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“That’s because OUR PEOPLE ain’t have no history”: How late-twentieth-century migrant literature subverts the history of Anglosphere cities and illuminates migrant narratives

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Introduction

For immigrants, their presence within their new country can be branded as temporary, and their identity seen as perpetually attached to their country of origin. However, through successive generations, migrant communities have established themselves geographically and culturally within occident cities. In truth, these metropolitan spaces are ever-evolving and offer the potential to be accurate reflections of the communities that compose them, despite the threats posed by gentrification. Yet, the absence of historical recognition for these migrant communities is a point of contention, as the subjectivity of history's formulation often goes overlooked, and static records of a city lack the potential for alteration if the appropriate evidence is not concrete. I will explore key examples of late-twentieth-century migrant literature that induct fictional experiences into the histories of Anglosphere cities and invite scepticism of the recorded history of these cities. Sam Selvon's *The Housing Lark* (1965), Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987) and Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* (1997) align in their focus on their metropolitan settings, the cities of London, Toronto, and Los Angeles respectively. These Anglosphere cities each saw similar influxes of migration through significant early-twentieth-century immigration policy. I will argue that these texts highlight the absent history of subaltern migrants from the historical documentation of these cities and national education systems.

Historiography, the study of the writing of history and the methods of historians, is naturally a subject familiar to the academic field of history. Indeed, seminal books such as Michel-Rolph Trouillot's *Silencing the Past* (1995) reflect the work already conducted in academic research and biographical publications. I will put forward that literary fiction in this same period addresses the production of history and how various groups are represented or absent within those accounts. Indeed, similar to Trouillot, these authors contend with the idea that "there are hegemonic versions of history that tend to actively silence subaltern voices"

(Oostindie 167). The opposition to "hegemonic versions of history" is not always directly done by disvaluing the reader's current perceptions of the histories of these Anglosphere cities and their inhabitants. Rather, the approach taken is often in line with what Trouillot determines to be the ultimate challenge of examining the production of historical narratives; to recognise and deconstruct its very production: "I also want to reject both the naïve proposition that we are prisoners of our pasts and the pernicious suggestion that history is whatever we make of it . . . the ultimate mark of power may be its invisibility; the ultimate challenge, the exposition of its roots" (Trouillot xxiii). Therefore, a key component of my examination will detail the manner in which this migrant fiction effectively 'exposes those roots' of history.

The relevance of historiography beyond my period of focus is evident in the ongoing work of historians such as David Olusoga, whose publication *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (2016) condemns the systematic exclusion of black British history from the pages of British history: "Black history is everywhere but repeatedly and often intentionally it has been misfiled, recategorized or sidelined. At times black British history is hidden in plain view" (Olusoga 19). Moreover, Olusoga recognises the importance of cities as spaces in which migrant history can be displayed to a large number of people but also regrettably overlooked:

> At the very centre of our capital city stands one of the most sympathetic, humane and heroic depictions of a black Briton . . . Yet the black Briton represented in this famous work of public art (Nelson's Column) is almost entirely unknown and rarely commented upon, despite having been on public display for well over one and a half centuries. (Olusoga 19)

Olusoga goes on to remark upon the migrant history stored away in the records of Admiral Horatio Nelson's fleet in the National Archives in London: "among them are men from across Britain but also others from India, Malta, Italy and the former American colonies"

(Olusoga 20). This reflects upon the records of migrant contributions contained within such archives, and the capability of literature such as Olusoga's to impart that information to a wider readership. Olusoga specifically addresses the eighteen men born in Africa and another hundred and twenty-three born in the West Indies as acutely significant (Olusoga 20). The importance of Olusoga's work in addressing side-lined black British history has been made readily apparent in the 'hostile environment' policies that have resulted in the ongoing Windrush scandal, which have seen the detainment and deportation of British citizens of Caribbean origin. The omission of black British history within public spaces and the education system has undoubtedly caused a marginalisation of black British citizens and has resulted in this unlawful attack on migrants and their families.

The following question of my texts and their portrayal of subaltern migrants will undoubtedly arise: Is the act of presenting the subaltern, and adapting oral histories and storytelling into the mass market literary form a necessary form of representation to combat prior exclusion? I will look to the literary theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1983) and the literature that has developed from her conclusions such as Joanne Sharp's *Geographies of Post colonialism* (2008). This literature will be crucial in understanding the complexities of subaltern representation and definition.

Naturally, because my fiction of focus spans multiple Anglosphere cities, an approach that recognises the shared composition of capitalist cities and class structures within the nations of the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada will be necessary. Marxist historiography and the historical narrative of 'history from below' will forefront my argument, as the migrant characters in my three primary texts share financial constraints and a placement in the lower classes that prevent them from being subjects for historical record. I will address how these authors engage in class conflict through this literary challenge to the dictation of metropolitan history. Furthermore, I will judge whether the shift toward revealing

the absence of subaltern and migrant histories by authors and historians in this period and into the twenty-first century is evidence of Raymond Williams's suggestion in *Marxism and Literature* (1977) that an emergent hegemony promotes new ideas in conflict with the dominant hegemony. Specifically, the emergent idea is that of how class constrictions on early-twentieth-century migrants and subaltern groups resulted in their exclusion from history, and how a new ideology emerged as the century progressed and continues to advocate for the discovery and inclusion of those previously absent histories.

Firstly, I will focus on Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* and the text's particular irreverence to history as it incorporates actual historical figures into the narrative and introduces scenes of untold migrant individual accomplishment such as Macedonian involvement in early Toronto industrial work. In doing so, Ondaatje presents another facet of literature's power when authors implement pre-existing and verifiable history into their fiction. Namely, that Temelcoff's selfless bridge rescue, while unverified and likely entirely fictional, can illuminate details left in the footnotes of the historical record of Toronto. While Temelcoff will never be named in such historical sources, Ondaatje's fictionalisation of the Macedonian contribution will ensure that the sparse details that do exist are foregrounded and prompt further research.

This will lead on to discussion of *Tropic of Orange*. Sesshu Foster's introduction to the text notes the approach to history that Karen Tei Yamashita takes, and what a reader will come to recognise through the multiperspectivity of the text. She claims that "this is the ultimate book about Los Angeles because there's no ultimate book about Los Angeles" (Foster xv). This introduction establishes the subjectivity of portrayals and histories in densely populated, multicultural cities, and the incapability of any book to encapsulate Los Angeles into a written documentation. In a sense, literature and history share this limitation, and any flaw which I address history to have in regards to its limitation of perspective can

also be attributed to fictional portrayals such as Yamashita's. Indeed, my approach to these texts is not to advocate their infallibility over the more commonly accessible history of these cities and nations. Rather, I will argue that these texts expose the workings and decision making behind recorded history and represent the capability of literature as a medium which can cement subaltern individuals and migrant groups within a shared common knowledge. Yamashita shows the necessity of this in the case of Manzanar Murakami, who "had become a fixture on the freeway overpass much like a mural or a traffic information sign or tagger's mark. He was there every day, sometimes even when it rained, but it rarely rained. After all, this was L.A" (Yamashita 34). This quotation highlights a key aspect of my second chapter; how Yamashita aligns subaltern figures such as Murakami with the artistic production and storytelling of fringe groups in metropolitan space. The significance of muralism to Asian and Mexican migrants and their descendants in Los Angeles throughout the twentieth century will be thoroughly explored. Moreover, the act of painting a mural is in itself an alternative form of cultural group representation that differs from the standard written texts, public statues or museum displays. In fact, these works physically mark the city, in turn changing the defined shape and texture of metropolitan spaces to both formalise untold elements of their history, while also displaying a message for future members of that community.

I will conclude with an analysis of Sam Selvon's *The Housing Lark* and how it examines the relation between the struggles for Caribbean migrant home ownership and the absence of Caribbean history. Evidently, Selvon's characters strive to establish themselves physically within the city with the purchase of a house, as Selvon introduces Caribbean migrant stories to fill the absence left from an empirical system, which has actively supplanted their history within English history:

> 'It's a bit mixed up, I think, but it's English history.' 'We don't know any other kind. That's all they used to teach we in school. 'That's because OUR PEOPLE ain't have no history. But what I wonder is, when we have, you think they going to learn the

children that in the English schools?' (Selvon 100)

The importance of ownership and the proof of belonging for migrant communities in London within the British system is the shadow which hangs over the comedic events of Selvon's characters. Selvon's declaration in the novel that "if a man have a house he establish his right to live" has been cruelly realised by those affected by the Windrush scandal in recent years, as they supposedly did not have the 'proof' required to stay in the country in which they were born or moved to very young (Selvon 37).

Chapter 1: The migrant history unearthed from the record of 'great men' in *In the Skin of a Lion*

Many critics have identified Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987) as a proponent of historical re-evaluation. Samuel Pane refers to Linda Hutcheon's definition of "historiographic metafictions—those novels that are self-referential or auto-representational and preoccupied with the production of history. Because they challenge the very writing of historical narrative, they must employ novel strategies and alternative sources of documentation" (Pane 62). The argumentation throughout my writing will remain consistent in its representation of my primary material as all "preoccupied with the production of history."

I argue that the presentation of history that these texts display can be aligned with Sabyasachi Bhattacharya's definition of 'history from below.' He dismisses ideas of this approach as merely a broadening of the scope of history to include those previously disregarded, instead advocating for it as "a new interpretative framework" (Bhattacharya 6):

> [History from below] may involve a break with the nationalist paradigm. The point is aptly illustrated in the debate between A Cabral and a Tanzanian historian. "What commands history in colonial condition", wrote Cabral, "is not the class struggle. I do no mean that the class struggle in Guinea stopped completely during the colonial period; it continued, but in a muted way. In the colonial period it is the state which commands history. (Bhattacharya 7)

Bhattacharya suggests that 'history from below' breaks from the national paradigm rooted in colonial power structures. The state controls its population and colonial territories through the power of language and knowledge construction. Michel Foucault suggests "that in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers" (Foucault 52). Here, Foucault addresses how our beliefs behind the validity of history are

dictated by the production of discourse. Indeed, what these authors face is not merely the barriers that prevent migrant histories from being heard due to the unrecorded nature of oral history or a contradiction with details enshrined in the history controlled by the state. The need to define Ondaatje's text as a 'historiographic metafiction' presents the descriptors bolted-on to fiction where the institutionalised discourse have determined the ways in which history can be presented. The term's composition as a combination of history and literature highlights that they customarily stand distinct, as fact and fiction. Despite the need to define this type of literature as distinct through the classification of "historiographic metafictions," the absence of this history and the filling of this gap by migrant literature shows a capability of the medium to convey "Products of the working class mind [that] have left so few records that we may never directly know" (Bhattacharya 13).

Joanne Sharp's *Geographies of Post colonialism* addresses how the practices of defining the Orient excluded the voices of the very people within those spaces:

> In the case of Orientalism, power emerged through institutions and practices used to name and describe the Orient. Those resident in the space of the Orient were not allowed to speak for themselves. They were always described by others, and characterised by others. (Sharp 18)

This can be similarly applied to the definition of migrant communities. Through my analysis of these texts, I aim to underline where institutionalised portrayals are revealed to be merely constructions that offer one perspective of migrant groups within metropolitan spaces. Such a comparison is supported by the conflict present between the Anglosphere settings of these novels and the role of migration in constructing and developing the cities of Toronto, Los Angeles and London. The distinction in presentation between the west and the Orient can be found in the similar distinction between migrant communities and their country of settlement.

Therefore, it is vital that these texts create stories that are "resident in the space." They do

this through a focus on their Anglosphere city settings, as they present overlooked spaces for migrant individuals and communities. Bhattacharya expresses that another strength of the 'history from below' method "lies in micro-level in-depth investigation. It is a history which is local in scale, taking as its subject the region, the township or the parish: in the case of the city, the morphology of the individual quarter or suburb, or even of the individual home or street" (Bhattacharya 14). The intent of this approach is to go beyond the notion that a city could ever be encapsulated into one idea, portrayal or history. Indeed, the fact that my primary texts all examine the production of history within the settings of Anglosphere cities lends them perfectly to this method of analysis and its connection to Marxist theory. Class structures are at their most evident in the physical disparities between sections of cities, and class conflict is at its most effective when situated in the economic and industrial centres of a nation. This method's origins derive "chiefly from a Marxist orientation" (Bhattacharya 4). This Marxist connection is further evident in sources such as Raymond Williams's *Marxism and Literature*, a text which reaffirms points on the intersection between class and history in Marxist study: "The next decisive intervention of Marxism was the rejection of what Marx called 'idealist historiography', and in that sense of the theoretical procedures of the Enlightenment. . . . What that account and perspective excluded was material history, the history of labour, industry as the 'open book of the human faculties" (Williams 18-19). In Ondaatje's novel, migrants have arrived in Canada and take the position among the lower classes through working labour jobs such as bridge construction. Class plays a fundamental role in the treatment of working-class and therefore migrant history.

Ondaatje's novel begins with the Epigraph from John Berger: "Never again will a single story be told as though it were the only one." This immediately establishes the author's consideration of the production of history as well as literature's capability to offer plurality in the dissemination of conflicting histories where there was once "a single story." One

reoccurring method which puts this sentiment into practice in Ondaatje's historiographic metafiction is the inclusion of real people and places alongside the novel's characters. Ondaatje positions the central character of the second chapter 'The Bridge'– Nicholas Temelcoff – as instrumental to the construction of the Prince Edward Viaduct. This bridge's importance to the city of Toronto is evidenced by Temelcoff's observations: "The bridge goes up in a dream. It will link the east end with the centre of the city. It will carry trains that have not even been invented yet" (Ondaatje 26). This situates migrants at the beginning of Toronto's construction and crucial to such inventions that connected the country. Yet, this quotation also paints an ethereal picture of the bridge, one of 'dream' which serves a purpose for the 'yet to be invented.' The intangibility of the bridge's purpose as envisioned by Temelcoff parallels the transience of this migrant work force, who aim "their hammers towards the noise of a nail they cannot see" (Ondaatje 28). It is a migrant community which will be lost in the records of history and whose transient work will see them fade from this area. This contrasts with the fate of characters in the novel sourced from real people, such as R.C. Harris. Harris is known as "the man behind the bridge . . . The longest-serving works commissioner in the city's history, who occupied the position for 33 years from 1912-1945, he has been credited with shaping 20th-century Toronto like no other" (Buck, para.6). This posthumous depiction in the Toronto Star falls in line with Thomas Carlyle's suggestion that "the History of the World . . . was the Biography of Great Men" (19).

'History from below' distinctly conflicts with history as the biography of great men and in doing so recognises the flaws of historical approaches that determine such men to be exclusively worthy of their "decisive" roles. Ondaatje presents Temelcoff to have a decisive role in the bridge's construction, his wages exceeding his co-workers for the increased responsibility he single-handedly takes on (Ondaatje 35). Despite his contribution, it is noted that "even in archive photographs it is difficult to find him. Again and again you see vista

before you and the eye must search along the wall of sky to the speck of burned paper across the valley that is him . . . he floats at the three hinges of the crescent-shaped steel arches. These knit the bridge together. The moment of cubism" (Ondaatje 34). Evidently, "archive photographs" have missed Temelcoff's contributions, and the way which this novel is situated amongst real places and historical figures such as Harris creates the effect that makes us doubt the accuracy of recorded history. Ondaatje effectively leads us to believe that this fictional character, or a man like him, could have been omitted, the reader having seen how inconsequential these migrant workers are deemed. Bhattacharya cites from Puerto Rican historians who declare that "we face the problem that the history presented as ours is only part of our history . . . what of the history of the historyless, the anonymous people who in their collective acts, their work, daily lives, and fellowship, have forged our society through the centuries" (Bhattacharya 3). Key to this quotation is its suggestion that the "historyless" have "forged our society." This supports a major component of my argumentation, namely that the migrant role in construction and development of Anglosphere cities is recognised by these literary works. They do so by revealing that the history of 'great men' has outlasted the generational dissemination of the collective acts of 'anonymous people,' and that we have been left with 'only part of our history.' These 'anonymous people' such as Temelcoff often contend with a position both within the lower class and of immigrant status. Indeed, Temelcoff works night-shifts on the bridge in order to attend school during the day and improve his language capability, while also saving enough money to become financially self-dependent by opening a bakery. He is shown in these moments to seek self-improvement in the aim of linguistic and spatial belonging within this new country. Temelcoff counteracts his invisibility and anonymity through his endeavours to be seen and heard.

I suggest that Ondaatje's mention of 'cubism' should also not go unrecognised. The simultaneity (multiple perspectives of a single subject) inherent in the artistic movement

matches the remit of his re-evaluation of history through this historiographic metafiction. A central aspect of cubism lies in its "juxtaposition or combination, in a single painting, of radically different and discontinuous perspective schemas or viewpoint" (Cottington 52). The fact that this allusion is situated close to the suggestion that photographic evidence is subjective and limited in its encapsulation of a total history further exhibits this author's willingness to blur the boundaries between art and history, and align the subjectivity which determines their portrayals of reality. Moreover, it signals the multiplicity of history when the discourses which determine knowledge are revealed.

The distinction between Harris and the Macedonian workers, between who has been remembered and those who have not, between a man you can find through simple internet research and the migrant worker community that are recognised in fiction alone is further addressed in the following quotation:

> At midnight the half-built bridge over the valley seemed deserted – just lanterns tracing its outlines. But there was always a night shift of thirty or forty men. After a while Harris removed himself from the car, lit a cigar, and walked onto the bridge. [Harris] slipped past the barrier and walked towards the working men. Few of them spoke English but they knew who he was. Sometimes he was accompanied by Pomphrey, an architect, the strange one from England who was later to design for Commissioner Harris one of the city's grandest buildings – the water filtration plant in the east end. (Ondaatje 29)

Ultimately, these projects will be remembered as the works and ideas of men such as Harris and Pomphrey. Yet, Ondaatje effectively highlights the workers absent from the history of this bridge through this description of Harris. He mentions that "there was always a night shift of thirty or forty men" in order to tie Harris's accomplishments in this moment to the unseen migrants on the bridge. Their presence within the darkness connects to their absence from the historical record of this bridge. In contrast, the bridge is lit, its outlines traced by lanterns. Harris is also visible through the cigar he lights when stepping onto the bridge. He is a figure that is physically visible alongside this bridge. Furthermore, he is known by the all of

the workers, and will retain his presence through the historical record of Toronto. Harris is depicted as being able to view the outlined bridge in sharp contrast to the workers who were noted to be hammering nails into a bridge obscured by fog. Ondaatje's use of light and darkness; visibility and obscurity, ties closely to his presentation of the limitations of perspective. Indeed, the defining moment of 'The Bridge' chapter comes with Temelcoff's rescue of the falling nun, a scene that no one witnesses. The scream of pain as he catches her misinterpreted as that of "the falling figure" (Ondaatje 31). This scene acts as a microcosm for Ondaatje's purpose throughout the novel. He identifies the limitations of the historical method by placing fictional events alongside documented places and people. In doing so, the subjectivity, choices and even misinterpretations made in the presentation of history become glaringly apparent.

An instrumental way in which Ondaatje shows the limitations of these lower class workers to be similarly remembered along with the history of this construction is in the distinction made between the language capability of Harris and the migrant workers. History is communicated through language, and these workers' silence in the English language is matched by their absence from history. Andrea Yew draws upon language as a crucial element of Ondaatje's writing and also picks up on this comparison between Harris and Temelcoff:

> The infantalisation of Telmelcoff by Harris is perhaps not deliberately condescending, but also a suggestion of a lack of self-awareness and self-understanding that is integral to growing up. Here, Ondaatje suggests that language is key for communication, but also a tool for self-understanding and, consequently, self-representation (Yew 16).

The requirement of communication and by conjunction self-representation is notably absent upon Temelcoff's arrival in the country. Ondaatje paints the picture of a developing setting, not yet marked by a defined culture or history:

> North America is still without language, gestures and work and bloodlines are the only currency. But it was a spell of language that brought Nicholas here, arriving in Canada without a passport in 1914, a great journey made in silence. (Ondaatje 43)

Clearly, while this induction of migrants to Canada occurred when the country's currency was still merely 'work', the necessity to learn English as time progresses and the struggle of migrants to find identity within this new country becomes apparent. Many migrants arrive in metropolitan spaces and take work that sees them remain silent. Therefore, this class structure results in them becoming absent even from the record of events that they played a crucial role in.

The intangibility of migrants in their metropolitan surroundings, as noted previously in regards to the dream-like construction of the fog covered bridge is further demonstrated by the depiction of Macedonian migration to Toronto. Temelcoff recounts that "he was told a fairy tale of Upper America by those who returned to the Macedonian villages, those first travellers who were the Judas goats to the west" (Ondaatje 43-44). This 'fairy tale' sold to migrants compounds their immaterial and insecure position in Canada. Moreover, a "Judas goat"; a trained goat used in animal herding, leads sheep or cattle to a specific destination. These first travellers inspired other migrants to follow with their stories, but the 'fairy tale' nature of their stories and their return to Macedonian illustrates their inability to find a secure place within society there. In order to have a place in history, these migrants who are disadvantaged by class standing, must find a rooted place within the country and the language in which to express themselves. This expression will not come from Macedonians who live this 'fairy tale' and move between countries, but rather from those like Temelcoff who recognise the importance of the English language in allowing him to engage in self-representation.

Returning to the transience of the migrant work force in comparison to the historical permanence afforded to Harris as the designer of the viaduct. Ondaatje illuminates the hidden community hub for these migrant workers as it is revealed to the unnamed nun by Temelcoff: "She realises the darkness represents a Macedonian night where customers sit outside at their tables . . . so when customers step in at any time, what they are entering is an old courtyard of the Balkans. A violin. Olive trees. Permanent evening. Now the arbour-like wallpaper makes sense to her. Now the parrot has a language" (Ondaatje 37). Again the role of language is pertinent to this story. The bar setting presents Temelcoff with a 'language,' distinct from his mimicry of English, through this Macedonian replication. However, this is also undeniably hidden away, and does not affect the dominant structures and image of the country being built by men like Harris. It's a place that transplants Macedonian nightlife. Again, we see the presence of migrants within a darkened space, much like their night shift on the bridge. The language that the nun recognises here is not the English language, and this setting grants a material identity for these workers that is notably distinct from the Toronto community. Temelcoff envisions a connection within the city through his bakery: "In a year he will open a bakery with the money he has saved. He released the catch on the pulley and slides free of the bridge" (Ondaatje 49). This final line of the chapter marks Temelcoff's move away from this life, as he establishes himself within the Toronto community in a business in his own name and for his own benefit, rather than Harris or Burke's. As Temelcoff slides free from his equipment, he slides free from the 'dreams' of other men that he can't envision.

Yet, the projects of men like Harris will find replacements for Temelcoff, as the industrial development of Toronto continues in subsequent chapters with consistent reference to Harris's dreams and the darkness that shrouds migrants: "The men work in the equivalent of the fallout of a candle. They are in the foresection of the cortex, in the small world of Rowland Harris' dream as he lies in bed on Neville Park Boulevard" (Ondaatje 111).

Patrick Lewis engages with the Toronto migrant community in the chapter 'Palace of Purification.' However, despite his position being reversed in comparison to Temelcoff, as a Canadian entering into Macedonian sub-community of the city, the dynamics of visibility and language that negate migrant history remain: "As English-speaking Canadian he becomes the foreign other of the foreigners in his own land, "their alien" (Siemerling 17). Winfried Siemerling summarises Patrick's journey throughout this chapter:

> When Patrick moves to an immigrant neighborhood in Toronto, where he will eventually catch up with the unknown stories about the world of the loggers he has encountered as a child. Here he also discovers a whole world of the other, outside his familiar boundaries (and for us beyond the horizon of a Toronto history written predominantly in English). Most significantly, with the discovery of the (in terms of the English language) silent other, and his journey into a foreign language and culture. (Siemerling 16-17)

Once again, the linguistic silence of these immigrants is combined with their invisibility. Ondaatje describes a scene early on in the chapter, "an hour after dusk disappeared into the earth the people came in silence, in small and large families, up the slope towards the half-built waterworks. Emerging from darkness" (Ondaatje 115). Here we see the importance of setting, and how migrant communities go unrecognised in metropolitan spaces, their movement in the cover of darkness here symbolises a distinction from the population who can be seen during the day. This is a core facet of each of my primary texts, and will therefore be returned to in greater depth is subsequent chapters.

As the novel's characters search for a voice, Ondaatje imparts a fictional history in place of the suppressed one in reality. The nature of this text as a historiographic metafiction allows it to do both. Siemerling encapsulates Ondaatje's method is the following quotation:

> Michael Ondaatje deciphers and invents the signs of another world coexisting silently with Toronto's written history and the surface of its present-day reality. The novel defamiliarizes habitual perceptions of Toronto by superimposing a reconstructed and imagined new world. With the non-English-speaking immigrants of Toronto, Ondaatje follows a whole community that crosses boundaries and borders to another reality and

a new language. (Siemerling 16)

Yet, the effect of this 'reconstructed and imagined new world' should be evaluated, as should the power the historiographic metafiction to disrupt the historical record of figures such as R.C. Harris. I wish to recall my earlier citation of a Toronto Star article. In said article on R.C. Harris's Bloor Street Viaduct, attention is paid to Ondaatje's novel and its portrayal of Harris: "Harris is a central character in Michael Ondaatje's novel *In the Skin of a Lion*. He is portrayed as an arrogant bureaucrat, obsessed with his own legacy. And while he was rotund, he was probably not as ego-driven as Ondaatje's depiction suggests" (Buck, para. 9). The doubt cast on Harris's character by Ondaatje's depiction is evident in the adverb 'probably.' The uncertainty exhibited here reflects the effect of Ondaatje's literature. The novel does not dramatically claim the objectivity of its alternative Toronto history, rather it establishes the decisions and the hierarchies at play that have determined the written history familiar to readers. This article wrestles with the suggestions made in Ondaatje's depiction of Harris, as the novel's very existence establishes "another world coexisting silently with Toronto's written history" that can no longer be overlooked (Siemerling 16).

This effect extends to my own writing. Ondaatje's identification of the flaws in the recording of migrant histories within Toronto as result of their class position and the barriers of the English language has prompted me to evaluate how these ideas emerge in other migrant fiction in the late twentieth century. Once the methods and factors behind what survives in written history are made clear, the intent to reconstruct or imagine the alternative histories of a given space become vital, regardless of any limitations that have been imposed on the validity of literature to impart that history.

Chapter 2: Remapping the history of L.A. in *Tropic of Orange*

Firstly, I will address the ways in which Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* aligns with Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*. This is evident from before even the first page of each novel. The epigraph of Ondaatje's work states that "never again will a single story be told as though it were the only one." Sesshu Foster's introduction to *Tropic of Orange* begins with a similar claim: "This is the ultimate book about Los Angeles because there's no ultimate book about Los Angeles" (Foster xv). Foster plays with the idea of this novel being the 'ultimate' portrayal of Los Angeles (L.A.) and in doing so recognises the subjectivity inherit in any depiction of the city. It is impossible to capture the city's current essence or its definitive history. Yet, Foster's introduction doesn't languish in nihilism in its deconstruction of the ideology and power behind the identity of L.A. Rather, Foster looks to the past and criticises where certain portrayals of the city have ingrained themselves into readers' minds as the 'ultimate' identity of a given space, and the migrant history omitted in the recreation of L.A. in fiction:

> Roman Polanski's 1974 noir classic, *Chinatown*, ostensibly set in 1937, makes no mention, of course, that in 1936 most of Chinatown was razed and buried under the newly built Union Station. Dodgers stadium commemorates in no way the Chicano neighbourhood of Chavez Ravine, whose residents were forcibly evicted, whose properties were buried under landfill for baseball parking lots. (Foster xv-xvi)

This quotation speaks to how historical events have been omitted and therefore forgotten in the public consciousness upon the induction of fictional representations of city. Foster highlights a history of unrepresented events in the artistic production of the late twentieth century and the distinct way in which Yamashita is mapping unrecognised sections of the city and the events tied to them. Although Yamashita's novel does not operate as a historiographic metafiction like *In the Skin of a Lion*, it shares elements of that genre as critics have defined the text as both speculative fiction and magical realism. Anne Mai Yee

Jansen suggests that "magical realism functions as a literary strategy of resistance, operating as a critique of race and contemporary immigration politics in the United States … Yamashita's use of magical realism represents migrant culture as "living on the borderline between fiction and reality" (Jansen 106). This navigation of fiction and reality is a facet of historiographic metafiction, namely in its consideration of the production of history and incorporation of historical persons and places. While Yamashita's representation of 'migrant culture' is rooted in her time of writing, it also reveals how migrant histories in the city are integral to present issues facing those groups. This intent is made clear in one of the novel's prefaces, in which it is stated that "what follows may not be about the future, but is perhaps about the recent past; a past that, even as you imagine it, happens" (Yamashita 3). Evidently, Yamashita prompts active consideration of the 'past' from the novel's beginning, as the boundaries between fiction and reality, as well as past and present, lose the distinctions that saw the knowledge of the forced displacement of a Chicano neighbourhood lost to history in the elevation of filmic representations of L.A. in this period. As seen with the Toronto Star's recognition of Ondaatje's portrayal of Harris, fiction is capable of reshaping the past to influence the present. Therefore, the importance of Yamashita's historical allusions cannot be understated, as the history of "displacement, dispossession and dislocation continues these days under the guise of gentrification" (Foster xvi). This conflict between the gentrified idea of multicultural L.A. and the migrant experience in the city will be examined further in my analysis of this text.

A point of comparison that I want to draw particular attention to is the allusions to named historical individuals and how they interact with the fictional characters of these two texts. As noted previously in the Toronto Star article: "Harris is a central character in Michael Ondaatje's novel *In the Skin of a Lion*. He is portrayed as an arrogant bureaucrat, obsessed with his own legacy" (Buck para. 9). Yamashita includes reference to the Mexican-American

reporter and civil rights activist Ruben Salazar, but establishes the man as a point of inspiration for Gabriel rather than creating a characterisation of him.

> I'm one of a handful of Chicano reporters on editorial staff … It was because of Ruben Salazar, the Mexican American reporter who was killed at the Silver Dollar during the so-called "East L.A. uprising" in the early seventies. Of course I never knew him personally but had read about and been inspired by the man. By the time I got my first story, he was long dead, but I was there to continue a tradition he had started. That's the way I felt. This was going to be my contribution to La Raza, to follow in his footsteps. (Yamashita 36)

The difference between the legacy of Salazar compared to the legacy of Harris is discernible here. Salazar is notable for being the first Mexican-American mainstream media journalist to cover the Chicano community. Therefore, Gabriel identifies a community that he can contribute to through his job as a reporter and Chicano background. This juxtaposes the singular positioning of Harris, who is tied to his projects rather than his people. Whereas Ondaatje situates Temelcoff and Patrick as unverifiable presences throughout Harris's life over the course of the novel's events, as they aim to destroy Harris's filtration plant for his exploitation of his workers in the novel's closing chapter. Salazar is conversely an inspiration for the fictional Gabriel. Yamashita does not present a narrative where Salazar and Gabriel interact, because her purpose is distinctly different from Ondaatje's, as Ondaatje challenges Harris's status within historical record. In contrast, Yamashita presents details of Salazar's life and death in line with other historical accounts. Yet, she does so while centring this allusion on the character of Gabriel, who firmly holds on to Salazar and by conjunction a crucial piece of Chicano history within this city. Moreover, an important expression covered in this section is that of 'La Raza,' which can be translated from Spanish to mean 'the community' or 'the race.' Francisco E. Balderrama notes in his analysis of the Mexican community within Los Angeles that:

> Mexican nationals were categorically denied assistance because of a "citizens only" policy, while Mexican Americans were also frequently refused help by public

> officials who did not recognize their citizenship. Because Mexicans and Mexican Americans maintained strong ties with Mexico, they turned to the local Mexican consulates which responded with an unprecedented campaign in defense of la raza or mexicanos-Mexican nationals and American citizens of Mexican descent (Balderrama ix).

This novel presents the border crisis and the issues facing Mexican migrants as still unresolved. Allusions made to Ruben Salazar and 'La Raza' work to both define Gabriel's character as a Chicano who is aware of his community's history in Los Angeles, and impart true historical information to a reader. Indeed, these seemingly minor historical allusions within this fiction may similarly inspire the reader to further engage with this migrant history and individuals in reality like Gabriel has, who use said history as impetus for their modern activism.

Yamashita does not always explicitly challenge how specific migrant histories or events have been overlooked, choosing instead to show how the individual or group histories of her characters are questioned. While reference to infrastructure built by immigrant labour and Ruben Salazar unearth narratives for the novel's readers, a general trend of disvalued migrant histories is evident in seemingly minor exchanges. Rafaela Cortes speaks of how her "great-great-grandfather brought his family across the mountains and through the jungles to get here [and that her] mothers people were weavers, and my father's people built the looms" (Yamashita 11). Yamashita's characterisation of the old woman's response while listening to this family history highlights her doubt: "such pretty stories," the old woman nodded as if they weren't true" (Yamashita 11). Evidently, the walls have risen between what is determined to be 'fact' and 'fiction,' despite the propensity for them to blur to suit the intentions of those defining L.A's history and identity for future generations through the film industry. Much like Ondaatje explored how Harris's physical construction of Toronto resulted in his recognition over the migrant labour that built the city, Yamashita focuses on the role of the media and film industry in constructing an L.A. identity for their benefit. The

novel comments upon this, in turn addressing who is permitted to define the image of L.A. through 'stories,' despite them being glaringly inaccurate: "That's what wrong with your precious L.A. detective films. It's always raining. It never rains here! The only reason it rains in those films is so Bogie can wear a trenchcoat" (Yamashita 20-21).

The importance of the city of L.A. in this text cannot be understated. A reoccurring point of contemplation for characters such as Manzanar Murakami and Buzzworm is how the city has been mapped and how it could be remapped. As noted previously, the 'history from below' approach concerns itself with "history which is local in scale, taking as its subject the region, the township or the parish: in the case of the city, the morphology of the individual quarter or suburb, or even of the individual home or street" (Bhattacharya 14). Indeed, the fine details of space are of paramount concern in this text. In the closing section of the fourth chapter, Buzzworm identifies how entire sections of the city - and by conjunction the people within those spaces – are overlooked:

> One day, Buzzworm got taken for a ride on the freeway. Got to pass over the Harbor Freeway, speed over the hood like the freeway was a giant bridge. He realized you could just skip out over his house, his streets, his part of town. You never had to see it ever. (Yamashita 31)

Buzzworm realises here in childhood how different areas of LA are viewed and valued. The reader is given a clear demonstration of the gaps in city's presentation, through spaces that are overlooked and therefore do not possess narrative or historical value. Further, the positioning here of the Harbor Freeway over the hood like 'a giant bridge' perhaps foreshadows the incident on the same Freeway later in the novel, as the homeless population beneath it emerge after a fire on the freeway displaces them. This event defies the 'map' of the city that Buzzworm recognised in his youth, as undesirable and disadvantaged communities that were hidden beneath the freeway emerge to media attention.

This idea of invisible communities calls back to the migrant communities in *In the Skin of a Lion,* as they were frequently presented within darkened spaces when working on Harris's structures. As a result of the freeway fire, the homeless population of L.A. are revealed in an intense light to the rest of the city's population, as the histories of characters such as the Japanese-American former doctor Manzanar Murakami are told by his television news executive granddaughter Emi, and the Chicano Journalist Gabriel noted previously. Through Yamashita's vivid descriptions, the ways in which certain industries and institutions have dictated L.A is shown to go beneath the surface, beyond what is visible or invisible to the deluge of drivers on the freeway:

> But what were these mapping layers? For Manzanar they began within the very geology of the land, the artesian rivers running beneath the surface, connected and divergent, shifting and swelling. There was the complex and normally silent web of faults – cracking like mud flats baking under the desert sun, like the crevices in aging hands and faces. Yet, below the surface, there was the man-made grid of civil utilities: Southern California pipelines of natural gas; the unnatural waterways of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, and the great dank tunnels of sewage; the cascades of poisonous effluents surging from rain-washed streets into the Santa Monica Bay. (Yamashita 52)

Here we see the dynamic between the geology of the land and construction of space. This is similar to constructions such as Harris's viaduct saw the city bend to the wills of men like him, as those structures provided electricity, water, and transport links. Certainly, if particular historical accounts and perspectives can maintain their dominance in the public consciousness despite their blatant subjectivity, so can the image of a city. The environmental costs of this 'civilised' and 'prosperous' city are apparent in reference to "poisonous effluents" and "unnatural waterways." Indeed, this description depicts the city as a disharmonious confluence of man and nature beneath the surface that mirrors the spatial divisions between communities on the surface. L.A. especially may be considered a multicultural metropolis, but as I will explore in the following section in regard to the sushi

restaurant scene, that image may also be a construction to placate those of the dominant class and financial standing in the city, as well as being a means to market the city's global image.

L.A's geographical connected to other nations in undeniable, the Mexican and Asian influences have been present through its history and will remain despite the 'maps' that are placed upon the city and the distinctions between native born citizens and migrants that are made: "Nobody respects our work. Says we cost money. Live on welfare. It's a lie. We pay taxes" (Yamashita 71). The influence of the film industry, and the infrastructural divisions mapped by city planners are just a few examples of the conflict over the identity of L.A. and America overall that has been unresolved for centuries. A Native American character in the novel makes note of this in his attempt to persuade those on the border to turn back:

> 'Go back old man. Do you have a green card? Do you have a social security card? Do you have any money? When you get there, you will be unprotected. If you get sick, no one can give you care. If you have children, no one will teach them. In the name of Tonantzin and the memory of Juan Diego, go back! You are illegal.'
> …
> But the people already north warned, 'listen to what we say. We have lived here all our lives, even before the others. Our ancestors hunted the woolly mammoth and the sabre-toothed tiger. And still we do not belong here.' (Yamashita 181)

This Native American speaker reflects upon the plight of his ancestors and the current status of his ethnic community. The maps of this space and the histories he addresses here have been made irrelevant now that 'the others' have constructed and altered that map. Control over the geographical space and with it control of the people and cultural histories contained within the spoken word of their communities has naturally resulted in control over the city's identity.

However, Yamashita's characters demonstrate a defiance against the binaries created between American and Mexican identities on the border. Yamashita playfully depicts Los Angeles to be "The Village of Our Lady Queen of Angels on the River Porciuncula, the second largest city of Mexico, also known as Los Angeles" (Yamashita 181). This is both a

denial of the geographical distinctions made between the two nations, as well as a historical allusion to California's history of changing ownership, which is also noted earlier in the novel: "*With a stroke of the pen, Mexico gave California to the gringos*" (Yamashita 115). Evidently, both the history and the geography of this state and this city are not as concrete as would seem. It is through the narrative of Bobby and Rafaela that Yamashita highlights the forces at play which promote such distinctions. This is made evident in the titles of the papers that Bobby reads:

> Didn't he read her papers? Bobby been reading them at night. Taking the Miraculous Stop Smoking and reading. Pile of them left on a shelf. Titles like *Maquiladoras & Migrants. Undocumented, Illegal & Alien: Immigrants vs. Immigration.* Talks about globalization of capital. Capitalization of poverty. *Internationalization of the labour force. Exploitation and political expediency. Devaluation of currency and foreign economic policy. Economic intervention.* Big words like that … Prop 187. Keep illegals out of schools and hospitals. They could pass all the propositions they want. People like him and Rafaela weren't gonna just disappear. (Yamashita 138-139)

Despite the terms applied to those of migrant backgrounds listed here, Bobby concludes this section by recognising that the geographical and historical connection that America has with migration, particularly along the Mexican border, cannot be erased with legislation or media uproar. Such connections are irreversible from the point of conception of these cities. Much like in Ondaatje's portrayal of Toronto, Yamashita reveals the crucial migrant contribution to the construction of Los Angeles:

> In those days, there were the railroads and the harbors and the aqueduct. These were the first infrastructures built by migrant and immigrant labor that created the initial grid on which everything else began to fill in. … And after that nothing could stop the growing congregation of humanity in this corner of the world, and a new grid spread itself with particular domination. (Yamashita 203)

This suggests that the city was in fact initially mapped by migrant workers. As time passes, and this contribution is lost in the collective memory of the city's population, it is vital that this history is maintained through alternative means such as Yamashita's fiction. As evidenced by the headlines of Bobby's papers, as well as the debate over migration which

persists into the twenty-first century, this history is vital in shaping perceptions of the current migrant communities.

This novel deconstructs how said distinctions between certain groups have been established and how a minor alteration to one's perspective can change this outlook. While looking over the freeway, Manzanar names the grid of roads "his map of labor" (Yamashita 203). In addition, Manzanar notes that "he saw them scatter across the city this way and that. … It was work that defined each person in the city, despite the fact that almost everyone wanted to be defined by their leisure. … for a scant moment in history, the poor looked out those same cars" (Yamashita 203). This final line comments upon the scene in which the homeless move into the cars abandoned by fleeing commuters during the freeway fire. Here we see how material signifiers such as cars, as well as "green cards" and "social security cards" in the border scene, act to signify a person's status and ultimately their worth to this society. In contrast to this, Manzanar envisions "a new kind of grid, this one defined not by inanimate structures … but by himself and others like him" (Yamashita 203). An example of redefining one's environment to more accurately represent a group or community is through muralism. Guisela Latorre establishes the role of muralism within the Chicana/o communities of Californian cities. Latorre suggests that "if the act of writing history is equated with power, then chicanas/os would undergo a radical process of empowerment through the writing and dissemination of their own history" (Latorre 20). This form of expression combines history and spatial defiance in its redefinition of the "inanimate structures" that dominate the identity of a city. In a city that Yamashita identifies as constructing freeways that obscure and bypass entire neighbourhoods, muralism physically transforms how these spaces have been constructed by the dominant culture. This transformation takes form in the artistic expression of the community's culture and history.

Key chapters in this novel address the flaws in how migrants and those of migrant backgrounds are characterised. For example, Emi's interaction with 'Caucasian Japanophiles' at Hiro's sushi bar shows how the city's multicultural identity often ignores and mischaracterises the distinctions between diasporic groups in the city:

> 'Gee, Gabe,' she perked up. 'Here we all are, your multicultural mosaic. There's you and me and the gays at the end of the bar and the guy with the turban … Gabe, it's all bullshit.' 'I know.' 'Cultural diversity is bullshit.' … 'Do you know what cultural diversity really is? 'I'm thinking.' 'It's a white guy wearing a Nirvana T-shirt and dreads. That's cultural diversity.' Emi looked up at the sushi chef. 'Don't you hate being multicultural?' she asked. (Yamashita 110-111)

Conflict soon arises after this exchange between Gabe and Emi, as one 'Japanophile' woman states that Emi should calm down:

> The woman never looked at Emi, but offered up a patronizing smile for Hiro-san. 'We're trying to enjoy our tea. By the way, Hiro-san, it's just delicious today.' 'See what I mean. Hiro? You're invisible. I'm invisible. We're all invisible. It's just tea, ginger, raw fish, and a credit card.'
> . . .
> The woman went on. 'I happen to adore the Japanese culture. What can I say? I adore different cultures. I've travelled all over the world. I love living in L.A. because I can find anything in the world to eat, right here. It's such a meeting place for all sorts of people. A true celebration of an international world.' (Yamashita 111)

This section highlights the issues surrounding the recognition of migrants in a city as overtly 'multicultural' as L.A. Emi condemns this construction of multiculturalism, and determines it to be a means for accessing 'exotic' foods and continuing the artificial cultural experiences found on tourist holidays.

The diasporic cultures that the novel shows to be rooted in the construction and development of the city are condensed into a capitalist operation, where decorative cultural elements are prioritised over the "invisible" people. The allure of the orient is embraced but not the people and migrant communities themselves. Much like the bridge workers Harris

overlooks, Emi is invisible to this woman who announces her love for the international world while also telling Emi (of Japanese descent) to calm down and not interrupt her 'experience' of Emi's fetishized culture. Indeed, this raises the point as to how multiculturalism is perceived by this woman, as her declared adoration for Japanese culture and international travel suggests a misunderstanding of the diasporic communities in Los Angeles. Migrants and their descendants are distinct from citizens of their country of origin. Sue-Im Lee identifies this novel's criticism of a 'Global Community,' as she notes that:

> 'Global village' has been the dominant term for expressing a global commonality that results from transnational commerce, migration, and culture. [Arcangel] travels throughout South America and Mexico singing "political poetry," recounting the southern continent's history of exploitation at the hands of Europeans. He literally bears, on his body, the scars of slavery and colonialism and is the self-identified voice and the consciousness of the colonized and of the Third World. So when Arcangel rebuts global village sentiments, he is not specifically deriding the First World's philanthropic enterprise at large but the facility with which the global "we" circulates in the First World's political, economic, and cultural discourse." (Lee 59)

Indeed, L.A. is a city that can be seen as a microcosm of this 'global village.' Yet, the fact that this global commonality is predicated on commerce and cultural exchange shows the fragility of this 'global village' idea. The exchange at the sushi bar presents Emi confronting a recipient of the benefits of multiculturalism. Emi denounces the notion of multiculturalism, whereas the woman at the bar praises it. This is because it allows her to 'engage' with a multitude of cultures through commerce in one city, while actively avoiding engagement with the communities behind the cultural products. Lee goes on to suggest that Arcangel's dissent toward this idealised global community based upon commonality and a collective "we" identity composed of distinct groups raises pertinent questions: "Who chooses the criteria of "sameness" that blankets the entire group? Whose difference is elided for the coherence of unity?" (Lee 60). L.A. is thought of by this nameless character to be an idealised multicultural haven. Yet, this novel shows how the city has been built by migrants but is divided to their detriment. Yamashita shows how the maps that have been laid out and the

structures of this city that've been built create a space that migrant groups are forced to accommodate to. With this in mind, the brief mentions of "Chinese burritos" earlier in the text takes on a whole new meaning (Yamashita 88). This could easily be looked over as an example of a combination and intersection of cultures manifest in food form. Yet, the sushi bar scene coupled with Lee's emphasis on the commercial incentive behind the 'global village' point more so to a capitalist exploitation of cultural hybridity for commercial purposes.

The pressures placed on the migrant communities to fulfil a role within this dictated 'global village' are evident throughout the text. Despite Murakami's seeming detachment from society through his separation from his occupation and family, he remains shackled to his role within the 'minority' Japanese American community. Due to Murakami's eccentricities, "the Japanese American community had apologized profusely for this blight on their image as a model minority" (Yamashita 34). This shows the strain place upon minority communities to work as a collective in line with their 'model minority' identification by the majority. Multiculturalism and the notion of a global community appear false in the face of this readily apparent community hierarchy, as well as the clear unequal expectations and responsibilities placed upon migrant communities in this city.

Sarah D. Wald identifies the novel's connection between disadvantaged groups situated in L.A., and points to the struggles of the dispossessed as highlighted in Foster's introduction, whether that be due to conquest and colonialism, or gentrification:

> Yamashita, moreover, connects the plight facing the homeless to the struggles of those newly dispossessed by neoliberal globalization and those who trace their dispossession to far earlier moments of conquest and colonialism. She links the struggles of the already dispossessed and homeless in Los Angeles to a surging army of border crossers and exploited migrant laborers from Mexico, Central America, and South America. (Wald 86)

However, it is crucial to acknowledge the complexities between what Siemerling notes to be 'the discovery of the … silent other, and his journey into a foreign language and culture" (Siemerling 16-17). This statement was cited previously, and refers to Patrick when he moves into an immigrant neighbourhood of Toronto. Though, it also applies to how I have conducted my examination of the historically and spatially 'silent' groups in Yamashita's novel. With that in mind, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay; "Can the Subaltern Speak?" illuminates the dangers of broadly categorising distinct communities within a 'concrete experience':

> Neither Deleuze nor Foucault seems aware that the intellectual within globalizing capital, brandishing concrete experience, can help consolidate the international division of labor by making one model of "concrete experience" the model. We are witnessing this in our discipline daily as we see the postcolonial migrant become the norm, thus occluding the native once again. (Spivak 27-28)

Indeed, the conflict between the Native American and Arcangel on the border is one scene in particular where the complexities of experience are overlooked in my focus on how these text's approach the subjectivity of history. My alignment of the migrant experiences of these novels is not done with the purpose of promoting a binary between the migrant and non-migrant experience, nor that history must be shaped with a blanket 'migrant' focus. Overall, I do not brand either my analysis or Yamashita's text as "valoriz[ing] the concrete experience of the oppressed" (Spivak 28). Broad terms such as 'history from below' or 'migrant' seek to find the complexities in communities that can be found through the acute exploration of geographical space and history. I recognise that my role as a literary critic is as equally subjective as the historical methods that have looked past certain migrant histories, and that no author, historian or critic can completely comprehend or account for the distinct experiences of each subaltern identity. As stated in the introduction to this thesis, the aim is to connect late-twentieth-century migrant literature set in occident cities. Through their examination of metropolitan structures, these texts expose the workings and decision making

behind recorded history and represent the capability of literature as a medium to cement subaltern individuals and migrant groups within a shared common knowledge.

Chapter 3: Creating history through linguistic and spatial expression in *The Housing Lark*

Sam Selvon's *The Housing Lark* can be aligned with Tropic of Orange in particular, as the idea of spatial control determining historiographic control within metropolitan spaces is also apparent in Selvon's work. The notion that this results in Selvon effectively 'remapping' London – in a similar manner to Yamashita's reinterpretation of Los Angeles or Ondaatje's of Toronto – has been addressed by John McLeod. His writing on the "Postcolonial London" makes note of Selvon's recreation of space:

> There is an alternative vision of London in *The Lonely Londoners* which rewrites the city in terms of the jaunty, positive calypsos of the day, and which is too quickly passed over. Selvon projects a utopian vision, inspired by calypso, of an optimistic and inclusive London created by the city's newcomers. (McLeod 30)

Evidently, all three late twentieth-century texts showcase that their cities have been and continue to be shaped by the designated "newcomers." McLeod's focus is on the broader collection of Postcolonial writings situated in London, as he identifies a trend that speaks to the idea of spatial and historiographic reinterpretation:

> Each writer is engaged in a double activity of presenting London as both 'place' and 'space': bearing witness to forms of urban authority which attempt to secure London's newcomers in a certain mapping of the city, but also prizing the agency of those whose determined attempts to open new spaces in London expose the city's plasticity and deliver it up to the democratizing possibilities of spatial creolization. (McLeod 27)

This interpretation emphasises an 'urban authority.' Indeed, the role of these institutions and authorities within the metropolitan space are also overwhelmingly present in Ondaatje and Yamashita's novels; the architectural role of R.C. Harris looms large over Temelcoff and Patrick's narratives, and the freeways and 'unnatural waterways' of L.A. create a grid that divides and disregards much of the city's population.

The need to adhere to a determined mapping of the city as encouraged by the pre-established grid of a city and its dominant population is readily apparent in the actions of Selvon's characters. This manifests in the following passage, which identifies Caribbean migrants who distance themselves from their own diasporic communities in order to 'assimilate' and find acceptance within 'English' groups, groups which put forth certain views of immigration:

> It have a lot of fellars in town who go about as if they don't want to have anything to do with West Indians. They talk with their English friends about the waves of immigration, and deplore the conditions immigrants live in, and say tut-tut when any of the boys get in trouble. As if they don't want to be known as immigrants themselves, they talk about coming from the South American continent, or Latin countries, and make it quite clear that they themselves like a race apart from the hustlers and dreamers who come over to Brit'n looking for work. (Selvon, 87-88)

Yet, this assimilation through the abandonment of one's native culture and contacts is proven to be unsteady in the text, as "loneliness does bust these fellars arse. They long for old-talk with the boys, they long to reminisce and hear the old dialect" (Selvon 88). These remarks regarding unnamed characters who attempt to 'pass' for a more favoured migrant identity or take on the attitudes of English friends show how this form of assimilation is unviable. It leads to them becoming a "race apart" not in their distinction from "the hustlers and dreamers," but from their native migrant community as well as the groups they try to assimilate into. Therefore, the need to remap the city itself, instead of force migrants into London's 'grid' becomes apparent.

In her discussion of Selvon's most prominent work: *The Lonely Londoners,* Rebecca Dyer examines how Selvon's fiction and by extension the migrant narratives within act to create a new 'immigrant' London:

> Selvon's early London fiction, specifically in *The Lonely Londoners* and the short story "My Girl in the City," migrant characters' movements throughout the city and their various uses of its place-names and public sites played a part in the creation of a

> new "immigrant" London in the immediate postwar years. Selvon's 1950s London is a place of contradictions and stark contrasts, and the migrant characters' multiple reactions to the city illustrate its ability both to charm and to belittle new residents. The migrant characters' everyday lives-the trajectories of their walks, their gatherings in small rented rooms, their manipulations of "proper" English-are political acts. (Dyer 112)

Much like the Prince Edward Viaduct covered in *In the Skin of a Lion* or the reference to the Manzanar concentration camps through the character in *Tropic of Orange*, here the integration of "real place-names and public sites" plays a notable role in this fiction. These structures give physical form to the pressures of conformity placed upon the migrant characters in Selvon's novels.

In *The Housing Lark*, reference is made to a man by the name of Charlie Victor, who separates himself from other Caribbean characters due to the pressures to conform, but ultimately faces loneliness and sickness as a result:

> Charlie Victor in Brixton had a way of making it clear that though the gods will it for him to be one of OUR PEOPLE, he was in a class by himself. . . . My boy looking thin and poorly and off-colour, as it were. He get so Anglicised that he even eating a currant bun and drinking a cup of tea for lunch! So though in fact he fooling himself that he just like any English citizen, loneliness busting his arse every day. (Selvon 88)

The excursion late on in the novel offers Charlie Victor a chance to "mingle with OUR PEOPLE,' which allows him to "reminisce and hear the old dialect" in a revitalising process (Selvon 88). Indeed, the passage above identifies the loneliness and physical degeneration that comes from becoming 'anglicised', and from this process of assimilating into the behaviours of a country that is blatantly hostile on the basis of race. One example of this comes in the form of Gallows' rejection by a housing agent: "The first day he go into the office, the agent tell him, 'Frankly, none of my clients desire to sell their property to coloured people." (Selvon 37). This absence of spatial – and historical as shown later in the novel – acceptance of Caribbean migrants necessitates the acquisition and ownership of space by the city's newcomers. In fact, this is the driving force behind the characters actions in the novel,

as beneath every comedic escapade in the novel lies this consideration of the West Indian ownership of space and historical remembrance that may come with that. Certainly, with R.C. Harris, Ondaatje demonstrates how the creation and dictation of space results in a historical permanence within Toronto record and public consciousness.

Caryl Phillips, Kittitian-British playwright, essayist and novelist of works such as *Crossing the River* (1993) comments on the how prejudices dictated spatial access in London and placed West Indian migrants in the accommodation of exploitative landlords:

> However, on arriving in Britain, they soon discovered that landlords were disinclined to rent to 'coloured' people. Signs in windows often read, 'No Coloureds, No Irish, No dogs.' As a consequence, West Indians had little choice but to take inferior rooms in often run-down and unsanitary houses, a situation made worse by the overcrowding that followed as yet more 'coloured' migrants entered the country. (Phillips 49)

Evidently, class mobility was severely hampered for these migrants and the racial prejudice denied them the possibility of assimilation or cultural exchange. Therefore, the characters of *The Housing Lark* embark on a collective purpose of acquiring a house. Gallows aptly summarises this spatial struggle and the need for migrant collaboration in recreating a city that is so clearly hostile:

> To Gallows, if a man have a house he establish his right to live, and he didn't mind even if he had a tenth of a share, or a twentieth for that matter, he would still feel he is the sole owner (Selvon 37).

The significance of buying a house in this novel is made clear in Gallows' sentiment here. As it gives these migrants a confirmation of place and a foundation within the British society. This shows the importance of ownership and the proof of belonging within this community; a need that is sadly felt by those affected by the Windrush scandal in modern times, as they supposedly did not have the 'proof' required to stay in the country in which they have lived practically all their lives.

This fear of instability and impermanence in the city is acutely felt by Teena and her family. It is exactly because she has a family that her plight becomes heightened, as the novel makes clear that it is "all well and good for the boys who free and single to make do with what they have, but what about when people start having family? Them English people don't want to rent from the time they see you, and as for when you have a family!" (Selvon 111). This crisis point for the housing purchase delivers a stark realisation to both the young men of the novel and the reader that the anecdotal nature and multiperspectivity of the novel reflects the lifestyle of young West Indian men in London at the time, who can make do looking after only themselves and spending what they had promised to collectively save for this 'lark.' Phillips makes this distinction between the intentions of men and women in the novel: "the instability and unreliability of the men who, free from the shackles of the matriarchal Caribbean, now roam irresponsibly in patriarchal Britain" (Phillips 49). Indeed, the depiction of some West Indian men in London in the novel points to this distinction: "some fellars just pick up themselves and come with the spirit of adventure, expecting the worst but hoping for the best. Some others just bored and decide to come and see what the old Brit'n look like" (Selvon 56). Therefore, I should not equate Teena's purpose in the novel to that of all West Indian migrants, who do not have the same immediate family connections that lead Teena to prioritise security and spatial control within a hostile city. Selvon settles on a form similar to Ondaatje and Yamashita's, as the multi-perspective narrative form is well suited to these varying attitudes to life in Britain for West Indian migrants. This form also reflects a period of time in which the West Indian population in the city "came to understand that they had a narrow purchase on life in Britain, and sadly they could not necessarily rely on each other — coming as they did from different islands and different traditions" (Phillips 50). The 'West Indian' or 'Caribbean' identity is not uniform, nor is the 'migrant' identifier placed on individuals. Yet, the fact that Selvon ends on Teena's desperate bid to revive this housing

purchase suggests that beneath the ‘larks’ and ‘adventures’ of men such as Battersby, lie the ‘narrow purchase’ and precarious position of these migrant characters, and ultimately the forces that oppose Teena laying down roots for her family to prosper.

The previous section identified the spatial challenge that these characters invoke. Yet despite how Selvon’s anecdotal style has meant that his fiction has been identified by critics as sourced from experiences and observations, the fictional nature of this text should not be overlooked. Dyer suggests that Selvon’s novels, in their setting of London, effectively act to remake the city through the lens and perspectives of migrant narratives:

> Selvon contributes his characters' London to the existing body of works set in the city. The London that Dickens, Thackeray, Eliot, and Woolf had previously portrayed is, in Selvon's fiction, being remade and its story rewritten through the incorporation of migrants' narratives. (Dyer 110)

Whereas McLeod identified the recreation of London by its newcomers and the role of Selvon’s characters in spatial remapping, Dyer suggests that Selvon’s fictional representation of the city effectively remakes it through the lens of migrant experiences. The need for this remaking of the city’s image is evident in lines such as the following, which criticises the media portrayal of the West Indian intent:

> You see, though the newspaper and the radio tell you that people in the West Indies desperate for jobs and that is why they come to Britain, you mustn’t believe that that is the case with all of them. (Selvon 56)

For one, this quotation reaffirms Selvon’s sentiment that a blanket representation of the West Indian migrant community is flawed, and that solutions and nuanced understanding can be found through identifying the difference between the likes of Teena and Gallows. This is a suitable point in which to mention that I recognise the flaws in my use of encapsulating terms to describe vastly different nationalities and communities that originate from the Caribbean. The flaws of media representations of people in the West Indies is made clear in this

quotation, as well as the dangers of broad terms such as 'immigrant,' 'West Indian,' or even the modern 'Caribbean' being used to create false representations and erect a binary between the migrants from that region and supposedly 'native' population in Britain. I encourage the introduction of language that recognises the complexity of national, ethnic and other group identities, but also see the impossibility to divorce myself currently from such terms that can be seen to 'other' this migrant community. Yet, this may be a consideration on my part that stems from the ideology of my current moment, which neglects the context of Selvon's time of writing in favour of my own. Selvon clearly shows how race in London was treated in such binaries and the system of broad exclusion on the basis of race or immigrant background instituted by landlords. Therefore, to distance my writing from the use of these encapsulating terms is in the end both detrimental to its comprehension, and ignorant of the dichotomies that Selvon's novel centres on.

In addition, the quotation on media portrayals also appears to directly challenge the narrative of West Indian immigration circulating at the time and a portrayal that has remained to this day, a portrayal of migrants as solely job seekers. This perspective does not come from the thoughts of actual migrants to Britain, but has rapidly spread through media as the outright characterisation of the intention behind immigration. In response to this, Selvon's text operates as a means of showing the unique experiences and identities of various immigrants who have settled in London. *The Housing Lark* acts against what is portrayed in the newspapers and radio to instead impart knowledge of Caribbean history and language. In a similar manner to the novel's main focus being on the spatial acquisition of this migrant group, Selvon uses language unheard of in England:

> To see him straggling along, is as if he take the place of Gallows, who was always the one trying hard to buttards. (That's a good word, but you won't find it in the dictionary. It mean like if you out of a game, for instance, and you want to come in, you have to buttards, that is, you pay a small fee and if the other players agree, they

> allow you to join. It ain't have no word in the English Language to mean that, so OUR PEOPLE make it up). (Selvon 92)

The term "Buttards" epitomises the struggle for these migrants to mark out their own space in the city and their history in successive decades. Selvon remarks that this word of "OUR PEOPLE" is not in the dictionary, thus requires definition by Selvon, who shows a willingness to share this word and its meaning. This showcases the potential for assimilation through mutual understanding, rather than the West Indian's merely being forced into English customs and attitudes. This is all emblematic of what the novel does overall with this community, as history omits these people, so fiction must take up the challenge of representation and nuanced depiction beyond the idea that 'these people' came over to take jobs. This also shows what must be sacrificed for integrating, as the English language as recorded in the dictionary lacks this word and therefore hampers the complete self-expression of these Caribbean characters. The same could be said for their place in the history, as these characters are well informed of England's history through their education in the West Indian colonies, but are as a result left with the impression that "OUR PEOPLE ain't have no history" (Selvon 100). When it comes to language, space and history, Selvon suggests that Caribbean migrants must conform to the authorities that hold prestige over these topics and proliferate their directions through dictionaries, history books and the education system. Mark Looker comments upon Selvon's motivation in doing this: "Just as he embraces and rejects tradition, Selvon works within, but shrewdly subverts, the cultural archive of English literary history" (Looker 10).

One way in which Selvon's fiction acts as both a subversion of the standardised media representations of West Indian immigrants and actively imparts the untold histories of these migrants within England's vast capital city is through his characters' use of anecdotes. The

following quotation depicts the horrific treatment of Eric Lopley; a named character who is only referenced in this passage:

> ‘I wouldn’t do that if I was you,’ Charlie say. ‘You remember what happen to Eric Lopley?’
> What happened to Eric Lopley was past history, but all the same, nobody ain’t ever forget. Eric was a Grenadian who get to share a room in the house . . . They beat him until he couldn’t move, and left him laying down on the pavement. Eric migrate to Birmingham, saying that London was too evil for him. . . . ‘Let that be a lesson, you see how they against us in this country, so the thing to do is make the best of it.’ (Selvon 10)

Selvon gives such stories a place in history, this ‘history’ being the reader’s impression and understanding of London in this period. The fact that Eric Lopley is given a name and a detailed backstory suggests that this anecdote is either directly lifted from a contact of Selvon’s or a constructed story that sources from the myriad of stories and experiences shared orally with Selvon within the West Indian migrant community in London.

This is further cemented a few pages on from this, as the narrator interjects into the formulation of the housing purchase idea:

> Now, that is exactly how everything happen. If I was writing a story I could make up all sorts of things, that Bat say so-and-so and Jean say this-and-that and Harry say but-what-about.
> Because how you know the idea catch on? Just like that? Is so things happen in life. Some words here, a little meeting there, and next thing you know, War Declare, or a Man Gone to the Moon.
> And being as I want to tell the truth, I have to say that that is how it happen. (Selvon 14)

This provides insight into the narrator’s voice and purpose, as this declaration of events covered being undoubtedly the truth - rather than a story – shows Selvon’s consistent consideration of how this fiction is both reflective of and a product of a migrant community that has lacked control of their own history. Although one could say that Selvon adheres to the opposition of “story” and “truth” in this quotation, the rhetorical interrogatives here show

his taunting of how 'objective' knowledge is constructed. Selvon plays with our certainty of the fictional nature of his novel, and whether the truth is really being expressed because he marks it as so. In line with Ondaatje and Yamashita, Selvon does this in order to challenge what Gert Oostindie sees as "[the] hegemonic versions of history that tend to actively silence subaltern voices" (Oostindie 167). While the narrator is plainly stating that he is telling the truth as it happened, there is an inevitability of hegemonic versions of history disempowering his 'truth' or overlooking such stories as irrelevant due to their literary form or their incompatibility with the national narrative. However, such "hegemonic versions of history" do not necessarily take form on a strictly governmental level, as the novel's conclusion shows the influence of a music agent to alter migrant history and supplant Selvon's Harry Banjo with an English-approved version of the character. The Harry Banjo that we are left with at the end of the novel states the need to "intergrade if we want to live in peace and harmony" (Selvon 124). This is a far cry from Selvon's earlier depiction of the character, who saw his name up in lights as "HARRY BANJO THE IMMIGRANT CALYPSONIAN" (Selvon 55). A character who once placed his immigrant status alongside his name now rejects Battersby's involvement: "where I going you can't follow" (Selvon 124). Here we see how history is changed and stories are purposely directed, while 'subaltern voices' go either unrecognised or must sacrifice the truth of their history.

To expand on this point, the closing pages of the novel see Banjo effectively taken from Selvon, as the backstory and characterisation that Selvon provided is swiftly altered for the benefit of Banjo's career and favourability toward an English audience. A music agent quickly seizes upon the imprisonment of Banjo presented to the reader earlier in the novel, as he formulates a way in which to reinterpret Banjo's story: "'maybe we could work an angle there.' Now as if he talking to himself. 'Yes, it might work….Innocent Calypsonian Takes Blame For Friend…'" (Selvon 122). Yet, it is also worth noting that Battersby delivers a

completely false story to the agent that Harry is "visiting the Scottish side of his family in North Ireland" (Selvon 120). Indeed, Battersby continues to twist Banjo's story and his relation to him throughout this conversation, with the aim of securing a piece of this deal. Therefore, it could be argued that the agent unearths a representation of Harry much closer to the truth. Although, the music agent similarly twists the details with the intention to "exploit the coloured angle" (Selvon 122). Following this remark, Battersby states: "red white and blue" (Selvon 122). It could be argued that upon the mentioned of colour, Battersby envisions the Union Flag, and the place of West Indian citizens as part of the British Empire. Conversely, the music agent aims to use the struggles placed upon West Indian migrants in London as a unique selling point for marketing Banjo, and therefore is addressing colour purely as a marker of the black West Indian community. Banjo's struggle is used here to sell music, as the stories of this novel that I and other critics have identified as a means of recreating both London in both a spatial and literary sense are instead shown by Selvon to become easily remoulded to fit popular narratives.

Furthermore, the music agent is shown to parade around with "the story, big photo in the papers, and this ballad about the loyalty and bonds of friendship that exist among the coloured members of the community" (Selvon 123). The trauma of Banjo's false imprisonment and "facts about the banana plantations in Jamaica [and] his childhood struggles" are crudely sourced from Battersby as a "gimmick to sell him to the English public" (Selvon 121). Such quotations resonate with my earlier discussion of the film industry in *Tropic of Orange*. In that case, the image of Los Angeles was out of the hands of its residents and firmly with capitalist forces. In a similar fashion, this agent of the music industry shows his intent to dictate the image of not only Banjo's imprisonment, but also the stories from his childhood. Moreover, this extends beyond Banjo's history, as the agent addresses Jamaica through reference to the banana plantations, in turn simplifying the

country's image to its role as an importer of 'exotic' products to Britain. Evidently, it is this 'exoticism' that this "Englisher" aims to sell through the histories of Banjo, "the coloured members of the community" and Banjo's native country. This raises the question as to who should publicise the stories of Caribbean migrants. Certainly, the agent's intent is simply to use Banjo's experiences as a selling point, which will ensure that issues such as his financial insecurity, limited work opportunities and false imprisonment are not addressed. The fact that this occurs at the end of the novel offers multiple questions as to Selvon's purpose. For a multi-perspective narrative to end with the effective acquisition of one of Selvon's characters certainly suggests a recognition of how Caribbean history and the experiences have been out of these migrants hands. Whether they were condemned in the media, or misrepresented for commercial purposes, Selvon contends with his standing as a Caribbean migrant who recognises that "being as I want to tell the truth, I have to say that that is how it happen" in spite of these representational challenges (Selvon 14).

Finally, I would like to draw attention to a series of integral quotations to my historiographic analysis of *The Housing Lark*. During an excursion to Hampton Court, the characters address historical method, teaching, and the power dynamics between English and West Indian history. The following exchange between Teena and Fitz epitomises the novel's aim to play with history, and defy the 'book' or 'brochure' being taught to the children:

> 'I didn't come to Hamdon Court to drink rum and idle,' Teena say, 'I am teaching the children some history. But you just wait until I get down there!' Of course I don't have to tell you that by this time all them Englishers looking on as if they never see two people talking in their lives. And hear Fitz, high with rum: 'Don't teach the children no wicked things! Henry Eight was a evil character living with ten-twelve women!' 'It don't say so in this book,' Teena say, waving a brochure.' (Selvon 95)

In this moment, Fitz challenges what value Teena's history book holds over his own adjustments to the story of Henry VIII. This mockery of English history continues, as "Richard with the lion heart", "Robin Hood", and "the Battle of Hastings" are all referenced

(Selvon 100). The historical knowledge of many of the characters in this chapter is striking, considering their repeated treatment as outsiders. Even in this very scene, a malicious "Englisher" is noted saying to the group that "they should put the lot of you on a banana boat and ship you back to Jamaica" (Selvon 103). Yet, the reason for their expansive knowledge of England's history is also shown here:

> 'I must say you boys surprise me with your historical knowledge. It's a bit mixed up, I think, but it's English history.' 'We don't know any other kind. That's all they used to teach we in school. 'That's because OUR PEOPLE ain't have no history. But what I wonder is, when we have, you think they going to learn the children that in the English schools?' 'Who say we ain't have history? What about the Carib Indians and Abercomby and Sir Walter Raleigh?' (Selvon 100)

This quotation reveals how history was taught in the colonies and how it superseded any creation of an original national history by way of its authority and its proliferation through the education system. Also, this vision of "when we have" history speaks to the purpose of the novel, which stands as a creation of history for these people in a written form where they previously cannot find themselves. This is made evident through the way in which it plays with English history and introduces stories contained within the community of West Indians – such as Greg Lopley's assault – which were previously untold.

This question of how this history is told is a matter of increasing discussion and recognition in recent years. Steve McQueen's film *Mangrove* (2020) similarly engages with the struggle of Caribbean Britons in London after their migration to Britain under the British Nationality Act 1948. This film is one film in the *Small Axe* series that premiered on the BBC in 2020. McQueen has expressed the pertinence of these stories, and that they are not merely accounted in historical record, but placed where they can be seen and engaged with by the larger general public: "I want it to be accessible to everyone . . . I wanted these stories to be in people's living rooms because that's where it belongs" ("MANGROVE Q&A | BFI London Film Festival 2020" 00:07:03-00:07:23). He touches upon a crucial element of my

thesis, namely that in speaking this history through literature, these authors impress upon an audience that would not had encountered these stories. *The Housing Lark* displays this recognition of both literature's capability to voice these stories, while also being a condemnation of how history is recorded, and ultimately what we value from history, and what is taught to us about the spaces in which we live.

Conclusion

I had set upon this examination of late-twentieth-century migrant fiction with the intent to connect Michael Ondaatje's seminal historiographic metafiction to other fiction within the time period. I aimed to show how postcolonial and postmodern thinking brought a "theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historiographic metafiction) is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past" (Hutcheon 5). Moreover, I saw a trend of migrant fiction that in particular sought to re-evaluate history as a human construct and show the potential for fiction to rework the "contents of the past" across disparate occidental cities within majority English speaking nations.

Yet, my analysis of the three texts has revealed how genre convention cannot fully encapsulate all three texts. Although, there are undoubtedly reoccurring themes throughout migrant literature of this period that should inspire further research that would more acutely examine how the migrant perspective must contend with their representation or absence in the history of occident cities. Indeed, Hutcheon herself recognises the unfitting terms that have been used to define such a multifaceted genre: "Such labeling is another mark of the inherent contradictoriness of historiographic metafiction, for it always works within conventions in order to subvert them. It is not just metafictional; nor is it just another version of the historical novel or the non-fictional novel" (Hutcheon 5). Evidently, all three texts implement a metafictional assessment of history when they directly reference events and the education of history within their nations. While *Tropic of Orange* is often placed within the speculative fiction category, and *The Housing Lark*'s contemporary depiction of West Indian migrant life in London see it more so within a general fiction classification, the elements shared between texts show the limitations of genre definitions. Indeed, Hutcheon's definition

of historiographic metafiction itself notes the tendency to "work within conventions in order to subvert them," and the literary genre's formulation as a combination – but also distinction from – metafiction and historical fiction show that such conventions as in continual flux and reconsideration.

Further differences between the texts should be noted. For one, the period of time between the releases of these texts is quite substantial and therefore leaves the period of focus being the entire latter half of the twentieth century. Yet, despite the age of Sam Selvon's text in comparison to the others that I have discussed, it contains the same intent for a migrant 'remapping' of space that is so prevalent in Yamashita turn of the century novel. *The Housing Lark*'s inclusion is rightly predicated on its setting and approach to migrant space and history.

Even within the text that had been defined as historiographic metafiction by critics, *In the Skin of a Lion*, diversifies its focus to much more than just the absent history of the Macedonian bridge workers, as the ownership of space and faculty for self-expression are given weight in the narrative. Indeed, the migrant subject in all three texts appears to be the more certain connective tissue than the conventions of historiographic metafiction. Moreover, it appears that the metropolitan space is the shared catalyst for the fictional "rethinking and reworking" of history, space and cultural characterisations. The 'melting pot' or 'Kaleidoscope' models of cultural interaction and assimilation are naturally most evident within the economic and social hubs of countries (Fuchs). This confluence of cultures has led to a historiographic hierarchy predicated on class and access to opportunities through education. Through the approaches of Marxist historiography and 'history from below,' the integral role of class in these migrant narratives has become apparent. All three texts focalise around characters situated in a lower class due to the financial and linguistic limitations brought about through their migration to a new country.

Ondaatje's historiographic metafiction also displays the author's recognition of the limitations of expression within migrant communities and the challenges of historiographic representation as a result. One of the novel's central characters early on in the novel notes the need for him to acquire the language through replication:

> When he returned to Toronto all he needed was a voice for all this language. Most immigrants learned their English from recorded songs or, until the talkies came, through mimicking actors on stage. (Ondaatje 47)

Temelcoff lacks the connection to English speakers that would secure his place within Canadian society. The alternative for him, and many immigrants learning their new country's language is through media replication. Andrea Yew sees this as more than just finding a language, but rather about finding a voice and self-expression:

> Here, Ondaatje suggests that while language is a bridge between the migrant subject and those around him, it is crucial for the migrant subject to find a mode of expression that is unique to him. In other words, it is not about finding a language, but about finding a voice. It is only then that one can represent one's experience, paving the way for a creation of a transnational identity within the dominant culture. (Yew 16)

Yew goes on to remark that Ondaatje's isn't simply advocating for assimilation into the dominant culture: "Ondaatje challenges this dichotomy, suggesting instead that belonging is not about fitting into or rejecting a dominant culture, but finding and representing one's voice within a cacophony of voices" (Yew 16). The conflict between co-existence and assimilation is central to all three of the quotations noted here. Language firmly roots itself as the means in which to achieve both of these, while also offering distinct manners of representing one's voice. I believe this is an essential parallel between Ondaatje's content and purpose, as the conflict surrounding self-expression as a migrant can also be found in the hallmarks of historiographic metafiction. Ondaatje's narrative assimilates into recorded history through recognisable persons and places, but also establishes his interpretation of history and

subjective focus on migrant communities in Toronto's foundation within the cacophony of history.

This "creation of a transnational identity within the dominant culture" is also prevalent in Yamashita's novel, which presents migrants character of multiple generations acting upon their ability to voice their experience and perspective. In a prefacing quotation from Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993), it is claimed that "it's against the law in California to walk on the freeways, but the law is archaic. Everyone who walks walks on the freeways sooner or later" (Yamashita 1). This establishes that Yamashita's novel will concern this notion of self-expression within the dominant culture, and of challenging archaic rules, institutions and cultural characterisations. Yamashita questions if the maps laid down and the rules that follow them do not accurately reflect of the reality of the city, and if the history and therefore our perception of the city are similarly untrue. There's a sentiment in all three novels that these archaic ways of viewing the world are naturally being eroded and will find themselves altered by those who express their voice. In this sense, we will all walk on the freeways sooner or later despite what the map dictates. We will all find it necessary to defy how history, identity and geography have been laid before us.

Indeed, mapping and geography are key concerns of Yamashita's text alongside the author's purpose of showing historiographic complexities and uncertainties. These two elements merge in the following quotation:

> Buzzworm studied the map. Balboa'd torn it out of a book from him to study. *Quartz* City or some such title. He followed the thick lines on the map showing the territorial standing or Crips versus Bloods. Old map. 1972. He shook his head. Even if it were true, whose territory was it anyway? Might as well show which police departments covered which beats; which local, state and federal politicians claimed which constituents; which kind of coloured people (brown, black, yellow) lived where . . . If someone could put down all the layers of the real map, maybe he could get the real picture." (Selvon 72)

This idea of mapping appears central to Yamashita's argument, as this quotation shows how history and racial divisions stem from the structure of a city. In contrast to the age of this "old map," this novel advocates for – while also itself being – a contemporary depiction of the city. In a similar fashion to how Ondaatje's novel has spurred recognition of the subjectivity inherent in historiography, this novel shows the current construction of a city throughout its development, from early construction to the multicultural identity promoted, and challenges where that identity has settled. The settled identity projected to the world is challenged by characters in the text such as Emi, who recognises which people benefit from the 'multiculturalism' that brands the city.

Although it precedes both Ondaatje and Yamashita's novels by some decades, *The Housing Lark* can be firmly placed within these categorisations. The trip to Hampton court is especially notable for its presentation of West Indian education and the absence of West Indian history detached from the metropole, which in turn informs the self-expression of this community. The novel's migrant group of characters, which hail from different Caribbean nations, also contend with the geographical uncertainty that stems from this lack of history and avenue for self-expression. Although, Selvon's use of West Indian terms and alterations to place names such as Hampton Court (Hamdon) highlight the ways in which this change is occurring, and how the novel operates as means of expression for overlooked groups that effectively captures West Indians dialects and perspectives through the narrator's patois. Yet, Selvon still displays how his characters are subject to external forces and powerful industries within the city, which act to warp the stories of Harry Banjo and simplify the nuanced composition of Selvon's characters and the friction that exists between them into a "ballad about the loyalty and bonds of friendship that exist among the coloured members of the community" (Selvon 123). This shows us how stories and history can be moulded by those with power and influence to fit a desire narrative. In doing so, structures remain in place and

the situation of these West Indians can be used as a gimmick rather than addressed or challenged. This speaks to the idea beyond the genre of historiographic metafiction, that fiction can alter representations of these communities that had been seized by the media.

Truly, this fiction is relevant now more than ever. The belief shared by Selvon's characters that there will come a time 'when we have' history speaks to the purpose of these novels, as they now stand as a creation of history for these people where they previously cannot find themselves. The ongoing Windrush Scandal shows how this same community of Caribbean migrants under the 1948 British Nationality Act have been forgotten in history, and how that has subsequently resulted in government policy and the authorities overlooking their nationality rights. Truly, the false imprisonments and deportations that came as part of the hostile environment policy in the United Kingdom highlight that Caribbean British subjects from the former colonies have faced a continual struggle to assert their history, right to home ownership and ability for self-expression. Thankfully, the response from contemporary historians, and the media coverage around the Windrush scandal rightfully reinstated this lost history into public consciousness.

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