



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Ghosts here and there : spectral resistance and the ethics of ghosts in postcolonial literature

Lee, C.

Citation

Lee, C. (2017, January 11). *Ghosts here and there : spectral resistance and the ethics of ghosts in postcolonial literature*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/45141>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/45141>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/45141> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Lee, C.

Title: Ghosts here and there : spectral resistance and the ethics of ghosts in postcolonial literature

Issue Date: 2017-01-11

Chapter I

Haunting Effects of Spectral Spaces in Postcolonial Literature

We moderns, despite our mechanistic and rationalistic ethos, live in landscapes filled with ghosts. (Bell 813)

Specter is a synonym for the term “ghost” or “phantom.” What is slightly different between a ghost and a specter is that a ghost can also refer to some otherworldly “non-human” creatures in various cultures.¹³ A specter is defined in a more narrow sense as the spirit of a deceased person. The *Oxford Dictionary* claims that the term “specter” is derived from the Latin word “spectrum” that literally refers to “image, apparition” from *specere* “to look.” The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines a specter as “a visible disembodied spirit” of a dead person and as “a ghost,” “the soul of a dead person thought of as living in an unseen world or as appearing to the living people.” According to these definitions, I will argue that a specter (sometimes known as ghost, phantom, apparition, spook, revenant, or wraith) is the spirit of a dead person that can appear to the living in visible form or other manifestation. It is generally described as a restless essence that haunts particular places, objects, or people he or she was associated with in life. Distinguished from the more benign spirits involved in ancestor worship, which are regarded as venerable and imagined as having a continued presence in some sort of afterlife, a specter

¹³ In various African and Asian cultures, many types of ghosts usually appear in animal form or refer to a non-human creature. For instance, The *Oni* (鬼) are a kind of *Yōkai* (ghost or strange apparition) in Japanese folklore that are portrayed as hideous and mythical creatures with sharp claws, wild hair, and two long horns growing from their heads. They were originally invisible spirits that caused disasters, disease, and other unpleasant things. Since these formless creatures could take on a variety of forms to deceive or eat human beings, they eventually became anthropomorphized and took on a form of ogres. References include Shirley Lim and Amy Ling’s *Reading the Literatures of Asian America* (1992) and Laurence C. Bush’s *Asian Horror Encyclopedia: Asian Horror Culture in Literature, Manga and Folklore* (2001).

is the spirit kept from a peaceful afterlife. It is generally regarded as an undesirable state and its haunting is associated with fear and injustice.

Since the early 1990s, the issue of the specter has become an important issue in contemporary literary and cultural studies. Considering the concept of “specter” in general, in terms of a reference to what is now unseen or past, it is usually employed as a metaphor of ghostly figures, such as strangers, aliens, foreigners, and invisible social outcasts, or serves to represent an unspeakable secret or history that is repressed within the dominant discourse. Inspired by the poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theorizations of ghosts that have stressed the temporal dimension of the specter, many literary critics have explored how the “haunting” of the spectral marks the return of the repressed or the relentless repetition and temporal disturbance of the past in the present. The haunting indicates that there are some oppressed groups who urgently call for attention and justice. It also reveals an untold story that challenges the authorized version of the event. Besides, increasing scholarly attention has been paid to the role of specters as “unstable interstitial figures” and something that “disrupts both oppositional thinking and the linearity of historical chronology” (Weinstock 62-63). Weinstock explains:

Neither living nor dead, present nor absent, the ghosts function as the paradigmatic deconstructive gesture, the “shadowy third” or trace of an absence that undermines the fixedness of such binary oppositions. As an entity out of place in time, as something from the past that emerges into the present, the phantom calls into question the linearity of history. (6)

By applying current notions of the specter to the studies of postcolonial literature, many researchers have demonstrated the deep connection between the spectral metaphor and the realms of memory, narrative, and subjectivity. They have not only examined the crucial place figurative ghosts have in the constitution of self, communities, and societies in some postcolonial works, but also have shown how the literary representation of the spectral effectuates the

transcendence of temporality and corporality, brings repressed others or histories to light, and undermines the rigid and figurative boundaries between presence and absence, dominant and subordinate, self and other in terms of race, gender, and class in a postcolonial context. Hence, the spectral metaphor can be regarded as a productive narrative device to re-construct the identities and historical narratives of oppressed groups.

Likewise, recent developments in the humanities and social sciences have highlighted the importance of “space.” Foucault states that the present epoch is “the epoch of space” in which “space takes for us the form of relations among sites” (Foucault 23). French anthropologist Marc Augé claims, “Society’s way of symbolically treating space constitutes the given from which the individual personality is shaped and the individual person’s experience constructed” (Augé, *An Anthropology for Contemporaneous Worlds* 5). Their arguments show that the way we think about space or establish a relation to a place inflects our understanding of the world, our attitudes toward others, and our construction of identities. Besides, more and more scholars have treated space as “a significant indicator of meaning” that represents social and political realities (Gräbe 163). Through their reconsideration of space and spatial practices in arts or social events, they have contributed to a renewed understanding of space: space is not an empty stage or physical locality but a dimension of the social, imbued with all kinds of stories, memories, events, and power relationships.¹⁴ Thus, “space” can be perceived as a loaded term that incorporates the interconnecting dimensions of cultural, geographical, and textual studies.

There are extended discussions of controversial issues in terms of space, such as boundary, border crossing, the politics of space, space and subjectivity, and time-space compression. One of the most fascinating concepts raised in the theories of contemporary space is the space of otherness, a place outside other places, outside power structures. Foucault claims, “despite the whole network of knowledge that enables us to delimit or to formalize it

¹⁴ See Doreen Massey’s *For Space* (2005), Tim Cresswell’s *Place: A Short Introduction*, and *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*, edited by Phil Hubbard, Rob Kitchen and Gill Valentine.

[space], contemporary space is still not disanctified. [It is] still nurtured by the hidden presence of the sacred” (Foucault 23). His statement suggests the intractable and spectral aspect of contemporary space, which, when nurtured by “the hidden presence of the sacred” (23), functions as “counter-sites” in which “the real sites are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (24). In the current environment of globalization, transnationalism and the postcolonial, there is a dimension of space that presents us with the existence of the “sacred” other and keeps eluding our grasp and reverting into the realm of the unknown.

Inspired by the current spectral turn and Foucault’s notion of space of otherness, I would like to suggest that the changing spaces of the contemporary world require new theoretical appraisals within which the ghost or the specter can serve as a productive narrative tool. Besides, by turning to the spatial turn and postcolonial studies, I attempt to give new territory to the ghost outside the framework of the Gothic.¹⁵ In this chapter, I will combine the concept of the specter with the notion of space to investigate how “spectral space” functions as a useful metaphor in reconstructing prevailing ideas of time, space, and identity in postcolonial literature. Spectral spaces are not Gothic spaces that are haunted by ghosts. I define the term “spectral space” as an actual living space—a place, location, or landscape—that is characterized by the nature of the specter, including the specter’s temporal heterogeneity, liminality, fluidity, and uncanny-ness. Considering specters as culturally specific and differentiated when descriptions of the specters vary widely in different cultures, I argue that there are various forms of spectral spaces and each of their representations needs to be explored in terms of its present singularity.¹⁶ By probing multiple

¹⁵ While the Gothic concentrate on the spatial dimension of haunting, there are a variety of literary representations of Gothic spaces, such as the haunted house, abandoned castles, alienated landscapes, and so on. Most of them are haunted by ghosts and informed by the language of necromancy.

¹⁶ Descriptions of the apparition of specters vary widely from a being-less presence to transparent, barely visible shapes, from realistic, lifelike visions to the shape of monstrous creatures. In Scandinavian and Finish tradition, ghosts appear in corporeal form. They are first mistaken for the living but appear and disappear suddenly, or leave no footprints or other traces. In Chinese and Japanese cultures, Yūrei (幽靈) are the general terms for specter. According to both traditional beliefs, all humans have a spirit or soul. When a person dies, the spirit leaves the body and enters a form of purgatory, where it waits for the proper funeral rites to be performed,

concepts of specters in different cultural traditions, I will suggest that spectral space can be perceived as a space of heterogeneous time, a space of fluidity, and a space of uncanny-ness. I will address how these three kinds of spectral space are represented in some well-known postcolonial novels, including Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, V. S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River*, Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*, and J. M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron*. By interrogating the literary representation of these spectral spaces and the effect they have on the subjects who live in, visit, or traverse them, I will examine how spectral spaces function in diverse manners to question the fixed demarcations between past and present, inside and outside, self and other, and to reconstruct the time-bound, place-bound, and socially constructed identity.

Spectral Space as Space of Heterogeneous Time

In Derrida's explorations of the temporality of the specter, a specter does not belong to the past but embodies a heterogeneous temporal horizon in which the past, present, and future are integrated. According to Derrida, a specter is present-absent, being neither and both at the same time, of which one "does not know whether it is living or if it is dead" (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 6). Thus, it "is always both *revenant* (invoking what was) and *arrivant* (announcing what will come)," and always associated with the eternal return of singularity and with the repetition of first-time-and-last-time (Blanco and Peeren, *Spectralities Reader* 13). Bearing Derrida's argument in mind, one can assume that a specter operates "in a number of temporal planes, most crucially the future and its possible interaction with the present and the past" (13). Besides, being associated with the messianic—"the way in which the future is always already

so that it may join its ancestors. However, if the person dies in a sudden, violent, or unhappy way, such as murder or suicide, or if the proper rituals for the dead have not been performed, the spirit is thought to transform into a *yūrei* (幽靈) which stays on earth, near a specific location, such as where s/he was killed or where his/her body lies, and haunts the living, especially a specific person, such as his/her murderer or beloved one. Like their European counterparts, a *yūrei* (幽靈) usually appears to the living in bodily likeness. In China and Japan, the appearance of *yūrei* (幽靈) is somewhat uniform: they are usually transparent, legless, and float in mid-air. Most of them are dressed in white and have long, black, and disheveled hair.

populated with certain possibilities derived from the past” (Brown 36)—Derrida’s notion of specter signals “the potential of re-articulation of these possibilities” (Blanco and Peeren, *Spectralities Reader* 13).

Acknowledging this temporal quality of a specter, spectral space can be perceived as a space of heterogeneous time that embodies a complex interaction of past, present, and future. It opens onto one of the features of Foucault’s idea of “heterotopias” or “heterochronies,” which refer to spaces which contain “slices of time,” including both “accumulating” and “temporal” time (Foucault 26). It is also related to the notion of the ghost theorized by Cameroonian political and historical theorist Achille Mbembe. In his description of the African postcolony, Mbembe argues that it is characterized by a form of sovereignty, which exerts a ghostly violence (necropower) to produce negative subjectivity and create death-worlds—“forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life that confer upon them the status of living dead (ghost)” (Mbembe 1). In such a postcolony, the ghost defines a new concept of temporality: there is no “reversibility and irreversibility of time” but “folding and unfolding over anew of experience,” and everything “takes place in an indefinite present” without congealing “to the point of consolidating into history” (6). In such a heterogeneously temporal territory, there is no continuity between the past, present, and future. There is no genealogy. There are only suspension and multiplication, which, according to Gerald Gaylard’s analysis of time and death in Southern African postcolonial novels, bear relevance to the imageries of “stranding, frozen decay, moments outside of time, lostness, in-betweenness, interstitiality” (Gaylard 5). Thus, spectral space can also be regarded as space of “infinity and fusion” as well as one of “stories and possibilities” (Foucault 26). When it is employed as a metaphor in narrative, it cannot only question the concept of linearity, but also convey “something of the transhistorical imagination” (Gaylard 1)—the “glimpses of the transpersonal and enduring which can have effective ethical effects” in a specific historical moment and location (5).

The desert in Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* serves as a good example

of such a space of heterogeneous time. Set at the end of World War II in an abandoned and damaged Italian villa, this Booker Prize-winning novel traces the intersection of four damaged lives, including an emotionally-wounded army nurse, Hana, the maimed thief and a friend of Hana's father, Caravaggio, the wary Indian sapper, Kip, and the mysterious, nameless, burned victim, the English patient. As the main character, even mentioned in the title of the novel, the English patient, who is burnt beyond recognition and acts as a riddle to his companions, turns out to be a Hungarian Count named Almásy. He was an explorer of the deserts of North Africa. It is worth noting that Count Almásy's exploration of the desert in the novel can be regarded as a practice of imperialism or colonialism—"an act of geographical violence, through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted and finally brought under control" (Said 225). By mapping and recording geographical surveys of the desert, he and other Saharan explorers of the Geographical Society participate in the colonial enterprise that treats the remote desert as a vast and empty space on which to draw boundaries of power and difference for further expropriation.

However, when the English patient's story unfolds through a series of flashbacks, one will find that the desert is neither fixed nor empty, but mobile and heterogeneously temporal. The English patient describes it as a place of shifting temporal and ontological realities—"a piece of cloth carried by winds, never held down by stones, and given a hundred shifting names long before Canterbury existed" (Ondaatje 138-39). He also considers it as "a place of pockets" and the "trompe l'oeil of time and water" (259). In the desert, he recognizes different plants, winds, routes, and towns that existed in the past or have existed for centuries. There he learns the stories of the ancient tribes or kingdoms, and is rescued from an airplane on fire and nursed by Bedouins. There he watches his dying lover being surrounded by the ancient cave paintings. The routes, towns, stories, paintings in the caves, the Bedouins, and the activities taken by the Geographical Society all mark signs of life and interconnected histories within the desert. Thus, the desert can be regarded as a space of heterogeneous time being "inhabited, traversed, and negotiated" (Boer 12). It is, in fact, "a varied landscape in which all sorts of flexible demarcations

are present, which draw and redraw spaces through time” (136), and in which “every trace tells a history” (138).

With signs of presence and absence, the desert ruptures the linearity of time and enables the English patient to develop a trans-historical sense of identity. Rufus Cook assumes that the desert is endowed with a certain time-defeating power, the power to “suspend or short-circuit linear, successive time, to collapse the past, present and future into one simultaneous, a-temporal instant” (Cook, “Imploding Time and Geography” 123). When the English patient stays for a while in the time-redeeming and heterogeneously temporal space of the desert, he can’t help becoming “unconscious of ancestry” (Ondaatje 246). He claims, “It (the desert) was a place of faith. We disappeared into landscape … Erase the family name! Erase nations! I was taught such things by the desert” (139). I would like to argue that it is not the emptiness of the desert but its overwhelming presence of memories, histories, and something imperceptible that makes it “a place of faith” for the English patient. The desert is regarded as a transformed landscape—“an earth that had no maps” (261)—that is changing and metamorphasized because it is intertwined with past, present, and future. It is sometimes a site of memorialization, sometimes a site of love, conflict and violence, and sometimes a site of dream and imagination. Its heterogeneous temporality and multiplicity frees the English patient from the grip of fixed and frozen time, and prompts him to re-examine his time-bound existence related to his homeland and nationality.

The desert not only disrupts the made up ideas of home or nationality, but also creates a communal identity or society. The English patient and the other members of the Geographical Society are infected by the desire “to remove the clothing of [their] countries” and the paths they have emerged from (Ondaatje 139). Though they are German, English, Hungarian, and African, they re-conceive of themselves as an “oasis society” through their love of the sand rather than through their identification with the nation-states (136). Since the desert dissolves their sense of temporal/spatial demarcation, names and origins become meaningless to them. Thus, they finally break the pretended continuity assigned by the dominant western discourse and reconstruct a

“communal identity” by creating a circle of international community (Whetter 446). In other words, containing traces of life and history, the desert stands for a point of entry into “that pure zone between land and chart between distances and legend between nature and storyteller,” where one learns that every subject is marked by “communal histories” and “communal books” (Ondaatje 246, 261).

The ruined villa in the novel serves as another instance of a space of heterogeneous time. As the major setting in the book, the abandoned Italian monastery, the Villa San Girolamo, not only acts as a shelter for the four disparate characters during the final days of World War II, but also stands for a place of memory and possibility. It might have been once the Villa Bruscoli owned by Poliziano—the great protégé of Lorenzo during the 15th century, and was a nunnery, the last stronghold of the German army and then a hospital of the Allies. When the novel opens at the end of the war, the villa used as a hospital has been evacuated. However, Hana decides to stay there with the English patient, who is not up to being transported along with the rest of the patients. Later, Caravaggio comes when he is drawn to Hana in ways he cannot articulate. Being responsible for disarming bombs in the area, Kip also stays in the villa with them.

On one hand, the remains of the old chapel, library, wild gardens, and unexplored mines in the villa mark the traces of different periods of time. Besides, the narrator describes the villa as a space without boundaries and structure: “There seemed little demarcation between house and landscape, between damaged building and the burned and shelled remnants of the earth” (Ondaatje 43). The imagery of the lack of border conveys how the present and the past appear heterogeneously and randomly there. By living and roaming among the ruins, Hana and the other characters seem to witness both presence and absence-presence of historical events and incorporate them into their life experiences.

On the other hand, the villa acts as a spectral location where the memories of Hana, Caravaggio, Kip, and Almásy are disclosed by unconventional yet interlaced narratives. There are multiple realities as the

point of view shifts from one character to another. The tense switches back and forth from present to past, and settings change randomly as each character's past unfolds. I will argue that, as a place where such a web of memories is displayed, the villa is heterogeneously temporal. In it, the characters are up to travel through time and space through their remembrance of the past and interaction with the other characters in the present. Besides, it acts as a place of "postcolonial transhistorical time," the time "that has a memory, that is learning from past failure, that is syncopating linear realism but not falling into iterative historical repetition" (Gaylard 13). It not only marks "escape" or "transcendence" from linear clock time, but also engages "interconnection" between past and present.

Such spectral temporality of the villa enables the characters to develop "transhistorical consciousness" and re-create a suspended but communal identity (Gaylard 8). The narrator says, "But here they were shedding skins. They could imitate nothing but what they were. There was no defence but to look for the truth in others" (Ondaatje 117). Since the "skins" that mark the demarcation between self and other are eliminated in the villa, the four characters of different backgrounds can string together without being constrained to their races, classes, and nations. In addition, by developing a profound relationship with each other and weaving a connected web of traumatic memories, they have reached an understanding, though temporarily, and begin undertaking a healing process. For instance, when they celebrate Hana's twenty-first birthday with food, wine, and snail lights, these four characters experience a communal union. They listen to Hana singing a song for Kip:

Singing in the voice of a tired traveler, alone against everything. A new testament. There was no certainty to the song anymore, the singer could only be one voice against all the mountains of power. That was the only sureness. The one voice was the single unspoiled thing. A song of snail light. Caravaggio realized she was singing with and echoing the

heart of the sapper. (269)

The scene represents not only a moment of communion between strangers, but also of “a postnational alternative to collective goodness” (Ty 18). In the ruined villa outside the history of linearity and progress, these international orphans free themselves from their time-bound identities and gather to celebrate the birth of a trans-historical and trans-national community at such a time of darkness.

Spectral Space as Space of Fluidity

A specter is associated with fluidity for its geographic movement, physical transformation, and liminality. Many cultures and religions believe that the essence of a being, such as the soul or the spirit of a deceased, continues to exist. It might either travel to heaven or hell (the sky world or underworld, nirvana, or join its ancestors, depending on different traditions), or stay on earth. Some religious views argue that the spirits of those who have died in violent or tragic events such as murder, accident, or suicide, or those who have no one perform proper funerals, are considered to be restless and disturbing ghosts existing on earth. Being kept from a peaceful afterlife, they are sometimes trapped inside the property where their death occurred or where their memories are strong. In certain contexts, they wander. Derrida argues that a specter is always out of place. It appears “when the dead have been misplaced, when they turn out to be no longer in the grave … but re-appear in another or other places” (Peeren, “The Ghost as a Gendered Chronotope” 84). As such, a specter always moves, making different places unsafe by its uncanny presence. In addition, in Chinese culture, a specter is a ghost of a person whom the family refuses to worship as an ancestor because of his or her shameful deeds. Without home, without belonging, a ghost in China is suggested to go from one place to another, looking for a substitute. Take No Name Woman in Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* for example. She committed suicide because she had an affair with another man. Regarding her story as a stain in

the family history, the family tries to forget her after her death. No one in the family worships her. The mother even forbids the heroin, Maxine, to talk about this nameless aunt. Dislocated from its origin and ancestry, the aunt's ghost is destined to be hungry and homeless, and to wander around endlessly. In this circumstance, a specter acts as an existence outside traditional forms of family, class, and nation. It can't take root anywhere, so it is condemned to wandering and a general drifting on a spatial as well as a symbolic level.

In other cultural contexts, such as in West African culture, a specter is perceived as a magical figure or spirit of an ancestor that can adopt different forms or shapes. Mbembe has investigated the capricious nature of the ghost and its ability to overturn things in the fiction of Amos Tutuola. He assumes that caprice is related to "dissolving the identity of each thing within an infinity of identities and forms with no direct link to their origin." (Mbembe 14). Accordingly, by changing its shape according to different situations, a ghost in this context is marked by its multiple identities and a process of becoming. It not only represents "the negation of all essential singularity," but it is also related to the concepts of fluidity and plurality (Mbembe 14).

In addition, a specter's mobile and hybrid nature results from its in-betweenness or liminality. Lois Parkinson Zamora, a leader in comparative literature of the Americas, defines a ghost as a prisoner in limbo that hangs between two worlds. She says, "Ghosts are liminal, metamorphic, intermediary: they exist in/between/on modernity's boundaries of physical and spiritual, magical and real, and challenge the lines of demarcation" (Zamora 77-78). Likewise, ghosts are recognized in the Buddhist religion as an intermediate existence occupying a distinct but overlapping world to the human one. Tibetan Buddhists believe that, when humans die, they enter the intermediate *Bardo* state, from which they will be reborn as a human or other creature unless they achieve *Nirvana*, where they are beyond all states of embodiment (Karma-glin-pa and Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz xxxiii).¹⁷ The Tibetan word

¹⁷ The term "nirvana" is most commonly associated with Buddhism, and represents an ultimate state of perfect quietude, freedom, and the highest happiness along with being the liberation from *samsara*, the repeating cycle of birth, life, and death. See *Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* (Flood, Gavin. *Nirvana*. Ed. John Bowker. *Oxford Dictionary of World*

bardo literally means “intermediate state” and is also translated as “transitional state,” “in-between state,” or “liminal state.”¹⁸ The term “liminality” derives from the word “limen” that designates threshold. Since “the threshold functions simultaneously as both an obstructive barrier and an enticing opening for the entry into unknown,” the liminal can be assumed as “a site where difference becomes encounter as well as a location that resists assimilation while simultaneously allowing for the dynamic possibilities of fusion.”¹⁹ Often informed by such notions of crossing, intersectionality, transition, and transformation, a specter occupies an ambivalent and hybridized space that “facilitates a process of encounters, engagements, and conversations within, between, among, and across the rich polyphony” that constitutes the dominant discourses on race, class, and gender.

Inheriting these features of a specter—mobility, hybridity, and liminality, the second kind of spectral space can be assumed as a space of fluidity. It acts as what Foucault asserts as “a floating piece of space, a place without a place” that is “closed in on itself and at the same time is given to the infinity” (Foucault 27). It also shares the similarity of Augé’s concept of “non-places” that are marked by the “ fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral,” and convey a sense of transience, such as spaces of “circulation (freeways, airways), consumption (department stores, supermarkets), and communication (telephones, faxes, television, cable networks)” (Augé, *Non-Places* 110). However, I will argue that this kind of spectral space is different from Augé’s concept of “non-places,” the spaces of “super-modernity” that lack anchoring in history, locality, and identity. Instead, it demonstrates interconnecting flows between specific places and histories. This spectral space is much like Doreen Massey’s idea of “routes” that call into question any authentic “roots” of traditions but keep connected with those local lives and traditions.²⁰ These

Religions) and *On World Religions: Diversity, Not Dissension*. Ed. Anindita N. Balslev. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2014.

¹⁸ See “Bardo” on Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bardo>. Accessed 22 Apr. 2015.

¹⁹ See SSAWW 2015 CFP. <https://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/node/58456>.

Accessed 15 Sep. 2014.

²⁰ Humanist geographer and space theorist Doreen Massey argues in “A Global Sense

routes are multiple instead of single. They are not linear and straightforward. Otherwise, they twist and turn, and interconnect with other routes. In such a kind of space, people are apt to “come into contact with those who haven’t moved around, or have come from different places” as well as to “become one of the ingredients of an existing hybridity” (Lippard 5-6).

By being hybrid and mobile, the literary representation of a fluid space not only questions the static concepts of home, nation, and the “us/them distinction,” but also effectuates the subjects who stay or traverse in it to reconsider his or her relationship to a place (Cresswell 27). In the following, I will show some examples of this kind of spectral space in Naipaul’s *A Bend in the River*. I will examine how they function as productive figures in deconstructing one’s normative understanding of social or national space that assumes “a tight and relatively immobile connection between a group of people and a site” (39), and in recreating a new sense of belonging for diasporas.

A Bend in the River is set in post-colonial Africa during the early days of Zaire’s independence after Belgian colonial rule of Congo. The protagonist, Salim, is a young Indian merchant from a Muslim family on the eastern coast of Africa. By witnessing how his family “continued to live … blindly” without establishing their connection with the locals, he decides to purchase a shop from his friend, Nazruddin, and begin a new life in the ragged African town at a bend in the great river (Naipaul 23). He journeys inland along the river, following the route of Conrad from a coastal city into the “heart of darkness” as well as the route of slavery in reverse (4). And then, in the town at the bend in the river, he builds his business and a new home with a family slave, Metty, and establishes a relationship with Zabeth, a tribal magician and trading woman, Ferdinand, the son of Zabeth, and some other European migrants from the east,

of Place” (1994) that, as geographers or citizens of the globalized world, one of the key political tasks is to forge a “global sense of place” that takes interconnectedness rather than separatism, routes rather than roots, as its foundation. In addition, in her notable work *For Space* (2005), she re-conceptualizes place in term of “routes,” in preference to single “roots,” and challenges notions of authenticity and identity that set up “place” (the fixity or rootedness of place) and “flow” (the fluidity of global economy) as opposites, whereas in fact, each is necessary to and formative of the other: “Identities are relational in ways that are spatio-temporal” (Massey, *For Space* 195).

such as Shoba and Mahesh. He also makes friends with Raymond and Yvette, the couple who live in the New Domain, a group of new buildings that are built on the ruined European suburb to show the Big Man's power in the newly independent country. Later, under the pressure of a serious political insurrection, Salim flies to London to become engaged to Nazruddin's daughter, Kareisha. After he returns to the town, he faces a national crisis of political violence and corruption. He not only finds his shop confiscated, but also experiences imprisonment for smuggling ivory and gold. With the help of Ferdinand, who serves as "an administrative cadet" in the town, Salim leaves the country at the end of the novel (270). In the last scene, he boards a steamer and flees from the inland village to the west coast of Africa.

It is worth noting that Salim travels often, moving from coast city to the inland village, from the village to the New Domain, and between the metropolis London and the formerly colonial Africa. He moves to those places under pressure "in the hope of finding a dwelling" and "surviving energy" (Wu 13). The means of transportation, such as steamer and airplane, play important roles in his journeys. By connecting different places, such as inland and coast, metropolis and colony, Europe and Africa, but without belonging to any of the locations, these means of transportation can be regarded as what I call spaces of fluidity. Marking Salim's temporary movement and his state of in-betweenness in the novel, such spaces of fluidity can disrupt the established discourse of polarities as well as underscore "the possibility of cultural hybridity" (Bhabha 4).

For instance, by bridging and juxtaposing European and African locales that contain similar pointlessly busy populations, undergo similar processes of decay, and are in a similar "self-consumptive state," the airplane serves as a crucial means for Salim to gain awareness of the problems of binary divisions embedded in colonial discourse (Johnson 219). During his visit to London, Salim discovers that "the Europe the airplane brought me to was not the Europe I had known all my life ... It was something shrunken and mean and forbidding" (Naipaul 229). He also finds that what he experiences in London is more like the repetition of his life in Africa: "In the streets of London I saw

these people, who were like myself ... they traded in the middle of London as they had traded in the middle of Africa" (230). Possessed of this disorientation, he questions the binaries of center and periphery, modernity and tradition, the metropolitan city and the colonial outposts. For him, the difference between London and Africa, "great cities" and "shanty cities," collapses. Thus, we can assume that an airplane acts as a liminal space that not only connects different locations, but also prompts one to revise a binary thinking sustained by the constructed social order and power relationships.

In addition, the airplane propels Salim to develop a new and ambiguous sense of belonging and re-create his relationship with place, history, and other communities. For example, by taking the flight back and forth from central Africa to London, Salim feels a sense of uncertainty that prompts him to question the essentialist thinking about home and nation, and the boundary between empire and colony. Salim's rich and educated Punjabi friend, Indar, assumes the airplane as "a wonderful thing": "You are still in one place when you arrive at the other. The aeroplane is faster than the heart ... You stop grieving ... You trample on the past" (Naipaul 119-20). Marked by its transience and mobility, the airplane seems to relate to Augé's concept of "non-places" and suggest a "global" identity, which is detached from feelings, local connection, and the past (Appiah 167-68). However, the celebration of freedom here turns out to be a deception. When Salim takes a flight to London, he not only feels "travelling fast" and "being in two places at once," but also develops a sense of uncertainty: "Both places were real; both places were unreal. You could play off one against another; and you had no feeling of having made a final decision, a great last journey" (Naipaul 229). Traveling by air to London makes him recognize his state as a visitor, a traveler or "a man just passing by" (95).

This sense of uncertainty is strengthened and turned into anxieties during his stay in the hotel in London. He claims, "I hated that hotel room. It made me feel I was nowhere. It forced old anxieties on me and added new ones, about London, about this bigger world where I would have to make my way" (231). The "old anxieties" are what he experiences in the middle of Africa

where “all was arbitrary” and “all our lives were fluid” and “isolated” (190). The airplane doesn’t bring him a sense of security or make him feel attached to the arrived city. On the contrary, it leads to his “disbelief in belongingness” (Wu 129):

That idea of going home, of leaving, the idea of the other place—I had lived with it in various forms for many years. In Africa it had always been with me. In London, in my hotel room, I had allowed it on some nights to take me over. It was a deception. I saw now that it comforted only to weaken and destroy ... There could be no going back; there was nothing to go back to. We had become what the world outside had made us; we had to live in the world as it existed. (Naipaul 244)

Salim gains an insight of his diasporic condition in the postcolonial world, where no place remains as the ultimate home. This sense of displacement or “unhomeliness” deconstructs “the old discourse of rootedness” and turns him into a “traveler who searches for an identity that is constantly in flux” (Boer 15). The airplane here acts as a space of fluidity in which none of the subjects feels an authentic relationship with any place, and their identities are always ambiguous, always both and neither at the same time.

The river in the novel serves as another instance of this kind of spectral space—a place of fluidity, liminality, and changeability. It is more than a fixed line cutting through the African landscape, but an avenue of commerce and a place where different people and cultures meet and mix. Besides, it plays a prominent role in Salim’s journey. Along the river, Salim travels from his Indian family’s home on the east coast of Africa to the inland village and then from the middle part of Africa to the west coast. Thus, the river here can be perceived as a mobile and hybrid space that not only connects worlds of difference, but also is itself a world of difference, within which negotiation and interaction between various and contrasting visions take place.

The water hyacinths—the “dark floating islands on the dark

river”—represent such a hybrid and mobile nature of the river (Naipaul 46). As the new-breeding plants in the river, these water hyacinths grow very fast, floating on the river day and night, and traveling long away. For the local people, they are an unfamiliar existence with dark power:

It was as if rain and river were tearing away bush from the heart of the continent and floating it down to the ocean, incalculable miles away. But the water hyacinth was the fruit of the river alone. The tall lilac-coloured flower had appeared only a few years before, and in the local language there was no word for it. The people still called it “the new thing” or “the new thing in the river,” and to them it was another enemy. (46)

The bush or the forest is described as the place “full of spirits” and hovered by “the protecting presences of a man’s ancestors” in the novel (65). The new plant that seems to come from the bush can be perceived as associated with the spirits of the dead. Besides, its fertility shows its monstrosity and conveys a sense of gothic horror: “Its rubbery vines and leaves formed thick tangles of vegetation that adhered to the river banks and clogged up waterways. It grew fast, faster than men could destroy it with the tools they had” (46). I would like to suggest that the spectral presence of this new enemy in the river questions the static concept of origin. Its association with the bush and the ghosts, its unfamiliarity, and its immeasurable fertility threaten people’s sense of security based on essentialist notions of home, rootedness, and binary divisions between life and death.

When the water hyacinths symbolize a new and aggressive resistance to the idea of essence, the river that breeds and spreads these new plants can be regarded as a space of creativity and becoming that propels the characters to recreate their identities. For example, by moving from one place to another along the river, Salim develops a critical attitude toward an essentialist notion of identity. He questions the Big Man’s agenda of nationalizing his country through practices of territorial and racial purity. He realizes that “the process of

nationalization,” which highlights ancestral belonging by excluding all non-African populations, doesn’t “produce a new nation for its citoyens and citoyennes, but rather a new space of unbelonging” (Johnson 224). In other words, the river undermines his belief in an identity rooted in the binary politics of race, gender, and sexuality.

Furthermore, the river propels Salim to establish a new and fluid identity. Leon claims:

Mobility creates multiple centres of consciousness in which the self feels that it is participating in several cultural traditions without being at home. These displacements, either real or imagined, create a sense of “unhomeliness” which can be defined as the obscure feelings that simultaneously draw and repel a person in her relations to a place. (Leon 15)

He also argues that “the fragmented, fluid places of travel represent sites for negotiating identity” in which the traveler is up to “reclaim, retrieve or create a home and a sense of belonging” (18). In the novel, by traveling frequently on the river, which contains diverse traces of histories, natural lives, and human practices, and which is always in the process of becoming, Salim develops a new sense of belonging. When Salim keeps searching for home and a place for arriving during the journey, he is also constantly placed in a situation of something new, unknown, and unexpected. He not only experiences complex political power relationships, but also participates in different cultural exchanges. Gradually, he establishes a new identity, an “identity-en-route,” that is always fluid, transitory, and “in the act of ‘becoming’” (66). In the final scene, as he takes a steamer to float away from the village, the river appears spectral and creates a sense of unhomeliness in his mind: “The air would have been full of moths and flying insects. The searchlight, while it was on, has shown thousands, white in the white light” (Naipaul 278). The thousands of moths and flying insects in the white misty air upon the river convey a gothic sense of the river in which something unknown and ghostly seem to happen.

Being haunting and consuming throughout the novel, the dark fluid river shows us an endless life journey without points of departure and arrival as well as a mobile identity in the postcolonial world.

Spectral Space as Space of Uncanniness

Specters are always uncanny since they mark a conflation of the real and the unreal, the familiar and the unfamiliar, the otherness within the self, and the return of the repressed. The notion of the uncanny derives from Freud's essay "The Uncanny," which defines it as "the class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar"—the coming together of strangeness and intimacy, the disturbing overlap between terror and comfort (Freud 1). He further explains that such a feeling of "dread and creeping horror" arises when "infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when the primitive beliefs which have been surmounted is seen once more to be confirmed" (245). For Freud, an uncanny moment is one in which repressed psychic material from the past returns repetitively in the present and haunts from generation to generation. Terry Castle further argues that the uncanny stands for an unseen realm beyond knowledge, the "darkness" that is "invented" by systems of reasoning in the "light" of the Enlightenment (Castle, *The Female Thermometer* 8). It is something inexplicable and banished from established knowledge, but appears darkly seductive and always sets off returns in the future.

As a spirit of the dead that exists outside the framework of temporal and spatial distinctions as well as beyond rational thoughts, a specter is uncanny. It usually appears to people in a foreign, incomprehensible, unfamiliar, and even fearful way. In the western gothic tradition, a specter is usually invisible but brings chill, smell, and noises. Derrida considers it an invisible visibility—"the visibility of a body which is not present in flesh and blood" (Derrida and Stiegler 115), and as "non-object," "non-present present," "being-there of an absent or departed one" (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 6). By always "confronting us with what precedes and exceeds our sense of autonomy, seeing us without

being seen,” this specter can be regarded as “a figure of absolute alterity (existing both outside and within us)” that cannot be anticipated, but always demands “a certain responsibility and answerability” (Blanco and Peeren, *Spectralities Reader* 33). Since the spirit of a deceased person that remains present in the material world is regarded as an unnatural or undesirable state of affairs, the idea of the specter is associated with a feeling of fear and terror.

Likewise, in other cultural traditions, a specter or ghost appears in an uncanny manner. A *revenant* in European folklore refers to “a deceased person returning from the dead to haunt the living, either as a disembodied ghost or alternatively as an animated (‘undead’) corpse” (Pettigrove 68). It sometimes looks pale or transparent, and sometimes appears fearsome with “extreme forms of human life” like the ghost in Africa and Asia (Mbembe 11). By re-reading two Tutuola’s texts, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, Mbembe shows the diverse shapes of ghostly terror and violence. On one hand, he argues that ghost terror derives from the deformity and the ugliness of the ghost’s body that “allow ghostly power to acquire this ability to double and to divide into a multiplicity of opposites” (11). On the other hand, he claims that operating through murder, capture, noise, and caprice, ghostly violence shows the concrete power of ghosts, which is tied to the world of terror. Similar to its western counterpart, the ghosts in this context are associated with “the fearsome machinations of an illogical, ungraspable system that negates all singularity and security, and imposes a constant threat of dismemberment and death” (Blanco and Peeren, *Spectralities Reader* 95).

As a figure beyond rationality or as the repressed one from the past that recurs persistently in the present to demand attention, a specter is always haunting and provoking senses of anxiety, fear, and terror in the mind of the living. Based upon these aspects of specter, I would like to suggest the third kind of spectral space as a space of uncanny-ness that, by being alien, chaotic, threatening, or unpredictable, functions as the opposite of reformed, hierarchical, and mapped space. It can be a place haunted by specters, like a location where irrevocable violence has been committed and traumatic memories recur. It can also be a natural landscape that remains foreign and

impenetrable to human beings. To paraphrase Mbembe, it can be “a world of images,” “a field of visions: fantasies, strange spaces, masks, surprises, and astonishment,” and a space escaping from “synthesis and geometry” (Mbembe 5). In such spectral space, one is caught between the past and the present, the intimate and the exposed, the familiar and the frightening, and one will develop a sense of uncertainty and doubt about rationality as well as the dominant notions of time, space, and identity.

The wild and monstrous landscapes act as this kind of spectral space in many colonial and postcolonial works set in Africa. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the wilderness is “a region of a wild or desolate character, or in which one wanders or loses one’s way.” In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the wilderness refers to “a world where the law of nature reigns, a world over which the first act of culture, Adam’s act of naming, has not been performed” (Coetzee, *White Writing* 49). Marking spaces of unruliness and desolation, the ones that are naturally born instead of being made, the wilderness plays an important role in the colonial history of Africa. When the white colonizers tried to tame the African land, to feel “at home in” or “at harmony with” it, or to “maintain a border separating a region of order and culture … from the barbarian wilderness,” the wild and natural aspect of it was always failing their wishes (10). As Luce Irigaray has observed: “Even as man seeks to rise higher and higher—in his knowledge too—so the ground fractures more and more beneath his feet. ‘Nature’ is forever dodging his project of representation, of reproduction. And his grasp” (Irigaray 134). Likewise, fraught with mysteries and indecipherable violence, the nature of African landscape always appears frightening and uncanny to the colonizers. It not only remains un-representable in dominant narratives, but also arouses a sense of anxiety and fear within the mind of the colonizers.

In Lessing’s novel *The Grass is Singing*, the bush serves as a good example of this kind of spectral space. JanMohamed identifies the world of the African bush and high-veldt as “uncontrollable, chaotic, unattainable, and ultimately evil” (JanMohamed 83). What he argues shows that the bush always looks unfamiliar and threatening to the white colonizers. Although most of

them can live a carefree life in the suburban world by reforming the land, none of them can avoid suffering from the fears when they confront its harshness. In the novel, the bush signifies an immeasurable force of darkness and otherness to the white protagonist, Mary Tuner. Mary was once an efficient secretary in town. After she marries Dick Turner, the white farmer in South Rhodesia, they move to the farmhouse that is surrounded by the bush in the country. When she first arrives there, she is totally terrified by “a wild nocturnal sound” of a bird, feeling “as if a hostile breath had blown upon her, from another world, from the trees” (Lessing 69). In her imagination, the bush marks an eternal and violent existence that will swallow their house one day after they leave the farm:

She had never become used to the bush, never felt at home in it ... Often in the night she woke and thought of the small brick house, like a frail shell that might crush inwards under the presence of the hostile bush. Often she thought how, if they left this place, one wet fermenting season would swallow the small cleared space, and send the young trees thrusting up from the floor, pushing aside brick and cement, so that in a few months there would be nothing left but heaps of rubble about the trunks of the trees. (187)

For Mary, the bush is there forever, haunting and destructive. As the title of the book suggests, whether people stay there or not, the grass is always singing. The vastness and darkness of the bush, which hasn’t been deformed yet or can’t be reformed completely by whites, endows itself with a mystic and uncanny power that gradually erodes Mary’s sense of time and her certainty of white superiority.

On one hand, the bush functions as a space of otherness that challenges the authenticity of white domination, which establishes the distribution between rich White land and poor Black land, between the dominant urban area and marginal rural one. Through spatial and narrative practices, the Empire and the colonizers tried to establish “place attachment” to foreign and unfamiliar

landscapes of the colonies. Said has analyzed three examples of imperialist geographical domination. The most general is to transform the colony into “images of what they left behind” by installing their own plants, animals, crops, and building methods. It usually brings the colony “new diseases, environmental imbalances and traumatic dislocation for the overpowered natives” (Said 225). The second way is to rationalize the long-term territorial possession, which implies the capitalistic exploitation of the colonial territory. The third is to transform the colonial space, such as anglicizing the names and conducting many geographical surveys for further expropriation of land in favor of “seigniorial families,” in order that it won’t look “foreign to the imperial eye” (226). Enforced during the colonial encounter, these three ways of geographical domination not only deform the existing land, but also install a traumatic relationship between the original inhabitants and newcomers. However, by refusing to be domesticated and to emerge into meaningful signs within imperialist narratives, the wilderness or the African bush calls into question the white settlers’ attempts to control and to create habitability in the unfamiliar and natural landscapes in Africa.

On the other hand, by signifying the uncanny existence of the native, the bush suspends the hierarchy between black and white, colonizer and colonized, higher and lower class. For Mary, the bush is not only made monstrous by its uncanny atmosphere, but also through its symbolic relationship with the native. By associating the bush with the hostile emotions and dark bodies of the native workers, Mary transforms her fear of the trees into her dread of Moses, the native servant at her house. She becomes weaker and weaker in her struggle with Moses and gradually relies on him. The hierarchical relationship and convention between white and black, mistress and servant are finally broken. The climax comes in the murder scene in the last chapter. Mary’s last thought comes out before Moses kills her, “the bush avenged itself.” And the narrator adds, “The trees advanced in a rush, like beasts, and the thunder was the noise of their coming” (Lessing 243). While the bush is described as something monstrous that “advanced in a rush,” I can’t help arguing that it might be because the spirits of the dead black ancestors

who have suffered under colonial exploitation invade the body of the bush, return to the world of the living, and take revenge against the white oppressor. Here, the images of the bush and the native mingle and act as the primary source of action. They present a subversive critique of what Mary holds to be true—about race, class, and white domination. In a broader sense, the bush, by persistently haunting Mary until her death, functions to fail the white colonizers' attempt to exploit the natives and their land.

There is a similar example of such an uncanny space in Coetzee's *Age of Iron* (1990). The novel takes the form of a letter-diary from a white Cape Town resident, Mrs. Curren, who is a retired classics professor dying of cancer, to her daughter in America. She details a series of strange events that turn her protected middle-class life upside down. As a "political liberal who has always considered herself a 'good person' in deplored the government's obfuscating and brutal policies," Mrs. Curren acknowledges her complicity in upholding the system after she experiences directly the horrors of apartheid (*Publishers Weekly*). The only person with whom she can communicate and get along is a homeless alcoholic appearing at her door. She asks him to be her messenger after her death and to mail the packet of her letters to her daughter. In her letters, she "records the rising tide of militancy among young blacks," who are "brave, defiant and vengeful," and mark "a generation whose hearts have turned to iron." She depicts the earth of South Africa as a space of specters that brings the white settlers an indescribable anxiety for the revenge of the black. She says,

Let me tell you, when I walk upon this land, this South Africa, I have a gathering feeling of walking upon black faces. They are dead but their spirit has not left them. They lie there heavy and obdurate, waiting for my feet to pass, waiting for me to go, waiting to be raised up again. Millions of figures of pig iron floating under the skin of the earth. The age of iron waiting to return. (Coetzee, *Age of Iron* 115)

By projecting and inflicting African spirituality and monstrosity to the land of South Africa, the white narrator is haunted by the possible return of the dead and the repressed other. She gradually feels uncertain about her attachment to the lived space. She is forced to reconsider the following questions: Whose land is it that she lives on and becomes attached to? Is it really possible to claim an attachment to the unfamiliar land of South Africa? The answers become unclear and her feeling of anxiety seems to obscure her understanding of relevant history, including the history of imperialism, as well as her construction of a stable and superior identity. In contrast to the mapped and secure space in the metropolis or the empire, the African landscape is spectral, uncanny, and hostile to the white settlers, so that it keeps reminding them of their internal fears of the unknown others. The landscape mocks their vain efforts to reign or control the inhabitants and their land.

Conclusion

Spectrality is intimately connected with certain locations. From mysterious deserts and dense forests, to haunted houses and urban labyrinths, specters haunt and traverse many varied landscapes, both internal and external, historic and contemporary, from which disturbing atmospheres emerge. Conceptualizing the specter as a differentiated concept, spectral space emerges as a diverse trope. It is called by a variety of names, represented in plural forms, and capable of producing divergent effects. In this chapter, I have defined spectral space as a space of heterogeneous time, a space of fluidity, and a space of uncanniness. Marking the crossing of the past and the present, inside and outside, self and other, each kind of spectral space provides a critique of the essentialist notions of time, space, race, and nationality. Its existence not only questions the authenticity of mapped and functionalized space, but also undermines established narratives and identities. In addition, inheriting the otherness and un-decidability of a specter, spectral space is surely always complex and mobile. Due to its multiplicity and changeability, it is destined to haunt the present and the dominant, and will never be exorcised completely. In

other words, spectral space functions as an alternative to the contemporary power system and ideologies. It ceaselessly directs our attention to internal and external otherness, as well as to the “future struggles for recognition, respect, and justice of those identified as non-masculine, non-heterosexual and/or non-white” (Blanco and Peeren, *Spectralities Reader* 20).

