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## The After Effects of Colonialism in the Postmodern Era: Competing Narratives and Celebrating the Local in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*

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THE AFTER EFFECTS OF COLONIALISM IN THE POSTMODERN ERA:  
COMPETING NARRATIVES AND CELEBRATING THE LOCAL IN  
MICHAEL ONDAATJE'S *ANIL'S GHOST*

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Bachelor of Arts in English  
Cleveland State University  
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submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree  
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This thesis has been approved  
for the Department of ENGLISH  
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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis, first and foremost, to my family. My parents, who've struggled and sacrificed to give their children a better life in America; my sisters, who have shown immense patience and understanding towards an annoying little brother; and lastly, to all of those who've been silenced by the differend and the cacophonous roar of history.

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**ABSTRACT**

Through the utilization of Jean-Francois Lyotard's views on the Postmodern Condition, this paper highlights the failure of metanarratives to accurately convince, as well as convey information and understanding in a postmodern society. This is due in part to what Lyotard believes is an increasing skepticism towards the grand totalizing nature of metanarratives and their reliance on some form of universal truth. In order to reverse the overarching effect of the metanarrative, its all-encompassing nature, and its power to legitimize illegitimate versions of institutionalized truths; one must focus on what Lyotard describes as "petit recits" or "little stories". This theoretical framework will serve as the foundation for understanding the interrelated functions of truth and identity within Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*. Set in the midst of the Sri Lankan civil war, Ondaatje uses his protagonist, Anil Tissera, to highlight not only the failure of the West to understand the decades long conflict, but also to indict the Sri Lankan government's complicity in the extrajudicial murders of its own civilians; as well as showcasing the relationship between testifying and witnessing unspeakable acts of violence. Because colonialism sought to bring the colonized other under a single law of imperial imposition, it is in a way a type of metanarrative; whose aftereffects continue to

linger in post-independence era nations. These aftereffects have caused the traditionally fragmented South-Asian society to fragment even further when the unifying feature of colonialism dissolved. The personal stories of the characters within Ondaatje's novel serve to not only showcase their understanding of the conflict, but also as an allegorical allusion to the island and its conflicts as well. Anil's identity creation; the conflict between brothers; the failure to prove hidden truths; and giving a voice to those who cannot or will not speak, are all attempts by Ondaatje and his characters, to shed new light on the personal stories and experiences of those whom traditional historical narratives fail to acknowledge.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Located off of the southern coast of India, rests the island nation of Sri Lanka. In 2009, the Sri Lankan government declared victory in a 25 year long civil war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, a terrorist group better known as the LTTE or Tamil Tigers, who sought the creation of a separate state and homeland for the Tamil minority in the north and east of the island, free from the control and discrimination of the majority Sinhalese-Buddhist government. Though the government eventually annihilated any vestiges of the LTTE cadres, the path to victory had been littered with the bodies of not only soldiers of the Sri Lankan Army, but the LTTE secessionists in the north and east, and also Sinhalese anti-government insurgents in the south, known as the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, or JVP, the People's Liberation Front. But the worst of all of these casualties were of those who didn't wear uniforms or camouflaged fatigues; innocent civilians: men, women, and children without the economic means to escape the senseless

and brutal violence. Still, to this very day, the actual numbers of civilian deaths, both Tamil and Sinhalese are unknown or greatly exaggerated. “Official” numbers are misleading and unofficial numbers are equally as untrustworthy, especially when numbers can be doctored and eye-witnesses permanently silenced. In Sri Lanka, fear is the most utilized and readily available tool for those designated as terrorists, but it is equally as powerful and devastating when it finds its way into the government’s arsenal.

During and even after this senseless and preventable civil war, the Sri Lankan government instituted and maintained a draconian style of law in its efforts to fight and curb terrorism and terrorist activities. In the midst of war, both the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE violated international human rights laws as outlined by the Geneva Convention. The LTTE were known for forcibly recruiting both child soldiers and adults, as well as using civilians as human shields and killing those who tried to escape areas of their control. Similarly, the Sri Lankan Government indiscriminately used heavy weapons on the civilian population, as well as the use of government ordered death squads to eliminate anyone who would stand in the way of their ultimate goal. Independent accounts from conflict zones were few and far between, since the government restricted access to not only news media, but also the United Nations, NGO’s and other humanitarian organizations. Ransoms, kidnappings, wide spread arbitrary arrests, and the detentions of civilians in secret prisons were part of everyday life, as well as torture and extrajudicial killings. No one was free from the violence; civilians, journalists and human rights workers were all targeted by both forces, with each campaign, more and more bodies’ lay lifeless and innocent blood was shed throughout this once beautiful paradise.

This is a tale of violence, pain, and most importantly, one of suffering. Like all tales, it has a beginning, one wrought with tensions between the colonizer and the colonized. On February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1948 the island now known as Sri Lanka gained its independence from British colonial rule, ending more than four centuries of previous European colonialism. When the British took over control of the island in 1815 from the Dutch, (who took over control after the Portuguese) the entire island was consolidated and would remain so until independence. It is during the British rule, which many of the fault lines between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities emerge, leading us all the way to the modern day civil conflict. With centuries of animosity toward an outside force no longer present, Sri Lankan society eventually collapsed upon itself. What should have been a time for having discussions about class and caste in a postcolonial society, became an intense argument about race and ethnicity. With no outsider left to blame for the island's current socio-economic and political disasters, the now dominant Sinhalese majority and the newly disenfranchised Tamil minority blamed each other for centuries-old colonial injustices perpetrated by British imperialism. Instead of coming together and moving forward as newly self-governed peoples, the societal patchwork which was once held together by the thread of colonialism fell apart; resulting in a more fragmented national, social, and religious identity.

Decades of animosity culminated with inter-ethnic riots throughout the country, but none as violent and fierce as what would become known as Black July, the event that would begin the long downward spiral for the country and its people. During July 23, 1983, news of Tamil militants in the northern city of Jaffna killing 13 Sri Lankan soldiers spread across the island. This attack would be manipulated by the state run media and

inflare island-wide ethnic tensions to dangerous, never before seen levels. All of the island's news coverage was focused on the murdered Sinhalese soldiers and the Tamil militants responsible for the brutal act. Yet, the same state run news organizations could have tempered ethnic tensions and quelled the outraged Sinhalese mobs if they hadn't blacked out all of the news coverage regarding the horrors of July 24, 1983: when members of the Sri Lankan armed forces went on a rampage, killing 14 Tamils in the north as retribution for their fallen comrades. A lethal combination of ethnic bitterness, bloodlust, and misinformation caused an eruption of violence directed at the minority Tamil populace. Violence began to spread like wildfire across the island when incensed Sinhalese mobs began mobilizing during the funerals of the fallen soldiers, resulting in several days of anti-Tamil rioting. Hundreds of Tamil and Indian owned shops and property in the business areas of the country's capital, Colombo, were attacked and burned down. Homes of Tamils were identified with electoral voting lists and were systematically targeted. Still to this day, the actual numbers of Black July riots are unknown. Some estimates of the Tamil casualties range from 200 to about 2,000; approximately 100,000 Sri Lankan Tamils were forced to enter refugee camps when several thousands of homes, business, factories, vehicles and other belongings were burnt to the ground; and almost 30,000 would become unemployed due to the destruction of work sites. The country experienced incalculable damages economically, politically, and morally (Bandarage 104-5).

It is shortly after this event, between the mid to late 1980's and early 1990's, that the Sri Lankan born Canadian, Michael Ondaatje, author of such works as *Running in the*

*Family* (1982) and most notably, *The English Patient* (1992) sets his politically charged and controversial murder mystery, *Anil's Ghost* (2000).

In writing *Anil's Ghost*, Ondaatje has chosen not to pass judgment, take sides, or seek the origins of the conflict. He attempts to set the record straight for his readers in the authorial note, albeit a small, yet concise description of the Sri Lankan situation during which he sets his novel. Ondaatje states that,

From the mid-1980's to the early 1990's, Sri Lanka was in a crisis that involved three essential groups: the government, the anti-government insurgents in the south and the separatist guerrillas in the north. Both the insurgents and separatists had declared war on the government. Eventually, in response, legal and illegal government squads were known to have been sent out to hunt down the separatists and insurgents. (*Anil's Ghost* 1)

Ondaatje goes on to state that “*Anil's Ghost* is a fictional work set during this political and historical moment. And while there existed organizations similar to those in this story, and similar events took place, the characters and incidents in the novel are invented” and that “Today the war in Sri Lanka continues in a different form” (*Anil's Ghost* 1).

This opening statement is rather powerful in differing ways. Firstly, Ondaatje's explanation not only encompasses the then current situation on the island, but also explains it in a way that is accessible to readers unfamiliar with Sri Lanka or its decade's long conflict. To the average western reader, the island of Sri Lanka is worlds away, far from the western gaze or perspective. But, for the reader or scholar familiar with the island and its conflicts, Ondaatje makes it clear that this novel is a work of fiction, with truthful elements. Secondly, Ondaatje's need to clarify not only the novel's position, but his own is also reflected in an interview with Maya Jaggi, her article, “The Soul of a

Migrant”, which appeared in *The Guardian* on Saturday, April 29, 2000. Ondaatje says that one of his main worries is that “he is well known in the west, and not many Sri Lankan authors are” and that “this book [could] get taken as representative” of not only Sri Lanka, but the conflict as well (Jaggi 251). Ondaatje clarifies his position even further when he asserts that,

There is a tendency with us in England and North America to say it’s a book ‘about Sri Lanka’. But it’s just my take on a few characters, a personal tunneling into that - not the statement about the war, as though this is the true and only story. Most events are private – individuals dealing with relatives and lovers. The book’s not just about Sri Lanka; it’s a story that’s very familiar in other parts of the world. (ibid)

It is through this fictional lens that we are introduced to not only Sri Lanka and the civil war, but also the novel’s characters and their own personal perspectives on the war and each other. Ondaatje’s “personal tunneling” draws the reader’s perspective closer to the island and the war by allowing the reader to see, feel and understand not only the character’s personal circumstances and emotions, but their ideologies as well. It is important to note how Ondaatje views many of the events in his novel as “private” and about “individuals dealing with relatives and lovers”. It is this focus on the personal and private events of these character’s lives that begs for both attention and analysis.

*Anil’s Ghost* is a story about Anil Tissera, a Sri Lankan born forensic anthropologist; educated, trained, and working in the west. After 15 years abroad, both in England and the United States, she volunteers to be part of a fact finding investigatory mission as part of a human rights group sent to Sri Lanka on behalf of the United Nations. Due to an increasing number of reports detailing possible human rights abuses, she is charged with uncovering and investigating the possibility of the Sri Lankan

government may be committing various human rights abuses involving its own citizenry. The suspicions of the U.N. are found to be accurate when she and her colleague, Sarath Diyasena, a government appointed archaeologist, are uncovering remains at an ancient burial ground. After days recording and removing ancient debris near the Bandarawela region, near caves and rock shelters, they come across ancient skeletons. Ondaatje writes that, “Three almost complete skeletons had been found. But a few days later, while excavating in the far reaches of a cave, Anil discovered a fourth skeleton, whose bones were still held together by dried ligaments, partially burned. Something not prehistoric” (*Anil’s Ghost* 50). The fact that this fresher skeleton (approximately four to six years deceased) is found within a government-protected archaeological preserve, is enough evidence for Anil to believe that the remains were that of a victim of an extrajudicial government murder. Her assumptions are further validated when she puts her forensic skills to use, deducing that the skeleton, later nicknamed “Sailor”, was “barely dead...when they tried to bury him. Or worse, they tried to burn him alive” (*Anil’s Ghost* 51).

What would follow is essentially a “typical murder mystery tale”, with Anil trying to find the true identity of Sailor as well as his murderer(s), while questioning the loyalty of those around her and trying to do all of this in a most secretive manner. Her travels will introduce her to Sarath’s former teacher, Palipana, a now blind epigraphist; Gamini, a medical doctor and surgeon, who also is Sarath’s drug addicted younger brother; and Ananda, a once celebrated artist, now a drunkard. All of whom help Anil in one way or another to solve this mystery and help her discover not only her true Sri Lankan identity, but the true identity of the island and its people as well. This mission is



a dangerous undertaking and Anil needs to be secretive and selective with the information she shares. Sarath informs her when they first meet at the Archaeological Offices, “The bodies turn up weekly now. The height of the terror was ‘eighty-eight and ‘eighty-nine, but of course it was going on long before that. Every side was killing and hiding evidence. *Every side*. This is an unofficial war, no one wants to alienate the foreign powers. So it’s secret gangs and squads... The government was not the only one doing the killing” (*Anil’s Ghost* 17). With an unknown enemy that could be lurking anywhere and foreign powers that have a vested monetary and economic interest in both the war and the welfare of the island, Anil is full of distrust. Eventually, it is this inability to trust those around her which leads to her trusting the wrong people, which will eventually come to haunt her.

## CHAPTER II

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The foundation of this paper will rely on Jean-Francois Lyotard's definition of the "Postmodern Condition" and the increasing skepticism towards the totalizing nature of metanarratives and their reliance on some form of "transcendent and universal truth". I will argue that Ondaatje uses the main protagonist, Anil, as a means to discover not only the "truth" behind the extrajudicial government murder she is sent to investigate, but also to refute Western notions and ideologies about the universalisms of civil strife and war, which are held by Anil and her NGO counterparts. Ondaatje crafts a narrative whose meaning seems, at first glance, ambiguous; but within the right context and with the proper background information about the political and cultural hemorrhaging of the Sri Lankan nation, allows the reader to understand that the causes and reasons for war are hardly universal, but the suffering of those left in its aftermath are. But, the search for truth is only half of the equation when dealing with this novel; the search for identity is

equally as important and integral to the notions of truth found within the text. *Anil's Ghost* questions the notions of identity surrounding not only the living characters, but also the dead ones and island itself as well. What emerges from the text is a celebration of the local, which continually intrudes upon and disrupts the plot progression of the novel. As the novel progresses, the local viewpoint becomes more evident as Ondaatje shifts the focus from a distant wide-angled Western perspective of Sri Lanka, held by an outsider; to an up-close and narrow perspective, held by the local.

The postmodern condition, according to Lyotard, created “incredulity towards metanarratives”. In *A Tyranny of Justice: The Ethics of Lyotard's Differend*, Allen Dunn states that “This condition is characterized by the disappearance of the metanarratives that once gave authority to a vision of a humanity united by a universal history. Postmodern culture is comprised of factional groups provisionally defined by ever-proliferating cycles of local narratives” (Dunn 215). It is by focusing on the “local narratives” found within Ondaatje’s text that we will be able to gain a true understanding of the Sri Lankan civil war and the plights faced by its people, which are often overlooked by the metanarratives created by the West.

Colonialism is in a sense a metanarrative, since it attempts to categorically classify lands, peoples, and cultures under a grand totalizing scheme where a single law of colonial imposition is forced upon many different groups. During the colonial era, Sri Lanka’s once separate and culturally unique groups of people, each with their own sets of ideologies and beliefs, were forced to become a homogeneous cultural mass. These groups and their people would eventually struggle to maintain their previous culturally indigenous identity while faced with a new, emerging colonial identity. In typical

imperialist fashion, the divide and conquer strategy was used to manipulate these groups; pitting them against each other through selective favoritism, both economically and socially. These traditionally separate and generally amiable groups of people would begin to develop a deep seeded animosity towards each other; and when the island gained independence, the postmodern condition took center stage, creating “factional groups”, all with their own versions of truth surrounding their national, social, and cultural identities. What would emerge would be a fractured and fragmented South-Asian identity. This fractured identity is expounded upon by Salman Rushdie in “Imaginary Homelands”, where he describes the fragmentary nature of memories and,

the incomplete truths they contain, the partial explanations they offer, that make them particularly evocative for the ‘transplanted’ writer...these shards of memory [acquire] greater status, greater resonance, because they were remains; fragmentation made trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquired numinous qualities (12).

Rushdie explains this fragmentation like a broken mirror, whose shards reflect many different histories and perceptions of the whole. This concept is explained by Rushdie, who argues that “Human beings do not perceive things whole; we are not gods but wounded creatures, cracked lenses, capable only of fractured perceptions”, where we are only “Partial beings” and that “Meaning is a shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved” (Rushdie 12). Rushdie’s claims are resonated by Paul Brians, who speaks of this fragmented reality in his work, *Modern South Asian Literature in English*, where he states that, “it would be absurd to refer to a ‘South Asian Reality’”, since “There is no such thing” because “South Asian literature is a

kaleidoscope of fragmented views, colored by the perceptions of its authors, reflecting myriad realities – and fantasies” (Brians 6).

Due to this fragmented reality, there is the unintended consequence of the creation of a fragmented identity; which was evident during the failed attempts of the Sri Lankan government’s endeavor to fabricate a new, homogenous identity of its diverse populous. With neither of the factional groups capable of agreeing on anything other than attempting to disenfranchise the other; the end result would lead to a decade’s long civil war. It is during this civil war that another metanarrative emerges from the West; much like how colonialism strove to group different people under a single, universal law, this new metanarrative strove to create a unitary history for the violent bloodshed and its causes. This new metanarrative focused on the three groups Ondaatje described: the government, anti-government insurgents, and separatist guerrillas; but, they have left out one key component, the individual people and their personal stories of heartbreak and triumph in the face violent adversity.

Lyotard believed that the postmodern era needed to move beyond the all-encompassing universality of the metanarrative by focusing on “petit recits”, or “little stories”. Sande Cohen’s “The ‘Use and Abuse of History’ According to Jean-Francois Lyotard” explains that “Lyotard brought the concept of incommensurability into historiography” where “the violence of actuality carries over into the violence of historical writing and such transmits the effects of its own form of violence”; where “Incommensurability suggests that the language that installs ‘history’ is more of a command or even demand than can ever be justified by appeal to things/ it happened” (Cohen 99). Here, the language used to describe a historical account fails to truly give

meaning to an experience because when one writes about history, one writes from their own perspective with their own goals and agendas in mind; forgetting about the real people involved with any particular situation. By focusing on the “little stories”, we are able to subvert the all-encompassing nature of the metanarrative, resulting in a more accurate version of events as witnessed and experienced by the people on the front lines of the conflict.

These little stories aid in creating what Dunn describes as “the singularity of experience”, stating that, “In this effort to resist the defiles of the structuralist signifier, Lyotard advocates adherence to the singularity of experience...[since] there is no language capable of rendering this singularity, since the particularity of experience must remain opaque to language” (Dunn 194). What occurs is the inability of language to truly explain or fulfill the needs of those affected by the incommensurability of language and what Lyotard calls the differend, which “is the product of the conflict generated by a double bind; it is produced by the inevitability that systems of justice will exclude individuals who do not share the systems basic premises” (Dunn 196). Lyotard relates the differend to a grievance that cannot be acknowledged, because the plaintiff is deprived of the means to express it. As Lyotard himself puts it, “I would like to call the differend the case where the plaintiff is divested of the means to argue and becomes for that reason a victim” (*Differend* 9). The “plaintiff” in this scenario is someone who has incurred damages and who disposes of the means to prove it, while one becomes a “victim” when they lose those means. The differend is located between what Dunn describes as an “epistemological gap” between “particulars and universals”, or between certain events and the attempts made to refer to said events. It is equally as important to

consider that the differend is produced “by a pure contingency that is devoid of cause or historical determination” (Dunn 197). It is within this “epistemological gap” that we find *Anil’s Ghost* situated, between the particulars of the Sri Lankan civil war and the universals of human suffering at the hands of “systems of justice” within the theater of war. What is created is a type of false history, which provides Lyotard with an example of false totality of existence, which is “shattered by the cry of the differend” where “events like Auschwitz have made these assumptions untenable; they have destroyed the metanarrative of universal history and have left in their wake only local histories, fragmented narratives that reflect a factionalized humanity” (Dunn 211). Here, postmodern culture’s factionalized groups are defined by continuous cycles of local narratives. With regards to *Anil’s Ghost*, we find that these factional groups take many forms, aside from the LTTE, JVP and the Sri Lankan government, there are human rights groups and their workers, like Anil; the archaeologists like Sarath and his mentor Palipana; doctors and those responsible for healing those left in the aftermath, like Gamini; and everyday people, like Ananda, who must endure suffering and the wounds of conflict that struggle to heal.

With the advent of the postmodern era, the power of the metanarrative began to fade as people looked towards the local for intimate stories of personal experiences. But, the metanarrative still maintained its significance within the realm of the historical narrative, where all-encompassing stories were used to provide a historical backdrop for various events. A unique problem arises, however, since the metanarrative used within the historical narrative often relies on an absolute and universal “Truth”, which foregoes the local version of a relative “truth”. Without the acknowledgement of the local, the

metanarrative strips them of their voice, which in turn, strips them of their identity.

Within Ondaatje's novel, he juxtaposes these elements to showcase not only the failure of the grand universal "Truths" held by the Western outsider, but also how "truth" and identity function in both a national and personal level, and how it affects the characters and their understanding of the civil war and its atrocities.

Anil's purpose within the novel is to uncover a hidden historical truth, which entails naming and identifying a victim of a possibly politically motivated extrajudicial government murder. In order to fulfill her objectives Anil has to not only identify the victim, but also give him a name. For Anil, "names are powerful talismans" (307), according to Margaret Scanlan in "*Anil's Ghost* and Terrorism's Time". The act of naming is powerful insofar as its ability to ascribe an identity to a place or an individual; and that is why Anil risks life and limb to identify the remains of the man she nicknames "Sailor". Her belief in the power of names and their ability to confer one's identity is the basis of her determination to not only figure out who Sailor is, but bring to justice those accountable for his demise. According to Anil, Sailor is an unwitting "representative of all those lost voices" and most important of all, "To give him a name would name the rest" (*Anil's Ghost* 56).

Sailor is described as being part of the "unhistorical dead", those whom history has long forgotten and whose testimonial witnessing of the atrocities of the civil war has been permanently silenced. This silence is an important factor in framing of Sailor's true identity, since, as Lesley Higgins explains, the "dialogical quest for the skeleton's identity had never been framed in terms of race or ethnicity or religion (the very mechanisms that served his annihilation); their deadly struggle to name the skeleton had



always been an effort to re-cognize bare life as induced by bio- and necropolitics” (208). By refusing to frame the skeleton’s identity by the means which contributed to his demise, Ondaatje leaves us with Sailor’s silence as the only tool to understand him with. Sailor’s silence is the key defining characteristic of what Gayatri Spivak refers to as the subaltern, a person “without lines of social mobility”, who has “no history and cannot speak” (83). The subaltern is not only silent, but is hidden from the national narrative. They lack the means to articulate for themselves because they have no voice of their own; Edward Said understands this as a “narrative missing from the official story”, because their story is “necessarily in the hands of others” (vii). It is up to Anil to not only speak for Sailor, but also identify him and allow his personal narrative to take its rightful place amongst the national narrative of Sri Lanka. She risks life and limb in order for this to happen, searching the island for clues and those who are willing to help her at their own risk.

The ability to speak and share one’s grievances are the keystones to both testifying and witnessing, but a problem arises in which one is unable to testify and must rely on another to speak on their behalf. Jelica Sumic-Riha discusses the different types of witnesses in “Testimony and the Real: Testimony between the Impossibility and Obligation”; where she describes an *auctor*, who is “a witness whose testimony refers to a pre-existing matter (a thing, a fact or a word) whose reality must be confirmed or guaranteed” and that, “the testimony thus implies a duality that brings out its structural inadequacy, the existence of an internal gap, a lacuna” (17). Sumic-Riha further expounds on the matter stating that “this gap is incarnated by the paradoxical figure of a mute witness”, explaining that there are both “true” and “pseudo” witnesses. Utilizing

the work of Primo Levi, who was at one time interned at Auschwitz, she writes that, Levi creates a division of those who went through those horrors as belonging to two different categories: “those who are silent and those who speak”.

The former are the ‘true’ witnesses because they have ‘touched the bottom’ and ‘seen the Gorgon’, as Primo Levi puts it, but they have returned mute. The latter, the survivors, on the other hand, are the ‘pseudo-witnesses’ who...assume the charge of bearing witness in the name of the ‘true’ witness. There is then not one witness...but two: the one that knows but cannot tell, the true witness, and the witness who speaks instead of the mute witness. (17)

Within the context of the novel, Anil takes on the role of the pseudo-witness for Sailor, who is the true witness. But Sailor’s silence must be further differentiated, according to the *Differend*, where Lyotard states that, “human beings endowed with language were placed in a situation such that none of them is now able to tell about it”, and that, “Most of them disappeared then, and the survivors rarely speak about it, their testimony bears only upon a minute part of this situation”. Lyotard questions whether one can truly believe if the event ever really existed, if not just a figment of the pseudo-witnesses imagination when he states,

Either the situation did not exist as such. Or else it did exist, in which case your informant’s testimony is false, either because he or she should have disappeared, or else because he or she should remain silent [...] To have ‘really seen with his own eyes’ a gas chamber would be the condition which gives one the authority to say it exists and to persuade the unbeliever. Yet it is still necessary to prove that the gas chamber was used to kill at the time it was seen. The only acceptable proof that it was used to kill is that one died from it. But if one is dead, one cannot testify that it is on account of the gas chamber. (1-2)

What occurs is what Lyotard describes as a “double-bind”, where the true witness is unable to speak for him/herself and must rely on another to speak on their behalf. This is

problematic on many levels, since the audience will never know whether the pseudo-witness is telling the truth. Lyotard further explains this double-bind, stating that,

To be able not to speak is not the same as not to be able to speak. The latter is a deprivation, the former a negation [...] If the survivors do not speak, is it because they cannot speak, or because they avail themselves of the possibility of not speaking that is given them by the ability to speak? Do they keep quite out of necessity, or freely, as it is said? (14)

Sumic-Riha also brings into question that there are two different types of silence, as proposed by Jacques Lacan, an “active” and “passive” silence. But she is quick to refer to Lyotard, stating that “The differend challenges this distinction or, rather, this undecidability of silences, incessantly since Lyotard recognizes not only ‘silence in abeyance’, but also silence as a radical suspension of linking which is announced by ‘the feeling that [...] linkage must be made but that there wouldn’t be anything upon which to link’” (Sumic-Riha 21). With this understanding of silences, it can be conferred that Sailor is not only a true witness, but is an actively silent victim of the civil war; while Anil acts as his pseudo-witness. But this isn’t the only incident in the novel that deals with witnessing and silence.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE LOCAL NARRATIVES OF *ANIL'S GHOST*

Within the main plot of *Anil's Ghost*, Ondaatje interweaves the eight sections of his text, with each section dealing with a specific character, with short italicized sections. These italicized sections have little to do with the actual plot of the novel, but, do add to the overall whole of the text. Typically, these italicized sections revolve around some other aspect of the novel or its character's, but somewhat indirectly. They consist of and focus on the emotional and universal aspects of suffering, trauma, politically motivated abductions and extrajudicial murders. Interestingly enough, these italicized passages seem to bleed through the main narrative of the novel. Ondaatje has crafted a narrative which focuses on Anil and her personal story; but, he slowly begins to unravel and fracture the story, imitating the real-life fragmented society he is depicting. As these "little stories" continually intrude upon the primary narrative, they transmit not only the

true local realities of the island, but also the lingering colonial aftereffects of a bygone era.

The first of these italicized sections are found in the beginning of the novel, reciting an old miner's folk song. *"In search of a job I came to Bogala / I went down the pits seventy-two fathoms deep / Invisible as a fly, not seen from the pit head / Only when I surface / Is my life safe... / Blessed be the scaffolding deep down the shaft / Blessed be the life wheel on the mine's pit head / Blessed be the chain attached to the life wheel..."* (*Anil's Ghost* 3). There is a great amount of thematic significance within the details of the lyrics. The theme of mining is connected to the novel through the laborious act of digging. Much of the novel deals with archaeology and finding some buried truth, whether it is a biological or scientific truth surrounding an uncovered object, or a deeper more symbolic truth, surrounding individuals and their lives. Whichever truth one decides to look for must be excavated and brought back to the surface. The second part of this folk song that needs to be taken into consideration is the allusions to Buddhism, namely the *"life wheel"* or the wheel of life. Here, the life wheel not only connects the miner to the outside world via his chain, but also to the living world. It is what allows him to dive deep within the depths of the earth and still affords him salvation by bringing him back to the surface. This allusion to both mining and Buddhism, is significant, especially since two of the main characters in the novel, Ananda and the body nicknamed Sailor, both have worked in a mine at some point in their lives. The reference to Buddhism is significant because Sri Lanka is home to not only one of the oldest and closest sects of Buddhism, Theravada, but also the closest form of the Buddha's original teachings; as well as being a catalyst for violence, since the pro-Buddhist stance of the

Sinhalese dominated government led to much religious fanaticism on both sides of the conflict.

The second of these italicized sections deals with Anil's past work experiences in the killing fields of the Guatemalan highlands. Anil and her forensic team is working to uncover bodies long buried during the war between guerrilla forces and the Guatemalan government; victims of torture, forced disappearances, and "scorched earth" warfare. This section not only juxtaposes the crisis in Guatemala with Sri Lanka, but also frames it within the context of the residual after effects of colonialism. Ondaatje describes how Anil's team would arrive at *"five-thirty in the morning [and] one or two family members would be waiting for them. And they would be present all day while Anil and the others worked, never leaving...someone always stayed, as if to ensure that the evidence would not be lost again. This vigil for the dead, for these half-revealed forms"* (Anil's Ghost 5). Anil also describes how during the night, when the forensic team wasn't excavating, that family members would remove the plastic sheeting covering the bodies and mourn the loss of their loved ones and that *"One morning Anil found a naked footprint in the mud. Another day a petal"* (ibid). The incommensurability of language is evident when Anil describes that *"There was always fear, double-edged, that it was their son in the pit, or that it was not their son – which meant there would be further searching. If it became clear that the body was a stranger, then, after weeks of waiting, the family would rise and leave. They would travel to other excavations...The possibility of their lost son was everywhere"*.

The passage closes with Anil arriving from a lunch break, witnessing a woman hunched over two bodies, as if in formal prayer. She had lost a husband and a brother

during an abduction, a year earlier and *“Now it seemed as if the men were asleep beside each other on a mat in the afternoon. She had once been the feminine string between them, the one who brought them together”* and how she would cook them lunch when they came home from working in the fields and watch as they took a nap afterwards.

This woman was a part of their lives every day and they were no longer part of it.

Ondaatje final words in this section speak to the incommensurability of language when he writes that *“There are no words Anil knows that can describe, even for just herself, the woman’s face. But the grief of love in that shoulder she will not forget, still remembers. The woman rose to her feet when she heard them approach and moved back, offering them room to work”* (*Anil’s Ghost* 6). This italicized section sets the stage for not only the character development of Anil, but also the thematic elements found later in the novel, as well as continuing the theme of digging from the previous italicized section.

Within this section, we the reader, as well as Anil, are taking part in what Victoria Burrows describes in “The Heterotopic Spaces of Postcolonial Trauma in Michael Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost*” as the “witnessing of postcolonial trauma”; not in Sri Lanka, but half a world away and that, “this deeply private moment of watching and the reliving another’s trauma is the result of a different form of Western intrusion into the politics and governance of another developing country” (Burrows 169). The use of Guatemala as the setting to introduce the reader to the text is a deliberate one. Burrows explains that Guatemala was at one time colonized by Spain and that after almost 100 years after being granted independence, the United States covertly supported a military coup d’état that collapsed the democratically elected government. What would result would be a series of human rights abuses and war crimes inflicted upon the Guatemalan people; and it is this

continued “intrusion” from the west that predicated imperialist attitudes towards the colonized “other” around the world. The centuries old damage at the hands of colonialism has already been done and it is up to forensic scientists and human rights workers, like Anil Tissera, to uncover the long hidden truths left in the aftermath, such as the countless bodies of the dead and missing; the gone but not forgotten; and to give closure to those still searching for their husbands, wives, siblings and children.

The third italicized section describes the dismemberment of ancient statues at a site called “Cave 14”, which was once “*the most beautiful site in a series of Buddhist cave temples in the Shanxi province*” (*Anil’s Ghost 12*) in northern China. Ondaatje writes that,

*This was the place of a complete crime. Heads separated from bodies. Hands broken off. None of the bodies remained – all the statuary had been removed in the few years following its discovery by Japanese archaeologists in 1918, the Bodhisattvas quickly bought up by museums in the West. Three torsos in a museum in California. A head lost in a river south of the Sind desert, adjacent to the pilgrim routs. The Royal Afterlife. (ibid)*

Here, the dismembering of religious statues for display in the West reflects the metaphorical involvement and complicity of the West to other tragedies, such as Guatemala. It’s interesting to note that this second italicized section immediately follows Anil’s arrival to the island, where Ondaatje describes Anil’s understanding of the Sri Lankan situation. Explaining that,

Anil had read documents and news reports, full of tragedy, and she had now lived abroad long enough to interpret Sri Lanka with a long-distance gaze. But here it was a more complicated world morally. The streets were still streets, the citizens remained citizens. They shopped, changed jobs, laughed. Yet, the darkest Greek tragedies were innocent compared to what was happening here. Heads on stakes. Skeletons dug out of a cocoa pit in Matale. At university Anil had translated lines from Archilochus -



*In the hospitality of war we left them their dead to remember us by. But here there was no such gesture to the families of the dead, not even the information of who the enemy was. (11)*

The dismemberment of people is contrasted with the dismemberment of religious relics, showcasing not only the horrors of the war, but also the dissection of objects, people and lands associated with imperialism. No thought is put into what the possible aftereffects are, but instead, focused on the here and now. Within this passage, Ondaatje begins to blur the distinction between the horrors of the colonial past with the then current horrors of the civil war.

The fourth italicized story describes a politically motivated murder of a government official. *“There were police officers all over the train. The man got on carrying a bird cage with a mynah in it. He walked through carriages, glancing at other passengers. There were no seats left and he sat on the floor. He was wearing a sarong, sandals, a Galle Road T-shirt” (Anil’s Ghost 31)*, opens the passage. This unassuming man wearing everyday civilian attire is waiting for the train to near a tunnel, approximately one mile from Kurunegala, where the train would *“curve into the dark claustrophobia of it”*. The unnamed man would arise from the floor just as the lights would go out, he would have *“Three minutes of darkness”* to carry out his nefarious plans. Ondaatje describes how,

*The man moved quickly to where he remembered the government official was, beside the isle. In the darkness he yanked him forward by his hair and wrapped the chain around his neck and began strangling him. He counted the seconds to himself in the darkness. When the man’s weight fell against him he still didn’t trust him, didn’t release his hold of the chain. He had a minute left. He stood and lifted the man into his arms...he steered him towards the open window...He jerked the official off the ground and pushed him through the opening...the man disappeared into the noise of the tunnel. (31-32)*

In this passage, we are exposed to one of the many brutal truths of the Sri Lankan civil war, that the enemy can be anyone at any time, and that your life can be taken in an instant. This unassuming man with a birdcage was a cold and calculated assassin, sent to silence a government official. We are not privileged to information such as the assassins' political affiliation, or whether or not he is a member of a terrorist organization, or even if he was justified in this killing. What we do know, is that the Sri Lankan people, as well as the government, are facing an unknown enemy. As Sarath, explains to Anil, "Those days you didn't know who was killing who...Now we all have blood on our clothes" (*Anil's Ghost* 48). The importance of this passage lies in how Ondaatje showcases the death of the government official; since his death took place in the most mundane of locations. It wasn't on a battlefield or in the streets during a riot, but on a train. It is also interesting to note that the jam-packed train car heading into a tunnel seems to be the embodiment of Sri Lanka: a group of people being hurled into the darkness and being enshrouded by its unseen dangers.

The fifth passage describes The National Atlas of Sri Lanka, which "*has seventy-three versions of the island – each template revealing only one aspect, one obsession: rainfall, winds, surface waters of lakes, rarer bodies of water locked deep within the earth*" (*Anil's Ghost* 39). The atlas had "*old portraits [which] show the produce and former kingdoms of the country; contemporary portraits show levels of wealth, poverty and literacy*" (ibid). The passage goes on to describe the geological maps of the atlas, filled with the various areas of the island and their natural resources, "*peat in the Muthurajawela swamp south of Negombo, coral along the coast from Ambalangoda to*

*Dondra Head, pearl banks offshore in the Gulf of Mannar*” (ibid). A listing of minerals and precious stones,

mica, zircon, thorianite, pegmatite, arkose, topaz, terra rosa limestone, dolomite marble. Graphite near Paragoda, green marble at Katupita and Ginigalpelessa. Black shale at Andigama. Kaolin, or china clay, at Boralessgamuwa. Plumbago graphite of the greatest purity...which would be mined in Sri Lanka for one hundred and sixty years, especially during the World Wars. (ibid)

Another section of the atlas describes just the bird life native to the island; another just about weather patterns, describing the trade winds and monsoon seasons; and pages of isobars and altitudes. Aside from the long, almost never ending list of demographics, statistics and natural resources is the brief and sudden ending of the passage. Ondaatje concludes with, *“There are no city names...There are no river names. No depiction of human life”* (*Anil’s Ghost* 40).

This passage, though it seems relatively innocuous, aids in the interconnectedness of the novel. Lesley Higgins alludes to the fact that this section, not only recalls the initial miner’s folk song, “anticipating two other major characters in the novel (Sailor and Ananda), but also connects the world wars with current postcolonial conflicts and that “they diagram and indeed produce history” (Higgins 207). This section’s ability to produce history is also mirrored in the fact that the maps of Sri Lanka “reproduce the process of the text [since] *Anil’s Ghost* diagrams Sri Lanka’s historical relations of power and knowledge from sovereignty to governmentality, from colonization to liberation, and civil war” (ibid). It is important to also note that these maps of Sri Lanka reflect the imperialist attitudes towards colonies and colonization, the removal of proper nouns indicates that the island is being looked at, not as a destination for travel or trade, but as a

resource destined to be stripped and mined. The gems, minerals and wildlife are not being highlighted for their uniqueness or beauty, but as a colonial grocery list. Sections like this one tend to be problematic, since much of the colonial backdrop necessary for a well-rounded understanding are lost when taken at face value. As Higgins points out, it is up to the reader to “distinguish the interconnections [and] reassemble the fragments” (207). Much like what Sarath’s former teacher Palipana explains that we must allow “the unprovable” truths to emerge (*Anil’s Ghost* 83).

The sixth italicized passage is probably one of the most significant, since it details a brief list of missing persons. Here, the seemingly disjointed italicized passages merge with the novel’s story itself. Ten names, listed with their age, date and approximate time of disappearance are listed inside the Civil Rights Movement offices at the Nadesan Center. “*Kumara Wijetunga, 17. 6<sup>th</sup> November 1989. At about 11:30 p.m. from his house*” and “*Jatunga Gunesena, 23. 11<sup>th</sup> December 1989. At 10:30 a.m. near his house while talking to a friend*” (*Anil’s Ghost* 41), are just two of the names. Ondaatje merges his authorial voice with the experiences of Anil in field offices and the human rights reports that land on her desk, writing that, “[there] were the fragments of collected information revealing the last sighting of a son, a younger brother, a father. In the letters of anguish from family members were the details of hour, location, apparel, the activity...*Going for a bath. Talking to a friend...*” (*Anil’s Ghost* 42). What follows is an account of the dangers of exposing the horrors of war, namely the discovery of a mass grave in Naipattimunai in 1985, where the “bloodstained clothing was identified by a parent as that worn by his son at the time of his arrest and disappearance” (ibid) and the president of the Citizen’s Committee, who brought police to the site, was arrested after an

ID card was found in a shirt pocket and put an immediate end to the unburial. Ondaatje writes how, “The identity of others in this grave in the Eastern Province – how they died, who they were – was never discovered. The warden of an orphanage who reported cases of annihilation was jailed. A human rights lawyer was shot and body removed by army personnel” (ibid). This missing person’s bulletin at the Civil Rights Center is compounded with Anil’s personal experiences with reports sent to her by various human rights groups while she was in the States. Ondaatje writes that,

Early investigations had led to no arrests, and protests from organizations had never reached even the mid-level of police or government. Requests for help by parents in their search for teenagers were impotent. Still, everything was grabbed and collected as evidence, everything that could be held on to in the windstorm of news was copied and sent abroad to strangers in Geneva. (42)

This passage reflects the futility and the overall failure of not only human rights groups, but of the United Nations and the “strangers in Geneva”. Reports filled with the personal anguish of families hopelessly searching for their loved ones get filed with the rest. There is no compassion or sense of urgency on the part of these groups. The failure of NGO’s is also mirrored in Anil’s attitude to these reports, “[she] picked up reports and opened folders that listed disappearances and killings. The last thing she wished to return to everyday was this. And every day she returned to it” (*Anil’s Ghost* 42). The burden of reading these reports eventually gets the better of Anil. These reports are a constant reminder of all the pain and suffering going on in the world, tragic tales from war torn countries; yet every day, she goes back to them. She is demonstrating not only a high level of professional duty, but is slowly absorbing the culture of her long forgotten homeland. The end of this brief commentary after the italicized passage of missing

persons is emphasized by one of the few instances within the novel in which Ondaatje actually references the situation in Sri Lanka directly.

There had been continual emergency from 1983 onwards, racial attacks and political killings. The terrorism of the separatist guerrilla groups, who were fighting for a homeland in the north. The insurrection of the insurgents in the south, against the government. Counterterrorism of the special forces against both of them. The disposal of bodies by fire. The disposal of bodies in rivers or the sea. The hiding and then reburial of corpses. It was a Hundred Years' War with modern weaponry, and backers on the sidelines in safe countries, a war sponsored by gun- and drug-runners. It became evident that political enemies were secretly joined in financial arms deals. *'The reason for war was war'*. (42-43)

By highlighting the gruesome situation in Sri Lanka, along with the political corruption and global financiers funding this war, Ondaatje juxtaposes Anil's apprehension with the reports and the actual good that they will bring about. There is a great deal of money to be made from a civil conflict; such is the case in Sri Lanka. The LTTE was known for their drug-running operations, residing in the north of the island, they had control of supply routes to India, where heroin trafficking, among others, were big business. But, the most damning of all is "that political enemies were secretly joined in financial arms deals". During the height of civil unrest and violence of the late 1980's, the Sri Lankan government looked towards India for assistance. The Indian Peace Keeping Force, or IPKF, was called in as reinforcements. Their efforts to quell the violence resulted in backlash from the Sri Lankan citizenry, who despised the fact that Indians were being involved in a "Sri Lankan situation". What would result was not only violence between the IPKF and the LTTE, but Sri Lankan civilians and government officials as well. The urge to rid the island of the IPKF was so great, that the Sri Lankan government authorized large shipments of weapons, many from the west, to be delivered to the LTTE, so that they may be able to rid the island of the IPKF presence. It is no

surprise that Anil begrudgingly goes back to the reports day after day, since it is not only her job, but many of the reports deal with her homeland and her people. The duty falls on her to actually care about the reports and those who submit them, since governments, politicians and political groups either don't care or refuse to acknowledge the suffering of others for the sake of profiting from the war machine.

The seventh italicized passage describes a day in the life of Ananda Udugama, who was once the last in a line of craftsmen appointed to carrying out the Netra Mangala, the tradition of painting eyes onto the Buddha statues that are situated all over the island. Now he makes his living as a miner in a gem pit near the Ratnapura district. The passage describes his daily excursions into the mine, *“At five-fifteen in the morning those who had woken in the dark had already walked a mile, left the streets and come down into the fields. They had blown out the one lantern among them and now moved confidently in the darkness, their bare feet in the mud and wet grass. Ananda Udugama was used to the dark paths”* (Anil's Ghost 91). This opening passage sets the stage for the character development of Ananda, since there is very little the reader or characters know about him or his tumultuous life, but this passage aims to illuminate his current life. The passage describes the *“three-foot-diameter hole in the ground that was the pit head”* where Ananda and others would descend into the darkness, *“on their knees digging into walls, feeling for any hardness of stone or root or gem”*, moving in the *“underground warrens, sloshing barefoot in mud and water, combing their fingers into the wet clay, the damp walls”*. Each worker had a shift that was at least six hours long, where *“Some entered the earth in darkness and emerged in light, some returned to dusk”* (ibid). The work performed by these miners is arduous and painstaking, working almost entirely *“in a*

*half-crouch, damp with sweat and tunnel water*” (*Anil’s Ghost* 92). This passage foregrounds events later in the novel as well as the personal struggles Ananda has faced, the phrase “*Ananda...was used to the dark paths*” speaks volumes in foreshadowing his daily demise at the hands of alcoholism after working in the pits. The passage closes with stating that “*At noon Ananda’s shift was over...by three in the afternoon, in the village where he lived with his sister and brother-in-law, Ananda was drunk*” and he would “*roll of the pallet he had been put on, would move in his familiar half-crouch out the door and piss in the yard, unable to stand or even look up to be aware who might be watching him*” (*Anil’s Ghost* 92-3). The dark path Ananda was used to walking doesn’t fully explain why he’s a drunkard or why he doesn’t paint the eyes on Buddha statues anymore, the final touch that allows the statues to assume their holiness. Throughout the text, we slowly uncover and illuminate the dark paths Ananda has traversed and the reasons surrounding his alcoholism, namely, the disappearance of his wife, which is also the subject of the next italicized passage.

The eighth italicized passage deals specifically with Ananda’s wife, Sirissa. This passage is by far one of the longest in the novel and like the two previous passages, becomes more personal and more directly involved with the plot of *Anil’s Ghost*. Sirissa works at a local school in a domestic capacity, though she does have an affinity for learning, since, “*She had been good at theorems in school [where] their logic fell clearly in front of her... [and]... She would always listen to the teachers as she worked in the flower beds or hallways*” (*Anil’s Ghost* 173). Her day starts like any other, getting dressed at six a.m. and walking one mile to the school. During her walk, the passage recounts the sights and sounds of the morning, the teenagers smoking cigarettes before



school, the prawn boats, men in neck high water untangling the nets placed the night before. The quietness of the early day, gradually getting louder as children and teenagers began to arrive and the voices of the “*youngest children, who would sit on the earth in front of the teachers learning their Sinhala, their mathematics, their English: ‘The peacock is a beautiful bird...It has a long tail!’*” (ibid). Sirissa’s daily routine is juxtaposed with the fact that there were government enforced curfews, forcing her to stay indoors at nighttime, often reading a book and thinking fondly of her husband, Ananda, who was away with work. She would have preferred walking in the streets after dinner, so she may watch the shops close for the night and watching “*the fall of electric light[s] out of the shops*” which was “*her favorite time, like putting away the senses one by one*”, because she loved “*the calm of the night streets that no longer had commerce in them, like a theater after the performance was over*” (*Anil’s Ghost* 173-4). But this idyllic life would come to a head once we near the end of the passage, where “*So many things happened during the...night. The frantic running, the terrified, the scared, the pea-brain furious and tired professional men of death punishing another village of dissent*” (ibid). The next morning Sirissa gets up early and heads out on her one mile trek to the school, “*the same twenty-five-minute walk she is familiar with*”. While approaching the bridge where the teenage boys would smoke, she notices that there were no fishermen today and that the road is empty. What happens next will change her life for the worse; she is ten yards away from the bridge when she sees the heads of two students on stakes, facing each other on either side of the bridge. “*Seventeen, eighteen, nineteen years old...she doesn’t know or care. She sees two more heads on the far side of the bridge and can tell even from here that she recognizes one of them. She would shrink down into herself, go*

*back, but she cannot” (Anil’s Ghost 174-5).* In the midst of all of this terror, Sirissa feels someone or something behind her, the cause of all this horror lurking near. *“She desires to become nothing at all. Mind capable of nothing. She does not even think of releasing them (the students) from this public gesture. Cannot touch anything because everything feels alive, wounded and raw but alive”.* She begins to run forward, past the gaze of the severed heads with her eyes shut tightly, hoping to open them once she passes them. She runs up a hill, towards the school, seeking refuge from the awfulness that surrounds her. *“She keeps running forward, and then she sees no more” (Anil’s Ghost 175).* This is the tale of Sirissa, a humble servant girl, working at a local school, whose normal everyday life was cut short by a senseless act of violence. We don’t know who killed her or the students that day, other than that they were *“the pea-brain furious and tired professional men of death punishing another village of dissent”.* This could be the work of any number of organizations of the island, the LTTE, exacting some sort of revenge on a Sinhalese school and its children; the JVP, believing that the school or village was harboring or supporting either members of the LTTE or the government; or even the government itself, believing that the village was engaged in activities counterintuitive to their own goals. Nonetheless, the use of corpses and severed heads for public display is well noted in Sri Lanka and if the guilty party was still around the scene of the crime, any witnesses would have to be dealt with.

This passage, much like many of these italicized sections are accounts that are removed from the consciousness of the characters. This is privileged information that we, the reader, are given by the author. It is independent of any knowledge that any one of the characters possess. This is why Ananda, Sirissa’s husband, has spiraled into the

depths of alcoholism. He doesn't know what happened to his wife since he was out of town when all of this happened. Did she leave him? Was she kidnapped? Or was she dead? Ananda doesn't know and will never know the truth of what happened that day to his wife; as far as he is concerned, the pain of her memory and the pain of not knowing have forced his hand to the only means of dulling the painful reality of his existence.

The ninth and final italicized passage continues the trend of these individual stories becoming more personal to the lived lives of the characters. This narrowing of the lens focuses on the reasons behind the strained relationship between the two brothers, Sarath and Gamini. The passage opens with Anil and Gamini on a train, the setting is eerily familiar to the previous passage regarding the murder of the government official, here the train is described as having *“some passengers on the train squatting in the aisles with wrapped bundles, pet birds”* (*Anil's Ghost* 251). Gamini, a doctor and surgeon is fully aware of the horrors of war, since he spends most of his long days dealing with the casualties and victims in the hospital. Unprovoked, he states aloud that *“I was the one she should have loved”*. Anil, sitting beside him hopes to get a confession out of him. As the train moves in and out of tunnels and the darkness Gamini says, *“I saw her often. More than most people knew”* and *“we were ‘related’...It wasn't a courtship”*. He relates courtship to a dance and mentions that they did dance once, at his wedding, explaining that it was *“A romantic moment. It was a wedding after all, you could embrace each other. I was getting married. She was married already. But I was the one she should have loved. I was already on speed, in those days, when I would see her”* (ibid). Anil interrupts, asking who he is speaking of. Gamini, either not hearing her or blatantly ignoring Anil's request, continues. *“I'm always awake. I'm good at what I do.*

*So when she was brought in to Dean Street Hospital, I was there". Gamini continues, stating that, "She had swallowed lye. Suiciders decide on that method of death because, since it's the most painful, they might stop themselves doing it. The throat is burned out, then the organs. She was unconscious, even when she woke she didn't know where she was...With one I was giving her pain killers and with the other using ammonia to snap her awake. I needed to reach her. I didn't want her to feel alone, in this last stage"* (*Anil's Ghost* 251-2). Gamini tells Anil that he was selfish, overloading her with painkillers even though he didn't want her to fall asleep, *"I should have just knocked her out, let her go. But I wanted her to be comforted by me being there. That it was me, not him, not her husband"*. Gamini, the doctor, possess the skills and knowledge to save many of his patients, but Gamini, the lovelorn, struggles to grasp the situation, caught between the roles of physician and heartbroken lover. *"I shook her until she saw who it was. She didn't care. I'm here I love you"* he says, but she just closes her eyes in what Gamini describes as disgust. She was in pain again, and Gamini tells her that he can't give her anymore medication or he'll lose her forever. The woman, in unimaginable pain, slowly puts her hand up and *"made a gesture across her throat"* (*Anil's Ghost* 252). Gamini's account is immediately interrupted as the train is engulfed in the darkness of the tunnel, *"Who was she?"* asks Anil as she touches his shoulder. Anil feels him turn towards her, ever so slightly, slowly sputtering out *"What would you do with a name?"* As the train goes in and out of tunnels, the darkness swarms around them as Gamini reflects on that painful night and the war gripping the nation.

*All the wards were busy that night...Shootings, others to be operated on. There are always a lot of suicides during a war. At first that seems strange, but you learn to understand it. And she, I think, was overcome by it. The nurses left me with her and then I was called into the triage wards.*

*She was full of morphine, asleep. I found a kid in the hall and I got him to watch her...This was three a.m. I didn't want him falling asleep, so I broke a Benzedrine ad gave him half. He found me later and told me she was awake. But I couldn't save her. (252-3)*

As Anil felt the gusts of wind from the open windows and the increasingly loud clatter of the wheels against the track, Gamini asks, “*What would you do with her name? Would you tell my brother?*”

This final italicized passage has much to offer us regarding the stress and horrors of war. Eventually, we learn that the woman Gamini loves is in fact his brother's wife, Ravina. It is inferred that maybe Sarath and Ravina's marriage was failing and that she may have loved Gamini in return, but remained faithful to her husband. In Gamini's mind, she should have and could have loved him as much as he loved her, but her duty to her husband and Gamini's duty to the hospital superseded their love. This love triangle mirrors many of the relationships in the novel, but most notably, it mirrors the civil war itself. The relationship between the two brothers has long been soured ever since they were children, what was once fighting amongst themselves for the love of their parents, has now morphed into a dispute over the love of a woman; much like how the Tamils and Sinhalese, essentially ethnic “brothers”, have once fought over the attention of the British during the colonial era and have now resorted to fighting over the island. As Ondaatje writes in his pseudo-memoir *Running in the Family*, Sri Lanka is “the wife of many marriages, courted by invaders who stepped ashore and claimed everything with the power of their sword or bible or language” (*Running* 64). The significance of this statement is profound, since the island is being treated like a woman with a history of failed colonial relationships, but, like Ravina, both will eventually suffer the same fate at the hands of those who supposedly “love” them.

The post-colonial metanarrative characteristics of the novel work in a myriad of ways. Each italicized story within the text is framed with another story, in a sense, superimposing one story over another, until a fragmented collage emerges. This fragmented South-Asian reality found in *Anil's Ghost* is also evident in Ondaatje's other works. In "Perceiving [...] In One's Own Body' the Violence of History, Politics and Writing: *Anil's Ghost* and Witness Writing", Milena Marinkova discusses that "The semi-documentary and metafictional nature of his texts addresses the question of how one can bear witness to reality, history or creativity" and that "the mixed-media quality of his books, which include or reference ledgers, maps, plaques, photographs, tapes, reels, letters, drawings, and interviews with witnesses, lends the textual artifacts texture whose materiality gestures at historical silences and obliterations" (Marinkova 108). Here, the fragmented reality produced in *Anil's Ghost* and Ondaatje's other works leads us to these "historical silences", which are invariably connected to Lyotard and his notions of testifying and witnessing. As Dunn points out, history "becomes an allegory of the inexpressible" where "the differend becomes a supererogatory supplement that tells us that the experience of suffering is always more than language represents" (Dunn 198). Lyotard believed that the modern strives to "present the unrepresentable" and that it maintains a level of nostalgia, "because it manifests, despite itself, an implicit longing for that 'lost' contents no longer felt amenable to, or available for, presentation" (Cosrello 77).

The lost history of the past is something that must be fought for. It is within these long forgotten and often hidden local histories that we find those who most need to be heard. Their silences not only affect our known history, but also prevents history from

truly acknowledging those who have suffered and been wronged by systematic exclusionary systems, unwilling and unable to rightfully acknowledge their very existence. The grand totalizing nature of history and historical writing often forgoes the “little stories” of individuals, but can be reversed by claiming the personal and private histories of the past; which are found to emerge when the “official” histories are questioned by the “little” histories of personal experience.

## CHAPTER IV

### IDENTITY CREATION

Much of *Anil's Ghost* deals with some sort of reclaiming of the past, either forgotten or repressed. The importance of past histories is a determinant factor in the creation and formation of an identity. There are many factors that are influenced by one's identity and simultaneously help shape our lives through how we are identified. One aspect of identity and how it shapes an individual is the name that is ascribed to the subject. Names and naming have their place in history and culture, it is just one way in which not only the world views the subject, but also the way the subject views itself. Victoria Cook discusses names and naming, and their importance in her article, "Exploring Transnational Identities in Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*", where she states that "names are capable of providing verification; they have the power to distinguish, substantiate and confirm, and above all they confer identity and establish identification" (Cook 3).



Ondaatje writes in *Running in the Family* a brief yet encompassing history of the island, its lore and the fascination it held in the hearts and minds of those seeking its riches from abroad. Ondaatje, speaks of maps, much like those found in the italicized passage dealing with The National Atlas of Sri Lanka, where they “reveal rumors of topography, the routes for invasion and trade, and the dark mad mind of travelers’ tales appear throughout Arab and Chinese and medieval records” and that “The island seduced all of Europe. The Portuguese. The Dutch. The English. And so its name changed, as well as its shape, - Serendip, Ratnapida (‘island of gems’), Taprobane, Zeloan, Zeilan, Seyllan, Ceilon, and Ceylon”, before its newest designation, Sri Lanka, meaning “resplendent land” in Sanskrit in 1972. (*Running* 64). With every new trader or conqueror that stepped upon its shores, the island’s name changed, but so did its identity. The island meant different things to different groups of people. For some, it was a place of learning; for others, a means of income; but for those who lived there, it was home.

This concept of name changes and identity are also found within the story of *Anil’s Ghost*, namely, Anil herself. Ondaatje doesn’t tell the reader much about his main protagonist’s life when she did live in Sri Lanka, aside from the fact that she was a “prodigal” swimmer and came from a rather well-to-do family. However, Ondaatje does describe in detail how she acquired the name Anil. It is by far, one of the most significant events of her life since “Her name had not always been Anil. She had been given two entirely inappropriate names and very early began to desire ‘Anil’, which was her brother’s unused second name”, as well as their grandfather’s name. (*Anil’s Ghost* 67). At the age of twelve she tried to purchase the name from her brother, offering to take his side in all family arguments, but that was to no avail, because he wouldn’t

commit to that deal even though he knew she wanted it very much. “Her campaign had caused anger and frustration within the household” writes Ondaatje, because she “stopped responding when called by either of her given names, even at school” (ibid). Her brother argued that he may want to keep his unused name, because “it gave him more authority” and that a second name “suggested perhaps an alternate side to his nature”. Eventually their parents gave up trying to reason with either of their children and when Anil was thirteen, they came up with a trade where “She gave her brother one hundred saved rupees, a pen set he had been eying for some time, a tin of fifty Gold Leaf cigarettes she had found, and a sexual favor he had demanded in the last hours of the impasse” (68). From that day forward, she “allowed no other first names on her passports or school reports or application forms” and that there “was a hunger of not having that name and the joy of getting it that she remembered most”. She liked everything about the name, “it slim, stripped-down quality, its feminine air, even though it was considered a male name” and even twenty years later, she felt the same way. Ondaatje writes that “Everything about the name pleased her...She’d hunted down the desired name like a specific lover she had seen and wanted, tempted by nothing else along the way” (68).

This name change is rather unusual in many instances because “Anil” is a boy’s name. By taking her brother’s name, she crosses the gender barrier and in a sense, becomes her brother’s new brother and in a strange and bizarre twist, she participates in granting her brother’s “sexual favor”. In a sense, this sexual favor is the last act she performs as a submissive female. The name change seems to foreground a particular androgynous quality of her character, as Heike Harting references in “Diasporic Cross-Currents in Michael Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost* and Anita Rau Badami’s *The Hero’s Walk*”.

Here, Harting argues that, Ondaatje's account of Anil's name change "relies on received gender norms by equating the feminine with passivity and physical form and the masculine with action and determination" (9). This feminine "passivity" is evident when Anil tries to buy or trade for the name with no success; but the masculine "action and determination" aspect emerges when she offers him money, cigarettes and herself. This act of prostitution, Cook elucidates, "serves to underline her subordinate female status prior to gaining her name, but it also reveals an ancient form of feminist resistance to patriarchal control: by bartering her sexual services for profit", and subsequently, by doing so, "Anil gains a measure of economic power and independence" (Cook 5).

Cook also argues that Ondaatje is examining the anxieties surrounding the way we construct our own personal identities by means of name, language and culture; and that by choosing a new name for herself, "Anil takes on a new identity; she becomes a 'stranger' to her past 'self' – to the person she was before she was Anil" (4). It is also important to note that Anil chooses a name she already has some sort of connection to, because it will be one of the few eastern aspects of her western self. Anil's decision to rename herself not only reflects her independence, but, according to Cook, also is a "liberating and self-creating action that affirms her identification with her ancestry, and assimilates her origins into her new persona" (4).

Within the contexts of the novel and colonial history, Ondaatje has crafted the history of Anil's name change in such a way as to mirror that of male-dominated colonial imperialism itself. Cook references Anne McClintock's, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, where McClintock suggests that in imperial terminology, naming is a "male prerogative" (26), and according to colonial ideology,

“the world if feminized and spatially spread for male exploration” and that, “explorers called unknown lands “virgin” territory” (McClintock 23-24). McClintock also alludes to the fact that when “naming ‘new’ lands, male imperialists mark them as their own” (29). Ondaatje has blurred the boundaries of not only gender, but identity formation. Much like how the island underwent a name change after gaining its independence, Anil gains her independence by taking the male prerogative of naming herself and in a sense takes ownership over her own identity. Cook views this as not only a “neo-colonial” action, but also “a gendered, masculine, action” (Cook 4).

Ondaatje’s blurring of gender boundaries has its significances, both in Anil’s personal and professional lives. At the age of sixteen, three years after her trade with her brother, Anil’s disposition was of concern to her parents. Ondaatje describes her at this time as “taut and furious within the family” and that her parents decided to take her to an astrologer “in an attempt to mollify these aspects of her nature” (*Anil’s Ghost* 136). The astrologer, using numerological equations with Anil’s birthdate and hour, along with the positioning of stars, determined that the problem with her temperament existed in her name. Arriving at the conclusion that “her tempestuousness could be harnessed with a name change” did not sit well with Anil, who made her opinion known with “loud incessant refusals”. In an effort to calm the girl down and for the sake of a compromise, the astrologer suggested the addition of an “e”, so that her name would be “Anile”; so it would “make her and her name more feminine”, because the “e” would “allow the fury to curve away”. Yet, even this she refused. Years later, Anil would believe that her “argumentativeness was only a phase”, due to the stress and tumultuousness of one’s teenage years where there was “bodily anarchy: young boys whose hormones are going

mad, young girls bouncing like a shuttlecock in the family politics between a father and mother” and that, “It was a minefield in one’s teens” (ibid).

The struggle with her gender identity with regard to her personal relationships comes to a head when we learn of her failed first marriage, while studying at Guy’s Hospital in London during her early twenties. “He too was from Sri Lanka” writes Ondaatje, and “in retrospect she could see that she had begun loving him because of her loneliness. She could cook a curry with him. She could refer to a specific barber in Bambalapitiya, could whisper her desire for jaggery or jackfruit and be understood” (*Anil’s Ghost* 141). Being a champion caliber swimmer in her homeland gave her a sort of revered celebrity status amongst the locals, which wasn’t the case in England. Here, she was an outsider stuck in a foreign land, devoid of family and friends. Her loneliness and homesickness resulted in her seeming “timed even to herself” where she often “felt lost and emotional” (142). It is in this state of mind that the usually strong willed Anil, fell victim to the charms of her future ex-husband.

He was a medical student as well, but not as shy as Anil, and “Within days of their meeting he focused his wits entirely on Anil – a many armed seducer and note writer and flower bringer and telephone message leaver” (ibid). With his company, Anil’s circle of friends grew and they were quickly married, even though she suspected that this was just another excuse to have a party. He is described as opening up the “geography of the bedroom, insisting on lovemaking in their nonsoundproof living room, on the wobbly sink in the shared bathroom down the hall, on the boundary line quite near the long-stop during a county cricket match”, where “These private acts in an almost public sphere echoed his social nature. There seemed to be no difference for him

between privacy and friendship and acquaintances. Later she would read that this was the central quality of a monster” (143). Regardless of all the fun that they were having as newlyweds, Anil realized that she would have to “come back to earth” and resume her studies.

The first riffs in the marriage occurred when her father-in-law arrived in England and took them out for dinner. Anil notes how the man who was never shy was “quite for once” during dinner and that his father “attempted to persuade them to return to Colombo and have his grandchildren”. “He kept referring to himself as a philanthropist,” writes Ondaatje, “which appeared to give him a belief that he was always on higher moral ground”. As dinner progressed, Anil noted to herself how he had used “every trick in the Colombo Seven social book against her” and he “objected to her having a full-time career, keeping her own name, was annoyed at her talking back” (143). Anil’s strong personality maintained even though slightly diminished with homesickness when she described her classroom autopsies to her new father-in-law, who received this news with outrage, rhetorically questioning “Is there nothing you won’t do?” (ibid). The next day, the father had lunch with his son before flying back the Sri Lanka. What they talked about is never made known, but one is led to believe that Anil was the topic of conversation because now, the couple fought continuously over everything. When they argued, Anil was “suspicious of his [new] insights and understanding” and that “During this time of claustrophobia and marital warfare, sex was the only mutual constant. [Where] She insisted on it as much as he. She assumed it gave the relationship some normality. Days of battle and fuck” (143-44). More so, Anil’s venture into matrimony was further complicated by her husband’s jealousy over her independence when she

would return home in the evenings after working in a lab. What at first “presented itself as sexual jealousy, then [became]...an attempt to limit her research and studies. It was the first handcuff of marriage, and it almost buried her” (144).

This venture into marriage failed on many levels, but also provides much insight into not only Anil’s personality and identity with regards to the crossing of gender barriers, but also their effect on the text itself, in a socio-historic and cultural manifestation of south Asian patriarchal familial structuring. Anil initially began crossing gender barriers when she assumed her brother’s name and continued when she left for the UK to study medicine. Not only is Anil taking the initiative of seeking a higher education, but is also doing so while entering the highly competitive and stressful field of medicine. The stress of school compiled with her homesickness resulted in her need for something more, which she found in another Sri Lankan student. With his companionship and amorous affections, Anil’s “timid” and “lost and emotional” self, began to dissipate. Her husband’s overactive sexuality and lack of differentiation between the spheres of public and private life echo the aggressive and conquering mindset of stereotypical “manliness” and subsequently, relegates her to the role of the “submissive” woman. When reminiscing about this part of her life, Anil even acknowledges that “there was considerable pleasure on both their parts during this early period. Though she realized it was going to be crucial for her to come back to earth, to continue her academic studies” (143).

In the mind of Anil’s father-in-law, her role was already decided for her when she married his son, to return to Colombo and have his grandchildren. She is only important to him insofar as her ability to reproduce and procreate with his son. Her father-in-law’s

attitude is part of the typical patriarchal mindset of how women should act and behave, as well as their roles in the family. This is evident in the phrasing Ondaatje uses to describe his behavior during the dinner scene. The fact that he used “every trick in the Colombo Seven social book” and “objected to her having a fulltime career, keeping her own name, [and] was annoyed at her talking back”. In essence, the “Colombo Seven social book” refers to how one will be viewed in Sri Lankan society. People gossip, and in Sri Lanka, it spreads like wildfire. It would only be a matter of time before gossip in the UK would make its way to the island, where it would become common knowledge that so-and-so’s son has married a woman who not only kept her own name, but has a fulltime career and talks back. His family would be seen as weak and his son would be viewed as a man who cannot control his wife. What the modern western world views as Anil being a strong independent woman, is viewed in the old fashioned eastern world as her husband being inferior.

Anil’s crossing of stereotypical gender boundaries continues after her husband and father-in-law have lunch. Though not explicitly stated, one can assume that her husband was severely scolded and vilified by his father for allowing such a woman take control of his marriage, hence her suspicion of his new “insights and understanding” when he arrived home. It is explained that Anil’s husband “appeared to spend all his spare energy on empathy” and that “When she wept, he would weep” (143). It is important to note that during this time their marriage is described as being claustrophobic and likened to warfare, where two opposing forces are locked in a bitter struggle of ideology and self-determination. It is equally important to note that “sex was the only constant” and that Anil, “insisted on it as much as he”. Here, Anil is taking a more



dominant role in the relationship; where her husband takes a more feminine role with his constant weeping and becoming overly sensitive, while Anil is taking a more masculine role in both her aggressive sexuality and her decision to return to school and the laboratory.

Eventually, Anil would make the decision to leave her husband. She had decided to wait until the end of the term to leave her failing marriage, so she could “avoid the harassment he was fully capable of; [because] he was one of those men with time on his hands” (145). This moment in her life was supposed to be a time of joy and celebration, was “treated as something illicit that deeply embarrassed her” (144) and Anil had to bring it to an end. Throughout Anil’s recollection of her marriage it’s imperative to note that Anil never mentions or refers to her husband’s name. By never acknowledging him by name, Anil is better able to erase him from her memory and personal history. Not only has the marriage been one of the most embarrassing endeavors she has endured, but it is also inadvertently gave her the drive and motivation to make a name for herself. After leaving her husband, Anil found solace in her studies, devoting all her energy to her work; which would result in her winning a scholarship to study in the United States and eventually apply her knowledge of forensic science to the field of human rights work.

Two years later, Anil found herself in Arizona, studying physical and chemical changes that take place in bones, “not only during life but also after death and burial” (145). It is during this time in America that her emerging masculine side takes a more dominant role in her personal and professional lives. Ondaatje mentions that Anil was “alongside the language of science” and that “the femur was the bone of choice” (145). The differentiation between men and women became a centralized subject in her forensic

science laboratory work, where she “made it a point to distinguish female and male traits as clearly as possible” (137). Strangely enough, though Ondaatje’s character is blurring the gender boundaries throughout the text, she herself, must distinguish the differences. In a sense, Anil is more masculine than most males, especially in the field of forensic sciences, which is a male dominated profession. It was during her time working in laboratories and hospitals that she herself sees the differences between the sexes with regards to her profession, echoing her insistence on distinguishing gender traits. She had “witnessed how women were much more easily discombobulated by the personal insights of a lover or husband; but they were better at dealing with calamity in professional work than men” and that, “They were geared to giving birth, protecting children, steering them through crisis”. But men on the other hand, “needed to pause and dress themselves in coldness in order to deal with a savaged body” (137). Throughout all her training in the U.S. and abroad, she saw this dichotomy play out over and over again, where “Women doctors were more confident in chaos and accident, calmer in dealing with the fresh corpse of an old woman, a young beautiful man, [and] small children” (ibid). Anil loved the atmosphere created by her fellow forensic scientists, a proverbial “boys club”, where Toxicologists and histologists “always insisted on rock and roll” music blaring in the lab and that once, “You stepped in through the airtight door and some heavy metal would be bumping and thrashing through the speakers” (146). Her colleagues would use shorthand descriptions to refer to corpses, like “the Lady in the Lake” and “the by-herselfer” and watch *The Price is Right* in the greenroom at lunchtime. They were “working in a building where the dead outnumber the living” and this was the normality of their everyday life. Anil enjoyed being on their bowling team and ending the evenings with “a

beer in one hand, and a cheese taco in the other, cheering or insulting teams and scuffing along the edges of the bowling alleys” (147). Anil looks back at this time in a nostalgic manner, since she had “loved the Southwest, missed being one of the boys and was now light –years beyond the character she had been in London” (ibid). In a sense, Anil has transgressed the gender barrier and has embodied the preconceived notions and stereotypes of masculinity with regards to her personal and professional lives, but there are consequences. Anil believes that women are more adept at dealing with the “calamity in professional work”, while men, “needed to pause and dress themselves in coldness” to deal with a “savaged body”. Yet, Ondaatje writes, “The times Anil would slip into woe were when she saw a dead child in clothes. A dead three-year-old with the clothes her parents had dressed her in” (137). Strangely, Anil’s commentary about the gender differences in her professional line of work has an inverse relationship with her and her gender identification. Being a woman, she should be able to maintain a calm demeanor when faced with the horrors of “A dead three-year-old”, but since she has traversed the gendered gap between the sexes, she has become, in a sense, a masculinized being, where she herself would need to “pause and dress [herself] in coldness”. Anil will need this calm demeanor when she and Sarath begin their dangerous journey towards the truth surrounding Sailor’s identity and those responsible for his murder.

## CHAPTER V

### TRUTH, WITNESSING, AND TESTIMONY

During their journey to solve the mystery surrounding the circumstances of Sailor's death, Anil and Sarath head to the Grove of Ascetics, an ancient 6<sup>th</sup> century monastery, now occupied by Sarath's former teacher, Palipana. Palipana was at one time a prominent archaeologist and a renowned epigraphist who had "wrestled archaeological authority in Sri Lanka away from the Europeans" and "had made his name translating Pali scripts and recording and translating the rock graffiti of Sigiriya" (79). Described as being the main driving force behind a pragmatic Sinhala movement, he "wrote lucidly, basing his work on exhaustive research, deeply knowledgeable about the context of the ancient cultures"; fighting against the Orientalist ideologies of the time, when "the West saw Asian history as a faint horizon where Europe joined the east, Palipana saw his country in fathoms and color, and Europe simply as a landmass on the end of the peninsula of Asia" (ibid). But Palipana's eminence in the field of archaeological sciences

has since then dwindled and diminished because he couldn't prove that the ancient texts he interpreted really existed. Though this work was "applauded in journals abroad and at home", one of his "protégés voiced the opinion that there was no real evidence for the existence of these texts" and that, "They were fiction" (81). Historians tried to locate the ruins Palipana wrote about, but it was to no avail. "No one could find the sentences he had quoted and translated from dying warriors, or any of the fragments from social manifestos handed down by kings, or even the erotic verses in Pali supposedly by lovers and confidants" (ibid). Palipana's reputation for meticulous research had afforded him a certain level of credibility, and this new work would have ended "arguments and debates by historians", but instead, it resulted in him being shunned from the archaeological community. Ondaatje writes that, "Now it seemed to others he had choreographed the arc of his career in order to attempt this one trick on the world. Though perhaps it was more than a trick, less of a falsehood in his own mind; perhaps for him it was not a false step but the step to another reality, the last stage of a long, truthful dance" (81). Palipana was a man who could "divine a thesis at any sacred forest" and lived a life where "History was ever-present around him" (80). In a sense, Palipana has been forcibly silenced by the academic community, unable to prove the truths he believes in and finds himself unable to speak for a forgotten past. Palipana not only acts as a pseudo-witness for an unprovable truth, representing the forgotten stories lost in the annals of history; but he also represents a version of Sri Lanka, grown old, weary, and sightless; as well as serving as a reminder of what was once great about ancient Sri Lankan history and culture. Though Palipana is blind, he is able to see not only how Asian culture and

history is undervalued in the West, but how it isn't necessary to see history in order to understand or appreciate it.

After his fall from the upper echelons of academia, Palipana chooses to live as an ascetic, solely dependent on his niece, Lakma, to care for him in his old age. If Palipana is the pseudo-witness, then Lakma is in fact the true witness. She has, in Primo Levi's words "touched the bottom" and "seen the Gorgon" because she is in fact actively silent, refusing to speak to anyone, even the uncle whom she has devoted her life to taking care of. As a twelve-year-old girl, Lakma witnessed the murders of both of her parents. A week after the incident she was taken by nuns to a government run ward for children whose parents have been killed in the civil war, but "The shock of the murder of the girl's parents...had touched everything within her, driving both her verbal and motor abilities into infancy. This was combined with an adult sullenness of spirit. She wanted nothing more to invade her" (103). For over a month the girl remained silent, having to be forced out of her room to do exercises in the sunlight. Fear gripped the poor girl on a daily basis and the nightmares of her dreams were indistinguishable from the horrors of her reality. Ondaatje describes her during this time as "A child who knew the falseness of the supposed religious security around her...she was immune to any help in this place. Any sudden sound was danger to her" and "She would finger through every meal looking for insects or glass [and] would not sleep in the safety of her bed but hidden underneath it" (103). Palipana, her only living relative, decided to remove her from the government run ward and took her with him to the Grove of Ascetics, where he would retrain her because, as Ondaatje writes, "Whatever skills she learned from her parents had been abandoned too deep within her" (104). Palipana

gave her the mnemonic skills of alphabet and phrasing, and conversed with her at the furthest edge of his knowledge and beliefs...He weaved into her presence his conversations about wars and medieval *slokas* and Pali texts and language, and spoke of how history faded too, as much as battle did, and how it could exist only with remembrance – for even the *slokas* on papyrus and bound *ola* leaves would be eaten by moths and silverfish, dissolved by rainstorms – how only stone and rock could hold one person’s loss and another’s beauty forever. (104)

Palipana would attempt to teach Lakma everything he knew about the history he held so dear before his eyesight would completely fail him. As the years drew on, he would learn to trust the darkness that would envelope him and even more so on his niece, who would become responsible for taking care of both of them. Together they would travel across the countryside, exploring historical sites and unearthing historical stories long forgotten. In the last few years of his life, he had “found the hidden histories, intentionally lost, that altered the perspective and knowledge of earlier times” and that history was found in stones and carvings, since “It was how one hid or wrote the truth when it was necessary to lie” (105).

Ondaatje describes how Palipana would decipher ancient texts, creating a “dialogue between old and hidden lines, the back-and-forth between what was official and unofficial...[he was] studying the specific style of a chisel-cut from the fourth century, then coming across an illegal story, one banned by kings and state and priests, in the interlinear texts. These verses contained the darker proof” (105). All the while, Lakma would watch and listen, “never speaking, a silent amanuensis for his whispered histories” where he “blended fragments of stories so that they became a landscape” (ibid).

Within this section of the novel, we learn of the personal trauma suffered by both Palipana and Lakma; him being turned away from the academic community and her

witnessing the horrors of civil war first hand. More importantly, we learn of the hidden histories that lay undiscovered, which, like Lakma, are silent. Their stories must be uncovered and retold, or, like the ancient slokas on papyrus and bound Ola leaves, they will deteriorate in time and will be lost forever. Though Lakma has been stripped of the power of verbal language, she still understands the power of written language, when, during the last week of Palipana's life, she chisels one of the first phrases he said to her on a rock slab near a lake, a phrase, "which she held on to like a raft in her years of fear" (107). He would sit by the water each morning while "the girl undressed and climbed down against the wall of submerged rock and banged and chiseled, so that in the last days of his life he was accompanied by the great generous noise of her work as if she were speaking out loud" (ibid). Even though she cannot speak verbally, her actions spoke for her. Using the techniques of ancient artisans described to her by her uncle, Lakma immortalizes her uncle's memory in stone by writing down his words, not his name or the years he spent alive, but, "just a gentle sentence". This sentence was a truth that both she and her uncle believed in, a permanent truth, emblazoned against a cold dark slab of rock that will stand the test of time.

Strangely enough, the story of Palipana's death doesn't fall into the linear progression of the plot. It is woven into the story of Anil and Sarath's visit to the Grove of Ascetics, and in a sense, becomes part of a hidden historical narrative. But before Palipana dies, he does help Anil and Sarath in their quest to solve Sailor's identity, by referring them to an artist capable of reconstructing the head of the skeleton; which we find out later in the novel to be Ananda. What's important to understand within this section on the novel is the fact that people, like history, have their silences. Whether one



is a pseudo-witness or a true witness, they are participating in reclaiming a lost historical past, actively engaging in an act that would give a voice to those forgotten souls of bygone eras. Although the reasons for their particular silences differ, the silences themselves speak for themselves, as Sumic-Riha points out, “Silence is certainly an interruption – but an interruption against the background of speech. In keeping quiet, the subject remains a speaking being. [And when] confronted with the unsayable, the subject might respond by remaining silent” (20).

As stated earlier, those attempting to speak on behalf of those who have been silenced results in a problematic situation for the pseudo-witness, who must prove that the true witness did indeed suffer. As the pseudo-witness, Anil must not only discover Sailor’s true identity, proving that he did in fact exist; but, also prove that he died at the hands of government officials and gather sufficient enough information to prove it. Her quest for Sailor’s identity leads her on a path of not only discovering identity, but truth as well.

For Ondaatje, truth is of the utmost importance within the confines of the novel. Whether collective or individual, truth serves to bridge the gap between the public and private spheres of the novel, as well as creating a cohesive unit comprised of the fractured and fragmented realities found within the text. In searching for truth within *Anil’s Ghost*, we find that there are many different versions of truth, as well as different opinions on truth and its usefulness. Truth, as an idea, can be either absolute or relative; where an absolute truth, must be completely accepted; while a relative truth must be continually measured and judged. Throughout the novel, Ondaatje has his characters view and understand truth as it relates to their personal life experiences; but when it comes to the

characters of Anil and Sarath, truth is used as a means to differentiate the ideologies between Western and Eastern notions of truth, as well as their individual perspectives on its effectiveness in bringing justice to Sailor.

For Anil, truth is an absolute concept founded on empirical facts. Heike Harting describes Anil as believing in “the grand narratives of Western civilization” founded on “empirical truth and reason” (10). Anil’s Western understanding of truth is based on the fact that “Information could always be clarified and acted upon” (*Anil’s Ghost* 54) and in her line of work, she “turned bodies into representatives of race and age and place” (55). Even when she examines Sailor’s skeleton, it’s evident that her training in both the medical and scientific fields supplements her understanding of not only empirical facts, but also the grand narratives of Western history. Ondaatje writes that, “She began to examine the skeleton...summarizing the facts of his death so far, permanent truths, same for Colombo as for Troy. One forearm broken. Partial burning. Vertebrae damage in the neck. The possibility of a small bullet wound in the skull. Entrance and exit” (64-65). In this instance, Anil’s views the skeleton’s injuries as any other medical examiner, but she also implies that “death as well as its causes are universal and ahistorical occurrences” (Harting 10) when comparing Colombo to Troy. Anil is even able to describe, in detail, the circumstances of his death, Ondaatje writes that,

She could read Sailor’s last actions by knowing the wounds on [the] bone. He puts his arms up over his face to protect himself from the blow. He is shot with a rifle, the bullet going through his arm, then into the neck. While he’s on the ground, they come up and kill him. Coup de grace. The smallest, cheapest bullet. A .22’s path that her ballpoint pen could slide through. Then they attempt to set fire to him and begin to dig his grave in this burning light. (65)

For Anil, her understanding of Sailor's remains leads her to desire a single, unitary truth, which she hopes will allow her to draw a distinction between the innocent and the guilty parties involved. Throughout her forensic training and past excursions to war-torn countries, Anil has developed a belief in hard facts, provable truths that can stand the test of scientific scrutiny and methodology. Anil's Western understanding of truth has led her to also believe that by finding and identifying the bones, she will help discover the truth surrounding the lived history of the victim: "'The truth will set you free.' I believe that", she asserts (102).

Anil's reliance on empirical facts and the truth they expose has its place in the West, but, when dealing with other cultures and countries, she knows all too well that this reliance does have its downside, especially if one finds themselves stuck in a conflict zone. "Forensic work during a political crisis was notorious" writes Ondaatje, with its "three-dimensional chess moves and back-room deals and muted statements for the 'good of the nation'" (28). Early in her career, Anil worked as a program assistant for an investigative team conducting human rights work in the Congo and when the group's investigation had "gone too far", "their collection of data had disappeared overnight, [and] their paperwork burned" (29). The group had nothing left, no data and no proof on the existences of the victims, or whether they had suffered at the hands of their government; they had nothing left to do, but get on a plane and go home: "So much for the international authority of Geneva... grand logos on letterheads and European office doors meant nothing where there was crisis. If and when you were asked by a government to leave, you left. You took nothing with you. Not a slide tray, not a piece of film" (29). The failure of the human rights groups in areas of conflict isn't anything

new, since these groups are often reliant on the governments they seek to indict with human rights violations. As Pheng Cheah states, the failure of NGO's are in part due to their being "anti-localist" and "creatures of intellectuals aimed at promoting a wider consciousness of humanity as a whole through the power of rational or affective persuasion" (Cheah 315). The failure of these groups rest in the fact that they are "work[ing] through a post national political order that detaches them from the people on whose behalf they work" and that there is a "kind of discrepancy between international human rights workers, such as Anil, and those stranded in the midst of international theaters of war, such as Sarath" (Harting 13).

This discrepancy between Anil and Sarath extends into their understanding of truth and how they view truth. As an archaeologist and historian, Sarath knows and understands Anil's motivations and dependency on facts, as well as the truths they can illuminate; but, because he is a local, he possesses a deeper understanding of the dangers of truth if handled inappropriately. As Lydia Kokkola explains in "Truthful (Hi)stories in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*", like his mentor Palipana, "Sarath considers the truth to be of little value" and that "the conclusions one draws from the truth are of more importance" (16). Like Anil, Sarath realizes that Sailor was murdered by the government and that this is a "provable fact" and a "historical truth"; but, as Kokkola states, "whereas Anil finds this fact sufficient in itself, Sarath is more cautious about its value" (ibid)

As a local, Sarath is very familiar with not only the conflict going on in his homeland, but how it's depicted abroad, especially in the West. Throughout the novel, Sarath tries to explain to Anil the situation on the island and how truth, if mishandled, can be detrimental for everyone involved. "I want you to understand the archaeological

surround of a fact” he tells Anil, “Or you’ll be like one of those journalists who file reports about flies and scabs while staying at the Galle Face Hotel. That false empathy and blame... That’s how we get seen in the West. It’s different here, dangerous. Sometimes law is on the side of power not truth” (44). Sarath’s skepticism of journalists are well founded, especially if they’re staying at a luxurious colonial era hotel, filing reports of “flies and scabs”, well removed from the true horrors that surround them. For Sarath, these journalists are no better than the NGO’s whom Pheng Cheah writes about; the one’s that distance themselves from the perspectives of the local.

Sarath’s initial warning about truth and power relations doesn’t go unheeded by Anil, who references her experiences in Central America, where a villager tells Anil’s investigatory group that “When soldiers burned our village they said this is the law, so I thought the law meant the right of the army to kill us” (44). Here, Ondaatje juxtaposes the humanitarian efforts in Central America with the present situation Anil finds herself in on the island. “I just feel I’ve been cooling my heels ever since I got here. Doors that should be open are closed. We’re here to supposedly investigate disappearances. But I go to offices and I can’t get it. Our purpose here seems to be the result of a gesture” (ibid). The gesture Anil refers to is important to note on a few levels. Firstly, many governments accused of human rights violations halfheartedly allow human rights investigators and NGO’s enter their countries in a show of goodwill, and to create an image of not only cooperation, but that they have nothing to hide. Secondly, though these governments have allowed humanitarian groups to enter their country, the governments in question often try to inhibit the investigation, much like what happened to Anil’s group while they were in the Congo. Thirdly, Anil’s skepticism of the

government and its officials trying to hamper her investigation also includes Sarath, a government appointed archaeologist. This third instance is surprising, even though Sarath has been made available to assist Anil, he would make the perfect government accomplice to sabotage her investigation. Anil even questions Sarath openly, when she refers to an earlier discovery during an autopsy of the found remains, stating, “That small piece of bone I found, the first day in the hold, you knew it wasn’t old, didn’t you?” (44) Sarath remains silent to her inquiry, until he advises her to “Be careful what you reveal” to which she replies, “And who I would reveal it to”. Sarath agrees, “That too, yes”, but Anil immediately interjects, “I *was* invited here”, to which he explains that, “International investigations don’t mean a lot”. Curious, Anil asks whether it was difficult to get a permit for them to work in the caves where they found Sailor. Sarath’s straight response, “It was difficult” (45). This wouldn’t be the only instance when Anil questions Sarath’s loyalty to her or the mission; but, interestingly enough, Ondaatje uses this distrust to underline and mirror the tension found on the island during the ongoing national emergency. It is this distrust, which will inevitably lead to tragedy at the end of the novel, the death of Sarath.

Throughout their journey to identify Sailor and bring his murder suspects to justice, Sarath continually tries to explain to Anil his understanding of truth; the truth known only to the local and how it functions on the island. Gradually, Anil comes closer to understanding what Sarath is trying to tell her. Much like an archeologist or a forensic anthropologist slowly uncovering a lost or hidden truth of the past, Anil must slowly become aware of the differences in an absolute or relative truth. “I don’t know where you stand” Anil tells Sarath, “I know...I know you feel the purpose of truth is more

complicated, that it's sometimes more dangerous here if you tell the truth". Sarath replies, "Everyone's scared...It's a national disease" (53). In the West, Anil "had come to expect clearly marked roads to the source of most mysteries. [Where] Information could always be clarified and acted upon. But here, on the island, she realized she was moving with only one arm of language among uncertain laws and a fear that was everywhere... Truth bounced between gossip and vengeance" (54).

During the political conflict, all sides involved maintained their belief in the truths they held to be true. Whether it was the government, the separatists or the insurgents, each maintained that theirs was the "real" truth, while the others were fabricated propaganda. Each side fought violently on behalf of their personal truths, allowing violence and fear to propagate and wreak havoc throughout the nation. Sarath is desperately trying to explain how dangerous their undertaking is in a country where there were "night interrogations", "vans in daylight picking up citizens at random", "Mass disappearances...reports of mass graves" (156), "bodies washed in onto the shore" and "victims of torture...lifted into the air by helicopter, flown a couple miles out to sea and dropped through the fathoms of air" (212).

Anil's usual hardheaded attitude that she exhibits in the West will not get her far in Sri Lanka, where there is a certain way one must conduct themselves in both private and public if they wish to be successful; this is especially true if one's goal is indicting the government in an extrajudicial civilian murder that was subsequently covered up. "They [the government] don't want results" Gamini explains to Anil, "They're fighting a war on two sides now... They don't need more criticism... And too many people know about your investigation. There is always someone paying attention" (132).

Though both brothers, Sarath and Gamini, try to enlighten Anil on the way things work on the island and the inherent danger of her undertaking; but it is Sarath, who's last bit of advice not only serves as a metaphor for truth on the island, but also exposes his ideological beliefs surrounding how the island is depicted in the West and foreshadows his eminent demise. Ondaatje writes that,

Sarath knew that for her the journey was in getting to the truth. But what would the truth bring them into? It was a flame against a sleeping lake of petrol. Sarath had seen truth broken into suitable pieces and used by foreign press alongside irrelevant photographs. A flippancy gesture towards Asia that might lead, as a result of this information, to new vengeance and slaughter. There were dangers in handing truth to an unsafe city around you. As an archaeologist Sarath believed in truth as a principle. That is, he would have given his life for the truth if the truth were of any use. (156-57)

Throughout the novel and throughout his life, Sarath tries to stay in the periphery when it comes to getting involved in both the politics of the island and the civil war. He maintains a deliberate distance due to the horrors he has witnessed around him, as well as knowing how others have suffered on a daily basis during the political crisis. For him, truth is a relative concept, because of its ability to fuel the corrupt ideologies of men for their personal gain. Lydia Kokkola draws upon the works of Friedrich Nietzsche and William James in creating an understanding of truth and its uses, which also coincide with Sarath's. Kokkola writes that, "By separating truth from its functions, Nietzsche posited that truth was simultaneously being celebrated as our highest value, and yet it has been harnessed to serve our ideologies" and that "By invoking truthfulness, one could avoid scrutinizing the substance of an ideological belief" (11). When drawing upon the work of James, Kokkola states that, "the value of true ideas lies in their ability to lead us away from eccentricity and isolation to consistency, stability and solidarity" and that,



“Both Nietzsche and James are concerned with the performativity of the truth, which also means that they regard truth as a relative not absolute” (ibid).

There is a clear distinction between Anil’s and Sarath’s versions of truth and its usefulness. By focusing our attention to the emphasis placed on the version of truth known by the local’s, we find that their perception of truth is complicated to say the least, especially in Sri Lanka. Though Sarath is a local, his purposeful distancing from the conflict has, in a sense, given us an understanding of truth from afar. In attempting to narrow the gap between absolute and relative truths, and the versions of truth known to by only the locals, we must finally turn to Ananda.

It was Palipana, who suggested that Anil and Sarath find the once great artificer Ananda, to reconstruct the face of Sailor in order to help determine the victim’s identity. Towards the end of the novel, Anil, Sarath and Ananda find themselves hidden away in an abandoned colonial-era estate known as a walawwa. The success of the mission was resting solely on Ananda’s ability to recreate Sailor’s face, especially since, “The central truism in her [Anil’s] work was that you could not find a suspect until you found the victim” (176). While Ananda works with Sailor’s skull, Anil looks over the rest of the bones in order to discover any markers of occupational stress. If they are able to figure out what he did for a living, then maybe, they will have a starting point for their search; as well as crafting a story about Sailor’s lived life. During her search, Anil discovers two different sets of occupational stress indicators.

The first from her reading of the bones, suggested ‘activity’ above the height of the shoulder. He had worked with his arms stretched out, reaching up or forward...the arm joints showed a symmetrical use, so both arms had been active. His pelvis, trunk and legs also gave the suggestion of agility, something like the swivel of a man on a trampoline. Acrobat? Circus performer? Trapeze, because of the arms? But how many circuses

were around in the Southern Provence during an emergency? [...] The other version of him was different. The left leg had been broken badly, in two places. (These wounds were not part of his murder. She could tell the breaks had occurred about three years before his death.) And the heel bones...suggested an alternate profile completely, a man static and sedentary. (178)

Anil's belief in empirical facts and the truths they expose prove useful in narrowing the possibilities of Sailor's occupation. But it is the true local, Ananda, who is able to inadvertently help Anil, when she sees him squatting. Anil kneels down beside him, taking hold of his ankle with both of her hands and then "She pressed her thumbs into the muscle and cartilage, moved them up a few inches above his ankle bone...Then down to the heel again" (179). With the help of Sarath translating, she asks why Ananda chooses to work like this. Sarath tells her that he was comfortable working like this. Anil was notably shocked, "'It's not comfortable' she said. 'Nothing in the foot is relaxed. There's stress. The ligament is being stretched against the bone. There will be a permanent bruise to it'" (179). When Anil asks why Ananda chooses to work this way, Sarath replies that "He's a carver", and that "he got used to squatting in the gem mines" where "The height down there is only about four feet" and "He was in them for a couple of years" (ibid). With this information, they now know that Sailor used to have a very athletic job before breaking his leg and seeking work in a mine. This is the breakthrough in the case that they were waiting for, since now they "have a story about him" Anil explained.

A few days after this discovery, Sarath informs Anil that Ananda has completed the facial reconstruction on Sailor's skull, "Apparently, he says, it's done. If they are any problems with it I suggest we don't complain, he's badly drunk" Sarath explains to Anil; as well as informing her that she should "Save whatever hesitations. Or he might

disappear on us” (183). Upon looking at the face of Sailor, Anil “watched it point-blank, coming to terms with it”, noticing that “There was a serenity in the face she did not see too often these days. There was no tension. A face comfortable with itself” and that this was something rather “unexpected...from such a scattered and unreliable presence as Ananda” (184).

The serene and peaceful look on the face of Sailor catches Anil off-guard, which resorts in Sarath stating that “It’s what he wants of the dead” (184). This statement puzzles Anil while she admires the youthful look of Sailor’s face and asks Sarath what exactly he means. “We have seen so many heads stuck on poles here, these last few years...You’d see them in the early mornings, somebodies night work, before the families heard about them and came and removed them and took them home. Wrapping them in their shirts or just cradling them. Someone’s son. These were blows to the heart” explains Sarath (184). Despite this horror, “There was only one thing worse” clarified Sarath, “when a family member simply just disappeared and there was no sighting or evidence of his existence or his death” (ibid).

Any hope and joy that Anil could have exhibited for the mission while viewing Ananda’s reconstruction was quickly squashed when Sarath tells her that,

In 1989, forty-six students attending a school in Ratnapura district and some of the staff who worked there disappeared. The vehicles that picked them up had no number plates. A yellow Lancer had been seen at the army camp and was recognized during the roundup. This was at the height of the campaign to wipe out insurgent rebels and their sympathizers in the villages. Ananda’s wife, Sirissa, disappeared at that time.... (184-85)

It had been three years since that incident and Ananda still hasn’t found his wife. Upon hearing this Anil breaks down; unable to cope with this new revelation, she begins

to stammer, eventually spitting out, “I...I feel ashamed” (185). The face which she thought looked so peaceful and so youthful could not hold her gaze any longer. Every time she would attempt to look at it, she would just think about Sirissa and think about the once great artificer, who crafted this image with his heart’s long lost love in mind. She would shed tears for not only Ananda and Sailor, but for all those effected by the atrocities of the civil war; those who must endure the loss of their loves and who must succumb to the “mad logic” here on the island, which there is “no resolving” (186). But the tears she sheds is not only for those swept up in the violence, but also for her mission, because she realizes that “the face was in no way a portrait of Sailor but showed a calm Ananda had known in his wife, a peacefulness he wanted for any victim” (187) and that “no one would recognize the face. [Since] It was not a reconstruction of Sailor’s face they were looking at” (187), but Sirissa’s.

It is through the character of Ananda that Ondaatje gives his audience, as well as Anil, a version of truth that can only be held by the true local. It is the true local who is able to give Anil not only the information she needs to understand the markers of occupation on the bones of Sailor; but a true understanding of what it means to be a local, trapped both physically and emotionally, within a conflict zone. It is also through Ananda that Anil is able to transverse the boundary between foreign observer and active participant, becoming one with her people. As Anil weeps for all who have suffered, it is Ananda who comes to comfort her with what Ondaatje describes as, “the softest touch on her face” (187). He attempts to comfort her by placing one hand on her shoulder while wiping away the tears from her face with the other. He “kneaded the skin of that imploded tension of weeping as if hers too was a face being sculpted, though she could

tell that wasn't in his thoughts. This was a tenderness she was receiving" (ibid). As her sobbing stopped, she would realize that "Ananda had touched her in a way she could recollect no one ever having touched her, except, perhaps, Lalitha. Or perhaps her mother, somewhere further back in her lost childhood" (187-88). With this simple gesture Ananda is able to reconnect Anil with the memories of her past; the tenderness shown to her was like that of her nanny or her mother. This sympathetic and nurturing action emphasizes the painful truth Ananda has come to learn; that the simple touch and gesture of wiping away the tears of another while acknowledging that person's pain and suffering is the most powerful action one can perform during a time of crisis. Ananda's simple gesture renews Anil's hope for not only the people of Sri Lanka, but for her mission; even though this renewed hope would not last for long.

Anil knew that something was on Ananda's mind when he was wiping away her tears, she would soon find out that Ananda was thinking about committing suicide. During the night Anil awoke to "sounds she had never heard before" (195). She runs through the darkness, reaching Ananda's room where she sees him "lying against a corner, trying with what energy he had left to stab himself in the throat" (ibid). Luckily Anil was able to use her medical training and quick thinking to instruct Sarath while she rushed to save Ananda's life, wrapping a torn pillowcase around the large wound on his neck and injecting him with some epinephrine, which she keeps on hand because of her allergy to bee stings. Being ill-equipped to handle such an emergency, Sarath volunteers to drive Ananda to the nearest hospital. Anil whispers that Ananda had "called forth the dead", to which Sarath replies, "No. He's just one of those who try to kill themselves because they lost people" (196). While Sarath readies the vehicle, Anil holds the

weakened Ananda in her arms where she “felt she could speak in any language” and “he would understand the purpose of any gesture” (197). This was in spite of the fact that “She had interrupted his death” and that “She was the obstacle to what he had wanted” (ibid).

Ananda, having completed the reconstruction of Sailor’s face, and having witnessed the emotion exhibited by Anil, longs to be free from the reality of his existence. He wishes to abandon this reality, so he may be with the dead, free from all the suffering this world has brought him and those around him. Throughout Anil’s carrier, she has worked with and for the dead; but in this instance, she works to keep the living alive. Even during the darkest of times, a light shines brightly for those who cannot see; leading the way for not only redemption, but truth as well. As the night turns to day, Anil is woken by Sarath returning from the hospital. “He’ll be alright... You saved him. Getting to him so quickly, then the bandage, the epinephrine. The doctor said he didn’t know too many who would know to do that in a crisis” (200). “It was lucky” Anil replies, to which Sarath asserts, “You should live here. Not be here for just another job”. Sarath’s statement lights a fire within Anil, a burning passion that has been absent during her time on the island, something long buried within her being erupts, “This isn’t just ‘another job’! I decided to come back. I wanted to come back” (ibid).

## CHAPTER VI

### SEEKING JUSTICE FOR SAILOR

With renewed conviction and fervor, Anil and Sarath embark on their journey to scour the local mines in the area. Sarath had a hunch that Sailor might have worked in a plumbago-graphite mine, so they went to the villages with Sailor's reconstructed head. Anil knew that the identification of Sailor based on Ananda's reconstruction wasn't too likely, since "There had been so many disappearances" (205), but they did have the markers of occupation to lead them in the right direction. It was at the third plumbago village they went to that they identified Sailor as Ruwan Kumara. A former toddy tapper, who after falling from a tree and breaking his leg, was able to get work in the local mine. The village had remembered when "outsiders" had picked him up from the tunnel he was working at. The "outsiders" brought a billa, "someone from the community with a gunnysack over his head, slits cut out for his eyes – to anonymously identify the rebel sympathizer" (269). Ondaatje writes that, "A billa was a monster, a ghost, to scare

children in games, and it had picked out Ruwan Kumara and he had been taken away” (ibid).

With a specific date for the abduction, Sarath and Anil head back to the walawwa to plan their next step. Sarath believed that they should be even more careful and gather more evidence, or face the possibility of their findings being rejected. He proposes that he leave for Colombo to search for Ruwan Kumara’s name in a government list of “undesirables” which he claims to have access to, while Anil waits for his return. Sarath said that this should take only two days and that he would return to the walawwa for Anil and Ruwan’s remains. He leaves her his cell phone even though she probably wouldn’t be able to contact him, but he would be able to call her. Five days passed and Anil still had no word from Sarath, “All her fears about him rose again – the relative who was a minister, his views on the danger of truth” (269) began to envelope her mind. By the sixth day Anil was furious, having no one to talk too and having no idea what Sarath was up to or planning, she uses his cell phone to contact an old friend of her father’s, Dr. Perera. She tells him, “I have to make a report and I need help... You knew my father. You worked with him. I need someone I can trust. There is maybe a political murder” (270). Dr. Perera hesitantly replies, “You are speaking on a cell phone. Don’t say my name... I can try to arrange something. Where are you?” (ibid) “It was the same question he had asked once before” writes Ondaatje, causing Anil to take a brief pause to contemplate her decision to tell him. “In Ekneligoda, sir. The walawwa”. “I know it” he quickly replies, then, in an instant, he was off the phone (ibid).

A day later, Anil finds herself in the Armory Auditorium, part of the anti-terrorist unit building in Colombo, where, “She no longer had possession of Sailor’s skeleton”



(271). It turns out that Dr. Perera wasn't in the car that came to pick her up at the walawwa, but he met her at the Hospital when she arrived in Colombo. While having lunch she told him about everything that she had done. She thought that as a friend of her father and a fellow colleague in the medical field, he would have more to say than "to take it no further", thinking that her work was good, but unsafe. She even refers to a speech he made long ago about "political responsibility", to which he replies "That was [just] a speech" (ibid). Anil had misplaced her trust with Dr. Perera, which resulted in the disappearance of Sailor's skeleton at the hospital while they were at lunch.

Now she finds herself alone in an auditorium that was "half filled with various officials, among them military and police personnel trained in counter-insurgency methods" (271), all trying to discredit her. She found herself having to give a report without any real information or evidence, just like Palipana once had to do. As she stands alone, next to an old skeleton that wasn't Sailor, she began to explain "various methods of bone analysis and skeletal identification relating to occupation and region of origin" (271). Unknown to her, Sarath was in the back of the auditorium watching her struggle to maintain her demeanor. Then all of a sudden he hears her say "I think you murdered hundreds of us". "*Hundreds of us*. Sarath thought to himself. Fifteen years away and she is finally *us*" (272). After that outburst, Sarath knew that they were in danger as "he sensed the hostility in the room" (ibid). He quickly devises a plan to save not only the mission, but also Anil by discrediting her and her research.

In a patronizing tone of voice he questions her about where the skeleton came from, the possibility of the skeleton not being a victim of a crime, but ancient remains from a historical gravesite, "The skeleton you have here is likely to be a hundred years

old – in spite of your fine social work about its career and habits and diet” (274). Anil tries to defend herself, stating that she could’ve proved wrong doing if her skeleton hadn’t been confiscated; a statement which Sarath quickly uses against her, insinuating that she was negligent and lost it. Incensed, she reminds Sarath and the other officials that she is here as part of a human rights investigation and that as a forensic specialist, she works for an “international authority”. Once again Sarath uses this against her, stating that “This ‘international authority’ has been invited here by the government” and that Anil must report “To *us*. To the government *here*. That means you work for the government here” (ibid). “What I wish to report is that some government forces have possibly murdered innocent people” Anil retorts. To which Sarath cleverly tells Anil that what she is proposing “could result in chaos” and asks her “Why do you not investigate the killings of government officers” (275), which receives a scattered applause from the room.

Seeing a brief opportunity to remedy the situation, Sarath challenges Anil to perform another forensic study on a different skeleton. Gesturing to a man in the hallway, Sarath explains that he and his archaeological team has “A two-hundred-year-old corpse” and wants to have evidence on the difference between the two corpses, to see if she “can manage to prove us wrong” (275). She agrees to the challenge and is given a forty-eight hour window to complete her study. Sarath informs Anil to leave all her research and her tape recorder in the room and is instructed to leave the building and that the new corpse will be waiting for her outside.

As Sarath wheels out the corpse and loads it into a van for Anil, he imagined what Anil was going through,

walking angrily, slamming each door she walked through...they would halt her at each corridor level, check her papers again and again to irritate and humiliate her...she would be searched, vials and slides removed from her briefcase or pockets, made to undress and dress again...and she would, he knew, be carrying nothing by the end of the journey, no scraps of information...But she would get out, which is all he wished for. (277)

It was an hour and a half before Sarath would see Anil emerge from the building, with no papers or forensic equipment. Anil was quiet and motionless as Sarath approached her. "I told you I would return to the walawwa" he says. "You didn't" she replies. "Everyone pays attention. My brother told you that. People knew you were from Colombo the moment you got here", scolded Sarath. He tells her to get in the van and get to work on the skeleton immediately and to forget about all of her papers and information that was confiscated because she'll never get them back. Anil, disoriented from the gauntlet she ran in the building and from Sarath's bizarre behavior, receives a hard slap in the face to bring her back to reality; and then Sarath advises her to, "Go with the skeleton and work on it. You don't have long. Don't call me. Get it done overnight. They want a report in two days. But get it done tonight" (282).

Later that night Anil found herself aboard the S.S. Oronsay, an old passenger liner from "the old days of the Orient Line" (18). This once grand vessel is now a colonial relic stripped of anything of value and is being used for storage by the Kynsey Road Hospital, as well as an impromptu laboratory for Anil's investigation. Here we find her drunk with "no wish in her to be here anymore"; speaking aloud, "just to hear the echo in the dim light so she would not feel alone with the ancient skeleton she had been given" (283). Half-heartedly she decides to begin her examination of the new skeleton, slowly cutting away the plastic wrapping, she discovers that this wasn't a new skeleton, but Sailor's. Within the skeleton's chest cavity Anil discovers her tape recorder that was

confiscated earlier in the day; as she turns on the recorder, “voices began filling the room around her” (284). All of the information she had recorded was there, as well as the barrage of questions she received from the military and police personnel. Before she could turn off the device Sarath’s voice came on “very clear and focused”, he whispers,

*I’m in the tunnel of the Armory Building. I have just a moment. As you can tell, this is not any skeleton but Sailor. It’s your twentieth-century evidence, five years old in death. Erase this tape. Erase my words here. Complete the report and be ready to leave at five tomorrow morning. There’s a seven o’clock plane. Someone will drive you to the airport. I would like it to be me but it will probably be Gunesena. Do not leave the lab or call me. (284)*

In the end, Anil was able to recover not only the remains of Ruwan Kumara, but the information pertinent to her investigation as well, but at what cost? In a retrospective act of remembering, Anil thinks of the time she spent with the two brothers Sarath and Gamini, how “they spoke of how much they loved their country. In spite of everything”. And how “No Westerner would understand the love they had for the place” (285). On the night in question, Anil remembers a question Gamini had posited,

American movies, English books – remember how they all end? The American or Englishman gets on a plane and leaves. That’s it. The camera leaves with him. He looks out of the window at Mombasa or Vietnam or Jakarta, someplace now he can look at through the clouds. The tired hero. A couple of words to the girl beside him. He’s going home. So the war, to all purposes, is over. That’s enough reality for the West. It’s probably the history of the last two hundred years of Western political writing. Go home. Write a book. Hit the circuit. (286)

Sadly, we will be left unaware of what happens to Anil or her investigation. It is more than likely that after examining the remains, she followed Sarath’s instructions and boarded the plane, taking her research with her. In a twist of irony, Ondaatje has his protagonist flee the island, just as Gamini describes, “the tired hero...going home”.

There is nothing more Anil can do for her investigation or those she has befriended, other than to deliver justice. But like many other human rights investigations in the past, her report will just end up on someone else's desk. Though she has completed the mission of identifying the remains of Sailor, her mission to indict the Sri Lankan government in this one extrajudicial murder has failed. Just like how the previous works of other NGO's have failed to truly bring to justice those responsible for horrific acts of violence, Anil has as well. If one is able to ascertain just one thing from Gamini's indictment of the Western hero, it is that, just because the "hero" leaves, doesn't mean that the war is over. Anil will go back home to the West, but it is the Sri Lankan's who must continue to live and endure their political nightmare. The war is far from over. Whether it is on the battlefield, fought between rival factions with opposing ideologies; between brothers, struggling to leave the past behind them; or the personal struggles within one's own heart and mind; the war continues, on many different fronts.

## CHAPTER VII

### LIFE AFTER ANIL: RECONCILIATION AND ACCEPTANCE

With Anil out of the picture, Ondaatje leaves us with brief glimpses into the world and friends she left behind. A worker from a civil rights organization arrives with the reports of victims along with “fresh, almost-damp black and white photographs, seven of them this week. [With the] Faces covered” (287), placing them on Gamini’s desk at the hospital. As he looked over the reports and viewed the photographs, he would record the descriptions of the wounds and how they were probably caused. By the time he reached the third picture, his world would begin to crumble as “he recognized the wounds, the innocent ones” (ibid), like the scar on his elbow from crashing his bicycle as a child and another from being hit with a cricket stump by his little brother. Rushing from his desk, Gamini runs down a flight of stairs and along a corridor towards the morgue. With his heart racing he begins to frantically pull off the sheets covering the bodies, until he saw

with his very own eyes what he had feared most, the lifeless corpse of his older brother, Sarath.

He could see the acid burns, the twisted leg. He unlocked the cupboard that held bandages, splints, disinfectant... washing the body's dark-brown markings with scrub lotion. He could heal his brother, set the left leg, [and] deal with every wound as if he were alive, as if treating the hundred small traumas would eventually bring him back into his life. (287)

Alone, Gamini would look upon his brother and think of their tumultuous history together; how Sarath had “always [been] too much of an older brother” and how everyone in the hospital had gone home, leaving Sarath is with his “least favorite relative” and his “unhappy shadow” (288). Ondaatje describes the scene as a “pieta between brothers”, a brief moment which could be the end or beginning of a “permanent conversation with Sarath” because if he didn’t talk to his brother now, “his brother would disappear from his life” (ibid). During this heart wrenching personal moment between brothers, Ondaatje describes how Sarath had always “sidestepped violence because of his character, as if there had never been a war within him... [Which] drove people around him mad” and how each of the brothers assumed that they were destined to meet a fatal end with the “darkness they had invented around themselves” (289). Though they were born as brothers they lived as enemies, refusing “to show hesitation and fear, it was only strength and anger they revealed when in the other’s company” (ibid). The days of anger and hatred between the brothers now seemed insignificant in light of Gamini having his brother appear before him as a victim of torture. Gamini had seen cases of torture in the past, “where every tooth had been removed, the nose cut apart, the eyes humiliated with liquids, [and] the ears entered” (289), these were the truths he had come to know. He also knew the telltale signs of torture evident on his brother. He would rip the sleeves of

his brother's shirt down to the cuffs, where "Below the elbows the hands had been broken in several places" (290). That night Gamini would stay with his brother until bodies began to arrive from a bombing somewhere else in the city. In the end Sarath lived up to his word, giving his life for truth, if it were of any use. Through his sacrifice, both Anil's investigation and the remains of Ruwan Kumara were saved and rescued; and even in death, he was able to reconcile his differences with his little brother.

Truth has the power to not only inform, but to reconcile differences as well as endow an individual with a restorative purpose. Ondaatje doesn't leave us with Sarath's death as his novel's only conclusion, but another more powerful ending regarding the redemptive qualities of truth. In the final pages of the novel we learn of a statue of the Buddha, blown to pieces with dynamite, by men who believed it contained a hidden treasure. Ondaatje writes that "This was for once not a political act or an act perpetrated by one belief against another", but one committed by men who "were trying to find a solution for hunger or a way to get out of their disintegrating lives" (300). The once peaceful gaze of the transcendent Buddha now lay in rubble, surrounded by "'innocent' fields...and the rock carvings [that] were perhaps places of torture and burials...mostly uninhabited land...a place where trucks came to burn and hide victims who had been picked up...fields where Buddhism and its values met the harsh political events of the twentieth century" (300).

It is here, where the conflicts of past and present meet that we find the once great artificer, Ananda Udugama, commissioned by the Archaeological Department to reconstruct the Buddha statue of Buduruvagala. Ananda was to work under the guidance of foreign specialists, but they never arrived because "There was too much political



turmoil” and that “They were finding dead bodies daily, not even buried, in the adjoining fields” (301). In the midst of death and destruction Ananda rebuilds the fallen statue with the help of local villagers. Together, through the scorching heat of the midday and the torrential downpour of monsoons, they work to give life to this once great structure. During months of assembly, Ananda focused his efforts on reconstructing the head, which had “seen the wars and offered peace or irony to those dying under it” (304). Upon completion of the statue’s reconstruction, Ananda gazes upon this once mighty god, its face with “one hundred chips and splinters of stone brought together...the seams of its face, [looked] as if were sewn together” (303-4), something he wouldn’t hide. He was being watched by a small boy while performing the Netra Mangala, the ceremony of painting the eyes to give the statue life. Ananda felt the “partial warmth” of the sun against his arms and the costume he wore over Sarath’s old cotton shirt, “the one he had promised himself he would wear for this morning’s ceremony” (305). While performing the ceremony, all Ananda can think of is how he and Anil would “always carry the ghost of Sarath Diyasena” (ibid) with them. Upon completion Ananda looks at the world from the Buddha’s point of view; the wind against his face, the mountains and rolling hills in the distance, the rains that were coming from miles away and the flora and fauna that surrounded him. It is here, at this precise moment, that Ananda has a truly restorative moment when he “briefly saw this angle of the world” (307), which maintained a certain seductive quality for him there. As he sits near the shoulders of a god, he sees birds diving through the gaps within the trees with the “tiniest of hearts in them beating exhausted and fast, the way Sirissa had died in the story he invented for her in the vacuum of her disappearance. A small brave heart. In the heights she loved and in the

dark she feared” (ibid). It was at that moment when the boy who was watching him placed his concerned hand atop of Ananda’s. It is this simple gesture, a “sweet touch from the world” (ibid), that brings hope to Ananda for a better future; it is the truth he has come to know and accept.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

When viewing Ondaatje's text as a whole, it is important to recognize the delicate balancing act he engages in between political involvement and artistic aestheticism. *Anil's Ghost* participates in representing a real world political crisis in an artistic fashion. Sumic-Riha quotes Gerard Wajcman, who draws upon Lyotard, when she states that, "it could be said that what animates art, according to Lyotard, is an impossible desire: 'to show and to say what cannot be seen or said – to aim at the impossible as impossible'" and that there is "a twofold task...imposed on art: to make us see and to aim at the real" (24). It has long been debated whether art can truly capture or describe a traumatic event, because "certain beings, events, experiences and situations are unsuitable for any artistic presentation whatsoever because there is no form of the sensuous presentation that could capture the essence of such an event, being or experience" (Sumic-Riha 25). Though theorists maintain a level of skepticism surrounding the ability of art to accurately depict

and represent the true nature of a traumatic event, they fail to realize that art, in a sense, acting as a pseudo-witness. By treating art as a witness to the event(s) it attempts to depict, we the reader are not only given a version of the truth surrounding an inexpressible event, but a window to witness the event for ourselves.

There is a certain inadequacy involved with an artistic representation dealing with any historical trauma; and while many critics have chosen to attack Ondaatje for his fictional treatment of the Sri Lankan civil war, for being either too “pro” or “anti” Tamil or Sinhalese, they fail to understand the socio-historic and cultural implications of his work. Ondaatje has chosen not to take sides in his recreation of the island’s events, distancing himself from the same rhetoric that led to the civil unrest in the first place. Through utilizing Lyotard’s views of the metanarrative and its totalizing and all-encompassing nature, we find ourselves relying on the “little stories” found within the text. By focusing on the local narratives found within the overarching narrative of *Anil’s Ghost*, we are able to view Sri Lanka and its political crisis from the viewpoints of the locals, who are the true witness’ to the events transpiring on the island. They are the ones who must live and suffer under the tyranny of an island wide oppression, and being bombarded with competing metanarratives from factionalized groups, both at home and abroad. The failure of NGO’s and the West is due to their inability to either understand or remedy the situation, and, is also in part due to the fact that they rely far too much on metanarratives. These groups, both foreign and domestic, look for a single and absolute truth to solve the problems of the modern age, yet fail to realize that truth is a relative concept; and without narrative, truth is just useless facts. By gesturing towards the local and the personal stories of the individual characters, we are able to see a much different

picture of Sri Lanka, one that is not found in government reports and newspapers.

Ondaatje allows us to see and experience the island through its people, the archaeologist, the epigraphist, the doctor, the artist and of course, the reluctant returnee. Even though she belongs a system of justice which relies on grand narratives, Anil's experiences on the island and with its people alters her understanding of not only truth, but herself as well. In uncovering a lost past, long hidden by the competing ideological narratives of our time, Anil is able to not only understand the viewpoint of the local, but identifies herself as one as well. She stands alone against the government, fighting to set right what once went horribly wrong; risking her life for a life already lost. By identifying herself and those who've died at the hands of the government, Anil takes a proactive stance in her identity formation. She no longer views herself as a foreign outsider on a human rights mission, but a long lost daughter of Sri Lanka; returning home to fight for her brothers and sisters, giving a voice to those who have been forever silenced.

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