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The Architecture of the Great House in the Contemporary Postcolonial Novel

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THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE GREAT HOUSE

IN THE CONTEMPORARY POSTCOLONIAL NOVEL

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Julie O'Neill Kloo

December 2009

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ABSTRACT

THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE GREAT HOUSE

IN THE CONTEMPORARY POSTCOLONIAL NOVEL

By

Julie O'Neill Kloo

December 2009

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Magali Cornier Michael

This project explores the use of the symbol of the Western European Great House by contemporary postcolonial novelists and consists of four chapters, each focusing on the ways that the power structures connected to the Great House impact the lives of the characters in four different postcolonial locations: Ireland, South Africa, Puerto Rico, and India. The use of the Western European Great House in Edna O'Brien's <u>House of Splendid Isolation</u> (1994), André Brink's <u>Imaginings of Sand</u> (1996), Rosario Ferré's <u>The House on the Lagoon</u> (1995), and Salman Rushdie's <u>The Moor's Last Sigh</u> (1995) reveals the continuing impact of colonial power structures in the wake of formal colonialism. The form and function of the houses in the novels provide insight into two key questions facing the postcolonial world: To what extent and in what forms are the power dynamics erected by Western European colonizers still operating? And, what can and should be

done with the lingering power structures that divide and oppress by means of gender, race, and class? The Great House enables these writers to investigate and problematize the power structures it represents. The architectural settings reveal not only that the colonial power structures were never airtight and impervious but also that they still exist, even if in ruins, and must be dealt with. Bringing together novels set in diverse places exposes the continuing potency of the power structures erected through the colonial process while concurrently highlighting the differences in the ways the power structures operate in each specific postcolonial location. This project underscores the significance of architecture to postcolonial literary studies by highlighting the important relationship between the built environment and society.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my loving and supportive family.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

given me to see so much of the world. My father's commitment to tackling seemingly

impossibly complex social issues has influenced me greatly. This project is largely an

off-shoot of his work. I could never have completed this dissertation without the loving

support of my husband, Juergen, and my sons, Jay and Ian. They gave me time and space

when I needed to work and were always there to make me laugh when I needed to play.

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The Architecture of the Great House in the Contemporary Postcolonial Novel

"A work of architecture has a subplot as well as a plot."
Robert Venturi, architect[1]

During the 1970's and 1980's, many postcolonial critics focused their attention on

the anxieties and problems associated with postcolonial writers' use of Western European

literary tools and conventions such as the novel, the bildungsroman, and the English,

French, and Spanish languages. Debates swirled around issues of oppression and

appropriation. Some postcolonial writers, like Kenyan Ngugi wa Thiong'o, in the spirit

of nationalism and in an effort to end domination by Western culture, wholly rejected the

styles and languages that they saw as participating in the perpetuation of colonial systems

of oppression. Meanwhile, Nigerian Chinua Achebe and many others continued to

employ Western European literary traditions and languages, arguing that, although these

were thrust upon them through colonization, postcolonial writers could seize them and

use them for their own purposes. The intensity of the discussions eased somewhat as the

twentieth century drew to a close, whether due to a sense of resignation brought about by

the realities of publishing and globalization, or as the problems associated with extreme

nationalism became undeniable, or perhaps out of a sense that positioning oneself on

either side of the debate carries with it a number of problems and concerns.

Regardless of the reasons, many postcolonial writers continue to wrestle with the

issues related to the colonial/postcolonial/neo-colonial experience using Western

European literary forms and languages. My project looks specifically at the use of the

symbol of the Western European Great House, and the structures of power associated

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[1] Quoted in David Bruce Brownlee's Out of the Ordinary: Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Associates – Architecture, Urbanism, Design (17).

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with it, in four postcolonial novels that explore various issues related to postcoloniality.[2]

In examining the form and function of the Western European Great Houses in Edna

O'Brien's House of Splendid Isolation (1994), André Brink's Imaginings of Sand (1996),

Rosario Ferré's The House on the Lagoon (1995), and Salman Rushdie's The Moor's

Last Sigh (1995), this study highlights the ways the writers employ the architectural

settings to expose and challenge the power dynamics central to the colonial project. In

each of these novels, the houses indicate not only that the colonial power structures were

never airtight and impervious but also that they still exist, even if in ruins, and must be

dealt with. I have chosen novels all published in the 1990's in part because the end of the

century – a century in which colonialism and its formal end were clearly a dominant

force – lends itself to retrospection. In addition, the common temporal context of the

texts allows differences between them to appear in sharper relief. By bringing together

novels set in diverse places – Ireland, South Africa, Puerto Rico, and India – this project

exposes the continuing potency of the power structures erected through the colonial

process while concurrently highlighting the differences in the ways the power structures

operate in each specific postcolonial location. The houses in these novels provide insight

into two key questions facing the postcolonial world: To what extent and in what forms

are the power dynamics erected by Western European colonizers still operating? And,

what can and should be done with the lingering power structures that divide and oppress

by means of gender, race, and class? This investigation of these fictional houses reveals

a recognition of the impossibility of a simple renovation, moving away from, or tearing

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[2]I am using the term "Great House" to refer to the grand estate houses of Western Europe which, while known by different terms in various languages and literatures (the "English Country House" in England, the "Big House" in Ireland, the "Hacienda" in Spain, the "Chateau" in France), share the ideological power structures that I will be examining.

down of the colonial power structures that they represent, suggesting that moving forward from the colonial experience will require figuring out a way to negotiate the ruins.

Central to the function of the Western European Great House as a symbol of power lies the notion that space is produced. Many sociologists and anthropologists, such as Henri Lefebvre (<u>The Production of Space</u> 1974) and Anthony King (<u>The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture</u> 1984), analyze the relationship between society and the built environment, arguing that "economic, social, political and especially, cultural conditions" produce architectural space (King 2004 128). According to Yi-Fu Tuan in <u>Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience</u>, human beings respond to "such basic features of design as enclosure and exposure, verticality and horizontality, mass, volume, interior spaciousness, and light" (117). Buildings function physiologically, providing shelter and comfort, and psychologically, creating spaces for interaction and privacy as well as reflecting aspirations and fears (Lang 3). Architects employ design elements in the construction of all kinds of buildings and in so doing consciously and subconsciously impact the lives of those living in and around them. Lefebvre contends that space integrates the political and the economic: "It is not political power *per se* that produces space; it does reproduce space, however, inasmuch as it is the locus and context of the reproduction of social relationships – relationships for which it is responsible" (321). Michel Foucault's examination of the architectural sites of social control, such as asylums, prisons, and military compounds, specifically considers the ways power operates in and through architectural structures, stressing that these buildings are material *and* ideological structures fundamental to the imposition of power because

they are "domains of knowledge (in that they embody a spatial ordering of categories) and domains of control (in that they effect an ordering of boundaries)" (Barnard 2007). Critics such as King and Lefebvre extend Foucault's investigations of the ways power operates in and through public structures to residential and commercial buildings. Each of these theorists acknowledges that social spaces, public and private, reflect and shape the cultural norms and mores of individuals and communities according to the specific matrix of ethnicity, class, and gender of a particular location (King 2004 65).

The ideology attached to the Western European Great House is multifaceted. First and foremost the Great Houses of Western Europe stand as symbols of power. Mark Girouard's contention that the existence and form of early English country houses reflect sixteenth century notions that society must be organized as God modeled the universe, as a hierarchy presided over by a figurehead, is true of other Great Houses in Western Europe as well. He regards the flourishing of the formal Great House as evidence of a society embracing a hierarchical structure with the lord of the house at its head (144). To those within its vicinity, the elements of the Great House's grand façade provide visible evidence of the wealth and power of the owner. Towers, turrets, bastions, parapets, and embrasures, which in the Middle Ages served to protect the lord and his tenants, remained elements of the Western European Great House's architecture long after fortification was necessary, reminding locals and visitors alike that this is where power originates and is administered (Ackerman 65). Moreover, porticoes, pediments, and other classical Greek and Roman architectural details function as symbols of culture and serve as a reminder not only of the Greek and Roman civilization on which modern Western European civilization is founded but also of the owner's connection to it (32).

The symmetries in the design of the exterior, as well as the stone and brick materials used to construct it, convey a strong sense of established order and strength.

A great deal of the power connected to the Great House emanates from the landscape surrounding it. The sense that the house is 'natural,' that it belongs in its particular location as part of the natural order, is key to its strength. Vita Sackville-West's description of the ideal country house in English Country Houses (1941) stresses the importance of the setting: "The house looks permanent; as permanent as if it had been there, not for a few hundred years, but forever . . . All there is to be seen appears to have arrived by nature as though it fell into place without effort . . . The highest compliment which can be paid about any new work done in the house, garden or park is to say it looks as if it had always been there" (Kelsall 4). The land on which the Great House rests is the foundation of the wealth with which it is erected and of which it is a symbol. Until late in the nineteenth century, landowners profited from the rents of their tenants more than the crops themselves. Land owning was prestigious, in part because of the stability of land's value. Wealthy people considered land a safe investment as other material assets had the potential of being stolen or destroyed (Girouard 300). Even in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when much of the money that supported the Great Houses came increasingly from land holdings in the colonies, and after much of the property around the Great Houses was sold off to pay the enormous costs of maintaining the house, the idea of the connection between the Great House and its surroundings remained crucial. The evolution of the design of these Great Houses, the use of windows and French doors (aided, of course, by technological improvements in the manufacturing of glass) and the shifting of the main rooms from the second floor to the first, providing

easier access to the garden, emphasize the continuing importance of the relationship between the building and the land (Girouard 229).

The design of the interiors of the Great Houses of Western Europe also reflects and reinforces hierarchies of power. Over time the changes in the layout of the floor plans reveal an increasingly strict division between the classes and the sexes, according to Michael Pearson, following a distinct binary code emphasizing oppositions such as "front/back, clean/dirty, day/night, public/private, male/female" (7). For instance, at the center of the English lord's house in the Middle Ages and Renaissance is the Great Hall, where several times a year the lord would entertain a large group inclusive of all classes such as visiting dignitaries, his family, and local tenants. However, by the eighteenth century, the days of large feasts including local residents of various social classes were over, and a grand staircase stands at the center of the house (Girouard 137). The invention of the back stairs in the late seventeenth century, which made it possible for the family and its servants to move about the house without seeing each other, accommodated an increasing desire for privacy by the owners and their families (138). Rigid barriers between the classes, and the desire of the upper class to maintain them, is also exemplified by interior features such as remote servants' wings (made possible by advances in bell system technology) and doors leading to the servants' areas designed to be virtually invisible (264).

The development of the interior design of the Great Houses indicates that the boundaries between the sexes were as distinct as those between the social classes. Beginning toward the end of the eighteenth century, the intensification of strict social sexual mores makes the separation of the sexes increasingly important. For example,

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male servants' rooms were typically located in the basement and female servants'

quarters were tucked a safe distance away in the attic (Girouard 208). Later, when it

became fashionable to create wings (subterranean rooms seeming inhumane), the males

and females were assigned wings on opposite sides of the house, female servants' rooms

often accessible only via a staircase or hallway well within view of the family (219).

Public spaces within the Great Houses also become clearly gendered. The library, where

men displayed the items they procured on their trips abroad (signs of wealth and taste),

their books (signs of intellectual superiority) and often weaponry (signs of physical

power), is marked as a masculine space. The dining room, where men linger after their

meal, and later the billiard room, are also deemed masculine spaces, filled with wood

furnishings and leather. The sitting room, fitted out with floral chintz upholstered

furnishings, where women retire after dinner to occupy themselves with sewing, cards, or

gossip until the men join them after their cigars and after dinner drinks, is marked as a

female space, as is the nursery (173). Thus, inside and out, the architectural order of the

Great Houses of Western Europe reflects the class and gender ideology and power

structures of Western European society, making the Great House a suitable and quite

handy symbol for authors to make use of in their writing.

To say that many critics have studied and written about the symbol of the Great

House in Western European literature is an understatement. As Richard Gill describes in

The Happy Rural Seat: The English Country House and Literary Imagination, the

presence of the English Country House in English literature is pervasive, starting with

Ben Johnson's country house poetry of the early seventeenth century and running through

the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth century works of Richardson, Fielding, Austen,

Dickens, James, Bowen, Woolf, Forster, Waugh, Ishiguro and countless others. The symbol of the Great House is just as prominent in the novels of French and Spanish writers such as Flaubert, Voltaire, Perez Galdos, and Laforet. Whether seen as a nostalgic ideal or a house of pain and horror, the Great House stands as a material symbol of the hierarchy and stability of power and, as such, is frequently employed by Western European authors. The power structures associated with the ideology of the Great House, as described above, rest on class and gender divisions, making such houses excellent sites for authors to explore and challenge these power dynamics. As Fredric Jameson, Edward Said, and many other critics have pointed out, anxiety about the Empire is reflected in the description and function of the Great Houses in many Western European novels. Indeed, as Patrick Brantlinger notes more generally, ". . . the empire operates as an outer limit that stabilizes and in some sense partially determines what happens at the center. The colonial "periphery" always appears marginally, though sometimes only as the faintest of traces, in the central metropolitan texts of the [nineteenth] century" (564). So even though novels such as Mansfield Park, Great Expectations, Howards End, Brideshead Revisited, and The Remains of the Day are set in country houses located in England proper, the questions raised by them with regard to British identity and social power structures are directly related to the colonial project.

As Western Europeans left for the colonies throughout the nineteenth century, they took along with them the ideology and power structures of the Western European Great House. Elleke Boehmer outlines the function of architecture in the colonial project:

> The social construction of space is part of the very machinery of
> imperialism. In the name of the imperial project space is evaluated and
> overlain with desire: creating homey landscapes out of 'alien' territories,
> drawing distant lands into the maps of empire, establishing ordered grids
> of occupation. These spatial events did not simply supplement the
> economic desire of imperialism, they made it make sense; took it from the
> visioned to the embodied. (158)

Through their architecture, and particularly the houses they built, colonizers attempted to establish and maintain their sense of "Western European-ness" in the foreign location. According to Victoria Rosner their homes became repositories of their identity and cultural ideology. Building houses was one of the ways, literally and figuratively, in which they attempted to construct a divide between their safe, stable Western European identity and culture inside and the dangerous, disconcerting "otherness" lurking outside. If colonialism was a project to enclose space within a Western European empire, the colonizers began the process by building houses that helped to establish a boundary clearly distinguishing what was inside from what was outside (Rosner 83). Constructing houses that embodied the social order of Western Europe and locating them in the foreign landscape functioned as an attempt to transplant that ordered hierarchy of power founded on divisions based on class, gender, and race in hopes that it would take root and grow there.[3]

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[3] Many theorists have investigated the adaptation and alteration that occurs in the transference of Western European architectural designs to the colonial location, a process King calls "cultural translation" (2004 199). It is important to note that elements of native architectural design sometimes flowed in the opposite direction, from periphery to center, and were adopted back "home." King explores this dynamic in The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture (1984).

Consequently, in their efforts to understand and reflect on these power structures erected through the colonial experience, many postcolonial authors employ the symbol of the Western European Great House. Although my project explores in detail four postcolonial novels in which the structure and ideology of the Great House figure prominently, countless other examples exist including, for example, Jean Rhys's <u>Wide Sargasso Sea</u>, Doris Lessing's <u>The Grass is Singing</u>, V. S. Naipaul's <u>A House for Mr. Biswas</u>, and Arundhati Roy's <u>The God of Small Things</u>. The design and function of the houses in these novels are used to investigate the hierarchies of power associated with the Great House in relation to the colonial project, calling attention to the instability and ineffectiveness of these power structures. These novels often build up these houses to tear them down, highlighting how ill-suited, how doomed, the Western European structures of power are in colonial/postcolonial locations. Yet, while the descriptions of the houses and the ways in which the characters live in and around them suggest that the ideology of the Great House cannot stand in a colonial/postcolonial/neo-colonial location, the remnants of the architectural structures, and their corresponding social structures, nevertheless still remain. Despite the characters' best efforts to either demolish, burn down, or simply abandon the houses, the damaged and decrepit forms remain, physical reminders that the end of formal colonialism did not mark the immediate disappearance of the ideological power structures erected during the period of formal colonization. These novels use the symbol of the Great House to explore ways in which the lingering power structures continue to impact the lives of the people living in postcolonial places. These explorations acknowledge the futility of postcolonial attempts to achieve final and complete freedom from the ideological power structures imposed through colonization

and to search for practical ways to carefully dismantle, rebuild, and renovate these

structures in order to create frameworks that they can inhabit more freely and equitably.

For this project, I explore novels from four vastly different postcolonial locations:

Ireland, South Africa, Puerto Rico, and India. While my fundamental claim that many

postcolonial novelists employ the symbol of the Western European Great House may at

first glance appear to participate in a critical impulse to make sweeping generalizations

about the colonial-postcolonial experience and postcolonial literature, collapsing

differences to create the illusion of a tidy category, in fact the aim of my project is to

highlight difference. Revathi Krishnaswamy argues that comparisons between literatures

from different places can be fruitful. Although she recognizes that the "older

comparativist framework, conceived with the nation-state as its dominant referent, has, of

course, fallen into disrepute because the terms that previously constituted the grammar of

comparison have been deconstructed and shown to be nothing more than Eurocentric

provincialisms pretending to be universals," she notes that unfortunately this "often

resulted in an uncritical abandonment of all comparison and an unmindful embrace of all

forms of heterogeneity, multiplicity, diversity, and difference, often with little or no

reference to specific historical or material contexts" (4). The detailed examinations of the

uses of the Great House by postcolonial authors in my project make clear that each

instance is influenced and framed by the specifics of each location's unique colonial

experience, as well as the local cultural traditions and power dynamics (Bery 10).

Therefore, rather than fall in line with a tendency toward generalization, my intention is

to call attention to difference, to resist the temptation to read each of these novels as

somehow "the same" because they were all written in the 1990's, because they are all

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postcolonial, and because they all feature the symbol of the Western European Great

House and its ideology. I also purposely include novels focusing on places that were also

colonized by countries other than Britain, in an effort to expand the scope of my project.

I aim to counter the inclination of some postcolonial critics to approach colonialism as a

strictly British project. By putting these texts side by side, my goal is to reinforce the

idea that no colonial experience is simple or straightforward and that, while there are

certainly similarities, the issues of their postcoloniality are as complicated and unique as

their experiences of colonization. The symbol of the Western European Great House will

be shown to be a malleable tool, capable of being used by authors from vastly different

places and colonial experiences to explore a variety of postcolonial issues and struggles.

My investigation of the use of the symbol of the Great House by contemporary

postcolonial novelists consists of four chapters, each concentrating on the ways that the

power structures connected to the symbol of the Western European Great House operate

in four different postcolonial locations. In House of Splendid Isolation (1994), Edna

O'Brien uses the architectural setting of the Anglo-Irish Big House to link the nationalist

struggles for independence and the contemporary sense of isolation and disruption of

community to Ireland's history of colonialism. The symbol of the Big House in Irish

literature emerged from and remains intricately intertwined with the island's colonial

experience. The connection between the construction of the actual Big Houses to British

colonial rule make the buildings important sites, materially and symbolically, in the fight

between the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy and the IRA nationalists. Several aspects of the Big

House novel genre make it an especially appropriate location for an exploration of

community and colonialism in part due to its sense of nostalgia for the fictional idyllic

past era when the Big House was the center of community, a place where benevolent Anglo-Irish Protestant landowners dutifully looked after cheerful, faithful Irish Catholic tenants. O'Brien's novel directly relates the devastating isolation of the characters to the hierarchical divisions of colonialism built into the social structure of the novel's central setting, Josie O'Grady's house. By revealing Josie's inability to connect with people, within the house and in the wider community, both as a young woman before the "Troubles" and as an old woman during the resurgence of the conflict between British loyalists and IRA rebels, the novel links her isolation to the hierarchical colonial social structure in which she lives. Through the characters of Josie and the IRA fugitive McGreevy, the novel points to a yearning for community that the divisive social structure constructed through Ireland's colonial experience impedes. The violent ending that leaves Josie dead, McGreevy catatonic and imprisoned, and the house in ruins stresses the physical and material effects of colonial ideological structures and suggests the impossibility of sustained community within them.

André Brink's Imaginings of Sand (1996) also raises questions about how individuals can come together and live peacefully within the remnants of the structures erected through the process of colonialism. Set in South Africa at the moment of the first free elections, the detailed descriptions of the primary setting, the protagonist's large family house, uses symbolic references to white and black and the association of these colors with the space inside and outside the structure associated with the Western European colonial project to reveal the continuing impact of apartheid's racial binary. Additionally, through architectural descriptions and the relationship of the characters to the house, Brink acknowledges the complexity of the hierarchical power structure in

South Africa by considering the impact of gender oppressions on the lives of the characters. As the country dismantles the formal system of apartheid and the division it established between whites and blacks is destabilized, the novel attempts to envision the possibility of whites and blacks cohabitating within the Western European power structures that, though compromised, still stand. In locating his imaginings of what post-apartheid South Africa might look like within a dilapidated, burned out Afrikaner farm house, Brink acknowledges that the colonial power structures have not been eradicated despite violent attempts and that hope for change rests in renovations accomplished by white and black South Africans working together from within the structures.

Next, the architecture of <u>The House on the Lagoon</u> (1995) provides a setting for Rosario Ferré's exploration of patriarchal colonial and neo-colonial power structures in Puerto Rico. The novel encompasses the four hundred years of Spanish colonial rule and its contemporary neo-colonial relationship with the United States in the three versions of the house built on the lagoon. This chapter looks specifically at the effects of the gendered hierarchies erected through Puerto Rico's long and varied history of colonization on the lives of the women in the novel. The design of the houses links each to either the era of Spanish colonialism or the period of American neo-colonialism. Through its calling attention to the similarities between the patriarchal oppression experienced by the women residing in the three versions of the house, the novel reveals a foundational colonial power structure largely unaltered by the shift from Spanish to United States rule. Ferré uses the form and function of the architecture to acknowledge and investigate the complex relationship between colonialism/neo-colonialism and patriarchy, considering the ways that class and race impact the women's lives within the

patriarchal colonial/neo-colonial power structure. Through its architecture, the novel underscores the notion that the foundational power structures of colonialism remain intact long after formal, military occupation ends and thus raises complicated questions about how and if they might be altered.

The final chapter focuses on the ways the architectural settings of Salman Rushdie's The Moor's Last Sigh (1995) call attention to the similarities in the power structures operating in the eras of colonialism, postcolonial nationalism, and neo-colonial globalization by highlighting the foundation of capitalism they share. The novel layers the historical periods within the architectural sites – the two Anglo-Indian bungalows on Cabral Island and on Malabar Hill in Bombay, the Cashondeliveri Tower, and the model of the Alhambra in Spain – through descriptions of the buildings and details about their economic foundations. The architectural settings link colonialism and globalization in ways that temper the celebrations of some postcolonial critics, such as Arjun Appadurai and John Tomlinson, that globalization has altered the West/East power structure and expanded opportunities for resistance and equity. The deep connections between colonialism and capitalist globalization in the architectural sites of the novel also highlight the necessity for postcolonial studies and globalization theory, which have developed largely apart from each other and focused strictly on either the cultural realm or the economic realm, to come together. Although the design and symbolic significance of the Western European Great House is directly related to the Anglo-Indian bungalows that are the novel's first two architectural settings, this chapter also widens the discussion of the ways postcolonial novelists employ architectural settings to investigate postcoloniality by also considering the twentieth-century skyscraper and the Alhambra,

an eleventh-century fortress in Spain. The first three chapters argue that the form and function of the Western European Great House in these contemporary postcolonial novels reveals the lingering significance of colonial power structures in the postcolonial location. Expanding the discussion to other built forms in the final chapter underscores the importance of understanding not only the Western European Great House but all kinds of architectural forms and points to possibilities for further investigation.

In highlighting the continuing existence and impact of colonial power structures in postcolonial locations, these novels raise questions about the appropriateness of the term "postcolonial." Many critics such as Walter Mignolo and Ramón Grosfoguel prefer the term "coloniality," arguing that "colonialism gave way to coloniality, that is, independence without decolonization" and that "the myth that we live in a decolonized world needs to be challenged" (Grosfoguel 99). Grosfoguel embraces the term "coloniality" because it implies the necessity of a second decolonization that would finally "address heterarchies of entangled racial, ethnic, sexual, gender, and economic relations that the first decolonization left untouched" (103). Regardless of the legitimate concerns raised about the use of the term "postcolonial," many theorists continue to employ it, as I have throughout this project. Rather than indicating a complete break with the colonial experience, my use of "postcolonial" corresponds with Peter Hulme's understanding of the term as indicative of a "*process* of disengagement from the whole colonial syndrome" (4). I am adopting Elleke Boehmer's definition of "postcolonial" that contends that it refers to more than a location's prior political status but also references certain "subject positions, political processes, cultural articulations and critical perspectives" and thus the term remains relevant and useful (22). In the following

chapters, I use "coloniality" to highlight the continuity of the colonial power structures that extend beyond the period of colonial rule and "postcolonial" to call specific attention to the period after the end of formal colonialism.

This project underscores the importance of being mindful of the vast differences between the ways specific locations experienced colonialism and the unique challenges each faces in its wake. Although these contemporary novels all posit hierarchical power structures constructed through colonial projects, they also tie the ways the structures operate and the difficulties they face in attempting to dismantle them directly to that location's particular historical experience and culture. The power structures of the Western European Great House morph depending on its location in much the same way as the actual architectural designs were adapted in various locations. Although Western European colonizers intended to transplant the material structure of the Great House to the colonial location unchanged, the design shifts in transit becoming the Anglo-Irish Big House in Ireland, the Afrikaner farm house in South Africa, the Spanish Revival/Frank Lloyd Wright mansions in Puerto Rico, and the Anglo-Indian bungalow and international skyscraper in India – each retaining its fundamental Western European colonial power structure but altered by its specific location. The variations in the buildings in these novels speak to the necessity for a varied approach to renovating the social structures. However, the novels my project explores provide no clear model for the renovation of colonial/neo-colonial structures that creates a space free of oppressive gender, class, and racial hierarchies. Although Imaginings of Sand ends with white and black South Africans living together in the burned and broken down Great House, the living situation is tenuous and the future uncertain. Yet, conversely, not one of the novels depicts a

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whole, stable, uncompromised structure that effectively and entirely controls and oppresses those inside and outside the house. The cracks and holes evident in the destabilized architectural sites in the novels leave openings that suggest the possibility of change.

The focus of the novels included in this project on the built environment emphasizes the material impact of colonial ideological structures on the lives of the individuals living in and around them by highlighting the effects of ideology on peoples' bodies, their every day activities, and the physical way they relate to one another. The impacts of the oppressions experienced by the occupants of the houses are not theoretical but physical. By situating characters within hierarchical colonial power structures, these novels connect physical, individual experience to larger historical ideological structures. King points out the importance of the kind of material explorations such as those conducted by O'Brien, Brink, Ferré, and Rushdie because of the ways they underscore that

> . . . personal histories are embedded in larger histories, personal geographies in larger geographies. What may, at the time, seem to be the 'smaller' histories, geographies and sociologies of, for example, individual families, households or communities, are also part of 'larger' histories of regions, nation states, and empires. We are products of our circumstances . . . we are presented with opportunities as well as constraints, opening up as well as closing off our options. (2004 189)

Moreover, the ways these postcolonial authors build up and tear down the architectural sites in these novels emphasizes the constructedness of the social structures that work

through the design of the houses. Although the texts vary in their optimism toward the notion of renovation or the construction of new power structures, the fact that the architectural sites are man-made means that they can be unmade or remade so that renovation is not altogether inconceivable.

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Community and Isolation in the Anglo-Irish Big House

in Edna O'Brien's House of Splendid Isolation

> I came on a great house in the middle of the night
> Its open lighted doorway and its windows all alight
> And all my friends were there and made me welcome too;
> But I woke in an old ruin that the winds howled through;
> > (W. B. Yeats, "The Curse of Cromwell")
>
> Each of these houses with its intense, centripetal life is
> isolated by something much more lasting than the physical
> fact of space: the isolation is an affair of origin.
> > (Elizabeth Bowen, Bowen's Court)

"Only connect . . ."

These words central to E.M. Forster's Howard's End (1910) underscore the

novel's exploration of the possibility and importance of connection between human

beings, of connection that, at the end of the novel, occurs because of, and within, the

English country house of the title. The setting functions through an understanding that

the English country house brought people from all levels of society together into a

community of personal and economic relationships, making it an ideal setting for writers

interested in investigating how individuals relate to each other in community and

particularly how the social structures symbolized by the country houses contributed to

and/or interfered with individuals coming together as a community. Just as Anglo-Irish

landowners borrowed and adapted the architecture of English country houses when they

built their Big Houses on their newly acquired Irish estates during British efforts to

control Ireland, Irish novelists have borrowed and adapted the symbol of the English

country house, creating the tradition of the Big House novel through which they explore

social issues specific to the Irish experience. The two literary genres, the English country house novel and the Big House novel, while related to each other as well as to a wider transnational literary tradition, are certainly not the same.   The symbol of the English country house becomes transformed when transplanted to Ireland, morphing into the Big House, becoming a space where the power dynamics of British colonialism in Ireland and their impact on individuals and communities are frequently explored. This chapter focuses specifically on the ways that Edna O'Brien's House of Splendid Isolation (1995) uses the symbol of the Big House to expose the effects of the island's colonial history on the sense of community in postcolonial Ireland. In her novel, O'Brien situates her investigation of late twentieth century Irish struggles with community and isolation primarily within the context of Mrs. Josie O'Grady's house. The history of the Big Houses constructed in Ireland by the British and the Anglo-Irish, and the wide use of the Big House as a literary symbol in Irish literature since 1800, makes it a fitting site for the novel's consideration of the possibility of establishing community within the alienating social structures erected by colonialism. Just as the literary Big House often presents community as compromised by divisive and isolating social hierarchies, the House of Splendid Isolation, while acknowledging some yearning for community, ultimately exposes the inevitability of disconnection that is far from splendid, as the novel's ironic title suggests, but rather devastating for those residing within and around social structures founded by colonialism.

  To lay a foundation for this discussion, I first provide an overview of the history of the relationship between Ireland and Great Britain, particularly emphasizing the construction of actual Big Houses as well as the development of the Big House novel

literary genre. Next I move into a detailed discussion of O'Brien's novel, focusing first on ways in which the young mistress of the house, Josie, finds herself isolated within the ideology of the Big House and then moving on to explore what IRA rebel McGreevy's intrusion into the now elderly Josie's house reveals about the conflicts and precariousness of community associated with postcolonial Irish nationalism. Finally, I draw some conclusions about what the novel suggests about the possibility of creating and sustaining community within both colonial *and* postcolonial nationalist ideological structures. The novel directly links the two systems, highlighting the divisive and disastrous effects they have on individuals living within and around them.

The Development of Material and Literary Irish Big Houses

The connection between the construction of the actual Big Houses and the British colonial project in Ireland is central to understanding the relationship between the novel's representation of the contemporary sense of isolation and lack of community to Ireland's colonial experience. Historians set English attempts to colonize Ireland as beginning in 1171 with Henry II. The Normans sent to settle in Ireland throughout the twelfth century built castles around which towns developed. Over time these first settlers lost their sense of distinct racial identity as they integrated into the Irish community through intermarriage. The relationship between Britain and Ireland continued to be fairly tenuous, with the English having little control over Ireland beyond the seventy mile radius around Dublin known as the Pale, until the sixteenth century. Plans to gain more control over Ireland by settling Protestant English citizens on the land enacted under Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I, Elizabeth I, and James I developed as Ireland gained

strategic significance after the Reformation due to growing unease in England about the power of Catholic Europe (Rauchbauer 2). The construction of tower houses and castles was encouraged through statutes such as one passed in 1429, which promised L10 to any settler who complied with construction specifications that included plans for small towers and castles. These architectural elements, according to Jacqueline Genet, were indicative of the "architecture of international feudalism built as a demonstration of Norman superiority both to control and intimidate the local population. These tower houses were distinguished by their defensive qualities, strategically sited . . . The height of these castles aided visibility and communication, while also conveying an image of power and dominance to the surrounding population" (62-63). Thus, the ideology of the colonial project was built into the structures erected by the British eager to control Ireland from the beginning.

Efforts to colonize Ireland were for the most part ineffective until the Ulster Plantation (1603-13). Under this plan, settlers from Northern England and Scotland relocated their families to confiscated land in Northern Ireland, which they were required to protect by arming themselves and building defenses such as tower houses. Animosity grew between the settlers and the Gaelic Irish, stemming not only from religious differences (the majority of the settlers were Presbyterian while the majority of the Irish were Catholic) but also from the economic exploitation of the Irish by the settlers. As tenants, the Irish were removed to poor quality land and given harsh terms of tenancy (Cross in Arnold 57). 1650 saw another influx of colonizers as large tracts of land in Ireland were seized by the Cromwellian parliament and awarded to soldiers and dutiful government officials. Unlike their Norman predecessors who assimilated into the Irish

culture, the Ulster settlers' proximity to their native lands enabled them to maintain their sense of British identity.   The ease of travel back and forth made it possible for many landowners to become absentee landlords, owning property in Ireland but living primarily in England. According to Sophia Cross, this led to a "substantial amount of money leaving Ireland in the form of rents, most notably during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Members of the aristocracy who owned estates in both Ireland and England often preferred to reside on their English estates, allowing the rents procured from their Irish estates to fund their lifestyles in England" (58). The tensions between the Irish Catholic natives and the Anglo-Irish landlords ensuing from this absenteeism widened the gulf between the two groups and became the subject of many novels seen as inaugurating the tradition of the Irish Big House novel, notably Maria Edgeworth's <u>The Castle Rackrent</u> (1800), often cited as the first Big House novel.

Historians point to the "Battle of the Boyne" of 1690 (in which Protestant English King William of Orange, with the help of the Protestants in Ulster, put down the Irish rebellion organized by the dethroned Catholic James II) as the beginning of the Protestant Ascendancy (Rauchbauer 2). Angered by what they considered lenient treatment of the Catholics in the Treaty of Limerick (1691) and eager to reinforce their hold on power and wealth, the predominantly Protestant Irish Parliament passed a succession of Penal Laws from 1695-1728 that further restricted Irish Catholic landownership and participation in political life. During this time, for example, it became illegal for Catholics to purchase or lease land for more than thirty-one years and their estates could no longer be inherited by a single heir. The Penal Laws institutionalized the correspondence between religion and nationality in Ireland, essentially dividing the

people living in Ireland into two groups: the small Anglican land-owning elite (the

Anglo-Irish Protestant Ascendancy[4]) and the dispossessed, disenfranchised Catholic

majority (the Irish Catholics), locking them into a feudal system of a landed gentry

supported by income from tenants working the land and preventing the development of

any sense of a unified national identity (Cross 59).

The Big Houses constructed by the Ascendancy throughout the eighteenth century

served multiple purposes, most of which established and perpetuated the hierarchical

divide between the Protestant Ascendancy and the Irish Catholics. Aside from providing

shelter for the landowner's family and a large staff of servants, the house functioned as

the administrative center for the staff and tenants as well as standing as a symbol of the

owner's wealth and social position. Famous architects such as Sir Edward Lovett Pearce

(1699-1733) and Richard Castle (1695-1751) were called on to design the houses and

their demesnes. These architects followed the styles that were popular in England: "the

Palladian style, the two- or three-storey compact block, neo-classical designs, neo-Gothic

houses and castles" (Rauchbauer 3). The Irish versions were typically scaled down in

accordance with the owner's financial means and place in the social hierarchy. In fact,

compared to the English country houses constructed at the same time, many of the

Ascendancy houses were quite small. Therefore, the term "Big House" refers less to the

size of the residence itself and more to its size relative to the standard one-room sod

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[4] Rauchbauer calls attention to the inaccuracy of the term "Anglo-Irish." In the nineteenth century, the term began to be used interchangeably with "Ascendancy" but incorrectly implies a uniform ethnic group. The Protestant landowners were, "in regard to their origins, often a hodge-podge and could be descended from Norman, Saxon, Scots, Gaelic, or Welsh stock" (4-5). While cognizant that these categories are not fixed and the terms are problematic, I will be using these terms interchangeably in reference to the landowning elite living in Ireland who are Protestant and of English ancestry.

hovels of the Irish tenants (Rauchbauer 3).[5] Regardless of their size, according to Genet

in <u>The Big House in Ireland in Reality and Representation</u>, these estates became the local

centers through which the English government wielded its power over Ireland.

Throughout the eighteenth century the British maintained a tight control of the

Irish Parliament. Some Irish Protestants resented the restrictions and sought greater

rights for Irish Catholics. They formed a group called the United Irishmen to fight for

equal rights for all Irish people, resulting in a failed rebellion in 1798. Fearful of losing

power to the Irish Catholics because of the growing support of Irish Protestants, the

Protestant Anglo-Irish passed the Act of Union in the Irish Parliament in 1801, creating

the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. This legislation officially incorporated

Ireland into Great Britain, doing away with the separate Irish Parliament and shifting the

seat of political power from Dublin to Westminster. In spite of their legal victory, the

Ascendancy continued to feel threatened by growing Irish opposition, which was

becoming more organized and more vocal. The shift of power to Westminster and a

lingering sense of insecurity is reflected in the location and architecture of the houses

they built. Construction of country estates across Ireland boomed since living in and

around Dublin, no longer the center of power, became less important (Cross 61-71).

Also, the Anglo-Irish Protestant landowners, mindful of the way they had acquired their

land and concerned about the threat of a growing Catholic middle class, sought ways to

reassert their power. Building a Big House was a material way to establish Ascendancy

authority over the land and generate a sense of stability and continuity (Genet 61). To

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[5] An Irish tourism website claims that, "One cynical observer has drawn the distinction between the petite
Irish castle and the massive fortifications found in England – In England the local lord protected his
community from the depredations of neighboring barons. In Ireland he had only to protect himself from his
local community" (www.tourismresources.ie).

create such an effect, towers were often incorporated into the design of these buildings: "the asymmetry of the castle would have blended with the landscape, giving the impression of permanence, as if the structure had always been there, like the castles built by the first settlers and the Gaelic lords in Ireland" (64).

Despite the strengthened bond to England established by the Act of Union and the continued construction of large estates, events of the nineteenth-century wrecked havoc on the Ascendancy's grip on power. The Anglo-Irish representatives in the British Parliament were marginalized politically by their counterparts in Westminster. The English elite considered them socially inferior, bolstering among the Anglo-Irish a growing sense of not completely belonging in either location, of not being fully "at home" in England or Ireland (Genet 62). The struggle for Catholic rights in the early part of the century, culminating in 1829 when Catholic men were granted the right to hold public office including service in the British Parliament, heightened Anglo-Irish anxiety about their position of authority. The potato famine of 1845-1848 further weakened Anglo-Irish control. With very little industry in Ireland, most of the Irish lived as tenants on land owned by the Anglo-Irish. Barely supporting their families after paying rent to their landlords, they relied heavily on the potato for subsistence. When blight struck and the potato crop failed, approximately 1.25 million Irish emigrated (chiefly to the United States and Canada) while another one million died of disease and starvation. Those in the Big House were far from immune to the potato famine's devastating impact. However, rather than creating unity and fellow-feeling, the famine intensified conflicts already raging between landlords and tenants over issues such as absenteeism, subletting, and eviction stemming from the feudal economic and social system in which the Irish felt

29

trapped, all of which were heightened by religious and cultural differences (Rauchbauer 5).

During these years, the Home Rule Movement developed as the Irish began calling for a separate Irish Parliament (Forster 174-182). Nationalist sentiments, crucial to defining a specific Irish identity for a free Ireland based on establishing differences between "us" and "them," between "Irish" and "British," grew as evidenced by the founding of the Gaelic League by poet Douglas Hyde (1893) and in the literary efforts of writers involved in the Irish Revival, such as W. B. Yeats (McCall 20-24). Although Ireland would remain a part of Great Britain, the proposed new Irish Parliament would handle domestic issues and be located in Ireland. The Anglo-Irish Protestants of the Ulster Province (six counties in Northern Ireland), mindful of their minority status and fearful that an Irish Parliament would be a Catholic Parliament, fought against the Home Rule bills, which were defeated in 1886 and 1892. Despite these two legislative failures, the first decade of the twentieth century saw the emergence of two groups dedicated to Irish independence. In 1905 journalist Arthur Griffith created Sinn Fein, a political group fighting for Ireland's right to govern itself. The establishment of Sinn Fein coincided with the formation of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), whose members were known as "republicans." This secret organization was determined to cut all ties to Great Britain. Although the Ulster Protestants continued to oppose Home Rule, in 1914 the Home Rule bill passed and was signed by George V. However, World War I (during which many of the Irish supported and fought along side the British) prevented its enactment. Mounting frustration and radicalization led to a violent, week-long rebellion in Dublin by republicans led by Patrick Pearse beginning on Easter Monday, 1916. The

public execution of fifteen republican leaders following the British suppression of the Easter Rising enraged the previously somewhat uninvolved Irish community and rallied them to the republican cause. In 1918, Sinn Fein, now dominated by the republicans, took seventy-three of the one hundred and five Irish seats in Parliament. Rather than head off to Westminster, however, the elected republicans went to Dublin where on January 21, 1919 they pronounced Ireland an independent republic and themselves its House of Representatives (or Dail Eireann). This declaration initiated four years of violent fighting between Irish rebels and British troops euphemistically called the "Troubles" (Foster 189-211).[6]

The British Parliament responded to the Irish declaration of independence in 1920 by instituting the Government of Ireland Act. This legislation split Ireland into two states, each continuing to be part of Great Britain and each having some degree of home rule. The six northern counties of Ulster were designated as the state of Northern Ireland. The Protestants, having a majority and favoring continued connection with Great Britain, quickly ratified the Act. However, the many Irish Catholics living in the north still hoped for a united Ireland. The other state was comprised of the three remaining Ulster counties and twenty-three counties in the South. The House of Representatives in Dublin firmly rejected the plan and vowed to fight for a unified and independent Ireland. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) began attacking British military and government sites in Northern Ireland as well as the southern state. The British responded by sending a police force to put down the IRA rebels. The British police force, referred to as the "Black and Tans" because of the color of their uniforms, quickly earned a reputation for brutality and

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[6] "The Troubles" is also used to refer to the period of violent sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland beginning in 1968 and ending with the Good Friday Agreement of 1998.

the contempt of the Irish (Foster 204-211). Much of the fighting took place in the

countryside where buildings were looted and burned. Rebel arsonists targeted Big

Houses in retribution for the republican houses destroyed by British troops, in part

because the houses stood as symbols of the British colonial occupation of Ireland.[7] Big

House owners, many of whom had barely managed to hold on to their estates through the

Famine years and the Land Wars, felt vulnerable surrounded by Irish Catholics and Black

and Tans and moved on to a safer location, many to residences in England (Rauchbauer

38).

     A treaty designed to end the conflict was agreed upon by the British and Irish

governments in 1921 through which the southern counties of Ireland became the Irish

Free State, a self-governing dominion although still part of the British Commonwealth.

Some of the citizens, led by Michael Collins and William Cosgrave, approved of the

treaty and the newly refigured state. However, others, such as Eamon De Valera, were

dissatisfied with a divided Ireland, insisting that the country be united and entirely

independent from England. By 1922 the conflict sparked a civil war. Fighting ended in

1923 with the establishment of opposing political parties by Cosgrave and De Valera.

Cosgrave's party controlled the Irish Parliament, which maintained a close economic

relationship with England, until Fianna Fail (De Valera's group) took over in 1932 and

began aggressively cutting links between Ireland and Great Britain. In 1937 the Irish

Parliament adopted a new constitution, declaring Ireland a "sovereign, independent,

democratic state." The new Irish government encouraged the development of a

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[7]In spite of this, the commonly-held belief that *most* Big Houses were vandalized or destroyed is an exaggeration. Current estimates (varying with the exact parameters attached to the term "Big House") put the number of Big Houses lost during the Troubles at 192, between five and ten percent of approximately 2000.

specifically Irish national identity, so that Catholicism became even more strongly linked

with Irish nationalism and Protestantism with Unionism in Northern Ireland (Rauchbauer

39-41).

Although Ireland claimed neutrality during World War II, thousands of Irishmen,

Catholics and Protestants, served in the British armed forces. Following the war,

violence erupted at home again as groups of IRA members periodically raided Northern

Ireland, where Catholics continued to call for re-unification and Protestants insisted on

maintaining their separate state, culminating in 1968 with a second period of terrorism

and retribution between Catholics and Protestants referred to as the "Troubles."

Sectarian violence gradually subsided as Ireland joined the European Community in 1973

(reconfigured and renamed the European Union in 1993) and became increasingly

incorporated into Europe's growing economy. Assuming a prominent position in global

capital markets, the Irish economy boomed throughout the 1990's, earning the island the

nickname "The Celtic Tiger." Ireland's economic achievement was aided by decreasing

social unrest, culminating in the Good Friday Agreement of May 22, 1998, when power-

sharing reform referenda were simultaneously passed by Northern Ireland and the Irish

Republic and heralded by many as a formal end to the period of terrorism that had

gripped the island since the late 1960's (Howe 6). One of the sectors contributing to

Ireland's financial success and growing power in the global economy is tourism. As top

tourist destinations and business convention centers, the decaying and abandoned Big

Houses of the Anglo-Irish are being refurbished and have become big business. The

renewed relevance of the Big Houses takes on added symbolic significance in light of

arguments put forth by critics such as David Lloyd, who points to Ireland's membership

in the European Union as a formal reuniting of the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain

that is indicative of a neo-colonial relationship in which "the imperatives that led to the

earlier Union are still operative in the deep material structure of things" (24).

The Big Houses constructed by the Anglo-Irish during the English efforts to

colonize Ireland dot not only Ireland's physical landscape but its literary landscape as

well.[8] Maria Edgeworth's <u>Castle Rackrent</u>, published two years after the 1798 rebellion,

is generally recognized as establishing the Big House novel genre. In the novel, the Irish

Catholic steward to four generations of Rackrents, Thady Quirk, describes the waste,

greed, abusiveness, absence, and ambivalence of the Ascendancy as he traces each

successive landlord's tenure of ownership of the estate, resulting in a damning portrait of

the Anglo-Irish. The text delineates the decline of the family within, and reflected

symbolically in descriptions of, the Castle Rackrent. According to Seamus Deane,

Edgeworth was the first writer to focus specifically on the problems between the

Protestant Ascendancy and the Irish Catholics (1986 91). Each landlord represents a fault

within the Anglo-Irish character responsible for the economic, political, and social

problems of the time. Some critics read the novel's strictly stereotypical characterization

as an assertion that independent individual action is completely restricted within Ireland's

social structure (97). Most agree that the novel suggests that the solution to the problems

facing the Irish rests in the hands of the Anglo-Irish, who need to fulfill their duties and

responsibilities as landlords. This first Big House novel does not depict an idyllic bond

between landlords and their tenants but rather laments the end of an era of benevolent

landlords caring for their faithful tenants, who respected and cared for them in return

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[8] This discussion focuses solely on tracing the use of the Big House in Irish novels; however, the Big
House appears frequently as a symbol and a setting throughout Irish poetry and drama.

(although many historians argue that this relationship never existed). Edgeworth

establishes nostalgia for the fictional idyll of a sense of community between the Anglo-

Irish and the Irish Catholics centered in and around the Big House as a central feature of

the Big House genre.

The symbol of the dilapidated Big House featured in The Castle Rackrent appears

frequently as the Big House novel genre takes a turn toward the gothic in the works of

nineteenth-century writers such as Charles Robert Maturin (1780-1824) and Sheridan Le

Fanu (1814-73). The Oxford Campanion to English Literature identifies the paralyzing

effect of a troubled past on the present as a central theme of Gothic novels, expressed

through "enclosed and haunted settings such as castles, crypts, convents, or gloomy

mansions, in images of ruin and decay, and in episodes of imprisonment, cruelty, and

persecution" (422). The crumbling Big Houses of the Anglo-Irish situated within bleak,

wild landscapes of Ireland are the settings of stories that wrestle with the alienation and

isolation of the Anglo-Irish as their economic and political power erode (Deane 100).

Novels such as Melmoth the Wanderer (1820) and Uncle Silas (1864) reveal the Anglo-

Irish psychological struggle with the guilt and fear associated with not only losing power

but also how they attained that power in the first place. Supernatural occurrences and an

eerie sense of being secretly watched fill the Big Houses with unease and uncertainty.

The houses in these novels are lonely, frightening places where longed for connection

between people appears unlikely and rarely occurs.

The novels of Edith Sommerville and Martin Ross (Violet Martin), both born into

the declining Anglo-Irish gentry in the middle of the nineteenth century, continue to call

attention to the contemporary problems of the Anglo-Irish and mourn the state of the

relationship between the landlords and the Irish peasantry. In <u>The Real Charlotte</u> (1894) and <u>The Big House of Inver</u> (1925), the action takes place in and around a large estate, formerly grand but now in disrepair, mismanaged by disreputable, decadent landlords. In the later novel, the illegitimate daughter of the estate's owner schemes to reunite the Big House with the land surrounding it by arranging a marriage between the handsome, rakish, Anglo-Irish son who will inherit the house and the beautiful, well-educated daughter of the middle class Irish Catholic man who bought the land when it was sold off (Kelsall 2003 152). Although the novel features subversively powerful women and suggests that the lineage and right to power and property have been compromised by covert personal relationships between the classes over time (consequently compromising the categories "Anglo-Irish" and "Irish"), the novel pines over a lost sense of community, one that supposedly once existed in and around the Big House. The yearned-for reconciliation of the house and the land, of the Anglo-Irish and the Irish Catholics, is ultimately rendered impossible as the house burns to the ground in the novel's final pages.

Elizabeth Bowen's <u>The Last September</u> (1929), perhaps the most canonical Big House novel after Edgeworth's, provides a portrait of life in and around the Big House during the Troubles. The novel chronicles the physical threat to the aristocrats' homes posed by the arsonist rebels along with the social threat to the position and power of the Anglo-Irish as a function of the impending independence from Great Britain. Although critics disagree as to whether the house in the novel, Danielstown, ultimately functions as a site of community, a site of isolation, or both, throughout the text the house clearly

determines and constricts the attitudes, actions, and interactions of the characters.[9] Declan Kiberd describes the young Lois Farquar as "caught in the open spaces between a role and a self . . . in a house whose very architecture and furniture provides her with those stage directions which tell an actor how to perform" (369). The novel's Anglo-Irish owners appear trapped in their own house, carrying on the traditions of their class – dances, tennis parties, and teas – that suggest order and stability but cognizant of the impending violence and doom. The characters remain paralyzed by their inability to imagine themselves in any other kind of structure, even to the last paragraph of the novel when Danielstown burns to the ground, leaving its owners, Sir Richard and Lady Naylor, in utter isolation, unable to speak or even look at each other.

The number of late twentieth-century authors writing novels categorized as belonging to the Big House genre, such as Jennifer Johnston, John Banville, Molly Keane, and William Trevor to name just a few, testifies to the continuation and durability of the tradition. Bowen, her contemporaries, and the Big House novelists who came after them, feature Big Houses collapsing, not only from financial and/or moral bankruptcy, but also as a result of pressures applied from the growing strength of nationalism outside the estate (Kreilkamp 7). Particularly after 1916, Big House novels become infused with the conflict between those wanting to sever Ireland's connection to Great Britain and those wanting to sustain it. The tensions between the Anglo-Irish landlords and Irish Catholic tenants creating and/or hampering community in earlier Big House novels become heightened and complicated as division is further institutionalized when the island splits into two nations and sectarian violence increases. In most of these novels,

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[9] For opposing views on community in The Last September, see Richard Gill's "The Country House in the Time of Trouble" and Moynahan's Anglo-Irish: The Literary Imagination in a Hyphenated Culture.

relationships between characters within and outside of the Big House are only available transgressively, across lines of class, religion, and gender, and are generally unsustainable (Krielkamp 203). In her introduction to The Anglo-Irish Novel and the Big House, Vera Kreilkamp writes of the contemporary use of the Big House genre that "each revival of interest in conservative cultural forms reminds us that social and political revolutions seldom embody permanent breaks with the past. What is discarded recurs, stirring submerged needs and common longings – suggesting both the incompleteness of revolutionary narratives and an enduring fascination with hierarchical social and aesthetic formulation" (1). Thus, even after the end of the formal colonial relationship between Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland, and in spite of the continuing colonial relationship between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the impact of the colonial structures continues, as does the relevance of the Big House as a literary symbol. Contemporary authors have found the symbol of the Big House, which emerged from and is entwined with Ireland's colonial history, useful in their explorations of issues related to Ireland's colonial experience.

Regardless of the connection between the construction of the Big Houses and the British colonial project in Ireland, the role of the Big Houses as material and symbolic centers of colonial power, or the frequency of direct and indirect references to both early and late twentieth-century periods of "Troubles" in twentieth-century Big House novels, some critics reject the significance of the genre. Seamus Deane dismisses contemporary Big House novels as merely nostalgic and evidence of a mediocre Irish novel tradition (Kreilkamp 32). In A Short History of Irish Literature, he writes, "Although the Big House continued to reappear in novels from 1930 to the present day, its function was

largely a nostalgic one; it was an image of memory, an indication of political

conservatism, even an expression of cultural disdain for the contemporary moment. But

in all essentials, it had become one of the many Romantic ruins of the European mind"

(206). Revisionists, such as Malcolm M. Kelsall and Stephen Howe, discount the reading

of Big House novels through a post-colonial critical lens, claiming that this results in

simplistic and overly politicized critique.[10] However, given the links between the actual

Big Houses, their literary representations, and Ireland's colonial experience as outlined

above, any consideration of a contemporary Big House novel *not* taking into account

Ireland's relationship to Great Britain would yield questionable results at best. In hopes

of demonstrating the validity and usefulness of the postcolonial approach to the Big

House novel, the following discussion of Edna O'Brien's House of Splendid Isolation

calls attention to these connections as it examines the novel's use of the conventions of

the Big House genre to dispel both the nostalgic myth of community centered around the

Anglo-Irish Big House and the notion that post-colonial nationalism can create

community.

While nostalgia for the ideal of the Big House as a center of community is a

recurring theme in Big House novels and critical analysis of them, most historians agree

that amicable bonds between landlords and tenants were never standard. Julian

Moynahan considers the sense of community longed for in Big House novels a fallacy.

He searches Irish history for a time when the friendly, supportive relationships frequently

suggested could have thrived. Unable to find an example he concludes that it was "most

likely never. Kindly relations *as a norm* are really not the case. They are what someone

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[10] See Stephen Howe's Ireland and Empire and Malcolm M. Kelsall's Literary Representations of the Irish Country House: Civilization and Savagery Under the Union for lengthy discussion of Revisionism and post-colonial theory in relation to Ireland.

infers as a child from the gentleness of servants and then in adulthood nostalgically projects back in time (206-7). The specific events from Irish history that Moynahan identifies as reflective of conflict between the Anglo-Irish landlords and the Catholic Irish tenants – the Tithe Wars, the Great Famine, and the Land Wars – are all connected to the English attempts to colonize and control Ireland. The lack of community, then, can be directly related to Ireland's specific colonial experience. Psychologist Geraldine Moane, in <u>Gender and Colonialism: A Psychological Analysis of Oppression and Liberation</u>, argues that the process of colonialism breaks up community: "Fragmentation, or divide and conquer, is a mechanism of control which is essential to domination, and which can be linked to particular social structures" (53). Big House culture established and perpetuated a system of seemingly natural hierarchical division that isolates individuals, even after the end of formal colonialism.

Regardless of the historical evidence to the contrary, a key element of the Big House literary genre is nostalgia for the Big House as a site of community. Kreilkamp points to the heavy influence of the ideology typified by English country house poems, an ideology espousing a "conservative feudal ideal of social cohesiveness," as the source of the genre's association of the Big House with community (16). The eighteenth century landlord-tenant social structure of England and Ireland appears in both literatures as "an ideal feudal community of hierarchical reciprocity, a lost Eden in which loyal vassals serve their beneficent lords in exchange for economic security and stability" (17). She identifies within the genre dual, and conflicting, tensions between the notion of the Big House as a site of division as a result of colonialism and the ideal of the Big House as a site of connection based on the ideology of feudal agrarian capitalism. The following

section explores these tensions and their effects on individuals as depicted in O'Brien's
House of Splendid Isolation.

Isolation and Community in the Big House

O'Brien's novel acknowledges the tradition of nostalgia for the community of the
Big House but, rather than participating in it, highlights its fallacy. House of Splendid
Isolation condemns the social structure associated with the Big House as isolating
through the depiction of the devastating and divisive impact of the colonial ideology built
into the house on the characters' relationships with each other. A close examination of
the interaction between the characters living inside and around the Big House in the novel
reveals cracks in the class and gender hierarchy, while simultaneously calling attention to
that social structure's power to isolate individuals from each other. Specifically, this
section of the discussion first considers the ways in which Josie's recollections of her
early life expose the class system embedded in the Big House. Although destabilized by
Josie's lower class roots, the social structure effectively prevents Josie from connecting
with those in the house (the servant girl Brid and farm helper Paud), as well as those
outside the house (Paud's mother and a gypsy girl). Next, an exploration of Josie's
marriage to James uncovers ways in which patriarchal Big House ideology also creates
distance between Josie and her husband, which widens as he fails to live up to the ideals
of the Big House landlord. Moreover, the gendered power structure becomes
increasingly compromised by Josie's growing control over James and the house. Finally,
Josie's symbolic refusal to perpetuate Big House culture through her decision to abort her

child underscores the depth of Josie's isolation and unhappiness with her life in the Big House.

Josie's retrospective descriptions of the house when she arrives just after her marriage to James O'Meara reflect her familiarity with the ideology of the Big House as a place of order and civility and her desire to believe it. She recalls:

> Long ago she had come as a bride, a bride with a loose fox collar over her velvet outfit. She had sat in the pony and trap while her husband . . . steered them around to the second lot of gates, the imposing silver gates which led to the front of the house and which were ceremoniously opened. She took it in almost at a glance: the breast of the house a washed blue and the side gables pointed in bluish stone, stables all along the back, every variety of window in the house proper, some of them boxed, and in the stooping verandah panes of multi-coloured glass shot with the sun's rays. The house of the low-lying lake. Any girl would have given her eyeteeth to marry into it . . . Doors and windows wide open, old box irons on the doors to keep them from slamming, and James's pride in showing her things, marching her around main rooms and lesser rooms and anterooms, saying they could do with a woman's touch, a woman's artistry. In the kitchen a smell of baking – cakes and pies and the Brid one whipping egg whites with a fork, on a soup plate. (29-30)

Josie, dressed in her best clothes, notes the architectural markers of upper class power as she approaches the house: the imposing silver gates, the numerous windows, the verandah, and the lake and property surrounding the house. In spite of the grandeur of

the house, her description of the gates, doors, and windows being "wide open" evokes a sense of welcoming and community. Once inside, James takes Josie through the house, suggesting the house's need for a lady to establish and maintain order, while also reinforcing his ultimate ownership by "marching" her through the rooms to dictate where and how she could make her mark. They tour the rooms according to the rank of each space in the power hierarchy of the house: the main rooms, the lesser rooms, the ante rooms. Ending the passage with the servant girl, Brid, located in the kitchen preparing treats for the new mistress of the house completes the depiction of the class and gender hierarchy associated with Big House culture.

Almost immediately following her tour of the house, the class hierarchy highlighted by the tour is destabilized as details about Josie's personal background fail to correspond with those associated with someone of her elevated social position, in spite of her fox collar and velvet dress. Standing in her new room, she "stood on her toes and swung about the room and thought, It is mine, mine. No mistress, no foreign woman to tell her to do this and do that and don't do this and redo that and why isn't the table laid" (33). The freedom Josie feels comes from the power she now wields as the wife of a landowner. This freedom is new to her since she grew up the daughter of Irish Catholic farmers, spent some time in New York City as a servant, and until her marriage served drinks in her uncle's pub. Her personal history conflicts with that typically associated with the mistress of the Big House, a woman presumably wealthy, well-connected, well-educated, and Protestant. Although in improving her social position through marriage she joins a large cast of heroines in English and Irish novels, Josie's move up the social

ladder contrasts with the ideology attached to the Big House, which is founded on fixed categories of class.

Josie's lower class past reveals cracks in the Anglo-Irish social hierarchy and raises questions about its stability. According to Declan Kiberd, the demarcation between colonizer and colonized has always been less clear-cut in Ireland than in other locations: "historically and politically, it would be wrong to speak of the Ascendancy ruling class as alien and English, and yet their identifications were as much – even more so – with the English gentry as with their Irish co-residents . . . Ambiguities of a different kind surround the native Irish who were regarded as racially distinct, but were also white and difficult to place within the Manichean dynamics of colonial racism" (1998 12). Josie exemplifies the problems associated with strict categories of identity, given that her personal history of growing up outside the Big House, as an Irish Catholic whose uncle was a member of the IRA, becomes irrelevant to the community. In spite of the flaws the members of the community spot, they ultimately come to regard her strictly as the Lady of the House after her marriage to James and move into the Big House, demonstrating the power of the colonial social structures over the individuals caught up in them. The descriptions of Josie's arrival at the house connect her awareness of her change in class directly to the house. She feels transformed by her relationship to the house and relishes the power over others that position grants her. She considers her years as a servant in America a "bad dream" now that she is "mistress of a house and [has] a serving girl whom she could call to wait on her, to iron her clothes, to amuse her if necessary" (34).

The young housemaid, Brid, immediately recognizes cracks in Josie's Lady of the House façade, setting up a tension between the two women that runs throughout the

novel. When they arrive home from the wedding and James introduces Josie to Brid, the

girl was "unable to contain her sputters of laughter. A fox fur on a warm day!" (29).

Contrary to her intention, Josie's inappropriate clothing, her misuse of the markers of her

new social position, reveals her as a social imposter. Lonely, ill at ease, and seemingly

eager to try out her new power, Josie summons Brid to her room and asks her to entertain

her. The friendly bond between a mistress and her maid Josie anticipates based on

expectations of Big House culture cannot be sustained as the women swing between

upholding social boundaries and crossing over them. As Brid dances around the room

humming, she thinks about her boyfriend. Yet when Josie asks what she's thinking

about, she tells her, "Nothing much" (35), demonstrating the limits of Josie's power over

Brid and Brid's subversive unwillingness to be controlled. Brid challenges Josie's

position of authority further by inviting her to dance. In dancing together, Josie and Brid

are able to connect, temporarily transgressing social boundaries of gender and class:

> [Brid] danced around the four-poster, crossed the room, went behind the
>
> shutter, peeped out, and asked the missus would she care for a dance, and
>
> together like dervishes they paced around the room, . . . four breasts being
>
> walloped in the bridal suite, the ewer rattling in the basin, and Our Lady of
>
> Limerick delineated in gold leaf, looking down at them podgily. At the
>
> end of it and breathless the missus searches in her purse and gives Brid
>
> threepence. (35-36)

The room's artifacts, the shaken water pitcher and disapproving depiction of the Virgin

Mary looking down at the ladies dancing together on the bride's wedding day, highlight

the inappropriate nature of their actions, of their breaking the rules of conduct dictated by

their class and gender.[11] The exchange of money at the end of the dance reestablishes the economic power structure temporarily transgressed by the dance. Ultimately, Josie's and Brid's positions at opposite ends of the social hierarchy of the Big House keep them from connecting.

The isolation Josie experiences as mistress of the Big House reveals the fallacy of the ideology positing the house as a location of community. In the novel, the relationships structured by the natural-seeming social hierarchy built into the house lead to conflict, division, and isolation. Just as with Brid, Josie's relationship with an uneducated local boy, Paud, highlights the ways the class structure of the Big House prevents connection between those in the house and those around it. After Josie sends James to a remote monastery for treatment of his alcoholism, she invites the young man into the kitchen in hopes of hiring him to do chores around the property. Having admired her from afar, he feels unworthy of making eye contact with her: "Paud could not look up at the missus, but rather fixed his attention on her skirt . . . He stared at the stitched hearts at the top of each pleat, hearts threaded in grey. He could not believe he was in the kitchen alone with her . . . He could not look at the missus. He wanted to kneel down at her feet and adore" (53). Instead of presenting his adoration as natural and right, however, the novel reveals them to be unfounded. His limited contact with her prior to this point highlights the distance and deference between those inside and those outside the house:

> . . . once . . . she had actually fainted outside their cottage and had to be
> helped up off the road. His mother brought her water, which she didn't
> drink because the glass was dirty. She didn't say the glass was dirty, but

---

[11] "Our Lady of Limerick" is one of hundreds of titles for the Blessed Virgin Mary.

> he knew it and saw the disgust on her face as she handed the glass back.
>
> Next day she sent up a can of red currants and black currants for them to
>
> make a pie, to thank them for their assistance. . . a few berries that were
>
> hardly enough to make one pie. (54-55)

Elements of this passage, such as the farmers caring for the mistress of the Big House in her time of need and the material gift of thanks from the mistress in return, appear to follow nostalgic Big House novel conventions. However, the tone suggests dissatisfaction and distance between the characters. The negative tone of the passage, coupled with the fact that this unintended encounter is the only time Paud and Josie had actually met, counter the nostalgic depiction of a close and loving relationship between the owners of the Big House and those living in its purview. Paud's adoration of Josie and Josie's apparent disgust, both related to their social positions, keep them from forming a relationship. As with the servant girl, the novel acknowledges the tradition of nostalgia for communal bonds between the classes of Big House society through this relationship but, in doing so, shows the unlikeliness of real connection within this structure.

Paud's dreamy worship of Josie contrasts drastically with his mother's attitude toward her, again calling attention to the absence of community in and around the Big House. Unhappy about her son's new job "at the big house," Paud's mother warns him about Josie:

> She knew that woman well, knew about her moods from Brid. That
>
> woman couldn't keep a girl or boy in her employment, her bitterness and
>
> her moods got the better of her. She cited Brid, who was locked in a

bedroom for two days and given only dry bread and water, locked in for a theft that she had not done. It was the missus herself who had stolen the scarf, an assistant had seen her doing it, but justice was one thing for the people in the big house and another for the cottiers and the cottiers' friends. She cited the glass of water, his mother did, a gesture that the woman had refused, then a few berries that were hardly enough to make one pie. (55)

Even though Paud's mother claims to know Josie, most of her knowledge comes second hand through Josie's maid. Her one direct encounter confirms her sense that Josie considers herself separate from and better than those outside the Big House. Hurt by Josie's rejection of her gesture of kindness, Paud's mother lists the injustices the mistress of the house has perpetrated on others in the community. So while Paud's affection for Josie temporarily creates a moment of nostalgia for connection associated with the Big House, his mother's bitter resentfulness immediately overwhelms and distinguishes it, once more unsettling the notion of the Big House as a place where the classes come together in community.

The incorporation of the supernatural (a long-standing convention of the Big House novel genre since Maturin and Le Fanu) through Josie's encounter with a gypsy girl, reinforces the notion that the house symbolizes a specific social structure that creates distance between people, while concurrently challenging the strength of that structure. The novel highlights class hierarchy when the "gypsy girl" identifies Josie as "the new woman of the house" when Josie returns home from a neighbor's house the day after her wedding. The description of one as a "girl" and the other as a "woman" differentiates the

two, as does their relationship to the Big House. Josie's authority comes from her occupation of the house, while as a gypsy the girl's homelessness leaves her powerless in the social structure of the Big House. Throughout the encounter between Josie and the gypsy, references to the house underscore their social positions. The gypsy follows Josie back to the house for a coin, behaving deferentially by walking behind her, and stands on the doorstep, "craining so as to see the fixtures and furnitures inside the hall" (44). The girl, however, is not as powerless as she might first appear. She unnerves Josie when she asks about a pane of glass missing from the conservatory window, because "it was a side window of the conservatory which, as her husband said, got smashed, year after year, not by any human hand, but by a hand unseen. He had to admit that it was a bit uncanny, and that the glazier thought the same, said how was it that no type of glass would stay still in that pane" (44). The girl unsettles Josie by calling attention to a flaw in the house that Josie and James are unable to understand or control. Similarly, her warning to Josie not to wear purple because it is "unlucky" and her muttering of the cryptic, foreboding message that "A man will come in and a child will go out . . . not in that order," echo the kind of eerie, unnatural happenings suggestive of aristocratic psychic uncertainty common to Big House novels since the nineteenth century. Only the second day of her marriage, Josie finds herself fearful and uncomfortable in her new surroundings. The ability of the gypsy girl to shake Josie points to the capacity of the oppressed to subvert and disrupt power structures and also exposes the insecurity felt by those at the top of the compromised and unstable hierarchical social order.

The distance and violence between Josie and her husband, James, further underscore the difficulties of sustaining relationships in the patriarchal hierarchy of Big

House culture. As noted earlier, the degenerate landowner and master has been a stock figure in Big House novels since Maria Edgeworth's Castle Rackrent. Typically, the genre laments the loss of community associated with Big House culture, pointing to the landlord's failure to live up to ideological expectations that he be wise, just, and caring as the source of the conflict between the landlord and his tenants. The novel's descriptions of James mirror the negative character traits attributed to the archetypal corrupted Irish landlord. Josie quickly becomes disillusioned as James's drinking, "garrulous" in the beginning, grows "sullen" and "spiteful" (46-47). Unsophisticated and cruel, James peppers the off-color stories he tells with foul language and humiliates Josie on the rare occasions when they entertain his brother and neighbors in the sitting room. Moreover, the pleasure he takes in brutally dominating Josie sexually highlights his impotence in other areas of his life. An unsuccessful horse breeder and aimless alcoholic, James typifies the common Big House novel characterization of the Anglo-Irish landlord as degenerate.

However, regardless of James's conforming to the stereotype of the Anglo-Irish estate owner, the portrait clearly does not result in the kind of nostalgia for a past era when the landlord was an educated, just, kind, and aristocratic patriarch, which Seamus Deane and others argue the genre perpetuates. As Josie learns from a neighbor recounting the history of the house, the house has never been owned by a fair and benevolent landlord (41-42). Moreover, his description of the house's origin locates it within Anglo-Irish society:

> . . . the Big house . . . the engineer who had built it with workmen in the
> winter when they weren't farming, built it from a design he saw in a book;

a later occupant responsible for the shrubs and flowers, had them sent in a

sack from botanical gardens all over the world . . . the house she had

married into, up the stairs, into the state rooms, . . . rooms where others

had slept, husbands and wives, English people and half-English people.

(41)

Following up this passage, which reinforces the relationship between the house and the

British colonial project, with sagas of the conflicts and misfortunes of the men and their

families who have owned the house since its construction disrupts any impulse toward

nostalgia for a time when different kind of landlords existed. The absence in the house's

history of an example of a caring, altruistic Anglo-Irish patriarch or of the kind of

community and fellow-feeling between the classes associated with Big House culture in

the literary genre underscores the impossibility of the ideal within the colonial power

structure.

Josie destabilizes the structure of the ideology of the Big House further as she

wrestles control of the house and money from James, usurping his position at the top of

the power hierarchy. James's alcoholism and degeneracy render him increasingly

incapacitated, leaving a void at the peak of the power structure. Lonely and frustrated by

James's neglect and abuse, Josie tests his grip on power shortly after their marriage by

insisting that he ask his brother, Mick, to move out of the house. James complies but can

only act on her order after physically removing himself from the house, calling Mick out

to the hayshed to break the news to him. James's inability to cede control to Josie within

the house emphasizes the strength of the ideological structure that positions the master

over the mistress at the top of the power hierarchy. Even outside the house, James has

trouble finding the words to follow through on her orders and, after offering Mick

countless cigarettes and randomly commenting about chores in the fields, Mick makes it

easier on him by announcing that "he was going anyhow" (46). Emasculated by Josie's

assumption of his role as head of the house by dictating who lives there, James "hated her

for making him do it" and could not even make eye contact with his brother because "he

was too ashamed" (46). Josie continues to take over tasks traditionally assigned to male

heads of estates (such as selling livestock and paying bills), creating more distance

between them as James sinks into alcoholism and she finally forces a broken and

resentful James to sign over the deed of the house to her: "she had won out everything,

no thoroughbreds anymore, no ponies, the dull slog of muck and mulch and the deeds of

the house in her name, the humiliation of being given a few shillings each Saturday like a

serving boy" (57). Just before his death, a child-like James moves into the room he had

once hoped would be the nursery where he sits in a rocking chair and is looked after by

his wife. While no longer violent, James and Josie's relationship is far from close.

Josie's position as head of the household and James's relegation to the status of servant

and child disrupt the assignment of roles according to gender in patriarchal Big House

culture, further chipping away at the ideology of the Big House but still not fostering

connection.

Josie's unwillingness to have a child also challenges the gender hierarchy built

into the Big House. Traditionally, in order to preserve upper-class men's position at the

top of the social structure, male landlords passed the ownership of their Anglo-Irish

estates down to their eldest sons according to a system of primogeniture. Husbands

counted on their wives to have children in order to perpetuate the gender and class

hierarchy they dominated. The novel emphasizes the importance of this custom when a neighbor tells Josie, distraught at being abandoned the morning after her wedding, that "a couple of children would make James happy, tie him down. . . 'A couple of children, that'll lift the curse'" (42). He attributes the unhappiness and tragedy long associated with the house to the owners' inability to effectively pass the property from one generation to the next, maintaining a foundation of stability. He says, "sorrowfully," that "the house had not known the cheerfulness of children" (42). According to Kreilkamp, throughout the literary tradition of the Big House novel, "accounts of the decaying family line, of genealogical breakdown and collapse, accompanies the depiction of the decline of the house," as evidenced by novels such as The Big House of Inver (1925) and Birchwood (1973). The novels often feature families incapable of producing heirs, particularly legitimate ones (Kreilkamp 23). In O'Brien's novel, James's inability to produce an heir is not vaguely hinted at as some form of cosmic retribution for past injustices on the part of owners of the Big House but, rather, is presented as Josie's conscious decision. When she conceives a child, she actively participates in tearing down the social structure in which she finds herself isolated by aborting the baby.

Josie's abortion represents an extreme instance of rejecting connection, and the episode highlights how refusing to live by the standards of Big House culture isolates her as much as trying to uphold them. Early in her marriage, she looks at the decrepit cradle James hauls up from the cellar into one of the vacant spare rooms and cannot imagine a baby in it: "I was not ready for a child. The crib that he brought up from the cellar was the most forelorn-looking thing. It had belonged to his people. It felt alien. I couldn't see myself rocking it" (210). Sexually abused by the alcoholic James who desperately

wants her to conceive, Josie feels that the baby she becomes pregnant with is "more like a

banshee than a child" and is "in league with her [dead] mother against her" (49). Rather

than conforming to social expectations for the mistress of the house by welcoming the

child and motherhood, and therefore strengthening the bonds of family in the house and

community, she prays for a miscarriage: "In the mornings she searched the lavatory bowl

for a sign and once roared with delight, but it was a trick of the eye. What she thought

was blood was a brown stain on the worn porcelain" (49). Josie turns to a local doctor,

who is horrified by her request for "something, some medicine" to "flush it out" (50).

The doctor, friendly and flirtatious when he thinks she is inquiring about how to get

pregnant, curtly dismisses her when he realizes she wants to terminate her pregnancy. He

accuses her of wanting him to participate in "breaking the laws of nature" (49). Josie's

refusal of motherhood leaves her feeling utterly alone: "There was no one she could tell.

There was no one she could talk to" (50). Her failure to comply with the norms

associated with her social position contributes to the distance and conflict between herself

and her husband in the house as well as the community (the doctor, the neighbors) around

the house.

Josie turns outside the Big House social structure to find a woman willing to

perform an abortion: "The woman I went to lived twenty miles away. She didn't ask my

name. She didn't ask me outright what I wanted, she already knew. Onnie they called

her. She had no second name. The chimney smoked . . . that was how I would recognize

the house, a gate lodge, smothered with yew trees and a chimney that smoked" (211).

The distance she travels, the unusual signs she must read to find her way, and the ignoble

nature of the lodge emphasize the fact that, in seeking an abortion, Josie breaks the code

of conduct for the mistress of the Big House. However, stepping out of the house and crossing over class and gender boundaries does not result in any relief of her sense of isolation. In fact, she creates no connection with the woman who performs the abortion, never learning her name or exchanging any information, even about the procedure. Josie tells no one about the abortion (although Brid suspects, they never discuss it) until just before her death, when she writes a note detailing the experience, placing it in an envelope marked, "TO BE OPENED AFTER MY DEATH" (210). Her willingness to share the story only after her death has made sustained connection impossible and punctuates the isolation she experiences throughout her life within the structure of the Big House.

As the earlier review of the tradition of the genre noted, representations of the Big House as a place of isolation are fairly common. However, a sense of mourning and nostalgia for a lost sense of community typically accompany depictions of the Big House as a divisive and isolating space. As the exploration of the relationships between Josie and those living in and around the house reveals, House of Splendid Isolation's bleak and relentlessly oppressive Big House demonstrates that it is not, nor has it ever been, a site of community. Josie's expectations of what her life will be like within the house serves to acknowledge the ideology of community associated with Big House culture. However, the absence of any evidence of sustained caring and connection in the history of the house or between the contemporary characters make the allusions to the ideology sad and pathetic rather than nostalgic. O'Brien continues to explore the lingering effects of the hierarchical power structure of the Big House on community and isolation in late twentieth-century Ireland as the novel moves forward to the time of the Troubles in the

1970's. When IRA rebel McGreevy breaks into the now elderly Josie's house, the novel

shifts to wrestle with the question of whether or not the Big House can be transformed

into a place of community by postcolonial nationalism.

Isolation, Community, and Nationalism in the Big House

The appearance of McGreevy brings the nationalism intensified by Ireland's

colonial experience into the novel's exploration of the divisive impact of colonial social

structures. The IRA assignment prompting McGreevy's intrusion into Josie's house

highlights the connection between British colonialism and contemporary conflict in

Ireland: McGreevy intends to blow up the English Judge Sir Roland's houseboat, which

is docked in a boathouse on the lake near Josie's house. Looking at the house and the

landscape surrounding it, he thinks, "No wonder the Englishman loves it. Has been

coming for thirty years, but missed out for the last few years on account of nasty

incidents. Homesick for the place although it is not his home" (94). Setting the

nationalist struggle within the Big House links them clearly by situating nationalism

within, although in conflict with, the colonial framework. Through the relationship

between McGreevy and Josie, House of Splendid Isolation explores the isolation

experienced by individuals caught in the intersections of the structures of colonial and

nationalist ideologies.

Obviously, the relationship between colonialism and nationalism is complex.[12]

Nineteenth-century imperial expansion depended on strong national identities, founded

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[12] For a succinct historical survey of the relationship between colonialism and nationalism see Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin's Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies (1998) and Ania Loomba's Colonialism/Postcolonialism (1998). For further analysis see Bhabba's Nation and Narration (1990), Chatterjee's The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories (1993), and Murray's Not on Any Map: Essays on Post-Coloniality and Cultural Nationalism (1997).

on unifying markers such as skin color and language, to define and maintain distinctions between colonizer and colonized (Ashcroft 153). Ironically, turn of the century and early twentieth-century anti-colonial resistance movements used nationalism to rally indigenous people together in opposition to colonial regimes. They harkened back to pre-colonial times and fought for independence based on a resurrected common cultural tradition and national identity (Ashcroft 153-4). Both colonial and anti-colonial uses of nationalism required bringing certain individuals into community while excluding others. Benedict Anderson, in Imagined Communities (1991), argues that large modern states develop a national identity through cultural instruments, such as newspapers and novels, through which a connection based on shared nationalist sentiments, ideals, and concerns between individuals can be disseminated, creating an "imagined" community (30). He uses the term, "imagined," because most of the members of the community will never actually interact. The "deep, horizontal comradeship" established by nationalism (regardless of actual social inequities) is a "limited" community with boundaries defining other nations (7). In the specific case of Ireland, the cultural identity upon which Irish nationalism and the Republic of Ireland was founded defined itself as 'not British' and 'not Protestant', preventing the people living on the island from uniting into one community. The Ulster Protestants, uninterested in breaking ties to Great Britain to become a distinct nation-state, bonded as a community based on its opposition to the independent Irish nation. The Irish nationalists living in the northern province, "who found themselves on the wrong side of partition, experienced feelings of dispossession and resentment at being cast adrift structurally from the rest of the Irish nation" (29). The separate and different ideologies on which these distinct "imagined communities" were

founded led not only to isolation between groups of people on the island but also to violent conflict.

O'Brien's novel challenges the notion that nationalism establishes strong and sustainable connections between individuals, even within these "imagined communities." Psychologists and theorists such as Geraldine Moane in Gender and Colonialism: A Psychological Analysis of Oppression and Liberation celebrate the power of community, arguing that, when oppressed individuals develop connections, they lose their sense of isolation and feel stronger through becoming part of a collective, making the transformation of oppressive social structures possible (139). In House of Splendid Isolation, however, the community established through nationalism does not alleviate the isolation experienced by the individuals involved. The novel disputes the idea that nationalism strengthens community through its depiction of the IRA as a social structure in which individuals become isolated. Naturally, McGreevy's position within the rebel organization puts him in conflict with those who oppose the movement and places him outside "legitimate" social institutions such as the Big House. However, rather than building relationships between himself and his IRA "brothers" fighting against the established social structure, his involvement in the nationalist movement leads to overwhelming isolation.

Throughout the novel, instead of creating community, nationalism raises barriers between the IRA members and their families and supporters. McGreevy and the other rebels distance themselves from their families to keep them from being affected by the violence associated with their fight for a united Ireland. They rarely contact the people they care about and never share information about what they are doing or where they are.

Although McGreevy has a mother whom he claims to love, his outlaw status prevents him from seeing her. He has lost several family members in the on-going fight, including his wife. He does not even allow himself to connect with his wife through his memories of her: "He thinks of Shiona. So soft a sound. Like silk or a breeze. He grants himself one, two, three fleeting reflections of her, and then he holds his head in both hands and pummels it and bangs it on the iron rungs to blank out the longing" (68). Although the young rebel supporter, Creena, has a crush on him and daydreams that, one day, "The South will go up there and reclaim the six counties and life will be normal and he'll come to me," she cares for him because he is a "volunteer" (127). Her affection for him is superficial, stemming from his connection to the cause rather than any specific personal knowledge or experience (127). Constantly on the run, McGreevy easily avoids familial and romantic entanglements.

The rebels also eschew close relationships with one another. McGreevy shuns all connections, even within the IRA. The men, brought together by their commitment to a united Ireland, ironically must keep their distance from each other to protect themselves and continue fighting. Although the abandoned barns, huts, and dugouts the rebels inhabit appear drastically different from the Big Houses, their residents are just as disconnected. In structures completely devoid of walls and floors that divide space into areas allocated according to class and gender hierarchies, each man diligently remains detached from the others. Knowing that trusting the wrong person yields deadly consequences, they hesitate to identify themselves and, when they do, they use false names. When a fellow rebel limps out of the hut in which they meet, McGreevy thinks to himself, "Impossible to say whether the limp is real or a stunt" (175). On the first

morning after he breaks into Josie's house, she points out the irony of the isolation

McGreevy experiences within the brotherhood of the IRA. Frustrated by his insistence

that he has "friends up and down this country," Josie finally asks, "if he has friends up

and down the country, why not decamp on some of them, why on her, where he is not

welcome . . . he puts the bread down and pushes the plate into the centre of the table"

(83). He abruptly leaves the room, cutting off the conversation. When confronted with

the reality that instead of fostering community the IRA perpetuates his isolation,

McGreevy ends his brief exchange with Josie, symbolized by his pushing away the bread,

a rejection of "communion."

Ironically, it is McGreevy's need to distance himself from anyone he knows, as

well as Josie's isolation within the Big House, which makes McGreevy's hiding in it, and

their coming together, possible. When Josie hears a muffled noise downstairs as he

enters, she reassures herself by thinking about her place in the house. She tells herself

that "she is three, no three and a half floors up," "the doors are locked and bolted," and

"she is in her own house, barricaded in" (65). She seeks comfort in aspects of the house

that, according to Big House ideology, should keep her separated from others and safe

from harm, such as the size of the house, her elevated position, the locks, and her

ownership itself. However, her feelings of fear and vulnerability related to her isolation

within that same structure overwhelm the solace that comes from such reminders. She

promises herself that, "when this night is over she will bestir herself, she will set about

finding a youngster to live in" (65). When McGreevy enters Josie's bedroom, gun

drawn, he peppers her with questions: "Who are you? Who else lives here? Have you

daily callers? Do you draw a pension? Have you animals – pets? Does the postman

come indoors? When was the last census? When were you last seen up in the village?"

(66) Almost all of these questions are designed to determine Josie's relationships with

people in and around the house. McGreevy's assumptions that there would be other

residents (family, staff, or both), there would be "callers", and she would have links to

the people in the village highlight the pervasiveness of the ideology of Big House culture.

Rather than forming those idealized social connections, however, Josie's life in the Big

House isolates her, leaving her vulnerable to McGreevy's intrusion.

Initially the two distance themselves from each other by abiding by traditional

dictates concerning the designation of space in the Big House according to class and

gender. Property-less and an outlaw, McGreevy sleeps on a pallet bed in a downstairs

room near the kitchen. Josie, upper class mistress of the house, stays upstairs, rocking in

her chair and rehearsing the narrative scripts associated with IRA home invasions: "He

will kill her, put her body in a sack and dump it in the lake; he will not kill, one of his

comrades will come and do it. He will maim her. He will demand ransom money . . .

Guards will come and raid the house, will get wind of it, and he will be shot trying to

escape. He will hook off in a day or two, leaving no traces behind, a taut apparition. It is

difficult to believe that she is in her own room or what was her own room an hour before"

(68). Feeling threatened, she takes steps to reinforce her ownership of the house: "She

walks through her several rooms in order to confirm them as hers. A warped and pitiless

neglect has invaded every corner, so that there are flaking walls, missing stair rods, stacks

of damp and mildewed newspapers, and over a light switch, like some rustic fetish, a

tranche of toadstools ripening in the sun" (77). The house's decay reflects the

compromised social structure Josie turns to for comfort. Still, as she wanders through the

house, Josie is confident about which room McGreevy settled in: "She knows which room he has chosen, her antennae tell her. The room on the ground floor where Paud slept. A single bed, adhesive paper glued to the lower half of the window" (77).

McGreevy's presence prompts her wandering through the house, searching it for reassurance but not finding any. As the gothic elements of the following passage suggest, past inequities and former injustices associated with the Big House have come back to haunt its owner:

> The last flight of stairs creaks. It always did. It was where James heard the chains, the chains of the dead, and predicted that they were coming for him. Well, they are back now with a vengeance, the chains of history, the restless dead and the restless living, with scores to settle. On the last step she pauses, undecided as to whether to go into the dining room or the drawing room, as if it mattered. Both doors are open, as are the folding baize-covered doors that lead to the morning room. She goes there. Her house seems so precious to her, even in its decay. Her house should not have to suffer this. (78)

Josie directly connects McGreevy's intrusion into the house with the history of the house, a clash between the "restless dead" and the "restless living." The deteriorated rooms, the open doors, and the sudden insignificance of the designation of space point to the compromised structure of the ideology of the Big House. Josie's sorrow in acknowledging this, however, is not nostalgic. The decline seems inevitable. Although she moves through the house looking for signs of stability and security, she does not

reminisce about times when it was anything other than what it is now, a site of historical conflict.

Josie and McGreevy begin to connect with each other in the Big House, but only by crossing over the boundaries of division and conventions built into it. Josie does find him in the downstairs servant's room as she anticipates, but his appropriation of her things unsettles her and disrupts her position of ownership. She sees him cleaning his gun with her sewing machine oil and wax and thinks, "Hers. Her dish, her wax, her primus, her house, and yet not hers" (81). When Josie reminds him that he was "not invited" and that the house is not big enough for the two of them, he mocks her control over his presence in the house by saying, "O! Bhean an Tighe" (O! Woman of the House), and makes no move toward obeying her and leaving (81). McGreevy also steps outside his gender role. Indeed, his domesticity startles Josie and frequently leads to frank exchanges between the two of them. She writes in her diary, "Earlier he did some scrubbing. The sound of the scrubbing brought me down. He was on his knees, half the tiled floor with sudsy water and the other half grimed. . . He scrubbed and scrubbed. 'If my husband were here would you have broken in?' I asked. 'Probably,' he said" (84). Moments of connection such as this occur only after transgressions of boundaries associated with Big House culture. For instance, their open dialogue about the fight for a united Ireland begins when Josie goes into the kitchen: "She did not expect to find him there, find him standing by the table eating a piece of bread with something on it, maybe a pickle. She cannot tell in the dark. Their eyes meet each other like two startled animals. . ." (82). Neither of them belongs in that space, Josie, because of her class position as mistress of the house, and McGreevy, because of his gender. Their mutual

displacement breaks down the social barriers that would typically keep them from communicating.

The changes in the way McGreevy and Josie inhabit the house reflect the growing connection between them. After the first few days of Josie barricading herself in her third floor bedroom and McGreevy confining himself to a small room next to the kitchen, they encounter each other and have several contentious exchanges in the hallway or on the stairs, relatively public spaces where encounters between people of different classes and genders typically occur in Big Houses. As they become less fearful of each other and more interested in communicating, the site of their conversations moves to the kitchen. Their relationship grows through these discussions and they begin to spend time in other rooms of the house, rooms more traditionally associated with social interaction between men and women of the same class:

> We meet in the morning room to get a bit of sun. My idea. A million ghosts sit there, including the dapping people who came, the husbands and wives and my own husband, who was cut out to be a gentleman. He says he is glad we talk. He says he loves truth, he loves justice, he loves children. . . He washes before he sees me. . . What I would like is for him to be him and at the same time not him. I like everything about him except what he does. . . He opened a large bottle of orangeade, a treat for both of us. . . He wants my admiration, he wants my trust. He wants my camaraderie. He says he even wants my happiness. (105-6)

McGreevy's increasing adherence to social standards, particularly his cleanliness, impresses Josie and makes it harder for her to disregard him as an unfeeling animal to be

kept at arms length. The cleanliness and manners he demonstrates lead her to encourage

him to spend less time in the cloak room and kitchen and more time in the morning room,

living room, and ultimately her husband's former bedroom.

Josie's growing connection with McGreevy results in her unwillingness to turn

him over to local authorities. As mistress of the Big House, she is expected by the

community to maintain Big House culture by actively opposing the IRA, which would

preclude her providing sanctuary for McGreevy. When her neighbor, Marty (whom she

"never liked. A snooper, always snooping, always in the spot where he should not be"),

appears at the back door citing concern that her telephone is not working, but secretly

working for the government "*sub rosa*" to find IRA members in the area, she refuses to

reveal McGreevy's presence (115). She listens to Marty's description of McGreevy's

heinous crimes but finds herself thinking instead about her revulsion towards Marty for

witnessing her many humiliations at the hands of James and for being the one to tell her

about James's death. She tries to create distance by refusing him tea and calling him by

his formal name, Martin. Regardless of her silence and detachment, Marty sees the

evidence of McGreevy in the house and of the community that has been established

between the two of them, "two of everything, two plates, two skin plates, two cups and

saucers," confirming his suspicions aroused by Josie's "reluctance to bring him into the

kitchen" (117). His hostility toward her becomes clear as he immediately thinks to

himself that, were he not on official government business, he would "snuff her, there and

then, take her by the neck and hold her till there was not a drop of breath left. It's what

she deserves" (117). The violence he imagines echoes his descriptions of McGreevy's

acts, destabilizing the stereotypical binaries associated with Irish nationalism

characterizing the general community as peaceful and good and the IRA rebels as violent and evil. The animosity between Marty and Josie highlights the lack of camaraderie between the neighbors and again challenges the notion of the Big House as a place of community, even among those both colonial and nationalist ideologies would position on the same side of the conflict.

Regardless of her desire to protect McGreevy and the community that develops between them, their connection breaks under the pressure of both the Big House and nationalist ideologies. Josie's encouraging McGreevy to come out of the shoe closet where he is hiding and into the formal living room on their last night together marks another crossing over of ideological boundaries, which again fosters a temporary sense of community but also ultimately leads to the tragic ending. That evening they speak frankly with each other. He confesses to her, "Don't think I wouldn't like things like this. Warmth and food and company. I like it here now . . . Many's the night I've gone past a house and looked in and wished . . . But the British Army is in our streets and it's wrong" (206). Josie tries to convince him that "The Ireland you're chasing is a dream . . . doesn't exist anymore" (208). Both of their statements connect their isolation to Ireland's colonial and nationalist history and, in spite of their desire to connect, the gap between their ideological positions remains. Unfortunately, the tenuous bond between them created through their disregard for the conventions of both the Big House culture and the nationalist movement cannot be sustained and results in disaster when the police, tipped off by the disgruntled neighbor, Marty, discovers the two in the living room together.

The police officers, representing institutional social authority, cannot see beyond the constructed stereotypes of both Josie as lady of the Big House and McGreevy as IRA

rebel. Initially they discount the possibility that Josie could be a sympathizer because of her ownership of the Big House, thinking, "If she's a Republican I'm a Mormon" (172). However, after Marty raises suspicions and they find out she has been to see the rebel Creena, they set up a surveillance of Josie's house. As they spy on Josie and McGreevy through the living room window, they view the relationship through the lens of colonial and nationalist ideology. The difficulty they have in seeing inside the room from outside and through their binoculars emphasizes the distance created by the situation: "what he sees is a room somewhat blurry, like the snow inside a paperweight" (198). As they watch Josie and McGreevy in the living room together, they interpret what they see according to narrative scripts: "She's not tied up because she's a willing accomplice. . . These guys are without conscience, without ideals, and with only one proclamation, money and guns and murder, guns and money . . . Think of the deaths, the mutilations, the broken families, the gutted homes" (202). Josie and McGreevy hear two wasps buzzing. He, thinking the sound is coming from bullets, throws her on the floor, trying to protect her from being shot. When they realize their mistake, they laugh and swat at the wasps. The guards outside construe this as molestation: "He's touching her . . . they're on the ground, the woman and the boyo. A man about to do a grim and grisly deed having a bit of last-minute fun with the old woman . . . It's repulsive . . . It's an orgy . . . and together they watch the two bodies rise, then caper around the room, meeting and parrying like lovers" (207).

Details in the descriptions of the police reaction to the report that McGreevy is living in Josie's house reinforce the connection between the Big House and colonial power structures as well as the local government officials' commitment to maintain the

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house and the ideology it represents. At the police station, there are "maps everywhere,

maps and aerial photographs which he [officer Rory] points to. He remarks on the

windows of the house, the exits, the terrain all around, the trees, the old woodland and

then symmetric lines of young forest where the subversive would go" (216). After

consulting these maps (fundamental to any colonial project), the police officers station

themselves around the house: "Men at the front gate, men up along the road, men at the

lower gate, flanks of men ringed around the house itself, and the vanguard, whose job it

is to rush in and take him by surprise" (217). The comparison of the mission to a

"hunting party" also reinforces the ideological underpinnings of the project: "A posse of

men like a hunting party, except there are no beaters and no dogs" (219). This situates

the fight over the house within the British and Anglo-Irish tradition. As the police

assume their positions around the house, they admire it: "Coming on the house so blue

and beautiful but lonely from disuse, he [Officer Ross] gasps. A hush to it – the blotched

and weathered walls, the birds' nests dangling from the eaves, and the creeper so

assiduous that the tiny dark threads clinging to the mortar resemble scrollwork, tracing its

battered history, which the morning will substantiate. 'Tis a pity to hurt her,' he says

staring at it. 'Tis what these psychopaths want, to kill everything of beauty we have'"

(218-219). The emphasis here on protecting the house instead of Josie reinforces their

priority to maintain the social structure symbolized by the house rather than specific

concern for Josie as an individual.

The destruction of the house and of Josie and McGreevy's connection occurs

simultaneously. Upon hearing the police entering the house, Josie's impulse is toward

community, to preserve her relationship with McGreevy and to find a way to bring him

and the police together. She thinks, "They must not kill him. She must remonstrate with them, mediate between him and them, which is perhaps why he came to her rather than another. On the top landing, the pall of gun smoke and the rapid gleeful charge of gunfire down below do not frighten her at all; she feels impervious to it, determined to find him" (220). Situated at the top of the stairs, Josie's feeling of empowerment to bring about community comes from her position in the hierarchical social structure, as reflected by her physical position. However, she does become frightened when she sees the damage done to the house as she searches for McGreevy: ". . . she finds instead in her husband's bedroom the gutted paneling and the gruesome gluey front where a wardrobe mirror had been" (220). While she runs through the house, the police mistake Josie for a gunman and shoot her: "Halfway she is stopped in weird and pantomimed suspension as the floor gives way and she falls, thinking and knowing that she has fallen and is injured. A shower of bullets like a swarm of crazed insects whiz back and forth around her. . . while her mouth, opening to say, but then non-say, is struck speechless . . . Her legs and her lower half drop through the ceiling, where she dangles like some grotesque trapeze artist" (221). Her position between the floors of her house as she dies suggests the instability of the hierarchical ideology of the Big House. Literally stuck in the structure of the house, Josie's death completely isolates her and ends any chance of community. Following her death, communication becomes impossible as the staircase collapses: "Voices, scuttling, pandemonium all drowned in the almighty crash as a balustrade comes tumbling down" (222).

At the end of the novel, all connection between the characters is destroyed. Once they get McGreevy down from the tree in which he is hiding and have him

handcuffed, "He seems to be watching, but without communion with them, or with the earth, and none with the stretcher onto which he is being lifted" (223). When confronted by a policeman, "The figure does not stir or respond, seems to be slipping away into invisibility" (227). The guard's reaction highlights the shallowness of Josie's relationship to the community: "'I knew her well,' Guard Gallagher says, and kneels by her as a relative might to catch her dying declaration. But there is none. No one will ever know her last thought or her last word; all they see is a woman with a face pale as the albumen inside an eggshell, the berry of blood, a stilled twitch around the mouth, suggesting an unfinished utterance" (224). The policeman mourns the loss of the house and its owner, blaming the nationalists: "His anger is up now, the beauty and lineaments of the house utterly destroyed, a woman dead, and another notch in the so-called struggle" (227). The novel leaves little possibility of community developing between these groups so completely isolated from each other within their ideological frameworks. In fact, the final words of the novel belong to the ghost of Josie's aborted daughter. Her disembodied description of the ruins of the house emphasizes the lifelessness of the structural remains. That the house is "in probate" suggests that what will happen to the remains of the house is yet to be determined. The house drifts, owned by no one, destroyed and uninhabitable.

Imagining Community in the Ruins

The novel provides no cozy and comfortable ending like the one conceived by Declan Kiberd at the end of <u>Inventing Ireland</u>, where he imagines Ireland as a seamless "quilt of many patches and colours, all beautiful, all distinct, yet all connected too. No

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one element should subordinate or assimilate the others: Irish or English, rural or urban, Gaelic or Anglo, each has its part in the pattern" (653). Different factions of the community (the Anglo-Irish Big House owner, the Irish Catholic rebel, and the police) do come together briefly at the end of the novel, but the result is a lifeless, mangled mess. Seamus Deane describes the Big House novel genre as "retrograde" and argues that contemporary novels in the genre are "divorced from the socio-cultural background to which it refers, [are] not only an anachronism but an instrument in the perpetuation of this myth, a cog in the wheel of a nostalgia machine which seeks to romanticize Irish history and, more particularly, the role played by the Ascendancy in Irish history" (Rauchbauer 216). However, rather than romanticizing Ireland's past, the unflinching portrait of the decrepit house, Josie and McGreevy's isolation, and the graphic depiction of Josie's murder by the police emphasize the material reality of Ireland's history. In fact, the opening lines of the novel set the story that follows within an historical context: "History is everywhere. It seeps into the soil, the subsoil. Like rain, or hail, or snow, or blood. A house remembers. An outhouse remembers. A people ruminate" (3). While O'Brien's novel acknowledges the nostalgic impulse in the genre, it does so in a way that foregrounds Irish colonial and nationalist history and in so doing resists idealizing both the Big House and nationalist ideologies as foundations for community. The acknowledgment of and resistance to nostalgia debunks the myth of community attached to Big House culture and the nationalist movement without attempting to erase or ignore the strength of the myth.

The horrific ending might be read as an imagining of the pain and horror of not moving far enough away from colonial structures, of not moving beyond postcolonial

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nationalism, and as a call for the need to completely break with both the Big House social

hierarchy and the nationalist ideology that followed it. Kiberd describes the perpetuation

of oppressive institutions in the wake of colonialism:

> The inappropriate forms left by the occupier lead the nationalism to
>
> violate the rights of minority groupings. . . All the old apparatus was
>
> maintained: the ever-burgeoning capital city with its dominance over the
>
> rest of the country . . . the planting of the tricolour on a state apparatus
>
> explicitly designed to disempower local communities; the emulation of the
>
> social hierarchies of imperial Britain . . . The people were so exhausted by
>
> the expenditure of energy in dislodging the occupier that they seemed to
>
> have little left with which to reimagine their condition . . . hard though it
>
> was to grapple with the social order left by the departed British, it was
>
> harder still to posit a social order that did not exist. (296)

House of Splendid Isolation explores the relationship Kiberd refers to between Ireland's

colonial and postcolonial nationalist eras and the divisions both ideologies construct

between individuals. The brutality of O'Brien's novel corresponds with Francis

Mulhern's argument that, "recrudescent and unnerving, traumatic history cannot be

comfortably accommodated: it lodges disruptively in the present" (Brewster 44). The

void left by the ruined house and destroyed relationships at the novel's end is not capable

of being filled by either ideology, as both have been exposed as restricting and ultimately

divisive.

The House of Splendid Isolation stands as a literary reminder of the complexity of

Ireland's postcolonial situation. The novel raises many unanswered questions about the

postcolonial condition specific to Ireland, which also resonate across the postcolonial

experience: Can people bond through a common sense of isolation? Can community

develop through a shared experience of isolation, fear and violence? In a bleak and

bloody landscape, can a space be imagined or created where some kind of new form

suitable for community can be born? What kind of society can come out of the collapse

and ruin of a divisive colonial and nationalist past? Is community unsustainable within

the colonial or the nationalist structures because both are ultimately founded on and

related to the capitalist economic system? House of Splendid Isolation leaves the reader

with questions similar to those Declan Kiberd raises in Inventing Ireland; like O'Brien,

Kiberd connects contemporary issues of Irish community to the island's past: "The

colonialist crime was the violation of the traditional community: the nationalist crime

was often a denial of the autonomy of the individual. Liberation would only come with

forms which stressed the interdependence of community and individual, rather than

canvassing the claims of one at the expense of the other. The question which faces the

decolonizing world, the question to which it might become the answer was: how to build

a future on the past without returning to it?" (292).

Regardless of the overwhelming hopelessness of the ending of the novel and its

inability to imagine an Ireland in which community can flourish, O'Brien effectively uses

the architecture of the Big House to explore the issues related to isolation and community

in contemporary Ireland and its relationship to Ireland's colonial history. Critics like

Seamus Deane, who condemn the continued use of and reference to the Big House novel

tradition as reinforcing and re-inscribing the oppressive structures of colonialism fail to

recognize the adaptability of the form. This novel demonstrates the genre's continued

relevance in spite of Kiberd's warning that "Those who persist in taking the discarded scaffolding for an actual living environment doom themselves to adolescence and eventual erasure" (302). While resolution and regeneration remain elusive, the fact that the genre grew out of the colonial experience underlying the contemporary problems make it particularly appropriate for the examination of those issues. O'Brien's use of the Big House genre gestures toward recognizing and facing the past as it impacts the present, even if the results of doing so are painful and uncertain. The architectural setting of the Big House highlights the materiality of the institutions and the personal and material effects they have on individuals *and* communities. The novel points to nations as imagined communities and emphasizes that, rather than being static and unified, they are constantly contested spaces; as Ania Loomba argues, "the 'nation' itself is a ground of dispute and debate, a site for the competing imaginings of different ideological and political interests" (207). As evidenced by House of Splendid Isolation, the Big House novel continues to provide fertile ground for the fight.

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Inside/Outside in André Brink's <u>Imaginings of Sand</u>:

Envisioning Post-Apartheid Reconciliation in the Great House

"Meeting of Two Cultures"
Sandile Goje
Linocut 1993[13]

Sandile Goje's 1993 linocut "Meeting of Two Cultures" conveys both the

optimism as well as the lingering challenges experienced by South Africans in the 1990's

as the apartheid system was dismantled and the country transformed into the "New South

Africa."[14] As critic Rayda Becker points out, Goje incorporates architectural elements

into the two figures, a "cone-on-cylinder" rondavel associated with indigenous South

African building and a symmetrical, rectangular house, a typical European South African

design, which calls attention to cultural and social differences. The color of the extended

hands at the center of the piece indicates that the two figures represent the two races,

black and white. Becker contends that even though the linocut perpetuates a focus on

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[13] This image is reproduced in Rayda Becker's "Homesteads and Headrests" in Hilton Judin and Ivan
Vladislavic's <u>Blank   : Architecture, apartheid and after</u>.
[14] This phrase was first used to describe post-apartheid South Africa in a speech by F.W. de Klerk in 1990
(Becker).

race, reinforces stereotypes (the shod white figure and the barefooted black figure reiterate the colonial dichotomy of civilized and uncivilized), and over-simplifies the dialogue, overall the message is a hopeful one that captures the "euphoric moment between the unbanning of the African National Congress (an anti-apartheid political organization) and the birth of the promised 'New South Africa.'" In similar ways, and with similarly problematic results, André Brink uses the symbol of the house in his 1996 novel, <u>Imaginings of Sand</u>, to explore the racial divide formalized under apartheid and to imagine reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa. Through close examination of the descriptions of the architecture of the house that is the novel's central setting and of the ways the white and black South African characters inhabit the house, this chapter asserts that, while Brink's novel acknowledges South Africa's complex history of colonization and its long-standing and brutal racial division, the text ultimately disrupts that binary and points to a future in which all South Africans can live together peacefully within the ruins of the divisive colonial power structure, a hopeful impulse reflective of the atmosphere of the 1990's immediately following the end of apartheid. Moreover, through the use of the traditional Western literary symbol of the Western European Great House as a means to imagine racial unity in a post-apartheid, postcolonial South Africa, the novel underscores the continuing impact of the colonial project and the necessity of acknowledging that legacy in the process of renovating former colonial societies, ultimately raising questions about the possibilities of moving beyond coloniality.[15]

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[15]Postcolonial and global world-system theorists, such as Ramón Grosfoguel, Timothy Brennan, Walter Mignolo, and Revathi Krishnaswamy, use the term "coloniality" to refer to "the continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of colonial administrations produced by colonial cultures and structures in the modern/colonial world-system" (Grosfoguel 95).

The architecture and function of the house that plays a central role in the novel are particularly useful as tools for investigating colonialism's impact on relationships between the races in South Africa because, as asserted in this dissertation's introduction, when Western Europeans set off for the colonies, they took the ideology of the Western European Great House along with them. Critics such as Victoria Rosner explain that, through their architecture, and particularly the houses they built, colonizers attempted to establish and maintain their culture and identity in the foreign location. The distinction between colonizer and colonized was crucial to the establishment of the superiority, and therefore the power, of the former over the latter. The physical structure of the house, built in accordance with Western European norms, created an essential barrier between the colonizer and the colonized. Rosner explains that, in Africa, "Space was divided (into inside and outside, safe and dangerous, wild and domestic, etc.) so that it could be conquered and assimilated; all these divisions served to maintain the overriding one between black and white, and relatedly, between English and African" (83). Because race was so fundamental to colonialism in South Africa, the architecture of South African colonizers was particularly designed to safeguard the white Western European inside from the black South African outside, to fortify the racial binary opposition of white and black. This correspondence between the colonial project's physical divide of inside and outside and the ideological divide between white and black will be central to this chapter's exploration of Brink's use of architecture in Imaginings of Sand.

My investigation of the racial divide associated with the colonial project will focus on the principal setting in Brink's Imaginings of Sand, a large house four hundred kilometers from Cape Town that was built by the protagonist Kristien Muller's ancestors

and lived in by generations of the family. The novel opens in 1994 as thirty-three year old Kristien, who has been living in London in self-imposed exile for eleven years, receives a phone call informing her that, in the run-up to the country's first free elections, the house has been fire-bombed and her grandmother, Ouma Kristina, is clinging to life and insisting she has stories she must tell her granddaughter. The close connection Kristien shares with her Ouma, as well as her childhood memories of the house and Ouma's stories, prompt Kristien to return to South Africa in order to reconnect with her past from which she has tried to distance herself: ". . . this is something I have to face myself, something I do not understand and need to understand" (15). Although she finds Ouma and the house in similarly ravaged condition, Kristien honors her grandmother's wish to be allowed to die at home and moves her out of the hospital and into the house. The narrative then alternates between the present – Kristien's caring for her grandmother in the days just before, during, and after the election – and the past – via the family history Ouma recounts through stories about nine generations of Kristien's female ancestors.[16] The significance of the house, the novel's primary setting, is underscored by the lengthy description of it in the first pages of the novel (6-11). Kristien's musings on the house at the beginning of the novel present it in binary terms. She describes it as "a place where anything or everything was possible, might happen, did happen . . . it appeared mysterious, improbable, dream or nightmare, wishful thought or guilt-ridden vision, desperate and exuberant proof of the extremes the human mind, let loose, is capable of" (9-10). These binaries establish a sense of Kristien's uncertainty about her

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[16] The novel not only establishes connections between Kristien and her family's history as well as connections between contemporary political events and the country's political history, but also disrupts notions of traditional historiography by presenting alternative women's histories typically silenced, insisting on the interrelationship of public and personal histories of South Africa. For critiques of Imaginings of Sand's challenges to traditional historiography, see Kossew (1997) and Diala (2001).

attitude toward the house and the power structure it represents. The drastic extremes in the description also set it up as a site of conflict.

After a brief review of the history of apartheid in South Africa and its influence on Afrikaner literature, my discussion of Brink's use of the symbol of the Western European Great House will consist of four sections. The first considers how Brink uses descriptions of the architecture and construction of the protagonist's ancestral home, and the novel's primary setting, to situate it within the context of South Africa's history of white Western European colonial domination. The second section focuses on the novel's emphasis on the binary of white and black, symbolically attached to references to inside and outside the family house, revealing ways apartheid worked to maintain racial separation. The third section examines Brink's use of architectural descriptions of the house and the ways it is inhabited to reveal transgressions that disrupt the notion of the structure's ability to maintain racial division and that envision the possibility of blacks and whites coming together to live within the ruins of the apartheid era social structure. Through these instances of transgression, Brink also highlights the oppressive binary of gender, widening his investigation beyond race and indicating that other destructive hierarchies of power must be renovated before individuals can live together peacefully. The final section explores architectural aspects of the ending of the novel, with its scenes of horrific tragedy and utopic optimism, raising questions about the movement toward racial reconciliation in the "New South Africa" as well as the implications of Brink's employment of the symbol of the Western European Great House to explore issues of racial unity in post-apartheid South Africa and what the enduring usefulness and power of this symbol suggests about moving beyond colonial social structures.

Apartheid and Its Influence on South African Literature

   The origins and operation of apartheid in South Africa are central to this chapter's

discussion of André Brink's <u>Imaginings of Sand</u>. According to Alonford Robinson, Jr.,

apartheid (an Afrikaans word for "apartness") legally formalized an ideology of racial

segregation that was already deeply entrenched in South African society long before it

became officially instituted when the National Party (NP) gained control of the

government in 1948. Both the Dutch settlers, who arrived at the Cape of Good Hope in

1652, and the British, who seized the Cape in 1806 (forcing the Dutch Boers, or

Afrikaners, toward the interior where they founded two republics, a movement known as

The Great Trek), established and maintained control over the indigenous population

through policies of strict distinctions and division between themselves and the native

"Others," such as pass laws that restricted black Africans' freedom to move and

employment constraints based on race.[17] The term "apartheid" first appeared in the

political campaigns of the Afrikaner nationalist National Party (NP) in the 1930's and

1940's. During and just after World War II, the cities experienced an influx of black

Africans, which, along with independence movements in colonized countries all over the

continent, spurred feelings of being outnumbered and threatened for the minority white

population, resulting in Daniel Malan's NP victory in 1948. In 1950 the government

passed the Population Registration Act, which divided South Africans into one of three

racial classifications: white, Bantu (black African), and Colored (individuals of mixed

race). These categories were later amended to include a fourth: Asian. This legislation

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[17] The British continued to extend their reach into the interior, particularly after the discovery of gold and diamonds in 1866-1867. The Boers rebelled against the British expansion resulting in the Anglo-Boer War from 1899-1902. The British won and the Union of South Africa was officially established in 1910. The two groups struggled for power throughout the first half of the twentieth century, until the victory of the Nationalist Party in 1948 (World Almanac and Book of Facts).

was followed by over 300 additional laws designed to completely divide the races in all aspects of society – legal, economic, educational, religious, and social. These laws not only determined where non-whites could work, learn, worship, live, or with whom they could have a sexual relationship but effectively ensured that whites owned eighty percent of the land in South Africa. Non-whites became completely disenfranchised in 1959 through the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act that assigned all non-whites to one of ten independent "homelands" (or "townships") scattered around the country (Robinson).[18] The government retained control over these homelands through the Criminal Law Amendment Act and the Public Safety Act (1953), which gave the government the authority to announce and enforce states of emergency, allowing police officers to arrest and imprison non-whites without legal recourse.

Demonstrations against apartheid were met with crushing violence. Incidents of government brutality toward black protesters, such as the Sharpeville massacre of March 21, 1960, during which sixty-nine blacks were killed by police officers during a protest against the pass laws, drew increased attention and condemnation from leaders all over the world. Later that year, amid growing international rebukes and after British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan publicly criticized South Africa's apartheid policies, staunch apartheid proponent South African Prime Minister H.F. Verwoerd put forth a referendum on whether the country should withdraw from the British Commonwealth and become an independent republic. The measure narrowly passed and South Africa became a republic on May 31, 1961. Throughout the 1960's and 1970's, protests increased as black organizations opposed to apartheid, such as the African National Congress (ANC), grew

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[18] Historians often refer to the broad, political policies that divided the races (such as the laws that created the homelands) as "grand apartheid" and refer to the policies that maintain segregation of the races in more direct and specific ways (such as the institution of separate public amenities) as "petty apartheid."

in power. In response to heightened resistance, the South African government ratcheted

up its security measures and the level of violence employed in combating uprisings. The

death of six hundred blacks at the hands of government troops during a demonstration

against apartheid in the township of Soweto in 1976 created a well-publicized

international outcry. In spite of mounting criticism, including limited economic

sanctions, the government, led by P. W. Botha, focused on security during the 1980's,

creating an almost perpetual state of emergency and alarming political violence. Shortly

after a strike in which over two million black workers participated, Botha resigned and

F.W. de Klerk took control of the government in 1989. Months later he freed ANC

leader Nelson Mandela, who had been imprisoned for over twenty-seven years, and on

February 2, 1990 announced plans to completely dismantle apartheid, establishing a

"New South Africa." By 1993, a democratic constitution had been approved and the

homelands were integrated into nine national provinces. In 1994, the first democratic

elections were held, yielding Nelson Mandela sixty-two percent of the votes and the

presidency of South Africa (World Almanac).

Apartheid was an overt formalization of the racial binary opposition central to

colonialism that has been a major focus of postcolonial critique since Edward Said's

Orientalism explicitly called attention to it in 1978. Said describes the process of

defining the colonized as "Other," a system of identification based on dichotomies:

West/East, civilized/savage, intellectual/emotional, white/black, in which the colonized is

typically figured as powerless in the hierarchies created by these divisions. Nobel Prize

winning writer J.M. Coetzee describes the construction of the racial binary in South

Africa this way: "When Europeans first arrived in southern Africa, they called

themselves *Christians* and the indigenous people *wild* or *heathens*. The dyad

Christian/heathen later mutated, taking a succession of forms, among them

civilized/primitive, *European/native*, *white/nonwhite*" (Dixon 58). As theoretical

exploration of these dichotomies developed, many postcolonial theorists (Said included)

disputed the notion of a simple and stable binary opposition in which all the power rests

on one side. Homi K. Bhabba argues that the structures of these dichotomies are flexible,

fuzzy, and penetrable and thus fail to produce stable identities and concrete systems of

power. In The Location of Culture, he contends that subversion takes place through

mimicry, slippage, and hybridization as the colonial culture is imposed on (and

appropriated by) the colonized, evidence that power does not reside solely on one side of

the divide. In "Can the Subaltern Speak?," Gayatri Spivak adds depth to the discussion

of the binary of colonizer and colonized by introducing the oppressive structures of

patriarchy and capitalism into the debate. According to Spivak's argument, multiple

binary oppositions (indicative of power hierarchies based on gender, race, and class)

operate simultaneously, forming a constricting web of power structures. Yet, despite

contemporary post-colonial theorists' challenges that complicate understandings of the

binary oppositions erected and maintained through the colonial process, the existence and

very real power of colonial binaries to shape and control social structures is evident,

particularly in South Africa where the racial binary was codified and brutally enforced

through the institution of apartheid. Regardless of the official dismantling of social

systems such as apartheid constructed around the ideal of binary division, novels like

Imaginings of Sand highlight the continued effects of binary oppositions erected through

the colonial process and uncertainties about how to renovate or deconstruct them. André

Brink's <u>Imaginings of Sand</u> enters into the explorations of binary oppositions these theorists engage in through its use of the symbol of the Western European Great House to reveal apartheid's destructive racial division, to demonstrate ways in which that divide is compromised and subverted, and finally to imagine reconciliation within the ruins of racial divides.

An understanding of the profound influence apartheid had on the subject and form of South African literature in general will provide a foundation for the discussion of Brink's novel in particular. Issues of race were a central feature in the works of white South Africans from the beginning.[19] Malvern van Wyk Smith points to the journals of the first explorers that juxtapose the beauty of the Cape with the "savageness" of the indigenous people as establishing "a discourse of race which . . . is really the one major theme of all of our writing" (1-2). Early white South African literature in English and Afrikaans typically took the form of the romance (establishing the land as the exotic other to the metropolis) or realism (in which the wild land is confronted and dominated) (Smith 9).[20] Olive Schriener's <u>The Story of an African Farm</u> (1883) is representative in both its African farm setting, which highlights the challenges of the colonial African location, as well as its "liberal humanist impulse," raising issues of individual freedom related to gender and class, while re-inscribing racial hierarchies either overtly or ambivalently (Smith 33). Beginning in the 1920's, as black African protests against their lack of

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[19] As Brink is an Afrikaner who writes in Afrikaans and English, this discussion focuses on the influence of apartheid on white South African writers. Of course South African literature is diverse and wide-ranging. Michael Chapman points to the difficulty of constituting a "single" South African literature: ". . . we have South African literature in English, Afrikaans literature, Zulu literature, Xhosa literature, Sotho literature and so on, each having its hermetic sets of assumptions, myths, and conventions" (xv). For an overview of the literatures of South Africa, see Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly's <u>Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970-1995</u>, Michael Chapman's <u>South African Literatures</u>, and Malvern Van Wyk Smith's <u>Grounds of Contest: A Survey of South African Literature,</u>

[20] The Afrikaans language slowly developed as the Dutch of the settlers on the Cape in 1652 was influenced by African languages and the English of the British colonizers arriving in 1795 (Chapman 79).

power grew more vocal, white writing in general became more emphatic about racial separation, more a "literature of dread, in contrast to a black discourse of endurance and challenge" (Smith 54-56, 67). Frequent and catastrophic depictions of relationships between white women and black men reveal rising fears of the breakdown of racial boundaries (Smith 56). By the 1960's, a group of white writers critical of the brutal apartheid policies of the government, known as the "Sestigers" (André Brink, Jan Robie, Breyten Breytenbach, Etienne Leroux, among others), began to publish texts openly condemning the administration and its policies of segregation. According to Elleke Boehmer, these authors employed literature as a "weapon of liberation" (Attridge 46). She notes that, through their powerful use of realism, "a narrowly defined classic realism became entrenched as the most reliable and 'relevant' way of capturing the troubling totality of the society" (Attridge 46). During the height of the struggle against apartheid, many writers concurred with Nadine Gordimer's insistence on critical realism as the form best able to "describe a situation so truthfully . . . that the reader can no longer evade it" (Diala, 2001, 52). Brink similarly argued the importance of realism to meet the need "to record, to witness, to represent" the horrors of apartheid that the media could not, or would not, present (Brink quoted in Kauer 58).

Brink's writing, beginning with the publication of the novel <u>Dennis van di Aand</u> (<u>Looking on Darkness</u>) in 1974, is widely recognized by literary critics as *litérature engagé*, dedicated to investigating the political injustices of the apartheid system in South Africa (Meintjes 169). <u>Dennis van di Aand</u> was so overtly critical of apartheid policies that it became the first novel written in Afrikaans subject to a governmental ban (Chapman 250). Brink became a key voice in the fight against "colonial hegemony,"

using his writing to "debunk myths created by the establishment" (Diala, 2005, 5-6).

Elleke Boehmer notes that, along with the use of critical realism, a common element of

much of the fiction published by white South Africans in the 1970's, and especially

through the 1980's, is endings that are "arrested in a difficult and frozen now" (48). The

endings of these novels are typically marked by "social breakdown, exile, leave-taking,

by the insistent imperatives of commitment to struggle, or simply by resistances to the

novelistic imagination, to envisioning the future" (45). Boehmer sees this trend as a

consequence of a society "constrained within the deathly binaries of a long history of

oppression and opposition" (45). As the end of apartheid drew nearer, Boehmer hoped

that South African novels would not "remain so painfully impaled on that two-pronged

fork which is history versus discourse, or reality versus fantasy" (53). In 1990, Brink

anticipated that the imaginations of writers that had been "narrowed and proscribed" by

apartheid, and the struggle against it, would be freed to re-imagine, re-invent, and dream

about new possibilities and hope for the future (Diala 2005 27). Through a close

examination of the symbol and function of the Western European Great House in

Imaginings of Sand, this chapter will highlight how Brink's 1996 novel reflects these

literary impulses to acknowledge the destructive binaries built into South African society

as well as to destabilize and alter them to imagine how society might accommodate both

races peacefully.

Locating the House Within the Framework of Colonial Racial Division

　　　　This section focuses specifically on ways in which the novel's descriptions of the

family house, in both the contemporary passages and Ouma's family stories, connect

South Africa's racial segregation to its history of colonial domination, while also challenging the comprehensiveness and rigidity of the racial divide constructed by colonialism. One of the ways Brink situates the house in the context of South Africa's history of colonialism is through its origin. Kristien's Afrikaner great-grandparents, Petronella and Hermanus Johannes Wepener, build the house "about three-quarters through the nineteenth century," putting the time of its construction at the height of Western European colonial domination (6). The money funding the construction of the house comes from a Victorian era "ostrich-feather boom" fueled by Western European demand for the exotic, decorative feathers (6). That money accrued through the sale of an African natural resource transformed into a frivolous consumer good and sold to wealthy Western Europeans underwrites the building project re-enacts the dynamic of colonial economics, highlighting the acquisition of natural resources at the core of the colonial project. However, the text immediately undermines the notion of colonial economics as completely rational and fixed by revealing that the decision to raise ostriches derived from religion rather than reason and that the success of the enterprise is accidental rather than logical. Ouma explains to Kristien that their ancestors

> . . . eradicated every vine on their near-limitless farm and changed to
> ostriches, prompted not by visions of wealth but by misplaced piety. In
> one of her legendary nocturnal conversations with God Petronella had
> been instructed by this Highest Authority . . . to get rid of the sinful vines
> that had assured the family's prosperity, and start anew. The climate ruled
> out wheat; it was a bad year for watermelons and there was no demand as
> yet for Lucerne; it was the wrong kind of grazing for cattle or sheep; and

after a number of ever more desperate trials and spectacular errors her

husband, Hermanus Johannes Wepener, hit, from sheer audacity if not

perversity, upon the idea of ostriches. (6)

That the impetus behind the Afrikaners' decision to raise ostriches on the land is based on

emotion and instinct, rather than the logic of capitalism, demonstrates a decision-making

process not grounded in Western reason and economic theory, thus revealing cracks in

the Western European colonial foundation of the house from the beginning. Further, the

description positions Petronella as the force behind the decisions of what she and her

husband should do with the land. She chooses the house design and oversees its

construction. The power Petronella wields over the land and the house disrupts the

patriarchal control usually associated with the colonial project, particularly in South

Africa where the Boers were typically devout Christians whose families and communities

were led strictly by men. Thus, through the details about the origins of the house, the

novel establishes it as a symbol of Western European colonialism but at the same time

reveals fissures in that power structure.

The architectural plans of the house also call attention to the imposition of

Western culture through colonialism as well as point to problems associated with

Western European attempts to impose its social structures onto the African landscape.

The blueprints for the house are ordered from a mail-order catalogue (6). Catalogues,

such as the one used by Kristien's great-grandparents, functioned as important tools of

the colonial enterprise in that they enabled those living in colonial outposts access to

Western goods. These items from "home" made it possible for colonizers to maintain

their connection to Western European culture, upholding the distinction between

themselves and the indigenous "Other." In ordering blueprints from the catalogue,

Petronella and Johannes look to Western European architectural design to build a "kind

of palace," a structure that reflects their "newfound wealth" (6). Throughout the novel,

frequent references to the house as a "palace" clearly mark it as a symbol of authority and

power. Yet, as with the economics supporting the house, Brink also uses the plans to call

attention to imperfections in colonialism's transference of social structures from the

metropolitan center to the periphery. The materials begin to arrive but "the original plan

had somehow been lost in transit" (6). Unwilling to wait a year for another set of

instructions, Petronella insists on building without the design specifications. The loss of

the plans while on their way from Western Europe to South Africa, and the length of time

for a new set to arrive, emphasizes the distance between the two locations and the

problems inherent in transferring information and goods from one place to the other.

Lacking explicit instructions, Petronella must improvise, which results in a structure that

is both Western European and non-Western European, that "resembled nothing else on

the planet" (7). Many post-colonial theorists, such as Homi Bhabha, argue that this type

of improvisation occurring in the process of colonization creates fissures in the over-

arching colonial domination, destabilizing the power structure and ultimately creating

spaces for challenges to colonial authority. In Brink's novel, the alterations to the design

of the house that result from the loss of the plans lead to the construction of a house that,

while connected to colonial power, also accommodates challenges to that system.

Another way in which the colonial location impacts the construction of the house

is the Wapeners' use of indigenous and foreign workers. The novel describes them as

"crude practical men used to hammering a recalcitrant tin roof into shape or stacking a

kraal wall or roughcasting a structure designed to withstand a hundred years of hellfire,

tornadoes, hurricanes, and the occasional summer deluge" (7). This passage, which

highlights specific aspects of the South African climate and the architectural designs that

indigenous people developed as best-suited for it, calls attention to the difficulties of

erecting a structure in a location other than that for which it had been originally designed,

an alternate space with a dissimilar climate and, consequently, necessitating different

building techniques. Petronella's construction workers, largely unfamiliar with Western

European materials and methods, are unable to produce a building completely unaffected

by the indigenous architectural styles. The wide variety of workers she employs also

impacts the structure, given that the workers include locals along with "a homesick

Malay team" and "a mixed gang of shady Italian and Austro-Hungarian bandits [that] had

had to be deported for wreaking havoc on the site" (7). The multinational construction

crew contributes to the sense of improvisation in the building of the house as well as

underscores the complexity of the colonial experience. The description of the

construction process highlights the disjunctions between the Western European design,

the South African location, and the diverse construction crew, helping to mark the house

as a symbol of complex and unstable colonial power.

 Likewise, architectural details of the completed house reinforce the notion that

Western European forms become altered when located in a colonial space. Once

completed, the house contains both Western European and non-Western European

elements:

> Three stories high, topped with turrets, minarets, fleches, campaniles,
>
> domes, what had started off as a High Victorian folly turned out as Boer

Baroque. Sandstone and redbrick, delicate fluted iron pillars and broekie

lace, interspersed with balustrades of finely turned Burmese teak, flashes

of Doric and Corinthian inspiration and even a Cape-Dutch gable on the

south façade . . . The interior . . . was an exhilarating maze of archways

and branching corridors, magnificent marble or teak staircases and

unexpected other, dingier, flights of steps leading to dead-ends or upstairs

doors opening on the void; attics and rooms and closets and cubicles with

no obvious or imaginable purpose, hidden among halls and chambers

more comprehensible, even ostentatious, in the proclamation of their

functions. (7)

Several details listed in this passage are connotative of the traditional Western European

Great House: three stories, candelabras, chimney pots, turrets, iron pillars, sandstone,

and brick. The "magnificent marble or teak staircases and unexpected other dingier

flights of steps," presumably one set for the owners and the other for the servants, point

to the hierarchical class system of Western European Great House ideology built into the

house. However, the inclusion of aspects of the architecture particularly associated with

Afrikaner design, such as the broekie lace and the Cape-Dutch gable, emphasizes that the

Western European colonial project in South Africa also produced structures unique to

that specific location.[21] In addition, the teak from Burma and the minarets indicate an

Eastern influence, further complicating the notion that in the process of colonization

cultural domination operates in an isolated, simplistic manner, in this case from Western

Europe to South Africa. The composite of Western European, Afrikaner, and non-

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[21] Broekie lace is ornamental wrought-iron work often used around verandas in Victorian era South African
architecture.

Western European design elements in the house attests to the impossibility of transferring Western European structures to the colonies completely unaltered and demonstrates that hybrid and new forms often emerge as cultures intermingle in colonial locations. All together, these diverse architectural elements create a destabilized space, a contact zone where cultures meet and influence each other, a process critic Mary Louise Pratt refers to as "transculturation."[22] Yet the prominence of the Western European design details and the absence of specific indigenous architectural features prevent the house from representing an all-inclusive space, a level playing field, of colonial cultural encounter. As Pratt carefully points out, the fact of multiple influences does not indicate shared power or equality. She argues that "the contact zones are social spaces where 'disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of dominance and subordination'" (Ashcroft 233). The architectural features of the house in the novel reveal the overarching force of the Western European power structure despite compromises and cracks related to its construction in South Africa. In the first few pages of Imaginings of Sand, the description of the origin, construction, and design of the house thus establish it as a complex colonial space. Because the house in the novel represents white colonial power as well as the instability of and gaps in that power structure, it serves as an appropriate location for Brink's investigation into South Africa's racial binary of apartheid, a space in which that seemingly static binary of power can be probed and re-imagined.

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[22] Ashcroft et al define transculturation, a term first used by Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz in the 1940's, as "the reciprocal influences of modes of representation and cultural practices of various kinds of colonies and metropoles" (233). See Pratt's Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (1992) for a discussion of transculturation and the colonial enterprise.

Inside and Outside, White and Black Imagery, and the Destabilization of the Racial Binary of Apartheid

Brink uses descriptions of the interior and exterior of the house to call attention to the cultural assignment of place according to race designed to separate whites and blacks through the association of inside with white and outside with black. Gates are a key symbol Brink employs to highlight the division of spaces and races. Upon Kristien's return to South Africa to care for her grandmother who is hospitalized after her home is fire-bombed in the wide-spread violence leading up to the repeal of apartheid, Kristien goes to the house to inspect the damage. She notices ". . . the tall gates, absurdly ostentatious, on the naked plains" (27). The gates stand as physical reminders of colonialism's reliance on defining and maintaining a separation between inside and outside, indicative of ownership and control of the land. The significance of establishing barriers to the colonial enterprise in South Africa is reflected in laws and business practices, such as the Imperial Land Bank's offer of loan reductions to colonizers able to erect fences around their property prior to the repayment of their loan in the early 1900's (Rosner 69). That the gates are ostentatious implies that they are purposely grand, especially in comparison with the bare land around them, meant to convey a message of wealth and power. Kristien views them as absurd, not only because they are at odds with the natural landscape, ill-suited for that location, but because they have been ineffective in preventing the attack on the house. As she approaches the gates, Kristien is forced to identify herself to the "two policemen armed with automatic guns" before she can enter (27). The armed white guards posted by the gates point to the Afrikaners' continued

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commitment to the belief in the importance of maintaining barriers between outside and inside as well as to the rising awareness of the penetrability of the barriers.

The details of the bombing itself demonstrate that the gates have failed, both symbolically and materially, to keep the indigenous "Other" outside. The novel connects the bombing of the house directly to the struggle against apartheid. The newspaper account Kristien reads on her way back to South Africa situates the incident within the context of the wider racial violence surrounding the upcoming elections: "Centarian attacked on remote farm. Seventh elderly victim in past three weeks. Massive manhunt launched by police. Commando of farmers scouring district. Minister warns not to take law into own hands. Security to be stepped up in country districts" (17). The novel provides several different perspectives on the four young, male perpetrators. Casper, Kristien's brother-in-law and leader of a group of farmer-commandos, attributes the bombing to "disaffected MK terrorists" (28).[23] The police officer who arrests the young men refers to them as a "band of terrorists" and justifies the beating he gives them to Kristien by claiming that it will enable her to "sleep safe in your bed at night" (145). Kristien describes them as "four teenage boys, the youngest about twelve" (144). The youngest boy's mother sees him as a child, a boy who got caught up in a gang in their impoverished township: "We live in a small shack only, black plastic, no water, much shit. Bad place for little child to growing up in, Karate Kid. I try, I try, I try, what can I do? The lots other children, much children, bad children, they make tsotsi gangs, he small still, what can I do?" (225). In presenting differences in the descriptions of the boys, that neither deny nor excuses their actions but call attention to them as individuals

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[23] The MK, or Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation), established in 1961, was a militant wing of the ANC devoted to fighting apartheid. Responsible for many bombings and banned by the government as a terrorist group, it was dismantled in 1990 as formal apartheid ended.

as well as the social conditions underlying their actions, the novel rejects the simplistic

characterization of the young black male perpetrators as terrorists by those in positions of

power (the journalists, the police, the white landowners). The boys are black and they

have committed an act of terrorism; they are also boys who have suffered poverty and

hopelessness and are the sons of mothers who love them. The novel thus disrupts the

binary logic that relies on facile categories of identity crucial to the operation of the

apartheid system.

Throughout the novel, Brink uses black and white imagery in his investigation of

racial division in South Africa. The description of the damage to the house as a result of

the bombing suggests the inability of the house to function either as a container of

"white" Western Europeanness or as a barrier to keep "black" South Africa out. From a

distance Kristien does not see any change to the house. However, as she gets closer, she

can see the

> . . . shocking damage the place has suffered . . . from closer by, I have a
>
> full view of the scarred wing to the right of the front entrance . . . the
>
> verandah lies collapsed in a heap of rubble; above it gape the blackened
>
> skeletal openings of doors and windows; one balustrade hangs at an angle
>
> from high above; the whole façade is covered with soot and grime . . . the
>
> scullery door hangs from its hinges, an oversized charred slice of Melba
>
> toast. Inside, I find the kitchen flooded in black water . . . About a third of
>
> the house has been destroyed, it seems. One wooden staircase has
>
> subsided altogether, leaving a gaping black hole half-blocked with rubble;
>
> another has been reduced to eerie scaffolding draped with charred

tapestries which pulverize into ashes as I touch them. But the main

staircase, of stone and marble, is intact, and the whole left wing of the

house appears largely unscathed. Windows still stare blankly outside,

interrogating the view. This is what is most disconcerting: the way the

sky obtrudes, the invasions of the house by outside space. It appropriates

walls and floors, pours through gutted windows, leaks from above, stares

through broken frames. The usual demarcations are no longer adequate.

(29-31)

Many of these details indicate that the structure is no longer intact or impervious.

Specifically, spaces marking transition between outside and inside have been destroyed,

such as the verandah, now reduced to rubble, and the door, whose purpose is to maintain

the distinction between outside and inside, now a gapping hole, a "blackened skeletal

opening." The architectural elements that define inside and outside, such as the walls,

floor, and roof, are all compromised so that "outside space" floods in. The verbs Brink

uses ("appropriates," "pours," "leaks") contribute to the sense that the structure is not

able to withstand or control the "invasion" from the outside. That Kristien finds the

intrusion of the light from the sky into the house disconcerting suggests that the cracks

have forced openings that are unsettling and threatening. Throughout the passage the

damage is described as black, connecting Kristien's agitation with the notion that the

bombing is a challenge to the racial divide that the house represents. The door is

"charred," the windows are "black skeletal remains," the kitchen floor is flooded with

"black water," the façade is covered in "soot," the "charred" tapestries are in "ashes." All

of these references to the damage as black signal that the barriers between white and

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black have been broken down and that the house is no longer able to fulfill its role as an impenetrable receptacle of white. Yet, even though the structure is no longer capable of completely maintaining the separation of black and white, some aspects associated with Western European power, such as the stone and marble staircase, still stand unscathed. The windows in one wing continue to "stare blankly outside, interrogating the view," perpetuating the colonial gaze on the colonized landscape of the "Other." These architectural remnants indicate that, even though compromised, the power structures committed to dividing outside from inside, and blacks from whites, are still operating.

The reactions of Kristien's sister, Anna, and her husband, Casper, to the bombing reveal their commitment as Afrikaners to re-securing racial division despite the looming general elections and probable dismantling of apartheid. Both worry that Ouma's compromised house will not be able to keep intruders outside. Before allowing Kristien to stay at the house or to move Ouma back in, they work to ensure that the barriers between outside and inside, damaged by the bomb and fire, are reconstructed. They insist that "electricity had to be restored and the telephone reconnected, outside doors replaced, burglar bars fixed to accessible windows" (57). However, the text undermines their efforts to re-establish the distinction between inside and outside at Ouma's house by implying the futility of the project through descriptions of black within their own house that reveal that it has also already been compromised. The narrator describes Anna and Casper's house on an adjoining farm as "dark, invaded by the night outside as if the very walls had become penetrable," despite the "several locks on the front door" (56). Casper and Anna reveal an awareness of the precariousness of the division between inside and outside established by the precautions they have instituted at their home, such as locks,

bars, and guns, through their insistence that their family all wear black nightclothes "in case the house is attacked and we all have to flee in the dark" (36). The black night clothing not only acknowledges the possibility that the divide can be breached and they can be forced outside by black South Africans forcing themselves inside but also suggests that the divide has, at least symbolically, already been transgressed. Black has made its way into the house. Whether black South Africans actually invade their house or not, the threat, the possibility, has shaped the behavior of the white Afrikaners inside, in big, public ways, such as forming armed vigilante groups, as well as in small, intimate ways, such as determining the color of their nightclothes. Thus, through its use of white and black imagery in connection with the colonial binary of inside and outside associated with the Western European Great House, the novel acknowledges *and* destabilizes the racial divisions of apartheid.

Transgressions of Apartheid's Racial Divide and Patriarchal Norms

In addition to the black and white imagery in the descriptions of the Wepener house, the novel uses the characters' attitudes toward the house, as well as specific architectural aspects of the house, to call attention to instances of transgression of the racial binary that destabilize the divide between white/inside and black/outside erected by colonialism and maintained through apartheid. Specifically, the characters' interracial personal relationships affect the way each of them inhabits and relates to the house. This section first focuses on Brink's use of the architecture of the house to highlight the ways the transgressions of the racial divide by Jacob Bonthuys (a black fugitive who takes refuge in the basement of the house) and Kristien reveal gaps in, as well as the lingering

power of, the apartheid system as it formally comes to an end. Then the discussion shifts

to Brink's use of the symbol of the Great House to acknowledge the gender oppression

endured by women under the apartheid system by considering the ways in which

interracial women's experiences within the house, specifically the housekeeper Trui,

Kristien's great-grandmother Rachel, and Ouma, represent trangressions of the racial

binary and active opposition to the patriarchal apartheid system. Brink employs

architectural details to reveal the complexly interwoven oppressions of race and gender

within apartheid South Africa. In defying the social expectations for how they should

live in and feel about the house, all of these characters represent challenges to South

Africa's patriarchal apartheid power structure.

Jacob Bonthuys's shifting position within the house and his changing relationship

with Kristien disrupt assigned roles and places in the apartheid social structure. When

Kristien discovers that Jacob Bonthuys, a black South African foreman from a

neighboring farm, has crossed the racial boundary established by apartheid by breaking

into Ouma's house to take refuge, her subsequent feelings of uncertainty toward the

house indicate that the transgression undercuts the notion of static positions within the

outside,black/ inside,white power structure. During her first night in the house, Kristien

finds Jacob hiding in the basement. When she sees that he has a bullet wound in his arm

and he explains that he had gone "to drop off a friend of ours who works on the farm with

me. . . Then a lot of farmers chased us in their bakkies and made a roadblock and we

drove off into the veld, and they shot at us, and they hit me here in the arm, but we got

away" (67), she realizes that he is the man that Casper's commandos had shot, believing

he had been involved with the bombing of Ouma's house. With the housekeeper Trui's

help, she tends to his wounds and allows him to stay in the basement. However, she finds his presence unsettling:

> I wander through the house, room after room, trying in vain to pick up some thread from years ago; but today it holds no challenge, no adventure, only gloom and emptiness, a sense of redundancy. It has outlived its time . . . Wherever I roam in the house, or even outside in the yard, among the trees, in the unkempt rose garden, among the outbuildings, I am haunted by the knowledge of the wounded stranger in the basement. No matter what I'm doing, he is there. I have taken him at his word, yet I have no way of knowing who he is and why he is here. His sole power lies in the fact that I have no choice in deciding whether he should be there to face me, or not. And that power is daunting. I have taken responsibility for him and yet I don't have the foggiest idea of what to do about it. I don't want him here, but I cannot throw him out. And I'm terrified. Not because he is there but because he may die. And his possible death calls me into question. (84-85)

Kristien compulsion to care for Jacob, even though she does not know him personally, stems from her feeling connected to and partly responsible for his injury because of her position as an Afrikaner and Casper's sister-in-law. Yet, she is unsure about exactly what their relationship is or should be. Although giving him shelter in the house enacts a crossing over of the apartheid division constructed to keep black South Africans outside, installing him in the basement positions him at the margins, in a space typically designated for things, servants, and those who deviate from social norms, such as the

mentally ill. The uncertainty of her relationship to Jacob manifests itself in her

ambivalence toward the house. His presence transforms her feelings about the house

from her childhood memories as a place of "challenge" and "adventure" to one of

"gloom" and "redundancy." Regardless of her acknowledgement that the house has

"outlived its time" and her willingness to challenge the structure by bringing Jacob

inside, her uneasiness indicates that she is not completely sure how they are supposed to

inhabit the space together.

As the novel progresses, the shifting positions Jacob occupies within the house

contribute to the novel's challenge to notions of who belongs inside and who belongs

outside. In the middle of the night Casper lets himself into the house and, drunk and

determined to demonstrate his power over Kristien after her constant criticisms (of both

his commitment to apartheid and his cruelty toward her sister) that challenge his

authority, attempts to rape Kristien (232-233). Hearing Kristien struggling to break free,

Jacob comes out from hiding in the basement and hits the unsuspecting Casper from

behind with a chair. Shocked because he had thought no one else was there, Casper

stumbles out of the house muttering excuses and blaming Kristien for the incident,

claiming that she had misunderstood his intentions, "I only came round for a chat and a

cup of coffee," and that she encouraged the attack, "I know a bitch in heat when I see

one" (234). This incident, which features a black South African man saving a white

woman from rape by a white Afrikaner man, turns the traditional colonial narrative inside

out. The novel powerfully undermines Casper's support of apartheid, founded on his

insistence that black men pose a threat to white women like Anna and Kristien and that

his role consists of preventing black men from intruding into the house, with this scene in

which Jacob, the black intruder, protects Kristien from Casper, the white man who has a key to the house. Thus the attack disrupts the narrative of white power as benevolent and protective constructed by men such as Casper. Shortly after this incident, Jacob begins to inhabit the house differently. Once his wound heals and the boys who are responsible for the bombing are identified, clearing him of any involvement, Jacob begins to move around the house more freely. On the day of the elections, he chooses to accompany Kristien to the polls, emerging from his place in the basement, "appearing unannounced from the dark hole he'd turned into his home. He had no change of clothing; but he'd obviously gone to great lengths in the bathroom upstairs" (306). At the end of the novel Jacob has gone back to his own home, but he returns to the house in the role of "official doorman," determining who has access to the house and who does not, a complete reversal of his initial position of powerless intruder hiding in the basement. Through Jacob's movement from outside the house, to the basement, to upstairs, to guard, the novel traces an incremental breaking down of the racial barriers determining the spaces black South Africans can occupy within the South African social structure.

At the beginning of the novel Kristien's physical distance from the house allows her to resist the social position imposed on her by the apartheid system through public and private transgressions of the racial divide. At twenty-one she leaves South Africa for England in an effort to break free from a family and a society that she finds controlling, defining, and limiting, "eager to burn as many bridges as possible" (149). Having physically removed herself from South Africa's social structure she further publicly moves outside her place in the racial binary by actively working with a group committed to tearing down apartheid after she settles in London. However, even though her

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involvement in the ANC anti-apartheid organization indicates a rejection of her place as a white Afrikaner in South African society, it also highlights her continuing and complex relationship to South Africa; her life in London and her anti-apartheid work therefore signify an opposition to the government policies as well as an impulse to perpetuate her connection to the country and an inability to completely sever her ties to South Africa or its social structure. While in London Kristien also privately transgresses the racial divide through her relationship with Sandile, a black South African. Through her work with the ANC Kristien meets the married Sandile, with whom she falls in love and has an affair. This relationship, which crosses over the racial divide of apartheid, indicates Kristien's effective transgression of that racial binary. Although the brevity of the relationship, five months, suggests an inability to sustain movement across the racial divide, the account of the breakup prevents ascribing the demise of the affair to racial difference: "To say that it was for the sake of his family makes it sound sanctimonious, or trivial, if not both. There was no feeling of doing a noble or lofty thing; only the inevitable thing. What they had, in that family, should not be jeopardized by anything as selfish and private as passion" (155). The details specifically attribute the failure of the relationship to Kristien's moral and ethical unwillingness to destroy Sandile's family by taking him away from his wife and children. Although Kristien's interracial romance ends relatively quickly, the relationship, and the absence of a single reference to any impact of the difference between their races on the end of the relationship, signals her effective, albeit temporary, movement beyond the racial dynamics of South Africa. Still, as with her public transgression through her ANC work, the fact that the relationship occurs in

London implies that distance from South Africa's social structure makes the movement across the racial divide possible.

Kristien's feelings about the house when she returns to South Africa underscore the significance of the distance between South Africa and London to Kristien's ability to publicly and privately cross the racial divide of apartheid. Her experiences of transgression while away from South Africa affect her ability to re-situate herself within South African's social structure. When she comes home eleven years later after hearing about the bombing of Ouma's house, Kristien's sister Anna and brother-in-law Casper argue that her continuing support of the anti-apartheid movement prevents her from fitting into the racially designated place she used to occupy in South African society. They insist that the years she spent outside the country – physically removing herself and creating a distance – make her opposition possible, an opposition that would be untenable had she remained within the social structure of that location. On several occasions they tell her that her absence keeps her from understanding the situation between the two sides: ". . . you don't seem to realize what's going on in this place. It's them or us . . . you've been away God knows how many years. Please don't try to tell *us* what to do. We *belong* here" (36). They see her as an outsider, viewing her life in London and her opposition to apartheid as an abandonment of South Africa and a rejection of Afrikaner identity. Kristien shares Casper and Anna's feeling that she no longer "belongs" there. As an Afrikaner committed to tearing down apartheid, she finds locating herself within the South African political framework difficult. The bombing of her family home stemming from the fight against apartheid she supports personally, negatively impacts her; seeing the fire-scorched house "interrupts the very process of return, the tensing

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forward, as it were, to reassume an identity suspended when I left this place, recovering the self that remained behind" (31). The disruption, signified by the damage to the house, to the rigid social structure of the past in which, as a white Afrikaner woman, she had been able to situate herself, makes it impossible to simply take up that identity when she returns.

References to Kristien's feelings about the house after her return reflect her continued struggle with her position within South Africa's social structure. Her time outside the country and her transgressions of the apartheid racial divide alter her perspective, enabling her to empathize with those struggling against apartheid and seeing the house from their point of view. Looking at the house with a group of ANC representatives, Kristien tells them, "You can understand why people would want to burn it down" (262). Yet, her heritage as a white Afrikaner connects her to the house and the system of white power it represents. Her stance in opposition to the power structure in which she grew up creates a sense of conflict in her relationship to the house as a symbol of that system: she feels "as if I'm an intruder in the one place that used to be my sanctuary from a world with which all too often I felt at odds" (29). Her statements reflect dislocation – not feeling entirely comfortable on either side of the divide. However, Kristien's writing her name in the dust on the dining room table, a place associated with intergenerational familial gatherings, as she wanders through the house upon her return signals an acknowledgement of her connection to the house and a desire to re-situate herself within her family and South Africa's social structure. That the "film of dust and fine black ash which invites me to write my name on it" (60) appears in the house because of the bombing, underscores the compromised nature of the power

structure Kristien must re-situate herself within, being back in South Africa and no longer

distant and disconnected.

When Kristien and Sandile meet again, this time in South Africa, their attitudes

toward her family's house convey the heightened influence of South Africa's policies of

racial separation on the viability of a renewed relationship between them. Regardless of

their time together in London, their shared commitment to the struggle against apartheid,

and the fact that Sandile is no longer married, the novel highlights Kristien and Sandile's

different standpoints through their comments as they approach the house together:

> "And those gates?" he exclaims, "Jesus, where are you taking me?"
>
> "Aren't they something?" I [Kristien] laugh. "When I was a child I
> always thought they were the gates of paradise."
>
> "Of hell, more likely," he mocks. "Abandon ye all hope." (257)

Their dramatically opposite descriptions of the gates as evocative of heaven and hell

reinforce the extreme binary of the apartheid system that the gates of the house represent.

The exchange situates their divergent viewpoints in the private and public history of

South Africa – Kristien's in the past of her childhood and Sandile's in the wider history

of the African slave trade's oppression of blacks by whites through his quotation of the

words carved or painted above the gates of the slave castles dotting the west coast of

Africa from which blacks boarded the slave ships. Through these comments about the

gates, the novel points to the continued pressure that this history of division exerts on

relationships between whites and blacks in South Africa, which is reiterated when

Kristien invites Sandile into the house and he refuses to go in, explaining, "They'll be

waiting for me" at the ANC office (257). Although she encourages him to cross over the

boundary and enter the house, he refuses, citing his commitment to those outside the house. Conversely, he asks if she will be at the ANC meeting later and she says no, that she has to stay at the house to "look after Ouma" (258). Her responsibilities inside the house prevent her from joining him outside the house. Back in South Africa, her obligations within the house and his outside prevent them from reconnecting. Regardless of their ability to temporarily come together outside South Africa, within the country the two are unable to cross the divisions erected by apartheid, which remain powerful enough to keep them on either side of the racial divide even on the eve of the end of apartheid.

The novel also uses the transgressions of apartheid's racial binary by Kristien's ancestors to reveal a history of cracks in the foundation of apartheid. The offspring of the cross-racial encounters attest to the fact that the divide established through public policy never effectively maintained the actual separation of whites and blacks and disrupt the possibility of distinguishing which side of the binary individuals should occupy. Kristien learns that Ouma and her long-time servant, Trui, are in fact blood relatives. Ouma's grandfather, Hermanus Johannes Wepener, raped the young daughter, Lida, of a black South African man, Salie, a tenant farming on his land, and in doing so fathered Trui's mother, Lizzie. In retaliation for his daughter's rape, Salie, sought "the only revenge he could think of" and raped Hermanus's daughter (and Ouma's mother), Rachel (112). When Rachel's pregnancy became evident, the family suspected that Salie was in fact the baby's father, although Rachel never explicitly told anyone. The morning after Ouma shares this information with her, Kristien asks Trui if she knows about their familial connection, thereby indicating her refusal to disregard or hide their kinship. Kristien's willingness to embrace the interracial connections of her ancestors mirrors a trend Meg

Samuelson identifies in "Fictional Representations of Rape in South African Fiction of the Transition," in which she argues that the prevalence of interracial rape resulting in children of "mixed parentage" in South African novels published in the 1990s reflects a hope for the "construction of a 'rainbow family'" (Arndt 183). Eager to acknowledge the evidence of the fallacy of apartheid's racial divide, Kristien approaches Trui to discuss their hereditary connection. She describes these brutal transgressions of the racial boundary to Trui metaphorically: "My great-grandfather and your grandfather both grazed on the other side of the fence" (170). The depiction of the division as a "fence" highlights the racial divide as a man-made construct designed to keep people apart and in their appointed spaces.

The violent racial transgressions of Rachel's and Lida's rapes also call attention to the patriarchal oppression associated with the apartheid system. The characterization of the rape of the two young women as "grazing," while troubling in its mildness, highlights the gender power structure intertwined with the racial divide. As men, Hermanus and Salie force their way across the racial boundary in ways the women in the novel cannot. Since the late 1980s, many critics such as Trinh T. Minh-ha, Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak, and Sara Suleri have explored the complicated relationship between patriarchy and the colonial project.[24] Geraldine Moane views the two systems as mutually supportive rather than parallel, arguing that "constructions of gender have served the interests of colonial domination, and colonial domination has produced ideologies and cultural practices which buttress patriarchy" (12). In Mapmakers: Writing in a State of Siege, Brink writes about the connection between race and gender oppression in the apartheid system, noting

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[24]See Geraldine Moane's Gender and Colonialism: A Psychological Analysis of Oppression and Liberation (1999) and Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin's Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies (1998).

that "racism almost invariably goes with male chauvinism" (8). Derek Attridge concurs, asserting that along with racism, apartheid's "ideological machinery" includes the determinisms of "patriarchy, sexism, homophobia, class and language bias, ethnic nationalism, and so on" (2). The racially transgressive rapes of Lida and Rachel highlight both apartheid's racial division and patriarchy and weave the oppressions of gender and race together, reflecting Brink and Attridge's assertions that gender oppression operates within the apartheid system.

Brink avoids eliding gender and racial oppressions, however, by calling attention to the differences between the circumstances of Kristien and Trui, women assigned to opposite positions in the racial divide despite their shared interracial ancestry. By highlighting the dissimilar impact the web of apartheid power has on the lives of Kristien and Trui the novel points to a complexly interwoven system of oppression within apartheid. As feminist post-colonial critics such as Gayatri Spivack, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Sara Suleri assert, women experience colonization differently depending on their race, class, religion, language, etc. In "Reinventing History: Reimagining the Novel: The Politics of Reading André Brink's *Imaginings of Sand*," critic Sue Kossew argues that, in its focus on recuperating the voices and experiences of white Afrikaner women, Imaginings of Sand ignores the complicity of Afrikaner women with the apartheid system, erases differences between white Afrikaner and black South African women, and perpetuates a patriarchal colonial silencing of indigenous South African women (121-122). However, while the text clearly centers on Kristien's Afrikaner family, Brink does acknowledge and explore differences between women's experiences in the apartheid structure through Trui and her relationship to the house. Trui rejects

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Kristien's impulse toward welcoming their common ancestry, insisting that "I have my people, you have yours. That's the way it's always been in this country. . . We've always got along just fine the way we were" (170). Kristien questions her attitude toward the unjust racial hierarchy by asking, "With your family living in the little box of a house back there and Ouma's family in this place? You call that getting along fine?" (170). Kristien's description of the racial divide in terms of the black South Africans "in the little box of a house back there" and Ouma's white Afrikaner family "in this place" effectively situates Trui with black South Africans, outside the house. However, Trui counters by reminding Kristien that, as a woman of mixed race, she cannot place herself firmly on either side of the divide, leaving her nowhere and exposing the racial dichotomy Kristien sets up as simplistic and reductive. Trui dismisses the notion that a new black South African government will change the power dynamic for her, saying, "The blacks never cared one bit about us coloreds, Miss Kristien. First the whites gave us hell, now it's the blacks. For us in-between people nothing will ever change" (169). Kristien insists that the end of apartheid will enable them to transform the arrangement: "It's precisely because we're getting a new government that we can start burying yesterday's wrongs, Trui" (170). Trui responds, 'I need more time, Miss Kristien. This is too much for one day.' She goes to the back door . . ." (170). Trui's request for "more time" to consider the possibility of change and her move toward the back door, a borderline space, reflect her skepticism that the dismantling of the apartheid system will provide her a more stable and powerful social position. Thus, while Kristien and Trui's shared ancestry attests to a history of transgressions that destabilizes notions of a fixed racial binary between blacks and whites in South Africa, it also highlights the different

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positions they occupy within the apartheid system and reveals the complexity of women's oppression under apartheid.

Through Ouma's mother Rachel's confinement within the house after being raped by a black South African man, the novel again highlights connections between the racial division of apartheid and the oppression of women. When Hermanus discovers his unmarried daughter's pregnancy and suspects the child will be of mixed race, he reacts by trying to reinforce the patriarchal apartheid structure compromised by the transgression of the racial divide as well as the social norms designed to control women's sexuality by dictating that sex and childbirth occur only within the institution of marriage. First, he argues with his wife, Petronella, that Rachel should be sent to an institution because, "for a white girl to have relations with a colored laborer . . . she must have taken leave of her senses, and an asylum was the only safe place for such a one" (107).[25] His labeling Rachel as insane re-positions her in a subordinate position within the system of oppositional dichotomies of Western and colonial logic (man/woman, white/black, rational/irrational, etc.) that her cross-racial sexual experience had disrupted. Petronella convinces her husband to keep Rachel at home, although he demands that she be locked in the basement, a peripheral space typically used to confine those considered mentally ill. Ouma explains to Kristien that this was a common Afrikaner practice at the time:

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[25] Hermanus's impulse to declare Rachel's crossing of the racial divide as evidence of insanity that warrants her removal from society is a response typical of Victorian Western Europeans, both in Europe and in the colonies. In fact, Michel Foucault's work describes the development of the concept of mental illness in Europe as an act of "Othering" (Loomba 138). Considering this dynamic from a Feminist standpoint, Shoshana Felman examines issues of gender in the construction and definition of mental illness, using Jacques Derrida's investigation of hierarchical cultural binaries to argue that "traditional ways of defining woman always subordinate her in the opposition; she is man's "Other" and is therefore what he is not – insane and silent" (4). Building on these theories of Foucault and Felman's in the African colonial context, Megan Vaughn finds that "the literature on madness in colonial Africa was more concerned with a definition of "Africanness" than with a definition of madness" so that "madness, as in the case of the European who goes native, is a transgression of supposed group identities" (Loomba 138-139).

The few top families of the district amassing all the wealth. Quite

staggering. Vain people who wouldn't mix with the hoi polloi. So they

started intermarrying, and in due course there were a couple of little idiots

in every family. Kept locked up in the cellar, looked after by orphan girls

from the cities. The shame of the great families, never allowed outside in

God's sun. (87)

Ouma describes the space of the basement as reserved for anyone who failed to abide by

the established social expectations: "an idiot needn't necessarily be retarded or a

waterhead. It's anyone who deviates from the norm. Anyone who dares to be different"

(87).[26] Here Brink's use of architectural space corresponds with philosopher Gaston

Bachelard's writings on how literary space is perceived and imagined in The Poetics of

Space. He argues that in our imaginations and in imaginative literature, basements are

spaces of fear and darkness where "'rationalization' is less rapid and less clear; also it is

never *definitive*. . . In the cellar, darkness prevails both day and night, and even when we

are carrying a lighted candle, we see shadows dancing on the dark walls" (19). In

addition, according to Bachelard, because the walls are buried "the situation grows more

dramatic and fear becomes exaggerated . . . The cellar then becomes buried madness,

walled-in tragedy" (20). Brink employs these imaginative, literary associations of the

basement with irrationality, fear, danger, and darkness in his critique of the apartheid

system. Rachel's imprisonment in the basement underscores the seriousness of the threat

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[26]Rachel's experience of being hidden in the basement echoes those of Victorian female literary figures
who do not conform to social mores and so are deemed insane and locked away in peripheral spaces, such
as Bertha, the madwoman in the attic of Bronte's Jane Eyre. The relationship between women's insanity
and patriarchy in these texts has been theorized by many feminist literary critics such as Sandra M. Gilbert,
Susan Gubar, and Nina Baym. Baym argues that breaking "the misogynist strictures and structures of
Victorian patriarchy" was kept "hidden; suppressed, it smoldered as a pure rage revealed in the furious
madwoman who disrupts or ruptures so many women's texts" (281).

posed by her transgression (even though forced and unwilling) of both the racial divide and the patriarchal authority of South Africa's social structure. Because Rachel's actions fail to uphold the dictates of patriarchal apartheid, her father deems them abnormal and/or insane. For order to be restored, she must be contained and controlled. In the buried basement, Rachel, whose pregnancy marks her transgression of the racial divide and patriarchal power structure, remains out of sight and silenced in a dark, peripheral space of the house. Thus, through Rachel's confinement in the basement, the novel emphasizes the impulse to categorize and control any challenge to apartheid's power structure.

However, Brink's novel also re-imagines that dark, fearful, marginalized space as a site of women's resistance. While confined in the basement, Rachel covers the walls with wildly colorful and erotic paintings:

> . . . those deep colors, the reds and greens and blues glowing at me like strange exotic fishes swimming up from some deep underwater world. Men with staggering erections, women spread-eagled, exposing their things like gaping wounds, and all kinds of copulations involving people and animals and birds and monster, even trees and stones. (89)

In their celebration of sexuality and representations of boundary-crossing, taboo relationships the images she paints defy patriarchal apartheid's control of women's bodies. Over the years the family tries to cover them with whitewash, symbolically attempting to silence her and remove the reminder of her transgressions of apartheid's social norms. Yet, her art continues to bleed through, "silent evidence of her paintings that no one could ever expunge from the basement walls – reappearing after every attempt like a stigmata – and her unrecorded death" (107). Even though Ouma never

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discovers what actually happened to Rachel (leaving her to speculate: "Did she simply waste away, refusing perhaps to eat, until she drifted off into death? Was someone hired to kill her, either in retribution or out of mercy? Did she hang or stab herself, or take poison on one of the rare nightly excursions when she was let out to collect plants and soils to mix her paints?"), her paintings give Rachel a voice that records and celebrates sexuality, the body, and transgressions of social norms, a voice that speaks to inspire later generations of women in the family (107). The images intrigue both Ouma and Kristien as young women when they find them on the walls in the basement. Ouma recalls her own transgressions in order to see the paintings: lying to avoid having to go to church with the family so she could have privacy and stealing the keys to the locked door to the basement. As a young woman "curious about my body," Ouma describes the "explosion those paintings set off in my mind" (89). Rachel's paintings transform the basement from a site of repression to one of resistance, which Kristien re-enacts three generations later when she disregards Casper and Anna's warnings to keep black Africans out of the house and shelters Jacob Bonthuys there. Rachel transforms the basement in which she is imprisoned through her self-expression and in the course of the novel it becomes a healing space for Jacob. Brink thus uses the architectural space in the novel to connect racial and gender oppression as well as to imagine a shift within the social structure from oppression to freedom.

Brink employs another peripheral space, the attic, to further highlight women's oppression in South Africa's hierarchy of power and to indicate that post-apartheid re-imagining of the South African social structure must include disruption of patriarchal authority. Just before her death, Ouma tells Kristien about a secret room at the top of the

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house, instructing her to enter it and destroy the contents. Kristien's describes entering the room:

> It is like entering a story, something by Grimm, Bluebeard's Castle. The door creaks, as it should, on its hinges. It is dark inside . . . Scraping the mounds of dust from the objects, I bring to light a collection of bags, mostly brown paper, stacked in rows upon rows . . . each ball of paper contains something, a wad, a pad, something very old and dry and stained . . . they are all sanitary rags and towels, used, and gathered, and stowed. What on earth for? . . . A silent witness to – what? Her life, she said. Her femininity? Her rejection or affirmation of it? (218-219)

The allusion to Grimm's fairy tales and the gothic elements associated with them, such as the creaky door, situate the secret attic room within a complex and gendered literary space. Many feminist literary critics and authors, such as Angela Carter, have explored patriarchal aspects of fairy tales, calling attention to the ways the conventions of fairy tales reveal constructions of gender that oppress women physically, economically, and sexually. The specific reference to Bluebeard's Castle establishes a parallel between the bloody corpses of Bluebeard's disobedient wives that were locked away in a secret chamber in his castle and Ouma's menstrual rags (symbols of women's sexuality, procreative and creative power) that have been locked away within the patriarchal structure of the house.[27] Her instructions to Kristien to remove the bags of menstrual rags from the house, to have "her life" as a woman freed from the tiny, secret room, signals a

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[27] For a feminist re-writing of Charles Perrault's fairy tale classic "Blue Beard," see Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" (1979).

refusal to allow women's creative power to be closeted away within the patriarchal structure of the house.

The details of the disposal of the bags of Ouma's menstrual rags connect the freeing of women's creativity and productivity to the destabilization of the power structure that the house represents. Obeying Ouma's wishes, Kristien carries the bags outside to burn them but birds suddenly swoop down and carry the rags away.[28] As she crosses the yard to re-enter the house, the symbolic freeing of women's regenerative power from the patriarchal apartheid structure alters the way Kristien sees the house: "there seems to be more space now, even if it isn't empty. And the palace sits on the ground like a huge ship on an unmoving sea, waiting for a current to loosen its moorings, to launch itself, to explore the space ahead" (259). Clearing out the attic and releasing the feminine regenerative power that had been contained there out into the world creates a sense of expansion, destabilization, and possible change in the structure of the house. Significantly, this passage is followed directly by Ouma's meeting with her lawyer to deed the house to Trui. These two events, Ouma's rejection of the racial divide by turning ownership of the house over to a colored woman and her refusal of patriarchal oppression symbolized by the release of her menstrual rags, signify challenges to the patriarchal apartheid system. That these incidents occur concurrently with the election, which formally tears down apartheid implies that both forms of oppression built into the apartheid structure must be deconstructed in order for change to occur. The juxtaposition of Ouma's intimate, private actions against the patriarchal apartheid system and the

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[28] For discussion of Brink's use of magical realism in the novel, see Marita Wenzel "The Latin American Connection: History, Memory, and Stories by Isabel Allende and André Brink" (71-88) and Isidore Diala "Nadine Gordimer, J.M. Coetzee, and André Brink: Guilt, Expiation, and the Reconciliation Process in Post-Apartheid Africa." (60).   .

widespread, public actions taken against apartheid during the election underscores that

real change to South Africa's social structure will require both private and public efforts.

Through his use of the symbolism attached to the architecture of the Great House to

explore the ways in which the characters' transgressions of the racial divide destabilize

notions of an immutable division of the races under apartheid and to acknowledge the

patriarchal oppression built into the apartheid system, Brink indicates that to end the

divisive racial power structure of apartheid South Africa other inequities established

through binary division, such as gender inequalities, must be exposed and confronted in

order to realize a transformation of the space into a shared, unified one.

Post-Apocalypse, Post-Apartheid Reconciliation

Through the architectural setting of the Wepener house, Brink acknowledges the

constructed binary division between white and black South Africans, which he also

challenges with instances of trangression of that divide. Bachelard sees binary divisions

as restrictive in that they prevent the possibility of thinking beyond that prescribed

dialectic and imaging something new. According to Bachelard, "Outside and inside form

a dialectic of division, the obvious geometry of which blinds us as soon as we bring it

into play in metaphorical domains. It has the sharpness of the dialectics of *yes* and *no*

which decides everything. Unless one is careful, it is made into a basis of images that

govern all thoughts of positive and negative" (211). At the end of <u>Imaginings of Sand</u>,

Brink uses descriptions of the house in which Anna's murders and suicide take place to

explode the "dialectic of division" of white inside/black outside. Then, having torn down

the binary divide constructed to separate white Afrikaners and black South Africans,

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Brink brings both races together within the structure of the house, re-imagining the Great House as a non-racially divisive structure that can accommodate all South Africans.

As the formal racial binary divide crumbles at the end of the novel, Anna's murder of her husband, children, and herself completely shatters the colonial, apartheid narrative that justified the construction of the barrier between the races. In the apartheid narrative, violent, barbaric, black South Africans outside pose the greatest threat to civilized white Afrikaners inside their houses. In fact, Kristien's initial reaction upon finding the carnage in her sister's house reflects the lingering power of colonial expectations: "An intruder. That was my first thought. It was so obvious. All the enemies Casper had made in the district; somebody, in the elation of the day's events, deciding to revenge all the accumulated bitterness of so many years" (329). However, her first conclusion is immediately challenged by the fact that "nothing in the house was out of place, or . . . missing. That all the doors were locked, the keys on the inside" (329). In a reversal of the narrative script of Casper's fears that a black South African man would break into his home, Kristien becomes the intruder: "I found a stone and hurled it through the large plate glass window, then chopped open a whole large enough to let me through" (329). The horrible, bloody spectacle Kristien encounters in the house suggests that, rather than create order and civilization, the barriers erected to establish and maintain a division between colonizer and colonized, inside and outside, white and black, men and women, instead produce chaos and barbarity. Throughout the novel, Casper's brutal psychological and physical abuse of Anna demonstrate his commitment to maintaining his power over his wife as much as his power over black South Africans. In an effort to make sense of what has happened, Kristien interprets her sister's actions as

an act of desperate resistance to Casper's domination: "Her only power was the power to destroy herself; and from that she didn't flinch. . . If your tongue is cut out you have to tell your story in another language altogether. This carnage is the only sign she can leave behind, her diary, her work of art" (331). The day before the murders and suicide, Anna confides in Kristien that, "even if the country does change, what difference can it make to me? I live on a different level, I'm afraid it's very basic. Man and woman. And that's not going to change . . . I'm living on a kind of subhuman level. I'm not even a woman any more. I'm just somebody's wife, somebody's sister, somebody's mother" (314-315). Anna's comments convey a sense of the dehumanizing effects of living under her husband's complete authority and the hopelessness she feels about the possibility of escaping from it. Anna's inability to imagine a life unstructured by the patriarchal colonial hierarchies imprisoning her results in horrific destruction. The novel connects Anna's assault on Casper's patriarchal authority to the battle against apartheid by offering a description of the house that superimposes the public account of the election on to the scene of Anna's murders and suicide: "The carnage stretched from the front room, where the television was still on – CNN bringing news of the elections; a new beacon of hope for the strife-torn world, the female announcer said in a voice that twanged like an electric guitar – down the hall, in to the bedrooms and the kitchen" (329). Again, in calling attention to gender hierarchies associated with apartheid, Brink points to a wider, more complex web of oppressive social binaries that must be renovated.

Several literary critics have noted that brutal, violent, apocalyptic scenes, such as the one at Anna and Casper's house, appear quite frequently in the conclusions of South African fiction of the 1970's and 1980's. In "The Colonial Mind in a State of Fear: The

Psychosis of Terror in the Contemporary South African Novel," J. U. Jacobs notes an apocalyptic nature in the literature of the late-apartheid/early-revolutionary South Africa era and relates it to the fear and terror felt by everyone at that time. An inability to imagine an end of colonialism produced novels ending with shattered civilizations and horrors (29-32).[29] Critic Elleke Boehmer also explores the effect of the end of South Africa's apartheid on the form of the endings in the 1980's:

> Narrative uncertainty, its suggestiveness and tease, were constrained within the deathly binaries of a long history of oppression and opposition. . . Often tales are end-stopped by social breakdown, exile, leave-taking, by the insistent imperatives of commitment to struggle, or simply by resistances to the novelistic imagination, to envisioning the future, imposed by the apartheid world. (45)

That Imaginings of Sand does not in fact end with Anna's murders and suicide, that the novel moves forward to depict what happens *after* the violence and death, reflects an impulse by the 1990's to imagine what might come after such horror, to imagine what living in the wake of apartheid might look like. The tragic brutality of the murders Anna commits and her suicide acknowledge the destruction and death associated with South African racial division and explodes the apartheid dialectic of white/black. By not ending the novel with the murders and suicide, Brink creates a space for possible reconciliation and a shared future in the ruins.

In fact, over the course of the novel, the way the housekeeper Trui and her husband Jeremiah occupy the Wepener house highlights the breakdown of the system that

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[29] Jacobs cites Karel Schoeman's Promised Land (1978), Elsa Joubert's To Die at Sunset (1982), and Shiva Naipaul's A Hot Country (1984) as examples of this trend.

places whites inside the Western European Great House and other races outside. When Kristien first returns to South Africa, they are "bedded down" in a small room near the kitchen, residing inside the house only so that they can serve as caretakers and servants. However, at the end of the novel after Ouma dies and wills the house to Trui, she and Jeremiah begin to occupy the house with an increasing sense of permanence

> . . . gradually taking possession, insinuating themselves into its space – initially with small indispensable items like an alarm clock, Bible, a flashlight, a change of clothing . . .; later with more emphatic signs of occupation: clothes and shoes stowed in a cupboard, . . . their own double bed, an old lemonwood slave chair, a framed embroidered pieta proclaiming, in High Dutch, *Great as the Sea are my Sorrows*" (338).

The items specifically listed point to an increasing sense of ownership. The first items mentioned include mostly practical, generic necessities connotative of a brief and tenuous stay. However, the personal objects they bring in after they inherit the house, such as their own bed, suggest permanent residence. In addition, the installation of the lemonwood slave chair and the High Dutch pieta[30], objects directly associated with South Africa's history of the oppression of blacks and the struggle for power of the Afrikaners, indicate that Trui and Jeremiah's move into the house marks a breakdown in the barrier that divided the culture and history of white and black South Africans. Significantly, references to the elections signaling the end of apartheid come directly before and after this description of Trui and Jeremiah's taking up residence in the house. Trui keeps "the radio on, full blast" so that in the house there was "a constant awareness of outside events

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[30] The OED defines a pieta as "a representation, in painting or sculpture, of the Virgin Mary holding the dead body of Christ on her lap."

invading our enclave" (338). The reports "kept us informed of the steady progress of the election and its aftermath" (338). The violence preceding the election abruptly stops, prompting Kristien to note that, "for so many years, . . . white and black had been invisible to one another, each pretending the other did not exist: now there was a sense of discovery in acknowledging our mutual presence" (339). Thus, the novel situates the breakdown of the racial barrier signified by Trui's ownership and occupation of the house within the context of the public dismantling of apartheid.

Brink closes the novel with images of black South Africans and white Afrikaners inhabiting the house together in a post-apartheid South Africa. With Ouma's death, Trui now owns the house and encourages Kristien to live there with her, signaling an end to the racial division that kept blacks and whites apart. The descriptions of the house at the end of the novel contribute to the sense that the end of apartheid is altering the social structure. Kristien muses, "Around us the house is alternately expanding and shrinking, a breathing in and a breathing out. The moon is high now. The walls have become transparent. They are translucent. There is space inside, infinite space" (323). The walls have not completely disappeared, nor have they been torn down. The description here differs markedly from the one that occurs when Kristien first returns to the house at the beginning of the novel. Earlier the walls are "blackened" and "skeletal." Here at the end they are "transparent" and "translucent" – significantly void of color. The walls still exist, but with white and black South Africans living within them, they no longer function as a form of racial division. Instead of a lifeless skeletal remain, the house appears alive and capable of change. In fact, throughout the novel, the house is described in terms connotative of imagination: as a "fantasy," a "dream" (262), a "nightmare"

(262), and a "phantasm" (227). Referring to the house in these terms reinforces the notion that it, and the social structure it represents, is a construct of the mind and, as such, might be renovated and changed. Yet, the house still stands, suggesting that going forward means having to deal with, to live with and in the structures and messy reality of the colonial past. Simply attempting to move away from those structures and pretending they never existed (as Kristien tries initially by living in London) is no more effective than the black South Africans' attempt to burn them down. Yet, even though Kristien still inhabits the house, she no longer seems to feel imprisoned by it: "I have chosen this place, not because I was born here and feel destined to remain; but because I went away, and then came back and now am here by choice" (347). The difference, then, at the end of the novel is that each of the characters has chosen to occupy the structure and to occupy it together.

By ending his novel with violence and death *and* reconciliation and hope, Brink enacts what Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly describe as South African writing's need to balance "reckoning with reconciliation," its need to "narrativize the past in such a way that the future becomes bearable" (3). Brink's forward-looking ending counters Boehmer's observation concerning contemporary South African literature of the 1980's and early 1990's:

> Even though an ending may be plural or indeterminate; even though a sense of things to come may be completely blocked out, more often than not we encounter a reluctance to speculate or dream, certainly to give any sort of positive reading about what might happen from now on, other than in the most obvious, formulaic, and limited ways . . . tomorrow is

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represented as struggle, or cataclysm, or the further disintegration of

society. (48-49)

Brink seeks to move beyond these kinds of endings, embodying the spirit he identifies in

his own critique of apartheid and political dissention: "It is rebellion not simply directed

against something, but aimed toward something" (Brink quoted in Chapman 404).

Imaginings of Sand reflects his impulse to move toward finding a path to racial unity in

South Africa. The novel certainly confronts and depicts the country's complex and

violent colonial history. However, along with recognizing and representing the

apocalyptic consequences of racial, as well as gender, inequity, it attempts to conceive of

something *beyond* these horrors – endeavoring to envision a South Africa for all South

Africans within the realities of postcolonialism. The horror happens *near* the end of the

novel. The novel does not deny the moment of horror, but it both acknowledges it and

imagines what might follow. While the ending might be criticized as utopic and

unrealistic (although the brutal deaths of Anna and her family work against this), it marks

a refusal to stay imprisoned within colonial structures, an acknowledgment that one has

to live in the remains of these structures but that perhaps one need not be oppressed by

them. Imaginings of Sand answers Boehmer's call for South African writing's

movement toward

. . . a return of endings that allow for new beginnings, for gestative

mystery, the moments and movements following apocalypse, also the

dramatization of different kinds of generation and continuity . . . an open-

endedness that makes room for new and various ways of thinking about

the future – no longer the inevitable interregnum, arrested birth, the

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moment before death – in short, the foreclosure of the frozen penultimate.

(51)

If, as Victoria Rosner puts forth, "Space is always contested, defined by and through the struggles over its meaning; the allocation of space organizes power" (83), then the shared space in the compromised, dilapidated Western European Great House at the end of Brink's novel clearly signals a reconfiguration of power within the ruins of the binary oppositions constructed by colonialism. Although this discussion focuses mainly on how the novel investigates and disrupts racial division in South Africa, by pointing to other oppressive and destructive hierarchical binaries, such as gender, Brink acknowledges the complexity of the social structures operating in South Africa and demonstrates that imagining a "New South Africa" will require more than tearing down apartheid. Just as Goje uses the symbolic architecture of native South Africans and Western Europeans to represent what the coming together of the two races in post-apartheid South Africa might look like in his "Meeting of Two Cultures," Brink strategically uses the symbol of the Western European Great House to expose how the racial binary of colonialism and apartheid operated and how it might be renovated into a space both races can inhabit together.

Brink's complex use of the symbol of the Western European Great House, which points to the continuing power of colonial/apartheid social structures while concurrently destabilizing and challenging them, raises questions about what it means for South Africa to be postcolonial and/or post-apartheid. Brink locates his investigation of the racial division associated with colonialism and apartheid within the architectural symbol of the Western European Great House because of that symbol's association with Western

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European systems of power. Even at a moment of such optimism and hopefulness as the mid 1990's when formal apartheid came to an end, persisting effects of the Western European colonial experience can be seen through the symbol of the Wepener family house. Although the house is damaged and South Africans of different races do reside in it together at the end of the novel, the structure still stands. In addition, employing a traditional Western literary symbol in his literary challenge to South African colonial and apartheid systems and in his imaginings of life in a post-apartheid South Africa underscores the influence of Western literary traditions on Brink's postcolonial novel, testifying to the lingering legacy and relevance of Western European cultural systems in postcolonial locations. In its use of the symbol of the Great House, the novel ultimately points to the unceasing repercussions of colonialism and, in so doing, prompts doubts about how new the "New South Africa" can be. This chapter's exploration of the Western European Great House in Imaginings of Sand reveals that Brink's novel does not present a brand new post-apartheid social structure but instead imagines a reconciliation firmly situated within a compromised colonial structure, consequently highlighting the continued coloniality in postcolonial, post-apartheid South Africa and tempering the hope of radical movement toward peaceful racial unity. In its insistence on the enduring legacy of colonial structures, the novel echoes many contemporary postcolonial and globalization theorists who assert that decolonization has yet to occur. As Ramón Grosfoguel argues:

> One crucial implication of the notion of coloniality of power is that the
> first decolonization was incomplete. It was limited to the juridical-political
> independence from the European imperial states. This led to the formation

of colonial independences. As a result, the world needs a second

decolonization, different and more radical than the first one. A future

decolonization would need to address heterarchies of entangled racial,

ethnic, sexual, gender, and economic relations that the first

decolonization left untouched. (103)

Thus, even though Brink's <u>Imaginings of Sand</u> closes with images of white and black

South Africans living peacefully together within a destabilized postcolonial structure,

through its highlighting of continuing coloniality, the novel contributes to contemporary

challenges to the mythology that colonial situations end after formal colonial rule.

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His and Hers: Gendered Positions of Power in Colonial/Neo-colonial Structures

in The House on the Lagoon

> "For we have, built into all of
> us, old blueprints of expectation and
> response, old structures of oppression, and
> these must be altered at the same time as we
> alter the living conditions that are a result of
> those structures. For the master's tools will
> never dismantle the master's house."[31]

Audre Lorde

Audre Lorde's frequently referenced passage asserts that the difficulties of tearing

down oppressive social structures stem not only from how deep-seeded and pervasive

they are, but also from the fact that any hope of demolishing or remodeling them rests in

using alternative strategies not readily available within the structures themselves. This

chapter examines Rosario Ferré's use of the traditional Western literary symbol of the

Great House in her exploration of how the blueprints for gender, race, and class

hierarchies built into that symbol impact the lives of the characters residing in the houses

of her 1995 novel, The House on the Lagoon.   After a brief overview of Ferré's

relationship to the tradition of the Latin American novel, the discussion focuses on

specific ways the architecture of the novel's houses exposes and challenges patriarchal

aspects of the Spanish and American colonial projects in Puerto Rico. Analysis of the

relationships between the men and women living in the houses reveals the complexity

and instability of colonial and neo-colonial power structures, particularly the difficulties

the women living in them face while trying to negotiate, re-imagine, subvert, and survive

in them. Although the novel stops short of constructing a viable alternative, Ferré's use

of the symbol of the Western European Great House succeeds in highlighting the

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[31] From "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" (McClintock 380).

persistence of patriarchal colonial power structures as well as women's multiple and shifting positions within them. If the symbol of the Great House can be considered a Western literary tool, Ferré's success in employing it in her critique of colonial and neo-colonial patriarchy chips away from the argument articulated by Lorde that the master's tools cannot be utilized in dismantling the master's house. Through her use of the Western literary symbol, Ferré effectively calls attention to similarities between colonialism and neo-colonialism without equating them, explores the relationship between colonialism and patriarchy without asserting a static, universal structure, and underscores the importance of considering specific historical contexts for post-colonial critique.

Rosario Ferré and the Latin American Novel

Critics typically describe Rosario Ferré as a Latin American author, primarily because she is a Puerto Rican writing predominantly in Spanish.[32] Yet, genre definitions can be problematic. In his Latin American Fiction: A Short Introduction, Philip Swanson lists a series of important difficulties related to creating an accurate and fixed meaning of the term 'Latin American fiction'. One obvious problem is that the enormous area typically referred to as Latin America, land in the Western Hemisphere south of the United States, encompasses numerous countries with vastly divergent historical, economic, cultural, and political systems. In addition, although Spanish is the most prevalent language, it certainly is not the only one, as Portuguese, French, and English

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[32] The House on the Lagoon is Ferre's first novel written in English.

are among the official languages of several Latin American states.[33] Swanson also calls

attention to concerns that arise when attempting to locate Latin American fiction

temporally:

> . . . when does 'Latin American' begin? Is one to include the period
>
> before the arrival of Columbus or can the word "Latin' only refer to the
>
> post-Columbian experience? Are the writings of the colonial period Latin
>
> American or often merely Spanish (even if written in the so-called New
>
> World)? Do Latin American culture and identity really begin in the
>
> nineteenth century with Independence and/or with the forging of nation
>
> states? Is the term valid anyway or merely the projection of a colonial
>
> European mentality? Does it include or do justice to the ethnic range and
>
> mix of the subcontinent (for example, of indigenous, European, African,
>
> other or mixed descent)? (1)

This wrestling with the term 'Latin American literature' echoes the experiences of

literary critics working with texts tied to postcolonial locations all over the world. That

much of the explosion of postcolonial criticism produced since Edward Said's

Orientalism in 1978 centers around debate about the construction of boundaries of time,

place, form, and content that make situating a text within a certain literary tradition

possible illustrates that these issues are typically hotly contested and can lead to many

more questions than answers.   Mindful of the problems raised by these questions, most

literary critics continue to use the term Latin American literature, usually (but not

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[33] The region gets its name, Latin America, from the Latin-based languages introduced by the Western colonizers: Spanish, Portuguese, and French.

exclusively) in reference to Spanish language texts written during and after the nineteenth century (2).

Ferré's novels are associated with the Post-Boom period in Latin American fiction, the fifth of five major categories of Latin American literature: Civilization and Barbarism, Romanticism, Realism, the Boom (or New Novel), and the Post-Boom. Writing prior to the early 1800's when much of Latin America, inspired by the successful revolutions in America and France, gained independence after 300 years of Western European rule (principally by Spain and Portugal, and to a lesser extent, the Netherlands, England and France) consisted primarily of narratives such as fanciful diaries and adventure chronicles produced by colonists to further their economic, political, and evangelical goals (Swanson 3). As European Romanticism spread to Latin America during the nineteenth century, ideals of individualism and nationalism emerge as major literary themes resulting in new forms specific to the Latin American location, such as Gaucho literature, which celebrates the native outlaw cowboys battling an oppressive government. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Realism became the predominant literary form. Writers continued their "exploration of emerging national identities," but did so by attempting to depict reality objectively and in great detail (Swanson 19).

Dramatic changes in form came with the advent of the New Novel in the 1940's and 1950's, which resulted in the Boom period of the 1960's. According to Swanson, the New Novel grew out of questions about whether, "reality was straightforward or even comprehensible; and that reality could ever be captured easily or accurately in writing" (Swanson 38). Given the anxieties and uncertainties of modernity, writers no longer felt that social realism's straightforward cause and effect linearity could capture their

experience. They used language and form to invent new ways of imagining and representing time and space, often resulting in fragmentation rather than linearity. Eager to represent their uniquely Latin American experience, they infused their writing with particular local traditions and histories. Their mixing of fantasy with every day reality became the principal stylistic development linked to the New Novel: magical realism (Shaw 38-62).[34] Magical realism became wildly popular, bringing Latin American novelists fame and lucrative publishing contracts.[35] However, by the mid 1970's many Latin American authors began to eschew some of the New Novel's innovations, such as its breaks from reality and its fragmentation, in favor of more traditional forms which they felt were less intellectually elitist and nihilistic, allowing them to connect with "mass or popular culture," and made for an "increased orientation towards social or political reality" (Swanson 87).

The novels of the Post-Boom are less fragmented, less fantastic, and more linear, making them markedly more reader-friendly (Swanson 12). Indeed, these accessible, straight-forward, plot-driven works contrast sharply with the complex puzzles of many of the Boom novels. Post-Boom novels typically embrace popular culture, which also gives them a less esoteric and elitist feel. This moving away from the formal aspects of Boom novels was not a simple one for Post-Boom authors. They wrestled with, "how to write realistic, socially oriented fiction without seeming to perform a U-turn back toward old-fashioned models" (Shaw 30). Even though modernism, post-modernism, and the Boom

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[34] Key originators of these literary innovations were Carlos Fuentes, Julio Cortázar, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Gabriel Garcia Márquez (Shaw 38-62).

[35] The explosion of the New Novel onto the world literary scene, referred to as the Boom, began in earnest with Mario Vargas Llosa's La Ciudad y los Perros (The Time of the Hero) winning the Biblioteca Breve Prize in 1962 (Shaw 61). Swanson attributes the sudden interest in Latin American authors in part to the 1959 revolution in Cuba, which raised interest in the region in general, as well as to the fact that many Latin American writers had relocated to Western Europe, particularly Spain and France, for economic and/or political reasons, which gave them greater access to the literary market (87).

problematized the form, realism provided a means to referentiality, a necessity for the

kinds of social commentary these authors were striving to achieve. They regarded the

Boom writers' undercutting of the possibility of knowing or interpreting reality as leaving

no space for solutions to problems plaguing Latin American countries (43-47). However,

critics such as Shaw and Linda Hutcheon emphasize that in adopting old forms, writers

do not necessarily employ them in an old-fashioned way. Roberto González Echevarria

argues that "this return to plot centeredness is not accompanied by any return to narrative

authority on the part of the author/narrator . . . often involving "ironic reflexitivity" on the

part of the author about the processes of writing themselves" (Shaw 21). The novels of

the Post-Boom are more realistic than those produced during the Boom, but they are

certainly conscious of the post-structural and postmodern problematizing of realism.

The Post-Boom period signaled more than simply a return to more traditional

form. Women made up a large part of the group of Post-Boom writers and bringing

gender issues to the forefront of their works was a large part of the Post-Boom's social

commentary. Many of these feminists aimed to unflinchingly expose the reality of Latin

American women's experience and explore the workings of gender oppression as well as

imagine possibilities for change.[36] Jean Franco claims that,

> Like French feminists, many Latin American women writers understood
>
> their position to be not so much one of confronting a dominant patriarchy
>
> with a new feminist position, but rather one of unsettling the stance that
>
> supports gender power/ knowledge as masculine. This "unsettling" is

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[36] Another instance of the Post-Boom shift to writing rooted in social and political reality is the emergence of *testimonio* – autobiography dictated to an educated writer by a lower socio/economic class individual (frequently women) typically silenced or completely absent from traditional narrative.

accomplished in a variety of ways through parody and pastiche, by mixing

genres and by constituting subversive mythologies. (122)

She identifies Isabel Allende, Luisa Valenzuela, Critina Peri Rossi, and Rosario Ferré

among the leading Latin American women writers she sees as participating in this

undertaking (122).   Despite their investigation of troubling gender matters, Allende notes

that many of these authors, weary of the pessimism associated with Boom novels, infuse

their texts with "a greater degree of optimism than before" (Shaw 10). Yet their turning

away from nihilism can hardly be characterized as an embracing of unguarded

romanticism. These feminist Post-Boom writers face head-on serious and disturbing

issues and are highly conscious of the often brutal impact of patriarchal social, economic,

and political circumstances on Latin American women's lives (Shaw 13). Many aspects

of Ferré's writing correspond with the elements associated with Post-Boom novels as

outlined above.

Ferré's attentiveness to gender issues, particularly women's oppression,

corresponds with one of the most significant aspects of the Post-Boom era. Her works are

politically charged and often participate in the Post-Boom critique and investigation of

traditional historiography.[37] The form of Ferré's writing also places her within the Post

Boom tradition. For the most part, her narratives progress linearly and, although she does

sometimes embrace the supernatural, for the most part she eschews the magical realism

of the Boom novels. Her works are accessible and typically include aspects of popular

Latin American culture. The only major controversy regarding Ferré's position as a key

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[37] In fact, most of the critical references to The House on the Lagoon concern its interrogation of traditional historiography.

Post-Boom literary figure has come from her decision in the 1990's to write in English rather than Spanish.

As a well-known and well-respected feminist Post-Boom author and critic, Ferré prompted a lot of questions and drew heated criticism for choosing to write her 1995 novel, The House on the Lagoon, in English. She followed this with Neighborhoods in 1998 and Flight of the Swan in 2001, also written in English. Prior to this, the bilingual Ferré had written first in Spanish and then translated her works into English.[38] Some critics, such as Swanson, suggest that writing in English has taken the edge off of her feminist critique: ". . . these novels are readily accessible, but perhaps break with the overtly radical political and feminist agenda that Ferré appeared to espouse in the past when writing in Spanish" (116). Swanson concludes that The House on the Lagoon ultimately, "seems something of a Latin confection to the recipe of a successful formula that will go down well with the English-language market," although he concedes that, "from a more radical perspective, perhaps this is an example of the colonized playing the colonizers at their own game, by using the North American market for a Latin American writer's own ends" (116). Julie Barak notes that, when asked about choosing to write in English at a lecture shortly following the novel's publication, Ferré responded, "It was a Machiavellian decision. If I write in Spanish, no one would ever pay attention to the book outside of Puerto Rico, or maybe, Mexico. This way I reach a larger audience. I sell more books" (38). Clearly, Ferré's comments do nothing to dispel the notion that practical material realities played a part in her decision to write in English. However, I

[38]Her background as an educated, upper-class Puerto Rican woman (Ferré's father was a pro-statehood governor of Puerto Rico from 1968 to 1972) who attended undergraduate and graduate school in the New York and Maryland helped to ensure her bilingualism.

agree with critics such as Lydia González-Quevedo that there is more to Ferré's writing

in English than simply earning U.S. dollars.

The vehemence and persistence of the questions themselves speak to the

significance of the issue of language in Puerto Rico. Despite constant debate and

government legislation, Puerto Rico is, in fact, an officially bilingual country.[39] As

countless postcolonial critics have theorized, language is central to issues of culture,

identity, and agency in colonial/postcolonial/neocolonial contexts.[40] Therefore, the

decision by postcolonial authors to write in their indigenous language, their "mother

tongue," or in the language imposed through colonialism is highly political. Beyond

merely selling more books, González-Quevedo asserts that by writing in English and then

translating into Spanish after so many years of writing in Spanish and then translating

into English, Ferré effects a movement back and forth across the antagonistic divide of

English/Spanish. Rather than getting stuck on one side of the barrier or the other, she

bends both languages to her purposes. She demonstrates "a perfect mastery of both

languages, the imperial one as well as the colonial one" in an act of "linguistic agency"

(251).[41] González-Quevedo argues that, for Ferré, "crossing over these language borders

continually has erased the identity icon that language once used to represent in nationalist

contexts" (256). In this way, "she [Ferré] affirms the possibility of a multilingual Puerto

Rican culture, and of a subject's identity politics that include both languages" (263).

Therefore, rather than somehow turning her back on Latin American literature,

Ferré's writing in English can be interpreted as constituting a move toward "healing a

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[39] A "Spanish only" law was passed in 1991 only to be repealed two years later (González-Quevedo 249).
[40] Ngugi Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe's debate on the topic in the 1970's laid the foundation for the discussions on the topic of language and colonialism/postcolonialism that continue today.
[41] It seems important to note that Spanish is also a language brought to the island through colonization when Christopher Columbus and the conquistadors arrived in 1492.

known rupture with the Spanish-only writer's identity politically charged in Puerto

Rico's postcolonial condition" (González-Quevedo 259-60). The House on the Lagoon

begins with two epigraphs, a quote from Homer's The Odyssey, followed by a quote

from José Eustasio Rivera's The Vortex. Along with introducing the major themes of her

novel, starting her first work written in English with translations of texts written in other

languages highlights her willingness to cross linguistic borders. Thus, from the very first

page Ferré refuses to be limited to any one language or set of literary traditions. The

remainder of this chapter focuses on how Ferré uses another tool, the Western literary

symbol of the Great House, to explore the impact of the gendered social hierarchies

constructed through Puerto Rico's past and continuing colonization on the lives of the

women living in them. Throughout the course of Ferré's novel, three houses are

constructed on the lagoon. After establishing a successful import business, the

Mendizabal family patriarch, Buenaventura, builds the initial house in the style of Frank

Lloyd Wright. Anger at his wife Rebecca's behavior in the house prompts him to tear it

down and erect the second house, a Spanish Revival mansion, in its place. Upon

inheriting this house, Buenaventura and Rebecca's son Quintín razes it and reconstructs

the original Wright-inspired house. This chapter investigates ways in which the three

incarnations of the house on the lagoon in Ferré's novel emphasize, and raise questions

about, Puerto Rico's former and continuing patriarchal coloniality.

Colonialism and Patriarchy on the Lagoon

Before exploring each particular house, however, a brief review of Puerto Rico's

history of colonialism will provide a foundation for the discussion of the connections the

novel makes between the island's colonial experiences and the oppressive patriarchal social structures operating in each house. Puerto Rico was first formally colonized by Spain when Christopher Columbus landed there in 1493. According to Ronald Blackburn Moreno's "Chronology of Puerto Rico," Columbus christened the island "San Juan Bautista" (St. John the Baptist), although over time it became known by the name of its largest city, Puerto Rico ("Rich Port"). The native inhabitants, Arawak Indians of the Tainos culture, fought the initial Spanish settlers who arrived in the early 1500's under the leadership of Ponce de León, the island's first Spanish governor. Their efforts to force the Spanish out were quickly thwarted and within fifty years those few Arawak Indians who had survived murder and disease had been enslaved. In 1511 Pope Julius II established three diocese of the Roman Catholic Church in Puerto Rico. The first African slaves were brought to the island two years later. In spite of devastating hurricanes and plagues, as well as frequent attacks by their neighbors from nearby islands (Carib Indians as well as other Western European colonizers in the area -- the English, the French, the Dutch), the Spanish slowly established a growing population.

Spain maintained control of Puerto Rico for 400 years. According to historian Raymond Carr, the island's importance to the Spanish empire stemmed from its location. With its vast Latin American holdings, Spain needed to ensure that it could move goods and personnel through the Atlantic freely. Puerto Rico became a crucial outpost from which they could monitor and safeguard the shipping lanes of the Caribbean. Initially the settlers were largely illiterate subsistence farmers overseen by government officials typically posted there as a political reward (17-18). As sugar, tobacco, and coffee plantations were established, export trade expanded and gradually divisions grew

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between the island's inhabitants. By the mid to late nineteenth century, elite landowners, merchants, and bureaucrats (almost exclusively of direct Spanish descent), who clearly benefited from the employment and/or income derived from markets protected by Puerto Rico's relationship with Spain, favored remaining a colony. Conversely, many small business owners, liberal intellectuals, and Creole farmers, who recognized the need for free trade and home rule, began to call for a break with Spain (18). Uprisings increased throughout the second half of the nineteenth century culminating in Spain's 1897 approval of a resolution giving Puerto Rico political and administrative autonomy.

Puerto Rico's self-governance was brief, however, as the United States invaded the island later that year during the Spanish-American War. Puerto Rico officially became a dependent of the United States in accord with the Treaty of Paris when the war ended in 1898. The form of the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico has shifted slightly several times since the United States took control. The Foraker Act of 1900 established a separate government on the island overseen by a U.S. appointed governor. In 1917, the Jones Act designated the island a territory with English as its official language. At that time the people were also granted U.S. citizenship. Puerto Rico's economy prospered during the 1920s and 1930s due to high sugar prices but, when the markets fell during the 1940s, migration to the U.S. increased dramatically. 1950 brought another change in the relationship between the island and the U.S when it was reclassified as a commonwealth. With this change Puerto Ricans gained the right to elect their own governor, have their own constitution, and fly their own flag. Nationalists and pro-independence groups flourished in the 1960s and continue to fight against U.S. rule, finding opposition from those who campaigned for statehood, arguing that the

benefits of the island's connection with the U.S. outweigh the costs. Plebiscites were held in 1967, 1993, and 1998 to allow Puerto Ricans to choose whether to retain their commonwealth status, become a state, or become independent. Each time the people voted to remain a commonwealth.[42]

Clearly, as is the case of each of the postcolonial locations discussed in other chapters of this dissertation, Puerto Rico has had an experience of colonialism unique unto itself. Theorists disagree over exactly where to place Puerto Rico on the spectrum of colonial-postcolonial-neo-colonial. Some contend that due to its continuing commonwealth status, the island should be considered a colonial space. Others argue that the form of U.S. rule, cultural and economic domination rather than overt and violent military control, marks Puerto Rico as a neo-colonial location. Another critical camp claims that, because the commonwealth shares so many issues stemming from the colonial experience with other postcolonial locations, it makes sense to think of the island in those terms. In his argument for considering Puerto Rico and other Latin American places postcolonial locations, Robin Fiddian adopts Peter Hulme's definition of postcolonial as, "referring to 'a *process* of disengagement from the whole colonial syndrome" (4). Obviously, each of these arguments comes with its merits and its difficulties. The vigorous debate itself indicates that firmly situating Puerto Rico into one of these categories is clearly problematic and, I believe, contrary to the impulse of Ferré's novel. I argue that the three houses on the lagoon reflect the island's two major periods of colonization, one the era of Spanish rule (which for the purposes of distinguishing between the two, I refer to as *colonial*) and the other the era of U. S. rule (which I refer to

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[42] Ramon Grosfoguel attributes the less than 10% vote for independence to political and economic realities, arguing that, "'Independence' and 'sovereignty' in the Caribbean periphery are a fictional narrative of the hegemonic developmentalist geoculture of the modern/colonial capitalist world-system" (8-9).

as *neo-colonial*). This chapter asserts that through the architecture and function of the houses, which call attention to the island's history of colonialism/neo-colonialism, Ferré explores the patriarchal oppression built into both, ultimately suggesting that, although the forms of the Spanish and U.S. domination differ in significant ways, beneath the surface the underlying male-dominated hierarchical social structure operates in much the same way. In so doing, the novel raises doubts about the usefulness, and even the possibility of, drawing lines to distinguish between colonialism-postcolonialism-neocolonialism, particularly in regard to the women's issues.

In fact, from the very beginning of the novel, details entwine the two periods of colonization in Puerto Rico: the 400 years of Spanish rule and the island's 100 year relationship with the U.S. The family's patriarch, Buenaventura Mendizabal, arrives in San Juan penniless from Extremadura, Spain via the *Virgen de Covadonga* on July 4, 1917. Buenaventura's stepping off the ship from Spain in search of wealth mimics the journey of the Spanish conquistadors. The ship's name itself significantly points to colonial complexity, calling attention not only to Spain's role as colonizer but also to that nation's own struggle against colonization. When the Moors ruled Spain in the eighth century, a small remnant of Spanish soldiers hid in the sacred caves of Covadonga praying to the Virgin Mary. They eventually fought off the Moors and drove them from the peninsula. Since that time, the caves have been a sacred site and a symbol of Spain's power. Therefore, naming the ship *Virgen de Covadonga* reminds readers of Spain's own long and multifarious colonial history. The date of Buenaventura's arrival also alludes to multiple colonial moments. Ironically, July 4, 1917, a month and day that immediately calls to mind U.S. independence from British colonization, is also the

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precise day Puerto Rico became an official territory of the U.S. Mixing these references

to Spain's complicated history of colonialism with allusions to U.S. experiences as both

colonized and colonizer, breaks down barriers between static categories of colonization,

laying the groundwork for the novel's insistence on commonalities across colonial eras,

carried out in part through architectural references.

On his first day in Puerto Rico, Buenaventura notes that the dome of the new

capitol building being constructed on "the avenue named after Ponce de León" is an

"exact copy of the one Thomas Jefferson built at Monticello," again combining allusions

to Spanish and American colonialism (17). Significantly, the details used to suggest the

two eras of colonialism are specifically gendered. Refering to Buenaventura, a direct

descendant of Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizzaro, as a patriarch places him in the

company of other historic colonial patriarchs: Ponce de León and Thomas Jefferson.[43]

In the example cited above, Ferré underscores the importance of building to the

patriarchal colonial project by mentioning both of these men renowned for their

construction in structural contexts: Ponce de Leon's avenue, Jefferson's Monticello.

Thus, even before the first house on the lagoon is built, architectural references call

attention to connections between patriarchy and both experiences of colonialism in

Puerto Rico.

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[43] Complications arising from Jefferson's relationship to colonialism reflect a wider debate on whether or not the United States should be considered a postcolonial location. The American Revolution brought about the end of British colonial control, making the United States no longer colonial and therefore postcolonial. Peter Hulme argues that the United States is postcolonial, only in ways vastly different from other locations such as India. However, many theorists contend that the United States' military and economic domination place it outside what can be considered postcolonial experience. For the purposes of this project, as a founding father of the country that for one hundred years has controlled Puerto Rico, Jefferson can be regarded a patriarch of the colonizers. For a lengthy discussion of the United States and postcolonial theory, see Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt's introduction in U. S. Studies and Postcolonial Theory.

Throughout this exploration of the relationship between patriarchy and colonialism in The House on the Lagoon, I use the term patriarchy to refer to a white Western European male-dominated social hierarchy as defined below by Geraldine Moane:

> . . . [Patriarchy is] a social system which is first of all hierarchical: that is, it can be characterized as a pyramid where a small percentage of people have access to most of the wealth and power, while large numbers have little access to wealth and power. It is secondly male dominated, in that it is mostly men who have access to power. It is also the case that those who have access to power are more likely to be white and heterosexual. Thus there are class, race, and gender dimensions to patriarchy, and there are also, as noted above, historical and cultural variations. (10)

Her recognition of "historical and cultural variations" is especially important to this discussion as the patriarchy in Ferré's novel will be shown to be particularly interconnected with Puerto Rico's experiences of colonialism. The relationship between patriarchy and colonialism has been widely theorized. In her criticism, Elleke Boehmer calls attention to the fact that the colonial project was primarily designed and enacted by men by referring to colonizers as "he" intentionally rather than generically, arguing that "this usage is justified . . . by the ubiquity of male-dominance at many levels of colonial activity" (9). In Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies (1998), Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin note commonalities between the two systems: "Patriarchy and imperialism can be seen to exert analogous forms of domination over those they render subordinate. Hence the experiences of women in patriarchy and those of colonized subjects can be paralleled

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in a number of respects, and both feminist and post-colonial politics oppose such dominance" (102). Moane sees the two systems as mutually supportive rather than parallel, contending that "the experience of colonization is gendered: that is, it is experienced differently by men and women. Furthermore, constructions of gender have served the interests of colonial domination, and colonial domination has produced ideologies and cultural practices which buttress patriarchy" (12). Therefore, while colonialism and patriarchy refer to distinct social systems, both are related and mutually constitutive.

Many critics warn against equating the two forms of oppression. Theorists such as Trinh T. Minh-ha, Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak, Sara Suleri, Hazel Carby, and bell hooks recognize similarities and affinities between the oppressive systems of colonialism and patriarchy, each placing men in positions of power over women, while attending to the dangers of conflating the two. They insist that simplistic configurations placing men in positions of power over women erase crucial differences between women. Postcolonial feminists, such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty in "Under Western Eyes," argue that the universal woman frequently implied by Western feminism equates all women, positing white middle class Western woman as the referent, ignoring women outside the white Western European world experiencing other forms of oppression based on race and class (Ashcroft 103). The postcolonial feminists listed above and many others have investigated ways in which women experience colonialism differently. Spivak, Mohanty, and Suleri highlight the "double colonization" of many women in the Third World who are oppressed in general as colonial subjects as well as particularly as women, often rendering them silent and invisible (Ashcroft 103-4). Other critics point to

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the complicated social positions held by colonizing women, experiencing gender oppression while concurrently wielding power over colonial subjects. bell hooks insists that feminist calls for sisterhood in the face of patriarchal oppression, a "bonding as victims," cover over the fact that women often participate in the exploitation of other women on the basis of class and/or race (McClintock 397). Ania Loomba reminds us that while the term patriarchy is helpful as a way to indicate "male domination over women," the ideology and manifestation of patriarchal hierarchies vary across time and place and are clearly impacted by the specifics of each colonial location (18).

The House on the Lagoon's investigation of the relationship of patriarchy to Puerto Rico's specific colonial experiences reflects these feminist postcolonial critics' calls to attend to historical context, especially consciousness of the ways in which other forms of oppression operate within specific locations. A close look at the houses in the novel reveals that Ferré's emphasis on the particulars of colonialism in Puerto Rico highlight patriarchal structures directly related to the island's two colonial periods, colonial and neo-colonial, ultimately revealing them as similarly oppressive to the women living in them in spite of differences in their veneers. The following exploration of the houses in the novel focuses on how the oppression experienced by the women living in them is directly related to the island's colonial experiences and on how, although the structures differ in surface appearance in the colonial and neo-colonial eras, the oppressions experienced by the women living in them are almost indistinguishable.

The First House on the Lagoon

The connections between Spanish colonialism and U. S. neo-colonialism and the underlying patriarchy they share as set forth in the description of Buenaventura's first day on the island continue and develop more fully in the houses constructed by Buenaventura and his son Quintín. Buenaventura founds his import business on the profits from selling fresh water to cargo ships from a spring near the lagoon. The narrator of the novel, Buenaventura's daughter-in-law Isabel, implies that the spring was acquired in a decidedly violent, colonizing manner, commenting that Buenaventura took over the spring after ". . . the caretaker of the spring was found dead, lying by the rim of the fountain, from a mysterious blow to the head" (11). That Buenaventura's money comes from the sale of a natural resource of the island procured through violence highlights the connection between his wealth and the capitalist colonial project. After amassing a significant fortune, Buenaventura wants to "move to a place more in keeping with their new prosperity" and decides to construct a house over the spring (40). His desire to live somewhere that reflects his rising social status underscores the house's function as a symbol of his wealth and power. Thus, the land the house is built on and the funds used to build it both call attention to the house's colonial location. Insisting that the house be built right over the spring, the source of his fortune, means that in this case the foundation of the male colonizer's house *literally* rests on the natural resources that were violently seized and exploited. In addition, Buenaventura demands that the house have a "magnificent terrace from where he could watch his ships go in and out of the harbor," clearly suggestive of the economics of colonization (43). When explaining the project to his architect Milan Pavel, he complains, "This place we're living in now can't properly

be called a home . . . It's only a temporary residence. I want you to build me a mansion

more suited to our social standing" (43). Buenaventura's instructions reveal that his

motivation for building the first house on the lagoon is to create a manifestation of his

place at the top of the local power structure.

Buenaventura's desire for a monument to his power and prestige leads him to

choose Pavel as his architect. Pavel is also a member of the island's elite: a well-dressed

European-born, American-educated architect responsible for the design of several

landmark buildings in Puerto Rico. He builds mansions for the prosperous Spanish

businessmen he meets through his membership in the Elks and Mason clubs, filling "San

Juan with beautiful copies of the master's houses, which the islanders hailed as gems of

architecture" (48). His houses combine American modernist design with grandiose

elements suggestive of wealth, such as golden mosaics. Although unaware that Pavel's

architectural style mimics Frank Lloyd Wright's quintessentially American design, the

islanders prize his buildings because they stand out as different, evoking a connection to

the West, but also because the design elements he adds to Wright's plans result in houses

that serve as symbols of wealth and power. In choosing a European-American architect

highly esteemed by the island's Spanish upperclass, Buenaventura purposely attempts to

align himself with those in positions of power over the island.

The details of Pavel's background link him to the U.S. and the neo-colonial.

Pavel came to Puerto Rico from the U.S. but, unbeknownst to anyone on the island,

including Buenaventura, never finished his architectural training. A protégé of Frank

Lloyd Wright in Chicago, he left the U.S. with a copy of Wright's design portfolio after

killing his adulterous wife. As with Buenaventura, the pursuit of economic gain provides

the impetus for Pavel's move to Puerto Rico. While on the run after the murder, he read reports of the island's poverty and need for construction in U.S. newspapers. Meeting some rich Puerto Rican sugar merchants in Florida convinces Pavel that construction opportunities exist in Puerto Rico at a distance safe enough to copy Wright's plans. Thus, Pavel's plagiarized buildings pose as new forms but in the end are funded by, and reinforce, power structures associated with traditional architectural forms. The Wright-inspired house on the lagoon he builds for Buenaventura stands as a metaphor for the neo-colonial relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico, which appears vastly different in some ways from the island's colonial relationship with Spain on the surface while the foundational systems of hierarchical power function similarly.

The numerous times Frank Lloyd Wright's name appears in the chapter in which Buenaventura hires Pavel to build the house (ten in eleven pages) underscores the significance of the origins of the plans for the house on the lagoon. The ideology associated with Frank Lloyd Wright (the man and his architecture) undergirds the novel's use of the symbol of the house to highlight the underlying similarities in the power structures of colonialism and neo-colonialism, in spite of overt differences. At first glance, many characteristics of Wright's designs appear at odds with hierarchical neo-colonial principles and credit him with developing a distinctly new style. Wright often spoke and wrote of his intention to create an architecture that reflected the "realities of twentieth century industrial civilization" (Satler 118). Olgivanna, the last of Wright's four wives, claimed that he "rebelled against outlived forms; it was impossible to build anything new on top of something that was already crumbling" (Satler 127). In many ways, his designs seem more democratic than traditional American architecture based on

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Western European ideals and principles. Wright himself encouraged this interpretation, claiming in his 1952 lecture, "The Destruction of the Box," that "organic architecture is the architecture of organic freedom" (Satler 4). Rather than complying with tradition, Wright sought a way to move beyond "the box," the standard cube of space that separated outside from inside and was constructed with post and beam construction (Satler 5). In her book Frank Lloyd Wright's Living Space, Gail Satler claims that,

> Wright believed that much of the existing Western architectural forms and notions of space sought to eliminate difference and to impose one view to which all must adhere. For Wright, this left space devoid of life and meaning. More importantly, it entrapped inhabitants so that they too lost their identity and living spirit. The challenge for Wright was to provide for this sense of space, through the preservation of differences . . . [He sought to] give voice to architectural/social orders(s) that he believed reflected and fostered a diversity in ways of living, not that imposed one way of life. This diversity, to him, was part of the American ethos he wished to preserve. (8-9)

The democracy and freedom of Wright's "organic" design philosophy thus appear antithetical with a strict and static patriarchal colonial power structure.

Indeed, in practice his use of windows and walls suggest a breakdown of hierarchy. An abundance of windows disrupts the distinction between inside and outside -- an important binary differentiation for the colonial/neo-colonial project. Satler argues that Wright's revolutionary ways of using windows reflect his democratic philosophy:

> To remain consistent with his belief that as many points of view as possible needed to be housed, Wright created windows in many untraditional shapes and placed them in untraditional places . . . His windows were completely broken up into patterned panes of glass . . . large sheets of glass tended to foster the notion of a single image or point of view. (104)

His open floor plans do away with the walls separating spaces within the house, making the designation of space according to gender or class less likely. In fact, according to Satler, he viewed walls as representations of "vertical imposition . . . the vertical as the inhibitor of speech and of individual freedom morally, socially, and physically" (Satler 100).

In addition, Wright's commitment to horizontal building appears to counter the colonial impulse toward hierarchy. According to Satler, "Wright was opposed to basements, attics, and many closets. All these provided for the possibility of secrecy and opacity that excess (and verticality) breeds" (101). The skyscrapers of the early twentieth-century troubled Wright. He found himself "discouraged by the emphasis of the vertical in building as the method for resolving the modern space problem when it reflected senseless excess and imitation – crass capitalism – as the dominant ideology and impetus for American architecture" (27). Building vertically imposes a hierarchical order and forces individuals to "look upward" (77). In Dynamics of Architectural Form, Arnheim sees Wright's horizontal plan as one in which "one can move freely in any directions without having the sensation of climbing or descending" (Satler 79). He argues that verticality creates an atmosphere of "isolation, ambition, and competition"

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(81). Satler agrees, claiming that the horizontal movement in Wright's designs "emphasize change or difference without imposing hierarchy. Going from one place to another need not evoke comparison. Aspirations or needs always remain at eye level" (80). In a capitalist economy where the price of land rose dramatically, it made sense to build upward, the height of the structure signifying the amount of profits generated by the companies housed in it (88). Wright saw the early twentieth-century obsession with vertical building as an expression of the logic of capitalism, which, according to most biographers, he abhorred (83).

Therefore, Wright's philosophy and designs appear to work counter to the divisive, controlling, and hierarchical impulses typically attached to colonial architecture. By referencing Wright, The House on the Lagoon initially intimates that neo-colonial power structures are, like Wright's designs, less hierarchical, less rigidly oppressive, and more responsive to the colonial location and the individuals living there than traditional colonial frameworks of domination. However, recent criticism arguing that Wright's work often contradicts many of the principals he championed undermines this reading. Rather than attributing the horizontal in Wright's work to a dedication to democratic ideals, some critics link it directly to the American ethos of Manifest Destiny. At the same time Satler insists on the democratic nature of Wright's design philosophy, she argues that Wright's stressing of the horizontal and a connection to the land stem from the, "American 'frontier' ideology of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, which Wright was strongly influenced by, that clearly stressed horizontal movement and expansion. The implication was that the possibility for movement was, would always be,

endless" (79). This imperialist impulse certainly makes it possible to read the horizontal designs as supportive of the U.S.'s neo-colonial agenda rather than as opposed to it.

Many of the design elements related to Wright's organic and democratic philosophy resulted in houses that have proven, in reality, difficult to live in. The horizontal roofs frequently leak and lead to costly repairs. The absence of attics, basements, and closets, not only reduce "secrecy and opacity" but greatly reduce storage as well (Satler 101). Even in Wright's open designs, work spaces within the home such as for cooking and laundry (tasks typically performed by women and/or lower class employees) are often relegated to cramped, out-of-the-way corners. Donald Johnson writes that Wright's house design was, "much more open about the entertaining spaces" while "the 'work space,' as he called the kitchen (with attendant storage and/or furnace) was tucked into an open but cupped space. Juxtaposed to the kitchen space and in a single large – and it could be amorphous – space were dining, sitting, or living, and sometimes a reading nook or a music alcove" (82). In spite of being de-emphasized and assigned   smaller spaces, the necessary household tasks continued to be required and performed. Therefore, the removal of some of the interior walls hardly seems to have reconfigured the house for freedom, especially for women and household staff.

Biographical anecdotes from Wright's life also undermine some of the democratic principals espoused in his philosophy. In the 1930's, Wright and his wife established the Taliesin Fellowship. Staunchly opposed to formal, traditional schools of architecture, Wright encouraged young apprentices to come to Taliesin and learn by working directly with him. Ayn Rand, who incorporated some of the ideals of Wright's architectural philosophy in her novel The Fountainhead, visited the Fellowship and was discouraged to

find the apprentices living in a "real caste system" where the students "moved in an atmosphere of worshipful, awed obedience" (61). She described the apprentices as "Medieval surfs," noting that at dinners "The Wrights and their guests sat on a raised platform high above the others" (61). In Frank Lloyd Wright Versus America: The 1930's, Donald Johnson observes a similar dynamic: "The Fellowship was touted as a self-sustaining workshop . . . it might have been seen as a kind of Kolkhoz, a collective farm community, or a kibbutz. But the reality was otherwise. It was closer to an English manor house" (64). Such accounts of Wright's life reveal that, as with his architectural design, beneath the surface of a philosophy espousing freedom and equality of individuals lie familiar hierarchical power structures. Given such evidence that, despite some appearance to the contrary, Wright's philosophy and designs ultimately reinforce a gender and class-based social order, Ferré's emphasis on the connection between Wright and the house on the lagoon establishes the house as a symbol of another structure that appears less restrictive than a more traditional form: neo-colonialism. The association between Wright, America's most celebrated architect, and the U.S. is clear. The fact that some of his designs can be interpreted as maintaining patriarchal hierarchical structures while appearing to dismantle them seems to mirror the argument put forth in the novel that, while neo-colonialism masquerades as something new, it in fact operates according to a stratified, oppressive social framework typical of traditional colonialism.

The description of the development of the house plans reveals that, while Pavel appears to disrupt convention by privileging Rebecca's desires over her husband Buenaventura's and attempting to create something "original" and organic to the island, he in fact constructs a space that reinforces gender, race, and class dynamics associated

with the colonial/neo-colonial project. Pavel initially rejects the commission, "suspecting that the real reason Buenaventura wanted him to design the house was that he liked his golden-mosaic decorations – which gave off an affluent glitter under the noonday sun – and not because of his avant-garde architectural lines" (44). However, after meeting Rebecca and becoming enchanted by her love of art and her free spirit, he agrees to build the house. Enamored by her beauty and elitist artistic interests, as well as feeling sorry for her being married to the brutish Buenaventura, Pavel accepts the job. Rejecting Buenaventura's coarse desire for a straight-forward symbol of his wealth and power, he aims to build the house Rebecca wants: "a masterpiece where everything will be carefully planned to preserve the illusion of art" (47). Although designing a house around Rebecca's artistic pursuits suggests a privileging of women's concerns over men's, and thus a disruption of the traditional dynamic of patriarchal colonialism, the novel frequently mentions the economics supporting Rebecca's artistic pursuits, highlighting the link between her interest in poetry, ballet, and modern dance and the economic freedom and privilege Rebecca enjoys as a member of the neo-colonial upper class. As the daughter of wealthy Puerto Ricans of Spanish lineage, Rebecca and her upper class friends "did not have to work for a living . . . wanted to lead beautiful lives, both inside and out, wear beautiful clothes, visit beautiful places, and occupy their minds with beautiful thoughts" (45). She models herself after Isadora Duncan and reads modernist poetry (45). The emphasis on the economics attached to Rebecca's interest in art, and the fact that the "Temple of Art" she wants will necessitate illusion, foreshadow that Pavel's neo-colonial design, while appearing "new" and "original," will ultimately

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fail to break free from the class and gender hierarchy traditionally associated with Buenaventura's brutal colonialism.

Pavel does incorporate spatial and artistic elements in the house in an attempt to construct a new kind of space that will showcase Rebecca's art rather than Buenaventura's business. However, the following passage describing the newly constructed house, which highlights its colonial foundation and the relationship between the new artistic architectural detail and the old colonial economic structure, reveals Pavel's failure to disassociate Rebecca's elite art and Buenaventura's colonial business:

> As he worked on the plans he grew inspired and added many new elements which would make the house more in keeping with life in the tropics. At the front entrance, the one which opened onto Ponce de Leon Avenue, there was to be a magnificent mosaic rainbow. Through this rainbow Rebecca would dance out into the world, swathed in her silk chiffons and reciting her love poems. The bedrooms would be in the front wing, facing the boulevard, and an elegant open pavilion would connect that wing to the dining and living rooms, which would face the lagoon . . . Under the house would be a large cellar. The kitchens would be there, as well as a large number of storage rooms, and a special chamber for the spring. The ceilings were to be twice as high as those of Wright's houses, and the edge of the gabled roofs would be decorated with a glittering mosaic of olive boughs – the token gesture Pavel made toward Buenaventura, since olives were one of Mendizabal's best-selling products . . . Pavel designed a beautiful golden terrace at the back of the house,

floating over the lagoon . . . It was the first time in his life he designed

something truly original. (48)

Some of the aspects of the house can be read as alterations to traditions of colonial

architecture that reinforce gender and class hierarchies. For example, Pavel's placing the

bedrooms at the front of the house facing the street diminishes the distance typically

established between the personal and the public, suggesting a less oppressive system for

women typically assigned to the private spaces located as far from the public sphere as

possible. Creating the mosaic rainbow through which Pavel imagines Rebecca dancing

"out into the world" also points to a freedom for women to move out into the world

beyond a patriarchal system in which women are confined to their homes. However, the

design details again underscore the economics that make Rebecca's lifestyle possible. It

is Buenaventura's money and the servants living in the cellar that allow her to wrap

herself in silk chiffons and afford her the leisure to spend her time dancing and reciting

love poems. By tying the independence Pavel imagines for Rebecca to her social

position as a colonizer's wife in its description of the house, the novel undercuts the

notion of the house standing as a symbol for a new, more equitable structure.

In addition, the passage above indicates that regardless of Pavel's focus on

creating a space of freedom for Rebecca, he incorporates many elements which mark the

residence as emblematic of the colonial origins of Buenaventura's power. The very

beginning of the depiction of the house's placement again reminds the reader, through the

reference to Ponce de León Avenue, that the house is specifically located within its

historical colonial context. It also sits directly over the spring, the original source

Buenaventura's wealth. The golden mosaic of olive boughs and the opulent terrace that

enables Buenaventura to observe his cargo ships come and go from the port further underscore the colonial economics upon which the house rests. The location of the "large cellar" for the servant's quarters under the Mendizabal's public and private rooms emphasizes colonial class stratification. The description accentuates the size of the space designated for the servants, suggestive of the vast number of people whose labor will be required to support the structure of the house. In fact, the servants' quarters become the very foundation of the house. Similarly, the ceilings of the house, "twice the height of Wright's," evoke a sense of space and freedom but also reinforce the sense of verticality and hierarchy. Thus, the alterations Pavel makes in Wright's designs when building in the neo-colonial location ultimately result in a house in which patriarchal colonial power structures are even more pronounced and less subtle than those of Wright's original plans, reinforcing, rather than reconfiguring, colonial patriarchal hierarchy.

Rebecca and Buenaventura's contrary visions of the purpose of the house, reflected in its neo-colonial design comprised of some elements that seem to oppose patriarchal oppression and others that support it, set the stage for conflict. She intends the house on the lagoon to be a space she can control and use to explore her artistic interests, a space of freedom disconnected from Buenaventura and his political and business interests. Initially they strike a compromise, alternately using their house for her artistic and his business pursuits, an arrangement that, like neo-colonialism, on the surface appears less patriarchal and oppressive. Rebecca particularly enjoys discussing politics with her artist friends because many of them support the fight for Puerto Rican independence, which Buenaventura adamantly opposes, believing that, "if she couldn't be independent herself . . . at least her country should have control over its own destiny"

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(97). Within months of the young couple moving into the house, however, Buenaventura

becomes the Spanish consul, which results in endless business meetings and formal

receptions for Spanish and U.S. dignitaries at the house. Rebecca fears that the house

will become a "Temple of Commerce and Diplomacy where her husband reigned

supreme," a fear realized when he tells her she can no longer entertain her artist friends

because it is "unseemly for a diplomat's wife to patronize such bohemian goings-on"

(51). She tries to retain some power over the use of the house by reminding him of the

traditional patriarchal framework of men's and women's separate spheres, arguing that,

"a man's kingdom is his business and woman's is the home, but Buenaventura wouldn't

take her seriously" (51).

Regardless of her efforts, Rebecca cannot separate herself and her art from

Buenaventura's business and politics because his affairs support the house economically.

She bows to the primacy of his interests when she accepts his decree that she give up her

artistic pursuits "because she didn't want to damage Buenaventura's career as a

diplomat" (51). In sacrificing her art for his business interests, she acknowledges that the

foundation of their lives rests on his financial assets. Descriptions of the house,

particularly private spaces typically designated as women's space, frequently underscore

Buenaventura's ultimate control of the house and Rebecca. For example, imported hams

are stored in Rebecca's closet, "next to her fashionable Paris outfits and lace lingerie"

(52). So, in spite of her attempts to distance herself from Buenaventura's business,

"when Rebecca was invited to dinner at their friends' homes, there was always an odor of

smoked ham about her that left no doubt as to the prosaic origin of the Mendizabal family

fortune" (52). Rebecca's inability to escape the permeating scent associated with her

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husband's business reinforces the extent to which the patriarchal colonial system envelops her.

Buenaventura's conceding to again allow Rebecca some control over the house occurs only after she becomes pregnant. Throughout their ten year marriage, their feelings about not having children differ dramatically: "This was a disappointment for Buenaventura, who wanted a large family, but Rebecca didn't mind it at all. She didn't want children. She felt she was a free spirit; if she had children, she'd never be able to dance and be one with nature the way she wanted" (39). Upon discovering that he will be a father, Buenaventura permits her to resume the soireés he had forbidden. By providing an heir, Rebecca fulfills a crucial aspect of the role of colonial wife, ensuring the continuation of the colonial patriarchal system, prompting Buenaventura to reward her with a loosening of the restrictions he had set on her artistic pursuits. Thrilled at the birth of a son and heir, Quintín, he tells her she can "invite as many artists as she wanted to her cultural gatherings, which would alternate with Buenaventura's diplomatic meetings" (57). He does not completely turn over control of the house to her, however, tolerating Rebecca's evenings of poetry reading and dance only as long as she continues to perform her role of hostess at dinners for his business associates on alternate evenings. Even though Rebecca re-establishes some power over what happens in the house, it is predicated on her fulfilling the duties of colonial wife and mother. This power dynamic between the mistress and master of the neo-colonial house on the lagoon reveals that patriarchal colonial precepts continue to dominate those living in the house.

The terrace becomes a battleground where the tenuousness of Rebecca's power within the neo-colonial structure plays out. After seven years of sharing control of the

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house, Rebecca tests the limits of her authority by "being true to her artistic vocation"

and dancing the Dance of the Seven Veils from Oscar Wilde's <u>Salomé</u>, even though she

knows that Buenaventura has invited business guests to their home that evening (65).

When Buenaventura arrives, he reacts swiftly and violently to end her sexually assertive

dance on the golden terrace:

> She took off each of the seven veils and was almost stark naked . . . when
>
> Buenaventura's Rolls-Royce arrived in front of the house and he walked
>
> up the stairs with several of his friends. When he saw Rebecca, he didn't
>
> say a word. He simply took off his cordovan belt, livid with rage, and
>
> flogged her until she fell unconscious to the floor. (65)

Lying lifeless on the terrace, Rebecca mirrors the ill-fated Salomé, whose sexuality and

passion led to death. Her bold claim of control over her body and the house by

performing nude on the terrace her husband built to monitor his export business is

countered by brutal violence. Details in the description of the event emphasize the source

of Buenaventura's power. The Rolls Royce serves as a symbol of his wealth. Arriving

with friends casts him as a leader of men. That his belt is "cordovan," an expensive

Spanish leather, provides a subtle reminder of his Spanish conquistador roots. In this

way, the novel connects Buenaventura's need to punish Rebecca for asserting herself to a

tradition of patriarchy and colonialism.

The beating puts an end to Rebecca's artistic pursuits, but she seems to trade one

form of resistance for another. As her considerable physical wounds heal, she uses

silence as a way to refuse to participate in a neo-colonial structure in which she has no

power. She sits "like a broken doll, dressed in one of her flowing gauze gowns, and

wouldn't say a word" (66).[44] Buenaventura, interpreting her silence as madness, blames

the house for Rebecca's "losing touch with reality," telling friends, "Pavel may be dead

and gone, but his house is still breeding fantasies around us like Anopheles mosquitoes.

If Rebecca goes mad, it will be his fault, everyone knows his buildings are jinxed and the

owners end up in an asylum. But I'm not going to let that happen to us" (66). Rebecca's

challenges to his authority, first her artistic pursuits, then her sexually assertive dance,

and finally her silent withdrawl, fuels Buenaventura's determination to regain control

over the space and his wife. He associates her resistance with the ambiguity of

patriarchal domination in the house's neo-colonial design. One evening, "as he sat with

Rebecca at the table in Pavel's beautiful dining room, he looked around reproachfully.

'We need to get rid of all this useless bric-a-brac' . . . taking in at a single gesture the

stained glass lamp hanging from the ceiling, the lotus water goblets on the table, and the

silver wine cooler on the buffet" (67). Because Buenaventura views the feminine and

artistic elements of the house as connected to the threat Rebecca poses to his control over

her and the house, he "called in a demotion crew, and had Pavel's house razed to the

ground. In twenty-four hours the Tiffany-glass windows and pearl-shell skylights were

shattered to pieces, and Rebecca's mosaic rainbow was ground to bits" (67). After years

of struggling to impose control over Rebecca in Pavel's neo-colonial house that allows

for the possibility of opposition to his authority, Buenaventura finally resolves to create a

space that will leave no ambiguity about his supremacy or Rebecca's place within the

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[44] For a discussion of silence as a form of resistance employed by post-colonial women see <u>Violence, Silence, and Anger: Women's Writing as Transgression</u> (1995) edited by Deirdre Lashgari and bell hook's <u>Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black</u> (1989) and <u>Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics</u> (1990).

patriarchal colonial power structure, tearing down the house on the lagoon and constructing a Spanish Revival mansion.

The Second House on the Lagoon

The architectural elements highlighted in the description of the new house Buenaventura builds over the well after demolishing Pavel's neo-colonial design characterize the new structure as masculine, violent, unyielding, and colonial:

> In place of the old house, Buenaventura built a Spanish Revival mansion with granite turrets, bare brick floors, and a forbidding granite stairway with a banister made of iron spears. From the ceiling in the entrance hall he hung his *piéce de résistance*, a spiked wooden wheel that had been used to torture the Moors during the Spanish Conquest, which he ordered made into a lamp. (67)

Significantly, Buenaventura makes all the decisions regarding the house's design and furnishing, unlike the first house when both he and Rebecca were involved. The feminine aesthetic embellishment of the first house, suggestive of a less-oppressive system, have been torn down and replaced with symbols of masculine, colonial power. The name of the architecture itself, Spanish Revival, points to a reversion to the unambiguous, aggressive domination of the Spanish colonial era. The cold, hard granite stairway is "forbidding." Spanish colonial weapons – iron spears and a spiked wheel of torture – replace elements connotative of compromise and freedom, such as the mosaic rainbow over the entryway. Locating these symbols in the entrance hall, where every visitor will be confronted by them, elevates their importance to the design of the house.

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Thus, the Spanish Revival mansion leaves no ambiguity about who holds the power in this house. Pavel's compromised neo-colonial design, which seemed on the surface to provide possibilities for women's power, ultimately could not be tolerated by Buenaventura; and, by incorporating symbols of masculine power and colonialism into the second house on the lagoon he leaves no space for uncertainty about his authority.

In the new house, the façade of freedom Rebecca experienced in the neo-colonial structure has been torn away as she leaves her artistic pursuits behind to provide Buenaventura with the large family he desires and take over the domestic responsibilities she avoided in the first house. Though the terrace on which she danced and expressed herself still stands because its demolition would weaken the foundation of the house, it is fused into the design of the new house. The incorporation of the terrace corresponds with Rebecca's re-inscription into the patriarchal colonial power structure symbolized by the Spanish Revival mansion. The description of the terrace becoming part of the new house is immediately followed by a list of the three additional children:

> Ignacio was born in 1938 . . . Patria and Libertad, followed soon after in 1939 and 1940, respectively. Rebecca bore her frequent pregnancies patiently, seemingly reconciled to her fate. But she was exhausted. She put away her dancing shoes and her poetry books and slowly faded from view. (69)

That she bares her pregnancies "patiently" and is "reconciled to her fate" highlights that for Rebecca, motherhood is more a duty than a desire. Once Buenaventura makes her artistic self expression impossible by beating her and tearing down the house, her fear

that motherhood would hamper it becomes irrelevant. She resigns herself to having children and, as she suspected would happen, she "faded from view."

This is not to say that Rebecca is completely powerless in the Spanish Revival mansion. From this point in the novel on, Rebecca conforms to the role of colonial wife and embraces the power, albeit limited, she wields as Buenaventura's spouse. As Ann Laura Stoler argues in "Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in Twentieth-Century Colonial Cultures," ". . . European women in these colonies experienced the cleavages of racial dominance and internal social distinctions very differently than men precisely because of their ambiguous positions, both as subordinates in colonial hierarchies, and as active agents of imperial culture in their own right" (McClintock 344). Although unable to fully expressing herself within the new overtly colonial house, Rebecca does command some authority as the wife of Buenaventura. She demonstrates this power as she patrols the hallways with a huge ring of keys, "with which she would lock up the wines, the coffee, the oil, and the sugar in the pantry" and presides over family dinners (52). She becomes a model colonial wife:

> . . . as if she were acting out a role on stage. In the thirty-seven years she
> had lived, she had given several very intense performances. Now she was
> set on being the perfect wife. The house on the lagoon was spotlessly
> clean. Industriousness became the Mendizabal family's supreme virtue,
> and no one was ever supposed to be sad. Order and discipline were very
> important. (120)

That this is a "role" that she performs highlights the fact that, rather than behaving freely and independently, she acts according to a socially prescribed set of rules. The values

Rebecca insists on in the new house (cleanliness, industriousness, cheerfulness, order, discipline) are ones typically associated with the colonial project, on the Western side of the binary divide between the colonizer and the colonized. As critics such as Victoria Rosner contend, colonizers were expected to maintain these Western virtues and colonial wives were charged with upholding them within the home. While subordinate to Buenaventura, being his wife gives Rebecca access to limited control over parts of the house, her children, and her servants (which will be discussed more fully in the final section of this chapter). Still, Rebecca never attempts to regain her artistic freedom within the Spanish Revival mansion. Instead, she enacts the role assigned to her and wields the power associated with her position within the rigid patriarchal colonial structure until the end of her life.

The Third House on the Lagoon

The first-born son Buenaventura and Rebecca raise in the house on the lagoon (the only one born in Pavel's original design), Quintín, witnesses and detests his father's brutal treatment of his mother, whom he sympathizes with and adores. As he matures, he figures himself a neo-colonial man, in the sense that, although he acknowledges and feels a connection to his family's Spanish colonial traditions, he strives to be less overtly authoritative and violent. From the very first page of the novel, Quintín attempts to distance himself from his Conquistador ancestry and cast himself as a new kind of man, more refined and less aggressive, controlling, and demanding than his father. Even though he has "inherited Buenaventura's swarthy Spanish looks" and his "fiery temper," he studies history and art at Columbia University in the U.S. and dreams of being an art

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collector and historian (81). He aligns himself politically with the U.S. by supporting

efforts to establish statehood for Puerto Rico. He thinks of the "United States as his real

country. He considered himself not a citizen of Puerto Rico but an American citizen – a

citizen of the world" (149). References linking him with the U.S. help create a sense that

he is an advocate and representative of the neo-colonial power structure. When he

proposes to Isabel, he promises to be different than his violent father. After beating a

young man he finds serenading his fiancé, he begs her forgiveness, insisting that he

"didn't want to be like his father, his grandfather, or the rest of his ancestors . . . who

were descended from the Spanish Conquistadors. They all had wrathful dispositions and,

worse yet, were proud of it, insisting that rashness was a necessary condition for bravery"

(5). He promises Isabel that he could and would control his violent tendencies.

In a move reflecting the young couple's hope not to reenact the brutal power

dynamic Quintín observed as a child between his parents, they try to physically distance

themselves from the house on the lagoon. Rather than live there, they move into a "small

apartment . . . in one of the new buildings of Alamares" (267). Isabel feels that this will

allow them to "finally live our own lives and be able to get away from the house on the

lagoon" (267). However, Rebecca undermines their plan from the start by insisting that

the couple have their wedding reception at the house on "Pavel's golden terrace" (206).

Seeing the gleaming terrace makes Isabel remember the story her husband told her about

"Rebecca and her unhappy performance as Salomé" (208). She thinks about how

"Rebecca wanted to be a writer and a dancer, but she became neither, because of her

unhappy marriage," foreshadowing the similar restrictions she would experience in the

house on the lagoon (208). Additionally, even though they live in town, Isabel learns

quickly that constant family obligations such as Sunday Mass, birthday parties, and christenings require frequent trips to the house: "Trying to get away from the house on the lagoon was like trying to get out of the briar patch; when you pulled away, you took part of it with you, and it pulled you right back" (255). While familial social occasions keep Isabel tied to the house on the lagoon, Quintín finds himself bound to his family economically as well. Rather than pursue a career as a historian, he begins working at his father's company, Mendizabal & Company.

Regardless of efforts to disassociate himself with his father, the deaths of his parents reveal character traits suggestive of the patriarchal Spanish colonial heritage beneath Quintín's neo-colonial façade. Following Buenaventura's death, Rebecca inherits the Spanish Revival mansion on the lagoon. When she dies two years later, in a final act of resistance, she subverts the tradition of primogeniture by dividing the estate (including the house) between her four children rather than leaving everything to her eldest son, Quintín (273). Although he considers himself a modern, contemporary man, being denied what he feels is his birthright as the first-born male infuriates him. This expression of his attachment to a power structure that is patriarchal and a central aspect of the Spanish colonial power dynamic, despite his declarations to break the mold of his domineering and violent father, indicate that at his core he is still very much attached to those traditions. Realizing that he will not be leading the company after his mother's will divides the power equally between he and his three siblings, Quintín creates a new company he can control completely, Gourmet Imports. His reaction to his mother's challenge to the patriarchal colonial system is to attempt to re-establish it. The description of how he puts together his new company emphasizes a connection to the

island's colonial history while incorporating elements that suggest its neo-colonial present. He leaves Puerto Rico and develops the business plan at the Spanish monastery his father and countless generations of Mendizabal Conquistadors had used as a retreat. He travels to Spain, France, and Switzerland to secure contracts with many of Buenaventura's old business partners. On top of this colonial foundation he situates the headquarters in a "modern building in San Juan" and establishes an expanded business model built around importing to the U.S. This results in something not entirely new but neo-colonial in that the company looks and functions a bit differently than his father's (and is linked to the U.S.), but the basic business fundamentals remain the same. After successfully establishing his company, he buys his siblings out of their partial ownership of the house, surprising Isabel (who has just given birth to a son) by announcing that they will be relocating to the house on the lagoon.

The changes the couple make to the house when they move in indicate that neither is entirely comfortable residing in the Spanish Revival mansion. Isabel rests easier after seeing "white paint covering the walls like an emulsion; it was as if we were spreading a coat of forgetfulness over them, erasing everything that had happened inside . . . Quintín and I bought modern furniture, new kitchenwares, new sheets and towels" (295). Not thoroughly satisfied with these small changes, Quintín quickly agrees when his art dealer, Mauricio, tells him that he is "squandering one of his greatest artistic resources" by not re-constructing Pavel's masterpiece, the first house on the lagoon. Isabel believes that Quintín's association between the Wright-inspired house and Rebecca motivates him to re-build the house: "If he could restore the house to its original state, he would feel closer to Rebecca, the house had been very much a part of her" (299). The details of the

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renovation underscore the notion that the project is an effort by Quintín to re-establish a connection to his artistic mother and the less-restrictive neo-colonial dynamic of the first house, distancing himself from his violent, controlling father symbolized by the Spanish Revival mansion:

> A demolition crew was brought to the house and in a matter of days it leveled Buenaventura's Gothic arches and granite turrets. Slowly a fairy-tale palace began to rise from the rubble. Artisans were brought from Italy, and they restored the glittering mosaic rainbow over the front door. The Tiffany-glass windows, the alabaster skylights, and the burlwood floors were all reproduced, so they looked exactly as they had in Rebecca's time. The house was spectacular, but I couldn't help feeling uncomfortable about spending so much money on it. How could we afford such luxuries? . . . The difficult economic situation on the island . . . had been exacerbated by the recent political violence . . . I had a beautiful son and a magnificent house. I could read and write as much as I wanted, once I finished supervising the household chores. And yet I never felt truly happy . . . Where had the money for the restoration of the house come from? (299-300)

Isabel and Quintín's lives within the reconstructed house on the lagoon appear eerily similar to those of Rebecca and Buenaventura when they first moved in, much like the architectural details listed above. Quintín works long hours and his business thrives and expands. Isabel, with a "beautiful son and a magnificent house," considers herself "blessed" (300).

As Rebecca had experienced during her first years in the Wright-inspired house on the lagoon, Isabel feels free to pursue her artistic interests, as long as she also performs the domestic duties attached to her role of wife and mother. She finds herself, as Rebecca had, in what Simon Gikandi calls the awkward and often contradictory positions colonizing women occupy, often "committed to the ideals of the dominant culture but also aware of their tenuous encampment in it" (228). Her vision of the house as a "fairy-tale palace" foreshadows the fiction of the freedom she feels in the house, of the neo-colonial as less oppressive and patriarchal. Significantly, the passage above connects Isabel's sense of unease with the financial foundation of the house and the island. Aware that the economic hardships and political unrest in Puerto Rico stem from being a territory of the U.S., her knowledge of the exploitative neo-colonial relationship undergirding the grandeur of her new home troubles Isabel.

Moreover Quintín becomes increasingly violent and controlling within the reconstructed neo-colonial space, mimicking Buenaventura's behavior in both the neo-colonial house and the Spanish Revival mansion, and thus suggesting a similar power dynamic even in the absence of overt symbols of traditional colonialism. Specifically, both father and son insist on exerting control over their wives' bodies. Guilt-ridden by his ruthlessness in wrestling the family home and business from his siblings and eager to save his son Manuel from a similar experience, Quintín refuses to have a second child even though Isabel wants a large family. He insists she be sterilized, threatening to force her to have an abortion if she becomes pregnant (301). Having witnessed the aftermath of an abortion her mother had experienced and having sworn never to go through that pain herself, Isabel concedes. She immediately regrets having the operation, "Once I got

home, I realized what I'd done and felt miserable. I was now barren *because* of Quintín"

(321). Although less physically aggressive in imposing his will on his wife, Quintín's

need to control Isabel's body, keeping her from using it as she desires (to have children)

through the invasive surgical procedure corresponds to Buenaventura's domination of

Rebecca's body, ending her sexually-assertive dance with a brutal beating.

Quíntin's aggressive control over women's bodies extends beyond his wife when

he has sex with Carmelina, the nineteen-year-old grand-daughter of the long-time head

housekeeper, Petra. Although Petra reprimands him, saying, "You took advantage and

raped her the day of the picnic on Lucumí Beach" (320), he cringes at her

characterization, telling Isabel, "The devil put Carmelina before me. She asked me to

swim out to the mangroves and I couldn't resist the temptation. It started out as a game,

and it was over before I realized what I'd done" (321). He rejects Petra's version of

events casting him as the rapist of a young girl whose gender, class, and race place her

beneath him in the patriarchal colonial hierarchy, a role inconsistent with his desire to

distance himself from his colonial ancestors. Unlike his father, who proudly takes Isabel

to see the Mendizabal Elementary School he built for the local black children, many of

whom had "gray-blue eyes like Buenaventura" because he "sometimes liked taking the

black women of Lucumí to the beach, where he made love to them on the sand for a few

dollars" (313), Quintín refuses to take responsibility for his actions. He makes excuses to

cover over his violent behavior, denying the accusation that he raped the young woman.

Desperate to shift the blame, he points to external supernatural forces, claims the

encounter began innocently, and finally insists on a lack of consciousness. Regardless of

his efforts to re-characterize what happened between him and Carmelina, Quintín's

actions reveal an attitude of power over all the women in the house on the lagoon, not just his wife.

Ironically, Isabel subverts Quintín's refusal to allow her to have more children and forces him to relax his commitment to patriarchal colonial/neo-colonial traditions with the child born of the rape of Carmelina. When she discovers that Carmelina has given birth to his child, she blackmails him into adopting the newborn Willie by threatening to divorce him and leave the house with their son Manuel (322). Unwilling to let this happen, Quíntin agrees to adopt the mulatto child. Isabel stays in the house, but moves into the guestroom and returns the "Mendizabals' heavy gold signet ring" that he had given her as an engagement ring (322). However, Quintín's insistence that they treat Willie and Manuel equally, regardless of the gossip of San Juan society that "never would have dared do what we did, adopt a mulatto child as our own and give him our last name," softens Isabel's heart (324). His willingness to compromise on the strict rules designed to ensure pure bloodlines marks an easing of rigidity of the patriarchal colonial power structure, represented by the Bloodline Books. These records of marriages kept by the Spanish priests had initially "been instituted to keep the blood free of Jewish or Islamic ancestry, and separate records of all white and nonwhite marriages were kept in them" (22). Even though after the "Americans arrived on the island, the Bloodline Books were abandoned," grandmothers could be counted on to remember "how the Bloodline Books had read and knew exactly who might have hidden stains in his or her pedigree" (23). Isabel points out that for many Puerto Ricans, the rules became irrelevant as "unsoiled lineages were becoming almost impossible to find" and when the U.S. took over the island experienced a "loosening of old Spanish customs" (23). Still, the

Mendizabals and other very wealthy and powerful families "stubbornly kept to the old Spanish ways," imposing an "even stricter code of behavior for their children" (24). Therefore, Quintín's acceptance of Willie as his son indicates a significant relaxing of the Spanish colonial traditions.[45] His movement toward a less rigid, more inclusive power structure creates a space for he and Isabel to come back together: "When I saw that Quintín was going out of his way to be fair with his two sons, my heart went out to him. A year after Willie arrived at the house on the lagoon, we were reconciled. I moved back to our room, and we shared the same bed again" (324). Because Quintín had conceded to Willie's adoption, she "willingly took over the role of mistress of the house on the lagoon," caring for the children, overseeing the care of the house, participating in women's groups and charities, and entertaining her husband's business associates (329).

However, just as with Buenaventura and Rebecca, the period of the couple's peaceful compromise within the house on the lagoon ends when she begins to challenge Quintín's authority through her self-expression. When they were in college, Quintín had admired Isabel's dream to be a writer and promised to support her literary efforts. However, Quintín becomes troubled when he discovers Isabel's manuscript. Although comfortable with her pursuit of fiction, finding that her "The House on the Lagoon" is an account of the personal history of their two families unsettles him. He feels she is blurring the lines between history, which he sees as constructions of facts by historians like himself, and fiction, which he considers imaginative "lies" full of fancy (70-72). He believes all fiction writers "interpreted reality . . . and that was why [he] preferred history to literature . . . there were limits to interpretation, even if the borders of reality were

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[45] Many critics have written about the social and economic significance of maintaining racial barriers for the colonial project. For an overview, see chapter 2, "Colonial and Post-colonial Identities" in Ania Loomba's Colonialism/Postcolonialism (1998).

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diffuse and malleable . . . that was why [he] didn't consider writing a serious occupation, like science or history" (72). Casting himself as an historian and Isabel as a novelist underscores the association between genre and gender, the traditional expectation that, as Joan Scott and others argue, history is written by men.[46] Quintín's criticism that she "made up incredible things about my family and left out much of what really happened" (71) point to key aspects of historiography that highlight the power of traditionally male historians to decide what is included/important and what is excluded/insignificant. He feels she "had altered everything. She was manipulating history for fiction's sake" (71). Conscious of history's ability to judge what is just or unjust, he wonders, "Was Isabel writing this novel because she wanted to have control over their lives? She was imposing her opinions and making the decisions . . . often pointing a finger at the male characters . . . The women in the novel, on the other hand, were all portrayed as victims" (109). What disturbs him is Isabel's claiming her own perspective and voice, her seizing the power to represent the past and present, a power Quintín maintains does not belong in the hands of Isabel, a woman trained in college to write fiction.

Isabel's text, "The House on the Lagoon," becomes the battlefield on which she and Quintín struggle for control, much as the golden terrace was the site of Rebecca and Buenaventura fight for power. The places Isabel hides her manuscript become increasingly further from, and symbolically challenging to, the patriarchal neo-colonial power structure and, accordingly, Quintín becomes more and more desperate to manipulate and suppress it. Initially he stumbles upon the first few chapters behind a

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[46] Many critics such as Joan Scott and Linda Hutcheon have explored issues of gender and power in relation to historiography. For a discussion of history and gender in Ferré's The House on the Lagoon, see Lydia Margarita Gonzalez-Quevedo's dissertation: A Postcolonial Approach to a Colonial Literature?: The Case of Puerto Rico.

Latin dictionary on a shelf in his study, a place associated with masculine traditional knowledge. He reads them and, although they make him "uneasy" and suspicious of her, he replaces them unaltered (75). The next chapters he finds in a cookbook in the kitchen, a space clearly associated with women and women's domestic sphere. Outraged that the events she recounts are "tarnished by embellishment or downright falsehoods . . . and tainted by feminist prejudices," he hastily jots down his own version, the "historical truth" (109), but afterward decides not to attach it to her text. However, he cannot resist imposing his voice and adds "a few commentaries here and there in pencil, in a tiny script which was almost invisible" (146). Later, realizing that Isabel has hidden the text in a new location and intent on reading it, he conducts an extensive search of the house and finally discovers additional chapters in a secret compartment in his mother's desk where Rebecca herself had concealed her portfolio of poems from her husband. Isabel's description of a conflict between the Nationalist cadets and Quintín's grandfather, Arrigoitía, particularly bothers him because "the lens through which the event was seen had been subtly altered, and the blame laid on the wrong party" (151). Unable to allow her version to stand, he begins to write in the margins and on the backs of the pages to correct the facts of her history and critique her style.

Reading her manuscript, Quintín becomes convinced that, if Isabel publishes "The House on the Lagoon," a scandal will ensue, destroying the legacy he intends to leave behind, San Juan's first art museum called the Mendizabal Foundation situated in the house on the lagoon, before it even becomes a reality. His fear that her achievement will mean that his own will be "stillborn, discredited from the start" motivates him as he hunts wildly for her text in order to destroy it (374-75). The notion that a power structure exists

within the neo-colonial house on the lagoon that provides an easing of patriarchal control by allowing a space for women to express themselves crumbles when Quintín threatens Isabel: "I will turn this house upside down until I find it. And if I don't and you publish it, I'll kill you" (375). He never finds it, though, as Isabel has entrusted it to Petra, who put it in a cardboard box near the altar of her effigy of Elegguá in the servants' quarters beneath the house, eventually passing it on to Willie before her death. It is only in this final location -- the servants' quarters next to an icon of a non-Western religious tradition – a space designated for the colonized, separated by the divides determined by gender, class, and race, as far from patriarchal colonial power as possible, that the text is finally securely out of Quintín's reach and beyond his control. The movement of the text from Quintín's library shelf, to the kitchen, to a secret drawer in Rebecca's desk, and finally to Elegguá's box calls attention to the underlying gendered colonial hierarchy of the house on the lagoon and emphasizes the increasing distance between Isabel's history and the power structure Quintín believes the text challenges.

Unable to locate and destroy Isabel's "The House on the Lagoon," Quintín focuses on ensuring that the physical house on the lagoon and the patriarchal neo-colonial power structure it represents stand long after his death. Convinced that neither of his sons, Manuel and Willie, is committed or qualified to uphold Buenaventura's patriarchal colonial traditions or his own neo-colonial ideals, he disinherits them both, rewriting his will to establish the house on the lagoon as an art museum named after himself. Manuel, who has become involved with a radical Marxist organization violently fighting for Puerto Rican independence, rejects both his grandfather's Spanish colonial heritage and the neo-colonialism of his father, claiming a Puerto Rican identity aligned with the

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experience of the colonized: "I'm a Puerto Rican and Father thinks he's an American.

He'd have us speaking English and forget we ever spoke Spanish. He thinks that way he

could peddle his hams more efficiently on the mainland" (391). Manuel blames the

island's problems on the exploitative capitalism of neo-colonialism that his father

embraces. Fighting against the economic hierarchy supporting and symbolized by the

house on the lagoon, he imagines a Puerto Rico "where everyone could be free – from

drugs, from ignorance, from poverty – where no one would sleep in the house on the

lagoon, while others had no sheets at all" (360). Quintín cannot bear the idea of the

house and the fortune it represents being used to tear down the neo-colonial power

structure. He disinherits Manuel out of fears that he would "donate our fortune to the

Independentista cause. . . Neither of them [his sons] cares a damn about Buenaventura's

reputation or about mine. Gourmet Imports and even our art collection will go to

subsidize the Independentistas and the Nationalists, those fanatics who have been our

family's proverbial enemies for over half a century" (370).

Isabel understands Quintín's reaction to Manuel's radical rejection of his ideals

but becomes outraged when he insists on disinheriting Willie as well. He claims that

Manuel could easily convince Willie to turn everything over to the radicals, "because he

adores his brother and does what Manuel tells him" (370). However, he also reveals an

underlying discomfort about having a child of mixed lineage inherit a place at the top of

the neo-colonial power structure when he tells Isabel, "I can't leave a fortune to Willie if

Manuel isn't going to inherit anything . . . Especially since I can't be sure Willie is my

son" (364). When Willie begins to experience epileptic fits as the violence escalates

surrounding the fight for independence and his ex-girlfriend Perla is shot and killed.

Quintín considers Willie an invalid and tells Isabel "the best thing would be to institutionalize him" in "an excellent hospital for epileptics in Boston" (399). In attempting to remove Willie from the will and the house on the lagoon, Quintín reverses the easing of colonial patriarchal power indicated by his adoption of Willie, an easing which had allowed Isabel to believe that she could live freely in the house with her husband, who was less authoritative, violent, and controlling than Buenaventura. Finally understanding that regardless of his neo-colonial exterior Quintín has become as committed to patriarchal colonial power as his father had been, Isabel realizes that Quintín will always dominate the house on the lagoon and resolves to escape from Quintín and the house.

Beneath the House(s) on the Lagoon

Unchanged throughout the construction of all three incarnations of the house on the lagoon is its foundation. The novel emphasizes that regardless of surface differences between the neo-colonial and colonial structures, the underlying ground of colonial oppression remains unaltered. In particular, descriptions of the servants' quarters in the basement highlight the position of the colonized in the colonial/neo-colonial hierarchy of power. Regardless of whether the structure above is overtly colonial (the Spanish Colonial Revival mansion) or incorporates elements that suggest a less patriarchal, less oppressive arrangement (the Wright-inspired house), the area inhabited by the colonized (in the case of Ferré's novel, the servants) stays the same. Just as Buenaventura's Spanish Conquistador ancestry links him to Spanish colonizers, the brief history provided

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in the novel of the housekeeper Petra's family clearly connects her to Puerto Rico's colonized people. She is the granddaughter of an Angolan chieftain brought to the island as a slave, who after leading an uprising had his tongue cut out publicly by the Spanish authorities (58-62). Her name, Spanish for "rock," indicates not only her personal strength but also situates her as part of the foundation on which the colonial/neo-colonial power structure rests.

The servant's quarters under the house locate Petra and the other servants in subordinate positions in the power structure represented by the houses on the lagoon. Petra's place is low enough that Rebecca "didn't even notice when Buenaventura brought Petra Aviles [and her husband Brambon] to work for them at the house . . . the couple installed themselves in the cellar. Petra worked as cook and Brambon became Buenaventura's chauffeur" (58). The description of the slave-like quarters underneath the house corresponds with their inferior position within the power hierarchy:

> At the center of the common room, a door had been cut into the dirt wall
> . . . it led to a dark tunnel into which twenty cells opened up. The cells
> had earthen floors and no windows; they were ventilated by grilles
> imbedded into the top of each end wall. Originally, the rooms had been
> intended for storage . . . When Buenaventura moved his merchandise to
> his warehouse . . . the storage rooms had been turned into servants'
> quarters. (236)

The details in this passage are connotative of the oppressive and imprisoning experience of the colonized at the bottom of the colonial/neo-colonial power hierarchy. The "dirt walls" and "earthen floor" emphasize the location of the servants underground. That the

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space had originally been conceived to house goods rather than people links their

condition to the economics of colonialism/neo-colonialism and also suggests an attitude

whereby the servants are considered commodities rather than human beings.[47]

Additionally, in referring to the rooms as "cells" with "grilles" providing ventilations,

Ferré establishes a sense of confinement. Throughout the renovations of the house, from

Pavel's neo-colonial design, to the Spanish Revival mansion, and back to the original

blueprint, the space beneath the house never changes, indicating that regardless of

whether or not the framework above ground is associated with a more or less violent,

oppressive structure, for those occupying the space of the colonized, the two designs

feature little difference.

The architectural details reinforce the notion that the colonial/neo-colonial power

structure places not only Buenaventura and Quintín in positions of power over Petra and

the servants, but Rebecca and Isabel as well. For example, the description of the dining

room of the Spanish Revival Mansion reinforces this dynamic:

> . . . the dining room was the most prominent room in the house. Up to
>
> forty guests could sit at the mahogany table, which had griffin feet and
>
> gargoyles carved at each end. The chairs had leather seats and backrests
>
> embossed with helmets of Spanish Conquistadors. At one end of the table,
>
> under the rug, there was a butlers' bell that rang in the kitchen, so Rebecca
>
> could silently summon the servants. (210)

Once again, the details of the furnishings – the griffin feet, gargoyles, and the helmets of

Spanish Conquistadors – call attention to the tradition of colonial power. Situated within

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[47] Aimé Césaire's <u>Discourse on Colonialism</u> (1972) argues that "colonization = "thingification"" (21) in his discussion of how colonial subjects are objectified through the process of colonization, a topic taken up and developed by many theorists, such as Said, Spivak, and Suleri.

this context is the bell, discreetly hidden under the rug. That the bell rests under Rebecca's feet indicates that, while she must bow to Buenaventura's demands or suffer his abuse, she sits in a position of authority over Petra and the other staff in the basement servants' quarters. Images such as Rebecca wandering through the house with a large ring of keys to cabinets holding valuable goods and counting the silver to make sure none had been stolen by the servants, as well as Isabel seeing that "the cooking and the laundering were impeccably done" and "taking care that Brambon fed the dogs and kept the mangroves properly pruned so that they wouldn't encroach on the house" (329), remind readers that the wives of the colonial and neo-colonial masters of the house do wield some power, albeit limited. Thus, the novel calls attention to the kinds of complex positions women occupy within patriarchal colonial/neo-colonial hierarchies that theorists such as Spivak, Mohanty, and Suleri argue must not be covered over by Western feminist assumptions of a single, universal "woman." The differences between the wives' and the servants' access to power within the house clearly problematizes any simplistic formula regarding gender and power that would designate men as powerful and women as powerless.

Also complicating a simple and static gendered hierarchy of power is the way the novel resists characterizing Petra as completely powerless, in spite of her being situated in a subordinate position within the house. In fact, descriptions of the basement reveal that Petra governs the servants' quarters:

> The area under the terrace was used as a common room by the servants . . .
> Petra had furnished it with an old set of wicker furniture which had
> originally been used at the house and which Rebecca had discarded. Her

wicker peacock throne was an important feature of the sitting room.

Every night she would sit on it [and] listen to the servants' complaints, and

give them advice. . . The servants respected Petra and it was through her

that order was established and maintained at the house. Petra was

Buenaventura's marshal; everything he commanded was done by her. The

servants considered Rebecca second in authority, before they did what she

asked, they always checked with Petra. They were grateful because it was

thanks to Petra that they managed to leave the stinking quagmire of Las

Minas in their rowboats and could live in relative comfort under

Buenaventura's roof. (236-239).

Symbols of political and military power (the peacock, throne, and the military rank of

marshal) in this passage counter the notion of Petra as inferior and powerless,

underscored by the fact that the other servants place her above Rebecca in the house's

hierarchy of power. The image of Petra holding court beneath the house, creating and

keeping order, seemingly turns the colonial/neo-colonial power structure upside down.

However, this is not to say that the novel presents a patriarchal power structure fully

compromised by a forceful servant. The passage also emphasizes that, like Rebecca and

Isabel, Petra's access to power is through her relationship to Buenaventura, who

ultimately rules the house, thus firmly situating Petra's instances of control within the

overarching context of an oppressive colonial/neo-colonial system.

Still, Petra's ability to exert influence over people and situations extends beyond

the basement of the house, thus pointing to cracks in the colonial/neo-colonial power

structure designed to oppress her. Exhibiting attitudes Said's Orientalism attributes to the

Western tradition of positioning the colonized as "other," "irrational," "savage," and "dangerous," Buenaventura, Rebbeca, Quintín, and Isabel all invest Petra with supernatural powers connected to her tribal African heritage and religion that allow her to manipulate individuals and events. For example, Buenaventura goes to the spring in the basement every day where Petra runs his "bath with perfumed bay leaves . . . and roots which she said had magical powers" (238). He claims "Petra's baths helped him do good business" (238-9). Likewise, when Rebecca has difficulty conceiving, the drinks Petra brews for her not only help her become pregnant again but also render her "surprisingly submissive" (68). Isabel turns to Petra and her god, Elegguá, for help when she looses faith in Quintín after he disinherits Willie: "I had grown so used to hearing her [Petra] pray to Elegguá that I had begun to believe a little in him myself, especially after seeing how Elegguá's Figa had protected Willie. All of a sudden the idea came to me that if I put the manuscript in Elegguá's care maybe peace would come once more to our house" (379). That they seek her out in her room "lined with bottles and jars filled with strange potions and herbal unguents" demonstrates their belief that she has access to understanding and power outside Western knowledge and science (238). However, as much as they might desire to make use of her alternative forms of power, they remain also suspicious and fearful of them. Quintín notes Petra's manipulation of Buenaventura and in the end blames her for Isabel's challenging his authority through her "The House on the Lagoon": "From the moment she arrived at the house Petra had wielded an inexplicable power over Buenaventura. Being a Spaniard, he found African voodoo rites exotic . . . Petra had entrenched herself in the cellar like a monstrous spider, and from there spun a web of malicious rumor which eventually enveloped the whole family" (74-

75). Losing control over his wife and her representation of their family history, by the end on the novel Quintín feels "like a fly caught in Petra's web" (250). Desperate to make sense of Isabel's refusal to comply with his insistence that she stop writing her text, which he sees as a threat to the patriarchal neo-colonial power structure, he falls back on Western colonial strategies of identifying Petra as the "other" and her "African voodoo rites" as incomprehensible and dangerous, reinforcing a system that grants him power.

Regardless of Petra's ability to "reign" in the basement and exert some influence over the women and men living in the house above her, ultimately she is unable to alter the power structure she literally lives under. Therefore, the novel demonstrates that, regardless of the changes to the structure above the basement, and the possibilities those changes might seem to imply for the master and mistress residing above, the basement remains the same. While the Spanish Revival mansion and the neo-colonial Wright-inspired design are built according to somewhat different plans, the foundation they rest on does not change. The novel's depiction of the lives of women placed at different levels within these structures reveals the complex positions women occupy within the patriarchal colonial power structure and certainly challenges the notion of women's "common oppression" that, as bell hooks argues, "disguises and mystifies the true nature of women's varied and complex social reality" (hooks 396). Through Petra and the servants in the basement, the novel acknowledges the complexity of the way patriarchy operates within the colonial/neo-colonial system, in spite of the novel's overall argument that for women, colonialism and neo-colonialism are similarly oppressive. At the novel's close, Isabel's trusting Petra with her manuscript for "The House on the Lagoon," and Petra's protection of it, indicates a move toward crossing over some of the boundaries

(such as race and class) that keep women in their positions within the patriarchal power

structure and prevent them from coming together in opposition to it. In this way, the

novel echoes Audre Lorde's call for women to

> . . . identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of
>
> relating across difference. . . The old patterns, no matter how cleverly
>
> rearranged to imitate progress, still condemn us to cosmetically altered
>
> repetitions of the same old exchanges, the same old guilt, hatred,
>
> recrimination, lamentation, and suspicion. (Lorde 379)

The Immolation of the House on the Lagoon

The ending of the novel leaves the fate of the patriarchal colonial/neo-colonial

structure unclear. The battle between Isabel and Quintín for control over the house on the

lagoon culminates in the book's final pages. Finally realizing that Quintín is committed

to a neo-colonial structure in which she is not free to express herself, Isabel devises a

plan to escape from it with her adopted son, Willie. As they prepare to leave, Manuel

arrives with a band of Independentistas to loot and burn the house, which they view as a

monument to neo-colonial capitalism. Over-powered by his son and the rebels, Quintín

joins Isabel and Willie in the boat she had readied for her own escape. When he

discovers her packed suitcases, the artwork she intends to sell, and the manuscript of

"The House on the Lagoon" that she recovered while leaving the house, he becomes irate.

Seeing Manuel, who has joined the cause of the colonized to tear down the neo-colonial

power structure, set fire to his house on the lagoon while Isabel's "The House on the

Lagoon" survives, he attacks his wife: " He began slapping me back and forth, striking

me on the head. I crouched helpless at the bottom of the boat, trying to protect myself"

(407). While in this submissive position, visions of Quintín's past violent behavior flash

though her mind and she tells herself that "nothing in the world could justify such

violence" (407). She gains control of the boat, steering it under the golden terrace so that

its iron beams strike him on the head, throwing his dead body into the lagoon. In the end,

Isabel appears to triumph over Quintin to some extent. He is dead, no longer able to

control her economically or physically, signaling an end to the patriarchal neo-colonial

structure, at least for her. Ironically, Isabel finally frees herself from the power hierarchy

of the house by using the terrace on which Rebecca staged her own unsuccessful

rebellion. Unrestricted now to publish her version of their family history, the manuscript

"The House on the Lagoon" is the only incarnation of the house still standing at the end

of the novel.

However, regardless of Isabel's personal victory, with the physical house in

flames presided over by the armed and angry Manuel, a gun in one hand and

Buenaventura's Conquistador signet ring on the other, the ending remains ambivalent.

The neo-colonial house crumbles in ruins, but the land and the house's foundation are

still in the hands of violent men. By placing such a patriarchal image in front of the

burning remains of the colonial/neo-colonial house, Ferré indicates that, while patriarchy

is a key aspect of colonial/neo-colonial systems, it extends beyond those systems to other

forms of power as well. The final glimpse of the house on the lagoon suggests that any

structure Manuel and the Marxist Independentistas construct on the lagoon will likely be

just as patriarchal, violent, and oppressive as the colonial/neo-colonial spaces of his

father and grandfather. In addition, although they have freed themselves from these

structures on the island, Isabel and Willie, living in exile in Florida, effectively displaced and homeless, are residents of the U.S. and as such cannot be seen as having fully escaped the neo-colonial system. Thus, the novel provides little hope of escaping from these sites of oppression and no hint of a possible model for the colonial/neo-colonial site that would foster a social system free from gender, class, and race hierarchy.

Ferré's depiction of the patriarchal oppression common to both of Puerto Rico's experiences of colonialism raises some troubling questions. Even though it problematizes the notion that all women experience patriarchal colonialism/neo-colonialism the same way through its depiction of the mistresses of the house and the servants, in calling attention to the similar oppression women experience under both colonial periods, does the novel cover over important differences? Does it effectively equate the kind of violence employed by Spanish colonists to the economic strategies of U.S. government and corporations? Likewise, in highlighting the similar patriarchy that operates throughout the two different colonial eras, does the novel veer into the pitfall of positing a universal patriarchal framework, which Mohanty and others argue does not exist, "unless one posits an international male conspiracy or a monolithic, ahistorical power structure" (257)? One way the novel works to avoid these problems is through its emphasis on the connection of the power relationships to Puerto Rico's particular historical context. The novel distinguishes between the two eras, such as emphasizing the overt violence of Spanish colonialism and the attempt to appear less authoritative of U.S. neo-colonialism, emphasizing differences in the patriarchal oppression of women associated with both systems. However it also reveals ways that the two periods of colonization are inseparable, still reflected in the social structures, resulting in a system

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of patriarchal power unique to Puerto Rico. Thus, the novel successfully explores ways in which, as Moane argues, "colonialism and patriarchy reinforce each other as systems of domination," rather than simply posit a static system of domination (33).

This chapter has focused particularly on the ways Ferré uses the architecture of the houses to connect patriarchal social structures to the island's history of colonialism/neo-colonialism. By highlighting surface differences and foundational similarities, she distinguishes between colonial and neo-colonial systems while weaving them together. In so doing, the novel insists on an awareness of the interrelated nature of social inequalities and the importance of understanding historical contexts, even if it does stop short of imagining an equitable and just alternative. As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin note, "there have been vigorous debates in a number of colonized societies over whether gender or colonial oppression is the more important political factor in women's lives" (102). The House on the Lagoon reveals that they are complexly intertwined. Ferré's choice to write this novel in English earned her the contempt of some critics of Latin American literature, who claimed she had become less politically charged, more main-stream and commercial. However, by focusing on the traditional Western literary symbol of the Great House and writing in English, she not only embraces dialogue and interaction, but delivers an unflinching and brutal critique of the patriarchal colonial/neo-colonial project in Puerto Rico. Critic Donald Shaw voices concerns about how Latin American authors will be able "to write realistic, socially oriented fiction without seeming to perform a u-turn back toward old fashioned models" (30). Ferré's The House on the Lagoon productively negotiates this movement by managing to use traditional

Western literary tools, if not to successfully re-build, at least to unsettle the power

structures embedded in them.

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The Anglo-Indian Bungalow, the Skyscraper, and the Alhambra:

Architecture and the Relationship Between Colonialism and Globalization

in Salman Rushdie's <u>The Moor's Last Sigh</u>

Explosion at the Taj Mahal Palace and Tower Hotel
Mumbai, India
November 28, 2008
(AP Photo/Rajanish Kakade)

On November 26, 2008, ten members of a Pakistani militant group crossed the

Arabian Sea from Pakistan to Mumbai (formerly Bombay), India.[48] Three horrific days

of hostage-taking, shootings, and bombings left 173 people dead and over 300 injured at

ten different sites across India's largest city and financial center.[49] One of the well-

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[48]The Shiv Sena government officially changed Bombay's name to Mumbai in 1995. For an account of the impact of religious sectarianism and global capitalism on Bombay/Mumbai in the 1990's, see Rashmi Varma's "Provincializing the Global City: From Bombay to Mumbai" (2004).

[49] The ten locations the terrorists attack occurred were the Chhatrapati Shrivaji train station, the Taj Mahal Palace and Tower Hotel, the Oberoi Trident hotel, the Leopold Café, the Cama Hospital, the Jewish

known buildings targeted in the destructive assault was the iconic Taj Mahal Palace and Tower Hotel. Just two months before the terrorist attack, Architectural Digest celebrated the completion of renovations to the landmark "Taj" hotel that since its opening in 1903 has been renowned for its "quintessence of imperial amplitude" (Beddow 234). In 1896, Industrialist Jamsetji N. Tata, the "visionary founder of India's first superconglomerate, the Tata Group," engaged English architect W. A. Stevens to build the extravagant hotel filled with the finest design features from all over the world: "Ceiling fans came from America, elevators from Germany, the baths were Turkish, and, of course, the butlers were from England" making it a "treasure trove of colonial heritage" (Beddow 234). Since opening its doors, the hotel has housed the world's wealthiest business people as well as "Indian royalty, European aristocracy, politicians, and artists" (Beddow 234). On the days of the terrorist attack in November 2008, hotel guests included "CEOs meeting with their boards, millionaires looking to buy yachts, financiers prepping for a private equity conference, and a prominent family and friends gathered for a wedding" (Srivastava). James Fontanella-Kahn of the Financial Times, like many other journalists, characterized the event as a "full-scale attack on global capitalism," insisting that, like the 9/11 terrorists who targeted the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, the Mumbai attackers specifically chose sites associated with elite international business. Indeed, for many, the terrorists' decision to physically destroy the Taj represents an attempt to challenge and tear down the colonial and global capitalist power structures attached to the historic grand hotel and underscores the importance of architecture's symbolic function.

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outreach center Nariman House, the Metro Cinema, St. Xavier's College, the Mazagoa docks, and a taxi cab.

Thirteen years before the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attack, Salman Rushdie uses architectural settings in his novel <u>The Moor's Last Sigh</u> to examine the complicated relationship between the eras of British colonialism, postcolonial nationalism, and neo-colonial globalization in India.[50] The four central architectural sites in the novel – the family residences on Cabral Island and Malabar Hill, the Cashondeliveri Tower, and the reproduction of the Alhambra – provide a narrative of the linear movement from the era of colonialism to neo-colonial global capitalism. However, Rushdie concurrently compromises the linearity of the narrative he establishes from one historical period to the next by including within each architectural setting elements connotative of the other eras and emphasizing the ways in which capitalism continuously operates as a foundation, setting up a layering of historical experiences that raises questions about the relationship between each of these periods and about attempts to establish rigid divisions between them. My investigation of the architecture in <u>The Moor's Last Sigh</u> reveals these periods to be complexly interwoven, thus reinforcing the notion of coloniality that insists that the power structures erected by colonialism continue long after the end of formal colonial rule. Furthermore, the underlying capitalism operating within all of the architectural sites highlights the centrality of economics to colonial/postcolonial/neo-colonial issues, underscoring the necessity for a more rigorous engagement between postcolonial studies and globalization theory and tempering the celebrations of many critics of globalization as a new and vastly different system in which the power of the West is diminished and opportunities for resistance and reform flourish.

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[50]The definitions of these terms are continuously challenged and revised. In this chapter I am using them to refer to historical time periods in India: colonialism being the period of British occupation and direct rule from 1668 to 1947, postcolonial nationalism being the period following Independence from 1947 to the 1970s, and neo-colonial globalization being the period beginning in the 1980s during which India becomes a powerful player in the international global economy.

Since the 1980's postcolonial literary critics and economic theorists have recognized and interrogated the complex relationship between colonialism and capitalism.[51] However, until very recently, postcolonial studies and globalization theory have progressed on parallel but separate tracks: postcolonial theory developing largely within the field of literary studies and focusing primarily on the cultural realm and globalization theory developing within the field of anthropology, sociology, and economics and focusing on the economic realm (Krishnaswamy 2-4, Grosfoguel 99-100). Simon Gikandi points out that postcolonial and globalization theories have both sought to explain "the tranformation of political and economic relationships in a world that seems to become increasingly interdependent with the passing of time, with boundaries that once defined national cultures becoming fuzzy" but notes that the theories inform each other infrequently (627). Revathi Krishnaswamy concurs that the two fields developed largely independently of each other, despite a shared vocabulary (3).[52] She argues that the two approaches have

> maintained quite different disciplinary affiliations even when their
> historical or geopolitical points of reference have converged. . .
> Postcolonialism focuses largely on a Eurocentric colonial past and
> examines how subaltern practices and productions in the non-Western
> peripheries responded to Western domination. Globalization theory
> concentrates largely on a post/neocolonial present and examines how

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[51] Critics such as Ella Shohat, Arif Dirlik, and Aijaz Ahmad among many others incorporate Marxist theory in their work, arguing that colonialism cannot be understood apart from capitalism (Majid 135).
[52] Krishnaswamy uses as examples of the shared language of postcolonial and globalization theory terms such as "deterritorialization, migrancy, difference, hybridity and cosmopolitanism, . . . universal and particular, global and local, homogeneity and heterogeneity" (3).

contemporary Western practices and production affect the rest of the
world. (2)

By bringing colonialism, postcolonialism, and neo-colonial globalization under the same
roof in each of the architectural sites of the novel, The Moor's Last Sigh insists on
complicated relationships between the historical experiences that require an
understanding of how they relate to each other and necessitates a disruption of the
boundaries between postcolonial and globalization theory. My discussion of the
complexities of the architectural settings in Rushdie's novel reveals a need for
multifaceted theoretical approaches that attend to cultural *and* economic systems that
critics such as Krishnaswamy, John Hawley, Robert Young, Anthony King, and Clara
Joseph are beginning to develop.

In addition, by bringing the historical periods of colonialism, post-colonialism,
and neo-colonial globalization together in the architectural sites of the novel and placing
each of them firmly on a common foundation of capitalism, The Moor's Last Sigh
challenges conceptions of globalization as a radically different world system with a
greatly enhanced capacity for resistance and equality. Since the 1990's, critics such as
Arjun Appadurai have argued that globalization's destabilization of the nation-state could
free individuals from a system that employs "myths of ethnicity" to define and defend
"boundaries of difference" and create the possibility for the "construction of transnational
group identities" (Krishnaswamy 9). They maintain that a global marketplace would
break down the hierarchical binary of the West and the rest, tearing apart the map of
"imperial cartography" (Krishnaswamy 9). Rather than viewing globalization as a
homogenizing Westernization of the world, Appadurai, John Tomlinson, and others

consider the ways in which aspects of Western culture are adopted, resisted, interpreted, and/or altered in other parts of the world as acts of subversive consumption and indicative of greater agency (Krishnaswamy 11). In Empire (2000) Hardt and Negri distinguish between imperialism and the period of globalization or Empire that follows it. Although they recognize that Empire "manages hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges through modulating networks of command" and that justice and peace might not be ushered in by the era of globalization, in the decentered system they describe the imposition of Western culture and power on the rest of the world is certainly mitigated and opportunities for resistance exist (2000 xii). However, many critics disagree with those celebrating the enhanced possibilities for agency in the hybridity, multiplicity, and migrancy of globalization. In this chapter I argue that The Moor's Last Sigh counters interpretations of globalization as markedly different from and less oppressive than colonialism and post-colonial nationalism by intertwining the experiences within the architectural structures and rooting these complex sites in a common capitalism, thus resisting visions of globalization as a fundamentally new and positive system.

My discussion of architecture in The Moor's Last Sigh follows the format of the novel in that it consists of four sections, each focusing on a different architectural location. The chapter begins with a consideration of the ways in which the novel uses the architecture of the narrator Moraes Zogoiby's grandparents' home on Cabral Island to establish it as a site connected to British colonialism and capitalism and then to complicate the colonial space by incorporating architectural elements suggestive of postcolonial partition, ultimately bringing these historical periods together in the mural Moraes's mother Aurora paints on her bedroom walls and ceiling. The second section

looks at the ways in which the novel complicates distinctions between historical eras through the descriptions of Moraes's parents' house in the Malabar Hill area of Bombay that highlight the colonial economic power structure on which the house rests as well as the impact of postcolonial partition and of exploitative neo-colonial international capitalism. As with Aurora's mural in the Cabral Island house, Rushdie uses the paintings covering the nursery walls to merge the historical periods. Next, the discussion shifts to the third location: Moraes's father Abraham's Cashondeliveri Tower in Mumbai. Although the novel clearly associates the skyscraper with neo-colonial international capitalism, the English garden on its roof links the building to the colonial power structures. Rushdie also ties the terrorist attack on the Cashondeliveri Tower to the era of British colonialism by following the passage about the building's destruction with a reference to Macauley's 1835 "Minute on Education." The fourth section focuses on how the novel uses the model of the Alhambra constructed by the painter and family friend, Vasco Miranda, to challenge the linear narrative of colonialism to neo-colonial globalization by creating a space associated with both of these eras. By situating its discussion of contemporary capitalist globalization in a setting connected to imperialism prior to the Western European colonial period (the Alhambra), Rushdie's novel collapses the distinctions between historical eras and stretches the boundaries of traditional postcolonial critique. My discussion closes with a consideration of the implications for theorists of the novel's use of architecture to challenge the divisions constructed between historical periods through its focus on the common capitalist dynamic. Ultimately, the complex architectural sites of the novel highlight the continuing strength of the power structures of colonialism, particularly its capitalist underpinnings. By intricately

entwining cultural structures and economic structures, the architectural sites of <u>The Moor's Last Sigh</u> stand as monuments to the importance of challenging the impulse of postcolonial studies and globalization theory to focus strictly on one or the other and firmly ground the era of globalization within the structures of coloniality.

Cabral Island

Rushdie sets the beginning of <u>The Moor's Last Sigh</u> in the family house of Francisco and Epifania da Gama, the grandparents of the novel's narrator, Moraes Zogoiby (nicknamed "Moor"). The architectural descriptions of the family house on Cabral Island typify Anglo-Indian bungalow design and thus link the house with the British colonial project. Rushdie then situates the conflicts arising from postcolonial nationalism within that colonial structure. The novel uses the Cabral Island house to reference the colonial and postcolonial historical periods while highlighting the capitalist trade operating through both that make drawing lines between the two eras difficult. Finally, the novel eliminates distinctions between the historical periods and weaves them together through the mural painted by Moraes's young mother, Aurora, that symbolically brings both eras together

Rushdie's use of architecture in his exploration of the connections between colonialism and postcolonial nationalism is particularly fitting given the symbolic use of architecture by the British in their colonial encounters. Many critics, such as Anthony King, Jon Lang, and Madhavi and Miki Desai, assert that the architecture of the buildings constructed by the British in India (as well as other colonial locations) reflects British attitudes toward their imperial mission. In India, the Portuguese explorer Vasco da

Gama's arrival in Calicut in 1498 ignited a contest between Portuguese, British, French and Dutch traders over access to the ports along the Western coast of India and control of trade with lucrative Asian markets. In 1600 Queen Elizabeth I created the East India Company to represent British interests in India, and by 1757, the East India Company had established itself as the dominant power in the area due in large part to poor management by the Portuguese and weakening Mogul authority. Officers of the East India Company and other Western European merchants constructed enclosed trading posts with houses and factories that became isolated settlements "with a life-style more like the routine of an Oxford or Cambridge College than anything their Oriental milieu might lead one to believe" (Lang 52). As their wealth increased, the British built large, ornate personal homes, typically of Neo-Classical design, to convey their position of social rank and power. The style echoed the Classical Revival occurring in Western Europe at the time; however, "The British used the Classical not simply because it was in good taste but because they saw themselves as carrying the mantle of the Romans. The architecture came to stand as a symbol of British imperialism throughout the empire" (Lang 60-61). After the East India Company ceded control of India to the Queen in 1858 following several small mutinies, British colonial administrators debated the best way to govern: Progressives believed in the supremacy of British culture and fought to impose it throughout the Empire; Conservatives argued that the British should impact the Indian way of life only when it benefited trade (Lang 15, 70). The debate extended to the architectural field with some architects insisting on "planting European forms of architecture on Indian soil with little modification" and others promoting designs that adopt or incorporate native elements (Lang 69). Progressive attitudes prevailed and the

architecture of the buildings constructed in colonial India reveals the core principal of

European superiority (Lang 15). The British relied heavily on Classical designs but also

borrowed from the entire European architectural tradition (the Romanesque, Gothic,

Renaissance, and Baroque) in their efforts to convey images of martial and imperial

power (Lang 52, 61).

Regardless of the reliance on Western European design standards, the architects

of the buildings constructed in India during the British Raj altered the forms somewhat to

account for the location. The tropical climate necessitated the incorporation of local

architectural elements, such as verandahs, in buildings as early as architect John

Goldingham's Government House in Madras (1800-2) that included deep verandahs in its

otherwise strict Classical design. Lang notes that the hybrid styles that develop

throughout the nineteenth century represent "pastiche" rather than "synthesis" (Lang 65).

Moreover, he argues that the indigenous architectural elements attached to the Western

European structures reveals ambiguities and contradictions about the British position in

India:

> On the one hand there is the 'ideal' imperial model and on the other, an
>
> effort to show a concern for the local environment – climatic and cultural.
>
> . . Classical and Neo-Gothic architecture are clearly used as statements of
>
> superior culture. Indo-Sacacenic architecture was an effort to merge
>
> British and Indian aspirations after 1858 and to show that, despite being an
>
> imperial power, the British in India were part of the Indian milieu . . . The
>
> buildings themselves and their architectural qualities were symbols of the
>
> consolidation of Imperial rule. (Lang 73)

Critics such as Lang and Metcalf underscore the colonial power dynamic underlying the debate by calling attention to the fact that the disputes concerning architectural design involved only the British; the Indians were rarely consulted and participated almost exclusively as consumers of the designs developed by the Empire (Lang 73).

The bungalow, one of the most significant developments in residential architecture in India during the nineteenth century, came about through combining indigenous architectural elements and Western European design. The form originated from two primary sources: the rural homes of Bengal (small, individual dwellings situated within a compound) and the eighteenth-century suburban English country house (King 1984 9-14).[53] The first bungalows erected by the managers of the East India Company followed Classical lines. Colonial administrators and merchants between the 1880s and the 1930s, aspiring to the lifestyles of the nobility back in England, built increasingly large and ostentatious homes favoring Gothic revival design with pitched roofs and decorative carpentry. However, the bungalows also included thick walls, sloping roofs, and verandahs necessitated by the warm, tropical environment. Typically the homes sat away from the road within a walled and landscaped compound, as opposed to the Hindu and Muslim tradition of building the house around a central courtyard. (Lang 55). The land around the house served a symbolic purpose: the garden connected the house to "Englishness" because of the English cultural tradition of gardening as a hobby. According to Lang et al, "The lawns and flowers provided a psychological reference to home and gave the family private space for outdoor life" (84). The garden also indicated the status of the family: senior officers desired a garden that was fifteen

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[53] The term "bungalow" derived from the Hindi word "Bangla" that means "of or belonging to Bengal" (King 1984 14).

times the footprint of the house while junior officers settled for much less (Lang 86). The walls around the perimeter also established a barrier between the colonizer within the house and the colonized outside that reinforced the colonial hierarchy of power and the gateposts indicated status and power though its assertion of individual land ownership and control (Lang 84). Critics such as Lang, King, and Metcalf agree that, despite indigenous elements, Anglo-Indian bungalows "served a political purpose: they presented an architecture of 'social distinction'" (Lang 84). Because of its potent symbolic connotation of power, many of India's elite embraced the Western European architectural styles and the Anglo-Indian bungalow. According to King, "In the first half of the twentieth century, the 'classical bungalow' though by no means the only form of residence for Europeans in India, was none the less the most typical, and most favoured for official and non-official elite. Of equal importance, it was increasingly being adopted by the growing Indian middle class" (1984 49). Adopting these designs signaled an owner's "progressive spirit" and also created a symbolic link between Indian owner and the powerful British rulers (Lang 63).

Within the context of Rushdie's novel, the details of the da Gama family house on Cabral Island mark it as a complex colonial space made up of elements connected with indigenous Indian design as well as aspects of the Anglo-Indian bungalow suggestive of imperial power. Moraes describes the house as "a grand old mansion in the traditional style, with many delightfully interlinking courtyards of greeny pools and mossed fountains, surrounded by galleries rich in woodcarving, off which lay labyrinths of tall rooms, their high roofs gabled and tiled. It was set in a rich man's paradise of tropical foliage" (15). Through the description of the central courtyard surrounded by labyrinths

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of rooms that corresponds with indigenous Indian design, the novel connects the house to

its Indian location. However, many elements of the house also link the house to colonial

power. Rushdie situates the house firmly within the era of British colonialism temporally

by setting the date of the Moor's great-grandparents' purchase of the home "at the dawn

of the century" – the height of British power in India (15). In addition, the description of

the landscape around the house as a "rich man's paradise of tropical foliage," a design

element of the Anglo-Indian bungalow employed to convey a sense of wealth and

privilege, contributes to the sense of the house as symbolic of economic power embedded

in the British colonial era. The land surrounding the house helps to characterize the

structure as a 'bungalow' as, according to King, by the early twentieth century the

bungalows were "always detached and located outside the city in the suburbs" (1984 37).

The "gabled" roof, the details of the interior (the elaborate woodcarvings and tall rooms),

and the large size of the house, indicated by the use of the term "mansion," establish it as

a site of wealth and privilege within the colonial power structure. Through the

combination of Indian architectural details and elements connotative of colonial power,

the novel creates a complicated setting that is neither entirely Indian nor entirely British

but rather highlights the composite of cultural traditions. The emphasis on the economic

status symbolized by the architectural elements, both the Indian and the British, calls

specific attention to the importance of the economic power structure built into the house.

The da Gama's ancestry and the family business that funds the purchase of the

bungalow on Cabral Island situate the house on an economic foundation of colonialism

and capitalism. Critics such as Arif Dirlik, Ania Loomba, Robert Young, Michael Hardt

and Antonio Negri among many others consider capitalism as foundational to the

Western European colonial project. In <u>Colonialism/Postcolonialism</u>, Loomba defines

colonialism as the "forcible takeover of land and economy, and, in the case of European

colonialism, a restructuring of non-capitalist economies in order to fuel European

capitalism. This allows us to understand modern European colonialism not as some

transhistorical impulse to conquer but as an integral part of capitalist development" (20).

Although scholars differ over the complexities of the relationship between capitalism and

colonialism, few dispute that capitalism operates at the core of the colonial project. The

novel's narrator underscores the economics of colonialism when he points out the

connection between the family's wealth and the history of Western European trade in the

first few pages of the novel: ". . . pepper, the coveted Black Gold of Malabar, was the

original stock-in-trade of my filthy-rich folks, the wealthiest spice, nut, bean and leaf

merchants in Cochin, who without any evidence save centuries of tradition claimed

wrong-side-of-the-blanket descent from great Vasco da Gama himself" (6). The

Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama (1469-1524), the first European to successfully sail

around the Cape of Good Hope and arrive in India in 1498, played a key role in Western

Europe's relationship with India as his voyage established the first maritime trade route

between Europe and Asia (King 1984 15). Despite Moraes's mixed heritage of Jewish,

Spanish, and Moorish ancestry, the link between Vasco da Gama, a figure central to the

Western European colonial project, and the patriarch of Moraes's family, Fransisco da

Gama, aligns the da Gama family with Western European colonizers.[54] The description

of the family's spice business also highlights the colonial economic dynamic of trading

the natural resources of colonized locations that brought Vasco da Gama to India.

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[54] Much of the criticism of <u>The Moor's Last Sigh</u> addresses issues of identity and hybridity. See Schulting, Dayal, and Cantor.

Significantly, the familial tie to da Gama also connects the house to India's future era of neo-colonial globalization. Anthony King and K. N. Chadhuri argue that da Gama's voyage was crucial in the development of global capitalism:

> The rise of this trade was to give a whole new dimension to economic activities on a global scale. . . European trade with Asia was part of a much larger movement of expansion, responsible for forging entirely new forms of economic ties between Europe and the areas peripheral to it. It was also part of the steady growth in commercial capitalism which was to have repercussions on a world scale. The products of Indian land and labour, raw cotton converted into cloth, ended up on the slave plantations of America and the West Indies, producing tobacco and sugar for Europe, just as the silver reales from the mints of Mexico City found their way into the major trading towns of India and China. (King 2004 15)

That the da Gama family's fortune enabling the purchase of the "mansion" surrounded by a "rich man's paradise of tropical foliage" comes from the trade of spices and nuts reinforces the connection between wealth and the dynamics of capitalist colonialism supporting the house and hints at the international trade in India's future.

The novel further complicates the setting when Francisco brings "M. Charles Jenneret" (Le Corbusier) to the bungalow in 1908 and commissions him to construct two new houses in the garden surrounding the da Gama home. The narrator describes them as "crazy":

> The one a strange angular slabby affair in which the garden penetrated the interior space so thoroughly that it was often hard to say whether one was

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in or out of doors, and the furniture looked like something made for a

hospital or a geometry class, you couldn't sit on it without bumping into

some pointy corner; the other a wood and paper house of cards – 'after the

style Japanese', . . . a flimsy fire-trap whose walls were sliding parchment

screens, and in whose rooms one was not supposed to sit, but kneel, and at

night one had to sleep on a mat on the floor with one's head on a wooden

block as if one were a servant . . . (15-16)

The Western and Eastern designs of both of these houses, referred to by Epifania

disparagingly as "follies," signifies a distinct departure from both the indigenous Indian

style as well as the British colonial Anglo-Indian bungalow. In particular, the Western

structure reflects typical modernist features such as angularity and the breaking down of

the barrier between inside and outside. Rushdie again disrupts the demarcations of eras

by temporally locating Le Corbusier's follies in 1908, somewhat ahead of their time.[55]

According to Lang, architects commissioned by British authorities and the Indian elite

began to introduce modern architectural designs in India in the 1930s (188). In fact,

Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier both worked in India in the 1950s. Lang's

description of the spread of modern architecture in India in the 1950s highlights its

European origin and suggests a cultural neo-colonial dynamic: "It was a time when the

various manifestations of Modernist architectural ideas in urban and building design –

which had been developed in Europe during the first three decades of the century – were

being applied across the world" (Lang 188). Although the modernist styles they

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[55] Time is an important focus of the novel. The narrator, Moraes, suffers from a rare condition causing him to age twice as fast as normal. For a discussion of time in the novel, see Sabine Schulting's "Peeling Off History in Salman Rushdie's The Moor's Last Sigh (Fludernik 239-258) and Samir Dayal's "Subaltern Envy? Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*" (Kuortti 257-305).

employed were connected with the avant-guarde, democracy, and internationalism, they were also strongly associated with the West (Lang 161-188). Including these houses evocative of the modern, international world, but still ultimately associated with Western European culture within the Anglo-Indian bungalow compound creates a multilayered space that acknowledges India's complicated British colonial and postcolonial experience.

The construction of the two structures evocative of the "East" and "West" coincide with the clash in the da Gama household between Francisco's growing support of the anti-colonial nationalist movement and Epifania's commitment to the British Empire. The Western European modernist and Japanese architectural "follies" Francisco erects on the grounds mimic nationalist desires to move away from forms directly associated with British colonialism and toward alternative forms connected to democracy, progress, and internationalism. Francisco defends his interest in the modern architecture and art his wife detests, insisting that "Old beauty is not enough, . . Old palaces, old behaviour, old gods. These days the world is full of questions, and there are new ways of being beautiful" (16-17). However, the description of the "crazy structures," with furniture "made for a hospital" with "pointy corners" in the Western house and the "wooden block" pillows and absence of chairs in the Eastern house, makes these new, modern designs that the novel associates with the era of burgeoning Indian nationalism appear uncomfortable and almost uninhabitable (16-17). The beginning of World War I finds Francisco successfully carrying on the "age-old da Gama art of turning spice and nuts into gold" and growing frustrated with British colonial rule; he yells across the dinner table at his wife: "Taxes doubled! Our youngsters dying in British uniform!

The nation's wealth is being shipped off, madam: at home our people starve, but British Tommy is utilizing our wheat, rice, jute, and coconut products. I personally am required to send out goods below cost-price. Our mines are being emptied: saltpeter, manganese, mica. I swear!" (17-18). Conversely, Epifania, who prefers her "beautiful home" to Le Corbusier's "madhouses," begrudgingly occupying them only when Francisco insisted, rejects her husband's nationalist beliefs (18). She clings to the British colonial system associated with the house she favors, arguing, "What are we but Empire's children? British have given us everything, isn't it? – Civilization, law, order, too much. Even your spices that stink up the house they buy out of their generosity, putting clothes on backs and food on children's plates" (18). Significantly, economics rests at the core of both of their arguments, highlighting the importance of the underlying capitalist dynamic beneath the colonial and postcolonial nationalist eras in India.

Within its depiction of the complex colonial structure of the main house, the novel explores the violent upheaval and conflict of India's postcolonial Independence and partition of 1947 metaphorically through a battle between two sides of the family.[56] By situating the familial conflict on Cabral Island in 1925, twenty-two years before the actual historical event of partition, Rushdie again disrupts the divisions between the historical eras of India and creates a sense of the layered and overlapping experiences operating in India. Following Francisco's death, his sons, Camoens and Aires, become distracted with their own personal pursuits. Epifania seizes control of the house and the

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[56] In 1946 the British announced they would grant India independence once India leaders established a system of government. After violent riots between Hindus and Muslims throughout the summer, British and Indian leaders decided to split the land into India and Pakistan. Pakistan and India formally achieved independence from British control on August 15 and August 16, 1947, respectively. The fighting between the religious factions continued, however, and 10 million people were suddenly displaced as Muslims residing in India left for safety in Pakistan and Hindus in Pakistan relocated to India (World Book 133).

da Gama business, inviting her own family, the Menezeses, to Cabral Island. Shortly after their arrival, Aires's wife Carmen, who is also Epifania's niece and had always been treated badly by the Menezeses side of the family, grows jealous of Epifania's sudden attention to her newly pregnant sister-in-law Belle, and invites relatives from her own other side of the family, the Lobos, to stay at the house as well. The clashes between the two families occur in the da Gama fields in the Spice Mountains and also within the house. The two groups cannot share the space peacefully, foreshadowing the struggles between Hindus and Muslims at the time of Independence: "As for the house on Cabral Island, it was full-to overflowing; you fell over the Lobos lining the stairs, and the toilets were blocked by Menezeses. Lobos angrily refused to budge when Menezeses tried to ascend or descent 'their' staircases . . . There was much bumping and shoving in the queues that formed at mealtimes, and harsh words were spoken in the courtyards" (37). Violence soon breaks out and spreads beyond the bungalow to Fransisco's modernist structures: "The two Corbusier follies were opened up to cope with the overcrowding problem, but they proved unpopular with the in-laws; there were fisticuffs over the increasingly vexed question of which family members should be granted the supposedly higher status of sleeping in the main house" (37). That the families view the main house, associated with Anglo-Indian colonial rule, as the apex of the power structure underscores its continuing potency. The novel points to the failure of postcolonial Independence's promises of democracy, modernization, and internationalization when the Western European modernist buildings of Le Corbusier cannot withstand the violent conflict between the two Indian groups:

One night rival gangs of Menezes and Lobo teenagers clashed violently in the Cabral Island gardens; there were broken arms and cracked heads and knife-wounds, two of them serious. The gangs ripped the paper walls of the Corbusier's East folly-in-the-style-Japanese, and damaged its wooden structure so gravely that it had to be demolished soon afterwards; they had broken into the West folly and destroyed much of the furniture and many of the books. (37)

The novel highlights the economics attached to the violent upheaval within these colonial and postcolonial structures through references to the spice trade business. As the Lobos and Menezeses tear each other and the follies apart, their family members on the Spice Mountain estates begin to burn the fields. Camoens opens a bedroom window in the main house and smells "the unmistakable odour of burning spices, cumin coriander turmeric, red-pepper-black-pepper, red-chilli-green-chilli, a little garlic, a little ginger, some sticks of cinnamon" (38). The scent of the spices reminds the reader of the business, and thus the economics, at the core of the dispute between the families. That the odor fills the air and penetrates all of the structures once again calls attention to the commonalities between the eras that the houses represent.

The novel situates its exploration of the repercussions of a divided India after partition within the Anglo-Indian bungalow. The Englishman responsible for the district holds Camoens and Aires responsible for the "arson, riot, murder and bloody affray" and sentences them to fifteen years in prison (40). The Menezeses and Lobos quickly return to Mangalore to avoid repercussions from their involvement, but the house remains divided. Camoens's wife, Belle, convinced that, "If we do not live separately then we

will die together," orders the de Gama Company's lawyers to divide the company in half

(41). She also insists on physically erecting a partition within the house through which

she believes "civilization should be restored":

> . . . from deepest-bottom to highest-top; the old family sets of linen,
> cutlery, crockery were all summarily divorced, down to the last tea spoon,
> pillow-slip and quarter-plate. . . almirahs, tallboys, poufs, long-armed cane
> chairs, bamboo poles for mosquito-nets, summer charpoys for those who
> preferred to sleep in the open air during the hot season, spittoons,
> thunderbox pots, hammocks, wine-glasses were all moved around; even
> the lizards on the walls were captured, and evenly distributed on both
> sides of the great divide. Studying the house's crumbling ground plans,
> and paying scrupulous attention to exact allocation to floor-space windows
> balconies, she split the mansion, its contents, courtyards and gardens, right
> down the middle. She had sackfuls of spices piled high along her newly
> established frontiers and where such barriers were inappropriate – for
> example the main staircase – she drew white lines down the centre and
> demanded that these demarcations be respected. In the kitchen she parted
> the pots and pans, and put up a chart of hours on the wall that bisected the
> week, day by day. The domestic servants were divided too, and even
> though almost all of them pleaded to be allowed to remain under her
> command she insisted on scrupulous fairness. (42)

The in-depth account of Belle's splitting up the very personal and seemingly non-

consequential everyday items in the house and the impracticality and inconvenience for

the residents calls attention to the material reality attached to the theoretical decision to divide the space and hints at the practical and personal impact that the political decision to divide India and Pakistan had on the material lives of individuals involved in the partition. However, regardless of her efforts to divide the space of the house and its contents, both halves continue to be contained within the structure of the Anglo-Indian bungalow and the fundamental colonial framework remains unaltered by the superficial interior division. Additionally, the "sackfuls of spices piled high" used to divide the space underscores the capitalist dynamic continuing to operate within the house and the power of economics to determine the form of architectural structures and the way people live in them.

Shortly after Belle's death, her daughter Aurora unites India's historical eras within the house by painting an elaborate mural in her room that expands the scope of time beyond the colonial and postcolonial periods through its content. In the weeks following Belle's death, family members discover the disappearance of several ivory tusks and Ganesh figurines, items of symbolic relevance to Hindus that Belle vociferously disliked. Convinced of the servants' guilt, the family gathers the staff to find the culprit. Realizing the injustice as her uncle verbally and physically attacks the servants, Aurora angrily admits to throwing the objects away, announcing that she had finally followed through on "what my mother always wanted to do" (58). Camoens confines Aurora to her bedroom as punishment for a week during which she feverishly paints a mural on the walls and ceiling. Her artistic vision amazes him:

> . . . she had put history on the walls, King Gondophares inviting St.
>
> Thomas the Apostle to India; and from the North, Emperor Asoka with his

Pillars of law, . . . and her versions of erotic temple-carvings, whose

explicit details made Camoens blanch, and of the building of the Taj

Mahal, after which as she unflinchingly showed, its great masons were

mutilated, their hands cut off, so that they could never build anything

finer; and from her own South she had chosen the battle of

Srirangapatnam and the sword of Tipu Sultan and the magic fortress of

Golconda where a man speaking normally in the gatehouse may be heard

clearly in the citadel and the coming long ago of the Jews. Modern history

was there too, there were jails full of passionate men, Congress and

Muslim League, Nehru Gandhi Jinnah Patel Bose Azad, and British

soldiers whispering rumours of an approaching war; and beyond history

were the creatures of her fancy, the hybrids, half woman half-tiger, half-

man half-snake, there were sea-monsters and mountain ghouls. In an

honored place was Vasco da Gama himself, setting his first foot on Indian

soil, sniffing the air, and seeking out whatever was spicy and hot and

made money. (59)

The characters brought together within Aurora's mural represent India's long and

complicated history. The description emphasizes the variety of cultures that have

impacted Indian society, particularly the multiple religious influences. By mixing them

all together within one space, the novel creates a mosaic rather than a linear

representation of India's historical experience. The inclusion of her "creatures of fancy"

also stretches the boundaries of traditional history beyond the real and the factual. The

novel situates Aurora's layered and expanded representation of the history of India that

collapses the historical periods into one within the context of capitalism and colonialism by ending the passage reviewing India's history, peppered with exchanges between the East and the West, with an image of Vasco da Gama and references to his lucrative colonial pursuits. The painting thus ultimately underscores the capitalist coloniality operating throughout the history of India.

Through the descriptions of the architecture and the details of the da Gama house on Cabral Island, the novel points to the successive historical periods of Western European colonialism and postcolonial Independence and nationalism in India. The Anglo-Indian design of the house clearly associates it with British colonial rule and the battles over Francisco's modernist guest houses and Belle's division of the house mimic the struggles of postcolonial nationalism and post-Independence partition. However, in constructing the movement from the period of colonization to postcolonial nationalism, Rushdie concurrently problematizes erecting a neat division between these eras and experiences by complexly intertwining the eras through architectural detail and by highlighting the similarities of the economic power dynamics at work in each period. The novel continually references the spice trade in its descriptions of the house and in so doing calls attention to the capitalism continuously operating within the structure, thus highlighting the foundational capitalist economics common to both historical experiences.

Malabar Hills

The Moor's Last Sigh continues to complicate distinctions between the eras of colonialism and postcolonialism in India and to emphasize the capitalist economics of

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both periods through the architectural descriptions of the house that the newly married

Aurora and her husband, Abraham, purchase on the outskirts of Bombay on Malabar Hill

in 1945 that weave the historical periods together. The location and details of the house

connect it to British colonialism and postcolonial nationalism. In particular, the multiple

associations of the name Aurora gives the house, Elephanta, link the setting to India's

precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial eras. The mural covering the nursery walls in the

house on Malabar Hill also contribute to <u>The Moor's Last Sigh</u>'s disruption of the rigid

distinctions between the historical periods. Differences between the eras are further

challenged by the novel's emphasis on Abraham's businesses that serve as the foundation

of the house, highlighting the exploitative capitalist dynamic continually operating during

and after the British colonial period

       The details about the house on Malabar Hill firmly establish its ties to colonialism

and capitalism. The narrator describes the family's new home as

> . . . a sprawling bungalow set amid tamarind, plane and jack-fruit trees on
>
> the slopes of Malabar Hill, Bombay, with a steeply terraced garden
>
> looking down on Chowpatty Beach, the Back Bay and Marine Drive.
>
> 'Cochin is finished, anyway,' Abraham reasoned. 'From a strictly
>
> business point of view the move makes complete sense.' (119)

As with their previous home on Cabral Island in Cochin, referring to the house as a

"bungalow" marks it as a symbol of prestige and power, underscored by the adjective

"sprawling" that suggests a large house occupying a significant amount of land. The

description also emphasizes the placement of the house overlooking the rest of Bombay

through references to its height: "on the slopes" and the "steeply terraced garden looking

down." Additionally, the location of Abraham and Aurora's new house grounds it within

the context of British colonialism in India and associates it with the capitalist economic

power structure underlying the British colonial project. The area of Bombay known as

Malabar Hill had initially been the site of Hindu temples and shrines. During the 1600's,

as Portugal and Great Britain struggled for control over the lucrative trade routes between

the East and the West along the Indian coast, Malabar Hill became a useful lookout point

for pirates also operating in the area. When the Portuguese ceded Bombay to the British

in 1668 they fortified the Bombay castle because of the strategic advantage of its height

and view of the ocean. While governor of Bombay from 1819-1827, Mountstuart

Elphinstone constructed the first Anglo-Indian bungalow on Malabar Hill, establishing it

as an enclave exclusively inhabited by the wealthy and powerful (Lang 236-237).[57]

Situating the da Gama-Zogoiby house in this area associated with India's elite

emphasizes the family's position within India's social structure and grounds it within the

context of British colonialism. In addition, because Malabar Hill's connection with

wealth and power stretches from the era of British colonialism through postcolonial

nationalism to the present, the location underscores the home's function as a symbol of

the capitalist economic power structures operating throughout each of these historical

eras.

The name Aurora insists on giving the house "in a spirit of ironic mischief or

perversity," "Elephanta," resonates with multiple meanings that link the house to several

historical periods. "Elephanta" associates the house with the pre-colonial myths of

Malabar Hill as the place of the great "elephant kings" (127). As the wooden-legged

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[57] Malabar Hills has continued to be an exclusive area populated by the rich and famous. Real estate
advertisements highlight the fact that contemporary business tycoons and affluent Bollywood stars populate
the hillside today.

servant assigned to guard the gates of the house, nicknamed Lambajan Chandiwala by

Aurora and Abraham (an "inter-lingual joke: lamba, long; jan, sounds like John; chandi,

silver"), tells the young Zogoiby children, ". . . in the days before men there were

elephants sitting on thrones and arguing philosophy, and it was the monkeys who were

their servants. It is said that when men first came to Elephanta Island in the days after the

elephants' fall they found statues of mammoths higher than the Qutb Minar in Delhi, and

they were so afraid that they smashed up the whole lot" (127). Lambajan reveals the

continuing influence of this tale by asking, "Why do you think-so god Ganesha is so

popular in Bombay City?" (127). His question highlights the fact that the name of the

house also alludes to the Hindu "elephant-headed deity Ganesha" at the center of the

contemporary annual Hindu festival held below on Chowpatty Beach that Aurora mocks

as she dances on the "precipitous ramparts" of the bungalow during the postcolonial

surge of Hindu fundamentalism in Bombay (123-127). Emphasizing the placement of

Elephanta's parapet high over the religious masses teeming below calls attention

symbolically to the powerful position of the house in India's social hierarchy. The

passage about Aurora's annual defiant dance on the terrace of Elephanta underscores the

distance between the da Gama-Zogoibys on the hilltop and the crowd of Hindu extremist

revelers below: ". . . plumed in a series of dazzle-hued mirrorwork outfits . . . her ankles

a-jingle with silver jhunjhuma bell-bracelets, . . . the great painter danced her defiance,

she danced her contempt for the perversity of humankind, which led these huge crowds to

risk death-by-trampling, 'just to dumpofy their dollies in the drink'" (123-4). Finally, the

name of the house calls to mind an important figure of British colonial authority,

Governor Elphinstone, who governed Bombay through the East India Company.

Therefore, attaching the name "Elephanta" to the family house creates a multilayered historical foundation for the structure that frustrates attempts to situate the house firmly within the moments around the dawn of postcolonial Independence as the specific date of the purchase, 1945, initially suggests.

References to the gates of the house, as well as the man guarding them, attest to the continuing strength of the social power structure associated with the Anglo-Indian bungalow. After running over a sailor participating in a navy strike, Aurora brings him back to Elephanta: "She had diminished him, subtracting a leg and therefore his future in the navy; and now who sought fiercely to enlarge him again, providing him with a new uniform, a new job, a new leg, a new identity . . . She had ruined his life, but she saved him from the worst, gutter-dwelling, begging-bowl consequences of that ruination. As a result, he fell in love with her . . . the impossible dog-devoted love of a slave for his queen" (135). She installs the lower caste, handicapped Lambajan Chandiwala at the gates of the property to fortify the division between her "earthly Paradise" and "Improper Bombay" by keeping the crush of Bombay out, guarding "his mistress from the coarse world outside" (135). She further asserts her position of power by re-naming him and calling him "Our private pirate" (126). Although Aurora embraces nationalism early on, as she ages, the "radical Aurora, Nationalist Queen" becomes "another Grande dame on the Hill, sipping tea and looking with distaste upon the poor man at the gate" (304). Late in the novel Raman "Mainduck" Fielding (the powerful politician who comes to power by inciting the Hindu majority to reassert their control over Bombay, reject Western culture, and transform the city into Mumbai) criticizes the Zogoibys and the Western power structure that their house represents: "On Malabar Hill you drink whisky-soda and

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talk democracy. But our people guard your gates. . . Who cares about you godless Hill

types? . . . One day the city – my beautiful goddess-named Mumbai, not this dirty

Anglo-style Bombay – will be on fire with our notions. Then Malabar Hill will burn and

Ram Rajya will come.' . . . 'Now our freedom, our beloved nation, is buried beneath the

layers of alien empires'" (192, 199). Fielding's view of the house underscores the

persistence of the Western European colonial power structure beyond the end of formal

rule.

Although the interior of the house on Malabar Hill remains largely undescribed,

the detailed depiction of the decoration of the children's nursery reveals the complex

intertwining of Western and Eastern cultural influences over a long expanse of history in

Bombay that stretches from time prior to British colonialism to the period of

contemporary neo-colonial globalization. When Vasco Miranda, a young Goan painter

infatuated with Aurora's art, appears at Elephanta determined to see her, Aurora

commissions him to paint the nursery. She directs him not to cover the walls with "harps

and angels . . . all those stinking gardens" (150). Instead she instructs him to paint

cartoons and comics: "that mouse, that duck, and what is the name of that bunny. . .

Maybe the cat that never catchoes the mouse . . . knottofied-up rifle barrels, and bathfuls

of big gold coins" (150). The emphasis on the particularly American icons such as

Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck in the description of Aurora's request as well as these

figures' close association with American consumer culture and its international power

foreshadows American neo-colonial cultural and economic domination. That she wants

images of "rifle barrels" and "gold coins" instead of "angels" and "gardens" signals a

rejection of ancient, religious narratives and an awareness of an alternative narrative of

violence and money, elements associated with the capitalism at the core of the colonial project as well as neo-colonial globalization. Miranda follows Aurora's directions but adds features from other historical periods in the painting that covers the nursery walls of the bungalow:

> In a large light room with a sea view . . . he first painted a series of trompe-l'oeil windows, Mughal-palatial, Andalusian Moorish, Manueline Portuguese, roseate Gothic, windows great and small; and then, through these magic casements, which were both windows of and on the world of make-believe, he gave us glimpses of his fabulous throngs. Early-period Mickey on his steamboat, Donald fighting the hands of Time, Unca Scrooge with $ signs in his eyes. . . There were talking roosters, booted pussies and flying, red-caped Wonder Dogs; also great galleries of more local heroes, for he gave us more than we had bargained for, adding djinns on carpets and thieves in giant pitchers and a man in the claws of a giant bird. He gave us story-oceans and abracadabras, Panchatantra fables and new lamps for old. (151-152)

Much like the mural Aurora paints in her bedroom on Cabral Island after her mother's death, the distinct architectural styles of the windows Miranda incorporates into the mural (Mughal-palatial, Andalusian Moorish, Manueline Portuguese, roseate Gothic) allude to the various cultural influences India has experienced through the continent's history: Eastern Mughal, North African Moorish and Andalusian Spanish, Portuguese, and Western European Gothic. Not only does combining these elements break down the distinction between the historical eras but specifically mixing the historical periods

within the windows underscores that the whole of India's varied and layered history shapes and determines the Zogoiby children's viewpoint. Additionally, along with the contemporary Western cartoon and comic book figures and scenes Aurora requests, Miranda includes ancient, traditional Eastern characters and stories, furthering the collapse of barriers between cultures and historical periods.

Clashes between Western European and Indian culture erupt frequently within the Zogoiby's bungalow, often around the dining room table, further destabilizing the space. Distraught when the Indian Army takes over Goa, "ending 451 years of Portuguese colonial rule," the self-professed Portuguese Vasco Miranda (at this point a commercially successful painter but still a constant houseguest) insists on re-asserting Portuguese culture in the house. He takes over the kitchen,

> . . . winning over our at-first-outraged old cook Ezekiel by teaching him
> the secrets of Goan cuisine and entering them in a new green copybook of
> recipes which he hung by the kitchen door on a length of wire; and for
> weeks after it was all pork, we were obliged to eat Goan chourisso sausage
> and pig's liver sarpotel and pork curries with coconut milk. (156)

His "counter-revolution" was not "confined to the dining table" as Miranda filled days with "tales of the heroism of Alfonso de Albuquerque who conquered Goa from the Sultan of Bijapur, one Yusuf Adilshah, on St. Catherine's Day, 1510; and of Vasco da Gama, too. 'A pepper-spice family like yours should understand how I feel,' he told Aurora, plaintively. 'Ours is a common history; what do these Indian soldiers know about it?'" (156). However, the dining room table becomes a battleground in the conflict between colonial and postcolonial nationalist power structures on the night of India's

Independence. Miranda, drunk and frustrated by his inability to profess his love for

Aurora as well as his conflicting emotions about the dawning Independence, gets caught

up in the celebration, although, "as a Goan, he was technically not involved" (166).

Horrified by the Hindu-Muslim killings, he stands unsteadily and angrily attacks the

Zogoiby family and its guests:

> 'What are you all so pleased about?' he shouted, swaying. 'This isn't your
>
> night. Bleddy Macaulay's minutemen! Don't you get it? Bunch of
>
> English-medium misfits, the lot of you. Minority group members.
>
> Square-peg freaks. *You don't belong here*. Country's as alien to you as if
>
> you were what's-the-word *lunatics. Moon men*. You read the wrong
>
> books, get on the wrong side in every argument, think the wrong thoughts.
>
> Even your bleddy dreams grow from foreign roots. . . And let me tell *you*
>
> something, Mr. Big Businessman Abie . . . Only one power in this damn
>
> country is strong enough to stand up against those gods and it isn't
>
> blankety blank sockular specialism. . . I'll tell you what it is. Corruption.
>
> . . Jolly old damn fine bribery and grease . . . Backhanders, payoffs,
>
> sweeteners. . . V. Miranda's definition of democracy: one man one bribe.'
>
> (166-7)

That Miranda's tirade insisting that the family's position within the Anglo-Indian power

structure prevents them from identifying with the nationalists occurs around the dining

room table of the Anglo-Indian bungalow on Malabar Hill underscores his argument. In

pointing out that the exploitative capitalist business practices that Abraham has employed

lucratively throughout the colonial period will continue to be effective after

Independence, Miranda calls attention to the underlying similarities between the two eras and challenges the notion of vast differences between the two.

The descriptions of Abraham's businesses that finance the house reveal that the exploitative capitalistic economic system underlying the colonial project continues unabashedly after Independence. Once settled into their home on Malabar Hill, Abraham quietly studies the few wealthy families that control the great wealth of Bombay and by the mid 1950's acquires enough knowledge to blackmail the playboy sons of the powerful House of Cashondeliveri, taking over their "giant enterprise with extensive holdings in banking, land, ships, chemicals, and fish" (180-181). Beneath these public international trading operations he expands his organization to prostitution and drugs, becoming a "veritable czar, a mughal of human frailty" (182). He covers his heroin trade by purchasing a talcum powder company, "Baby Softo" (184). The novel emphasizes the many layers of Abraham's business empire:

> . . . these relatively few canisters produced, for several years, an export-
> based income which far outstripped the rest of the company's profits, and
> made possible a broad-based corporate diversification – an income which
> was never declared, however, which appeared in no ledger save the secret
> encoded book of books which Abraham kept profoundly hidden, perhaps
> in some dark recess of his corrupted soul. The city itself, perhaps the
> whole country, was a palimpsest, Under World beneath Over World, black
> market beneath white; when the whole of life was like this, when an
> invisible reality moved phantomwise beneath a visible fiction, subverting

all its meanings, how could Abraham's career have been any different?

How could any of us have escaped that deadly layering? (184)

By emphasizing that Abraham expands his fortune in the postcolonial period through exploitative business practices thinly veiled by "legitimate" international business ventures, the novel echoes the argument of many postcolonial critics that although the "free trade" of international globalization might appear to have revised the colonial economic power dynamic by creating greater economic opportunities for those outside the West, the oppressions and inequities of the capitalist power structure continue to operate. Using the image of a palimpsest discourages a linear understanding of the economics of Abraham's business and encourages the reader to consider the similar economic factors at work during both eras. Calling attention to the layering of Abraham's corporation reveals the common exploitative capitalist trade financing both the Cabral Island and Malabar Hill houses and operating in both the colonial and postcolonial eras.

Cashondeliveri Tower

Rushdie continues to entwine India's historical eras by bringing colonialism and neo-colonial globalization together in his third architectural setting, the Cashondeliveri Tower. The sky-scraper houses the Zogoiby business enterprises and Abraham spends the majority of his time in his penthouse at the pinnacle of the tower. By shifting the dominant architectural setting from the Anglo-Indian bungalow residences of Cabral Island and Malabar Hill to the Cashondeliveri Tower in Bombay, the novel indicates a progression from the colonial/postcolonial eras toward neo-colonial globalization. The

details of the Tower reinforce this movement in part by locating the building in Bombay – a city known as India's financial center and an important hub of the global economy. The details about the land under and around the Tower and its development highlight the exploitative capitalism foundational to the building. As a skyscraper designed by I. M. Pei, the Cahsondeliveri Tower reflects Abraham's position at the top of the international economic power structure. However, the novel uses passages describing the explosion of the skyscraper also to draw connections between the building and British colonialism, linking the eras of neo-colonial globalization and colonialism.

By locating the Cashondeliveri Tower in Bombay, Rushdie creates an economic foundation for the building that connects it to India's long participation in the global economy. Bombay has been considered the financial capital of India ever since the British and Portuguese established their trade routes. In "Provincializing the Global City: From Bombay to Mumbai," Rashmi Varma points out that during and after the British colonial period the actual land of the city became increasingly connected to Bombay's economy and social structure. The country's financial capital and the "center of its cosmopolitan modernity" in the years following Independence, Bombay experienced a "shift from manufacturing to service and finance industries" so that transnational capital flowed more easily into the city. Varma argues that, "Capital's endless capacity to first invest in the built environment and then destroy it in order to create newer opportunities for capital accumulation has been of course key to Bombay's capitalist development. As the state cedes more and more space to private capital, Bombay becomes increasingly vulnerable to the vagaries of private investment and the global economy that produce vast inequities in the labor markets and often fictitious scarcities of space in the city" (75).

However, regardless of changes in the particular dynamics of Bombay's economy, the novel's descriptions of Bombay underscore its long-standing importance as a financial hub: "Bombay was central, had been so from the moment of its creation: the bastard child of a Portuguese-English wedding, and yet the most Indian of Indian cities. In Bombay all Indias met and merged. In Bombay, too, all-India met what-was-not-India . . . In Bombay, as the old, founding myth of nation faded, the new god-and-mammon India was being born. The wealth of the country flowed through its exchanges, its ports" (350-351). Even though this description alludes to distinct eras in Bombay's, and India's, history – colonialism, postcolonial nationalism and sectarianism, and international globalization – words such as "wedding," "met and merged," and "flowed" create the sense of these periods as being interconnected rather than separate and unrelated to one another.

The details about the specific land on which financial skyscrapers such as the Cashondeliveri Tower rest and the construction of the building link the structure to exploitative global capitalist business practices. Abraham's investment in the project to push back the bay and develop the land beneath it highlights the centrality of land ownership in the global economy: ". . . new tracts of land – 'something out of nothing' – were reclaimed from the Arabian Sea at the southern end of the Bombay peninsula's Back Bay, and Abraham invested heavily in this reverse-Atlantis rising from the waves" (185). The slight of hand implied by referring to the project as creating "something out of nothing" infuses it with a sense of trickery and illusion. The description of the development of the land continues this suggestion of a destabilized and layered reality in which brutal forces operate secretly under a benign visible façade:

Abraham explained how invisible funds could find their way through a

series of invisible bank accounts and end up, visible and clean as a

whistle, in the account of a friend. . . He showed how easy it would be to

persuade those worthy officers whose job it was to monitor and control the

number and height of new buildings in the Reclamation that they would be

much advantaged were they to lose the gift of sight . . . so that great

crowds of new edifices could actually remain invisible to public scrutiny,

and soar into the sky, as high as anyone could wish. And, once again, hey

presto, the invisible buildings would generate mountains of cash, they

would become some of the most valuable real-estate on earth; . . . Suppose

these invisible buildings could be built by an invisible work-force? Would

that not be the most elegant and economic of results? . . . city authorities

decreed that any persons who had settled in Bombay subsequent to the last

census were to be deemed not to exist. Because they had been cancelled,

it followed that the city bore no responsibility for their housing or welfare.

. . it cannot be denied that for the million or more ghosts who had just

been created by law, life got harder. . . these persons were not just

invisible, but actually, according to official pronouncements, simply not at

all there. (186-187)

This account of the building's construction wherein the people who actually build the

skyscrapers disappear in the process of creating it emphasizes their position of

powerlessness in the power structure of international globalization that the building

represents. Ramón Grosfoguel links the oppressions of neo-colonial globalization with

colonialism: "It is crucial to point out that coloniality in the contemporary world-system stems from the long history of European colonialism that preceeded it. Five hundred years of European colonial expansion and domination formed an international division of labor between Europeans and non-Europeans that is reproduced in the present so-called postcolonial phase of the capitalist world-system" (96). The passages about the development business Abraham runs from his penthouse of the Cashondeliveri Tower call attention to the often unseen exploitation associated with his capitalist endeavors, economic processes still at work long after the end of formal colonialism.

The form of Abraham's Cashodeliveri Tower, a gigantic skyscraper, also connects the building to capitalism and the era of neo-colonial globalization. The descriptions of the tower in the novel reinforce its height: "hanging garden in the sky . . . sitting astride the highest needle in the giant bright pincushion at the city's southern tip" (317), "the thirty-first floor penthouse" (322), "high-rise glass Eden" (332). Henri Lefebvre theorizes the relationship between the skyscraper and the capitalist power structure: "The arrogant verticality of skyscrapers, and especially of public and state buildings, introduces a phallic or more precisely a phallocratic element into the visual realm; the purpose of this display, of this need to impress, is to convey an impression of authority to each spectator. Verticality and great height have ever been the spatial expression of potentially violent power" (98). Architectural critic Thomas Van Leeuwen also recognizes that the first skyscrapers erected by businessmen in New York in the early twentieth century reflect a "commitment to the 'symbolism of height'" (81). He notes that the height translated to economic gain because in the city the "conditions in the horizontal plane of the grid were equal, but the vertical space was free territory," thus

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creating an opportunity to "make money out of land" (81). However, Anthony King

agrees with Fenske and Holdsworth's assessment that the design is primarily symbolic:

"The landmark towers were rarely of any true functional use to their corporate builders

. . . [Their logic was the] establishment of a physical presence for an unmaterial business

such as insurance and the assertion of individual ego" (King 11). King views the

skyscraper as a statement of "the economic ideology, mode of production and ethos from

which it was largely (if not entirely) produced: capitalist land values, speculative office

development and big business materialism" (11). He also points out that by 1913, the

"practice of making the building a metaphor of the owner by naming it after him had

become well established" (11). The skyscraper's name in the novel, the Cashondeliveri

Tower, reinforces the connection between the structure of the skyscraper and an

individual's position in the economic power structure: ". . . Cashondeliveri Terrace –

named after the nineteenth-century Parsi grandee and cut-throat moneylender Sir Duljee

Duljeebhoy Cashondeliveri" (159). In attaching the name of a "cut-throat moneylender"

(connotative of brutal business practices) from the era of the East India Company and

British Colonial rule to the building housing Abraham's late twentieth-century

international conglomerate, Rushdie's novel bridges the distance between the two

periods.

The description of the Cashondeliveri Tower emphasizes the internationality of

the structure, thus associating it with globalization. King argues that throughout the

twentieth century skyscrapers rose up in international cities across the globe, symbolizing

the spread of the global capitalist power structure. He notes the metaphoric significance

of skyscrapers in postcolonial locations: "The most cursory perusal of city view

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postcards in major cities of the world, from Ankara to Zagreb, would confirm the assumption that popular conceptions of spectacularity and 'modernity' in cities are to be represented by the city's most recent high rise building" (12). Roger Keil concurs, arguing that the "gigantic tower" is "the most important symbolic product of the world economy" (quoted in King 15). The description of Abraham's personal accommodations at the top of the skyscraper further connects the structure to the era of capitalist globalization:

> . . . the thirty-first floor of the jewel of the New Bombay, I. M. Pei's masterpiece, Cashondeliveri Tower. . . a giant atrium stocked with trees and plants from more temperate climes than our own – there were orchards of apple-trees and *poiriers*, and heavy grapevines, too – all under glass, maintained at ideal conditions of temperature and humidity by a climate-control system whose cost would have been unimaginable if it had not been invisible; for, by some happy chance, no electricity bill had ever been presented to Abraham for payment. (187)

The novel underscores the building's association with international capitalism by attributing the design to I. M. Pei, the Chinese-born American architect positioned at the center of the Modernist urban architectural movement often referred to as the International Style. Well-known for his "bold and skillful arrangements of groups of geometric shapes and for his dramatic use of richly contrasted materials, spaces, and surfaces," he designed iconic buildings for artistic and commercial purposes across the world: the John F. Kennedy International Airport (1960), the John Hancock Tower in Boston (1973), the East Building of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

(1978), Nestlé Corporation Headquarters (1981), and a glass pyramid in the courtyard of the Louvre Museum in Paris (1989) (Britannica Online). Attributing the design of Cashondeliveri Tower to the internationally prolific Pei echoes Lang's observation that globalization affects architecture: "The globalization of the world's economy is resulting in a uniformity of architecture, particularly commercial architecture in the central business districts of cities across the world. Often the same set of architects work everywhere. The internally imposed pressure to comply with international norms as well as the desire of multinational companies to have a modern international image creates a universal aesthetic expression that overlays regional demands" (298). The description of the penthouse also reinforces the notion that the structure lacks a connection to its specific Indian location by stressing the Western European landscape at the top of the structure. The design creates a synthetic climate completely different from that of Bombay. Significantly, the plants and trees Abraham chooses to surround himself with originate from Western Europe. That the novel calls attention to the exorbitant cost of maintaining this Western European landscape on top of the Bombay skyscraper infers that only Abraham's position at the top of the global capitalist power structure makes it possible.

When Hindu extremists bomb the Cashondeliveri Tower, the novel's description of the explosion links it to India's colonial experience.[58] As the Cashondeliveri Tower explodes,

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[58] Critics have discussed connections between the violence in the novel to the violence in Mumbai in the early 1990's. Rashmi Varma argues that the real violence in the early 1990's in which thousands of Muslims were massacred in Bombay stems from the rise of the right wing Shiv Sena party that controlled the city during the 1980's and 1990's, linking "the growth of ethnic chauvinism to struggles over economic resources in the city" (67). See Samir Dayal's "Subaltern Envy? Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*" for a discussion of the rising Hindu right wing in Mumbai and the novel.

. . . Tower workers started spilling madly into the street. Sixty seconds later, however, the great atrium at the top of Cashondeliveri Tower burst like a firework in the sky and a rain of glass knives began to fall, stabbing the running workers through the neck the back the thigh, spearing their dreams, their loves, their hope. . . Finally, Abraham's garden rained down like a benediction. Imported soil, English lawn-grass and foreign flowers – crocuses, daffodils, roses, hollyhocks, forget-me-nots – fell towards the Backbay Reclamation; also alien fruits. Whole trees rose gracefully into the heavens before floating down to earth, like giant spores. The feathers of un-Indian birds went on drifting through the air for days. Peppercorns, whole cumin, cinnamon sticks, cardamoms mingled with the imported flora and birdlife, dancing rat-a-tat on the roads and sidewalks like perfumed hail. Abraham had always kept sacks of Cochin spices close at hand. (375)

The passage begins by recording the physical harm experienced by the workers in the building, emphasizing the real and material pain inflicted on them by the Tower and the capitalist economic structure it represents. After this the attention shifts to the English flora of Abraham's sky garden that connects the space to the British colonial project. The last to rain down are the Indian spices that Abraham stores in the penthouse, connotative of the capitalist trade at the core of the colonial project. Through this description of the collapse of the skyscraper the novel brings the eras of colonialism and neo-colonial globalization together, suggesting that the power structure that the Hindu extremists seek to destroy is one comprised of all of these experiences.

Immediately following the description of the explosion of the Cashondeliveri Tower the novel quotes Macauley's 1835 "Minute on Education," linking the bombing of the building with the British colonial project and pointing to an intricately complex web of historical experiences. The novel references a passage that asserts English superiority and the importance of imposing this belief on the colonized: "To form a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in opinions, in morals, in intellect. . . a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature" (376). By linking the neo-colonial international capitalist era and the colonial era through this juxtaposition of the explosion and Macauley's lecture, the novel highlights the relationship between the two eras that globalization and world-systems scholars such as Timothy Brennan, Ramón Grosfoguel, and Walter Mignolo have begun to theorize. For example, Mignolo acknowledges differences between the historical periods but encourages an understanding of "coloniality":

> . . . whereas imperialism/colonialism refers to specific sociohistorical
> configurations (i.e. the Spanish and British Empires' colonies in the
> Americas and Asia), modernity/coloniality refers to the conceptual and
> ideological matrix of the Atlantic world that, since 1500, has expanded all
> over the globe. . . coloniality or what is the same, the colonial matrix of
> power, describes a specific kind of imperial/colonial relations that
> emerged in the Atlantic world in the sixteenth century and brought
> imperialism and capitalism together. . . The colonial matrix of power
> explains the specificity of the modern/colonial world and the
> imperial/colonial expansion of Christian, Western, and Capitalist empires

. . . Coloniality underlines the massive land appropriation and massive

exploitation of labor at the foundation of colonialism/capitalism. . .

Globalization, as it is understood today, goes hand in hand with

coloniality, with the foundation of the colonial matrix of power. (110).

The specific Macaulay quote that Rushdie chooses highlights British colonialism's use of

cultural difference to establish a hierarchy of power. Mignolo sees this as an integral

aspect of coloniality and thus globalization:

In order to exploit, it is necessary to dominate, and in order to dominate, it

is necessary to build discourses and belief systems that produce the

imperial image as the locus of right and unavoidable march of history and

the colonies as the locus of the erroneous, the inferior, the weak, the

barbarians, the primitives, and so on. To conflate differences with values

in human beings' hierarchical order is not just to *identify* "cultural"

differences but to *build* "colonial" differences justified in a "racial"

configuration of human beings in the planet, their languages and religions,

their economies, and their social organizations" (110).

Using Macauley as the post-script to the deadly destruction of the Cashondeliveri Tower

thus calls attention to the colonial foundations of the hierarchical neo-colonial power

structures and therefore to the lingering coloniality in postcolonial India.

Rushdie also uses the skyscraper to link colonialism and neo-colonial

globalization through the English garden built atop the Cashondeliveri tower that

represents the colonial power structures that are incorporated into the neo-colonial

system. The collapse of the tower implies that the power structure of globalization

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founded on colonialism and neo-colonialism's exploitative capitalist practices cannot ultimately stand. The narrative's movement backward in time, from the neo-colonial globalization of the Tower to the colonialism of Macauley, follows the temporal order within the passage about the explosion (from the workers, to the English flowers, to the spices) that continues in the final section of the novel when Moraes boards a plane headed for Andalusia, Spain. Rather than provide a model of a stable postcolonial structure, the novel shifts to its final architectural setting, a model of the Alhambra in Spain where the boundaries of colonialism are tested and stretched and the exploration of the relationship between colonialism and neo-colonial globalization continues.

The Little Alhambra

The novel further disrupts the notion of linear progress from one historical period to another and continues to establish a firm connection between neo-colonial globalization and colonialism when it shifts to its final architectural setting: the painter Vasco Miranda's fortress house in Benengeli, Spain that he modeled after the Alhambra, the palatial residence of the Moors who ruled the Spanish peninsula from 711 until 1492. After the explosions in Bombay, Moraes travels to Spain to retrieve his mother's paintings stolen by Miranda, including "The Moor's Last Sigh," a depiction of the moment that the last Moorish sultan, Boabdil, relinquished his authority over Granada to Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand.[59] Having been unable to situate himself within the

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[59]The scene of the final moment of Eastern colonialism in the West and the end of the peaceful co-existence of different cultures and religious beliefs is the subject of many of Aurora's paintings, particularly "The Moor's Last Sigh" of the novel's title, and figures predominantly throughout the novel. Much of the criticism of the novel has centered on this aspect of the novel and the notion of hybridity. For an analysis of the Alhambra as a subject of Aurora's paintings and the ideal of hybridity, see Paul Cantor's "Tales of

complexly layered spaces of the bungalows of Cabral Island and Malabar Hill and the

Cashondeliveri Tower, Moraes attempts to relocate to a space renowned for its peaceful

acceptance and commingling of cultures: the Alhambra.[60] Moraes's description of

Miranda's castle leaves no doubt of the intention to copy the Alhambra: "I saw Vasco's

folly, its red walls dominating the crest of the hill above the town. I was particularly

struck by its high, high tower, which looked like something out of a fairy story. . . The

edifice was as high as the twin towers adorning the Benengeli church; Vasco had set

himself up as God's rival. . . I instructed Vivar the cabbie to take me to the 'Little

Alhambra'" (388). This section of my chapter considers the ways in which Rushdie's

situating of the little Alhambra, a location connected to the last instance of Eastern

imperialism in the West and the dawn of the age of Western European imperialism, in a

homogenized, commodified, international city creates a site of multilayered histories so

intertwined that attempting to consider one period without regard to the others becomes

impossible.

The novel uses Miranda's Alhambra to challenge common definitions and

assumptions of the term "colonialism" by reminding readers of the history of Eastern

colonization of the West. In 711 Arab and Berber soldiers entered the southernmost tip

of the Iberian peninsula by way of the Straits of Gibraltar. These Moors (the Arab and

Berber Muslims who settled in North Africa and Spain) ruled most of Spain until the

eleventh-century when Christians began taking back their territory. Historian Marianne

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the Alhambra: Rushdie's Use of Spanish History in *The Moor's Last Sigh*" (1997). See also, Justyna
Deszcz's "Salman Rushdie's Magical Kingdom: *The Moor's Last Sigh* and Fairy-Tale Utopia" and Sabine
Schulting's "Peeling off History in Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*."
[60] Rushdie is certainly not the first to use the Alhambra as a setting in his writing. Washington Irving,
Henry Swinburne, Benjamin Disraeli, John Ruskin, Lytton Strachey, and Sacheverell Sitwell all make use
of the evocative and romantic Moorish backdrop. More recently, Doris Lessing utilize the Alhambra's
architecture in The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five (Irwin 131, 159-162).

Barrucand notes that today the southwestern provinces of Almeria, Málaga, Cádiz, Huelva, Seville, Cordova, Jaén, and Granada comprise Andalusia, although from the eighth to the tenth-century al-Andalus referred to all of Islamic Spain, which included almost the entire Iberian peninsula (11-12). The series of structures comprising the Alhambra, whose form and function was primarily Islamic, were constructed during the span of Moorish rule, with the most substantial elements completed during the mid to late fourteenth century. The Alhambra (an abbreviation of Qal'at alHamra, "the red fort") gets its name from the red clay of the surrounding landscape and sits on one of the highest spurs of Granada (Grabar 25). It served as the "residence and seat of government" of the Arabian Nasrid family, who originally seized power over Granada in 1238 (Irwin 5-6). More than simply a castle, fort, or palace, it was comprised of "walls with their twenty-three towers and four gates once enclosed, alongside seven palaces, dwelling houses for a whole range of social classes, as well as offices of all kinds, the Royal mint, public and private mosques, workshops, garrisons, prisons, public and private baths, the royal Necropolis, gardens, a defensive structure, and a summer residence" (Barrucand 187). Even though the Muslim Moors controlled the land and the common language was Arabic, al-Andalus contained a significant number of Jewish and Christian communities living side by side (Fletcher 10, 93). Muslim control of Spain ended in 1492 when the last principality, Granada, fell and the sultan, Boabdil, surrendered the Alhambra to Ferdinand and Isabella (Irwin 2-5).[61] By circling back to

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[61]The novel establishes multiple connections between the narrator Moraes and the history of the Alhambra. His mother nicknames him "Moor" and makes him the model for her painting of the sultan Boabdil's famous surrender of the Alhambra that marks the end of Eastern colonialism in the West called, "The Moor's Last Sigh." As Paul Cantor points out, "The Jewish ancestors of the businessman Abraham Zogoiby are said to have come to India as a result of the same Christianization of Spain that led to the expulsion of the Moors, and, according to family legend, the Indian Zogoibys are descended from Boabdil

this period of Eastern colonization of the West, the novel challenges definitions of

colonialism and postcolonialism as described by Ashcroft: "post-colonialism as it has

been employed in recent accounts has been primarily concerned to examine the processes

and effects of, and reactions to, European colonialism from the sixteenth century up to

and including the neo-colonialism of the present day" (188). By incorporating a location

connected to a colonial experience that reverses the trajectory typically assumed in

postcolonial studies, the novel counters an understanding of colonialism as uni-

directional. Additionally, in referring to a period of colonization well before the start of

Western European colonialism in the 1500's, the text also expands standard definitions of

the term "colonialism" temporally.

The layers of conflicting meanings associated with the Alhambra contribute to the

investigation of the complex relationships and blurred distinctions between historical eras

in the architectural sites of The Moor's Last Sigh. The architecture of the structure brings

elements from a variety of traditions together, making it the symbol of a blending of the

many cultures in the region. Although the Alhambra stands as the premiere example of

Eastern architecture in the West, architectural experts and historians such as Irwin,

Fletcher, and Barrucand agree that it incorporates multiple influences: "The paintings on

the ceiling of the nearby Hall of Kings was done by a Spanish Christian painter and

depict historical scenes. The Lion Fountain, that gives this part of the palace its name,

was originally made for a Jewish palace of the eleventh century, but subsequently it had

its Jewish imagery erased and Muslim motifs were substituted" (Irwin 90). This

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himself, who, after his loss of Granada, purportedly had an interracial romance with a Spanish Jewess"
(83).

description of the architecture echoes the historical accounts of the period of Moorish rule in Spain that describes Christians, Jews, and Muslims living peacefully together, an arrangement referred to as "convivencia" (or "living together") (Fletcher 135). Richard Fletcher describes this period as a "long, intimate embrace: sharing a land, learning from one another, trading, intermarrying, misunderstanding, squabbling, fighting – generally indulging in all the incidents that go to furnish the ups and down of coexistence or a relationship" (8). However, Fletcher and others have begun to question the traditional assumption of peaceful diversity and fruitful co-existence associated with the Alhambra, thus problematizing the site's symbolic function[62] Although the Muslim sultans ruling over Granada from the Alhambra have "come down in history as capable, cultured, and popular rulers," historians such as Irwin contend that little proof supports such characterizations (Irwin 78). For example, Irwin points out that although slavery had mostly ended in Western Europe by the fourteenth century, Moorish Spain continued the practice and thus the "palaces of the Alhambra were built upon the suffering and the spoils of war. Christian captives were employed as slave labour . . . Fourteenth century verses inscribed on the wall of the Alhambra actually make this boast: You imposed chains on the captives and dawn found them at our door building your palaces as your servants" (70). In addition to the problematization of the connotation of fruitful co-existence, Irwin argues that, especially for Arabs and Muslims, the Alhambra "has come to stand for all that they have lost in recent centuries – not just in Spain, but also territories in the Balkans, India and elsewhere, as well as the end of the caliphate, the

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[62] In his exploration of multiculturalism and history in <u>The Moor's Last Sigh</u>, Paul Cantor argues that because the Alhambra represents Muslim imperialism, the novel "calls into question any simple equation one might be tempted to make between imperialism and monoculturalism on the one hand or between anti-imperialism and multiculturalism on the other. . . imperialism may at times be linked to multiculturalism" (326).

eclipse of Arab science and philosophy and a decline of cultural confidence. The Alhambra serves as an icon of exile and loss. . . In the Arab consciousness, the Alhambra is populated by ghosts and is the object of backward glances and heavy sighs" (181, 184). Thus, the Alhambra functions as a complicated symbol, spanning the historical periods since its construction and representing both the possibility, as well as the loss, of an idyllic multicultural society.

While the association of the Andalusian location with Eastern colonization in the West and the moment of the dawning of Western European colonial projects situates Miranda's little Alhambra in a colonial context, the novel concurrently connects the site to contemporary neo-colonial international capitalism. The fortune that Miranda accumulates and uses to construct his fortress comes from commercial international art sales: "Vasco had discovered that his work was commercial. It was the launch of that extraordinary – and in many ways meretricious – career during which it would seem, at times, that no new hotel lobby or airport terminal was complete until it had been decorated with a gigantic V. Miranda mural that managed, somehow, to be at once pyrotechnic and banal" (159-160). The passage reveals that the value of Miranda's paintings comes from its commercial appeal. Since airports and hotels serve as crucial sites of international business, locating the paintings in that context underscores the murals' connection to the global economy. In addition to establishing a foundation of global capitalism for the structure Miranda builds with the profits from art, placing his artwork in a context of airports and hotels, culturally generic spaces specifically associated with travel, attaches a sense of dislocation and disconnection to the little Alhambra.

The description of the town of Benengeli in which Miranda constructs his fortress also connects the setting to neo-colonial globalization. The narrator's observations highlight the lack of connection between the culture of the town and its Spanish location:

> . . . a most un-Spanish thoroughfare, a 'pedestrianised' street full of non-Spaniards . . . who plainly had no interest in the siesta or any other local customs. This thoroughfare, which, as I would discover, was known by the locals as the Street of Parasites, was flanked by a large number of expensive boutiques – Gucci, Hermés, Aquascutum, Cardin, Paloma Picasso – and also by eating-places ranging from Scandinavian meatball-vendors to a Stars-and-Stripes-liveried Chicago Rib Shack. . . I heard people speaking English, American, French, German, Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, and what might have been either Dutch or Afrikaans. But these were not visitors; they carried no cameras, and behaved as people do on their own territory. This denatured part of Benegeli had become theirs. There was not a single Spaniard to be seen. 'Perhaps these expatriates are the new Moors,' I thought. (390)

The passage notes the absence of the Spanish language and traditions and then catalogues the international commodities, foods, and languages that have taken the place of indigenous Spanish culture. The detailed list of "expensive boutiques" again underscores the centrality of capitalism and the dominance of Western European products within the global economy. Even though referring to different nationalities marks the space as "international," the emphasis on consumption through the boutiques and restaurants and the description of the residents as "parasites" creates a sense of bland, lifeless, globalized

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homogeneity rather than a space of multicultural exchange and engagement.[63] Rushdie

ends this passage that establishes Benengeli as a site of global capitalism with Moraes's

characterization of the elite, cosmopolitan Western Europeans now occupying Andalusia

as the "new Moors," a label that casts them as contemporary colonizers and draws a

parallel between contemporary neo-colonial globalization and the period of the Moors'

colonization of Spain.

In the context of this layered historical location, Rushdie's novel uses the little

Alhambra to reveal the oppressive power structures common to all colonial eras by

challenging the traditional association of the Alhambra with peaceful co-existance

through references to the falseness of the reproduction and by depicting it as a space of

imprisonment rather than freedom. After initially admiring the little Alhambra, Moraes

begins to notice problems in its construction:

> . . . Was this a house built of love or hate? . . . For there was something
>
> sour here, some envy in the brilliance of the emulation; and as the first
>
> shock of recognition wore off, and the day rose up, I began to see the
>
> flaws in the grand design. . . The building's sense of proportion was also
>
> poor, and its lines were misconceived. No, it was not a miracle, after all;
>
> my first impressions had been illusory, and the illusion had already faded.

---

[63]Paul Cantor argues that "Benengeli's multiculturalism is the product of what many regard as the latest form of imperialism, multinational capitalism. The town has been invaded by displaced persons from all around the world, who give it a cosmopolitan character, especially in terms of languages. But Rushdie finds this particular form of cultural hybridity empty. In his view, the commodity culture of capitalism abstracts from the local, from anything that roots a people in their soil, and substitutes instead a world of falsely universal brand names, epitomized by the fast-food chains that spring up everywhere and belong nowhere. This commercial cosmopolitanism *denatures* human beings; by ignoring all local customs, it dissolves their sense of cultural identity, which is always anchored in a larger sense of community" (334).

> The 'Little Alhambra', for all its size and flamboyance, was no New
>
> Moorusalem, but an ugly, pretentious house. (408-409)

Moraes' description emphasizes the instability of the structure through its acknowledgement of design "flaws" and defects in the building's "proportion" and "lines." The faults Moraes recognizes in the design that dispell the illusion of the space as one of balance and freedom are reinforced when Miranda imprisons Moraes "in the topmost tower-room" (419). The little Alhambra holds others prisoner as well. Miranda locks Moraes in the tower with Aoi Ue, a Japanese art restoration expert tasked with recovering a painting Aurora had painted over. In addition, Moraes comes to understand that Miranda "too, was a prisoner in this house, his greatest folly, which trapped him in his own inadequacy, his failure to approach Aurora's heights," mirroring the observation of many postcolonial theorists that the structures of colonialism/postcolonialism shape the lives of those on both sides of the colonial divide, the colonized *and* the colonizers (430). The imprisonment of these characters within a structure associated with colonialism and grounded in international globalization highlights the relationship between the two eras and reveals the ways in which individuals find themselves trapped in the power structures that both historical periods share. The conflict and violence that lead to the deaths of all three characters locked in the little Alhambra at the end of the novel explode the notion that the social structures of colonialism and neo-colonial globalization can be spaces of sustained peaceful and productive co-existance.

The novel's final architectural setting links the eras of Moorish Spain and contemporary neo-colonial globalization by highlighting how Miranda's model of the Alhambra is constructed with funds from global trade and located within a "denatured"

town where international consumerism obliterates indigenous Spanish culture. Through

layering these historical experiences, the novel calls attention to their similarities,

particularly the oppressive power structures founded on capitalism, and challenges the

notion that fruitful and peaceful multicultural co-existence can occur within the context

of coloniality and international globalization. The architectural references to the

Alhambra destabilize the premise that colonialism can only operate uni-directionally

from the West to the East. Situating neo-colonial globalization within this setting of

disrupted assumptions about colonial power structures creates a space for understanding

that, although global capitalism operates increasingly through multiple, dispersed,

transnational centers of power rather than through a traditional nation-state system in

which the power resides physically in the West, this renovation does not necessarily

result in a structure that is fundamentally different, less oppressive, or more equitable.

Responding to the Complex Architectural Settings of <u>The Moor's Last Sigh</u>

The architectural settings of Rushdie's novel trace a narrative from colonialism to

neo-colonial globalization but ultimately disrupt any sense of linearity and positive

progress forward toward freedom, multiculturalism, and equity by layering historical eras

within each site. The movement from one location to another does follow a traditional

progression from one historical era to another in that the descriptions of the first site, the

house on Cabral Island, link it primarily to the Anglo-Indian bungalow and British

colonialism; the descriptions of the second site, the house on Malabar Hill, connect it to

the post-colonial nationalist era; the descriptions of the third and fourth settings, the

Cashondeliveri Tower and the little Alhambra, place them in the context of neo-colonial

globalization. However, as Rushdie establishes a firm connection between each structure and specific historical period, he also undermines the relationship by referencing other eras, creating a sense that these eras, while distinguishable in many ways, are all interrelated and inseparable. Each era influences all of the structures. The palimpsest of historical experiences the novel builds into these spaces makes it difficult to separate one from the other and in this way the novel insists on the connection between these eras and highlights the necessity of being mindful that one period cannot be understood without consideration of the others.

The novel's architectural sites bring the historical periods of colonialism and neo-colonial globalization together but fail to develop a blueprint for an alternative power structure. In the last scene of the novel, Moraes looks at the original Alhambra in the distance as he dies and yearns for an unlikely breakdown of the oppressive power structures founded on colonialism and capitalism:

> . . . and there is stands, the glory of the Moors, their triumphant masterpiece and their last redoubt. The Alhambra, Europe's red fort, sister to Delhi's and Agra's – the palace of interlocking forms and secret wisdom, of pleasure-courts and watergardens, that monument to a lost possibility that nevertheless has gone on standing, long after its conquerors have fallen; like a testament to lost but sweetest love, to the love that endures beyond defeat, beyond annihilation, beyond despair; to the defeated love that is greater than what defeats it, to that most profound of our needs, to our need for flowing together, for putting an end to frontiers, for the dropping of the boundaries of the self. Yes, I have seen it

across an oceanic plain, though it has not been given to me to walk in its

noble courts. I watch it vanish in the twilight, and in its fading it brings

tears to my eyes" (433).

Although the vanishing vision of a peaceful and free multicultural society disappears at

the end of the novel, suggesting pessimisticly that this goal is a mirage and ultimately

unattainable, the novel's more successful attempt to breakdown barriers between the

historical experiences of colonialism, postcolonialism, and neo-colonialial globalization

by weaving them together with the common thread of capitalism, materially through the

novel's architecture and theoretically by challenging the division between the

postcolonial studies and globalization theory, creates a space for new understanding of

the past and present.

Through its architectural settings, the novel grounds neo-colonial globalization

within the scope of coloniality and in so doing resists approaching globalization as an

altogether new cultural and economic dynamic and reinforces the call by critics such as

Krishnaswamy, Hawley, and King for theoretical approaches that bring postcolonial and

globalization theories together. However, while The Moor's Last Sigh provides an

excellent example of how intricately interconnected the issues are that each discipline

concerns itself with, exactly how the two fields of study might come together remains

uncertain. Krishnaswamy questions "on what terms and to what ends" the engagement

between the two approaches should occur. She asks: "Is globalization theory just a

strategically recast version of postmodernism – one that effectively blunts the critical

edge of postcolonialism through a spatiotemporal leveling of differences? And if it is,

can postcolonial studies survive its rapid assimilation into globalization theory and still

manage to stake out a separate, meaningful future for itself?" (3). Other critics considering the relationship between postcolonialism and globalization, such as Timothy Brennan, raise concerns about the incorporation of both areas of inquiry into the system they aim to critique (47). Yet, John Hawley embraces the prospect of postcolonial studies and globalization theory coming together, asserting that "capitalism and imperialism are essentially one aggressive process with two faces . . . The actual reality of contemporary global empire not only questions various grand narratives of globalization (Fukuyama, Huntington, Friedman, and Hardt and Negri), but also dares postcolonialism itself to think of effective strategies for resisting and interrogating neo-imperialism. . . One of the major challenges confronting postcolonialism, as I see it, is how to theorize and mobilize new forms of decolonizing agency in opposition to neocolonizing global capitalism" (71). Despite the difficult questions and the uncertainty about the impact of merging the two fields of study, bringing them together will certainly yield new ways of investigating issues related to contemporary international globalization.

Rushdie's use of architecture in his investigation of the connections between colonialism and neo-colonial globalization emphasizes the material impact of these theoretical issues and stresses the importance for globalization theory to move beyond the purely economic sphere. King, who calls the exclusion of the "cultural realities and cultural politics" of colonialism and postcolonialism from globalization theory "one of the most profound omission in both the public, as well as academic study and understanding of the modern world," highlights that the term "global" is fundamentally a "spatial expression" and insists that power structures play out materially and

symbolically in architecture (2004 29, 48). King asks, ". . . after well over a decade of often abstract, theoretical debates about globalization, postnationalism and other conceptual notions, where can we point to the material, concrete manifestation of their existence? What are the spaces produced by this putative global culture . . . Where are the places where it can be found, contained or imagined? How does the imagining, construction or 'reality' of global culture put new meanings into the spaces, places and built forms which have existed since times immemorial?" (25). By employing architecture to explore the relationship between coloniality and global capitalism, <u>The Moor's Last Sigh</u> grounds the issues in the material world, giving them weight and substance, stressing the materiality of the ideological structures and the fact that individuals' lives are situated within and shaped by them.

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