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HAUNTING EFFECTS OF SPECTRAL SPACES IN POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE

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Abstract

Inspired by the current "spectral turn" and "spatial turn" in literary and cultural studies, I attempt to propose the term 'spectral space' and investigate how it functions as a useful metaphor in reconstructing prevailing ideas about time, space and identity in postcolonial literature. In this essay I defined 'spectral space' as an actual living space – a place, location, or landscape – that is characterized by the features of the specter. Considering specters as culturally specific and differentiated, there are various forms of spectral spaces and each of their representations needs to be explored in terms of its present singularity. By probing multiple concepts of specters in different cultural traditions, I suggested that spectral space can be perceived as a space of heterogeneous time, a space of fluidity, and a space of uncanny-ness. Furthermore, I explored 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*, and Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*. By interrogating the impact they make on the subjects who live in, visit or traverse them, I will examine how spectral spaces function 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.

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

As the synonym for 'ghost' or "phantom,' specter is defined by *Oxford English Dictionary* as "the soul of a deceased person, spoken of as appearing in a visible form, or otherwise manifesting its presence, to the living." 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 is the spirit kept from a peaceful afterlife. It usually refers to the scary spirit of the unsettled dead that disturbs the life of the living and haunts our unjust memories.

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 specter 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" that "disrupts both oppositional thinking and the linearity of historical chronology" (Weinstock 62-63). By applying the current notions of the specter to the studies of postcolonial literature, many literary researchers have demonstrated the deep connection between the spectral metaphor and the realms of memory and subjectivity. They have not only examined the crucial place figurative ghosts have for the constitution of self, communities and societies, 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.

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" (23). The 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" (*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 understandings of the world, our attitudes to 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 reconsiderations 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 relations.[1]

Such a spatial emphasis is productive in the face of recent theorizations of the specter, which have analyzed the specter more in its temporal dimension than in spatial terms. Some scholars have questioned the persistent focus on temporality in Derrida's account of the specter as well as within psychoanalysis and trauma studies.[2] In her critique of Derrida's privileging of time over space, Esther Peeren argues that it is not merely time "that spectralizes space" and "transforms space into spacing," but also space that "spectralizes time by giving it body and causing it to appear" (82). As such, "the ghost of time" is "conjured in space." The ghost is "both out of sync and out of place" (Peeren 82). In the "Introduction" of *Popular Ghosts*, Blanco and Peeren also analyze a specter in spatial terms, claiming it "as a physical occupation of everyday

[1] 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.

[2] Derrida thinks of the specter as a figure of relentless repetition and temporal disturbance by claiming the specter's time is the time "out of joint." Psychoanalytic critics like Freud and Abraham and Torok also have focused on the temporal dimension of the ghost by aligning their apparition with theories of trauma and the returned of the repressed.

sites … in a disturbance of space as much as of time" (*Popular Ghosts* xvii). In their studies, however, the question of where or what kind of space is "spectral" is still under-theorized. In this essay I will explore the connection between the current spectral turn and spatial turn in cultural studies by proposing the term 'spectral space' and investigate how it functions as a useful metaphor in reconstructing prevailing ideas about time, space and identity in postcolonial literature.

I define the term "spectral space" as an actual living space – a place, location, or landscape – that is characterized by the features of the specter. 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. By probing multiple 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*, and Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*. By interrogating the impact they make on the subjects who live in, visit or traverse them, I will examine how spectral spaces function 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 into each other. According to Derrida, a specter is present-absence, being neither and both at the same time, of which one "does not know whether it is living or if it is dead" (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 (Derrida 10-11). 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" (Blanco and Peeren, *The Spectralities Reader* 13). Besides, being associated with the messianic—"the way in which the future is always already 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 the African postcolony is characterized by a form of sovereignty, which exerts a ghostly violence (necropower) to produce the 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). 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" (5). When such a heterogeneously temporal space is employed as a metaphor in narrative, it not only functions to question the concept of linearity, but also conveys "something of the transhistorical imagination" – the "glimpses of the transpersonal and enduring which can have effective ethical effects" in a specific historical moment and location (Gaylard 1, 15).

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, Caravaggio, the wary Indian sapper, Kip, and the mysterious, nameless, burned victim, the English patient. Burnt beyond recognition, the main character—the English patient—turns out to be a Hungarian Count called Almásy. He was an explorer of the deserts of North Africa. It is worth noting that the Count Almásy's exploration of the desert 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 of it.

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 lover dying 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 "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" (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) is 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 English Patient regards the desert as a transformed landscape – "an earth that had no maps" – because it is intertwined with past, present and future (261). For him the desert 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 free 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.

When the desert disrupts the made up ideas of home or nationality, it creates a communal 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 re-conceive of themselves as an "oasis society" through their love of the sand (Ondaatje 170, 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 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 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 the 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 seems 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 absent-presence of historical events and incorporate them into their life experiences.

On the other hand, the villa acts as a 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 the villa is heterogeneously temporal when such a web of memories is displayed in it. There 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.

In addition, the villa conveys a sense 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

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spectral temporality of the villa enables the characters to develop "transhistorical consciousness" and re-create a suspended but communal identity (8). The narrator says, "But here they were shedding skins. They could imitate nothing but what they were. There was no defense 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 race, class and nations. By developing a profound relationship with each other and weaving a connected web of traumatic memories, they have reached an understanding, though temporarily, and start undertaking a healing process. For instance, the four characters experience a communal union when they celebrate Hana's twenty-first birthday with food, wine, and snail lights. In the occasion Hana sings a song for Kip. The narrator says:

> 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. (269)

The scene represents a moment of communion between strangers as well as the moment 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 together 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. In certain contexts specters 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 84). As such, the specter moves and makes different places unsafe by its uncanny presence. In Chinese culture, a ghost usually refers to the spirit of a dead person whom the family rejects to worship as an ancestor because he or she has done some shameful deeds to the family. Without home, without belonging, a ghost in China is suggested to go from one place to another, looking for a substitute. It can't take root anywhere, so that it is condemned to a drifting on a spatial as well as on 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 shape. 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 a human dies, they enter the intermediate *Bardo* state, from which they will be reborn as a human or other creature unless they achieve *Nirvana* (Karma-gliṅ-pa and Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz xxxiii).[3] The Tibetan word *bardo* literally means "intermediate state" and is also translated as "transitional state," "in-between state," or "liminal state." 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. 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 binary domains.

Inheriting these features of a specter, including mobility, hybridity and liminality, 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 covey 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.[4] These routes are multiple instead of being single. They are not linear and straightforward. Otherwise, they twist and turn, and interconnect with other routes. In such kind of space people are up 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). I will show some examples of this kind of spectral space in Naipaul's *A Bend in the River*. I will examine how the space of fluidity functions as productive metaphor in deconstructing a normative understanding of social or national space, which assumes "a tight and relatively

[3] The term "nirvana" is most commonly associated with Buddhism, and represents an ultimate state of perfect quietude, freedom, and the highest happiness along with it 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 Religions*) and *On World Religions: Diversity, Not Dissension*. Ed. Anindita N Balslev. New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2014.

[4] Doreen Massey argues in "A Global Sense 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).

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 at the Eastern coast of Africa. By witnessing how his family "continued to live … blindly" without establishing their connection with the local, 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). It is worth noting that Salim travels very 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 streamer 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. In this case 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 relations.

In addition, the airplane propels Salim to develop a new and ambiguous sense of belonging and re-create his relationship to 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. The airplane is assumed by Salim's rich and educated Punjabi friend, Indar, 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 merely 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. The hotel is also a liminal space where tourists come and go, always stay temporarily. Thus, Salim claims, "I hated that hotel room. It made me feel I was nowhere" (231). The hotel room reminds him about his "old anxieties," which are also what he experiences in the middle of Africa, where "all was arbitrary" and "all our lives were fluid" and "isolated" (190). Traveling with the airplane from Africa to London 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). He learns that the "idea of going home, of leaving, the idea of the other place" is a deception: "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 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 river in the novel serves as another instance of space of fluidity. The river 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 is also 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, the water hyacinths are an unfamiliar existence—"the new thing" and "another enemy" for the local people (46). The narrator says: "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" (46). Because the bush or the forest is described in the novel as the place "full of spirits" and hovered by "the protecting presences of a man's ancestors," the new plant that seems to come from the bush can be perceived as associated with the spirits of the dead (65). 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 plant 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 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 national 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 addition, 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 relations, 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'" (Leon 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 un-homeliness 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 seems 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 Uncanny-ness

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). 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 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 invisible but brings chill, smell and noises. Derrida considers it as 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 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.

In some African cultural beliefs ghosts return from the dead with violence or "extreme forms of human life" (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 the 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 like to suggest the third kind of spectral space as a space of uncanny-ness. It can be a haunted place, like a house or 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). It usually appears alien, chaotic, and unpredictable, and functions as the threat to reformed, hierarchical, and mapped space.

The wilderness acts as an example of such an uncanny space. 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 the space of unruliness and desolation, the one that is naturally born instead of being made, the wilderness always appears frightening and uncanny to the colonizers. For instance, when the white colonizers tried to tame the African land, to feel "at home in" or "at harmony with" it, the wild and natural aspect of the land was always failing their wishes (10). 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 *The Grass is Singing* the bush serves as a good example of this kind of spectral space. 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 to Dick Turner, the white farmer in South Rhodesia, they move together 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). She never gets used of the bush. In her imagination the bush marks an eternal and violent existence that will one day send the young trees to crush their house and swallow the small cleared space (187). For her, 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 cannot be reformed completely by the white, endow itself with an uncanny power that gradually erodes Mary's sense of time.

In addition, when the bush is made monstrous and uncanny through its symbolic association with the native, it suspends Mary's certainty of white superiority and of hierarchy between black and white, colonizer and colonized, higher and lower class. 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 suggest that it might because the spirits of the

dead black ancestors, who have suffered under colonial exploitation, invade the body of the bush to return to the world of the living and take revenge against the white oppressors. Here the images of the bush and the native mingle together 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 till her death, functions to fail the white colonizers' attempt to exploit the natives and their land.

Spectrality is intimately connected to certain locations. From mysterious deserts and dense forests, to haunted houses and urban labyrinths, specters haunt and traverse many varied landscapes, 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 essay I have defined spectral space as a space of heterogeneous time, a space of fluidity, and a space of uncanny-ness. 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 unpredictability of a specter, spectral space is surely complex and mobile. Due to its multiplicity and changeability, it is destined to haunt the present and the dominant, and will never be reformed or domesticated completely. In other words, it functions as an alternative to the contemporary power system and ideologies by ceaselessly directing our attention to internal and external otherness, as well as to the "struggles for recognition, respect, and justice of those identified as non-masculine, non-heterosexual and/or non-white" (Blanco and Peeren, *Spectralities Reader* 20).

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