The question of identity in Michael Ondaatje's „The English Patient“

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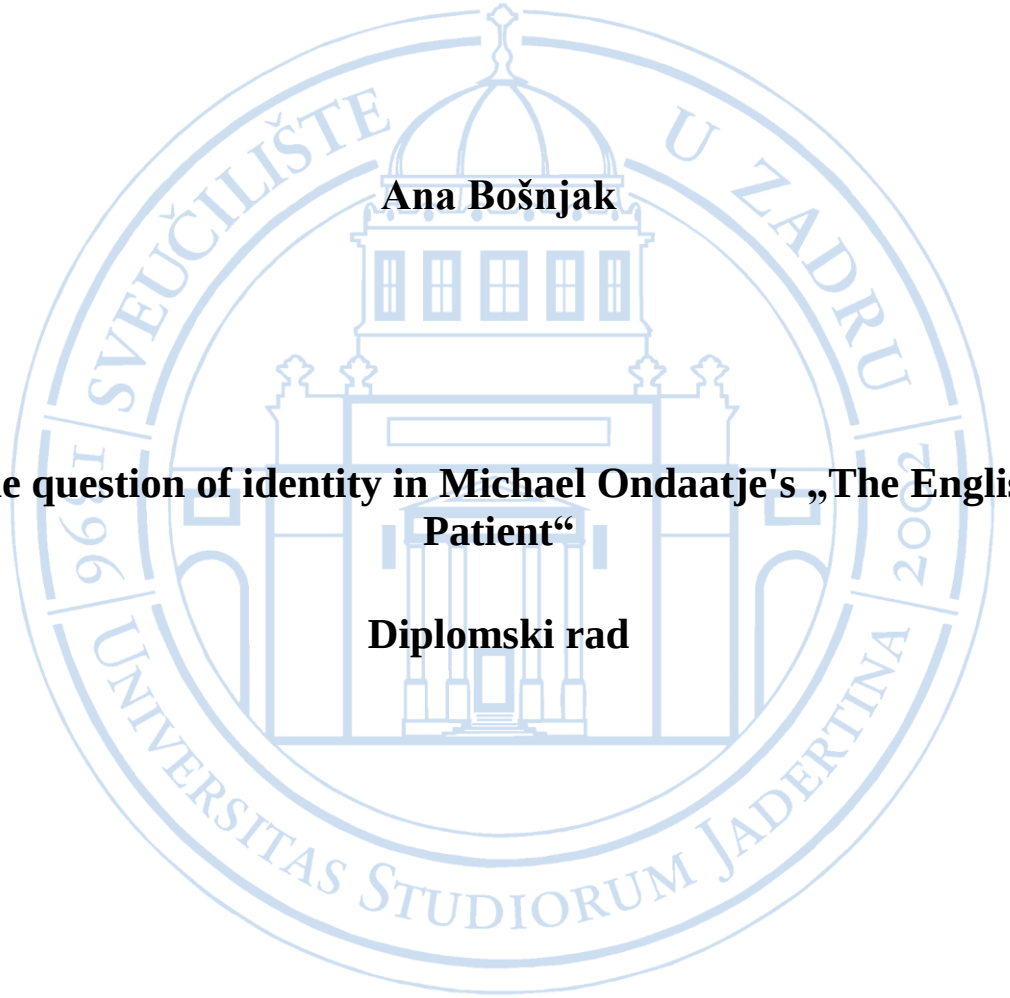
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Sveučilište u Zadru

Odjel za anglistiku

Diplomski sveučilišni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti; smjer: nastavnički (dvopredmetni)



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Diplomski rad

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Zadar, 2016.

Izjava o akademskoj čestitosti

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Zadar, 29. rujan 2016.

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1. Introduction

This master's thesis deals with the complex nature of one's identity which is put to focus under wartime circumstances. In *The English Patient*, the main characters can be seen as representatives of their nations and their involvement in WWII is examined to make the reader question the role of identity in that historic period and in general. The novel itself is a work of art, written in extremely poetic language that helps envision the scenery which is so significant that it can be regarded as a character as well. Images and sounds of nature complement each scene and the story in whole.

A group of random people find each other in an unknown territory and unknown roles. Through their previously unimagined relationships they find what each of them is missing – hope, compassion, understanding, love and closure. They decide to put aside their differences and focus on the positive qualities of mankind by creating a world of their own which does not subjugate to outer rules and rulers. They are all faced with the problem of displacement as they all find themselves in a foreign country and being part of a war they neither approve of nor belong to. Displacement and identity are common themes in postcolonial literature, when the characters feel in-between nations and in-between identities. Ondaatje shows Canadian multiculturalism through his characters by giving importance to their cultures, customs and beliefs.

This is a story that also includes eternal themes of love and war, fidelity and loyalty, betrayal and vengeance and many others, all existing in this multicultural setting that the writer creates with such attention to details, making it hard for the reader not to get involved and imagine themselves as a part of it. All the characters tell their own stories and though we are aware that we only hear their side, we cannot help but immediately sympathize with them.

They are all victims of the war but they also play their part in it, they are not completely innocent. Every war, like every other story passed on through history, has various points of view. There are multiple sides and multiple interpretations which make it hard to extracts some facts and determine the exact sequence. That is why history is sometimes seen as ambiguous, giving official overview using evidence but still leaving room for many mysteries and emotions in relation to these stories.

Mapping a territory is usually done to insert power over it. When colonizers discover an attractive territory, they map it to show their dominance and control. With this action they also map the natives of the territory, imposing their self-proclaimed superiority based on their knowledge and prosperity. This mapping is presented as a scientific exploration, but it is de facto carried out for military purposes. It is used as a guide for finding strategic points which can be used in battle. By mapping and changing the original environment, the colonizers change the identity of the natives which are then considered colonised.

The novel *The English Patient* gained much success upon its publication and in 1996 it was adapted into a romantic drama war film. The film received critical acclaim and was a box office success and a major award winner (9 Academy Awards). It follows the plot of the novel but focuses more on the romances in order to attract a wider audience. Ondaatje himself worked closely with the filmmakers to accurately transfer the novel's poetic language onto the big screen.

1.1. Outline of the thesis

The thesis opens up with the introductory chapter on the subject matter and the overall aim of the analysis. It provides basic information about the author and his cultural background

as well as his writing style. In the following chapter, a brief summary of the plot is provided to help the reader understand the story in whole. Historical implications are described in the fourth chapter and the author's intentions are explained. The fifth chapter deals with the problem of identity for each character separately and in relation to other characters. The connection the characters share is a key to understanding their displacement and understanding the novel in general. Major themes, motifs and symbols are revealed in the six chapter which puts an emphasis on the characters' emotional states and cherishes their connection with nature. The novel was adapted into an Academy Award-winning film released in 1997 and the final chapter brings an overview of differences between the novel and the film. It depicts how cinematic techniques can make the audience experience the story in many ways as they give importance to every detail. The thesis ends with the conclusion on the main themes and questions regarding identity, nationality and human relations in wartime.

2. Author

Michael Ondaatje was born in 1943 in Colombo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), immigrated to Canada via England in 1962 and became a Canadian citizen in 1965. He received his BA from the University of Toronto in 1965 and his MA from Queens University in Kingston. In 1971 he began teaching at York University in Toronto, where he resides[1].

Ondaatje first gained his literary reputation as a poet but it was his fiction that has contributed greatly to his national and international renown. Ondaatje's most acclaimed novel to date is *The English Patient*, which won the Booker Prize upon its publication in 1992. Ondaatje became the first Canadian ever to receive that prestigious award. The novel was adapted into a film by Anthony Minghella that won 9 Academy Awards including the one for Best Picture in 1997[2].

As an immigrant to Canada's multicultural society, much of Ondaatje's writing is about identity, history and about people of 'in-between'. These topics gain more and more on their importance in this age of globalization, disappearing borders and the migration of people whether for economic, political or other reasons.

Ondaatje's style of writing is very poetic, characterized by images of multiculturalism, colonialism and romantic exoticism. Although he claims that his work is pure fiction, many historical figures and events play crucial roles in his plots. Besides historical accuracy, his other preoccupations are fragmented consciousness and fragmented sentence structure.

[1] http://postcolonialstudies.emory.edu/michael-ondaatje/
[2] http://www.miramax.com/movie/the-english-patient

3. Plot overview

The story deals with the gradually revealed histories of four occupants of the Villa San Girolamo, situated in the hills north of Florence and severely damaged during World War II. The novel resists chronological order - the past and the present are continually intertwined as the narrative structure is often interrupted by flashbacks and past occurrences.

The novel opens with Hana, a nurse from Canada, caring for a pilot who was burned beyond recognition in a plane wreck, has no identification and cannot remember his name. Thanks to his accent, he is simply known as "the English Patient". His only possession is a copy of Herodotus's *The Histories*. Later, it is revealed that the patient is, in fact, László de Almásy, a Hungarian count and a desert explorer.

Hana is only twenty years old but has been through much during the war. After losing her father, she decided not to get too personal with her patients. Even though she does not know much about the English patient, she refuses to leave him and decides to make his last months less painful by infusing him with sufficient doses of morphine while reading to him by his bedside and piecing together his story from the shards of his memories.

A man with bandaged hands, called Caravaggio, arrives at the villa. He is an old friend of Hana's father and another victim of the war. Having a reputation of a thief back in Canada, his skills were put to work by the British Intelligence in North Africa during the war. After being caught by the Germans on one of his spy missions, he was tortured and crippled both physically and emotionally for the rest of his life.

The quartet is completed by an Indian Sikh trained as a sapper, or bomb-defuser, in the British Army. His name is Kirpal Singh but the British call him Kip. Kip's unit is in charge of demining the whole area where the Germans have left booby-trapped bombs. After defusing a

bomb with Hana's help, the experience raises strong feelings between them as he feels he is somehow responsible for her. They soon become lovers.

In time, the patient begins to reveal his story: he was part of an international geographic expedition exploring the North African desert that went searching for the lost oasis of Zerzura in 1930. In 1936, a young British aristocrat Geoffrey Clifton and his wife Katharine joined the expedition. One night, after hearing Katharine read a passage from his book; Almásy realized he was in love with her. They began a passionate affair feeling obsessed with each other while trying to hide from Geoffrey and the rest of the crew. Although they ended their relationship, Geoffrey eventually found out and tried to kill all three of them by crashing a plane into Almasy. The crash missed Almásy, killed Geoffrey and left Katharine severely injured. Trying to get help, Almásy was locked up as a spy by the British due to his foreign-sounding name. Upon his release, he made a deal with the Germans and came back for Katharine's body to the Cave of Swimmers where he had left her. His plane caught fire and Almásy, covered in flames, was rescued by the Bedouins who cared for him before he ended up in a war-hospital where he met Hana.

Caravaggio's suspicions that Almásy is not really English are confirmed and he fills in Almásy's gaps in the story. Geoffrey was an agent of British Intelligence who knew about the affair the whole time. They planned to kill Almásy in the desert but lost him before the plane crash that left him unrecognizable.

The last chapter focuses on Kip and his story as a Sikh in the British world in which he is very comfortable until he hears of the atomic bomb that the Allies have dropped on Japan. Enraged, he wants to kill Almásy for he is a representative of the West, but decides not to and leaves the villa. Years later, Kip is a family man and a doctor in India. Although he is happy and fulfilled, he often wonders about Hana.

4. The question of history

Readers of fiction are insatiably interested in the "real" story behind the fictionalized persons and events. Though several characters in the novel are marginal figures from history, that does not necessarily mean that this novel is a historical novel. As a matter of fact, Ondaatje himself, in his acknowledgments, notes that some of the characters in the book are based on actual historical figures, but stresses that the story and the portraits of the characters are fictional. He claims that beyond the sources cited in acknowledgments, he was unaware of the history of any of the characters involved and that his work is purely fictional.

A part of the true historical basis for the novel is the passage taken from the minutes of the Geographical Society meeting of November 194-, that mentions the tragedy of the Cliftons and serves as the novel's epigraph:

> Most of you, I am sure, remember the tragic circumstances of the death of Geoffrey Clifton at Gilf Kebir, followed later by the disappearance of his wife Katharine Clifton, which took place during the 1939 desert expedition in search of Zerzura.
>
> I cannot begin this meeting tonight without referring very sympathetically to those tragic occurrences.
>
> The lecture this evening . . .

This excerpt draws attention to the multiple realities which exist in the novel. On the one hand, there is the brief and superficial tone that characterizes official reports and history books that, in this case, serve the geographers and desert explorers in search of Zerzura. On the other hand, fact is that reports of this kind often omit many stories, mysteries and emotions related to the topic. There is an endless number of possibilities that lie below these

excerpts as they do not tell the whole truth. Ondaatje took advantage of that and created an entire novel around the mystery of the Cliftons and the desert explorer László de Almásy.

Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek was specifically interested in the historical background of the novel. In his paper "Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, 'History,' and the Other" (1999), he discusses the true identity of Almásy and the married couple Sir Robert Clayton and Lady Clayton East Clayton (Geoffrey and Katharine Clifton in the novel).

László de Almásy, Count of Zsadány and Törökszentmiklós, second son of the ethnographer, zoologist, and Asia-explorer György Almásy, was born 22 August 1895 in the family's castle, Borostyánkö, and died in Salzburg 22 March 1951. As a cartographer and explorer, he discovered the lost and legendary oasis Zerzura in the Lybian desert, prehistorical paintings in the caves of the Uweinat mountain and collected many geographical data of the Lybian desert. Several works were published in Hungarian, French and German about his travels to many parts of Africa and, in addition to *The English Patient*, his life inspired four more novels (Tötösy de Zepetnek 3).

Similar to the elusive identity of the English Patient in the novel, Almásy's personal life raises a few questions. While Hungarian encyclopaedias and genealogical sources do not leave any doubts about Almásy's aristocratic rank, János Gudenus and László Szentirmay, whose book about the fate of Hungarian aristocrats after the Second World War is acknowledged as an authoritative source, suggest that Almásy could not have been an aristocrat. They claim that Almásy was a member of the branch of the Almásy family that did not receive the title of count and remained in the ranks of the middle nobility. Gudenus and Szentirmay write:

> In the aristocratic line of the Almásy family there was no László. Surely the reference is to László (de) Almásy, the renowned Africa explorer and

> discoverer, whom the Hungarian General Staff, in his rank as a reserve officer of the Royal Hungarian Army, assigned to General Rommel as a desert expert. After the war he was exonerated and declared innocent of war crimes. In Egypt, he is highly regarded and several institutions are named in his honour. (qtd. in Tötösy de Zepetnek 4)

On the other hand, there is evidence that Almásy received the title orally from the last Emperor of Austria-Hungary, Karl, during his attempt in 1921 to drive with Almásy from Switzerland to Hungary to reclaim his throne as King of Hungary, but Almásy's rank and title of count was not recognized by the Hungarian parliament. Nevertheless, Almásy used the title and Hungarian sources published between the two world wars listed him with the title of count. His usage of the title is not necessarily an act of usurpation but serves as an interesting connection to the character of Almásy in the novel (Tötösy de Zepetnek 4).

Another aspect of Almásy's life that still remains unresolved is his role in the Second World War. Due to his expertise of the Sahara and Northern Africa, he was very precious to the Royal Hungarian Army. As a reserve officer, he was first drafted to active duty by the German army to serve General Rommel. His activities became an issue with the secret and intelligence services of England, Egypt, and Italy, as he was considered a German spy. In the 'Operation Salam' he took two German agents across the desert, from Lybia to Egypt, deep behind the Allied lines. Only after the release of the film *The English Patient* was the question of Nazi connection raised. It is impossible to establish whether Almásy was a Nazi sympathiser or not. Although there is some evidence that he approved of Hitler's economic and social policies, there is also a number of sources claiming that Almásy, using his connections, saved several Jewish-Hungarian families during the final days of the war in 1944 (Tötösy de Zepetnek 6).

One of the novel's main interests is the love story of Almásy and Katharine, which serves as another indicator that this is indeed a work of fiction, as it seems to be that, in his real life, Almásy was actually a homosexual. Allegedly, he had a homosexual relationship with general Rommel. Their relationship has been reported after the release of the film in 1996 by a nephew of the general. Other sources, confirming the long-time rumours about his sexuality, are the love letters between him and a young soldier Hans Entholt, found in Germany. Like his lover in the novel, Katharine, his real life homosexual lover Hans died tragically during Rommel's retreat from Africa after stepping on one of his own side's landmines.[3]

Sir Robert Clayton began his cartographic and anthropological travels on the Nile with Almásy after 1931. He was a British aristocrat with a pilot's licence, interested in geographical discoveries and keen to find the legendary oasis called Zerzura. Immediately after his marriage in 1932, he set out with Almásy's crew to explore the unknown area of the Lybian Desert north of the Gilf Kebir, but after being lost for several days in the desert, the expedition returned without achieving its object. In a few weeks, Sir Robert developed a disease similar to infantile paralysis and died at the age of 24 (Tötösy de Zepetnek 5).

Dissimilar to Almásy, the historical data about Lady Clayton is clear – she was a very experienced pilot and a talented sculptor. She accompanied her husband in several expeditions and after his death carried on with his work. However, her own expedition in the Lybian desert where she flew her own plane was unsuccessful. It is obvious that Lady Clayton and Almásy knew each other from previous expeditions, but there are no indications that Almásy ever accompanied her to these expeditions due to his own parallel ones at the same time. Five days upon her return to England from an expedition to Lapland, she fell to her death during a

[3] http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1263670/Inspiration-The-English-Patient-hero-gay-love-Nazi-soldier.html

short flight at Brooklands. The accident has never been explained, but it seems that she had climbed out of the cockpit and fell out of the plain, which is inexplicable considering her aviatic experience. Evidently, Ondaatje did not create the character of Katharine based on her historical persona because in the novel there is no mention of her various qualities, vast scientific knowledge, interest in aviation and artistic talent that made her an exceptional women of her time (Tötösy de Zepetnek 6).

The question of history, truth and fiction got its answer in Ondaatje's letter to *The Globe and Mail* as a response to the criticism:

> ...I wrote about an enigmatic desert explorer whose role when World War II broke out was to be a betrayer. In reality the facts are still murky and still uncertain – to some historians he was a spy, some others think he was a double agent... The English Patient is not a history lesson but an interpretation of human emotions – love, desire, betrayals in war and betrayals in peace – in a historical time. It holds no sympathy for Nazis... It is about forgiveness, how people come out of war. (qtd. in Tötösy de Zepetnek 8)

According to these sources, Ondaatje indeed did not write the novel as a history lesson, but as a multicultural story that acknowledges various points of view by exploring the characters' feelings towards each other and towards the political situation of time. Some of the characters are based on historical figures mainly to get the readers more involved as this period in time still raises many questions and certainly holds many mysteries. The characters are carefully chosen regarding their nationalities and participation in the war to show the influence on their actions and relationships. Each of them struggles with their identity as they try to overcome the obstacles the war had created.

5. The question of identity

Through identity, as a social construct, we consider ourselves members of various groups or communities that we call nations. Nations provide people with a sense of belonging, connectedness and identity through a shared territory they believe they own and therefore have the right to separate from other peoples' land by means of borders. However, starting with the 90s, nationalism, nation and national identity began to lose their significance as the world was becoming increasingly international, particularly after the period of decolonisation which stimulated colonized peoples to develop their own sense of nationalism and national identity against the colonial, national identity of the West (Gültekin 1-2).

A major theme of post-colonial literature is the aspect of place and displacement that characterizes post-colonial cultures in their attempt to create or recreate independent local identity. As a post-colonial Canadian writer, born in Sri Lanka and raised in a multicultural society, Ondaatje is faced with a problem of displacement in a new space. The experience of colonialism and therefore of post-colonialism is simply not the same in Canada, as it is in the West Indies, Africa or India, so Canada is placed among Australia, New Zealand, and white South Africa, to form a 'Second World'. Writers from these countries are sometimes called mediators between colonizers and colonised (Michałek 5-7).

The central issue of the novel is the problem of identity and displacement, experienced both by the colonizer and the colonized. It is interesting to observe which standpoint the characters take while arguing about colonialism, history and culture. All inhabitants of the Villa deal with the problem of displacement in their own way, but they share a strong bond because they are all exiles who have found new identities in a place other than their homeland. They may have belonged to separate worlds before the war, but now their lives are interwoven.

5.1. Almásy

Almásy's account of his life begins *in medias res*, at the age of 35, when he joined a branch of Geographical Society in London. They called themselves 'desert Europeans' because during their exploration and mapping they became more familiar with the desert than they ever were with their homeland. Known as 'International Sand Club', gradually they became nationless because the desert taught them to place no value to invented concepts such as nation or citizenship in a place where the nature is so powerful and makes no distinctions.

> 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 became nationless. I came to hate nations. We are deformed by nation-states. (Ondaatje 147)

During the war, the desert was a territory of interest, but after the war the West once again lost interest in the desert. Almásy thinks of himself as a man without a homeland, a man of the desert. Of all the four inhabitants of Villa San Girolamo, he seems to be the least concerned about his own identity. He desires anonymity and wishes to erase all nations. The plane-crash helps him lose his identity as his body is burned beyond recognition, his plane damaged and his brain working only on drugs. He is too damaged to be identified and, in a way, cannot be considered a person anymore, but a 'blank screen' upon which the other inhabitants of the villa write their stories and reflect their wishes. They seem to live through him, using him to heal their own wounds.

Although Almásy's name is not revealed until Chapter IX and all the events of his life have passed he is still the focus of the action but mainly through his relationships with other characters. Though Hungarian by birth, his English education shaped his speech and mannerisms in an extreme way so that many people simply assume he is English, which is the

great irony of the novel. There is a moment where Kip discovers that he is not English, according to the way he drinks condensed milk: "We have discovered a shared pleasure. The boy and I. For me on my journeys in Egypt, for him in India. "Have you ever had condensed-milk sandwiches?" the sapper asks." (Ondaatje 188). Kip, having learned all English customs and making sure he follows them accordingly, notices that the patient does not possess these manners in this case, but does not question the patient's identity and just smiles: "You must have been raised elsewhere,' the sapper says. 'The English don't suck it out that way." (Ondaatje 189).

Refusing to be defined by nationality himself, Almásy still falls in love with a British woman, married to a British man, ends up in an Italian villa with a Canadian nurse, a Canadian thief and a Sikh sapper working for the British. Placing no value to the concept of nations and states caused Almásy a great deal of trouble in wartime. Even in the desert, which became another stage of the war, the harsh reality of the world put pressure on him. He was declared a German spy by the British due to his participation in the Operation Salaam which meant nothing to him because he was doing it for love instead of power, which makes the reader see him in a sympathetic light. Nevertheless, we must keep in mind that we hear the story only from his point of view and should not make judgements on that basis.

On his death-bed, he realizes that he cannot escape the socio-political implications of war fought for power and money. Even though he refused to take part in it, his map-making helped turn the desert into a place of war, making him a war accomplice.

The question of the English patient's identity is not a question of an individual – it can be interpreted as a more global question that can specifically be applied to the age of colonialism, regarding the relations of the colonisers and the colonised. Hilger (4) argues that the 'English' patient, as the Other, and his deformed body represent the ambiguity of the term

'history' metonymically; it contains both the effects of history and his story. He is the unsettling presence at the end of colonialism and the war because history writes the problems of a 'period of adjustment' upon his body. His charred body becomes a metonymic representation of the new dark age'. According to Marinkova (122), a charred black body is usually associated with images of darkness and semi-darkness and suggests that the difference between the 'white nations' and the 'brown races' is more complicated that the racialized binaries of imperial center vs. colony, or European vs. non-European. His questionable Europeanness (multicultural, dark, and contiguous with the Ottomans) threatens to destabilize any recognizable identity parameters. Another ambiguity is setting the novel in Italy – the cradle of both fascism and Renaissance. The patient's possible Hungarian origin and his British, as well as German loyalties signify the breakdown of European empires. For Burcar (2) the blackness of his skin possibly connotes the demise of white male civilisation ravaged by WWII and raises the question what an Englishman really is after these centuries of colonialism. It is clear that the rigorously maintained socio-political boundaries between blackness and whiteness have been crossed and 'the English' as a species are extinct.

Just as the 'English' patient is falling apart, the war broke apart many empires and the British was not an exception. One of the most important British colonies - India, gained independence in 1947. As an Indian representative in the novel, Kip is pictured as the Patient's follower who is leaving the rules of the West and returning to his origins. The Patient's identity is fragmented, just as Britain's after the processes of decolonisation, and Kip's is in the process of restoration using the traditional values of his native country.

In the end, due to his fragmented narrative and identity, the Patient becomes similar to his Herodotus' Histories – a collection of stories glued into a whole from a number of other stories. He becomes just another text that can be read and re-read – like everything in postmodernism (Stankevičiūtė 6).

5.2. Hana

In the novel Hana struggles with her identity and matures from an adolescent into an adult. Forced to grow up quickly and join the army as a nurse, she lost touch with her childhood dreams and insouciance until she came to the Villa and started to feel safe again, started to feel at home: 'They were protected by the simple fact that the villa seemed a ruin. But she felt safe here, half adult and half child. Coming out of what had happened to her during the war, she drew her own rules to herself' (Ondaatje 15). At the beginning there are no indications of what Hana has been through in the war, but as the story unveils, so does her emotional suffering.

It is revealed that Hana lost the man she loved in war and had an abortion, but what affected her most was the death of her father in an accident where he was burned beyond recognition and Hana was nowhere near. She never forgave herself for not being there to save him so in order to find atonement she decided to take care of the burned English patient who reminded her of her father: "There was something about him she wanted to learn, grow into, and hide in, where she could turn away from being an adult." (Ondaatje 54). Caravaggio even accuses her of being in love with the patient but her love for him is pure as she sees him as a saint: "Hipbones of Christ, she thinks. He is her despairing saint." (Ondaatje 3). This adds to the importance of her actions and to the love (or the idea of love) she feels for him. Aside from being responsible for the Patient, she still tries to connect with her inner self, escape from the harsh world and feel like a child again so she goes out into the garden and plays hopscotch.

Having faced many tragedies in the war, Hana was forced to learn to distance herself from her patients, not letting her emotions get in the way of her nursing duties. Eventually she found a way to shield herself from the mortality that the war brings:

> After three full days without rest, she finally lay down on the floor beside a mattress where someone lay dead, and slept for twelve hours, closing her eyes against the world around her.
>
> When she woke, she picked up a pair of scissors out of the porcelain bowl, leaned over and began to cut her hair, not concerned with shape or length, just cutting it away—the irritation of its presence during the previous days still in her mind—when she had bent forward and her hair had touched blood in a wound. She would have nothing to link her, to lock her, to death (Ondaatje 51-2).

Cutting her hair and refusing to look at her reflection in a mirror were Hana's symbolic ways of detachment from the war, blood and death. She started calling everyone 'Buddy' to retain her professionalism and avoid personal attachments. After the death of one of her patients, Hana rejected all the rules and took a pair of tennis shoes from his backpack. Though slightly too big for her, they felt comfortable, a symbol of her position in war – she was not up to it at first but adapted in time. Michałek (11) also states the symbolism of this action - Hana took the dead soldier's tennis shoes, not combat boots, thus she did not want to remember his experiences from the war, but the man himself as a human being, not a soldier. She wore the same tennis shoes the day she decided to stay behind with the English Patient, but got out of her nurse's uniform and put on her brown print frock. Initially, we do not know the reasons why Hanna decided to stay there but it seems it was her way of stepping out of the war, acknowledging that her war was over.

Hana's emotional wounds start to heal with the presence of others in the Villa. She connects with the Patient through reading which helps her step away from her life and emerge into the lives of others. The arrival of her father's old friend Caravaggio brings back some

happy childhood memories, but it is the arrival of two soldiers that really makes a crucial mark on her emotional state.

Hana and Kip come from completely different worlds but are both desperately in need of love and protection after experiencing the war. Even though they try not to show their emotional weaknesses by building their own separate worlds, they gradually turn to each other, letting their guards down and finding comfort after severe emotional suffering.

Guided by her need and willingness to help others, she helps Kip defuse a bomb despite of his objections to her interfering. This act shows her bravery and the responsibility she feels as an adult but also her childish recklessness as she puts her life at risk without thinking. She remains in search for her identity, or better said, she continues to build her identity while bonding with the inhabitants of the Villa.

Identity for Hana is something that she probably did not think of as a child but after experiencing many horrors during the war, she sees the world in a different way. After losing a father, a lover and a child, she tries to distance herself from the pain and become stronger and more resilient. With the help from others in the Villa, she restores her faith in life. She finds friendship and love that are not based on any national or political basis which shows her there is life after the war. She entered the war as a child but throughout the time spent in the Villa, she has become a determined young woman whose identity is shaped by her reactions to specific circumstances that not everyone faces in life.

In the end Hana longs for her home and writes to her stepmother Clara – her only family member left. This act symbolizes a new beginning in her life and hope can be detected in Hana's words. Another symbol of recovery is her once again long hair which has been restored through time spent in the Villa, just like Hana's emotional state.

5.3. Caravaggio

At the beginning of the novel the Patient's identity is unknown due to his condition and his claim that he does not remember who he is. While Hana is merely curious about the Patient's identity, Caravaggio is anxious to find out if the Patient is lying and trying to hide his true identity. Why this strange obsession? The answer lies in the fact that Caravaggio's identity has been destroyed and his search for the man responsible has brought him to the Patient.

Caravaggio was a thief while he was living in Canada and for the most part his identity revolved around his skills and abilities. Caravaggio was never a violent burglar; on the contrary, Hana even remembers that, in his burglaries, Caravaggio was always distracted by 'the human element': Breaking into a house during Christmas, he would become annoyed if he noticed the Advent calendar had not been opened up to the date to which it should have been (Ondaatje 221).

Caravaggio worked as a spy for the Allies during the war but was caught by Nazi soldiers. In charge of his torture and interrogation was a voice on the telephone that ordered the soldiers to cut off Caravaggio's thumbs as an appropriate punishment for a thief. Since then he has been trying to put a face to that voice and suspects the Patient is the German spy he is looking for.

'The man with bandaged hands' (Ondaatje 29) is the most accurate description of Caravaggio and his identity after his time in the war. Having been robbed of that part of the body that was the most important part of his identity – his hands, he is now 'the man with bandaged hands' but also with bandaged identity.

He has become addicted to morphine and is wearing, as Ondaatje (123) describes it, 'false limbs that morphine promises'. This explains the state he is in – physically and mentally, a state of fear, addiction and loneliness. It only seems appropriate that he comes to the Villa that is in similar condition, as Ondaatje (29) puts it – 'in near ruins'.

He comes to the Villa after he finds out that Hana is there but also to follow the lead in his investigation. He tries to convince Hana to leave the Villa since the whole area is littered with mines but she refuses to leave the Patient. Despite being quite older than Hana, Caravaggio seems to be in love with her and is jealous of the relationship she has created with the Patient:

> 'Why do you adore him so much?
>
> I love him.
>
> You don't love him, you adore him.
>
> Go away, Caravaggio. Please.
>
> You've tied yourself to a corpse for some reason' (Ondaatje 47).

As Abu Baker (102) claims, Caravaggio's body was 'rewritten' after the discovery of his identity by cutting off his thumbs. He had been trained to invent double agents or phantoms who would take on flesh. Therefore, he is trying to invent a skin for the English patient. He holds him responsible for the loss of his own identity and wants to shed light on the truth behind the Patient's stories. In his attempt to get revenge, it seems that Caravaggio is once again distracted by 'the human element' as he spends most of his time in the Villa enjoying the company of the other inhabitants. He is in a phase of rebuilding after he has learned to deal with his new identity that the war has forced upon him.

5.4. Kip (Kirpal Singh)

Kip is a conflicted character – a man without a country, a Sikh that Ondaatje uses to explore Anglo-Indian relations in the period of WWII. Though born and raised in India, he is estranged from his family and traditions and works as a sapper in the British army.

Hilger (46) says that Kip is the product of the English colonial power in India and exemplifies the domesticated Other who, being a 'not quite/not white' subject, is never granted full equality. Although he puts his life at risk everyday by dismantling bombs for the British, he knows they will never accept him as an equal so he cherishes some things that represent his homeland, for example his carefully layered turban and his long hair.

Even though he seems assimilated into English culture, Gültekin (4) describes him as a hybrid – an in-between identity with a double perspective. He is polite and well-mannered, patient and emotionally detached which makes him an excellent sapper. During his time in the army, the only man who was able to see beyond his race was his mentor Lord Suffolk. He accepted him as a student and as a friend which meant a great deal for Kip. Their dangerous job did not allow many friendships to last, and this one was not an exception. After Lord Suffolk's death, Kip felt like losing a family member – a father, so he turned inwards, not allowing anyone too close.

Not being able to fill in his mentor's shoes and become, for a change, the one in charge, he escapes and decides to spend time dismantling bombs on his own near the Villa. His emotional detachment has become a part of his identity but interactions with the inhabitants of the Villa, especially Hana, gradually put his guard down. Hana, traumatized by her tragedies in the war, still finds strength and approaches the sapper who is in need of human connection even though he has become accustomed to distance and distrust.

After the news of the atomic bomb dropped in Japan, Kip's identity crisis is at its worse. The guilt he feels for helping the West has now come to the surface and completely taken over him. He feels betrayed by the British and sees this event as a symbol of Western aggression against the 'brown races of the world' – a reality he has forgotten while enjoying his time in the Villa where national and rational boundaries do not exist.

Gültekin (5) describes Kip's anger in terms of his racially based generalization against the West. He is ready to abandon his friends as he categorizes them as colonizers just as all natives are categorizes as inferior stereotypes by colonizers, namely, 'wild' or 'barbaric savages'. His cultural displacement is evident in his disappointment with Western culture which makes him revert to his traditional culture as an anti-western Sikh nationalist like his brother:

> 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? (Ondaatje 303).

By creating the character of Kip, Ondaatje puts an emphasis on the strained Anglo-Indian relations during a period of chaos for the British Empire. India was always the jewel in the crown of the British Empire and the growth of national awareness and the desire for freedom marks this period of decolonization. After the bomb, Kip embraces his once lost national identity and returns to his family tradition – he becomes a doctor and has an Indian family. However, even years later he still feels connected to Hana and thinks of the time spent in the Villa which reveals that he is still tied between two worlds:

> He sits in the garden. And he watches Hana, her hair longer, in her own country. And what does she do? He sees her always, her face and body, but he doesn't know what her profession is or what her circumstances are, although he sees her reactions to people around her, her bending down to children, a white fridge door behind her, a background of noiseless tram cars (Ondaatje 319).

> And so Hana moves and her face turns and in a regret she lowers her hair. Her shoulder touches the edge of a cupboard and a glass dislodges. Kirpal's left hand swoops down and catches the dropped fork an inch from the floor and gently passes it into the fingers of his daughter, a wrinkle at the edge of his eyes behind his spectacles (Ondaatje 321).

Another colonial aspect of the novel is Hilger's (46) observation that Kip is connected to Rudyard Kipling and his titular 'hero' Kim, as the relationship between Kip and the 'English' patient to Hana seemed like a reversal of *Kim*. Although his name is Kirpal Singh, the British gave him the nickname Kip when some officers interpreted the butter stain on one of his reports as kipper grease. A kipper is 'a salty English fish', usually smoked or dried. Kip's identity has been 'smoked out' so to speak, and within a week his real name, Kirpal Singh, had been forgotten.

Abu Baker (10) also claims that Ondaatje introduces Kip as a revolutionary version of Kipling's Kim. Like Kim, Kip begins as a devoted colonised who serves the British Empire. Kim remains the devoted servant of the empire and works against his own people, whereas Kip rebels against it after the nuclear bombing of Japan and casts away his 'colonised shell'. Ondaatje depicts the racism which Kip was subjected to and allows his reader to view the 'Other' point of view, unlike Rudyard Kipling, for instance, who does not touch upon such issues.

5.5. Katharine

Katharine is an Oxford-educated woman who finds herself in the desert not by choice but as company to her husband Geoffrey, who is also a part of the British aristocracy. To other members of the expedition, they seem happily married, but Katharine's affair with Almásy reveals another side of her, mostly wild and passionate.

Although at the beginning it seems that Almásy and Katherine have nothing in common, after hearing Katharine read the story of Candaules and Gyges from *The Histories*, he falls in love with her. Katharine feels misplaced in the desert and is in need of something to make her feel alive. Her relationship with Geoffrey is more of a sibling relationship and her passion comes forth only with Almásy. She is a woman who knows what she wants and is not afraid to take it, which is obvious in her words to Almásy: "I want you to ravish me." (Ondaatje 250).

Katherine's relationship with Almásy is full of obsession, anger and jealousy. While Almásy is jealous of her husband, she is jealous of his adoration of the desert. This is their main divergence because Almásy has dedicated his life to exploring something that Katharine, despite her best efforts, does not adapt to:

> But she was a woman who had grown up within gardens, among moistness, with words like *trellis* and *hedgehog*. Her passion for the desert was temporary. She'd come to love its sternness because of him, wanting to understand his comfort in its solitude. She was always happier in rain, in bathrooms steaming with liquid air, in sleepy wetness, climbing back in from his window that rainy night in Cairo and putting on her clothes while still wet, in order to hold it all (Ondaatje 181).

Katharine's identity as a polite and genteel British wife is also changed during her time in the desert and the war. She shows minimum signs of remorse over the betrayal of her husband. Frustrated by Almásy's coldness, she often punches him, angry that he does not want to change his views. Almásy cannot bear to be owned by Katharine as he despises everything connected to ownership, but in the end it is Katharine that ends their affair due to his unwillingness to change.

She herself changed under the influence of Almásy. She educated herself and always remained eager to learn something more: "I was fifteen years older. But she was smarter. She was hungrier to change than I expected." (Ondaatje 244). Geoffrey just was not enough of a challenge for her as Almásy was with his vast knowledge and experience.

After overly protective Geoffrey's revenge plan leaves her badly hurt in the heart of the desert, she finally finds peace in a land she never thought of as a home. The desert becomes part of her eternal identity when Almásy uses pollen, herbs and ash of acacia to make her eternal. Her national identity has no meaning in this holly place and her body is the only thing that the earth takes back:

> We die containing a richness of lovers and tribes, tastes we have swallowed, bodies we have plunged into and swum up as if rivers of wisdom, characters we have climbed into as if trees, fears we have hidden in as if caves. I wish for all this to be marked on my body when I am dead. I believe in such cartography— to be marked by nature, not just to label ourselves on a map like the names of rich men and women on buildings. We are communal histories, communal books. We are not owned or monogamous in our taste or experience (Ondaatje 277).

5.6. Interconnectedness of the characters

None of the characters has a stable identity but they try to heal themselves through their friendships, forging another identity that is not connected to nations or war but to humanity and nature. Ondaatje insists on their relationships being the only way of recovering from the horrors of the war thus restoring their faith in humanity.

The novel marks a shift in Ondaatje's work - the elimination of the hero, a single romanticized protagonist, in favour of a quartet of balanced and strongly interrelated characters. If the English patient represents the former Ondaatje hero, then perhaps his charred and blackened body as he lies drugged and sinking into death, without identity, can be seen as Ondaatje's recognition of the failure of that particular form of literary hero and the version of masculinity that he embodies (Ellis 25-6).

Ellis (26-7) also notices that the dying English patient is not permitted to retreat into silence and isolation. He forms relationships with others: Hana loves him as a father, he finds a friend in Kip through their mutual knowledge of weapons and bombs and he is pursued by Caravaggio who shares a morphine addiction with him. He attends parties and dinners with the other three protagonists and shares his knowledge of literature and history. Actually, Almásy only exists literally because of his connections with Hana, Kip and Caravaggio.

It seems that the only reason the Patient is still alive is to tell his story as story-telling is also one of the main characteristics of the novel. Through story-telling the characters relive their moments of great suffering but with the help of others they surmount them. It is the process of story-telling and revealing their emotions that lets them forge their new identities. The story-telling is mostly third-person narrative, so the reader also gets involved in their lives and identities while trying to put together his/her own version of sequence of events.

All of the characters have something in common when they come to the Villa – they are all lonely and could die there in the Villa without anyone noticing. Although not in search for relationships, in this new environment they all find their role and form a group - Hana cooks for the whole group, Caravaggio steals food and wine, Kip cleans the area of mines and they all take care of the English patient. The Villa is a place of safety for them where national identity is not important. In the end it does not matter to them who the Patient really is. Hana says it is not important and it shows that the process of story-telling is more important than the result itself.

Reading is also very important for their relationships – Hana reads to Almásy to connect with him and learn from him, Almásy's copy of *The Histories* by Herodotus not only serves him for geographical purposes but it is Katharine's reading of the story from it that makes Almásy fall in love with her. Katharine also reads from it to learn all she can about the desert herself in order to understand Almásy better. Characters use reading to escape the present and the loneliness and form connections that are essential for their recovery.

The reader puts together Almásy's story from fragments he talks about. Almásy thinks of himself as a collection of such fragments, as a 'communal' history or book. His identity can only be pasted together from recollected fragments, from stories told. Although he physically dies, his story is passed on. He is transformed and transmitted, and can now 'walk on an earth that has no maps', having been privately collected by those who gather the pieces of his story (Saklofske 81).

When Katharine expresses how much she misses the rain and green English gardens, when Hana talks about the snow and lakes in Canada or when Kip mentions India, they do not only describe the places they were born but talk about them like they are a part of them and their identity. The English patient describes himself and Kip as 'international bastards – born

in one place and choosing to live elsewhere' (Ondaatje 188). Caravaggio feels that none of them belong to this war and that it is not their war to fight: "The trouble with all of us is we are where we shouldn't be. What are we doing in Africa, in Italy? What is Kip doing dismantling bombs in orchards, for God's sake? What is he doing fighting English wars?" (Ondaatje 129). Much like the interconnectedness of characters' identities and their relationships, the interconnectedness of nationality and identity ties the characters despite their efforts against it. Almásy tries to escape from nationalities but in wartime that is not possible even in the desert. Although he forges his identity of a nationless explorer of the desert, in the end he is unable to save Katharine and is locked up only because his name sounds foreign. In the desert and the Villa national identity should not play an important part as personal connections do, but it does. The characters' inability to escape from the outside world is highlighted by Kip's reaction to the news of the atomic bomb. They cannot deny the existing differences between their cultures and national identities that invade their peaceful isolated Villa.

The end of the novel is devoted to Kip's thoughts of Hana and his family in India. Despite his love and affection for his family, Kip longs to see Hana. He thinks of her very often and even wants to communicate with her, which can be seen as a start of a new 'social consciousness beyond national consciousness', implying the emergence of his postnational identity with a more pluralistic vision of the world in the course of time (Gültekin 6).

6. Major themes, motifs and symbols

6.1. Mapping, naming and owning

Owning maps of an area gives you power over it. North African deserts were not of much importance to Europeans until they became battlefields in World War II. Mapping these places became crucial for their invading troops so explorers and scientist suddenly gained big roles and big donations for their services to the army. Abu Baker (3) explains that when colonisers gathered information about the geography of the land and the characteristics of the people who lived in it, it served them as a way of 'smooth' dominance of the coloniser by changing the land's geographical and even ecological identity.

Almásy's constant repetition of the phrase that 'the desert cannot be owned' emphasizes his disgust towards using the nature for political purposes. Geographical land is free of any artificial borders that man forces upon it. It cannot be claimed, owned or limited. Almásy is aware of the value of information in war time but refuses to serve the army. He wishes to erase all national identities because he sees the suffering that is the result of the fight for political power and dominance. People close to him lose their lives due to nationalism – his friend Madox but also Katharine because his own name sounded foreign to the British when he tried to get help for her. It seems that the writer also criticizes Western nationalism or rather colonial nationalism because he wants the reader to comprehend characters' identities in a place where, for him, names and nations are erased (desert and the Villa) and reveals us their names only later in the book - we do not learn Hana's name until Chapter II, Kip's name until Chapter III and Almásy's name until Chapter IX.

As a historiographic metafiction, the novel blurs the line between fact and fiction to question the conflict between history's authoritative versions of the past and oral records

based on myths and legends. Therefore, Herodotus is called both the 'father of history' and 'father of lies', because his book is based on oral sources such as the Gyges and Candules episode. Greek city states' resistance to the Persian Empire, depicted in Herodotus's book serves as an allusion to the resistance to the imperial powers that rule India and Africa such as the British, or to the Germans and the allies who invaded the African territory during the Second World War (Gültekin 6-7).

The association between war and cricket suggests that the colonisers enjoy these wars as if they were games and it also implies the frequency of these wars where the value of life of the colonised races is undermined substantially. Nonetheless, the colonised sometimes willingly sacrifice their lives for the colonisers in the hope of being admitted into their camp. In *The English Patient* all wars prove to be the same. Ondaatje claims that history repeats itself and that the same wars are fought all over again. He links WWII to Medieval wars as they are all fought in the same cities, on the same grounds, in which, if you dig deep enough, you can find evidence and remains of all these wars (Abu Baker 9).

While Almásy carries a translation of Herodotus's *The Histories,* Madox carries Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. Curran (4) suggests that perhaps it is Madox's choice of talisman that allows him to suspect Almásy's love and adulterous relationship with Katharine Clifton and to recognize the danger of that liaison. Understanding the role Geoffrey Clifton had at the time, he knew the complexity and extent of the web in which the two lovers had been caught. The English machine knew every move the lovers made from the first day and their awkward touches.

In terms of possession, the love Almásy and Katharine share is very different from that of Hana and Kip. Almásy has always been emotionally distant, choosing a profession that studies the environment and civilizations that are no longer present. Power and money have

no value for him because he knows they are fleeting and uses them only when necessary in his explorations. He is accustomed to a life of a loner, independent and self-sufficient. His world collides with Katharine's, and she, as a self-realized woman, is also surprised by her sudden need for another person. They do not fit in each other's lives and their differences create a discord in their relationship and finally end it. Although they love each other immensely, at the same time they hate each other because of their interdependence they are not used to. Almásy and Katharine refused to change for one another but Hana and Kip found a way to let their differences connect them. Kip, facing death every day, finds his link to sanity and humanity in Hana. He does not name parts of her body to show they are his to own. Their relationship is based on mutual respect and providing comfort in a time of need. Kip's maturity is the reason why Hana finally starts feeling like a woman and not just a nurse, why she feels "her tongue instead of a swab, her tooth instead of a needle" (Ondaatje 132).

6.2. The desert and the Villa

Ondaatje uses two major narrative spaces – the Egyptian desert and the war-ruined Villa San Girolamo in an Italian town to further explore his characters. They are situated in remote places so emphasis can be put on their relationships and emotions. It may seem that the desert and the Villa are two completely opposite spaces but there are some similarities between them that Ondaatje cleverly chooses. The aestheticism of these spaces fits perfectly into his already poetic and artistic narrative. These are spaces that are completely under nature's influence, unaffected by time, borders or nationalities.

The characters in the novel live in a desert both metaphorically and literally. All the characters are living in their own metaphorical deserts trying to cope with their traumatic war experiences but Almásy is the only one who experiences both types of deserts (Abu Baker

102). Due to sandstorms, the desert is considered uncontrollable and can be seen as a metaphor of the characters' fragmented and unreliable national identities that are put to focus after the traumatic war experiences. The desert can almost be considered a character in the novel when taking into account the power it has not only over Almásy but everyone who has ever had contact with it. It intensifies and destroys. Barren and mostly desolate, the desert affects every personal connection that exists in it, making it hard for everyone to hide their true faces in such a harsh environment. Every feeling comes to surface, intensified and uncontrollable.

Gültekin (4) considers the Villa as a kind of desert, a place of refuge almost like Eden, where nations, races, anything artificial that divides human beings is meaningless. The Villa has the function of hospitalization, it is a space of hospitality that accepts and welcomes Others, no matter their nationality or personal history.

Although the war has left the Villa ruined, with numerous holes in walls and ceilings, nature has found a way to make it a part of the landscape again by filling these holes with flowers and branches, thus returning life to the Villa. It is a metaphor for rebirth, characters' emotional recovery and hope for a better future.

Herodotus's writings take Almásy through time and through the desert, describing many connections between nature and ancient civilizations. Characters also make connections that last even when they are no longer together – Almásy still loves Katharine after her death as Hana does her father, while Kip, despite having a new family, never loses his connection to Hana. Love transcends time and place but is not unaffected by global issues such as the mention of the atomic bomb in the novel that breaks the characters' isolation and makes them question everything they are and everything they believe in.

Ondaatje's national identity can be detected in the fact that the Italian villa that accepts people regardless of their nationality is in a way similar to Canada, a multicultural county whose residents have found a way to live together accepting and celebrating their cultural differences.

6.3. Healing and religious connotations

The characters' identities are closely connected to their physical and psychological traumas. Caravaggio is referred to as 'the man with bandaged hands', making an emphasis on his wounds before even mentioning his name. The Patient's description also includes his injuries – his 'black body' and Hana, as well, can be seen as more patient than nurse. Identifying the person with their crippled bodies accentuates the harm the war has caused them.

Healing is a theme that is mutual to all characters. The unbearable emotional baggage that these characters bring with them is equal to their physical wounds. Hana lost her father, Caravaggio lost his thumbs, Kip lost his mother and his surrogate father, and the English patient lost both the love of his life and his own body. Although they are all in denial to some extent, sharing their stories with others brings them so much needed healing.

The characters' bodies not only connect them to present time but transcend time and space. They form a connection between characters which can be noticed when Almásy sees a vaccination scar on Katharine's arm and remembers her as a child or when Caravaggio, with just one look, sees everything Hana has been through. Connection between physical and psychological is a recurrent theme in the novel and by understanding bodies, characters gradually understand each other's identities.

The novel is full of religious connotations but it does not privilege one religion over another. It serves more as a sign of acceptance, going from outsider to insider, like when Bedouins treat Almásy's burned body by using their indigenous ways of practicing medicine and grant him permission to join the tribal rituals. Although the characters belong to different religions, they do not impose their own religion on others because they understand the importance of having a safe place in wartime, whether it is an actual place, a person or just a feeling of hope. That is why Ondaatje carefully chooses their final resting places which may not be holy for them but are for others that find comfort in it. Katharine hates the desert but dies in a cave that was holy to ancient people and Almásy as a desert lover as well, Hana's father dies in a dove-cot where doves are safe from rats and Madox takes his own life in a holy church. None of these locations are religious for them but are special for their loved ones that consider these places 'holy' thus finding comfort in the idea that they may have finally found peace.

6.4. The four elements of Nature

The four elements of Nature: water, air, fire and earth can easily be noticed in the novel as they have important roles in the characters' lives. They often symbolize a turning point in their lives and offer an insight into their emotional states.

In many cultures water usually symbolizes the beginning of life and purification. As Lima (231) notices at the beginning of the book when Hana is bathing the Patient, it can also play a part in the process of healing. Even though the Patient mentions how he loves the desert and its dryness, he respects the historical relationship between the water and the tribes of the desert:

> In Tassili I have seen rock engravings from a time when the Sahara people hunted water horses from reed boats. In Wadi Sura I saw caves whose walls were covered with paintings of swimmers. Here there has been a lake. I could draw its shape on a wall for them. […] Harpoons are still found in the desert. There were water people. Even today caravans look like a river. Water is the exile, carried back in cans and flasks, the ghost between your hands and your mouth (Ondaatje 20).

For Katharine, her love of water may represent her attempt at purification – an escape from the guilt of having an affair. Lima (233) explains that Hana, as a part of her healing, compares Clara to a canoe, thus mentioning the soothing sensation that water brings. Although water is a symbol of construction, it can be also be a symbol of destruction, mostly evident in Kip's experience. Like most Indians, he has a high respect for water and uses it in his daily rituals of purification – bathing and washing his long hair. At the end of the book, while he is returning to his country, he experiences the destructive power of water. Shocked by the bombing, raged and disappointed, he is returning to his own country and culture, but on the way, under heavy rain, he falls from a bridge and almost drowns. This near death experience could be seen as his rebirth or resurrection, when he is 'washed' from the English culture and civilization and returns to his origins.

The element of air is represented by winds that are of great importance for the desert and those who live in it. Ondaatje gives a beautiful and poetic description of different types of winds that blow in the desert and have various effects:

> There is also the ———, the secret wind of the desert, whose name was erased by a king after his son died within it. And the *nafliat*—a blast out of Arabia. The *mezzar-ifoullousen* —a violent and cold southwesterly known to Berbers

> as 'that which plucks the fowls.' The *beshabar*, a black and dry northeasterly out of the Caucasus, 'black wind.' The *Samiel* from Turkey, 'poison and wind,' used often in battle. As well as the other 'poison winds,' the *simoom*, of North Africa, and the *solano*, whose dust plucks off rare petals, causing giddiness (Ondaatje 18).

While winds had strong influence upon their daily activities and expeditions, they also describe their emotions, for example when Almásy and Katharine are trapped in the car and trapped by their emotions in the time of a strong sandstorm. Their feelings and passion come to the surface in comparison to the intensity of the storm.

Lima (238) describes the aspect of purification through fire taking into consideration Almásy and Hana's relationship. In the plane accident, fire consumed Almásy's past life, but in the same time offered him a possibility of regeneration through the identity of the English Patient - a man with no past, no future, just a brief moment in the present time to heal his emotional burden. He thinks of his new body as a suffering he must endure in order to redeem himself for not being able to save Katharine. Due to his condition, Hana sees their relationship as a possibility of her own healing after the losses she suffered in the war.

Earth is examined through desert. One of the most spectacular landscapes on the Earth and at the same time one of the most powerful ones, desert does not leave anyone indifferent. A man can only feel small when he comes in contact with such force of nature. Many times in the novel the desert has played some part in the characters' lives but the scene that strongly depicts the respect felt for the desert is the ritualistic burial of Katharine's body. Although she always stressed her dislike towards the desert, she has found her final home in it, absorbing its history and power which makes her death a sort of comeback to nature – to earth.

Ondaatje puts great emphasis on all natural elements and they can even be seen as a separate character in the novel. They are directly related to characters' stories, their happiest and saddest moments. The characters show great appreciation towards nature, therefore their experiences are always highlighted by some natural occurrences which become a part of their journeys to healing.

7. The film adaptation

7.1. Differences between the novel and the film

Adapting a novel into a film should be seen as a translation of an entity into another language that has a strong relationship with its original source, but yet is fully independent from it (Scheufele 28). A novel is usually written by a single author, whereas the production of a film involves many people with different backgrounds, qualities, opinions and interests. The practical demands of adapting a 300-page novel to a film, especially a postmodern novel like *The English Patient*, characterized by a fragmented narrative enriched with poetic language, confront a filmmaker with a difficult task. The artistic form of the original novel cannot be preserved in a different medium, which has its own possibilities and limitations in creating form (Scheufele 26).

Anthony Minghella's adaptation of *The English Patient* has been criticized mostly for its unfaithful rendering of Ondaatje's 'original' and prioritizing of romance over the historical responsibility of colonial powers, and in particular the dropping of the H-bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Marinkova 125). The film's editor Walter Murch, in his response to the amount of controversy surrounding the ending of the novel, provides an explanation for leaving out such an important global happening in the film:

> The film was so much about those five individual people: the Patient, Hana, Kip, Katharine, Caravaggio – that to suddenly open it up near the end and ask the audience to imagine the death of hundreds of thousands of unknown people... It was too abstract. So the bomb of Hiroshima became the bomb that killed Hardy, someone you knew. Everything else recognized itself from that new starting point. (qtd. in Scheufele 63-4)

As Scheufele (30) explains it, every detail that is seen or heard in a film represents only one version of an indefinite number of possibilities of how one can imagine what is described by words in a novel. For example, Almásy's copy of the *Histories* is not described in its colour, size or where it is placed so the filmmakers have to decide on its setting in the frame, the sound it makes when being opened and how it affects the characters, especially Almásy who gets flashbacks after Hana reads from it.

As opposed to the discontinuous structure in the novel, flashbacks in the film are shown in chronological order in order to appeal to a wider audience, which, unlike a reader, does not have the possibility of returning to a certain point in the story to recollect some part of the plot. For economical purposes and appealing to the audience, certain strategies (e.g. close-up) are used to highlight main elements such as the beauty of the desert or tragic love story. The biggest obstacle the filmmakers faced was the length so they had to make some changes, or rather say abbreviations. They decided on a central narrative love story between Almásy and Katharine and the Tuscany narrative as a frame around it.

The eternal love theme that the audience is always the most easily subjected to is emphasized at the expense of the problematic issues concerning Kip and his relationship with Hana. The novel finishes with Kip leaving the Villa on his motorbike and moving ahead in spite of his spiritual connection with Hana because he cannot deal with the news of the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Furthermore, Hana, who is in the novel described as unhappy back in Canada, in the last sequence of the film looks with hope at the sun behind the cypress trees (Scheufele 37-8).

Historical connotations that are so essential in the novel are somewhat lost in the film version, the most important one being the dying Katharine's 'embalmment'. In the novel she is embalmed by the nature, history and culture of the desert using colour from the cave

paintings, whereas in the film she is only embalmed by her lover, with saffron from the thimble he gave her that serves as another example of the film's emphasis on the theme of eternal love (Scheufele 56-7).

The greatest omission in the film is a less complex character of Kip. As an 'Other', he plays a central role in the novel, but in the film his role is reduced mainly to a lover of Hana, and once again, the more important imperial theme is subordinate to the love theme. While the novel deals with his struggles of a cultural hybrid and provides us with a point of view of the colonised, the film merely mentions some colonial aspects.

The only explicit scene that portraits the coloniser-colonised relationship is when Kip reads a section of Rudyard Kipling's novel *Kim* to the Patient, who corrects his reading. In the novel it is Hana who reads, but this change was made in order to put an emphasis on the character of the colonised as Kip responds to the Patient:

> 'It's still there, the cannon, outside the museum. It was made of metal cups and bowls taken from every household in the city as a tax, then melted down. Then later they fired the cannon at my people, the natives. And the message everywhere in your book – however slowly I read it – is that the best destiny for India is to be ruled by the British.' (qtd. in Scheufele 62)

This scene serves as another indicator of his mixed loyalties to his dual cultures, Indian traditions and English education.

The necessity of abbreviation caused some of the previous Kip's experiences to be left out in the film, mainly those in the British army which are described in detail through the novel (one chapter only about him and dismantling a bomb). To get the audience interested, a scene where Kip takes Hana to a church was added to a script as a part of their growing romance. According to Scheufele (67), it stands for a love scene, as it is placed between a

courtship by candlelight and a naked conversation in bed. The symbolism is present when Hana calls out Kip's name as she rises into the air to see the wall paintings, and then thanks him enthusiastically when she alights.

This comparison of Ondaatje's novel and Minghella's film has revealed that the genre of melodrama that was chosen for the film dictated some changes, mostly in the process of scriptwriting and editing. In order to adjust it to the medium and to keep the audience intrigued, the film focused on the everlasting theme of love transcending cultural and many other differences.

7.2. Images and sounds

Film music, especially the title piece that may reappear throughout the film, can have strong effects on viewers' emotions and thus their connection to the plot and the characters. Having chosen love as a central theme, the filmmakers used many images and sounds suitable to the scenes and characters' rising emotions which surely resulted in many memorable moments for the audience.

Szerelem, Szerelem serves as a background of the hand drawing and the plane flying over the desert in the opening scene of the film. It is actually a Hungarian song (hint at the Patinet's actual identity) but portrays the mistiqueness of the desert very well. The tune is played also after Katharine and Almásy meet before Geoffrey finds out about the affair and once again in the final images of the film (mixed with Gabriel Yared's classical performance) when Almásy is grieving for Katharine in the Cave of Swimmers. Both the Hungarian song and the period jazz pieces *Wang Wang Blues* and *Cheek to Cheek* function as indicators of the historical setting of the film, drawing the spectators to the inter-war years (Marinkova 131).

Oriental atmosphere is present in many settings and has a major role in the characters' feelings. In the Islamic World, Katharine is the 'Other' in comparison to other women wearing the dark veiling which makes her feel like a different person – a different wife. Although the minarets of Cairo seen through Almásy's room subtly point out that adultery is considered a serious crime in the Islamic world, Katharine and Almásy feel free as if there are no restrictions to their love in this 'Other' world (Scheufele 69-70). Even for Bermann the desert is a 'place without maps' that gives no importance to social restrictions. Thinking about his Arab lover Kamal, he says to Almásy: 'How do you explain? To someone who's never been here? Feelings which seem quite normal'.

Images of landscape and its force are often connected to the plot thus the passion between Almásy and Katharine outbreaks during a sandstorm. The shapes of the dunes being drawn at the beginning of the film resemble the curves of the female body - Katharine's, which Almásy later claimes to possess as his love towards Katharine makes him 'map' her like others do with deserts in spite of his hatred towards ownership. Scheufele (82) notices that the filmmakers obviously recognised the significance of the water motif, and even though any mention of Zerzura (connected to the fountain outside the Villa in the novel) is missing in the film, they included two bathing scenes – Hana bathing in a bathtub outside and Kip washing his hair outside as well. Opposed to tradition, in this case a woman is watching a man bathing, and while doing so, Hana 'imagines all of Asia through the gestures of this one man'. Though he may be the object of the gaze, he is not 'colonised' by Hana. They are both equal in their relationship. The large round water basin in the garden also figures as a fertility symbol when Hana, Kip, Hardy, and Caravaggio carry the Patient around it in the rain in a joyous parade reminiscent of a ritual rain dance.

In the novel Katharine is connected to water and Almásy to desert. They retain these connections as his body in the film resembles the sand of the desert and her love for water and

gardens is expressed many times. She's in love with the hotel plumbing – she swims for hours, or she's in the bath. In the scene in Almásy's bathtub to Almásy's question what she loves the most, Katharine's first answer is 'water'. Almásy names Katharine's suprasternal notch 'Almásy Bosphorus' thus retaining geographical markings connected to water and at the same time showing how much his love for Katharine has consumed him and made him start claiming possessions. He is the one that touches her and not vice versa, he is the one that wants her all to himself. At the Christmas dinner, Katharine asks her husband: 'Aren't you dying for green, anything green, or rain' and when the Patient reminisces, he says he is 'dying for rain' which is an expression of his longing for Katharine. Minghella has retained the powerful connection created in the novel between the characters and nature and helped the filmmakers to transfer it on the big screen, making the cinema audience aware of its significance to the whole story. It contains some of the main motifs of the story – forces of nature, lack of boundaries and mapping.

When Almásy is carrying Katharine from the plane to the cave, the white cloth, blowing behind in the wind and covering her in the cave, is both bridal dress and shroud, suggests Scheufele (92) and the long walk on the ledge of the rock massif, when Almásy is carrying his lover in his arms, simultaneously invokes a walk down the aisle and a funeral train.

Almásy's urge to name and possess parts of Katharine's body combines fetishistic and colonial desire (Hsu 4). Cartography is once again connected with their relationship as both at the farewell dinner and at the earlier Christmas party, Almásy watches Katharine through gridded screens like those of a map maker. His room has similar windows which cast shadowy grids on their bodies, which are also transferred onto Katharine's body when she dies in a plane crash wearing a grid-patterned dress. Also, a subjective shot at the beginning of the movie shows Almásy's view of the world through the grid of a reed mask that the Bedouins

who rescue him have placed over his charred and disfigured face. Thus, for the most part, the film depicts only failed attempts to transgress grids of social and national boundaries.

Marinkova (129) draws attention to the actors' accents that are also crucial for the recurring 'foreign' theme – all actors are 'international bastards' – played by Juliette Binoche (Hana), Ralph Fiennes (the English patient/Laszlo de Almásy), Willem Dafoe (David Caravaggio) and Naveen Andrews (Kip). Other actors playing German and Canadian soldiers, or the members of the International Sand Club, all speak with a recognizably 'foreign' accent which reinforces the otherness of the film's soundscape in unison with its exotic landscape.

8. Conclusion

It is nature that connects people, not their nationalities. The desert cannot be claimed or owned, it is a place of winds and stones where people are only temporary passengers but nature lets them leave their marks for other generations as inheritance. It does not allow concepts like nationality and national identity, in it every man is equal and honoured for his actions. This is why the author chose the desert and an abandoned villa as a setting for the story that deals with postcolonial issues but through everlasting themes of wartime suffering and love that transcends time and place.

The characters' attempts to shed their national identities that cost them a great deal in WWII is a way for them to escape their past. They try to forge new identities based on their personal character and interactions with others. They seem to be able to live in their nationless family but soon, after the bombing of Japan, they realize that nationality, especially in wartime, is something that follows a man to every corner of the world. A man can invent a new life, a new identity for himself, but owning and controlling are so deeply embedded in human history that no one can escape and free themselves.

The novel contrasts national identity and personal identity. It provides a place where nations have no meaning and a person's character is what matters the most. There are not many places like that left. Through human history there have always been colonisers. Their desire to possess and impose authority over the natives brought discord and rebellions. One man cannot take another man's freedom in the name of nations. All people are born the same, no matter their geographical and temporal distances. Nations are just artificial notions that people use to somehow show their connection to other people born and living on the same territory marked by yet again artificial boundaries. Wars are fought and lives are lost in the name of nations and possessing a certain national identity.

The novel's ending, though, gives us a glimmer of hope when we find out that Kip, the character influenced by national identity and military actions the most, still feels a strong personal connection to Hana, thus showing signs of a new identity and a new vision of the world.

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The question of identity in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*

SUMMARY

A group of characters of mixed nationalities is situated in an Italian villa in the last stages of WWII. Each of them is lost on an unknown territory, away from their loved ones and asking themselves many questions in search of their identity after being crippled by the war. Gradually, through storytelling, they let their guards down and find comfort in the presence of others.

The author Michael Ondaatje, an immigrant himself, portrays Canadian multiculturalism when he lets the characters discard their national identities and choose to form their own, based on their personalities and relationships with others. Hana, a Canadian nurse, stays behind her troop to take care of a patient that is burned beyond recognition. In him, she sees all the men she was not able to save, including her father and decides to reduce his suffering on his deathbed. The patient is merely known as 'the English Patient' due to his English manner and accent. Although it seems that he has lost his memory, flashbacks that he experiences give us fragments of his life story. Canadian thief Caravaggio blames the English patient for losing his thumbs in war which were part of his identity and wishes to have his revenge. The character that shows real coloniser-colonised relationships is Kip, a Sikh sapper working for the British army dismantling bombs. He is estranged from his Indian family but not completely accepted into British society. He is an 'in-between' character of special interest for Ondaatje, who uses his reactions to further explore major postcolonial themes – those of nationalism and identity.

KEY WORDS: identity, nationality, territory, war, postcolonialism, multiculturalism

Pitanje identiteta u Micheal Ondaatjeovom *The English Patient*

SAŽETAK

Grupa likova miješanih nacionalnosti smještena je u talijansku vilu u zadnjim etapama Drugog svjetskog rata. Izgubljeni na nepoznatom teritoriju i daleko od najmilijih postavljaju si mnoga pitanja u potrazi za svojim identitetom. Postepeno, kroz razgovor i pričanje priča, stječu povjerenje jedni u druge i pronalaze utjehu.

Autor Michael Ondaatje, također imigrant, vješto prikazuje multikulturalizam Kanade kada likovi odbacuju svoje nacionalne identitete i odlučuju izgraditi vlastite koji će se temeljiti na njihovim osobnostima i međusobnim odnosima. Hana, medicinska sestra iz Kanade, ostavlja svoju vojnu trupu kako bi se brinula za pacijenta koji je zadobio opekotine u ratu. U njemu vidi sve one pacijente koje nije uspjela spasiti, pa tako i svog oca te odlučuje umanjiti mu patnje na smrtnoj postelji. Pacijent je poznat pod imenom 'Engleski pacijent' zbog svojih engleskih manira i naglaska. Iako se čini da je izgubio pamćenje, njegova priča, kroz retrospekciju, ipak dolazi na površinu. Kanadski lopov Caravaggio krivi engleskog pacijenta zbog gubitka palčeva u ratu koji su bili dio njegovog identiteta te želi osvetu. Lik koji otkriva prave odnose između kolonizatora i koloniziranih je Kip, sik koji razmontirava bombe za britansku vojsku. Otuđen je od vlastite obitelji, ali nije ni potpuno prihvaćen u britanskom društvu. On je lik koji je 'između' pa je od posebnog interesa za Ondaatjea koji koristi njegove reakcije kako bi dublje istražio glavne postkolonijalne teme – nacionalizam i pitanje identiteta.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: identitet, nacionalnost, teritorij, rat, postkolonijalizam, multikulturalizam