Contested Space: Space, Identity, Identity Formation and Fragmentation in Selected Anglophone Texts

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Project Description

The proposed project will analyze the constructions and narrative representations of the concepts of space, identity, identity formation and fragmentation in selected Anglophone texts. The way the literary texts denaturalize and respatialize western spaces will be my major focus. Elaborating on the radical postmodernist perspectives on space, particularly Thirdspace of Edward Soja, the analyses will disclose the inseparable relations among spatiality, identity and language. Linking insights from the disciplines of the postmodern geography and space-oriented literary studies, constructions of space and identity in the following texts will be analyzed: Toni Morrison’s *A Mercy* (2008) and *Home* (2012), Dionne Brand’s *In Another Place, Not Here* (1996) and *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (2001) and Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake* (2003). The project will contribute to the criticism of the texts and it will shed light on the theoretical and methodological handling of the concepts of space, identity and fragmentation in literary studies.

Since the late 1960s, the study of space has acquired a forceful importance and led to a renewed interest in the concept. The terms space, place, mapping or cartography that were traditionally reserved for geography have become common tools of analysis in various disciplines, particularly in contemporary literary studies, critical theory, sociology, media and cultural studies. With the spatial turn in geography, geographers began to adopt an enlarged vision of the forms of causality by stressing the role of humans in shaping the environment rather than accepting it passively. Such a change in the conceptualization of space as social, multidimensional and produced has promised openness, socio-spatial alternatives, change and exchange, which has paved ways for new critical approaches in various disciplines, including postcolonial studies and literary studies. Marxist and postmodern critics, such as Henri Lefebvre and Fredric Jameson, contributed to the conceptualization of space as a product and demonstrated the role of space in the continuation of the social order and the materialization of ideology. Postmodernism, on the other hand, has conceptualized space not only as a product but as a “wildcard” that produces actively, participating in the politics and cultural negotiations. Edward Soja’s *Postmodern Geographies* (1989) was one of the most initial and influential responses to postmodernism and the precursor of the postmodern momentum in geography. For Soja,
space is neither given nor empty to be filled; it is rather a culturally constructed entity, being part of the general cultural web, and line any cultural entity, it is subject to be formed, changed, accepted and rejected. Soja’s major mission is to visualize the other ways that postmodernists look at becoming and spatiality. Through his concept of Thirdspace, Soja aims to make people “think differently about the meanings and significance of space and those related concepts” (1). Thirdspace or “critical thirding” demonstrates “a growing awareness of the simultaneity and interwoven complexity of the social, the historical, and the spatial, their inseparability and interdependence” (Soja 3); thus, it is an efficient invitation to enter “a space of extraordinary openness and a place of critical exchange” (Soja 3).

The texts chosen for this study lend themselves to an investigation of spatial analysis since they operate on a complex understanding of space and identity, denaturalize their settings and remap them in unconventional ways. A radical postmodernist perspective to space, as in Soja’s Thirdspace, increases the chance of “reading” such texts in spatial terms better. In my analysis of the spatialities in the texts, I examine particular narrative strategies and literary forms of representation with regard to space, identity, margin, migration, movement. In so doing, a focus on the language and narratological strategies are to be essential in the analyses of the texts. The texts will be comparatively analyzed both at the story and discourse levels. In so doing, each text will first be analyzed in a separate chapter but an individual final part will be devoted to comparisons and results in order to identify, evaluate and interpret the similarities and differences in the corpus. Since the texts are themselves situated with different historicalities, socialities and spatialities, they are never an end in themselves, but are equally open to contestation, thereby paving the ways for new beginnings. Complying with the critical discourse that the text initiates, this dissertation will serve to a similar purpose, a responsibility that is addressed Bhabha as follows “the critic must attempt to fully realize, and take responsibility for the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present” (12). My analysis of the texts will not only uncover the unrepresented pasts and spatial issues that have traditionally been disregarded but also highlight new possibilities and more diverse ways of space and identity interactions on a variety of levels and backgrounds.

Works Cited
