

# Contested Spaces in Contemporary North American Novels



# Contested Spaces in Contemporary North American Novels:

*Reading for Space*

By

Şemsettin Tabur

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Following abbreviations are used to refer to the primary sources:

*AM: A Mercy*

*AP: In Another Place, Not Here*

*TN: The Namesake*

*AY: There Will Never Be Another You*



## INTRODUCTION

*“I take SPACE to be the central fact  
to man born in America, from Folsom cave to now.  
I spell it large because it comes large here.  
Large, and without mercy.”*  
(Olson 11)

In this study of contemporary North American fiction, the novels of four women writers are analyzed from several spatially oriented perspectives. The selected texts are Toni Morrison’s *A Mercy* (2008), Dionne Brand’s *In Another Place, Not Here* (1996), Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake* (2003) and Carolyn See’s *There Will Never Be Another You* (2006). Linking a variety of critical concepts from spatial studies, sociology and literary studies, the spatially oriented analyses of the novels examine how these works narrativize the ways spaces are physically, ideologically, and socially produced. Elaborating on the open, relational, multiple, and processual features of space, the analyses disclose the inseparable relations between space, politics, and identity on both individual and social levels. The approach adopted is based on a conception of space as a contested, fluid, generative and political constituent of society and social experience. Accordingly, I use the expression “contested space” to refer to the relational, often contradictory, and alternative processes of producing space differently. By analyzing different spatial perspectives and literary forms on the contested grounds of space, this study seeks to contribute to the criticism of the novels and to shed light on the theoretical and methodological handling of the concept of space in literary studies.

As a whole, the present study responds to the postmodern geographer Edward Soja’s call “to think differently about the meanings and significance of space and those related concepts that compose and comprise the inherent *spatiality of human life*: place, location, locality, landscape, environment, home, city, region, territory, and geography” (*Thirdspace* 1, italics in original). Space, as many scholars of various disciplines have come to acknowledge, is an integral component of individual and social experience. It “becomes more urgent than ever to keep our contemporary consciousness of spatiality—or critical geographical

imagination—creatively open to redefinition and expansion in new directions and to resist any attempt to narrow or confine its scope” (Soja, *Thirdspace 2*).<sup>1</sup> Following the Marxist geographer Henri Lefebvre, who demonstrated the relevance of space in the production and representation of the social order, Soja argues that space should be re-theorized continuously as a central category in the enquiry of contemporary social phenomena. Since the so-called spatial turn in the second half of the twentieth century, and since the late 1960s in particular, the study of space has acquired importance. This has led to constant interest in the concept across various disciplines; space has been approached and conceptualized differently. As Soja argues, “the organization, use, and meaning of space is a product of social translation, transformation, and experience” (“Socio-Spatial” 210), and a large number of studies have examined the processes that construct space in diverse ways. Literary studies, in this respect, has participated actively in addressing and re-theorizing the complex, myriad forms of spatial production. Especially since the 1990s, literary critics have increasingly acknowledged the complexity of space. The conventional, taken-for-granted notion that refers to space as either an empty, static setting or simply as a metaphor in literary works is now questioned and reconsidered using insights from other disciplines, such as cultural geography and sociology.

Literary works, as social and spatial practices, are significant not only in reflecting social milieus and space production processes but also in shaping what has been and can be discovered about the spatiality of human life, a fact explained by bell hooks as follows: “Spaces can be real and imagined. Spaces can tell stories and unfold histories. Spaces can be interrupted, appropriated, and transformed through artistic and literary practice” (152). With bell hooks in mind, it is clear that analyzing how spaces are represented and communicated in/through literary works can certainly contribute to the study of space. In this regard, a literary work can actually be considered as a critical map<sup>2</sup> that provides readers with an orientation to understand, interpret, and interrogate the world. Narratives do not simply reflect the actual world but enable the imagination of alternatives. As Robert Tally argues, the spaces that literary works address “call for new cartographic approaches, new forms of representation and

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<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Doreen Massey describes her 2005 study *For Space* as “the case for an alternative approach to space,” and proposes that spatial thinking, like space itself, should never be “finished” or “closed” (8).

<sup>2</sup> A solid number of literary scholars like Andrew Thacker, Bertrand Westphal, and Robert Tally have already referred to the relationship between cartography and narration. For more information, see Section 1.3 of Chapter One.

new ways of imagining our *place* in the universe” (*Spatiality* 42-3, italics in original).

This study analyzes literary works “as” space as well as “for” space, which is to say I read each selected novel as a contested space that questions conventional and often authoritative understandings of social and spatial structures. All the writers featured in this study approach space as complex, processual, and relational constructions. Their works represent different, multiscalar spaces and places as well as the social, historical, cultural, and political processes that produce them. They explore the spaces of power and the dominant representations of space in their novels, which emphasizes the fact that space is not neutral and innocent but “filled with politics and ideology” (Keith and Pile 4). Therefore, the novels, which are themselves embedded in their own socio-political contexts, represent multifarious power relations and cultural negotiations. Moreover, each novel critiques fixed, essentialist conceptions of space by emphasizing the lived, “real-and-imagined” spaces of various characters.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, movement, border transgression, and the complex relationship between diverse productions of space and the varied practices of characters are significant in all of the selected novels. The novels plunge the reader into issues of identity, power, belonging, oppression, intercultural encounter, parenthood, home, and community. In particular, the entangled intergenerational relationships stand out. In these novels, both identity and the process of making space are shown as fluid and dynamic through characters that are shaped by such spaces while actively transforming them.

I will explore each novel from a spatial perspective to investigate the thematization of space through the following three central questions: First, how are narrative spaces produced and practiced physically in the novels? Second, how are spaces represented and constructed ideologically? Finally, how are these physical and imagined spaces alternatively lived and contested by the characters? To explore such questions and investigate each novel spatially, the analytical chapters will follow a tripartite structure. In the first part of each chapter, I will investigate the spatial dimensions of the following concepts: colonialism, justice, diaspora, and risk. In the second part of each chapter, I will investigate the novels as textual spaces. I use the term textual space to refer to the four relational spaces that can be distinguished in analyzing literary works from spatially

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<sup>3</sup> The term “real-and-imagined” belongs to Edward Soja. Bringing these two words together with a hyphen, Soja emphasizes how real and imagined aspects should be conceptualized together in thinking about space. In the rest of this study, I will use the term in the same sense.

oriented perspectives: the socio-cultural context or the real-world space in which a novel can be situated, the material space of each novel (paratextual features), the narrative organization, and the storyworld that the novel narrates (narrative space). More precisely, I will firstly investigate the socio-cultural contexts of each novel as the relational spaces of textual spatiality. Secondly, each text will be analyzed as a material object to examine how narrative spaces shape the paratext of the novels. Thirdly, discourse elements such as narrative situation, i.e. narration, narrative voice, point of view, focalization, language usage, and the reader's positioning will be examined as the spatial practices that shape what Ryan, referring to the scholars such as Joseph Frank, calls "the spatial form of the text" ("Space"). My primary assumption is that the spatial themes that are explored in the novels' storyworlds are constitutive to the act of narration. My specific focus on space in exploring these issues should not mean that the spatial is more important than the temporal, for both time and space are mutually constitutive in the narrativity of a literary work. Yet, considering the traditional peripheralization of space within literary studies, I follow Susan S. Friedman's suggestion to put "a compensatory emphasis on space" ("Spatial" 194) in my analyses. Finally, narrative spaces, which are the conceived, perceived, and lived settings in the storyworld, will be examined in the third part of each chapter. I will analyze how different narrative spaces are produced and practiced physically, imagined and represented ideologically, and experienced and negotiated alternatively. To this end, I will draw on a wide range of theories and concepts from literary studies, cultural studies, spatial studies, geography, and sociology.

The book consists of five chapters. The theoretical chapter which follows introduces the concepts of space and spatiality, and delves into their relationship to identity, politics, and literature. To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the term for my literary analyses I will first delineate the concept of space as contested, relational, dynamic, political, and socially produced. Secondly, I will examine the spatial turn in the social sciences, and provide an overview of the changes in the conceptualization of space since the 1960s. Here, I will take a brief look at the theories of cultural geographers Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja and Doreen Massey in order to develop my specific use of "contested space". Thirdly, I will analyze the close relations between space, narrative, geography, and literature. In doing so, I will focus on how recent spatial theorizations have been received in literary studies and how the latter has contributed to the study of space and place. Space-related insights into literary works as offered by Walter Benjamin, Michel de Certeau and

Mikhail Bakhtin will be discussed as early examples of theorizing space and spatializing narrative within literary studies. After analyzing the theories that approach literary works as closely related to the spatial project, I will discuss literary cartography as a recent example of spatially oriented literary studies. The same chapter will also introduce the ways I approach the selected novels as contested spaces. In so doing, I will explain the different forms of textual spatiality that will be considered in the analysis of the novels and introduce the ways I will use Lefebvre and Edward Soja's conceptual triad to examine the narrative space of each.

After these theoretical explorations, Chapter Two presents an in-depth textual analysis of Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*. Morrison, in *Playing in the Dark*, contends that she "want[s] to draw a map of a critical geography and use that map to open as much space for discovery, intellectual adventure and close exploration as did the original charting of the New World—without the mandate for conquest" (3). *A Mercy*, I argue, exemplifies Morrison's project: the novel offers complex, contested literary mappings of late seventeenth-century America. Bringing a range of characters (European slave owners, indentured servants, Native Americans, Presbyterians, Puritans, enslaved and free Africans) together in the "ad hoc territory" (AM 11) of America, Morrison "unmaps"<sup>4</sup> the "beginning" of America (AM 2), and interrogates how racism and colonization were institutionalized through a wide range of spatial themes including "fluid land claims" (AM 10) displacements, (dis)possession, slavery, land owning, and (re)naming. The novel suggests that colonialism and the invention of racism at that particular time in America were spatial as well as social and historical processes.

Elaborating on the concept of colonial space, I will draw on Lefebvre and Soja's conceptual triad and firstly analyze how the novel represents the physical production of colonial spaces. As I argue, the narrative locations are physically produced by figures like Senhor D'Ortega and Jacob Vaark; these characters go on to discover, name, and order the landscape of the "New World" through the spatial practices that constitute Firstspace or the perceived spaces of colonialism. Physical practices,

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<sup>4</sup> Here and in the rest of this book I use the word "unmap" in the way Sherene Razack, who, in turn, refers to Richard Phillips, describes it: "'To unmap,' Richard Phillips notes, is not only to denaturalize geography by asking how spaces come to be but also 'to undermine world views that rest upon it. Just as mapping colonized lands enabled Europeans to imagine and legally claim that they had discovered and therefore owned the lands of the 'New World,' unmapping is intended to undermine the idea of white settler innocence [...] and to uncover the ideologies and practices of conquest and domination" (5).

however, cannot be considered to be entirely distinct from imagined, symbolic constructions, and representations. To be more precise, the physical spaces of colonialism are manifested according to particular conceptualizations, “fantasies” (Noyes 71, 84) and “myths” (Upstone 6), which I will analyze as Secondspace or the conceived spaces of colonialism.<sup>5</sup> The dominant representations which produce America as an empty Eden, the discourses that construct colonized lands as properties that can be enclosed and named, and the binarism of order and chaos will be discussed as the symbolic, imagined spaces of colonial spatiality with reference to the novel. I will examine how such Cartesian conceptualizations of space affect the spatial practices of colonial figures like D’Ortega and Vaark. In addition to these physical and conceptual productions of colonial space, the novel represents the lived spaces of characters. The diverse ways in which characters Lina, Sorrow and Florens experience and negotiate the real-and-imagined spaces of colonialism will be analyzed as examples of Thirdspace.

The third chapter analyzes Dionne Brand’s *In Another Place, Not Here* by looking at the concept of spatial justice as theorized by Edward Soja in his *Seeking Spatial Justice*. In this substantial work, Soja investigates the interlocking relations between space and (in)justice, and claims that “the spatiality of (in)justice [...] affects society and social life just as much as social processes shape the spatiality or specific geography of (in)justice” (*Seeking* 5). Refusing to offer a “simplified cook-book definition” (*Seeking* 6), Soja uses the term spatial justice to refer to the social production of space with the democratic participation of individuals and local grassroots organizations that claim a right to construct and negotiate socially produced spaces. The notion of spatial justice recognizes the role of spatial constructions in different sorts of unjust, oppressive arrangements and calls attention to the often-neglected effects of space in social, economic, and political structures. From this perspective, spatial (in)justice is closely related to social, political, and economic forms of (in)justice. In his theory, Soja points toward the spatial injustices on different spatial scales, and investigates the complex factors that produce such unjust spatialities. Literary works, in this regard, can contribute to further conceptualizations about the ways spatial (in)justice is produced, imagined, and experienced at the individual as well as at the social levels.

In the third chapter, I seek to develop my own understanding of spatial (in)justice in exploring the real and imagined spaces of Brand’s *In Another*

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<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Neil Smith claims that “the production of space also implies the production of meaning, concepts and consciousness of space which are inseparably linked to its physical production” (*Uneven Development*, 77)

*Place, Not Here*. Suggesting that “true artists always break open a space” (Olbey, “Conversation” 89), Brand brings various characters together in the contested, unjust, and dominant geographies of an unnamed Caribbean island and Canada in *In Another Place, Not Here*. The novel unmaps the violent geographies of injustice and oppression as practiced and represented by ideologies like racism, colonialism, and imperialism. I will analyze the spatial practices (Firstspace) as well as the dominant, ideological discourses (Secondspace) that project spatial injustices in multiscalar narrative spaces such as domestic places, cane fields, and urban settings like Sudbury and Toronto. Exploring these narrative spaces as relational geographies of injustice, domination, and exploitation, the novel represents the physical production of injustice on the spatial level and the ideological representation of unjust spaces as two complementary and dominant processes. After examining both the perceived and conceived spaces which deny the characters’ participation in the social production of space, I will analyze how major black, woman characters respond to injustices and domination, and claim their lived spaces (Thirdspace). More precisely, I will first examine how the character of Adela constructs and perceives the island after her violent displacement from Africa. As my reading of Adela will demonstrate, she is so entrapped in the idea of Africa as the nostalgic homeland that she refuses to interact with the *here* and *now* of the Caribbean island. Her refusal to bring up her offspring and name her environment suggests that Adela cannot take part in the social production of space. Secondly, Verlia’s varied relationships with Sudbury, Toronto, and rural Grenada will be examined. Verlia, as an intellectual, socialist, and rebellious character, exhibits a binary worldview toward space: she is so immersed in the ideological space that she underestimates the significance of physical and lived spaces in her struggle against social injustices. Unlike Adela, Verlia thinks that she can easily leave her past behind and devote herself to the socialist revolution. She acknowledges the true power of interacting with people and knowing one’s immediate environment only after she moves from Toronto to Grenada. Thirdly, Elizete, as an illiterate and peasant character, exemplifies another, contested spatial experience in the novel. Contrary to Adela and Verlia, Elizete strives to negotiate her lived space despite the social and spatial injustices and dominations. After the invasion of the island by the United States, she moves to Toronto as an illegal immigrant. Elizete’s initial contact with the city conjures up Adela’s enslavement. Her mapping of Toronto reveals its spatial, economic injustices and oppressions of various sorts as well as racialization toward non-white immigrants. Yet, with space Elizete begins to do something about her situation. Using the spatial tactics

she develops, she can survive and negotiate a sense of place in Toronto. Although it is not clear whether she accomplishes this or not, Elizete's finding Abena, who is Verlia's former lover, and their subsequent coalition building conjures up what Soja's calls "a critical strategy of 'thirthing-as-Othering'" (*Thirdspace* 5). Elizete rejects the "either/or" choice imposed on her in Toronto, for she refuses to go back to the Caribbean and to give herself to the white, dominant, racist, patriarchal hegemony there. In so doing, Elizete promises the hope of claiming a right to space in Toronto despite her "illegal" status as an immigrant and the many other forms of social, economic, and spatial oppression which she faces.

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* is examined in Chapter Four. I will explore the ways the complex, relational spaces of diaspora and immigration are represented in the novel. *The Namesake* narrates varying spatial experiences of first and second-generation Bengali immigrants in America and Calcutta. On the very first page of the novel, the heterodiegetic narrator describes Ashima Ganguli in her kitchen. In this opening scene, Lahiri draws the reader's attention to the fact "there is something missing" (*TN* 1), not only in the "concoction" that Ashima is preparing, but also in the life that the Gangulis lead in America. She compares her life as a foreigner in the United States to "a sort of lifelong pregnancy—a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts" (*TN* 49), and my analysis of the novel seeks to examine the spatial conditions of this "complicated and demanding" (*TN* 49-50) life for the different plethora of characters. The novel has already been analyzed from different perspectives to address the Gangulis' experience in America: name, belonging, national identity, the parents in the home country, language, and diaspora to mention but a few. Since these are all experienced in/through space, I will look at different sorts of space as well as their relation to the issue of diasporic identity. The parents Ashima and Ashoke, and their American-born children Gogol and Sonja experience the physical and imagined spaces differently. While Ashima describes her life as a foreigner as "a sort of lifelong pregnancy" (*TN* 49), second-generation characters like Gogol and Moushumi initially call America their home. The novel, however, complicates the differences in the perception and conception of diaspora spaces by introducing the relational geographies of Calcutta and Paris, and shows how these spaces, as well as the diaspora identities, are fluid, in-between and processual.

After focusing on the novel's context, its paratexts, and narrative organization, I will explore physical spaces and spatial practices. The apartments and the family house where the Gangulis live will be contrasted with the two houses owned by the Montgomerys and the

Ratliffs. The Gangulis' family house on Pemberton Road will be central to my discussion because this functions as a metaphorical "overcoat" for the Gangulis and their Bengali friends. This house, which Ashima decides to sell in the end, is a conflictual space which is defined and practiced differently by the characters and the dominant discourse. Additionally, the public spaces in American cities and Calcutta will be examined as well. Secondly, I will analyze how the dominant discourse of the "model-minority myth" constructs the private and public spaces of diaspora and the spatial practices of characters. While the "American" families interact with space in a way that assumes that they "possess every piece of landscape, not only the house itself but every tree and blade of grass" (*TN* 154-55) the immigrant families, and the first-generation members in particular, live in "perpetual fear of disaster" (*TN* 148), even in their own houses. This, I argue, is related to the dominant discourses and representations, and they will be examined as the conceived spaces of diaspora. Thirdly, I will explore how three characters, namely Ashima, Gogol and Moushumi, negotiate the real-and-imagined diaspora spaces. The novel suggests that these characters experience and negotiate lived spaces differently. Their accounts show the complexity and relationality of diaspora spaces, and demonstrate the heterogeneity of diaspora experiences.

The final analytical chapter focuses on Carolyn See's *There Will Never Be Another You*. In her novel See maps post 9/11 Los Angeles, where the symptoms of risk, uncertainty, anxiety, and fear are experienced by various characters in different ways. The novel begins with the "news" of the 9/11 attacks and interrogates how this event affects the various characters' lives. The experience of the catastrophic destruction of the World Trade Center is accompanied by experiences of risks such as international terrorism, environmental degradation, deterritorialization, cancer, shattered personal and familial relations, bioterrorism, and epidemics. In my spatially oriented analysis of the novel, I will turn to the perspective of risk to examine the processual and relational spaces. Both terms, risk and space, are highly contested and closely related to one another. In the same way that spatiality always has a risk dimension, risk has a spatial dimension: "[t]he spatial dimension is essential for the social construction of risk, including risk governance and moral judgements about risk taking and risk distribution" (Müller-Mahn and Doevenspeck 202).

Drawing on recent theorizations about risk, in particular Ulrich Beck's "world risk society," Chapter Five sheds light on the ways in which literary works participate in the narrativization and communication of the spatial dimensions of risk. In so doing, I will examine the concept of "riskscape" as theorized by Detlef Müller-Mahn and Jonathan Everts, and

combine their insights with the spatial theories that I investigate in the present study. I will conceptualize riskscapes as produced and productive, relational, multilayered, and processual. The riskscapes in the novel are the products of the relations between different spaces; domestic spaces, the workplace, the city of Los Angeles, and the dominant institutional representations of these spaces by government officers, and the media. In an attempt to anticipate and control the catastrophes that might befall the city, the government maps Los Angeles as an enclosed space targeted by the danger of international terrorism. For Ulrich Beck, “the narrative of risk is a narrative of irony” (“Living” 329), and one of the “bitter ironies” is as follows: “in order to protect their populations from the danger of terrorism, states increasingly limit civil rights and liberties, with the result that in the end the open, free society may be abolished, but the terrorist threat is by no means averted” (“Living” 330). Correspondingly, in See’s *There Will Never Be Another You*, the institutionalized claims of Los Angeles as being under threat from international terrorism contrast with the characters’ lived spaces which reflect more ambivalent, uncertain, and new types of risks that resist easy definition and activism. To explore the contradictions between institutional, top-down risk claims and more individual and socio-cultural experiences, I will analyze the narrative spaces in the novel. I will first look at the physical locations at different scales and examine how they are produced and practiced to reflect and promote the institutionalized risk and security claims. Secondly, the representations of spaces will be investigated by focusing on the discourses projected by the media and government. The conceived spaces are the dominant ways of representing the physical spaces as infused with certain types of risks like international and medical terrorism, which affect both the physical and social production of riskscapes. Thirdly, the lived, real-and-imagined spaces of the characters Andrea, Danny, Phil, Vernon and Edith will be examined as alternative spaces to the ways riskscapes are physically and conceptually produced by the government and the media.

In the conclusion, I will return to the introductory research question of how literary texts map, represent, and contest spaces in alternative ways. After comparing the ways that space is represented and produced in the selected novels, I will evaluate the first chapter’s theoretical premises and examine how the theoretical framework is modified, negotiated, and functionalized in the literary works. Bringing together four novels from different literary and cultural traditions around the issues of space and identity, the present study seeks to offer new ways of thinking about spatiality in literary works and thus can be situated within spatially oriented literary criticism.

## CHAPTER ONE

# SPACE, THE SPATIAL TURN, AND SPATIALLY ORIENTED LITERARY STUDIES

*“For the future to be open, space must be open too.”*  
(Massey, *For Space* 12)

*“Mapping, like language, is creation more than representation,  
and so it is not illogical to think of fiction as cartography.  
The only way a country can be truly mapped is with its stories.”*  
(Aritha van Herk 80)

In a well-known and often quoted sentence, Fredric Jameson contends that “our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than categories of time” (*Postmodernism*, 16). Although it is a vital and critical concept for understanding the contemporary world, space was overlooked in the analysis and interpretation of individual and social experiences for a long time. Similarly, conventional and redundant attitudes toward space, as well as the tendency in both everyday and academic use to regard the meaning of the term as self-evident, today seem rather problematic. Since the late 1960s, the so-called spatial turn in the social sciences and humanities has led scholars to continuously reassess the centrality of space. Since then, scholars from various disciplines have approached space as one “of the most diffuse, ill-defined and inchoate concepts” (Hubbard, “Space/Place” 41). Literary studies has engaged extensively with issues of spatiality and the study in hand seeks to investigate the ways space has been, and can further be, addressed, represented, and reconsidered in literary works.

In the first part of this chapter I will introduce the concept of space as contested, relational, and processual. Furthermore, I will provide an overview of the complex connections between space, place, identity, and politics, and will refer to the distinctions made between space and place. The second part will focus on the spatial turn in the social sciences and humanities by discussing the works of three inaugurating figures: Henri

Lefebvre, Edward Soja and Doreen Massey. The third part will offer an overview of how space is approached in literary studies. After investigating space, narrative, geography, and literature in relation to each other, I will discuss how literary cartography, as a spatially oriented literary approach, theorizes space as an analytical category in the analysis of literary works. This part will introduce the theoretical framework of my study, my approach to the selected novels and the ways in which I analyze them from spatially oriented perspectives.

### **1.1 Space, Identity, Politics, and Place: Theorizing Space as a Contested Concept**

Defining space as such is a highly ambitious and problematic endeavor. For Doreen Massey, space is “one of the most obvious of things which is mobilised as a term in a thousand different contexts, but whose potential meanings are all too rarely explicated or addressed” (“Philosophy” 27). Therefore, space, contrary to one’s immediate inclination to regard it as something which is already known, is a term that requires more critical attention. One of the many reasons for the underestimation of space’s importance in humans’ individual and social lives is the conventional notion of space. As many critics have convincingly argued, Western thought has traditionally defined space either as a distance between entities or as an empty container which can house all sorts of things.<sup>1</sup> As a counterpart of space, time was, and sometimes still is, prioritized as the cause of action, change, and development.<sup>2</sup> Space has often been regarded

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<sup>1</sup> The *Oxford Learner’s Dictionary*, for instance, defines “space” in terms of emptiness: “an amount of an area or of a place that is empty or that is available for use,” “the quality of being large and empty, allowing you to move freely” (“Space” Def.1. *oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com*. Oxford Learner’s Dictionary, Aug. 2015. Web) The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it in relation to time: “Time which is free or available for doing something; leisure; opportunity” (“Space” Def.1. *oed.com*. Oxford English Dictionary, Aug. 2015. Web).

<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault explains that “Space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile. Time on the contrary, was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic” (Power/Knowledge 70). Likewise, Massey points to the dichotomy between time and space, and argues that space was long seen as “not time” (“Politics” 71). She further claims that the most widespread notion about space is “the view of space which, in one way or another, defines it as stasis, and as utterly opposed to time” (“Politics” 67). Her article titled “Politics and Time/Space” includes a detailed overview of the reasons why temporality was understood as dynamism in Western thought, with a particular focus on Ernesto Laclau’s work.

as an empty, stable, and neutral object which, for many spatial theorists, is a political and ideological choice for the justification of dominant operations on the spatial level. To be more precise, the everyday conception of space as empty, natural, and homogeneous leads to the invisibility of the processes that produce space and which space produces. As Soja explains: “We must be insistently aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology” (*Postmodern* 6). An immigrant neighborhood, for instance, is not just a natural, empty space filled with individuals but a space that is produced by a number of processes including social, economic, political, ideological, and cultural ones. Despite earlier attempts that sought to question the objective and vacuum-like status of space,<sup>3</sup> it was only with the spatial turn in the social sciences and humanities in the 1960s that the term began to be approached more openly and critically in disciplines like geography and sociology. In literary and cultural studies, the conceptualization of space also underwent a transition from a simplistic notion to a more complex one. Although space had long been equated only with narrative settings, functioning as a box or backstage for action, since the 1990s the terms space and place have received more critical attention in literary studies.

As David Harvey avers, “[h]ow we represent space and time in theory matters, because it affects how we and others interpret and then act with respect to the world” (*Postmodernity* 205). A large number of studies have re-theorized space; many of these emphasize that social and spatial phenomena are mutually related. With the reassertion of space in the social sciences and the humanities, space is no longer conceptualized as a passive, empty container or a category independent of human beings. Various disciplines, ranging from mathematics to architecture and cognitive science have approached and conceptualized it differently. This shows that space is a contested concept. What I prefer to call spatial studies has engaged with the myriad ways space is related to society and social life. This school of thought has sought to demonstrate that it is an indispensable constituent and active participant in social relations and politics. My understanding of space as contested is informed by various

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<sup>3</sup> As Russell West-Pavlov argues, Albert Einstein’s theory of relativity, for instance, “showed that space appeared to have different consistencies, so that depending on the position of an experiencing or perceiving subject time might stretch or shrink accordingly” (16). Similarly, German sociologist Georg Simmel called for attention to the social dimensions of space as early as 1903.

studies from different disciplines that emphasize the active, always changing, relational, political, and liminal aspects of space.

Identity and politics have often been examined as being closely related to the ways space is produced and productive. Like space, theorizations of identity have recently undergone conspicuous changes. Many studies, from a wide range of disciplines, have conceptualized identities as socially constructed and performed, in clear juxtaposition with the traditional notions of identity as a stable, self-sustaining, and essential entity. Identity politics has been a broadly explored and contested field since the 1960s, when a number of movements called attention to the visibility of various identities that had been oppressed until that time. More recently, postmodern conceptualizations have explored the processes through which identities are discursively and relationally constructed. In the process of such conceptual developments, the relationship between identity and space has been redescribed as intricate and disputed. Space and identity produce, and are produced by, one another. As James Martin argues, “[s]patiality is widely recognised as a key dimension in the formation of social identities: identities are understood to be generated in relation to specific places, both territorial and social” (98). Writers like bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldúa and Homi Bhabha have addressed the relationship between identity, place, and space, and pointed toward the fact that spaces can be seen as sites of resistance for individuals and communities to develop and perform alternative identities. Drawing on the works of such critics, I will examine identities as relational processes that are constructed and performed socio-spatially. Categories that constitute identities such as race, gender and immigration are spatially performed and negotiated. As I seek to demonstrate through my analysis, identity is a central category in each of the four novels. Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*, for instance, is a highly intriguing text for such an enquiry since it investigates a number of identity-related issues in/in-between a wide range of narrative spaces and perspectives. The diasporic identities are developed through the characters’ constant movements from Calcutta to Boston, New York and their re-settlements in these spaces.

Recent spatial theorizations have also emphasized the fact that space is not neutral and innocent, but permeated with politics.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, thinking critically about space necessitates consideration of the political aspects of the concept. A broad range of interdisciplinary work has addressed the complex relationship between space and politics. Edward Said's work, for instance, introduces his notion of "imaginative geographies". According to Said, spaces are not only physically, but also imaginatively, culturally and ideologically constructed. He points out that colonization, imperialism and Eurocentric orientalism were, and still are, about culture and imagination as well as politics, economics and military power. The imagination processes that Said mentions include a broad range of physical and ideological spaces and the everyday places that individuals use such as classrooms and hospitals. Being aware of the spatial dimension of politics and the political dimension of spatiality is important because any resistance or opposition to neo-colonialist, imperialist and orientalist operations should address the spatial and geographical dimensions: "If there is anything that radically distinguishes the imagination of anti-imperialism, it is the geographical element. Imperialism after all is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control" (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 225).

Henri Lefebvre pointed out the political aspects of space and spatiality from a Marxist perspective. In *Everyday Life in the Modern World* he examines the connection between capitalism and urban space-making, and suggests that "[t]he great event of the last few years is that the effects of industrialisation on a superficially modified capitalist society of production and property have produced their results: a programmed *everyday life* in its appropriate *urban setting*. Such a process was favored by the disintegration of the traditional town and the expansion of urbanism" (65, italics in original). For Lefebvre, contemporary capitalism has developed its own "abstract space," which, in turn, has turned out to be essential for the survival and commodification of capital. Moreover, individuals' conceptions and spatial practices have been defined and appropriated by

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<sup>4</sup> In her article, "Politics and Space/Time," Doreen Massey briefly lists some remarks by contemporary scholars who address the relationship between space and politics as follows: "It is space not time that hides consequences from us" (Berger); 'The difference that space makes' (Sayer); 'That new spatiality implicit in the postmodern' (Jameson); 'It is space rather than time which is the distinctively significant dimension of contemporary capitalism' (Urry); and 'All the social sciences must make room for an increasingly geographical conception of mankind' (Braudel)" (65).

the abstract space of capitalism as well. Similarly, Soja argues for the spatial aspects of politics as well as the political aspects of space. His idea of the “socio-spatial dialectic” refers to the fact that “social processes shap[e] spatiality [and] at the same time spatiality shapes social processes” (*Seeking* 18), and suggests that “the geographies in which we live can have both positive and negative effects on our lives” (*Seeking* 19). Such effects, however, are not natural, but are produced both physically and ideologically. Soja connects these propositions about the spatiality of human life with social and political action in his theory of “spatial justice” and argues that (in)justice has a spatial dimension. Seeking justice should necessitate consideration of spatial dimensions. Since space is bound to politics in complex ways, the spatially oriented literary analyses of the selected novels will examine the political aspects of space. As already discussed in the Introduction, the analytical chapters will bring together different perspectives on the ways space is represented, produced and contested in literary works. Colonialism, spatial justice, diaspora, and risk, among many other issues, will be investigated from spatial perspectives. Furthermore, I seek to show the ways these four other issues might contribute to spatial theory in the social sciences in general and in literary studies in particular.

To show how space is a contested concept, the term place must also be discussed here. Both terms are used extensively in everyday and academic contexts, although they are not distinguished clearly. While space and place are used synonymously and often arbitrarily with other words such as environment, location, territory or area, many spatial theorists, and cultural geographers in particular, have maintained that there are distinctions to be made between them. In Marxist geography, for instance, space is approached mostly with a particular emphasis on its socially produced, consumed and political aspects. Place, however, “emerges as a particular form of space, one that is created through acts of naming as well as through the distinctive activities and imaginings associated with particular social spaces” in Lefebvre and other Marxist geographers’ accounts (Hubbard, “Space/Place” 42). Human geography is more interested in place than space; place is space with meaning and human experience. Tim Cresswell, for instance, explains that “[s]pace, then, has been seen in distinction to place as a realm without meaning [...] When humans invest meaning in a portion of space and then become attached to it in some way (naming is one such way) it becomes a place” (10).

However, such a distinction between the two terms brings more issues to the surface. Once place is conceptualized as a type of space to which people ascribe emotions and feelings depending on their experiences, it is

“often equated with security and enclosure, whereas space is associated with freedom and mobility” (Hubbard, “Space/Place” 43). Following the same line of thought, a further distinction is made between space and place with regard to movement and stillness. Yi-Fu Tuan explains “if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place” (6). Some theorists point out that space is prioritized over place under the influence of globalization and capitalism. Marc Augé, for instance, “argues that there are now many ‘non-places’ solely associated with the accelerated flow of people and goods around the world that do not act as localised sites for the celebration of ‘real’ cultures” (Hubbard, “Space/Place” 44).

Although such definitions point toward significant distinctions, they run the risk of establishing a clearly bordered dualism between these two concepts, which seem to have a more complex relationship with one another. Places, private houses for instance, can no longer be seen as immune to the political, global and capitalist flows of information and practices. Similarly, spaces can also be imbued with meanings depending on the use and gaze of other people. Therefore, the boundaries between these terms seem to have been blurred with the recent changes in the understanding of the impact of power relations and globalization processes. More recent insights accordingly emphasize the contested and unfixed natures of space and place. For instance, Doreen Massey seeks a global and more “progressive sense of place” in her *Space, Place, and Gender*, and theorizes the concept as “constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations” (154). Place, like space, is a contested concept, and its various dimensions have been defined differently depending on perspectives.

As will become clear in the following analytical chapters, I will focus more on space than place. The concept of space that I employ in this study, however, already stresses its radically open, real, and imagined characteristics. Such an approach to space does not neglect the aspects that have been popularly reserved for place. Therefore, I subscribe to the postmodernist position of conceptualizing both space and place as “real-and-imagined assemblages constituted via language” (Hubbard, “Space/Place” 47). In this, I follow other studies in literary and cultural studies. For Sheila Hones, the difficulty in distinguishing between space and place is representative of the problems that can occur in an interdisciplinary work which draws on geographical and narratological approaches. She argues that contemporary geography’s “self-conscious interrogation of spatial terminology [...] can, for example, produce

problems if the imperative to think and rethink the nature of basic concepts such as space, place, distance, and scale becomes a source of frustration for scholars working in other fields” (75). She gives the example of literary scholar Susan S. Friedman, who refuses to make any distinction between space and place, for “such distinctions (rampant in geography and social theory) vary considerably and are often contradictory” (qtd. in Hones 75). For the kind of spatially oriented analysis of literary texts that I seek to accomplish in this study, it is not practical to stick to such distinctions either. Without denying the various distinctions that have been mentioned above, I approach both concepts as unfixed, contested, and significant for the critical space that the novels open. The analyses of the lived spaces, in particular, will stress the subjective, imagined, and rhizomatic features of the spaces that the characters negotiate in the novels.

## 1.2 The Spatial Turn in the Social Sciences

Conceptualizations of space as a container or backdrop for human actions prior to the spatial turn either relegated the concept to a subject matter for Euclidean geometry and mathematics or approached it as a subjective experience.<sup>5</sup> From the nineteenth century to the second half of the twentieth century, time and history continued to be seen as superior to and more important than space and geography in understanding and interpreting social phenomena. Especially after the end of World War II, the belief in science and objectivity dominated geography, and space was theorized within rational, statistical and mathematical patterns. However, this so-called quantitative revolution and essentialist absolutism aroused a counter-reaction. With the spatial turn in the second half of the twentieth

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<sup>5</sup> René Descartes understood space as a geographical extension and expansion within three dimensions. Space, within this line of thought, is considered to be a *res extensa*, which, in turn, leads to the conceptualization of space as stable, objective and geometrically measurable. For Immanuel Kant, however, space is the necessary condition of our experience (*experianta*) of the physical world along with time. To be more precise, Kant argues that space and time are the a priori existences which are neither mental categories nor completely empirical things. For a succinct overview of the ways space has been approached in Western thought since René Descartes, see Tally’s *Spatiality*.

century,<sup>6</sup> especially since the late 1960s, the study of space has acquired importance and led to constant interest in the concept across a very broad range of disciplines.<sup>7</sup> The terms space, place, mapping, and cartography which were traditionally reserved for geography have become common tools of analysis in various disciplines including sociology, philosophy, theology, media, and cultural studies. For Soja, such a shift reflects “the uneven development of historical versus spatial discourse” and therefore “is fundamentally an attempt to develop a more creative and critically effective balancing of the spatial/geographical and the temporal/historical imaginations” (“Taking” 12). In other words, the spatial turn questioned why space and spatial thinking had been neglected in the social sciences. Many scholars from different disciplines have acknowledged the significance of this renewed interest in space and as a result, sought interdisciplinary fields of inquiry for their study. This marks the paradigm shift that Foucault foresaw in 1967:

The great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history: with its themes of development and of suspension, of crisis, and cycle, themes of the ever-accumulating past, with its great preponderance of dead men and the menacing glaciation of the world. [...] The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein. (“Other” 22)

The “great obsession” with history that Foucault identifies has been questioned and challenged by a solid number of studies. It should, however, be mentioned that space is still treated as an already familiar concept in various disciplines. Scholars often tend to approach space as a self-evident and taken-for-granted term. Referring to Henri Lefebvre,

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<sup>6</sup> The term “spatial turn” was first coined by Edward Soja in his 1989 book *Postmodern Geographies*, in which he examines “Western Marxism’s spatial turn” (39). Fredric Jameson also uses the term in his 1991 study *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*: “A certain spatial turn has often seemed to offer one or more productive ways of distinguishing postmodernism from modernism proper” (154). The idea, however, can be traced back to Michel Foucault’s 1967 lecture “Of Other Spaces”.

<sup>7</sup> In Soja’s words, the 1960s “saw explosive urban unrest spread around the world and from the rubble and ashes grew a revolutionary new way to think about space and the powerful effects of specifically urban spatiality on human behavior and societal development” (“Taking” 17).

Massey addresses this problem as follows: “Henri Lefebvre points out in the opening arguments of *The Production of Space* (1991) that we often use that word ‘space’, in popular discourse or in academic, without being fully conscious of what we mean by it. We have inherited an imagination so deeply ingrained that it is often not actively thought. Based on assumptions no longer recognised as such, it is an imagination with the implacable force of the patently obvious. That is the trouble” (*For Space* 17). Therefore, it is of vital importance to consider the spatial turn as a process which “is still ongoing and has not yet reached into the mainstream of most academic disciplines” (Soja, “Taking” 12).

In literary and cultural studies, the spatial turn has aroused an interest in numerous terms, including space, place, landscape, mobility, territorialization, and location.<sup>8</sup> Given that space is often conceptualized as a social and cultural construct, looking at literary works *as* and *for* space has proven to be quite useful in broadening the study of space. Literary works scrutinize the dialectical relationship between material and abstract, fact and fiction, and real and imagined, which is what the spatial turn has insinuated. Moreover, the idea promoted by social science scholars of the spatial turn has been adopted by literary scholars as theoretical frameworks, which will be discussed in the third part of this chapter. Before looking at the ways in which space is approached in literary and cultural studies, I will briefly discuss the spatial theorizations of three leading figures, Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja, and Doreen Massey, in order to delineate the notion of contested space that I will use in my analysis of the selected novels. Though different, their spatial considerations explore a comprehensive approach to space by referring to real and imagined, social and individual, and produced and represented aspects simultaneously, making them of particular importance for my literary analysis.

### 1.2.1 Henri Lefebvre and the Social Production of Space

One of the key figures of the spatial turn was Henri Lefebvre. His conception of space as a social and cultural product proved to be a crucial and radical argument in the rethinking of the term in the 1970s. His

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<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Robert Tally argues, it is “difficult, and misleading, to identify a particular date or moment when this occurred,” but “[o]ne cannot help noticing an increasingly spatial or geographical vocabulary in critical texts, with various forms of mapping or cartography being used to survey literary terrains, to plot narrative trajectories, to locate and explore sites, and to project imaginary coordinates” (*Spatiality* 12).