

**From the Postcolonial to the Transnational:
Issues of Identity in
Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*.**

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Abstract

Anil's Ghost, by Michael Ondaatje, is set in present day Sri Lanka against the background of civil war. This dissertation addresses some of the issues of identity that are raised in the narrative of *Anil's Ghost* through a close analysis of the text, paying particular attention to the way in which Ondaatje examines identity as both a “construct” and a “process”. The approach used is one that draws on postcolonial theory and takes a “transnational” perspective.

The central argument asserts that Ondaatje's text moves beyond the concept of a postcolonial literature of “resistance”, into an area that requires a theory of “process” rather than “product”. Transnationalism is shown here to be just such a theory – in that it captures something of this fluidity – and therefore to be very suitable for the analysis of Ondaatje's discourse. The main focus of this research, then, is to demonstrate a transnational conceptual matrix as being an appropriate framework for the examination of identity in *Anil's Ghost* – in so doing it puts forward transnationalism as a positive means for the articulation of difference and fragmentation in the construction of an holistic, multi-cultural identity.

Three main themes are addressed in the course of this argument, with regard to the way in which they impact on issues of identification: naming, and its association with mapping; the relationship between language and identity; the interaction between

memory and dislocation. These themes are examined in the light of Ondaatje's paradigm of "the returning stranger" (Powells 2) and underpinned by the application of transnational theory, as put forward by critics such as Paul Giles. This dissertation explores issues of identity in *Anil's Ghost*, which traverse cultural and national boundaries and encompass both central and marginal positions, through the application of a transnational methodology.

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Introduction

This dissertation engages in a study of the construction of identity in the work of the Canadian based author, Michael Ondaatje, focussing on his latest novel, *Anil's Ghost*. It will consider Ondaatje's examination of the process of identification, not only in the formation of personal and individual identities but also those of groups and nations. In the opening chapter of their influential text, *The Empire Writes Back*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin describe how

the strength of post-colonial theory may well lie in its inherently comparative methodology and the hybridized and syncretic view of the modern world which this implies. This view provides a framework of 'difference on equal terms' within which multicultural theories, both within and between societies, may continue to be fruitfully explored (36).

This is a framework that may usefully be employed here, in the analysis of Ondaatje's interpretation of identity in *Anil's Ghost*, with regard to three major themes: the first chapter considers the implications of naming and mapping for identity; the second is concerned with the relationship between identity and language; and the third chapter examines identity in terms of the interplay between memory, forgetting, location and dislocation.

There has been an implicit recognition on the part of Canadian historians, commentators and literary critics that writers provide within their work a sense of national identity; the inference here is that "national identity" is, in fact, a construction. Benedict Anderson has contributed a great deal to the concept of "nation" and "nationalism" as a construct: he describes nations

as “*imagined* because the members of even the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6) – “Nationality”, then, as a form of identification cannot be conceived as a “given”, but must be defined in relation to the perception and location of “Self” and “Other” – this is undoubtedly so in the context of Canada as an ex-settler colony. Therefore, for writers such as Michael Ondaatje, who endeavour to bridge the gap between life and literature, there has been what Alan Lawson describes as “the psychological responsibility to find not only . . . the usable past, but also the usable here, the usable now, the usable us, and the usable tongue” (168). In order to be “usable” these concepts must be relevant and, for Canadian writers in particular, these cultural phenomena, as expressed in the terms “nationality” and “nationalism”, have important consequences.

These terms are certainly relevant in relation to Michael Ondaatje, when seen in the light of his cultural background – born in Sri Lanka of Dutch parentage, he was educated at a British public school and finally emigrated to Canada at the age of nineteen. Ondaatje could be said, therefore, to have not only an Imperial, establishment education, but also a multicultural ethos; this is of particular importance when considering the transgression of boundaries that is so central to this dissertation. J. U. Jacobs discusses Ondaatje’s work of memoir, *Running in the Family*, in terms of the way his cultural origins impact on the discourse. He states that Ondaatje’s background is one of “dispersal and cultural translation and of a family history of crossing and recrossing the imperial divide” (6): for example, speaking of Nuwara Eliya, the town in which his grandparents lived, Ondaatje says “everyone was vaguely

related and had Sinhalese, Tamil, Dutch, British and Burgher blood in them going back many generations" (*Running* 41).

Thus Ondaatje's past experience gives an added dimension to the analysis of his work from a postcolonial perspective: his position gives more weight to his exploration of the conflicts and contradictions of an identity that incorporates a colonial past and a postcolonial present. Josef Pesch also addresses Ondaatje's postcolonial stance in two articles, "Michael Ondaatje's Novels and (Post)Colonial Correctness" and "East Meets West in Michael Ondaatje's Novels". He suggests that "novels like Ondaatje's are excellent examples of a writing which facilitates a reflection of the complexities involved in presenting and negotiating between conflicting positions of cultures" ("Michael" 106). Postcolonialism, then, provides a useful critical apparatus from which to approach the deconstruction and interpretation of *Anil's Ghost*; however, as this dissertation suggests, Ondaatje posits a construction of identity that exceeds the reach of a purely postcolonial perspective.

In order to appreciate the need to move beyond this perspective for the exploration of *Anil's Ghost*, it is first necessary to briefly examine some of the concepts that underpin postcolonial theory. The construction of cultural values, such as civilisation and humanity, produces, as a consequence, the antithetical notions of the "savage" and the "primitive", which in turn engenders an urge for reform. Ashcroft et al describe how

the historical moment which saw the emergence of 'English' as an academic discipline also produced the nineteenth-century colonised form of Imperialism . . . Literature was made as

central to the cultural enterprise of Empire as the monarchy was to its political formation (3).

In other words, they argue that the same ideological ethos formed the basis for the study of English, as for the growth of Empire, the one being intrinsically linked with the other. The relationship is, of course, not as absolute as the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* would have it appear: at its most simplistic level, this notion would suggest that the dissolution of the Empire should also result in the abandonment of the study of English literature. This is patently not the case; however, de-colonisation has created a context in which literatures have developed that assert their difference from the Imperial centre.

Heather Murray concludes that the study of English Literature can be seen “as a conduit through which English literature and its accompanying values are transported from the centre to the margins” (58). Postcolonialism as a critical practice, could be said to have emerged as a response to the cultural marginalisation propagated by Imperialism – although much current literary and cultural theory has moved on from this initial position. Frantz Fanon, an early anti-imperialist and political theorist, stated that “not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man” (110). Retrospectively this statement emerges as constructing a framework of binary oppositions that include not only black/white, but also coloniser/colonised and self/other. Ghosh-Schellhorn suggests that within such a hierarchy the “only form of agency . . . [for] the oppressed, is that of the necessarily subversive tactics of the disempowered” (29), and in this way “resistance” becomes key to postcolonial literary theory.

Said, in his groundbreaking work *Orientalism*, discusses the way in which works of English literature may construct other people (in this case those of “the Orient”) as “lesser” than their English counterparts, in a variety of ways. He describes Orientalism as:

ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promote[s] the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, “us”) and the strange (the Orient, the East, “them”)My argument takes it that the Orientalist reality is both antihuman and persistent (233).

The work of critics such as Said draws attention to the power-relations inscribed by the dominator/dominated dialectic, and as such promotes a great deal of interest in the literature of “resistance”. Ghosh-Schellhorn suggests, however, that whilst this perception of power-relations was undoubtedly useful in theorising a particular period of colonial history, it has become somewhat outmoded. She defines Said as having made “the recuperative attempt to invalidate the aggrandizing depiction of oriental Calibans by the West, not by offering alternative self-depictions, but by exposing the texts implicated in this colonial manipulation of representation” (30). In other words, Ghosh-Schellhorn points out that while Said highlights and questions colonial discourse, his work does not deconstruct the assumptions of the Western Canon, and therefore “defies its own recuperative motivation” (30). This raises the question of whether there is a more appropriate theoretical perspective, from which to deconstruct Ondaatje’s *Anil Ghost* – a novel that engages with certain “Western” assumptions, and confronts some of the cultural clashes between East and West.

There is a sense in which literary criticism is moving on from the hegemonic notion of the "Third World" as defined by the colonial gaze. Indian critics such as Aijaz Ahmad have pointed out that it has become a common generalisation to see all third-world texts within the paradigm of "writing back", which is to suggest that such texts have no alternative but to narrate the national oppression of colonialism and imperialism (102). Indeed Ahmad is one of several postcolonial critics who insist that there are many different kinds of "nationalisms" and consequently the necessity for a variety of "postcolonialisms". In fact, it is true to say that postcolonialism is not a specific condition or, indeed, an entity; rather it is a range of approaches conceived in order to counteract colonial and imperial attitudes.

In Canada, national identity is, as Diana Brydon comments, "neither unified nor natural but something we work at reinventing and protecting every day" ("Introduction" 9). An ex-settler community with a colonial culture, Canada has an ambivalent attitude towards "nationhood" that strives to maintain a balance between the desire to construct a communal identity, and the need to afford recognition and restitution to the indigenous peoples of the country. There is an on-going debate as to whether invader-settler societies, such as that of Canada, warrant inclusion within the postcolonial field: Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, editors of *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, argue that countries such as Canada should be excluded because of "their implication in contemporary capitalism", and also because of their "historical relation" to colonialism (4). But as Brydon points out,

these two conditions provide compelling reasons for including the analysis of Canadian culture within postcolonial studies.

Colonialism and imperialism fuelled the development of capitalism; their relation requires examination to be understood. Similarly, if postcolonialism does not investigate the range of historical relations of colonies to colonialism, it will never gain a full perspective on colonialism and how to counter its negative effects ("Introduction" 10).

Linda Hutcheon argues that although the term "postcolonial" is often applied to the writing of European settler-invader societies, it is more appropriate to apply it to the writing of the indigenous peoples of Canada ("Circling" 75). She differentiates between the "various histories of colonialism . . . of the Canadian experience", describing a Canadian colonial culture that "defined itself in terms of values that can today be seen as British, white, middle-class, heterosexual and male" ("Circling" 76-7). There are, indeed, many pitfalls in ascribing the term "post-colonial" to Canadian culture and literature, however the concept is somewhat flexible, and offers a valuable entry-point from which to approach the Canadian context.

It is true that the literature of settler-invader societies such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada occupies something of an ambiguous position in these debates. However, other critics, such as Herb Wylie, agree with Brydon when she argues that

the post-colonial perspective provides us with the language and the political analysis for understanding these differences. The danger is less that Canadians will rush to leap on the victim wagon than that they will refuse to recognize that they may well

have some things in common with colonised people elsewhere
(Brydon, "White" 194)

Wylie states that "postcolonialism is increasingly being recognized as a larger paradigm informed and shaped by considerations of textuality, history, place, culture, and marginality, within which it is possible to talk about specific kinds of post-colonialisms" (153) Withholding from Canada the status of "postcolonial" may in itself be seen as complicit in marginalising the experience of the invader-settler and the immigrant.

Said acknowledges that it is "partly because of empire, [that] all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic" (*Culture* xxxix). This is a point of view that is borne out through close analysis of Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*. In his discussion of "The Location of Culture", Homi Bhabha states that

the very concepts of homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or "organic" ethnic communities – as *the grounds of cultural comparativism* – are in a profound process of redefinition. . . .

there is overwhelming evidence of a more transnational and translational sense of the hybridity of imagined communities. (5).

Previously-held notions of a world mapped by colonialism are being challenged here in Bhabha's work, which reflects the cultural diaspora that is a result of the contemporary move towards internationalism. His reference to "imagined communities" echoes the title of Anderson's influential book of the same name, and opens up the possibility of "nation" and "nationalism" as

being constructed modes of identification – an idea that is examined more closely in chapter two of this dissertation. Bhabha goes on to speak of the way this “radical revision in the concept of human community itself . . . as a local or transnational reality, is being both interrogated and reinitiated” (“Location” 6). Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost* could be said to constitute just such an interrogation.

This impetus towards a multicultural society is one that struggles both for and against containment within the category of “nation” – a struggle that is reflected in this extract from a poem by Raymond Filip, in which he declares:

I am the Canadian Mosaic: a melting pot on ice,
I am always the next generation,
The child with which good immigrant fiction ends,
I am the child grown up, writing in English,
Mother tongue in mind, adopted tongue in cheek,
You were Commonwealth, I am common loss,
Like a citizen of the world, in exile,
Or an overseas package returned to sender,
I am nothing left to be but Canadian.

The second and third chapters of this dissertation pay close attention to the ironic voice, which speaks with the “adopted tongue” of the migrant, in the context of a multicultural identity. The Canadian nation has written multiculturalism into its constitution, but nonetheless the complex cultural background of Canadian writers such as Filip and, of course, Michael Ondaatje, instigates a literature reflective of the cultural clashes that are an inevitable consequence of the interweaving of nationalities, histories and

border divisions. There is a discourse that inscribes a process of dislocation and displacement, which requires interrogation from a new perspective, one that acknowledges the roles played by syncretism and hybridity.

The need for such a perspective has been recognised for many years: at the beginning of the twentieth century, the American intellectual Randolph Bourne wrote a piece entitled "Trans-National America". Charles Molesworth's introduction to Bourne's work in a recent anthology describes his writing as "extremely prescient", and suggests that "it is fair to say that even today the thinking on multiculturalism and its political and social forms has rarely gone beyond Bourne's formulations" (1731). Bourne urges his readers to reject the "melting pot" metaphor, which he says will result in a culture that is "washed out into a tasteless, colorless fluid of uniformity" (1736): he envisages instead a world in which a variety of cultures co-exist, "inextricably mingled, yet not homogeneous. They merge but they do not fuse" (1737). The integration of ethnic identity that gives rise to the notion of syncretism is represented in such concrete examples as: "the indigenous women descendants of the Incas in Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia [who] favor wearing the black British bobby hats instead of their traditional alpaca wool hats" (Goergen 1); statues of angels and saints in the sixteenth-century baroque churches of Mexico that have Indian faces; African gods that are often represented today as Catholic Saints.

Recent postcolonial theorising has begun to explore Bourne's concept of transnationalism as a useful methodology for academic study, particularly with regard to American culture. Paul Giles suggests that "transnationalism" is an effective term "since it implies a mediating conception which acknowledges the hollowing out of national identity while simultaneously

admitting its capacity to shape cultural forms in a spectral way" ("Trans Atlantique" 15). Robert Gross also considers there to be a need for "transnational thinking" (384) in a world where "intellectually, people cross borders as they please" (390) and national identity is no longer seen as single and unified: he describes a global culture that becomes "increasingly a transnational *mélange*" (392).

The very nature of the concept "transnational" is one that defies ascription to any one national culture, thus rendering it applicable not only to American Studies, but also in the context of Michael Ondaatje's work. By employing this "transnational" perspective of postcolonial theory, we can begin to see the colonial mirror held up by Ondaatje to reflect the "deadly conflict between Tamils and Sinhalese" described by Bhabha ("Location" 5) – a representation that reveals this conflict as being reminiscent of imperialist behaviour. This colonial, and indeed postcolonial mirror, also displays something of the influence of acculturation on the construction of identity. *Anil's Ghost* provides a complex postcolonial discourse that foregrounds the cultural hybridity of which Homi Bhabha speaks. Ondaatje explores the effects of cross-cultural contamination with regards to identity, in what can be seen as part of the search for "a new globalism that is neither the old universalism nor the Disney simulacrum" (Brydon, "White" 141).

The reader of *Anil's Ghost* is led towards a revelation of the hidden Imperialist ideology of the "historiography and cartography of the colonial era" (Renger 123), but Ondaatje then subverts this notion in order to highlight the fragmentary nature of history. Stephen Slemon suggests that "the focus on the problem of history is shared by the body of theoretical criticism in post-

colonial cultural studies which argues that people in post-colonial cultures engage in a special dialogue with history". Slemon goes on to say that a clash takes place between the "inherited" concept of imperial history as a small number of major achievements and the view that the unheard and unknown voices of the marginalised form the "true" record of history ("Magic" 15). *Anil's Ghost* presents a perspective of postcolonial discourse that involves the "recuperation of silenced voices as axial to a 'positive imagined reconstruction of reality'" (Slemon, "Reading" 20). In other words, in bringing to the fore the voices of the marginalised this text "re-inscribes" their role in history, but it also inscribes a transnational understanding that interrogates the cultural clash between these various historical narratives and reveals the inadequacy of each of them when taken in isolation.

Ondaatje exposes the desire for facts, for "precisely recorded moments of history" (*Anil* 55) as being part of the Imperial desire for fixity. Imperialism portrays time as a linear concept, a trope of Enlightenment shaped around the progress of humanity from what Anne McClintock calls "slouching deprivation to erect, enlightened reason" (9). The Western notion of history is one of sharing a single common past, which gives rise to a proliferation of terms with prefixes such as "post-" and "pre-" that mark a relational position in chronological time. The mapping of time through historiography is closely related to that of the mapping of space in cartography, and one of the most important functions of colonial cartography was to make visible that which could only be imagined. Zbigniew Bialas suggests that "it is important to bear in mind that the map was not necessary for an explorer – it was necessary *after* completing the journey of exploration" (19). In other words, as

McClintock points out, the map is “a technology of possession, promising that those with the capacity to make such perfect representations must also have the right of territorial control” (28). Ondaatje employs this colonial concept of mapping as a method of appropriation in his interrogation of the cultural interplay between constructions of “Self” and “Other”.

The fictional recreation of the National Atlas of Sri Lanka in *Anil's Ghost* considered from the perspective of the postcolonial, discloses the nature of a document that paradoxically contrives to dislocate national identity whilst at the same time locating its national geographical features. Ondaatje demonstrates that Imperialist cartography has a marginalising effect, and underlines the importance of naming in the process of cultural identity. Furthermore, it is implicit within Ondaatje's text that as Sri Lanka's indigenous culture is erased by the omission of names, there is also the possibility of a process of recuperation through the reinstatement of those names.

J U Jacobs examines the notions of mapping and naming in Michael Ondaatje's work: he points out that “acts of exploration, cognitive appropriation and inscription have never been innocent; they have always been profoundly political” (4). Jacobs goes on to suggest that Ondaatje draws imaginative maps within his work, “not according to the grid of imperialism but in terms of the co-ordinates of a postcolonial reality” (2). Furthermore, the fictional topography of Ondaatje's narrative is one that constructs the “Other” in terms of its incorporation into the hybridity of transnationalism. He maps a world that operates in a state of flux, in which traditional notions of the colonial binary of dominator and dominated are continually challenged, modified and influenced by the experiences which act upon them.

Ondaatje employs notions of mapping in *Anil's Ghost* not only in literal terms, but also in terms of the body through forensic science, and in terms of history through archaeology. He challenges the imperial presentation of cartography as a progression from darkness to enlightenment, and the assumption that there are "clearly marked roads to the source of most mysteries" (*Anil* 54): in doing so he examines the complex interdependence between coloniser and colonised. The "imaginative maps" of *Anil's Ghost* plot a transnational journey, a circuitous route that is unimpeded by either national or cultural boundaries.

The central character of the novel is a Sri Lankan woman, Anil Tissera, whose westernisation, adopted masculine name and role as scientist/spokesperson for the United Nations, renders her the antithesis of Gayatri Spivak's "subaltern woman". From a postcolonial perspective, hers is a voice that not only breaks the silence previously imposed by an imperialist discourse, but also speaks for those silenced by the neo-colonialist ideology that Ondaatje exposes in his examination of the war in Sri Lanka. The language of transnationalism, which Ondaatje speaks through Anil, incorporates the contradictions and paradoxes that are displayed in human – and therefore cultural – diversity.

The complex identity of the character of Anil Tissera is one that incorporates the positions of colonised, coloniser and postcolonial: she is a woman born into an Eastern culture, who is complicit with her own "colonisation" by Western ideologies. Anil's return to Sri Lanka casts her in the role of "coloniser", in her "neo-colonial" attempts to impose Western/scientific notions of "Truth" and "History" upon her work and those she works with.

Tissera embodies both association and disassociation, and encompasses binary oppositions between known and unknown, location and dislocation, past and present, to name but a few. Anil is not only colonised and coloniser, but also concomitantly postcolonial – giving voice to the “subaltern” indigenous woman in a scientific world more often aligned with a white patriarchal hegemony. This interwoven, multicultural, and indeed paradoxical identity leads this dissertation to argue that the character of Anil Tissera can be analysed most effectively in the light of transnationalism.

Ondaatje’s text decentres representations of fixity whilst at the same time foregrounding the gaps that are produced by the colonial encounter in the cultural construction of meaning and truth. He strives for a dialogic mode, which rather than portraying a binary and polarised notion of colonialism, confronts the coercive and static position of the monocultural and examines the possibility of unity in the fragmentation of the multicultural. Dennis Walder suggests that

ideas of cross-fertilization, of the potential richness of traffic between and across boundaries – racial, national or international – can return post-colonial theorizing to a more celebratory, even (to use an old-fashioned word) liberatory mode, as a way simultaneously to acknowledge *while continuing to resist* the oppressions of past *and* present (81).

This dissertation demonstrates that the emergent theory of “transnationalism” fulfils something of this hope for the postcolonial, in that it “captures a world of fluid borders, where goods, ideas, and people flow constantly across once sovereign space” (Gross 378). Giles considers it to be a theory in which it is

not the map that is of importance, but the “process of mapping” which is particularly valuable (“Transnationalism” 9).

The application of the transnational to *Anil's Ghost* is proved here to be a very appropriate approach for the analysis of Michael Ondaatje's examination of identity as a process in itself. The following chapter establishes transnationalism as a key concept for the analysis of the themes of “naming” and “mapping” in *Anil's Ghost*. It focuses on the role of these themes in Ondaatje's exploration of identity as “fluid” and provisional, particularly in terms of the construction of national and individual forms of identification.

Chapter One

In order to examine Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* from a transnational perspective, it is necessary to locate the text within a contemporary critical framework. Ondaatje's work, however, appears inherently resistant to enclosure within boundaries of any sort, be they of form or genre, or indeed history or fiction. To analyse Ondaatje's work in terms of a postcolonial narrative is to become involved in a type of literary cartography – one that attempts to plot the theoretical landscape of his novels in a paradoxically “neo-colonialist” fashion.

It is just such a paradox that lies at the heart of Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*, in that it is predicated on the paradigm of “the returning stranger”. This is a concept that Ondaatje considers “very central to our time” (Powells 2): speaking in an interview with Dave Powells, he explains that it is based on an “image of someone returning to a country they'd once been a part of, now finding themselves a stranger in that place” (1). In his memoir, *Running in the Family*, Michael Ondaatje explores his own complex cultural background from just such a standpoint. Sri Lanka is the land of his birth, thus he feels able to avoid what he terms as “that sense of a foreigner coming in and interpreting the country for other foreigners” (Brown 39). However, after twenty-five years away, his is also the voice of the stranger, encompassing both coloniser and colonised: “I am the foreigner. I am the prodigal who hates the foreigner” (*Running* 79) – as both author and subject of *Running in the Family*, Ondaatje's position reflects this apparent contradiction.

Anil Tissera, the central character of *Anil's Ghost*, occupies a very similar cultural position to that of Michael Ondaatje himself, in relation to Sri Lanka. Hers is a narratorial voice that is simultaneously both insider and outsider, problematising conventional notions of that which is "Other", whilst at the same time exposing cultural conflicts between Eastern and Western ideologies. This is a postcolonial text that confronts several of the determining cultural factors that have engendered it, and as such, it is self-consciously aware of the way in which "self" and "other" are constructed.

Both Arun Mukherjee and Chelva Kanaganayakam criticise Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* for its portrayal of Sri Lanka as an exotic idyll whilst glossing over its history of war and conflict¹. Far from avoiding the horrors of war, *Anil's Ghost* is a novel that is set against a backdrop of the three-sided conflict between the government, the separatist Tamil Tigers and anti-government insurgents during the late 1980s. There is no attempt, however, to analyse the constantly changing situation, to take sides or to offer any solutions: Ondaatje's primary concern is to examine the effect that such conditions have on the way people live their lives. Ondaatje negotiates a difficult political terrain; his novel is censorious of the use of violence, but does not attempt to occupy the moral high ground. Instead he explores the permeable spaces in between, striking a delicate balance that has a transnational perspective, one which involves the "renegotiation and redescription of power" (Giles, *Transnationalism* 6).

As has been pointed out in the introduction to this dissertation, transnationalism was first mooted by Randolph Bourne in an essay published in 1916, entitled "Trans-National America". Bourne was concerned that

acceptance of the metaphor of the “melting pot” would result in a culture devoid of flavour and variety. More recently there has been a growing concern amongst writers with what Giles terms as “the increasingly problematic status of the nation-state”, and with the “tendency of conceptual categories to exceed national boundaries”: at the same time Giles points out that many authors are reluctant to “abandon the signifying capacity of the nation entirely” (Foreword x). Michael Ondaatje is a writer whose personal experience places him in an ideal position to explore this unstable environment, and the emergence of a “transnational theory” provides an ideal approach for the examination of his most recent work.

Ondaatje’s perspective is one from which traditional notions of “Self” and “Other” may be viewed not only in terms of cultural difference, but also as constructed modes of identification. *Anil’s Ghost* sometimes exposes the dichotomy between Eastern and Western cultures, and yet both of these cultures form a dialectic within the novel, or more specifically within the character of Anil Tissera. A postcolonial stance that emphasises the difference between the marginalised colonial subject and the dominant imperial centre of power is inadequate in the examination of this dialectic. This is because Anil embodies both centre and margin, and demonstrates the possibility of identification as being a process of continual development.

Ondaatje explores this process of acculturation as identity through Anil’s negotiation of her own experience of cultural diaspora; and it is true to say that a postcolonial perspective provides a point from which her identification with both Eastern and Western cultures may be seen as part of “a disruptive force counteracting homogenous notions of national identity”

(Schulze-Engler 7). Chris Prentice points out that national identity “projects and reflects identities of race, colour, gender, sexuality, class and so on, founded on its perception of the unitary Self, and the negative but also unified Other” (48). Ondaatje blatantly challenges these perceptions of a unified Self/Other, and erodes the boundaries between them, precipitating what Prentice terms as “moments . . . in which postmodernism may also be recognized as *abject* for post-colonialism” (50): by “*abject*” Prentice is referring to that which disturbs identity, and does not adhere to rules or boundaries.

Hutcheon also refers to the “overlap between the postmodern and the post-colonial” (73), describing it as “a problematic site of interaction” (73). Similarly Simon During, in his article “Postmodernism or Postcolonialism” attempts to establish the relations between the two “posts” – arguing that “post-colonialism is to be viewed . . . as a resistance to postmodernism” (372). This would suggest, however, a relationship in which postcolonialism is permanently situated in the position of “writing back”. Prentice agrees with Hutcheon that this site is problematic, but he suggests that this is because the postmodern threatens the “‘clean and proper’ self of post-colonialism with its excess(iveness)” (50). It is in this area of “overlap”, this interstitial point, that transnational theory proves particularly valuable.

In the character of Anil Tissera, Ondaatje inscribes a cultural formation that could, in many ways, be described as postmodern, in that she transgresses the conventional notions of identity and boundaries of gender and position. However, neither a postmodern, nor a postcolonial perspective or indeed the point of intersection between, is sufficient to encompass the

multivalent integration of ideologies and cultures that form the fluid whole that is Anil Tissera. Hers is, more accurately, a transnational perspective; she does indeed cross and recross many ideological boundaries, but she does so as a migrant returning to her once colonial homeland.

This is not to say that Anil is empty of any national identity at all, but rather that her multiculturalism demonstrates the possibility of a fundamental parity between various nationalist discourses, ascribing multivalency to each of the cultures she encounters. Giles suggests that “transnationalism serves to reveal the parameters of national formations”, as well as their “blindspots” and “limitations” (“Transnationalism” 1): an examination of Ondaatje’s work from a transnational approach uncovers some of the clashes that occur between national cultures, and the ambivalence inherent in a multicultural identity such as that of Anil’s.

The character of Anil Tissera occupies a “dis-located” position, in terms of her name, her nationality and her family; in problematising notions of individual identity, Ondaatje explores the concept of “Self” as something constructed, and yet whole and realisable. In other words, Ondaatje reveals Anil’s transnational nature as being a continually changing mixture of a variety of cultures, which incorporates, encompasses and contains various fragments in one unified being. He examines anxieties about the way in which we construct our own personal identity in terms of name, language and culture. Robert Kroetsch points out that the problem of identity is

not so much that of knowing one’s identity as it is that of how to relate that newly evolving identity to its inherited or ‘given’ names. And the first technique might be simply to hold those

names in suspension, to let the identity speak itself out of a willed namelessness. ("No" 51)

It will become clear in the course of this chapter that, for Ondaatje, it is possible, indeed necessary, to move beyond fixed expressions of identification in order to perceive of identity in terms of a process of construction.

Frank Schulze-Engler speaks of

a veritable maze of globalized spaces in-between – not between the 'West' and 'the rest', however, but between innumerable intertwined histories that – at one stage or another – have all been caught up in modernity and yet have produced a unique reality of their own (13).

Ondaatje's work focuses attention on the complications that arise from just such a multicultural reality, exposing the gaps, but also providing structures of contact and exchange that confront the interwoven nature of an increasingly syncretised and hybridised global community. His voice is one of those involved in re-defining the boundaries, speaking from beyond notions of "the Other" and "writing back" to "the West", and reconfiguring the "postcolonial" perspective into one of "transnationalism". *Anil's Ghost* provides a forum for the expression of a range of cultural identities – one in which the postcolonial voice does not simply speak from the margins, but is represented as an integrated component of a transnational identity.

Kroetsch suggests that "it is possible that the old obsessive notion of identity, of ego, is itself a spent fiction" ("Unhiding" 63), and for Ondaatje this does indeed appear to be so. He calls into question the possibility of a

definitive view of identity or identification, and denies the fixity of identity that is inscribed in the neo-colonial action of naming. As Hall points out, "identity is a process, identity is split. Identity is not a fixed point but an ambivalent point" (16). For Ondaatje identity – either personal or public, individual or national – is always provisional and shifting; his work continually crosses and recrosses the boundaries between real and fictional identification. The characters of *Anil's Ghost* are often placed between these lines of demarcation in liminal zones of namelessness and placelessness, paradoxically becoming situated by their position as "dis-located".

Names and namelessness are central to Ondaatje's problematising of notions of identity. He points out in the acknowledgements section of *Running in the Family* that the use of names "may give an air of authenticity" (206). In other words names are capable of providing verification; they have the power to distinguish, substantiate and confirm, and above all they confer identity and establish identification. To be named, therefore, is to belong, to be located: Rocio Davis comments that "not to know and belong to a family or have a role in history is to be denied the very basis of identity" (267).

Ondaatje confronts this denial of the foundations of identity when he examines the plight of 'the disappeared' through the text of *Anil's Ghost*. Anil feels that by attempting to establish the identity of the skeleton "Sailor" and find the family to whom he belongs, she will be locating all those who Sailor represents: "who was this skeleton? This representative of all those lost voices. To give him a name would name the rest" (56). In this sense to be nameless is, indeed, to be without an identity, a "lost voice" that must be

“called” back into existence. “Sailor” is representative of all who cannot name themselves and who rely on others to locate them, or call them into being.

Ondaatje draws attention to the process of naming as a profoundly political act early on in the text of *Anil's Ghost*. He takes a “partial list of the ‘disappeared’ [which] is drawn from Amnesty International reports” (310) and places it immediately after a reconstruction of a section from *The National Atlas of Sri Lanka*. The implications of Ondaatje’s use of this atlas will be dealt with in a moment, but first it is important to note his deliberate juxtaposing of this “extract” which concludes: “*There are pages of isobars and altitudes. There are no city names There are no river names. No depiction of human life*” (40-1) with the detailed information about the victims of the civil war, including individual names, ages, dates and the hour of disappearance, that follows it. These names and details of individuals were “collected as evidence . . . and sent abroad to strangers in Geneva. Anil picked up reports and opened folders that listed disappearances and killings” (42). This document is the antithesis of the fictive maps from the *National Atlas of Sri Lanka*, and provides a striking contrast that strengthens the nature of the rhetoric. Both of the “extracts” are italicised, foregrounding the link between them, particularly in terms of their apparent facticity and authenticity.

The juxtaposition of the atlas with an excerpt from Amnesty International’s list of “the disappeared” foregrounds the possibility of a connection between them. The Atlas is merely a fictional reconstruction; the list, on the other hand, is a factual document, comprised of real names, actual dates, times and places. These are real people, not merely a figment of the imagination. It is in the slippage between fiction and reality, between the

fictive Atlas and the actual list from Amnesty International, that Ondaatje focuses his reader's attention on the connection between art and life. This association is one of the demands made by historiographic metafiction, and as Kroetsch suggests in *The Lovely Treachery of Words*, "we separate the two fatally" ("Moment" 4).

J. U. Jacobs suggests that naming, like mapping, is an act of "cognitive appropriation" which has "never been innocent" (4), and Ondaatje's juxtapositioning of these forms of representation reflects upon the postcolonial themes of absence and domination that are inscribed within such an act. In her exploration of the implications of colonial map-making in Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, Nicola Renger argues that a map may name "a territory into existence, while simultaneously making the native population invisible" (112). Ondaatje portrays the *National Atlas of Sri Lanka* as revealing the symbolic and mimetic claims of "seventy-three versions of the island" (39), including detailed information about the geology, flora and fauna, but having no reference at all to the indigenous population – either Tamil or Sinhalese – or to any human existence whatsoever.

McClintock expands on the notion of the imperial "desire to name" (28) as being complicit with the dispossession of aboriginal peoples in her discussion of the "myth of the empty land" (30). She says that "since indigenous peoples are not supposed to be spatially there – for the lands are 'empty' – they are symbolically displaced" into what she calls "*anachronistic space*": this is a space in which colonised people exist outside of official history as "anachronistic humans, atavistic, irrational, bereft of human agency – the living embodiment of the archaic 'primitive'" (30). In pointing out the

absence of indigenous city and river names, Ondaatje is exposing the “National Atlas” as a method of spatial control, which is connotative of an imperialist tool of appropriation, in a representation that illustrates the “dislocating” power of the coloniser.

This cartographic discourse mimetically reproduces a Westernised version of the “real world” of Sri Lanka; it provides a catalogue of alluring Eastern riches, devoid of human life and in need of being controlled and contained. However, Ondaatje is careful to point out that this text of territorial fixity is not contemporary, but outdated, established in “*what now seems a medieval time*” (40), a time when Sri Lanka was being constructed as “foreign” exotic and “Other”. The implication is that the documents produced by the Department of Meteorology which compiled its records in the 1930s, were of an era comparable with that of the epigraph Ondaatje uses in his memoir, *Running in the Family*. A fourteenth century friar named Oderic describes his impressions of Sri Lanka thus: “I saw in this island fowls as big as our country geese having two heads . . . and other miraculous things which I will not here write of” (9). The age of Empire is linked implicitly here with an era before the Enlightenment, one steeped in ignorance and myth.

Where once in the past the West had erased Sri Lankan names from the map, *Anil's Ghost* describes how Sri Lankans, in the late twentieth century, are being literally and metaphorically erased by their own people and government. From a transnational aspect, this inversion of roles serves to point out that any demarcation that may be made as to imperialist attitudes being solely of the “West” is purely contingent. Ondaatje describes Geneva and the United States as supporting the human rights of those whose protests

“had never reached even the mid-level of police or government” (42) in Sri Lanka. Thus the perspective is reversed; the boundaries between East and West, between “Self” and “Other” are challenged and breached in the complexities of terrorism and the politics of war.

Some of the implications of naming in relation to identity are foregrounded in Anil’s defiant act of self-naming. Anil was not the name given to her by her parents, but one that she acquired for herself from her brother:

She had been given two entirely inappropriate names and very early began to desire ‘Anil,’ which was her brother’s unused second name. She had tried to buy it from him when she was twelve years old, offering to support him in all family arguments. He would not commit himself to the trade though he knew she wanted the name more than anything else. . . . Finally the siblings worked out a trade between them. . . . After that she allowed no other first names on her passports or school reports or application forms. Later when she recalled her childhood, it was the hunger of not having that name and the joy of getting it that she remembered most. Everything about the name pleased her, its slim, stripped-down quality, its feminine air, even though it was considered a male name. Twenty years later she felt the same about it. She’d hunted down the desired name like a specific lover she had seen and wanted, tempted by nothing else along the way. (67-8)

For Ondaatje, names and identities are not fixed entities, but cultural and ideological constructions. Through 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 became “Anil”. We are not told the name she was known by for the first twelve years of her life. In fact, prior to becoming Anil, she remains un-identified; missing a name, she is akin to the nameless skeleton “Sailor”.

In acquiring her name Anil ruptures the boundary between “Self” and “Other”. She does not merely take on a new mask or disguise, but is recreated, defining herself through the trade with her brother. It is significant that Anil does not choose a name at random; rather she desires one that she already has a relationship with, one that belongs both to her brother and to the grandfather she has never known. Anil’s gesture is not only one that asserts her independence, but it is also a liberating and self-creating action that affirms her identification with her ancestry, and assimilates her origins into her new persona. Furthermore, it demonstrates a syncreticity and hybridity that is involved in the construction of identity, and is revealed through a transnational examination of this exploration of naming.

In the light of previous arguments, Anil’s desire to appropriate the terrain of her own identity through the process of naming may appear to be neo-colonial in nature. However, from a transnational perspective Ondaatje constructs Anil’s personal identity as one that defines the individual in terms of a “state” of “self-hood”; thus the private persona stands as a figurative representation of nation, and as such individual identity is subject to the effects of transnationalism.²

In the struggle to gain her chosen identity, Anil trades that which she possesses, confirming that there is a price in the liberation from “other” into

“self-hood”. However, this deal is negotiated and agreed by both parties; her brother gains “one hundred saved rupees, a pen set he had been eyeing for some time, a tin of fifty Gold Leaf cigarettes she had found, and a sexual favour he had demanded in the last hours of the impasse” (68). It is clear from this quotation that this exploration of identity through the acquisition of a name has other complex elements of transgression; for example, there are indications of incest, and the challenging of constructions of gender. Anil, after all, “was considered a male name” (68) and perhaps reflects a “masculine” side to her identity that is revealed further in her choice of a career as a forensic scientist, one that is also seen as predominantly masculine.

McClintock suggests that in imperial terms naming is a “male prerogative” (26), and that in colonial discourse “the world is feminized and spatially spread for male exploration . . . explorers called unknown lands ‘virgin’ territory.” (23-24): she points out that by “naming ‘new’ lands, male imperials mark them as their own” (29). As such, Ondaatje blurs the boundaries of gender in his construction of the character of Anil Tissera; by naming herself, she claims the territory of her identity, her own “state” of self-hood, in what can be construed as not only a neo-colonial, but also a gendered, masculine, action.

Later in the novel, Ondaatje foregrounds this masculinity even further:

Anil’s name – the one she’d bought from her brother at the age of thirteen – had another stage to go through before it settled.

By the time Anil was sixteen, she was taut and furious within the family. Her parents brought her to an astrologer in Wellawatta in an attempt to mollify these aspects of her nature. The man . . .

not realizing the involved commerce behind it, said the problem resided in her name. Her tempestuousness could be harnessed with a name change. . . . families waited in the hall hoping to overhear. . . . What they heard were loud insistent refusals from the girl. The astrologer-soothsayer had eventually compromised his solution down to a simple appendage – the addition of an *e*, so she would be *Anile*. It would make her name more feminine, the *e* would allow the fury to curve away. But she refused even this (136).

Here Anil's determined refusal to feminise her name in any way emphasises the importance of its "maleness". By transgressing gender boundaries, Ondaatje confirms Anil's refusal to accept ascription to any fixed traditional gender roles in the construction of her identity. Spivak argues that

both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow ("Can" 287).

Anil abjures the position of Spivak's gendered subaltern, through her rejection of an imposed cultural identity and the traditional role of the colonial female. Instead she claims a syncretic gender construction that assumes both male and female traits, and is transnational in nature, in that her individual "state" includes characteristics from areas that are traditionally constructed as *either* masculine *or* feminine. Thus, the notion of Anil's gendered self is one that is multiple, contradictory and fragmented in nature.

In her work, Anil makes it a point to “distinguish female and male traits as clearly as possible” (137); she loves “being one of the boys” (147) and yet also appreciates that being a woman makes her “better at dealing with calamity in professional work than men” (137). In terms of gender, Ondaatje bestows on Anil “the peculiar freedoms of ambiguity rather than the fixity of one identity” (McClintock 174). This is reflected in the fact that, in the business deal to secure the purchase of her name, Anil’s behaviour is predominantly stereotypically masculine, and yet part of the price she pays is a “sexual favour” that her brother demands. This act of prostitution on Anil’s part 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 (her desired name), Anil gains a measure of economic power and independence.

As was mentioned earlier, Ondaatje posits here the possibility of an incestuous relationship between brother and sister which may be usefully examined in the light of transnationalism. In order to do this, it is necessary to first consider the relationship between nation and gender. McClintock points out that the etymology of the word “nation” reveals it as stemming from *natio* to be born, and that discussion regarding nations frequently centres on the semantic field of the familial and the domestic. She describes how we often refer to our “homeland” and speak of nations in terms of “motherlands” or “fatherlands”, we say that foreigners “adopt” a new country and in Britain, matters to do with immigration are dealt with by the “Home Office” (357).

Paul Gilroy discusses how “gender differences” are “extremely important in nation-building”; in fact he says, “it can be a nation only if the

correct version of gender hierarchy has been established" (127). Anil can be seen to have adopted both male and female traits and, therefore, in her construction of a transnational identity, to incorporate the possibilities of both "motherland" and "fatherland" and their colonial offspring. Taking the trope of nation as familial and gendered one step further, Gilroy examines the relationship between "diaspora" and "masculinism", and points out that there is a "close etymological relationship between the word diaspora and the word sperm" (126). However, he also states that the alternative "family term" for diaspora is the word "spore" which allows for an "asexual" method of reproduction, and he confirms that "diaspora can be used to conjure up both" (127).

In the gendered "family" of nation, then, the reproductive possibilities of diaspora may be seen to inseminate nation with nation to produce a hybridised cultural identity; or to reproduce asexually, through a process of fission from the originating culture, which results in the syncretism that is an essential part of transnationalism. The incestuous act between Anil and her brother may therefore be seen in the light of the conception of a new transnational identity, one that is not prohibited from inter-relationship by any barrier or taboo.

Gayle Rubin argues that according to the work of Lévi-Strauss, the prohibition of incest ensures that sisters, daughters and mothers must be given in marriage, and thus creates a "wide network of relations" (173), a group of people who are connected together by a "kinship structure" (174): moreover as a result, "the incest taboo and the results of its application constitute the origin of culture, and is a prerequisite of culture" (176).

Therefore she concludes that in order to succeed, “the feminist program must include a task even more onerous than the extermination of men; it must attempt to get rid of culture and substitute some entirely new phenomena on the face of the earth” (176).

As Rubin concedes herself, it is neither probable nor feasible that there will be an eradication of culture (or indeed of either men or women); however, Ondaatje demonstrates the possibility of – if not removing – at least transcending or breaching the divisions and boundaries between cultures. He does this by establishing the notion of identity as a process that involves continual cultural syncretism and hybridity, and by substituting the outmoded idea of a fixed cultural identity with the emerging concept of one that is truly transnational. The cultural anthropologist, David Schneider, in his book *American Kinship*, argues that in American culture, any sexual act outside of the “husband-wife relationship”, is defined as “morally, and in some cases, legally, wrong”; he states that “between blood relatives”, such an act is “incest and prohibited” (38). Although this argument relates specifically to “Western” American, culture, it is applicable here in that Anil’s transnational identity incorporates her complicity with the West. By making an incestuous act a prerequisite for the purchase of Anil’s name, Ondaatje indicates that the origination of her transnationalism is the breaking of a taboo; to become transnational involves the transgression of the boundaries that differentiate between us and them, insider and outsider, national and international.

Ramón Gutiérrez suggests that to have American nationality one must either be “born into the nation (the order of nature)” or enter it “through a legal process (the order of law) and become citizens through a process we call

'naturalisation'; he confirms that "nature and law thus create citizens" (255). Ondaatje demonstrates that a transnational identity, such as that of Anil Tissera's, is not created through either "nature" or "law", but comes into being outside of the accepted order that is required for belonging to a single nationality. In order to gain transnational "citizenship", Anil moves beyond the traditional modes of national identification.

As a "transnational" Anil provides a figurative representation of the feminised nature of the land as an object of desire, the "earth mother"; and in taking possession of a male name she also subsumes something of the patriarchal role: "she'd hunted down the desired name like a specific lover she had seen and wanted, tempted by nothing else along the way" (68). In his most recent book of poetry *Handwriting*, Ondaatje describes "the way someone's name holds terraces of character, contains all of our adventures together" (55). Anil's name, her demand to define herself within and through that name, to name herself, reflects this poetic representation; viewed from a transnational notion of syncretism, her name "holds" her character. In this context it is significant that Anil has a fascination with names: her favourite rock star is "The Artist Formerly Known As. . ." (37), a celebrity who replaced his name with a symbol; and her questioning of her lover, Cullis, reveals that his middle name is Biggles, "as in *Biggles Flies East* and *Biggles Wets His Bed?*" (37).

These two book titles, one genuine and one obviously fictitious, may be seen as indicative of some of Cullis' characteristics; the true title, *Biggles Flies East*, alludes to Cullis' involvement with Anil, while the invented one not only connotes him as being false and untruthful in nature, but also evokes a sense

of childishness and insecurity. Here Ondaatje's problematising of identity through naming takes on a playful irony in terms of a postcolonial, or more particularly a transnational perspective. "Anil had courted foreignness" (54) both literally and figuratively in her affair with Cullis Biggles Wright, named (as Anil points out) after the central protagonist "Biggles", from the series of books by Captain W.E. Johns. These are boys' adventure stories which were very popular in the early part of the twentieth century.

Cullis' namesake "Biggles" is a stereotypical representation of an English pilot and hero who fights for his country in the First World War: Anil's association with Cullis therefore represents her ambivalent relationship with the West, in that she conducts a relationship with him and appreciates some of his qualities, but at the same time she refuses to be controlled or contained by him. Ironically it is Anil who constructs her own identity in the rejection of her original name and the appropriation of her new one; Cullis, on the other hand, accepts the identity given to him by his parents – he is named Biggles as his "dad grew up on his books" (37). Ondaatje's reversal of the roles of coloniser and colonised is one that demonstrates the way in which power and control are no longer necessarily negotiated in line with traditional hierarchies and systems of authority.

Anil and Cullis can be seen, therefore, to form a relationship that spans the cultural delineation between East and West, one that bears further analysis in the light of transnationalism. It is not surprising that Cullis, having been brought up on stories of the British Empire, should embody several traits that could be considered stereotypically British. For example, he remembers

times when she tried to strip off his carefulness, tried to unbuckle his worried glance. Making him dance on one of the dark streets of Europe to a small cassette player she pressed against his ear. . . . Watching her torso through the car door as she yelped and pounded on the roof. He felt he had been encased in ice or metal and she was banging on its surface in order to reach him, in order to let him out. The energy of her swirling clothes, the wild grin as she entered the car again and kissed him –she could have broken him free. But as a married man he had already pawned his heart (263-4).

In this extract Cullis exhibits what is often termed as “British reserve”, the remains of a cultural code of conduct that was common in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and encouraged self-conscious, “civilised”, self-restrained and inhibited behaviour.

Whilst Cullis is constrained by his cultural background, Anil is portrayed here as exotic and passionate; her Sri Lankan culture allows her to be energetic and spontaneous. She describes this aspect of herself and her compatriots thus:

We are full of anarchy. We take our clothes off because we shouldn't take our clothes off. . . . if I meet a Sri Lankan elsewhere in the world and we have a free afternoon, it doesn't necessarily happen, but each of us knows all hell could break loose (138).

Ondaatje empowers Anil through a transnational identity that encompasses both Western order and Eastern disorder; her Western proclivity towards

naming and appropriation, and Eastern passion and impulsiveness leave her free to plunder Cullis both physically and emotionally. Cullis' lack of freedom is implied in the "carefulness" and worry that he wears as protective "clothing", and which Anil attempts to "strip off" and "unbuckle". The car in which he sits and his marriage, stand as metaphors for the constraints imposed on Cullis by a fixed cultural identity, boundaries that Anil's transnationalism has no difficulty in transgressing.

In the self-construction of her identity, Anil is complicit, then, in allowing herself to be "colonised" by Western culture. However, in exploring the effect of acculturation on individual identity, Ondaatje exposes some of the dichotomies between Eastern and Western cultures in the conflicts that Anil experiences. Anil's brief, unsuccessful marriage to a Sri Lankan whilst studying in England is a significant episode in this context. Her husband is a controlling and jealous character: "at first this presented itself as sexual jealousy, then she saw it as an attempt to limit her research and studies. It was the first handcuff of marriage, and it almost buried her" (144).

A parallel can be drawn here between Anil's marriage and that of her lover Cullis. Both are bound by their marriages – albeit in different ways – for "as a married man" Cullis confesses "he had already pawned his heart" (264); although he transgresses the boundaries of faithfulness in his marriage, he remains confined within "his fucked-up life, his clenched fears" (265). Cullis appears unable or unwilling to accept "the love and comfort he was scared to take" (265) from Anil and stays with his wife; Anil, on the other hand, refuses to comply with the restrictions that her husband attempts to impose and so ends her marriage.

From a transnational perspective, both of these marriages can be seen as representative of ties to the characters' respective cultures. Anil's husband provides a metaphor for the Eastern culture that she feels is attempting to prevent her becoming Westernised. Anil leaves him very early in the relationship, making sure that he cannot locate her, an action that adumbrates her temporary disavowal of her Sri Lankan cultural heritage. Hutcheon suggests that for the immigrant who has left behind a strong cultural tradition "the drive towards self-definition within a new culture may well involve separation from this ethnic past, at least temporarily" (*Splitting* 51). This is certainly true of Anil, who after escaping her husband "turned fully to the place she found herself in" (145), refusing to speak Sinhala, and immersing herself completely in her work. Later, when questioned by Cullis about her background, she gives him no details, merely replying "I live here In the West" (36).

Anil's treatment of her marriage "as something illicit that deeply embarrassed her" (144) is paralleled in her subjugation of her Eastern cultural identity in favour of the West. However, Ondaatje highlights acculturation as being an evolutionary process, rather than a product, in Anil's subsequent return to Sri Lanka. It is notable that Anil's husband remains nameless throughout the narrative and after the marriage is over Anil "would never say his name out loud" (144). By refusing to name her husband, Anil erases him from the cartography of her life in an action reminiscent of the imperial map-makers referred to earlier in this chapter. This contrasts strongly with Anil's desire to name the skeleton of the Sri Lankan victim that she calls "Sailor". Thus in the action of naming, in Anil's appropriation of imperial methods of

control, Ondaatje demonstrates the construction of a transnational identity as being one of process and fluidity.

This chapter has examined the way in which Michael Ondaatje problematises notions of either individual or national identity as fixed and immutable, adopting instead a perspective that considers such boundaries as both flexible and permeable. It is possible to conclude that Ondaatje offers a tri-phasic model of the process of acculturation, examined through the construction of Anil Tissera's personal and cultural identity. Anil is initially dependent upon the cultural and individual identity given to her by her parents; however, she moves into an independent phase signalled by her desire for another name and her adoption of a different culture. Finally, Anil moves into the third phase of interdependency, when she returns to Sri Lanka developing a multicultural perspective that is transnational rather than global or universal in its construction.

In their introduction to *Transatlantic Studies*, Will Kaufman and Heidi Macpherson suggest that there is an "inexorable drive towards interdependent and more global perspectives in criticism and education" (xix): it is this interdependency that is at the heart of transnational theory. The examination of "naming" in Ondaatje's work in the light of a transnational perspective has proved elucidatory, in that such a viewpoint has served to highlight the interwoven strands which construct the fabric of a multicultural identity. Ondaatje's representation is one that explores a site of interaction that is concomitant with transnationalism, in which no one national identity takes precedence over another, but several aspects work interdependently with,

through and of each other; an osmotic process that reflects the fluidity of identity.

This chapter has shown how Ondaatje examines the role of naming and namelessness in the construction of an interdependent and transnational identity. Transnationalism employs the tools of syncretism and hybridity to reconceptualise notions of national identity, to disturb structures of power and to assert the difference of meaning. The exploration of naming is fundamental in understanding *Anil's Ghost* from a perspective that has moved on from a postcolonial stance to a transnational dynamic: a perspective foreshadowed in the colonial story of Anansi, the he/she black spider god of the Ashanti, who visited the British coloniser Jeffrey Amherst.

Anansi, according to the story, dressed in British clothes, put on a beautiful white hat, moved with perfect English manners, and spoke in perfect British English. "Jeffrey Amherst, asked Anansi, who are you, and who am I?" "I am the one, said Jeffrey Amherst, looking at the he/she black spider, dressed in English clothes. I am the one with the power to name you, multiplicity. I am the one with the power to tolerate your double nature, without ever having to accept you, and I will always name you, multiplicity." "Thank you, said Anansi, I will tell my people what they must learn, what you must also learn Jeffrey Amherst, I am, said Anansi, I am the many who will live as One. You are the one, who will perish within the many" (Salkey 12).

Ondaatje demonstrates a re-inscription of the power to name, that draws on this singular, postcolonial figure of Anansi – "the many who live as One" –

through the trope of Anil's transnational identity: an individual and fluid identity that thrives by encompassing cultural multiplicity. The power to name is most obviously conferred through language, and the next chapter of this dissertation will go on to examine the significance of a transnationalist approach to Ondaatje's exploration of the role of language in the formation of both national and private identity.

Chapter Two

This chapter considers the way in which a transnational perspective serves to elucidate Ondaatje's exploration of language in terms of the problematising of notions of national and individual identity in *Anil's Ghost*. It demonstrates that Ondaatje's novel exposes the difficulties and possibilities inherent in expressing, through language, what Giles terms as the "fundamentally equivalent discourses of race, gender and ethnicity" ("Transnationalism" 6). There emerges a transnational understanding of language that crosses the divisions of nationalism and exceeds postcolonial notions of "writing back".

In order to discern the way in which Ondaatje configures transnationalism through language it is necessary, first of all, to consider the relationship between language and nation. In the chapter entitled "Old Languages, New Models" of his influential book *Imagined Communities*, Anderson examines the historical development of "vernacular languages-of-state" and the effects of "print-language" and literacy; he points to these factors as being "central" to the "shaping" of "nationalisms" (71). Anderson suggests that "as literacy increased, it became easier to arouse popular support, with the masses discovering a new glory in the print elevation of languages they had humbly spoken all along" (80). There is a profound connection, then, between language and national identity – a link that, in the past, served to reinforce the borders and boundaries that separate nations.

The transnationalist identity, as determined by Ondaatje, refuses to be contained within these borders and frequently transgresses any such lines of demarcation, whereas the postcolonial voice seeks either to subvert or

destroy these borders, or indeed to construct boundaries of their own. The introduction of *The Empire Writes Back* suggests that “one of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language” (Ashcroft, et al 7). The authors point out that the adoption of a “standard” version of the “metropolitan language” by an imperial system of education can be seen to render any “variants” unimportant and insignificant (7). In this imperialist model, language becomes a means by which power is sustained, and cultural ideologies, such as notions of “reality” and “truth”, are established and confirmed. It is this domination that the postcolonial voice rejects, by the subversion and transformation of language into a range of distinctive linguistic variations. Ondaatje’s transnational approach to language is not concerned with either standard or variant usage, but with establishing an holistic means of communication that encompasses difference.

It is in this context of language as part of the processes of imperialism and colonisation that Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin propose a distinction between English with a capital “E”, as representative of “the ‘standard’ British English inherited from the empire” and the “linguistic code, english”, without a capital letter, “which has been transformed and subverted into several distinctive varieties throughout the world” (*The Empire* 8). Walder concludes that “whatever English now represents, or has represented over centuries of colonization, it belongs to everyone. It is a global language, the first of its kind” (44).

Whilst Ondaatje acknowledges English as a useful means of communication within a global context in *Anil’s Ghost*, he does not elevate it above and beyond any other language, but integrates it as part of a diverse

and transnational whole. In the novel he describes Sri Lankan doctors working in the operating theatre of the base hospital. They are allowed to listen to the test match on the radio which has the “cricket commentary alternating between Sinhala and English When the commentator switched to English there had to be an instant translation into Sinhala by Rohan, the anaesthetist” (228). Ondaatje invokes cricket as a game once symbolic of imperial power that has been absorbed into the society of postcolonial Sri Lanka, to provide an emblem of transnationalism which is underpinned by the concomitant use of the dominant languages of both cultures.

It is significant, however, that the “most bilingual of the staff” is Rohan, the anaesthetist, whose skills of translation were gained through his exposure to “global” English in the form of the “small-type texts that came with tanks of oxygen” (228). It is evident that Ondaatje recognises the complex postcolonial concerns regarding English as a hegemonic language, and understands the possible dangers of its influence. At the same time he provides a transnational discourse throughout the narrative of *Anil's Ghost*, which serves to highlight the difficulties engendered by such a potentially dominant language – but does not attempt to “disentangle the threads of the strands” (Bourne 1742).

There are those such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the East African novelist, who, having written with great creativity in English, decide to return to their own language, because they feel that in accepting English as their “global” language they are also accepting its values (Walder 44). Thiong'o states that:

language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we

come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. . . .

Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings. . . . (290)

For Thiong'o individual and national identity are inextricably linked with language, and as such his rejection of English represents a postcolonial refusal to submit to the political dominance and "globalisation" that its use implies.

There are other postcolonial writers, however, such as Chinua Achebe, who regard the appropriation of the English language as an essentially subversive strategy in itself: Achebe writes in what Ashcroft et al term as "the linguistic code, english" (*The Empire* 8). In their introduction to the section on language in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, Ashcroft et al expand on the way in which the "alien language", English, is adapted to "the exigencies of a mother grammar, syntax, vocabulary and . . . the speaking voice" of the postcolonial writer (284). It is clear that the debates regarding postcolonial literatures and the forms of "English" that they adopt, or indeed reject, are complex and varied.

Ondaatje's use of the English language moves beyond that of the global, interpreted here as a "standard" version of English employed in world-wide communication, and of a universal notion of English as a language that is adaptable to a variety of needs including the pidgins and creoles of various nation-states. Ondaatje is a Canadian citizen, and a descendant of Dutch Burghers, and therefore could be said to have a perspective of English as the "imperial" language that is ambivalent at the very least. The language Ondaatje uses in the narrative of *Anil's Ghost* is transnational in nature, as

opposed to either global or universal, and reflects a syncretism and hybridity that could be seen as representative of his own “trans-national” identity.

Although written principally in English, the novel is interwoven with words and phrases from several languages, including French, Spanish, Tamil and Sinhalese. All of these languages form part of the text in a manner that is neither obtrusive nor onerous for the reader; rather the richness of the semantic field articulates the complexity of a multi-lingual and multicultural identity in its transcendence of the barriers posed by language and culture. In this respect Ondaatje’s work constitutes what Bourne envisages as “an enterprise of integration” (1743).

It may prove useful at this point to examine the way in which Ondaatje acknowledges the power of language, and of English in particular, in an earlier work – *Running in the Family*, he uses the following extract from the *Ceylon Sunday Times* as an epigraph: “The Americans were able to put a man on the moon because they knew English. The Sinhalese and Tamils whose knowledge of English was poor, thought that the earth was flat” (9). This quotation equates knowledge of the English language with technological advancement: it connotes English as an enabling and dominant discourse that provides the means for figurative and literal detachment from those who are uneducated.

Igor Maver suggests that in his use of this extract, Ondaatje is expressing “his indebtedness to the English language as a *lingua franca* . . . which made the literary search for his roots possible and also expressible” (62). This may well be the case, but there is also the possibility that in drawing attention to the dominant role of the English language in terms of

global technological advancement, Ondaatje is problematising notions of a universalist attitude to language: pointing out the irony of a world that applauds advances and achievements through global communications whilst ignoring the rich diversity of the individual and the particular. Such an attitude can be seen as part of an imperial desire to promote its ideology as objective and vital, and to disparage local concerns as insignificant.

However, Giles has perceived that the dialectic between the local and the global, “between the insular and the transnational” (“Virtual” 543) is gaining emphasis. Transnationalism itself has something of an ironic voice, an inherent doubleness that is coterminous with Ondaatje’s perspective here: as Giles explains, transnationalism “acknowledges the hollowing out of national identity while simultaneously admitting its capacity to shape cultural forms in a spectral way” (“Trans-Atlantique” 15). In other words, there is a certain irony in the notion that in seeking out points of convergence or indeed transcendence of boundaries – that which is common to *all* nations good or bad – transnationalism also reveals that which is distinct, different and individual, paradoxically finding unity in fragmentation, location in dislocation, and wholeness in fluidity and “process”.

The transnational effect of the interface between the local and the global is demonstrated in the reflections of Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) the Bengali writer and Nobel Prize-winner, who was able to say that “our direct contact with the larger world was linked up with the contemporary history of the English people. . . . It was mainly through their mighty literature that we formed our ideas”; it “nourished our minds in the past” and continues “even now to convey its deep resonance to the recesses of our heart” (qtd. in

Walder 92). In the foreword to *Kanthapura*, one of the first influential novels in English by an Indian writer, Raja Rao, the author observes: "We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us" (296).

Although not Indian, Ondaatje was born and brought up in Sri Lanka and shares a similar national literary history. This history is echoed in *Anil's Ghost*, when he describes the single bookshelf in the rest house where Anil is staying: "Agatha Christie. P.G. Wodehouse. Enid Blyton. John Masters. The usual suspects in any Asian library. She had read most of them as a child or as a teenager" (58). Ondaatje has carefully crafted this list of writers to represent a particular type of "Englishness". Each of these prolific authors produced immensely popular work in the early part of the twentieth century, and all of their fiction could be described as portraying an ideology and culture that is quintessentially English in terms of the discourse of British Imperialism.

Blyton's "golliwogs", and Christie's *Ten Little Niggers* are considered racist by today's standards, and Wodehouse's characters, such as Jeeves, the resourceful valet, and Wooster, his dim-witted employer, embody the social and class discourse of a bygone era. John Masters, born in Calcutta in 1914, was the fifth generation of his family to serve with the British army in India, and many of his novels deal with the lives of the British, and in particular the military, in India. Ondaatje creates an "Asian library" that reflects the imperialist sentiments of Thomas Babington Macaulay, who stated that "a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India" (242). He strove for the creation of "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect"

(249). Ondaatje's fictional library reflects the lineaments of colonialism – there is no mention at all of any writer indigenous to Sri Lanka, or indeed to Asia.

The word “author” itself has implications of authorisation, of having control and power, and Ondaatje's construction of an English literary canon, in a Sri Lankan rest house, foregrounds the way in which “education in English under British colonial rule came to be an effective form of control and containment” that encouraged “cultural assimilation” (Walder 91). These authors are described by Ondaatje as “suspects”, and as such they may be found guilty of promulgating the Western paradigm, which has resulted – with the complicity of the colonised – in their assimilation into the Asian culture, so far as to constitute a normative requirement for the average household's collection of books. In this mimetic representation of Southern Asia's literary history, Ondaatje discloses the remnants of an imperial ideology that once attempted to enforce the Anglicisation of the indigenous population: he then subverts its inscription, describing this typically “English literature” as having become part of “any Asian library”, in a representation that conveys the displacement of national frontiers into a new and transnational cultural arena.

The transnational perspective, then, is concomitantly that of the “insider” and the “outsider”, and can usefully be linked with certain forms of praxis in the examination of Ondaatje's construction of personal and national identity through language. For example, Ondaatje employs the duality of the ironic voice that reflects the inherent doubleness of the transnational identity, as can be seen in his demonstration of the way in which language acts as both a means of communication and of isolation for Anil in her role as “the returning stranger”³.

On the first weekend of Anil's return to her homeland she goes to see Lalitha, her "ayah", "the only person who taught her real things as a child" (24). The reunion is one of great pathos, demonstrating Anil's struggle to reconnect with her childhood identity. In her endeavour to bridge the divide, Anil "steps forward to embrace her" (22) and in response Lalitha weeps and touches Anil's hair: but there is "a lost language between them", and they sit in silence holding hands, with Anil "feeling an ache in herself" (22); thus Ondaatje implies a sense of separation that is attributable to a lack of verbal communication. This sense of Anil's isolation is deepened by Ondaatje's juxtaposing of Lalitha's relationship with her granddaughter who is looking after her:

The granddaughter talked in Tamil to Lalitha. Anil could understand only a few words when it was spoken, relying mostly on the manner of speech to understand what they were saying. She'd once said something to a stranger who had met her sentence with a blank stare, and had then been told that because of her lack of tone the listener didn't understand the remark. He could not tell if it was a question, a statement or a command. (23)

This extract demonstrates the ongoing dialectic that is central to Anil's transnational identity. She has returned to visit a person and place that represent an early and fundamental part of her cultural identity, yet she is isolated from the experience through her lack of language. Anil's attempt to speak in Tamil to a stranger fails because although she knows the words, she does not have the necessary intonation to make herself understood.

Language here is connotative of both the known and the unknown, of a split in the identity of the self, and a means for both belonging and separation.

A useful comparison regarding this transnational doubleness of identity as demonstrated through language, can be drawn with an episode in Ondaatje's memoir *Running in the Family*. He relates a story about a song that his father, Mervyn Ondaatje, used to sing when he was drunk:

He had made it up and he sang it only when he was really drunk. Partly English and partly Sinhalese, a bit like a *baila* as it used brand names and street names and gibberish. It made no sense to anyone but it wasn't gibberish to him because he always sang exactly the same words each time. (194-5)

Meaning is challenged here – after all, the song only makes sense to the singer and no-one else – just as Anil's version of Tamil made sense only to herself. As Smaro Kamboureli points out, "the father's claim to be a pure Tamil is recanted by the mixed language of his song" (89). Adopting a transnational perspective reveals the ambivalence in language that inscribes the division between signifier and signified, between *langue* and *parole*, and in Anil's case between "Self" and "Other". Transnationalism serves to highlight the interwoven strands and complexities that are part of the construction of an identity such as Anil's, from their points of convergence and divergence.

It is just such an intersection that occurs in a further dimension to the cultural conflict present in the encounter between Anil, Lalitha and the granddaughter: it is important to note that Tamil is one of three languages spoken in Sri Lanka, the others being English and Sinhala. During the conversation between the three women it is made clear that "Lalitha seemed

embarrassed to be talking in Tamil and was whispering” (23). Anil’s only possible form of communication with Lalitha would be through the Sinhalese language, but the granddaughter speaks deliberately “loudly” in Tamil and then translates her grandmother’s words into English, refusing Anil access to the conversation, and casting her in the role of the foreign “Other”, the stranger. As a child Anil had spoken mainly in Sinhala to Lalitha, finally abandoning the language altogether shortly after moving to England:

Her last conversation in Sinhala was the distressed chat she’d had with Lalitha that ended with her crying She no longer spoke Sinhala to anyone. She turned fully to the place she found herself in She was now alongside the language of science.

(145)

Thus the granddaughter clashes with Anil culturally on two fronts, “othering” her in terms of the three-sided internal conflict over national identity in Sri Lanka, and the stereotypical imperialist conflict between East and West. Anil, however, is placed “alongside” another language, that of science, a position that, as will be argued later in this dissertation, enables her to transgress the boundaries and incorporate yet another “transnational turn” (Gross 388).

When Lalitha’s granddaughter learns that Anil’s parents are dead and her brother has left, she accuses her of no longer having “any connection” to Sri Lanka (23-4); Anil, however, refuses this alterity, pointing out that Lalitha “was the one who brought me up” (24). For Anil, her cultural identity as an adult is inextricably interwoven with her Sri Lankan upbringing. Anil no longer has any familial connection to, or physical links with her Sri Lankan culture, even to the point of having refused – and indeed being refused –

communication. The figure of Lalitha, therefore, stands as a metaphor for the living link that is the dialectic between Anil's largely Westernised "Self" and her Sri Lankan "Other". Ondaatje appears to be positing Anil in neo-colonial terms, in her abandonment of the Sinhalese language in favour of the Western "language of science"; however, when questioned, she confesses that she still speaks "a little" Sinhala (9). Hers is a complex identity, which defies labelling from the perspective of the colonial or neo-colonial "Self", nor can it simply be interpreted as a postcolonial response to "Otherness"; rather the character of Anil Tissera defines identity as a culturally syncretic and hybridised construction in that it gives of itself, receives of others, and fuses with yet others to produce a unique, complete, yet fluid whole.

In other words Ondaatje is pointing out that it is possible for the construction of cultural identity to be an on-going process; not simply a process of Westernisation, or of postcoloniality, but one that is "transnationalist" in nature. He presents an identity gradually emptying of individual national identities, and yet incorporating of the intertwining discourses of national histories that shape each other, and combine to form an organic whole. If, as Anderson suggests, language has the "capacity for generating" nationalisms, or as he terms them "imagined communities" (133), then Anil's rejection of the Sinhalese language and subsequent cognisance of its personal cultural value for her own identity, is very pertinent to the notion of "transnationalism".

It is significant that in the process of acculturation, Anil turns to "the language of science" (145) as her lingua franca, a language that – whilst constituting a specialised jargon – is potentially unlimited by any single nation

or culture. The forensic anthropologists with whom Anil works in the West are from a variety of places including Europe, Central America and Canada: an international group of people whose common language is “the rhetoric of death over the intercom” (147). Anil boasts that she knows “the name of several bones in Spanish” (34) which she has learnt from one of her colleagues, thus connoting a syncretism in her chosen “language of science” that appears pertinent to the construction of a “transnationalist” identity.

However, as M. Annette Jaimes Guerrero points out in her essay “Academic Apartheid”, it is “Western philosophy that permeate[s] most academic disciplines and define[s] our conventional notions of truth” (57). The language of science is one that is often presumed to be universal, and yet has an arguably Eurocentric ethos – one which is not necessarily compatible with the Sri Lankan methodology that Anil is required to work with, for as Guerrero goes on to say, “*not all people ‘know’ the same way*” (sic 58).

Ondaatje confronts this cultural clash between Eastern and Western philosophies in his construction of the character of Anil Tissera. Anil is educated in Europe and North America; Ondaatje describes her as having “felt completed abroad. . . . And she had come to expect clearly marked roads to the source of most mysteries” (54). She is depicted as having become complicit with the colonial theme of mapping as an imperial method of control, applied here in conceptual rather than physical, temporal or spatial terms⁴. In the conclusion to chapter one of this dissertation, it was suggested that Ondaatje employs a tri-phasic model of acculturation, and it is in the second, “independent”, phase of this process that Anil chooses science as her language – a language that could be said to be predicated on Western

imperial thought. Thus Anil becomes a stranger to the Sri Lankan culture of her childhood. Her expectations are those of a Westerner, in that for Anil “information could always be clarified and acted upon”; however, this is a statement that she finds does not hold true in Sri Lanka: “here, on this island, she realised she was moving with only one arm of language” (54).

Anil finds that her attempts at communication are rendered problematic, in that there is a lack of understanding with regard to ideological differences between Eastern and Western cultures – differences that are predicated on a contrasting cognisance of meaning. This is demonstrated in the ambivalence about perceptions of truth in Sri Lanka, an indication of which is seen in Anil’s first meeting with the character Sarath Diyasena:

‘Right. Right,’ he said in a drawl she would become familiar with, a precise and time-stalling mannerism in him. It was like the Asian Nod, which included in its almost circular movement the possibility of a no. Sarath Diyasena’s ‘Right,’ spoken twice, was an official and hesitant agreement for courtesy’s sake but included the suggestion that things were on hold. (17)

While for Anil, “the journey was in getting to the truth” (156), Sarath’s concern is, “what would the truth bring them into?” (156). He sees the truth as “a flame against a sleeping lake of petrol”, potentially dangerous and open to misuse. Ondaatje juxtaposes Anil’s desire to identify the skeleton of “Sailor” through the language of science, with Sarath’s equivocal belief in “truth as a principle” (157). Sarath goes on to explain that “he would have given his life for the truth if the truth were of any use” (157).

When Anil's scientific methods of searching for the truth regarding Sailor's murder are called into question thus: "We have never had the truth. Not even with your work on bones" (102); her reply is firmly aligned with Western thinking. She declares that – "we use the bone to search for it. "The truth shall set you free." I believe that" (102). Anil's words are placed within quotation marks because they are a direct quote from the New Testament, the foundational text for Christian beliefs: the Gospel of John says, "you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (ch.8 v.32). In response, her Sri Lankan inquisitor states that "most of the time in our world, truth is just opinion" (102). This confrontation regarding the meaning of "truth" is very complex and several boundaries are transgressed here in terms of a transnational representation of identity; however, it is the way in which language inscribes notions of both "Self" and "Other" that is the relevant point at this juncture.

Ondaatje uses language to confront this fundamental cultural difference concerning "truth" throughout the novel; he problematises notions of individual and national identity through both Eastern and Western interpretations that are ascribed to the concept of truth. Pesch comments that for Ondaatje, "truth, it seems, is truly relative: a matter of context and perspective" ("Mediation" 66). The defamiliarisation of such a "fixed" Western paradigm underlines the nature of transnationalism, as Hall says:

This is the great de-centering of identity that is a consequence of the relativization of the Western world – of the discovery of other worlds, other peoples, other cultures, and other languages. Western rational thought despite its imperializing

claim to be *the* form of universal knowledge, suddenly appears to be just another episteme. To use Foucault's words, just another regime of truth. Or Nietzsche's, not absolute Knowledge, not total Truth, just another *particular* form of knowledge harnessed to particular forms of historical power. The linkage between knowledge and power is what made that regime True, what enabled that regime to claim to speak the truth about identity for everyone else across the globe.

When that installation of Western rationality begins to go and to be seen not as absolute, disinterested, objective, neutral, scientific, non-powerful truth, but dirty truth – truth implicated in the hard game of power. . . that destabilizes the old logic of identity. (12)

In defining Anil's language of science in relation to a universal notion of a single truth, Ondaatje is presenting it in just such imperialist terms. Anil's ability to communicate in Sri Lanka is not empowered by her scientific knowledge, or by her desire for truth; indeed to a certain extent it is impeded, placing her in the position of a Westernised "stranger" returning to a culture in which people "*know*" in a different way.

It is just such a "knowledge" that is central to Ondaatje's exploration of the interface between epistemological and ontological perceptions of truth in his depiction of the work of the character Palipana, in *Anil's Ghost*. Ondaatje describes him as being an epigraphist and historian who "was at the centre of a nationalistic group that eventually wrestled archaeological authority in Sri Lanka away from the Europeans" (79). In the figure of Palipana, Ondaatje

creates an eminent academic who sees his country “in fathoms and colour, and Europe simply as a landmass on the end of the peninsula of Asia” (79).

Palipana's personal identity is strongly associated with his national culture and language; for example, “he had made his name translating Pali scripts and recording and translating the rock graffiti of Sigiriya”, and he is “deeply knowledgeable about the context of ancient cultures” (79). It is through language that Ondaatje defines Palipana's approach to Sri Lanka's national history, attributing him with an academic credibility that draws on scientific notions of truth as “provable”; he “wrote lucidly, basing his work on exhaustive research. . . . All archaeological data proposed by a student had to be confirmed Palipana always seemed to be saving himself for the language of history” (79-80).

It is in speaking the language of history, however, that Palipana blurs the boundary between fact and fiction; his translation of “a linguistic subtext that explained the political tides and royal eddies of the island in the sixth century” (81) is discredited. “Palipana's gesture” is “seen as a betrayal of the principles on which he had built his reputation” (82) and he is “turned gracelessly out of the establishment” (81). From a postcolonial perspective, Palipana's action can be seen as a means of “writing back” to colonial notions regarding truth: Palipana addresses the gaps or absences, undermining the distinctions between the borders that divide history from fiction, and fact from imagination. Ondaatje's narrator makes it clear that “the point was not that he would ever be proved wrong” (83), but rather that “he could not prove that he was right” (83): in demanding scientific proof, Western imperialism silences the multi-vocal Eastern voice that speaks of mysticism and faith.

It is in the process through which Palipana reaches his translation that Ondaatje uncovers the possibility of cultural syncretism, employing language and imagery that allude to the Bible and Western religious beliefs. The inscriptions of "the Stone Book at Polonnaruwa" (83) are connotative of the Ten Commandments, received from God, by Moses, on "two stone tablets" (Deuteronomy 4. 13); and the reference to "walking across water" (*Anil* 83) evokes images of Jesus "walking on the water" (Matthew 14.26). In this slippage between Eastern and Western mysticism, Ondaatje elicits an unexpectedly transnational aspect to the "unprovable truth" (83) of Sri Lanka's national history.

Ondaatje problematises the discourse of universalism, then, in his critique of science as a lingua franca. In juxtaposing the "colonial" or even "neo-colonial" aspects of science with the Eastern culture of mysticism, he goes beyond postcolonial theorising of the empowerment of the "Other", and undermines the transcendence of globalisation in language. Giles suggests that "transnationalism does not involve simply the suspension of nationalism, but rather an interrogation of that border where the indigenous or experiential meets the abstracting forces of global communication" ("Trans-Atlantique" 20). It can be seen that a transnational approach proves important in the interpretation of Ondaatje's exploration of identity through its relationship with language, in that it involves just such an interrogation: transnationalism serves here, not only to further an understanding of areas of intersection, but also to highlight potential sites of difference.

The notion of language as a site of separation, and the subversion of English as being a global or "universal" mode of communication, is developed

further in the section of *Anil's Ghost* entitled "The Mouse". This part of the novel focuses on Sarath's brother, Gamini Diyasena, whose nickname provides the heading for the section. Gamini, a doctor, is captured by Tamil Guerrillas and forced to treat their wounded:

he said, as clearly as he could in the two official languages, 'I – am – a – doctor – ' . . . There was going to be a problem with communication. He couldn't speak Tamil well enough, they couldn't speak Sinhala. There was just paltry English between Gamini and the leader (218-9).

Despite being positioned as the only means of communication, the English language is identified here as alien and "other". The use of the adjective "paltry" has a number of derogatory connotations, deliberately subjugating the language and its role and rendering it culturally incongruous. The language barriers are symbolic of the cultural attitudes that divide Sri Lanka as a nation, but it is the silence they create that allows Gamini to speak beyond these constructed boundaries into a shared experience of suffering and healing. In Kroetsch's words, Ondaatje examines a "changed sense of language, a movement from the old language, through silence . . . into a new language" ("Grammar" 91).

Ondaatje's exploration of national and individual identity through language includes an examination of silence as part of the process of moving from the old to the new, and as essential to its fragmentation and deconstruction. Language as communication plays an integral part in carrying culture, in articulating what is "Self" and what is "Other"; Ondaatje suggests in

his text that it is the silence in between that fills the spaces, and signifies the potential for change.

For Ondaatje this silence is often involuntary, and therefore has an implicit sense of the violence ascribed to forcefully being made "Other". In *Anil's Ghost* he describes how Anil saw that "those who were slammed and stained by violence, lost the power of language and logic. It was the way to abandon emotion, a last protection for the self" (55-56). Later in the novel he explores this protective silence through the character Lakma, who as a twelve year old child had witnessed the murder of her parents, the shock of which "had touched everything within her, driving both her verbal and her motor ability into infancy", and rendering her "silent" and "non-reacting" (103). She is the niece of the disgraced historian Palipana, who, despite his failing eyesight, takes her with him into the forest and attempts to "deliver her from the inflicted isolation" (104). It is in the relationship between these two disparate characters that Ondaatje demonstrates the possibility of learning a new, metaphysical language, one of mutual trust.

Separated from civilisation, they live together in a place that was once an ancient forest monastery named "the Grove of Ascetics" (104). Both Lamka and Palipana have been emptied of their original individual identities: in her trauma, Lamka has abandoned "whatever skills she learned from her parents" (104), and Palipana has lost his academic kudos as well his sight. In their physical isolation and need, the communication that develops between them is one of empathy and equality; both give and receive of each other on two levels, the physical and the spiritual. He gave her "the mnemonic skills of alphabet and phrasing, and conversed with her at the furthest edge of his

knowledge and beliefs” (104); she “watched him and listened, never speaking, a silent amanuensis for his whispered histories” (105).

When Palipana finally becomes blind, Lamka gains authority, guiding, feeding, shaving and dressing him: “as his vision left him he gave more and more of his life to her” (106). Ondaatje merges their sightless and silent individuality into one single, mystical and holistic identity, which gains expression through an intuitive language that is beyond words. In a prescient moment the reader sees the flames of Palipana’s funeral pyre shimmer in the water. Lamka is seen to cut one of the first phrases Palipana ever spoke to her into the rock at the edge of the lake, “where the horizon of the water was, so that depending on tide and pull of the moon, the words in the rock would submerge or hang above their reflection or be revealed in both elements” (107). Their communal language becomes inscribed into a liminal zone that is mimetic of the very nature of their identity; it is brought into existence in the space between the elements of earth, fire, air, and water – belonging to all yet imprisoned by none.

It is a language that gives the once silent Lamka utterance, in her chiselling and hammering of the rock; the “great generous noise of her work” is a sound that makes it seem “as if she were speaking out loud” (107). She carves an anonymous eulogy for Palipana; “not his name or the years of his living, just a gentle sentence once clutched by her, the imprint of it now carried by water around the lake” (107). Ondaatje defamiliarises and disrupts notions of identity, of what is “Self” and “Other”, in this new language; a language that bears within it the dialectic of history, echoes of the ancient

“rock graffiti of Sigiriya” (79); and, perhaps more importantly, a language that elides the gap between history and truth.

The relationship between Palipana and Lamka, which gives rise to this language of trust, may usefully be viewed as “transnational” in nature. The first chapter of this dissertation put forward the argument that Ondaatje’s construction of personal identity defines the individual in terms of a “state” of “self-hood”: whilst Palipana and Lamka are members of the same family, their relationship becomes transnational in the light of this notion. Emptied of their personal identities – or individual “nationalities” – their alliance is not one of assimilation, but mutual trust, forming their own new language and a new identity – a “transnationality” – which is both syncretic and hybridised.

Stephens argues that “the moment of transnationalism is less the transcendence of the national than the very moment of its construction” (606), and it is this moment of construction with regards to individual identity that is revealed here by Ondaatje. Hall argues that “we have now to reconceptualize identity as a *process of identification*. . . . something that happens over time, that is never absolutely stable, that is subject to the play of history and the play of difference” (emphasis in the original, 15). Here in this fictional representation Ondaatje attempts to bridge the gap between life and literature, to “reconceptualize identity” in just such a way, and take what Lawson describes as “the usable past, the usable here” and “the usable now”, and redefine it into a “usable tongue” (168).

The notion of a “usable” tongue that can communicate between “Self” and “Other”, one that is not purely a postcolonial voice that “speaks back”, or indeed a universalist voice that ignores difference, but a voice that is truly

transnational in nature, is, of course, somewhat utopian. Ondaatje illustrates the mythical possibility of a hybrid language in his memoir, *Running in the Family*. In a chapter entitled “Tongue” he relates the following myth, told to him as a child by his father when a giant thalagoya lizard was killed at the resthouse in which they were staying: “if a child is given thalagoya tongue to eat he will become brilliantly articulate, will always speak beautifully, and in his speech will be able to ‘catch’ and collect wonderful, humorous information” (73). There follows more detail as to how the tongue should be eaten in order to ensure that “verbal brilliance” (74) will follow, albeit “many years later” (74); and almost as an afterthought, the chances of side effects – “bad behaviour (the burning of furniture, etc.). . . . possible death” (74).

In this symbolic legend, Ondaatje raises the possibility that consuming parts of another culture, and absorbing it into one’s own cultural identity has wonderful potential. The metaphorical eating of the tongue implies an integration that is not in anyway superficial; nor is it simple, or without risk or consequence. In order to achieve this loquacity, this multiplicity of tongues, one must undergo the unpleasant experience of swallowing the tongue of the freshly killed lizard whole, and, if one survives, wait many years for the resultant benefits (74).

There are some parallels that may be drawn here between this myth and the experience of the migrant, in particular that of Anil Tissera in *Anil’s Ghost*: removing the tongue of the “Other” she once was and absorbing it into the “Self” she would become, necessitates the death of the “Other” and also risks the annihilation of the “Self” that is now. In order to become the multi-lingual, multicultural identity that she represents, Anil Tissera consumes parts

of the languages and cultures of the imagined communities that she experiences, in an ongoing process that contributes to the construction of a transnational identity.

Earlier in this chapter the voice of transnationalism was termed “ironic”, in that it has an inherent duality which both exposes and contains difference; this doubleness is reflected in Ondaatje’s exposure of language as a means of both isolation and communication⁵. An examination of the way in which Ondaatje problematises notions of national and individual identity through language has revealed that his transgression of these boundaries is transnational in nature. A syncretic and hybridised construction of identity emerges to reveal a new understanding of language, which traverses the borders of nationalism.

Ondaatje’s transnational perspective of language has been shown to be one that moves beyond postcolonial notions of “writing back”, as regards a global or universal means of communication; instead it displays an interwoven discourse that is as multicultural as it is multi-lingual. *Anil’s Ghost* provides what Bourne foresaw as “a symbol of that cosmopolitan interchange which is coming, in spite of . . . national exclusiveness” (1741). This chapter has also demonstrated that the transnational dynamic may fruitfully be used as an heuristic tool in the analysis of individual as well as national identity, in its application to the territory of personal “space” – the “state” of “self-hood”.

Ondaatje gives poetic expression to a transnational vision of language in his latest book of poetry *Handwriting*. In a poem entitled “The Distance of a Shout” he inscribes language as part of the liminal spaces in-between –

portraying a growing recognition of this emergent form of inter-communication:

Handwriting occurred on waves,
on leaves, the scripts of smoke,
a sign on a bridge along the Mahaweli River.

A gradual acceptance of this new language. (6)

The connotations of these four lines of poetry are as numerous as they are complex; however, their relevance here is in their embodiment of a “new language” – a physical form of language – “Handwriting”. This is a language that takes place within the constituent elements of the ancient universe – earth, air, water and fire – in an echo of the transnational language of Lamka and Palipana which was discussed earlier. Language, for Ondaatje, is intrinsic to all creation and as such it engenders a transnational mode of discourse, one that has already “occurred”, spanning the gaps between cultures, and encompassing both sides of the divide.

Michael Ondaatje uses the language of transnationalism to express the indeterminate nature of identity, and to examine the possibility of locating both “Self” and “Other” within one single form of identification as process. The third and final chapter of this dissertation, analyses the way in which Ondaatje explores the paradoxical notion of being located in a state of “dis-location”, through the themes of mapping, memory, and forgetting in *Anil's Ghost*.

Chapter Three

Transnationalism, in terms of the literary theory employed in this dissertation, situates itself at the intersection of boundaries. It occupies a position that does not so much transcend lines of demarcation, as reflect the ideological and cultural constructions of national, individual and group identity, from the point at which these formations both converge and diverge. The first two chapters of this thesis have focussed on Michael Ondaatje's examination of identity as a state of flux, from this transnational perspective, through an analysis of naming and language. The examination of this aspect of Ondaatje's novel exposes language as being inextricably bound up with the construction of both public and private identity, paradoxically dividing "Self" from "Other", and revealing the internal division between "self" and "self" – the "split self" (Kamboureli 89); whilst concomitantly providing the means for "writing back".

It is against such a background that this third chapter employs the transnational in the exploration of the concern that Ondaatje has with how notions of "Self" and "Other" are located: or more specifically, to borrow Hall's phrase, to examine the way in which Ondaatje reconceptualises identity as "*a process of identification*" (italics in original, 15). The transnational provides a useful perspective from which to examine some of the temporal and spatial aspects, such as memory, forgetting and mapping, employed by Ondaatje in relation to the construction of identity. This analysis of Ondaatje's work thereby reveals the paradox of an identity such as his own, which could be said to be located in a permanent state of "dis-location".

This notion of identity as fluid and mobile is anathema to the imperial construction of identity, "imagined by the (confusedly) classifying mind of the colonial state" (Anderson 165). In his discussion of the "British colonial census-makers" (164) of the early twentieth century, Anderson points out that they had a "passion for completeness and un-ambiguity", and an "intolerance of multiple. . . blurred, or changing identifications"; he says that "the fiction of the census is that everyone is in it, and that everyone has one – and only one – extremely clear place. No fractions" (166). Ondaatje challenges this fixed notion of a "located" and "locating" national identity in the character of Anil Tissera whose complex persona no longer has a specific nationality, being both hybrid and syncretic in nature.

The first chapter of this thesis established Anil as the instigator of change within her own individual identity through the act of acquiring a new name: an apparently neo-colonial act of self-avowal which seen from a transnational perspective marks the moment of construction of a private, individual "state" of self-hood. The creative process of Anil's identity involves achieving an independence that is concomitantly physical, emotional and cultural, but such liberation has the potentiality for isolation; as Spivak says, "I am a bicultural, but my biculturality is that I'm not at home in either of the places" in which I live (*Post-Colonial* 83). Anil refuses to be held by a single culture, and defies compliance with any stereotypical ascription of roles. Ondaatje situates her character as being part of a complex web of conflicting positions, those of both insider and outsider, that counteracts an opposition between Self/Other or We/They. Anil inhabits what Ghosh-Schellhorn terms a "state of transitionality" (39). In other words she is a migrant who was born in

one place but has come to live elsewhere; hers is an identity that incorporates acculturation as process not product.

Ondaatje's characterisation of Anil repeatedly underlines the continual development of her identity. The reader is told that as a young woman growing up in Sri Lanka, Anil Tissera had been a minor celebrity because of her exceptional prowess as a swimmer, making head-line news in "*The Observer*. . . 'Anil Wins It'" (10). On her return to her homeland as a female forensic scientist working for the UN, she finds that her fame for winning the swimming contest has gone before her: she is greeted with phrases such as "So—you are the swimmer!" (16) and "You're the swimmer, no?" (26). However, Anil refuses to be labelled, declaring that she is "not a swimmer" (17). Later she confesses that, like her father, she "should have been a doctor, but . . . swerved off into forensics. [She] didn't want to be him at that time" (47). Anil resists any attempt at containment or dominance, and refuses alterity in terms of Spivak's "gendered subaltern" (*Outside* 140): she does not submit to any fixed or imposed form of identification, but instead values difference and diversity, seeking out an independent position that does not simply transcend borders, boundaries and categories, but renders them impotent – negating their power to exert control over her personal identity.

Ondaatje foregrounds some of the conflicts and contradictions that are implicit in the pursuit, definition and imposition of borders and categories: in the following extract from *Anil's Ghost*, he raises the possibility that the desire to be located, to delineate boundaries, to identify and be identified may have violent consequences:

At a mass grave found in Naipattimunai in 1985, bloodstained clothing was identified by a parent as that worn by his son at the time of his arrest and disappearance. When an ID card was found in a shirt pocket, the police called an immediate halt to the unburial, and the following day the president of the Citizens' Committee – who had brought the police to the location – was arrested The warden of an orphanage who reported cases of annihilation was jailed. A human rights lawyer was shot and the body removed by army personnel. . . . There had been a 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. The 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. (42-3)

Ondaatje relates this historiographic information within a fictive framework, and by doing so elides the distinction between fact and fiction, deliberately rupturing the boundary between history and story. This trope foregrounds the reality of the events surrounding this novel – thus reinforcing the point that postcolonial independence has not resulted in liberation for everyone – indeed violent clashes continue to take place across racial and cultural boundaries.

Pesch suggests that “we are formed *and* de-formed by cultures” but the erasure of culture would prove self-defeating in that “human life on this planet is unthinkable without culture” (“Cultural” 73). A close analysis of

Ondaatje's work from a transnational perspective reveals the possibility that culture is not necessarily destructive in itself: rather it is the categories, boundaries and divisions imposed in the desire for cultural identity that are fundamental in causing gaps, oppositions and clashes. *Anil's Ghost* envisages a restructuring of the perception of identity that does not necessitate the eradication of culture, but refuses precise cultural definition.

For Ondaatje the quest for categorical identity and identification, indeed for "location", is one that is part of a colonialist discourse; this is a notion contiguous with Anderson's view that the "colonial state's style of thinking . . . was a totalizing classificatory grid. . . . The effect of the grid was always to be able to say of anything that it was this, not that; it belonged here, not there. It was bounded, determinate" (184). It has already been suggested in this thesis that in juxtaposing the "imperialist" map with the "post-colonial" list of the disappeared, Ondaatje posits the Sri Lankan civil war in terms of a neo-colonialist desire for cultural supremacy: for it is always "the intention of colonialist power to possess the terrain of its Others" (Slemon, "Scramble" 20). By highlighting the difficulties and complexities that must be negotiated in the quest to locate individual and national cultural identity, Ondaatje's novel appears to acknowledge the inevitability of change, and the desirability of a transnational culture predicated on dislocation.

Dislocation in this context should be understood in relation to a Marxist de-centring of identity which Hall describes as being such that "we cannot find within ourselves as individual selves or subjects or identities the point of origin from which discourse or history or practice originates" (11). Hall goes on to point out that there is also the "very profound displacement which begins with

Freud's discovery of the unconscious" (11); in other words there is a complex relationship between identity (both individual and collective) and the unknown and unknowable elements of the psyche and the past, which has a profoundly destabilising effect. Thus individual identities, national identities, and indeed Western and Eastern cultural identities are all called into question, dispersed, fragmented and displaced.

This dislocatory aspect of identity, and its construction in terms of fragmentation and displacement, is crucial to a transnational interpretation of Ondaatje's work, in that he defies any clear categorisation between "Self" and "Other", confronts the possibility of fissures between "Self" and "Self", and acknowledges the conflicts and contradictions that may be contained within a single identity. The central character of Anil Tissera incorporates the complexities of a multicultural reality, crossing and re-crossing cultural divides until the lines themselves are obscured. Giles suggests that "transgression, whose etymological meaning involves the crossing of a line, is closely interwoven both figuratively and literally with notions of displacement" ("Virtual" 537).

Anil's relationship with the married Englishman, Cullis Biggles Wright, involves both figurative and literal cultural transgression. Earlier examination of the relationship in this thesis reveals Ondaatje's reversal of the coloniser and colonised roles in terms of naming, but there is a further transnational dimension to their parting. Anil instigates a separation that figuratively articulates what Homi K. Bhabha identifies as "an ambivalence and splitting of the subject that enables identity to be strategic and effective because of its structure as a contingent, 'double' consciousness" ("Unpacking" 206). W. E.

B. DuBois describes the concept of “double-consciousness” as being “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others One ever feels his two-ness . . . two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings” (364) – Anil must recognise this “two-ness” within herself in order to attain “transnationality”.

Cullis, in his figurative representation of the West, enjoys his secret intimacy with the East, in the person of Anil, and does not wish either to be open about the relationship, or to relinquish it. He will not agree to Anil’s suggestion that they should part, finally clutching her by the hair and refusing to let her go; in response she stabs him in the arm with a small knife, forcing him to release her. This act of violence appears as unwarranted as it is unexpected, a physical invasion that could be seen to have its parallel in erstwhile acts of colonial domination. The use of force to subjugate, or even annihilate the “Other” may appear to be akin to colonial behaviour: to describe Anil’s action as neo-colonial, however, does not take into account the way in which this incident is juxtaposed within an encounter with the character Palipana. Anil’s reminiscence about her separation from Cullis is interrupted by Palipana’s words: “there has always been slaughter in passion You renounce society, but to do so you must first be a part of it, learn your decision from it” (102-3): in other words, in order to attain a balanced cultural identity, Anil must experience what it is to be “Other” – to recognise her own “double consciousness”.

Anil’s acculturation of Western ideology and cultural traits is represented metaphorically in her relationship with Cullis, one which she must end in order to move on from this wholly Westernised “Self” towards an

identity that is inter-dependent and “Other”. The passionate and incisive act that marks the end of their affair is connotative of the violence that is implicit in the “Othering” of “Self”. Located in this way Anil’s experience with Cullis can be read as part of a continuing process of syncretism that does not conform to theories of globalism or universalism but is a function of de-colonisation in the establishment of an independent cultural identity. Ondaatje constructs Anil’s identity as being that of both “Insider” and “Outsider”, concomitantly part of the West and yet severing ties *with* the West: a transnational state of “selfhood” that is comparable with Homi K. Bhabha’s definition of identity as “an intersubjective, performative act that refuses the division of public/private, psyche/social” (“Unpacking” 206).

This conception of identity is one that encompasses difference, and operates within a Derridean conception of *différance*, in that it recognises the infinite possibilities of the “play of difference across identity”, and the fact that the “notion of essential forms of identity is no longer tenable” (italics in original, Hall 17). The transnational identity is not bounded or determined by any single nationality, culture, or category, but incorporates and assimilates the deferment that is the inevitable result of the interplay between difference and identity. Temporal and spatial boundaries provide a framework in which to conceptualise these notions of difference, and to locate “Self” and “Other”; however, the imposition of such a structure may also obfuscate the concept of identity as *différance*. Ondaatje demonstrates the possibility of locating both “Self” and “Other” within the “dis-location” that is implicit in *différance*, through the narrative structure of *Anil’s Ghost*. He juxtaposes the episode in which Anil ends her relationship, with a conversation that she has several months

later in Sri Lanka, with the effect of suturing the two incidents almost seamlessly together. As a result, Ondaatje collapses the usual linear structure of time and space in this section. Anil's stabbing of Cullis, which, in terms of a linear temporality had already taken place in America before her leaving to work in Sri Lanka, is juxtaposed with her first encounter with Palipana in "The Grove of Ascetics" (100-1): Anil is in a clearing in the centre of a forest in Sri Lanka and yet she is simultaneously severing her connection with Cullis – "the good-bye was quick and fatal" (101).

By doing so, Ondaatje opens up the possibility that an interdependency exists between notions of "Self" and "Other" outside of the constrictions and limitations that are imposed by space and time. He demonstrates this through – to borrow Salman Rushdie's term – the "imaginary homeland"⁶ of Anil's constructed identity; for even in the heart of the Eastern part of her "Self" Anil is conscious of the presence of her Western "Other", represented by Cullis: she "felt there was this physical line to him wherever he was on the planet" (102). In other words, self-representation is determined by an internal as well as an external dialogic relationship between the "Self" and the "Other", for as Hall suggests, "the Other is not outside, but also inside the Self, the identity" (16). Without the distortion of temporal and spatial distance, Anil's action may be defined as one that, whilst asserting the dominant position of the "Self", recognises the cultural duality that is the perspective of the migrant.

Hutcheon engages with this duality, claiming that the "doubleness – of identity, of culture, of loyalties, often of language . . . continues to define the experience of those of any 'different' ethnicity and race" (48). She goes on to assert that irony is one of the key tropes in communicating this doubleness, in

that it allows “the other” to speak to the “dominant culture” from “within” whilst maintaining the ability to adopt a conflicting and possibly subversive position (49). Will Kaufman discusses the duality of the ironic identity, suggesting the image of “two conflicting personae in one shared body” (*Comedian*, 12).

Anil’s transnational identity is certainly ironic in this sense, offering as it does the concept of unity in fragmentation, and holism in disparateness.

Ondaatje gives a palimpsestic vision that reveals the ironically dual construction of Anil’s identity; his narrator describes her as she waits in the hall in the Archaeological Offices in Colombo for her colleague, Sarath:

She moved down the hall from map to map. Each one depicted an aspect of the island: climate, soil, plantation, humidity, historical ruins, birds, insect life. Traits of the country like those of a complex friend. . . .

‘. . . Don’t know much en-tomology,’ she sang, looking at the map of mines – a black scattering of them like filaments. She glanced at herself reflected vaguely in the map’s glass. She was in jeans, sandals and a loose silk shirt (146).

This complex image places Anil once again in a neo-colonial position, that of exerting the controlling power of the gaze: singing the words of a Western “pop” song she is “looking”, her gaze directed at the framed maps of Sri Lanka, which, as the discussion in chapter one of this thesis asserts, often figure as an imperial tool of spatial control. McClintock suggests that in imperial terms, “the regime of the spectacle (inspection, observation, sight) merged with the regime of power” (58) and describes a child’s toy map of the world as embodying “the scopic megalomania that animates the panoptical

desire to consume the world whole" (60). Richard Cavell suggests that the "enterprise of colonialism has a fundamentally spatial aspect: the seizing of territories, the mapping of sites, the framing of landscapes. . . the displacement of peoples" (111). From a postcolonial perspective it would appear that Ondaatje portrays Anil as the colonised "Other" reclaiming dominion over de-colonised territory: the scene provides a trope for "writing back" to the Empire, a re-inscription of the indigenous people onto the topography of the colonial map.

However, Anil is now "light-years beyond the character she had been" (147); as she stares at the maps she catches sight of her own reflection in the glass: in Western dress, she forms a ghostly presence superimposed over the colonial cartography of her homeland. From a transnational perspective it becomes clear that in seeing herself projected on to her Sri Lankan background, which in turn shows through her Westernised surface, Anil is presented with a mirror image of herself, a double: the observer is observed in an endless deferment that inscribes the concept of identity as *différance*. Boundaries and divisions are blurred and obscured; East and West, coloniser and colonised, the *unheimlich* self that so concerns Sigmund Freud and Otto Rank, are all contained within the frame of Anil's unified transnational identity.

The critical stance of transnationalism has an ironic "double" voice, which is particularly pertinent to this duality of identity demonstrated through Anil. The transnational functions in both a deconstructive and constructive capacity, enabling it to highlight the difficulties and complexities of cultural syncretism, and yet also assert positive notions of difference. According to Hutcheon, "irony opens up new space, literally between opposing meanings,

where new things can happen" ("Splitting", 17); transnationalism inhabits just such a place. When Anil first returns to Sri Lanka, for example, she attempts to reconnect with her past through a visit to her childhood "ayah", ironically the experience only serves to make her feel isolated in the land of her birth: it is a postcard – "her girlfriend Leaf's message from America" – that makes her "feel better. Some communication from the West" (28). Anil experiences alienation from her compatriots on both sides of the cultural divide, but it is in the transnational space that is opened up between her Eastern and Western cultural identities that she is able to construct a new transnational identity as process.

There is further irony in the fact that Anil is made to feel "located" by Leaf, a woman who is losing the ability to locate herself because of her failing memory. Leaf provides a type of alter ego for Anil in that both have very individual traits, as is connoted in their unusual first names, and the fact that both are forensic scientists: indeed Leaf's character is described by the narratorial voice of Anil as "this woman who had been her echo" (254). The irony of the locus that Leaf provides for Anil serves to underline the significance of Anil's quest to identify and locate the nameless skeleton 'Sailor' – particularly when it is seen as concomitant with Leaf's growing dislocation through Alzheimer's disease. This mental isolation is reflected in her physical retreat to the desert in New Mexico,

a half-mile from the Very Large Array of Telescopes, which minute by minute drew information out of the skies. Information about the state of things ten billion years ago, and as many miles out. . . . She was living alongside these receivers of the

huge history of the sky. Who was out there? How far away was that signal? Who was dying unmoored?

Well it turned out Leaf was (255).

The dualism of the ironic voice can be heard speaking into the silent space in which Leaf is placed, as she lives out her increasingly isolated life without memory, amidst the scientific technology. The irony of the situation exposes the incongruity of a society so intent on the scientific pursuit of a globalising and universalist mapping of history, and the discovery of extra-terrestrial life, that the memory of the individual is abandoned to an “unmoored” death. The imperialist preoccupation with the global is connoted here by Ondaatje as complicit in obliterating local concerns, and is in direct opposition to the transnational nature of Anil's identity which encompasses difference – including that of Western science and Eastern mysticism. The relationship between Anil and Leaf is one that incorporates both East and West, location and dislocation, memory and forgetting.

“Memory” and “forgetting” play a vital role in Ondaatje's problematising of national and individual constructions of identity, and in his subverting of the traditional contours and temporal boundaries that are employed in the mapping of history. For Ondaatje it seems that it is memory that calls us into existence; Leaf “was starting to lose her memory, fighting for her life” (256). Just as the signifier that is her name only gains its existence through location as part of a variety of signifieds – a leaf of a tree, a table, or a book for example – so the character “Leaf” is only brought into existence through the location of memory – her own, Anil's, and of course, the reader's. In fact, it is actually only Anil's memories of her that call Leaf's character into being within

the novel, hence the irony of her conversation with Anil: “Do you think they can hear us?” Leaf asked. ‘That giant metal ear in the desert. Is it picking us up too? I’m just a detail from the subplot, right” (256): Ondaatje draws attention to the paradoxical significance of her character in the ironic truth of her statement.

A closer examination of Leaf as perceived through the duality of Anil’s transnational identity reveals her character as providing a metaphorical representation of the split between “Self” and “Self”: between the self of the present, and the specular representation of the self that inhabits the memory. The mythical nature of this relationship between Anil and Leaf is foregrounded by the way in which Ondaatje articulates Anil’s memories of her as having occurred “once upon a time in the West” (235). As has already been mentioned, Leaf serves as an “alter ego” for Anil, a doppelgänger figure who encapsulates the fragmentation and dislocation contained within Anil’s identity: she figures as a trope for the Westernised reflection of Anil’s inherently Sri Lankan “Self”.

The picture postcard that Anil receives from Leaf in Sri Lanka is of “One American bird” (29), emblematic in this context of the freedom from boundaries and restrictions that has become part of Anil’s transnational identification. In representing Anil’s split “Self”, Leaf embodies some of the contradictions that are contained within Anil’s transnational identity. It is Leaf who “introduced Anil to the finer arts of ten-pin bowling, raucous hooting in bars, and high speed driving in the desert” (235). This “laddish” behaviour is the antithesis of Anil’s character when she first arrived in the West – she had been quiet and shy and “seemed timid even to herself” (142). Leaf, therefore,

makes manifest echoes of the masculine, gendered aspect of Anil's transnational "state" – established in chapter one of this dissertation as being coterminous with the patriarchal and imperialist discourse implicit in naming.

McClintock considers the complex, interwoven relationship that exists between the traditional binaries of male and female, self and other. She contends that the categories of nation and gender cannot be viewed separately from one another, arguing that

not only have the needs of postcolonial nations been largely identified with male conflicts, male aspirations and male interests, but the very representation of national power has rested on prior constructions of gender power (14).

It is this association between gender and nation that Ondaatje configures as a crucial factor in the process of creating a transnational identity.

The interplay between gender, imperialism, and postcolonialism is one that demands attention in relation to the culturally-syncretic and hybridised nature of Anil's transnational identity – one that transgresses several boundaries including those of race and gender⁷. The relationship between Leaf and Anil not only reveals conflicting stereotypically gendered behaviour, but also elements of transgression across the accepted gender boundaries that define sexuality. Leaf

loved movies and remained in depression about the disappearance of drive-ins and their al fresco quality, 'All our shoes off, all our shirts off, rolling against Chevy leather – there has been nothing like it since' (235).

This quotation has sexual connotations that reflect the popular notion of the “drive-in” as a place where young people go to “make out” – connotations that are developed further with regard to Leaf and Anil’s relationship – the narrator describes how they would carry the television into the yard and curl up “in the double hammock”, to watch old movies together and share an occasional joint (235-6); later “they’d wake up at three in the morning entangled in each other’s arms” (254).

Anil is not restricted or contained by any rigid adherence to any specific dictum of sexual preference, but is free to breach such constructed divisions. The sexuality of this relationship between Leaf and Anil demonstrates once again that transnationalism involves the transgression of boundaries, be they of gender, race or nationality⁸. Stereotypical gender constructions, and the normative ascription of gender roles, are also broken by Anil and Leaf in their viewing of “movies” as amateur film critics. Laura Mulvey discusses scopophilia and, citing Freud, argues that there is an “erotic basis for pleasure in looking at another person as object” (587). Mulvey goes on to state that, in cinematic terms, “pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female”. She asserts that “the determining male gaze” is placed in opposition to the “*to-be-looked-at-ness*” of the female (589).

Ondaatje portrays Anil and Leaf as watching a range of films that are frequently analysed in terms of feminism and popular culture, including romances, westerns, and film noir. This is a reversal of the scopophilic role, in which Anil and Leaf are active participants. He describes the two women “watching the calm, carefully sexual black-and-white walk of Montgomery Clift” (235); the way in which they “disappeared into the intricacies of *Red*

River, theorizing on the strangely casual shooting of John Ireland They rewound the video and watched it once more” (236); the obsession they have with watching the film *Point Blank* – so much so that they write to the film director:

They told the director that it was one of their *favourite* films, they were simply inquiring as forensic specialists. When they looked at the scene closely they saw Lee Marvin’s hand leap up to his chest. ‘See he has difficulty on his right side. When he swims later in the bay he uses his left arm.’ ‘God, it’s a great movie’.

(238)

There is a transnational perspective that is revealed in this blurring of the distinctions between the “highbrow” culture of the scientific and intellectual, and the “lowbrow” culture of film and popular culture – by interweaving such diverse threads from both sides of the cultural divide, Ondaatje represents an integration and coherence that is a very similar process to that of transnationalism. Such is the depth of their fascination that Anil even suggests, “you know, Leaf, we should do a book. *A Forensic Doctor Looks at the Movies*” (237): it is important to note, however, that despite the inclusion of a transcript of Anil’s letter to the film-director, John Boorman (259), there is no indication at all of them ever receiving any type of response – there is no reciprocation of interest, no setting up of a dialogue: it is one thing to recognise the “Other” and indeed to experience what it is to be “Other”, but there can be no dialogue until the “Other” can be heard to speak.

Detailed and analytical, Anil and Leaf carefully scrutinise each scene, theorising in their common language of forensic science over the intricacies of

the old black-and-white movies that they watch together, attempting to ascertain truth from fiction: "I don't think it hit him in the liver. Look at the angle of the shot" – they discussed the possibilities of who killed Cherry Valance as "the films staggered backwards and forwards in Leaf's yard, until the actions became clear to them" (237). It is important to note that this subversion of the "determining male gaze" (Mulvey 589) occurs outside of the accepted conventions of the cinematic space. Rather than the "physical space of the cinema" which, according to Jackie Stacey, provides a "transitional space between every day life outside the cinema and the fantasy world of the Hollywood film about to be shown" (99), Anil and Leaf watch their "movies" in the liminal zone of "Leaf's backyard" (235). Ondaatje subverts not only the viewing of the film, but also the conditions of screening, transgressing the boundaries between inside and outside. Mulvey refers to the cinema and its conventions, as that "hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically"; however, Ondaatje challenges this perception, bringing the films into an open, transnational space, and rupturing the division between myth and reality in the rewinding and replaying of the video that breaks the verisimilitude of the narrative.

As fictitious characters themselves, Leaf and Anil together cross and re-cross the divisions between life and art, fact and fiction, and prescribed gender roles. In this postmodern episode, which blurs the distinction between life and film, Ondaatje reveals a Baudrillardian "culture of the simulacrum", but he does so within a transnational frame of reference. Anil Tissera and Leaf Niedecker are representatives of the "Trans-National" society envisaged by Bourne; they are migrants observing cinematic simulations of the colonisation

of a land and its indigenous people, which is and yet is not their own. They are de-centred and yet central though their position is not that of the dominant neo-colonial: it is definitely not that of the colonised and dis-empowered, nor, indeed, is it that of the postcolonial “writing back” to the empirical centre. Instead they are *dis*-located into a transnational point in-between, an intervening space of convergence and divergence of national boundaries and cultural categories. Homi K. Bhabha suggests that “in the process of cultural translation there opens up a ‘space-in-between’, an interstitial temporality . . . a release into an endlessly fragmented subject in ‘process’” (“Unpacking” 204): it is just such a space that Ondaatje explores in the characters of Anil and Leaf.

Anil’s Ghost, then, examines this “process” of identification, of “cultural translation”, from neither centre nor margin, but from multiple points of intersection, the gaps in between coterminous fragments of history and place. Kroetsch asserts that “archaeology allows the fragmentary nature of the story, against the coerced unity of traditional history” (“Moment” 7), and Ondaatje predicates the story of *Anil’s Ghost* on a similar archaeological notion of history. Sarath, Anil’s colleague, describes his love of archaeology to her: “I love history, the intimacy of entering all those landscapes. Like entering a dream. Someone nudges a stone away and there’s a story” (259). There is no singular unified “History” for Ondaatje, but a range of histories, of “landscapes”, where the paths and borders that traverse and surround them are continually crossing and overlapping each other.

Ondaatje’s construction of the historical landscape of *Anil’s Ghost* contains references to actual archaeological sites: the fifth century “rock

graffiti of Sigiriya” (79) in Sri Lanka, and an archaeological find in China of three water tombs containing the “coffin of an ancient ruler” and “the bodies of twenty female musicians along with their instruments . . . zithers, flutes, pan-pipes, drums, iron bells” (260), also from the fifth century B.C.. Ondaatje presents a transnational perspective of history as an interwoven discourse, which serves to elucidate the crossing of boundaries between history and story, truth and fiction, and uncovers a mystical quality that is homologous with memory.

There is a clash between Sarath and Anil over their response to the fate of the female Chinese musicians. He takes an Eastern multi-vocal stance that sees the *denouement* of their lives as the product of “another world with its own value system that came to the surface”, for whom “music was not entertainment” but “a moral and spiritual force” (261). Anil, on the other hand, adopts a Western, feminist viewpoint, labelling them “twenty murdered women”, and proclaiming “love me, love my orchestra. You *can* take it with you!” Anil’s rational, empiricist thinking considers their sacrifice as a “kind of madness”; however, her transnational nature concedes that the potential for such an act “lies within the structure of all civilizations, not just in distant cultures” (261).

According to Pesch, Ondaatje’s view of history is that it “can never be told accurately, because it is always written with hindsight, across a temporal – and . . . also a spatial – gap” (Mediation 66). Ajay Heble also suggests that “for Ondaatje, history, like fiction, is a form of discourse, a reservoir of potential meanings but also a playground for an endless proliferation of revisions and reinterpretations” (98). Just as he signals the fluidity of national

and individual identity through his problematising of apparently located tropes such as language and naming, so Ondaatje defamiliarises the role of history in the construction of identity. Ondaatje defies the binary oppositions that exist between ancient and modern, historical and contemporary; one of the ways in which he does this is through the conflation of past and present within the memories of his characters.

Ondaatje transforms the abstract nature of memory into a more concrete, visible form through an exploration of the way physical representations of the past may actually become absorbed into the present – in a process that results in the past being made manifest within the present. He reveals an historical perspective that does not see the past as fixed, but as open to reinterpretation by the present, and portrays the contemporaneous existence of the ancient and the modern. The delineation between past and present is blurred, an obfuscation that reveals how the process of identity may involve the reinterpretation of fragments of history into the discourse of today.

This ongoing dialectic between history and modernity, inscribed within identity, gains expression within the narrative of *Anil's Ghost*. Ondaatje's narrator describes how, in their search to identify the skeleton, Anil and Sarath employ someone to recreate what "Sailor's" head may have looked like using the skull. The reconstruction of the head represents a realisation of an abstract notion, a calling into being of the past in the hopes of rekindling memory. Memory, however, is an unstable medium; each day "when Ananda could go no further with the skull's reconstruction, he took it all apart, breaking up the clay" only to return the following day to "re-create the previous day's work in twenty minutes. Then he thought and composed the face a further

step" (171). On seeing the final sculpture of Sailor, "now in his posthumous life", Anil feels that:

this head was not just how someone possibly looked, it was a specific person. It revealed a distinct personality, as real as the head of Sarath. As if she was finally meeting a person who had been described to her in letters, or someone she had once lifted up as a child who was now an adult (184).

However, Sarath and Anil realise that although this is actually a reconstruction of Sailor's head, its production has been mediated through Ananda's memories of his wife, Sirissa – one of "the disappeared" – another victim of Sri Lanka's civil war. The past, internalised through memory, manifests itself and intrudes into the present to become a concrete representation of an abstract notion: "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).

The head is severed from the body, a gruesome reminder of the many victims whose heads were "stuck on poles", and yet to have this dislocated identity is preferable to there being "no sighting or evidence of his existence or his death" (184). Here Ondaatje provides a postcolonial response in his rewriting of history that reclaims the identities of those who have been eradicated or marginalised by the colonial oppressor. Moving beyond the postcolonial, however, the head is symbolic of the dislocation that is intrinsic to a transnational identity; belonging to no single "national" body, it is constructed on the basis of one identity whilst bearing the traits of another. Ondaatje's fictional recreation of Sailor's head provides a metaphor for a new

and hybridised identity: a representation of the “new ethnicity” referred to by Hall. He describes this ethnicity as

a new conception of our identities because it has not lost hold of the place and the ground from which we can speak, yet it is no longer contained within that place as an essence. . . the new ethnicities. . . are neither locked into the past nor able to forget the past. Neither all the same nor entirely different. Identity *and* difference. It is a new settlement between identity and difference (20).

Ondaatje takes just such an approach to the constructedness of identity; through a conflation of memory and the present moment, there is a recognition of the transcendence of boundaries, and the difference and diversity that is inherent in transnationalism.

In a recent interview, Ondaatje discussed his interest in history, and commented that his perspective is mainly concerned with “where the personal and the historical meet. That edge” (Fagan 120). It is in this liminal area – the boundary between the experience of the individual and the public factual events which affect that experience – that Ondaatje closely questions and examines the process of constructing identity. Bhabha refers to this liminal area as “a space of intervention – *in between* past and present, haunted memory . . . the world of transnational relations that we are poised to occupy” (“Unpacking” 204). Through the character of Anil, Ondaatje puts forward some rhetorical questions that interrogate this space:

If she were to step into another life now, back to the adopted country of her choice, how much would Gamini and the memory

of Sarath be a part of her life? Would she talk to intimates about them, the two Colombo brothers? And she in some way like a sister between them, keeping them from mauling each other's worlds? Wherever she might be, would she think of them?

Consider the strange middle-class pair who were born in one world and in mid-life stepped waist-deep into another? (285)

These questions reflect an interdependency between memory, the present and the future in the construction of identity as process. Anil's transnational identity is one that inhabits a space that is in between, one that is paradoxically located at a point of dislocation, and one that reveals the cultural differences of others.

Gross points out that transnationalism "carries the multicultural impulse to an international plane. It highlights fundamental differences between cultural groups" (388). In her role as the returning stranger Anil provides "the beard, the excuse" for the two Sri Lankan brothers to "align themselves" (285) – she understands their passion for their nation:

they spoke of how much they loved their country. In spite of everything. No Westerner would understand the love they had for the place. . . . 'American movies, English books – remember how they all end?' Gamini asked that night. 'The American or the Englishman gets on a plane and leaves. That's it. The camera leaves with him. . . . 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' (285-6).

Postcolonial theorising may suggest that Anil's departure from Sri Lanka is indeed an act of abandonment. When she leaves, however, she takes with her, as evidence against the government, the skeleton of "Sailor" who has been identified as Ruwan Kumara, a "rebel sympathizer" abducted from his village (269). Hers is a transnational stance that, without partaking of a sentimental search for roots, acknowledges the syncretic and hybridised nature of cultural identity and looks outward to an admixture of ideas.

It is of great significance that Anil's departure does not constitute the ending of Ondaatje's novel; the story continues in Sri Lanka, in an ending that resists closure in its telling of the reconstruction of a bomb damaged statue of the Buddha, and the building of a new statue to take its place. Ondaatje describes how "the 120-foot-high statue" (299) is blown up by thieves, so that "the statue buckled and the torso leapt towards the earth and the great expressive face of the Buddha fell forward and smashed into the ground" (300). These are images that have connotations of Shelley's "Ozymandias", an intertextuality that foregrounds once again the transnational nature of Ondaatje's novel. This is a world in which the empire has been laid low, and yet neo-colonial forces are rising up to take its place: eventually work on both the statues is complete and there are "two figures – one of scarred grey rock, one of white plaster" (304-5).

Close up the face of the reconstructed statue "looked quilted" (302) it looked "as if it were sewn roughly together" (304). Ananda had planned to "homogenize the stone, blend the face into a unit" (302), but when he saw it he decided to leave it untouched – "he wouldn't hide that" (304). The face resembles a map, a patchwork quilt; and just as "Sailor's" head, created by

Ananda, holds the image of his wife, so the restored Buddha is a hybrid identity – fragments of stone knitted and fused together with molten iron. The eyes of the Buddha are cut by the artificer in the “Nêtra Mangala” ceremony, “until he had eyes – always the last thing painted or sculpted – he was not the Buddha” (306). Now rebuilt, a new incarnation, the face of this reconstruction has the “composure” and “qualities” that have been given to it by Ananda, and yet its eyes are the work of another artist – “the lidded grey eyes someone else had cut in another century eyes that had once belonged to a god” (304).

This statue inhabits a “space-in-between”, a fragmented figure, whose gaze belongs neither to heaven nor earth, is neither Insider nor Outsider; it is a transnational figure, one that Homi Bhabha would term as “a living ghost” – in that it occupies that “space of intervention – in *between* past and present, haunted memory” (“Unpacking” 203-4). Giles also uses “spectral” terminology with regard to transnationalism, quoting Derrida he suggests that nationalisms “are supported merely by the ghosts of transcendent spirit”: however, there remains “the *Geist* of nineteenth-century idealism [that] connotes both spirit and specter, evoking the shades of a ghostly nationalism that will not quite disappear” (“Trans Atlantique” 12). It is undeniable that the boundaries of national identity are becoming increasingly permeable, and yet their affects and effects remain tangibly present. The conflicts and clashes that result have been shown here to haunt the text of Michael Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost* – truly a spectre of the transnational.

Conclusion

This dissertation has demonstrated that in a postcolonial world, where the concepts of “nationality”, “nationalism” and the “nation-state” are increasingly being questioned, transnational theory provides a useful conceptual matrix. Transnationalism has proved a very appropriate perspective from which to explore Michael Ondaatje’s construction of identity as process, in that it has facilitated the interrogation of naming, language and memory as influential concepts with regard to identification: concepts which exceed national boundaries. Thus the transnational offers a framework for examining a discourse which goes beyond the postcolonial and is not contained by the international. Stephens makes a useful distinction between “internationalism”, which she sees as aiming to “bring nations together”, and “transnationalism”, which, she says “seeks to go beyond the nation form itself” (607). A transnationalist approach is, therefore, eminently suited to the analysis of a text such as *Anil’s Ghost*, which challenges and subverts national and cultural divisions.

Walder discusses what comes “after Post-Colonialism”, and suggests that literary studies needs to account for “the class and gender, as well as race dimensions of its subject”. He sees contemporary writers, such as Ondaatje, as

resisting the mapping of themselves by the knowledges of the past, implicated as they are by the empires of the past; while reaching towards an uncertain future in which – is it conceivable? may be we need new concepts for this – in which

the silenced and oppressed reinscribe themselves in a changing history, language and theory (208).

Transnationalism is just such a concept; it allows its proponents to reach both forwards and backwards towards cultural plenitude, and has the potential to accommodate change in order to give voice to “the silenced and oppressed”. According to Giles, the transnational is concerned with the “process of mapping” (“Transnationalism” 9) – placing emphasis on the methods and actions involved, rather than on the outcome – and therefore it is invaluable in achieving this reinscription. The first chapter of this dissertation established mapping and naming as actions that are inscribed within imperialist methods of control and appropriation; adopting a transnational perspective revealed the imposed demarcations to be arbitrary, and contingent, thus revealing a reversal of the expected roles through an examination of the processes involved.

A focus on the processes of mapping and naming has also proved important in considering Ondaatje’s paradigm of “the returning stranger” (Powells 2). Someone who is “coming back” to a place should have no need of a map, and yet the stranger may be unable to get there without one – what then of “the returning stranger”, whose knowledge of a place is “recreated”, synthesised anew through the intervening experiences? The process of mapping such a journey has emerged in this dissertation as being a truly transnational enterprise, one in which the once solid lines of boundaries and divisions have been broken and ruptured to form a more flexible topography.

The concept of “the returning stranger” has been shown to be homologous with that of the transnational, in that both encompass the

positions of “insider” and “outsider”, and yet concomitantly expose the conflict between these positions. The ensuing dialectic is one that demonstrates the inadequacy of a postcolonial stance for the examination of *Anil's Ghost*, in that transnationalism is a discourse that has moved beyond notions of the marginalised colonial and imperial centre, into an area that recognises the possibility of “fundamentally equivalent discourses of race, gender and ethnicity” (Giles, “Transnationalism” 6). Ondaatje brings clashes between Eastern and Western cultures – such as those regarding “truth” – into this transnational arena, exposing differences, but also offering the chance of co-existence and the hope of a recognition of parity.

The manifestation of transnationalism considered here is one that has revealed the fluidity and permeability of divisions and boundaries to be an essential part of Michael Ondaatje's construction of identity. It has proved an excellent tool for comprehending the complexities involved in negotiating a world in which the desire for location is predicated on the need for dislocation. In other words, the longing to be named, to have a voice, to remember and be remembered – indeed to be identified – are all part of the diversity of human experience that has no fixity for Ondaatje, but must be situated instead in an ongoing process of identification.

This process is demonstrated through a tri-phasic model of acculturation that is revealed in the character of Anil Tissera. Anil can be seen to move from the initial, culturally-dependent phase of her childhood identity into an independent position indicated by her change of name and adoption of a new culture. In the third, interdependent phase, there is a recognition of Anil's multicultural complexity as “the returning stranger” – she is able to “step

into another life now, back to the adopted country of her choice” (285) – an interdependency that is at the heart of transnationalism.

Gilroy discusses the “evolution of diaspora” in contemporary times, suggesting that “this requires moving the focus of inquiry away from the notions of fixed identity that we have already discovered to be worn out and placing it instead upon the processes of identification” (132). The application of transnationalism to Michael Ondaatje’s discussion of naming has foregrounded its importance for these “processes of identification”. Naming has been established as being significant in terms of appropriation and self-definition, and therefore fundamental in terms of the construction of identity. The role of naming and namelessness in *Anil’s Ghost* has been shown to exceed the scope of the bounded and determinate, and to inhabit a dis-located area in-between that encompasses both centre and margin.

Ondaatje’s concern with language in the construction of both national and individual identity has disclosed complex postcolonial concerns, which include the recognition that cultural domination is possible through the imposition of a global or universalist attitude to language, a problem that is compounded by the disparaging of local and individual concerns as insignificant. Ondaatje’s own use of language in the narrative of *Anil’s Ghost* displays a syncretism and hybridity that is a reflection of his multicultural background and is theoretically transnationalist in nature. The configuration of this transnational dynamic in Ondaatje’s work reveals an ironic perspective that reflects the duality of the voice of the migrant. The transnational seeks to determine that which transcends boundaries and divisions between nations, and therefore also draws attention to those factors which are antithetical and

distinct – thus disclosing the paradox of unity in contradiction and difference. This ironic construction works to uncover the inherent doubleness of language as a means of both communication and isolation through the character of Anil Tissera.

Hall points out that “at one and the same time people feel part of the world and part of their village. They have neighborhood identities and they are citizens of the world” (15). In other words, Hall is suggesting that the experience of many people in the modern world is one that absorbs and contains both local and global concerns. Ondaatje expands on this perception in that, through Anil, he demonstrates such experience to be antithetical to a fixed, stable, and permanent notion of identity: Anil has a fluid identity, which has been revealed here to be transnational in nature. This is a theory that does not deny difference, but rather celebrates diversity and confirms the link between local and global concerns that is forged in the crucible of a multicultural society.

However, Gross voices a very real concern when he suggests that “for any cosmopolitan admirer of human diversity, transnationalism poses a difficult dilemma: is it possible to be a citizen of the world, without flattening out that world in the process?” (392). Ondaatje gives an affirmative answer to this question in the narrative of *Anil's Ghost*, by confronting some fundamental cultural clashes and ascribing equality and validity to the roles of both “insider” and “outsider”, “Self” and “Other” – in a discourse that seeks to highlight, rather than disentangle, the “threads of living and potent cultures” (Bourne 1741) – indeed to attempt to separate these threads would inevitably lead to the destruction of the multicultural “fabric” that he weaves. Language is used

as a means by which to confront cultural difference – for example through Anil’s abandonment of Sinhalese, her acculturation of the language of Science, and her subsequent role as “the returning stranger”. Ultimately though, cultural difference can be seen to be contained within the single transnational identity of Anil Tissera that is reflective of her cultural hybridity and syncretism. Both Hall and Gross can be seen as contributing to a transnational impulse that reveals the world as being inextricably linked culturally, and in undeniable need of a positive means for the articulation of difference and fragmentation.

This dissertation has applied the notion of the transnational to the identification of the individual, in that it has defined Ondaatje’s construction of personal identity in terms of a “state” of “self-hood”. In the light of this perspective the character of Anil Tissera, for example, can be viewed as transnational – not only through the acculturation of national ideologies, values, languages and beliefs – but also in her name, attitudes, gendered behaviour and sexuality: thus revealing, at a personal level, the syncretism and hybridity that traverse boundaries and divisions, and are an essential part of transnationalism.

Anil’s Ghost envisages identity as a permeable and fluid concept, one that moves beyond the desire for categorical location, into a liminal zone that seeks out the gaps, spaces and oppositions that exist in between categories and divisions. Paradoxically, in dispersing, fragmenting, and displacing national and individual cultural identities, Ondaatje may be seen as seeking to locate such identities in “dis-location”. As a consequence, his work defies any clear notions of categorisation, but incorporates a number of classifications,

including colonial, postcolonial and neo-colonial, within one larger “transnational” framework.

An examination of some of the temporal and spatial aspects of Ondaatje’s work such as memory, mapping and forgetting has proved useful in the exploration of identity as a continual process. Ondaatje’s complex image of Anil – her reflection appearing superimposed over a map of Sri Lanka – is revealed as one that places Anil within the transnational framework, and locates her in the “dis-location” of the liminal spaces in-between. According to Graham Huggan,

in-betweenness can be liberating, allowing the freedom to experiment with alternative identities or to oppose and outmanoeuvre monolithic cultural codes. Yet it can also be debilitating, forcing the recognition that all identity is illusory or that mobility is the effect of continual displacement (119).

Ondaatje’s work negotiates this dichotomy by striking a careful balance that is exemplified in his paradigm of “the returning stranger” – one who belongs, and yet does not belong, who is concomitantly both “Self” and “Other” – a concept clearly encompassed here by the transnational dynamic.

It has also become clear from this study of *Anil’s Ghost*, that the locus provided by memory is of a fragmented nature, and involves an interplay – indeed a conflation – between past and present, which transgresses the boundaries between history and story, truth and fiction. Ondaatje’s archaeological construction of history is one that determines a multiplicity of potential meanings, and reveals an interwoven discourse that crosses both personal and public experience. It is encapsulated in the transnational

reconstruction of the head of the skeleton, “Sailor” – a symbol of dislocation, removed from its “national” body, it has its foundations in one identity, and bears some of the features of another. The head thus provides a metaphor for the theory of transnationalism employed here, disconnected from any specific “cultural” body of criticism, and bearing some of the traits of both the “postcolonial” and the “postmodern” – its countenance is at once familiar and yet unknown – it is, perhaps, the face of the “returning stranger”.

The examination of identity by Michael Ondaatje in his novel, *Anil's Ghost*, from a transnational perspective, has brought a range of issues into focus including: the effects of acculturation, citizenship and migration; the way in which globalisation and universalism are perceived in terms of power, language, and information; the relationship between local and global concerns; and the debate regarding perceptions of history. These are issues that traverse national boundaries, and they are of particular relevance to writers such as Ondaatje, who have allegiance to Canada – a nation that has inscribed multiculturalism into its constitution. Canadian writer Robert Kroetsch comments that there are those who would say that “Canada lacks ghosts”. His response – “Ha. We are our own ghosts” (“Canadian” 57) – reveals something of the concern that exists regarding Canadian national identity: Canadians, Kroetsch says, “live with the exquisite fear that we are invisible people” (“Canadian” 57). Anil’s “Ghost” is one that haunts contemporary Canadian culture. It is the spectre of multiculturalism, ever present in the struggle for a visible Canadian national identity and made manifest here in the work of Michael Ondaatje through the mirror of Transnational theory – it is indeed a “trans-national spirit” (Bourne 1742).

Notes

¹ See Arun P. Mukherjee's article "The Poetry of Michael Ondaatje and Cyril Dabydeen: Two Responses to Otherness." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 20.1. (1985): 49-67. Also, Chelva Kanaganayakam's, "A Trick with a Glass: Michael Ondaatje's South Asian Connection." *Canadian Literature* 132 (1992): 33-42.

² This argument is developed further in the discussion on language and identity in chapter two, pages 61 – 63: the analysis of the relationship between Palipana and Lamka.

³ The concept of the duality of the transnational identity as perceived through the ironic voice is explored further in chapter three of this dissertation with regard to dislocation, memory and forgetting, on pages 75 – 80 in particular.

⁴ The notion of mapping being applied in conceptual rather than physical, temporal or spatial terms, is developed further in chapter three of this thesis, on pages 73 – 75, with regard to memory and dislocation and their effect on the construction of identity.

⁵ See page 47.

⁶ This phrase is taken from the title of Salman Rushdie's book *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. London: Granta in association with Penguin, 1992.

⁷ The association between nation and gender is established in the first chapter of this thesis with regard to the formation of Anil's transnational identity (pages 29 – 34), and is expanded here in terms of the analysis of the development of such an identity.

⁸ See Chapter One of this dissertation (pages 29 – 34) with regard to the establishment of Anil's transnational identity through the problematising of gender boundaries, and the breaking of the "incest taboo".

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