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Representations of Home: A Study of Memory and Trauma

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By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes three Canadian Sri Lankan writers' representations of "Home" in *Running in the Family* by Michael Ondaatje, *Funny Boy* by Shyam Selvadurai, *The Boat People* by Sharon Bala and *Anil's Ghost* also by Ondaatje. Most of the novels capture some of the "crucial junctures" in Sri Lankan history that intersect with political, ethnic, and national conflict; and how traversing these intersections causes trauma in the characters. Each writer in their text examines Sri Lankan history from a distance, while renegotiating their characters' ties to their homeland. I examine existing theory by Susan Stanford Friedman and Vijay Agnew as they define what a home is, and look at displacement and belonging simultaneously to examine what they have to say about the home as a construct. In my thesis, I explore how each writer reinvigorates what "home" means to their characters, via the fictional representations of their emotional and expatriate longings, through memory, trauma and nostalgia. I particularly focus on these four texts by referring to Marianne Hirsch's discussion of "postmemory" and Edward Mallot's theory examining the role of witness writing in each text. Finally, I consider the role of the body in transferring memory and trauma, both in the representations of literal bodies of slain characters, but also through the recollected memory of forebears, and how those familial predecessors transfer history by creating witnesses to their memories and trauma.

DEDICATION

To everyone who knew I would complete this, way before I decided to begin this.

To everyone back at home, cheering me on.

For my husband Anuk who passed me hot chocolate and wine (at 3 am) during my first semester in Sri Lanka and for being amazingly supportive right throughout.

And last but not least me.

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INTRODUCTION

My thesis will examine the representations of "home" in three Canadian-Sri Lankan writers using four texts: *Running in the Family* by Michael Ondaatje, *Funny Boy* by Shyam Selvadurai, *The Boat People* by Sharon Bala and *Anil's Ghost* also by Ondaatje. All these writers problematize the concept of "home" as each of their characters seeks to re-negotiate his/her connection to a homeland that is located only in the past. In my thesis, I examine how memories play a crucial role; as Vijay Agnew says about diaspora, memory, and identity, "Memories establish a connection between our individual past and our collective past (our origins, heritage, and history). The past is always with us, and it defines our present; it resonates in our voices, hovers over our silences, and explains how we came to be ourselves and to inhabit what we call 'our homes'" (Agnew 3). It is through memories that these writers are able to connect to a past that reinvigorates their connections to their origins, heritage and history which allow them to recreate their homes in the present. Although there is an essential loss in representing the past, Ondaatje, Bala, and Selvadurai each revives, challenges, and complicates the idea of "home." In analyzing these four texts, I raise continuous questions of what makes a physical location "home" to the characters, of how they negotiate the distance between a brick-and-mortar home, an idealistic and nostalgic home, and a home that, to resituate Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith's words, functions as a "continuous present" in their new geographical locations. Susan Stanford Friedman in her article "Bodies on the Move: A Poetics of Home and Diaspora" examines how the concept of home has always been ambiguously identified as "a memory," "an ideal," and a utopian fantasy. According to Friedman, home is "an imaginary space longed for, always already lost in the very formation of the idea of home" (Friedman 192). Friedman's concept of a home that is already lost speaks to the fact that each of these writers in broad strokes paints an image of home that exists predominantly in the mind. Their representations of home are fragments of memories

recreated in narratives to rationalize one's displacement of their first home, in their second home. Agnew includes both the physical reality of "brick and mortar" homes, and at the same time includes the idea of "home" as "part of our imagination and longing to belong" (Agnew 15). For Agnew, the "diasporic individual" is torn away from one home to reside in another. For Ondaatje's characters, such migrational movement is optional; for the refugees in Bala and Selvadurai's novels, the need to journey from one geography to another arises because of ongoing political oppression. Agnew argues that the concept of home, in such cases, is free floating; in each of my chapters I examine what it means to "choose" one's nation, and what that choice denotes, given the heterogeneous definitions of home.

In Chapter One: Re-inventing Memory: The search for Ondaatje's Oedipal Forebear in *Running in the Family*, I explore the intense displacement of the "self" in the text and the unconventional methods that Ondaatje adopts in his search for his identity. In the text, Ondaatje attempts to redefine himself through his father Mervyn Ondaatje's identity. My argument builds on Joanne Saul's article, "'The shape of the unknown thing': Writing Displacement in *Running in the Family*," and examines the overlapping ways in which Ondaatje finds himself constantly questioning his identity and self. On Ondaatje's return to his homeland, he appears almost as a foreigner with few connections to the island. He reconstructs memory through "his relatives' anecdotes and bits of gossip, and from snippets of journal entries, poems, photographs, and newspaper clippings he gathers" (Coleman 105) in order to piece together his father as well as Mervyn Ondaatje's Ceylon. This chapter will develop the idea of Ondaatje's displacement as a trauma resulting from the political upheavals in Sri Lanka, in which I argue that he is able to relive and recuperate his past as well as his identity through the effective use of memory. Relying on Edward Mallot's argument in *Memory, Nationalism, and Narrative in Contemporary South Asia* of the body as a site of remembrance, I examine Mervyn Ondaatje as a site of memory where the body

remembers the trauma inflicted, regardless of whether he intended to share his experiences or not. I explore how Ondaatje, in Shoshana Felman's terms, becomes "a belated witness" to his late father's memories and effectively conveys an underrepresented part of Sri Lankan history particularly that of the Dutch-Burgher minority in this text.

In Chapter Two: The Other Inside: Trauma and Embodied Memory in *Funny Boy* by Shyam Selvadurai, I focus particularly on the trauma that the Chelvaratnam family experiences as a result of being a Tamil minority in a largely Sinhala Buddhist landscape. Arjie, a young boy, narrates the entire ethnic conflict in the way that he perceives it, through the lens of what he learns through his family's experiences and reactions to his own developing sexuality. In this chapter, I address Minoli Salgado's critique that the narration through such a young protagonist results in "a loss of historical depth" (Salgado 7). I also trace the emergence of Arjie's "otherness" that steadily begins to develop following a trauma that his entire family vicariously experience through a storied memory. I examine Paul Antze and his theory of how a single traumatic event sparks the growth of the 'otherness', connecting his argument to Janet Zandy's who states that, "Home is an idea," "an inner geography where the ache to belong finally quits, where there is no sense of 'otherness', where there is, at last, a community" (Zandy 1). I argue that Arjie's "otherness" is never at ease and with time it only grows, challenging Zandy's notion that home provides an emotional salve to the "ache to belong." Nowhere does Arjie feel more at home as a Tamil than with this family; at the same time, his nascent sexuality denies him that sense of belonging in his own home. His sexual identity and his relationship to another boy, Shehan, doubly marginalize him and cause Arjie to further question his identity. In this chapter I examine the trauma that the entire family undergo as they witness the loss of their loved ones, the loss of their home and relationships, and their geographical disruption as they choose to move across the globe. I analyze these events through Cathy Caruth's theory that trauma is

not merely locatable in the "originary trauma," but through belated responses that haunt a survivor. I also examine in this chapter the pain that Arjie and his family experience as they decide to migrate to Canada after losing their physical and ancestral home.

In Chapter Three: Body Displacement in Bodies of Water I examine *The Boat People* by Sharon Bala, looking in particular at how the storyline problematizes the concept of the self and identity in the light of the refugee. I build on Lynda Mannik's argument of "water as ambiguous space" (6) in her introduction to *Migration by Boat: Discourses of Trauma, Exclusion, and Survival*. Leaving Sri Lanka deterritorializes those aboard the boat and reterritorializes them only as they dock on the shores of British Columbia. Until the refugees reach land, they occupy a liminal space and identity; but on arrival, the media and governing bodies tag them as "terrorists," "losers in an overseas war" (Bala 40), defining their political identity as an antagonistic one. I examine representations of the refugees fleeing a crisis through Malkki's argument that "being 'uprooted' propels individuals to become amoral and potentially, criminally minded" (Mannik 2), and show how the opposing counsel's portrayal of the refugees as "monstrous" influences the media and the general public. In this chapter, I bring in theory by Kieran O'Doherty and Amanda LeCouteur to argue that the very designation, "boat people" has come to indicate a derogatory status, rather than a neutral starting point for those experiencing a humanitarian crisis. In her novel, Bala explores not only the Tamil ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka but also the Canadian Japanese internment that displaced its victims and caused intergenerational trauma over time. In her fiction, the idea of memory as a means to transmit history to subsequent generations, is both powerful and unreliable. Bala's own account of "purposeful amnesia" reveals a refugee survival strategy that enables the continuation of the cycle of violence. According to Hamid Naficy, exile can happen in one's own homeland as "internal banishment […] and as the lived experience of many state subjects" (Naficy 123). In Bala's novel, the reader witnesses not only the

refugee's efforts to gain access to Canada, but also flashbacks wherein their own government has oppressed them. The Sinhalese government has been historically antagonistic to Tamil citizens, but the novel complicates simple extremes by showing how members of the Tamil Tigers also harass and tyrannize the main characters. All those who escape on the boat risk physical death over social and political death. Bala shifts between the physical home in the North of Jaffna where the characters have lived all their lives and the prison compound where the Canadian government details the refugees. Each one longs for that hoped-for moment when Canada will become a home away from home. To do so, they must cast away their former home, and embrace a life where they may always be regarded, by some, as "the other." In the novel, I lean on Floya Anthias's shift from a definition of diaspora based on ethnicity, and move toward one based on class, gender, and "trans-ethnic alliances." For Anthias, "non-nation-based solidarities" (Anthias 557) begin to create new national homes for refugees.

In Chapter Four I examine *Anil's Ghost* by Michael Ondaatje through Cathy Caruth's argument in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* that "one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead […] to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound" (8). The narrative account directly examines how trauma is able to pass from one body to another, as the trauma of the body Anil studies and tries to protect locates itself within Anil's body. Anil, the protagonist, has only tenuous connections to her home Sri Lanka, but by returning and by investigating the disappearances and killings within the country, Anil becomes a victim of the same malaise that inflicts the country. I explore Mallot's idea of how the body acts as a site of remembrance particularly in the case of Sailor's body in that a body "holds important cues for how history and narrative might be reconsidered" (154), especially when hegemonic rule imposes verbal silence pertaining to violence. I argue that the novel fits what

Michelle Balaev identifies as a trauma novel which she defines as a narrative where victims are unable to speak of the trauma as there is either speechless terror or amnesia, further reinforcing the idea that trauma is unrepresentable. I explore how a traumatic event establishes new links to the place of trauma. I further Greg Forter's argument that while trauma is inherently unrepresentable as the Caruthian model suggests, it is also due to the fact that "it has to do with the enforced rupture with precolonial pasts and the prohibitions against remembrance enforced by particular regimes of power" (Forter 74), implying that trauma is unrepresentable because the reproductions of trauma are subject to power structures. I argue for the vulnerability of the human body and examine how power structures silence Anil's attempt to serve as this one victim's conduit, and how her failure affects her sense of self. When Anil leaves the country, Ondaatje raises questions as to whether she is able to effectively convey the trauma that she reads in Sailor's body when every attempt to read trauma has been quashed by powerful institutions.

My thesis examines what home means to each character and how they attempt to recreate this literal, fictional, imaginative, and political space using memory, nostalgia and trauma. Displacement of their identities is a crucial aspect in their search for their homes, especially as it is only when their homes are gone, lost, left behind, desired and imagined (Friedman 202) that characters experience a level of displacement that prompts them to recreate their homes. Although each character embraces, rejects, and reproduces an idea of home, the temporal and geographical gap between what they once considered home and their new settlement, embraced because of drastically-altered circumstances, alters not only the home they each long for, but the structure and function of that longing itself.

CHAPTER 1: RE-INVENTING MEMORY: THE SEARCH FOR ONDAATJE'S OEDIPAL FOREBEAR

In this chapter, I examine Michael Ondaatje's intense displacement of the "self" in *Running in the Family* and the unconventional means by which Ondaatje searches for his identity through his search for and representation of his father. In the chapter, I use the term "Oedipal forebear" to refer to Ondaatje's attempts to identify with his father as an object of desire that influences Ondaatje's identity and as a patriarch that has always been absent in his and his mother's life following their divorce and subsequent migration. My argument builds on Joanne Saul's article, "'The shape of the unknown thing': Writing Displacement in *Running in the Family*," and examines the overlapping ways in which Ondaatje finds himself constantly questioning his identity and self. By "self," I mean a hypothesis of being that is socially formed in conjunction with one's experiences and memories.

In this memoir/novel, Michael Ondaatje situates himself as autobiographer: living in Toronto and returning to his Sri Lankan "homeland," in two separate visits. *Running in the Family* offers an autobiographical narrative, in which Ondaatje seeks to immerse himself in the history of his parents, but a "history" that includes research, legend, hearsay, and myth. As the off-spring of an Eastern Elite, at a point in history when British Imperialism had finally lost its power within the island nation, Ondaatje struggles to negotiate his identity against a Ceylon and a Patriarch that are partly fictional, partly non-existent at the time that he writes this text. Kaja Silverman terms Ondaatje's retelling of his experience of returning to his homeland as a response to "the Oedipal severance" of his patrilineal roots at the tender age of eleven which accentuates his displacement as he moves away from his "home" in Sri Lanka and begins his life as an immigrant in England and Canada. His yearning for clarity in his identity begins as "the bright bone of a dream" of his father surrounded by dogs "barking into the tropical landscape" (Ondaatje 5), which ultimately leads him to revisit Sri Lanka in

1978 and 1980 as a foreigner returning to his own country in search of his home. On his return to Toronto, he reconstructs memory through "his relatives' anecdotes and bits of gossip, and from snippets of journal entries, poems, photographs, and newspaper clippings he gathers" (Coleman 105). Ondaatje does so by blurring the lines between the geopolitical entity, Ceylon, and the somewhat fanciful figure of Mervyn Ondaatje, as he toys with the notion of nationalism and identity, both intrinsically woven into the self. I will also examine Ondaatje's displacement as a trauma resulting from the political upheavals in Sri Lanka, and argue that he attempts to relive a past that he was denied; however, he is able to relive and recuperate as a means of reconstructing his child-self through the memory of his parents in his own words, and in the recollections of others. I call on Edward Mallot's argument in *Memory, Nationalism, and Narrative in Contemporary South Asia* and extend Mallot's idea of the body as a site of remembrance in order to examine Mervyn Ondaatje as a site of memory where the body remembers the trauma inflicted, regardless of whether he wishes to share his experiences or not.

In tracing Mervyn Ondaatje and reconstructing his family history, protagonist-Ondaatje stumbles on the traumatic history of Sri Lanka which in turn enables narrator-Ondaatje to find the links between his identity, his "self," and his national connections. *Running in the Family* becomes the culminating point of his search for a self that Ondaatje only constructs as he re-invents and evokes the memory of both his father and Ceylon, with the help of friends and family who artistically collaborate to resuscitate the dying memory of his father's Ceylon by infusing stories into a space about which Ondaatje was ignorant until he himself is summoned to Asia in that "bright bone of a dream" (Ondaatje 5). This collaborative effort enables Ondaatje to re-infuse meaning to his "self." I explore Vijay Agnew's concept of memory and home in *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity: A Search for Home* to further understand Ondaatje's endeavor as he establishes a connection between the individual past

and the collective past to fully account for an identity that evaded him all his life. As he re-invents his story and in turn the history of his country by anthologizing memories, he awakens the deep-seated scars of both Mervyn Ondaatje and Ceylon. I argue that it is the process of (re)inventing memories through which Ondaatje vicariously relives the past and – in doing so – discovers himself.

One of the most problematic questions in *Running in the Family* arises with regard to labelling Ondaatje as Canadian or Sri Lankan or Canadian/Sri Lankan. A focus on his national identity leads to further scrutiny about his "home" and his belonging which help narrow his search for his identity. The simplest of questions regarding Ondaatje's self at the start of the text are precisely the answers that his writing attempts to problematize and later resolve; for example, it examines questions such as what Ondaatje's homeland is and if homeland is a place that is defined by geographic location or if home is where his father is buried. Ondaatje's displacement begins when he is born into a prominent Dutch-Burgher family at a time when Sri Lanka's name was still Ceylon. In colonial Ceylon, the Ondaatjes occupied a privileged position as English educated elite. In *Running in the Family*, Ondaatje contextualizes his father against this backdrop by writing of his youthful, erratic extravagances in England:

> It was two and a half years later, after several modest letters about his successful academic career, that his parents discovered he had not even passed the entrance exam and was living off their money in England. He had rented extravagant rooms in Cambridge and simply eliminated the academic element of university…making a name for himself as someone who knew exactly what was valuable and interesting in the Cambridge circles of the 1920s. (Ondaatje 14)

The family's privilege was short-lived as it took place during an era prior to the insurgence of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism, still at an embryonic stage while his father lived in Cambridge and subsequently married. This nationalism grew steadily, promoting a political ideology emphasizing Sinhalese culture ethnically interlaced with Theravada Buddhism. It is this precise and disruptive emphasis on nationalism following the collapse of the British colonial rule in Ceylon that begins to interrogate minority ethnic identities and how they belong in (and to) Sri Lanka. Saradha Balasubramanian in her article "History as a 'Well-Told Lie' in Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*" recapitulates the ethnic violence that Ondaatje touches on as a need veiled by the governing body to gain supremacy over any other minority within the island nation:

> The dominant Sinhalese national narrative uses the Mahavamsa I to link the beginning of Sri Lankan history with the origin of the Sinhalese race and the arrival of Vijaya and his companions in the 511 century B.C. The arrival of the Tamils is traced back to the 3rd century B.C., thereby granting the status of "original inhabitant" to the Sinhalese. (73)

Interestingly, Saradha Balasubramanian also believes that with colonization, the British who overthrew the Dutch, and the Dutch who overthrew the Portuguese understood the importance of a "unified" country: "The fault lines in Sri Lankan society at this point were class and caste, not religion, language or ethnicity. The current ethnic conflict, then, is of recent origin although its actors claim historical antecedents" (73). Despite the Sri Lankan government's claims of inclusiveness, the Sinhala Only Act and several other political reformations within the country only serve to marginalize and ostracize the minorities. Ondaatje's narrative in this context becomes a parallel narrative to the dominant Sinhala Buddhist narrative that the country seeks to promote; in Ondaatje's narrative, class and caste are illustrated through language and ethnicity.

Balasubramanian's article highlights *Running in the Family* as "both a subtle critique of the exclusionary narratives of nation-building in Sri Lanka and an imaginative reconstruction of personal and national history" (71). It becomes important for Ondaatje to reconcile the transition that his childhood home undergoes in such a short span of time. Mervyn Ondaatje appears to mirror the rise and fall of an ethnic minority that will have to revise their belonging to their "home" following the rapid socio-political changes that were underway. Saul in her article "'The shape of the unknown thing': Writing Displacement in *Running in the Family*" also sympathizes with Ondaatje's displacement:

> This separation from his child-hood home complicates any easy sense of belonging when he returns decades later. His journeys to Sri Lanka are not straightforward home-comings; the connections he seeks are tenuous. The text itself thus becomes the site of an exploration of self through familial connections, origins, and place; it becomes the site of Ondaatje's complex act of cultural recovery. (Saul 35)

In Ondaatje's search for his Oedipal forebear, he scavenges for stories of his father's by-gone days. As he immerses himself in the past, he encounters a similar manifestation in his dream in Canada when he hears a recollection of his father, by his friend Arthur. This image of his father striding from the jungle into which he ran in a drunken state, is one that Ondaatje relates that "he cannot come to terms with":

> My father was walking towards him, huge and naked. In one hand he holds five ropes, and dangling on the end of each of them is a black dog. None of the five are touching the ground. He is holding his arm outstretched, holding them with one arm as if he has supernatural strength…He had captured all the evil in the regions he had passed through and was holding it. (Ondaatje 163 -164)

The recollection is indicative of Mervyn Ondaatje having a firm grip on the socio-political chaos that the country was experiencing at the time. Amidst the chaos of the transition that colonial/postcolonial Sri Lanka is undergoing, Ondaatje marvels at his father's confidence. At the outset, it appears as if Mervyn Ondaatje has a strong hold on the situation following the collapse of the British colonial rule in Ceylon and the social decline of the Dutch-Burgher minority. However, I argue that this image that represents Mervyn Ondaatje's heyday is in rapid decline. In the chapter titled "Thanikama" (which means "loneliness" in Sinhala) Ondaatje juxtaposes the once magnificent image of Mervyn Ondaatje that Arthur recalls against the alcoholic father he ultimately becomes. Ondaatje dwells on the inebriated Mervyn stripped of all vitality "…he sat in front of the house now fully aware that the car was empty but for his body, this corpse" (Ondaatje 169). Ondaatje documents how Mervyn finally lives the remaining days of his life, as he becomes distanced from his family following the divorce from Doris (Ondaatje's mother) and constantly resorts to alcohol. Ondaatje traces his parents' economic decline in *Running in the Family*: "They had come a long way in fourteen years from being the products of two of the best known and wealthiest families in Ceylon: my father now owning only a chicken farm at Rock Hill, my mother working in a hotel" (Ondaatje 172). Here, Ondaatje is subtly grieving for his parents' past that would have allowed him the opportunity to re-define himself despite his immigrant status as a Sri Lankan Canadian. Sangeetha Ray, commenting on Ondaatje's national displacement, states that:

> Although Ondaatje situates the family securely in a Sri Lankan social and geographical landscape (with the exception of a description of his father's spent at Oxford and references to family members traveling to countries), he uses history and literature as a way of constructing his family as simultaneously Sri Lankan and international. By tracing the generational connection of his family to show a final geographical

> displacement at the core, Ondaatje uses the generational linkage as a way to dislocate them geographically. (Ray 42)

It becomes important to Ondaatje to enact in words the social decline of his Dutch-Burgher family in order to re-negotiate his connection to his home that begins at the very root; in Ondaatje's case his father Mervyn Ondaatje. I limit my scope to examining Ondaatje's patrilineal ties to his motherland because his mother, with her children, leaves the land that causes such harrowing experiences in Mervyn Ondaatje's life. The father's choice to remain in the country despite the changing ambiance and politics makes him the prime candidate for Ondaatje to examine and re-negotiate his ties to the country. As Ondaatje begins his search for a self that is intrinsically woven into his "home," his task as a writer/(auto)biographer/recorder/quasi-historian is so arduous that on his return to his home country he has to recreate from a collage of anecdotes that only a few remember. In writing this book, Ondaatje presents the distant and fading memory of "a home" with the only trace of its past in the memories of family and friends.

His search for his "home" is as crucial and elusive as his search for the "real" identity of Mervyn Ondaatje as captured in the photograph in the chapter, "What we think of Married Life." At each juncture, the reader understands how the stories that Ondaatje hears about his father give him more and more information about his father, yet make it difficult for him to develop a deep understanding of his father. At the end of the novel, there remain only fragments of a character, all needing to be pieced together to form his identity. The elusive character portrayal by Ondaatje is also a commentary on how identity itself is in a constant flux, and adapts, metamorphizes, challenges the notion of an essential self. It is perhaps the reason for Joanne Saul's observation that "often the stories he hears do not correspond to his own memories, and historical documents tend to contradict one another. The result is that, in the midst of his travels, Ondaatje discovers the extent of his disconnection, or the trauma of

his uprooting" (Saul 35). Ondaatje's search for his father and his homeland are deliberately interchangeable, just as his displacement is temporal and spatial. It is only if Ondaatje can recreate his father's Ceylon that he can begin to understand his father; at the same time, his literary recreation becomes a challenge because of the Oedipal severance that takes place due to his own migration. Dan Coleman in a comparison of *A Casual Brutality* by Neil Bissoondath and *Running in the Family* states that: "The similarities continue in that the son's alienation is most poignantly figured in his lost father: the emigrant son's severance from patria is emotionally intensified through his severance from pater" (Coleman 105). In Coleman's reading of *Running in the Family*, he argues that despite Ondaatje's best efforts to fully comprehend his father with the help of his family and friends, he fails. I believe this "failure" is part of the book's format, due to the fragmentary nature of the memories that are inherently capable of depicting snippets of the past rather than the actual past. All the past is a reconstruction of actual incidents and, in reproducing Mervyn Ondaatje's past through stories, Ondaatje's achievement is only partial in retrieving an "actual" father, but also a way to present his investigation into his own identity through fragments about his forebear. Sangeetha Ray makes a similar point in her essay:

> It is unnerving for this reader to see how the voices of generations of women who spun their stories for him, "each memory a wild thread in the sarong" (110), are subordinated to a recuperation of the wild, misunderstood, alcoholic father who is ultimately privileged as one who would never be fully understood by any of his children. (47)

Ondaatje assigns a certain amount of reverence and mystery to his father as someone who cannot be fully comprehended or defined, concluding that his father will remain "one of those books we long to read whose pages remain uncut" (Ondaatje 200) reinforcing the notion that Ondaatje's attempt to recreate his father will only depict a fraction of Mervyn's "real" self while the rest would be a representation of him. Dan Coleman explains this mythologizing of

Mervyn Ondaatje through a reading of Freud's "Family Romances" as Ondaatje struggles to write his father into words. Coleman states that Ondaatje undergoes the natural processes of separation and that his responses in the text to his search for the lost patriarch are justifiable as "Freud describes the process by which children deal with the unhappy discovery that their parents are neither omniscient nor omnipotent. To compensate for this disillusion, the child begins to make up 'pseudo-biographies' which discard or replace the disappointing parents" (107). Coleman's reading of the Oedipal severance in the article prefigures my focus on the connection between Ondaatje's home and patrilineal roots. According to Dan Coleman: "As the child learns about the distinct sexual roles played by the parents in his own procreation, he comes to realize that maternity is provable and certain, while paternity is not" (107). *Running in the Family* is an attempt to find the missing patriarch that has been absent in Ondaatje's life. Freud in *Family Romance* states that:

> …These new and aristocratic parents are equipped with attributes that are derived entirely from real recollections of the actual and humble ones; so that in fact the child is not getting rid of his father but exalting him. Indeed the whole effort at replacing the real father by a superior one is only an expression of the child's longing for the happy, vanished days when his father seemed to him the noblest and strongest of men and his mother the dearest and loveliest of women. He is turning away from the father whom he knows to-day to the father in whom he believed in the earlier years of his childhood; and his phantasy is no more than the expression of a regret that those happy days have gone. (Freud 239-240)

Similar to Ondaatje's attempt to reconcile his relations with his home, he attempts to re-negotiate his understanding of his patriarch. When his relatives speak of Mervyn Ondaatje's attitude to life, the reader understands that Ondaatje is acquainting himself with his own father for the first time since his parents' separation. He constructs a Mervyn Ondaatje

fashioned by others' memories of him. By beginning to understand his father, Ondaatje discovers his Dutch/Tamil ancestry, his culture, the history of Ceylon and the transition to Sri Lanka. He becomes privy to a life and a part of him he never knew existed. This new information he gathers from stories redefines him as an individual.

The dominant sentiment in *Running in the Family* is nostalgia. There is a constant yearning and a continuous attempt to relive the past. It is in this context that memory plays a very important role in *Running in the Family* as Ondaatje re-invents memory throughout the text. The entire text is "an act of transfer" of memories of family, friends, and anyone who knew Mervyn Ondaatje and witnessed the socio-political upheavals in Sri Lanka. With the assistance of primary and secondary witnesses, Ondaatje begins his task to re-invent what history (by way of simply documenting the dominant narrative of the Sinhala Buddhist experience of colonialism) deliberately and conveniently chooses to forget. Jill Bennet in "The Aesthetics of Sense-Memory: Theorising Trauma through the Visual Arts,"[1] brings forth a compelling argument with regard to the 1911 Swiss psychologist Édouard Claparède who argues, "It is impossible to feel emotion as past…One cannot be a spectator of one's own feelings; one feels them, or one does not feel them; one cannot imagine them without stripping them of their affective essence" (Radstone and Hodgkin 27). Bennet's understanding of Claparède's statement is that emotions are only applicable in the present, while memories become "ideas, representations, and representation inherently implies distance, perspective" (27) and Ondaatje seems to bridge this gap through what Svetlana Boym calls "restorative nostalgia" as this term signifies "emphasis on the *nostos* and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps" (41) as Ondaatje seeks to "reconstruct" the past. This type of nostalgia is different from "reflective nostalgia" that "lingers on the ruins" (41). Bennet critiques this refutation against emotional memory as he argues that although emotion may not be retrievable, it is revivable through memory. This is

precisely my understanding of what Ondaatje's collaborators do, as they revive for the narrator snippets of his father's life. However, it becomes Ondaatje's undertaking as he uses those sensations to produce "a new bout of emotion." Bennet says that "affect, properly conjured, produces a real-time somatic experience, no longer framed as representation" (27). These memories become the sole means through which Ondaatje is able to connect to a past, a culture, and a person that no longer exists. The memories form a bridge that assist him to discover his selfhood against this backdrop. Furthermore, Ondaatje is able to access cultural memory that is in decline as Ondaatje connects to his roots through his Dutch-Burgher colonial ancestry through the use of memory. Ondaatje does not depict his family's history through the dominant experience of colonial Sri Lanka and the post-colonial experience (which is largely the experience of a majority of Sinhala Buddhist). My take on *Running in the Family* is that Ondaatje speaks for a minority's experience that has very little representation in the history of Sri Lanka. Hirsch and Smith in "Feminism and Cultural Memory: An Introduction" state that "what a culture remembers and what it chooses to forget are intricately bound up with issues of power and hegemony" (6). In light of this statement, it is arguable that there exists a collective "forgetting" when an entire community doesn't wish to dwell on particular histories, simply because it causes deep hurt in recollecting the sense of alienation that is often an imposition on minority races within a country where the dominant race/ethnicity holds "power and hegemony." In these cases, a dominant culture may purposefully dismiss particular histories (especially of its oppression of less-powerful groups). In this particular text Ondaatje does not speak of the kind of active violence that Shyam Selvadurai and Sharon Bala address (which I analyze in the subsequent chapters of this thesis), but rather, examines the subtle form of victimization that the Dutch-Burgher minority face by tracing Mervyn Ondaatje's growing discomfort in his own country. Similar to a detective, the narrator in *Running in the Family* pieces together the buried past of

Mervyn Ondaatje and postcolonial Ceylon in stories and fragments, thereby providing a counter memory to official hegemonic history. There are many criticisms levelled at Ondaatje (Arun Prabha Mukherjee and Chelva Kanaganayakam are the most strident) that the composite of memories is insufficient to portray the "real" situation. Ondaatje comes under particular heavy criticism from some critics, for failing to depict the Sinhala/Tamil ethnic conflict. According to Mukherjee, Ondaatje fails to use his experience grounded in trauma resulting from the ethnic violence in his (auto)/biography/memoir to depict his dislocation or emerging otherness through this experience. However, I argue that Ondaatje here speaks about a struggle that the Dutch-Burgher minority experienced but whose displacement has continuously been dismissed on the account of the Tamil/Sinhala ethnic conflict dominating Memory and Trauma studies. His authorial intention becomes his father's experience because the memory and the trauma of displacement becomes his birthright and endowment that witnesses transfer to him through the act of telling: "You must get this book right," […] "You can only write it once" (Ondaatje 183). Regardless of these acts of transfer in memory, it is impossible to mirror an exact version of Mervyn Ondaatje or the exact historical moments in Sri Lanka. In this particular text, with the evasiveness with regard to specific times and places and people, one could argue that Ondaatje evades that kind of "exactitude" that other novelists present, depicting Sri Lanka in fiction. As Jill Bennet argues, these portrayals could only be the artful use of affect or representation. Ondaatje in his character portrayal of his father reveals the complexity of Mervyn Ondaatje's character as he remains incomprehensible, even while alive. After his death, all these competing narratives about him present different and layered versions of the man, the historical figure, the father, because identity and selfhood are by nature elusive. I believe that these portrayals emerging through stories are merely reflections and reconstructions that attempt to mirror an exactitude that is impossible to recreate as realistic biography. Paul Connerton states that "to remember . . . is

precisely not to recall events as isolated, it is to become capable of forming meaningful narrative sequences" (26) and this is precisely what Ondaatje attempts in the fragmented narrative that he pieces together in *Running in the Family*. The stories become Ondaatje's primary means to relive the past. By initiating this search, Ondaatje does with his family history what Hirsch and Smith note would be a retrospective witness inviting his readers to join in his exploration: he "projects himself (herself) into the space of the past, a space that was empty until he (she) brought memories to it, and he (she) has permitted memories to be inscribed onto his (her) own body, thus assuming their burdens" (Hirsch and Smith 2). Ondaatje, similar to Hirsch and Smith's statement, assumes the burden of portraying his father as he was a central figure in Ondaatje's life that was largely absent. It is a "space of the past" that Ondaatje much later re-invents despite the inherent drawbacks of representing the past. Although Ondaatje remains absent throughout the changes that take place within the country and in Mervyn Ondaatje's life, he is able to vicariously experience what the others witnessed first-hand and fictionalize their experiences. Maurice Halbwachs states that "it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories" (7); Ondaatje's fading memories of his childhood, along with the others' memories enable him to re-invent the same experience for the reader as he "acquires," "recalls," "recognizes," and "localizes" these memories, and reproduces them as an artistic creation for his readership. Vijay Agnew explains how memory forms a link that enables us to begin to unravel our sense of belonging:

> Memories establish a connection between our individual past and our collective past (our origins, heritage, and history). The past is always with us, and it defines our present; it resonates in our voices, hovers over our silences, and explains how we came to be ourselves and to inhabit what we call 'our homes'. (3)

According to Agnew, an individual's past and the collective past overlap in memories and as Ondaatje links his memories to that of his family's, he is able to establish a connection to the past and in turn is able to recreate his home in the present. Ondaatje's search for a home in *Running in the Family* is not in the sense of a traditional one, but exceeds the reader's conventional definition and is somewhat similar to Agnew's and Hirsch and Smith's definition that revamps the traditional understanding of a temporal home. Hirsch and Smith examine how parent/child connections transmit cultural memory and how "violence of war, totalitarianism, exile, or sexual abuse" can interrupt transmission within a family. In other words, any type of trauma interrupts cultural memory and this exacerbates the wound. In Ondaatje's case, the injury is to his identity as he struggles to discover his selfhood: "Nevertheless, the sons and daughters in the chain of familial and thus also of cultural memory attempt to bear witness to the fragmented, interrupted, and mostly traumatic stories they have inherited through verbal, visual, and bodily acts of postmemory" (Hirsch and Smith 10) and this retrospective witnessing creates "co-witnesses" to the trauma such as Ondaatje the son/narrator/detective/writer.

> The family appears both as an object of nostalgia, a space of potential protection from the public violence of the twentieth century, a home and a haven, and, contrarily, as a dangerous and violent traumatizing space in its own right. It thus offers a site in which not only the particularities of listening, empathy, and identification but also the appropriations and distortions, the power differentials that characterize the transmission of cultural memory and the work of counter memory, can fruitfully be identified. (Hirsch and Smith 10)

The trauma that I refer to in Ondaatje's and his father's case is more psychological than physical, resulting in a constant fear for one's safety and an overpowering sense of dislocation. This dislocation causes lasting fractures in their identity as the reader is able to

trace the sharp decline in Mervyn Ondaatje's character as he becomes incessantly disillusioned, living in the past while Ondaatje goes about life in Canada. For Ondaatje, there is a huge void within him that haunts him and causes him to cross the seas to make sense of his missing self. The word trauma in Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* captures a different kind of trauma from that of Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* [the subject of Chapter Four of this thesis]. I examine, here, the mental suffering that transfers to subsequent generations in the form of alterations to one's sense of self, particularly that which results in both the Tamil and Dutch-Burgher minority community in Sri Lanka. It is possible at some level that this same displacement is the reality of the Tamil community, but my concern in this chapter is with the displacement and trauma that results within the Dutch-Burgher community.[2] Although the memories that Ondaatje documents do not depict imminent physical violence; these memories assist Ondaatje to trace the fear of dislocation that settles into his father's life. This fear alters Mervyn Ondaatje's personality, and the stories are evidence of how drastically he changes. Mallot's understanding of trauma in "Body Politics and the Body Politic" is that,

> The Greek origin of 'trauma' suggests a wound to the body; over time, however, the word has become appropriated for sufferings of the soul and spirit… it is the physical body that often becomes a focal point in the literatures of trauma; writers seek to make bodies the real texts by which others' experiences can be understood. (166)

Mallot's argument fits perfectly into the explanation of Ondaatje's attempt to equate all the contributors, characters and himself to a book when he states, "This is their book as much as mine" (Ondaatje 186). In doing so, Ondaatje indirectly asserts that the past and the present, the individual and the collective experiences, meld within the text. Their bodies (Ondaatje, his family and the Dutch-burgher minority in Sri Lanka) similar to Mervyn Ondaatje's body becomes a text on which history writes itself. Mallot quotes Sandra Soo-Jin Lee who writes that "[i]n cases where memory of events and experiences are continually challenged,

undermined and erased by other more authoritative forces, the body is often presented in testament of the 'truth'" (92). This notion of viewing Michael Ondaatje as a text is not an original claim; Joanne Saul does so as well. In her article, "Displacement and Self-Representation: Theorizing Contemporary Canadian Biotexts," Saul argues that Ondaatje writes himself into *Running in the Family*. Her argument is that Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* is a biotext where Ondaatje negotiates his belonging in terms of nation and ethnicity. Saul also argues that Ondaatje's task as an autobiographer is more complex as his negotiations need to take place in "the multiple sites of belonging" that are involved since his migration. Saul builds her argument on George Bowering's term "biotext":

> As a way of privileging literary form as the very place where the writer of a specific poem or fiction finds him or her self. While "Autobiography replaces the writer," Bowering claims that "Biotext is an extension of him." Rather than admitting a gap between self and text, "biotext" foregrounds the writer's efforts to articulate him or her self through the writing process. The text itself comes to life. (Saul 260)

Saul argues that *Running in the Family* is more an extension of Ondaatje's self rather than an account about him and examines the text as an expression of his displaced self, resulting from his emigration from Sri Lanka. There is much debate about the genre Ondaatje's narrative fits into but most critics[3] argue for autobiographical elements in the text straddling post-modernism. The genre is interesting for the reason that Mallot explores the "common assumption in the West" (167) that Freud's "Talking cure" is a starting point to healing from trauma. *Running in the Family* becomes a writing cure. Saul believes that the text is "his acceptance of the explanatory and recuperative powers of storytelling" (Saul 36). I agree with Saul's argument of viewing the text as a means to overcome a childhood trauma that Ondaatje only confronts much later in life. Since he vaguely recalls his past, he is able to fully recover it only by tracing his own roots to his first home in Sri Lanka. Milica Živković

in “Memory and Place in Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family”* develops the idea of Ondaatje as an “absent protagonist of his narrative” (101) arguing that his focus remains on peripheral subjects such as his father Mervyn Ondaatje, his mother Doris Gratiaen, his grandmother Lalla, and their relationship to their collective past of Sri Lanka. Živković’s notion of the “absent protagonist” has interesting reverberations in that it connects to Jonathan Culler’s argument of how the self is always a composite of partial identifications (Culler 141) and I believe Ondaatje’s partial identifications occur by listening to stories about his predecessors that reflect parts of him but never the total image of him. Through his absence, Ondaatje documents how each memory of his past has the ability to define his selfhood. For example, he traces back to his father’s education at Oxford and his parents’ marriage, their care-free life in Sri Lanka; he examines stories that ceased to hold any importance since his parents’ divorce until now as each story becomes a part of him. His absence is also justifiable as his role transcends that of a mere character in a narrative trajectory. By documenting stories, Ondaatje enables not only himself but also his reader the rare opportunity to empathize from a distance. He and his reader together witness and experience the individual or cultural trauma of displacement. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub describe “the act of listening to the trauma of the Holocaust as a shared vulnerability and intersubjectivity” (10). By listening to Ondaatje’s father’s eventual displacement Ondaatje bears witness to an entire generation’s history as he too becomes a conduit of the past. According to Hirsch and Smith, such acts are applicable beyond the specific context of Holocaust testimony: “There are hazards to the listening to trauma. Trauma—and its impact on the hearer—leaves, indeed, no hiding place intact. As one comes to know the survivor, one really comes to know oneself and that is no simple task” (Felman and Laub 72). This particular research on Holocaust survivors is relevant to my analysis because, regardless of geographical location and region, various researchers promote the idea of trauma as a

universal experience rather than privileging certain traumas above others. In her article "Heterotopic Spaces of Postcolonial Trauma in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*" Victoria Burrows acknowledges that "much of trauma theory grew out of Holocaust studies which sought ways to enable particularized forms of profound historical trauma to be narrativized" (Burrows 162). Although the Holocaust experience dominates much of trauma theory, Burrows argues that the future of trauma theory should seek to incorporate other global traumas. Burrows's argument illustrates that trauma theory has to date been predominantly Eurocentric, privileging white pain, with the exception of investigations into the narratives that emerge from the harrowing experiences of slavery depicted in Black American Literature and Indigenous stories of generational trauma. This is the vein in which I argue that Ondaatje's experience—regardless of how subtle—results in a displacement similar to that experienced by many other victims of global trauma. In keeping with the contention of this thesis, the memories of his father and his country assist Ondaatje in multiple ways; indeed, stories of distress and trauma facilitate his search for himself, and these stories enable him to discover an integral part of his selfhood of which he was ignorant prior to his attempt at reconnecting to his roots. By researching, recording, and re-inventing memories, Ondaatje renegotiates his home and the sense of belonging that causes his displacement as he pieces together his childhood home and more importantly his parents' home. Although Canada is in Ondaatje's understanding his first home by choice, his father's home is very much a part of Ondaatje's past. His retelling of the trauma that these memories transmit enables him to break the silence imposed on witnesses of trauma by those who control hegemonic discursive spaces. Mallot, citing Deborah M. Horwitz on trauma as a result of domestic violence, asserts that "silence is not a neutral act; rather, it is a politically regressive one that passively permits the continuation of violence against women and children" (Mallot 4). This commentary on silence is applicable even in Michael Ondaatje's situation. His family's trauma goes

unnoticed for so long but it is a reality of a minority that struggles to find belonging in a homeland that subtly rejects them as Sri Lankans. Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* is a recuperative narrative of home that helps him to reconstitute an identity that is fractured by the trauma of displacement.

In Ondaatje's search for his father and his home, I find that in his writing he does something remarkable through the character of Mervyn Ondaatje as he transforms Mervyn's body into a site of remembrance. Mallot argues that it is impossible to talk about memory without the body because the physical sensations of the body translate into memory:

> The assumption that the two necessarily coexist can prove so compulsive that the body as its own entity may 'drop out' of memory's principal narrative (of course my body was there, because this is what I remember). Scholars working in the fields of trauma and testimony, moreover, have frequently turned to the common ground shared by bodies and memories, perhaps following Edward S. Casey's claim that '*there is no memory without body memory'* (emphasis in original). (Mallot 154)

When the dominant nationalistic narrative seeks to invalidate and call to question the Dutch-Burgher minority's version of history, Mervyn Ondaatje's body becomes a "subversive means to store and reveal the past" (Mallot 153). Speaking of Shauna Singh Baldwin's novel, *What the Body Remembers*, Mallot in his chapter, "What Bodies Remember: Michael Ondaatje, Shauna Singh Baldwin, and Corporeal Testimony" argues that,

> The body can also serve as an intentional instrument of individual agency, as characters choose to 'write' memories with and on their corporeal selves to cope with psychologically oriented crises. For Baldwin, the body of one often becomes emblematic of the bodies of many, allowing a single victim's story to make claims for a much broader group (165-166).

This same argument can be applicable in reading Mervyn Ondaatje's character in *Running in the Family*. Mallot examines the ways in which "the human body can, independently and even autonomously, retain and reveal an individual's history" (154) and in turn is able to "represent the bodies of many, allowing a single victim's story to advance claims for others" (154). As Mervyn Ondaatje's character beckons his son to return to Sri Lanka in his dream, the search that begins with the longing for his Oedipal forebear compounds into a search for a lost past, the history of his community against that of the ethnic majority, his identity, his roots, and the familial stories that have been erased or silenced up until then. Mervyn Ondaatje's body becomes the canvas that delineates the drastic social and political decline that the minorities experience as Sinhala Buddhist nationalism pervades the Sri Lankan constitution and becomes the prevalent sentiment within the country. As Mervyn Ondaatje diminishes into nothingness, he succumbs to his dipsomania and becomes the mere product of a governing system that continually oppresses the minorities. Although Ondaatje does not directly reference the historical social and political upheavals in Sri Lanka, the only evidence to suggest Mervyn Ondaatje's social decline is purely through the decline in his character. His trauma is reflected towards the end, as his children recall "his downward swings" (Ondaatje 180) and how he is overcome with paranoia and an intense fear for his safety. Mallot examines the word "trauma" and asserts that there is an essential blurring of the mind and the body in trauma victims in literature. In other words, Mallot seems to suggest that the body and the mind are interchangeable and this allows for an interpretation that in this instance Ondaatje uses a mental trauma (that of displacement in one's own society) to reflect the physical downturn in Mervyn Ondaatje's character. References to trauma in literature then focus on both the physical as well as the mental. Mallot cites Laurie Vickeroy who explains that "[t]rauma writers make the suffering body the small, focused universe of the tormented and a vehicle for rendering unimaginable experience tangible to readers" (32-33).

Mallot's point is that the body is often used as a canvas to depict mental and physical trauma that would otherwise be incommunicable to the reader; I transpose his reading of Vickeroy in order to illustrate that the body is able to transfer and communicate trauma that is often depicted as "unrepresentable." Ondaatje uses his father's body to focalize the pain of an entire community as they become outsiders in their own country when Sinhala Buddhists establish themselves as the original inhabitants claiming rights to Sri Lanka. Mervyn Ondaatje internalizes the trauma and resorts to alcoholism as a coping mechanism "when he could no longer hold all the information, the awareness of what was happening" (Ondaatje 181). Mervyn Ondaatje becomes the receptacle that embodies the trauma between the individual and the collective experience. Felman argues that through depictions in literature focalizing the body, the writer is able to project the suffering of the victim "within the body" (108) onto the reader. This projection of trauma allows the reader to comprehend the source of not only Mervyn Ondaatje's displacement but also Michael Ondaatje's. Mervyn's body becomes a receptacle for reading the trauma that history inflicts on him. Mallot states that:

> What a body remembers may hold important clues for understanding communal violence, as well as important cues for how history and narrative might be reconsidered. These authors position the physical self not just as the testing ground by which we may recognize traumatic events, but as a trans-textual site of the past: bodies retain and reveal events and emotional impacts in ways that complement what traditional, verbal narratives cannot say. (154)

In a similar manner, Mervyn Ondaatje literally testifies against the dominant narrative and permeates the silence with his story. Each time the storyteller (friends or family or Michael Ondaatje) calls to mind a fragment of Mervyn Ondaatje's body, he serves to evoke a memory of something larger than a mere individual and personal experience. Felman argues that,

> …successful trauma narratives manage to place the suffering of the victim 'within the body' of the reader, moving the impact of trauma, as it were, from one body to another: 'The specific task of the literary testimony is, in other words, to open up in that belated witness, which the reader now historically becomes, the imaginative capability of perceiving history what is happening to others in one's own body'. (Felman 108)

Felman's argument is that a successful trauma narrative is able to create the same experience within the reader and make belated witnesses of a historical event that the past would bar the reader from experiencing. However, Ondaatje after having become a belated witness to his father's trauma through the various stories that depict Mervyn Ondaatje, re-invents the past in *Running in the Family*, and makes the reader a belated witness of a trauma that is severely unrepresented. Mervyn Ondaatje's literal absence and the search for his incorporeal body then becomes a superficial quest in the narrative as it becomes clear that Ondaatje seeks to transfer the trauma "from one body to another" as he becomes a belated witness of his father's suffering. In returning to the home of his father, Ondaatje seeks to piece together his father's body through the effective use of "witness" testimonies. Ondaatje's words reflect his desire to absorb the experience both pleasurable and traumatic: "My body must remember everything, this brief insect bite, smell of wet fruit, the slow snail light, rain, rain and underneath the hint of colours …" (163). Ondaatje's search enables him to begin to unearth the partial truths that the dominant narrative seeks to silence. The truism he presents in the text that, "In Sri Lanka a well-told lie is worth a thousand facts" (163), becomes an invitation for readers to question the so-called facts that appear to take the form of truths.

At the heart of Michael Ondaatje's search lies a trauma that an entire community and country experienced. However, to this day the Burgher community's discomfort and eventual yet subtle displacement is underplayed and dismissed by the dominant narrative or the more

prominent minority narrative (for example, ignored or left out of stories of the Tamil community that dominates much of the literature on being exiled in their own country that I will discuss in the subsequent chapters). In the larger context of criticism levelled at this account by Arun P. Mukherjee and Chelva Kanaganayakam, I argue that although there is immense pressure to narrate the Sinhala and Tamil conflict, Ondaatje faithfully depicts his community's displacement. Furthermore, the trauma that Ondaatje's family undergoes in the history of Sri Lanka with its various amendments and repeals to the constitution that marginalize minority communities is illustrated through Ondaatje's father's experience. Mervyn Ondaatje's subordination to the dominant ethnicity is trivialized as the experience of another minority is given prominence by literary critics such as Arun P. Mukherjee and Chelva Kanaganayakam over what may seem as a lesser degree of trauma and displacement that is hardly represented in Sri Lankan literature. Circling back to Burrows's argument in *Whiteness and Trauma*, the question remains unanswered as to what the yardstick to measure pain is and how it privileges certain types of trauma over others. Ondaatje terms his entire process of writing and bringing his father's memory back to life as a mere "gesture," but there are many indicators that point to his search to reach the very core of his identity as his process toward recuperation from a community loss. His anthology of memories enables Ondaatje to re-invent and relive a past that remains inaccessible if not for the memories of those who witnessed the transition from Ceylon to Sri Lanka. Ondaatje reclaims his past through memories that allow him the chance to forge connections with his family as he becomes a witness to the cultural memory. The role of witness thus places him in a unique position to create stories that get to live as memories, even as these memories are "reworked." Similar to the "human pyramid"[4] (Ondaatje 10) that reveals bodies standing below him, he becomes an integral part of a familial history and the relationships he forms,

firmly rooted within the Ondaatje family. Through Ondaatje's writing he is ultimately able to redefine not only his selfhood but also his "home."

CHAPTER 2: THE OTHER INSIDE: TRAUMA AND EMBODIED MEMORY IN *FUNNY BOY*

In this chapter, I examine the trauma that Shyam Selvadurai depicts through fictionalized memories in *Funny Boy*. Although the text does not fall into the category of a conventional "trauma novel" as defined by Michelle Balaev, who argues that a trauma novel ideally "creates a speechless fright that divides or destroys identity" (Balaev 1), it offers the reader multiple ways of reading verbal and non-verbal trauma. The story revolves around a Tamil family in Sri Lanka from the 1970s to the 1980s that witnesses generations of ethnic violence. For the family, this trauma continues to affect the successive generations as much as it has affected its predecessors. The story captures the displacement of the Chelvaratnam family starting from Ammachi, a survivor of her father's trauma in the 1950s, leading to the subsequent generation of Chelva (who appears until the very end to convince himself that he is exempt from the traumatic experience if he can adapt to the oppression) to Arjie a third-generation survivor.[5] As the story begins, Arjie is a 7-year-old child narrator who absorbs these familial experiences until he forms an identity for himself in the story. *Funny Boy* explores Arjie who navigates through the do's and the don'ts in society and presents an insight into how Arjie develops his "self."

In *Funny Boy,* intergenerational trauma plays out in Arjie's household as Selvadurai depicts how the past as well as the present violence is able to inflict irreversible damage in the characters' lives. Arjie, the narrator, chronicles these events and the memories of past events as if he were recounting his thoughts in a journal.[6] This journal-like format reveals how Arjie and the reader become "belated witnesses" in Shoshana Felman's sense of the idea of bearing witness to the literary testimony of trauma, while exploring Marianne Hirsch's concept of the fluidity of trauma locating itself in witnesses' bodies. This chapter will build on Edward Mallot's ideas in *Memory, Nationalism, and Narrative in Contemporary South*

Asia and "Body Politics and The Body Politic: Memory as Human Inscription in What the Body Remembers" wherein he explores how the body becomes "not simply something to be read and interpreted, but an entity that tells others how it should be understood" (Mallot 172). I will supplement and enhance Mallot's argument by examining embodied memory in trauma as illustrated in *Regimes of Memory* by Susannah Radstone and Katharine Hodgkin. I argue in this chapter that Selvadurai uses the body as a text to reveal the traumatic history of an entire ethnic minority that ensued during the Tamil Pogrom in Sri Lanka. I will further explore, alongside memory and trauma, the concept of "home" and how Arjie's entire family comes to renounce their figurative "home" soon after the mob destroys their literal house, and begin to conceive as "home" in distant Canada, a place where they haven't yet lived. Selvadurai destroys the physical reality of the brick and mortar home in Arjie's narrative to extrapolate the displacement that Arjie's family experiences as the country pushes towards the ideal of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism.

Vijay Agnew in *Diaspora, Memory and Identity: A Search for Home* states that "the flexibility in defining what is home and its location is associated with self and with community identities that are deterritorialized or constructed across borders and boundaries of phenomena such as race, ethnicity, nationality, and citizenship" (Agnew 15). The idea of "home" that Agnew expostulates as crossing national borders and identity boundaries appears to form the framework in *Funny Boy* as the book opens with Arjie playing the game "bride-bride" with siblings and cousins. In setting up the rules and boundaries of the game, the children performs an imagining of a future extended family. By the end of the book, 17-year-old Arjie and his immediate family leave their home in Sri Lanka and assume refugee status in their new home Canada. Selvadurai chooses to present an entire ethnic minority's displacement through Arjie, who is also displaced in his gender identity and sexual orientation. Selvadurai weaves into Arjie's character an intense sense of displacement as a

young boy who continuously fails to fit mainstream heterosexual masculinity in a restrictive South Asian environment. In this chapter I build on Minoli Salgado's arguments that *Funny Boy* depicts a political version of Sri Lanka, and argue that this realist narrative explores ideas of identity, belonging, and displacement through Arjie and his queer, Tamil Sri Lankan identity.

In *Funny Boy*, Selvadurai highlights the ethnic disparity through relationships that society consider taboo. Each chapter in the novel focuses on a relationship that 1980s Sri Lankan society prohibits.[7] It is these relationships that shed light on how the ethnic division in Sri Lanka shapes each character and their complex decisions. The characters' trauma lies beneath the façades that they enact in the novel (such as Arjie's father Chelva's and Arjie's trauma much later in the novel), and Selvadurai captures this "otherness" in each character by revealing how distinctly they react to their individual as well as collective trauma. The concept of trauma that creates a dormant and forceful existence in *Funny Boy* directly correlates to Sigmund Freud's early works on Psychoanalysis. Paul Antze, in reintroducing this much debated theory,[8] argues that while the entirety of Freud's theories cannot be cited as having a scientific base, recent research in cognitive neuroscience and Psychoanalysis presents "an expressive idiom and a model of human personhood" (in Radstone and Hodgkin 98). At the inception of his theory, Freud viewed trauma as a "foreign body," and later viewed it as "a buried city" waiting for its discovery (in Radstone and Hodgkin 101). Antze revises these metaphors to suggest that trauma presents itself as an "otherness inside ourselves" that is "inherently alien to our own make up" and that is not easily segregated from the rest of our lives (in Radstone and Hodgkin 102). In this way, he takes Freud's notion of trauma as "foreign" and reads that otherness as "buried" within the self.

When examining Arjie's narration of the events that conspire in the novel, I argue that it is easy to trace the emergence of this otherness that Antze speaks of in Arjie's character. In

Arjie's situation, this "otherness" develops with each story that he hears (as "witness"), until the final chapter when he experiences his own trauma. All the adult characters in the novel infuse into Arjie's world the intergenerational trauma that continues to plague theirs and his existence, similar to what Antze promulgates in his essay "The Other Inside: Memory as metaphor in Psychoanalysis": "the idea of the centrality of learnt, procedural, non-representational memory in a field of psychology best known as neuro-cognitivism" (in Radstone and Hodgkin 91) proves that what Arjie finally witnesses is in reality a learned process before he is finally able to identify it as a trauma. This duality in character that Antze speaks of appears more pronounced in older characters such as Ammachi, the matriarchal pillar in the Chelvaratnam family. Ammachi functions as a watchdog within her Tamil family, regulating the entire family's relations with the Sinhala community.

Ammachi hosts all the grandchildren once a month, in what they call "spend-the-days," as well as housing her unmarried daughter Radha Aunty, while watching over the relations of all her married sons and daughters. Her youngest, Radha Aunty has returned from America ostensibly to marry a Tamil man, Rajan. Ammachi discovers that Radha Aunty has socialized with a Sinhalese man, Anil Jayasinghe, and complains to her husband, the family patriarch: "What did I tell you. She was getting a lift from a Sinhalese. Only a Sinhalese would be impertinent enough to offer an unmarried girl a lift" (Selvadurai 58). Ammachi reprimands Radha Aunty for transgressing the division created in blood that polices the border of the Sinhala-Tamil relationships. Selvadurai reveals how Ammachi's response is one that those inflicted by the trauma present to the younger generation to learn and embrace. Ammachi compels the characters to toe the line that she draws. Radha Aunty is a character that is generationally (and until recently geographically) removed from the trauma, but who becomes a by-stander to her mother's trauma until she experiences it on her own. Radha Aunty encounters her own traumatic event as the mob attack her train travelling from Jaffna

to Colombo. Although she escapes, the violence scars her and shifts her perspective to the extent that eventually she decides to marry the Tamil suitor, Rajan, that Ammachi originally proposed.

In Ammachi's admonishments to Radha Aunty to break off her relationship with Anil, she alludes to the fact that the Sinhalese race is inherently violent and the fate of a young Tamil daughter should never be placed in the hands of a Sinhalese suitor. When Anil's father protests against Ammachi who openly walks into his house and reprimands Anil for giving Radha Aunty a ride back home, what Anil's father says to Radha Aunty who attempts to apologize on behalf of her mother further reaffirms the divide between the races: "Be careful. We Sinhalese are losing patience with you Tamils and your arrogance" (Selvadurai 66). Eva Hoffman in *After Such Knowledge,* writing about Holocaust survivors, states that:

> The guardianship of the Holocaust is being passed on to us. The second generation is the hinge generation in which received, transferred knowledge of events is being transmuted into history, or into myth. (Hoffman 103)

Hoffman, a child of Holocaust survivors, argues that such trauma, despite it being "a profound personal legacy," presents the second generation a task to remain "fixed at the point of trauma" or "to be transformed into new sets of relations with the world and new understanding" (Hoffman 103). In the Chelvaratnam family, Ammachi's past relationship with the Sinhalese is a response and a defense mechanism that she leans on to judiciously control her interactions with these so-called perpetrators. Her traumatic experience of witnessing her father's body sliced into pieces at the hands of a Sinhalese mob in an earlier 1958 uprising, informs not only her attitude towards the Sinhalese but influences the response of everybody else in the Chelvaratnam family. In keeping with Hoffman's statement, it is evident that the entire family remains "fixed at the point of trauma" (Hoffman 103) despite

the growing number of years, as the Sinhala-Tamil conflict escalates internally while lying dormant externally, bidding its time before it erupts. In fact, Selvadurai captures how the family's past trauma educates Arjie and fills a void he didn't know existed. For example, the Chelvaratnam family educates Arjie that there is a difference between Tamils and Sinhalese, and that one race victimizes the other based on its minority status. Arjie is taught to be prepared for the day that he would be victimized as every Tamil Sri Lankan's story serves as a cautionary tale in Arjie's life. It creates a consciousness, a duality that ignorance cements particularly when he is unable to understand why it is a crime to be in a relationship with mixed ethnicities. "The intensity of Ammachi's reaction had shaken me. I wondered why Anil's being Sinhalese upset her so?" (Selvadurai 59). It is Janaki, the family's Sinhalese servant, who narrates the story of Ammachi's trauma and explicitly explains how the body "was as if someone had taken a lid of a tin can and cut pieces of him" (Selvadurai 59). It is noteworthy that Selvadurai voices Ammachi's trauma of her dead father not through Ammachi herself but by "a belated witness" to her suffering. Arjie hears about his great-grandfather's torture and death from Janaki and from his father, Chelva, Ammachi's son, who relays the information about his mother's father. It is only through "the story of the body" (60) that Arjie learns about the conflict between the Tamils and the Sinhalese. The story of the body is resurrected to make Arjie a witness to the family's trauma. Minoli Salgado in her article, "Writing Sri Lanka, Reading Resistance: Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* and A. Sivanandan's *When Memory Dies*," critiques Selvadurai for taking a lukewarm approach in depicting Sri Lanka's violent history through the eyes of Arjie. Salgado states that "Selvadurai's foregrounding of an adolescent's perspective and the ambiguity of sexual identity operates, unwittingly perhaps, at the expense of reinforcing ethnic difference and results in a corresponding loss of historical depth" (Salgado 7). However, I believe that despite the partial truth in this criticism, there's more to Selvadurai's agenda in taking such

an approach. Selvadurai masterfully makes the reader privy to some of the most harrowing atrocities against the Tamil community, without overly engaging in the politics of the struggle between the Tamil and Sinhala communities. The novel does not create political propaganda for readers to sympathize with a political faction, but rather documents one family's pain and loss from the perspective of the Tamil minority (and from a child-narrator who does not understand complicated ethnic distinctions). I believe Selvadurai's quest is not to document the traumatic past of a country from the point of view of a diasporic Sri Lankan writer, nor is his agenda to fit into the roles that Salgado states in her article, to cater to the "implicit demand for the writer to take on the role of cultural spokesman, social commentator and national prophet" (Salgado 5). *Funny Boy* is a narrative attempt to capture the displacement and the trauma that follows as a result of being persecuted as a minority. Salgado argues that although the novel is "a powerful portrayal of victimization and expulsion […] it does so at the expense of reinforcing the prevailing tendency to read Sri Lankan political violence through a historically-transcendent, binary logic of Sinhalese-Tamil discord" (12). I argue that this binary discord needs to be established in order to develop the complexity surrounding the Sinhala-Tamil conflict in Sri Lanka particularly to understand the dynamics in Amma's and Daryl Uncle's relationship (which I will speak about later on) as well as Shehan (a classmate from school) and Arjie's relationship, which is considered a taboo owing to the cross ethnicity as well as homosexuality.

Another particularly interesting point that Selvadurai promotes through Arjie is his growing exile from childhood. Arjie appears in the opening pages as a young boy immersed in his own world where there are no separate worlds for "boys" and "girls" and everything is child's play. But very soon the adults impose sanctions on Arjie as he is forbidden from playing with dolls, forbidden to play the part of the bride with his cousins, and ultimately forbidden to play with the girls at all. Although his exile from childhood is gradual, it

escalates to the extent that Chelva decides Arjie must attend a stricter school, one that is particularly strict in imposing gender roles. At the very beginning Arjie says:

> Yet those Sundays, when I was seven, marked the beginning of my exile from the world I loved. Like a ship that leaves a port for the vast expanse of sea, those much looked forward to days took me away from the safe harbour of childhood towards the precarious waters of adult life. (5)

Arjie seems to argue that the very gratification of those "spend-the-days" took him *away* from an idyllic childhood. Similar to how Arjie loses his love for the much longed for "spend-the-days," Chelva takes away Arjie's love of going to his school, as Arjie's father believes the education that Arjie receives is making him "soft." Chelva enrolls Arjie in The Queen Victoria Academy that is notoriously known for its regimented education, with the staunch belief that attending this school which divides students into Tamil and Sinhalese classes would make Arjie more of a man. Despite the constant bullying and abuse that takes place in the school, Arjie's elder brother Diggy gives Arjie advice: "Once you come to The Queen Victoria Academy you are a man. Either you take it like a man or the other boys will look down on you" (207). What it means to be a man is a concept that Arjie's parents inculcate in both their sons, but when Arjie meets Shehan the two feel an attraction and then develop a relationship. Arjie is constantly torn between wanting a closeness with Shehan, but dreading being labelled "funny" because it is a term that his father constantly spat out with disgust when they were growing up, and it is a feeling that Arjie begins to associate with his own homosexual desires. Chelva's overt disgust of homosexuality initially keeps Arjie from discovering his identity and exploring his desires to be with Shehan, without a sense of guilt trailing his every action. In speaking about socially defined gender roles, Michel Foucault argues in *The History of Sexuality* that:

> …the notion of 'sex' made it possible to group together, in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures, and it enabled one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle, an omnipresent meaning: sex was thus able to function as a unique signifier and as a universal signified. (Foucault 153)

Foucault argues that gender is a social construct that originated "artificially" and at present is construed as the norm. Judith Butler in her influential work *Gender Trouble* builds on Foucault's argument and elaborates on this point that the construct of gender is entirely a forced concept. In terms of Foucault's "grouping" of sexual category and Butler's sense of gender as a construct, what Arjie rebels against is categorization itself, especially a label such as "funny" latches onto his body against his will. Butler, in speaking about heterosexuality, says that:

> In other words, there is no reason to divide up human bodies into male and female sexes except that such a division suits the economic needs of heterosexuality and lends a naturalistic gloss to the institution of heterosexuality. Hence, for Wittig, there is no distinction between sex and gender; the category of "sex" is itself a gendered category, fully politically invested, naturalized but not natural. (Butler 179)

Taking on Butler's words about male/female divisions, Arjie represents the adolescent at the cusp of this division seeking to rationalize these boundaries that define such gender roles. I argue that the displacement that Arjie feels is exacerbated; he is conflicted with not only about his ethnicity but he is an exile from his own childhood and sexual orientation. As he moves away from his childhood to the adult world, Arjie is made a witness to the family's trauma and, once he is witness, there is no way to return to his innocent childhood. The trauma Arjie and his family experience hold partial truths in stories that still reverberate in Sri

Lanka, and shed light on how trauma has a debilitating effect on its victims. To argue that the events that conspire in the novel lack a broader historical context, as Salgado does, is to move away from the realm of fiction and literature to the world of history and fact. Salgado appears suspect of Selvadurai's depiction of the historical events that take place in the novel as she states that:

> Arjie's narrative is so convincing because of its faithfulness to his youthful perspective and its immersion in the present but, concomitantly, lacks the kind of historical awareness necessary for contextualizing the ethnic conflict in anything other than the most reductive terms. The single historical event that marks his awareness – the killing of his great grandfather in the race riots of the 50's – works to reinforce his increasing awareness of ethnic polarization. (Salgado 9)

That single traumatic event sparks the growth of the "otherness" pertaining to trauma that Paul Antze outlines. The Chelvaratnam family functions as an example of how trauma and memory shape and define one's sense of self. In Arjie's formative years, beginning with his attraction to weddings and brides, it is clear that he believes that "love" makes everything possible. When he witnesses the break-up between Radha Aunty and Anil, he is unable to fathom how two people who love each other can succumb to societal and parental pressure, especially because Arjie as the omniscient narrator sees the inconsolable Radha Aunty after she breaks up with Anil. The trauma that Radha Aunty undergoes and Arjie's father's explanation about forbidden relationships changes his entire perspective on love. It is once again reinforced emphatically when Arjie's mother has an affair with Uncle Daryl who is of Dutch-Burgher descent. When Uncle Daryl begins his affair with Arjie's mother Nalini, it is passionate but brief and is concealed from the watchful eyes of society. The relationship between Nalini who is of Tamil origin and Uncle Daryl's Dutch-Burgher identity is shunned by Arjie's aunt Neliya Aunty as she reveals the consequences of this forbidden relationship:

"Be careful, Nalini […] Society is not as forgiving as a sister. You have a husband and three children to think about" (125). It becomes clear to Arjie that his mother's relationship is an illicit affair when Uncle Daryl disappears and Arjie's mother is unable to probe into his death or nudge the police into starting an investigation into her lover's disappearance without raising suspicions that would ruin her character. It becomes clear to the reader that this knowledge changes Arjie's identity in more than just an ethnic recognition. Throughout the novel, the entire family falls victim to past trauma[9] long before Selvadurai concludes with "The Riot Journal: An Epilogue." The novel reveals the persistent nature of trauma and how it has the ability to poison an entire generation and subsequent generations until redressed. Furthermore, what begins with one generation continues to flow through the subsequent generations as Selvadurai reveals how even the youngest member of the Chelvaratnam family soon learns to tread carefully around the Sinhalese. In Arjie's case, although he and his brother Diggy are children born to Tamil parents, they are enrolled in a Sinhala school and, while Diggy follows the Tamil stream, it is interesting that Arjie follows the Sinhala stream. Furthermore, although Arjie is Tamil and identifies with the Tamil community, it is interesting that Arjie cannot speak his own mother tongue. All these details can be read as survival tactics[10] that the minority have to resort to. Although Selvadurai does not offer a scene in which Arjie's parents discuss why he speaks Sinhalese and not Tamil, or how that language barrier will affect him in school, the very fact of these details in a coming-of-age novel speaks to the reverberations of ethnic violence in daily occurrences. In "The Generation of Postmemory" Marianne Hirsch argues that:

> Postmemory describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply

> and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right… To grow up with such overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness, is to risk having one's own stories and experiences displaced, even evacuated, by those of a previous generation. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. (Hirsch 103)

This quotation explains how a previous generation's trauma when conveyed effectively becomes easily appropriated by the subsequent generations through stories and various other means that become the only remaining evidence of the trauma. These stories become a part of their identity as their bodies continue to become vessels of testimonies. I apply Marianne Hirsch's concept of Postmemory to Arjie's life in a literary enactment to better comprehend the irreversible damage trauma has on the human psyche, while it situates his family's cultural and collective trauma within his body. Arjie may be very young when the novel begins, and a late-teenager by its end, but he serves as a confessional vehicle who overhears, witnesses, and absorbs the terrible stories the adults experience and convey to him. Ammachi's and his entire family's stories become Arjie's stories, eventually shaping his thoughts and actions as this collective, cultural memory deeply affects Arjie's psyche and begin to "constitute memories in their own right" (103). The novel becomes a testimony of one individual who testifies for the loss of his home, relationships, loved ones, and affinity to a country that expels them from their own home on the basis of their ethnicity.

Marianne Hirsch's idea of how storied memories are able to replace one's own subjectivity and how one inherits one's predecessors' past becomes more relevant as "the story of [the] body" (Selvadurai 60) stipulates the Chelvaratnam family's relations with their Sinhalese counterparts long before the 1983 riots that the family experiences firsthand. Ammachi's father's body becomes a symbol and a pivotal juncture in the Chelvaratnam

family, one onto which Selvadurai builds his entire narration. Ammachi's father's body symbolizes much more than the start of the violence brewing in Sri Lanka. Collier's and Munck's "Critical Juncture Framework" provides a methodological guidance for applying what is popularly known in social sciences as "a critical juncture" to examine historical institutional analyses. They examine how a,

> critical juncture is (1) a major episode of institutional innovation, (2) occurring in distinct ways, and (3) generating an enduring legacy […] specifying that even though "[a]ll episodes of institutional innovation are potentially of interest to social scientists, […] [their framework focuses] on those that leave an enduring legacy. (Collier and Munck 2)

The critical juncture theory is often applied in the social sciences to determine if a particular occurrence in history causes "a critical juncture" that (1) the State is responsible for, (2) causes multiple forms violence and oppression following this state implementation, and (3) creates a ripple that will have lasting ramifications politically and socially. The article is important in understanding that Ammachi's father's body is a metaphoric "critical juncture" in the family's history. His body becomes cathartic in representing a critical juncture that changes the lives of the entire Chelvaratnam family as Arjie documents in the Riot Journal that the State has been sanctioning the attacks against the Tamil community (1) and this violence that is depicted through Ammachi's father's body is an oppression that the State commits against the Chelvaratnam family and it continues to have "lasting ramifications" that the family suffer from as their trauma grows steadily following the various attacks against the Tamil community. For example, Selvadurai explores this aspect in Jegan (Chelva's childhood friend's son), who works in Chelva's hotel where someone writes "Death to all Tamil pariahs" on his window. Corinne Wyss builds on Collier's and Munck's argument, focusing "on the steps, or "antecedent conditions" and "cleavages" that lead to the critical juncture"

(Wyss 14) in Sri Lanka following colonization by the Portuguese, Dutch, and subsequently the British. Wyss identifies the Sinhala Only Act as one such critical juncture in the history of Sri Lanka. She marks 1956 as the year of the "Official Language Act (Sinhala-Only Act): Sinhala shall be the one official language of Ceylon" and notes that in 1972 "The official language policy is given constitutional recognition; the status of the Sinhala-Only policy is consolidated by emphasizing the subordinate position of Tamil" (Wyss 16). Selvadurai encapsulates Wyss's entire argument whereby the government in dismissing English, the lingua franca of the time, and imposing Sinhala on its Tamil Sri Lankan population, forced the subordination of the Tamils as "second-class citizens" within their own country. It is the moment in history that is responsible for the buildup to the 1950s, 1980s and 2000-2010s violence that writers such as Selvadurai, Bala, Ondaatje and many others attempt to represent. Robert Kearney in his 1978 essay, states that this decision results in Tamil citizens arguing that, "due to the Sinhala-only policy, they are treated as aliens in their own land" (Kearney 528). Kearney argues that the dominant nationalist narrative is that this attempt by the government at the time was a means to reassert and stop the cultural deterioration that was a direct result of colonization; however, Kearney argues that this rationalization became another corrupt means to reinforce an age-old war between the Sinhala and the Tamil communities:

> A "swabhasha" (or "own language") movement prior to independence had led to a decision that English was gradually to be displaced as the official language of the nation by both Sinhala and Tamil. Shortly after independence, however, a national resurgence among the Sinhala people, with roots extending back to the late nineteenth century, burst into the political arena. The demand among the majority community turned from "swabhasha" to "Sinhala only" as the official language. The official

> language controversy shifted from an attack on the privileged position of the English-educated multi-communal elite to a clash between ethnic communities. (Kearney 527)

Interestingly, Chelva's explanation for Ammachi's father's death does not fully explain the political, sociological, or financial complexities that Kearney or Wyss highlight; rather, Arjie's father mildly touches on one of the critical junctures that Wyss documents. It is noteworthy that Chelva does not analyze the past, he simply narrates it. I argue that the reason for this character failing to flesh out this story is the reason for Salgado's critique that Arjie's narrative doesn't capture fully the actual conflict in entirety. The story behind Ammachi's father's body is Selvadurai's way to provide a narrative that foregrounds the Tamil experience and contrasts the dominant narrative of the Sinhalese majority. Such a scene invokes Mervyn Ondaatje's gradual physical and social decline in Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*. While Ondaatje captures the perspective from the Sri Lankan Burgher minority, Selvadurai captures the past from the perspective of the Tamil minority.[11] Selvadurai capitalizes on "the subversive means" the body is able "to store and reveal the past" (Mallot 153). Mallot argues that "The human body, then, assumes a presiding, repeated concern for this entire project, as text and testing ground of memory" (Mallot 153); furthermore, it becomes a testimony that influences successive generations' memories and stories. The narrative that Selvadurai weaves in this light is a challenge to Sri Lankan history that doesn't account for any of these voices and seeks to justify, deny, and erase any trace of the trauma that is part of the identity of the Tamil community. In *Funny Boy*, Arjie innocently questions his father:

> "But you're Tamil and I'm Tamil and nobody's killing us."
>
> "This was twenty years ago, in the fifties, son. At that time, some Sinhalese people killed Tamil people."

> "But why?"
>
> He shifted in his chair. "It's hard to explain. You'll understand when you're older."
>
> "But I want to know now."
>
> He looked at me irritated. "It had to do with some laws," he said. "The Sinhalese wanted to make Sinhala the only national language, and the Tamils did not like this. So there was a riot and many Tamils were killed." (Selvadurai 61)

Arjie reacts to this story by explaining to the reader: "…What I learned made me very uneasy, because I realized these problems were not a thing of the past" (Selvadurai 61). It is his father's story that sensitizes Arjie to the ethnic division and gives birth to the "otherness" that Antze theorizes in his article that I cited at the beginning of this chapter. The trauma enacted through memory creates a fluidity between the past and the present, and is able to touch Arjie several generations later, most notably through a memory of a body reflecting the physical signs of trauma in an ethnic conflict. Mallot elaborates how:

> the human body can, independently and even autonomously, retain and reveal an individual's history…What a body remembers may hold important clues for understanding communal violence, as well as important cues for how history and narrative might be reconsidered. These authors position the physical self not just as the testing ground by which we may recognize traumatic events, but as a transtextual site of the past: bodies retain and reveal events and emotional impacts in ways that complement what traditional, verbal narratives cannot say. (Mallot 154)

I extend Mallot's argument to go beyond the body memory of an individual to incorporate how the image of a character's dead body reverberates a collective, cultural trauma that situates each of the characters within the trauma. The body is a testimony for the violence

that results in embodying one's own ethnic identity as a Tamil in their home. It is for this reason that the memory of Ammachi's father's body holds such a revered place in the Chelvaratnam family. The memory is able to connect the individual's past to the collective past. It is able to also connect the individual's history to an entire nation's history. From this narrative point in the second chapter, the novel veers away from the gendered world of the Girls versus Boys side in Arjie's adolescent mind as he is taught to embrace his gender identity. After having asserted this division the world becomes more divided in Arjie's mind. The world from this point appears to him as segregated, and Chelva's story becomes "a critical juncture" in Arjie's life in comprehending this segregation. Salgado argues that this segregation infuses "a binary logic" whereby Arjie's world now comprises of mutually exclusive spaces inhabited by the respective races as the Sinhalese and the Tamils. After Arjie discovers his otherness through witnessing his father relate this memory, it alters and shapes his sense of self. It is this change in his identity that causes him to re-evaluate all his relations/interactions with his Sinhalese peers, and this is the point at which Arjie's otherness begins to develop openly. Ammachi's father's body represents much more than the natural and individual loss of a loved one. An interesting point in Mallot's argument sheds light on another interpretation of how the body operates as a testimony and how it is able to impress upon others who witness the trauma. Mallot argues that memory and the body form an intrinsic connection as, "The use of the term 'trauma' itself speaks to the blurring boundaries between body and mind. Scholars have often noted that the Greek origin of 'trauma' suggests a wound to the body; over time, however, the word has become appropriated for sufferings of the soul and spirit" (Mallot 166). I argue that the wounds to Ammachi's father's body create generations of inextricable sufferings in his family's spirit. Mallot also asserts that "…it is the physical body that often becomes a focal point in the literatures of trauma; writers seek to make bodies the real texts by which others' experiences can be understood" (Mallot 166).

This idea of interchangeability directly correlates with the link that Selvadurai makes as Arjie experiences an entire shift in perspective by being a witness to this memory of his great grandfather's demise. Laurie Vickeroy states that "[t]rauma writers make the suffering body the small, focused universe of the tormented and a vehicle for rendering unimaginable experience tangible to readers" (Vickeroy 323). In light of this argument, Ammachi's father doesn't live to speak of his traumatic experience but his body does. The physical remainder of his existence is able to function as a text to traumatize his entire family as well as the reader to the extent that it becomes a shared experience that they witnessed first-hand.[12] Mallot quoting Shoshana Felman states that:

> …successful trauma narratives manage to place the suffering of the victim 'within the body' of the reader, moving the impact of trauma, as it were, from one body to another: […] to open up in that belated witness […] the imaginative capability of perceiving history-what is happening to others-in one's own body.' (Felman 108)

Through his novel *Funny Boy,* Selvadurai documenting the Tamil Sri Lankan oppression does exactly what Felman states, in that the reader becomes "belated witness" to this fictionalized historical period, much as Arjie becomes belated witness to the violence done to his great-grandfather. This literary account transmits these characters' pain and suffering while placing it "within the body of the reader" (108). As a result of the memory that the Chelvaratnam family share with the reader, Ammachi's father's body is able to provide an alternative narrative to the dominant nationalistic narrative that seeks to invalidate the Tamil community's narrative by imposing silence about the Tamil experience. Sandra Soo-Jin Lee states that "[i]n cases where memory of events and experiences are continually challenged, undermined and erased by other more authoritative forces, the body is often presented in testament of the 'truth'" (92). The censoring of literature about the nationalistic narrative that exists to this day does not enable Sri Lankan Tamils or Sinhalese to openly sympathize or

acknowledge the suffering that took place in the 1950s, 1980s or the at the end of the 30-year war without such voices being labelled as supporter of the radical Tamil Tigers (LTTE). Selvadurai addresses the reductive means by which Sinhalese characters in the novel[13] deem the Tamil community as terrorists if they choose to transgress this fine boundary. "Ammachi often talked about the Tigers. She was on their side and declared that if they did get a separate state, which they call Eelam, she would be the first to go and live in it" (Selvadurai 61). Ammachi's support for the Tamil Tigers directly correlates to her experience and interpretation of the violence done to her father. Selvadurai presents Tamil Tigers as a group engaged in a futile political struggle with ulterior motives, echoing the assessment which Neil Devotta summarizes in his article, "The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and The Lost Quest for Separatism in Sri Lanka":

> Tamil separatism was predictable, the LTTE's immanent contradictions—the quest for state-building and independence juxtaposed with fascistic rule and terrorist practices—undermined its legitimacy and inevitably made Eelam an evanescent goal. Indeed, … the LTTE was more bane than boon for Sri Lanka's Tamils. (Devotta 1023)

By the manner in which Selvadurai presents Ammachi's views and Chelva's reproach that the LTTE could never be the Tamil Sri Lankan minority's advocate for re-instating their rights, the literature in *Funny Boy* does not engage in the political debate so much as the author uses that scene to document a tragedy and how it lives in the minds of the victims through memories. Much later in the novel, Selvadurai presents several other atrocities against the Tamil community that display an attack on culture and ethnicity. Most notably the burning of the Jaffna Public library, an assault that is not levelled at a particular individual or family, but it sears to the very heart of the Tamil community. Thamil Venthan Ananthavinayagan argues that "Targeting knowledge, history, and memory is a key feature in ethnic cleansing, as the attack on the Oriental Institute in 1992 in Sarajevo by Serbian

nationalists evidenced. [T]he burning of the Jaffna Public Library was not a simple arson attack" (Ananthavinayagan 1). To many Tamil Sri Lankans, the library burning symbolized the blatant refusal to respect minorities and their culture within the country. Ananthavinayagan accuses the government openly for the destruction of a valuable resource that was a crowning jewel of the Tamil community. The article grieves for the loss of rare texts and poetry that were cultural remnants of the long line of Tamil poets and writers. Selvadurai's depiction of this tragic event in May 1981 serves to memorialize and make belated witnesses of the reader of a trauma that "was never properly investigated and the perpetrators [were] never held to account" (Ananthavinayagan 2). Indeed, by ending the novel with entries from Arjie's diary, Selvadurai links the Tamil literary history with Arjie's experiences. Arjie's narrative culminates in the Black July of 1983 to record the anxiety, the fear, and the bloodshed that the State keeps concealed and dismisses for years. In the novel, Arjie records how the adults are aware that the government conspires with the Tamil mob to attack Tamil families, as the mob seems to follow the electoral lists that contain information about the Tamil families, information in the possession of the State. When the mob burns down many Tamil's houses, including Arjie's family's home, and loot what is left, and when Ammachi and Appachi are doused with kerosene and burnt to ashes on their way home, Selvadurai presents these memories as fractions of the trauma that inscribe corporeally in Sri Lankan Tamils: "The traffic in front of him was too congested and, fearing the worst, he had got out of his car and hurried along the pavement. But he got there too late. The mob had set the car on fire with Ammachi and Appachi in it" (Selvadurai 306). Ammachi and Appachi become "silent victims" who "disappear under the clods of earth that were thrown on them" (Selvadurai 308) at their burial. To enact for readers such horrible lived experiences, Selvadurai's fictional narration acts as cultural record. These events become tragic accounts in Sri Lankan history that in Canada, most readers and some Sri Lankans from later

generations know little/nothing about. Storied memories such as *Funny Boy* make readers into witnesses of that country's chaotic violence. And, in experiencing his grandparents' horrific death, Arjie takes on the role his grandmother experienced; namely, as witness and victim to a loved one's violent death. Selvadurai's attempt to connect his readers to the gruesome reality of a country's past is his attempt to create witnesses so that actual memories live on in the fictions of his characters. His novel sensitizes readers to a politics they may not undergo, and so brings a new awareness to the cultural complicity that time and distance impose on subsequent generations causing them to suffer "purposeful amnesia"[14] that would eventually silence this part of history that is vital to one's understanding of the self.

In *Funny Boy,* Selvadurai explores complicated concepts of home and belonging. Although his characters have literal homes for most of the novel, Selvadurai portrays them as metaphorically displaced. Arjie's displacement in terms of his sexual identity is equated to the displacement that others in his family and Sri Lankan Tamils experience as a result of their ethnic identity. However, the opening of the novel does not give the reader many hints of this displacement that preoccupies the entire narrative until mid-way through the second chapter. Selvadurai begins his narration of Arjie and his family at Ammachi's and Appachi's home, playing amidst cousins, aunts, and uncles. The experience of entering this hallowed house by the sea is as if entering a place of worship:

> … after we carefully wiped our feet on the doormat, [we saw] the dark corridor running the length of it, on one side of which the bedrooms and on the other the drawing and dining rooms. This corridor, with its old photographs on both walls and its ceiling so high that our footsteps echoed, scared me a little. (Selvadurai 1-2)

Ammachi's house becomes a sacred space for Arjie because this is where the entire family come together for special days. It is a space where several generations grew up and it

becomes a space inscribed with their cultural identity. A space where individual and collective memories intermingle to create a shared experience of the assurance of safety and acceptance that the Chelvaratnam family call "home." Located on Ramanayagam Road where several other Tamil families co-exist in harmony (with a few Sinhala families living on that road, including Anil's family), becomes a place that provides the comfort and the safety of a home. Salgado argues that Selavdurai's *Funny Boy* predominantly focuses on "spatial registers such as territory, space, place and home" (Salgado 3). She argues that:

> *Funny Boy* charts a clearly segregated terrain of permitted spaces and forbidden zones, and it is the negotiation, invasion and violation of these spaces that occupies much of the novel. Physical space is politicised, gendered, socially stratified (into the family residence and servant's quarters), legitimated and policed. Its contestation stands as a metaphor for the larger struggle for territorial control in the country. (Salgado 120)

Salgado equates the physical space as divided by politics, social differences, and gender; in this way, and how Arjie has to learn to navigate these spaces that will eventually begin to symbolize the politicized space of Sri Lanka. She further argues that these "permitted spaces" and "forbidden zones" are important in enabling Arjie's character to embrace his queer identity. It becomes a crucial step in straddling the acceptable against the unacceptable to finally arrive at the queer self with which Arjie identifies. What is particularly intriguing in Selvadurai's novel is the role space and home play in identity. As the narrative progresses, with the onset of the Black July in 1983, this space that the Chelvaratnam family identify as "home" causes the greatest grief as the Sinhala mob loot and set the house on fire along with all the other Tamil houses on Ramanayagam Road as well as threaten the characters' physical beings. When Arjie's grandparents' house is burnt, the whole family grieves the loss, and it is only a matter of a few days until Arjie's immediate family home is also destroyed by a mob. Selvadurai captures the constant fear and anxiety as they sleep in shoes and trousers prepared

to sneak over a ladder at night to their neighbour's house. The destruction of their homes become "a critical juncture" in the victimization of Sri Lankan Tamils, and Selvadurai captures the intense pain of the entire family as they grieve not only for the structure made of bricks and mortar, but for the memories, the assurance and acceptance that the mob violate. The fictionalized pain of one family illustrates a true trauma that many Tamil Sri Lankans shared during the Tamil Pogrom.

Through the struggle for spatial dominance in the text, Selvadurai sparks the debate over "territory" and this is reminiscent of Homi K. Bhaba's argument in *The Location of Culture* which argues that, "Etymologically unsettled, 'territory' derives from both terra (earth) and terrere (to frighten) whence territorium, 'a place from which people are frightened off'" (Bhabha 99-100). Through the destruction of Tamil homes in 1983, the mob tried to literally conquer the territory by violating the living spaces of Sri Lankan Tamils. In doing so, they seared into the hearts of not only all Sinhalese, but all other minorities that Sri Lanka is not home to the Tamils. Chelva in *Funny Boy* repeatedly rejected his wife's pleas that they leave Sri Lanka and move to Canada: "My father shook his head emphatically. I'll never emigrate (195)." And: "Never. I will never leave this country" (207), he again adamantly replies. Yet by the end of the novel, he voices the deep pain at the loss of his childhood home and his own home as he says, "I don't feel at home in Sri Lanka any longer, will never feel safe again" (Selvadurai 304). Despite having never lived anywhere else, by the end of the novel the family has made plans to move to Canada. Selvadurai links Chelva's same sentiment with the loss Arjie expresses for the family home. After the burning and the looting, he cycles back to the house one last time:

> I had the nagging sense that there was something I needed to do but could not remember what […] Then. for the first time, I began to cry for our house. I sat on the verandah steps and wept for the loss of my home, for the loss of everything that I held

> to be precious. I tried to muffle the sound of my weeping, but my voice cried out loudly as if it were the only weapon I had against those who had destroyed my life. (Selvadurai 310-311)

This is the last time Arjie sees his home before he leaves to Canada. Arjie grieves for "the loss of his house" and everything else that he holds "precious," including his dead grandparents; as well, he grieves for the care-free life that was also destroyed. Added to his pain is his impending separation from his lover Shehan. In this way, the image of his home forms a reminder of an abrupt end resulting from a lasting trauma. When Arjie leaves his childhood home he also leaves a country that would incriminate him for his sexual identity.[15] Salgado argues:

> At the end of the novel Selvadurai signals loss of home through the breakdown of physical boundaries as Arjie's house is burned and left exposed to the elements. As Pradeep Jeganathan has pointed out, the pogrom in which Arjie's home is destroyed did indeed lead to the renegotiation of space and the domestication of differential power dynamics. (Salgado 121)

As Salgado points out in this extract, as the mob attack Tamil bodies, spaces and commodities, by destroying Arjie's home, his circumstances force him to renegotiate the space that he identifies as his home. Selvadurai re-introduces this distant land[16] Canada as a new home to seek refuge from the trauma that overwhelms the Chelvaratnam family. It is as if Sharon Bala in *The Boat People* begins her narrative from where Shyam Selvadurai ends his. Bala's concern is more contemporary as she examines the culmination of the 1983 riots in the final clash at Puthukkudiyiruppu, setting her novel mostly during the 2006-2010 years. Bala's sympathies lie with the working-class Tamil Sri Lankans in Jaffna, whereas Shyam Selvadurai examines the Tamil elite living in the hub of Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka. In

leaving Sri Lanka in search of a new home, Selvadurai voices the family's anxieties of having never envisaged having to migrate as "penniless refugees" (Selvadurai 309). Salgado argues that Shyam Selvadurai is a "'realist' writer who draws upon his own experience of socio-cultural relations to foreground the discrepancy between lived experience and social and political prescriptives." She extends her claim to remark that Selvadurai "forges [his] identity and [his] goal in exile" and "[finds] his racial and sexual identity in Canada" (Salgado 110), implying that Selvadurai shares snippets of Arjie's trauma, memory, and identity as depicted in *Funny Bo*y. The interchangeable character of Arjie/Selvadurai conveys his story and trauma to subsequent generations that are ignorant of the harrowing past of a minority that fled to safety as refugees and eventually forged new homes in a distant land. In doing so, Selvadurai captures the Sri Lankan Tamil exilic diaspora's experience/memories/trauma as he traces Arjie's trajectory and exile to Canada. Janet Zandy states that "Home is an idea…an inner geography where the ache to belong finally quits, where there is no sense of 'otherness', where there is at last a community" (1). In Zandy's terms, home is a place where an individual's "otherness" dissipates, but in Arjie's and his family's situation, this otherness only grows more aggressively as Selvadurai culminates their displacement through the destruction of their physical home. Vijay Agnew examines how at a certain point, the word diaspora only captured immigrants living in a foreign land, living with a desire to return to their homeland one day. Agnew sheds light on how the word diaspora has evolved to include varied meanings to understand how communities come together with a shared sense of history and homeland. Agnew examines how "the term diaspora has been expanded to incorporate situations that are "defined by its ability to recreate a culture in diverse locations" (Agnew 4), and can enable "an individual living in the diaspora […] to [experience] a dynamic tension every day between living 'here' and remembering 'there', between memories of places of origin and entanglements with places of residence, and between the

metaphorical and the physical home" (Agnew 4). In light of Agnew's idea of "home," Selvadurai, in re-writing the exilic diaspora's past, is reenacting a history that is disintegrating into myth. In Arjie's final recollection of weeping for the loss of everything he held precious, the narrative presents a form of reflective nostalgia on Selvadurai's part. Svetlana Boym in *The Future of Nostalgia* claims that:

> Reflective nostalgia does not pretend to rebuild the mythical place called home, it is 'enamored of distance, not of the referent itself'. This type of nostalgic narrative is ironic, inconclusive and fragmentary. Nostalgics of the second type are aware of the gap between identity and resemblance; the home is in ruins …This defamiliarization and sense of distance drives them to tell their story, to narrate the relationship between past, present and future. (Boym 50)

In keeping with Boym's concept of reflective nostalgia in literature and the attempt to capture the past that seems unfamiliar to many, the writer is in a sense mourning a loss that can never be completely recalled, but that "has some connection to the loss of collective frameworks of memory" (Boym 55). Selvadurai's narrative captures a past that cannot fully represent nor depict the trauma of an entire minority but it is certainly an attempt to capture a fragment of the past that continues to struggle to be heard.

Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* engages with the reader as it explores ideas of identity, belonging, home, memories, and trauma. Although the story is about a single family and their escape to Canada, it becomes a shared experience for many who are unable to heal from a trauma that has not only scarred survivors but subsequent generations. The Tamil Pogrom continues to resonate. Much of the literature I address in this thesis is based on theorists studying trauma and memory in Holocaust survivors, as well as scholars of Black history in the Americas and Indigenous writing about intergenerational trauma. I do not wish

to argue that cultural oppression and trauma is “the same” for each of these unique and identity groups. However, the horrific events that took place in both Sri Lanka and in Selvadurai’s depiction of Sri Lanka are a violation against all humanity, and as such belong in a discussion not only of ethnic and racial violence, but in how various narratives depict such intergenerational trauma. Selvadurai uses Arjie’s narration to unite readers in a past and in a series of memories as a tribute to those whose pain has long been dismissed and invalidated.

CHAPTER 3: BODY DISPLACEMENT IN BODIES OF WATER

Sharon Bala, in her debut novel *The Boat People*, examines how one's perception of "home" is integral to one's understanding of the self. The fictional storyline problematizes the concept of the self and identity in the light of the refugee, a character who simultaneously experiences deterritorialization and reterritorialization on reaching the shores of British Columbia. The entire novel is about a group of refugees who pawn all their belongings and pay a middleman to obtain a place in a boat that provides the only escape route from the war between the Sinhalese government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Bala captures the dilemma of characters caught between committing a crime by taking steps to escape the war zone and making the decision to stay, likely suffering death at the hands of one of the two factions. Bala illustrates this dilemma as she focuses the reader's attention on her protagonist Mahindan and his son Sellian who witness tremendous agony in Sri Lanka, on their passage in the boat, upon their arrival into British Columbia where they finally land, and during the long months thereafter, mostly spent in a temporary prison. During the journey, none of the refugees on board are aware of where exactly they will land; through this ambiguity in location, Bala reveals their frustrations and acute desperation in escaping their so-called "home" Sri Lanka. It appears as a coincidence that the boat reaches the shores of British Columbia and the story begins with Border Services investigating each character's background in their homeland to determine their admissibility into the country as refugees. In the investigations, Bala reveals how her protagonist Mahindan has directly aided the LTTE in fixing a bomb in a bus that the LTTE explode in Ratmalana. Mahindan reveals that he is compelled to carry out this task for fear that his family would be tortured and killed if he refused. The entire narrative is predominantly about Mahindan's Refugee Board hearing and the build-up to it but Bala also examines the plight of characters such as Ranga (a civilian who forges his identification in the hopes of escaping Sri Lanka), Hema and her daughters

who escape sexual violence, Savithri, another Tamil refugee who has lost her husband and two sons but escapes Sri Lanka with the surviving son, the journalist Prasad who has a target on his back for breaking the silence around the two factions. Bala narrates the novel in snippets from the perspective of several characters where the refugees who land in British Columbia each have to face a tribunal that will assess if they are actual victims of war or they are the perpetrators fleeing a losing battle. There are three story lines in the novel, one that examines the protagonist Mahindan's escape from Sri Lanka, the story of how Mahindan's trauma sparks the interest of Priya, a junior lawyer and second-generation survivor of the Tamil-Sinhala conflict assisting the case and the story of how the judge Grace Nakamura, a second-generation survivor of the Japanese Internment and a political appointee of Minister Blair, remains untouched by her predecessor's history of trauma. In Mahindan's story, the reader is privy to the Refugee Board hearings that the government of Canada conduct as Bala problematizes the definition of refugees in the process. Bala introduces two second-generation immigrants of former refugees to Canada: Grace Nakamura and Priya,[17] who know nothing of the circumstances that caused their parents to leave their former homes, Priya's to escape to Canada, and Grace's mother and grandparents who were relocated to another city and their home taken from them. Through the Refugee Board hearings, Priya begins to identify with the refugees as she recalibrates her identity and her relationship to her parents' adopted home but Grace's situation remains unchanged. Although Priya's connection is ethnically stronger, Grace's awakening to her racialized identity remains undetermined as Kumi, Grace's mother, is unable to effectively communicate her childhood stories as she suffers from Alzheimer's disease. At the start of the novel, the second generation knows nothing of their parents' exile from their own homes. This human crisis presents itself through a boat bearing over five hundred refugees which becomes a critical juncture in the two Canadian characters' understanding of their own identities.

In *The Boat People*, Bala contextualizes her characters onboard the MV Sun Sea as historically fleeing the 2009 war in Sri Lanka, with the Sri Lankan military forcefully recapturing the LTTE bases in Kilinochchi and several Northern areas of the country. Bala attempts to make the reader understand that one can be an exile in one's own country. Paul Allatson and Jo MacCormack in "Introduction: Exile and Social Transformation" discuss how such exile can occur, thereby dislocating masses of people in their own homes. They speak of "exile […] as a disturbed physical and psychic relation to space and home" (2) just as Bala presents such scenes as the disassociation with Sri Lanka as a home that characters display soon after arriving in Canada. The victims in this novel become criminals for travelling to safety "illegally." Bala uses flashbacks and memories to represent the traumatic experiences that the refugees encounter while living in Sri Lanka, as well as when they flee from that trauma. Michelle Balaev defines the trauma novel as depicting the "transformation of the self ignited by an external, often terrifying experience, which illuminates the process of coming to terms with the dynamics of memory that inform the new perceptions of the self and world" (1). Although in keeping with Balaev's criteria of a trauma novel, *The Boat People* does not fall into the category of a conventional trauma novel in that aspect of speechless terror that makes trauma unrepresentable; however, there are unmistakable aspects worth noting, particularly the belatedness of trauma that Mahindan experiences and the second generation experience several decades later that Grace and Priya both confront. Through Mahindan's "dreams and flashbacks" (40), Bala's non-linear narrative captures the period ranging from the ceasefire in Sri Lanka to the final, violent battle of Puthukkudiyirippu. Mahindan struggles to overcome his own trauma while protecting his son as much as possible from the trauma, and bearing witness to others' trauma. This chapter also examines the domino effect that Priya experiences at the arrival of the boat. Until the day that the boat arrives, she is merely a Canadian, a second-generation immigrant born to Sri Lankan

parents who have immigrated from their first home. Their stories of dislocation and exile are buried and not conveyed to the second-generation[18] until the boat arrives and she instigates talk of her parents' homeland with her father and uncle. Although she reluctantly becomes part of the legal process, she eventually begins to connect to her parents' homeland through the stories that the refugees narrate and that her Uncle Romesh later corroborates. These stories are integral to her formation of self as they are part of her identity. Bala also projects the communication barrier that the refugees experience as many of the refugees require a translator to narrate their story in the adjudication process. However, it is through the Tamil diaspora that Canadian translators' function as mediators allowing the stories to speak for many who didn't survive this trauma.[19] The Tamil diaspora functions as a community as individuals arrive at the detention camps (houses in prisons) to help. Although Sharon Bala leaves Mahindan's fate undecided at the very end of the novel, the other characters' gradual integration to the Canadian system following the Refugee verdicts bear witness to the recovery that a safe home can offer.

Sharon Bala's plot unfolds in July 2009, on an unseaworthy boat, adrift on the vast, perilous ocean. The setting literally mirrors the refugees' situation, as the waves batter the boat and the water reflects an endless sky: the waves "mirror" the instability of the refugees' future while the "endless sky" speaks to their lost homeland as they travel without the assurances that they would ever regain that sense of belonging as they renounce their citizenship in Sri Lanka. The dangerous geography mirrors their political fate as a group of Tamil refugees who have lost their rights in their homeland.

> They had been at sea for weeks or months, sunrises blurring into sunsets. Days spent on deck, tarps draped overhead to block out the sun, and the floor burning beneath them. Stormy nights when the ship would lurch and reel, Sellian cradled in Mahindan's lap,

> their stomachs tumbling with the pitch and yaw of the angry ocean…But the captain had said they were close and for days they had been expecting land… (Bala 11)

The deliberate evasiveness and the lack of precision in location in the high seas becomes an intriguing origination of the plot. Scholars such as Lynda Mannik believe that there is purpose in such a choice of location[20] as she identifies "water as ambiguous space" (6) in her introduction to *Migration by Boat: Discourses of Trauma, Exclusion, and Survival*. She discusses how water is a space where there is danger and peril, but also hope for a better future through the constant movement at sea. The sea voyage also becomes an essential transitionary period in their identity from refugee to the possible status of citizen. Mannik argues that these representations of oceanic voyages that are imagined and reimagined, lived and experienced by actual people metaphorically represent liminal spaces where human beings narratively float between uprooted lives and ambiguous identities (6). She further elaborates that, "the ambiguous nature of liminality, associated with the sea and ocean travel, also facilitates many negative associations for refugees" (6). These refugees renounce a previous citizenship in search of an alternative that is presumably better. But to the country where they arrive, they represent the fearful unknown. Bala's novel depicts Minister Blair as making politically-motivated speeches about all immigrants and these refugees in particular, referring to the refugees as "terrorists," and "losers in an overseas war" (Bala 40). Minister Blair's appointee Grace begins her career as an adjudicator who already holds a bias against refugees. Mannik extends her argument of water as an ambiguous space wherein people who migrate by boats are considered threats as their movements on the water are often uncontrolled and uncontrollable:

> Modern Nationalism is founded on a homogeneous system where all global space is marked, named and accounted for. This nationalism is accompanied by an unspoken ideology that being "rooted" in a place creates necessary morality and balance, and

> conversely, that being "uprooted" propels individuals to become amoral and potentially, criminally minded. (Mannik 2)

This liminal situation within a nation-based nationalism by default identifies refugees as what Susan Coutin deems as a form of stereotyping that generally entails negative connotations in refugees, "non-human, which often leads to extremely dehumanizing treatment" (Coutin 199). Coutin's statement is relevant in understanding Bala's representation of the refugees who dock in British Columbia. Canada Border services intercept the boat full of refugees and the next course of action in Bala's narrative is that they are to remain in detention centres and prisons until the Immigration and Refugee Board hearings take place.

Mahindan describes the first detention centre in these terms: "There was a tall chain-link fence, barbed wire coiled on top. Two guards hauled back the doors to reveal a sprawling prison complex…." (Bala 20). Bala alludes to a restrictive and hostile environment as she describes regimented life from within the walls of the detention centre. Mahindan recalls how they are to line up for meals, for a shower, and how they must follow a particular schedule each morning. Furthermore, when the authorities separate Mahindan and his son, an indicator that suggests "forcible confinement" much more than refugee detention, Bala attempts to represent the inhuman treatment that Mahindan experiences until the tribunal grants him a verdict. In that scene, Bala captures the separation of the father and the son as Sellian pleads with his helpless father to stay with him:

> The guard repeated the same short word over and over then strode towards them, impatient, and grasped the top of Sellian's arm.
>
> Appa!

> No! He is my son! The metal between his feet rattled and Mahindan felt his weight tip forward…By the time Mahindan was upright, the guard had Sellian draped over his shoulder and was carrying him away…Sellian was mutinous, kicking and beating his fists on the man's back. The juice box fell; purple liquid pooled in a puddle on the asphalt. (Bala 13-14)

The portrayal of this scene contextually and theoretically aligns with Coutin's and Mannik's arguments that media representations of refugees as "non-human" (Coutin 199) and as "an objectified, undifferentiated mass" (Mannik 6) that influences the general response of the people. This observation by such scholars informs the manner in which the guards use "cuffs" and ankle restraints whenever dealing with the refugees.

In the novel, Minister Fred Blair becomes the spokesperson to disseminate seeds of malice and hatred in his statements to the public, thereby casting suspicion over the refugees that they may be members of an armed terrorist organization. His statements incite the public, and Priya notices the influence over public opinion, hearing one radio host announce he supports a "lock and load" policy (Bala 84) for the refugees, wishing to send them back to where they came from. In Blair's instructions to Grace Nakamura, Blair says:

> Half the people on board had ties to the LTTE, the separatist group better known as the Tamil Tigers, who had been waging war against the Sri Lankan government for more than twenty years. Terrorists. Losers in an overseas war who had fled to Canada to lick their wounds and regroup. (Bala 40)

The Minister's statement reflects his position that no refugees are without suspicion, and that all will have ties to terrorists. In another statement to the *Globe and Mail,* Blair blatantly condemns the refugees as "thugs," "foreign criminals and those who seek to abuse our generosity" (Bala 46). His hate constructs the refugees as "monstrosities," monsters who

Jeffrey Cohen describes as "born at […] metaphoric crossroads" (Cohen 3) and "refuses easy categorization" (Cohen 5).[21] Cohen speaks about a theory whereby monsters are embodiments of difference, amplified and exaggerated to the point that the monster's body poses a threat to normativity, and I transpose his words in order to point out that in Bala's novel, she reveals how the refugees as a category exemplify difference whereby they become monstrosities in the eyes of the society. In "Monster Culture: Seven Thesis" Cohen expostulates that monsters are projections of an (Other) self and this reading compliments Jennifer Rutherford's argument about the term "holing" which she uses to describe the state of an individual who is socially victimized. According to Rutherford, "to hole someone is to excise them from the social into a state of unbeing in which they are absented and symbolically negated. To be holed is not to die as such, but to die socially" (in Mannik 102). Rutherford's statement regarding "the state of unbeing" is relevant in the refugees' situation as neither the Sri Lankan government, nor the Tamil Tigers nor the general populace in British Columbia see them as having a distinct self at first. The refugees constantly epitomize Blair's fears of invasion/corruption in *The Boat People*, and the authorities go to great lengths to draw a clear demarcation between "us" and "them." Priya's change in perception illustrates how knowledge of the context and close contact with the refugees and their trauma shatters this boundary between "them" and "us," thereby creating a solidarity between the refugees and herself. This solidarity connects her to her parents' and her paternal uncle Romesh's shared memories of the Sinhalese-Tamil clashes in the 1980s. Priya is able to probe into this past because of her alliance with the stories of the refugees that gives her a right to place herself against the larger context of her parents' past.

Bala's title, *The Boat People*, places the reader in the centre of the discourse pertaining to refugees; the title itself becomes a compelling choice, referring back to a specific historical series of events, especially for Canadian readers. The title sets up a distance between the

refugees and the reader until Bala bridges that divide by stirring empathy in the reader. She does so by tracing the lives of the Tamil characters and their escape from Sri Lanka. Prior to leaving Sri Lanka, each character has a harrowing story. For example, Mahindan's wife dies in child labour because there is no basic medication in the hospital (Bala 177), Kumaran's wife who has just lost her husband and two sons pawns her jewellery to ensure a place in the boat (Bala 235-236), Prasad the newspaperman is politically threatened for being a journalist speaking for Tamil Sri Lankans' suffering[22] (Bala 361), while Mrs. Sokolingam escapes with her two daughters after fleeing their home, and one daughter being raped by a camp soldier (Bala 150). Bala fleshes out each of her characters to counter the negative stereotype that Blair promotes in his speech. On several occasions in the text, the reader comes across the title "Boat people" and I believe by choosing this as a title, Bala problematizes the entire concept. Mannik states that, "the term boat people is currently perhaps the most derogatory term" (5) in existence to describe refugees fleeing to safety. Kieran O'Doherty and Amanda LeCouteur shed more light on the complexities arising out of such labelling in their article examining social categorisation in the media:

> A significant problem in this study was the question of what label to adopt for the people who represent the focus of the study. One of the points that will be argued is that referring to a distinctive category of "illegal immigrants," "boat people," or even "asylum seekers" is problematic. (O'Doherty & LeCouteur 2)

O'Doherty and LeCouteur identify their subjects as "unexpected arrivals" to evade existing labels in the media. In doing so, they focus on the act of arriving, much like air travellers landing in an airport. They identify the importance that language plays in media portrayals that influence the public's perception.

Fathima Cader in "Tamil, Tiger, Terrorist? Anti-migrant hysteria and the criminalization of asylum seekers in Canada,"[23] alludes to the fact that because the refugees onboard were Tamil there was an implication that they were terrorists, an assumption that persisted with guards and legal authorities, even before granting a trial. In the article Cader points to how the media plays a crucial rule in misreporting the facts based on bias, quoting from the CBSA:

> "According to a Canada Border Services Agency report – marked secret and obtained by the *Vancouver Sun* through the Access to Information Act – at least 25 of the 76 migrants were members of the Tamil Tigers." The CBSA created this report in January, the *Vancouver Sun* published it in June, and the CBSA publicly recanted it in July. (Cader 10)

These stereotypes that the media carelessly promote affect the refugees' identities and impose a distorted sense of self in that such media reports may have negative ramifications on an already vulnerable group of people.

Bala particularly represents this in the case of Ranga's suicide. It appears as if he had aided the LTTE in a naval attack as his identity card comes from a Sea Tiger. In his hearing when the opposing counsel for the State Amarjit Singh exposes this fact, Bala portrays Ranga's intense desperation. Although Ranga's deceit is to have illegally purchased the identity card of a dead man, unknown to the card's seller (later hinted at as Mahindan), and which the reader learns through Mahindan's flashback story, there is no legally acceptable explanation for his criminal act. Ranga's identity card pins him as an active member of the LTTE cadre when in reality he was only a greengrocer from Mannar. In going to great lengths to forge his documents to escape his plight in Sri Lanka, Ranga has sealed himself a horrific fate. Mahindan's panic that he will be implicated in Ranga's legal woes, and his

regret at not considering that the identity card might have a questionable history indicate his involvement in trading in false documents[24]:

> The identity card. Ranga howled into his hands.
>
> Mahindan turned to the door and scanned as far as he could out the window. His knees trembled. The identity card. He had never considered…
>
> It was not me, Ranga said. I was never in the LTTE
>
> […]
>
> Now he will tell, Mahindan thought. And everything will be finished
>
> It was not me, Ranga said.
>
> […]
>
> Sea Tigers. The identity card. Ranga's limp. Mahindan could see him circling around the evidence, sniffing, getting closer. (Bala 250)

It is clear to the reader that Ranga played no part in aiding the LTTE in any attack, but Bala reveals how there is only a binary system to adjudicate these refugees' situation, whereby one is either guilty of crime or not; to explain Ranga's situation would only serve to incriminate him and Mahindan further. Amarjit Singh, the opposing counsel, argues at the Refugee Board hearing that Ranga is a criminal and the media endorses this identity. Therefore, it is possible to interpret Ranga's suicide in the detention centre as guilt for his past criminal actions; but also as his inability to rebut the allegation.

Ranga's suicide is another instance where language "fails" these refugees as the binary outlook in legal jargon further incriminate those waiting for a decision and hinders the successful articulation of a more humane narrative. Amarjit Singh and the media attack the

fragile sense of self that these refugees muster. Jonathan Culler in his article "Identity, Identification and the Subject" claims that, "The self is constituted by what is reflected back by a mirror, by the mother, and by others in social relations generally. Identity is the product of a series of partial identifications, never completed" (Culler 114). If the media and the authorities constantly accuse a defendant waiting for a decision (in a transitionary period), they are unwittingly imposing the identity of an offender on the defendant's identity. This imposition causes Ranga's eventual suicide. Bala also portrays cultural bias through the character of Minister Blair as he instructs Grace that, "legitimate refugees should apply for status before they arrive, at the High Commission in their own country. Our families took the slow, legal route in. Why should others be allowed to skip the paperwork and cut to the front of the line?" (Bala 77). This statement reveals the Minister's insensitivity towards a humanitarian crisis and marks the hypocrisy of a system that was put in place to address a such a crisis in the first place. In portraying his stance, Bala critiques the privilege that the Minister enjoys through his assumption that all immigrants have easy access to such "paperwork," and the time to apply via the legal process. The media creates a hype that spreads anti-Tamil hysteria among the general populace, promoting hatred for the refugees, narratively conveyed through radio programs that voice negative opinions about the refugees and the "lock and load" (Bala 84) method to solve the problem.

At the detention reviews, Amarjit Singh begins each hearing with accusations that the refugee in question is a terrorist and by convoluting facts into monstrous stories: In Mrs. Sokolingham's case, "It is the Minister's opinion that the migrant is inadmissible on the grounds that she has aided and abetted a smuggling operation" (Bala 149). In Ranga's case, "Singh pressed on: We now have international corroboration for the migrant's true identity. As a longtime arms smuggler, he is known to authorities in India and Thailand. L-15, -16, and -17" (Bala 260). Bala leaves the burden on the reader to determine whether or not some

of the refugees are “monsters.” In doing so, she extends to readers a burden similar to what she places on the adjudicators: the task becomes complicated as the adjudicators and the reader have to take into consideration all the details of each refugee’s past and determine his/her admissibility. Similar to Ranga’s situation, Bala portrays Mahindan’s as an intricate mix of innocence and complicity. Mahindan’s case is particularly complex for the reader as he admits he aided and abetted the Tamil Tigers. As a mechanic, Mahindan is useful to the Tigers as he can repair their vehicles. The Tigers subsequently use one such vehicle in an explosion in Ratmalana that killed many innocent civilians. Bala presents Mahindan’s thoughts as he reveals he was under duress to carry out the LTTE instructions:

> Mahindan thought of the job on Wednesday night. The Tigers didn’t tell him what they wanted until they arrived, and he never found out what happened after the vehicles left his garage. But if explosives were involved, they came wrapped in Velcro…Every time he was made to rig up the brakes on a car or strap bombs to the underside of a truck, he thought of how he was bound to these weapons, one link in a chain of events that would end a life. (Bala 124-125)

Similarly, every character in the novel escaping the clutches of the Tamil tigers and the Sri Lankan military had to choose their lives over others’ and this choice stereotypes them as threats that presents them as “monsters”:

> ‘My wife was pregnant at the time’. He appealed to the judge and said: ‘With our son. The cadre would have set fire to our house, allowed my wife to burn inside. The things they did to us…you cannot imagine. Sinhalese army, Tamil Tigers…we were nothing to them’. (Bala 169)

Bala portrays the dilemma of victims caught in the crossfires, by depicting both the urgency and helplessness that the victims feel. The portrayal humanizes them; each victim develops a

distinct personhood in the novel as they struggle to overcome the tragic atrocities that severely impact their identity and selfhood.

Another label that by default attaches itself to refugees in the text is the word "exiles." Edward Said, in his introduction to *Reflections on Exile*, argues that "Exiles, émigrés, refugees and expatriates uprooted from their lands must make do in new surroundings, and the creativity as well as sadness that can be seen in what they do is one of the experiences that has still to find its chroniclers" (xiv). Bala attempts to chronicle hardships that the refugees experience and appears to mirror Said's concern with regard to the concept of "home." Said draws attention to the intricate relationship between an individual and their homeland:

> Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever. (173)

Although each of Bala's characters longs to leave behind their home and any associations of their home, the loss that each of them feels haunts them as a permanent loss in keeping with Said's thoughts on exile. Bala uses Mahindan's memories of Sri Lankan food, the heat, the mangoes and a few of his memories with his wife in Jaffna to create nostalgia for his home to indicate that his home is not something that Mahindan can easily disown.

Building on Said's statement about exile from one's country, Hamid Naficy argues that one can be exiled in one's own homeland as he states: "internal banishment, or 'deprivation

of means of production and communication, exclusion from public life', could designate the lived experience of many state subjects who may not be targeted by a state's juridical, legal, or policing apparatuses" (Naficy 123). Naficy's argument includes not only Tamil refugees but also any minority living under a xenophobic rule of law. Naficy's argument of "internal banishment" within one's own homeland is applicable in Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* as it explores how the changing demographics of the post-colonial rule in Sri Lanka force the Dutch-Burgher minority to leave its homeland as Sinhala Buddhist nationalism dominates over all the other minorities. This post-colonial concept enables the inclusion of Michael Ondaatje's immigration as a Dutch Burgher as he vicariously experiences the end of an era through his father's loss of identity following the volatile political terrain that marginalizes all minorities living in Sri Lanka. In Chapter 1, I spoke of Ondaatje's displacement in *Running in the Family* and how that displacement reveals that Ondaatje reconstitutes his connection to the land by recreating his family's memories. The text is a compilation that reinvigorates meaning to his home, but the reader can never forget that this home is a construct and only captures fragments of a past, fragments that compose but do not totalize his home. Ondaatje longs for his home, whereas Bala's story gives a different facet to the same home without the fanciful details and fondness that appear in Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*. Contrary to Ondaatje who "runs" (104) towards his home as Milica Živković points out; the refugees in Bala's text are running away from their home. Over three decades, the LTTE clashes with the Sri Lankan government for an autonomous homeland, Tamil Eelam. In her novel, Bala reveals that many Sri Lankan Tamils believe that the LTTE is, as Sharika Thiranagam puts it, the "sole representative of the Tamil People" (266). However, as the plot unfolds, Bala traces how even the ardent believers of the cause represented through Rama and Ruksala (Mahindan's wife Chithra's cousin sister and husband), and even Priya's Uncle Romesh, retract their stance as the LTTE use innocent civilians to carry out their

ruthless mission, and harm anyone who does not follow their directions. Bala examines how the Tamil community suffers as a result of Sinhala Buddhist despotism. Mahindan's story is representative of many other Tamil Sri Lankans' whose lives changed after Tamil rights were stripped away. Mahindan recalls how his grandfather lost his prestigious government position soon after the Sinhala Only Act in 1956 and had to relocate to the North out of fear for his and his family's lives: "His grandfather had spoken English. He had gone to London for his studies and worked as a civil servant in Colombo until the Sinhala Only Act ended his career" (Bala 12). Sri Lankan Tamils were forced to speak only the Sinhala language when prior to this Act English was the lingua franca of the island. Bala's novel gives the sense that the North of the country was by default Tamil territory while every other part was unofficially the terrain of the Sinhala Buddhists. With this geography in mind, the eruption of trouble in parts of Colombo where Tamil houses were burnt seems a direct message to restore territorial dominance. The story comes full circle only when Priya starts looking into her past to trace her family's entry into Canada. She soon realizes that she enjoys a certain amount of privilege as a result of her parents' decision to leave their homeland, and to leave Sri Lanka via that legal "paperwork" that so impresses Minister Blair. In the authorities' eyes, her parents were the model immigrants who had migrated to Canada in the stipulated method. Her father explains: "From an early age, I knew I had to go" (Bala 187). Priya's uncle also narrates the horrific details of the 1983 riots and speaks from his personal experience as he recalls impersonating a Sinhala youth named Rupert Lakmanarachchi, to escape the sure death that would've come had his aggressors recognized that he was Tamil:

> …I was coming home from office. From the bus, we could see fellows were fighting. They were coming on and demanding to know who was Tamil. The girls at least could cover their heads and pretend to be muslim. But the rest of us—God help you if your Sinhala was poor, if someone knew you had a Tamil name. (Bala 193)

Uncle Romesh's story, perfectly illustrates Naficy's definition of what it means to be an "internal exile." According to Naficy, displacement doesn't have to be "territorial or cross border" (Naficy 123), a person is an "internal exile" when the state discriminates against specific communities and they are unable to exert their rights or to challenge the state. Bala reveals that by boarding a barely seaworthy boat the refugees choose the lesser evil by escaping their native land. It becomes clear that what Bala reiterates in her text is that these refugees aboard this boat risk literal death as well as social and political death.

Ancillary to the displacement that arises out of the refugees' exilic status, the narrative draws the reader's attention to traumatic memory which has the ability to erase the self. The text is replete with memories of the past as each refugee painfully suffers through trauma resulting from a rape or a death or other unspeakable horror. I here examine memory as a construct of the past and examine Alon Confino's notion of "the representation of the past and the making of it into a shared cultural knowledge by successive generations in 'vehicles of memory'" (Confino 1386) such as Bala's fictional account. Characters such as Mahindan and the other refugees become "vehicles of memory" that function as receptacles of the past that will serve to educate future generations of the "cultural" oppression that the Tamil community has been suffering with for generations in their homeland. Their experiences of trauma thus conveyed through Bala's narrative representations educate the Canadian readership about such contexts that would inform their response to the narrative. When examining traumatic memory in *The Boat People*, "sense memory" plays a vital role as Mahindan does not reflect on the past experiences per se but "registers the lived process of memory at a specific moment," therefore; the representation of trauma does not represent "originary trauma" but "the state or experience of post-traumatic memory" (Hirsch and Radstone 35). Hirsch and Radstone build on the premise that trauma is always a belated response and Bala reveals how Mahindan and other characters suffer from "post-traumatic

memory" that continues to create, in the present moment, the same kind of agitation and anxiety that they experienced in the past. After their escape from Sri Lanka the refugees relive their trauma through flashbacks, dreams, and bouts of depression:

> During his trips downtown for detention hearings, Mahindan would stare out the window at the endless lanes of wide highways, the chains of cars, sun glinting off their shiny surfaces…He would imagine the city under siege. A civil war was raging, rockets shooting from the mountains, glass blown out of the houses, buildings gouged by bombs. Trees snapped in half, fires burning in the street, bodies crumpled, a car smouldering, all its doors flung wide open. (Bala 279-280)

By depicting Mahindan as experiencing a non-eventful trip through Vancouver at the same time as he envisions bombs destroying the city, Bala reveals how Mahindan easily slips between the past and the present, blurring the lines between then and now despite the spatial and temporal distance that separates Mahindan from his traumatic experience. Mahindan is unable to break away from the trance that draws him to his trauma and the place of trauma, causing him to involuntarily relive over and over again an experience that he thought leaving the place would solve. Besides the refugees, Bala also introduces the traumatic experiences of other diaspora members, with traumatic pasts similar to those of the refugees. Despite their long absences from Sri Lanka, they vividly recall the conditions that forced them to uproot themselves, as with Priya's parents' generation that lived through the 1980-89 riots and escaped to Canada. I argue that in examining the link to the second generation's trauma, Marianne Hirsch's concept of Postmemory is relevant in understanding that trauma passes on from one generation to another as witnesses transfer "knowledge of events" that eventually form the tapestry of an entire community's history. In Bala's narrative, although Priya's parents deliberately refrain from talking about the past for fear of burdening their children with a trauma that an entire community has been struggling with, Bala uses the arrival of the

boat as a catalyst to cause Priya to probe into her parents' past. It is through the stories of the refugees, Uncle Romesh and the diaspora that she begins to transform into a "vehicle of memory" (Confino 1386) herself. Cathy Caruth states that: "Trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Caruth 4). Caruth's concept emphasizes how trauma doesn't elicit an immediate response but begins to develop latently. The fact that it was "not known in the first instance" is how it begins to haunt its victim. Caruth's argument aligns with Hirsch's and Radstone's statement that it is "resolutely an issue of the present" (Hirsch and Radstone 35). The reason behind Mahindan's inability to separate the past from his present lies in his inability to break free from the latency that causes him to experience the past in his present. In the novel, the reader notices the nightmares from which all the refugees suffer, reinforcing the idea that although their journey by boat promises an escape from the place of trauma, it doesn't promise an escape from their traumatic experiences that haunt them. Bala reveals in her novel how the state is an inextricable part of the refugees' narratives and these toxic memories have the ability to silence their narrative, thereby becoming "incommunicable" to others. What needs to be communicated is silenced, thus "encircling the real" (Edkins 15) becomes impossible. Bala's novel presents Ranga's suicide as the narrative of the state dominates over his narrative, thereby ultimately silencing him: "Doesn't matter what I say. They won't believe me" (Bala 276) […] "Mahindan saw the legs first […] There was a half second of confusion and then understanding. A body dangling in midair" (Bala 281). Ranga's body tells a story upon which the State inscribes its control. Amarjit Singh presents evidence of shrapnel in Ranga's upper right shin as evidence that ties Ranga to the alleged attack on the Sri Lankan military. His injury to his leg and his limp marks him, although Ranga claimed that he was not a member of the LTTE. His silence with regard to

his forged documents directly pin him to a crime he did not commit. Ranga's body becomes an instrument that the State manipulates as his injury to the leg and his limp are misconstrued and used as weapons to negate his traumatic past as an innocent civilian. In the novel, Bala reveals that the injury to Ranga's leg was a result of an explosion that took place close to Ranga's cart but Ranga's silence as to his identification enables the State to counter Ranga's body memory and impose the body memory of the Sea Tiger upon the unfortunate Ranga. This counter body memory silences a testimony that would speak for many others like himself whose bodies become contesting grounds on which both the LTTE and the State inscribe power. Ranga's silence and his ultimate death is a triumph for both hegemonies in that his death makes his trauma "incommunicable" and "encircling the real" becomes impossible as silence reigns in his subject position. Edward Mallot examines how "the human body can, independently and autonomously, retain and reveal an individual's history" (Mallot 154) and I apply Mallot's statement to Ranga's case as his scars from a midnight shell attack speak to Ranga's involvement with the LTTE. Though they have no other proof than the forged document, the opposing counsel insists that he was a Sea Tiger who sustained injuries during an attack. His body and the actual Sea Tiger's body get confused and the State's story[25] prevails over Ranga's actual history, when Ranga mistakenly assumes the Sea Tiger's identity. His inability to explain his stance and his choice to remain silent in the face of incrimination leads to his defeat. Amy Kaminsky in *After Exile: Writing the Latin American Diaspora* argues "that without the emplaced human body, there is nothing to know or represent about exile and its aftermath" (xi), thereby signifying a permanent defeat in the wrestle against the State that seeks to promote a single narrative. The reader realizes that Ranga's silence only serves to nurture the dominant narrative as the only narrative. Silence pervades the detention reviews and the hearings as the victims/witnesses of war crimes narrate their story in sterile environments and with an audience that literally cannot

understand a word they say. Bala places the English Language as a barrier to communicating the victims' stories and their emotions in that much of their story and their emotion fail to reach the adjudicator. Although the Canadian adjudicators hear translations of the victims' stories, the refugees are unable to engage with their surroundings and directly convey their narrative to the adjudicators, reinforcing the divide between "us" and "them." Bala highlights how language fails the refugees particularly in Ranga's case when he can defend himself with only one sentence, that doesn't make sense to his listeners:

> Hurst turned to Ranga and asked: Do you have anything to say?
>
> Blacker [the translator], in a deadpan voice: I am not a Tiger.
>
> Hurst said: You are saying this evidence is false? That it has been fabricated?
>
> Under the table, Ranga rubbed furiously at his leg. This man, he said, in English. This man no me.
>
> At any time in your life, were you a Sea Tiger? Hurst asked.
>
> Singh sat still, hands clasped, as Ranga dug his grave deeper.
>
> No, Ranga said again in English. This man…this man no me. (Bala 260)

Their stories, emotions, their very selves are lost in translation. Bala attempts to bridge this disconnect as she unites the reader through their stories of their past with the characters' traumatic experiences since. Shoshana Felman in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* expostulates that a trauma narrative can only be effective if the "literary testimony" evokes the same sensations "in one's own body" (108). The trauma that these refugees experience isn't an individual experience, but rather a shared one. The memories of the "mortar shells and rockets," "falling artillery," "the whole world on

fire," all accompanied by "the cries of the dying" (Bala 1), are a shared experience of their previous home. These memories reveal the horror they leave behind as they become shared memories and, in a sense, bind them to their past. According to Confino, speaking of shared cultural knowledge that is transmitted through individuals acting as "vehicles of memory," "collective memory is an exploration of a shared identity that unites a social group, be it a family or a nation, whose members nonetheless have different interests and motivations" (Confino 1390). This collective memory if shared with others becomes a strong affront to the State's denial of Human Rights violations of the war victims.

In *The Boat People,* despite being outcasts in their home country, most find a second home that allows them a chance at living without fear of their ethnicity as Tamils in Canada. In the novel, Bala captures Mahindan's surprise at Canada being a home to people who speak Tamil flawlessly: "One of the ladies spoke. Her Tamil was fluent and unaccented. She was the interpreter, a member of the Tamil Alliance. There were thousands of Tamils in Canada, she told them…to find they had come to a place so full of their own" (Bala 24). In the novel, Bala in presenting such characters that speak "fluent" and "unaccented" Tamil, introduces the Tamil diaspora within Canada. A community that not only speaks the language but also shares the same cultural knowledge as the refugees. Brian Keith Axel, commenting on the Sikh diaspora, writes that the term diaspora means "different things to different people at different times" but has come to represent these differences in "more general, more mobile forms" (Axel 24). Most importantly, Axel argues that rather than "the homeland creating the diaspora, it has been the diaspora, or histories of displacement, that have created particular kinds of places—homelands" (Axel 199). In *The Boat People* the word "home" recurs multiple times but, interestingly, none of the refugees use the word home to refer to Sri Lanka. There is a constant yearning for a safe home as Sellian draws pictures of a magical place in his art while Mahindan calls up mental images of a home in Canada. Mahindan's

first reaction when he reaches Canada is a feeling of safety. Bala uses the disassociation with Sri Lanka and the emerging sense of association to the Tamil community that volunteers to help in Canada to make the word "diaspora" synonymous with the word "home" in the novel. According to Axel's argument that diasporas create homelands, Bala reveals how the Tamil diaspora represented through characters such as Charlika welcome the refugees to their homes. In the novel, Charlika becomes so invested in the lives of Hema and her daughters that they share their traumatic past in Jaffna with her. In turn Charlika is able to provide a safe home until they are able to face their hearing and be integrated into a system following a favourable decision. Agnew argues that:

> There is no ideal diaspora, nor do all of these elements have to be present to define it, and there is no hierarchy among them that emerges by the absence or presence of one or more of these elements. Importance, however, lies in the shared history of displacement, suffering, adaptation, and resistance. (Agnew 4)

Agnew's argument is that the word diaspora is a concept that is loaded with definitions and criteria that at times in the past excluded displays of rudimentary solidarity over a shared history. The word at one point in history was used to explain a minority community living outside of one's homeland coming together to create a solidarity based on one's shared history. Agnew's idea of diaspora revamps that fixed ideology surrounding the word. In applying Agnew's concept of diaspora all those who open their homes to the refugees and emotionally invest themselves in this crisis are presented as a diaspora in the novel. Bala extends this term even to Canadian families, such as the one that adopts Sellian, to reveal how a new kind of diaspora emerges out of "a non-nation based solidarity" (Anthias 557). According to Floya Anthia diaspora means a word that "[moves] toward one based on class, gender, and "trans-ethnic alliances"" (Anthias 557). Priya, a second-generation immigrant to

Canada in particular finds it astounding that volunteers from around British Columbia sacrifice their time and effort for the well-being of the asylum seekers:

> We are trying to get in line for spots in boardinghouses. And there are volunteers who have offered their spare rooms and basement apartments…Priya felt chastened by this, the goodwill and camaraderie of so many people willing to take strangers in, all because of a shared sense of what…ethnicity?... diaspora? (Bala 50)

The Tamil Alliance along with other volunteers recruit lawyers, provides advice and the kind of support that typically a family can offer. Priya newly understands the importance of being part of the diaspora that her parents discouraged her to join when she was a child. She witnesses Tamil Canadians and Canadians across British Columbia responding to the need for any kind of help for these stranded refugees.

Bala presents Priya, Grace Nakamura and her twins Meg and Brianne as "belated witness[es]" (Felman 108) to the silent suffering of an entire community through their predecessors. In the novel Bala speaks of two historical traumas, the thirty-year conflict in Sri Lanka and the Japanese Canadian internment. Through Priya (and her parents' and Uncle's past), Bala presents a national trauma, and through Grace and her mother Kumi, Bala hints at one of Canada's past national traumas.[26] In both these traumas, Bala reveals how previous generations either intentionally or unintentionally remain disconnected from their past. In an interview Bala states that "It's important to not forget our personal past, our family's past, and our country's past. Purposeful amnesia is a particularly dangerous thing" (Interview-Kajal). I believe that in the novel, when Priya's parents refuse to burden their children (Priya and Rat) with their trauma of having escaped an ongoing crisis, they are essentially depriving their children of a part of their identity. Priya is missing an integral part of her identity as a Tamil Canadian-Sri Lankan. Similarly, for Grace Nakamura, Kumi's parents "kept quiet"

about losing their home, their family business, and their life in the internment camp because, "they thought they were protecting us" (Bala 53). But in protecting successive generations from their parents' trauma the parents not only shield their children from a history of suffering, they also shield them from the state perpetuation of suffering and trauma. The result is the insensitivity and callousness that Grace presents. Grace lives by her grandmother's teaching to "Focus on tomorrow. No point regretting yesterday" (Bala 109) and as a result, feels very little pity for refugees who choose to leave their home, who choose to lie to authorities. Kumi is unable to share her memories with Grace but attempts to convey her memories to her granddaughters through a "family history project" wherein she and Grace's daughters research reparations for Japanese Internment (Bala 200). More and more, Alzheimer's poses a threat to Kumi's memory, and she becomes less and less effective at conveying an entire community's trauma adequately to educate younger generations. Kumi points out to Grace her error in thinking that her job to adjudicate and determine what becomes of the refugees is nondiscriminatory. Grace's disconnect with her past scares Kumi, who says:

> I know what your job is, Kumi said. Making history…history…making it happen.
>
> And happen. Again. Again.
>
> This is totally different! These people are …we're fighting a war on terror.
>
> Yes yes war is always the excuse…
>
> …This is a new kind of war, one we've never seen before. The country's security is at stake. It's my job to protect us.
>
> Don't fool yourself, Grace. You're not that important. (Bala 325)

In the novel, Bala reveals that those who become belated witnesses of their previous generation's trauma are vital to society as they pass their successors the trauma that contains their cultural history and in turn shapes their collective identity. The belated witnesses unearth the stories many years after the actual event and still are able to feel the same feelings of insecurity, fear, and dread that propel the first generation to move to safety. Uncle Romesh asks Priya, "why are you bringing this up now? … These are old-old stories" (Bala 192). And Grace questions the reasoning behind transmitting specific knowledge to her children. However, these stories of Sri Lanka's past are a part of Priya's identity as much as they are her parents' and the Canadian Tamil community's. The history of the Japanese Canadian internment are a part of Grace, Meg, and Brianne as much as they are a part of Obachaan, Hiro (Kumi's parents), and Kumi. Although these belated witnesses become partakers in their family's trauma only many years later, they share a collective memory that is crucial in understanding their cultural history. The past is able to affect and shape the belated witnesses even if they have no memory of the event and despite their complete withdrawal from the source of the trauma. Hirsch describes how memory plays a crucial role in connecting subsequent generations to the source of the trauma:

> [D]escendants of survivors (of victims as well as of perpetrators) of massive traumatic events connect so deeply to the previous generation's remembrances of the past that they need to call that connection memory and thus that, in certain extreme circumstances, memory can be transmitted to those who were not actually there to live an event. (Hirsch 105-106)

At the start of her involvement in the Refugee crisis, Priya is hesitant and even offended that one of her bosses, Gigovaz, singles her out to work on the cases pertaining to refugees when her interests clearly lie in corporate law. However, as she connects to her roots through memories, as she feels growing compassion for the refugees and greater confidence that she

will be able to help them, she becomes a link in the chain of witnesses to the horrors that ensue in Sri Lanka. Priya vicariously experiences the intense displacement of the refugees to the point that she too needs to revise her sense of self and identity through her shared memories of Sri Lanka. At this point in the novel Priya develops a "double perspective," (195) as Agnew would say of her parents' first home that inevitably alters her relation to Sri Lanka. As she stumbles on these traumatic memories that Uncle and her father transfer to her, she learns to peel away the façade of the tropical island full of "tea estates," "stilt fishermen," "mangosteen" (Bala 191), and delves into the traumatic memories that offer more blunt history of Sri Lanka. Bala's task as an author is also fascinating as she "quilts" together this narrative of memories, trauma, diaspora, identity, and displacement. *The Boat People* does not only present one refugee's story, but a boatful. And, although this is its primary storyline, it does not only offer the story of Tamils escaping oppression in Sri Lanka, but also an assortment of Canadian characters, with diverse backgrounds, many of whom harbour their own racialized oppression.

Sharon Bala's task as a writer is to commit to writing fictional accounts of a past that has scarred certain minority communities. In the process, she renounces the idea of a brick and mortar home, to adopt familiar but more complex notions such as "diaspora" that foster a sense of belonging among exiles and refugees. She revamps the entire notion of a home as her characters escape the clutches of a State that thrives on human rights violations against its ethnic minorities. Bala illustrates the liminal spaces that refugees and exiles occupy as they experience disorientation while moving from the familiar to the unknown, using the vast, perilous, raging sea to reflect the magnitude of their displacement. The voyage from Sri Lanka to the coast of British Columbia invokes a rite of passage wherein the refugees lose their homeland in the hopes of adopting a new homeland that will grant them citizenship. In her text Bala examines a growing humanitarian crisis, one that many survivors refuse to

articulate, as they choose “purposeful amnesia” that will only keep this cycle of victimization forever in a spin. She interrogates the influence that trauma and memory have to shape an individual who leaves the known for the unknown. As in Ondaatje’s *Running in the Family*, storied memories become the primary means of educating those removed from the past. Her story holds a mirror up to those who enjoy the privilege of a safe home against those who are willing to lose everything in order to find a home.

CHAPTER 4: BODILY INSCRIPTIONS, WITNESS WRITING AND THE HOMELAND IN *ANIL'S GHOST*

In this chapter I examine *Anil's Ghost* by Michael Ondaatje. Mrinalini Chakravorty terms the novel "an archive of death" (542) as it captures the numerous deaths, kidnappings, disappearances, and mutilations that form the crux in theories of trauma, memory, and the body, my focus in this chapter. What is particularly interesting amidst all the novel's violence is Anil's initial choice to return to her home country Sri Lanka. Unlike the characters in *Funny Boy* by Shyam Selvadurai and the refugees in Sharon Bala's novel *The Boat People*, who all flee from Sri Lanka, Ondaatje's character Anil Tissera returns to the island in the capacity of a forensic anthropologist for the United Nations to investigate the killings and disappearances in Sri Lanka. The journey that Anil undertakes differs vastly from the quasi-autobiography of Ondaatje in *Running in the Family* who in that memoir-novel yearns for Asia and embarks on a journey to collect memories to reconstruct the post-colonial Ceylon of his parents' time. Anil's objective, in returning to "a homeland" she has not visited in over fifteen years, is to probe into the traumatic past/present and redress or rather bring to light the malaise from which the country suffers. Once there, her resolve is to get to the root of the problem in Sri Lanka by investigating the remains of a body whom they name "Sailor" that she discovers in a protected zone in Sri Lanka. Sailor's death appears to be a recent death in comparison to the other, historic remains in the grave and Anil begins to investigate the death. Anil, as a representative for United Nations, along with Sri Lankan Sarath Diyasena, Anil's archaeologist companion who brings Anil up to speed when she returns to the country, are to probe into Human Rights violations and compile a report to determine for certain if the Sri Lankan government is involved in these violations against its own citizens. Despite warnings from Sarath that she ought to be cautious of the government who may attempt to obstruct her investigation, when Anil does contact a government official she inevitably does

so at the risk of their lives. At the end of the novel, Anil is fortunate to escape the violence that pervades Sri Lanka even if she too falls victim to the cruelty that devours its witnesses. At the outset of the novel, Ondaatje places an Author's note that warns its readers of "three essential groups: the government, the anti-government insurgents in the south and separatist guerillas in the north." The entire novel depicts the mental and physical trauma resulting from violence that the government in particular commits, and Anil's purpose becomes more and more difficult to maintain as she wrestles to bring the truth into the open, which she believes will provide some closure to the victims who are left with no answers to their questions. The novel's narrator speaks of how the government does not take any action or assist family members with details regarding the deaths and disappearances of their loved ones; often families continue to live with the hope that deceased family might still return. Anil's task is to provide some closure to these incidents to which the UN has taken an interest. In this chapter, I examine trauma through Cathy Caruth's argument in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History,* where she argues that "one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead […] to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound" (8). In Ondaatje's novel, the readers are able to identify the fluid nature of trauma as it moves from the victim to the witness. Each voiceless and at times nameless victim is a trauma or a wound in history, an idea of "wound" that Freud develops out of the Greek term, "traumatikos" (Freud 253). In *Mourning and Melancholia*, Freud examines how melancholy acts as an open wound and begins to form "a hole" in the psychic sphere of the individual much like an internal haemorrhage[27] that progressively develops over time. Nasrullah Mambrol makes the definition:

> In the traditional trauma model pioneered by Cathy Caruth, trauma is viewed as an event that fragments consciousness and prevents direct linguistic representation. The

> model draws attention to the severity of suffering by suggesting the traumatic experience irrevocably damages the psyche. Trauma is an unassimilated event that shatters identity and remains outside normal memory and narrative representation. (Mambrol-Literary Theory and Criticism blog)

According to Mambrol, Caruth's trauma model suggests that when an individual experiences trauma, that trauma has the ability to alter a person's sense of self as the damage that trauma does cannot be undone. It "irrevocably damages the psyche" and it paralyzes a person's ability to speak of the trauma. Therefore, any narrative attempt to present trauma is a failure as Caruth argues that trauma is unrepresentable. The traumatic experience is able to create a gap between the experience and any linguistic attempt at representing trauma. In the novel, the Caruthian model of trauma constantly recurs as all living characters are unable to speak of the trauma, while Sailor, the dead body under investigation, is presented as an alternative narrative depicting bodily trauma. I also elaborate on how Ondaatje departs from the conventional trauma novel[28] as he focuses on what Michelle Balaev calls "the geographic place of the traumatic experience and remembrance situates the individual" (Balaev 1) in a social, cultural and political context that will influence the reconfiguration of the self. More interesting is the manner in which Ondaatje uses body memory in the novel. Ondaatje presents a victim's body, buried in the ground with three other pre-historic bodies; the discovery of this fourth body is a starting point for the emotional recovery of Ondaatje's protagonist. However, in the novel Ondaatje reveals how the governing bodies suppress the truth of the brutality it and other political groups visit upon Sri Lankans by inflicting more trauma on those who attempt to begin the process of reconciliation and healing within the country. My reading aligns with Greg Forter's argument that while trauma is inherently unrepresentable as the Caruthian model suggests, its unrepresentable nature is because "it has to do with the enforced rupture with precolonial pasts and the prohibitions against

remembrance enforced by particular regimes of power" (Forter 74), implying that trauma is unrepresentable because the reproductions of trauma are subject to power structures. I argue for the vulnerability of the human body and examine how power structures silence Anil's attempt to serve as this one victim's conduit, and how her failure affects her sense of self.

In *Anil's Ghost,* Ondaatje portrays trauma in victims and witnesses as a debilitating disease that sets into an individual much like a highly contagious infection, spreading throughout one's entire being, and beginning to spread to others. Balaev associates trauma with the "contagion theory" stemming from the Caruthian model of trauma. According to Ondaatje's character, Sarath, trauma plagues the entire country. Sarath believes that the effects of such trauma are gradual yet fatal, and Ondaatje illustrates this fatalistic reaction to trauma through his characters who ultimately suffer bleak ends. Caruth argues that all of literary studies claims that "trauma stands outside representation altogether" (Caruth 17), as language fails to capture the actual experience, forming an intrinsic rift. Freud first introduces this fissure in the form of *latency* using an example of an individual who encounters a near-death experience as he escapes a train collision. Freud believes that similar to an infectious disease that will begin to develop more aggressively over the "incubation period," the latency of the response to a traumatic event merely marks a more pronounced existence of the trauma. Caruth applies Freud's theory of latency to Jewish history in "Moses and Monotheism," theorizing that:

> The experience of trauma, the fact of latency, would thus seem to consist, not in the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself. The historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all. And it is this inherent latency of the event

> that paradoxically explains the peculiar, temporal structure, the belatedness, of the… historical experience. (Caruth 17)

Caruth builds on Freud's theory of latency and argues that trauma is a reaction to "an originary" event much later and this reaction is amplified as the victim realizes how the trauma was not perceived as a violation or shock in the first place. Balaev argues that it is the literature on psychological models of trauma that makes readers look past trauma theory's dominant model and (as redress), in order to effectively represent trauma, there needs to be "theoretical pluralism that draws upon various models of trauma" (xiii) that would provide fodder for various representations to emerge. By "theoretical pluralism," she means that multiple theories on psychological effects of trauma that move beyond the Caruthian theory of trauma (that goes beyond accepting trauma as "unrepresentable") need to emerge for narrative representation to expand. I argue that Ondaatje's narrative resonates alongside Caruth's argument that trauma incorporates this "inherent latency," while capturing the aftermath of trauma as unrepresentable in instances (for example: most living subjects) and representable through bodily memory in Sailor's depiction. Caruth argues that, "For history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs; or to put it differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence" (Caruth 18). Caruth's model of trauma, then, promotes the idea that the impact that trauma has on a victim evades language and expression, as it cannot be represented accurately. After examining Balaev's observation that trauma needs to be depicted through alternative psychological processes of memory especially through creating a mechanism of "remembering," I see *Anil's Ghost* as an attempt to capture trauma in diverse ways to avoid advocating a homogenous representation of trauma. Ondaatje dedicates page 37 of the text to some of the victims who disappeared during the 1988-1989 period, which he notes is "a partial list of the 'disappeared'" from Amnesty International reports. This list

informs the readers of the kind of baggage (knowledge) that Anil is privy to in her unique position as an outsider attempting to investigate the trauma within Sri Lanka. I argue that when Anil arrives in the country, as a result of her exposure to the knowledge of the trauma, she is already infected by this contagion. Her journey with Sarath (from finding the body, to hiding it among the prehistoric remains, to finding a sculptor to reconstruct the face of this victim, to Sarath's final demonstration about their findings to the government) appears to be a paranoid concealment of her task that she conducts only using sources such as Palipana (a retired scientist) and Ananda (the sculptor). These resources strike the readers as unorthodox ways to counter government intelligence. Although at the start of the novel Anil's paranoia does not make sense, it gains significance towards the latter part of the text. I believe that the concealment of her investigation is because of what she has heard about the Government before she actually experiences violence herself. One small scene in the novel highlights the disappearance of Ananda's[29] wife, Sirissa, a scene which illustrates how literature fails to depict trauma. Sirissa walks toward a school (where she works as a cleaner), only to come across child victims of the war. Instead of depicting the effects on Sirissa's psyche after seeing such brutality on the human body, the readers have information only up to that point of her disappearance:

> She sees the heads of the two students on stakes, on either side of the bridge, facing each other…She feels something is behind her, whatever is the cause of this. She desires to become nothing at all. Mind incapable of nothing…Cannot touch anything because everything feels alive, wounded and raw but alive. (Ondaatje 171)

This depiction of Sirissa as unable to comprehend what is happening when experiencing this traumatic event and her eventual disappearance is a strategy Ondaatje uses to represent trauma as unrepresentable. Ondaatje chooses not to depict what happens next in Sirissa's story. Sirissa's speechless terror is, in part, a narrative omission that heightens her traumatic

experience. In presenting Sirissa as unable to comprehend let alone articulate violence against school children, Ondaatje leaves the readers to imagine what horror has befallen her when he offers no further details about her disappearance. Elsewhere in the novel, Anil meets Lakma, another victim traumatized by the violent deaths of both her parents, when Anil goes in search of Palipana, a former historian who has left civilization entirely to escape the violence. Lakma is Palipana's niece, and cares for his physical needs as he gives her time and space to heal from her own anguish. Ondaatje describes Lakma as a victim stamped by trauma:

> A few years before, the girl Lakma had seen her parents killed. A week after their murder, the twelve-year-old child was taken to a government run by nuns…. The shock of the murder of the girl's parents, however, had touched everything within her, driving both her verbal and her motor ability into infancy. This was combined with an adult sullenness of spirit. She wanted nothing more to evade her. (Ondaatje 99)

The rhetorical use of silence in these instances stamp the victims and the witnesses, offering no opportunity to talk through the horror, or give survivors a language about what has happened, that will allow those survivors a chance to heal from the trauma. Through these silenced victims and witnesses, Ondaatje narratively illustrates that accurate representation of trauma is near impossible. Kali Tal in *Worlds of Hurt* states that: "Accurate representation of trauma can never be achieved without recreating the event since, by its very definition, trauma lies beyond the bounds of 'normal conception'" (15). In the wake of this constant state of trauma in *Anil's Ghost*, Ondaatje illustrates how survivors witness the death of their loved ones and continue to live scarred. They occupy sites of both witness and victim, and continue to live with the pain that over time begins to define every aspect of their life. The text particularly focuses on fear, which Ondaatje projects as a constant state of mind in Sri Lanka among people who continuously witness violence. In a detailed account of fear in survivors, Ondaatje's narrator tells readers:

> In a fearful nation, public sorrow was stamped down by the climate of uncertainty. If a father protested a son's death, it was feared another family member would be killed. If people you knew disappeared, there was a chance they might stay alive if you did not cause trouble. This was the scarring psychosis in the country. Death, loss was "unfinished," so you could not walk through it. (Ondaatje 52)

This passage seems to mirror Freud's "traumatic neurosis," a rudimentary principle which seems to hold much truth with regard to survivors of trauma suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. According to Freud, in traumatic neurosis a person encounters a trauma which subsequently creates "a consequence of an extensive breach being made in the protective shield against stimuli" (Freud 35). Trauma is "any kind of excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield … with a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli" (Freud 33). It is the overstimulation of the unprepared system that creates a deep impact and causes this constant state of fear to set in. Freud's theory of the overstimulated system corresponds to the anxiety prevalent in Sri Lanka that has set deep into Anil's bones as well those who do and will continue to live in Sri Lanka. In the novel, Ondaatje makes it clear that it was fear that set Anil in motion. Sarath has travelled away from Colombo, and asks her to wait for him to get in touch with her. A matter of a short time. But days and days pass, and not only does she not hear from him, but Anil learns that Sarath has already long returned to Colombo. Sarath has given her repeated warnings to not reveal the location where they were conducting their investigations, yet – in an act of desperation – Anil believes he has betrayed their work, and calls a government official to locate Sarath, as he holds the only piece of evidence they have against the government. That one phone call sets their course, and puts all their work in jeopardy.

The first half of the novel appears to subscribe to the conventional trauma novel as there appears to be silence on the part of victims and witnesses; language fails to explain the

traumatic events. However, through Anil's investigation of Sailor's body, *Anil's Ghost* departs from the conventional trauma novel as Ondaatje explores body memory as an alternative means to provide closure for the living. Memory plays a very important role in this novel as the state promotes competing histories that negate the personal history. Ondaatje is no amateur at exploring the links between history, memory, and the body. In *Running in the Family*, Ondaatje uses his father's body to re-invent a murky past by creating a collage of memories that enable him to vicariously and momentarily live in a homeland that is no longer in existence. In *Anil's Ghost*, Ondaatje is investigating a different kind of unrepresented history. A history much similar to the "amygdala" (the region of the brain primarily associated with emotional processes) of a person that houses its "most fearful memories" (Ondaatje 131). Ondaatje's protagonist, Anil, scavenges the dark aspects, the hidden and the suppressed information that the dominant narrative dismisses and trivializes.[30]

Anil realizes that the victims have no redress and are doubly victimized by the deliberate "forgetting" or suppression of their loved ones' existence to the extent that the witnesses stamped by trauma eventually learn to hold on to the remains (that exclude the body) of a loved one: "just the coloured and patterned sarong a missing relative last slept in, which in normal times would have become a household rag but now was sacred" (Ondaatje 52). These relics become their only path to beginning the healing process in a setting that doesn't acknowledge the victim's[31] presence or his/her absence. However, Anil opposes the idea of victims' families having to settle for a shred of a memory and strives to name the victims and the agents of the crime. Anil examines disfigured, mutilated bodies that are nameless and often faceless. Her task becomes more and more difficult as the narrator reveals the context within which she lives in Sri Lanka: "…the bodies turn up weekly now. The height of the terror was eighty-eight and eighty-nine, but of course it was going on long before that. Every side was killing and hiding the evidence. Every side. This was an

unofficial war" (Ondaatje 13). Anil's connections to Sri Lanka are familial rather than political; as such, Ondaatje positions her as invested yet separate. Whatever the outcome of her work and investigations, she will return to her North American home, leaving behind her brief foray into the homeland of her childhood.

Ondaatje historically grounds Anil's search in the aftermath of the period between 1988 and 1989, a violent period in the annals of Sri Lanka. Ondaatje commits to narrative memory a history that impacted many, but is severely unrepresented in literature. This underrepresentation is changing, but still remains a factor because of its taboo nature and the inherent difficulty in representing a continually evolving situation. The JVP insurrection led by Marxist Nationalist leaders such as Rohana Wijeweera inspired young college/university level students and the youth of the time to take up arms to convert Sri Lanka into a socialist nation in keeping with Marxist-Leninist ideology on one side. On the other side of the country, the government resorted to counter-insurgency and counter-terrorist operations. They made such choices in the mayhem of their bad decisions to fight against the Tamil Tigers by disseminating widespread hatred towards all Tamils. Meanwhile, the Tamil Tigers unleashed their own fury for a separate state, culminating in the Black July of 1989 which served to heighten the violence and death within the country. Forter argues that "[t]he 'unrepresentable' character of trauma is thus due not to its being 'originary' and hence, beyond history and representation. Rather, it has to do with the enforced rupture with precolonial pasts and the prohibitions against remembrance enforced by particular regimes of power" (Forter 73). This argument is relevant even in this context as Ondaatje reveals how hegemonic power operates to impose silence on the victims. Forter argues that the only means to represent trauma is to portray the means that these forces employ to suppress representation. For example, he cites that the past of these characters is "*in principle* recoverable, representable, narratable" (73), but each narration has to fit into the conventional

narrative and hegemonic modernity. Forter illustrates that to "give voice" to those who are silenced is simply "an effort to shatter linguistic forms that conspire in the illusions of total understanding" (Forter 74). Forter is of the view that those efforts of speaking the "unspeakable" can only happen in the interstices of what can "be said" within a given historical framework. Thus, an emphasis on how regimes repress information becomes a way to imply the "unrepresentable." In Anil's search to incriminate the government and hold it accountable for the deaths and disappearances, she speaks of the unspeakable horrors within what can be said. Her fear of the suppression of her findings reveal that the government officials would go to any length to erase her findings. This turbulent political space becomes the backdrop against which Anil begins to unearth the alternative narrative hidden in the depths of a severely disfigured body, Sailor.

Mrinalini Chakravorty, in her essay "The Dead That Haunt *Anil's Ghost*: Subaltern Difference and Postcolonial Melancholia," argues that by portraying death in the postcolony, Ondaatje "endorses a stereotype of civilizational difference in which the generic fictionalization of mass death leads readers to affirm the meaninglessness of individual life in the postcolony" (Chakravorty 543). Chakravorty, through a postcolonial reading of the text, argues that in depicting the postcolony as a site of death, decay, and all the other negative associations that follow, Ondaatje reinforces a dangerous stereotype about the postcolony; namely, that readers will see "the postcolony as an archive of death" (543). Chakravorty also extends her argument to suggest that by depicting Sailor as a body rather than an actual person, Ondaatje evokes an alternative humanity that she identifies as a postcolonial crypt whereby an individual's experience speaks for many others. However, Milena Marinkova in "Perceiving […] in one's own body' the Violence of History, Politics and Writing: *Anil's Ghost* and Witness Writing" disagrees with Chakravorty and argues that Ondaatje's text:

> …does not reduce its critique to facile essentialist juxtapositions such as West vs. East, Christianity vs. Buddhism, local vs. foreign. *Anil's Ghost* neither envisages a solution to the crisis in Sri Lanka, nor does it sublimate the crisis into a cathartic artistic creation. On the contrary, Ondaatje's novel carries out an act of witnessing, which maps the violent encounter between the public and the intimate and which testifies to the irreparable corporeal inscriptions of this encounter, without adjudicating through a final verdict or offering a lasting cure. (Marinkova 109)

Marinkova's argument is precisely the framework on which I build my argument. In the novel, one constant is death and violence as, regardless of the victims' affiliations and allegiances to either or none of the "three camps of enemies" (13), mutilated, burnt, or buried bodies are the consequence. Chakravorty argues that Ondaatje, through the influx of dead bodies, is "foregrounding violent death as a staple of the postcolony… and implicates us as readers in a host of assumptions entailed in seeing the postcolony as an archive of death" (543). Readers do, to a certain extent, act as "witness" to this violence in the postcolony, yet what Ondaatje attempts to do is to examine how trauma and memory inscribe themselves on the living as well as the dead. In the text, Anil's presence in this climate of bloodshed is to unearth the truth sedimented within the body and it is the analysis that draws her closer to naming the perpetrators of these recent violent deaths that seem to form more of a trend than an isolated incident.

By discovering, investigating, and keeping concealed Sailor's body, Anil conveys the importance of bodies as evidence, and also as literal remains of the conflict's destructiveness. In her profession "Anil turned bodies into representatives of race and age and place" (Ondaatje 51). Her education equips her with the kind of skills needed to view the body as "a text and testing ground of memory" (Mallot 153), and Sailor's body is able to act as a testimony when trauma "resists language and actively destroys" (Scarry 4) any kind of

linguistic attempt to describe it. Elaine Scarry's argument acknowledges that trauma can destroy language and cause speechlessness while Mallot's argument seems to provide an alternative to a literary testimony via the body that can be read as a text in the absence of any other type of testimony that is suppressed. Mallot's emphasis on body memory is crucial in *Anil's Ghost* as Anil is able to read the trauma buried in Sailor's body and Ondaatje is able to represent Sailor's trauma through unconventional means. Marinkova invokes Scarry:

> The body, as Elaine Scarry observes, is thus constructed as a weakness and vulnerability, which can be manipulated, exploited and tortured. A conduit of pain, corporeality is perceived as a threat to the self, leading to the loss of language, consciousness and sense of the world. If the heightened sense of physicality alerts one to human mortality and destructibility, it also leads to the sense of lack of agency and betrayal; an uncomfortable reminder of the self's vulnerability, the corporeal becomes the resented member of the Cartesian split. (Marinkova 110)

Marinkova's argument that the human body is simply a vulnerability that functions as a text where trauma is able to inscribe itself is a concept that Ondaatje effectively articulates in Sailor's body. I believe that Anil and Ondaatje are both placed in similar positions to decipher the truth behind Sailor's death. While Anil examines the corporeal reality of Sailor's body (and attempts to link his death to many others who have suffered a similar fate), Ondaatje attempts to speak the unspeakable by pointing at the government as a major contributor to the trauma and fear that the general populace suffers. Mallot, commenting on Anil's unique position states that:

> For Ondaatje, the stakes are much higher than mere academic curiosity; if his protagonist can access and understand the memories hidden within the corpses of

> communal violence, she might manage to spark an international intervention in Sri Lanka's seemingly perpetual cycles of bloodshed. (Mallot 154)

Anil's preoccupation with Sailor is a result of her belief that Sailor is a "representative of all those lost voices. To give him a name would name the rest" (Ondaatje 52). When Anil and Sarath identify Sailor as Ruwan Kumara, a man who worked in a village mine, Kumara's body retains evidence that is able to speak for him. Anil identifies the victim as a plumbago miner and she is able to ascertain his previous employment was a toddy tapper, and finds evidence that he was part of a "list of government undesirables" (Ondaatje 265). Mallot believes that Ondaatje's portrayal of Sailor:

> …holds important cues for how history and narrative might be reconsidered. These authors position the physical self not just as a testing ground but as a trans-textual site of the past: bodies retain and reveal events and emotional impacts in ways that complement what traditional, verbal narratives cannot say. (Mallot 154)

Mallot elaborates on how the body becomes a text in which memory and trauma overlap and inscribe the experiences on the self. For example, simply by analyzing Sailor's body, Anil is able to determine what is hidden in "plain sight," that Sailor's body has been hidden in the "wrong" grave yet appears to obviously belong to a recent victim. Anil points to the cause of death and sequence in which Sailor succumbs to his death: "She could read Sailor's last actions by knowing the wounds on the bone. He puts his arms over his face to protect himself from the blow. He is shot with a rifle, the bullet going through his arm, then into the neck. While he's on the ground, they come up and kill him" (Ondaatje 61). This passage reveals that Anil is able to describe to the very last detail of Sailor's traumatic experience, an experience that – even had he lived through – his language would not permit him to speak of.

Similarly, Sailor's body illustrates what Mallot talks about in his book *Memory, Nationalism, and Narrative in Contemporary South Asia*, where he explains that bodies in general retain traces of the past and their experiences. When language fails, when Freud's latency and Caruth's belatedness of the originary trauma affect the power to describe trauma, and when power hegemonies silence trauma, the body is still able to speak for itself. Through Sailor's story, Ondaatje suggests that power hegemonies that hide that crucial evidence are guilty of committing a crime that exceeds the trauma done to the body during its lifetime. The self is "a series of partial identifications, never completed" (Culler 114), and Mallot argues that one's sense of self is reliant on one's lived experiences that create memories and trauma. According to Mallot's argument, the body becomes an instrument to access bodily memory that will influence one's identity. Forter argues that in response to overwhelming and inassimilable events:

> the self responds by absenting itself from direct experience of the event. The trauma therefore lives on (in the subject) only in this lacuna where the self "was not." From there it erupts unbidden into consciousness, not in the form of narratable story, but as intrusive, belatedly experienced and achronological memorial shards (flashbacks, nightmares, image-traces, and so forth). (Forter 67)

Forter's argument illustrates a self that absents itself from the experience, yet later these experiences return to severely influence the self. In Anil, although she is physically present, her emerging trauma lives in a state of absentia as Anil doesn't register that she is a victim of trauma until she finds her confiscated evidence comprising of the recorder and Sailor's body. The recorder contains Sarath's final words explaining the sacrifice that he has made to ensure Anil's escape from the trap that was set to destroy her evidence and silence both of them. It is only when she returns to her hiding place and hears Sarath's voice that she latently registers how she escapes the clutches of death while Sarath succumbs to the violence.

Edward Casey argues that, “there is no memory without body memory” (172), highlighting the fact that the body is able to retain references of the past through its memory of its experiences. It is only if the body is present during an experience, that the mind is able to retain and reproduce the memory through flashbacks, dreams etc. Ondaatje emphasizes the importance of body memory as Sailor’s body becomes evidence of an alternative narrative that is the reality of many such victims of bodily violence. Sandra Soo-Jin Lee states that when there are “competing narratives,” body memory takes precedence: “in cases where memory of events and experiences are continually challenged, undermined and erased by other more authoritative forces, the body is often presented in testament of the truth” (Lee 92). Ondaatje provides an example of what Lee theorizes: when testimonies fail and trauma leaves victims speechless, Anil still finds the truth sedimented within Sailor’s body. His body directly implicates the government and reveals what institutional power can do to one individual.

The novel ends with Sarath’s death and Anil’s escape from the country. Sailor’s body retains the evidence, but the question that Ondaatje poses by the ambiguous end to Anil’s story is if Anil’s body will be able to speak of the trauma to those who would listen. The government silences Sarath, Anil’s companion, the only other person who holds this information, by killing him. When the government officials realize that Anil threatens to fracture the dominant narrative they fabricated, the government confiscates Sailor’s body, as well as all evidence that Anil and Sarath have gathered, and sets a trap to physically harm Anil. This response attempts to eliminate a truth that would enlighten people about the atrocities, and would reveal the extent to which the Sri Lankan governing body goes to perpetuate violence, then nurtures the illusion that it is blameless and helpless against the other two factions fighting. Anil is able to escape because Sarath manages to divert the government’s attention to safeguard not only her safe exit, but also a way to preserve some of

their research. When Sarath suffers the same fate as Sailor, the narrative presents a circular horror: the memories entrenched in his body act as a text that locates his pain within Anil, especially as she knows her friend and colleague has experienced a similar death and disposal. Caruth argues that trauma is able to pass from one person to another and create a connection, writing that "one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead […] to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound" (8). Sailor's body becomes a text where trauma locates itself within Anil's body and moves on to make the readers witnesses to Anil's anguish. In making Anil a vehicle for this story, Ondaatje suggests that trauma is able to fluidly pass from one person to another. Laurie Vickeroy states that "trauma writers make the suffering body the small, focused universe of the tormented, and vehicle for rendering unimaginable experience tangible to readers" (Vickeroy 32-33). Through Anil's investigation she opens herself to become a witness to many other victims such as Sailor, as well as a victim herself. Shoshana Felman explains that "successful trauma narratives" "place the suffering of the victim 'within the body' of the reader", thereby making "belated witnesses," while transferring "what is happening to others—*in one's own body*'" (Felman 108). The perception of violence "happening to others in one's own body," makes witnesses of Ondaatje's readers as they become privy to alien circumstances and feelings, as Ondaatje places the "unspeakable" and the "unrepresentable" in narrative form. Anil's search for the root cause of Sailor's trauma and her attempt to speak on behalf of Sailor are Ondaatje's efforts to represent the "unrepresentable." Although death would be a permanent closure to silence a victim, making his/her story "unrepresentable," when Anil scavenges the details of Sailor's death, she becomes a belated witness who carries his story within her body. The belated witness begins to experience the birth of another existence within his/her own existence. Ondaatje describes the manner in which Anil begins to develop this "other" self as

she investigates Sailor's body. He depicts trauma as a dormant presence within each survivor/witness in a similar manner to Paul Antze, who elaborates on Freud's idea of "a buried city" which lurks within each individual, an otherness that comes into existence only when they experience a trauma (101): "Freud's work presents memory not simply as foreign or buried, but as an active – though hidden – force in our daily lives…they all converge on the idea of an otherness inside ourselves, as though there were something inherently alien in our own make-up" (in Radstone 102). Ondaatje simply offers one sentence to describe that Anil's trauma will continue to reverberate in her life following Sarath's death, and her exposure to mass death. Through Ananda, the artist who helps Anil and Sarath to recreate Sailor's face, Ondaatje reveals the permanence of this injury to their psyche: "[Ananda] and [Anil] would always carry the ghost of Sarath Diyasena" (Onddatje 301). This sentence introduces the idea that death is unfinished and that the memories play an important role in continuing to haunt the survivors of a trauma, whether those survivors have known the victims intimately or briefly.

While presenting narratives of trauma and body memory, Ondaatje's novel examines another crucial aspect of Anil's journey, her relationship to her homeland. Ondaatje places Anil's return to her homeland as if she were a stranger to her own country, a foreigner with no attachment to Sri Lanka. It is perhaps for this reason that she is the ideal candidate to investigate the crimes rampant in the country. Victoria Burrows in her article "The Heterotopic Spaces of Postcolonial Trauma in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*" suggests that Anil is a representative of the Western world who returns to a heterotopic space which Michel Foucault identifies as "a place of otherness," "of other spaces." Burrows identifies "des espaces autres" as a location where Anil will develop an alternative self. Unlike the protagonists in Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*, Bala's *The Boat People* and Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*, Anil's relationship to her country is that of estranged subject. She doesn't arrive

in Sri Lanka to obtain a deeper understanding of her "self," but to carry out what she thinks at first will be a straight-forward task. At the start of the novel, "The island no longer held her by the past…Anil had read documents and news reports, full of tragedy, and she had now lived abroad long enough to interpret Sri Lanka with a long-distance gaze" (Ondaatje 7). Anil does not arrive in Sri Lanka as a diasporic subject returning home full of nostalgia for days gone by. The only familial connection she has in Sri Lanka is to her ayah Lalitha, whom she only visits once. Furthermore, Anil's inability to fluently speak Sinhala and her partial ability to speak Tamil distances her further from this supposed "homeland." Burrows argues that:

> Anil's attachment to things Western results in an inability to see trauma from a postcolonial perspective. She is attached epistemologically and ontologically to an order of things that disallows her from connecting to the lived traumatic pain of Sri Lanka's postcolonial others, and indeed, in many ways she is culturally complicit with the false empathy and the blame of the West that Ondaatje so decries. (Burrows 168)

Burrows argument is largely reliant on the fact that Anil is an outsider to Sri Lanka, and that her status as an outsider to the country creates a dissociation (and complicity) that prevents Anil from identifying with the trauma that she witnesses. However, I argue that although Anil arrives in the country to objectively conduct an investigation without emotionally investing herself in that place, Ondaatje shows Anil gradually beginning to re-discover herself in relation to her homeland. Upon first returning to Sri Lanka, Anil witnesses "the buried senses from childhood still alive in her" (Ondaatje 11). If there was a void, an indifference to her homeland at the start of her journey, by the end of that journey, she experiences a recalibration of her self. Not only does Anil try to expose the government violence and cover-up by disclosing her and Sarath's inspections of Sailor's body, she also forges a new connection to the island, however negative her experiences there prove to be. In "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory" Balaev argues that:

> The trauma novel demonstrates how a traumatic event disrupts attachments between self and others by challenging fundamental assumptions about moral laws and social relationships that are themselves connected to specific environments….The primacy of place in the representations of trauma anchors the individual. (Balaev 1)

Anil's homeland anchors her in her trauma and she becomes one with the victims as she partakes in the pain and agony to which an outsider is not privy. Before Anil realizes that Sarath has found Sailor's body and that she will be able to replicate and preserve their examinations, she makes up her mind to leave the country: "She knew she wouldn't be staying here much longer, there was no wish in her to be here anymore. There was blood everywhere. A casual sense of massacre" (Ondaatje 280). Her discovery of Sarath's cleverness comes just before the reader's (and presumably Anil's) discovery of his murder; intriguingly, the novel ends many pages after Anil's final appearance in the book. Ondaatje ends his story of Anil with a host of open-ended questions:

> If she were to step into another life now, back to the adopted country of her choice, how much would [Sarath's brother] Gamini and the memory of Sarath be a part of her life? Would she talk to intimates about them, keeping them from mauling each other's worlds? Wherever she might be, would she think of them? (Ondaatje 282)

Anil forges a strong connection that was not there at the beginning of her journey. Sarath helps her to forge a link to her country, despite the war, the trauma, and the bloodshed. The other novelists in this thesis depict Sri Lankan citizens who flee to Canada; Ondaatje's novels depict Canadians who return, however briefly to a Sri Lanka of their childhood. This Sri Lanka no longer represents their home, but has become a place that represents embedded perceptions of a once idyllic homeland that still contains certain traces from the past. It is crucial to locate Anil in this reconfigured environment, and to reveal how trauma re-defines

her in relation to that environment. Ondaatje brings Anil's story to an abrupt end but later interjects that the memory of her time in Sri Lanka will follow her like a ghost, and will redefine her relations to her homeland, thereby re-defining her subject position not only to her childhood past memories, but also to the memory of what that childhood homeland has grown into, how it has progressed in the wake of political and ethnic violence.

Anil's Ghost is in itself a text of witnessing, because the novel carefully maps Anil's trajectory and situates her in the midst of an ongoing trauma that Ondaatje presents as a continuing state of mind in Sri Lanka. In returning to Sri Lanka, Anil witnesses, first-hand, what the country is experiencing. While Ondaatje's work fits into the Caruthian model of trauma that represents trauma as unspeakable, he presents body memory as a method to read traces of trauma in victims. Through Anil, Ondaatje captures a form of trauma witnessing as she reads Sailor's body as if it were a text. She vicariously witnesses the unspeakable, attempting to commit traumatic experiences to words by presenting her reports to the United Nations. Further, in reading Ondaatje's novel through Forter's argument I argue that depictions of trauma are not inherently unrepresentable, but that memory itself is affected and contained within and through bodies that have experienced trauma. Precolonial regimes that enact laws and threats to prohibit remembrance will rupture in various ways where hegemonic power instills fear and imposes silence on its victims. The way to break the silence is to find alternative narrative means that are able to convey trauma effectively. *Anil's Ghost* is an assault against a Sri Lankan government that continues to silence generations of cyclical killings and murders that remain unrepresented. Through the careful portrayal of Anil's journey, it is clear that Ondaatje writes a fictional account of actual trauma taking place in his own former homeland. The novel does not attempt to provide a solution to the malaise; rather, through the fictionalized accounts of its many characters (doctors, sculptors, forensic scientists, mine workers), *Anil's Ghost* portrays the truth of traumatic experiences

not through factual remembrance but by presenting, in Felman's words, "what is happening to others—*in one's own body*." The novel presents horrific events by suggesting that the "self" (and its reconfiguration) travels from page to readers, from history to imagination and back.

CONCLUSION

In my thesis, I have examined representations of home in three Canadian-Sri Lankan writers and their characters as presented in four texts, *Running in the Family, Funny Boy, The Boat People* and *Anil's Ghost.* Their representations of characters and place differ vastly, although each either touches on or directly addresses the political/ethnic clashes that took place in post-colonial Sri Lanka. In all four texts, the Sri Lanka that the protagonists initially identify with as their "home" proves not to be the place where they feel safe, or eventually long for. Such a shift in their nostalgic desire can be described in part with Svetlana Boym's argument that they "are aware of the gap between identity and resemblance; the home is in ruins… this defamiliarization and sense of distance drives them to tell their story, to narrate the relationship between past, present and future" (Boym 50), but also because they are exiles, immigrants, and refugees who have already found a second home or who are in the process of finding that home. Their search for a specific place requires a journey away from that place, echoing Carole Boyce Davies who says, writing on the poetics of diaspora, that home "can only have meaning once one experiences a level of displacement from it" (112). Each of these three writers examine how home survives only in the mind after having experienced this displacement. As Susan Stanford Friedman says, home is "an imaginary space longed for, always already lost in the very formation of the idea of home" (Friedman 192). The four texts mirror this fleeting notion of home through memories, nostalgia, and even trauma. The characters who people these books have "already lost" the literal Sri Lanka as they physically journey to (or back to) Canada; they have also "already lost" home as an imaginary space, in that each representation of home captures only fragments of what they called "home."

At the beginning of *Running in the Family*, Ondaatje writes that "home" is a place that his father called "home," but as a writer who weaves together storied memories, he recreates

the past as an ideal place. Through his search for his father in the stories his friends and family narrate, he vicariously experiences a nostalgic home, a fictionalized home, and a home that supplies a familial fluency that had previously eluded him. For Shyam Selvadurai's character Arjie and his family, their literal home, Sri Lanka, becomes a place of exile and harrowing memories. Their second home, Canada, is not a place any of them had ever visited, but the place where Selvadurai envisages Arjie's emerging "otherness" will dissipate and thrive. Like the rest of his family, Arjie leaves Sri Lanka to escape the violence perpetrated against Tamil citizens, yet he also escapes the societal and cultural oppression of his queerness, looking to his new home as a place that will embrace his entire, layered self. In *The Boat People*, home is again a place of exile that Mahindan, who brings with him his son Sellian, pays to escape. Along with the other characters who have experienced agonizing physical and emotional trauma, the boat journey promises a relief from persecution and from constant violence. Sri Lanka, in that novel, becomes a home they look back at but refuse to return to at any cost (indeed, the cost may be torture and even death, as the novel portrays any rejection of refugee status as leading to severe and brutal outcomes for any of the refugees). Through the character Ranga, who commits suicide after the Refugee Board Hearing has designated him a terrorist, Bala reveals that Ranga chooses death over having to return to Sri Lanka. In *The Boat People*, then, home represents both reflective nostalgia (which Boym describes as, "enamored of distance," "ironic, inconclusive and fragmentary" (Boym 50) and physical threat (any return poses a far worse menace than their current imprisonment). Through a disparate group of characters, Bala depicts various experiences the refugees have escaped by boarding this barely seaworthy vessel (she includes a car mechanic, a jeweller, parents, children, a journalist, and others). They have all given up their previous citizenship, profession, and Sri Lankan identity in the hopes of obtaining a new citizenship, and a hostility-free life. As the novel progresses, many realize that their tribulations and

sacrifice do not provide any guarantee of being granted Canadian citizenship. By the latter half of the novel, none of the characters, including those as young as Sellian, associate home with Sri Lanka. Again and again in flashback scenes, Bala re-enacts the violence unleashed in the North of Jaffna, and the coercion and violence against the boat's characters by government operators and Tamil Tigers. In representing these traumas, Bala's narrative revives a complex and ruthless history. Her characters may wish to believe that history is best forgotten, but Bala resurrects horrific details so that her readers may be made witnesses of the characters' trauma.

Jonathan Culler says of identity, subjectivity, and literary representation that, "The value of literature has long been linked to the vicarious experiences it gives readers" (112), further emphasizing Shoshana Felman's notion of a "literary testimony," wherein the reader becomes capable of perceiving "what is happening to others—*in [their] own bod[ies]*" (108). Thus, not only do characters embody the trauma, which survives to educate subsequent generations, but readers who have never experienced these ordeals also pass along such "history." In her novel, Bala invokes the concept that "History is owned by the winners" (Bala 193) and her narrative account challenges those who engage in "purposeful amnesia" to erase and manipulate history. As a contrast, I argue that Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* fashions a response to critics such as Arun Prabha Mukherjee and Chelva Kanaganayakam, who argue that Ondaatje deliberately evades the socio-politics of Sri Lanka by focusing on his family and their stories in *Running in the Family.* In fact, Ondaatje's task as a writer is to speak about his experiences as an immigrant examining Sri Lanka with "a long-distance gaze," and not to make explicit political statements. *Running in the Family*, as a literary record of novel, memoir, and familial chronicle, serves a very different narrative purpose than does *Anil's Ghost*. In *Anil's Ghost*, Ondaatje presents a former resident who has emigrated, like himself, and who has no connections to her country, but who witnesses the horrors that she has only

heard about. Eventually, Anil builds new connections by simply returning to a country that needs her help. Through Anil's return, Ondaatje explores how a single narrative buried deep in the bones of the victim is still able to testify against the State's narrative. Greg Forter argues that power silences trauma and while Ondaatje's narrative depicts this aspect, it also reveals how the body is able to function as a text to reveal its past.

My thesis examines trauma, what Freud considers a wound, inflicted on the body and psyche of a person, and which has the ability to alter that person's sense of self. According to Cathy Caruth, trauma is an inherently belated response to the "originary trauma" that takes place, and "its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Caruth 4). Merely escaping the moment of its infliction does not halt its lasting impact; rather, it exacerbates a response to what could have been. In each of these texts, trauma passes down from one body to the next. In *The Boat People*, anxiety, fear, rejection, oppression passes from Mahindan to his son Sellian, from the refugees to the Tamil volunteer, Charlika, to the lawyer protagonists, Priya, and even to the Adjudicator, Grace, who initially resists feeling sympathy for the refugees. In *Funny Boy*, the body that "passes down" information is Arjie's great-grandfather, killed before Arjie's birth, a violence that determines the family's angst and even their social choices about marriage and friendships. In *Anil's Ghost*, the protagonist scientifically inspects a literal body, and in doing so reveals not only the violence inflicted on one person but, in that act of inquiry, becomes witness to the recent political unrest and violence taking place within Sri Lanka.

In each of these narratives, the writers make witnesses of readers to their characters' traumas, despite the cultural or social distances between readers and characters. In this light, memory also plays a vital role in passing down trauma to subsequent generations as the past and the present meld together in memories. Memory connects Ondaatje to a father he barely remembers; body memory enables Arjie to situate himself within his great grandfather's

death until he experiences his own, similar, trauma. Memory also facilitates the stories of the refugees that convey their side of a brutal story, informing readers of details that to which the adjudicators in the novel are not privy. And "unearthing" memory ties Anil to her immediate past as well as to the political past Sri Lankans continue to experience. The body memory buried in the bones of Sailor are able to narrate a story that the State continues to censor.

Through placing these fictional memories as snippets of history and collective memory in a mélange of individual memory not brought to the open, these three writers invariably echo Friedman's words that "travel, migration, exile – these are the itineraries of being as becoming, identity forming in the movements through space, identity in motion. […] The body in motion is the muse" (205-206). If home is already lost when one begins to search for it, and what these writers arrive at is what they now call home, then home has become an everyplace – where readers can delve into the nostalgic longing of the characters, and emerge from the page as narrative witnesses, of their memories of home. "The body in motion is the muse"; the body, then, even as it melts into an unreliable and nostalgic memento mori, acts as muse to inspire further writing, further reader-witnesses to create a home that vastly differs from the physical home regardless of whether it is something the writer is running towards or escaping.

NOTES

[1] "The Aesthetics of Sense-Memory" by Jill Bennet is a chapter in Susannah Radstone's and Katharine Hodgkin's *Regimes of Memory, 2003.*

[2] Although *Running in the Family* is a fictional memoir, I do not wish to argue that the concerns Ondaatje raises are invalid.

[3] Sangeetha Ray, Joanne Saul, Saradha Balasubramanium.

[4] The human pyramid is a dream and a reference that Ondaatje uses in the text to depict how each individual member of the family is instrumental in enabling him to occupy the position he does "quite near the top" (10). I believe this reference connotes his identity.

[5] Until he encounters his own trauma.

[6] It is noteworthy that the final chapter titled "The Riot Journal: An Epilogue" is an extract from a journal that Arjie maintains.

[7] In the first chapter, Selvadurai examines cross dressing and how gender roles are to be strictly adhered to. Chapter two discusses mixed marriage. Chapter three discusses male/female matrimonial friendship. Chapter four examines the detrimental effects of Jegan's previous alliance to the LTTE. Chapter five is the forbidden relationship between Arjie and Shehan. And the book closes with chapter 6, Arjie's journal detailing the family's final days in Sri Lanka.

[8] In a collective work of essays by Susannah Radstone and Katharine Hodgkin.

[9] The unanimous front that each character plays in opposing the marriage between Radha Aunty and Anil informs the reader of the entire family's attitude towards the Sinhalese. The dominant trauma that haunts the family is Ammachi's father's death, but in the novel the reader notices how carefully Chelva treads when conducting business as he too is scarred by his family's past. This division between the Sinhalese and the Tamils continue to the extent

that even Arjie's brother Diggy guards an invisible line that informs him instinctively that he belongs with the Tamil cricket team.

[10] In Bala's narrative of Uncle Romesh in *The Boat People*, he impersonates a Sinhala youth and speaks fluent Sinhala when he is caught by the Sinhala mob. His ability to speak Sinhala without a Tamil accent is the only reason he survives the assault.

[11] Uncle Daryl is a Dutch-Burgher and for this reason I believe that Selvadurai, through his sudden death, is acknowledging the fact that all minorities were subject to this kind of violence in varying degrees.

[12] This is significant as while Ammachi's trauma becomes the family's trauma for a long time, the injury is exacerbated when Arjie's own grandparents are attacked and burnt; so, in this bookended way, his father's experience (as trauma witness) becomes his own. The loss of home and the eventual destruction of his family home adds to Arjie's trauma, adding another layer of trauma he has witnessed transforming into trauma he experiences himself.

[13] Banduratne mudalali, his sons, ardent followers, and the hotel workers anonymously victimize Jegan as they consider him a Tamil Tiger as he is a Tamil and he is favoured by Chelva.

[14] A term borrowed from Sharon Bala in her interview to Kajal.

[15] According to the law of the land sections 365 and 365 A of the Penal Code 1883 of Sri Lanka consider it a crime to engage in any romantic relations that do not fall within the definition of "natural." By law, Arjie's desires would exile him from a land that allows only relations between a man and woman. The law, although not yet repealed, is not actionable at present in a court of law, but violence against LGBTQ communities remain largely rampant and unaddressed in Sri Lanka.

[16] Mentioned early in the novel, when Arjie says, “It is a picture made even more sentimental by the loss of all that was associated with them. By all of us having to leave Sri Lanka years later because of communal violence and forge a new home for ourselves in Canada” (5).

[17] Bala’s character, Grace Nakamura a second-generation refugee of the Japanese Internment, is the judge presiding over the Refugee Board Hearings while Priya is a junior lawyer at a firm representing some of the refugees, and who at first joins the hearings reluctantly. During the course of the hearings while Priya identifies with the refugees with each harrowing story, Grace has a more serious challenge before her as her mother’s memory is fading and her ability to convey the internment trauma becomes more challenging. Bala leaves Grace’s plot line open for interpretation for the reader to speculate Grace’s awakening to her identity.

[18] Priya’s father refuses to speak about his trauma in Sri Lanka but it is her Uncle Romesh who is able to function as a conduit to connect Priya to her parents’ and her culture’s traumatic past.

[19] I refer to the many other Tamil Sri Lankans in the novel who were caught in the crossfires in Sri Lanka and did not survive to flee on a boat, and particularly to Ranga who survives the journey but subsequently commits suicide after a decision from the Refugee Board that he must return to Sri Lanka, and for fear he will be tortured upon his return.

[20] I refer to the endless sea in this instance.

[21] This is another reason that I refer to the refugees in my paper as occupying the realm of the unknown as their experience is still far too unrepresented for readers to identify or even sympathize with their plight.

[22] The character of Prasad was partially inspired by Lasantha Wickrematunge, a brave Sinhalese journalist assassinated in Sri Lanka in 2009 for his fair-minded reporting.

[23] Commenting on the actual boats carrying human cargo to British Columbia that inspired Bala to fictionally represent this humanitarian crisis in her novel.

[24] There is evidence from the start that Ranga shows gratitude for a favour Mahindan has done for him: "Because of you only, I am here" (Bala 11). There is also a scene where Kumaran's wife asks Mahindan to help prepare "papers" for her surviving child and herself:

> A man inside said you helped him, she said. I don't know any man, Mahindan said. But now he was worried. How much did she know? She could run to the main road, flag down a soldier, and…He said you have papers, she said. I don't know anything about papers, he said. She had no proof, he told himself. The money was gone. All he had was a meaningless note. One adult male, one child male. I lost our identity cards and documents, she said. In the jungle, during a shelling, I lost everything. And now everyone is saying how to arrive without papers? (Bala 335)

[25] I refer to any and every official government.

[26] The Japanese Canadian internment during World War II as the Canadian government forcefully dispersed "all persons of the Japanese race" (Agnew 48)

[27]I refer to the internal hemorrhage and wound as a key component in the Caruthian model of trauma.

[28] The conventional trauma novel according to Michelle Balaev is where victims are unable to speak of the trauma as there is either speechless terror or amnesia, further reinforcing the idea that trauma is unrepresentable.

[29] Ananda is a sculptor and painter that Anil and Sarath recruit to reconstruct Sailor's face. Later the story reveals that Sirissa is Ananda's wife who disappeared following an incident close to her school where she works.

[30] The dominant narrative presents not only an assumed consensus, with one narrative dominating cultural consciousness, but its general acceptance exists because of the dominant power structures that allow for, and support, what makes it possible to be told and retold. In this novel, the ruling government controls the dominant narrative.

[31] I refer to victims as those who have suffered actual bodily violence: death, disappearances, mutilations; the characters left to witness and mourn are also victims, but in different ways.

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