous and complex journey. It was a very wide world" (113). Almásy wants to reach Katharine and believes it would restore his sanity, but he knows there are many obstacles in their way. The phrase "It was a very wide world" implies the vastness of the challenges they face that keeps them apart.

There's also a tiny event in the novel as they celebrate the 21st birthday of Hana in the villa. The Western residents in the Villa (Hana, the English patient / Almásy, Caravaggio) welcome Kip who belongs to a Sikh origin. This shows their friendship as they all seem to disregard their national limitations and racial origins. It shows that anything artificial that divides human beings is meaningless in the Villa.

The very first trace of identity reformation in the novel can be seen in our main character. The English patient is no longer a young man who once used to

explore deserts and betrayed his nation. When he gets to the villa, he requests a mirror from Hana to observe his burns. He wishes to die with no identity, free from what or how the world or society would label him. His belief in a name only carries negative division and limitations of the past and present, “Erase the family name! Erase nations. I was taught such things by the desert” (139).

The loss of his family name, and his nation, shows the English patient’s escape from an old identity and allows him to recreate a new version of identity. He not only uses his body to escape his previous identity, but also to create a new identity for Almásy.

Until the very end of the war with the bombing in Japan, they have managed to isolate themselves from the world by entering their own separate space in the villa. But later in August, when Kip hears the news of atomic bomb dropped on Japan, he becomes furious. He believes that a Western nation would never carry out such a horrific act against another Western nation.

Kip gets angry and even tries to threaten Almaśy (the English patient) is a Western man for him as he thought was English. He is very disappointed with western culture and starts questioning his preference over his own culture. Him trying to kill the English patient shows his rage and anger against the western culture and him willing to abandon his western friends too. He is also very disappointed with himself as he starts to reflect looking at the picture of his family and starts questioning lot of things, "His name is Kripal Singh, and he does not know what he is doing here” (287).

Kip goes through a different process of reforming his identity. He feels deceived by the British Empire's claims of freedom and wants to give up his Sikh identity in order to get along with his newly found culture. After the bombing in Japan at the end of the war, he realizes his real identity is what makes him different from western customs. He realizes that he will always be seen as an outsider. After gaining that understanding, he accepts his true identity and, at the end of the war, makes his way back to the Punjab, where he belongs.

Nevertheless, he sometimes remembers Hana and thinks of her and seems to regret his decision to leave her without a word:

It seems every month he witnesses her this way, as if these moments of revelation are a continuation of the letters she wrote to him every year, getting no reply, until she stopped sending them, turned away by his silence. His character, he supposed. Now there are these urges to talk with her during a meal and return to that stage they were most intimate at in the tent or in the English patient's room, both of which contained the turbulent river of space between them. (301-302)

A similarity we can find in both Almaśy, a westerner and Kip, a colonized native, is that they go through a whole process of abandoning their national identity. All the residents of the villa are displaced individuals far away from their homeland. They all have gone through a lot of hardships in different ways during the war both as the westerner and colonized native. Eventually, Kip reverts to his own traditional national identity. Even with the British army training and discipline in Kip adopts the English

norms rebels against them and quits the western culture. He also cuties with his western friends who he categorizes as colonizers. He reveals:

My brother told me. Never turn your back on Europe. The deal makers. The makers. The map drawers. Never trust Europeans, he said. Never shake hands with them. 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? (284-285)

This shows Kip's uncontrollable rage and him reverting to anti-western national identity. In conclusion, the characters like Almásy, Hana, Kip, and Caravaggio face a big journey of figuring out who they are and reforming their identities. Even though they end up in a strange place, they start to rebuild themselves there. They forget about the outside world and make their own little community. Almásy and Kip both decide to let go of their old identities and find new ones. Finally, they show that people can change and find themselves, even in the middle of the war.

In *The English Patient*, the main characters represent the idea of changing identities and connections across national borders. Count Almaśy, the English patient struggles with changing identities and forgotten memories, which shows the weakening of personal identity in the time of the World War II. Characters such as Caravaggio, Hana, and Kip also effectively face the challenges of connection and belonging beyond country boundaries, establishing strong connections that extend beyond geopolitical bounds.

Count Almaśy represents the idea of changing identity and overcoming geopolitical boundaries. Almaśy's adventure as a Hungarian adventurer and cartographer takes place during World War II. The writer portrays Almaśy as a

character profoundly affected by trauma, illustrating his loss of identity and disconnect from the past. For instance, he states, "I was perhaps the first one to stand up alive out of a burning plane. a man whose head was on fire. they didn't know my name."

I didn't know their tribe.

Who are you?

I don't know. you keep on asking me.

You said you were English. (5)

Almásy exhibits profound loss of identity and a disconnect from his past. His confused state becomes obvious when he finds it difficult to respond properly to inquiries about his name and nationality. He states, "I was perhaps the first one to stand up alive out of a burning plane," emphasizing his traumatic experience and fragmented memory. Almásy expresses uncertainty about his identity, as he cannot recall the names of those around him or even his own, responding with "Who are you? I don't know (42)." This further highlights his psychological dislocation.

Despite identifying as English, the confusion in his memories points to a more nuanced sense of self. The mention of his being a man "whose head was on fire" vividly illustrates his physical and emotional turmoil, reinforcing the theme of disconnection from self. Almásy's attempt to answer these probing questions, despite the chaos of his memories, showcases his resilience in navigating uncertainty. This passage underscores the pervasive theme of identity crisis within the narrative as Almásy grapples with the fragmented pieces of his past.

Almásy is drawn to the deserts of North Africa. He develops close relationships with people from a variety of backgrounds in his adventure, which shows that personal connections surpass national affiliations. Almásy reflects on how

war and boundaries have complicated identity, “I didn’t care whether I was Italian or Hungarian or anything. The desert seemed an ocean of freedom. I had wanted to erase nations” (258).

Almásy expresses a deep desire to move beyond national identities when he says, “I didn’t care whether I was Italian or Hungarian or anything. The desert seemed an ocean of freedom. I had wanted to erase nations.” This statement shows how the desert represents a place of freedom for him, where the boundaries of nationality disappear. He feels liberated in the vastness of the desert, which allows him to escape the conflicts tied to his identity.

In order to live a rootless existence in the air (as a pilot) and in the desert, where boundaries and so ownership are impossible to determine, he decides to cut off his roots. Almásy believes that the world should be such a place where people from different, religions, cultures and languages can live together. The English patient expresses his hate for the idea of nations when he says, “We are communal histories, communal books. We are owned or monogamous in our taste or experience. All I desired was to walk upon such an earth that had no maps” (261).

This shows us how Almásy does not hesitate openly to reject the idea of being tied to one nation. Count Almásy shows the theme of shifting identity and overcoming geopolitical boundaries. His experiences during the second World War, particularly his forgetful state and interactions with others, highlights shifting of personal identity. His connections with individuals from different backgrounds and nations show his importance and beliefs of personal relationships over national connections. Almásy's searching for the elusive horizon reflects a desire for a world without boundaries and divisions, where people of different cultures can live together harmoniously.

Ultimately, Almásy's rejection of national identity highlights his vision for a world free from the limitations of geopolitical labels.

Kripal Singh, or Kip, is presented as a skilled and mysterious British Army sapper. Next to the English patient, Kip receives the most attention in the novel. The author shows his deep interest not just by providing the reader with plenty of information about the character himself, but also about his occupation as a sapper. The fact that Kip lost his name is the first indication of how easily this version of himself has been controlled for a very long time:

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. (91)

Kip feels different from the Eurocentric norm, so he chooses a new nickname and within a week his real name, Kirpal Singh, had been forgotten. Being Indian, he offers a different viewpoint in the novel. Kip's personality and how he acts around others are influenced by his identity and Sikh background. He comes across as a pushover. He is a very skilled sapper, yet constantly an outsider. This can be looking in, "But he was a professional. And he remained the foreigner, the Sikh." "The self-sufficiency and privacy Hana saw in him later were caused not just by his being a sapper in the Italian campaign. It was as much a result of being the anonymous member of another race, a part of the invisible world" (289).

Kip's struggle to fit into a world where he is seen as different. Even though he is skilled and professional in his work, he still feels like an outsider due to his background. This sense of not quite fitting in is the source of his desire to be independent. Kip's experience highlights the challenges faced by those who try to integrate into a society that often views them as foreign. This creates an inner conflict for him as he navigates his identity while seeking acceptance among others. Almásy highlights a shared sense of dislocation when he states, "Kip and I are both international bastards—born one place and choosing to live elsewhere. Fighting to get back to or get away from our homelands all our lives, though Kip doesn't recognize that yet. That's why we get on so well together" (177).

This line underscores their common experience of feeling like outsiders, a key theme throughout *The English Patient*. By calling themselves "international bastards," Almásy emphasizes their struggle with identity in a world defined by borders and conflict. Both characters are shaped by their origins yet find themselves in different cultures, grappling with the longing to belong while navigating their complex histories. Almásy's observation that Kip is unaware of this shared struggle indicates a deeper understanding of their friendship; he recognizes the internal conflicts that come with being caught between worlds. This connection between Almásy and Kip illustrates how personal histories influence relationships. Their bond shows that even in a tumultuous environment, understanding and empathy can emerge.

He tries hard to fit in with his new identity in England, but he is obviously ashamed of himself for not succeeding in doing so. Kip sees the world in a simpler way compared to his brother, who is far more educated about the colonial powers ruling the Punjab. Ultimately, after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which

it marks the turning point, Kip understands his role in the world and becomes politically mature. This can be seen in following paragraph given below:

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. 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.
(255)

Kip goes through a different process of discovering his identity. He begins as an immigrant who joined the military because he feels deceived by the British Empire's claims of freedom and wants to give up his Sikh identity in order to get along with his newly found culture. By the end of the war, he realizes his real identity is what makes him different from western customs. Despite his great skills and experience working as a sapper for the British Army, he realizes that he will always be seen as an outsider. After gaining that understanding, he accepts his true identity and, at the end of the war, makes his way back to the Punjab, where he belongs.

Hana is shown as a major character whose narrative revolves around themes of resilience, love, and grief. Hana is the only female character in the novel that has a backstory. During World War II, Hana, a young nurse, from Montreal, Canada and is really attached to her Canadian identity. She is fully aware of the current wartime situations and builds deep connections with complete strangers who share a national identity as she states, “where you come from becomes important” (238).

Whereas Almásy hates that people bond just because they are from the same place, Hana gives importance to the nationality identity or place of origins. She points out the effects of the war and argues that one's background becomes more important

during times of war. This conversation shows the conflict between one's own identity and other people's perspectives. It shows the difficulties of building relationships with others at the time of war.

She avoids thinking too much about her Canadian identity because it makes her sad to think about the people she's lost from there. This is portrayed in the below given paragraph, She never looked at herself in mirrors again. [. . .] She feared the day she would remove blood from a patient's face and discover her father or someone who had served her food across a counter on Danforth Avenue. [. . .] Where was and what was Toronto anymore in her mind? (251)

It shows Hana's hesitation to confront her Canadian identity. She does not look in mirrors anymore because she is scared that she will see the faces of the people she lost. It also shows Hana's fear of encountering familiar faces from Toronto, such as her father or people from her neighborhood. This suggests her desire to distance herself from her past and the pain connected with it. Hana leaves Canada and chooses to go to war as a civil servant or a nurse. Hana eventually returns to Canada, but her future is uncertain.

Caravaggio is a complicated character whose presence makes the story more complex. Caravaggio seems mysterious because he used to be a robber before becoming an intelligence agent. We gain limited insight into Caravaggio's national identity through a brief exchange with Hana. When she asks, "Were you a spy then?" he responds, 'Not quite,' before adding, "At times we were sent in to steal. Here I was, an Italian and a thief" (35).

This exchange merges aspects of moral ambiguity and nationality, hinting at the complexity of his identity. As a thief in Toronto, he roams the city, breaking and entering, invading personal boundaries. He continues on this path after being hired as

a spy during the war. But at the villa, where he has to stay passive for a while, he puts on the mask of a detective and searches for the truth about the true identity of the English patient, “A twenty-year-old who throws herself out of the world to love a ghost!” “I know you love the man, but he’s not an Englishman” (45).

Caravaggio expresses his frustration at Hana's love towards Almásy, as he does not share his nationality or background. Almásy’s identity is kept a mystery the entire time. Despite sounding English, the statement "he's not an Englishman" implies that Almásy does not properly fit into a single national identity. This introduces us to the identity crisis and raises questions about Almásy's national identity and origin.

Caravaggio also tells Hana about Almásy's friendship with English explorers before the war and how he worked with the Germans during the conflict. "Between the wars Almásy had English friends. Great explorers. But when war broke out, he went with the Germans. Rommel asked him to take Eppler across the desert into Cairo because it would have been too obvious by plane or parachute" (267).

Here Caravaggio shows how easily Almásy's shifted sides and how he gave no importance to national identities and loyalties even during wartime. Caravaggio's role adds depth to the story, raising questions about loyalty and identity in wartime.

In this way, Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* effectively shows the complexities of transnational identities through its characters and their interactions within a war-torn villa. The story revolves around the lives of Hana, Kip, Caravaggio, and Almásy, four characters from different origins who are all struggling with their sense of identity and belonging. The way in which these characters are portrayed by Ondaatje captures an exciting and interwoven aspect of transnational life, in which individual identities cross-conventional national borders. The villa transforms into a small transnational space where national and cultural boundaries dissolve, allowing

the characters to create new identities that draw from a variety of backgrounds and experiences.

However, Ondaatje does not merely celebrate the positive aspects of transnationalism; he also addresses its inherent challenges. Through Kip's effort to find his place in a largely Western culture and the hostility he encounters, the story explores the challenges experienced by people with transnational identities.

Comparably, the unclear nature of Almásy's identity and his shifting allegiances draw attention to the difficulties and occasionally the loneliness associated with living a global life.

This analysis of *The English Patient* demonstrates that Ondaatje's portrayal of transnationalism extends beyond the mere blending of cultures. It captures the tensions and conflicts that arise from differing belief systems and the rejection of migrants, reflecting real-world issues faced by contemporary migrants. This multifaceted approach provides a richer, more accurate representation of transnational identities than traditional postcolonial concept of hybridity.

In conclusion, *The English Patient* serves as a deep exploration of transnationalism, showing how identities can be both fluid and fragmented. Ondaatje's work transcends conventional categories, offering a detailed and empathetic portrayal of the transnational experience. As such, it stands out as a significant contribution to migrant literature, highlighting the evolving nature of identity in a globalized world. Further comparative studies with other migrant literature could reveal whether Ondaatje's approach signals a broader view in the picture of transnationalism in contemporary fiction. Through this analysis, I have shown the traces of transnationalism in the novel, highlighting the importance of this perspective in understanding the intricate identities of Ondaatje's characters.

Works Cited

- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Americanah*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013.
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2006.
- Castles, Stephen, and Mark J. Miller. *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*. 5th ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 5.
- Díaz, Junot. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Riverhead Books, 2007.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. J.B. Lippincott, 1937.
- Jay, Paul. *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*. Cornell University Press, 2010.
- Johansen, Emily. "Postcolonial Spaces and Transnational Identities in the English Patient." *Postcolonial Text*, vol. 3, no. 4, 2008, pp. 1-19.
- O'Brien, Susie. "Deserts and Gardens: The Novels of Michael Ondaatje and Transnational Space." *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2006, pp. 61-75.
- Pivato, Joseph. "The English Patient: Transnational Identities." *Canadian Literature*, vol. 176, 2003, pp. 88-105.
- Pivato, Joseph. *Transnationalism and Cultural Identity in Literature*. Guernica Editions, 2001.
- Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. Random House, 1997.
- Rushdie, Salman. "Step Across This Line." *Collected Nonfiction 1992-2002*, Random House, 2002.
- Savu, Laura E. "Transnationalism and Home in Michael Ondaatje's The English Patient." *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2009, pp. 169-185.

Tötösy de Zepetnek, Steven. "The English Patient and the Possibility of Transnationalism." *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2001, pp. 85-95.

Vertovec, Steven. *Transnationalism*. Routledge. 2009.