International Journal of Education and Humanities
ISSN: 2770-6702 | Vol. 21, No. 3, 2025

Spatial Studies of *A Distant Shore*: Immigrants' Negotiation in English Society

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Abstract: This paper employs Soja's spatial theory to examine the strategies adopted by immigrants-represented by Solomon, in response to spatial exclusion in England. It analyzes their experiences through the lenses of FIrstspace, Secondspace, and Tirhdspace. Immigrants confront a harsh Firstspace reality marked by systemic barriers, prejudice, and marginalization-forcing them into invisible, ghost-like existences. In response, a central, tragic strategy emerges: the conscious performance of "becoming British," as embodied by the protagonist Solomon. This performative assimilation represents a Thirdspace practice-a negotiated, desperate attempt to transcend exclusion by mimicking the host society's accents and customs, in the hope of transforming England from a site of alienation into a home.

Keywords: Edward Soja, Thirdspace, Identity.

1. Introduction

A Distant Shore is Caryl Phillips' (1958-) seventh novel, published in 2003. It delves into the complex issues of belonging, identity dislocation, and persecution on various grounds. Subverting single-voice story-telling, the novel uses a contrapuntal narrative structure to disclose the fragmented lives of the two protagonists--Dorothy and Solomon. Solomon is a 30-year-old refugee recently arrived from Africa, trying to merge into the new community of England[1-5].

Despite Phillips' well-deserved position as a prominent Caribbean British author, highlighted by numerous awards and honors, there remains a notable dearth of domestic literary research into Phillips and his novel *A Distant Shore* when compared to the extensive studies conducted abroad. While there have been few studies conducted on this novel domestically, most existing research focuses on themes of diaspora, community, and the sense of belonging within the context of post-colonial studies. However, the issue of identity in this novel has rarely been examined through the lens of space theory. Therefore, this thesis aims to broaden the research perspectives on *A Distant Shore* by employing Edward Soja's space theory.

Edward William Soja (1940–2015) was an urbanist, a postmodern political geographer and urban theorist. In Edward Soja's concept of space, Firstspace represents "the real", Secondspace signifies "conceived in ideas about space, in thoughtful re-presentations of human spatiality in mental or cognitive forms", and the investigation of Thirdspace involves journeys to places that are both "real and imagined" (Soja, 1996: 10-11).[6-7] In other words, space is composed of the Firstspace that is materialized, the Secondspace that is conceptualized, and the Thirdspace that combines practicality and imagination. "Thirding-Othering" has changed the past situation in which first space and second space confront each other and have long occupied people's spatial thinking. Thirdspace originates from the first space and the second space, but transcends both in terms of scope, substance and significance (Lu, 2004). From Soja's perspective, the post-colonial critique is regarded as the product of "thirding-as-Othering", "an assertively different and intentionally disruptive way of (re)interpreting the relation between the colonizer and the colonized, the center and the periphery, Firstworlds and Thirdworlds" (1996: 126).

2. Immigrant's Negotiation with English Society

Solomon, the novel's protagonist, stands as a poignant representative of collective struggle to merge into England. He, like many others, comes to believe that assimilation is the only viable path to escape his marginalization. In his mind, by meticulously adopting English accents, manners, and social codes, he can shed his outsider status and finally achieve the acceptance and stability he was promised. This performance of identity becomes a desperate negotiation for a place to belong, a belief that by mirroring the host society, he can transform England from a site of alienation into a true home. Therefore, this paper mainly analyzes Solomon's spatial strategy to analyze immigrants' collective action and consequences.

2.1. Confinement in Firstspace

For Solomon, the interaction between him and Firstspace is usually depressing and stressful. His posture in Firstspace is restrictied and confined, for his existence is always not legal or shady, not matter in his own country, or in England. Therefore, Firstspace keeps limiting him, and his condition in Firstspace is unipositive. For him, Firstspace is the metaphor of prison, where he never successfully escapes to be free. This unsound relationship between him and Firstspace foreshadows Solomon's maladaptive strategy as a subsequence.

The malformed living mode begins at his homeland. Solomon's motherland, an unnamed country in Africa, i is ravaged by relentless civil wars. He was initially sent to fight in a genocidal civil war, which he resists to do as time passes by. As a matter of course, he is branded a war criminal, a label that extends to his family as well. When enemy forces attack his family, he is hidden by his father in a cupboard in the house, leaving him to witness the brutal massacre of his family from his concealed position. After escaping the carnage, Solomon seeks refuge with his uncle Joshua. Together, they hide in a dark attic, waiting for an opportunity

to flee the country. Solomon is afraid of being witnessed by others, for he becomes the guilty person in the country. If he gets caught by the people who chase him, he would face an end even worse than his family. Therefore, he has to hide himself in a space with walls surrounding where no one can see him. Open and public spaces, on the other hand, symbolize imminent danger-places of torture, death, and the harrowing echoes of suffering.

If exposed to open spaces, Solomon is forced to maintain an unrelenting state of vigilance to protect himself. He is described as "nervously scanning the street" (82), "looking over his shoulder," "increasing his pace," "breaking into a panic-stricken run," and finally "trying to compose himself" (Phillips, 2005: 83). Such actions illustrate the constant anxiety and fear that dominate his life in the open. However, living perpetually as an outlaw is not a life anyone desires, and Solomon is no exception. Determined to escape the suffocating grip of his current existence, he resolves to flee his country and seek refuge in England. To him, England represents the promise of "freedom," "happiness," and "justice"-a place where he hopes to shed the shadow of his fugitive life and live openly without fear of persecution. At this stage, Solomon's life is confined to small, hidden spaces, dictated by his need to evade those hunting him. These spaces, emblematic of his entrapment in the physical realm of Firstspace, offer him only the bare minimum of survival. Yet, his yearning to break free from these limitations fuels his decision to seek a new beginning abroad. Unfortunately, the restrictions he faces in Firstspace are merely the initial manifestations of the larger constraints that will continue to shape his existence. Solomon's escape marks the end of one chapter of confinement but also the beginning of another, as his pursuit of freedom leads to new challenges and limitations in foreign lands.

On the way to England, Solomon endures an extremely tough and inhuman journey, which gradually deprives their original identities. They first climb into a truck, and lie down with "oppressive weight of a heavy tarpaulin" on their bodies (84). Their arms and legs are pressing up against each other, swaying as the truck jolts. All this is to disguise them as the cargo, in order to cross the border. Through days and nights running, they are able to get into a plane, where they have no seats to sit, and are carried like goods in a "large tubular warehouse" (89). As the plane levels up, the temperature decreases. In order to get warm, they have to lean on each other. Later, they also take the boat and the train, however different the transportation is, the migrants move silently and furtively, never being spotted by others. As Toivanen points out, "the uncomfortable, cramped conditions of clandestine travel evoke a parallel with Middle Passage journeys on slave ships which were regularly conceived as coffins or floating tombs" (2019:124). Migrants are enduring and getting accustomed to be trapped in a narrow and crowded space, which they gradually believe to be the most appropriate place to accommodate their body. In this way, their body generally not belong to them in highly restricted spaces. They cannot freely decide where they head to, or which posture they feel the best. What they could do is to tolerate and accept anything that they receive. As Soja points out, "the space of human body is perhaps the most critical site to watch the production and reproduction of power" (1996: 114). When Solomon's autonomy of his own body is weakened, he subdues to the dualism of center and margin on England, which has profound influence of the strategy he takes to deal with identity predicament.

In order to cross the border, closed space is necessary to cover their true identities as a human, instead, they are carried and moved with a new identity-goods, only in which way can they be transferred safely and quietly. As goods, they have no right to decide where their bodies moving towards. For example, they cannot choose a comfortable way to migrate to England. Whenever they are in a closed space, they cannot go out or even have a glimpse at the outside. The only thing they can do is to be moved and to mechanically follow the orders commanded by others, even though the transporting condition is intolerable. They "turn into zombie-like dehumanized, alienated figures who lack agency, emotion, and identity; oscillate between life and death", in order to reset their life in a new piece of land, where they fail to foresee to be "a destination of non-arrival" (2019: 123). This way of mobility deeply affects Solomon's subsequent failure in adapting and integrating into England, and results in several symptoms in Secondspace.

One important element that usually accompanies closed space is darkness. Darkness means to live in a space where nobody can see them. In order words, darkness is the cover on their original identity from any exterior forces that may judge and even hurt them. They could only live as a human when the night comes, which means their original identity is allowable only when no one can see them:

Solomon's journey is pronouncedly marked by darkness: he leaves his home town during the night. The truck transporting the exiles arrives at the airport when it is dark, and when the plane takes off, Gabriel looks out of the window, seeing nothing but "blackness". When the plane lands, it is again dark. Darkness conveys the idea of an unknown destination, the 'disorientation and uncertainties' that inform the itinerary, and alienation. (2019: 125)

Throughout Solomon's journey, his environment is always shrouded in darkness, but occasionally the lights of the distant city become the only bright spot. These lights symbolize the hope of arrival, and also represent a space that welcomes him and seems to be able to save these homeless migrants from their endless predicament. However, it turns out that darkness still dominates even in the places that are expected to be safe havens: Solomon sees black English skies in London from the tinted windows of police cars. This darkness does not dissipate at the destination he pursues, which once again indicates that they are destined to be trapped in a state of homelessness forever.

After arriving at England, Solomon does not find any space where he could reasonably exist. At first, he experiences couple of hiding days in a desolated house with cracked windows and dislodged bricks. There have been long days since the house was discarded, which works as a safe space for Solomon to rest and recover. Space that can accommodate migrants like Solomon are either restricted spaces on the way to England or blank spaces like this house to be of no interest to anyone. Prison is another form of restrictive space. In the prison, where criminals are arrested and waiting to be judged, there gathers a group of migrants, who are convicted of theft, rape or other accusation. They are not treated as human-being, instead, the night warder called them "cum" or "animal", and usually ignore their demands, such as requirement of food and medical care. His roommate Said is eventually died of malaria, without receiving any medical treatment, even though they have begged for it.

Seen in this light, it becomes evident that Solomon is

predominantly confined to a limited Firstspace, a tangible, physical realm that reinforces his marginalization. These constrained spaces serve as constant reminders of his identity as filthy or impure, marking him as someone without the rights or agency to cross into new territories. For Solomon, exploring beyond these borders symbolizes the possibility of a new beginning-one that remains perpetually out of reach. Whenever Solomon occupies spaces deemed inappropriate for someone of his status, he is met with judgment and maltreatment. While he might navigate these spaces temporarily, he can never truly belong or live within them. Ultimately, he is compelled to retreat to the margins.

This spatial restriction underscores the external control over his mobility and autonomy. The trajectory of his movements is preordained by societal forces; any attempt to inhabit spaces outside his prescribed role invites punishment and ostracism. Foucault's theory of the Panopticon provides a useful lens to interpret this dynamic. As he observes: "Our society is not one of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces [...]" (Foucault, 1995: 217). This constant surveillance shapes Solomon's reality, enforcing boundaries that confine him to a life perpetually dictated by external forces, ensuring he remains in his assigned place within the social hierarchy. Finally, confined and restricted spaces deprive of his agency and autonomy, also foreshadow Solomon's vulnerability in mental state and depression in Secondspace.

2.2. Predicament in Secondspace

Long-time trapping in restricted space dealt lifetime trauma on Solomon, in spite of his unawareness of it. After the cruel murder of his family, Solomon furtively gets out of the cupboard, yet to find his "legs and arms are stiff, and he walks with great difficulty" (Phillips, 2005: 76), which implies that his distorted relationship with Firstspace will have a long-lasting and invisible impact on him. His physical stiffness mirrors the psychological paralysis caused by his prolonged confinement and the overwhelming sense of helplessness it instills. This moment highlights how his forced adaptation to such restrictive spaces has deeply affected his ability to orient his identity in England, both physically and emotionally. The trauma, although unspoken, manifests in his inability to break free from the boundaries imposed on him, illustrating the profound and lingering consequences of living in perpetual marginalization, and finally lead to Solomon's affliction in a predicament where he can never reach to a stable identity. This can be noted from many aspects: fractured memories, either-or choices plight and lack of emotions.

Memories and thinking are important elements to check Solomon's state in Secondspace, which reflects how stressful and painful when it comes to identity predicament. The way of narration explicitly manifests Solomon's fractured memory impacted by trauma and inhuman experiences. Depiction of Solomon is mainly happening in chapter two and chapter four, as well as some observation from Dorothy's angle of view in chapter one. It is obvious that the notable feature of Solomon's narration is disordered story-telling and fragmentized reminiscence. Chapter two is mainly about the reality where Solomon is arrested in the prison and how he is acquitted, however chaotically divided by recalls of the harsh journey of illegal immigration and the reason why he has to escape from his war-torn motherland. Also, chapter four features with reality that Solomon is able to legally live in England and problems occur as he moves in Stoneleigh, while inserted with memory fragments of his life with family Anderson as well as bonding with Mike. The narration, interspersed with flashbacks without obvious marks, requires readers to continuously reassess their position within the narrative, piecing together the connections between the past and the present. This deliberate fragmentation renders the plot obscure and disorienting. However, this chaotic and scrambled narrative structure is not merely a stylistic choice; it mirrors Solomon's tumultuous existence in Secondspace. According to Secondspace theory, this realm is shaped by subjective experiences, emotional turmoil, and ideological constructions. The disarray of the narrative becomes a literal representation of Solomon's emotional and mental state, as his perception of space and time is conditioned by trauma and instability.

There are several symptoms of Solomon's disordered Secondspace. Amnesia often plagues Solomon, serving as both a defense mechanism and a symptom of his inner turmoil. When Catherine questions him in an attempt to uncover more details about the rape accusation against him, "Gabriel hears the question, but his mind blocks it, like a boxer might parry a blow. He stares blankly at the lawyer" (105). Even as he struggles to recall any fragment of his encounter with Denise, he is unable to confront the memory, acknowledging that he "knows that at some point in the future he will probably have to start to remember about the girl, but he is not ready. Not yet" (108). This selective amnesia reflects his instinctive withdrawal from memories that are too painful to confront, as his mind shields itself from trauma by erecting barriers against these recollections.

However, even as he actively avoids certain memories, other fragments of his past resurface involuntarily, relentlessly haunting him. Solomon is frequently tormented by recalling of the brutal slaughter of his family, the harrowing journey of migration, and his life with the Anderson family. What's worse, his dream forces himself to face the realities that he shrinks from, such as failure to protect his family- "Gabriel dreams of his mother. He gazes at her, but she will not speak to him" (144), abandonment by people- "These two people have cast him aside and it hurts" (145); no respond from his family- "I begged my parents to share with me their knowledge of these ill tidings, but whenever they appeared to be about to bless me with an answer" (254). These memories intrude upon his present, underscoring his inability to break free from the grip of his past. His failure to fully dissociate from his former life and rebuild his identity represents his struggle to achieve a fresh start, as the weight of his history prevents him from moving forward.

The fractured memories and his inability to reconcile with his past illustrate the mental dissonance and instability in Secondspace. His mind becomes a battleground where he oscillates between suppressing painful memories and being involuntarily consumed by them. This reveals not only his struggle to establish a coherent sense of self but also his broader inability to adapt to a life shaped by displacement, guilt, and unresolved trauma. Thus, Solomon's symptoms in Secondspace-his selective amnesia and intrusive memories-serve as manifestations of his deeper plight. They reflect his fractured identity and his ongoing struggle to reconcile the emotional and psychological spaces of his past and present. The Secondspace, for Solomon, becomes an arena of

unresolved tensions, where his memories, fears, and aspirations clash, leaving him trapped in a liminal state between what was and what could be.

Luburić-Cvijanović aptly describes this phenomenon: "Conditioned by trauma, the nature of his journey, and the meandering logic of memory, Gabriel can only provide a fractured narrative" (2018: 120). Solomon's Secondspace is fractured, reflecting the disjointed reality of a man fleeing violence and oppression. The disorientation in the narrative mirrors his struggle of navigating spaces that are no longer grounded in stability or logic. His Secondspace is a psychological terrain shaped by chaos and disorientation, where his memories blur the boundaries of physical and temporal realities. This narrative fragmentation also serves as an emotional expression of Solomon's inner world. Just as Secondspace reflects the imagined and abstract dimensions of space, the novel's structure illustrates how trauma and displacement disrupt his sense of continuity and identity. The past intrudes unpredictably into the present, and the present is constantly reframed through the lens of past experiences. This creates a narrative that is simultaneously chaotic and deeply personal-a Secondspace of the mind, where memories and emotions dictate the shape of the story.

Duality is also a feature of his Secondspace. The frequent shifts between the present and the past in the story are not merely indicative of traumatic aftermath but serve as a profound manifestation of Solomon's inner conflict and duality. As noted by Luburić-Cvijanović, "The pronounced duality of *A Distant Shore*-Dorothy/Gabriel, Gabriel/Solomon, past/present, first/third person, Africa/Europe, homogeneity/heterogeneity-underscores a particular ambivalence with national identity" (116). This duality permeates both the narrative structure and Solomon's psychological landscape, illustrating his inability to reconcile his fractured sense of self. Notably, chapters two and four, which focus on Solomon's perspective, are narrated through differing points of view: the former employs a third-person perspective, while the latter shifts to first-person narration. This deliberate alternation disrupts the narrative consistency, reflecting Solomon's fragmented identity and his oscillation between self-awareness and detachment. Furthermore, memories of Africa continually intrude upon Solomon's consciousness, despite his efforts to start afresh in England and suppress the painful remnants of his past. These recurring recollections signify that his ties to his homeland-and the trauma associated with it-remain deeply entrenched in his psyche, preventing him from fully embracing his new identity in England. This narrative strategy of duality mirrors Solomon's predicament in Secondspace. For him, Secondspace becomes a liminal zone, where he is caught between Africa and Europe, between his past and his present, and between the need to conceal his history and the impossibility of escaping it. In this space of duality, Solomon struggles with an identity crisis, hesitating between the desire to belong and the inability to find a stable sense of self.

The duality within Solomon's Secondspace exacerbates his discomfort and immobility, creating an "either-nor" dynamic that leaves him unable to move forward or retreat into the past. Each decision he faces-whether to fully embrace his new identity or to acknowledge his old one-feels equally fraught with loss and alienation. This indecision compounds his psychological turmoil, amplifying his sense of displacement and detachment.

The third sign of Solomon's deeply depressed Secondspace is lack of emotions, or repression of emotions. As it is clearly depicted in the novel, his Firstspace experience of concealment and limitation makes it vital for him to conceal and suppress his true feelings and desires:

> The heat of the day gives way to the noises of the night, but Gabriel is in pain, for his bladder is full and he is stiff with cold. When the truck finally stops, the dozen men are able to escape from beneath the tarpaulin. […] As the temperature begins to rise, and the blazing heat of the second day bears down upon them with full force, Gabriel cuts two holes in the tarpaulin so that air might pass through with greater ease. Having done so, he once more submits to the dull, uncomfortable rhythm of the journey. (87)

Even when he witnesses his family being cruelly killed, he does not show any grief or agony. By placing his sensation on the second place, he is aimed to restart his life. "He knows that if he is lucky the past will soon be truly past […] life is taking him beyond this nightmare and to a new place and a new beginning" (Phillips, 2005: 85). If he finally integrates into England community, it is possible for him to express his true thoughts and feelings. However, during Mike's funeral, even Ms. and Mr. Anderson are extremely sorrowful about the accident, Solomon does not express his lament explicitly; when receiving malicious letters and revenge from Weston villagers, he does not exude any trace of anger. This can be reflection of his failure of integration into England, but also manifestation of lesion that really caused in his Secondspace.

Therefore, a pervasive sense of loss frequently shrouds Solomon, particularly following his release from prison. The unfamiliar and unwelcoming environment of England starkly contrasts with the freedom and solace he had hoped to find. The bleakness of his new reality is encapsulated in the imagery of the sky and the city: "The sky was a grey blanket that hung limply over Gabriel's head, while all around him traffic roared so that no matter which direction he walked in, it was impossible to escape the terrible noise" (156). This description not only conveys the oppressive and chaotic nature of his surroundings but also mirrors his internal desolation and alienation. Also, the unfamiliar architecture and labyrinthine streets of England amplify his sense of loss and disorientation. As he navigates the city, the alien landscape becomes a symbol of his inability to connect with his new environment: "Gabriel still does not recognise a single building that he walks past, or a junction that he crosses, or a street that he turns into […] these directionless streets were not laid out to welcome the feet of newcomers" (164). The unrecognizable buildings and streets not only highlight the physical unfamiliarity of his surroundings but also underscore his psychological and emotional displacement. The city's layout, seemingly indifferent to newcomers, mirrors the broader societal indifference he experiences.

This profound sense of loss reflects Solomon's struggle within Secondspace, where the imagined ideals of his new life in England clash with the harsh realities of his lived experience. In Secondspace, where emotional and ideological perceptions of space dominate, Solomon's inability to find familiarity, connection, or acceptance leaves him adrift. The unwelcoming physical environment serves as a metaphor for his exclusion from the social and cultural fabric of England, reinforcing his status as an outsider: "So he too came from another country? This was difficult for me to understand. At home it was relatively simple to distinguish a man of a different tribe or region, but among these people I was lost" (248).

Solomon's permanent departure from his hometown marks the beginning of a search for a new home, one where he can find acceptance and safety. However, in his Secondspace, the concept of "home" becomes deeply distorted and fluid, reflecting his shifting sense of identity and belonging. Initially, "home" is a source of pride for Solomon, tied to his identity and heritage. It is a place imbued with familiarity, familial love, and cultural grounding. During his arduous journey to England, "home" becomes an imagined sanctuary-a place where freedom, happiness, and safety are not just hoped for but necessary for survival. Gradually, "home" becomes an ambiguous and evolving idea, still under discovery. It is no longer tied to a specific location but becomes a state of mind or an aspiration—a space where he might one day feel secure and accepted. In Solomon's cognition, the definition of "home" undergoes constant reconfiguration, mirroring his fractured sense of self and the challenges of navigating a life uprooted by violence and exile. The ever-changing nature of "home" highlights not only his personal struggles but also the broader experiences of migrants, whose ideas of belonging and stability are continuously reshaped by external and internal forces.

2.3. Compromise in Thirdspace

According to Soja, Thirdspace is a place where everyone especially the silenced and the marginalized and have a chance to speak out, because Thirdspace allows difference to coexist.

The disordering of difference from its persistent binary structuring and the reconstitution of difference as the basis for a new cultural politics of multiplicity and strategic alliance among all who are peripheralized, marginalized, and subordinated by the social construction of difference (especially in its strictly dichotomized forms) are key processes in the development of radical subjectivity. (1996: 93)

In order to survive and live peacefully in a climate that is at times indifferent and at times openly hostile, Solomon repeatedly struggles within the distorted realm of Secondspace. He grapples with the fundamental question of identity-with what identity does he expect to live in this new land? His journey to England was intended to be an escape from the relentless life of a fugitive and a search for a place to restart his existence. However, his experience reveals a harsh truth: living in a different physical space does not necessarily allow one to live with a different identity. The weight of his past, coupled with societal perceptions, continues to define him. In England, Solomon encounters the West Indian immigrant community, a group that reflects various responses to displacement and marginalization. Some members strive for success and assimilation within their adopted country, while others suffer under the crushing weight of discrimination and exclusion. "Diversity" has become an unchangeable reality within English culture, offering, at least in theory, a range of possibilities for belonging and survival. Yet, for Solomon, these possibilities remain out of reach. Eventually, he comes to a painful realization: he can never fully integrate into English society unless he severs ties with his past identity. This reluctant compromise marks a critical turning point, illustrating the immense pressure to abandon one's roots in order to achieve superficial acceptance. However, this strategy proves futile in the end-denying his past does not grant Solomon peace or a sense of belonging. Instead, it deepens his alienation, revealing that the forced erasure of identity comes at an irreparable cost. Solomon's ultimate failure to reconcile his identity within this hostile environment can be understood as a process unfolding in three distinct stages: retreatment, compromise, and final loss in the forming Thirdspace.

Solomon tends to retreat to confined spaces as a form of self-protection, due to his physical and psychological experiences. Even after acquiring legal status and securing employment as a "handyman-cum-night-watchman" (Phillips, 2005: 14) in Stoneleigh, he imposes limitations on his own living space, choosing isolation over integration. This voluntary withdrawal reflects both his need for safety and his inability to connect with the community around him.

For instance, as a night-watchman, Solomon's responsibilities involve patrolling the area, ensuring safety, and, theoretically, interacting with villagers-a role that offers opportunities to forge relationships and become a part of the Weston community. On the contrary, Solomon deliberately avoids these chances for social engagement. When passing by the pub, a central site for social interaction in the village, he rejects the opportunity to enter and socialize: "I see the pub, but I have no desire to once again enter into one of these places, so I follow the pathway beside the water" (255). Instead, he opts for less populated routes, avoiding human contact and withdrawing from spaces of potential connection. Even when he encounters boys that are "hairless, with egg-shaped heads and blue tattoos on their bare arms", he does not answer their spiteful questions, and chooses to go back the same way (256). "I am sensitive to the weight of […] gaze" (257). This conscious avoidance underscores his instinct to escape people's gaze-a symptom of his profound discomfort with both himself and his surroundings.

Moreover, Solomon's reliance on confined forms of mobility further exemplifies his retreat. He chooses to drive a car to shuttle through the town, using the vehicle as a protective medium that shields him from the outside world. Unlike walking, which would require him to move openly among villagers, driving enables Solomon to remain physically separate, unseen and untouched. This decision, while pragmatic, also symbolizes his psychological entrenchment: rather than merging into the group, he isolates himself within a controlled, enclosed space. On one hand, this strategy shields him from the hostility or suspicion of the villagers; on the other, it reflects his deeper retreat from the social world and his refusal-or inability-to engage with the English community.

Solomon's behavior during his free time further reinforces this pattern of withdrawal. After completing his daily work, he does not linger in the town or explore it in a meaningful way. Instead, he retreats to his house, where he observes the world outside from the safety of his own space. However, his return home is not driven by physical exhaustion but by a psychological need to remain unseen, to observe without being observed. As he explains: "Once I am inside my house, I stand in the living room and study the street. There is a lamp-post outside my window which bestows light in such a way that it is possible for me to see out, but if I stand back and in shadow I do not think that it is possible for anybody to see in" (257). This description reveals Solomon's deliberate act of positioning himself in the shadows-present yet invisible, a silent observer of a world he cannot enter.

Through these actions, Solomon's retreatment into confined spaces-whether physical or metaphorical-becomes a reflection of his lack of confidence in his identity and the

sense of alienation. Due to several displaced experiences, he is left with traumatic aftermath and finds it hard to integrate into the community. The choice to isolate himself from communal life underscores his internalized fear of rejection, hostility, and displacement. The physical boundaries of his car, his house, and the sparsely populated paths he treads mirror the psychological boundaries he constructs to protect himself from an environment he perceives as threatening. Ultimately, his retreat is not just a survival mechanism but also a manifestation of his failure to reconcile his past with his present, and results in his following concession.

There is a reason that Solomon chooses to compromise. In essence, Solomon is caught in a binary identity choice problem and was unaware of the formation of the Thirdspace. For him, identity establishment is a multiple-choice question. He needs to make a choice from the existing identities-those belong to the center, and those abandoned to the marginalized, instead of regarding it as a simple answer question, to use his imagination and logic to recreate it, and redefine the relationship between the center and the peripheralized. Soja once points out that "as an initial stage, categorical identity as subaltern is crucial necessay" (1996: 97). Copying and imitating the center is never the only way to deconstruct the duality between the center and the margin. Instead, choosing the margin as a new space to define the rule, and reconstruct the existing structure can be of help. Though many make mistakes, by simulating the center, to escape the fate of being marginalized. Solomon is one of them. In the end, he chooses to live in "England" from the binary opposition between England and the Third World, finally giving up his African identity.

The use of names becomes a significant marker of Solomon's internal struggle and ultimate decision to relinquish his African identity and history. Initially, the name change is not Solomon's own idea but rather a pragmatic suggestion from others. Up until his interrogation, he still identifies as "Gabriel", clinging to the remnants of his original self. This persistence reflects his initial reluctance to sever ties with his past, even as his identity comes under threat. However, following the dismissal of the accusations against him, his lawyer Catherine proposes a drastic measure for his protection: "I'm sure you'll find some kind of work in the north, and you really should become somebody else, Gabriel. I know you don't want to do this, but it will really help" (169). Catherine's advice is presented as a means of survival in an environment that refuses to accept him as he is. By adopting a new identity, she implies that he can navigate the hostile English society with greater ease, masking his history to avoid further persecution. The eventual transformation from "Gabriel" to "Solomon" is not immediate, nor is it made willingly. It is a decision forged under the trade-off of trauma, rejection, and survival. After enduring inhumane treatment in prison and facing constant hostility, sarcasm, and even threats from the English people, Solomon succumbs to the necessity of reinvention. "The loss of one's identity in this sense does not depend on the traveller's will but represents a loss of agency entailed by the zombifying journey" (Toivanen, 2019: 126). Changing his name signifies an attempt to shed the identity that makes him a perpetual outsider and to escape the burden of his past. However, this act of erasure is also deeply symbolic: it is not simply a name change, but a disavowal of the self.

Solomon's reflection on this transformation reveals the cost of such a decision. His new name marks a division within himself, creating a sense of fragmentation: "My new family knew only one small part of me. In truth, only one half of me was alive and functioning" (264). This admission underscores the incompleteness of his new identity. By abandoning Gabriel, Solomon suppresses the very experiences, memories, and cultural ties that have shaped him. Though the name "Solomon" allows him to survive in a superficial sense, it also reduces him to a mere shell of his former self-a man who exists only partially, with half of his identity buried alongside his discarded name.

The process of adopting his new identity is fraught with hesitation, repetition, and guilt. Even as Solomon repeats his new name in an effort to solidify this reinvention, he cannot escape the profound sense of loss that accompanies it:

I was a coward who had trained himself to forget. I accepted from people. From Mr. and Mrs. Anderson. I was no longer "Hawk." I was no longer my mother's Gabriel. It was Solomon who learned of Mike's death. It was Solomon who was lying in a warm bed in a strange room among these kind people. It was Solomon. I was Solomon. (269)

However, the past identity can never be fully relinquished. No matter how hard Solomon tries to suppress it, it inevitably resurfaces, often through involuntary and subconscious means-most notably in his dreams. He confesses, "My dreams contained my history" (268), acknowledging that the past remains deeply ingrained in his psyche, finding ways to manifest even when he consciously seeks to forget. Every time he falls asleep, his dreams become haunted by the memories he cannot escape. He admits, "After Mike's death I was very disturbed and I could escape neither myself, nor my country, nor my family" (269). Here, Solomon reveals the impossibility of severing ties with his past; his history continues to intrude, refusing to be silenced or buried completely.

Solomon's former identity is not just a source of pain and trauma but also where his pride and honor reside. Whenever he feels discrimination from Weston villagers, he intuitively connects to his past identity, which is a legacy of survival, strength, and dignity. In a moment of reflection, he recalls:

They do not know who I am. I am the son of an elder, a man who decided disputes and punished crimes. I am a man who travelled a very considerable distance south and then returned to the bosom of my doomed family, always moving at night, and eating berries and drinking water from streams. I am a man who has survived, and I would rather die like a free man than suffer my blood to be drawn like a slave's (256).

Therefore, his past identity is a complex mixture. On one hand, his past is a burden that he desperately wishes to escape, a history marked by trauma, death, and displacement. On the other hand, it is also a vital part of his identity, a source of pride and self-respect. As time passes, the weight of Solomon's suppressed identity becomes unbearable, transforming into an urgent need to reclaim and share his story. His realization grows stronger: "If I do not share my story, then I have only this one year to my life. I am a one-year-old man who walks with heavy steps. I am a man burdened with hidden history" (271). This statement underscores the devastating effects of erasure. The act of sharing his story becomes not only a way to affirm his humanity but also a means of unburdening himself from the hidden history that weighs so heavily on his soul.

Tragically, before Solomon can reveal his story to Dorothy and reclaim the wholeness of his identity, he is murdered by the Weston villagers. His death is a chilling reminder of the

hostility and violence that accompany displacement, as well as the ultimate silencing of his voice. The villagers' act of murder does more than end Solomon's life-it extinguishes the possibility of his story being told, leaving his past unheard and unacknowledged. In this way, Solomon's fate serves as a devastating commentary on the plight of those caught in the margins of society, whose identities are forcibly suppressed, misunderstood, or erased.

Solomon's failure in identity pursuit can be concluded in two aspects. First of all, his compromise in identity choice puts himself in a more difficult circumstances-to imitate the Englanders, while cannot totally abandon his African identity. This results in the sense of displacement and disconnection to himself, and causes huge trauma to his self-recognition. Second, the "home" he is seeking has already changed under the background of globalization and modernization, where even the natives cannot reach a sense of belonging. In Thirdspace, these exists a critical strategy. Thirding-as-Othering is "the first and most important step in transforming the categorical and closed logic of either/or to the dialectically open logic of both/and also…" (Soja, 1996: 60). At the very beginning, it is an unwise choice for Solomon to take part in the either/or game, because the disturbing national heterogeneity has already blurred the boundary between the insider and the outsider. The boundary is blurred and belonging is not fixed but "a matter of perpetual crossing and recrossing" to indicate that "a logic of displacement is inseparable from national 'belonging'" (Clingman, 2007: 47). Solomon's unawareness of the forming of Thirdspace, and consistent compromise to imagined either/or situation results in his final failure in identity crisis.

3. Summary

For migrants such as Solomon, they come to England for the hope of a better future and life. They endure harsh travel and unbearable condition to successfully arrive in their dream nation. However, what face them are discrimination and indifference among people, not expected by them before. In order to adapt into English life and community, they abandon their African identities, including their name, language, culture and so on. Instead of joining in the efforts of establishing a Thirdspace where everyone can have their voice being heard, they choose to help the Englanders to build their fading homeland. However, with huge efforts to be a complete "Englander", they are still not treated as true "Englanders" on this piece of land. Even though they obtain legal identity to stay in England, they still face discrimination and danger from English community. Ultimately, they cannot find a space as "home" that can accommodate and protect them. They lose in the chaotic space in the end.

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