THE OVERSEAS INDIAN OTHER – CAUGHT BETWEEN OUTER SPACE AND INNER SPACE – AS IMMIGRANT, OR AT HOME, IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S *UNACCUSTOMED EARTH* AND KIRAN DESAI'S *HULLABALOO IN THE GUAVA ORCHARD*

Ileana-Mihaela Popescu

Abstract: *This paper examines the impact of space—as representing both home and homeless—on the Indian integration, adaptation and acceptance in the Indian-American world. This leads to alienation, in most of the cases, and to rejection by the society the Indian lives in, forcing him/her to react either by seclusion or by coming back to nature, in a strange way, which the society disapproves. Analysis focuses on defining and characterising the concepts of time and space, the dichotomy outer space–inner space and, real space–imagined space, the rhetoric of power in the space of otherness, as well as memory triggered by overseas space and created by non-native space. The conjunction between people and space builds different degrees of maladaptation and alienation. The time period is after 1990s, and the main argument draws on stories written in India and in America. The lack of integration, caused by a hostile space, is the binding force acting between Jhumpa Lahiri's characters from the collection of short stories* Unaccustomed Earth *and Kiran Desai's protagonist from* Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard. *The estranged Indian hero living in America feels segregated from the foreign society he lives in, as he is an immigrant in a new overseas space. As his adoptive country is across the ocean from the home nation, the sensation of estrangement is increased by the vastness of the dividing water expanse. Nevertheless, this feeling of exclusion is shared, in the same way, by the Indian at home, whose native space does not prove to be friendlier to him; on the contrary, society casts him aside, on the reason of oddness. The repudiated hero finds relief in coming back to nature, as this dumb space is capable of receiving him unconditionally. This paper argues that not only the overseas foreign space is the cause of shaping a broken destiny, in the matrix, but also the native space—under the influence of power and prejudice—typifies estrangement and homelessness. This explains the hero's choice of a tree as home, for the bewilderment of his family and the entire society. Thus, individual space takes the shape of the overseas adopting home and coming back to nature instead of living in a civilised society.*

Keywords: *real space, imagined space, the space of otherness, space and power, space and memory, overseas space*

In postcolonialism, after 1990s, immigration from India started to take place on a larger scale than before, as people tried to shape their own path separate from the colonial powers. Indians are forced to emigrate, because of the harsh conditions in their country. The ones who decide to remain at home will encounter the discriminative power of a society divided into castes. Thus, the space away from home, or from overseas, usually the Anglo-American space, sets its own laws to which people should adapt their inner worlds. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that space, with all its characteristics and forms, in the paradigm of exile or at home, becomes a defining element in the process of adaptation–maladaptation. Space can be regarded from many angles and deconstructed and reconstructed in order to understand the

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intertwined influences which it manifests over people, immigrants or not. Space shapes human being's behaviour and, explains certain feelings, frustrations, decisions and style of life. Therefore, for the deeper understanding of the fictional heroes, who are the prototypes of the real ones, it is necessary that space be analysed in various frames, such as: the time—space—people triangle; the alienated self caught between space and nature; space as place and space as power. All these concepts lie at the basis of comprehending the overseas Indian, caught between Outer Space and Inner Space, as Immigrant, or at home.

Time–Space–People

The time–space–people triangle is a complex of coordinates which carve a person's destiny, whether immigrant or native. "Time and space cannot reasonably be separated" (Barrows 3) is the conclusion of scientists and of men of literature. All the three parameters are intertwining and depending on one another, creating historical enclaves with separate characteristics for that era, for instance, the Gothic period. Vukamovic and Grmusa speak about a rhythmic space, where space vibrates under the tonality of time, as places are changed under social pressure and ruling powers. "The temporal and spatial parameters of human experience move beyond their familiar dualism and are merged into space-time, inherent in every narrative work" (9). Therefore, time and space are fluid and unsettled; they are under the influence of society and people. Space is carried along, in the inner world, as it is animated by features such as freedom, mobility and established values; while place is characterised by enclosure, humanised features and meanings (Tuan 54). Flavia Schiavo claims that the association of space and place creates the context which brings together the material and the immaterial valences of the two worlds. Context includes social and cultural areas (Schiavo 77). People live in concentric circles: the small one is their inner space and time, which is enclosed by the larger one, the outer space and time of the society they live in.

The triangle time–space–people takes different dimensions from place to place. The Indians from Jhumpa Lahiri's story "Unaccustomed Earth,"from a collection of short stories by the same title, compare the time spent in India with the one spent in America. They contrast the customs from both places; as emerging from the narrative, the place has shaped, along the time, their character, their behaviour, mentality, way of being:

> After her mother's death, Ruma's father retired from the pharmaceutical company where he had worked for many decades and began travelling in Europe, a continent he's never seen. [...] Occasionally, a postcard would arrive in Seattle, where Ruma and Adam and their son, Akash, lived. [...] Ruma was reminded of the telegrams her parents used to send to their relatives long ago, after visiting Calcutta and safely arriving back in Pennsylvania. [...] "You're always welcome here, Baba," she'd told her father on the phone. "You know you don't have to ask." Her mother would not have asked. "We're coming to see you in July," she would have informed Ruma, the plane tickets already in hand. There was a time in her life when such presumptuousness would have angered Ruma. She missed it now.
>
> (Lahiri 3-5)

Even the title, *Unaccustomed Earth*, hints to a place devoid of the usual (Indian) traditions and social behaviour which an Indian immigrant would expect. In America, people are more formal and distant; they expect guests to visit them, when they have previously been invited, even the family members. They are not too sentimental and family ties are not particularly strong. Therefore, postcards, phone calls or other ways of close communication are not very

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common among them. Time and space are the two coordinates which influence people, their behaviour, and their traditions. According to the period and to the place people live in, other human interaction patterns obtain.

This triangle, with its two-way influences, manifests not only abroad, for the immigrants, but also at home. The protagonist of the novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* by Kiran Desai is the embodiment of the individual's revolt against social rules and against the lack of understanding for people with a low intelligence. His failure as a clerk in a post office leads him to the decision of climbing up a tree and making it his own house, far away from the rejecting society:

> The afternoon of the next day, the family departed to attend another wedding (for it was the wedding season, you remember), but they left Sampath at home so as to be sure he would not pull down his pants at yet another important event. As soon as they had rounded the corner of the lane on which they lived, Sampath let himself out of the house. [...] He caught the first bus. In this moment, before the driver changed gears and proceeded up the hillside, Sampath leapt from the window of the stalling bus [...]. He ran with a feeling of great urgency. Over bushes, through weeds, before him he saw a tree, an ancient tree, silence held between its branches like a prayer. He reached its base and feverishly, without pausing, he began to climb. Yes, he was in the right place at last, [...] lodged in a fork in the guava tree.
>
> (Desai 48-51)

Sampath, the rejected individual from society and family, finds his peace, at last, in a guava tree. The social space which repudiates him is in opposition with the natural space: Mother Nature accepts him as he is, a strange, low-minded person. Town space creates its social rules, as people leave a mark on their space and time. Natural space, however, is different; it is not under the power of people's prejudices and laws. Time, in nature, has a lower flow, it changes so little. On the other hand, even the name "Sampath" is a carrier of meaning for the whole understanding of the book. It comes from the combination of "sam" and "path": "sam" is the abbreviation of "Samadhi", a Sanskrit word, which means "intense esoteric meditation through yoga" (Online Etymology Dictionary). The name's etymology leads to the interpretation that "the path" to absolute knowledge and wisdom of the Earth can be obtained through ascetic isolation and meditation, and not necessarily through being subjected to the social pattern.

Place–Memory–Space

Space as home versus homelessness sets forth the two types of people's lives: of the natives, on the one hand, and of the immigrants, on the other hand. In this way it is possible to contrast and compare the two destinies. The ones who choose to remain at home, just as the ones who leave the country, come across difficult situations in the mother nation or among foreigners. Under the privilege of living among people with whom one shares the same features, language and traditions, people from the native country are not protected against the manifestations of power, in the form of racism or gender and class discrimination. In opposition, immigrants are devoid of whatever is called nationhood, longing after manifesting their ancestral inheritance. Still, the existence among—usually superior—nations proves to be impoverishing, inasmuch as the burden of being the other in a foreign land. This is caused by the fact that migration occurs from the underdeveloped countries to the developed ones. The whirligig of time comes with discrimination, alienation and disruption. In this context, space,

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as home or homelessness, converges towards the same meaning of hostile place as far as it is connected with civilisation, social order, and power.

The transition between one land and another is usually intermediated by the sea, as the world is split into two opposing elements: dry and wet space. The water creates the "zones of exchange," as Steinberg names them (163), zones of decentring the centre, of passing from one world to another in search of a better life. Yet, can a present-day Odysseus, on a quest for the genuine home, truly find the home space? Or will he remain a traveller in a homeless space? The shifting centres will trigger the changes of power, thus making the immigrant suffer from other sorts of discriminations. He leaves the poverty of his third-world country to aspire to a better standard of life, but he encounters discrimination and is placed in binary opposition as the "other." The ocean, the middle-space, becomes a signifier for passage, mobility, change, as its fluidity confers "shifting, fragmented identities and connections" (Steinberg 158). Nonetheless, apart from its dynamics, the ocean is "the smooth space par excellence" (Deleuze and Guattari 497), "stable both in space and time, enabling settlement and territorialization" (Steinberg 159). The figurative meaning of the ocean is that of purity, non-discrimination, no social stratification and no hierarchy of any kind. Foucault has noticed that "in civilisations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes place of adventure and police takes place of pirates" (27). Therefore, the ocean is "a mobile space, whose very essence is constituted by its fluidity and that, thereby, is central to the flows of modern society" (Steinberg 160). Thus, the ocean becomes an important constituent in the transition from one space to another and in the definition of space, which stands for the other element, in the land–water opposition.

Memory is a substantial trigger in the recollection of space. It is what forces people to come back their native places. Without it, space would not have the same value on the map of individual and society. According to Erll, memory is of two types: collected memory and collective memory. The collected one is an important factor in shaping a certain space, as "we act according to collectively shared values and norms; and we assimilate second-hand experiences into our personal wealth of experience" (Erll 97). These types of memory come from that specific space that is inhabited. Every feature that one space owns, in the form of culture, is passed to people, under the form of specificity of that place. On the other hand, "collective memory refers to the symbols, media, social institutions, and practices which are used to construct, maintain, and represent versions of a shared past" (Erll 98). Therefore, the collected memory is reflected on the individual, while the collective memory is encompassed by the institutions of the state, at the macro level. Both types of memory are intertwined with space, predetermining one another. Memory is the one which creates that nostalgia of the past belonging to a certain space. People have the tendency to regret the old times when a certain place is looked at in another way. That is why memory is considered to be a metaphor, because it stands in people's minds for the missing place. With the help of memory, people conceive their cultural identity, as a nation and as individuals. Thus, memory becomes a binder between space and people. A good example is offered by Lahiri, in her novel, through the male character, Ruma's father, when he remembers some places from his former house, with the help of memory. Thus, one more time, it is proved that space, without memories, is a dead place:

> When he was Ruma's age, he had lived with his wife and children in a small apartment in Garden City, New Jersey. They'd converted a walk-in closet into a nursery when Romi and then Ruma were born. [...] He remembered his wife making meals on the electric stove in the tiny kitchen, the rooms smelling afterward of whatever she's prepared. They lived on the fourteenth floor and she would dry her saris one by one over the narrow balcony railing. The bedroom in which Romi and

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> Ruma had both been conceived was dreary, morning light never penetrating, and yet he considered it, still, the most sacred of spaces. [...] His children would only remember the large house he'd bought in the suburbs with willow trees in the backyard, with rooms for each of them and a basement filled with their toys.
>
> (Lahiri 28-29)

The small apartment and the big house carry different emotional values; that is why their significance for Ruma's father is distorted. We would expect to see him more attached to the big and luxurious house, as the children are, but he is so closely bound to the place where he had spent his first part of his life, where he was happy with his wife and children, where he had formed his family. Thus, the simple place gets significance and becomes the dear space of his life. The memory of it was triggered by the room in Ruma's house where he had been accommodated. Spaces are kept in mind with the help of memory and are particularised with the help of whatever events are lived there.

Space–Self–Nature

Space can be material and immaterial, according to what is seen and what is felt. It encompasses all the physical markers, which make out of it a unique place: geographical position, climate, natural environment, fauna, flora, inhabitants, as well as cultural traditions. Nevertheless, the subtle essence of space, of whatever is felt, but not seen, is carried along in one person's mind and soul. This quintessence is taken away overseas by the immigrant and it becomes the reason for yearning after the home place and the measure for comparison with whatever is the new space. According to Bertrand Westphal, "Deterritorialization softens the rigidity of traditional standards; it causes the proliferation of focal centres and a global oscillation of the system of reference" (37). The material space means territory; it means the association with land, with rituals, with the strictness of social rules, whilst the deterritorialisation of the immaterial space breaks the centre and it deconstructs it into other focal centres. The overseas immigrant has to adapt to a new system of reference, specific for another space, in order to aspire to integration and assimilation. In most cases, this does not happen and the individual ends in oscillating from centre to centre. On the other hand, "places respond to the criteria of constant deterritorialization, which gives them a paradoxical continuity, by rendering them labile" (Westphal 143). Thus, space departs from place because it takes from the territory its specificity, making it abstract and movable. Place undergoes the changes of nature caused by time, while space encompasses additionally the changes of people, mentality, society, traditions and other social components which create the progression place–specificity–space.

Space takes different dimensions from the perspective of outer and inner worlds. Whatever is outside will never be the same inside, as the two spatial forms are governed by different laws. The outer space carries along the imprint of the entire community of people and of each individual, as well. It is carved by the myths and traditions of all generations who have passed through that land. Time has also affected the land, through changes of nature and through history. There is a permanent transgression from one state to another, caused by time and society. Whereas the inner space is singular, under the rules of the individual, and the changes are determined by the person's evolution; these changes are, again, under the pressure of time and space. However, the speed of change is less rapid for the inner space, than for the outer space. It takes time to internalise the changes, and the two factors, time and people leave a mark on the inner space, only if the person accepts them, according to certain

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subjective laws. Therefore, the self is caught between space and time; it is shaped and influenced by external and internal laws.

In geocriticism, place becomes the centre of creation. Literature represents reality in a deformed way; never does it succeed to rise to the perfection of nature. As Westphal argues, "at the interface of world and text, events that take place are more complex and ambitious for literature than merely serving the interests of reality" (112). Thus, literature becomes the reality at second hand, in which the self is transposed through the eyes of the narrator. In imagology, a branch of geocriticism, place becomes a picture taken by the author of the text. And each place carries, with it its specificity, its particular traces. "Different places on the face of the earth have different vital effluence; different vibration, and different chemical exhalation, different polarity with different stars [...] the spirit of the place is a great reality" (Lawrence 5-6). Space has its own time and spirit; its unique self, which interacts with people's personalities, creating one indestructible corpus. When people leave that space, they will carry with them the spirit of the place that they lived in. This will mark people's existence and will impede their smooth adaptation to the new country. Apart from the imagology of the place, geocriticism has a concrete understanding, as well, that one of cartography. Its role is not only of configuring the world, but also literature. Tally describes it as a way "in which writers map the social space in order to make sense of the world" (4). Thus, space becomes a tool through which the world is understood and analysed. For Tally, "geocriticism examines the fundamentally cartographic aspects of fiction, which also offer productive trans-disciplinary opportunities for further inquiry (4). Whereas, for Westphal, "geocriticism explores the inter-relations between the geography of the real and the geography of the imagination, in short, it brings the library to the world" (274–275). Cartography stands for the real space, while the productive inquiries stand for the geography of imagination. Therefore, the real space of nature lies at the basis of the imagined space, which is a production of the self.

Ruma's father, from *Unaccustomed Earth*, is the one who experiences the most the concept of space, as he emigrates from India to America; he keeps alive the family ties and suffers and feels guilty every time he returns from a visit from India. The second generation, his children, Romi and Ruma, do not experience the same emotions at the sight of Indian places. They are Indians, but they have never lived in India; for them, India is only the story of their parents. After the death of his wife, the father began to travel, to move from place to place, to discover the beauty of the world. Thus, real spaces meet imagined spaces. All those places, about which he has read along his life, are now explored. They are distorted and perceived through his moods, his state of mind, and his spirit. When he mourns his wife, the places do not seem as gorgeous as featured in advertisements; but when he feels attraction for another Indian woman, widow herself, then the place assumes another meaning, another beauty and another dimension:

> How free it was, these days, to travel alone, with only a single suitcase to check. He had never visited the Pacific Northwest, never appreciated the staggering breadth of his adopted land. [The] trips to India were always epic, and he still recalled the anxiety they provoked in him, [...] his wife had lived for these journeys, and until both his parents died, a part of him lived for them, too. And so they'd gone in spite of the expense, in spite of the sadness and shame he felt each time he returned to Calcutta, in spite of the fact that the older his children grew, the less they wanted to go.
>
> (Lahiri 7-8)

India becomes, for the emigrats, a space charged with memories, while people long after the native place and the traditional way of being. The simple place, nature itself is endowed with

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the spirit and feeling of Mother-home-nature. In the old Indian man's mind, India is also an imaginary place, created by the inner space. The regrets for deserting it are growing more and more and space departs from the real place and takes the dimension of the imagined one, the one which lies in people's minds and souls.

One of the most suitable novels for debating space is *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, as it changes the normal space and setting of the action of the novel—land, in most of the cases, or sea, sometimes— with the tree. Climbing up a tree and declaring it your home is considered at least strange, if not pure madness. Sampath's guava house was looked at, by the co-villagers, with extreme reactions. At first, the family made all efforts to convince him to leave the tree and return home. The villagers came to stare at him curiously, as if he were a strange being, which increased the family's shame. In order to escape the embarrassing situation, of being the "other", because Sampath did not obey the laws of society, the family tells the people that their son is a saint. In this way, it is more than evident that the space shapes people's lives, personalities, attitudes, and behaviours. A journalist took Sampath a photo and wrote an article about him:

> In February, this picture was even printed in the *Times of India*, together with the headline "The Baba of Shahkot in his Tree Abode". *This peaceful orchard outside Shahkot*, it read, *had been transformed by a glut of visitors rushing to see the hermit of Shahkot, whose rare simplicity and profound wisdom are bringing solace and hope to many who are disheartened by these complicated and corrupt times. "There is a spiritual atmosphere here that I have not seen anywhere in India," Miss Jyotsna, a postal worker, told this reporter. She professes herself a frequent visitor to this hermit, whom disciples affectionately call "Monkey Baba" or "Tree Baba" in reference to his fondness for animals and the simplicity of his dwelling place. While admitting all who come to see him, he limits the hours when he is available to protect his secluded lifestyle...* After the appearance of this article, letters by thousand began to arrive for Sampath from all over the country. Mostly they bore no address, just the photograph of Sampath in his tree pasted trustfully upon the envelope. Inside were pleas for help and questions from ardent wisdom seekers.
>
> (Desai 119, emphasis added)

Therefore, space has the power to carve myths and to shape personalities. Its power is great, even if spaces are influenced and modelled by people. Self and Space are in a continuous exchange of vibrations which make this relationship a unique combination, which can happen only once. If that specific self is combined with another space, then another type of relation will come out. Although a person's inner soul may carry along the dear native space, especially when emigrating, that inner space can never be materialised again into another space.

Power–Space–The Other

Deterritorialisation and transgression to the third space lead to an inner trauma, to maladaptation, which finally ends in the perception of the foreign space as hostile and racist. "The trajectory of globalization has created environmentally racist and misogynistic geopolitical *zones* that divide the population into racialised and gendered hierarchies" (Tally 117). In the era of global movement, spaces become more and more far-flung from people. They move from their native territory to a new one, from economical or political reasons, not taking into account their longing after the loved space. This deterritorialisation and

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transgression toward other spaces activate the binary opposition centre–periphery. For the new comers, the new space becomes the third space (a term coined by Soja), which receives them as foreigners. "Everything comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, [...] everyday life and unending history" (Soja 56-57). This mixture of populations leads to mixtures of the spirit of the spaces, which is carried along through deterritorialization, and ends in the feeling of alienation and loss of affiliation.

The rhetoric of power in the space of otherness is definitely important for the perception of the other. Space is shaped by the power of society, or the power of the dominators. This tension between the two poles issues diverse reactions of lack of adaptation, of rejection, and strange behaviour. The receiving country has the power to carve the space and to give laws. The newcomers should obey. They will never feel the new place as home, but always as foreigner. This will lead to a restraint attitude from the immigrants, who will never perceive the inhabited space as theirs. This happens to the Indian family who immigrated to America, who has never accepted the foreign space, i.e. America, as their nation. As Lahiri observes about Ruma's mother, "The isolation of living in an American suburb, something about which his wife complained and about which he felt responsible, had been more solitude than she could bear" (29). The Indian woman, in general, feels more dependent on her husband than the American woman does. With the coming to America, Ruma's mother is afraid of the prospect of surviving alone, after her husband's death, in a foreign space. Therefore, the space is the one which makes one feel at home, or a stranger.

The power of space is not felt only abroad, but at home, as well. In India, for instance, as in every country which has passed through the experience of colonisation, space was not felt anymore as home, but as if it belonged to the conquerors; the natives had to subject to the power of the leading nation. Power at home was exerted by the ruling society, government, rich people, superior castes; this led to the rejection of the dominators and the need to hide away from the excessively oppressing rules and laws. This is the case of Sampath, the main character from *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, who chooses to leave the normal space of a human being, the town, in order to live in a tree. The lack of adaptation to the extremely demanding society and his low-intelligence, led the main character of Desa's novel to desert the homely space and to adapt to the space of nature and animals. The reaction of the other villagers was quite strange, as they did not know how to react; they passed from rejection to the admiration given to a saint. Sampath's father exclaims in contempt about his son:

> "Phoo!" Mr Chawla snorted. "Progress! Ever since he was born, this boy has been progressing steadily in the wrong direction. Instead of trying to work his way upwards, he started on a downward climb and now he is almost as close to the bottom as he could ever be."
>
> (Desai 26)

It is clear that Mr. Chawla, who is a respectable, rich father, from a superior caste, would never meet his expectations with his son, Sampath, who is a strange young boy by the standards of the powerful society. Therefore, because of the exceeding power of the space in which the son lives, and because of the lack of solutions for young adults like him, he will end up in searching another space, a free-rules space, the space of nature, where nobody will judge him for what is good or wrong and no one will exert power over him.

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Conclusion

Spatiality in literary discourse is inexhaustible; it has many facets and it interacts with other literary dimensions, such as time, people, and nations. Time is no longer the single marker in literary discourse; aspects related to the social and political period matter, but they are in connection with space. Space comes with certain characteristics, which makes out of it the abstract variant of place. Space has freedom, mobility and established values, whereas place is enclosed, humanised and has meaning. When a person leaves a place, he or she takes away the spirit of the space, whatever is meaningful and transportable. The land where one leaves becomes a space with cultural specificity, with emotions and feelings, with memories; and when it is taken away, in someone's heart, it will always be felt superior to the one encountered there. The space of home, versus homelessness, gives the feeling of Mother Land, even if it also has its oppressing power and uses discrimination. Space is not only land, but also sea. Waters are in between lands and they function as platforms for transition, as well as ways of strengthening the characters. They offer tough conditions of living and the image of endless sky and water. Waters also trigger memories from home, and they bring about nostalgia and a dream-like attitude. Strange creatures of the depths are analysed by researchers and they become frightening characters in maritime literature. Thus, real space becomes imagined space. Whatever is outside is internalised and, with the help of imagination, it is transformed into a space of imagination. The spaces of the cities, organised by social rules, make people feel the need of returning to nature. This natural space offers freedom, lack of social constraints and the communion with the other beings. Power is the element which shapes spaces, at home, or in the third space. When deterritorialisation is produced and people transgress towards other areas, they are treated there like the others this creates a gap between the inhabited space and them. They cannot feel at home in a land where they are discriminated and pushed to the margins by the ruling power. On the other hand, the space of home is not always welcoming for everyone. Colonised people and people from inferior castes or social strata will always perceive this space as foreign, even if it is their home space. Therefore, space is a complex network of elements such as time, people, self, inner world, outer world, nature and place, and the oppressing power. All these elements generate the spirit of a certain place, either land or water, and its markers are highly involved in a person's adaptation or maladaptation.

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