



DOI Number of the Paper: <https://zenodo.org/doi/10.5281/zenodo.10866120>

Link of the Paper: <https://jar.bwo-researches.com/index.php/jarh/article/view/379>

Edition Link: [Journal of Academic Research for Humanities JARH, 4\(1\) January-March 2024](#)

HJRS Link: [Journal of Academic Research for Humanities JARH \(HEC-Recognized for 2023-2024\)](#)

A Postcolonial Perspective of Alterity in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*

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Paper Information

Citation of the paper:

(JARH) Riaz-ud-Din, K. and Anwar, S., (2024). A Postcolonial Perspective of Alterity in Michael Ondaatje's 'The English Patient'. In *Journal of Academic Research for Humanities*, 4(1), 13–24B.

QR Code for the Paper:



Subject Areas for JARH:

- 1 English Literature
- 2 Arts & Humanities

Timeline of the Paper at JARH:

Received on: 11-12-2023
 Reviews Completed on: 16-03-2024
 Accepted on: 22-03-2025
 Online on: 24-03-2024

License:



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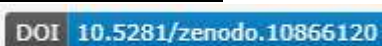
Recognized for BWO-R:



Published by BWO Researches INTL.:



DOI Image of the paper:



Abstract

This article examines alterity in Michael Ondaatje's novel *The English Patient* (1992). It explores the themes of racial and cultural alterity, the binary of "Us" and "Them", and the Orientals as "lamentably alien" from the postcolonial theory of Edward Said. Textual analysis, as a research method, is employed for the collection, analysis, and discussion of data. The three strategies of textual analysis, namely preparation, organizing, and reporting, are utilized to establish a nexus between the theory and data. Humans are a single commune. However, they are categorized into "Us" and "Them" by the leaders and intellectuals of world powers for their national interest. Racism has been proliferated by them. The study explores the racial and cultural alterity of Kip in different geographical locations in the novel. Besides, it endeavours to follow the failed journey of Kip's assimilation into English society. Ondaatje (1992) investigates the impacts of World War II on a group of multicultural characters in a war-torn villa in Italy. The racial and cultural alterity of Kip is a means of amazement in England and Italy. Although he serves altruistically as a bomb disposal specialist during the war, he is treated as a foreigner Sikh. The study finds that the psyche of colonizers and white race is discriminatory towards brown races. They are treated as racially inferior. Since Japan had a brown race population, it was nuked by the United States. Contrariwise, Germany, a white race nation, was overpowered through conventional war.

Keywords: alterity, racism, discrimination, colonizers, inferiority

Introduction

In the wake of decolonization, postcolonial writers in the newly independent states investigated critically "the immense distortion introduced by the empire into the lives of 'lesser' peoples and 'subject races' generation after generation" (Said, 1978, p. xiv). Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2007) assert that the social, cultural, and psychological impacts "of colonization on cultures and societies" (p. 168) of the colonized races were probed by those intellectuals. As observed by Said (1993) "Without empire ... there is no European novel" (p. 69), the bulk of the colonial writings were either partial to imperial powers or distorted the cultures and images of the colonized nations. The 'novels of Empire' are fiction with the backdrop of the colonial world. Prominent examples are "Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901), Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) and E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924)" (Cuddon & Habib, 2013, p. 160). These novels misrepresented the sentiments, cultures, and traditions of the native colonized peoples. They justified the imperialistic policies and projects of European powers.

Postcolonial writers examined imperial writings analytically. Biased colonial misrepresentations were interpreted by writers from erstwhile colonized nations such as "Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Nadine Gordimer, Derek Walcott and R. K. Narayan" (Parameswaran, 1983, p. 34). They challenged the falsification of facts of colonialist writers by writing back at them in their language. Bartels, Eckstein, Waller, and Wiemann (2019) contend that postcolonial writing is representative of authority and emancipation from the domineering culture of colonial Europe since it suggests "having a voice, taking control of a narrative, its interpretation and its communication" (p. 189). Edward Said's seminal book *Orientalism* (1978) serves as a groundbreaking treatise for postcolonial studies. Besides Said, the writings of Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak are highly influential in the area.

Thus, the focus was shifted from the Empire to former colonies. Different themes are explored in postcolonial literature: slavery, hybridity, cultural imperialism, space, diaspora, identity crisis, alterity, ethnicity, and representation and resistance.

Michael Ondaatje is one of the brilliant stars in the galaxy of postcolonial writers. His third novel *The English Patient* (1992) is the focus of this research study. It has occupied an exalted place in postcolonial fiction, as different themes and problems related to the colonial period and its legacies, and the *Second World War (1939–45)* with its unspeakable horrors are explored in it.

Alterity

The term 'alterity' originated from the Latin word 'alterity', which means 'Otherness', different conditions of being, or diversity. The German philosopher Friedrich Hegel has the distinction of being the first scholar to establish alterity or 'Otherness' as a state of identity "in his master-slave allegory" (Herman, Jahn, & Ryan, 2010, p. 12). Alterity is employed by philosophers as a substitute word for 'Otherness', to record a change in the perceptions of the people of the West about the bond between consciousness and the outside world (Ashcroft et al., 2007, p. 9). Scholars have identified different types of alterity: racial, social, cultural, historical, political, and gendered (Gandhi, 1998, p. 24). But fundamental to alterity in the context of postcolonial theory is racism. Ruth Benedict was the first anthropologist to use the term 'racism' in *Race and Racism* (1940) in which "it referred to a set of ideas which defined groups in terms of biological inferiority or superiority" (Clarke, 2003, p. 16). Thus, people are discriminated against on the strength of racial doctrines. Alterity refers to "the colonized" peoples, who were marginalized as a result of colonial discourses, recognized by their variation from the empire, and downgraded to a representation of childish insufficiency. It delineates the term in which "the colonized subject" acquires a perception of identity as

other and subordinate. Accordingly, postcolonial theory identifies that colonial discourse characteristically justifies itself through binary oppositions namely, "maturity/immaturity, civilization/barbarism, developed/developing, progressive/primitive. Critics like Ashis Nandy have especially drawn attention to the colonial use of the homology between childhood and the state of being colonised." (Gandhi, 1998, p. 32)

In postcolonial theory, alterity is adopted to give the perception of deep-rooted racial and cultural Otherness and the methods by which this Otherness is created. It was a universal custom that the colonial culture created the colonized native as the fundamental other of the colonizer white cultures. Nayar (2015) claims that it is argued by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978) that the feeling of the self of the European was created by its comparison with the Asian, Arab and African Other. However, the 'Other' was depicted as an inferior Other (p. 6). Said (1978) claims that Balfour and Cromer ascribed derogatory terms to the Orientals such as illogical, immoral, childish, and quaint; whereas Europeans were eulogized as logical, moral, sophisticated, and exceptional. Due to their innate biasedness towards Orientals, those scholars intentionally divided the world into "Us" and "Them" (p. 40).

Alterity is observed in the present world too, since classification exists in the form of North-South, First World, Second World, and Third World countries. Major Western powers control the decisions of the world in the UN Security Council and IMF. They disregard the opinions and sentiments of the majority of Asian, African and South American people.

Statement of the Problem

All human beings are part of a global community, but they are classified into "Us" and "Them" by the narrow interests of major powers. Racism is propagated by imperial powers and radical nationalists. World War II provides the setting of Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992). Killing and destruction were executed in the name of nationalism.

Humanity was under threat from the war machines of world powers. This study investigates alterity in the different geographical localities in the novel.

Objectives of the Research

1. To examine different kinds of alterity in the varied cultural and geographical localities in Michael Ondaatje's novel *The English Patient*.
2. To explore the failed journey of Kip's assimilation into English society in the novel.

Research Questions

1. What kinds of alterity are depicted in the different cultural and geographical locations in the novel?
2. Why does the assimilation process of Kip in English society fail?

Significance of the Research

This article explores alterity in Ondaatje (1992) from Edward Said's postcolonial theory. This aspect of research is a new addition to the existing compendium of knowledge available on alterity. It is a fact that all human beings are created equal (Kobayashi & Hidaka, 2020, p. 1). But the white races consider themselves superior and civilized, whereas the black and brown races are regarded as inferior and uncivilized (Said, 1978, p. 300). The human race has been categorized unjustly into "Us" and "Them" by the colour of their skin, not by skills or abilities. This study highlights the biased attitudes of European colonizers towards colonized people and the United States' unjustified nuclear bombings of Oriental Japan.

Research Methodology

This study is qualitative. Textual analysis, as a research method, is employed for the interpretation, analysis, and discussion of the text of Ondaatje's (1992) novel *The English Patient*.

Theoretical Framework

The study employs Edward Said's postcolonial theory, enunciated in *Orientalism* (1978), for the analysis of alterity in *The English Patient*. Postcolonial theory concentrates "on

the power relations between colonizer and colonized" (Fludernik, 2007, p. 260). According to Childs and Williams (2013), alterity is one of the most significant obsessions in postcolonial theory (p. 218). The debate of alterity has a deep-rooted history. It is predominantly associated with Edward Said. In the postcolonial theory of Edward Said, the Other is primarily the colonized native, whereas the Self is the colonizer or national of imperial Europe. The major perception of Edward Said concentrates on the notion of orientalism, which is described "as the West's othering of the East in terms of knowledge, power, and status" (Fludernik, 2007, p. 267). The conviction in the inferiority of the colonized Other functions as a justification for the marginalization of the cultural accomplishments of these people and by defiling their civilizations with the imposition of British or French language and culture on them (Fludernik, 2007, p. 267). Said (1978) believes that Orientalism invented an "imaginative geography", where the West represented the difference between "our land-barbarian land" (p. 54). However, "This imaginative geography emphasized and dramatized the cultural differences between 'us' and 'them'." (Nayar, 2010, p. 15).

Literature Review

Vivekanandhan and Sathyanathan (2021) observe that since the colonized countries have been the victims of severe cultural fusion, the fiction produced there is hybrid. They stress that multicultural themes are very significant themes in postcolonial fiction. Identity and cultural hybridity are the major themes in Ondaatje (1992). The scholars believe that postcolonial theory is concerned with matters, namely society, culture, racism, and ethnicity. It lends the power of speech to the marginalized people, who are subjugated by the hegemony of the Empire. The scholars assert that Edward Said and Homi Bhabha are credited as the pioneers of the theory. It calls into question the Manichean views of the colonialists that the colonized subjects are inferior, mean, effeminate, and

untrustworthy. Correspondingly, Habib (2011) pinpoints that postcolonial theory has incorporated targets, primarily, to review the colonial history from the point of view of the colonized; to find out "the economic, political, and cultural impact of colonialism on both the colonized peoples and the colonizing powers; to analyze the process of decolonization; and ... to participate in the goals of political liberation" (p. 272). Moreover, Young (2016) asserts that postcolonial theory is oriented towards "forces of oppression and coercive domination that operate in the contemporary world: the politics of anti-colonialism and neocolonialism, race, gender, nationalisms, class and ethnicities define its terrain" (p. 11). Similarly, Mtairi (2019) maintains that postcolonial theory concentrates on the bonds that exist between the empire and its colonized subjects. Besides, it aims to examine the repression of colonizers, the struggle of the colonized against colonialism, the impact of colonization on colonizers and colonized, the relationship between them, diasporic identities, assimilation of cultures, and cultural hybridity.

Shabanirad and Marandi (2015) have observed that the meaning of Orientalism for Edward Said was the compendium of misrepresentations, stereotypes, fabrications, and illusions, which were invented by Western scholars about the Orient to dominate it. The scholars observe that George Orwell, who is a writer from the West, has tasted imperialism as a colonial administrator in Burma. Orwell reflected on the subject of colonialism in his novel *Burmese Days* (1934). The novelist endeavours to convince his readers that the practice of imperialism is unethical. They opine that imperialism was seen by Orwell as a system based on injustices and discrimination, and he challenged it along with *Empire* in his novel. But he has negated his perspective wittingly and unwittingly, and adhered to the imperial discourse of the Orientalists. The scholars expounded the ways and methods by which Orwell maintained "a white male Eurocentric

imperialist viewpoint" (p. 22). They concluded that on the one hand, Orwell had represented Oriental women as oppressed, whereas on the other, they were portrayed as being docile, mute, enticing and licentious.

Analysis and Discussion

The English Patient (1992) is "a hauntingly beautiful tale weaves myths and metaphors around the end of Empire" (Iyer, 1993, p. 48). The setting of the novel is the twilight of the Empire. The charred body of a bedridden English patient at Villa San Girolamo symbolizes the death of the old world of imperialism. The new dawn is visible on the horizon which will herald the birth of a new world, where people will draw maps by carving up the Empire. Ross (1992) pinpoints, "*The English Patient* is much darker. The patient might be a metaphor for the British empire, dying slowly, haunted by memory. 'That's one of the reasons I picked the title,' says Ondaatje". (para. 25).

Ondaatje (1992) "investigates the politics of race, displaces the white man's burden by illustrating imperialism's malevolence towards coloured skin" (Irvine, 1995, p. 143). He explores alterity and racism in the novel along with other themes. The plot of the novel is inspired by the stories and identities of four multicultural characters. Destiny has brought them into a war-ravaged villa in Italy during the war. Memory is the most significant element in the novel. The plot is woven by the stories and anecdotes of the characters by flashbacks. They have reconstructed their painful past from memories. Moreover, they have either served or are serving imperial powers. However, they are not immune from the atrocities of the war. Williams (1998) observes that these frail characters are damaged either physically or mentally by the violence committed in this "strange time, the end of a war" (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 57), in the name of empire and nationalism.

Alterity

Alterity is the basic concern in postcolonial theory, which concentrates "on the power relations between colonizer and colonized"

(Fludernik, 2007, p. 260). The debate of alterity has a deep-rooted history. It is predominantly associated with Edward Said. In the postcolonial theory of Edward Said, the Other is primarily the colonized native, whereas the Self is the colonizer or national of imperial Europe (Fludernik, 2007, p. 265). The Villa San Girolamo is dwelled by the four protagonists of *The English Patient*. They belong to different races, cultures, and professions. The English patient or Almasy, Hana and Caravaggio are the representatives of the white race, whereas Kirpal Singh or Kip belongs to the brown race. Almasy has served the imperial powers directly or indirectly, but he is an exponent of a nationless world. Although Canada, the native country of Hana and Caravaggio, was a British colony in the near past, however, they represent the colonizers of the West like Almasy. Conversely, India, the homeland of Kip, is a British colony, therefore he is the only colonized member of the quartet. According to Hamer (1989), as Edward Said has demonstrated ... the colonized is typically passive and spoken for, and does not control its representation but is represented by a hegemonic impulse by which it is constructed as a stable and unitary entity. ... bringing it within the confines of knowledge, making it knowable, robs the colonized, as Said claims, of contradiction and depth, to be left drained and empty under the gaze of the conqueror. (p. 195)

Curiously, Kirpal Singh is not introduced in the novel by his name Michael Ondaatje, but as an anonymous Sikh soldier. When Hana was playing the piano during the darkness of night, the sound alerted sappers in the area because the retreating Germans booby-trapped most of the musical instruments in the suburb of Florence. Accordingly, two soldiers entered the Villa, and in the bolt of lightning, she noticed that "one of the men was a Sikh" (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 67). Ondaatje (1992) keeps his name as a closely guarded secret from the readers for the better part of the Third Chapter of the novel, and it is analogous to the mystery of the true identity and name of the English patient. It is extremely

puzzling that Ondaatje (1992) does not present him as Kirpal Singh or Kip, but rather he is mentioned variously as "a Sikh" (p. 75), "the Sikh" (p. 76), "the sapper" (p. 75), "the Sikh sapper" (p. 92), "the young sapper" (p. 75), "the young soldier" (p. 77), and "the young Sikh sapper" (p. 74). Ironically, his nickname Kip is announced to the reader by an anecdote. During his military training in England, Kirpal Singh is nicknamed Kip by his unit's fellows. A slight mishap became the basis of the coining of his nickname. Some marks of butter were found on the sheet of paper, containing his first bomb-clearing report in England. This clumsy handling of the report spurred his officer to retort, "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 ... had been forgotten." (Ondaatje, 1992, pp. 93–94). However, he does not record his protest, but rather likes the idea of a shorter version of his name, because it is fashionable in English society. Thus, the colonized furnishes his representation, since his patronymic is thrown into oblivion. It is relevant to mention the first epigraph of Said (1978), in which Karl Marx is quoted: "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented" (p. xxvi).

Racial and Cultural Alterity

Bhabha (1994) observes, "The postcolonial perspective ... insists that cultural and political identity are constructed through a process of alterity. Questions of race and cultural difference overlay issues of sexuality and gender and overdetermine the social alliances of class and democratic socialism" (p. 251). The creation of the character of Kip by Ondaatje (1992) is methodical. Although British India was inhabited by Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, he created an Indian Sikh character having characteristic features as a representative of colonized Other on purpose. Sikhs are distinctive for their physical attributes: rounded or peaked turbans, *kesh* (uncut hair), and *kara* (steel bracelet) (Barwiński & Musiaka, 2019, p. 169). It is by

design that he is introduced by his race "a Sikh" (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 67). His dramatic entrance into the Villa revealed his racial identity to Hana, who recognized him by his physical traits. "He ... stood there for a while in darkness, a lean boy, a dark turban, the *kara* loose on his wrist against the skin" (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 233).

Kip is the only Indian Sikh, who volunteers to become a sapper during his military training in England. Ondaatje (1992) observes that Kip was sceptical about his selection in the bomb disposal unit due to his brown race, although he has a knack for technology, since "[h]e had come from a country where mathematics and mechanics were natural traits" (p. 200). Kip is not wrong in his assessment when he boasted about the consummate skills of his Sikh race in the use of technology and machines. He displayed his intrinsic aptitude towards machines by defusing unexploded dreadful bombs. Ondaatje (1992) reflects that it is a matter of routine for Kip to spend "all day in a clay pit dismantling a bomb that might kill him at any moment, could come home from the burial of a fellow sapper, ... but whatever the trials around him there was always solution and light" (p. 289). Although the situation in Europe during the war was far from normal, and he was a stranger on foreign soil, he risked his life to save humans from the horrors of bombs.

After he decided to enlist in the British military, he was examined by a medical doctor, and "there was yellow chalk scribbled onto [their] bodies when [they] lined up in the Lahore courtyard" (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 212). Ondaatje (1992) believes that the whole process of recruitment was found extremely annoying by Kip, but he turned a blind eye to the greater cause of humanity. The way slates were tied to their necks with scribbled yellow chalk notes was reminiscent of the antebellum American slavery. However, he was not furious at the degrading and inhuman treatment, but he believed that his brother, who was an ardent nationalist, would have taken exception to it. He would have washed both the vestiges of slavery and his

unbridled fury by pouring a bucket of water from a nearby well over his body. It was observed by Kip that the behaviour of the officers was very rude. This attitude of the colonizer's officers was universal because as masters of the land, they always displayed their "racial superiority" (Said, 1978, p. 15). Memmi (2003) opines that the colonized is the "creature of oppression" since they are oppressed not only physically, but also mentally (p. 163).

In England, Kip is subjected to racial discrimination. He senses his racial alterity because he is seen everywhere as "a black figure, the background radicalizing the darkness of his skin and his khaki uniform" (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 193). During his application processing stage for a bomb disposal unit, he glances casually at the books in the office. However, when he turned and caught the woman's eyes on him ... 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. (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 200)

Memmi (2003) observes, "Racism is ingrained in actions, institutions, and like the colonialist methods" (p. 20). Kip is fully mindful of his racial alterity. He is on foreign soil among perfect strangers, who have no inkling about the ethos of his race, culture, and religion. But for the sake of humanity, he is there and is fighting someone else's wars on a transcontinental turf. He is termed accurately as "*fato profugus* – fate's fugitive" (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 291) by the English patient.

He was accustomed to his invisibility. In England, he was ignored in the various barracks, and he came to prefer that. 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 (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 209).

After the death of his guru Lord Suffolk, Kip is elevated to the position of the head of his bomb disposal unit. However, his English subordinates felt insulted to accept his superior

position. Kip did not challenge their racial prejudice, because he considered, "It is not a question of superiority and inferiority" (Said, 1978, p. 33). Ondaatje (1992) notes that Kip "was ten years younger than Hardy, and no Englishman, but Hardy was happiest in the *cocoon* of regimental discipline. There was always hesitation by the soldiers to call him 'sir,' but Hardy barked it out loud and enthusiastically" (p. 225).

Although Kip is inspired by the culture, habits, and etiquette of Western society, he has not forgotten his Indian habits. Caravaggio was amazed when he observed that "He is always washing his hands. ... 'How did you get through a war?' Caravaggio laughs. 'I grew up in India, Uncle. You wash your hands all the time. Before all meals. A habit.'" (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 81). Nonetheless, with time, Hana and Caravaggio get accustomed to his social and cultural alterity. Even, when Hana sees Caravaggio "from a window eating with his hands as he sits on one of the thirty-six steps by the chapel, not a fork or a knife in sight, as if he were learning to eat like someone from the East" (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 42), it astonishes her greatly. However, they adapted themselves to his eating habits. He always brings his herbaceous food to the table. "His onions and his herbs – which Caravaggio suspected he was taking from the Franciscans' garden ... He peeled the onions with the same knife he used to strip rubber from a fuze wire." (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 92).

Despite his military training in England, Kip never shuns his Indian habits and customs. Although he is immersed in English society, he does not forget his identity and culture. The English relish to eat beef, but as a Sikh, he prefers to be a vegetarian just like his fellow Sikhs. He also favours eating with his right hand, instead of using cutlery. And it is a source of astonishment for Caravaggio. According to Ondaatje (1992), "There is probably some rare animal, Caravaggio thinks, who eats the same foods that this young soldier eats with his right hand ... He uses the knife only to peel the skin

from the onion, to slice fruit" (p. 93). This judgment of Caravaggio is extremely unjustified. It portrays "the inherent superiority of the [white] race" (Said, 1993, p. 101).

Orientalists are always painted as lazy by the colonialists, but Kip is very punctual. At dawn, "he pours tooth powder onto the brush and begins a ten-minute session of ... brushing" (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 92). "For most of his childhood in Lahore, he slept on a mat on the floor of his bedroom. And in truth, he has never gotten accustomed to the beds of the West" (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 298). It does not matter, whether he is in England or Italy, he sleeps on the floor or carpet. Even, his lovers Hana and Caravaggio sometimes make fun of his cultural alterity. "They were ... turning silly in their toasts to the sapper – 'the great forager'." (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 283).

Binary of "Us" and "Them"

According to Said (1978), Orientalism invented an "imaginative geography", where the West represented the difference between "our land-barbarian land" (p. 54). "This imaginative geography emphasized and dramatized the cultural differences between 'us' and 'them'." (Nayar, 2010, p. 15). It is elaborated further by Said (1978) that "imaginative geography of the 'our land-barbarian land' variety ... is enough for 'us' to set up these boundaries in our minds" (54). Kip is conscious of his alterity and the reality of his being a member of a colonized race. When he moves into the Villa, he refrains from entering it because it is inhabited by the white members of the quartet, but rather he "sets up a tent in the far reaches of the garden" (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 76). Dougherty (2019) claims, "[b]y locating his tent on edges of the Villa's land, Kip stakes out a marginal position concerning the others" (p. 38). Kip draws a boundary voluntarily between "Us" and "Them" to claim his own space. However, he is under the gaze of Hana and Caravaggio, who are the representatives of the colonizer of the West. All his activities are monitored surreptitiously by them. They give representation to his actions in the Villa. In this

way, the racial and cultural alterity of Kip is closely observed by Hana. Ondaatje (1992) remarks that Hana "notices the darker brown skin of his wrist, which slides freely within the bangle that clinks sometimes when he drinks a cup of tea in front of her" (p. 78). "She sees his shirtless brown body as he tosses water over himself like a bird using its wing" (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 77). Since the Orientals are considered strange and exotic by people of the West, the brown colour of Kip fascinates Hana. She is very curious to explore his eccentric habits and customs. But the use of the simile "bird" for Kip clearly illustrates the weak and vulnerable position of the colonized people. This direct comparison by Ondaatje (1992) depicts the worth of the Other in a chaotic situation, and it is unjustifiable for an altruistic sapper, who is "fighting English wars" (p. 129). However, Kip "seems casually content with this small group in the villa, some kind of loose star on the edge of their system. This is like a holiday for him after the war of mud and rivers and bridges" (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 79).

Kip has pitched his tent on the fringe of the Villa. This "tent keeps the distinction between east and west, India and Europe, very clear" (Dougherty, 2019, p. 39). However, in a very bizarre way, "[h]e sleeps half in and half out of the tent" (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 81). Since he is away from his home, the tent is his home. It provides him space, where he can reflect on his past, his family, and his native country. "In the tent, he unwinds the wet turban, dries his hair and weaves another around his head" (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 295).

In the Villa, Hana becomes his paramour. But she is a representative of the white race, and she has been highly inquisitive about the colour of his skin and his race. Michael Ondaatje perceives that for Hana, Kip is "being the anonymous member of another race, a part of the invisible world" (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 209). "He was unaware that for her he was just a silhouette, his slight body and his skin part of the darkness" (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 121). Notwithstanding her

biasedness, it becomes routine for her to visit him in his tent after administering a morphine dose to her patient. As Kip is very imaginative, he transports her to India in his imagination, and he conjures up the five rivers of his country for her. However, it is observed by Ondaatje (1992) that for her, he "remained the foreigner, the Sikh" (p. 111). Moreover, Hana "imagines all of Asia through the gestures of this one man. The way he lazily moves, his quiet civilisation" (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 229). Loomba (2015) corroborates the observation of Ondaatje (1992), "laziness, aggression, violence, greed, sexual promiscuity and deviance, female masculinity and male effeminacy, bestiality, primitivism, innocence and irrationality are attributed ... by the English, French, Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese colonists to" (p. 115) colonized others. Hana "learns all the varieties of his darkness. The colour of his forearm against the colour of his neck. The colour of his palms, his cheek, the skin under the turban. The darkness of fingers separating red and black wires" (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 134). Said (1978) observes, "Denys Hay has called the idea of Europe, a collective notion identifying 'us' Europeans as against all 'those' non-Europeans, and ... the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures." (p. 7). As both Hana and Kip are the representatives of diverse races, their relationship has been aptly described by Ondaatje (1992), "they were most intimate at in the tent or the English patient's room, both of which contained the turbulent river of space between them" (p. 320).

Furthermore, Said (1978) claims that the colonized people of the East are portrayed by Western scholars, to be gullible, 'devoid of energy and initiative', much given to 'fulsome flattery', intrigue, cunning, and unkindness to animals; [they] cannot walk on either a road or a pavement ... [they] are inveterate liars, they are 'lethargic and suspicious', and in everything oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race. (pp. 38–39)

Conversely, Kip is kind, altruistic, energetic, and agile. He is the conscience of the novel. His choice of profession is extremely dangerous in the World War II scenario, but he wants to save humanity from the horrors of bombs. He is the second son of his parent, and it is his family tradition that the second son will become a doctor. But when the war came, he ignored his family aspirations, and "joined a Sikh regiment and was shipped to England. ... he had volunteered himself into a unit of engineers that had been set up to deal with delayed-action and unexploded bombs" (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 194). He leads from the front. First, it was at the mercy of German Airpower in England. After the capitulation of France to Germany in 1940, England was the primary target of German bombings. "By August the blitz had begun, and in one month there were suddenly 2,500 unexploded bombs ... By September the number of live bombs had reached 3,700." (Ondaatje, 1992, pp. 195–96). Then, he is transported along with his team to Italy in 1944, where "he was protecting [the people] like children from the mine" (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 121).

The Orientals as "Lamentably Alien"

Said (1978) claims, along with all other peoples variously designated as backward, degenerate, uncivilized, and retarded, the Orientals were viewed in a framework constructed out of biological determinism and moral-political admonishment. The Oriental was linked thus to elements in Western society (delinquents, the insane, women, the poor) having in common an identity best described as lamentably alien. Orientals were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through and analyzed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined or—as the colonial powers openly coveted their territory—taken over (p. 207).

The catastrophic news of the bombings of Japan jolts the imaginary world of Kip. He is stupefied because "he sees the streets of Asia full of fire. It rolls across cities like a burst map, the hurricane of heat withering bodies as it

meets them, the shadow of humans suddenly in the air" (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 302). The predicament of the Orient is recapitulated by Said (1978) that the scholars of the West have always visualized, "the Orient is ... either to be feared (the Yellow Peril, the Mongol hordes, the brown dominions) or to be controlled (by pacification, research and development, outright occupation whenever possible)" (p. 301). It is a fact that the Americans and their allies were fighting Germany and Japan. Ironically, Germany, a nation of the white race, was defeated through conventional weapons. In contrast, Japan, an Oriental state with a brown race population, was nuked to test the efficacy of the newly invented weapon on human beings. It is the darkest chapter of history when more than one hundred and ten thousand innocent souls were burnt in the red-hot furnace of uranium in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The bombings are termed by Ondaatje (1992) as "tremor of Western wisdom" (p. 302), "[t]he death of a civilization" (p. 304), and "*the end of the world*" (p. 311). It demonstrated the savagery of the white races towards the brown races of the Orient. They could have easily defeated Japanese forces through conventional war, but their hatred for the brown races as "lamentably alien" spurred them to take such a punitive action, which will be unimaginable for other powers to resort to in the future.

Kip is a symbol of humanity in the novel. As a bomb-defusing specialist, he neutralized countless bombs in England and Italy. However, the news of American nuclear attacks is heartbreaking for him. He felt himself powerless. This bomb, which is the mother of all bombs, is beyond his capacity to defuse. He is unable to help his "lamentably alien" fellows of the Orient. And it is for the first time, that he realizes that he is exploited by the colonized British military. In his diatribe as a mouthpiece of Michael Ondaatje, Kip challenges the military might of white races led by England:

Your fragile white island that with customs and manners and books and prefects and reason

somehow converted the rest of the world. ... Was it just ships that gave you such power? Was it ... the histories and printing presses? (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 301)

In a state of frenzy, Kip points his gun at the English patient, but he is reminded by Caravaggio that "[h]e isn't an Englishman" (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 304). However, Kip replies with his postcolonial logic as a representative of Michael Ondaatje and Colonized Other.

American, French, I don't care. When you start bombing the brown races of the world, you're an Englishman. You had King Leopold of Belgium and now you have fucking Harry Truman of the USA. You all learned it from the English (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 304).

It is visualized by the postcolonial mind of Kip that "the bodies that burn in Asia are brown, just as the voices infiltrating hatred are white" (Marinkova, 2011, p. 121). Though Kip wanted genuinely to assimilate into Western society, this unfortunate episode forces him to leave his lover Hana and Europe to their fate, and he "is no longer their sentinel" (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 304). He decides to return to his native country India to free it from the yoke of British imperialism.

Conclusion

The study recapitulates that the Western powers have vindicated their colonialism on the premise of alterity. The white races believed themselves as superior, whereas the black and brown races were imagined as inferior. The racial and cultural alterity of Kip was highlighted by Ondaatje (1992) in England and Italy. Besides, the arrogant attitudes and racial discrimination of the colonizers were exposed during the interpretation of the text. Kip was adored for his services, but marginalized for the colour of his skin. He was mocked for his physical features. His social mingling was discouraged. He loved English music and customs, however, their racist attitudes impeded his assimilation into their society. He was treated as a foreigner Sikh. He was dubbed "the great forager" and "rare animal". It is further observed that the psyche of the colonizers and white race was biased and

discriminatory towards colonized Others. They were treated as racially inferior. It was discovered that the United States, as a leader of the West, nuked Japan since it had a brown race population. In contrast, Germany, a fierce enemy with white race inhabitants, was defeated through conventional warfare. The punitive action of the United States was termed by Ondaatje (1992) as "tremor of Western wisdom" (p. 302), "[t]he death of a civilization" (p. 304), and "the end of the world" (p. 311).

Ondaatje (1992) explored the fragile relationships between the white race and the brown race. He criticized the role of England in the subjugation of free people as well as the nuking of Japan. He announced implicitly that the aftermath of Hiroshima had given birth to neocolonialism spearheaded by the United States. This study is a new addition to the compendium of knowledge on alterity and postcolonial literature. It has explored alterity from the postcolonial theory of Edward Said. It will give fresh insight to future researchers and scholars working in the area.

Recommendations

The English Patient (1992) can be explored through Psychoanalytic Theory. Since the identity of the bedridden protagonist the English patient is an enigma, his identity is hidden for the better part of the novel. Memory plays a significant role in the novel. Despite his physical handicap, the mind of the English patient is sound and brimming with information. The mental processes of his mind can be investigated thoroughly.

Innovation

This research work has applied postcolonial theory innovatively to the analysis of 'The English Patient' (1992). It has offered fresh insights into the representation of race, identity, and power dynamics. It has also highlighted inventively the altruism and heroism of Kip, a member of the brown race and a colonized, on foreign soil amid unexploded bombs. The paper is conveying the version of BWO Research Intl. "Empowering Humanity with Knowledge through Research".

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